

YES, SIR



LAYLA VALENTINE

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This work was previously released under another pen name, Evelyn Troy.

CHAPTER ONE



Clara heard the sounds of the few patrons at the bar talking in the corners, chatting about their days—about business ventures won and lost, about upcoming reports and office gossip, all the shop-talk that came along with an early happy hour hang-out. She glanced around the room; it wasn't quite six yet, which explained why the bar was near-deserted. The staff members coming in were all prepping for the next rush: cutting lemons, limes, and oranges, stocking bottles of liquor, emptying ice into beer bins. Clara had come in to kill a little time between clients, and found herself almost stuck to her stool, unwilling to move.

In the interests of not getting kicked out, she'd ordered a martini; something she could nurse for a long time without attracting attention. Money wasn't really an issue—she had worked hard through most of the day already, and she'd been getting generous tips from some of her clientele lately. But Clara had never really been interested in drinking for the sake of getting drunk.

As she sipped the crisp, cool elixir of pure alcohol,

Clara's thoughts turned to the direction her life had taken. She was becoming more and more familiar with the internal monologue titled *How We Got to This Point*. Overall, she had to admit that the life she had chosen wasn't exactly bad thus far; she never wanted for money, and whenever she wanted to go shopping, all she had to do was book a few more clients and everything would be right as rain once more.

Clara had gotten into the escort business almost by accident; floundering through college, not really certain of what she really wanted to study and unwilling to take on years of student loan debt for a subject she wasn't truly passionate about. She had answered an ad posted in the student union that promised an exciting job opportunity with flexible hours, good pay, and a comfortable environment. *That's definitely one way to describe it*, Clara thought wryly. Before she knew it, she had met her Madame, and after discussing the job over a few drinks, had found herself agreeing to try it out with a few clients. "If you don't like it then you can walk away, no questions asked."

The Madame took a cut from Clara's earnings, but Clara knew that even if she wanted to "go freelance", as some of the girls called it, she wouldn't be able to find a much better deal. Anyone who would want to represent her interests would probably insist on a bigger cut, and the odds were good that on top of it, they would be intolerable. Clara had only ever seen her Madame a couple of times, but their dealings were fair. The Madame negotiated the price and rate and Clara sent her 10% of her earnings at the end of the night. Any tips beyond the quote were Clara's to keep.

In spite of the ready ability to buy whatever she wanted, to work the hours she felt like—within reason—Clara had begun to wonder just how sustainable her life was. Sure, she could get by on escorting for a few years to come; she was twenty-three, with big eyes, good skin, and a fit figure that she kept in line through religious attendance at the gym. But eventually, even if she resorted to plastic surgery like some of the older girls had, Clara knew that there would come a time that her earnings would start to fall. There was only so much a surgeon's scalpel or shot of Botox could really do—age would eventually show itself in other ways.

Even if her age was not a cause for concern, Clara was reaching a point where she didn't know how much she wanted to continue with her life the way it was. She glanced out through the window of the bar and watched as businessmen and women passed by on the sidewalk outside. Clara took another sip of her martini, smiling to herself; one or two of the men walking so deliberately and busily down the street looked like carbon copies of her clients. After a while, Clara thought, all of the clients started looking like carbon copies of each other; she had to remember first names—without knowing if they were the men's real first names—and faces based on something other than what they looked like. There was the client with the bad comb-over, the client who wore far too much cologne, the client who incessantly chewed spearmint gum.

Clara knew that she shouldn't be too bitter; after all, some of the other girls had gotten clients who refused to take showers, clients who signed up for one service and then decided, upon reaching the hotel room, that they should have more for their money, clients who invited

friends into the room either to watch or to participate—without paying extra. These clients, of course, were never accepted by the Madame again, but the damage was already done. Clara had something of a reputation among her Madame's girls; she chuckled lowly to herself, thinking of it. She had a relatively small number of steadfast clients, while everyone else who frequented her Madame's business avoided her strictly, telling the other girls that she was a cold, unfeeling bitch.

The truth was that if any of her clients tried to bring in a stranger without running it past her and the Madame first, Clara had no problem with kicking them out of the room. She could always book another client; she was not going to let anyone walk all over her. Clara had strict rules; and in part because of her those rules, she had loyal clients. They knew what to expect from her, and they respected the fact that they could not push her around.

At first, when Clara had decided to take the job, she had told the Madame her ground rules: she was not going to go beyond the agreed-upon time unless the client paid more. She was not going to accept any last-minute additions to the party unless the client paid more. She would not add extra services to what had been negotiated unless the client paid more. Her clientele knew that her time was money; they knew that she was worth it. Every once in a while, if she was having a particularly good time, and there was no one waiting for her, she would extend a particularly good client's session—but always at her discretion.

The Madame had been skeptical of what she had called Clara's "pickiness" at first—but several of the ground rules that Clara had laid out proved so valuable that the

woman had established them for all of the girls working for her. Not all of the girls went with the rules, but those who did were grateful not to be coerced into doing more than they agreed to.

Clara peered into the clear, clean-looking cocktail, with the two green olives studded with blue cheese floating dreamily at the bottom. In spite of establishing herself within the world of high-class escorts, she knew—deep down—that she wasn't really satisfied. She still had years of "career" left in her, at least inasmuch as a person could consider the life of an escort a career; but did she really want to continue doing this until she couldn't make money anymore? Some of the other women that Clara knew were getting up there in years, at least as far as the industry was concerned. Even with plastic surgery, she had maybe another seventeen years or so before things bottomed out and the only clients she could realistically keep were either those who swore up and down that they would leave their wives for her, and those who fetishized "older" women.

Maybe it's time to go back to school, Clara thought idly. She had had the thought a few times in the last few months; at first escorting had been a stopgap measure. She hadn't even quit school until her "business" had really taken off. When it had come to choosing between making money and spending money, Clara's decision had been clear. But things were becoming decidedly murkier now. While she didn't exactly know what she wanted to study any more than she had when she had left school, the feeling that she needed something more stable, something she could talk about openly to people other than fellow escorts, was getting stronger. As it was, her resume was more than a little barren. At twenty-three,

she had a suspicious lack of work experience, and no degree.

Clara had, more than once, jokingly suggested to a few of her clients that they could do her a favor by hiring her for a “legitimate” job at one of their businesses. She knew it was hopeless, and that any of the men she catered to who would actually hire her as a receptionist or a data-entry clerk would almost certainly assume that she was “on the clock” for their interest as well. That would entirely defeat the purpose of getting a legitimate job. But if she could make a clean break from the industry—on good terms, because while her Madame was not precisely a criminal kingpin, it didn’t make sense to piss the woman off—she might still have an opportunity to reinvent herself.

Good God, twenty-three and I’m already meditating on being too old for something, Clara thought, shaking her head and taking another sip of her martini. She considered ordering another; she was drinking slowly enough that a second installment wouldn’t get her too tipsy. Some of the girls working for the same Madame preferred to “take the edge off,” Clara knew. None of them ever got sloppy drunk, but they did get understandably nervous, and had their own set of stresses to want to dull. Clara knew that more than one girl she worked with was on medication of one variety or another.

She took the last sip of her martini and tipped the olives into her mouth, biting down into the briny, vodka-soaked flesh until she tasted the creamy sharpness of the cheese. On the one hand, she didn’t have much to complain about; she had never been busted, she had a

good Madame, not a single client had ever tried to beat her. On the other hand, Clara had started to want more than a leisurely life, waking up at ten in the morning or later—depending on how late she had worked the night before—only to go shopping for a few hours, hit the gym, and start taking clients. Her life had no structure to it, it seemed; it didn't matter what day of the week it was when she worked any given day. And for a woman who only worked maybe ten hours a week, she was making a scandalous amount of money.

Of course, Clara thought, the downside was that she couldn't really date anyone. There were guys—her coworkers were more than happy to tell her—who were totally into dating escorts. But the idea of dating someone who specifically wanted to be with a woman who traded sexual favors for money left Clara feeling dirty. Even though most of her clients wanted a fairly run-of-the-mill experience, rehashing her clientele during an actual date would feel weird and wrong. And then too, Clara thought wryly, it would be something like a busman's holiday to have sex with a boyfriend when she spent hours every week having sex with near-strangers.

Clara had just about decided to go ahead and have another cocktail when her phone buzzed in her purse. She glanced around as innocently as possible then reached into the leather bag and felt around. There were two phones in there: one personal, and one that was reserved for her Madame to contact her on. Clara received a new work phone, and a new phone number, by courier every few weeks. She never bothered to learn her work phone number, since it changed so constantly; the only important thing was knowing that she was being called.

“Hello,” Clara said. She never identified herself on the work phone; for one thing, her Madame knew who she was talking to, and for another, if she was with a client when a call came in, Clara might be going by any of a half-dozen other names.

“I have a new client for you,” the Madame said. Clara frowned. She had a rule about new clients; namely, that she didn’t take any. With a roster of eight or nine steady clients who saw her at least once a week for several hours at a time, she didn’t need to. The Madame was making money just fine off of her. Before Clara had put the restriction on new clientele into place, she had endured numerous newbies who would walk into her hotel room thinking that they’d paid their hour and could do what they wanted—clients who thought that all the porn they’d watched was an instructional video.

“We talked about this,” Clara said, keeping her voice firm but low.

“Trust me, I’m looking out for you, kid,” the Madame countered. “You know I respect your rules. But this one... well, let’s just say you could give him the next two days for the rate he’s willing to pay and come out ahead.”

“Oh really?”

It was an iffy proposition; some men who paid well were graciousness itself, looking for discretion and willing to put forth the effort to have it. They usually wanted fairly run-of-the-mill services, but didn’t have the time to cultivate a real relationship. Other men who put forth a lot of money had been shut out by other providers for good reason and had found the only way to get the action they sought—action Clara and many other women were

usually vehemently opposed to—was to put money up front and negotiate later.

“I’ll give it to you straight,” the Madame said. “I need you to take him. He was very specific that he wanted to see you—that if you were unavailable, he would wait as long as it took until you could take him.”

“What does he want me in particular for?” Clara asked sharply.

“He saw your picture in the directory and said you were the only one. Of course, knowing your lack of inclination for new clients, I was able to push the price up a great deal... and even then he seemed more than willing to pay a premium.”

Clara glanced up as the bartender poured a dividend into her martini glass. She came to this bar often and tipped well; they were always happy to serve her, even letting her linger beyond last call to hang out while they cleaned up.

“What’s your impression?” Clara chewed her bottom lip and brought her martini glass up, sipping the extra bump of liquor slowly.

“Clean, respectful, not demanding. Firm. He was vague on the details of what he wanted for his price, but there weren’t any red flags.”

Clara considered. She clucked her tongue against the roof of her mouth and took another sip.

The Madame waited—Clara was one of her top earners, she had earned the privilege of patience.

“Would you go?” Clara said

The woman at the other end of the line laughed, a rattle of long-time cigarette smoking in the chuckle. “Honey, I would already be there if he wanted me, the rate he agreed to.”

That, at least was promising. Clara still had her doubts—she always did, when it came to new clients—but if the Madame approved of the guy, she had probably put him through his paces, the subtle psychological probing that came along with the negotiation of an escort of Clara’s caliber.

“Confirm it,” Clara said simply.

“Excellent. I’ll text you the address. You don’t need anything special; no character. Just you. And the meeting time.” Without saying goodbye, the Madame hung up.

Clara knocked back the last sip and a half of her martini; even if she hadn’t had to leave, the glass was no longer cold enough to keep the liquor palatable. The money at least would give her an additional cushion if she finally made up her mind to quit, Clara thought. If she could get through the appointment with whoever this mysterious new client was, and didn’t end up leaving his room in a tearing fit.

CHAPTER TWO



Clara tried not to look around too much as she pulled into the parking garage across the street from the hotel where she had been instructed to meet her new client. Going to meet a client, instead of having the client come to her, always made her nervous, but when the hotel was as high-end as the one she saw across the street, she felt even more on edge. She smoothed her hair and pulled down the mirror to check herself in it, feeling her heart beating faster.

Clara had never been to the hotel her new client had directed her to. She had heard of it mentioned in passing as one of the most opulent in the city, but most of her clientele were just above comfortable—they weren't the kind of men who could drop a couple thousand dollars a night for the privilege of sleeping away from home. Her Madame had put any other propositions from other clients on hold, telling them that Clara was booked up. If things turned out horribly with the new guy, she could still salvage the night, and maybe make a few extra tips from men who were so pleased that she was able to find room in her schedule just for them.

Clara stepped out of her car and walked out of the parking garage quickly. The trick with locations like the one was to be as discreet as humanly possible, to look as if she absolutely knew where she was going. The first time she had served a client at a high-end hotel—not as exclusive as the one she was about to enter, but still beyond her means—Clara had cultivated a kind of hauteur that discouraged questions from the front desk. She didn't make a lot of eye contact with people in the lobby but she didn't avoid it either. She kept things businesslike. Clara had found that the majority of hotels were happy to look the other way for women like her—provided that a certain amount of professionalism was maintained.

As she stepped into the revolving door and got a glimpse of the lush interior, Clara realized that it may not be enough to be businesslike and brisk on this occasion. The hotel was more than just high-end: it was clearly one of a kind; a boutique location with all of the trappings that the rich and famous could possibly desire.

Stepping into the lobby, Clara took a moment to drink in the casual splendor of her surroundings; the walls were burnished mahogany, the floor polished marble, with loops and whorls of inclusions, absolutely breathtaking. The planters scattered around the lobby emitted a rich, green smell of ferns and lilies, mingling with the leather of the low chairs and sofas where a few guests were enjoying early-evening cocktails. Soft, unobtrusive piano music filled the air, mingling with the sounds of conversations.

Clara took a deep breath as surreptitiously as she could. She had dressed for the occasion not in a costume,

exactly, but in professional attire: a dress that came to just above the knee, her dark hair swept back in a bun, a pair of moderate heels, and a blazer.

She had been told that the client had a suite waiting; that she would only have to ask at the front desk for him and the clerk would ring up to his room, and give her directions to get there. The hugeness of the space told Clara that that instruction was as much to prevent her getting lost as anything else. *If he's paying like she said, he might have one of those rooms that isn't readily accessible*, she thought as she strode purposefully towards the desk. It occurred to her to wonder just what class of client she had managed to attract, and what it was about her profile that had intrigued him so much.

Clara stepped up to the desk and the clerk looked up from his computer, giving her a polite nod to show that he would get to her in a moment. He had a phone handset cradled on his shoulder as he typed. "Yes, Mr. Hammersmith, it will absolutely be completely to your preferences when you arrive. We're pleased to have you as a guest again."

Clara waited patiently, taking a moment to glance around and soak up more of the opulence. This would be a location worth telling the other girls about next time they got together for lunch. Even if the client somehow turned out to be a bust, the mere fact that she had gotten into such a prestigious hotel without being incinerated like a vampire walking into a church would score her major points.

Finally, the clerk finished his conversation and turned his attention fully onto her. "Good evening, ma'am," he said.

He had a faint accent that Clara couldn't quite place, but she thought it might be French. "How can I help you?"

Clara called her instructions to mind. "Yes, I was told to check in with you before going up to speak with my associate," Clara said, keeping her voice level. This was a gate-keeper, she reminded herself. As long as she acted like she belonged, he wouldn't have any reason to turn her away. "I was told he was expecting me and left instructions at the desk. My name is Vanessa Duchamp."

The clerk nodded, and then looked something up on his computer. Immediately, his face turned a bright red. "Of course, Ms. Duchamp, we're delighted to have you here with us this evening," he said, taking refuge from his embarrassment in rote formula. "I have a key card for you; your associate is on the twelfth-floor penthouse suite, accessible by the last elevator. The key card will admit you into the elevator and take you up to that floor." The clerk paused and glanced at her briefly. "We ask that you check in with us once more if you have any other... associates... that you'll be meeting with this evening, and turn in the key card when your appointment is complete."

Clara smiled slightly, knowing that the clerk knew exactly what was going on, but couldn't say anything. She was going to play by the rules; she hadn't ever made a habit of ruffling feathers if she could help it.

"Thank you very much," Clara said, taking the card from him. "I'll let you know right away that I only have one associate staying here this evening." *Anyone else I associate with would have to sell a kidney just to pass the credit check.*

The clerk nodded gratefully and pretended to be busy

with something else as Clara walked away from the desk. She couldn't suppress the smile that curved her lips as she strode towards the elevator bank. She shook her head slightly; it was funny to think that the clerk was embarrassed to be speaking to an escort, to be making arrangements for one. She had to believe that he was either very new to his job, or very naive; Clara had only been inside the hotel for a few moments, but already she could tell that it was not the kind of place where people of her career were a rarity.

She inserted the card in the reader positioned just below the call button and waited for it to light up. Clara glanced around, trying her best not to look furtive and set the whole thing spiraling out of control. The elevator obediently chimed, the doors sliding back into the wall with barely a murmur.

Clara stepped inside the elevator quickly, retrieving the card and slipping it into her purse as she looked over the buttons for the various floors. *Remember to turn it in at the end of the night*, Clara told herself firmly. *Just in case you ever get a client like this again. You don't want to be 'that escort.'* The twelfth floor of the building was evidently the top floor—Clara pressed the button and a polite recorded voice requested her credentials. She slid the card into the reader above the floor buttons and the doors closed once more.

As the elevator moved upwards, Clara wondered just how the night was going to play out; she had never entertained a client as wealthy as the one who had requested her. There was a whisper of suspicion in the back of her mind that implied something about the insanely wealthy tending to have insane tastes—and

Clara felt a frisson of apprehension at the fact that her new client hadn't specified what he wanted, merely that he was willing to pay a premium, and that it would not be anything she had specifically put in her profile she was not okay with.

Maybe I should consider a more detailed list of 'no's,' Clara thought, fidgeting slightly. She took a deep breath and told herself she was being ridiculous. Nothing that this man could propose would be shocking to her—though that didn't mean she would be willing to go through with it.

The elevator chimed once more and the doors opened. Clara's curious gaze took in a short corridor with only one door at the end of it; the suite was obviously so large that it took up most of the floor.

Clara stepped out of the elevator, making sure she had grabbed the key card, and proceeded towards the only door available to her. The hallway was quiet in a way that was almost unsettling—as if the thick, plush carpet and walls conspired to muffle any sound she might make.

She took a deep breath as she stood at the door, pushing down her final misgivings. She knocked quickly, shifting her purse. It had her kit, both of her phones, and a few other necessities that came in handy when she was working with a client on their turf.

As she waited for someone to come to the door, Clara speculated as to what kind of person would pay so much money for a night with her. The Madame had said that he was clean and professional. Maybe that meant he was elderly; in Clara's experience, young men didn't tend to have the kind of wealth that would grant them the ability

to stay at such a luxurious hotel. *Hey, you never know, maybe it's Ryan Gosling on the other side of the door,* she thought wryly.

She heard the slide and thunk of a deadbolt shooting, heard the crackling pop of the door's seal, and then put on her most polite, interested smile as the door opened. For a moment, as the client came into view, Clara's smile faltered in surprise. The man who stood at the door was several inches taller than her, broad across the shoulders and subtly muscular. Soft-looking, curly brown hair was brushed neatly to the collar of his well-tailored suit, and dark brown eyes peered with interest out of a tanned, olive-skinned face with well-groomed eyebrows and just the faintest hint of stubble.

"Hello," Clara said, feeling her heart beating a little faster.

"Please come in," the man said, with a slight accent, which Clara guessed was Greek. He opened the door wider and gestured for her to step through it.

Clara recovered from her shock quickly, taking a quick breath to suppress the tingle of attraction she had felt. She was there to work, she reminded herself. But as she walked into the suite, she received another shock; no amount of splendor could compare to the spacious, luxurious home-within-a-hotel that she found herself in. There was a crackling fire in the hearth, everything smelled clean without the acrid note of disinfectant, and the floor underneath her feet was undoubtedly real, solid hardwood. There was an unmistakable sense of quiet, understated luxury, the like of which Clara had never experienced before in her life.

"In town on business?" she asked, glancing around the

room to try and find where the money for her fee would be. The unspoken rule was that she should be able to excuse herself to the restroom—*where would the restroom even be in this place?*—and count it to make sure that everything was in order, though she would not claim the envelope until their meeting was over.

“The envelope is on the mantle,” the man said, closing the door behind them. Just like the hallway outside, there was some quality to the suite’s walls, the thick rugs on the floor, which seemed designed to mute any sound.

Clara followed his gaze to the mantle above the fireplace and spotted the envelope. It wasn’t one of the plain letter envelopes she sometimes received money in; even from a distance she could discern the creamy, matte finish of luxury stationery.

Clara glanced at her client to make sure that he was okay with her checking the envelope. “Could I use the restroom? I’d like to freshen up.” The man nodded, moving to the huge leather couch to wait for her. She saw him pick up a tumbler with what looked like bourbon and ice in it before she turned her attention back onto her pay.

A quick glance around the room, with eyes no longer dulled by shock, showed Clara a smaller door and she picked up the envelope and headed towards it, glancing again at her silent client. He was waiting, patiently, and Clara took the plunge, opening the door and stepping through it. She would have to send a quick text to the Madame to confirm it was all there; no matter how good-looking the man was, she was not about to give him a discount.

Clara opened the folded-over envelope and took the slim pile of money out. For a moment she felt weak at the knees, just looking at it; the bills were all higher denominations—nothing smaller than a twenty, and there were many of them.

She counted quickly, making sure the crisp, new bills didn't stick together and throw her off. *Jesus Christ, there's five thousand here.* The sum was not just good—it was astronomical. *Just how hard is he going to make me work for this?* Clara shook her head, taking a deep breath. She slipped the money back into the envelope and pulled out her phone. Calling up the contact for her Madame, she sent her report in the form of a question. *Five Thousand?* An instant after it sent, she got her response. *Confirmed.*

Clara looked in the mirror, smoothing her dark hair and making sure her makeup was clean and not smudged. The client hadn't given her even the slightest indication of what he wanted—just that she was to come to him looking professional.

She opened the door and stepped through it, holding the envelope where he could see. The man looked up from his drink and for just a moment, Clara caught the fleeting expression of absolute hunger that she had seen in so many men's faces before. It disappeared as quickly as it showed.

"I'm afraid I'm not sure what you like," she said, moving to put the envelope back onto the mantle. The man's gaze trailed over her slowly, his look thoughtful. "Is this your first time working with a professional?" The man smiled slightly and shook his head. "Do you spend a lot of time

in this hotel? It's probably the nicest I've seen."

The man took a sip of his drink and set it down. "Everything is as it should be, I assume?" he said, a faint trace of something more than simple politeness in his voice. Clara gave him points for not being curt; in spite of his lack of reaction to her attempts to break the ice, she didn't think he was completely cold.

"Oh, absolutely," Clara said. "Is there anything you want to discuss before we proceed?"

The man shook his head and stood in a quick, fluid movement. "I hope you're not nervous," he said, coming closer to her slowly. "I want you to understand that nothing we do this evening is intended to harm you. If you need me to stop, or even to slow down, I will. I didn't hire you to simply bear it with a smile."

"That sounds... like an interesting proposition," Clara said, her heart starting to beat faster once more.

"It's necessary. I want you to feel safe. Please promise me that if you ever feel unsafe, you will speak up."

Clara smiled, a more genuine expression than her usual working grin. "Oh trust me; I never fail to make my feelings known."

The man's smile flashed across his face. "From your picture I didn't think you were the type to suffer in silence." He came closer to her again, stepping slowly until he was only inches away. "What name do you want to be called tonight?"

Clara used half a dozen different names with her usual clients, but in the man's presence, her preferred

monikers all fled from her mind. “Clara,” she said.

The man gave her another raking glance, a smile tugging at the corners of his lips. “It suits you. Let’s begin, Clara.”

He took her by the hand with a firm grip, guiding her through the living room towards the larger of the doors in the suite. Clara noticed—her senses heightened by apprehension—that while his touch was firm, it wasn’t painful or forceful in the slightest. She swallowed down her lingering misgivings and thought of what she could do with the thousands of dollars she was earning as her client led her through the door into a dark room.

CHAPTER THREE



The door closed behind her and for a moment, her head swimming from the darkness, Clara felt a wave of apprehension. After a few fast heartbeats, she heard the sound of a light switch clicking, and the room was filled with soft light, illuminating a huge bed on the far end of the immense bedroom.

Just like the living room, everything she saw bore subtle testimony to the highest caliber of wealth: thick rugs, a huge fireplace, and walls painted a deep, velvety green. An open doorway showed another bathroom, even more palatial than the one she had just been in. The man's hand fell away from Clara's and she realized belatedly, as he closed the door behind them, that she didn't see a single window in the room.

"I want to remind you once more: don't be afraid."

Clara turned to look at him and saw his hand moving to another switch on the panel. He flipped it up and she heard the whirring of motors, the silky quiet slide of movement. She watched in fascination, confusion, and just a hint of fear as the walls began to shift. The bed

seemed to almost move backward as movement filled the room.

In moments, the room transformed completely: the walls flipped and shifted, revealing hanging hooks with handcuffs, spreader bars, wrist and ankle restraints. A table folded down into place, and a huge X-shaped fixture slid out on one side of the room.

Before Clara's startled eyes, an innocuous-looking wardrobe opened, panels sliding out to reveal a display of gags, blindfolds, whips, and sex toys of various sizes and materials, all clean and organized, ready to hand. Her mind reeled as she took in tools and toys both familiar and utterly unrecognizable, things she had no name for alongside familiar staples of BDSM: butt plugs, lubricants, dildos, vibrators for every conceivable part of the body, clamps and clips and gleaming metal hardware.

She stood in silence for a moment, taking everything in as the sounds of movements died off with the descent of a heavy-gauge chain, bearing a hook at the end of it, from the ceiling. The room represented to Clara's eyes the single most comprehensive collection of paraphernalia she had ever seen.

Clara felt a shiver of apprehension tingle down her spine, but in spite of her instinctive fear, she couldn't help a flickering rush of excitement. Some of her clients enjoyed a little bit of kink; she was certainly no stranger to the scene, though her clients did not take nearly as formal an approach as the man next to her clearly did.

"Are you ready to proceed?" the man asked.

Clara took another quick look around, thinking to herself that someone who could command a collection like this could obviously well afford to spend five thousand dollars on someone to use it on for a night.

“I think so,” she said, swallowing.

“While you are in this room, you will refer to me as Master, or ‘sir’,” the man said firmly. “Is that understood, Clara?”

For a moment, she regretted the impulse that had made her give him her real name—it would be much more difficult to brush the experience aside and forget about it that way.

“Yes, Sir,” she replied. Her gaze kept moving over the various implements and restraints around the room. She hoped—prayed—that the X-shaped structure was not intended for her.

“Take off your clothes,” the man said, moving to a chair Clara hadn’t noticed, along the closest wall. He sat down, watching her with studied impassivity.

Clara’s self-possessed mind rebelled at the firm order for a moment before she reasserted herself. *Do the job. He’s paying you well enough for it. It might even be a little fun...* Clara pushed down her reluctance to obey and turned towards him, reaching up to the buttons of her blazer.

The man’s gaze remained riveted on her as she began slowly unbuttoning the jacket, taking her time without dragging out the action. He clearly didn’t want her to be overly theatrical about it; without knowing how she knew, Clara realized that he wanted her to be as natural as

possible, not to act like a vamp or overtly professional. She slid the blazer down off of her shoulders and along her arms, letting it fall to the floor. “Like this, Sir?” she asked. The man nodded, his brown eyes intent on her.

Clara turned her back; she had been around enough men to be used to anticipating, admiring, devouring looks—but there was something different about the way her new client was looking at her, the desire that flicked through his dark eyes. It almost made her uncomfortable to be the subject of that acute gaze, but she told herself once more to keep her mind on her job.

She unzipped the dress, following the line of her spine, until she came to the end of the zipper, right above the curve of her ass. Clara slid the straps down and turned to face him as she pushed the fabric slowly along her body, down over her hips, letting it fall to her feet.

Early in her career, Clara had found that the investment of good underwear was well worth it; for clients, she wore satin and lace. The man’s eyes widened appreciatively, taking in the sight of her barely-concealed breasts, the visible skin underneath the lace of her panties. Clara realized with more than a little surprise that she was starting to get wet, fluids building up along her labia, soaking into the lace.

“Continue,” the man said.

“Yes, Sir,” Clara replied, licking her lips unconsciously.

She reached around to her back and unhooked the clasp of her bra. She let the straps fall down from her shoulders and loosened the fabric from her skin slowly, gathering it up at her breasts, prolonging the moment

before she finally pulled it completely away, dropping it to the floor. Her full, heavy breasts bounced slightly, freed of the lingerie, and Clara saw the man's glance shift to them, a look of satisfaction in his eyes.

Before he had to prompt her again, Clara hooked her fingers in the waistband of her panties, turning her back to him once more. She slid the fabric down over her hips, drawing it along her legs, bending forward to give him the best possible view as her hands came to her knees. She let the fabric fall and stepped out of it, turning slowly to face him.

Clara had undressed in front of men so many times that she had thought she was completely lacking in modesty, completely unable to feel any kind of nervousness. But something in the man's hungry gaze made her almost want to cover herself up.

"Very good," the man said, nodding ever so slightly.

He stood quickly and moved towards her. Clara stood in absolute stillness as his hands wandered slowly over her body, cupping her heavy breasts, rolling her nipples between his fingers, and then sliding down along the curve of her waist to her hips.

"If at any point you can't continue, you will say 'powderpuff,'" he told her. "Otherwise—I will assume that you are perfectly fine with what I am doing. Say the word, Clara."

"Powderpuff," Clara said, frowning slightly in confusion. The client twisted her nipples firmly between his fingers, sending a hot jolt through her body, straight to her already-wet pussy.

“Say it again, I want to make sure you’ll remember it.”

“Powderpuff,” Clara parroted. Certainly, she thought to herself, there was no way anyone could confuse something so out of context with anything else.

The man nodded again and reached down between her legs, his fingertips gliding along her sensitive inner thighs, moving up to her slick folds to give her an experimental rub.

“There are three rules,” the man said, rubbing and stroking her slowly. He barely avoided contact with her clit, making Clara want to moan out, making her want to push her hips down and rub herself more firmly against his fingers. “The first is that you will not tell me no. If you need to use your safe word, use your safe word—but if you tell me no, if you defy me or challenge me, I will punish you. Is that understood?” Clara nodded. “Out loud, Clara.”

“Yes, Sir,” she said quickly. The man continued stroking her inner labia in a slow, steady rhythm.

“The next is that you are to follow my instructions exactly. If I tell you not to make a sound, you will remain silent. If I tell you to remain absolutely still, you will not move. If you disobey, you will be punished. Understood?”

“Yes, Sir,” Clara said again. His touching, rubbing, stroking fingers were making it difficult for her to think. She took a deep breath, trying to steady herself.

“Finally, you are not allowed to orgasm until I give you explicit permission.”

“Yes, Sir,” Clara said without prompting; this last rule

would be easy. She hadn't had a single genuine orgasm with a client in her life. Plenty of her clients had been nice, but she had always been with them for their pleasure, not her own. As Clara had told the other women she worked with, if she wanted to come, she'd cuddle up to a vibrator.

The client withdrew his fingers from her wet folds and Clara felt a brief flicker of disappointment. He took her by the wrist and led her towards the wall, moving quickly. She realized she still had her heels on—but he hadn't given her instructions to take them off. The client held her in place, perusing the options at his disposal, and Clara swallowed down the impulse to ask him to go easy on her. She was the professional; she should be able to handle almost anything he could reasonably dish out. She had a moment's apprehension that he might not obey his own rules in regards to the safe word—but he wouldn't have given her that option if he didn't intend to follow through, Clara decided.

The man moved to one of the hooks and selected a pair of leather cuffs that had a short, dense chain holding them together. He moved quickly, locking one around the wrist he held her by almost before Clara could decipher what he was doing, and moving her other wrist into place in front of her in what seemed like an instant. The leather of the cuffs bit into her skin slightly, a soft lining wrapping around her in the same moment. Instinctively she tugged against the restraints, knowing that it would be to no avail; Clara thought she saw the man smile for just an instant at her reaction.

She heard the clatter of metal hardware as the man picked up what she recognized as a spreader bar,

complete with two ankle-fitted cuffs on either end. He knelt down at her feet and Clara held her breath, suppressing the urge to argue as he wrapped one of the cuffs around her leg, just above her shoes. He pulled her other leg out along the length of the bar and attached the other cuff, rendering her helpless: wrists bound in front of her, legs locked in a spread position that barely allowed enough movement to shuffle. The man pulled at the chain between her wrists, leading her back across the floor to the center of the room. Clara glanced up to see the hook dangling from the ceiling; it was obvious to her that this was her destination.

The client lifted her arms up over her head, reaching up for the hook, and Clara watched in curious fascination and rising arousal as he draped the short chain over the hook, tugging and adjusting the apparatus until she was inextricably trapped, her arms stretched upward with no room to pull free. She could tug as much as she liked, but there was no way she could get the chain over the lip of the hook, no way to get herself free.

As the man walked away from her, quickly shedding his expensive suit jacket, Clara wondered at the fact that in spite of her reluctance, she hadn't actually refused any of the measures he had taken; there was something about the sense of ceremony, about his attention to laying out the rules and making sure she understood, that made her trust him. Had any of her other clients left her bound and chained to a ceiling to peruse a wardrobe full of miscellaneous toys, she would have already been screaming for release; but something about the man's demeanor made her curious for more, made her wonder just what he was going to do—and how much she was going to enjoy it.

“Look straight ahead, Clara,” the client said, and she moved to obey.

Her straining ears took in the sounds of plastic clattering, metal clinking, the rustle of fabrics; Clara’s curiosity mounted but she was firmly in the mentality that she knew her client wanted from her: obedience.

She clenched her hands into fists, fidgeting slightly on her feet as the heels she hadn’t counted on spending very long wearing started putting pressure on her toes, setting up a dull throb through her arches. She could feel the hanging tension in her shoulders—she knew that it wouldn’t be long before they began to ache as well—but she knew better than to complain or to ask for mercy.

Clara heard movement from behind her. She took a deep breath and suppressed the instinctive whimper that formed in her throat as her vision was blacked out. A whisper of cloth near her ears, a tightening of the dark, silky fabric around her face, and she told herself firmly that it was just a blindfold.

“For right now,” the man said, his voice low and tightly in control. “You can make as much noise as you want. This room is sound-proofed, and there’s no one on this floor other than us.” She shivered, tensing as she felt his hands move around to cup her breasts.

“Yes, Sir,” Clara said, knowing some acknowledgment was required. Her skin tingled, anticipation lighting up her nervous system and making the cold brush of air between her legs even colder, the heat building up in her chest and along her hips more intense. Without the ability to see, every sound—shifting, clattering, clinking—from behind her seemed incredibly loud. Clara steeled

herself, trying to figure out what was going to happen, trying to form a mental image based on the sounds.

Before she could come to any conclusions, she heard a rustling of fabric, and then a fluttering splat—and a shock of heat jolted across her ass cheeks, making her gasp. She jumped, struggling briefly and ineffectually against the bindings that held her legs spread, her arms over her head.

“I did not tell you that you could move, Clara,” the man said. Clara opened her mouth to protest, to try and excuse herself, to apologize—only to yelp as the leather straps rained down against her ass and the backs of her thighs three times in rapid succession.

“Y-yes, Sir,” she said, tightening her fists, struggling to hold herself still.

“You will remain still until I give you permission to move.”

“Yes, Master,” Clara said, taking a deep breath and realizing abruptly that he must be using a flogger—it explained the multiple stripes of crisscrossing fire that she felt forming on her skin.

He brought the leather straps down against her again and again, falling into a steady, unhesitating rhythm. The strips fluttered, rustling in Clara’s ears, and then collided against her skin, painting abstract lines and splatters of hot, tingling pain against her ass, her thighs, up onto her vulnerable shoulders. She yelped, whimpering as the effort of standing still for each punishing blow of the flogger against her body became harder and harder by the moment.

There was a momentary pause, and Clara exhaled

slowly, hoping that he had finished. But once more she heard the rustling of leather—this time coming from in front of her—and Clara cried out, her body instinctively pulling back before she could stop herself as the licking lines of fire danced along her right breast.

“I did not give you permission to move, Clara,” the man reminded her.

“Yes, Sir—I’m sorry, I didn’t mean—” before she could complete the sentence, the flogger came down across each of her breasts in three fast blows, making it impossible to do anything but squeal and yelp. She struggled to remain still as every muscle in her body seemed to tense and coil, every impulse directing her to attempt to pull back from the pain, to try and evade the blows. She shivered, unable to help herself, as the leather strips of the flogger danced down along her inner thighs, curling around her legs, painting stripes of tingling fire that echoed all over her body. For the moment, Clara couldn’t even feel the throbbing of her shoulders or the pain in her feet—the crackling, electric sensation that the flogger left behind consumed her mind.

