



DARK
PROMISES

MM ROMANCE
BOOK 1

SKY MCCOY

Dark Promises
Dark Passion, Volume 1
Sky McCoy

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Dark Promises

Book 1

Dark Passion Series

By Sky McCoy

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Table of Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

[Dark Promises \(Dark Passion, #1\)](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 1 | Daniel](#)

[Chapter 2 | Daniel](#)

[Chapter 3 | Daniel](#)

[Chapter 4 | Daniel](#)

[Chapter 5 | Daniel](#)

[Chapter 6 | Cole](#)

[Chapter 7 | Cole](#)

[Chapter 8 | Daniel](#)

[Chapter 9 | Daniel](#)

[Chapter 10 | Cole](#)

[Chapter 11 | Cole](#)

[Chapter 12 | Cole](#)

[Chapter 13 | Daniel](#)

[Chapter 14 | Cole](#)

[Chapter 15 | Cole](#)

[Chapter 16 | Daniel](#)

[Chapter 17 | Cole](#)

[Chapter 18 | Daniel](#)

[Chapter 19 | Daniel](#)

[Chapter 20 | Daniel](#)

[Chapter 21 | Daniel](#)

[Dark Promises Book 1 Dark Seduction Book 2 Dark Passion Book 3 on Pre-order | If you enjoyed Dark Promises you may want to read Cabana Boys. Below is an excerpt from chapters 1 and 2. | Chapter 1 | Justin](#)

[About the Author](#)

Daniel:

“I had been searching for that one person who ignited and excited my darkest secrets. And I had many. I met no one I cared about who shared my desire for this life I led. These dark desires I held close and used often. I passed many men when I exited my building, our eyes locked, but my heart never skipped a beat. I knew then I had to find the one. And I did. He sauntered into my club, but I didn’t know if he was into men, and especially a man like me who carried dark secrets that fueled my dark passion, and at that moment, I didn’t care because I wanted him, and I always got what I wanted, because I was relentless and ruthless in my desires. His name was Cole.”

This is a three-part Dark MM Romance with second chance and HFN ending.

Contact me at skymccoy0@gmail.com if you want to chat or review my books. You can sign up for my [newsletter](#) to get advanced information for free books. And check out my [Website](#) for upcoming books.

To keep up with Sky McCoy's books published, visit my [website](#). And please leave a review so I can keep bringing you books you enjoy reading.

If you haven't read the Wounded Inked Series you may want to read that best-selling and popular series. The beloved characters from Wounded Inked will make their appearances in Wounded Inked MC Sin Series and Cabana Boys. You can find [Sky McCoy's books here on Amazon and in KU](#). Enjoy! Please leave a review.

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Edited by Ann Attwood

Prologue

Cole sauntered into Pluck the Cherry, his hands in his pockets hiding his nervous fingers tugging and flirting with his keychain. He scanned the room full of men wearing suits, and eyed a gorgeous man with a surly look wearing different attire, a black running suit as he talked to another man who appeared to have someone hiding behind him.

On his black sweatshirt, there was a logo in gold with a red cherry sitting inside a cocktail glass. Cole couldn't make out what the logo said, because of his distance from the handsome dude in the dim-lit room. *The guy could be thirty or maybe thirty-five, but not a day more*, he thought.

When he sat on the bar stool, he felt his jeans slip down and he tugged at his tee shirt to cover the tramp stamp he'd gotten tattooed on his backside. He'd always been self-conscience of that design because he didn't want people to get the wrong impression of him, even though he'd been attracted to men who were aggressive and straightforward in their desires, because he couldn't or hadn't learned how to be the aggressor in dating.

In truth, Cole never had the time.

He ordered a Heineken beer because that was all he enjoyed drinking, and one was all he could afford now. He knew once he'd taken his tests to get his law degree, he'd have the opportunity to be in the company of some serious players in this building, and this club.

When the barmaid brought back his cold beer with a heated smile, her ample breasts accompanying and holding them firmly in a low-cut blouse, a few buttons unhooked strategically offering a peek at what Cole could get whether he gave a good tip or not. Cole offered her a closed smile and paid cash for his drink, and a tip which said, *"No thanks, I can't afford you and you're not what I'm looking for."* He turned to face the back of the man in the black sweatsuit, and what he saw was impressive. Long legs, wide shoulders, and a hard ass.

Now that was a man he could give himself to. If only the dude would turn and see him. *Be careful what you wish for.* It was as if Cole had willed that man to see him and when he turned, he locked eyes with Cole, and a shiver of intense heat invaded Cole, which hit him like a lightning strike, and blew him away.

The music was soft, and the jazz was piped in. For some reason Cole had never been a fan, but it relaxed him, and he felt the strain of going through all those years to get to the point where he would become a lawyer dissolve.

He wished he could sit here and enjoy his drink without feeling like an imposter. He felt he didn't belong to this clientele of suits with their expensive watches and equally expensive suits and ties... not to mention their shoes.

Cole's eyes surveyed the bar with its expensive leather furniture and lights. He'd never been in this building, but he knew if he'd gotten the position he wanted after passing the bar, this would be the place high-powered men would haunt, and maybe one day he'd be one of them. But for now, the only man who enticed and had his cock hungry was the tall stranger dressed in black with a gold logo.

Of all the time to check out a bar was tonight, because he should have been studying so he could pass his bar exam, but he wanted to do something different besides sleep with his books, and pull an all-nighter with his friend who'd kept talking about Pluck the Cherry and the kind of men they'd meet once 'all this was over and a thing of the past.' Tonight, would be the only time he would have done something unpredictable, exciting, and surprising even to himself, and he'd prove something to that friend of his who thought he was afraid to go out alone.

So, here he was on a Friday night, sitting and enjoying his beer, relaxed, willing and able to connect with one of these handsome successful men for a one-night stand. He didn't want to attract just any man. He had specific wants and desires that dated back since he was a teenager full of lust and unusual sexual desires. When he turned, the man who had caught his

eye when he first ambled into this elegant bar, stood in front of him.

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When the barmaid showed up and leaned over, displaying her cleavage, to ask if he needed another drink, it *wasn't* the soft voice of the barmaid that turned him on and had his jeans tightening, making him shift nervously around to meet a pair of intense eyes. It was the low rumble of a deep voice. "I'll take it from here. I think the two dudes at the end of the bar need drinks."

The barmaid turned on the balls of her feet, because now she knew she was wasting her time.

The two men locked eyes, and Cole's cock came to attention and his jeans soaked up the pre-cum that his jock-briefs failed to. That serious look on the stranger's face turned into a soft pleasant handsome smooth face, and the stranger's stare pinned him to that stool, where Cole's breathing became intense as he tried to conceal it.

When the stranger swiped his long tongue over his full lips, slanted his head and winked and smiled, Cole blinked. "I'm Daniel, and I own this joint." It didn't look like a joint to Cole.

"Cole. My name is Cole," he stuttered.

When Daniel moved closer to Cole, Cole wanted to move away, not because he didn't want to be that close to him, but because he'd never been approached by a man in his thirties and one who he'd been attracted to. Daniel not only captivated Cole's attention by his physical closeness, but he'd also been held spellbound by his senses. Daniel smelled of liquor, and expensive cologne, a mixture of flowers and musk.

"Would you like to dance?" Cole glanced around and saw no one was paying any attention to them, and Cole felt relieved. Not even the barmaid, who knew her boss had pulled him out of the herd for whatever reason. "Or talk. I don't care which one. You fascinate me and I'd like to know you better."

Cole stepped down from the stool, where Daniel proved to be taller and very impressive and when he held out his hand, Cole, mesmerized by the handsome man, placed his hand inside of Daniel's.

When Cole thought he was being led to the dance floor, Daniel took a quick right and directed him through a corridor, past the restrooms, and down a long hallway, then opened a door and they stepped inside.

With Daniel's hungry eyes following him and his mouth forming into a sexy smirk, Cole backed against the wall as Daniel stared at him, and the silence hovered between the two until the low easy music found its way through to Daniel's office. Cole's gaze softened along with Daniel's who appeared to be amused and curious as to why Cole had followed him into his office unless it was what both wanted at the time—a one and done.

Cole's face reddened with lust and a willingness to explore whatever the night had in store with this handsome intense-looking man. "Would you like another beer? I don't like drinking alone," Daniel said in a soft gravelly tone, then he sauntered to his fridge and pulled out a beer, guzzled it down and strolled closer to Cole, who seemed to be a fixture on the wall near the door. He should have taken a seat in the comfortable sofa, but for some reason Cole didn't. Maybe he thought if something went wrong, he could get the locked door open and get the hell out of there, or scream for help.

Although he knew if he had to call for help it would be useless. To cover up his nervousness, Cole said, "I'll have another beer."

Daniel's gaze paused for a second, taking in Cole's expression and body which was smaller than his. So far Cole had shown Daniel his need for a strong commanding man, and desire to be possessed, in which case he'd come to the right place, because he was who Daniel was looking for, and his facial expression sent the signal to Cole that there was a dark promise he could fulfill.

Daniel's eyes wavered and perused Cole, and appeared to be stuck on Cole's nervous biting of his bottom lip. Daniel's intense glance caused Cole to become anxious. He'd come this far and he was ready to explore the notion of being in a stranger's office when he just locked the doors, which made Cole shudder with desire. Daniel planted his firm body against Cole's slim firm muscular frame.

To Cole's surprise, and perhaps because of his wanton desire to be fucked by a stranger, he thought it was his body that leaned forward to answer Daniel that they were both after the same thing—a one-night stand that wouldn't soon be forgotten by either men.

“I thought you were going to get me a drink?” Cole said, more relaxed.

“It can wait.” Daniel's raw intense eyes bored into him with a heated gaze.

Cole knew what he wanted, because he wanted the same thing. He wanted to be used. He wanted to be taken and not be able to walk the next few days, because he wanted to remember that feeling for months to come. He needed the excitement of knowing he'd been taken by a stranger and then he could go on and live his life knowing he'd done what he wanted for once.

“Are you going to take off that tee and let me see your chest, those stiff nubs?” Cole glanced down, but before Cole could lift his tee, Daniel's large hand was under his shirt, and pinching one of his nipples with his viselike fingers. Cole held his gaze on the stranger with a shiver of excitement pumping through his cock.

Daniel leaned in and raised Cole's shirt, capturing him as he raised his arms, then entangling him in his shirt covering his mouth eyes and head as Daniel twisted him around, grabbed his cotton tee and pushed away from the door. Daniel dragged him and slammed him into the wall behind his desk. Cole smelled the liquor and aftershave, because his senses became sharpened by the lack of seeing. His sense of smell and feelings honed in on the hard body pressing against him.

Daniel reached and took Cole's balls in his hand and tightened his grip and with his mouth he sucked and bit Cole's nipple, then he moved away, and said, "I have nipple clamps for those beautiful tender nubs." However, when he released Cole's balls from his tight grip, Cole shuddered from the loss of the pain and pleasure he'd derived from the heavy hard grip.

Daniel unzipped Cole's jeans. then shoved his hand down inside and reached for Cole's length with a heavy grasping hand. Daniel followed this by squeezing Cole's tender warm sac. Cole only cleared his throat trying to mask the pain, and enjoyed the pleasure he was receiving from the stranger who called himself Daniel.

"You do like it rough, well, you've come to the right man, and Daniel's fingers strayed and found a home penetrating through Cole's tight ring of muscle and when he shoved both fingers inside as he pinned Cole's body, Cole gave off a loud moan, signaling that he wanted more of the same.

Daniel lowered his head and sucked and bit the untouched right nipple, and Cole's hips began dry fucking Daniel's full cock, before Daniel pulled away, turned Cole around where he faced the wall with his tee-shirt still covering his eyes. His arms were tethered and unmovable where the stranger had complete access and control of him, and if he wanted to scream no one would hear him. But Cole had no intention of leaving until he'd gotten what he came for.

He heard the tear of a condom, but he didn't feel anything but the stranger's two fingers being shoved inside of him, and the feeling of masterful strokes reaching deep touching his prostate. The desire to be fucked overwhelmed him, and nothing mattered any more to Cole but to be used and taken hard and relentlessly by this intense sexy man.

The stranger leaned closer to Cole's neck hidden behind the shirt binding him and making him sightless. Daniel whispered, "I want to possess you... all of you. I want to control your body because I want you to be mine and mine alone.

Cole heard his jeans drop and because the stranger named Daniel had his body hard-pressed against his, he felt Daniel's rock-hard warm flesh against his ass, and then his hole pulsed, and without a warning and no lube, Daniel's thick fingers pressed on Cole's hole. Daniel's hard palm struck Cole's lean muscular ass, and he tightened his ass cheeks, then he felt Daniel's hips propel forward, and his cock slammed against Cole's tight firm ass.

Cole blew out a quick breath, his body shook and trembled as if it had been hit by a car.

The stranger pulled out once more and leaned forward, whispering over the soft music, "All you have to do is beg me to place my heavy cock in that tight little hot hole, and after you get what you want, I'll get what I want, and that's you."