When the blows finally stopped, Clara sagged as much as the chains binding her allowed, thin whimpers leaving her lips. To her shock, she realized that at some point during the punishing flogging, her pussy had become drenched, her arousal coating down onto her inner thighs.

As she felt her Master’s fingers brush along her soaking, throbbing folds, Clara’s face burned with embarrassment that she had liked it so much. She heard an amused

chuckle as he stroked and rubbed her swiftly, his fingers probing her and his thumb barely sweeping against her clit. Clara moaned helplessly, remembering only at the last moment that she had not been given permission to move as the pleasure of the man's touch made her want to lean into his fingers.

"You're a fast learner, Clara," he said, then his fingers left her and she whimpered again, disappointed.

Unable to see what the client was doing, Clara felt something tugging at the chain that bound her wrists and felt the restraints pull free from the hook. Her Master carefully brought her hands down in front of her, and Clara groaned at the relief that flooded through her—wincing slightly at the pins-and-needles sensation that followed the renewed blood flow.

The client made no move to remove the blindfold; he tugged at the restraints and Clara opened her mouth—before remembering the rule against it—to ask him to let her at least see where he was leading her. She could make noise; she could not express defiance. *Use the safe word*, she thought in a moment of weakness as she shuffled across the floor, off-balance, vulnerable, and curious.

But she didn't want to stop; Clara realized that she really wanted to know what this man had planned for her next. She felt vulnerable and slightly irritated at her inability to see what was going on around her, but she didn't actually feel afraid. The tingling, fiery pain of the flogger was starting to subside to a humming warmth, still distracting, but oddly arousing, weirdly pleasant in a way she would never have anticipated.

Clara felt the man lifting her up, and as her legs and ass settled against a cold, hard expanse of metal, she realized that he had brought her over to the table. Her wrists were unbound—though her legs were still firmly spread—and Clara felt the temptation to reach up and remove her own blindfold. But before she could make a move, she felt something cold and metallic close around one wrist—another kind of restraint. The man positioned her wrist at her side, and Clara felt a cold bar press against the curve of her ass. She was still puzzling through what was being done to her when another metal cuff closed around her other wrist. Her arms were trapped at her sides, her legs spread helplessly in front of her.

The man pushed her onto her back, and Clara had no choice but to submit to his manipulations as he shifted her on the table, bringing her legs up until she was utterly prone, the bar between her wrists pressing uncomfortably against her ass.

Something moved. Clara felt the man sliding her shoes off and felt cold metal against her feet. She wanted to fidget—but there was nowhere for her to go, and even if she could, she had not been given permission to move. Once again she heard movement, and somehow felt as if the client had left her—as if she were all alone, naked and bound on a table she couldn't escape from, her body tingling all over with deep heat in all of the places the flogger had landed.

“For this phase,” the man told her, his voice moving closer once more, “you can move—as much as the bindings allow—but I expect you to remain utterly silent. Nothing more than breathing, Clara. Do you

understand?”

Clara started to open her mouth to say “Yes, Sir,” but then stopped, pressing her lips together and nodding.

The man chuckled. “You’re a very quick study, aren’t you?”

His voice was approving, and Clara almost forgot the prohibition as his hands slid over her body slowly, caressing all of the places that were still fiery hot and tingling from the whipping. She clenched her teeth, swallowing down the moan she could feel forming in her throat.

She gasped as the touch shifted; the man’s fingers closed around her nipples, pulling and tugging, rolling and twisting them until they hardened into firm nubs. Clara squirmed, the impulse of her body telling her to get away from the torment of his wicked fingers, but there was no escape. A whimper attempted to squeak up through her throat but Clara suppressed it, breathing as slowly and as deeply as her position would allow. She could hear the breaths whistling slightly through her nose and realized with a start that the fabric against her eyes was wet—that tears had formed in her eyes to soak the blindfold.

The client’s fingers moved away, and for a moment Clara felt relief—until he began to carefully slap at her breasts, sending more tingling fire through her. She gritted her teeth, squirming to try and get away but not letting a single sound leave her lips.

When she felt the cold bite of something metallic closing around her right nipple, Clara gasped again, tugging

ineffectually at the cuffs around her wrists. It tightened down, pressure mounting until she nearly cried out in protest. She heard a click and then the tightening ceased—but the pressure on her tender anatomy sent hot-and-cold spurs digging into her breast, shocks of sensation that seemed to travel directly to her pussy. Blind, writhing, she was not prepared for the second clamp closing around her left nipple and an involuntary squeal ripped through her throat, barely escaping her lips. The client clucked his tongue against his teeth, and in her mind she pictured him shaking his head in disapproval.

Slaps rained against her, blows of hot skin against her skin, across her breasts, down along her sweat-slick abdomen, and finally—Clara steeling herself, clenching her teeth until her jaw ached—one blow exploded against the slick folds of her pussy.

“Better,” the man said. “Remember that. Disobey and you will be punished immediately.”

Clara nodded, unable to speak, even if there hadn’t been a prohibition against it.

“Do you remember the safe word?” Clara hesitated a moment before nodding, calling it to mind with an effort. “You may speak—what is the safe word?”

“Powderpuff, Sir,” she said quickly.

The man’s fingers brushed against her labia more gently. “Good girl.”

Clara tilted her head back against the cold table, panting as the ache in her breasts intensified. She wanted to beg him to stop—but although he’d reminded her of the safe word, Clara couldn’t bring herself to use it. There was

something about the pain that was intensely thrilling, something about not knowing what would happen next that turned her on more and more. Clara's jumbled, feverish thoughts were disturbed by the sound of a ratcheting click, followed by a low, buzzing hum.

Hard, cold plastic swiped against each of her nipples in turn and Clara nearly cried out at the confusing, pleasing-but-painful sensation that jolted through her. She breathed harder, controlling herself with an effort she never experienced before in her life.

The vibrator hummed and buzzed along the curves of her body, and Clara sucked her bottom lip between her teeth as she felt it nearing what she knew was its destination. The client rubbed the smooth, plastic object along the folds of her soaking wet pussy, pressing against her inner labia and then slowly moving upward until he found her clit.

Clara's hips bucked against the table, a moan building up in her chest as she squirmed and writhed against the bindings holding her helplessly in place. She tried to push down to get better contact as her breathing went wild; heavy panting that verged on hyperventilation sent her blood roaring in her ears as the man teased her relentlessly, pressing against her throbbing, aching clit and then retreating over and over again.

"Remember, Clara: you are not allowed to come until you have permission."

Clara nodded, willing to agree to anything for the moment, as long as it would continue, as long as he would eventually let her have the relief she craved.

She swallowed down the moans that formed in her throat, tugging at the wrist cuffs, twisting her hips as much as the bars holding her in place would allow, squirming and writhing as the client tormented her for what seemed like hours. It was impossible; Clara became convinced that if her Master did not give her permission to come, she would die, trying to follow the mercurial movements of the vibrator against her with shifting hips. Just as she was certain that she could not possibly hold back for another instant, the smooth plastic retreated and Clara bit down the keening groan that rose up inside of her at being denied her relief so cruelly.

She was still reeling from deprivation as she realized that the cuffs around her ankles were falling away, as the bindings on her wrists slacked and then clattered against the table. Too thoroughly lost to even attempt to move, she gasped—still trapped in the obedient mental state the client had somehow put her into—as the pressure from the clamps on her nipples eased and then disappeared entirely, relief flooding through her body. Finally, the blindfold slid away with a whisper of fabric and she was left trembling, panting, prone, on the table.

The client lifted her up in strong arms, and Clara looked around in utter confusion, trying to understand what was happening. He carried her across the room, towards the huge, luxurious bed, and laid her down carefully on it. Sometime during their session, he had stripped down to the pants of his suit, and as he loomed over her, she took in the sight of his muscular chest, the ridges and planes of his abs.

The man reached down, and Clara watched in bemused fascination as he unbuckled his belt and opened the fly

of his trousers, pushing them quickly down over his hips. He brought his boxer-briefs down with them and Clara's eyes widened at the sight of his thick, hard cock springing free. He stepped out of the last of his clothing and covered Clara's body with his own, climbing onto the bed; his weight somehow comforting.

"You did very, very well, Clara," he murmured, his hands wandering along her curves. "I'm very pleased with you." The man kissed her, his lips hungry against hers, filled with an urgency that belied the cold calculation of his earlier movements. "Do you want to come for your Master?"

Clara started to speak—but remembered the prohibition the moment her mouth was open, and nodded. The client chuckled, rocking his hips steadily against hers, and Clara felt the irresistible heat and hardness of his cock rubbing against her soaking wet labia.

"You can make as much noise as you want now—but don't come just yet. Do you think you can hold back a little bit longer?"

"Yes, Sir," Clara said, nodding eagerly.

The man's hips shifted against hers. He thrust into her slowly, taking her inch by inch, filling her up with heat and hardness. Clara moaned out, pushing her hips down to meet his, hungry to feel him fully inside of her. He paused for just a moment when their bodies pressed flush together and Clara felt his cock twitching against her inner walls, felt his body tense as he pulled himself back from the edge of orgasm. He began to move inside of her, rocking his hips, pushing deeper and deeper with every thrust. Clara moaned out again and again as she

felt her pleasure cresting once more.

She whimpered as he began to move faster and faster, his cock brushing against her G-spot with every few thrusts, the friction between their bodies driving her steadily beyond her endurance. She had never in her life had to struggle so hard to hold back; she had never felt so completely overwhelmed by sensation, so full of conflicting, tingling, hot and cold crackles of electricity.

Just when she was on the verge of despair—certain that she would disobey him and earn another punishment, the client pressed his lips to her ear. “Come for me, Clara,” he whispered, his voice tight with control. “Come as hard as you can.”

Clara nearly shrieked at the relief that flooded through her at receiving permission. Wave after wave of pleasure rushed through her and she felt every muscle tightening and flexing, her inner walls gripping the man’s cock as if her body itself refused to let him leave it. For a few moments, the pleasure was so intense that Clara almost sobbed, her body confusing it with almost-pain. She belatedly realized that the man had not put a condom on, as she felt the hot, sticky-slick rush flooding into her, his cock twitching as he groaned in deep pleasure.

Clara sagged against the soft, thick blankets as the man slowed and then came to a stop, his weight pressing into her as he relaxed.

“Thank you,” he murmured softly, pressing a gentle kiss to her collarbone.

As her mind started to come back from the thick fog, Clara realized—with a shock that was almost enough to

make her gasp—that he had made her come; not a single one of her clients had ever brought her to orgasm before, but he had succeeded to an earth-shattering degree.

The client lifted himself off of her quickly and Clara tried to shake off the lingering amazement and haze that had come along with the intense experience. He picked up his pants and reached into the pocket, withdrawing a dark brown leather wallet.

“I believe you’ve earned far more than the agreed-upon price,” he said, barely looking at her. He opened up the wallet and tugged several bills out of it, turning away from Clara and placing them neatly on the bed next to her. Clara barely glanced at the money, watching in confused fascination as the man quickly dressed.

When she did glance at the money he had given her—her tip—Clara was astonished; there was easily another several hundred dollars there. “You can stay here for a while, if you need to recover,” he said, glancing at her briefly. “I would ask that you don’t stay beyond an hour.” He gave her a fleeting smile and then opened the bedroom door, walking through it quickly.

For a moment, Clara merely laid back against the bed, utterly astonished at the way the night had gone. She had made enough in her tip to compensate for the Madame’s percentage of her earnings; she had come for the first time with a client—in fact, Clara couldn’t remember having a more intense orgasm in her entire life.

She shook her head, gathering up the tatters of her self-determination and self-will. It had been kind of him to

give her the use of the room to recover, but she wasn't going to overstay her welcome.

She dressed as quickly as the client had, her mind still ringing with questions. Clara knew it was unthinkable to ask at the front desk for the name of the man who had just given her such intense pleasure; the cover was that she knew him, that she was an associate of his. If she broke that cover, if she destroyed the illusion, she would be disturbing the quiet working order of the hotel. She could only hope that he would ask to see her again.

Clara gathered up her tip and stuffed it into her bra before walking into the living room where the regular pay would hopefully still be waiting for her. The client had already left but thankfully the envelope remained, with the five thousand inside. As she looked around her, amazed, Clara spotted something out of place on the lush rug: a dark brown leather wallet.

She frowned and moved to pick it up, consumed with curiosity. There were more bills tucked inside; more than she cared to count. Flipping through the card slots, she saw a Centurion and several Platinum credit cards. Finally, she found a small set of identical business cards. She read the name: Stephanos Kofidis, and the address listed. For a moment, she considered turning it in at the reception desk downstairs; but her curiosity was too intense.

Clara tucked the wallet carefully into her purse, trying to recall where she might have heard the strangely familiar name before. She thought she might hold on to it a little longer, and hopefully return it to its proper owner herself.

CHAPTER FOUR



“Holy crap, I wish she’d get me a job like that,” Amanda said, as Clara finished telling a carefully-edited version of the night’s events. While Amanda could certainly handle the gritty details of exactly what had gone on between her and Stephanos Kofidis, Clara thought she would keep the total sum of her earnings unmentioned; it wasn’t that she didn’t trust Amanda—as her roommate Clara would have to trust the other girl as much as she trusted anyone—but she didn’t want to sound like she was bragging either. It helped that Amanda worked for the same Madame, though Amanda tended to go for quantity of clients, rather than quality.

“I feel like she pretty much lucked into it,” Clara admitted. “Though I do have to wonder what it was about me that he insisted on only having me.”

Amanda rolled her eyes. “Like either of us is ever going to penetrate the depths of what makes a client choose us. If we could, we’d work freelance as consultants.”

“Yeah—tell all the girls which of their best features to highlight,” Clara said, grinning slightly. Amanda had

taken three clients to Clara's one that night—but had made less than half the money. *Of course, a client like that one is sort of a whale. You can't ever count on getting one.*

“So he really made you come?” Amanda said, somewhat incredulously.

Clara nodded, almost as amazed as her roommate was. “It was almost like I couldn't *not* come,” she said, shaking her head in amazement. “You know, I never in a million years would have thought I'd be the kind of girl to get off on that.”

“I'd never in a million years think that a client could be that... normal?”

“You think wanting to whip and clamp and...” Clara shook her head. Some part of her mind insisted that she should feel humiliated by her experience. But in spite of the lingering soreness in her nipples, the throbbing heat that tingled in crisscrossing stripes along her skin, she didn't feel degraded; she felt exhilarated. “You think that's normal?”

Amanda laughed. “Sweetie, not all of us have your picky tastes when it comes to clientele.”

Amanda stood and strode into the kitchen, walking straight to the fridge to take out the chilled bottle of wine that Clara had brought home. Five thousand dollars richer, Clara had thought it was only fair to spring for the bottle; not the most expensive in the twenty-three-hour liquor store, but not the cheapest either; a little indulgence.

Clara and Amanda had met through work; their Madame

had suggested to both of them that living with another escort was the best possible option—it saved on housing costs and meant that there was always someone there to make sure you got home safely. Clara had chosen to move in with Amanda after working alongside her a few times, and after several conversations had led them to discover that they had more in common with each other than with any of the other girls working.

Amanda brought the bottle into the room with two large glasses and a corkscrew, shaking her head still in disbelief. Before becoming an escort, Amanda had worked as the “wine specialist” at an edgy bar, and she had transitioned into the business more directly than Clara had. The bar she’d worked at was not officially a strip bar, but the girls who worked there were scantily clad, and very attentive to the clientele. It had been a natural transition for Amanda, with her naturally blonde hair and curvy body, to move into more direct sex work.

“I mean, you’ve seen me come in black and blue after a kinky John got a bit too eager,” Amanda said.

Clara shrugged. “I guess I haven’t been working the kink beat enough to get an impression of how normal it is,” she said with a grin.

Amanda opened the bottle easily and poured them both glasses of the crisp, clean white wine, bringing her glass to her nose. “Anyway, that’s not what I meant,” she said, taking an experimental sip. Clara followed her action, breathing in the slightly peachy aroma before wetting her lips and then taking a deeper swallow. “I mean, he was all about safety and consent and stuff, from what you said. It was like the paying you part wasn’t even on his

mind.”

Clara shrugged again. “Well I mean, a guy like that, he probably wipes his ass with hundred dollar bills.”

Amanda laughed. Clara had shown her the wallet with its plenitude of Platinum-level cards and the coveted “Black American Express.” She knew she could trust her roommate not to snatch it and go shopping. They both had professional ethics, and even if there had been a temptation, they were both well aware of the fact that anyone in their right mind would cancel all cards and list them as lost—and that any purchases made on such a card would be flagged as fraud, which they would be. It wasn’t worth the risk, when they could simply earn a good shopping spree through hard work.

“Well yeah, but guys like that tend to not think of anyone at all as a real person, you know? Much less an escort.”

Clara nodded; the wealthiest of her clients tended towards that exact thought process. “It was definitely the most interesting job I’ve ever been on,” she observed.

“Well hopefully since you were such a ‘good girl,’ he’ll ask for you again.”

Clara pretended to scowl at her friend’s use of the words Kofidis had used. She had spared none of the details of the events of the night other than the specific amount of money she had earned.

“Hopefully I won’t have to wait and see,” Clara said, smiling slowly. She considered for a moment. “You know, that name is familiar and I can’t remember why.” She shook her head. “Watch, he’s probably some serial killer with a wealthy family to get him off.”

“Why would he need a wealthy family to get him off when he has you?” Amanda smirked. “Ooh, maybe he’s like a lesser-known movie actor. I still can’t believe you forgot to make him suit up.” Amanda shook her head once again in disbelief. “Well if he knocked you up, and he’s that rich...”

“If he knocked me up I’m going to the doctor. Even if he gave me a million dollars it wouldn’t amount to a hill of beans if I had a little one to look after.” Clara caught up her bottom lip between her teeth and worried over it for a moment, thinking. “Where have I heard that name before? I know I have.”

“Look him up then, stupid,” Amanda said.

Clara stood and set her wine glass on the coffee table, going into her room to retrieve her laptop. It was new, the product of a couple of weeks’ worth of work with a particularly generous client. Clara had refused to let the man entertain the notion that he was going to leave his wife for her by telling him in no uncertain terms that she would make an awful wife.

She returned to her seat on the sofa while Amanda turned on the TV and flipped through the channels. Clara typed the client’s name into Google and glanced at the TV while she waited for the results to load. Amanda had a penchant for the *Real Housewives* series; she claimed that in some of the cases, it was aspirational, as some of the wives were pretty clearly escorts who caught their whale clients and held on for dear life.

Clara and Amanda had good-naturedly bickered more than once about the possibility of really ending up with a client; Clara had generally considered it a ridiculous

suggestion. “How are you ever going to have the level of respect a relationship needs if the way you met him was inherently disrespectful?” she had asked Amanda, who had suggested that respect was not legal tender.

Clara glanced back at her computer screen. Her eyes widened. There were over a million results for the name Stephanos Kofidis, and as she scrolled through the different links, it became obvious why. Clicking a link at random, Clara skimmed a news item. *Greek Billionaire Stephanos Kofidis, notoriously reticent about his personal life, was seen with another new model on his arm at the Cannes Film Festival this week...* Clara looked at the picture that accompanied the feature; the man pictured was obviously her client, with a waifish redhead on his arm. She went back to the results and clicked another news item that discussed a recent acquisition Kofidis had made, adding a cryptocurrency interest to his financial empire.

“So, is he a serial killer?” Amanda asked.

Clara shook her head, barely hearing the question. She began to form an image of the man who had been so generous to her—who had brought her pleasure she had never experienced in her life. None of the news outlets that covered him had been able to pin a wife or kids on him; they all referred to him as a bachelor. He was social but not sociable; the few interviews he had granted never touched on anything about his personal life, focusing instead on his theories of economics and his business sense, the work he had done with this or that charity. He gave generously to a number of organizations, but he was apparently reclusive—never showing up at more than two or three events with the same woman.

Some of the press speculated that there was a dark secret in Kofidis' past, but if he made a habit of using escorts, he wasn't very open about it—no one had been able to place that particular accusation on him. There were a few "insider" comments about personal tragedies which had caused the great man to be more guarded about his personal life. Clara frowned, somehow disappointed, even though she couldn't put a finger on why.

"He's definitely legit," Clara said, putting her laptop aside and reclaiming her glass of wine. "Some distant tragic past that everyone alludes to but no one says anything definitive about, and no wife or kids."

"Huh," Amanda countered, frowning. "You'd think a guy that rich wouldn't have to pay for it—directly at least."

Clara laughed. "Well, he shows up to events with pretty little things on his arm, but never the same one more than twice." She considered it. "It's like... I guess it seems like he doesn't want anyone close to him. Which is understandable; if I had more money than God I'd keep everyone at arm's length too."

Amanda rolled her eyes. "Please, woman, you'd lose it in a day bailing out all the girls and getting them into vocational school or something."

"I still say we'd all be better served with legitimate careers. Maybe I'd lobby to have prostitution better respected."

"Not likely either of us is ever going to be in a position to do that. Unless, of course, we get a sweet gig representing instead of being the hired talent," Amanda

said flatly.

“Living the dream, huh?”

Amanda laughed and raised her glass. Clara followed suit. She sipped her wine and picked up her laptop again, looking for more information about the mysterious client. How could a man pick up an escort, have a huge suite in an extremely exclusive hotel, stocked with his own toys for his amusement on moving walls no less—without anyone being aware of it? She was fascinated, not only by the level of power such wealth implied to her, but by the man himself.

Kofidis was an odd duck, Clara decided. He could easily have just convinced whatever model he had on retainer at the moment to take a little extra money for the privilege of being teased and tortured—especially given that he was so skilled at it that he made Clara climax.

She closed her eyes, remembering vividly how easily the man had brought her into the role of submissive, how readily she had fallen into the obedient mindset. Some of that was, certainly, her own mental training—to focus on the client’s wants and needs, rather than her own—but she had had an out at any time, and many of the things the Greek had done to her were things she would never have permitted from any other client in her book.

Clara didn’t feel as though she had been coerced; she felt as if she had been invited, had been compelled by his curiously firm, yet understanding, demeanor to open up parts of herself that she had never known she had. She shivered involuntarily, remembering the way she had called him “Master,” the way she had responded to his prompts out of pure instinct.

The fact that she had given him her real name—even if it was only her first name—confused Clara. Normally it was at the top of her mind to give a client a fake name, after figuring out the kind of girl he wanted her to be. She would probe for preferences, and adopt the appropriate mannerisms along with the name; Clara had had more than one discussion with fellow escorts about how much of their job was theater—giving the client a fantasy experience that they were willing to pay for. Clara had played the ingénue, the strict professional, the cold fish, the sultry vixen; the whole range.

“Don’t go getting all Single White Female on him,” Amanda said, from her position on the other side of the couch.

Clara shrugged. “It’s just weird, is all. Anyway, I need to give him back his wallet. I can’t just like... report it, you know?” She didn’t mention that she could have just dropped it at the reception desk; that would have been too simple.

“Yeah, no, that much is obvious,” Amanda agreed. In their position, the less they had to deal with the police, the better. Of course, in any escort’s life, there were occasional events where the police had to be called; but while some were just cops on the beat, willing to overlook the circumstances that led to a young, pretty woman being in a hotel room with a man she didn’t know, there were some who insisted on bringing in the escort with the John. Better by far to avoid too many questions from representatives of the law.

“I’m going to give it to him personally,” Clara said, smiling slowly. “Manda, you’re going to have to do me a favor...”

“I’m listening,” Amanda said, with an expression that Clara read as interest.

“I’ll give you gas money,” Clara told her before anything else. “I have his address—at least, his business address. We’ll go up there tomorrow, I’ll dress to the nines and I’ll have a little meeting with the high-and-mighty. Maybe I can get a retainer.”

“If you get a retainer, you’d better give me more than gas money.”

Clara rolled her eyes. “If I get a retainer from him, I’ll front the rent on this dump for six months.”

Amanda’s bright eyes glittered at the prospect. She extended a hand and Clara pumped it. “Deal.”

CHAPTER FIVE



Amanda was less than thrilled to be awake before noon; Clara had spent most of the night researching further into Kofidis' life and fortune, falling into a fitful sleep just before dawn. She had been forced to sweeten the pot to get her roommate out of bed by offering to buy breakfast at their favorite diner.

Clara had put a great deal of thought into how she was going to approach the problem of meeting with her mysterious client. She knew that, even holding his wallet, she was unlikely to be a welcome sight, and she would need to get into the sacred space of his office through strategy. *Showing up and proclaiming myself to be his eight o'clock date from last night is not likely to get me in,* she had thought, waking from a dream of being once more under Kofidis' less-than-gentle care.

After an enormous breakfast of Eggs Benedict with crab meat instead of bacon, followed by pancakes and mimosas, Clara had assembled her strategy, asking for Amanda's input as they drove back to the apartment.

"I figure I show up in character as a business associate,

dressed to the nines, all sleek and polished, and insist that I had a meeting with the big man last night,” Clara told her friend.

Amanda laughed. “Technically not a lie,” she pointed out.

“I politely bully the receptionist into letting me up with lots of ‘do you know who I am?’ and get up there. Then I give him the wallet and propose that I become his go-to girl.”

“If he liked it as much as you said he did, I can’t see why he’d say no.”

“Especially if I offer him a package rate,” Clara said with a little grin. She wouldn’t need to have any other clients at all if she could get a regular thing going with Kofidis.

As Clara changed clothes, however, reaching into the back of her closet for the fine, tailored business suit she had originally bought for job interviews, she started to change her mind. *Even a single-client escort is still an escort*, she thought with a tinge of bitterness. *But a mistress is a different thing. Maybe...* if she could explain to him that she wanted more from her life, she might be able to appeal to the investor in the man.

Clara decided on the same tight, professional bun she had worn to her first encounter with the Greek, along with a pair of her best heels. She did her makeup carefully; nothing could betray an escort more readily than too much contouring, too much color.

“You look so boring—it’s amazing!” Amanda said, when Clara came out of her room.

“This is how I’ll be looking when I’m a legitimate professional,” Clara countered. She still cherished a

slight hope of one day working a “real” job, of showing up at some office five days a week and doing something... she just wasn’t sure what yet. There was time enough later to think of that.

Amanda grumbled a little as they drove from the suburban outskirts of the city into the downtown area. “You’d better fill the tank, woman,” Amanda said, glancing at her gas gauge.

“You haven’t even used a full tank. Not even half a tank,” Clara countered, knowing she would fill her friend’s tank anyway. The old sedan had been a godsend to Clara, and had saved her having to own her own car. She and Amanda had an agreement that Clara would chip in for any major repairs, that she would replace any gas she used, and that she’d contribute to the insurance in exchange for being listed as an authorized driver. She’d borrowed the car the night before and had hit the gas station on the way home.

“Yeah, yeah, sure. But it’s still an inconvenience. Why do they have to work so far away from everything?” Amanda disliked coming downtown unless it was for the express purpose of shopping or clubbing. Clara, by contrast, had always had an abiding affection for the downtown area, with the huge, sky-reaching buildings, the pulse of business, the chatter and noise. She could see herself, in better days, living in a nice apartment in the midst of some city, far away from where she had worked.

“Just remember, if he takes me on as his go-to, I’m paying rent for the next six months. You could buy a lot of handbags with the savings.”

Amanda smiled contentedly, and Clara knew that her

friend was thinking of her ultimate purchase: a real Birkin—even if the amount that Amanda would save on rent was far from what the legendary handbag cost.

Every escort that Clara knew—herself included—cherished the idea of legitimacy in some form or another. In a sense, they were like shadow-people; they worked mostly at night, they couldn't tell anyone other than other people in the industry about their jobs, their lives were a series of untraceable cash transactions.

Clara's own vision of legitimacy was less tangible than Amanda's; she envisioned a home—not a slightly ramshackle apartment in a no-questions-asked complex, but somewhere she could live on her own, the rent paid dependably. A nice apartment or even a small house she owned outright. As long as her income was so unpredictable—and even with steady clients who called for her routinely, Clara's income was unpredictable—it was an unattainable goal. She had seen more than one escort, riding high on a few very generous clients, take on a nicer apartment—only to end up evicted months later when they couldn't quite come up with the same money that had prompted them to sign the lease.

They pulled into the financial district and Clara tried not to feel too conspicuous. The old sedan wasn't a jalopy, but it looked out of place among the sleek sports cars, boat-like German sedans, and luxury American SUVs that lined the parallel parking spots up and down the street.

Clara worried at her bottom lip, thinking that they had better park as blame-free as possible as soon as they found the right building. If there was even a slight

problem with Amanda's parking, some high-blown businessman was liable to take offense and call the police.

"There it is," Amanda said, peering through the windshield and pointing.

Clara looked up. The building in question was grandiose, even by financial district standards; it reached up into the sky, a glinting, glimmering monolith of steel and glass, topped with an arch made of some black material that Clara couldn't identify. There was something foreboding about it, something that made the building look like it was muscling the other, smaller buildings out of the way, as if it would climb onto the shoulders of the others to reach its rightful place, even higher in the sky.

Amanda pulled into a parking spot adjoining the building, and Clara sighed with relief that she didn't have to walk too far to get inside. If things went pear-shaped, she wanted a quick exit. "You parked clean?" she asked her roommate.

Amanda rolled her eyes. "I've been parallel parking since I was fourteen. Stop stalling."

Clara took a deep breath and composed herself, running through her character story in her mind; she had met with Stephanos Kofidis the night before to discuss the details of a potential deal, and needed to speak with him immediately. Clara thought for a moment that she might be better served adopting a humbler demeanor—that she could play the role of 'big man's personal assistant' instead of being a power player herself. But that would just her more likely to be brushed off and dismissed; it was too much of a risk.

Clara strode quickly towards the entry of the building, telling herself over and over again that she was an important person. She didn't look around at the few people who passed her on the sidewalk; she straightened her back and walked with as much confidence as she could muster. An important person would not be concerned about who was on the street with her. An important person would not even notice.

When she opened the doors to the Kofidis Financial building, Clara nearly stumbled over her own character; the austere might of the exterior was nothing to the quiet splendor within. A floor above the lobby, she could see the arching greens and yellows and blues of a "nature space," which filled the air with a delicate pungency and perfume, drifting down with a scent that Clara recognized from a trip to a greenhouse. The floor beneath her feet was marble—as priceless as the marble in the hotel from the night before. Instead of mahogany panels, the walls were veined granite, giving an impression of cold, efficient professionalism.

Clara spotted the front desk and made her way towards it, noticing the petite brunette sat behind the imposing fixture. She thought that the girl manning the desk might be even younger than she was—maybe as young as eighteen. A flicker of envy flashed through her mind; had Kofidis hired the girl himself? Clara discarded the notion; a company as huge as Kofidis' would have a huge human resources department—it would be ridiculous for a man in his position to supervise the hiring of the building's receptionist.

Clara sized the girl up as she approached the desk; she would start out firm, she decided, but with a

graciousness that came with status. No expectation of being told no, every expectation of a simple favor being conferred. That would be the best way. If the girl cut up stiff, then she'd turn on the heat.

The girl looked up as Clara stopped in front of her, waiting patiently to be recognized. "Welcome to Kofidis Financial," she said, a rote formula that wasn't in the slightest softened by the quick, polite smile she gave. "How can I help you?"

Clara echoed the girl's smile with a slightly softer one. "I need to speak with Stephanos Kofidis," Clara said. "He should be expecting me; we met last night to discuss a proposal." It wasn't—strictly speaking—a lie.

"Do you have a meeting scheduled with him?" the girl asked. "I can confirm with his scheduling assistant."

Clara shook her head. "No scheduled meeting, but we did speak last night, and I'm certain he will want to discuss our possible venture in more detail."

The girl glanced at her screen, tapping a few keys. "I apologize, ma'am, but Mr. Kofidis currently has no space in his schedule."

Clara's expression hardened. "And I apologize, but if you do not allow me to speak with him, he will likely be very disappointed by the delay in advancing our mutual business interests."

The girl smiled sympathetically. "I wish I could let you up, ma'am, but unfortunately I don't have clearance to let anyone who hasn't been pre-approved in to see Mr. Kofidis. He's a very busy man, as I'm sure you can appreciate." The girl paused, and Clara tried to think of

another tactic. “I can certainly get a message to him to advise him that you came by; he’s usually very quick to respond.”

“That will not do,” Clara said, with all the grace she could muster. She couldn’t run the risk of causing a scene; it would be only too easy to get herself thrown out of the building altogether. She wondered why she hadn’t bothered to call Kofidis and offer to bring him his wallet. *Because you wanted to talk to him face-to-face. Because if you called him he could weasel out of actually seeing you.* “I need to speak with him immediately. I’m sure you do have access to Mr. Kofidis,” Clara smiled slightly. “All you would need to do is mention that Clara Masters is here to see him, and he will give you all the clearance you require.”

“I’m very, very sorry, ma’am,” the girl said. “I do have some access to Mr. Kofidis, but his status is listed as unavailable; if I tried to reach him now it would go straight to his voicemail.”

Clara frowned. She glanced around the lobby, watching the busily-moving employees of the huge company. Not a single one of them would be in a position to help her, to lend her any credibility. Clara had an idea. She was right there—she had his card. She could call the phone number on it, tell the man she was there, and brazen it out. It was the only way.

“Thank you for your help,” Clara said, giving the girl a politer smile than she deserved for such unfeeling and robotic comments. “I’ll just give Stephanos a quick call and tell him I’ve dropped by.”

She stepped away from the desk and moved to a quieter

part of the lobby—though with the stone walls and floor, the slightest movements seemed to echo on into infinity. Clara reached into the purse Amanda had loaned her, finding the business card by touch—she had stored it separately to the wallet, with no intention of returning it to the man unless he asked for it.

As she was rummaging around for her cell phone to call him, intent on getting her meeting by any means necessary, Clara looked up, aware that if she lingered too long she might look conspicuous. She nearly dropped the phone that had just come into her hand as her wandering gaze took in the sight of her client. Stephanos Kofidis was striding purposefully from the elevator bank, acknowledging the few people who called out salutations with a bare nod of his head or a quick polite smile. Clara followed him with her eyes, beginning to edge in his direction as he made his way through the lobby towards the doors.

She watched as he stepped out of the building without a second glance and walked—seemingly oblivious to her slow, careful pursuit—towards a shining, flawless black town car. He nodded to someone on the street and opened the back door, sliding into the seat and closing the door behind him.

Clara hurried to where Amanda's car was still parked, climbing into the passenger seat as Kofidis' car pulled away from the curb and into the street, moving with careful speed through the near-constant city traffic.

“Okay, 'Manda,” Clara said, throwing the purse down between her feet. “See that car? Follow the hell out of it.” She pointed out the town car to her friend.

“What the hell? Am I some kind of taxi now?”

Clara gave her friend a significant look. “No questions. Just do it. I’ll buy you two freaking tanks of gas if you want.”

Amanda briefly looked at her as if Clara had grown a second head, but turned on the ignition, pulling into traffic a few cars behind their target. “I assume you’ll want to keep a discreet distance,” Amanda said dryly. “So your prey doesn’t know you’re following him.”

Clara rolled her eyes. “I couldn’t get in to see him; stupid desk jockey stonewalled me.”

“Did you throw down?”

Clara shook her head. “Too high risk. I’d rather not get searched by security with that man’s wallet in your bag.”

Clara’s heart beat faster as they settled into the pursuit. While they were within the downtown area, it was easy for Amanda to keep an eye on their target without having to follow too closely.

It was the middle of the afternoon, and Clara wondered what a man like Kofidis would be doing leaving work at a time like that. *Of course, since he’s the CEO, it’s not like anyone can fire him.* She knew Kofidis had no one to answer to; if he wanted to leave in the middle of the day, that was his business.

It did seem strange that someone who had worked so hard to build up a fortune would neglect it in any way. Clara tried to slow the rabbit-rapid beating of her heart as they followed the town car. It occurred to her that the Greek might be leaving to meet with business associates.

If his driver stopped at a restaurant or country club, they would just have to wait until he was finished. Amanda probably wouldn't be all that agreeable, but there was no way that Clara was going to cause a scene or embarrass the man by showing up when he was in the middle of making a deal.

The traffic around them started to dissolve, and Amanda had to drive more carefully to keep from being noticed. "Dude, this is crazy," Amanda said, keeping well back from the target, following Kofidis into the outskirts of the city and then beyond, into the suburbs. "He's probably like—meeting with a congressman or something."

"Just keep following. You have plenty of gas, right?" Clara glanced at the dial; it showed just under half a tank. "Unless he's going on a spontaneous road trip without even packing, he'll have to stop somewhere within the county." But even Clara began to entertain doubts as the car in front of them continued on through the thick suburban area without showing the faintest sign of stopping.

When they passed the city limits, Amanda protested again. "I can't just go on a wild chase like this, and neither can you."