Cole's body responded to being needed by the stranger and his ass pushed against the stranger's warm thick engorged length, and the stranger pulled apart Cole's ass cheeks, passed his thumb along the ridges of his ring of muscle, and Cole closed his eyes and sucked in a hard breath. Before he could release it, dull pain hit him like he'd been struck by lightning twice, and the heat from the intrusion filled him with Daniel's controlling dark desire to own this young man.

In Cole's mind and body, he wanted to be controlled and used by the stranger called Daniel.

Chapter 1

Daniel

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I t'd been five nights, and I hadn't slept but a few hours each night. I'd had enough. This couldn't go on any longer.

“Get up, Sam, you shouldn't be in bed with me.” I'd tired of begging him to sleep anywhere but near me. “I've told you several times, I don't do sleep overs, and if I forgot, you know very well I don't want you sleeping in my room, and in *my* bed. No one sleeps with me, not even you,” I complained, but it appeared I was wasting my words on him.

Sam glanced up at me and yawned, ignoring me completely, then he laid his head down without opening his eyes.

“He never listens to me. What is it about me that Sam won't listen when I've been very explicit. Every male in my life takes the same stance, and won't pay any attention when I talk to them. It's as if I don't exist. What do they want from me? Well, this time I've had enough, and I will not be disregarded anymore,” I murmured, when I sat up, my feet on the floor. I reached for my robe and stared at the corner of the bed.

I tugged. Sam was sleeping on my robe. Another item of disrespect. “What the fuck? Now he's taking over my clothes too. I have to do something about this and soon.” He'd gotten out of control the first day he begged to come home with me. “It's not good to let Sam get away with too much I see. Pretty soon he'll be the Master, and I'll have to do whatever he commands.”

For now, I'm still in control... I think.

I pushed him, but no movement. He barely turned his head. “Get your lazy ass up, because I have to get to work and all you do is lie around my apartment and eat all day. It's a good

life if you can get it, and apparently you've made it your life's mission to do nothing but lie around, and run away every man I've brought home to play.

“The limo will be here in an hour, and that's all we have is an hour, and you know it takes you longer than that to get ready, now on your feet, you spoiled...”

I didn't want him to get used to me cursing him, because he was new to this, and I wanted him to see the good part, not the bad part where I'd shut him off from my other life.

Watching as Sam finally decided to amble out of my bed, and stare at me and try to get back in bed, I yelled because this was enough.

“Yes, I'm talking to you. Who else is here besides me and you? You've run off my cook and cleaning lady with your slovenly ways. You're such a bitch the way you sleep taking up my side of the bed, and that's why I don't want you in here. There are other rooms in this large apartment you can go to, but you always choose this bed, and why is that? Oh, I know you don't want me to have company. You want this to be about me and you. Well, it's not about me and you any longer. There's going to be a threesome and if you don't like that you can just sleep in another room.

“What do you say about that? I thought so, you have nothing to say, because you don't run anything around here. Who's paying the bills anyway. I take care of you, spend all kinds of money on you, and you never appreciate it. I want you gone, because you've ruined all my previous relationships because you insist on sleeping with me. I can't have it, and I won't. Now get your collar and get out of my room. I have to get into the shower,” I said to Sam, who was speechless, and standing looking at me with his large brown eyes while scratching his head as I lumbered into the shower mumbling to myself.

I could be talking to the wall for all Sam cared. *I have all this shit to do today and I'm going to be late. Interview a new club manager, fire my old one, because he acts like Sam, doesn't listen and does what he wants. I opened this club with*

two other dudes, and where are they now? Left all this on me to go to Europe for a vacation. When do I get one? I thought, stepping out of a warm calming shower.

When I exited the shower after a minute, because I knew if I stayed any longer, I'd be late once I was dressed, and that would leave a few minutes for walking and for Sam to do his business.

I looked into Sam's big sad brown eyes, and he didn't say anything, he just looked up at me as if what I just said meant nothing to him, because he was intent on doing exactly what he wanted. I was dressed and I threw on a coat, because I had to fire Ryan.

Sam wasn't cooperating. "If you think I'm leaving you here alone, then think again. The last time I left you alone, you tore up an antique sofa and chair worth thousands. And where the fuck is your coat? If you think I'm going to get it, fuck you, because I do enough for you, and I'm tired of this relationship. It's not working out. It's one way, but I'm going to change it, because you never do your part." I couldn't believe the only conversations I was having with someone who slept with me was a dog. And it was all his fault that I had no one in my bed but him. This was going to change, and soon.

"Okay, now that you've finally found your coat, didn't you forget something." I watched as Sam scurried down the foyer to get his leash. "No that's not the right one. That's the one I couldn't find, because you took it, and I was looking all over the house for it the other night, and you had it all along." I raised my eyebrow. "That was the collar I was looking for and the handcuffs. This cute guy come over for a little fun and games, and instead of you making yourself scarce, you were crying and mauling the door all night. A man like me can't have a satisfied orgasm with you pawing and scratching at the door, and then when that didn't work, you were crying. I think you knew what you were doing.

"So, fuck you, Sam, let's go, because I'm taking you to obedience school after the groomers, and I hope they nick you in places you won't easily forget." Sam began moaning,

because I think he understood what was going to happen today.

“ I’ll let the dog whisperer teach you how to behave, because men don’t want to be bothered with a man who has a dog that hates another male in the house and can’t behave himself. I should know. Because of you, no one will call me anymore. I have to resort to calling them, and they ask if I still have that dog. This time I’ll tell them the dog died... and don’t whimper, because if this doesn’t work, one of us is leaving here, and it’s not me,” I warned.

After placing Sam’s collar and coat on, I dragged him out of my apartment kicking and screaming for his morning walk. But he must have known there were things I had to tend to first before I arrived at my office, which made him reluctant to even rush to do his business. I swore Sam knew what he was doing.

Chapter 2

Daniel

After my early morning stroll with Sam, I saw that the limo had arrived and was waiting. I didn't wait for anyone to open the door, I wasn't that pretentious, but my partners were. When we'd finally gotten the business off the drawing table and it became a reality, and we'd paid off all the backers. We started making money hand over fist as the saying went. We needed to get around quickly without worrying about parking and parking fees. The way we worked it off we could save money by paying a limo service, or have our own limos on call. That proved to be a good business decision for more than one reason.

Then the pandemic hit, and we lost everything, and I became the sole owner of club *Pluck the Cherry*. Now, I was responsible for the firing and hiring, and this dog who didn't want to cooperate with me.

Opening the door to the limo I hopped in with Sam. As I settled back, and attempted to buckle Sam in, the young man sitting behind the wheel with the dark blue suit, said, "You can't bring a dog in here." *Oh, for fuck's sake what now.*

"The company I work for has a policy of not picking up anyone who has dogs. We have to clean the limos at the end of the day, and they will have to pay us extra, and they don't want to do that. Things have changed."

"For your information and your companies, everyone has a dog these days, even me." I swung my disgruntled glance over to Sam. I thought about how my last lover, Cole, abandoned me and Sam, and under the disguise he had to go out of town on business, and never came back, leaving me with Sam who cried every night like a baby because he was, and I'd spent night and days taking care of him as if I was a parent. If I wanted a puppy and children, I could have had them, but I didn't want this, but Cole convinced me that having a puppy would be life-changing, and it was.

That was two years ago, and I was stilling feeling the pain of Cole leaving, and from a broken heart. You'd think I would get over Cole, but even with counseling it didn't seem to work. Over that one failed romance, I'd been paying through the nose with his dog and the counseling sessions I'd been forced to attend, because I couldn't forget him.

The driver turned to me, and said, "I don't have a dog." He proudly announced and that took me out of my thoughts about my love-hate relationship with Cole and Sam. "I have a cat," the driver announced. Sam started fidgeting when he heard the word cat. He always became uncomfortable when he smelled or watched cats from the window or television, and maybe it was because I threatened him with it by showing videos of cats. In my defense, that was the only way to control Sam sometimes.

After a few minutes of listening to the guy's reasons, and Sam growling, then whimpering, I realized he *wasn't* my driver. Perhaps they'd changed him at the last minute. "Where's my usual driver?"

"I don't know, sir. I was sent to this address and told that I was to wait for Mr. Healy, and he'd be down—"

"Oh, for heaven's sake. I'm in the wrong car," I huffed.

"Is that your limo over there? The one that's leaving?" I remembered telling the service if I wasn't ready by 7 a.m., I'd take a cab. When I glanced down at my watch, it was now eight thirty.

"You've made me late for my meeting—"

"Excuse me, but I wasn't the one who made you late. If you didn't spend your time arguing with me, and getting into the wrong car, then you would have realized you'd made a mistake, not me."

"I don't need you lecturing me or arguing with me about my dog. Do you know who I am?"

"No, and I don't care. Do you know who I am?" I sat seething, waiting for him to give me his name.

“I’m your worst nightmare. I’m young and I’ve been through hell with my boyfriend, who reminds me of you, and I don’t give a fuck, you—”

“Did you say you will fuck me?” I sat up, because it had been a long time since I had anyone tell me that. Usually it was me who made the first move.

“No, I didn’t say I’d fuck you. You’ve taken my words out of context, and put words in my mouth, and if I was in the habit of fucking arrogant dudes like you who think they’re entitled, it wouldn’t be you. Besides, I would have stayed with my partner. You’re too difficult to get along with. Just look at your dog. He’s cowering at the sound of your voice.”

Sam wasn’t cowering, it was his way to make everyone think I was the bad guy, and he’d get a man’s sympathy, and make them think I was abusing him. When in fact, he was abusing me.

“Now will you please get out of my car, because the guy should be down any minute, because he paid for only his ride not yours. I have to make a living if it hadn’t occurred to you, and by the look of your suit and shoes, and that expensive dog, you’re waiting for a limo you can afford to pay for, but I can’t afford to lose my job because of you. You can get another ride to your fancy office.”

“It’s late already, can you drop me at my office and then you drop my dog at the dog training—”

“Were you listening at all. It figures. No, I cannot drop you and your dog anywhere, because my client will be down shortly. And if you’re wondering, you’re the one who needs to be trained. And I’m just the one to teach you how to treat people who you think are below you.”

Where the fuck did that come from? I was a working stiff. I’d never looked at anyone and thought they were below me. If he knew where I came from and how I had to work hard to afford to live in this neighborhood and wear these clothes, he wouldn’t believe me. And that was why I can’t tell that story and especially to this one here.

“I’m in need of a lot of things, and if or when you decide you’re in need of a man like me, I’m in need of training and I think you could use what I’ve got.” I licked my lips as he followed my tongue in the rear mirror. “Here’s my card.” I reached and pulled it out of my card case. “If you ever find yourself without a job, I have a job for you. Now can you drop me off? It seems your passenger isn’t coming anytime soon.”

“You never give up, do you?” He adjusted himself and turned to face me. “Will you make it worth my while?”

“I can do better than that. If you drop me off at my office, and take my dog to the groomers, I’ll pay you a week’s salary.” He glanced around and looked at the clock.

“I do have a little time, because I arrived here earlier than even I expected. I had a fight with my boyfriend, and well... it’s a deal.” Then, the guy pulled into traffic, and in a half hour I was stepping out of his car.

“Here’s the address where Sam’s going.” I reached into my pocket and realized that I didn’t have any money. “Pick me up at four, and I’ll pay you then.” I stepped out of the limo and left Sam whimpering in the back in a seat belt. He hated those things, but it was for his own protection.

I realized I hadn’t gotten the limo driver’s name or anything, not even the license plates.

Oh well, I thought. One of my problems would be over if he took Sam off my hands. But as soon as the car drove away, I missed Sam. I didn’t have anyone to go home to at night and no one to talk to, but the television.

When I reached the office, “What’s wrong, Daniel? Word got around that you were going to fire someone, and I hope it isn’t me.”

“It’s not you, Dawn, you’re my favorite secretary, and what would I do without you? You know I mentioned to you about taking my dog for a night—”

“Not tonight,” she said. “I babysat Sam, and it was the worse night of my life and my husband said, ‘never again.’ It was like having a little baby in the house, and you know what

I think about children. My cats were terrorized, and I couldn't function for weeks because of sleepless nights, and my husband and I... well, let's say, we made love in unconventional ways. That's how bad it became. So, no, if you're asking me."

Dawn was in her fifties and her husband was skating on a cool seventy, so I couldn't imagine what their love life was like and I didn't want to hear. I'd shared enough with her to last a lifetime because of her age, and she'd be dead soon and I wouldn't have to face her for too long. And she was tight-lipped as they said. She could be trusted to keep secrets. I thought she had words of wisdom too concerning my broken relationship with Cole and whether it had to do with my use of bondage to have an orgasm and a few of the kinks I'd enjoyed with him.

Chapter 3

Daniel

I listened to Dawn for a few minutes about Sam being detrimental to her love life. I knew if she didn't want Sam near her and her cats—and she was an animal lover—he was bad news all around, and she would never take him again.