Clara rolled her eyes. "Look, I'll give you an extra ten spot if you just shut up and keep driving. And don't let him catch you following him."

"He's fine. Just one thing: if he doesn't know you're following him, if you don't even want him to see you following him, how is this really going to play out?"

Clara frowned. "Extra twenty, final offer."

Amanda looked at her, and Clara knew her friend was weighing her options. She nodded silently and continued.

The road snaked out in front of them and Clara began to feel more and more ridiculous as the driver passed the outskirts of the suburbs and entered the countryside. The stretches of land between homes began to grow, and the little flashes of residences showed increasingly sprawling houses—starting out fairly modest and gradually becoming ornate and stately.

Clara chewed on her bottom lip, wondering if what she was doing was really wise. *Worst case scenario, you have to wait a while and offer Amanda a bit more money to keep her mouth shut about it*, she told herself firmly.

Finally, as Amanda's gas tank was showing just under a quarter full, the town car pulled into a driveway that snaked through a gate, disappearing onto a lush, manicured property.

The gate was open, but Amanda knew better than to follow the car in. She parked a discreet distance away, looking at Clara firmly. "Look," she said, pressing her lips together. "I got a call while you were playing Streisand back there; I've got a client I have to get to."

Clara reached into her purse and extracted the client's wallet, along with her own. "Here," she said, pulling out a neatly-folded roll of bills. She counted out forty dollars for the gas she had used up, another forty for a second tank, and a final twenty to cover Amanda's silence. "I'll catch a cab home," she said, slipping the man's wallet into her bra, and her own into the pocket of her blazer.

“Call me if things go pear-shaped,” Amanda said. “Or even if things are a brilliant success. Basically, let me know.”

Clara nodded and climbed out of the car, looking at the long brick wall dividing the property from the road. As Amanda pulled away and onto the road once more, Clara considered the situation in front of her.

She could only assume that for reasons that remained mysterious, Kofidis had gone home in the middle of the day. Well, Clara thought, it would be easier to get past a housekeeper or security guard than it would a corporate flunky whose only job was to say no.

She walked slowly towards the gate, thinking that the mansion was isolated even by the standards of the rest of the houses in the area. She couldn't see any more cars coming, which was promising. In fact, as she slipped through the still-open gate, Clara didn't see any cars at all. She thought it likely that the chauffeur who had driven Kofidis home would have pulled around to some garage, and Kofidis would be home alone. So far, so promising; but how to get in?

Clara picked her way carefully up the gravel drive. The mansion was exactly the kind of residence she would expect a man like Kofidis to have—a retreat in the middle of nowhere for when things got too stressful in the city. The sprawling lawn was perfectly manicured, the brick wall edged with lush, well-maintained hedges. The perimeter of the house was ringed with low-lying plants spaced out perfectly: flowers, tiny bushes, plants Clara couldn't even identify.

Clara slowly made her way around the perimeter,

glancing into the windows spread out along the wall. She tripped on a sprinkler head and cursed, struggling to keep upright even as she crouched slightly, trying not to crush the plants that lined her path.

There was nothing to see and everything to see—the rooms appeared vacant every time she stole a glance, and Clara had to wonder why anyone would ever have such a huge house all to themselves. *No wonder he's paying for escorts; I'd be lonely too*, she thought, sneaking a look into another room: splendidly furnished, with a crystal chandelier, but utterly empty.

She was trying to decide on how she could get into the place—there had to be some kind of back door, a garden entry she could slip into unnoticed—when Clara caught sight of something through a window and stopped, puzzled.

The room she looked into was the first occupied one in the house. As she stared in amazement, Clara watched a group of men in exquisite suits, their faces obscured by masks, come into the room from somewhere deeper inside the mansion. The room looked something like the ballroom of the hotel where Clara's senior prom had taken place, only much nicer, with gleaming fixtures, a solid floor, and comfortable furniture scattered around.

If the men in masks hadn't been enough of a shock, Clara gasped as a procession of young women, ranging from svelte to richly curved, came into the room, each of them naked except for masks that covered their faces; Clara noticed in passing that the women's masks were not as ornate as the men's, but more colorful—they looked like a troupe of fairies walking shamelessly into

the room, smiles on lipsticked lips, high color in their cheeks. Clara leaned in closer to the glass, trying to understand what was happening, feeling a frisson of erotic tension deep between her hips; the women were beautiful.

She was so drawn in by the spectacle that she didn't hear footsteps approaching until the firm tramp of them was right behind her. Clara turned to try and explain, but before she could move, she felt two pairs of hands close around her shoulders and waist, and as she gasped, instinctively beginning to struggle, black fabric descended over her head, blocking out all sight of who might have apprehended her.

CHAPTER SIX



Clara knew she had been trespassing; but she also knew that she did not in any way want to end up a dismembered body reported about on the news, identified by her teeth if she was identified at all.

She kicked out as she felt herself being lifted up off of the ground, and began to scream immediately. “Put me down! I will sue you for every cent you have to your name and have your pay garnished for the rest of your life!”

She knew the threats were empty—especially in the face of the vast wealth she had seen on unabashed display—but she had to make them anyhow. She struggled, but the grip on her shoulders and legs was too strong to gain any advantage. Clara couldn’t be sure, blinded as she was by the hood that covered her face, but the parts of bodies pressed against her back and along her legs felt meaty and strong—she pictured linebackers or body builders, juiced up on steroids, carrying her squirming, writhing body as if it were nothing at all.

None of her assailants spoke a word as they carried her, but Clara spoke enough for four people, shouting for

help, screaming threats, insisting that if they would just let her go, she wouldn't say anything about what she had seen.

Clara heard her shouts and screams beginning to echo, felt the change in the climate around her—cool and dry instead of the warm humidity of the garden—and realized that she was no longer outdoors. Abruptly the hands on her body fell away and she landed on a hard, cold floor with an indignant, frightened yelp.

A moment later, the hood slipped away, and Clara gasped as she took in her surroundings; she was in a huge, vaulting room, and she realized in a flash that it was the room she had been looking into when the men had grabbed her, even more impressive than her gaze had taken in from the outside. Those same men in their tailored suits, and women in nothing at all, surrounded her, and Clara felt the dark intensity of their gaze, saw the tension and anger in their postures, as they stared at her from behind the masks.

“Who are you?” someone asked her quickly.

“What are you doing here? Who told you about this event?” Another voice spoke up from the group—which suddenly seemed to Clara's eyes like a much larger crowd than before.

She opened her mouth to speak but couldn't form words as her heart pounded in her chest, her blood roaring in her ears. She didn't know how to begin; she didn't know what to say, whether to be honest about following Kofidis there or to make up a lie. She floundered, looking at the sea of angry, masked faces, wondering where her client had gone to; this was his house, or so she had assumed.

He would surely be responsible for interlopers.

Before she could respond, one of the masked figures stepped forward, turning to the rest of the group. He made a conciliating gesture with his hands, and when he spoke, his voice was oddly familiar to Clara's ears.

"I'll deal with this woman," he said. He glanced at the men who had apprehended her, and Clara followed his gaze; there were three of them—and they were every bit as muscular as she had supposed, dressed not in jerseys but in smart, nondescript suits. "You can go back to patrolling the perimeter; make sure we're not disturbed again." The masked figure turned back to the others of his kind. "Please proceed without me."

He grabbed her arm, close to her shoulder, and Clara bit back the angry retort, feeling a deep tingle of fear along her spine. She glanced back at the rest of the group, who were moving away from the scene of her humiliation, beginning to relax.

The man led her up a long flight of stairs, holding onto her arm tightly but not actually hurting her, moderating his pace to make sure she didn't trip or stumble. Clara followed, unable to extricate her arm; she ceased to try after a first attempt, knowing she might as well get whatever was coming to her over with as quickly as possible if she wanted to leave the mansion in one piece. She still burned with curiosity about the assembly below; how did the Greek fit into that libertine group?

Her captor led her down a short hallway and propelled her into a small, nondescript room. Clara's panicked eyes barely took in the sight of tasteful art, a few scattered pieces of furniture, a bookshelf, before she turned to the

man who had said that he would deal with her.

“Look—I’m sorry I invaded your privacy, I really didn’t mean to,” she started. “I’m—I’m looking for someone and I know I shouldn’t have trespassed, but it’s really urgent...” Clara’s sentence broke off, petering into silence, as the man pulled the mask back from his face.

Standing before her, looking stern but not exactly angry, was Stephanos Kofidis. Clara’s knees went weak and she sighed with a mixture of relief and consternation.

“What are you doing here?” he asked. “Do you know what would have happened to you if I hadn’t been in the room when you were caught?”

Clara staggered backward at the concern in the man’s accented voice, the frenetic, lilted undercurrent. “I—I...” Clara licked her lips. She looked down at the floor, feeling embarrassed at the flimsiness of her excuse. “You dropped your wallet when you left the hotel last night,” she said, pressing her lips together. Clara dared a look at Kofidis’ face and saw amazement in his features. She reached into her blouse and pulled the wallet free of her bra, displaying it. “I tried to catch you at the office, but I got stonewalled, so I figured I’d follow you and give it to you in person.” Daring another look, she caught a brief flicker of amusement on her client’s face.

“You could have given it to the front desk,” he pointed out. “Either at the hotel or at my office; no one would have asked any... inconvenient questions.”

Clara shrugged. “I thought about it,” she admitted. “If I knew that this was the kind of thing I was going to be walking into I probably would have done it that way but...

I thought it would be the classier thing to give it back to you myself.”

Kofidis smiled slightly, shaking his head as if he didn't quite believe her—as if he didn't quite believe that knowledge of where she would find herself would have deterred her. “What you did was really stupid,” he said, moving to sit down in a wing back chair. “The people in the room downstairs are incredibly powerful; many of them far more powerful than me. You've not only put yourself in danger, but you've compromised me too.”

Clara bit her bottom lip. “I'm sorry, Mr. Kofidis. I swear, if I'd known...” she shrugged. “I mean it's not like I expected to walk into some kind of... actually, I'm not sure what I just saw.”

Kofidis chuckled. He looked her up and down slowly, taking the wallet from her hands gently. “Suffice it to say that it's a very private party,” he said wryly. He paused, and his gaze raked over her again. “I believe I know how to make your intrusion right. It will get us both off the hook, so to speak. If you play this right, it could be beneficial to us both.”

Clara's eyes widened as the Greek stood. “What do you mean?” she asked.

“Under normal circumstances, I would conduct a thorough vetting before admitting someone to a group like this,” Kofidis said. “But these aren't normal circumstances. Understand that at no point will you have to do anything you don't want to do. Do you remember our safe word from last night?”

Clara racked her mind for a moment. “Powderpuff,” she

said, not quite making the word a question.

Kofidis nodded. “Use your safe word if you find yourself needing it. Remember, Clara—” he smiled slightly, “is that your real name?” Clara nodded. “Remember: even in your position as a newcomer, you are entitled to use your safe word if ever you feel unsafe.”

Before Clara could ask any more questions, Kofidis had pulled the mask down over his face once more and took her by the hand, leading her quickly from the room.

She followed him down the stairs once more, her heart beating faster in her chest. Kofidis led her back into the room they had left only moments before, where she saw that the party was starting to progress; men were talking quietly to the naked women, their hands beginning to roam. There were attendants—marked by clean, white blazers and black pants—standing at the edges of the room, moving furniture, silently finishing preparations that Clara couldn’t divine the intention of. As they came into the room, the conversation ceased, ebbing slowly as every eye in the room turned onto them.

“My apologies,” Kofidis said, holding Clara’s hand firmly. “Our unexpected guest is actually an acquaintance of mine. She was unaware of today’s festivities, but I can guarantee she is the soul of discretion.” There was a murmur through the assembly.

Kofidis paused to let the group go silent before speaking again. “Her name is Clara, and she is a very talented escort of the highest class—who is also an extremely enthusiastic participant in my interests.” He paused again and Clara was surprised to find that not a single member of the party showed any sign of judgment against her—

she then reminded herself that powerful people who came to a mansion in the middle of nowhere with a parade of naked, masked women were likely patrons of escorts even more highly-paid than she was. “She is my guest, and I take full responsibility for her.”

The import of his words, in the context of what was clearly in progress, sank into Clara’s mind as he pulled her into the center of the room. She hesitated, resisting only slightly as he began to unbutton the blazer she was wearing. He gave her a quick, firm glance that forestalled any protest she might have made, and Clara realized what he had meant in telling her that it would get them both off the hook and could even prove to benefit them both.

As Kofidis slowly unbuttoned her jacket, Clara glanced around, seeing the masked faces watching with intent interest. Her heart beat faster—no longer in fear, but in a kind of growing response to the tense, expectant atmosphere.

Kofidis tugged the blazer down from her shoulders and along her arms, exposing the creamy white skin underneath. He gave her a quick, approving nod as Clara stood there, allowing herself to be stripped but not actively participating. Her client pulled the silky material of her blouse free of her skirt, the fabric whispering against her skin as she lifted her arms over her head obediently.

Clara heard a soft moan, sensed some subtle movement in the room around her but her attention remained riveted on the Greek as he reached down, his hands gliding over the curves of her body until he found the zipper on her

skirt. He pulled it along its track, and Clara gasped softly as the fabric loosened, sliding down before he even began to tug it down along her legs. She stepped out of it and—glancing at him for approval before she moved—kicked off the heels that had so nearly been her downfall in the garden outside.

Stephanos took her bare arms gently but firmly in his hands and slowly turned her around, displaying her barely-clothed body to the group to a murmur of approval. He pulled her back slightly so that everyone would have the benefit of the view, and Clara noticed that the group watching her seemed to have thinned slightly, some of the assemblage moving over to the discreetly-placed furniture.

Stephanos stood behind her, making her the absolute center of attention; he gently unhooked the clasp of her bra, sliding the lacy fabric along her back, down her shoulders, cupping the front before he pulled it away. Clara's full breasts bounced slightly, freed of the confines of her lingerie, and she realized that she was already starting to become aroused, her nipples beginning to harden in the cool air, her pussy beginning to become slick as her body heated up.

Finally, his hands slid around her waist until they came to the waistband of her matching panties. He paused for just a moment before pulling them down in a movement quick enough to rip the fragile fabric, making Clara and several of the other people in the room gasp in reaction. He gave the lace another quick, jerking pull, and it came free of her body all at once, leaving her fully nude before the intently-watching spectators. For a heady moment, Clara felt the gazes of everyone on her; the only time in

her life that she had felt so completely naked, so utterly vulnerable, had been the night before, trapped in Stephanos' restraints, blindfolded and struggling to divine what his next action would be.

Stephanos turned her to face him and gave her a little approving smile. "You're now properly attired," he said, glancing at the rest of the guests with humor flashing in his masked eyes. "Feel free to join the party, Clara." His hands fell away and he stepped back.

For just a moment, Clara felt completely petrified; she had no idea what to do. She looked around the room and saw that the people who had wandered away from her performance with Stephanos were already amusing themselves. The people who had stayed to watch were beginning to move around as well, and some of the pressure of performance began to ease as the party started to progress.

Clara moved out of the center of the room, still feeling self-conscious. She looked around as discreetly as she could, then realized that she was the only one making any effort to be discreet. Anyone who wasn't actively involved with other members of the party was unabashedly watching, talking to the other spectators in a relaxed camaraderie.

For a while she wandered around, at a loss for what she should be doing, and drank in the sights and sounds of the unfolding debauchery. As an escort, she wasn't exactly shocked by what was going on—but as she watched a masked man, reclining on a leather couch, guide a woman's eager mouth down to his fully erect cock, the eroticism that infected the room began to have

its effect on Clara as well.

She moved from one scene to another, trying not to stare too obviously. In one corner she watched as two men stripped down to nothing but their masks, revealing unimpressive physiques to a masked woman whose hands wandered over their bodies eagerly, moving down to take each of their cocks in hand. Another group of men were watching as a masked woman masturbated in front of them, sprawled on a footstool, her legs spread wide open to give them a view of her fingers plunging into her drenched pussy, her thumb working her clit, moans escaping her lips.

Another group featured two men with a masked woman sandwiched between them; to Clara's ears it sounded as though they were discussing business as they thrust into her from both sides, not quite ignoring her moans of delight but dividing their attention between her and each other. One of the men sat back against the arm of the couch, pulling the girl onto him, while the other man shifted position, thrusting harder and faster into the girl's ass, pressing a lazy kiss to her shoulder as she cooed.

Stephanos seemed to have disappeared entirely, but Clara couldn't summon up enough concern to be worried, instead becoming more and more intrigued by the casual debauchery going on around her. Two women had taken over a divan, one straddling the bottom woman's face. Clara shivered as a frisson of arousal worked through her spine at the sight of the two women; the bottom woman pulled the top one by her hips, twisting her head up to bury her face against her soaking wet pussy and moaning as the other woman pushed her hips down to meet her, burying her face between her

legs at the same time.

Clara's fevered mind could barely keep track of the variations on display: couples, groups, and singles mingled and co-mingled, moving around the room from one erotic pleasure to another. She thought she saw two masked women feeding one suited man grapes as they took turns stroking his hard cock, the only part of him bare to the room, but the organized chaos of the party overwhelmed her enough to make her wonder if she had only imagined it.

Clara felt her pussy starting to become wetter and wetter as she took in as much as she could, her hands beginning to wander over her body unconsciously as she responded. She wanted desperately to slip into one of the scenes unfolding in front of her, and her frustration mounted as she wandered, unsure of the etiquette. *God, what do I do? Say "How about making that double a triple?"*

She chewed a fingernail, her eyes searching the room. If she could find the Greek, she might work her way into whatever scene he was participating in. She had no idea where her client was—and if she had known how to ingratiate herself into one of the situations unfolding in front of her, it wouldn't have mattered at all.

CHAPTER SEVEN



Clara's distracted, increasingly frustrated thoughts were interrupted as she was surrounded by a group of masked women.

"You look lonely," one of them said. "Why don't you come with us, Clara?"

Two other women took her hands and began leading her away, and Clara looked around to see that they were accompanied by several of the suited, masked men. She felt a flicker of fear as they guided her away from the main room, through a door she hadn't noticed in her inspection.

Her fear began to dissolve as she was led into a huge, graciously appointed bedroom, an open wardrobe revealing a small collection of familiar items: butt plugs, a few restraints, vibrators, and a strap-on harness with a few different attachments.

The two women who had led her into the room began to touch her everywhere, their hands cupping her breasts, moving down between her legs to delicately stroke her

soaking wet folds, to the delight of the men.

“I love perky, big boobs like these,” one of the women—a slim and willowy redhead—commented, rolling and lightly pinching Clara’s nipples until she let out a soft moan. She leaned in, bringing one of Clara’s breasts to her mouth and claiming the nipple with her lips, sucking and licking.

The other women were stripping the four men who had accompanied them into the room, murmuring quiet compliments and meaningless patter as they attended to them.

“Ooh, she’s wet and lively,” the woman stroking Clara’s pussy told the others.

Clara tilted her head to the side as the brunette’s lips swept along the line of her neck. She watched as two of the women who had busied themselves stripping the masked men sank onto their knees, opening their mouths and looking up at them invitingly. Clara shivered as the woman stroking her plunged two fingers inside of her pussy, nibbling with playful roughness along her shoulder.

One of the men had pulled a masked woman over to the bed, and Clara watched, torn between the delicious pleasure of the two women ministering to her and the sight unfolding before her. The man pushed the woman onto the bed with calculated roughness, pulling her hips back and up as she settled her weight on her forearms.

“Watch all you want, baby,” one of the women attending to her said, switching from one breast to the other.

Clara let out a cry, arching and twisting, as the other

woman rubbed her fingers along her inner walls, her thumb working Clara's clit steadily as she became wetter and wetter. The man left the woman bent over the bed and strode to the wardrobe, idly stroking his own cock.

"Do you want to be spanked, too?" the woman behind Clara asked, and she murmured something that she thought was an almost affirmative, watching as the man retrieved a belt from the small collection of tools and toys. "I bet your ass would look so cute, all pink."

"Oh, you just know she'd make the prettiest noises," the woman sucking on her breasts told her companion.

Clara jumped at the sound of the belt colliding against the masked woman's ass, panting and shivering as the two women continued to tease and work her feverish body.

"How many times do you think she can get off before she's begging to quit?"

Clara shook her head slightly, attempting to attempt to clear it of the rising fog of desire that rendered her unable to speak.

The woman sliding her fingers in and out of Clara's pussy began to work her more forcefully, adding a third finger and twisting them inside of her, fingertips pressing and rubbing until they found her G-spot.

"Five gets you ten she can go all night," the other woman said.

Clara's gaze was torn away from the sight of the woman being spanked with a belt as the woman who had been worshiping her breasts pulled her face around to kiss her

hungrily. “We can get one of the Masters to spank you until you can’t stand it anymore,” she told Clara lowly. “And then fuck you until you come all over him and give us plenty to lick up.”

“Mmm,” the woman behind her was murmuring. “I love the taste of come in a nice,” she punctuated her words with almost-savage thrusts of her fingers. “Tight, juicy pussy.”

Clara started—she had expected that in a group as large as this, the men would wear condoms.

“You’re on birth control, aren’t you baby? It’s so much nicer that way—and everyone here is clean.”

Clara nodded, unable to speak as moans and whimpers ripped through her throat.

“Bring Clara over here,” she heard one of the men say. “You’ve had enough fun with her for right now.”

Clara groaned as the woman’s fingers retreated from her pussy, leaving her throbbing with need. She glanced around the bedroom as the willowy redhead led her towards one of the naked, masked men. The two women who had gone to their knees were eagerly sucking on their Masters’ cocks, gleefully accepting the men’s hands on the back of their head pushing them to take more and more. On the bed, a man watched the girl being spanked, shuddering slightly at every mewling cry, while another woman rode him hard and fast, her small, shapely breasts moving with the rhythm. Another woman was sprawled over a padded trunk, moaning with unabashed pleasure as one of the men thrust into her from behind while another brought his hard cock to her

mouth.

“Tie her up,” Clara heard a man say; the slim redhead moved to the wardrobe and Clara turned her attention onto the man she had been brought to. He cupped and kneaded her breasts, his gaze taking in every inch of her with speculative enjoyment in his eyes. “I don’t want you to be able to squirm at all. Make any noises you have to, but no moving.”

Clara nodded mutely, more than willing to consent to any terms that would bring her to the orgasm she craved.

The redhead returned, and Clara found her arms being gently pulled behind her back. Leather cuffs closed around one wrist and then the other, and the man’s grip tightened on her breasts as the woman folded Clara’s forearms against the small of her back, pulling her shoulders back to make her breasts even more prominent.

She gave an involuntary yelp as the woman’s downward-sliding caress came to a stop at her ankles; in an instant, it seemed to Clara, distracted by the man’s insistent touch, her legs came together, and she was bound just above the feet with almost no ability to walk. She looked down instinctively, through the man’s arms, and saw that there was a short, stout chain between her feet—just enough to allow her to shuffle if she had to.

“Yes,” the man said, nodding approvingly. “She’s so lovely like this, don’t you think, Jessica?” Clara heard the redhead murmur her agreement.

The man led her to the bed, and Clara saw that the woman who had been receiving a spanking was now on

the floor with the man who had been administering the punishment, her legs spread wide. She was moaning, murmuring gratitude as the man's cock thrust up into her—and Clara saw that it was not the woman's pussy that was being filled as she moved up and down on him so eagerly, but her ass.

The redhead pushed Clara forward at the shoulder, and Clara let out a startled, wordless protest as she fell face-first to the bed, unable to stop her descent with her arms pinned to her back.

The redhead turned Clara's head, giving her the ability to breathe unhindered, and then climbed onto the bed. "What you're going to do," the redhead told her. "Is lick me like an eager little slave while Clinton gives you the spanking you want so badly. If you make me come before he finishes, you get to come, too; if not, you'll have to watch him fuck me while you're still all tied up. Do you understand the rules, sweetie?"

Clara barely hesitated before nodding. She had worked alongside women—she had even, on occasion, "played" with women at her clients' behest—but she had never actually gone down on a woman in her short career as an escort, keeping to touching and fingering them, or letting herself be eaten.

The redhead shifted in front of her, spreading her legs wide around Clara's shoulders, and in moments Clara's face was only inches away from the woman's pussy. Her bare labia were shining and slick with fluids, the top of her mound decorated with a tiny tuft of hair that proved her auburn locks were natural.

Clara took a deep breath and tilted her head, bringing

her lips up to the woman's pussy and nuzzling against her experimentally. The woman smelled clean, with the briny, ocean-like scent of arousal and nothing else. Clara slid her tongue along the cleft and the redhead shivered, letting out a short, soft, approving moan. The sharp, slightly sweet taste of the woman's fluids coated Clara's tongue and she went to work, burying her face against the slick pussy and immediately beginning to lick and suck.

She gasped, startled, as she felt a jolt of white-hot pain crashing against the curve of her ass.

"Keep going, baby; you want a chance to come, don't you?"

The redhead's fingers slid along Clara's scalp, deftly freeing her hair from the tight bun, and Clara took a deep breath, focusing on the task at hand. She yelped as another stripe of hot pain painted itself against her ass, struggling instinctively against the bindings on her arms even as she redoubled her efforts to bring the woman in front of her pleasure.

Clara tried to remember what she had liked when other people went down on her—but every time she nearly called it to mind, the whip came down across her skin, blanking out all thought. She decided to abandon thought and work instinctively, sucking and licking, plunging her tongue into the tight heat of the woman's slit, working up to the swollen clit to nuzzle her lips and lap the tip of her tongue against it.

She heard deep moans boiling up from the woman, felt her body tensing as Clara's efforts began to bear fruit. After a while, she began to anticipate and even eagerly

appreciate the lash of the whip as it danced over the curve of her ass, along her thighs. The searing pain developed into a throbbing heat, and Clara gave into the helplessness of her situation, focused entirely on bringing the redhead to orgasm.

The woman let out a sharp, piercing cry, her hands tugging roughly at Clara's hair as her body tensed. The next moment, her fluids gushed against Clara's lips, filling her mouth with a salty-sharp sweetness that Clara found herself eagerly swallowing down and devouring.

The redhead shivered and trembled as Clara continued to work her, sucking her clit between her lips, plunging her tongue deep inside of her, past the clenching, flexing muscles at the front of her pussy. The whip lashes against her body ceased as the woman in front of her shook and writhed, holding onto her orgasm for as long as she could before sagging back against the bed.

Clara became aware of a hand sliding between her closed legs, fingers rubbing along her throbbing, soaking wet pussy as she lay panting, and her face slick with the other woman's arousal. She was barely aware of the ache in her shoulders from their constrained position, acutely aware of the fire that crackled across her entire ass, along the backs of her legs, and the teasing pleasure of someone rubbing her with thick fingers.

"She needs cock, Clinton," the redhead said, between panting gasps for breath. "She's been so sweet to me, you should really let her come like the good girl she is."

The redhead shifted, sitting up, and Clara groaned as the man's fingers plunged into her swiftly, rubbing along her inner walls. "You just want to lick come out of her pussy,

don't you Jessica?" he said with a grin.

Clara whimpered, straining to get better contact, as the redhead nodded eagerly. She could hear the sounds of pleasure that swirled around the room—moans, cries, skin slapping against skin, the hum of a vibrator—but she was so wrapped up in her own part of the event that she could barely pay attention.

Somehow, the chain between her ankles came away; Clara could feel her legs being pulled apart, spread wide, though she could still feel the tight wrap of the cuffs against her skin. Her arms were carefully unfolded, and Clara looked around her in confusion. The redhead was no longer in front of her; she saw the woman's flaming locks in the corner of her vision as her weakened arms were guided onto the bed, pushed into place underneath her.

"You did such a good job making me come, Clara," Jessica's voice was a low murmur in her ear. "I can't wait to return the favor after Clinton's done with you."

Clara let out a low, deep moan as she felt the hard, hot cock pressing up against her, pushing into her body in one fast thrust. It retreated and she keened with need.

"Push yourself onto him, Clara," Jessica instructed. "Clinton loves eager little sluts like us."

Clara did as she was told, pushing her hips backward, and was rewarded by the filling warmth of cock once more pushing deep inside of her. She began to move instinctively, thrusting back to meet the hips of the man pounding into her from behind. Another man climbed onto the bed and positioned himself in front of her, and

Clara bent her head eagerly to his erect cock, taking him into her mouth and moaning around his length as the other man thrust into her harder and faster from behind.

Within moments, Clara found herself barely able to focus on pleasuring the man who had joined them, sucking and licking him mindlessly as she tumbled over into an intense orgasm. Wave after wave of pleasure washed through her and Clara struggled to maintain enough focus to continue her efforts as her climax obliterated her thoughts; she barely noticed the way the man's cock began to twitch between her lips, barely heard his long, loud groan of pleasure before the bitter-sharp flavor of his come came gushing across her tongue.

She swallowed convulsively, taking down every drop of his orgasm as the man behind her continued to pound her only-too-willing body, reaching his own climax only a few moments later. Clara's mind reeled as she tried to process the mingling sensations of heat rushing into the depths of her pussy and down her throat, her body twisting and moving until she was utterly spent.

She came back to herself with the sensation of soft lips and a hot tongue dancing over her sensitized labia, the sound of pleased moans from somewhere behind her reaching her ears. She realized all at once that someone was licking and sucking both her own fluids and the man's come from her pussy, that whoever was working her into a renewed frenzy of desire was eager—hungry, even—for the taste of her, the tongue plunging deep inside of her, slithering up to swipe against her clit.

Clara fell into a deep, hazy reverie, all thought receding as she reached another swift orgasm, as she felt the

characters in the room shifting around her, new people moving into place to pull her towards them even as the others mingled into new groups, the sounds of wet pleasure filling her ears and almost obscuring her own noises.

CHAPTER EIGHT



Long after Clara ceased to keep track of time, she noticed that the group in her room had thinned; men in suits and women naked except for masks began to wander out, until Clara was left to her own devices. At a loss for what to do with herself, she thought about the last several hours as she lay on the bed alone.

She was shocked by how much she had enjoyed herself—how much she had savored every minute of the strange party. Even without a mask on, the atmosphere had been so free, so uninhibited, that she hadn't noticed a distinction between herself and the others in the room. The men had definitely been dominant—but the women hadn't been entirely submissive; Clara remembered flashes of nonchalant behavior from the masked girls, flirtatious and playful.

She heard chatter coming from outside of the room and gathered herself up, climbing out of the bed and leaving the empty bedroom to wander back into the grand lobby. She found her clothes where Stephanos had left them, scattered on the floor, and slipped back into them—save

for the ripped panties. *With the money he already gave you, you can afford the replacement,* she told herself. *Besides, it's better to write off a pair of undies than to have to deal with... whatever might have happened otherwise.*

The guests were beginning to thin out, leaving just as anonymously as she had seen them come in. Looking through the window, Clara saw several black town cars—varying from sleek and sporty new models to old-fashioned Rolls Royce boats—gathering along the driveway. She watched in curiosity as suited, masked men climbed into them one by one, to be carried off of the property in silent anonymous splendor. A few of the cars collected women as well—now well-dressed, still wearing their masks.

Clara wondered just how many of the female participants had been professionals like herself, and how many had been hobbyists. She thought of the redhead who'd taken such an interest in her and felt herself blushing slightly, shivering at the memory of the woman's lips and tongue against her pussy. It didn't bother Clara that she couldn't fully remember everything she had done, every person she had found herself swapped between; the hazy fog of arousal, of intense pleasure, had covered over everything, leaving her nothing but a hum of lingering satisfaction and a distant, tingling heat along different parts of her body.

She remembered suddenly that Amanda had left her at the gate; that she had no way home. She had left her cell phone in the car in the rush to get out and follow Stephanos. Clara worried at her bottom lip. There had to be a phone in the house somewhere, she reasoned.

More and more people were drifting out of the house, getting into cars to go. As Clara's concern deepened into worry, she felt someone's hand close around her arm and turned, almost indignant.

Stephanos, still wearing his mask, smiled slightly at her. He guided her away from the few remaining guests into another room she hadn't seen.

"Did you enjoy yourself?" he asked, sliding the mask back from his face.

Clara laughed, unable to help herself. "If I had enjoyed myself any more, I would have been dead at the end of it," she replied.

"Did you have to use your safe word at any point?" Stephanos looked down at her with a faint trace of concern.

"I never felt the need," Clara reassured him. "It was weird, but nobody made me feel unsafe or judged... even though someone had announced to the room that I'm an escort."

Stephanos chuckled. "As I'm sure you've already gathered, the kind of people who were at this event are not the sort to judge a person for how they make their money." He withdrew an envelope from a pocket of his blazer. "Some of the participants... were professionals such as yourself."

Clara nodded. She had assumed that at least a few of the women were sex workers—porn stars, perhaps, cam girls, escorts like herself. That didn't take away anything of the allure of the situation; she had never seen a group of people more genuinely interested in pleasure for

pleasure's sake; a group who were able to be unselfconscious without being overdramatic.

Stephanos found a pocket on her blazer and stuffed the envelope into it, smiling at her lightly. "It's very late—I hope none of your usual clients will be missing you. Consider this your fee for the evening, unexpected as your engagement was."

Clara smiled slightly. *He's paying me for what I gladly would've have done for free—or paid him for, if it came down to it. Top client status achieved,* she thought.

He led her out of the room and Clara noticed that everyone had departed, leaving one lone town car in the driveway.

"Did you make any arrangements to be picked up?" Stephanos asked her.

Clara blushed as she shook her head. "I was sort of in a hurry," she admitted. "I kind of forgot my phone. I was going to call a cab to get back into town."

The Greek smiled slowly. "Come with me," he suggested, taking her hand with surprising gentleness. He led her out of the house and towards the lone town car. "I can drop you off wherever you like."

Clara considered her options. She was wary of letting any client—even Stephanos—know where she lived. She had cash enough to afford a cab from this remote hideaway, certainly she could have him drop her in the downtown area, grab a drink, and then find a way to contact Amanda to let her know she was okay.

"Let me think of where that is," Clara said, with a wry

smile.

“I can understand not wanting a client to know where you live,” Stephanos said, opening the back door to the car and gesturing for her to get in. “Anywhere you like; you have plenty of time to think.”

Clara chuckled softly as she climbed into the car. If she had tried to imagine what the interior would look like, she would have pictured it much the way she found it; soft, buttery leather upholstery, wide, comfortable seats, plenty of legroom.

Stephanos climbed in behind her and tapped the ceiling near the divider between the back and the driver’s compartment, and Clara felt the car start to silkily move on the gravel driveway, heading towards the road.

For a moment, they were both silent, and Clara wondered just how much she had risked on Stephanos’ behalf, following him the way she had, being discovered. It would have been easy for him to be angry with her, and Clara had to acknowledge that she had got off lightly.

As she was wondering about the mysterious man, and how he had come to be involved in the strange party, Stephanos cleared his throat.

“You shouldn’t have followed me,” he said quietly. Before Clara could protest or attempt to excuse herself, he raised a hand, smiling at her slightly. “I’m not angry; I don’t think any man of sense could be.”

“I guess I’m not a man of sense,” Clara admitted with a wry smile. “I’d be angry in your position.”

Stephanos laughed. “It came out well in the end, thanks

to your willingness to go along with the program. In fact, several people informed me in very pleased terms that you were absolutely delightful.”

Clara blushed, wondering just to what extent she had been discussed. Modesty was not a disease she had ever considered herself likely to catch.

He reached out and touched her knee lightly, his fingers warm against her skin. “You have a curious, inquisitive mind; and an open one. I noticed that our first evening together.” He combed his fingers through his hair, glancing through the window. “I have to appreciate the fact that you’re so open to new experiences, and so willing to go after something you’re interested in.” Stephanos chuckled. “Anyone with an entrepreneurial spirit is a kindred soul for a businessman.”

Clara found herself smiling in response to his comment. “Who were those people?” she asked. “I mean—obviously, some were professionals, but the men in suits?”

Stephanos shrugged slightly. “Very powerful men,” he said slowly. “Lawyers, businessmen, men with even greater power—government representatives, some of them.” He shook his head. “Their greatest fear is being discovered by the press. No one in our position would want any of the events of this evening to land in a newspaper.”

“I can see why you’d want privacy for that kind of party,” Clara agreed.

“What they suspected—when you were discovered peering into the windows—was that you were a journalist;

that one of them had been tailed by someone from the press. If they'd continued to entertain that suspicion, I'm not sure what they would have done. But I'm certain that neither of us would have enjoyed it."

Clara's mouth went dry, her throat closing in a spasm. "I can only imagine," she said, biting her bottom lip as images of torture—of a far less erotic variety—filled her mind. "Thanks for saving my bacon, then."

She hadn't entirely realized just how serious the situation had been—though she'd gotten the impression that it was dangerous after her being discovered outside, looking in. For powerful people, being exposed in the midst of debauched activities like the one she'd seen would be terrifying.