“Did you even bring him to a trainer?” Dawn questioned, tapping on her Smartphone. When I didn't answer her she leaned over. “You know he could be suffering from loneliness. Have you tried taking him to a therapist?” *Is she kidding?* My therapist bill alone and the furniture and my suits Sam had managed to destroy, I could go broke in less than a year.

“I can't afford that. I make lots of money in my bar, but too many expenses are eating into my profits. And with the closing for months, I can't get good people to work now. They all want to work from home. We don't sell drinks from home. You have to be here serving and mixing drinks, and Ryan is not helping my bottom line either. If I keep him and he does all these stupid things, like letting his boyfriend Jay come in and drink free along with his friends, then what is he good for?”

“Do you have anyone to replace Ryan?” It was a logical question that I had no answers to.

“When have I had time? You would be the first one I would tell. I have to go over the books first, and then fire Ryan. I can't afford his mistakes, and he has this boyfriend who hangs around the club every night. He can't do his job, and one night on my day off when I couldn't sleep because of Sam, I found them in a compromising position on my desk. On my *desk!*” I repeated. “My desk is antique. My mother left that desk to me, not to be defiled by a pair of lust-filled men. I can't get rid of it, so I'm getting rid of Ryan. What time does he come in?”

“Daniel, you know you're not good at firing anyone. You left that to your partners, and now you have no partners,

because they thought the business would fail, because of the pandemic, but you were smart enough to keep it going, and you brought it back and with Ryan's help I might add," Dawn reminded me.

I wasn't an ungrateful bastard, but Cole and Sam did something to my life I was still trying to reconstruct from the ground up. Which was like trying to build a house from the top down without the foundation, and that would never work, and I knew it. They just about wrecked it, and I hadn't been the same. I didn't want to see Cole again. Ever.

"Did you think this through, Daniel?" I focused when Dawn spoke and narrowed my gaze. "I mean firing Ryan, or are you acting on the spur of the moment? Ryan has good points and not all of them bad. Talk to him and tell him you don't want him and his boyfriend fucking on your desk, and in your office."

"I spoke to him and he said he was getting something from your office, and his boyfriend followed him and he was a spur of the moment kind of guy."

Well, that pissed me off, because when I first met Cole we had our first serious moments in my office, and we had our kiss on that desk after I fucked him hard against that wall, and other memories that were too good to forget. I didn't want to walk into my office, and every time I glanced at my desk, I'd see Ryan's naked ass and his boyfriend's balls. It clouded out all my beautiful memories of Cole.

"Have you thought about a little paint and change the furniture, modernize the place, take off these drapes and get some sunshine in here. It's like a mausoleum dedicated to memorializing your failed relationship with Cole. Get rid of that old antique furniture. You're a young man, for God's sake. You're only thirty-five. And give Ryan a second chance. Everyone deserve a second chance."

I thought about what Dawn said. Maybe she had a point, but I'd have to talk to Ryan first and see where his head was, and if he was contrite about his undignified behavior in my private office.

I blew out a large breath. “I do what needs to be done, and Ryan is fucking up in my professional opinion, and as his boss I have to consider what you’ve said also. I need a manager willing to work and keep his private life private and give me time to have a life. I do need to do something with that puppy Cole left me a few years back, and abandoned Sam.”

“Daniel, he’s not a puppy, you’ll never have a life if you don’t take Sam to a trainer.”

“I have that covered, Dawn. I’ve made arrangement for that today. Now, tell Ryan to come to my office. He’s sitting outside according to the monitor.” Dawn turned and raised her eyebrows, slanted her head, reminding me I wasn’t good at getting rid of people and things.

Chapter 4

Daniel

“Come in, Ryan, sit.” He looked nervous and disheveled, his hair appeared to have been raked several times with his fingers, his shirt needing to go to the laundry or cleaners, not at all his dapper, no-wrinkles-anywhere self. What was going on with him? Ryan trotted reluctantly to the chair in front of my desk. He sat on his hands with a grim look on his face. “What’s the matter, your cat died?” I knew that wasn’t appropriate, but I wasn’t feeling like being proper, or giving a suitable greeting or small talk about the weather or any such things.

“No, but my fish caught something and they’re in trouble of being wiped out as we speak. Now my fish tank is almost empty of my prize and expensive fish. I think I only have one expensive fish fighting for his life. I love looking at those fish when I’m nervous like now, because I know you’re going to fire me, and if you do, Jay’s going to think I’m a loser, and well, leave me.”

Now wasn’t the time to get caught up in Ryan’s love life or the lives of his fish. I had enough problems of my own. Ryan glanced over at me with hooded eyes, “Are you going to fire me?”

“Who said I was going to fire you? I just need to talk to you to see if you’re on the same page with me, and whether I can count on you to take more interest in this job you claim to like so much, and whether you want to work for me... I asked you over and over again not to do things in my office that I didn’t approve of, but you continued. For example, not to have your boyfriend Jay hang around here, and you kissing him in front of customers and not doing your job. You’re my right-hand man, Ryan. I depend on you a lot, and now I’m feeling as if I can’t count on you at all.”

“That was just one time, Daniel. You know me, I’m a hard worker and I want to learn the business, so I can get a club of my own someday. I want to ask Jay to marry me and if I can’t

make this work, I don't know what I'm going to do. I can't lose Jay."

"From what I understand, you can't lose the job either. What's it going to be?"

"This managerial position pays good money. You pay more than most bars and clubs in the area, and I want this, and I can keep Jay. One day we can open up a pub together."

"What about Jay's friends? They're coming in, drinking as if drinks are on the house. They're not. They cost money."

"Who told you that?"

"Never mind who said it. Is it true?" Ryan began fiddling with his fingers and twirling his curls, and I knew the truth. If he lied to me, then his ass was gone.

"It's true. But I told Jay he couldn't hang out here if he's going to have his friends over and not pay for their drinks, and they can't pay their bills and he can't pay them, because they've just been laid off from their tech jobs. I tried to pay their accounts, but I couldn't keep up... I'll pay you back everything that's owed, Daniel."

Reaching and presenting Ryan with the bill, he glanced down and placed his hand over his mouth, "That much?"

"Yes, that much. It seems they have expensive tastes too." I knew I couldn't let him go, because he owed me too much money, and maybe I could get him to work it off.

"I may have to ask a favor of you, and if I don't fire you, I expect you to work off some of that money incurred by your boyfriend." He glanced at me with an interested look in his eyes. He appeared relieved when he blew out a hard breath. But he hadn't heard my request yet. It was either that or get fired, and I'd take him to the small claims court. I didn't have time to take Ryan to court or fire him, but it was a thought and a threat he'd fall for.

"I hope your favor doesn't include dog-sitting?" Ryan questioned.

“We’ll talk about that another time, just understand that you owe me, Ryan. You can go now, but remember what I’ve said.”

The day went quickly, and Ryan got back to his job of checking the stock and going over his spreadsheet. When I’d stepped out of my office, and headed for my upscale bar, Pluck the Cherry, it was noon. Ryan was socializing with the businessmen in the building who stopped off for a drink and a meet up.

Ryan was good at meeting people and selling beer, wine, and liquor for the businessmen in the upper floors for parties, and celebrations which brought in extra money. This was his idea and I appreciated him, but as much as he was bringing in, my profits were getting lower and lower and bills were going up.

Ryan had an eye for detail too. He’d modernized the old décor in the bar area which cost a pretty penny, but he’d been notorious for spending other people’s money, but the changes made in my club needed all the changes he’d proposed. Ryan took an old, tired interior of dark wood and tired leather chairs, revamped everything, especially the chairs at the bar where he ordered soft-leather cushioned ones in grey, and soft blues, and with backs where the customers relaxed and could swivel around without getting a stiff neck to talk to that special man or gal.

He took out most of the country and western music, and rock, and added soft music with a little bit of jazz piped into the place where people could dance to it. Men and women would leave tipsy, holding hands, and in love at least for the night. *He’s great for my bar*, I thought as I watched Ryan laughing and socializing with the customers. He’d walked from table to table to make sure they were happy and taken care of. He made sure the waiters and waitresses were on their jobs of selling liquor with a smile.

I glanced around looking at my waiters and waitresses, and they were moving about ensuring that drinks were replenished, and asking questions if someone looked drunk. Most people lived in the city with cabs as they stepped outside to get home.

Ryan would make sure cabs were on call or parked outside the building, or a limo to make sure no one drove home drunk.

Others living in nearby high rises had limos to take them home. My eyes left them and my mind wandered through the couples dancing to soft music, the clicking of glasses, and chatter. Everyone had a smile on their face, and a sway to their hips if they were on the dance floor. There were soft kisses to go around.

My gaze settled on the front entrance, and in walked the most handsome young man I'd ever seen in my life. Oh my, but he was stunning in that blue suit and white shirt opened down to the third button, revealing his naked chest and strands of fine dark hair.

Lean and muscular. My gaze flirted with the man who didn't know I was alive, and my mind took flight. I knew instinctively, and my sexual drive awakened after two long hellish years. My cock thumped inside my pants. I knew what I wanted to do to him. Get him on a hard mattress, face down, handcuffs, and flog his fine young hard ass with a crop before I entered that tight hole. I felt my breath hitch and I had to restrain myself from palming my cock.

It was as if he'd rode in on a cloud, and I stood at the end of the rainbow waiting for him to come down from that cloud and be everything to me. That was just a daydream. But I knew if I could just talk to him, he would be mine. I never knew anything this right. I knew he was right for me. I could feel it, as if someone had sent him to me, and I would take advantage of every second. With him in my life I could put the thoughts of Cole to rest. I could function again and get Cole out of my mind and my life. Everything I did lately was with Cole in mind. What if I moved or bought another apartment, how would Cole find me? I'd had enough of those thoughts.

I needed Ryan to take over tonight. When I glanced around, Ryan was talking and writing something on a pad.

Ryan perhaps had learned something by my talk with him, and he was doing his job. I knew that guy, and he was having a birthday party on the twenty-first floor, and Ryan no doubt

would send up a bar and have Jay to man it to make extra money. It was one thing about Ryan, he did put Jay to work. I would have chosen anyone except Jay, but if that helped clear out his bills and Jay could bring in extra money, I was good with that.

I kept one eye on the stranger and one eye on Ryan. I tried to make contact with Ryan without leaving the area where I had a partial view of the stranger in the expensive suit and the fine dark chest hair.

Chapter 5

Daniel

My eyes and mind were still focused on that handsome young stranger as I watched him glide through the crowd. I tried not to notice by looking in Ryan's direction, but my eyes stalked the man nonetheless, and when he glanced my way, I angled my body away.

Men and women alike stood back and watched that deliciously handsome man stroll in my direction, passing booths and tables, headed for the bar. I reached for my eyeglasses to get a better look, but they were for reading, so that was a waste of time.

As he neared and took aim at a seat close by, I grasped and hurriedly removed those eyeglasses, and tucked them back into my suit pocket. I didn't want to signal nerd, but I guessed I was, and wearing glasses came as a result from reading too many books in college, not books from my classes, but comic books and Science Fiction. Because of my interests, I dropped out in my last year, and the fact that I didn't have enough credits to graduate.

I could feel my heart beating through my shirt as I got up the nerve to march over to him. I needed more time to calm down and get myself together for a conversation. It had been a while since I'd picked up a man. Two years to be exact. Although it was cool inside, I had beads of sweat on my forehead, and I knew this wasn't the right time.

In the dimly lit room where I made out his outline, a lean muscular body, delicate dark features, with a strong jawline, and narrow nose with thin plump kissable lips, my pulsed raced. His hair was black and curly, his eyes blue, and tanned smooth skin that sparkled, and he appeared to be twenty-five if a day.

My heart thundered when a guy stepped close to him, and whispered in his ear, and the sexy young man swiped his tongue over his lips and placed his hand around the guy's

waist. The bartender poured him and his friend a drink, as if he knew them. Did the two know each other? Did the three of them have some dealings in the past? Had they engaged in a threesome? Did my bartender know them, or was he just acting friendly for a better tip?

Those were the questions of a desperate man who had waited too long to make his move.

It was too much for me to think about now, because I'd had enough of trying to figure out how I would get him into my bed without his friend fucking that up.

When the friend embraced and kissed the gorgeous guy on the cheek, was he welcoming him back? One thing I knew, he was gay, and he was going to be mine. There was only one man I'd met that I felt like this from locking eyes with him, and that was Cole.

I wanted this guy in my bed, if I had to blindfold and handcuff him. That was my kink. When the glasses came off, and I put the business guy to rest, it was playtime. However, getting a young man to play with me had proven difficult, because of Cole's puppy who now was a dog with a problematic personality.

If I was going to invest time in this man, I had to consider a lot of things and the number one thing was Sam? *Oh fuck, there's the problem of Sam in all my relationships, but that's where Ryan came in*, I thought.

I turned to get Ryan's attention, waved my hands in the air at him, and still he didn't look around. Someone touched him on the shoulder just as I was contemplating walking to the back of the bar, but they pointed my way. Finally, Ryan turned around and spotted me waving and sauntered over to me. When I turned to eye the handsome dude, my heart sank, because that gorgeous dude and his friend were gone that fast.