"It's to your credit that you rose to the challenge," Stephanos said. His gaze traveled over her slowly. "I'm pleased that you went with the flow. I also have to apologize for destroying your panties."

Clara laughed. "They weren't that expensive," she said, dismissing his concern with a gesture. "It's not like I can't buy a new pair."

"I certainly hope after what you've earned tonight and last night that you could afford multiple replacements," Stephanos said, with a slight smile, and Clara nodded, grinning.

For a long moment they both fell silent, and Clara wondered if there was anything left to say between them; if she had still been seriously entertaining the notion of trying to get the Greek to put her "on retainer," to make her his go-to escort, she thought that this would be the

time to broach the topic. And while she would certainly enjoy continuing their association, she couldn't quite bring herself to talk about it. The two evenings had shifted so many things around in her mind that Clara wasn't entirely sure how she felt about it all—it would take time for her to come to any conclusions.

She realized that Stephanos wasn't gazing out through the smoked glass of the windows; he was looking right at her. Not in a way that made her feel violated, but with a kind of interest, an intrigue, which she could sense.

Clara met his gaze, her cheeks warming as they looked at each other in silence. She thought that she sensed the slightest of forward movements from the man; she thought to herself—without knowing how she felt—that he was moving in to kiss her.

Before she could decide whether or not she wanted him to kiss her, Clara's ears were filled with a sharp, high-pitched skidding, a stuttering squeal of tires on pavement. She reached out instinctively to grab something to hold onto as the inertia of the car and her body propelled her forward. Clara heard a crunching, metallic groan and found herself thrown upwards and forward, a bright white crash of pain shocking through her skull. In the next moment, everything went black; she barely felt her body tumbling back down to the floor of the car, barely felt the impact of her limbs colliding with the floorboard.

CHAPTER NINE



“Need to call Amanda...”

“It’s okay, Clara, just relax...”

“Phone... need to call...”

“You’re going to be all right, Clara...”

Flickers of light and sound shot through Clara’s mind, breaking up the deep blackness. She felt her face being lightly tapped, a buzzing voice cutting through the ringing of her ears. She heard muted, muffled conversations swimming around her, before the darkness came over once more.

Clara heard herself speaking—saying something, but it took too much effort to form the words. Her mouth felt as though it was full of wadded cotton, her tongue was so heavy. Her eyes wouldn’t fully open, so everything she saw took on the quality of pictures with the camera-shutter half-closed.

There was something about a car accident. She heard someone asking, “Is everyone okay?”

Clara swam through deep levels of darkness, unsure of whether she was moving up into light or deeper into the black. There was a sound of a siren, she thought. Someone told her over and over again that she was all right, in a comfortingly familiar voice—but one she couldn't place.

She felt herself lifted up by strong arms, carried away as her eyes opened enough to see a crumpled, crushed black mass of metal, another vehicle close by. The howling sound was so far away; it was easier to focus on the arms carrying her, on the voice murmuring gently that she was going to be okay.

Her deep unconsciousness was broken up by fleeting images; Clara saw herself as if in a movie, nuzzling against a woman's breasts, looking up into her masked face with a grin. Someone was touching her, rubbing her soaking wet pussy as Clara nuzzled and worshiped a woman's breasts.

Another flash of light, and she was looking up at a masked man as her lips descended on his cock, the taste of his precum coating her tongue. She gagged slightly as he thrust his hips into her face, his cock plunging down to her throat. Flash—and she was rubbing against a masked woman, rocking her hips to bring her slick folds against the woman's soaking pussy as a man in another mask took her partner from behind, thrusting eagerly up into her.

She heard low voices arguing. Someone was saying he didn't care about the cost. "*Type O negative...*" "*I'm telling you, St. Mary's...*" "*Yes, I'm certain.*"

Clara had no idea what was going on around her; her

head throbbed, and her body felt sore in ways she couldn't determine the cause for. She felt herself moving and came back in brief moments of stillness. When she was aware of herself, she couldn't quite bring herself to care about what was happening to her—it seemed like too much effort when everything hurt and felt so very heavy.

Gradually, Clara's moments of self-awareness lengthened and brightened, and she struggled against the consuming, swallowing darkness, trying to kick her legs, to pull her arms back, to lift herself out of it. She heard words leaving her mouth without meaning and tried to focus. If she could focus, somehow she would be able to know, somehow she would get out of the black.

Clara realized suddenly that she felt cold—that there was something slightly soft but not very yielding underneath her. The air around her smelled of antiseptic, and though she ached everywhere still, she didn't feel quite so heavy. She made a sound between a groan and a mumble and felt her face moving into a grimace. She realized that she was awake, and opened her eyes.

For a moment, disoriented, Clara took in the sterile walls of a hospital room, the carefully cheerful botanical print in front of her, the dry, chilly air filling her nose. There was a sharper pain in her arm and she looked down to see an IV inserted. *What the hell did I do to land in a hospital?* She wondered, frowning.

As she strained against the lingering ache in her head, feeling as though her thoughts were traveling the speed of cold molasses, Clara remembered the crash all at once. Talking to Stephanos, the way he had leaned

towards her ever so slightly, the screeching, skidding, stuttering of the wheels underneath her and the metallic crunch, the way she had found herself pitched forward—and the sharp, bright flash of pain as her head connected with the ceiling of the car.

Shit. Shit. Shit. Clara replayed the events of the evening leading up to the crash. She was grateful that she was in a hospital, but she had no idea which one, where she was, if anyone had contacted Amanda.

God—I'm naked under this stupid gown. Fuck, someone stole my money. How the hell am I going to pay for this fucking luxury hospital stay? The fear of any cash-based worker was always the possibility of landing in the hospital; for escorts like Clara, that fear was increased by the potential for questions.

She looked around the room quickly, trying to assess just how much her stay might cost, and whether she should raise a little hell to have her effects returned to her. Clara's gaze fell onto a figure seated calmly in a chair next to her bed; it was Stephanos.

She sighed with relief, bringing one hand to her forehead to touch the spots of lingering pain. "I feel like I've been out for a long time," Clara said, trying to sort through the conflicting, stacking flashes of awareness.

"Not so long," Stephanos said, with a faint smile. "A few hours. I held onto your things, so don't be worried about your earnings."

Clara chuckled lowly. "I was kind of concerned about how I was going to pay for all this, grateful as I am." She ran her hands over her body carefully, not wanting to

dislodge the IV in her arm. So far, she thought, so good; all of the parts present and accounted for.

“You won’t have to pay for it at all,” Stephanos said. “It wasn’t your fault—you were an innocent bystander in the situation. There’s no reason for you to pay.”

“Thank you again,” Clara said. She closed her eyes for a moment. “What actually happened?”

Stephanos shrugged. “My driver hit another car—I’m ashamed to say he was probably not paying as much attention as he should have been.” Stephanos paused for just a moment, looking her over. “Everyone is fine; my driver has only a few bruises and bumps to take as a lesson, the other car’s occupants are also in good shape, and the doctors say that barring a few lumps and bumps, you’ll be fine as well.”

Clara remembered something from the floating haze of semi-consciousness that had interrupted the period of black. “Oh God, I promised my friend I’d call her. She’s probably worried sick.”

Stephanos smiled slightly and reached over to the bedside table, picking up the old-fashioned phone and handing it to her. Clara ruminated on the instructions printed on it for a moment before lifting the handset and dialing her friend’s number. Amanda didn’t answer—she was probably with another client—so Clara left a brief message, assuring her friend that she was fine, but might not be home for a while. “I’ll call you again later... things are kind of up in the air at the moment,” she finished. “Bye.”

She put the handset down and turned the phone over to

Stephanos, who replaced it on the bedside table. Clara took him in slowly; he was still wearing his suit, but had loosened his tie, and the fine fabric of the outfit was rumpled.

“Why did you stick around?” Clara asked, confused. “I mean, if you just wanted to pay you could have given instructions and been on your merry way.”

Stephanos smiled slightly, a fleetingly sad look in his eyes. “I felt responsible for what happened. You were injured in my car, due to the actions of my driver.” He licked his lips. “I feel better knowing you’re awake, that you seem to be back to yourself.”

“Did I...” Clara pressed her lips together, remembering the vivid flashes of dreamlike memory that had pervaded her unconsciousness. “I didn’t talk, did I?”

Stephanos chuckled, shaking his head. “Not in any way that anyone would have been able to decipher. Some things about making a phone call. There were a few moments on the way here where I saw your facial expression change...” His smile deepened, and Clara felt her cheeks heating up. “But I don’t believe anyone else was paying attention—they were too busy looking at the monitoring machines.” He took a deep breath and exhaled. “You should rest. I’ll stay here with you, if you don’t mind.”

Clara nodded; she didn’t think she had much choice in the matter—and anyway, she felt oddly reassured, even safe, in Stephanos’ presence. *Let’s see them try and kick him out when visiting hours end*, she thought, closing her eyes and retreating almost immediately into a soft sleep.

A doctor came in at one point, the sound of his entrance rousing Clara; she looked around to see Stephanos sitting up in his chair as if he, too, had succumbed to exhaustion. The doctor barely looked at her, instead dividing his attention between the chart at the foot of her bed and the machines that were monitoring her. “It looks as though you’ve completely stabilized,” he said, directing his comment to Stephanos rather than to Clara.

“You’re certain there are no serious injuries?”

Clara wanted to protest—after all, she was the patient, not Stephanos—but she knew that in her position, with Stephanos footing the bill for the care she had received, it wasn’t worth making a point. If it had been her own money, she could have thrown a fit with reason.

“Her EEG is clear, there are no signs of internal injuries, no broken bones, and nothing picked up on an MRI.” For the first time since he had entered the room, the doctor turned his attention onto Clara. “You can be discharged as soon as you’re up to walking out of here,” he said, with a faint smile, and Clara nodded her understanding.

“Is there anywhere you need to be?” Stephanos asked her. “Anyone you need to call?”

Clara considered the questions as the doctor left the room, giving them privacy once more. She didn’t want to think of just how much more this was costing Stephanos; the few times she had been in the hospital in the past, she had been in a shared room, and she knew that a private room like this one probably cost an arm and a leg. *And a few teeth. A major organ.*

She shrugged. “I don’t even know what time it is,” she

said.

Stephanos looked at a spot on the wall above the back of her bed. "It's morning," he told her.

Clara wondered how long she had been unconscious after the accident, how long she had slept after her conversation with Stephanos.

"I don't really have anywhere to be," she admitted.

Stephanos smiled slightly. "Well, then; let's get you out of the gown and into your clothes, and we'll get out of here."

Clara looked around the room; her clothing had at some point been returned to her, and was folded neatly on a bureau. "Do you mind if I get a shower first? I'm feeling kind of..." Clara made a face. "Not really my cleanest."

Stephanos laughed as she blushed. "Not that I think a hospital shower will make you feel all that cleaner," he said, smiling slightly. "But it would probably complete your recovery, if nothing else."

Clara climbed out of bed carefully; she still felt a bit shaky, but not as disoriented as she had been when she first arrived in the room. She walked towards the bathroom of the private suite, thinking that it was quite a strange turn of events when an escort could ask a billionaire client to wait on her to take a shower before paying the bill for her stay in hospital. But if Stephanos was willing to wait for her, Clara was not about to sit around with her skin feeling oily, her hair stiff and sticky from sweat.

She showered quickly, using the harsh, detergent-like

soap and shampoo, and conditioner that didn't seem to do anything to either soften or detangle her hair. The towel was cheaper than the ones in her own apartment, but she got herself dry and finger-combed her dark hair until it was passable.

She realized abruptly that she had forgotten her clothes in her haste to get the shower over with. She looked down at her body; Stephanos had seen her naked twice, she didn't think she should have any reservations about him watching her dress. There were still a few pinkish-red stripes along her legs, and as she turned in front of the mirror, she saw her ass was crisscrossed with them too, along with a few bruises scattered over her body where her fragile flesh had met the unyielding contours of the town car's interior. She could feel a tender spot on her scalp where her head had collided with the roof.

Taking a deep breath and suppressing her sudden sense of modesty, Clara stepped out of the bathroom, the thin towel draped around her. Stephanos' gaze lit on her barely-covered body and she saw something flicker in his eyes—something like hunger—before his expression turned neutral once more.

"I was going to tell you that you'd forgotten your clothes," he said, sitting back in his chair. "But you were in too much of a hurry."

Clara smiled, rolling her eyes. "Not like you haven't seen me naked anyway," she pointed out, letting the towel drop and scooping it up to lay it carefully over the edge of the bed.

She collected her clothing and dressed quickly, propelled by a mixture of guilt at how long she had delayed

Stephanos from his normal affairs—whatever those might be—and a recurrence of the strange sense of vulnerable modesty she had suffered in the bathroom. *Stop being ridiculous*, she told herself firmly. *More men have seen you naked than you could possibly count or remember. This is just another guy.*

Clara was amused as Stephanos led her through the hospital to the billing section, keeping her close in a way that didn't speak to any specific attachment between them. She wondered just what story he had given the staff to allow him to stay in her room—or what he would say to explain his interest in paying her bill. He waited patiently for their turn, barely looking around in even passing curiosity. Clara would rather not have known how much she owed the man; her mental math estimate on the probable cost of her hospital stay was bad enough.

Clara thought it amazing—and more than a little appalling—when she noticed how the female clerk at the billing desk treated Stephanos. If she had come in on her own, Clara knew she'd have been discharged whether or not she felt up to leaving, whether or not she had a means of getting home. The clerk asked if Stephanos was sure that Clara was ready to leave the hospital; smiling and simpering, obviously aware—or at least intuiting—that he was wealthy.

Clara contrasted the woman's behavior with how she had acted with the person in line in front of them. The clerk had barely looked at the patient or his wife, merely looking at the screen and rattling off figures and questions. With Stephanos, she patiently explained what each charge that added up to the five thousand dollar total represented. *He's spending as much on my stay as*

he did on our session, Clara thought with disgust.

Stephanos glanced at her with amusement in his eyes as he withdrew his wallet from his pocket and took out the black American Express card, laying it on the counter with a muted metallic clink.

Paperwork signed and the charge cleared, Stephanos guided her out of the hospital to a waiting car. “Different driver,” he said when Clara hesitated.

She glanced at him. “I wasn’t thinking he was going to get us in another accident,” she said quickly.

Stephanos chuckled. “I assumed you were worried that I’d make a driver come back to work after an accident.”

Clara blushed. “I was actually trying to decide where to ask you to take me.”

Stephanos cupped her elbow lightly, opening the door and gesturing for her to get in. The car was slightly less luxurious—though no less expensive—than the previous one had been, and Clara wondered if Stephanos used a service or if he just had several drivers and several cars on retainer, waiting to be summoned whenever he needed them.

“If you please,” Stephanos said, climbing in next to her and tapping the divider to cue the driver to leave, “I’m still rather concerned about your well-being. I think a meal and some rest would do you good. Of course, you know your social calendar better than I do; if you really have to be somewhere I won’t detain you.”

Clara smiled sheepishly. “Under normal circumstances, I wouldn’t even be awake this time of day.”

“Then I’m sure you won’t mind a short detour.”

CHAPTER TEN



The hotel that the car finally pulled up to was different from the one where Clara had met Stephanos the first night. It was no less grand, however, positioned in the downtown area, close to the financial district—convenient, she was sure, for his interests in getting to and from work.

Stephanos helped her out of the car and onto the sidewalk, and Clara couldn't help smiling in amazement as he greeted the doorman, quickly asking about the attendant's preferred sports team and handing the man a crisp five-dollar bill. He led her through an opulent lobby that seemed to Clara's eyes to be composed entirely of gleaming brass and priceless wood, towards an elevator marked "Executive Members Only, Please." Another flickering of his fingers and Clara saw that Stephanos had punched in some kind of code on a pad next to the elevator doors.

"I would have thought that a guy of your—resources—would have some huge loft apartment, a renovated building or something. Isn't that what all you incredibly

wealthy types do?”

Stephanos laughed, his hand lingering on the small of her back, his touch oddly soothing. “It makes more fiscal sense to base myself out of this hotel; the rate is better than what I would spend on an actual residence, and it fills my needs better.”

Clara shrugged, reminding herself that just because owning her own home was her picture of legitimacy, it didn’t mean that everyone lived that way.

The elevator moved through floor after floor in a silky ascent that Clara barely felt. She looked around in curiosity at the car, at Stephanos.

“So you actually live here,” she said, making it not quite a question.

“For the moment, yes,” Stephanos replied. “It’s close to the office, in case I need to be there at short notice. I have all the space I require, and if I feel like dining in, I can order a meal that’s as good, if not better, than anything I could have at a restaurant.”

Clara puckered her lips slightly in amusement. “So do you not know how to cook, or can you just not be bothered to make the effort?”

A flicker of something moved through the Greek’s eyes and he shrugged. “I do cook occasionally—the suite has a kitchen—but it’s never been a passion of mine.”

Something about the tone of his voice made Clara halt that line of questioning, though curiosity burned within her. The rest of the quick ascent passed in silence.

The elevator chimed and the doors slid open to reveal a tiny hallway leading to a single door; Clara smiled to herself. Of course, she thought, if Stephanos was going to have a hotel room to live out of, he would hardly choose one less exclusive than the place where he played.

He led her through the hallway, moving briskly as if even in the hallowed hallway of the penthouse suite of a hotel, he couldn't be assured of privacy.

He inserted a key card and opened the door, gesturing for Clara to precede him into the room.

Glancing around, Clara's first impression was that it was more like an apartment than any hotel room had a right to be. As she stepped through the foyer and into the living room area of the suite, she spotted a staircase leading up to a sliding-glass door, caught a slice of what must be a rooftop balcony.

The living room itself was the picture of subdued splendor: a huge couch dominated the space in front of a tall, gleaming window, with a few chairs placed in a loose conversational circle around a coffee table that was probably worth more than Clara made at least in a month. *At least, any other month than this one,* she thought. She hadn't checked the envelope that Stephanos had given her yet, but based on its weight, she fully expected it contained at least as much as her previous earnings from him.

"Have a seat," Stephanos said.

Clara looked at the expensive hardwood floor and kicked off her shoes, placing them near the entryway. She

sighed in contentment as she stepped onto a thick, soft rug, wriggling her toes slightly in its appealing texture before continuing on to the couch.

“You’re probably starving,” Stephanos said. “In fact, if you aren’t, after all the calories you expended last night, then I will call up my driver and we will take you to a better hospital.”

Clara laughed. “You just dropped five thousand dollars on a hospital stay for me; I think they knew what they were doing there,” she pointed out. “I am hungry, though.” As soon as Stephanos had mentioned it, her stomach had given a lurch inside of her, reminding her that she had been neglecting it.

“If you weren’t hungry, then the doctors would have missed something in your workup,” Stephanos said, giving her a slightly firm look. “I’m not interested in spending five thousand dollars for incompetent doctors to decide you’re fine when you aren’t.”

Clara grinned slightly. “It’s fortunate then that they didn’t miss anything, and I’m starving.”

There was something both pleasing and troubling about the depth of Stephanos’ concern for her; Clara was not used to clients having any concern for her well-being beyond the job itself. But then, she thought, Stephanos was unlike any of her previous clients in every way she could possibly imagine.

He excused himself, turning away and walking into another room of the suite; Clara assumed it must be the kitchen. She looked around the room, noting details that her dazzled eyes had failed to take in during her initial

inspection. It was clear to her, finding little signs of subtle wear, that the suite was definitely a residence; it didn't have the aseptic quality that hotel rooms usually had.

Clara smelled something delicious—though she couldn't place what—coming from the direction that Stephanos had gone, and a few moments later, he returned with a bottle of wine, two glasses, and a fairly lavish meal for two laid out on a large heavy tray.

"I'm a bit hungry myself," he admitted.

"You said you don't cook," Clara said, raising an eyebrow as he set the tray down, handing her a napkin roll.

Stephanos smiled. "These are leftovers, I'm afraid."

Clara eyed the plate he set on the coffee table in front of her: there were slices of perfectly-cooked steak nestled among an assortment of roasted vegetables, and rice pilaf with toasted nuts and raisins.

Stephanos opened the bottle of wine—with a label that Clara easily recognized as expensive—and poured the deep red liquid into two glasses before seating himself in one of the chairs. "Eat!" he said, as she hesitated a moment longer.

Clara unwrapped her utensils and shifted on the couch, laying the cloth across her lap before she started to eat.

They sat in silence for a few moments until Clara took her first sip of the wine; she had never been fond of red wine before—it always seemed heavy, too dry and bitter to her tongue. The one Stephanos had selected, however, was sweet and almost plummy, rolling against her tongue to mingle with the lingering flavor of the steak.

“Oh God, I needed that,” she said, shaking her head in amazement.

“Purely medicinal,” he told her, with a flicker of a smile. “I wouldn’t recommend getting drunk for a few days—you don’t have a concussion, but you can never be too careful with a head injury.”

Clara nodded. “I don’t tend to make a point of getting drunk anyway,” she said.

Stephanos looked at her speculatively. “What’s your favorite cocktail?”

Clara smiled slowly. “I tend to alternate,” she said. “I like drinks I can savor—not something you have to gulp down.” Clara considered. “If I could only have one kind of cocktail for the rest of my life, I’d probably choose a martini.”

“Not what I would have expected,” Stephanos said, raising an approving eyebrow.

“Well from a practical standpoint,” Clara said, digging back into her steak, “you can fit a martini into most budgets—so even when you’re broke, you can get at least an okay martini. Not a great one, of course.” Clara wrinkled her nose, remembering the few times she had tried a cut-rate martini. “But they can only get so cheap with the vermouth. And you can switch between vodka and gin if you want something with more flavor.” She grinned. “Also, I love olives.”

“And what would be your second choice?” Clara swallowed a bite of the pilaf, thinking that the raisins complemented the flavors more than she had expected.

“A Manhattan, I think. Or a Sidecar.” She glanced at him. “What about you?”

Stephanos considered the question, taking a lingering sip of the wine. “Gin and tonic,” he said. “Or a highball.” He set his plate aside, cradling his wine glass and watching as Clara ate. “How did you end up a professional?”

Clara took a deep breath, picking up her own wine glass and taking a slow sip. “Kind of by accident,” she said. She explained about her floundering through college, about the job posting, and how she had decided to try it out for a week. “As I’m sure you’re aware, making money can be a pretty intense drug,” she said, smiling slightly.

“Very intense. It ruins some people.”

Clara nodded. “I’ve seen it happen; though of course, on probably a smaller scale than it does with billionaires.”

She thought of the escorts she had seen through the few years of her career, who had succumbed to a variety of vices. They had been so sure that they could just keep making money to continue their habits, whatever they happened to be. But her Madame had a low tolerance when it came to something like showing up to a job buzzed.

“How does one become a billionaire in the first place?” she asked.

Stephanos smiled and shrugged. “Almost as accidentally as one becomes an escort,” he told her. “When I struck out on my own I only knew that I wanted to stop reporting to someone else, stop making money for someone who had no real interest in me as a person.” He glanced around the room, a thoughtful look coming over his

features. “I was young and foolishly wise.”

“Foolishly wise?” Clara sat back from her plate, her stomach satisfied.

“I made bad choices for good reasons; I threw myself into starting a business convinced that I was so much smarter than the men who paid me—and I was, in certain respects.”

Clara listened in fascination as Stephanos detailed the rise of his empire; the lessons he had learned since moving to the States from Greece, the pivots his business interests had taken over the years as he built up a monolith of corporate interest. She noticed as he spoke that he didn’t mention anything at all about his personal life; it was strange that he didn’t mention any regret at his bachelor status—or even laud it as preferable.

When Stephanos skillfully turned the conversation back onto the subject of Clara’s life, she found herself telling him about her desire to go back to school. “I mean, after a certain point you can’t get jobs as an escort unless you’re willing to take any job...” she frowned. “You can move into representing other escorts, but...” Clara worried at her bottom lip, draining the dregs of wine from her glass. “I guess I kind of have a desire to eventually be a legitimate, open member of society.”

Stephanos nodded. “You’re a smart, driven woman; you’re open-minded with just enough opportunism to look out for your self-interest. You could go far.” He stood, setting his glass down. “How are you feeling, Clara?”

Clara blinked at the question, still absorbing the compliments. “Really good, actually,” she said, startled at

how much a meal, a glass of wine, and a conversation had restored her sense of well-being.

“In that case, I hope you’ll enjoy seeing more of the suite,” Stephanos said, his eyes darkening slightly with what Clara could easily read as desire.

She smiled slowly. “You don’t have to use a line on me, you know,” she said, rising to her feet.

She set her wine glass down carefully as Stephanos closed the distance between them. He took her by the hand, leaning in to brush his lips against hers briefly.

Clara followed as he led her through the living room and towards a tightly closed door, off to the side of the huge room. She could feel a tingle of anticipation working through her spine, felt her heart starting to beat faster. She knew, at least dimly, what was coming, and Clara was surprised at how eager she was for it.

Stephanos opened the door and propelled her into the room, following her quickly and closing the door behind them. Just like the other hotel, the room was utterly dark until Clara heard a click, and soft, yellowish light illuminated everything.

Clara feasted her eyes: the room was even more spectacular than the first hotel room had been, though some part of her mind noted it was more sparsely decorated. The walls were painted a deep red, and a four-poster bed dominated the space. There were low dressers, a few wardrobes that looked as though they were made of positively ancient wood.

“Do you remember the safe word?” Stephanos asked from behind her, interrupting Clara’s perusal.

She turned to look at him and saw that his eyes were positively eager. “Yes,” she said. Stephanos raised an eyebrow and Clara blushed, realizing her mistake. “Yes, Sir,” she said.

“Very good,” Stephanos said, a slight smile curving his lips.

He took her hand and led her to a group of wardrobes along one of the walls. One by one he opened them, revealing a collection of toys, tools, and restraints every bit as impressive as the first one she had seen.

Clara’s skin tingled, her chest and face heating up as she took in the sight of vibrators of all conceivable shapes and sizes, plugs of various diameters, lubricants—flavored and non-flavored. She saw clamps, cuffs, ropes, spreader bars, anything that a wealthy man could possibly want to use against a willing, submissive victim.

“Strip, Clara,” Stephanos said, his hand releasing hers.

He moved to sit down in a chair that Clara hadn’t noticed and she took a deep breath, momentarily overwhelmed by the thrumming eroticism and arousal she felt. She realized that she had completely forgotten her lack of panties, and almost felt disappointed that her performance for her Master would be shortened.

Clara began unbuttoning the blazer of her suit, turning to face her expectant audience of one. She slid the fabric along her arms, remembering Stephanos’ movements from the day before, in front of the assembled party.

She stripped her clothes off as slowly as she could, taking her time as she slithered out of the blouse, turning her back to him to give the maximum impact to taking her

bra off. As she slipped her skirt down along her legs, stepping out of it, Stephanos hesitated for only a moment, watching her with starving eyes, before standing.

“You are very good at that, Clara,” he told her with approval. He stepped towards one of the wardrobes, turning his back to her; but Clara had seen the distinctive bulge at the front of his tailored pants.

He turned towards her once more, and Clara saw a long, slim collar dangling from his hands. She shook her head slightly; not out of fear, but out of a momentary distaste. It was one thing to allow him to bind her—but a collar? “No,” she said.

Stephanos frowned. “I do not tolerate disobedience,” he told her firmly.

Clara caught up her bottom lip between her teeth, eyeing the collar with suspicion.

Stephanos softened—minutely. “If you need to use your safe word at any time, I accept that and will respect it. But if you refuse something out of mere distaste, I will punish you.”

Clara swallowed. “Yes, Sir,” she said finally.

The Greek advanced on her, bringing the collar up to her neck. Clara felt a shiver down her spine as the cool leather wrapped around her skin, pressing all around her throat. She heard the clinking of its metal hardware as Stephanos buckled it at the back of her neck, tweaking it to fall just above her collarbone. He nodded with approval, stepping back to admire the result.

Clara knew without having to be told that she must stand still, that she must wait as Stephanos moved back to the wardrobe, obscuring her ability to watch what he was doing. She heard the clatter and clink of plastic and metal, and took a deep breath. Something about wearing the collar around her neck put her more thoroughly into a submissive mindset even than her previous binding had; she almost couldn't indulge in the fidgeting and squirming impulses that danced along her limbs.

Stephanos turned back to her and Clara's gaze flicked downward to see his hands full of various items: rope, cuffs, and things she couldn't identify in the soft light. He approached until he was only inches away from her naked body and drew her wrists in front of her.

Knowing she had no choice—other than to use her safe word and risk the entire encounter ending—Clara held her wrists where Stephanos put them, swallowing down her instinctive refusal. Surprisingly soft, the rope coiled around and around her wrists, tightening until the silky material bit into her skin. Stephanos pushed her hands down lightly once she was inextricably bound, and Clara took another deep breath.

Her Master sank down to his knees in front of her, glancing up at her face. He reached up between her slightly spread legs, brushing his fingers against her already-wet pussy. "You realize, Clara, that you must be punished for your presumption yesterday," he said, matter-of-factly.

Clara nodded. "Yes, Sir," she said out loud, remembering his preference for verbal acknowledgment.

Stephanos stroked her slowly, rubbing between her labia

until he found her clit. Clara let out a soft moan, uncertain as to whether or not she had permission to move. She closed her eyes, struggling to maintain control as he swirled his fingertips in tight circles around her throbbing, sensitive clit.

His fingers retreated, and Clara sighed, knowing it was not her place to ask for more—or to complain at her pleasure being cut off. As she was struggling to regain her patience, she felt the cold slither of leather wrapping around one ankle and then the other. There was a clatter of metal and she looked down to see a short, thick chain between her legs, giving her only a small range of motion.

Stephanos stood, once more taking in the sight of her helplessly bound, a smile tugging at the corners of his lips in spite of the stern expression he affected. “You must also be punished for telling me ‘no’ when you had already agreed to submit to me,” he told her. He clucked his tongue against his teeth. “Your crimes are grave indeed.” He met her gaze. “Remember, Clara: when you submit to me, you may use your safe word, and I will always respect it. You may call a halt if you ever feel truly uncomfortable, or in pain, or if you don’t feel safe. But when you say ‘no,’ you are expressing defiance. And as your Master, it is my job to remind you of what your place is.”

Clara hesitated before nodding. “Yes, Master, I understand,” she said.

Stephanos’ gaze traveled slowly down her vulnerable, bound body, as if he was taking in every line, every curve. “From this point forward, you are not allowed to make a

sound. You will remain silent except for breathing—or using your safe word, if need be. Is that understood?” Clara started to speak and then closed her mouth, nodding instead. Stephanos smiled, his eyes full of approval. “You are a very quick study. I appreciate that in a slave.”

He left her again and Clara tried not to fidget; her wrists pulled seemingly of their own will against the silky, tight ropes binding them. She heard clattering, clanking sounds from the wardrobes and shivered, wondering just what form her punishments would take.

“To assist you,” Stephanos said, approaching her once more, “since I remember quite well that you can’t always restrain yourself, I thought this would be in order.” He showed her a ball gag, the rubber a deep burgundy in the middle of a leather strap. “Open your mouth, Clara.”

Clara hesitated; she had never allowed a client to gag her—she wanted always to be able to protest, to tell anyone off who thought they could take advantage of her.

“We’ll discuss an alternative to the safe word in a moment,” Stephanos said—a concern that hadn’t yet fully come to Clara’s mind.

She took a deep breath and opened her mouth.

Stephanos pushed the rubber ball past her lips, between her teeth, and Clara felt her jaw tightening around it instinctively. He buckled it at the back of her head, gingerly touching the spot on her scalp that was still tender from the accident.

“Now,” he said, meeting her gaze. “If you need to use the

safe word while you're gagged, I want you to tap your right foot three times on the floor. Do you understand?"

Clara nodded, experimentally raising and lowering her foot. The chain that bound her ankles would just allow the movement.

"Just because you're gagged doesn't mean you can make noise. If I hear anything other than breathing from you, your punishment will become more severe."

Clara nodded her understanding, and Stephanos began guiding her across the room. She felt a flare of resentment for the way that the chain between her legs made her shuffle helplessly, dependent on his support. Her wrists bound in front of her made it difficult for her to balance in the small range of motion, further increasing her dependence on his steady grip. Her jaw was beginning to ache from biting down on the ball gag, and Clara tried to relax it by force of will.

Her Master stopped a few feet from the bed and withdrew something from his pocket; Clara recognized it as a pair of nipple clamps, with a long chain between them. Stephanos' hands slithered over her body, caressing her, teasing her, the cold metal of the chain tickling along her arms, against her ribs. He reached up and delivered quick, sharp slap to each of her breasts in turn, making Clara gasp in surprise. She started to step back but forced herself to stand absolutely still, accepting the blows that stung and made her sensitive skin tingle with heat.

Before she could fully adjust to the unexpected assault, Stephanos' fingers closed around her nipples, twisting and pulling them. Clara bit down on the gag to suppress

the cry of mingled pleasure and dismay, instinctively pulling back, trying to evade his firm grip.

When her nipples had hardened to Stephanos' satisfaction, Clara closed her eyes to the sight of one of the clamps moving towards her in his hand. Cold pain shot through her breast, sending a jolt of sensation that served only to make her pussy wetter, as the first of the clamps closed around one of her nipples, tightening with agonizing slowness. Clara forced herself to breathe as slowly and deeply as the gag would allow, feeling a sudden spurt of revulsion as she realized she was drooling around the rubber.

The chain clinked, and Clara gasped as she felt a tugging at her clamped nipple. She looked down to watch Stephanos carefully guide the thin chain upwards and realized he was threading it through a ring at the front of her collar. He let the remaining clamp dangle as he teased her other nipple into quick, painful firmness, rubbing and pinching it until it hardened. He applied the second clamp, and the chain between the two tugged tight, pulling at both nipples simultaneously. Clara tilted her neck forward, struggling to get some relief from the curiously pleasurable pain.

Stephanos pushed and guided her, and as Clara attempted to relieve the ache in her nipples, she found her hands pulled up, lashed to one of the posters at the foot of the bed. She pulled her head back, instantly regretting it as new sensation surged through her body, making the walls of her pussy tighten, her fluids beginning to flow down onto her thighs.

The Greek's hand snaked up between her legs to stroke

her soaking wet labia and Clara worked hard to suppress the moan that built up in her throat, leaning forward until her forehead pressed to the solid wood of the bedpost.

She shivered, her hips moving without any conscious thought. As soon as she began to relax, her jaw beginning to ease around the ball gag, Stephanos' fingers retreated, leaving Clara so bereft that she wanted to cry.

"This is punishment, Clara, not pleasure," he reminded her.

Clara nodded, wincing as the movement tightened the chain, tugging at the clamps on her nipples.

For a long moment, nothing further happened, and Clara began to feel afraid. Was her punishment simply to stand there, bound and helpless, her Master watching her from just out of sight as she struggled to avoid pulling the chain attached to her nipples?

Before she could begin to think of a way out of her predicament, Clara heard a whistling movement behind her. She bit down on the gag, breathing heavily through her nose, as a stripe of white-hot heat flared across the curve of her ass. It wasn't a flogger, nor was it a belt. As the second blow came, Clara realized that it was some kind of stick; her mind flashed on the riding crop she had seen among the other implements in the wardrobe.

She fidgeted, listening for any kind of reprimand, any correction from her Master; it seemed that while he wanted her to remain silent, he had no objections to her moving as much as her bound position would allow. Blows rained down against her ass—Clara lost count of

how many, trapped in the need to remain utterly silent, to do nothing more than breathe, as whimpers and moans built up deep in her throat.

She jumped as the crop landed against a spot that had already received attention, twisting and trying to squirm away from the rain of strikes against her already-sensitive skin, but the crop followed her no matter how she tried to twist out of its path. Clara felt her chin go slick with saliva, felt the hot gliding of tears down her cheeks. She forgot about the clamps and threw her head back only to barely stifle the instinctive cry the tug of the chain brought with it.

Eventually, giving in to the punishment with all her heart, she merely leaned against the bedpost, shivering and trembling, feeling herself becoming aroused at the tingling heat, the cold grip on her nipples. She kept her feet pressed firmly on the floor; at no point while Stephanos delivered her punishment did the thought of using her non-verbal safe word occur to her.

“You’re showing distinct improvement,” Stephanos said, and the stripes of hot agony stopped, replaced by cool fingers caressing her abused flesh.

Clara shivered, breathing heavily through the gag, her nose stopped up slightly from the tears that flowed from her eyes.

“I don’t think you yelped even once.”

Clara shook her head, eager for the validation of her Master’s approval. It surprised her, even in the depths of the deep, powerful arousal that filled her mind, to realize that she had fallen so completely into his spell; that she

considered him—for the moment at least—to truly be her Master.

“But I still think that you need to be made aware of your position,” he finished.

Clara’s brows knit together as she tried to puzzle out what he meant. Stephanos’ fingers slid down along the cleft of her ass and she tensed, feeling a frisson of doubt. She had strict rules about anal play; she always had. Some of her fellow escorts had called her a prude, and told her it would impact her earnings to not allow it—but Clara had always stood firm. If a client wanted to be pegged, or if he wanted to lick her there, or finger her, she would allow it. But anything more than that was against the rules.

“When you submit to me,” Stephanos said, his fingertip swirling around her tight pucker, “I expect you to submit entirely. You must trust me completely to know what you will enjoy.” His finger pressed against her, testing, probing, and Clara gasped as his other hand slapped her already-abused skin, sending a shockwave of sensation through her. “Do you understand?”

Clara hesitated before nodding. The finger retreated and she sagged against the bedpost, hoping against hope that the ordeal was over.

In spite of her reluctance, however, Clara had to admit that the idea of Stephanos doing something like that to her was oddly appealing. She heard his steps retreating and felt a flicker of fear that he would leave her there once more, still stinging from her punishment. When she heard the rustling of something in one of the wardrobes, she sighed in relief. Whatever else might happen, she

wasn't going to be left alone.

The Greek approached once more, and Clara pulled herself up slightly, wincing as the tug of the chain reminded her once more of the clamps on her nipples. She tilted her head forward, pressing it against the wood of the post. When she heard a familiar, liquid squirting sound—the telltale noise of lubricant being expelled from a bottle—she started. *No. No, no, no.* She made a sound around the gag, and then cringed.

“You haven't been given permission to speak,” Stephanos told her, his hand coming down sharply across her ass cheek. He paused, the silence hanging heavily. “Do you need to use your safe word?”

Clara bit down into the gag. Her jaw was throbbing. Did she? Did she actually feel unsafe? The idea was distasteful—at least, Clara thought to herself, she had always considered it so. She had always thought it was dirty, degrading. But then, she was being taught her position; she was being made to submit. She knew that if she was really uncomfortable, she could tap her foot on the ground and he would stop.

Clara shook her head, refusing to use her safe word. She closed her eyes, biting into the gag, and felt Stephanos' fingers, slick from lubricant, trace down along the cleft of her ass. He swirled them around her tight pucker, pressing carefully but steadily, and Clara cringed, feeling the slippery, cool sensation of the lubricant gradually coating her skin.

She clenched her hands into fists, breathing slowly as one finger slid inside her most intimate orifice, rubbing and swirling in a way that she couldn't help but find

appealing. She tingled all over as the finger pushed deeper and deeper, making its way past her body's defenses. Clara heard another liquid sound, and the finger withdrew only to slide in once more, more of the slick, slippery stuff coating her as Stephanos pressed deeper. It felt dirty; it felt degrading. But at the same time, it felt strangely good, weirdly right.

Stephanos slid a second finger inside of her and Clara felt her body starting to move of its own will, her hips shifting, her muscles flexing—seemingly not to repel the invasion, but to pull his fingers in deeper.

She breathed heavily, trying to understand what was happening to her—trying to understand why every nerve in her body felt as though it was on fire with arousal, keener than anything she had ever experienced. She writhed as Stephanos curled and twisted his fingers inside of her tight hole, struggling not to make a sound as conflicting feelings of need and rejection warred in her. Her muscles began to relax without conscious effort, and Stephanos' fingers moved faster, thrusting deep inside, coating her completely with the slick, cool lubricant.

The fingers withdrew and Clara had to swallow down an instinctive, pleading whimper; she was amazed at how much she wanted him to continue. Before she could examine her feelings, Clara heard more of the lubricant squirting, and a moment later, she felt something cold and semi-rigid pressing against her slick, quivering hole.

Clara gasped, twisting in instinctive rejection as the object began to press into her slowly, pushing past her startled defenses. It felt thick, wider than the fingers that

Stephanos had plunged into her, and for a moment she couldn't understand what it was. She bit down as the object steadily worked its way inside of her, inch by inch, making her feel almost uncomfortably full. It was, she realized, some kind of butt plug.

He worked quickly but steadily, pushing against her defenses until Clara began to relax and accept the invading probe, breathing as slowly as she could. If his fingers inside of her had felt degrading, the blunt, slick probe filling her up, stretching her tight hole, made her feel positively dirty.

There could be no question of her submission to him, as she squirmed, her hips pushing back to take in more of the plug, her body more eager than her mind. The forward pressure abruptly ceased, and Clara staggered, abandoned to the feeling of the plug completely inserted inside of her.

"I am going to remove your gag, and you will be allowed to speak," Stephanos said firmly. "But I expect you only to speak in response to my question, for right now. Do you understand?"

Clara nodded eagerly, squirming as she tried to accustom herself to the sensation of slick fullness inside of her, where she had never experienced it before.

The buckle at the back of her head clinked, and Stephanos gently guided the gag out of Clara's aching mouth, his fingers gently wiping the saliva away from her lips and chin. "You're not in pain, are you?" he asked.

Clara started to shake her head before remembering that she could speak. "No, Sir," she replied.

She felt him pressing against the bottom of the plug, moving it around inside of her. An involuntary moan of deep pleasure left her and she turned her head to apologize—crying out as the movement tugged at the chain, tightening the grip of the clamps.

Stephanos chuckled. “I’m not going to punish you for that, don’t worry.” His hand slid over the curve of her ass, and then squeezed. “Now; do you think you fully understand your role, Clara?”

“Yes, Sir,” she said, nodding.

He wiggled the plug inside of the tight confines of her ass and Clara sagged against the bedpost, her hips pushing back involuntarily in response to the strange pleasure the movement sent through her.

“Whenever you submit to me in the future, you will remember to submit completely, won’t you?”

“Yes, Sir.”

She sensed, rather than saw, Stephanos smiling. One of his hands drifted between her legs and he began to stroke her labia lightly, teasingly.

“Do you like the feeling of your tight little ass being filled, Clara?”

“Yes—oh, yes, Sir, I do.”

The words tumbled out before she could even give them thought. She did like it—and she felt ashamed for liking it, even as she felt the pleasure of the blunt, thick probe invading her, even as her pussy began to flood from her arousal.

His lips pressed to her ear. “Would you like me to fill your tight little ass with my cock?”

Clara gasped as his fingers found her clit, rubbing it in tight little circles.

“Remember—you cannot come without permission from me.”

Clara nodded, shivering as she struggled to maintain control of herself.

“Now, again,” Stephanos continued, “would you like me to fill your tight, hot little ass with my cock?”

“Y-y-yes, please, Sir.” Clara tilted her head back and cried out at the sharp pain of the clamps contrasting with the pleasure from her pussy and her ass.

“Another day, I will,” Stephanos said, his voice briefly full of regret. “You’re too tight for me to take you without hurting you. Am I the first man to play with you this way?”

Clara nodded. “I’ve let—oh, oh God, Master... I’ve let people finger... or lick... but never this, Sir.”

She groaned as Stephanos tugged the plug slowly out of her, nearly all the way, before plunging it inside of her body once more. Between the strangely appealing sensation in her ass and the tingling pleasure of his fingers against her clit, Clara didn’t think she would be able to hold back her orgasm much longer.

His voice, so close to her ear, dropped lower. “Does it make you feel dirty to be teased this way?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“But you love it, don’t you, Clara?”

Clara nodded, momentarily unable to speak as Stephanos once more pulled the plug nearly completely out of her before sliding it back in.

“Good girl,” he murmured, his hand leaving her ass, moving up to give her breast a careful squeeze. “You’re going to hold onto that toy for a little while longer, can you do that?”

“Y-yes, yes, Sir, I can,” Clara replied. His fingers retreated from her pussy and Clara keened, pressing her forehead against the bedpost in desperation. She felt movement tugging at her wrists; Stephanos pulled her up carefully, and she saw that he had untied her hands from the bedpost.

“On your knees, Clara,” he told her.

Clara looked down at her bound wrists, trapped in front of her; at her shackled ankles. She took a deep breath and sank down carefully, reaching out for the support of Stephanos’ hands as she struggled to maintain balance. She shivered at the way the plug shifted inside of her as she moved, somehow seeming to push deeper inside her tight confines. She balanced on her knees as well as she could and looked up at her Master, wondering what he had planned.

He opened the fly of his pants, pushing them down his legs and tugging his boxer briefs with them. His hard cock sprung from the tight confines, only inches away from her face, flushed almost purple with the intensity of his arousal.

“Show me how grateful you are for my attentions to you,”

he told her, and Clara understood immediately what he wanted.

Her jaw still ached from the gag, but she opened her mouth, leaning forward to close the distance between her lips and the tip of Stephanos' cock. She glanced up at his face as she took him into her mouth, sucking gently as the tip slid past her lips to meet her tongue. This was something she knew how to do intimately.

She began to take him inch by inch into her mouth, sucking and licking, moving her lips firmly up and down over the length of his thick, hard cock. She trailed the tip of her tongue along the sensitive underside, swirling around the tip. He was better-endowed than most of her clients had been, but she had learned long before how to pleasure men of all sizes with her mouth.

Clara looked up to meet Stephanos' intense gaze, moaning as his precum began to flow, coating her tongue with sharp, slightly bitter flavor. She moved faster, wincing and whimpering as her movements made the clamps on her nipples tug tighter. His hips began to move, and his hand sank down along the curve of her skull, his fingers tangling in her hair as he pushed his cock deeper and deeper into her mouth.

She was trapped, lost in sensations: the pain in her breasts, the shifting pleasure and fullness of the plug in her ass, the taste and feeling of her Master's cock between her lips. His precum began to flow more freely, and Clara smiled to herself, bobbing her head more eagerly, moving to meet the thrusts of his hips. Thoughts of her own pleasure, of her own orgasm, evaporated; all she could think of was bringing pleasure to the man who

had done so much for her. Clara moaned and yelped, gagging slightly as her over-ambitious movements triggered the reflex at the back of her throat. She wanted more than anything to make her Master come, to taste the hot gush of his semen rushing into her mouth and swallow down every last drop.

But before she could bring him to orgasm, Stephanos carefully pushed her away, steadying her as the bindings on her wrists and ankles made it impossible for her to maintain balance.

“I should have guessed you’d be talented,” he said, panting slightly. “Though I think you might just be a natural.” He gave her an approving smile, gently stroking her cheek. “Do you want to come for me, Clara?”

“Yes, please, Master,” Clara said. Every moment of pleasuring him, feeling the plug inside of her, the cold pain of the clamps on her nipples, had been an erotic torment—so much so that Clara had feared that she would orgasm without being touched.

Stephanos lifted Clara up, holding her as she reeled. He admired the sight of her one final time before reaching out and untying the ropes that bound her wrists in quick, deft movements.

Clara knew without having to be told that she must remain still, patiently obedient to her Master; she couldn’t touch any of the things he had brought to bear on her.

Her Master sank down in front of her and the shackles fell away from her ankles, tossed carelessly across the room. Next, he loosened the clamps on her nipples, sending a flood of relief that was so intense that Clara

nearly came, before she asserted the firmest control she possessed on herself, breathing deeply and reminding herself that she had not been given permission. The collar came away from her neck in a whisper of leather and a clink of metal, cast aside just as carelessly as the shackles had been.

Finally, Stephanos reached around, his hands caressing and rubbing the curve of her ass. "I think you like having your tight little ass filled up more than you even admitted," he said. Clara blushed, not quite meeting his gaze, as Stephanos leaned in, pressing a lazy kiss to her ear. "Another time, when you're prepared and ready for it, I will fuck your lovely little ass, Clara, and I will let you come just like that."

Clara shivered at the promise in his low voice; she had no doubt that Stephanos could not only give her pleasure by taking her anally, but also bring her to orgasm.

She moaned as she felt him pulling on the butt plug, slowly and carefully easing it out of her body. He set it aside more carefully than he had the other implements, gathering Clara into his arms and kissing her hungrily on the lips.

"You're a very good girl, Clara," he told her.

He pressed her onto the bed and covered her body with his own, touching and caressing her everywhere in a way that was totally different from his possessive touch while she was bound. There was something gentle, something more beseeching in his touch as he slipped down between her legs.

Stephanos brought each of her breasts up to his mouth,

and Clara moaned out as he claimed each of her nipples in turn, soothing the pain his clamps had inflicted. She struggled to fight down the orgasm that was so close she could taste it. Feeling daring, and responding to the kind of connection she had never felt with another client in her life, Clara began to touch Stephanos, threading her fingers through his thick, soft hair.

She pulled his face up to hers and kissed him hungrily, pulling back to look into his eyes. "Please, Sir?" she asked; it was no struggle to make her voice plaintive.

Stephanos chuckled and Clara felt his hard cock sliding along her soaking wet folds. He thrust into her, filling her all at once, and Clara let out a high, involuntary cry of pleasure.

He rocked his hips against hers slowly at first, and in spite of her urgent need for relief, Clara met his pace, her hands wandering over his broad shoulders, his muscled back. She dragged her lips along his jaw, down the column of his throat.

"Yes, Clara," he murmured, gradually picking up his pace as he began to thrust a little bit faster, pushing deeper and deeper inside of her. "God, you're so wet," he said, panting.

Their moans filled Clara's ears as her body tingled all over, the last of her control beginning to evaporate as Stephanos' thick cock rubbed along her inner walls, brushing against her G-spot. He was pressed against her so tightly that every movement of his hips created more friction against her clit, making it more and more impossible for Clara to hold back her orgasm.

“Come for me, Clara,” he said, gasping. “Come hard all over me, good girl.”

Clara’s fingernails dug into the skin of his shoulders as the last restraint fell away from her mind; within a few heartbeats of his command, she found herself tumbling over the precipice, her orgasm hitting her with the force of a tsunami. Pleasure crashed through every nerve in her body, overwhelming her—driving out all ability to think. She moved mindlessly as spasms of sensation racked her, so intense they might have been pain.

She felt Stephanos’ body tense, felt his cock twitching inside of her, and Clara let out a long, low moan of satisfaction as her orgasm intensified with the first hot rush of his come flooding into her. They both continued to move, unwilling to stop; Clara clung to her Master as if for life itself, trying to retain just enough consciousness to continue feeling and enjoying the intense jolts of pleasure that lit up her nervous system, obliterating everything else.

Eventually, the pleasure ebbed away and Clara spiraled into darkness, her body going limp without thought. She barely felt the cautious, careful caresses, barely heard the murmured question that she replied to with a mindless affirmative. For minutes that felt like an eternity, Clara hung in the deep, warm buzz of her orgasm, panting until her breathing began to even without any conscious thought. She was more thoroughly satisfied than she had ever been in her entire life; she was content, without a desire for anything at all. Everything—everything—was absolutely right.

CHAPTER ELEVEN



Clara's legs twitched with aftershocks of pleasure as she opened her eyes, half-aware of the sound of Stephanos speaking to her.

"You were so good, Clara," he was telling her, as his hands trailed over her body. "I've never met a better, more natural submissive than you."

Clara turned her head in the direction of his voice, smiling weakly. "You say that after I told you no?" she asked him playfully.

The Greek chuckled, pulling her close and wrapping his arms around her tightly. "If you weren't occasionally defiant, you wouldn't be a natural submissive," he told her. He released her reluctantly, sitting up next to her in the bed. "Submission isn't mindless," he said. "At least, not natural submission. Real submission is a choice."

Clara considered that. She had never felt as if she didn't have a choice, in all of her sexual encounters either with Stephanos or at his behest; even though she hadn't had much of an alternative when it came to joining the party,

she could have opted out at any time. With Stephanos, if she ever felt truly disturbed, she could invoke her safe word.

“I guess it’s not obedience when you don’t have a choice,” she said.

Stephanos nodded slowly. “Obedience is when you do something you’re not sure you want to do, because someone demands it of you. The not being sure—the self-will you’re conquering—is part of the act of obeying.” He brushed a lock of hair away from her sweat-sticky cheek. “A good submissive doesn’t just do what her Master says. She makes the choice to do it.”

Clara considered that idea. “Which is why you kept giving me an out.”

He nodded again. “You could have stopped everything at any time—I hope I made that clear. Even being paid, in my rooms, when you submit to me, you can withdraw consent at any time.”

Clara smiled. “You know, I don’t think I’ll ever understand you.”

Stephanos laughed. “I think you understand me much better than you think, Clara. You’re just too smart to show it.”

He stood quickly, and Clara felt a brief regret, a flicker of almost-pain as his demeanor became businesslike, a swift shutter falling over the warmth that had been clear on his face moments before. He walked towards one of the other wardrobes in the room and Clara watched as he opened it to reveal a safe; it looked impressively secure, with several digital safeguards that she watched him

deactivate one by one: fingerprint, a multi-digit code, and finally a voice print. She heard the clunk of the lock turning over and Stephanos opened the lockbox.

He withdrew an envelope, opening it and counting quickly before he put it back into the safe, reaching for another. Clara wondered with faint amusement if he had different envelopes for different types of escort. The thought brought a tingle of jealousy that she just as quickly rejected; she couldn't get hung up on a client. She couldn't let herself think of him possessively. She couldn't even really let herself envy whoever had him as a client.

Stephanos turned back to her after finding the envelope he wanted and closing up the safe once more. Clara sat up, recognizing that their current session was over, loath as she was for it to end. She could still feel the creamy, slick sensation of his fluids along the folds of her wet pussy. He extended the envelope towards her, and Clara startled herself with the sudden decision she had come to. She shook her head, pushing it back towards him.

He frowned. "You haven't counted it."

"No—it's not that," Clara said, smiling. "I appreciate it, I do—and I'm sure it's every bit as generous as what you've already paid me." She took a deep breath and sighed. "I just... I quit. Not—not you." She blushed. "I mean, I'm quitting escorting. Everything we did just now... everything I did last night, and today, it was by choice, not because I'm getting paid to do it."

Clara saw a flicker of a smile play across Stephanos' face and he shrugged, moving to put the envelope on the top of the wardrobe. Part of Clara's mind protested that she

was being stupid; that if he wanted to pay her, she should just take it. But a deeper part of her brain was still considering what he had said about choice, playing it along with her own gradual feelings of discontentment with her life, the slow process of her own decision to leave her dubious career.

Clara dressed slowly, wishing she had some reason to detain Stephanos. She knew that he was probably busier by far than she; it occurred to her to wonder how he could have taken as much time away from his company as he had in the last few days. But that was not her concern. She squirmed as she smoothed her skirt over her legs, acutely aware that she was bare underneath still, that Stephanos' come, mingled with her own fluids, was slowly oozing along her labia, sliding along her thighs. She would go home and take a shower, and consider what she would do with her life now that she was no longer taking clients. She would find a way to break ties with her Madame; she might have to leave Amanda's life as well, which was worth regretting.

Stephanos had dressed before her, disappearing into the living room. He'd left the bedroom door open, an obvious indication that she was to follow him. Their time together, for the moment at least, was at an end. Clara looked around the room, shaking her head to herself. She wondered briefly whether taking a new client—which she had steadfastly refused to do for months until Stephanos—earlier would have brought about such a deep revelation of what she really wanted. She had to doubt it.

As Clara moved to vacate the bedroom, her gaze fell on a picture, positioned at the back of a dresser. She frowned slightly as she focused on it for a moment. It was a

photograph of a couple, and after a moment, Clara realized that the man in the photo was Stephanos, several years younger. The woman in the picture she almost didn't glance at, but something about her drew Clara's gaze in spite of her resolve. The woman looked hauntingly like Clara herself. After a moment of confused concern, Clara pushed the recognition out of her mind. Like so much else involving Stephanos Kofidis, it wasn't her business.

"I'll walk you out; my driver will take you home... or wherever you tell him to take you," Stephanos said, with a little smile.

Clara chuckled. "I think at this point I can trust you to know my address vicariously," she said, and Stephanos' hand slid to the small of her back as he led her out of the hotel suite.

They were silent on the way down in the elevator, but Clara knew that there was an understanding between them; their client-provider relationship was at an end, but that didn't mean that they were completely ready to go their separate ways. Clara fought back a feeling of melancholy as they entered the lobby; she told herself that it was not completely done between them as Stephanos pulled her out of the flow of foot traffic and into a quick embrace. She hadn't realized how much she had needed that silent signal until she felt his strong arms tight around her, a promise of more.

Before she could bring herself to pull away, Clara saw a flash of light in the corner of her vision.

"Mr. Kofidis!" someone shouted; in an instant, dozens more voices chimed in, and Clara looked around in

bewilderment.

“Mr. Kofidis, how long have you been using escorts?”

“Is this woman a lover or simply a paid lay?”

“What is your comment on the accusation of sordid mansion parties, Mr. Kofidis?”

Clara stared, unable to speak or react, as the questions seemed to fly at them from all sides. Stephanos pulled her close to him and she found herself walking quickly as he led her swiftly back to the elevator.

Thinking far more quickly than she, Stephanos keyed in his code and they were back in the silence of the car in a few moments. Clara’s heart was pounding in her chest as the questions sank into her mind; the reporters had known that she was an escort, that Stephanos had hired an escort, and they knew something about parties like the one she had participated in.

When the elevator arrived at the penthouse floor, Stephanos propelled her quickly through the short hall and back into the confines of his room. Clara saw the shocked, bewildered look on his face.

“How the hell did they know any of that?” he asked.

He looked at her and Clara read sympathy in his eyes, sympathy for her in addition to his shock and anger. She sank down onto the floor, unable to support herself, unable to answer the question that echoed in her own mind as well as his...

CHAPTER TWELVE



Clara stood in the hotel room, heart racing, unable to quite comprehend what had just happened. She could still hear the shouted questions—whether Stephanos made a habit of sleeping with escorts, what he knew about billionaire sex parties. She swallowed against the tightness she felt in her throat, looking at the Greek in the depths of her panic. She couldn't believe it; they had even somehow managed to dig up information on her. Her eyes stung with the beginnings of tears as she relived the moment of horrifying exposure; her Madame was going to be furious. If she had been caught with one client, that meant her other clients, especially her regulars, would get jumpy.

It was just as well that she had decided to quit the game, Clara thought irrelevantly. She wouldn't be able to get work for months with the press all over her. She threw herself down onto the nearest chair, shaking all over, hands trembling as the enormity of the situation hit her. Not only was she outed—which would have ruined her career if she had hoped to continue in escorting—but anyone who searched for her online when she applied for

a real job would find out that she had been an escort.

After a moment's panicked reflection, Clara realized that Stephanos was pacing slowly but steadily in the room, absolutely silent, looking down at the floor. And then the secondary impact of the situation came over her; who else could have given the press the scoop about Stephanos' sex life? She had been to the party—she had been his escort in the kinky games he liked to play. She would be the first person that anyone would suspect; even if she knew that she hadn't given the press the story, there was no way for him to know that.

Clara's panic deepened. She felt her eyes burning, felt the first of a handful of tears rolling down her cheeks as her heart beat faster in her chest. Not only was she afraid for her own life now—a billionaire like Stephanos could easily make her life miserable, if not have her eliminated.

Clara had just begun to feel as if she might want to know Stephanos; while they had not made exact plans to be together, there had been that aspect of their session—had it really only been moments before? —that told her that they would see each other again. She had gone through the session specifically because Stephanos and his BDSM-play intrigued her; the picture she had seen in his room, with the woman who looked so strikingly similar to herself had intrigued Clara, and Stephanos' odd contrast in demeanor—dominant, demanding, but insisting on her complete willingness to participate, in her trust and consent—had intrigued her as well. But now, she had almost no doubt, she would never, ever see him again.

“Stephanos,” she said, her breath hitching in her throat.

She swallowed, took a breath, and tried again. “I’m so sorry—I swear to God I didn’t say anything to anyone—I have no idea...” She swallowed again. “I don’t even know anyone in the press!”

He stopped pacing and turned to face her, the troubled, thoughtful look on his face dissolving into something softer. “Don’t worry, Clara,” he said, the ghost of a smile on his face. “I don’t think you’re the one who ratted everyone out. It’d be just as bad for you, after all.”

Clara started opening her mouth to protest, but Stephanos held up one hand to forestall her, the smile on his face deepening.

“And, of course, I know you have no interest in harming me.”

Clara sighed with relief, sinking back against the plush cushions of the chair.

“The issue at hand,” he said, beginning to pace again, “is to keep you from being hounded by the press, and to figure out how to keep my... associates... from retaliating. It must have been one of the other escorts; one of the regulars.” He shook his head, worrying at his bottom lip.

Clara watched him intently, torn between worry for the situation they were both in and interest in the new facet of Stephanos’ personality on display.

“Oh, you’re right,” she said, closing her eyes as a tremor swept through her body. She remembered the way that they had questioned her at the party before Stephanos had vouched for her; she remembered his very real concern for her well-being in light of the members of the

party assuming that she was a journalist. “They’re going to think it was me. If they’re coming after you...”

The Greek nodded. “If they’re coming after me, they’ll be going after whoever they think might be involved. As far as I could tell I don’t think they have any other names... but if it was one of the other escorts, then I’m sure it will come out eventually.”

Clara’s eyes widened. “But I didn’t even know anyone—other than you. If other names come out, then they won’t come after me, will they?”

Stephanos shrugged, looking concerned in spite of what Clara knew was an effort on his part to be as nonchalant as possible. “Nobody knows who you may or may not have identified. Remember: I have absolute faith in you or I would not have brought you into the party. I don’t doubt you now. But the men and women—other than whoever revealed this business—at that party have kept their secrets closely guarded.”

“And they’re going to think that even if I named random billionaires, if I hit on one of them...” Clara sighed. “So should I put all the money I’ve been banking on a bodyguard? Know anyone?”

He laughed. “For right this second, I’m more concerned with damage control. I don’t want to see you hounded, Clara.” He stopped pacing and came towards her, looking down at her with a soft smile on his face. “You do not deserve that.” He kissed her lightly on the lips before resuming his deliberations, pacing slowly.

As she waited for him to decide how to confront the issue facing them both, Clara’s thoughts turned back to the

picture she had seen. The woman in the picture had looked very much like her; but it seemed like that woman was no longer around, for whatever reason. Was Stephanos divorced from her, or was it something else? And had he only chosen Clara as his escort because he wanted someone who resembled the woman from the picture? Clara frowned to herself in thought. Her Madame had been insistent that Stephanos had specifically requested her; that no one else would do. The fact that he had been willing to pay so much for her services was the only reason that she had agreed to take on a new client.

“Stephanos?” she asked softly, interrupting his reverie. He turned and looked at her, one eyebrow raised slightly in acknowledgment. “I noticed earlier...”

Clara hesitated. Did she really want to bring it up? What if the only reason he had chosen her was because he wanted to punish the woman in the picture—only she was no longer around?

She took a deep breath as surreptitiously as possible. “There was a picture I saw. The... the woman in it looked a lot like me.”

Stephanos’ eyes widened slightly. “I had forgotten that I had that picture,” he said, his cheeks coloring slightly. He cleared his throat, and Clara frowned slightly. He glanced away for just a moment before meeting her gaze once more. “I am hopeful that we can see each other again—if you have no issue with that?”

Clara shook her head, though in light of his unwillingness to talk about the woman in the picture, she couldn’t help but feel a slight hesitation. “I’d like to see you again too,”

she said.

Stephanos smiled, losing some of the uneasy look his face had taken on. “For the time being, however, I think you should lay low. If you don’t have classes or other obligations, you need to stay home as much as possible.”

That was not an appealing thought, but Clara could understand the need for it. If she wasn’t available to be hounded, eventually the press would give up on the story for something meatier. She had to hope that something meatier wouldn’t be other people who had been involved in the party.

“Okay,” she said, taking a deep breath and exhaling.

Stephanos kissed her lightly on the lips once more, giving her shoulder a careful, gentle squeeze. “There’s a back way out of the building,” he said slowly. “Security at the front desk will have gotten rid of them in the lobby by now, but I can’t promise they won’t be milling around the front of the building. Some may even be in the back, but it’s the best chance you have.” He told her how to get out of the building the back way, and to meet his driver two blocks away from the hotel.

Clara followed his instructions to the letter, and found that when she was outside of the building, none of the press had managed to sneak their way to the back. She took the employee path out of the tiny parking lot, and navigated her way to the point where she would meet with Stephanos’ driver.

As she got into the car and gave the man her address, Clara reflected on the strange turn of events in her life. She still felt a slight twinge of irritation that Stephanos

had been so reticent about the woman in the picture. It was difficult not to think that in some way she must be a “replacement”, someone to take the place of the woman in the photo. But Clara had to wonder just how it was that Stephanos no longer had the woman in his life. *On the other hand, if she were there, there'd be no reason to buy an expensive call girl to scratch his itch.*

She wondered just how grateful she should be—both to the woman from the picture and to Stephanos' apparent appetite for her. The situation had brought enough money into her life to make it possible for Clara to quit her job, to leave the business. That was a decision Clara knew would make at least a few waves; she would probably have to move out eventually, find an apartment she could afford on her own. That was something to worry about later, Clara told herself, as the driver smoothly turned onto the street where she lived. She would deal with the fallout as it came; there was no use in borrowing trouble.

She thanked the driver, not certain if it was the right thing to tip him; he was being paid by Stephanos. Well, Clara thought, as the man smiled politely to her, apparently waiting for her to exit the vehicle, if she was being rude, she would have to make amends for that later. She closed the car door carefully and headed up to her apartment, her mind swimming with the probable fallout of the insane press attention that she was now apparently subject to. She sighed as she unlocked the door, thinking that it was going to be a miserable next few days.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN



Clara sat in the living room of her apartment, pretending to watch TV. When Stephanos had told she had to stay home, she had vastly overestimated her ability to entertain herself. Earlier in the day, when she had gotten up, she had quickly exhausted all of the sites she liked to follow online. She had tried to read a book, but she felt too fidgety. Amanda hadn't been around; she had texted Clara to tell her that she was on an overnight session with a client, and would probably continue through to the next day if she could negotiate the right terms.

It's only because you know you can't leave that it's bothering you, Clara told herself for what she thought might have been the twelfth time. She changed the channel and tried unsuccessfully to immerse herself in a travel show. Just a few moments later she took a deep breath and stood, leaving the room and going into the kitchen.

She poured herself a glass of wine, telling herself that the time of day didn't matter that much. It was afternoon

—at least she wasn't drinking in the morning. She brought the glass of wine back into the living room and sat down, watching as Anthony Bourdain wandered around Vienna. She tried to think of things she could do to entertain herself and came up with nothing.

Clara's phone buzzed against the coffee table and she jumped at the sound, thinking—hoping—that it would be from Stephanos. But that was ridiculous; she realized in a moment that it was her “work phone.” *I should have mailed that shit back to her*, Clara thought, remembering her Madame belatedly. She picked up the phone and opened the text message nonetheless.

You should tell me if you're taking a night off, the message read. *One of your regulars is eager to see you*. Clara wondered if the Madame just hadn't heard the news yet, or if she was somehow convinced that Clara's new status as a figure of tabloid curiosity was a good business draw. The fact that one of her regulars was interested in seeing her made Clara feel mildly nauseated. If the man had any sense at all, he would switch to a new escort or maybe even avoid the professionals for a few weeks while he waited for the furor to die down. But she knew that most men were far from sensible; whoever was interested in engaging her services for the night was apparently turned on by the fact that she'd been embroiled in a scandal with a Greek billionaire.

Clara frowned. She had no real responsibility to her Madame to work—there were plenty of girls who just dropped off the face of the planet as far as the woman was concerned. Clara would give Amanda a note to pass to their “boss” as soon as she came home, and hand over

the phone along with it. She wanted a clean break from the business—no equivocation.

She closed the message and set the phone down. She wasn't even technically supposed to be working that night; she was open for clientele on her "off" nights, but as long as she had made the Madame's monthly goal—and Clara reflected with satisfaction that she had made that in just her first session with Stephanos—there was no need for her to actually work. But escorting was a people business, Clara thought wryly. It wasn't good form to turn down work, even if she had all the money she needed.

Her phone buzzed twice more, and then it was still for a long stretch and Clara reasoned that the Madam had decided to move on; to offer whichever client was asking after her an alternate. She didn't look at the messages—she knew, in her cabin-fevered state, that she would be too easily convinced to take another job, not for the money but just for the excuse to leave the house. She played a guessing game in her mind, wondering just which one of her regulars had wanted her. It gave her something to think about other than the situation with Stephanos and his powerful associates.

How many escorts had been at the party? There had been some women that Clara had seen who she had thought definitely had the air of professionals, women who seemed more than comfortable with the intensely erotic atmosphere, who were absolutely fine with being completely naked save for the masks they wore. There were at least a few women at the gathering who had not given Clara the impression of being completely and totally at ease; women whose enthusiasm had a giddy,

slightly nervous edge to it. She wondered just how many of them had been lovers or mistresses of the powerful men, and how many had been women like herself?

She changed the channel again, deciding that a marathon of a show about a world-famous chef traveling the world was the last thing she needed while housebound. She put on one of Amanda's favorite shows and stared at the TV, sipping her wine as slowly as she could. Clara supposed that she could try and surf the Internet, hope to get sucked into something or another.

Clara had achieved the level of boredom that brought with it ideas like cutting her hair, or cooking something extensive and time-consuming in the kitchen, just to fill time, when she heard her personal phone ringing. The sound of her ringtone was enough to snap Clara out of her frustrated search for bad ideas, and she got off of the couch quickly, going into her bedroom where the phone was charging. She couldn't think of anyone that would call her at that time of day; her friends who hadn't fallen by the wayside over the few years she had been an escort were busy with their own lives, and her friends in the business would just be starting up for the day.

The number flashing on the screen was familiar, and Clara racked her brain as it rang. She frowned, the neurons connecting on the third ring; it was her ex-boyfriend, Kyle. Clara debated accepting the call. Kyle had been one of the better boyfriends she had had, but he had been the one to end the relationship, before she had even gone into escorting. He had not given her any real reasoning for wanting to leave her other than nebulously telling her he "needed space."

Clara had been perplexed by the excuse at the time—she had given Kyle space as a matter of course, as much because she was an independent person as out of any concern for his needs. They hadn't been living together; they had only seen each other a few times a week. When the breakup had happened, Clara had come to the conclusion that the “space” Kyle had needed was to find greener pastures—that he was interested in some other woman and at least had the decency to break up with her rather than cheat on her.

But she couldn't deny that the call triggered her curiosity. Why would he be calling her over a year later? For a moment, Clara almost let the call roll over into voicemail; she had no real interest in seeing him again, especially since meeting Stephanos. But she had to wonder not only why Kyle was calling her, and whether he had changed at all. *Probably things just aren't working out with whoever he started seeing after he dumped me*, she thought wryly. Clara had been cooped up for so long that any kind of entertainment was appealing to her.

Before the call could roll over, Clara hit the accept button. “Hello?” She decided to pretend as though she hadn't recognized the phone number; whatever Kyle wanted with her, her position would be stronger if he didn't think she still had his number memorized.

“Hey, Clara!” Her lips twitched with an amused smile at his obvious enthusiasm. “I was thinking of you the other day and got your number from Sarah.” Clara raised an eyebrow at that; she hadn't spoken to Sarah in at least a month—but at least, as far as she could remember, she was still on good terms with her. None of her pre-escort friends knew about Clara's vocation; she had kept the

two lives as separate as circumstances allowed.

“How’s life treating you?” she asked, privately doubling down on her bet that whoever he had been seeing hadn’t worked out.

“Not bad,” Kyle said. “How have you been?”

Clara took the phone with her back into the living room and sat on the couch, sipping her wine. She was in no particular hurry for the phone call to end; she was curious about Kyle, and she was bored out of her mind. She said nothing about what she had been doing other than that she was “freelancing” for a living. Kyle said bland things about his job, and after a few minutes of normal small talk, Clara found herself actually relieved when he came to the point of why he had called her in the first place.

“I’m actually in town for a conference right now; everything’s all wrapped up but I don’t leave for another couple of days. I was hoping you might want to hang out for a bit.”

Clara bit her bottom lip, thinking about the invitation. Any excuse to leave her house was a good one, but she knew all too well that Stephanos had been right in advising her to stick close to home. She tried to decide whether the risk of being seen by the press was worth the reward of spending a few hours away. She looked at the TV; there was nothing on that she actually wanted to watch. She knew that if she didn’t have something to do with herself, she was going to succumb to the temptation to do something reckless in the house just to get past the boredom.

“Sure,” she said, telling herself firmly that it wasn’t as though the press would be all that interested in her; certainly she hadn’t noticed any signs that her apartment was being staked out. The billionaires implicated were much more interesting than an escort, and she was almost certainly safe in Kyle’s company. “Where do you want to meet up?”

“How about that new place—I think it’s called Fresh?”

Clara smiled slightly to herself. The restaurant was expensive, but didn’t approach what Stephanos would have considered first-rate. It was nice enough, however, for a meeting between old friends—or exes—and she was more than willing to agree to it as a meeting spot. *He’s trying to impress me*, she thought with a grin. *Well, let him.*

She agreed to meet Kyle for dinner at seven o’clock and finished the call in much brighter spirits. She checked the time; she had a few hours before she would need to leave. She would finish off her glass of wine, take a nice long bath, and get ready in the most leisurely manner possible before making her way downtown.