"What is it, Daniel?" Ryan asked. I raised my hand and shook my head.

"I'll be back. Just wait here because I have to ask... no, tell you something." I hadn't planned on giving him an option

because he owed me.

“It’s not about my boyfriend?” He appeared worried. And I would be too if I was afraid Jay, who seemed to be up to all kinds of shenanigans, could cost Ryan his job.

“No. Nothing like that,” and I rushed out of the bar, out into the building. Standing in the lobby I looked around and turned in a circle wondering where he’d gone. My heart sank and my face soured. He and his friend were nowhere to be found.

Stopping at the security desk with monitors, I questioned, “Did you see two well-dressed men pass?”

“No sir. I was reading and had my head in the books for a second. And no one passed at least that I noticed.”

“Could you look on your monitor.” He turned and tried to peruse his monitors. Then he glanced up at me. “You know you haven’t told me anything about the two men. Did they forget to pay their checks?”

“No. Nothing like that. One had on a dark blue suit with a white shirt opened and no tie. His eyes blue and his hair dark and curly.”

“You’ve just described half the men who work in this building,” the security guard said, as if I had wasted his time and he wanted to get back to his book.

“But you would know him if he’d passed and if you’d seen him. He’s gorgeous.”

“I guess I don’t see men the way you do, Mr. James. I’m not gay.” He shook his head and furrowed his brow. “I don’t look at dudes.”

Don’t be a dick, I thought, but I did add. “What does that have to do with seeing a beautiful man and appreciating one whether you’re straight or gay?” I walked away and then turned back. “You know you haven’t lived long enough. You never know. What are you, twenty?” And I smiled. He glanced up at me and furrowed his brow.

I strode in the direction of my club, and before I disappeared behind the elevators to my left, I heard someone call out.

“Daniel.” In my mind all I saw was the handsome man calling out my name, but how did he know who I was? I turned and my nightmare started all over again. “Daniel. I kept your dog and I thought about how you must have missed him, and therefore, I brought him back. I expect to get paid of course.” I’d been hoping he’d keep him longer and send me a ransom note where I could decline his offer, but no such luck.

“Of course. Come with me.” I led the limo driver into the side door to my office and when I strolled in, there was Ryan in my office again and arguing with his boyfriend, Jay, who was supposed to be manning a bar for an impromptu party.

“Can you follow orders for once, and why did I give you your own office if I find you in mine all the time?” I was upset and I let him have it with my strongest voice.

“We were just talking, and your office is soundproof and I had to get something off your computer.” I didn’t believe it, but I had no proof, unlike the time I caught them bare assed in the act. It seemed you had to catch someone and then prove what they were doing. I hadn’t thought about putting in a camera until now.

“Don’t you have a computer? I gave you one. And remind me to redecorate and start with the walls.” I reached, for the petty cash in my desk after opening the drawer with a key and paid the limo driver. I gave him extra, because I knew the hell he’d endured with Sam.

“Before you go, could you drop off Sam to the trainer’s tomorrow morning, and pick him up.” I saw a little hesitancy, and I said, “It will be worth your while. I’ll text you where to collect him.”

“In that case I’ll do it.” And he left, but Ryan and his friend, Jay, stayed, but when the two saw the displeasure covering my face, they turned on their heels ready to leave. Sam glanced up at me with sad eyes—the kind he used to give me when he was a puppy—but now he was no longer a puppy,

but he was still playing with my heart strings and this time it wasn't working.

With Sam in my life, I had no life with the exception of him.

“Ryan, you and Jay need you to take Sam home with you after you close up. I'm going home to get some rest.”

I saw the disappointment cross their faces, and they glanced at each other. When I left them standing in my office holding on to Sam and Jay holding the leash, and Sam growling, I headed for the door, when Ryan said, “I forgot, the bartender said that a guy left a note for you in a sealed envelope.

Taking the envelope, I thought nothing of it, caught a taxi and arrived home. It was the next day when I opened the letter and read it.

Hello, Sexy.

I had my eyes on you from the moment I strolled into the bar. The bartender said that you were the owner. I didn't know whether you would talk to me, so the easiest thing to do was to leave this note.

I'm new in town, and I checked and heard around that you enjoyed BDSM, and that you were interested in playing games. Since I'm interested also, I thought I'd invite you over for some fun and games. Bring your leather and crop, and a mask. I'm not a man who is interested in playing with a number of partners, but with one man of my liking, and I liked you right off.

I have no interest in having a long-term relationship unless it involves bondage. I hope we can make a go of it, because I'm seriously into you.

Yours,

Dark Promises

Chapter 6

Cole

“I know you’ve been asking for this for a long time, and now we’re transferring you to New York... Well... what do you think?” I sat in Max’s office shocked, staring past Max, thinking about what it meant if he’d said that earlier. But it didn’t happen and now that it had, what could I say? Thank you? I didn’t expect this and now you were ruining my life a second time.

In the first place, I hadn’t expected to be transferred to California when I’d signed on to Max’s law firm, but it happened overnight, and all my dreams of a life with Daniel had faded in that second I’d been told about the transfer two years ago.

I’d just graduated from law school specializing in entertainment law, and I’d been offered a contract. The day I signed it and agreed to work at this prestigious law firm in New York, I thought all my dreams had been answered, along with meeting and falling in love with Daniel. All my dreams for the future had become a reality, I thought. To be in New York where everything in entertainment started had been my dream come true, and soon turned into my nightmare.

I didn’t want to see Daniel’s face when I told him, therefore, I just left and flew to California, and I didn’t blame him if he never saw me again. I hadn’t seen him in two years or talked to him. Two long fucking years, and my puppy must be grown by now. I’d changed a lot since then, maybe more mature than I was at the time. A new haircut, new clothes and occasional superficial boyfriends, some actors, some producers all wanting a pretty young face to hang on to, or if they needed professional advice I was the go-to man. In California, I wasn’t a person, but a commodity. A necessary service and anyone who needed me pretended that they wanted me for more than good advice, but to have as a life partner. That didn’t happen. The only thing that happened was Covid.

When I met a man and he'd express he needed a life partner, that was as superficial and phony as the lies they told about themselves when we'd finally hooked up over Tinder and an occasional virtual face to face.

When I first met Daniel, I was right out of law school, had no sex life, but he'd introduced me to his life not long afterwards, and I loved it. When he said he wanted me, I believed him. Just as I believed that my transfer to California would be temporary. I'd go there for a short period, meet the partners, and head back home to Manhattan and to Daniel before he had time to miss me.

I worshipped and adored him, but when I understood that California would become my permanent home, I thought it best to let him go.

When I settled in at the firm, and it afforded me a chance to travel, I took it. Maybe a little too soon because I'd just met Daniel at his club. There he was standing not paying attention and especially not to me. He was the man I'd dreamed about. He wore this expensive dark suit with a blue shirt and opened where his muscular chest was on display, especially when he dropped something and reached to retrieve it from a chair.

I loved that suit and while in California, I bought one similar to feel a closeness to him or to be him.

There I stood in his club, a brash nervous young man, not sure of himself. Finally, he noticed me and sauntered over. His dark eyes scrutinized me from my feet to my groin and as his gaze ascended after pausing for a moment, his eyes settling on my hard full cock, he coughed and straightened up, and we locked eyes. Daniel's lips curled up to the right in a mischievous smile that wasn't lost on my eyes. His eyes appeared to be filled with mischief when he said, "Do you always stand that close to a man where he can smell you?"

"Sometimes. The other times, I'm naked and I smell much better than now." He winked and chuckled as if I had said something dynamic. I trembled at the thought I was able to get a few words out that would put a smile on his face.

“I don’t know if you can smell any better, because I’m smelling flowers and natural musk and that is driving me crazy,” Daniel said. “I wonder what it would be like if you were naked and lying in my dungeon.” He smirked, dropped those words, then turned around and away from me. I wasn’t sure if he thought I would run away, but I didn’t. There was something about the way he said dungeon that had me curious and excited, and wanting to know more.

When I was first approached about leaving New York and hadn’t had my first experience of being tied down by Daniel and fucked within an inch of my life, I thought who wouldn’t want to go to California with all the sun and beautiful rich men? I realized within a few days of meeting Daniel I didn’t want to go to California. However, I’d committed myself, signed a contract I didn’t read, and me a lawyer. Now that was a joke. I had to go or lose a position of a lifetime.

The day I arrived in sunny and rainy California wasn’t what I wanted. I missed Daniel, and I missed Sam my Jack Russell terrier. I thought I would have the time to call Daniel and tell him I’d gone out of town, and I’d see him soon. We had a discussion about being together, but I was sent out of the country, and when I woke up, it was two years later, and now they were sending me back to live in New York for good.

Not knowing how Daniel would take to me showing up at his door and whether he’d given away Sam, had me nervous for the first time in my life. That brash young man who stepped into Pluck the Cherry alone that fateful night, had lost his impetuous nature. Time, and not being with my true love had made me uncertain about everything. I was older and I thought that would make me confident, but the more I learned about things and people, the more I became less able to handle things, primarily because I wasn’t around the man I truly loved, and I knew had loved me once.

Being away from him and the type of confident man I’d first met led me to believe he wasn’t spending his life waiting for a man who never called. One day I showed up in his life and the next I was gone.

I didn't know how to feel now, but I knew Daniel was the man for me. But after all this time was he even thinking about me? Did he lie awake at night, or as I had done on many occasions try to recreate our lives together with just a tug of my cock, then spend the rest of the night wishing and dreaming Daniel was whipping my ass with a crop to bring me to orgasm.

I had to find out, because I never stopped thinking about him, never stopped wanting him, but was too afraid to call after I'd allowed too much time to pass between us. I wanted to explain to him what had happened, but I didn't want to hear him tell me it was over, therefore, I postponed that call for so long it didn't make sense to even make that call after two years.

I wrote several letters, and they were returned unopened. I guessed he was angry with me, and I gave up on that relationship, but never my love for him.

“What are you thinking about, Cole? I knew you wanted to go home, but I couldn't swing it until now,” Max said, after I remained silent for too long. There was so much I'd been going over in my mind, and I was sure that was a rhetorical question, because when you asked an individual what they were thinking, it was too private for them to even say, therefore, in my case I said not what I was thinking, but a go-to answer for most things.

“I appreciate the gesture, but I didn't expect it this soon. I don't have an apartment.” Even as I wanted to be home in New York, now I was afraid. That was what I'd been thinking.

“You don't have to worry about a thing. You were an asset to this firm and you're still very young. We lucked out when we got you on board. All that's arranged for you. You'll be one of the youngest partners in the firm, and it comes with a car and an apartment, and a generous salary. So, pack your bags, and you don't have to worry about anything, it's all there waiting, and you have an expense account. You'll have to buy suits for New York weather, because all those things you wore over here are different.”

Tell me about it. Max must have forgotten I was born in New York.

“I know, I was born in Manhattan,” I said absentmindedly, when I rose from my chair and offered a closed smile.

“Oh yes, I forgot.”

I stumbled out of Max’s office after speaking to the secretary who had my itinerary waiting. I’d fly to New York in the company jet tomorrow, and had two weeks off before I had to meet the partners. I had no plans except seeing Daniel. I didn’t have the nerve to see him up close, I just wanted to watch him to see if he’d found a partner or someone special. I wasn’t sure how to handle that. Would I walk up to him and say, “*Baby, I’m home?*” Or wait outside his home if he were alone and stride up to him. *Now I’m turning into a stalker,* I thought with a shake of my head, and a smile that had tugged on my lips each time I thought about Daniel.

When I reached my office and cleaned out my desk, I instructed my secretary and PAs to take what they wanted. All I had was the picture of Daniel and me at Coney Island, and that would be enough for now.

Chapter 7

Cole

I arrived at my apartment and stepped around it, looking out at the skyline, and I felt lonely and empty. Then, I had Sam, and since I hadn't seen him either, I was sure he'd forgotten me or hated me. After unpacking I knew I couldn't stay inside, I needed to go for a walk. This was my first night back, therefore, I called a friend to meet me at Daniel's bar. Was it still there? I sure hoped so. Perhaps it wasn't there anymore with the Covid thing. Maybe he wasn't even in that business any longer. But I had to see for myself, but this time I didn't have the balls I once had. I needed someone to hold my hand just in case he'd moved on, and I couldn't handle it. However, what had I expected? I questioned myself. Did I think he'd wait for me to call after two years. They went by so fast, but so slowly.

“Hey, dude, I'll give you two guesses. Who do you think is calling?”

“Cole, of course.”

“How did you know?”

“Same number, same name,” Bryan said.

“You never cleared my number out of your phone?” It seemed the love of my life did. He probably got sick of waiting for me to call he pulled the plug as they said.

“Why should I. I knew one day you'd be back. About a year in after you left, Daniel would call everyday looking for you. He used some excuse about your dog, but I knew he was sick over you leaving. I tried to make excuses for you, until there weren't any left. You should have said something. Text, Facetime, something—”

“I know, but I didn't have any time to myself. It was all business, and I let that life take over my personal life, and now I have none.”