As she slipped into the bath, feeling a few twinges as the hot water hit parts of her body that Stephanos had focused on during their previous session, Clara had a moment’s concern about whether she should actually go through with the meeting. He had given her specific guidelines; she was not supposed to leave the apartment. She was supposed to be lying low. The possibility that she might find herself besieged by

paparazzi shouting questions about her career as an escort, about her connection with Stephanos Kofidis, while trying to enjoy a quiet dinner with someone, was more than a little daunting.

Clara soaked in the bath while she contemplated it, weighing the negatives and positives. She had already told Kyle that she would meet him; if she called back to cancel, he would know that something was up and might start looking for more information. She had to assume that he didn't know about her current situation; she had to give him at least that much benefit of the doubt. But if he did start digging online, he would quickly find out exactly what was going on—and while Clara had never thought to even see Kyle again in her life, the idea of him judging her was frustrating. There was also the fact that without something to do, Clara knew that she was going to progress into real cabin fever.

She pulled herself out of the bathtub and wrapped herself in a towel, perching on the side of the bath while she thought about what to wear. She had come around to rejecting the plan that Stephanos had put together; what reason did she have to trust him, really?

She picked out a matching bra and panty set, choosing something in blush-toned lace. Clara could believe that Stephanos wanted her out of the spotlight, but considering how reticent he'd been about the woman in the picture, she couldn't help but think that it was as much for his own benefit as for hers. As long as she did nothing to draw attention to herself, how much harm could it possibly do?

Clara chose a deep blue dress with a slightly plunging

neckline—not enough to look overtly sexual, but enough to remind Kyle of what he had been missing out on since he broke up with her. She put on a little makeup, confining herself to a mostly natural appearance. Clara had become something of an expert in suiting the tastes of her clientele; she had learned how to turn her features up or down, to look like a vixen or the girl next door, depending on what a particular client liked and wanted. For meeting an ex for dinner, she decided to go with what she would wear for a normal outing with friends; just enough to make her eyes more vivid, with a touch of color on her lips and cheeks.

Finally, it was time for her to leave; Clara called a cab and waited impatiently for it to arrive, reflecting not for the first time that she should probably put some of her hard-earned money into buying a car. But that was a concern for a different day.

She hurried down the stairs towards the parking lot when she got the call confirming that the driver had arrived. *On any other day, meeting with Kyle would be small potatoes*, Clara thought with more than a small amount of amazement. *How weird has my life gotten that it's an event?* She looked around, subconsciously remembering the onslaught of paparazzi that had greeted her and Stephanos in the lobby of the hotel he lived out of. Clara had nearly concluded that she was absolutely free and clear when her gaze stopped on a man half-concealed by the landscaping.

He was as utterly unremarkable as Clara thought any person could possibly be, with average features, wearing a nondescript suit. He was watching her intently. Clara felt her heart beating faster as she spotted him, a lump

rising in her throat as she expected him to jump out and begin asking questions, or to bring out a camera and start taking pictures.

The man did neither; the fact that he was clearly watching her, that he was so very obvious in blending in, was enough to send a chill down Clara's spine. The moment her gaze met his, he took a step back and dissolved into the woody trees and shrubbery that surrounded the apartment complex.

She took another deep breath. *If you see him again, call the cops and say he's stalking you.* Even then, Clara knew that calling the cops would be less than a great idea.

She got into the cab before the driver could get irritated and gave him the address of the restaurant, pushing the man out of her mind as completely as she could manage.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN



Kyle had already arrived when the cab pulled up to the restaurant. Clara paid the driver, giving him a good tip—she wondered again if Stephanos’ driver had expected a similar courtesy from her, and then dismissed the question. During the drive from her apartment, Clara had started to think that perhaps Stephanos had decided against seeing her again; maybe his strategy of her laying low had been in part to have a reason not to see her for a while. Whatever the case, she was determined to have a good time.

“It’s so good to see you, Clara,” Kyle said with a bright smile as she walked up, reaching out and giving her a quick hug and a kiss on the cheek. “You’re looking even better than ever.”

Clara smiled, thinking to herself that it was exactly what she was going for, and kissed his cheek in return. They were seated quickly, and Clara asked Kyle about the conference that had brought him into town.

“I actually found myself in pharmaceutical sales kind of by accident,” he said with a little grin, and began

explaining more about his job. They had discussed their current jobs a little over the phone before, but Clara had been as vague as humanly possible.

“I travel a lot—not just going to conferences, but also talking to prospective clients, things like that,” Kyle continued, and Clara thought to herself that a career in pharmaceutical sales sounded not all that different from her own.

She told Kyle that she was going back to school, that freelancing had been good for her, but she wanted to find something a little more stable. As she began to relax and the meal progressed—a four-course meal that Clara had to admit was one of the better ones of her life—she found herself opening up a little bit. She had enough self-preservation not to even hint at what kind of “freelance” work she did, but she did find herself talking about Amanda as her roommate, and they both talked about the friends they still had in common.

“Oh God, you’re still friends with Fisher?” Clara asked in shock. “I didn’t think anyone was friends with him anymore.”

“Well, he’s actually—indirectly—how I ended up in my current gig,” Kyle explained. “So I felt like I should keep up at least a little bit with him. We message each other sometimes, meet up for a beer maybe once or twice a month. He’s really different from how he used to be—I swear.”

That led to a discussion of just what Fisher had been like; Clara had managed to steer clear of him, but many of her female friends had fallen for the medical student’s charms, and he had happily bounced from bed to bed,

disturbing the equilibrium of the circle of friends until all of the women in the group had met and decided that none of them would ever sleep with him again; Clara thought wryly that being punched by a few of the guys in the group for sleeping with girls they had their eye on had probably also changed his thoughts on the wisdom of his bed-hopping ways.

When they had finished dessert, Clara started to dread having to go back to her apartment where she would be alone. She was relieved when Kyle asked if she felt like an after-dinner drink, and readily agreed, pleased that Kyle seemed to be even less interested in ending the night out than she was. As they had one, and then two drinks, Clara found herself laughing, relaxing, enjoying Kyle's company more than she would have ever expected.

Clara was feeling more than slightly tipsy, beginning to think that she would need to go home soon—whether or not she wanted to—when Kyle said the words that she had wanted to hear all night.

“You know,” he said, setting his empty glass down, “I’ve thought about it a bunch of times since we split up.”

“Excuse me, I have to interject,” Clara said, raising a hand playfully. “We did not split up. You dumped me because you ‘needed space’.”

“You’re right,” Kyle agreed. “I was an idiot, is what I was getting at. I’ve regretted it so many times since.”

Clara had spent the entire night wondering in the back of her mind if Kyle had somehow heard something about the tabloid furor surrounding her; she had hoped against

hope that the fact that he hadn't brought it up meant that he had no idea of what was going on in her life. She had to think that if he was making such a confession, he had no idea about Stephanos.

"Is that so?" Clara asked, giving him a grin.

"It is," Kyle said, nodding. "I was hoping..." he hesitated, glancing around. "You know—I totally get it if you want to say no. But I was hoping that maybe you'd be willing to put me up for the night. I don't want to sleep alone in my hotel room."

Clara laughed. "With your salary, you wouldn't have to," she pointed out. "But if you really just absolutely need a friendly face in bed with you, I guess I can let you stay the night at my place."

She wouldn't admit it to Kyle, but some magical combination of the alcohol, the reminiscing, and the good meal had brought back most, if not all of her lingering feelings towards him, softening the blow of the breakup and reminding her of all of the things she had liked about him: his bright blue eyes, his easy smile, the slightly messy, untamed look of his hair; his ready humor, biting sarcasm, and the way they were able to banter together almost effortlessly.

For a moment, Clara thought that if things hadn't mysteriously gone sour between them, she might never have gotten into escorting at all; she might have finished her degree, found a way to pay for it, and be working a legitimate career. It was a glimmer of all the things she had given up over the past several months of her steady life as an escort—as intoxicating as the alcohol itself.

They piled into a cab together, still laughing over a half-remembered inside joke that had persisted through their entire relationship, and Kyle leaned in towards her as the car pulled away from the curb, bringing his lips down onto hers. Clara found herself responding to him at once, felt her body heating up; she couldn't help but admit to herself that in spite of his boring-sounding job, Kyle was as interesting as he had ever been, and just as good-looking.

She raked her fingers through his hair as Kyle deepened the kiss, heedless of the sign posted in the cab that passengers were monitored at all times on closed-circuit cameras. Clara moaned as Kyle's hands began to move over her body, caressing and teasing her through her clothes. She felt her pussy start to become slick, her nerves vibrating with electric impulses as she let her hands wander over his body in return. She found all the familiar landmarks, locating them through the fabric of the dress shirt that Kyle wore, through the tailored pants.

When the cab came to a stop, it was almost a shock; Clara was so wrapped up in the taste of Kyle's lips, the feeling of his hands moving along her body, slipping ever-so-slowly underneath the hem of her dress to teasingly caress her inner thighs, cupping her breasts through the fabric of her clothes, that she had no idea of how much time had passed.

Kyle paid the driver and helped her out of the car, and she laughed at the fact that it was even possible for her to be this spontaneous when it came to sex anymore; she had the fear that she had lost all ability to think of sex as anything other than a performance. Her encounters with Stephanos and with the men and women at the secret

party had largely been so thrilling because she'd been able to completely forget that she was "for hire." It was a relief as Kyle took her hand and prodded her to lead him to her apartment, to realize that it wasn't simply Stephanos, or the situations she had been in with him; that she could experience that kind of spontaneity herself.

She let Kyle into the apartment and he pressed her against the door as soon as it was closed behind them, kissing her even more hungrily than before. Clara moaned against his lips as she felt the hard ridge of his erection pressing against her, reminding her of other things she had enjoyed about him before their relationship had ended.

His hands trailed over her body, and she realized he was trying to figure out how exactly her dress came off. Clara laughed, breaking away from the kiss and guiding his hand to the zipper along her side. Kyle chuckled lowly, tugging the zipper down along her ribs, and Clara felt her heart beating faster, her body tingling and heating up as his hands slid down to the hem of her dress.

Kyle's lips shifted down to her neck, and Clara fumbled at the buttons of his dress shirt as he kissed and nipped at her sensitive skin. He was a little rougher, a little more demanding than she remembered, but Clara found that she actually liked the change.

Kyle pulled back slightly, breaking away just enough to pull her dress over her head and toss it away from him before cupping her breasts in his hands. Clara was utterly distracted from undressing him as Kyle's fingers wrapped around her rapidly hardening nipples, twisting

and rolling them through the thin, lacy fabric of her bra.

“God, I’ve thought about this so many times,” Kyle murmured, bringing his lips down against Clara’s once more. He pulled her away from the door and started to lead her through the apartment, and Clara stirred herself out of her reverie long enough to steer him towards her room instead of Amanda’s.

She pushed him through her bedroom door and grabbed at the hem of his shirt, tugging at it as she tried to undo the last of the buttons. Kyle laughed, reaching around to her back and unclasping her bra. Clara shivered at the slight chill as the fabric fell away from her skin, reaching out and pulling Kyle close to her.

He kissed her again, his tongue probing and tasting her, his hands wandering over her body in fast, devastating touches that made her hotter and hotter. Clara pressed her body against Kyle’s, feeling her pussy becoming wetter and wetter, feeling her nerves tingle with hot-and-cold electric impulses. Kyle broke away from her lips and Clara panted, tilting her head back to give him full access to her neck.

Kyle cupped her breasts, bringing each one to his mouth in turn. Clara moaned out as he claimed each of her nipples, sucking and licking, grazing them carefully with his teeth. She writhed, twisting, arching into his attentions, her hands blindly reaching out to grab at his head, his shoulders, his back. She lost all track of time as Kyle worshiped her with his mouth, kissing every inch of her full breasts only to come back to her tingling nipples again and again.

It seemed to her as if Kyle had been teasing her for an

eternity—for hours—when he broke away from her breasts, bringing his mouth back up to hers to kiss her with hungry desperation. Kyle pressed his hips against hers, and Clara rubbed herself against him shamelessly, hungry for more contact than their clothes would allow—so aroused that she couldn't imagine holding back for much longer.

Kyle pushed her carefully onto the bed, and Clara found herself sprawling, panting slightly as she looked up at him. He unbuttoned and unzipped his pants, pushing them down over his hips along with his boxers.

“You are so fucking hot,” Kyle said, shaking his head in disbelief.

Clara's avid gaze moved from his face to the sight of his hard, fully erect cock springing free of his boxers. Somehow he was larger than Clara remembered: thicker and heavier looking. “You're not so bad yourself,” she said, breathless with desire.

She sat up on the bed, slithering down to put her feet on the floor. She reached out eagerly, wrapping her hand around Kyle's cock. She stroked him up and down, moaning softly at the feeling of his velvety skin, the heat of his erection.

“I forgot how good this is,” Clara said, glancing up at Kyle's face.

He groaned as she tightened her grip around the base of his cock, rubbing the tip with her thumb. Precum began to flow from the tip and Clara leaned in, swiping her tongue against his skin, eagerly tasting the salty-sharpness of Kyle's fluids.

Kyle's moan deepened, and in the corner of her eye, Clara saw his head fall back slightly, his eyes closing. "I forgot how good you are at this."

Kyle's cock twitched in her hand, against her lips, and Clara wrapped her mouth around him. She sucked and licked, pumping the base of his cock with her hand. "God—shit, Clara..."

Kyle's hips began to move as Clara started to move her lips up and down along the length of his shaft, meeting her hand, her tongue swirling around his flesh as she took him deeper and deeper into her mouth. Kyle's hands tangled in her hair, his fingers brushing against her scalp, rubbing and tugging as his precum began to flow even more freely, coating Clara's tongue even as she swallowed. She moaned with him in her mouth, closing her eyes, focusing on giving him pleasure.

Clara gasped, nearly choking as Kyle tugged sharply at her hair, thrusting his hips into her face; he had never been quite this rough before—and while Clara liked it, she needed him to be at least a little careful. She touched his hip lightly, adjusting the movement of her mouth and hand on his cock, and he calmed slightly, thrusting his hips steadily as she sucked and licked and worshiped him.

Clara reached up, cupping his balls lightly, giving them a delicate squeeze to see how he would react; it was a tactic she had learned as an escort—one she hadn't known about when she and Kyle had been dating. He let out a strangled sound, somewhere between a moan and a cry, and Clara felt his body tense up.

She felt Kyle's cock beginning to twitch between her lips,

and as he groaned out long and low, the hot, sharp-tasting flood of his come gushed into her mouth. She swallowed convulsively, sucking harder, working her mouth up and down over Kyle's length as his orgasm intensified. She swallowed again and again, moaning at the taste of him, the feeling of his cock in her mouth. The knowledge that she had made him come was as arousing as the actual act. Clara finished him off, sucking until she felt his cock beginning to become flaccid, swallowing every last drop.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN



Kyle carefully disentangled his fingers from her hair and Clara fell back against the bed, looking up at him with a mixture of amusement and need. Kyle looked drunk; unsteady on his feet, he looked at her with hazy, lust-darkened eyes, a grin on his face.

“You have to have been practicing,” Kyle said, still panting slightly. “If you had been that good I could never have even thought the words, ‘I need space’.”

Clara laughed and rolled her eyes, letting her hands trail over her body in a teasing caress. She knew it would take him a minute or two to recover, at least enough to return the favor, but she felt like she was on fire, consumed with the need to get off. Clara slid one hand down along her body slowly watching Kyle as he watched her.

“Don’t think you’re going to get me back so easily,” Clara told him, grinning as she slid her hand underneath the waistband of her panties. She stroked her slick labia lightly at first, barely touching herself, and saw Kyle’s eyes widen with renewed interest and arousal.

“Have... have you been taking care of yourself then?” Kyle asked her, still slightly breathless.

Clara shrugged, pressing her fingers against her soaking wet folds more firmly, shivering as she worked down between her labia to find her clit. She bit her bottom lip, spreading her legs slightly wider as she stroked and rubbed, closing her eyes. Her breath hitched in her chest, catching in her throat as her arousal mounted; she was already drenched in sweat, her pussy soaking through the thin fabric of her panties, her fluids coating her fingers as she touched herself.

She moaned out, gripping the sheets with her free hand for the sake of something to hold onto as her hips began to move under the impetus of her touch. For the moment she didn't even care that Kyle was watching; she was more interested in the feelings coursing through her body, lighting up her nervous system, than in his avid gaze.

Clara was almost startled when she felt Kyle's hand close on her wrist, when she felt him tug her hand out of her panties carefully. She opened her eyes, looking up to meet Kyle's lust-filled gaze.

“You shouldn't have to take care of yourself,” Kyle murmured.

He leaned towards her, kissing her quickly on the lips as his fingers hooked in the waistband of her panties. Clara wrapped her arms around his shoulders, lifting her hips to assist Kyle as he tugged her underwear down along her legs, tossing the panties aside without looking to see where they went.

Kyle broke away from Clara's lips; she was trembling already, hot and cold flashes dancing along her nerve endings as she writhed helplessly underneath him, needy for more. Clara moaned as Kyle's lips brushed against the sensitive spot just below her ear, as he kissed a path downward slowly, nipping and licking her sweat-salted skin.

He lingered at her breasts, kissing every inch of the lush, heavy mounds and taking a few moments to claim each nipple in turn with lips, teeth, and tongue before he continued his descent. Clara grabbed at his shoulders, at his subtly muscled arms, her hips moving mindlessly, rubbing herself against his leg, against his hip, as Kyle took his time, kissing and nibbling along her abdomen. He nuzzled against her hip, his stubble rough against her softer skin, while his hands spread her legs wide.

Clara cried out as Kyle buried his face against her pussy, nuzzling against her bare skin, his stubble-rough chin rubbing along her folds. She grabbed his shoulder, her fingers pressing into him as he licked up and down along her labia, teasing her with lingering laps of his tongue. Clara squirmed and writhed, grabbing at the sheets underneath her, pushing and twisting her hips as Kyle sucked and licked, barely missing her clit. She threw her head back against the blankets, her fingernails digging into his shoulder; she could hear the sucking, wet sounds, even over her moans and cries.

Kyle teased her relentlessly, bringing the tip of his tongue nearly up to her clit and then lingering along her inner labia, probing her and tasting her as Clara pitched and arched, becoming more and more turned on. When she was certain that she couldn't possibly stand any more

teasing, Kyle began to flick his tongue lightly against her clit, slowly at first, and then faster. Clara moaned out long and low, her hips bucking in reaction to the jolt of pleasure that the contact sent through her. Kyle sucked her clit between his lips, his tongue working her faster and faster, sending more electric crackles of sensation through her nerves.

She tried to hold herself back, tried to savor the delicious feelings that coursed through her, but she found her pleasure mounting faster and faster, felt her muscles tightening in spasms as she came closer and closer to orgasm by the moment. Kyle's tongue switched between her clit and her pussy, bringing her to the edge and then moving away, over and over again until Clara was gasping and panting, crying out with pleasure. She dug her fingernails into his skin, scratched him without thinking, her body twisting as her muscles tensed and flexed in erratic convulsions.

She lost all track of time; Clara couldn't tell whether Kyle had been working at her pussy for minutes or hours. All she knew was that she was on the absolute edge of climax, trembling and almost ready to beg for it. In the part of her mind where she was still able to think, Clara couldn't help but compare it to Stephanos; it was not the same feeling, but she was as turned on as she had ever been.

Just when Clara thought that if she didn't climax she would lose her mind, Kyle began to flicker his tongue faster against her clit, bringing her to the edge and then tumbling her over it all at once. Clara cried out over and over again as wave after wave of pleasure washed over her, blotting out all ability to think of anything other than

how good she felt. Her hips moved, her body contorted outside of her control as spasms convulsed her muscles. She barely heard Kyle moaning against her, the vibrations intensifying her climax, making her gush against his lips and chin as she moaned.

Kyle's attentions only ceased as the last of the spasms of pleasure began to abate, leaving Clara trembling in the aftershocks, electric crackling jolts still twitching their way through her nerves. She panted and gasped for breath before she collapsed against the bed. Her legs felt like jelly, her arms felt utterly unreal. Her clit tingled, the inner walls of her pussy tightening in reaction to the pleasure that coursed through her. She was almost too far gone to notice Kyle kissing his way up from her drenched pussy, kissing her hip, along her abdomen, lightly brushing against her breasts, and then bringing his lips to meet hers, kissing her hungrily.

As she came back to herself, still draped in the heavy haze of pleasure, Clara felt the heat of Kyle's rapidly hardening cock pressing against her. "Give me just a minute," she murmured, wrapping her arms around him limply.

"Take your time," Kyle replied, touching her everywhere with caressing touches, soothing her trembling body.

"I'm not the only one who's been practicing," Clara said, giggling slightly. "You're better than I remember at that."

Kyle laughed, cupping her breasts and teasing her nipples. He slipped one hand down along her body, sliding between her legs to stroke her labia lightly.

"I do remember that you always felt great wrapped

around me,” Kyle murmured in her ear.

Clara found herself rubbing against his fingers, starting to become turned on all over again. “Okay; maybe we don’t need to wait any longer,” Clara said, wrapping her legs around his waist.

Kyle laughed again, kissing her on the lips, along her throat. He rocked his hips against hers and Clara moaned softly as his hard cock rubbed against her, replacing his fingers.

“In fact, if you make me wait, I might kill you.”

“So impatient,” Kyle said with a laugh. He rocked steadily against her, turning her on more and more, rubbing along her folds. The tip of his hot, hard cock brushed against her clit, sending tingling flashes through her body.

“You love it,” Clara countered, pushing her hips down to meet his thrusts.

Kyle nipped along her throat, and then brought his lips to hers, kissing her hungrily and swallowing down her moans. He thrust into her slowly, filling her up inch by inch, and Clara’s grip on his shoulders tightened, her thighs flexing around his waist as she took him deeper and deeper. Kyle moaned against her lips, pushing past the initial resistance of her body, burying himself deep inside of her and holding still for a long moment.

They began to move together, Clara pushing down to meet Kyle’s thrusts, her hands trailing all over his body. Kyle kissed her everywhere, his hands cupping her breasts, teasing her nipples, caressing her as they began to move faster and faster. Every movement of their bodies

brought her pleasure higher and higher, and Clara thought that even though she'd only climaxed moments before, she wasn't going to be able to last long; she almost couldn't believe how good she felt, and the fact that she was already on the edge.

"God, you feel good," Kyle murmured in her ear, dragging his lips along the line of her jaw. "You've always felt so good. How could I have forgotten this?" He began to thrust harder and faster, pushing deeper and deeper inside of her.

Clara cried out as Kyle's cock brushed up against her G-spot, sending a rush of sensation through her body that made her tremble. He brushed against her pleasure center again and again, every few thrusts, nipping and nibbling along her throat, and Clara felt her muscles fluttering around him as her body heated up more and more, electric tingling lighting up her nervous system.

"You—you too," she said between gasps, touching him everywhere.

They were moving faster and faster, drenched in sweat, and Clara could feel the tension mounting inside of her like a tight knot somewhere deep between her hips. Kyle reached down between their bodies, and Clara moaned out long and low as his fingers found her clit, rubbing and stroking her in counterpoint to his thrusts.

Within moments, it seemed, Clara was clutching at Kyle's body as the first wave of pleasure crashed through her. She cried out, throwing her head back and digging her fingernails into his back as more and more sensation washed through every nerve in her body. She kissed everywhere on Kyle's neck and shoulder that her lips

could reach, twisting and writhing as her orgasm consumed her. She felt Kyle's cock twitching inside of her, felt the first sticky-slick gush of his orgasm rushing into her in. Kyle moaned against her neck, thrusting into her a few final hard, fast times, gripping her body tightly as they moved together until they simply couldn't move any longer.

Clara came back to herself gradually, aware of the humming pleasure still buzzing in her veins. She felt Kyle's weight against her body and chuckled lowly, still breathing heavily. "Okay, that might be a good argument for getting back together," Clara said.

Kyle echoed her chuckle. "Oh I'm just getting started," he told her, kissing her lightly on the cheek. He gathered himself up and sank onto the bed next to her, holding himself up on his elbow to look down at her with a grin. "Got anything to drink around here?"

Clara considered. "There might be a beer or two," she said. "Are you really going to make me get up and go to the kitchen?"

Kyle kissed her lightly on the palm of her hand. "I'll get it."

He climbed out of the bed, giving her another grin. Clara took a moment to admire his naked body as he looked around for his boxers. "You don't have to get dressed, my roommate's out for the night."

Kyle grinned again and walked out of the bedroom naked, and Clara admired the sight of him leaving the room.

A few moments later, he came back, two opened beers in

his hand, and Clara sat up in her bed, leaning against the headboard. She could remember the particular set of assignments—and the clients that came with them—that had won her the money to buy it; she dismissed the thought harshly. This was not the time to think of being paid for sex.

She accepted one of the bottles from Kyle and sipped. “I hadn’t realized how much you taste like beer,” she said, giving Kyle a little grin. It was true; the slightly bitter hoppy flavor of the beer was not all that different from the taste of Kyle’s come.

He laughed, reaching out to tousle her already-messy hair. “You taste like ice cream,” he countered.

Clara shrugged, blushing slightly; she hadn’t really thought about what she tasted like—and she didn’t quite believe the compliment.

They began to talk, taking up from where they had left off as they sipped their beers, their hands beginning to wander. Clara considered that it might actually be nice to get back together with Kyle: good sex, and they obviously enjoyed each other’s company.

“So,” she said, setting her empty beer down on the bedside table and sliding closer to Kyle in the bed. “Is the only reason you called me because you got dumped? Because I could understand remembering your ex when you find yourself lonely.”

Kyle laughed. “I’m single, and I’ve been single for a while.” He glanced at her and there was something in his eyes that she couldn’t quite read. “What about you? I probably should have asked if you’re seeing anyone

before I seduced you.”

Clara rolled her eyes. “If I was seeing anyone seriously you would not have been able to seduce me.”

Kyle smirked. “Well, you know, I think I’m pretty charming.”

“Pretty charming, yes, but I do take my relationships seriously, when I’m in one. I’m hurt you’d think I’d cheat even for you.” She changed the subject, asking Kyle how long he was planning on being in town, what he’d done and seen at the conference, but Kyle continued to probe.

“Successful woman like you, I’m kind of confused why you wouldn’t have a boyfriend.” Kyle nuzzled her playfully but Clara was beginning to feel a low stirring of alarm, replacing the comfortable haze of pleasure that the sex had provided.

“I don’t have a boyfriend because I don’t want one.” She frowned. “What’s up with your sudden interest in my love life, anyway? I mean...” she shrugged. “If you don’t want more than a fling I’m totally all right with that, there’s no need to—well, kind of insult me by suggesting I’m cheating on someone.”

“You never did mention what you did freelance,” Kyle said.

Clara felt her cheeks heating up. She wanted to believe that it was a subject-change, that it was nothing more than Kyle backing off of her, but something in the shift in his voice, the eager look in his eyes, told her that he had been working around to this all night.

“You don’t have a boyfriend, but you’ve gotten just...”

insanely good at sex?" he asked.

"I've had some flings," Clara said, not quite able to meet his gaze. "It's not worth talking about; I'm clean and you'd better be."

"I thought I saw a picture of you in the newspaper the other day," Kyle said, letting the almost-question trail off.

Clara shrugged. "Probably just someone who looked like me. Most of those newspapers just spread scandal and lies anyway."

Kyle turned her face towards his. "How do you know Stephanos Kofidis?"

Clara stared at him in shock. She had assumed that the journalists who had besieged her and Stephanos hadn't just gone back to their offices without reporting on anything, but she hadn't actually investigated to see just how far-flung the coverage was.

As she stared at him in silence, a different idea crystalized in Clara's mind; Kyle hadn't looked her up because he was interested in a booty call with an ex, or even because he missed her. He had seen the reports and was only interested in taking her out and getting her comfortable so that he could get the details of her dalliance with Stephanos.

She laughed bitterly. "Oh, you asshole," she said, shaking her head and slithering free of his arms.

"What? You had to know it was all over the news. Your picture was all over the place! I'm just curious, Clara."

Clara scowled at Kyle. "Just curious? Then why didn't

you mention it right off the bat? You haven't changed at all, have you, Kyle?" Clara grabbed up her robe and wrapped it tightly around herself, feeling dirtier than her job had ever made her feel. "You're such an arrogant asshole, do you know that? No fucking wonder you don't have a girlfriend."

"Hey—excuse me, I'm not the one hanging out with billionaires at sex parties!"

Clara's face burned and she felt her anger rising, heating up inside of her mind with every passing moment. "Get the hell out of my house. Get out! If you don't I swear to God I'll call the cops."

She went into the living room where her purse had fallen in the rush to get into bed with Kyle; she didn't know if she had the moral courage to actually follow through with her threat—months and months of avoiding police contact made for ingrained habits. But she knew that she had to get Kyle out of the apartment. The only reason he had wanted to be with her was because he wanted to hook up with a billionaire's plaything—he didn't even view her as a person anymore, just as an object that he could get some fun out of and maybe make some money from.

"Who were you going to sell your story to, Kyle?" she asked him, bringing the phone with her into the bedroom.

Kyle was slowly gathering up his clothes. "I wasn't going to sell any stories," he protested weakly.

"The hell you weren't. Hurry up, asshole. If you're not out of here in two minutes, dressed or not, I'm calling the cops and getting you charged with—stalking, or—or something. I don't even know what." She dialed the

emergency number but didn't hit the call button, and showed Kyle the screen. "Get the hell out."

Kyle hurried then, pulling on his boxers and pants all at once, not even bothering with his shirt. He barely looked at her as he rushed out of the bedroom and towards the front door.

Clara sat down heavily on the couch after the door closed behind him; she knew she should lock it, but at the moment she felt nothing but revulsion. She had been such an idiot; even without her giving him any information, it wasn't as if Kyle didn't have a story to sell. The next thing she knew, she'd be seeing headlines on the tabloids: "*I Fucked Stephanos Kofidis' Escort.*"

Clara closed her eyes and wished that Amanda were home. *God I wish there was just someone I could talk to about this. Anyone.* She felt used; she felt dirty. She decided with a sigh that she would take a shower and crawl into bed, hoping that the next day she would somehow feel better about the whole situation.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN



Clara paced back and forth next to the swimming pool of her apartment complex, worrying at her bottom lip. When she had awakened that morning there had still been no sign of Amanda; only a text saying she had decided to crash at another escort's pad. That was normal enough, but Clara needed some kind of comfort. She needed to talk to someone about what had happened with Kyle, everything that had happened with Stephanos. In the absence of her friend and roommate, the only person she could think of was Stephanos himself—if he would answer his phone.

Clara stopped pacing and sat down, at a loss for what to do with herself. She had called Stephanos three times, and three times he hadn't answered. She knew that he was busy—probably even busier than usual, considering the mess that they were both in. She realized that he probably didn't have her personal phone number—it would be unlike her to give it out; but then, in the past week, she had done a lot of things with him that were not her usual *modus operandi*.

She stood and began pacing again, looking around her without really seeing anything. She thought about her options; she could go looking for the Greek, but she doubted that he would welcome that. If she went anywhere near any of the places she could reasonably expect him to be, the press would be on her in an instant. She could try calling him again, but she doubted he wouldn't answer her fourth call if he hadn't answered her first three. She groaned, looking around her once more.

It was then that she noticed the limousine that had pulled up to the building. Clara stopped in her tracks, staring at it for a moment. There was no one in her building who would have ordered a limo. Her heart started beating faster and she left the pool area, walking towards the car in curiosity. The car looked like the one Stephanos had sent her home in, the one he had taken out to the party. Clara approached and the driver got out, looking around until he spotted her.

"Please get in," the man said, giving her a slightly stilted smile. It wasn't the same driver as she had seen before, but Clara had to think that Stephanos probably had more than a few drivers working for him at any given time.

She climbed into the back seat, her heart beating faster with anticipation. She looked around, but Stephanos wasn't there. Clara tried not to feel disappointed. Maybe this was the answer to her calls; maybe Stephanos didn't want to discuss things over the phone, but wanted to talk to her in person.

The driver got in and pulled away from the apartment building, and Clara looked down at her clothes, feeling a slight wave of chagrin. If she had known that she was

going to be seeing Stephanos on such short notice she would have chosen something a little nicer, maybe done her makeup.

“Excuse me,” Clara said, leaning in closer to the driver’s compartment. “Who do you work for? And how—how did you know to pick me up?” The driver glanced at her through the rear-view mirror.

“I knew who I was looking for,” the driver said, glancing back at the road.

“Where are we going, exactly?”

“Nowhere you haven’t been before.”

Gradually, as the driver moved out of the city proper, Clara’s stomach began to twist inside of her. She told herself that a wealthy man like Stephanos probably had a country house, in addition to his ongoing hotel penthouse suite. It only made sense that a wealthy man would have several places to live. But as she watched the landscape go past the window, familiar landmarks deepened her anxiety. She took deep breaths; instinctively she knew that asking the driver any more questions would probably avail her nothing. She couldn’t expect any answers—even if it was Stephanos’ driver, which she had started to doubt.

Clara picked at imaginary lint on her skirt, worrying at her bottom lip as she tried to contain her rising anxiety. She wondered if Stephanos knew about her dalliance with Kyle the night before; she hadn’t mentioned it in the message she had left, but if Kyle had run to a journalist, she thought he would already have the information. She had avoided looking at the news on the off chance that

there would be another tabloid special about her.

Her mind swirled with possibilities as the car drove deeper and deeper into the countryside. Maybe Stephanos would punish her for her tryst. Clara shivered as she thought of all the different toys and implements he had at his disposal seemingly anywhere he was. She wasn't sure whether she dreaded it or anticipated the possibility more. But then, she thought, if he knew about her going out when he had specifically told her not to leave the apartment, he might also be bringing her in to tell her in person that he didn't want to see her anymore.

Clara's anxiety deepened as more and more of the landscape around her became familiar, trying to remember just what it was she was identifying. As the car pulled onto an isolated side-road, the reason came to her all at once. They were going to the same place that Clara had found him before; the car was taking her to the mansion where the sex party had happened. *Oh God. Oh God. It's not Stephanos. Or not just Stephanos.*

Clara felt her heart pounding in her chest, and tried to breathe slowly. If it was Stephanos' mansion it could still be him. If it was his friends', though... she shivered as a much less sexual tingle went down her spine. Her eyes stung and Clara swallowed against the lump that was forming in her throat. She was not going to cry. She was not going to be weak in front of those people. Images flashed through her mind; Stephanos had told her flatly that he had no idea what the people in the party would have done to her if they thought she was a journalist snooping for a scoop. There had been real concern in his eyes at the thought of what these powerful people could do.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



The driver pulled into the driveway and any doubts about her destination evaporated. Clara took a deep breath and told herself to just face whatever was going to happen to her as bravely as possible. The car door was locked; Clara swallowed again, taking a deep breath. The driver got out and walked around the car, and Clara wasn't certain whether he was being courteous or simply ensuring that she didn't try to make a run for it. He opened the door and took her hand, helping her out of the back seat; when he didn't relinquish her hand the moment she was steady on her feet, Clara decided that he must be following orders.

The driver guided her to the front door of the house and Clara's mind flashed back to the way that the two guards had carried her into the sex party. At least this time she had the dignity of walking on her own two feet, instead of being carried with a bag over her head. *I already know where I am, it's not like they have any reason to give me the kidnapping treatment.* She had to wonder if the driver had been given instructions to grab her if she didn't come along willingly.

Clara tried to steady herself in spite of the churning anxiety inside of her. Maybe it had been Stephanos' house all along, and maybe the driver was just under instructions from him. She tried to tell herself that everything would be okay; after all, Stephanos believed her about not revealing his secrets to the press. He knew—or at least trusted—that she was genuine. If it was him that she was being brought to see, Clara thought there was a chance that she might get out in one piece.

But the driver guided her into the ballroom that she remembered so well, and after a moment's wait, Clara saw the same procession of people entering the room as she had the first time; the women were dressed, but barely—and they were once again all in masks.

Her stomach plunged inside of her. It felt as though it had dropped to her knees, maybe even her ankles, and Clara barely kept back the groan of dismay that threatened to push its way up through her throat. These were some of the most powerful people in the world, according to Stephanos. Billionaires, congressmen, lawyers, the one percent.

Clara looked across what seemed like a sea of faces, trying to peer through the masks of the ominously silent assembly. Stephanos had been a member of their group; he had to be among them, didn't he? But the masks covered the men's faces just enough to make identifying any of them impossible. Clara thought bitterly that even if she had gone to the press, she wouldn't have been able to give anyone any kind of clue about who she had slept with, or who she had seen doing what. The only person she knew in the entire group was Stephanos.

“Thank you for coming,” one of the men said, moving slightly forward of the rest of the group.