“That sounds intense, Cole. What are you doing now?”

“I’m in town and I need help locating Daniel.”

“Although he never calls anymore, he still owns ‘Pluck the Cherry.’ I’ve gone in there several times, because I tried dating him after a year, and you didn’t call, but what he was into I just didn’t get. You know the ropes and handcuffs it wasn’t my scene, and what’s with the dog scratching at the door and then whining all night? I’d say you and Daniel were into some heavy shit,” Bryan confessed. “I thought he and I could get something going, but all he talked about was you. I didn’t want him questioning me about you every time we had a date, so I just brushed it off. Said I couldn’t take the dog.”

“Does he still have Sam?”

“I don’t know,” Bryan said. “He claimed he was trying to give him away because he reminds him of you. I declined to take him because with my schedule and Sam being needy, I couldn’t look after him.”

“I called because I want you to go with me to Daniel’s club tonight.”

“I don’t know. I have a guy I’m seeing, and I don’t want to cock that up.”

“It will just be this time. You owe me.”

“I thought that debt was paid,” Bryan said.

“Well, it is. I don’t want to beg, but I will if I have to. Just go with me this one time and I promise I won’t ask any more of you.”

Bryan reluctantly agreed to go with me to the club. When we strolled in Daniel appeared to be busy. Bryan had stopped outside to speak to a friend, and I walked into the place alone. But Bryan knew how important it was to me, and he rushed in to get a drink I’d promised to pay for.

I had my back to Daniel, although every part of me wanted to face him and walk up to him and declare that I was home, and this was it. I wanted to ask him to marry me, but I didn’t want the rejection I knew would follow. After all, he must be fucking or engaged with someone. I wasn’t exactly spending my off nights jerking off, unless it was to a dick pick of some

stranger wearing a harness and leather. But only if the ass was hard, did I waste my time.

The only man I bent over for was Daniel.

Bryan strolled in just when I wanted to see who Daniel was talking to. I couldn't contain myself, because I wanted to rush over there and plant a kiss on his lips. I strummed my fingers on the bar when the bartender stopped what he was doing and rushed to take my order. But Bryan was sitting next to me, and he appeared to be more interested in the bartender. He rubbed his hands together. "I'm ready for a drink," he said to the barkeeper, then leaned and kissed me.

I winced. *What the fuck?* "Why did you kiss me?" I questioned after I furrowed my brow, then smiled hoping the men sitting next to me didn't hear me, or Daniel didn't see us and me wipe my lips.

"You need to pretend that you're not here for him, but for me."

"But I am."

"No you're not," Bryan countered. "You're here for me, because I don't think he recognizes you or me anymore, but we have his attention because he's staring. I look the same, Cole, but I was just a one-night stand. But you look like a different man simply by the way you dress, and that haircut."

Bryan raked his hands through my hair, and I shuddered because I didn't like him like that. I don't let friends touch me that way and Bryan was nowhere near a friend, especially since he mentioned having sex with Daniel, but since he'd offered to help me get him back, I guessed I could forget he'd fucked or was being fucked by the love of my life, because I'd deserted him.

Bryan took me out of my thoughts when his hand fingered the collar of my suit coat to straighten it out. "Cole wouldn't be caught dead in an expensive suit, and that shirt must cost my week's wages."

I'd gotten Bryan a position in my law firm doing clerical work when I discovered that I'd been summoned to California,

if I wanted to keep my position. It was an opportunity I didn't want to pass up, and I forgot about everything and everybody, and when I woke I'd left Daniel and Sam behind. Now I was here trying to get back what I'd walked away from.

"He couldn't have forgotten me that easily," I lamented.

The bartender stood patiently waiting, and said, "If you were mine, I'd never forget you." I smiled and shook my head and raised an eyebrow, then narrowed my eyes as Bryan leaned into the bartender.

"What can I get you two?" I gave him our orders. Two shots of vodka each.

"See what I mean. I used to date Daniel, mind you it was for one night, and he doesn't even remember me. Look at the way he's staring at us, as if he knows us or wants to know one of us. I bet if I were to show him my cock, he'd remember," Bryan snickered. "Now why would you think Daniel would even remember you? How long did you two date? Not even a good month."

"Because we were in love," I insisted. "You I could understand, but we were together night and day. I was just about to move in with him when I sent Sam over, and I was to come the next day, but it didn't happen."

"If you were so much in love, why didn't you call him and tell him you would be away?" I downed my second shot and turned and glanced at Daniel. He looked sexy with or without his glasses. I used to ask him to wear them, because for some reason they made me further aroused when he pulled out his crop, and took me over his knee and paddled my ass. Thinking about those nights with Daniel brought on extreme arousal. Heat coursed from my head to my feet. I had to get out of the bar at this point.

"I didn't tell Daniel and I didn't call because I discovered I'd be out of the states for a year, and I didn't have the heart to tell him. I thought I could forget him, and now it seems he's forgotten me. Do you see how he's whispering into the cute guy's ear?"

“Do you want another drink?” the bartender questioned with a curious smile.

“No, but who are those two men?” I knew Daniel, but not the other guy, or the one peeking from behind him.

“One is the owner, that’s Daniel the one with the dark hair and sexy beard and dark eyes, and the other is his manager, Ryan, and over there is the manager’s boyfriend, he’s a hot mess. He’ll fuck anything that moves. I’ve tapped that sweet ass several times, but Ryan doesn’t seem to mind. I think that’s how they keep their relationship going. That’s why I’m single. Call me selfish, but I can’t share,” the bartender said aiming a heated glare at Bryan, along with a long tongue he swiped quickly around his lips, then turned and reached for something from the bar, and just as quickly swiveled around to face us.

“We need to leave,” I added. When I paid the bartender, he handed Bryan a card and I said, “Would you give this letter to Daniel?” He raised his eyebrow, but then he nodded his head, and I took that as he would deliver the note.

We strode out when the bar was getting crowded, the dance floor emptying, and the music growing softer.

After stepping into the lobby and watching the security guy with his head down, we made it to the outside and waved a passing cab down, then climbed inside. The cabbie dropped Bryan and me off at my new apartment.

“I have to see this place the firm is giving you. They barely pay me minimum wage, and living in Manhattan if I don’t work overtime, I can’t pay Con Edison. You know electricity.” I raised my eyebrow suggesting that I knew what it was as I opened the door, and it was filled with expensive furniture and paintings. Bryan sauntered around passing his palm on the back of the sofa, on the tables and piano. “What the fuck, Cole, do you play the piano?”

“Not the last time I checked. It went with the apartment. The place was already furnished. My secretary asked me what kind of furniture I wanted, and I couldn’t tell her. I just said use your best judgement, and it was a good thing she did,

because I didn't know what the fuck to put in a place like this.”

“Yeah, I know. Last time I saw you, Cole, you'd just graduated from law school and were living in this crappy apartment the size of a shoebox with holes in the ceiling and the winter coming, and you didn't have any heat. Now look at you. On top of the world.”

Bryan had been right. I stood with him as we glanced out at the Manhattan skyline. I could name the buildings as we turned to the right and left watching through the floor-to-ceiling windows.

“Stay a night, Bryan. I don't like to be alone, because it's the first night back in this city.”

“I have to go to work tomorrow, and you said you have two or three weeks off to get settled—”

“You can dress in some of my clothes, they're new and we look to be the same size.” There was an aggregable light in his eyes if I read him. Bryan had admired some of the things I wore. What he didn't know was I'd bought them at a resale shop. But everything I wore now was new. I worked hard not to wear those old clothes anymore. It wasn't that something was wrong with the clothing, but they'd belonged to someone else before me. “And you can keep the shirts and pants.”

“You don't have to twist my arm. It will be like I'm on vacation living here even for one night... what about a robe and pajamas?”

“You can keep those too.”

“Then, it really is a vacation.”

“No. It's not.” I didn't want Bryan to get too comfortable.

Bryan and I sat and drank, stood with our hands in our pockets gazing out at the buildings, wondering what people were doing in the apartments across the way. We talked through the night about how to get Daniel to notice me. However, Bryan had an insane idea he wanted to put into play. And because I was desperate, I bought into it and went along with him.

Chapter 8

Daniel

After I headed home, slept through the night for a change, and none of that getting up three times in the night to let Sam do his business, to be honest, I thought he was jerking my chain anyway. But one night I stayed in bed, and locked him out of the room, and that was the day my cleaning lady finally quit.

“No. No. Mr. Daniel, dogs are supposed to be outside.” Well, she was from Guatemala, and this was New York. She continued lecturing me “I’ve had enough, Mr. Daniel. I love dogs, but this one is damaged. Your partner is to blame. He was such a beautiful puppy and when Mr. Cole didn’t return, Sam changed. I can’t work for you anymore until he sees a therapist.”

“Is there such a thing? I don’t think so,” I explained, hoping she’d stay on until I could get some answers about his behavior.

“Have you taken him to a trainer? A dog whisperer?” she questioned, with her bag in her hand shaking her head as Sam looked on, as if knowing he’d run another person away, and then that would only be him and me.

I was at Sam’s mercy. I wanted to give him away to someone in my building, but they had heard horror stories, and everyone I’d begged to keep him for a time wanted nothing to do with him. If they hadn’t heard the tales and agreed to take him for a night to see if they could have him as a pet, Sam ended up at my door the next morning in a box looking like a lost soul.

He was a baby then, but now he was full grown, and things hadn’t gotten any better. I just utilized the people I knew, and who owed me a favor, and now I was running out of favors and people. Deep down I didn’t want to lose Sam, therefore, I asked close friends, and my brother, Sidney, whom I suspected of passing around rumors of how awful Sam behaved, and

he'd never keep him again. I guessed Sidney blamed me for his partner leaving, but I suspected it had to do with something basic like Sidney had never settled down, because he drank too much and enjoyed handcuffing his lovers to the bed, never asking for a safe word. That would do it.

Sam was only part of Sidney's problem. Sidney was his own problem.

Sam was my last contact with Cole, and when Sidney brought him back, I'd been relieved, especially since he said his boyfriend didn't want the puppy because he didn't like dogs. He was a cat person, and no present would make him forget how Sidney behaved when he was drinking. In Sidney's defense he was better when he drank. *But now he's been sober for years and he's not as agreeable, or as much fun as before,* I thought.

I was incredibly happy when Sidney brought Sam back to me, because after considering how much I loved that dog because we'd bonded when I was ill, and he slept at my side when I injured my leg falling in the snow. I knew once Sam went, I'd forget how much I needed Cole, how much I yearned for him and loved him. I wanted to hold on to that feeling as much as I wanted to hold on to Sam.

No one understood me the way Cole did. There was a deep dark passion inside me, and it had to come out. Cole was the one man who knew my secret, embraced it, and brought out that dark passion in me. I had this passion for Bondage. When I looked at a man and thought of him as a mate, I imagined I could tie him up and fuck him day and night, but not all the men I'd met shared that enthusiasm for this. That was until I met Cole.

With Cole he indulged my every whim and enjoyed me doing whatever I wanted, as long as it wasn't severe, and that was where the safe word came. Because we were the same as far as sexual pleasure, we rarely used our safe words.

I'd tried telling my brother, Sidney, that if he went this way he'd have to use a safe word, but he didn't get it. Therefore, I didn't confide in him again, but I'd heard rumors around my

club that Sidney was notorious for going beyond the limits of bondage and S&M. Nevertheless, he did engage in this with both men and women. He stated that he enjoyed sex with both sexes, but if he found a woman or man he was attracted to, he'd go with that particular person. It didn't matter whether they were women or men. It was the act of bondage that had his dick quivering and quaking.

I was just the opposite. It had to be a male and a particular type, and therefore, no one I'd met would satisfy me the way Cole had, and as someone said, 'Everything in the world is about sex.' Yes, but sex that fitted into my desire had to include bondage. I was taking it out of context to suit my own needs, and my need was for Cole and the special feeling he gave me when I'd strapped him into a swing and fucked him.

The way I'd paddled his lean muscular ass and watched him, and I'd reacted to his moans and groans by jerking off when I fingered his hole, and laid my crop on his ass until he gave the safe word which he never did.

Thinking too much about Cole had me hard, but what was the point if I couldn't have a warm body I was in love with, and that was why I remained single before I met Cole, and after he'd left me with something to remember him by.

With a hard cock, I tumbled out of bed with the notion I'd better enjoy the solitude before Ryan brought Sam back.

When I had time to get myself together and rest, it appeared I wanted to do anything but that. I worked twenty-four seven, because I didn't want to think about Cole, and now it seemed I had to do something if just to get out of bed and make myself a cup of coffee and breakfast until I could hire someone to clean and cook for me. I knew it was only going to last for a few months, if that, before they ran for the door. But I had to do something because this place was becoming a house of horrors and I wasn't talking about my pain room.

After forcing myself up, and heading to the kitchen, on my way the bell rang, and the doorman announced that I have a visitor. I heard a deep voice.

“Tell him it’s Sidney, and I’m coming up. And tell Daniel to put a muzzle on Sam. He hates me anyway.” I wondered why.

“Should I let him up to your apartment, Mr. Daniel?” the doorman said.

“Yeah, why not. You can’t stop him anyway.”

Before he hit the elevator, I heard Sidney tell the doorman. “Thanks a lot, Edgar. You really are doing your job whatever it is anyway. I thought they’d fired all the doormen in New York. I guess one slipped through the cracks and is here to give me hell.” Sidney was his usual insulting self. I was sure he’d save the rest for me.

We had different mothers, but the same father. And because we were his only children, we developed a loose bond. I’d see Sidney when I felt like it, and he’d see me when he needed to borrow money, or if our father had had enough of him and had thrown him out. I imagined the part about the money was true today. Our father had only died a year ago.

Before I could get my morning coffee, the doorbell rang. “Oh fuck. Couldn’t he have taken the stairs?” No one took the stairs anymore. You never knew who you’d meet, even in a building like this with men and women making seven figures a year. The people above me divorced, and they found the husband in the freezer a year later, and his wife had taken everything and showed up in Europe. I guessed it was too much being together during Covid that caused a lot of couples to go insane.

Maybe that could have happened to Cole and me. I’d never know.

I peeked through the peephole, rolled my eyes, and took a deep breath before I opened the door. “What now?” I murmured. Sidney held up two cups of expensive coffee, and I opened the door because I couldn’t resist the smell of White Chocolate Mocha. What an idiot I turned out to be, because I could be bought by a smile and a cup of six-dollar coffee. I knew that coffee would cost me thousands.

Opening the door, he staggered in. Looking at his clothes he'd been up all-night partying. "What's up with you dude?" he said, before I jerked the coffee cup and took a sip, then I aimed my body in the direction of the kitchen. He followed me. This was going to be a fucking hard day with him around.

Chapter 9

Daniel

Sidney stood back and said, “Don’t I get a hug. You know I’m your only family now that Dad’s dead. Did he leave you anything like a 401 K?” Sidney strolled around looking and examining my things before sticking his hand in my empty bowl, then stood in front of the fruit bowl looking in it.

“What do you expect to find in my fruit bowl?” He reached for a banana and peeled it and took a seat across from me, but never drank his coffee. It must have been a ruse to get into my apartment, because he knew I had a weakness for a few things and they were coffee, Sam and Cole. Not in that order of course.

“Do you have toast and water to wash this banana down?”

“Sure. There’s everything you need for breakfast, but you’ll have to cook it yourself, because my cook quit—”

“And your maid I see.” He pointed to the dishes in the sink. Looking around he decided to walk to the fridge and retrieve a bottle of water. “Where’s that little terror, Sam? You finally got rid of him?” He smiled and I knew why. They had a hate relationship on both their parts. If Sidney came over Sam would steal his keys, or phone, and hide them.

“He’s having a sleep over at Ryan’s,” I added. Sidney started laughing.

“Doesn’t Ryan have cats?”

“I think so.”

“Did you warn him and his partner, because you never warned me, and my partner left me because of Sam.”

I slapped Sidney’s plate containing toast on the counter. “You know damn well Sam wasn’t the reason you and yours broke up. Everyone knows that story, and here you are trying to blame Sam.” I stared at him after drinking the coffee. “Now,

tell me why you're really here, and not to discuss Sam, or your relationship, such as it is."

"Do you remember that exercise gym I had before Covid? Well, it no longer exists. I had bad luck, and I couldn't open it back up."

"What did you do with the money Dad left us and the loan you took out for your business?"

"It's all gone."

"What the fuck, Sid. What were you doing?"

"My best."

I wondered what that was. Instead of thinking the worst, I tried another way around this. Tonight, I had to meet some cute guy at his apartment, and I was not over Cole, so what was I thinking? He had everything that I wanted. Willing to try something new and I didn't have to go on a dating app to find him. He found me. Go figure.

"You can stay here for as long as it takes to get yourself together, but you have to do one thing for me, and it's not beyond you. You know I'm into bondage, and—"

"I'm not into that."

"You mean, not anymore. What happened, did someone file a lawsuit against you?" When Sidney looked up and around avoiding my eyes, I knew the truth. "You can tell everyone else how you've put that bondage stuff behind, but I know you, and I know what you're into. The talk is all around and especially in clubs. You tried to hide it from your partner, but he found out, and it was that and not Sam who broke up your relationships. Take my advice, if you're happy with someone who likes the same things you like in and out of bed, then you'll have an easier time with a relationship—"

"Like you. I thought Cole was the love of your life—"

"You don't know anything about us. I didn't go around placing ads looking for a partner that wasn't into bondage, and then finding out they just wanted someone to take care of them."

“Okay. Okay, Daniel. What the fuck do I have to do to get a roof over my head until I can get something going? After we sell Dad’s apartment building, I’m out of here.”

“Good.” I rose from my seat, and walked around and sat next to Sidney, took a deep breath and looked him in his dark-green eyes. I’d never noticed before, but we had the same color eyes, and I guessed we did have something in common besides our father.

“I need you to pretend to be me and meet this gorgeous guy tonight. He’s into bondage and that shouldn’t be something foreign to you. I hear you’re a Master in our community. Just pull out your leather chaps or whatever the fuck you have, ropes chains whips, and meet him at his apartment.”

Sidney narrowed his glance. “Isn’t that dangerous?”

“Not as dangerous as you meeting men in some of those Bondage clubs or gay circuit parties with no supervision, or those women I heard you paid for to use dildos on you who probably have a lover or husband somewhere waiting to have a go at your ass.”

“Is nothing sacred? Does everyone know my business?” Sydney asked.

“No. But when you do it out in open at one of those clubs, or you tell people and hand out cards, what do you expect? You get men with all kinds of kinks, and some not too savory in what they expect of you or want to do to you.” I saw Sidney’s jade eyes moving around, and I knew he’d thought about what I’d said. “Are you going to stand in for me?”

“What’s wrong with that guy? I deserve to know.” I glared at Sidney and furrowed my brow. The only thing he deserved to know was if he didn’t do as I asked, then his time with me would be cut very short. However, I wasn’t the kind of man to kick Sidney out, especially since he needed somewhere to stay, so I kept quiet for a while and took another sip of my coffee and thought about how much I liked the coffee and how much I missed Sam.

“Nothing is wrong with him. He’s just not Cole.” Which was the truth.

“Are you ever going to get over Cole? You know, Daniel, you’re too old to be moping around over him. What do you two have in common? You’re what thirty-something and when you told me about him, he was twentyish.” I paced around the kitchen holding on to my lifeline—white chocolate mocha and wishing he’d drop the conversation about Cole .

“Why don’t you track him down, and beg him to come back to you?” When I didn’t say anything, but stared at Sidney, he said, “Oh, I forgot. You’re too proud. Well, pride will take you only so far. I would have been couch surfing today if I hadn’t swallowed my pride and came here told you about my problem.”

“And if you don’t do me this favor, you *will* be couch surfing again,” I assured him. Another one of my empty threats, but he didn’t know that. Besides, I didn’t need a grown man who had all kinds of chances in life to piss away his chances by not going to school, or taking up some kind of profession. When I was struggling to pay rent and stay in school, he was living rent free with our father.

He had our father believing that if he sent Sidney to college, then he could go on to veterinarian school, because he claimed he loved animals. Just not the kind that walked on four legs. It was more like the two-legged kind who had *him* on all fours begging for more.

“Well, I don’t think I’ll have to couch surf for long, because I’ve got a buyer for Dad’s building in Brooklyn. Then I’ll take my half and open a bondage club.” I narrowed my glance. Was he kidding? Well, I guessed he wasn’t. “I’m going to serve drinks, have dancers on weekends, and shows. I might give you competition,” he said, before straightening his shoulders back and winking at me. The only competition he could give me was going broke sooner than me, if Ryan didn’t put me in that position before Sidney got there.

“It’s not the same kind of club, and we aren’t competing for the same business or interests. We’re not even striving for

our father's love anymore." I never knew why everything with Sidney had to be a contest.

Sidney slanted his head. "Yeah, I was a dick, wasn't I—"

"Do you want me to answer that? Because I'm sure you knew what you were doing when you told him I was gay, and failed to tell him that you were gay too," I said with a little more animosity in my voice than I wanted. I was having a great morning until my brother chose this day to make me aware that I had a brother I hadn't wanted to see until Father's memorial.

Sidney twisted his mouth, and whenever he did that I knew what would come out would either have me wishing I was dead, or he was. "I was bisexual and now that Father is dead, I can admit that I'm gay. Had I told him the truth..." Did he even know the truth anymore? "...that would have killed him. He never did get over you being in love with a man. How did you keep that from him all those years?"

"Maybe it was because I didn't live with him. After my mother died, he married your mother, and you took up all his time." Sidney raised his arms out to the side and shrugged his shoulders.

"I was a kid and the baby, you were my older brother, and you should have understood. I understood about you being Father's son."

"I came first." *You dick*, I wanted to tell him, but I didn't because there were more important things I had to discuss, like who was purchasing the building and him replacing me tonight.

"We haven't settled the matter of you showing up to take my place. So, I take your silence as a *yes* you will be there tonight. You never know, you might like this guy. Like you said, it helps to have something in common with the man you're fucking, even if it's sharing a kink."

"What kind of kink did you and Cole share?" He caught me off guard with that question and it took me back to that last

night we were together. I had to drop my thoughts of Cole, because it became too painful, and focus on Sidney.

“Do you expect me to tell you about what we did in bed?” He hunched his shoulders. “Now that we’ve got that behind us, do you have everything you need for tonight?”

“I came here with nothing. My partner took all my things. I think he put them on eBay or one of those sites, and from what I saw, he made a lot of money selling my used underwear and each pair came with a date and some other shit I don’t care to mention—”

Shaking my head, I said, “Spare me the gory details. Now go to my playroom and get what you think you will need for tonight, and the spare bedroom is to your right. It has its own shower, and you do need one. And don’t worry, I won’t be selling anything you touch on eBay.”

“I like to bathe and lie in a warm tub for hours—”

“Well, you won’t be doing that here. If you need deodorant or anything else, there’s a closet full of new items Cole left behind.”

“I don’t use deodorant to play, some men love that musky odor—”

“And some don’t,” I explained to my wayward younger brother who had a lot to learn about men. Or maybe I had a lot to learn, because he’d been finding men and women to support his habits since I could remember. And he kept a job for as long as he could get a paycheck and then on to another job where someone would hire him. *Go figure.*

When Sidney ambled to the fridge and cabinet, my phone rang. I reached in the bowl and looked at Sidney. “Get yourself some breakfast because I have to take this.”

I headed to my bedroom and answered my phone before it went to text messages. *Oh shit, it’s Ryan.* I knew what that was about, and I dreaded answering it.

Chapter 10

Cole

“I don’t think I can do this. Daniel is sure to recognize me, and I’m nervous,” Bryan said after I’d agreed to go along with his scheme. However, I knew just what he felt or thought. Daniel was a man who never deceived anyone, and for that he got plenty of it. And some from me. Well, a lot more than he deserved. Here it was I left him for a long time and didn’t say anything, and came back and wanted to start over where we left off. Either I was delusional, or had bad judgement, or Bryan was when he hatched this idea.

Daniel first approached me at his club, and when I saw him standing straight, wide shoulders lean and long legs, I thought I had walked into a dream, and it would never end.

Not knowing enough about my sexual desires and not acting on them, I came to this quiet beautiful mature man, and he freed me from all of my fears, all my worries and tensions when he brought me to his home, into his world that night.

He held my hand when he opened the door, and revealed his playroom, but all I thought about was this was a dungeon I’d heard about from friends and to beware. When I came out as gay, I heard stories about men like Daniel, but unlike him, he was handsome and kind, his voice soft belying all the horror stories I’d heard about men lying in wait for young men like me.

At the time I’d been working my way through college, and then law school living in a crappy apartment in Brooklyn and going to Brooklyn college. There wasn’t any time to go out partying like my few friends had done in their teenage years. They’d described how they’d skipped school, and headed uptown with phony identification and seen the real world, while I was suffering to pass tests to become a lawyer. After graduating from college, then it was the LSAT to get into law school and after that I found myself taking the MBC just to keep my options open where I could work in a different state if New York didn’t work out, and later I discovered that because

I'd taken that test, I'd lose the only man I've ever loved, wanted to love, or had something in common with, and it had to do with the way we accepted each other when it came to our sexual desires.

A few years back a friend had gotten me out of my apartment and books to go to this bar called Pluck the Cherry. My friend, Cody, threw down his books while we were studying and had planned on pulling an all-nighter, and said, "Let's go out. You've been spending too much time in the books." Looking around my studio apartment, he said, "You even sleep with your books. Half your bed is covered with tablets, a computer and all these fucking books. You know there should be a man somewhere under those sheets with a hard dick and cum stains, but knowing you, I won't waste my time looking." He stood and strolled to my bed and raised the sheet and shook his head. "Just as I thought, a waste of my time." And he turned to me. "I thought maybe I'd find a used condom at least."