Clara wondered if the man was being ironic; it wasn't as if she had had a huge amount of choice in the matter—and she had to believe now, that if she hadn't gotten into the limo willingly, the driver would have taken other measures to get her to the mansion.

“No problem,” Clara said, keeping her voice carefully level.

She glanced from one masked face to another, wondering if these men and women had already come to a decision about her; if this meeting was to tell her what her fate would be. *If they were going to make me disappear, I really don't think they'd tell me about it.* They weren't bond villains. They were the kinds of people who made inconvenient people disappear whenever it suited them. She felt as if the temperature in the room had dropped fifteen degrees in a moment. *If they're still talking to you, then it can't be that bad.*

“You should know, Clara, that we know all about your background, and none of us would bar you from joining in our activities because of it.”

Clara nodded, a little startled that the man knew her name. She tried to remember if she had given her name to anyone. She couldn't recall telling anyone her name, and the entire orgy had assumed a blurry aspect in her mind. Had Stephanos introduced her to the group?

“I seem to recall that Stephanos told you I was an escort; you seemed pretty welcoming then.”

The man nodded, and Clara wished—even knowing that

it was useless to do so—that she could at least see his face. She had no idea who he was, and the sea of masked, anonymous faces was somehow more intimidating than anything she had been through in her life. Somehow their very anonymity made it completely plausible in her mind that these people could have her killed and disposed of without a single repercussion.

“We’ve done a little searching since then, I’m sure you understand.”

Clara took a deep breath, her mind jumping to the memory of the man hanging around in the bushes at her apartment complex. She had thought he was a journalist, but a more sinister picture was forming in her mind.

“We’re aware of your relationship with Stephanos,” the man continued.

“I don’t... I don’t know if I’d call it a relationship,” Clara said weakly.

“Even a business relationship is a relationship, Clara,” the man said, and Clara thought she sensed kindness in his voice. “Stephanos trusted you enough to bring you to our last party; that in itself speaks highly of his opinion of you.”

Clara tried not to fidget, even though every impulse in her body screamed at her to run. It wouldn’t do her any good and she knew it.

“Okay, so you know about Stephanos and me,” she said, taking a deep breath. Her hands didn’t want to remain still at her sides; her feet felt almost itchy.

“We’ve done our research,” the man said, the kindness

leaving his voice.

Clara once more looked around the sea of anonymous faces in front of her; was Stephanos among them? “So then, if it’s not presumptuous of me to ask, what am I doing here?”

Her heart was pounding, her blood roaring in her ears. She knew it was absolutely presumptuous of her to ask. She knew, too, why she was there; but Clara thought to herself that the dragging out of the situation was exactly what she wanted to avoid. If they were going to interrogate her, torture her, kill her, she just wanted to get it over with.

“We wanted to give you an opportunity to discuss this recent... situation,” the man said. Clara wondered which walk of life he belonged to; was he a congressman in disguise? An influential judge? Was he another billionaire, one of Stephanos’ peers? “Of course you understand, as someone who only joined us recently, that our suspicion has been on you.”

“That was my...” Clara hesitated. “Not exactly my first thought when the vultures descended, but it was only about the second or third.” Someone in the group chuckled, and Clara found herself smiling nervously.

“And what do you know about the story that came out?”

Clara took a deep breath. Either they would believe her or they wouldn’t. “I don’t know anything,” she said, shaking her head and glancing around the group. “I didn’t contact the press. That’s all I know.”

She waited as silence descended. She tried to tell herself that if they didn’t believe her it would still be all right

somehow; but images of being tortured filled her mind, sinking her stomach even further. There was no kidding herself that the kind of torture these individuals would bring to bear on someone they thought had ratted them out would be very different than the kind of punishment the Greek had inflicted on her.

There was a quiet murmur, breaking the thick silence, and Clara felt her heart give a stuttering skip in her chest.

“Based on what we do know about you, about Stephanos, and about the situation, we’re inclined to believe you,” the man said.

Clara’s knees felt as though they’d been replaced with poorly set jelly as relief flooded her. “Thank you,” she said, exhaling without knowing how long she’d been holding her breath. “I don’t know why you trust me, but I’m grateful that you do.” There was another chuckle from somewhere in the depths of the group.

“You were well-received,” the man said, the faintest glimmer of a smile on his lips. “Had you not performed so well, we might be inclined to doubt you.”

Clara heard a murmur—she couldn’t make out if the voice was masculine or feminine, but the words sounded like something to do with a wallet, and Clara had to wonder once more if Stephanos was in the group, if he was going along with this inquisition.

“I appreciate your fairness,” Clara said, at a loss for anything else to say. “Am... am I allowed to leave?”

“Yes,” the man said, taking the slightest of steps backward. “We’re going to continue our investigations, but for the moment, we have no reason to detain you,

Clara.”

She had thought that she couldn't possibly be more relieved than when she had heard that they believed her—that the group thought she was at least trustworthy enough not to have blabbed to the press. But the second wallop of relief that flowed through her was even more intense than the first, nearly bringing her plunging to her knees before she straightened herself and took a steadying breath.

“Thank you again,” Clara said, managing a weak smile. “I... Thank you.”

The group of anonymous faces ebbed away, individuals moving like a flow of water, turning away from her as if she were no longer important. But Clara had never been happier to be absolutely insignificant in her life; she was so intensely glad that she was no longer in the glaring spotlight that the feeling was almost painful. She took a deep breath, wondering how she was going to get back home, as she thought with chagrin that she hadn't even had her purse with her—only her phone. She didn't think that she would have much luck with a cab this far out in the countryside.

The driver who had brought her in appeared in the corner of her version and cleared his throat. “If you'll follow me, please.”

Clara looked at him for a moment before glancing back at the departing flow of masked people; there was no sign leading her to believe that Stephanos was among them. She had to hope that if he had been in the group, he would have found some way to signal her. Suddenly she felt exhausted.

“I can’t think of any other way I’d get home,” Clara told the man, stepping towards him.

He escorted her out of the mansion and down along the walkway, thankfully not taking her by the hand this time. Clara got into the car with less anticipation than before, and sat back in the seat, closing her eyes. It was only too easy to think of what could have happened if the people in the group had chosen not to believe her, if they had been suspicious enough to jump to the conclusion that it must be her. *I could almost forgive them torturing me, if I really thought about it*, Clara thought as the driver started out from the mansion. She shivered. She could forgive the group’s impulse to verify that her story was accurate, but she was glad that she hadn’t had to go through it.

The sight of her apartment building had never been more welcome as the driver approached. Clara wondered if Amanda had managed to get home yet, or if her friend was running on energy drinks and caffeine pills, trying to get in a little more work. As the driver turned into the parking lot, it struck Clara as odd that Amanda would work so constantly even over a period of a couple of days; while she knew that Amanda typically booked more clients than she did, her roommate did have to get some rest.

She got out of the car and thanked the driver, though Clara thought that she wasn’t sure just what she was thanking him for; he had, after all, basically been sent to abduct her.

As she walked up to the entrance of her building, Clara looked up from the sidewalk to see that Stephanos was standing outside, watching her.

“What the hell are you doing here?” she asked, glancing around as she belatedly realized that she had nearly shouted the question in her surprise.

“Waiting for you,” he said.

Clara felt a flash of guilt; Stephanos obviously hadn't been at the meeting she'd been taken to.

Before she could gather her thoughts enough to explain where she had been, Stephanos raised a hand to forestall her, speaking again. “I have some news.”

“News?”

He pulled her slightly aside, away from the people passing by, heading in and out of the building. “News about the situation,” he said, raising an eyebrow.

“Okay,” Clara said, her heart beating a little faster. “So what's the situation?”

He glanced around, not quite furtively. “I had a few of my own investigators looking into the source of the newspaper reports,” he said. Clara swallowed, not sure why she felt guilty. “I know that the club is looking into it, but I wanted answers of my own, especially since the only name being mentioned appears to be mine.” He paused slightly, before lowering his voice. “I had someone set to watch both you and your roommate.”

“What?” Clara frowned. “Why would you do that?” If Stephanos had trusted that she wasn't the source of the leak, she didn't quite understand why he would have someone watching her. She felt a trickle of annoyance as she realized that the man who had been in the bushes outside of her apartment was not someone who the

group had hired, but Stephanos' own investigator.

“Yes,” Stephanos said slowly. “I have a company on retainer for these things; you two were not the only ones I had him look into. Please believe me when I say that I didn't suspect you for a moment—I had you followed because I wanted to see if someone else was following you.”

That didn't quite mollify Clara, but her curiosity about the news that Stephanos had mentioned overcame her irritation. “Who was it, then?” she asked.

“There was no one in the group—none of the professionals, and even some of the non-escorts who I thought could be likely culprits had alibis, and were clean. None of them were the culprit.” Stephanos met her gaze, looking at her steadily. “Even then I had no doubts about you, Clara. I hope you know that.”

“I'm relieved to hear it,” she said, not quite sarcastically. “So, if it wasn't me, and it wasn't one of the other women at the party, who was it?”

Stephanos' lips twisted in something between a smile and a frown, and Clara felt her heart beating faster, felt her stomach lurch with a feeling of guilt she couldn't quite form a reason for.

“It was your roommate,” he said slowly. “The person who leaked the story to the newspaper was Amanda. My detective got the information from the first newspaper to carry the story. It could only have been her.”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN



For a long time after Stephanos spoke, Clara stood in silent shock, trying to comprehend how she felt. Confusion, anger, irritation, relief flickered through her, each emotion popping to the top of her mind only to be overwhelmed by one of the others. The Greek had had her followed, but he had trusted her; he had believed in her innocence.

Clara sat down heavily on a bench in front of her building. Amanda had sold her out. It hadn't been one of the other escorts who had been at the secret party; it had been her own friend, her roommate.

Clara looked down at her feet. It seemed like only moments before she had been so relieved to discover that the powerful, wealthy people that Stephanos associated with had decided to trust her. *Only Stephanos' name was mentioned*, Clara thought. *That should have been the first damned clue.* But she had been so careful to avoid looking at the lurid reports to even discover if anyone else's name had been suggested. She had been so consumed by her own innocence and the fact that she

might be blamed for it unjustly that she hadn't paid attention to the small amount of evidence in front of her.

Her irritation rose up again. *He had me followed! He had some private detective tailing me.* She felt a flicker of guilt, too, at the fact that, in telling Amanda about the details of her interactions with Stephanos, she hadn't been entirely blameless. What's more, if some other story came out about her, she would know with a fair amount of confidence that it had come from Kyle, and that it was her own fault.

Clara looked up at Stephanos; he was watching her intently, something in his dark eyes she couldn't read although the rest of his face was carefully neutral.

"If you trusted me, why did you have me followed?"

He shrugged. "I told you; I wanted to see if there was someone else watching you."

Clara sighed. It was reasonable—and she hated the fact that it was reasonable. But if someone had been tailing her, trying to get dirt on her, why wouldn't Stephanos have sent someone to tail that person instead?

Clara's thoughts circled back to the subject of Amanda, and the fact that the roommate and fellow escort that she had trusted most had been the one to reveal her secret to the press. "It's my fault anyway," Clara said, sighing. "I mean, if I hadn't told her anything, she wouldn't have had a story."

"You're a smart woman, Clara; if Amanda hadn't been trustworthy in the past, you wouldn't have chosen to live with her, and you certainly wouldn't have told her anything, would you?"

Clara thought back to how it had all began; she had come back from her first session with Stephanos, full of excitement at the opulence of the hotel he had chosen, the fact that she had climaxed from her session with him. It had been so innocent; just two escorts talking about an odd encounter with a client. If she hadn't searched for his information online in front of her roommate, it would have simply ended there.

"I didn't..." Clara frowned. "It didn't start out as a confession, really." She told Stephanos about coming home from their first session, about telling Amanda about him as a point of curiosity before she had even known who he was. "Amanda was the one driving the car when I followed you to that party," Clara explained. "And then of course once I got home..." she shrugged.

"Amanda was curious." Clara nodded.

"She wanted to know what the hell had happened to me. I mean... you leave a friend at the front gate of a huge mansion in the middle of nowhere you're going to want answers. I didn't even think anything of it."

"Professional gossip."

Clara sighed. "It's just as well I'm out of the business. No guy in their right mind would hire me at this point anymore anyway."

Stephanos smiled faintly. "There are plenty of men out there, I'm sure you know, who would love a scandal-ridden escort."

"Not the kind of guys I'd want to work with," Clara retorted. She remembered that as she had been lying low, bored out of her mind, her Madame had texted her

that there was a client looking for her. She shivered. “I don’t understand why she’d even do it.”

Stephanos shrugged, sitting down next to her on the bench. “There are any number of reasons I can think of,” he said. “She might have been envious of your success. She also probably got more than a little money out of the deal—is she as successful an escort as you are?”

Clara shook her head. “She works with a lot of clients; she’s never really invested the time to create a high quality of clientele.” She picked at imaginary lint on her skirt. “I thought we were friends. I thought I could trust her.”

Clara’s sense of betrayal began to trickle away as she realized that if Stephanos could discover the source of the news stories, his associates could as well. She remembered the terror she had felt when confronted with that sea of anonymous faces, the knowledge that those powerful people could easily have her disposed of.

Clara looked at Stephanos. “We have to talk to her about this,” she said quickly. “I know she’s probably not on your list of people you’d love to talk to but...” Clara bit her bottom lip. “As shitty as what she did is, your—associates—could...”

He nodded slowly. “They are very powerful and very paranoid. They could do any number of things to her, especially since she’s an escort.” He considered for a moment. “Yes, we need to talk to her about this. It isn’t a matter of taste.”

Clara racked her mind; Amanda had been making excuses for two days as to why she wasn’t at home—of

course, she was trying to avoid Clara. Whether she thought that Clara might know, or simply felt guilty, Clara was the last person that Amanda would want to be around right now, after selling her out. She would have to convince Amanda that she had no idea of what was happening; she would have to lure her back to the apartment for some other reason.

“What do you think?” Clara asked, telling him about how Amanda had been avoiding her.

“Send her a message,” Stephanos suggested. “Say you’re worried about her, and that you’ve made dinner—you want to make sure she isn’t being held hostage somewhere or something like that. Completely innocent, completely unaware.” His expression became firm. “If she doesn’t take the bait, worst case scenario we can have her located.”

Clara cringed internally. While she knew Stephanos was not the kind of man to hurt Amanda without reason, she thought that he also had plenty of reason to want her silenced. He couldn’t be as paranoid as the other members of his club, could he?

“Let’s see if she takes the bait first,” Clara suggested weakly. “I may be pissed at her for ruining my life and yours, but I’m not sure I have the stomach for abduction.”

The Greek smiled slightly. “It’s not at the top of my list, either, Clara. But if we don’t get to her first, the others in the group will. And I’m afraid they won’t be as understanding.”

Clara nodded. She took her phone out of her pocket and opened up the message thread with Amanda. *Hey babe,*

where you at? You can't live on Red Bull and NoDoz forever, you know! I'm starting to think some crazy client has you locked up in his basement. Come back to the pad and we'll have a bite to eat—I'm cooking right now. She showed it to Stephanos and he nodded his approval.

There was nothing to talk about while Clara waited to see if Amanda would reply. If she didn't it could mean that Amanda was actually with a client—or that she was moving a step further in trying to avoid Clara. It would be difficult to tell either way.

Clara bit her bottom lip, worrying it between her teeth; she knew that Amanda being in deep trouble was nothing but the woman's just desserts—but she couldn't help but worry that maybe she and Stephanos hadn't acted fast enough, that sometime between when she had left the mansion and when Stephanos had given her the news, the group had figured out the source on their own and acted faster. Clara's phone buzzed in her hand and she let out a breath she didn't know she was holding.

Well, if you're cooking, then I'll high tail it!

“Good,” Clara said, showing the message to Stephanos.

“Shall we go up? I think it would spoil the surprise if we met her here.”

Clara smiled weakly. “Yeah. No sense giving her the chance to make a run for it.”

Clara felt a frisson of anxiety as she unlocked and opened the door to the apartment she shared with Amanda. Stephanos was accustomed to the most luxurious of surroundings; she couldn't even imagine what the price tag on his penthouse hotel room was. She

glanced at him as he followed her through the door, trying to evaluate his reaction. *He knows you aren't a billionaire, what's he going to expect?* But the possibility that Stephanos could regard her living space with distaste weighed on her. Somehow just the possibility of being judged by him hurt.

But there was not even a flicker of consternation on Stephanos' face as Clara closed and locked the door behind her. He walked easily to the couch and sat down, smiling slightly at her.

"Can I get you something to drink?" Clara asked, falling back on the rote courtesy that her parents had tried to instill in her as a child.

"For right now I think water would be best," he answered. He looked at her for a moment longer. "Clara, you're not worried that I'm secretly thinking something about how you live your life, are you?"

Clara grinned wryly. "Well, it had entered my mind that my apartment isn't... what you'd be used to."

Stephanos chuckled lowly. "Clara, I'm no snob. I didn't always live in a luxury suite, you know." He spread his hands out in front of him. "Your home is clean and comfortable. The level of opulence is mostly window-dressing."

"You sound so polite," Clara said, losing some of her nervousness. "This place would never make the cover of *Better Homes and Gardens*."

He laughed again. "If you're wondering, it does not look like a stereotypical escort's home, if such a thing existed." He regarded her levelly. "I've known escorts before,

Clara.” He paused for a moment, as if considering what he wanted to say. “You’re not a stereotype in my mind, you’re not an object; you’re a person who I’ve enjoyed a good business relationship with and whose interests coincide with my own.”

Clara felt her cheeks warming at the implied compliments and turned quickly. “Let me just get you that glass of water,” she said, retreating into the kitchen.

She wasn’t sure how she felt about Stephanos, exactly; her irritation at him sending an investigator after her and Amanda was still present, but only at a fraction of its initial strength. She couldn’t help but be grateful for the way he had continued to treat her, for the fact that he didn’t view her as some kind of glorified sex toy, and the fact that he seemed to be genuinely interested in her as a human being.

CHAPTER NINETEEN



Amanda had apparently taken the message at face value; Clara didn't have very long to wait before she heard the rattling clink of keys at the door, the sound of the lock turning over. She glanced at Stephanos. Her heart was pounding but as far as she could see, he was not even slightly concerned about the confrontation that was about to take place. He sat with his hands folded, looking as though he owned the apartment.

When Amanda walked in, Clara saw her open her mouth to call out for her and then—her gaze falling on Stephanos—stopped short.

“Oh—I forgot to mention,” Clara said, forcing her voice to remain innocent. “We have a guest for dinner. Amanda, meet Stephanos.”

Stephanos stood in a fluid movement. “Stephanos Kofidis,” he added, not quite smiling.

Amanda's eyes widened to the point that Clara thought they might actually fall out. “Stephanos Kofidis,” she said

slowly. “You’re—you’re Stephanos Kofidis.”

“Stephanos wanted to meet you,” Clara said, struggling to keep her composure. She was torn between the lingering anger she felt at Amanda for betraying her, and amusement at the absurdity of the situation.

“You—mentioned me to him?” Amanda’s confusion looked almost genuine.

“In fact,” the Greek said, sitting down once more, and Clara hoped that she was never in a position to be on the receiving end of the gaze he had turned on Amanda just then. “I’m very interested in talking to you. Clara mentioned you in passing.”

“What can I do for you?” Amanda asked, her voice squeaking slightly. Clara saw her roommate glance at the door.

“There’s no reason to run, Amanda,” Clara said, keeping her voice level.

“I thought you didn’t usually do threesomes with other escorts,” Amanda said.

“That’s not why I’m here,” Stephanos told her. “Have a seat, Amanda.”

Clara saw her friend swallow nervously; Amanda hesitated, and Clara prepared to run after her in case the other woman tried to flee.

The moment passed, and Amanda sat down, picking nervously at her clothes. “What can I do for you?” she asked, glancing from Clara to Stephanos.

“We know you talked to the press,” Clara said.

“What?” Amanda tried to look shocked—but Clara had seen her friend when she had been genuinely surprised. She knew the real thing from the fake.

“You spoke to the press about me being Clara’s client, about the party she attended,” Stephanos said flatly.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. What good would it do me to throw another escort under the bus?”

“Please don’t waste my time, Amanda,” Stephanos said. Clara felt a chill flash down her spine and remembered the times that she had been in his room—when he had punished her. There was something of that quality in his voice as he spoke to Amanda, but without any kind of warmth.

“I—I’m not wasting your time,” Amanda said, her cheeks flushing. “I really don’t know what you’re talking about. Is there something going on with the press?”

Clara sighed, closing her eyes. “Mandy, don’t do this. You know exactly what we’re talking about. You went to some newspaper and told them all the stuff I told you.”

Amanda hesitated a moment and Clara started to think longingly of the possibilities of torture.

“Okay, fine,” Amanda said, sighing. She covered her face with her hands. “I did; it was me.”

“Why?” Clara asked her. “Why would you do that?”

“Particularly since you could have easily made more money by blackmailing me,” Stephanos pointed out. “Though you would have risked being arrested.”

Amanda glanced at each of them and bit her bottom lip.

“I made some money off of it, but that wasn’t why,” Amanda said quietly. “I just—I was... I was so mad.”

“Why were you mad at Stephanos?”

“At you!” Amanda said. Her eyes were watering slightly, and Clara hoped that her friend wouldn’t try and change things by crying or trying to make them pity her. Amanda took a deep breath and began to speak again. “I’ve been wanting to get out of the business too,” Amanda said.

“You never said anything about it to me,” Clara told her, crossing her arms over her chest. She told herself not to pity the other woman.

“Yeah, well, it’s not like I’ve ever had a chance to get out,” Amanda said, looking at her sharply. “I’m having to take six or seven guys a night or—or sometimes more—just to keep up with you.”

“That’s because you’ve never been selective,” Clara told her, frowning.

“It’s not just that. When you told me about Stephanos...”

“Did you tell her how much I gave you?” Stephanos asked Clara.

“She didn’t have to,” Amanda interjected. “I mean, she told me you were generous, but it’s not just that, it’s the connections.”

“So you went to the press and told them the story hoping—what, exactly?” Stephanos’ voice was quiet, patient.

“It was petty, but I—I’ve never had the luck Clara’s had, and now that she’s got you as a client...”

“Stephanos is not my client anymore, Amanda. I’m out.”

“Yeah, but you wouldn’t be out if you weren’t rolling in cash right now, would you?” Amanda shook her head, taking a deep breath. “I guess I thought that... if I did that, it would make us even.”

“So you figured that selling me out to the press, having me hounded—and, by the way, making a bunch of extremely powerful billionaires pissed off at me enough to possibly kill me—was justified because I’m getting out and you can’t?” Clara stood before she knew what she was doing. “What kind of psycho are you? You could have gotten me killed, Amanda!”

She saw her friend and roommate’s face go pale. “I— I didn’t think it would be *that* bad,” Amanda said. “I just figured Stephanos wouldn’t want to see you anymore; that you’d—you’d have to maybe keep escorting... I wouldn’t be so alone...” Amanda shook her head. “I never would have done it if I thought you were going to be in real danger, Clara—seriously.”

“Did you not get the part of the story where they threatened me before Stephanos was able to bail me out?” Clara saw Stephanos lift his hands up, in the corner of her vision, and subsided, sitting down in her chair once more with ill grace.

“These people—associates of mine—that Clara mentioned,” Stephanos said, his voice measured. “They are very dangerous people.” Amanda turned paler. “But I believe that they’re also fairly forgiving people. You had none of their names; they will be safe once this dies down. I can give you a chance to apologize to them, before they come after you themselves.”

“Stephanos?” Clara looked at the man that she had reluctantly started to have real feelings for, who she thought she could, possibly, really enjoy being with.

“There’s another party happening this evening,” the Greek said, not looking at Clara. “I would like to invite you to attend, Amanda.”

“Invite her?” Clara scowled. “After everything she’s done?”

“It’s less an invitation and more like a summons,” Stephanos said with a little smile. “You will find yourself in very, very deep trouble if you don’t come with us, Amanda.”

“Then I guess I have to go,” Amanda said dully. “But—they’re—you’re sure they’re not going to try and kill me as soon as they find out?”

“It will give you an opportunity to make some connections of your own,” he said with unmistakable amusement in his voice. “And if you go to them, things will probably go much better than if they are forced to hunt you down.” He paused to let the import of his words sink in and finally turned his gaze onto Clara. “You should both get ready. I’ll have my driver come and pick us up from here.”

CHAPTER TWENTY



Clara tried not to fidget as she settled in the back seat of Stephanos' car, unable to quite suppress her nervousness. Stephanos had made a brief phone call as she and Amanda quickly dressed and did their makeup. Amanda admitted that she hadn't actually been working for the past few days; she had been trying to avoid Clara. Clara still didn't quite forgive her friend, but she didn't exactly want Amanda to be tortured or killed, either.

"You're sure this is going to be okay?" Clara asked slowly.

Amanda looked just as nervous as Clara felt, and the other woman looked at Stephanos for confirmation.

"I'm confident. I know these people quite well."

Clara took a deep breath as the driver pulled away from the curb in front of her apartment building and started off on the long trek towards the mansion. She watched the scenery flow past the window, worrying at her bottom lip. Amanda and Stephanos made small talk next to her, but Clara couldn't bring herself to participate. She wasn't

sure how her roommate was able to keep such a brave face on; but then, Amanda had no idea who the people were, and while Clara didn't know any of their real identities, she could still remember Stephanos' warnings to her when she was caught, and the ominous sight of his associates when she had been brought into the mansion again, only hours earlier. She had been certain that the people in that group would not balk at killing her, or torturing her to get the information they needed out of her.

"You're certain this is going to work out?" Clara asked Stephanos.

He pulled his attention away from Amanda and nodded, reaching out and taking her hand to give it a comforting squeeze. "It will work out just fine, Clara."

Clara had to take his word for it; she didn't think she had much choice in the situation either. After all, it had been at least partially her own fault for telling Amanda about Stephanos, anyway. She was certain that her own apologies would have to come at some point as well—and that thought brought a new wave of fear. They had already absolved her once, and it frightened her to think that they would now find out that, even inadvertently, she did indeed share some of the blame for the scandal. Clara concentrated on taking deep breaths, telling herself that Stephanos knew the members of his club better than she did. He wouldn't put her in danger, would he?

She let her thoughts wander as the driver made his way through the countryside, putting more and more distance between them and the city. She had almost forgotten how removed the mansion was. *The perfect place for your*

secret sex party needs, she thought wryly. Almost in spite of herself, Clara found herself smiling. She would just have to deal with whatever happened; there was no other way around it.

Amanda's anxiety started to show as they approached the mansion and pulled up on the driveway. Stephanos opened the door to the back seat and stepped out, reaching back to offer Clara a hand up. Amanda looked scared, and for a moment Clara thought that her roommate might yet try to run, but she followed them both out of the car, and walked at their side as Stephanos led Clara along the driveway, up the path to the front door of the mansion. Clara thought irrelevantly that for someone who wasn't even part of the club, she was certainly spending a great deal of time amongst his associates.

Stephanos put his hand on the small of her back, and Clara was torn between feeling comforted by his touch and feeling as though she was being propelled into a trial. She, Stephanos, and Amanda moved through the entryway to the mansion, through a short hallway, and then they were in the huge, vaulting room where the group had assembled the two times Clara had seen them.

That same group of people filled the room now, and Clara glanced at her erstwhile friend to see how Amanda was handling the sight of so many masked figures. The women were already nude, but Clara thought to herself that she had never seen women who looked more thoroughly dressed in nothing but masks in her entire life. There was a long, ominous silence, and Clara felt the multitude of gazes on herself, on Stephanos, on

Amanda.

“I understand that you have information for us,” one of the men in the group said, addressing Stephanos. His voice was familiar, but Clara couldn’t quite tell if it was the man who had addressed her when she had been interrogated.

“I do indeed,” said Stephanos, looking at Amanda as his hand left the small of Clara’s back. He pushed Amanda forward slightly. “This is the source of the leak. Her name is Amanda, and she is an escort who lives with Clara.”

Clara heard a murmur ripple through the group.

“Explain,” the man said.

“She was motivated by envy and acted impulsively,” Stephanos said. “Amanda was jealous of the connections that Clara was able to form through her association with me—and through her attendance at the previous meeting. She regrets her actions.”

“I believe we would like to hear from Amanda, now,” someone in the crowd said.

Once more, Clara was stricken by how threatening the group seemed with their faces and identities obscured. She thought to herself that it would be so much easier to confront them if any hint of expression could be seen—anything other than the occasional curving of lips in a smile or a frown.

“I—I’m really sorry,” Amanda began, her voice shaking.

Clara could see that her friend’s shoulders were less than steady, and her knees looked as though they might

give out from underneath her at any moment. Clara felt her heart beating faster, her palms damp with sweat.

“I understand that what I did was wrong,” Amanda continued, “and that it was... it wasn’t just between me and Clara. I should have thought about what it would do to everyone else.” She took a deep breath. “I didn’t mean to—to expose your... club, or group, whatever you call this. I didn’t intend any harm, I just... I was eaten up with jealousy. I wasn’t thinking. I’m sorry.”

There was another long silence, and Clara found herself searching the sea of anonymous faces, trying to discern the mood of the room. A soft murmur went through the assembly; lips barely moved, and the voices were so quiet that Clara couldn’t tell who was speaking and who wasn’t. She wondered about the power dynamic in the group, about who was really in charge. She realized to her chagrin that she probably wouldn’t have any real opportunity to find out; she wouldn’t be able to blame them if they never wanted to have her in their midst again.

“We accept your apology,” said the man who had spoken before. “We can understand why you acted in the manner you did, and accept that you were not aware of the consequences your actions would have.”

Amanda sagged in relief, and Clara began to let herself feel a flicker of hope that they might all get out of the situation intact. She might not even have to be punished, since they all seemed to be so amenable to Amanda’s apology.

“Thank you,” Amanda said, stumbling over her words. “Thank you, so much. I swear I won’t ever do anything

like this again.”

The man held up a hand, stopping the onward rush of Amanda’s words. “Accepting your apology does not mean that you are absolved of guilt,” he said.

Amanda stepped backward instinctively, and Clara found herself sympathizing with her friend’s unease.

“We accept your apology,” the man continued, “but the fact still stands that you breached our confidence and have done harm to our community. As regards being absolved of that, you have a choice.”

Amanda nodded, and Clara swallowed against the lump that was beginning to form in her throat. She glanced at Stephanos, but his expression was unreadable.

“We consider ourselves something of a family,” the man said slowly. “And you’ve now got information about us which we’d rather didn’t become public knowledge. You can choose either to leave right now and never return, never speaking a word of this to anyone—or you can join our family.”

Clara absorbed the words with difficulty; they were going to invite Amanda to participate in the group? She couldn’t quite believe that they would trust her, after what Amanda had done.

“If you choose to join this family, Amanda, you must stand before us and strip yourself naked, to begin your initiation.”

There was a moment of silence, and Clara watched as her friend deliberated on her choice, looking from one anonymous face in the crowd to another.

Finally, Amanda took a deep breath and nodded, shifting to stand where everyone in the group could see her. Clara felt a mixture of relief and something akin to jealousy that her friend was going to get off so easily, until she realized, remembering the proclivities of the group's members, that Amanda's initiation would likely include more than a little bit of punishment detail—she'd probably be spanked, tied up, teased relentlessly, made to service members of the group. It had been what Clara had gone through herself, and she couldn't help feeling a rush of heat through her body at the memory.

Amanda began to slowly unbutton her blouse, her hands trembling under the onslaught of intent, watchful gazes. Clara bit her bottom lip, hoping that Amanda wouldn't somehow screw the situation up after the group had been so lenient with her. Just as Amanda reached the point halfway down her blouse, her bra showing, she stopped.

What the hell is she doing? Clara wondered. She couldn't imagine Amanda suddenly getting squeamish; being naked in front of strangers was part of her job. For her part, when Stephanos had stripped Clara down before the assembly, she had been a little nervous, but excited too, titillated by the experience.

"I—I—I'm sorry," Amanda said, and Clara watched in shock as her roommate swallowed nervously, quickly re-buttoning her blouse. "I can't do this. I'll—I'll never... I won't come back." With that, Amanda ran out of the ballroom and through the hall, her high-heeled steps clattering all the way to the front door, before silence consumed the room.

A soft murmur went through the crowd, and Clara turned her attention back to the assembly of masked men and women, glancing furtively between them and Stephanos. She had to admit that she was glad to see Amanda leave; she had been quite jealously resentful that Amanda was going to have a chance to join the group. At the same time, she was relieved that Amanda had got away without being tortured or even killed for her mistake. She could never trust the other woman again, knowing just how much Amanda resented her success, but she was happy that no harm had come to her.

“Well that seems to have settled that issue,” said the man who seemed to be the leader of the group. There was a soft almost-chuckle, and Clara couldn’t help but smile to herself slightly. “However, that leaves us with two culprits as yet unaccounted for.”

Clara bit her bottom lip, glancing at Stephanos with a flash of guilt.

“The two of you have let this community down,” the man said.

“I understand that,” Stephanos said.

Clara couldn’t quite make herself speak; she wasn’t sure if she was even entitled to.

“You both acted nearly as egregiously as the woman who just ran out of that door,” the man said, and Clara felt his gaze shift to her. “Clara, you intruded on our previous party, sticking your nose in something that was none of your business—before telling someone outside of the group about the proceedings.” The man paused and Clara felt a flush of relief wash through her as she

sensed the group's attention shift to Stephanos.

“And you, Stephanos,” the man continued, “you were rash to bring her amongst us after she had been caught, given that you barely knew her.”

Clara wondered with a pang of guilt just how much Stephanos would detest her if her actions resulted in him being ejected from the group.

“You are both now in a position where you must earn your dues in this community again.” A murmur went through the assembly, and Clara knew instinctively just what the man meant. “Perform for us.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE



Almost immediately, Stephanos closed the distance between them. Clara took a deep breath; she was nervous—but the excitement that had started to tingle under her skin as Amanda began to strip, the vicarious thrill, the reenactment of her own initiation into the group, made her more than willing to participate again. This time, she knew more or less what was expected of her—what Stephanos was going to do—and she was looking forward to how it would play out.

Stephanos turned and positioned her, and Clara watched as the men and women shifted about, silently jockeying for a good view of what was about to happen. She stood rooted to the spot, holding herself as still as possible as the Greek stepped behind her and began to unbutton her blouse, arms encircling her, hands pulling the blouse apart as his fingers freed one button after another, gradually working their way down, exposing more and more of her skin to the sea of intent gazes. He tugged her shirt free of her skirt, then pulled the fabric down her arms, tossing it to the floor with a flourish.

Clara felt her pussy beginning to warm up, beginning to become slick, as she felt Stephanos' fingers tugging the zipper down along her hip, her skirt loosening at her waist. He pulled gently, dragging the skirt down over her hips, along her thighs, letting it fall to her feet, leaving Clara standing before their audience in nothing more than a lace bra, panties, and her high heels. She could feel lust-filled gazes taking in every inch of her, trembling slightly with the rising desire that worked its way through her nervous system, making her tingle all over with phantom caresses.

Stephanos' fingers made quick work of her bra clasp, but he guided the lace away from her body slowly, sliding the straps down first along her arms before gently tugging the cups away from her breasts, letting them bounce slightly as they were freed from the confines of the garment. Clara resisted the urge to cross her arms over her chest, to cover herself from the eyes that watched with so much interest. Stephanos cupped her breasts, giving them a slightly playful squeeze that sent a murmur through the audience before he let his hands glide down over her body, to the waistband of her panties.

Instead of ripping them as he had before, Stephanos tugged them gently over her hips, sliding the fabric down to her knees and letting them tumble down to her feet. Clara stepped out of them and kicked her shoes off, standing before the assembled group completely naked. In spite of her nervousness, she couldn't deny that she was already turned on, that the spectacle of being stripped in front of an audience was something that she could really enjoy.

At some silent cue, the group began to spread out, and

for an instant, Clara was at a loss for what to do with herself. She watched silently as couples and groups made their way around the room, finding various coveted areas; in a matter of moments the tension had dissolved into a kind of steady erotic hum, as the women took up positions and displayed themselves, or moved to whichever man they had decided to play with. Stephanos left her side without Clara knowing how, or to where he had disappeared.

A hand closed around her wrist, and Clara turned her head to see a masked woman with the most incredible head of golden locks smiling at her, with a slightly leering curve to her lips. “You didn’t think you’d get off that easily, did you sweetie?” the woman asked playfully.

She began to lead Clara away from the center of the room, towards one of the doors that led away from the main action of the party. Clara felt a shiver of delirious fever work its way through her spine as the mysterious woman opened the door and pushed her through it, following a step behind her.

“Here she is,” the blonde said, her voice rich with amusement and an undercurrent of desire.

“Very well. What shall we do with her, ladies?”