I closed my eyes for a second and opened them.

"I have to pass the bar exam, and if I manage to do that and get a job, then I have to find an apartment in Manhattan. You don't know how hard this is. You have parents who can afford to take care of you, and besides you live in your parents' basement half the year. "

"Don't hate me because I take the road that's already traveled. You like the hard way." It's not that I want things the hard way. I'm doing what I think will make me happy in my life and that's working with creative people.

"You would have to take the hard road. A law degree in entertainment? Who does that anymore when the chances of you succeeding in a city like Manhattan is next to impossible. Everyone knows someone, and their brothers and sisters and their children have those jobs locked up," Cody said.

Well, Cody did a job on me that night. I was so depressed that I placed my books down, rushed into the shower for a second because of the cold water, found a pair of tight jeans

and tee, then we jumped on the subway to hit the clubs in Manhattan.

We didn't get far before we were standing in front of a building with a bar called Pluck the Cherry. I watched as all the cute gay guys strolled in the lobby, and inside was this high-end club where men wore expensive suits and I wanted that to be me. They looked so different from the dudes I'd hang out with. I wanted what they had and that was why I worked at that profession.

"I don't think this place is for us," I said, hunching my shoulders, and furrowing my forehead, and placing my hands across my chest. Cody pried my hands that had taken the form of tight fists from being wrapped around my chest.

"You look like you've never been anywhere or done anything. Relax. I'm going in here without you if I have to, and you can take the train back to Brooklyn. But here is where the big boys are. Don't you want to be drinking with them." I tucked my hands in my pocket. I didn't think I would have enough to get back to Brooklyn if I bought a drink. Maybe a beer, but looking at the building and the men strolling with their satchels, I couldn't afford this.

"That's because I haven't," I admitted. I'd gone from high school to college and the only exciting or adventurous thing I'd done besides going to off Broadway plays with my mother was to stand outside a club called Pluck the Cherry.

We looked at the sign with a cherry sitting in a cocktail glass, and Cody said, "This should be a great start on your road to excitement, and getting your cherry plucked like the sign said. What can go wrong?" Cody asked when I pulled out the few dollars in my pocket to show him after I'd paid my rent.

"How much do you have?" I questioned. I had more than him. At the time my mother had just sent me money for rent, that she probably suffered for. If things didn't go as Cody had planned, I'd have to get a part-time job someplace. Maybe in a grocery store on Flatbush or Ocean Parkway, or working at a burger house. My mother and my father warned me that they

could pay for the first degree, but not law school. And I didn't listen. I tapped my grandparents for the rest they had put aside for their retirement.

I'd been wracked with guilt about taking the money from them, but Granny assured me that they had the first dime they ever made and had land they planned on selling. After that I relaxed and spent that time studying, trying *not* to make them wish I'd never been born.

If I could graduate without too much of a scandal, and for me that would be *not* passing my tests and *not* getting a job and becoming homeless without telling my parents I was homeless. And if they happened to drive by me one day and see me with a squeegee blade cleaning cars there would have been heart attacks I'd caused, and I'd be blamed for that. Now that would come under the umbrella of scandal for my father's family. Not even my father knowing I was gay had put that to the top of the list on his side of the family of lawyers.

My mother's side had wanted me to be a decent human being and that was all they'd asked of me when she died. I had tried to fulfill their wishes the best I could so far.

Working on becoming a lawyer took all my time and energy and because I was dead tired, I let Cody convince me that I needed a life. The night I walked into Daniel's club, I began to live. Because he taught me how to relax, and because of him I passed the bar, and got that job I'd been waiting for, which would change my life and make my family proud of me.

Chapter 11

Cole

When Daniel and I had locked eyes, there was no denying the attraction between us on our first meeting. Cody and I stood at the bar waiting for someone to dance, and then slip into that seat. But no such luck. I watched as Daniel sauntered over to us. “Hey, would you like a drink?” His voice was soft and low like the music he played in his club.

“I don’t drink,” I said, standing at the bar, my legs crossed as Cody tried to get the bartender’s attention.

“Cole doesn’t drink, but I do. He’s studying to be a lawyer. You’ve heard that expression, sober as a judge or something like that.” Daniel raised his hand, his glance never faltered when he glimpsed at my hair and face. He stopped at my chest. I guessed he didn’t want to be too obvious at what he wanted from me. With his heated glare there wasn’t a doubt from him or me what we wanted and needed that night. I was too shy and inexperienced to flirt, but he had none of those hangups and I was happy for it.

The bartender strode quickly over to where we stood and placed a shot glass in front of Cody. “Vodka,” Cody declared.

I didn’t drink then, but now was different. Drinking had caught up with me because of my loneliness and being away from Daniel.

“Then would you like to dance?” Daniel held out his hand. I glanced down then up at his face to see if he was serious, and yes, he was. “That is, if your boyfriend thinks it’s okay.” I glanced at Cody, but he was staring down the bartender as they traded glances. “I warn you, I aim to take you from your boyfriend.”

“It’s not necessary. I decide if I want to dance with someone, and Cody’s not my boyfriend. We’re friends. That’s all.”

Once Daniel heard this he took hold of my hand and headed to his office, and after he'd made love to me and I was breathless from his rough treatment, I managed to get back to the bar with Daniel in tow, to find Cody flirting with several men.

“Good, because I wondered who'd I have to kill to be with you,” Daniel said with a wink, and he reached for my hand to lead me onto the dance floor. “I had planned on just dancing with you, but you got in the way, that's why I brought you to my office. I knew what you needed, and I wanted to be the one giving it to you tonight.” When he placed his arms around my waist, and I stood glaring at him, he added, “Don't you know how to dance?”

“Of course, I do.”

“Then place your hands around my neck. I need to be close to you and smell your scent again. This time it smells different.” And so did he. It was filled with musk that belonged to me, liquor and cum from both of us. At the time I didn't know what he wanted, so I smiled and did what he asked. I thought he wanted a one and done. We danced off and on most of the night, laughed and talked, sitting in the back of his club at his private booth, and when the place closed down, I glanced around looking for Cody, but he'd gone. He didn't say anything, but I guessed he found what he was looking for, just as I had.

“Do you have to be home tonight?” Daniel leaned over and whispered into my ear, sending chills throughout my body, promising more to come.

“No. Why?”

“Would you come home with me? I promise if you don't want to stay the night, I'll send you home in a cab, or my car.”

His car. Now that impressed me, and I couldn't wait to see his apartment. I thought, *Why not have an adventure for once?* Everyone saw me with this man, so if anything went wrong, but I couldn't think like that. *Nothing will go wrong*, I thought as I stepped into his enormous apartment. “Do you live alone?”

“Yes, of course,” he said, dropping his keys, then moving close to me and staring. He pushed away a stray strand of my hair. “You are so pretty. What are you, twenty-five? Not a teenager, but...” He leaned in, took my face in his palms, and kissed my lips. It was a soft kiss with trained lips that had kissed before. Not like my lips waiting to be kissed.

He pulled back and passed his warm tongue over my bottom lip, and my mouth parted for it. When we separated, he kissed my neck as he raked his fingers through my hair and sniffed at my shoulder blade.

“You don’t have on any deodorant.”

“No, I don’t,” I said nervously. “You see, I rushed out of my apartment after a shower. It was on the spur of the minute I decided to go with Cody.” He placed his finger on my lips to stop my endless chatter, and excuses about not wearing something he cared little if nothing about.

When I thought he’d scold me for not putting on some, he said, “Take off your shirt.” I wanted to please him, and he placed his hand on the bottom of my tee and helped me raise my shirt over my head. He stopped and with my arms straight up, confined by my sleeves, and covering my face, he repeated the same action in his office, I discovered I’d enjoyed not seeing, but feeling his hands roam over me. This heightened my arousal and I felt sensual and sexy.

I felt his warm mouth on my nipples, and I moaned with pleasure as my senses took hold of me, and my desire for more of the same. Unable to see, my senses came alive, and all I could do was feel his tongue as it passed over my taut nipple, then he began sucking it hard and pinching my right nipple and my cock roared to life and began weeping with pre-cum.

Next, he licked under my arms, and my body shuddered and trembled. He began sniffing my armpit one after the other as he cupped his cock. I hurried and pulled the shirt over my head, and glanced down at him, at my cock hard with pre-cum threatening, then he unzipped my jeans and, in my rush, to get out of the house, I didn’t bring any condoms, not expecting to use them, of course. He held on to my cock and squeezed it in

his palms as he reached for my balls and squeezed while asking for a safe word. I gave none. I felt nothing but intense arousal that consumed me from my head to my feet.

The pain wasn't there, because I had a high threshold for pain.

“You're more than what I'm looking for. Now that's sexy, because I didn't expect that.” Once more I tried to explain what it was about me and pain, but he placed his finger to his nose and then over my lip. He held out his hand after I stepped out of my jeans. I wore no socks. Daniel took my hand, turned to me, and said, “By the way, I'm Daniel. I thought I'd introduce myself because we will be seeing each other again, I promise you.

He reached into his pocket, and brought out a key.

Chapter 12

Cole

It was more of a playroom, and when I asked him, “Is this a dungeon?” he smiled, easily took off his clothes and let them drop on a bench, then I was next as I toed off my shoes, while Daniel held me to the spot with a sexy dark-green eyes. When he stood naked with hooded eyes, I thought, *Holy shit! He’s better looking with his clothes off.* Muscles and broad chest, and his cock twice the size of mine when limp, but it soon stood to attention at full mast.

He reached for his cock and layered it on top of mine and began jerking our lengths together as he claimed my mouth, capturing my tongue when I slid it into his welcoming mouth.

He pulled back from the heated kiss, and said, “No, with you it will be my playroom.” Looking around I’d been amazed by different sizes of benches, different kinds of whips and paddles.

I strode around, touching and looking, raising a paddle and examining it for exactly what, I didn’t know, but I tried to behave as if I wasn’t that callow youth who’d spent his life in books.

“Pick one.” I turned to Daniel with a wide expression. “I would never use it on anyone but you.” I wanted to be part of Daniel’s life. I was eager to learn how this would change, and how I viewed myself sexually. So far, I’d been comfortable with him naked. Perhaps, because I never had anyone judge how I looked naked.

I needed this handsome man to validate my existence, my sexuality, and immediately I wanted to be in his bed. I’d been greedy for his love, and I didn’t want him to share it with anyone. Therefore, I made myself available whenever he needed me in his playroom, and it became regularly.

That night two years ago, he became mine, and I became his.

Bryan said something to me, and with all these thoughts spinning through my mind, I didn't hear him because the television was playing in the background, then he repeated his words. "I can take your place. We're about the same height, and I'll be wearing leather—"

"No. No. He likes vinyl." I strolled to a bunch of boxes that hadn't been emptied and reached inside and held up the mask. "Can you wear this? You know it's confining, and if you can't, then don't attempt it, because you might fuck it up for me."

"I can do this," Bryan assured me.

"What about this?" I reached for a paddle and raised it up along with a crop."

"This looks intense. I only played with Daniel one time, and neither one of us got into it. I knew he asked me over because he wanted to know if I knew where you went to, and his heart wasn't into playing, and neither was my ass. I wore a pair of chaps under a trench coat in the summer. I know. I know, don't say it. My balls were sweating, I got a rash later, and my dick never got hard, no matter how he paddled my ass. That just wasn't my thing. I thought I would like it, because Daniel was looking to replace you. I admit that I thought if you didn't want him enough, then I could take your place. Well, I learned the hard way I couldn't."

"Of course, you couldn't replace me." I did everything to keep from laughing in Bryan's face. "Daniel must have changed, or he was taking out his frustrations on you."

"It's a fine time to find that out, but that's neither here nor there. I gave him the safe word after my ass was red and raw, and he offered me a drink, and we decided that we couldn't do this anymore. We'd just be friends, and after that, I didn't see him, because I wanted more than just friendship from him." I glared at Bryan. "It would never work anyway because of Sam."

"What about Sam?"

“That dog’s a menace, and that’s probably why Daniel can’t keep a man, I hear. Yeah, maybe that’s it,” Bryan said. “I know I’d been trying too hard, but you were gone, and we were both in need of something—” I didn’t want to hear any more.

“How is this going to work out?” I questioned. I took a minute or two and thought about it. “I don’t think it will, but do it because I thought I was ready to see him, and have him over before things went too far with you two, or he recognized you. I would come in, and reveal myself and I’d confess, but I’m not ready at this time.”

I’d been confused and I didn’t know what to do. I wanted this to work out. I needed to get close to him in my own time, and at my place where I could control the situation. *If I walked up to him at his bar, I’d be at a disadvantage*, I thought.

“Is there anything I need to know about what Daniel expects?” Bryan questioned.

“What? This isn’t what Daniel expects, it’s what I don’t want you to do. No fucking, no matter how long he or you’ve been jerking off. I’ll buy some of his favorite candles, that should get him in the mood of thinking about me. I have all kinds of things in that box. Pick something.” My glance fell on Bryan.