There were three men in the room, in various states of undress, and four other women in addition to Clara and the blonde—all of them in nothing more than ornate masks: brunette, redhead, another blonde, and one woman with bright, vivid pink hair, and pierced nipples.

The blonde who had led Clara into the room let go of her hand, and began to touch her everywhere, her hands

wandering over the curves of her breasts, down along her inner thighs.

“Hmmm,” the redhead said, coming closer to join the blonde in caressing her. “I think she needs a good whipping to start.”

“Her nipples are cute,” the redhead murmured, turning to glance over her shoulder at the others in the room. “I think they’d be even cuter clamped, though, don’t you think, gentlemen?”

Clara moaned, unable to help herself, as the woman twisted and rolled her nipples between her fingers, sending jolts of sensation seemingly straight to her pussy.

“She should also be tied up—not allowed to come until she gets everyone else in the room off.”

“Using any and all of her holes,” one of the men suggested.

Clara, trapped between the two women groping and teasing her, adrift already on a haze of deepening arousal, murmured her consent. She wasn’t quite sure what words left her lips, but one of them sounded, to her fuzzy ears, like “Please.”

“Tie her up, ladies,” the first man said, stepping out of the last of his clothes.

Clara gasped, startled, as the caressing, teasing hands retreated. The pink-haired woman approached her quickly, holding a spreader bar in her hands; Clara felt a pair of hands on her ankles, and submitted as one of the women pulled her legs apart, while the pink-haired

woman knelt to fasten the cuffs around her legs.

The other blonde was helping the third man undress, and Clara felt a strange, heady mixture of anticipation and a frisson of what could almost be fear. Nothing that they had actually proposed scared her—the words that had filtered through her mind had only excited her more and more—but the fact that these were strangers, people with something of a bone to pick with her, tinged her arousal even further.

The redhead gently pinned Clara's arms behind her back, and after a moment's consultation with the men, Clara felt the brush of soft, silky rope against her skin, felt it tightening until the binding was almost painful, leaving her inextricably trapped, her legs spread wide. The pink-haired woman stood, and Clara's gaze flicked to her hands; the other woman was playfully displaying a pair of jeweled clamps. There was no rubber coating on the ends of this pair, nothing but metal and glittering jewels that looked heavy and cold to Clara's eyes.

The redhead reached around to Clara's front, cupping her breasts briefly before latching onto her nipples with her fingertips. Clara gasped and moaned as the redhead's fingers twisted and pulled, her nipples hardening into tight, firm nubs under the pressure.

The pink-haired woman opened up one of the clamps, spreading the end wide before slipping her hand underneath the redhead's fingers. Clara cried out as the cold metal closed on her sensitive nipple, a jolt of pain and pleasure shooting through her body. The pink-haired woman's fingers retreated and Clara's cry became a moan as the jewels on the clamp pulled it downward,

sending a new wave of sensation skittering through her body.

She had barely become accustomed to the pulling weight of the first clamp when the pink-haired woman attached the second. Clara's shoulders hunched forward instinctively, her body trying to curl inward with the insidious weight on her nipples, the pinching tug that was painful and yet so pleasurable that she felt her pussy flood.

"There now," the first blonde said, and Clara hazily turned to look in the direction of her voice; the woman was idly stroking the first man's hard cock, watching the proceedings. "Doesn't she look lovely all trussed up like that?" There was a murmur of assent through the room.

The redhead and the pink-haired woman carefully led Clara across the room, holding her up as she awkwardly shuffled. Her breasts moved with every step, sending wave after wave of sensation tingling down from her pained nipples. Clara looked around to see that the brunette was contentedly sucking at one of the men's cocks, eagerly getting him fully hard. The third man was stroking himself slowly, licking his lips in anticipation.

"I bet her pussy is soaking wet already," the redhead said. Clara felt the woman's fingers press against her slick folds, and moaned out as the woman found her clit in an instant, rubbing her firmly. "Mm, she is. A natural-born little slut."

"What's her ass like?" One of the men asked.

Clara shook her head, not to deny the question, but to try and clear the deepening haze of desire that was making

it harder and harder to think. She felt a fingertip press against her tight pucker, swirling slightly as it pushed gently past the resistance of her body.

“She’s tight. Have to loosen her up a bit if you want to fuck her,” the pink-haired woman said. “But we have lots of toys, and lots of lube.”

“I’d love to watch one of you ladies take her with a strapon,” said the man who was being sucked by the brunette.

Clara tried to focus on the three men, and fix what little identifying information she could take in about them in her mind; one was wearing a bright green mask with loops and whorls of black braid—he was the first man who had spoken; the one who seemed to be in charge of her punishment. The one stroking himself was balding, with a pitch-black mask that looked almost Medieval—almost frightening if she stared at it for too long. The brunette was servicing the man with a red and gold mask, who pushed her away gently.

Clara gasped as she was pushed, face down, onto the bed; she tugged at the bindings on her wrist to attempt to break her fall, to no avail. She let out a yelp of pain and surprise as her clamped breasts hit the blankets, a shockwave of sensation rocking her and momentarily making it impossible to think.

She turned her head so that she could breathe more easily, and shivered as she felt two—then three—pairs of hands touching her everywhere; playing with her hair, caressing and stroking her labia, rubbing against her clit, trailing along the curve of her ass. Clara let out a low moan as two fingers plunged deep inside of her pussy, rubbing along her inner walls.

Abruptly, all of the touches retreated, and Clara gasped, shuddering with withdrawal and tension. She tried to remember what, exactly, had been proposed for her punishment; but it was too difficult to think, too difficult to do anything but submit to whatever these men and women had in mind for her. She was already so turned on that she thought she might climax at any moment—even if no one in the room even touched her.

“What do we do to her if she comes without permission?”

Clara let out a muffled curse at the question, wondering which of the women had read her so easily.

“More punishment... although I think she might like that,” one of the other women suggested.

Clara closed her eyes, awash in the sensations that were coursing through her, giving into her fate. Before she had met Stephanos, she never would have expected to enjoy the prospect of being tortured and punished by a group of strangers, on display for their amusement. But now she was so incredibly turned on, so wrapped up in the erotic thrill, enveloped by the charged atmosphere that she couldn't understand why Amanda had run away from it.

“I think she needs this tight little pucker filled before her whipping,” one of the men said.

Clara groaned against the blankets as she felt something cool sliding along the curve of her ass. She could hear moans, coos of pleasure, and opened her eyes to see that the balding man was on his knees in front of the second blonde, holding her legs spread and her pussy over his face as he devoured her. The blonde who had

led her into the room was nowhere in sight; but Clara saw the redhead, seated in a wide, low chair, legs spread wide, stroking and rubbing herself.

Clara heard a liquid, squirting sound, and seconds later she felt cool, slick fingers press against her ass. She made a sound that wasn't quite a protest—somewhere between a moan and a whimper—as the fingers swirled around her hole, working their way past the resistance of her muscles to spread the slippery lubricant. They slid deeper before retreating, and she heard the squirting sound again. Once more the fingers pressed against her, and Clara moaned out long and low as she felt them invade her most intimate hole, thrusting in and out slowly, working her until her muscles began to relax.

The fingers retreated suddenly and without warning, and Clara sagged against the bed, instantly regretting the impulse when a fresh wave of tingling pain and pleasure jolted through her breasts at the movement. She tensed as she felt something else—cold, slick, and slightly rigid—press against her pucker. Clara forced herself to take a deep breath as the thick probe pushed carefully past the resistance of her body, sliding slowly into her ass, filling her up with a sensation that was not quite pain but which made her feel almost uncomfortably full. She clenched her hands into fists and tried to relax by force of will, allowing the plug deeper and deeper inside of her.

For a long moment, as the plug slid completely in, Clara lay with her head tilted, her arms and legs bound, helpless and shivering from the conflicting sensations of pain and pleasure crackling through her nervous system. In spite of the sounds filling the air, she felt almost completely isolated, alone. Her muscles twitched

convulsively around the butt plug, her body reacting to it, and Clara could barely keep track of the different parts of her body anymore—she knew that her pussy was throbbing, soaking wet, that her breasts ached, her shoulders had begun to protest the position she was confined to, her neck twinging with something like pain, but everything was awash—too much for her nervous system to identify individually.

She barely heard the rustle, the slightly whistling flicker; but suddenly there was an explosion of fiery-hot pain across the curve of her ass, and Clara cried out, arching at the lash of heat against her skin.

Her head was gently turned, and she looked up to see the pink-haired woman directly in front of her; the woman's legs were spread wide, her hairless pussy only inches away, and Clara remembered hazily what her punishment was to entail. She buried her face obediently against the other woman's pussy, nuzzling and licking; yelping as another shock of hot pain splashed against her ass, mingling with and somehow adding to the full, thick feeling of the plug buried deep inside of her. Another lash, and then another, and she was moaning in earnest, trying to focus on the needs of the pink-haired woman while conflicting impulses drove her to mindless reaction.

Clara felt her eyes watering as more and more stripes of pain flared against the curve of her ass, and then up and down along the backs of her thighs; she felt the bite of the rope on her wrists as she twisted and writhed, every movement making the plug shift inside of her in a way that was strange and yet pleasant. She licked and sucked, plunging her tongue as deeply into the other

woman's pussy as she could, bringing the tip of her tongue up to flicker against the pink-haired woman's clit, lapping up the fluids that flowed freely. Clara couldn't tell if she had already climaxed or was on the edge of one, as whimpers, cries and yelps left her, muffled against the other woman's labia.

She swallowed the flood of fluids that gushed against her lips, and before she could quite catch her breath, Clara opened her eyes to see the balding man taking up the woman's position, bringing the tip of his cock to her lips. Clara trembled and shook, making low, whimpering moans as she wrapped her mouth around the thick, hard cock, beginning immediately to suck and lick hungrily, eager to please the man. Her body shifted and twisted, trying to somehow both evade the flickering lashes of the whip and arch into them at the same time; Clara found herself becoming more and more turned on, hopelessly trapped in the thick web of eroticism that wrapped around her.

Clara felt the balding man's cock twitching between her lips, and gasped as the first hot, sharp-tasting gush of come spurted into her mouth. The painful fire of the whip against her skin had melted away, and Clara moaned against the man's skin as she felt a hot, eager tongue sliding up and down along her slick folds, tasting and probing her. She had no idea what the other people in the room were doing; she didn't care—everything in her world had shrunk down to the sensations coursing through her body, the tingling hot and cold electric impulses that danced through her nerves.

Everything became a blur, and Clara lost herself and came back in random moments; she felt a thick, hard

cock pressing against her soaking wet folds and pushed back onto it instinctively, moaning with a shudder as it filled her up. She lost track of who she was pleasuring at any given time as one person after another appeared in front of her, bringing her lips to either a cock or the drenched, slick folds of a pussy.

The rope fell away from her wrists and Clara's arms sank to her sides, but she made no effort to change her position, to free herself in any way, instead pushing her hips back to take the cock that filled her deeper, shuddering as the plug that still filled her ass rubbed up against the cock plunging inside of her pussy.

She came back to herself as she was being maneuvered onto the bed, shifted onto her back. One of the men straddled her shoulders, bringing his cock down to her lips, and Clara happily latched onto him, wrapping her lips around his erection and reaching up to cup his heavy balls as she swirled her tongue against the tip of his cock. She felt a hot mouth against her sensitive pussy, felt an eager tongue lapping at the come that was slowly leaking from her folds; she gagged slightly as the man straddling her pushed deep inside of her mouth, his cock brushing against the back of her throat, and forced herself to have enough focus to remember to breathe.

Clara let herself be handed from one lover to another, limp with pleasure, as one orgasm after another rocked her body, making any thought absolutely impossible. She responded to commands almost mindlessly, eager for more, tasting and exploring with tongue and lips and hands; she realized at one point that she was stroking one of the men hard and fast while another man's cock thrust deeper and deeper inside of her, rubbing against

her G-spot.

She heard her moans leaving her throat with animal abandon, heard herself begging to be fucked harder, moaning for the man whose cock slid past her lips. She knew that this was supposed to be punishment, but Clara was so thoroughly coiled in the grip of sensations and pleasure that she lost track of how many times she came, until she was so utterly spent that she couldn't even make herself move anymore.

The room gradually went quiet, the haze slowly lifting, and Clara felt a tugging against her ass; she moaned softly against the blankets as the plug slid out of her and she curled in on herself, trying to fight through the thick fog of overwhelming pleasure and satisfaction to stir herself enough to get up.

"You're welcome back anytime, sweetie," someone murmured in her ear.

Clara lifted a hand to acknowledge the praise and felt a soft kiss pressed against her cheek.

After a few moments of silence, Clara pulled her head up. She took a deep breath and scrubbed at her face, blinking a few times. She felt sticky and slick all at once, covered in fluids she couldn't quite identify. She turned onto her back and looked around, every nerve still humming and buzzing with pleasure, and Clara realized that she was smiling, that she had been smiling in her satisfied daze for a long time.

She sat up and tried to force her exhausted mind to think. Stephanos would have to be around somewhere; Clara tried to think of what she should do. Certainly she

couldn't just stay where she was. She gathered herself up, feeling twinges in her arms and legs, feeling the lingering heat of the welts along the curve of her ass.

The ballroom was nearly empty, and Clara managed to find her clothes and slip into them awkwardly. Her wrists ached from being bound, her shoulders would probably be sore the next day, and as she slipped her bra on, the echo of pain in her nipples told her that she was not going to be eager to be clamped again anytime in the next several hours.

"Clara."

She turned, and saw Stephanos; his mask was pushed back on his head, and he smiled as she met his gaze. "I see you had a good time; I assume everyone was pleased with your performance?"

Clara shrugged. "I don't know how many were in there altogether," she said, "but everyone I was with seemed pretty pleased."

Stephanos laughed, reaching out to caress her cheek for just a moment. "You need to get some rest," he told her. "If you were still a working girl, the last few hours would have earned you a month's pay, from what I heard."

"I'm almost sorry I quit then," Clara said wryly.

He laughed again, his hand falling against the small of her back carefully. He steered her out of the mansion, to the driveway, and towards one of the unmarked black cars, letting her in and then climbing in behind her.

"I think you'll find Amanda has made herself scarce this evening," Stephanos said, as the driver pulled onto the

road. "Get some sleep, eat something, and take all the time you need to recuperate from your exuberant initiation."

Clara nodded. Still suffused with pleasure and satisfaction, she leaned against him without thinking why. Stephanos draped an arm around her, holding her close, and Clara fell into an easy doze, exhausted but smiling at the sensation of the crackling, tingling aftershocks of all she had done.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO



Stephanos was right; Amanda made herself scarce, and Clara was relieved not to have to deal with the presence of the woman she was beginning to consider a former friend. Stephanos had dropped her off at her apartment building, and she had gone up and almost immediately to bed, her dreams deliciously replaying the events of her initiation into the group.

The day after the confrontation, Clara was more than content to stay at home; she was still tired from her exertions the day before, and reeling from how close she had come from being in real trouble. The members of Stephanos' group could easily have decided to treat her another way. Her mistake in telling Amanda about the party, about Stephanos, could have cost her much more dearly than it had.

As she lay around the house, trying to decide what she would do with herself now that she was out of the business officially, Clara thought about Stephanos. Her mind returned, over and over again, to the picture she had seen in his room; to the woman who had looked so

much like her. Clara knew that nothing the Greek did was completely by accident—he was a man who ordered his life fairly thoroughly. *He probably stays as wealthy as he does just to have the privilege of doing so*, Clara thought, remembering the unapologetic way in which Stephanos had informed her that he'd been having her followed.

To the best of Clara's knowledge, Kyle hadn't gone to the press with the story of seducing her; certainly there didn't seem to be any news headlines about her, and the tabloids were beginning to slowly move away from the Kofidis scoop and focus on other scandals. Clara could only hope that there wouldn't be a bombshell later; certainly, she thought, if Stephanos had had someone following her, then he already knew about her outing with Kyle. She wondered if she dared to talk to him about it.

By the second day, Clara was beginning to feel restless. Amanda had texted her to apologize again, to tell her that she was going to lie low for a while, and Clara felt more than a little sad that she no longer had someone in her life that she could really, truly trust; Amanda had been her closest friend until she'd betrayed her—none of her friends from before she was an escort could possibly have understood Clara's choices, her life.

Clara began to try and form a picture in her mind of what her life would be like now that she was no longer an escort; she had no real idea of what Stephanos' intentions towards her were, but she knew that she wanted to go back to school. She wanted to have something of a "legitimate" life—no more skirting under the radar, no more constant mental arithmetic to know how many jobs she would have to take in order to finance her life. She had money now; she had means to live for a

while. She wondered just how Stephanos' group of associates would play into her plans, but she couldn't be sure what that would mean in terms of her ability to live something like a normal life.

Three days after she had met with the group, Clara was lounging on the couch, trying to decide whether or not to go to the grocery store, when her phone rang. It was her personal phone; she had long since let her work phone die. Clara picked her phone up off of the bedside table, thinking that it might be Amanda, or one of her other friends checking in. Instead, the name that flashed across the screen was Stephanos'. Clara smiled to herself slightly—she had added his number to her phone when he gave her his card.

For a moment, Clara wondered just how Stephanos had gotten her number. *He had you tailed by a private detective. A phone number would be a cinch.*

She tapped the 'accept' icon. "Hello?"

"Hello, Clara," came the deep, lightly-accented reply.

Clara sat down on the bed, sighing with relief. She hadn't realized how tense she had been until she heard Stephanos' voice. Underneath her thoughts about what her new life would look like was the worry that it wouldn't include Stephanos; that he might not get in touch with her again.

"Hey, Stephanos." Her heart was beating faster; was this going to be something of a "dear John" call? She had to hope that if he was going to sever his relationship with her—as ambiguous as it was—that he'd do it in person.

"I was hoping you might have time to see me later today,"

Stephanos said.

Clara smiled as relief washed over her. “I don’t know,” she said playfully. “My life is just so busy, you know. Lots of social calls.”

“Have you recovered from the party?”

Clara’s smile deepened. “I have.”

“I’d love to see you later; how does seven o’clock sound?”

Clara forced herself to wait for just a moment—the span of three heartbeats.

“That sounds good,” she said. “Should I take a cab?”

“I’ll send someone.”

After ending the call, Clara put the phone down and considered. She thought about the woman in the picture, and the fact that Stephanos had been so reticent to talk about her. A thought had been forming in the back of her mind over the days since she had been absolved in the leak about the sex parties; she was certain he had chosen her out of all of her Madame’s escorts because she looked like the woman in the picture—strikingly so. *If that’s why he picked me...*

She had a few hours before the driver would come to get her. Clara went through her closet, trying to find a dress that resembled the one the woman in the picture was wearing; she looked again and again, discarding one after the other. While the two women looked similar, their taste in clothes was very different.

She went to the nearest clothing store and browsed for a while, thinking of the image of the woman over and over

again, comparing the dresses available to what she had seen. The picture had been taken years before, and it would be impossible to locate the exact same dress, particularly on such short notice. But she could find something similar. The woman's dress had looked soft, with a light floral motif that Clara thought very flattering and sweetly feminine. She finally found one that captured the spirit of the dress in the picture and bought it, hurrying back to her apartment.

Clara took a shower; there was still a lingering ache in her nipples, and in certain parts of her body where she'd been whipped, but the last few days had given her enough time to recover. It took three attempts for her to style her hair the way that the woman in the picture had worn it, but Clara thought that the look on Stephanos' face, when she came into the room, would be worth it. She hadn't given very much thought to her feelings regarding the enigmatic billionaire—but she had come to the conclusion that as much as she could make it happen, she wanted him in her life.

The driver was outside of the building and Clara hurried down, giving herself only a glance in the mirror. She had even done her makeup to match the woman in the picture; she only hoped that Stephanos would appreciate the effort she had put in.

Clara tried not to fidget in the back seat of the car as the driver maneuvered through traffic, heading into downtown and the hotel where Stephanos' penthouse suite lay. Her mind was spinning; she went back and forth between certainty that Stephanos would react with desire and need at the sight of her, and fear that he would be appalled at her presumption. *He had to have*

chosen you, even unconsciously, because you look like that woman. Guy like that doesn't keep a picture of a woman with him if he doesn't have some attachment to her. Her anxious mind suggested that maybe the meeting wasn't as promising as it had first seemed; maybe it was for Stephanos to dissolve their tenuous, ill-defined relationship.

She thanked the driver and got out of the car, smoothing the soft folds of the dress over her hips as she walked towards the entrance of the hotel, remembering that she needed to get the elevator key in order to get up to Stephanos' penthouse suite.

"I'm here to see Stephanos Kofidis," Clara said, meeting the front desk woman's gaze as levelly as she could.

The woman glanced at a note on her computer and Clara wondered if she was going to have trouble. "Ms. Clarins?" the woman said.

Clara almost laughed. "Yes," she said.

"Excellent. Mr. Kofidis has given instructions that you're to have a key of your own, so you can come and go as you like," the woman said, reaching under the desk and producing a key card.

Clara took it from her and hurried towards the exclusive elevator, thanking the receptionist as an afterthought. So Stephanos had requested that she receive a card of her own; that boded well for her.

Clara tried to predict how Stephanos would react when he saw her, looking like the woman that he apparently had such strong feelings for. She smiled to herself, anticipating his delight. If he had chosen her for her

resemblance, then he would be amazed, and she hoped, deeply pleased. Clara began to feel impatient even with the smooth, silky speed of the elevator; she wanted to see the look on his face.

She stepped off of the elevator and followed the short hall to Stephanos' door, knocking quickly. Clara tried not to fidget as she waited for Stephanos to answer. Her heart was beating faster and faster, her hands tingling; the only time she could remember being more nervous had been a few days before—being stripped by Stephanos in front of his secret society.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE



The door opened and Clara took a deep breath, smiling apprehensively. In a moment, Stephanos was before her. Clara was shocked at the look on his face; he stared at her for a long moment, his jaw falling open.

“Come in, Clara,” he said slowly, stepping back as if he had seen a ghost.

Clara came into the suite, confused to see him shaking his head as he closed the door behind her.

“Is—is there something wrong?” Clara asked, watching him intently.

Stephanos looked at the floor, glancing at her every few moments in his silence, and she thought she could see tears in his eyes. He shook his head, glancing at her again, and Clara saw him scrub at his face.

“Look—I—I’m sorry, if I did something...” Clara felt panic welling up inside of her.

“Have a seat, Clara,” Stephanos said, giving her a weak

smile and gesturing to the couch.

Clara sat down heavily, hoping against hope that she hadn't somehow permanently ruined what chance she might have had to form something like a normal relationship with him.

"Really, Stephanos," Clara said, watching as he moved to a seat nearby and composed himself slowly. "I'm sorry if I overstepped."

He shook his head again, and met her gaze. "I should apologize to you," he said quietly. "I admit, I initially choose you because you resembled the woman I had loved; my high school sweetheart." He took another deep breath. "She died, fifteen years ago. And when I saw your picture..." he smiled weakly. "When I saw your picture, I was intrigued."

"So I was right about that," Clara said quietly.

Stephanos nodded. "When I first asked for you, that was what motivated me," he said. He gave her a stronger smile, reaching out and laying his hand against hers. "But I think, after the time we've had together, that I've gotten to know you—a little bit, at least." Clara chuckled softly at the understatement. "You are so much more than a woman who happens to look like someone I cared about. You're an intelligent, resourceful, ambitious woman in your own right. You're independent and self-willed, and I admire the hell out of you."

"You admire me?" Clara looked at him in disbelief.

"Not a lot of women have the strength of mind to be able to deal with the situations you have and too many women who go into the escort trade never make it out. You know

your own mind; you make your own choices. That's very admirable."

Clara blushed; she was used to receiving compliments about her beauty—even though she knew that for most of the men she had worked with, the compliments were fool's gold. To be complimented on her mind, her character; that was something she hadn't anticipated.

Before she could reply, Stephanos leaned in, sliding out of the chair and onto his knees in front of her. He turned her face up to his and kissed her hungrily, his hand tightening on hers.

Clara responded immediately, parting her lips to the teasing swipe of his probing tongue, letting her hands wander onto his shoulders as Stephanos deepened the embrace. His hands slipped and slid over her body, caressing her through the fabric of her clothes, touching her everywhere, and in spite of the consternation she had felt just moments before, Clara felt herself becoming more and more turned on, her body heating up, her nerves beginning to tingle.

Stephanos pulled her up off of the couch as he stood, his hands trailing over her, finding the zipper on the dress. He broke away from her lips and Clara tilted her head to the side as he began to kiss and nip along the column of her throat. For a moment—an instant—she was shocked; this was nothing at all like their previous encounters together. She had expected him to take her into the bedroom, to flip the switch on the wall and expose all of the implements and toys he had at his disposal. She had expected another wickedly erotic, bondage-infused encounter where she would be trained or punished,

playing the role of his submissive.

Instead, as Stephanos brought his lips back up to hers once more, Clara found herself trembling with rising lust that had nothing to do with any exotic titillation. Stephanos' fingers found the zipper and tugged it down over her skin slowly, and she stirred herself out of her shock to fumble at the buttons of his tailored suit jacket, thinking with amazement that she would never have thought that what looked to be simple, straightforward sex could be so exciting to her.

She trembled at his touch, her hands less skillful than she remembered them being, her nerves crackling with hot and cold rushes of sensation as the soft fabric of her dress brushed along her skin.

Stephanos slid the sleeves down off of her shoulders, along her arms; Clara felt the whisper of the fabric against her hips as it fell to the floor, leaving her in nothing but a cream-colored lace bra and panties, and her shoes. Stephanos stepped back slightly, and Clara found herself blushing as he unabashedly admired her, his gaze taking in every inch of her body, lingering on her breasts, her hips, and her face.

He closed the distance between them once more and kissed her hungrily, as if he wanted to devour her; Clara draped her arms around his shoulders, pressing her body against his. She could feel the hard ridge of his cock pressing against her and remembered how good he had felt the few times they had been together—suddenly she couldn't stand the thought of any delay in feeling him inside of her once more.

Clara's hands slid over the planes and ridges of his back

as he caressed her everywhere, touching and teasing. She found her way to his chest, and her fingers groped and fumbled for the buttons of his shirt, slowly and unsteadily freeing them.

Stephanos cupped her breasts, teasing her nipples into firm little nubs as he broke away from her lips to kiss along her throat once more. He reached around to her back, gently opening the clasp of her bra.

Clara moaned as he tugged the light, flimsy fabric away, bringing one of her breasts up to his lips the next moment to worship it with his mouth. She reeled against Stephanos as he latched onto her nipple, sucking and licking, his fingers wrapping around her other nipple to roll and twist it, sending jolts of pleasure straight to her already-wet pussy.

She wasn't sure how, but Clara found herself tugging Stephanos' shirt off, as he switched from one nipple to the other, lavishing attention on the tender nubs, moaning against her skin. She made a sound that was somewhere between a moan and a cry of pleasure, arching up to his lips, writhing as he reached down between her legs to stroke her through the thin fabric of her panties. She trailed her hands over his bare back and shoulders, feeling the heat of him, the velvety softness of his skin.

Stephanos pushed her gently onto the couch and Clara gasped in surprise, looking up at him. He smiled slightly, his eyes dark with lust, and Clara watched as his hands fell to the waistband of his pants, his fingers working quickly to unbuckle his belt.

He unbuttoned and unzipped his fly, and Clara felt her

heart beating faster, her breath catching in her throat as he pushed his trousers and boxers down over his hips in one quick movement. She licked her lips as his hard cock sprang free, proudly erect.

It occurred to Clara that she had never given herself the freedom to just admire Stephanos' body. In their previous sessions, she had been so wound up by the punishment that by the time she had been able to see him naked, she had been too far gone to truly appreciate the sight.

Stephanos knelt in front of her, kissing her again as his hands trailed along her body, sliding down along her curves to stop at her hips. He hooked his fingers in the waistband of her panties and tugged them down sharply, and Clara lifted herself up just enough to help him, moaning out against his lips. She threaded her fingers through his hair, marveling at the fact that her hands were free, that her ankles were unfettered, that she had seemingly full access to him.

The Greek broke away from her lips and Clara gasped as he pushed her gently onto her back, his hands moving to spread her legs wide. Clara shivered, trembling underneath him as he kissed a path down from her lips, along her throat, past her collarbones. He lingered at her breasts once more, teasing them with his hands as well as his mouth, playfully grazing her sensitive nipples with his teeth.

Clara felt her inner muscles flexing in spasms, her pussy beginning to flood as Stephanos nipped and nibbled his way down along her abdomen. She tried to remember if he had ever done this to her in their sessions, but she couldn't make herself think of anything but how much

she wanted to feel his lips against her, how much she wanted to feel him inside of her.

Stephanos nuzzled the curve of her hip, and Clara looked down to meet his gaze. “You’re so beautiful, Clara,” he murmured, pressing a kiss to her sensitive skin.

His fingertips brushed along her inner thigh, a teasing, feather-light touch that made her want to wrap her legs around his head and keep him where she needed him most.

Clara moaned out as Stephanos skipped over her pussy entirely, dragging his lips along the inside of her thigh, nipping sharply enough to make her gasp.

When he finally buried his face against her slick folds, Clara grabbed at his hair, at his shoulders, her hips bucking in reaction. He lapped at her fluids hungrily, his tongue slithering up and down, teasingly flickering just between her folds.

Clara half-whimpered, writhing underneath him on the couch, so desperate for more that she would have happily begged had Stephanos commanded it. He parted her labia with his fingers and began to nuzzle against her, sucking lightly against her inner folds, his tongue sliding just inside of her. Clara threw her head back against the pillows, words leaving her lips in a jumble—praise and pleas tumbling out without thought.

Stephanos teased her relentlessly, sucking and licking, bringing the tip of his tongue up every few moments to just barely swipe at Clara’s clit, and she shivered underneath him, moving her hips in instinctive reaction,

struggling to get better contact where she wanted it most. Stephanos lapped at her as if he was starving, moaning against her drenched flesh, pressing more and more firmly with his tongue and lips as Clara arched and twisted underneath him.

Her body tingled all over, and her hands shifted mindlessly—alternating between caressing and grabbing at Stephanos' head and shoulders, and trailing along her own body to play with her breasts.

Clara cried out as he finally brought his tongue up to her clit, swirling the tip around the cluster of nerves, sucking the bead of flesh between his lips. Her fingers tangled in his hair and she felt him pushing her thighs down, pinning them to the couch, trapping her in place as he sucked and licked at her pleasure center. Clara panted and gasped, struggling to break free of his hands, her body consumed with the pleasure coursing through it and the need to get better and better contact with his mouth.

Just as she reached the verge of orgasm, Stephanos' tongue slid down again, focusing on her soaking wet entrance, lapping up her fluids. He probed her with his tongue, wriggling the slick muscle inside of her, making her cry out with need.

He teased her relentlessly for what seemed like hours, bringing his tongue and lips up to her clit until she was on the very edge before shifting down again to focus on her labia, keeping her constantly at the peak of need, until Clara thought that if she didn't reach orgasm she may actually die of frustration.

She felt his fingertips playing lightly against her slick

folds as his mouth moved up once more. He slid two fingers inside of her, pushing gently to rub along her inner walls, flickering his tongue against her clit so fast that Clara couldn't even follow the movement. She cried out, arching up off of the couch and pushing her hips down as Stephanos worked his fingers in and out of her tight, soaking pussy, plunging them deeper and deeper.

She felt a jolt of white-hot pleasure run through her as he rubbed his fingertips along her G-spot; everything in Clara's mind blanked as she reeled, lost in the sensations of his mouth against her clit and his fingers buried deep inside of her. Wave after wave of pleasure coursed through her body, and Clara was barely aware of the sounds leaving her throat, of the way she twisted and contorted underneath him, writhing and grabbing at his hair, his shoulders, his arms. Clara moaned again and again as Stephanos continued to work her with his mouth and fingers, her orgasm deepening until she was almost frightened at the intensity of the pleasure that rocked her.

As the spasms began to abate, Stephanos finally began to slow, his fingers retreating from her gradually. Clara sagged against the couch, panting and gasping for breath, even as Stephanos continued to playfully lick her folds, as if he meant to lap up every last drop of her. She trembled with the aftershocks that continued to tingle through her nervous system, smiling as he pulled back from her drenched folds to kiss a lazy, meandering path upward along her body.

She could taste herself on his lips when he kissed her, his hands caressing her everywhere, somehow soothing her and reawakening her arousal at the same time. Clara moaned against his lips as she felt the heat and weight

of his erection pressing against her thigh, against her hip, reminding her of what was yet to come.

She broke away from the kiss, opening her eyes to look up into his. “I’m sorry—it’s rude of me... not to think of your needs,” she said, still panting.

Stephanos chuckled lowly. “You’re not on the clock now,” he reminded her, kissing her lightly on the lips. “And I was taught that good things come to those who wait.”

Clara draped her legs around his waist, pushing her hips down against his to rub her slick folds against him. “If that’s—your secret,” she said, shivering as Stephanos’ cock rubbed up against her sensitive, tingling clit, “no wonder I’m not a billionaire.”

Stephanos kissed her once more, and Clara grinned against his lips as she felt his fingers brushing against her, his cock moving along her labia as he guided the tip up to the well of her pussy.

He thrust into her slowly, filling her up inch by inch, and Clara moaned out, wrapping her arms around his shoulders, pulling his body close as her hips pushed down as if of their own will.

Stephanos evaded her, taking his time, rocking his hips slowly to work his way deeper and deeper inside of her. In spite of the orgasm still buzzing away at her nerve endings, Clara wanted more—she wanted to feel him all of the way inside of her.

His hips pressed flush against hers, Stephanos paused, breaking away from her lips. “You feel so good wrapped around me like this, Clara,” he murmured. He moved his hips slowly, and Clara felt her muscles flex around his

cock as a jolt of sensation coursed through her.

“Not as good as you feel,” she told him breathlessly, pushing her hips down to meet his thrusts.

Stephanos chuckled, kissing her lightly on the lips, and Clara found herself falling into his rhythm, twisting and writhing underneath him as the pleasure mounted in her body. She touched him everywhere her hands could reach, exploring and caressing, bringing her lips up to his again and again as he began to move faster and faster inside of her, thrusting harder, pushing deeper into her body.

Clara cried out as the tip of Stephanos' cock found her G-spot. Her muscles flexed convulsively, and she gripped his shoulders, trying to hold back her orgasm; she wanted to savor the feeling of closeness, the full, hot sensation of his cock inside of her. She twisted and shifted her hips, her lips against his throat, finding his mouth over and over again as every thrust of his hips brought her closer and closer to orgasm.

She hit her second climax only a few heartbeats before Stephanos; Clara moaned out, gripping Stephanos' body tightly against hers, as wave after wave of pleasure rushed through her nervous system. She felt his cock twitching inside of her, heard his answering groan, the sound muffled against her neck, and then the hot, slick gush of his orgasm flooded into her as they both struggled to keep moving, to prolong the pleasure that consumed them.

Stephanos collapsed against her, spent, and Clara sagged back against the couch, her arms limp, her legs tangled around his, as she panted and gasped for

breath. Electric impulses danced up and down through her body as she fell into a deep, satisfied haze of pleasure, more content than she ever thought she would be.

After a long moment—Clara would never really remember how much time passed as they struggled to catch their breath—Stephanos lifted himself up slightly, looking down at her with the softest expression she had ever seen in his eyes.

“I wish I could say I’m disappointed that this wasn’t kinkier,” Clara said, giggling without being entirely sure why.

“Oh, don’t worry,” he said lightly, brushing his lips against hers. “I have plenty of kinky plans for you, my dear.”

Clara started slightly at the term of endearment; she couldn’t remember whether he had ever called her anything like that—at least where she could hear it. He had praised her, complimented her after their sessions, but she couldn’t seem to think of a point when he had called her something so familiar and loving.

“Is that so?” Clara asked, still struggling to understand the shift in Stephanos’ behavior.

“Oh definitely. Why would I bother having a gorgeous, uninhibited girlfriend if I didn’t want to indulge every little whim she could come up with?”

Clara stared at him in shock. “Girlfriend?” she asked, her mind freezing on that word.

The Greek chuckled lowly, but she could see a flicker of doubt in his eyes. “Yes, girlfriend. That is, if you want to

be?” He raised an eyebrow. “I mean, just uncomplicated sex is nice, but it’s easier to schedule if you’re actually seeing me.”

Clara laughed, wrapping her arms around him tightly.

“Besides,” Stephanos continued, brushing his lips along her jaw, “I happen to enjoy your company even when we’re not having sex.”

Clara smiled, turning his face to meet his gaze. “How can I say no to that?” she said, kissing him lightly on the lips. “As long as you’re serious about indulging every little sexy whim I get.”

Stephanos rocked his hips against hers, and Clara felt his cock beginning to harden once more. “Every last one,” he said with a playful grin.

Clara began to move with him once more, smiling unabashedly; she couldn’t imagine how she could possibly be happier.

The End



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