Bryan sat on the floor, and started pulling out outfits. “What about this?”

“I can be a cat.” I shook my head. “Are you serious? Do you think a man like Daniel plays these soft games. What do you think BDSM is about? Not cat play. He’s hard-core,” I bellowed.

“That must have gotten into the box by mistake.” I snatched it from his hand. “I had a roommate who was into that,” I admitted. “Not with me of course.”

“Maybe I should wear this collar?” Bryan asked.

“That might turn Daniel off. Remember this is to see where his head is, and to extract some information. What he’s into, and does he have a new kink, a new lover.” I needed to

know all of that before I invested my heart only to be hurt if he'd found anyone to replace me. He said he never would, but a lot of time had passed, and we both had changed.

“I'm not a person who knows how to get information from someone without seduction.” Bryan dropped the mask and crop on the floor, and glared at me. “And I don't want him sucking my feet.”

“He only sucked mine, and those large feet of yours will turn anyone off. So don't get ahead of yourself, Bryan. No one, and especially not Daniel will want to suck those size twelves.”

“If you're going to be insulting, I may consider not doing this at all.” I had no choice and I needed Bryan, and he was right. Where did I get off insulting him when he was doing me a favor?

“I'm sorry.” I placed my hand on Bryan's shoulder and he relaxed.

“Now, tell me what he likes to do—”

“It's personal and he only did it with me. The only thing you did with him was let him paddle your ass.”

“If I'm going to be locked in a room with your ex-boyfriend, I should at least know what to expect. Suppose he's graduated to some extreme shit, and I'm not prepared. Maybe you leaving him affected him enough where he'd tie me up and put clamps on my nipples, or my balls. My balls haven't recovered since the last time. Two years, and my balls—”

“Enough of your balls, Bryan. Maybe I should wait and then try to approach him myself. After all, you were the one who suggested this idiotic plan, and now you act as if you can't go through with it. It was your outrageous stunt, remember, and you even wrote the letter.” I placed my fist under my chin and stared at Bryan. I was pissed for a lot of things, and that was just one of them. First of all, he went out with Daniel, and second, he must have been naked in front of him.

“It wasn’t a letter, it was a note. There is a difference.” My attention wandered over to Bryan. *Who gives a fuck if it was a note or letter?*

I had to blame someone, and why not Bryan, because he should never have tried to sleep with my boyfriend right after I’d left town, and after I’d declared that Daniel was the love of my life and I wanted him to be my life partner.

In my defense, how was I to know I wasn’t coming back? How was Bryan to know? He could have waited a reasonable length of time before he began fooling around with Daniel. Isn’t it stated somewhere there’s an etiquette for mourning. A person has to wait before they go out and try to date the widow or widower.

It felt as if I was in mourning, that someone had died, and it was me, and that should count toward my situation. My focus turned back to Bryan.

“I’ll be in one of the rooms, and if he asks you about the boxes, tell him you just moved to New York, and you haven’t had a chance to meet anyone, and you saw him at the club and you heard he was into BDSM, and you wanted an introduction, so you left him a note. Explain you’re not the type to play in front of others, and you don’t go to Bondage clubs, and you wanted to get to know him first. If everything goes well, I’ll bring out something to drink before anything takes place.”

Bryan turned to me. “What are you going to be doing? Not trying to listen in, I hope.”

“Why? No. The rooms in this apartment are soundproof. Do you hear any sirens? After all, I was hoping it didn’t get that far. What are you wishing for? Don’t worry, you will not get to first base with me here if you’re looking for a repeat.”

“I was just checking, Cole. I wouldn’t do that to you now that you’re back. But you are at a disadvantage. You’ve been gone a long time. Since I will be close to him, he might recognize me. And I don’t want anything to go down I’m not prepared for. Like, if I decide to dress like a fem boy and he couldn’t handle it and went off on me.” I rolled my eyes and

furrowed my brow. *Oh god, why did I do this, and with Bryan of all people?* I thought.

“Are you trying to tell me that you’re into that? You know those are things you should tell someone before you offer to substitute for them. I don’t want Daniel to get the wrong impression of me when I decide to tell him you and I set this up because I didn’t know how to approach you. For now, try going with a traditional outfit, and follow the script,” I warned.

I glanced at my phone. “Could you hurry and decide what you’re going to wear. I need to approve it before you make a fool of yourself and me.”

“If Daniel has gone to the dark side, then I won’t be able to fool him. It seems he’s expecting someone forceful, and I won’t fit the bill... what do you think if I wear this?”

“I think he’ll turn around and head home after he takes your balls.” I watched Bryan shudder, and I laughed inside. Serve him right to fuck around with another man’s cock.

Chapter 13

Daniel

“Ryan, I thought you and your partner agreed to keep Sam for a week. I have a date tonight.” That I wasn’t going to keep, but he didn’t need to know that.

“I’ve never known you to have a date in the last two years. Something changed? Don’t tell me you’ve finally gotten tired of waiting for Cole, and decided that playing with your cock and balls wasn’t going to satisfy anyone, not even you.”

“I hope you remember who you’re talking to. If not, then let me remind you that you were in my office begging for your job, and I was gracious enough to disregard the money you owed for all the drinks you claimed your partner inadvertently gave away while I was trying to get some rest.”

“I know. I know, and I apologize,” Ryan said, the sound of his voice a bit contrite. Not enough, but I’ll take his apology for now.

“You’re going to have to put off your date... for another time. For now, you’ll have to play with your... I mean... that rambunctious little terrier, because he’s missing.” I raked my fingers through my hair, and paced from one end of the room to the other. Then I faced Ryan.

“What the fuck do you mean?” I narrowed my glance. Ryan stepped back.

As much as I blamed Sam for chasing away the few dates I had, he wasn’t to blame, and I’d come to love Sam. I guessed I needed someone to blame, because I still hurt deep down and he was the nearest thing to Cole, and Cole had hurt me. I’d been trying to replace Cole with someone ever since he disappeared on me, and there’s no one who could replace him.

Cole had turned my body inside out and my mind was a hot mess. He was the only man who I’d connected to sexually and mentally lately. The very thought of Cole had my hands trembling from the excitement of knowing I’d be in my

playroom, and I'd do some of the most exciting things to him. The thought made my cock ache, and it frustrated me, annoyed me, and thrilled me at the same time, because it seemed unnatural for any individual to have that much control over me for all these years, and I didn't know why.

I suspended my thought after I realized what Ryan had said, and once more I was taking my frustrations out on him, and since Sam wasn't here, Ryan became the fall guy. He and that useless partner of his, Jay. I found myself saying things that I didn't mean.

Ryan, can't you do anything right? I thought, but I didn't want to make the situation worse between us, so I didn't say what I'd thought since I'd hired him. Right now I needed Ryan. "I gave you a little dog to take care—"

"He's not any little dog. He's mischievous, and I swear he knew what me and Jay were saying about him. We had no privacy..." *Welcome to my world*, "...and we were trying to get in our lovemaking, because I work all hours since you made me a manager."

"Don't act as if you didn't want that position. That's all you asked for was to be a manager, and when I said what I'd pay to get home and have a life, and I needed time off, you agreed, so don't pretend now that it's too much. Now, tell me what happened to Sam?"

"The job wasn't too much, it was Sam. Sam was causing so much trouble when we closed the door on him to our bedroom, and we went to bed, but couldn't sleep. He was scratching and whining, and I couldn't get an orgasm, so I got up to walk him, hoping that would wear him out. Well, when I put on the collar, he resisted and jerked away from me, so I brought him outside without a leash. When I turned my back, he darted across the street, and I couldn't find him or see him anywhere. I came in and called you. Doesn't he have a micro-chip or something?"

"It's in his collar," I barked, "and we know where that is. He wouldn't let the vet install the chip, even though the vet said it was tiny. He bit him before he could do it, and the vet

kicked Sam out of the kennel. I had to beg another vet to take care of him, and pay him higher fees. Now you tell me he's gone."

"What do you want from me? You couldn't handle him, and you expect me to."

"I expect you to find him. I don't know your area. Put out posters, put his video on Tik Tok. Facebook, I don't know, and I don't care. Just find him, even if you have to go door to door. Offer a reward anything, and if you don't find him within a week, you will have to pay for everything along with whatever else you owe me. I have to find Sam. He's all I have." I couldn't believe I let those words slip from my mouth. There was complete silence coming from Ryan. Maybe he was as shocked as I was at that revelation, and totally hysterical.

"Hire someone to find him. It's either that, or you and your partner will be looking for another job. It's as simple as that." There was another silence and then I heard the phone cut off.

I sat and looked out over the city. Sam wasn't used to roaming around the city without me. Where was he going? Was he looking for Cole? He hadn't been the same since Cole vanished on both of us. Cole deserted the two individuals who loved him the most, and I couldn't forgive him for that.

I placed my head in my palms, and whispered, "Wherever you are, Cole and Sam, come back to me." I didn't believe saying those words would make a difference, but I thought if you put something out in the universe, then maybe it would come back to you in a positive way.

"What's wrong?" I glanced up.

"Nothing. Nothing at all," I said to Sidney. "Can you do me a favor?"

"Sure, what is it?"

"I need you to take my place tonight. I'm not feeling up to going out on a date. But there's something you should know first. It's a date with a cute guy who thinks I'm a BDSM master—"

"Well, are you?" Sidney raised an eyebrow.

“Some say I am, but I haven’t had anyone in over two years.”

“That’s just around the time Cole left if I’m correct.” He aimed his raised eyebrow at me.

“Yes. Now I saw this guy at the club last night, and he sent me a note and invited me over to his place, and Sam is missing and I don’t think I can function. I just want you to show up and for all intents and purposes just get to know the guy. Nothing heavy or serious. Like you’re doing an interview to see if you’re... I mean, if I’m compatible with him. If you need something to wear, then wear some of my things.”

“Why didn’t you invite him here? You have a dungeon—”

“It’s a playroom,” I insisted, “...and it was meant for me and Cole. No one else is supposed to see it. Since Cole and I have been together, I’ve had no one in there but him. I kept it just like it was the day he left me.”

“The Magnificent Ambersons,” Sidney whispered. I hardly heard him.

“What?” I questioned. “Say it.” I was impatient and worried. Now I felt empty, because the last thing Cole left with me was his dog. I felt if he ever came back, he’d look for it, and I couldn’t tell him I didn’t take care of Sam. But if Sam was so precious to him, why would he leave him with me? Maybe because he wanted to come back some day, and that would be his entry. *Who leaves their precious little puppy and is gone for years and then returns?* It wasn’t the same as leaving his clothes and shoes, which he did. And stupid me kept them.

At that moment I’d convinced myself that Cole wanted us, and the next I’d completely demolished that thought.

I heard Sidney talking and I paid attention. It wasn’t at all what I thought about.

“I was watching a movie when I couldn’t sleep, and the name of it was *The Magnificent Ambersons*. It’s about...” I rolled my eyes, because I didn’t have time for Sidney to go into a long explanation about old movies that I was sure I

wouldn't be interested in. If he recommended or if he watched it for whatever value, I wouldn't go near it.

Chapter 14

Cole

I hoped Bryan wouldn't cock this up, but he was known to do a lot of things. I had no one to count on to handle this important task, therefore he had to be my go-to guy. He came when I called him, and I did appreciate the gesture, even if I wasn't the most pleasant dude to be around, but my attitude had to do with my impatient behavior, because I needed Daniel. "What are you wearing?" I glanced up to see Bryan in a pair of tight black jeans, and a black tee with a logo of a Star Wars character, or maybe it was Lord of the Rings.

Because the tee-shirt had been washed a number of times, I couldn't make out the logo.

"Where did you find that ratty thing?"

"What? It's mine of course. I carry it in my backpack along with a change of underwear—" I wasn't interested, I just wanted an answer to my first question. I placed my hand up to stop him from going on about why. He saw the look in my eyes and the shake of my head, and he cut that short, or he'd go on about his sac for eternity.

"I didn't feel comfortable wearing those clothes. After all, I don't think we should jump into anything right now. You said you wanted information and I'll get it for you. You have to talk to get that kind of information, not lying across a bench naked with a mask over my head, and a harness waiting which makes me nervous. Since I'm the one whose ass is on the line, then I think I should do it my way. As long as you get what you want, it doesn't matter how I extract the info from Daniel."

"If it means you sucking his cock in my living room that would definitely be a hard no."

"I told you that we weren't compatible. Had I thought we were, I would have still been with Daniel when you came back to town looking to start up where you left off. It doesn't work that way, Cole—"

“I know how things work, Bryan, and I don’t need lectures from you.” I calmed a moment. “Look, do as you see fit. If you’re just cocking around with Daniel and you discover that you want to make a play for him, that’s where I come in and tell him it was all your idea.”

“Can you move some of those boxes into the next room?” Bryan asked. I glanced at the clock, and it was almost time. “Do you have the wine chilled?” Another question. I narrowed my eyes at Bryan.

“I told you about the liquor,” I admonished Bryan.

“It’s just wine and not liquor, and besides, I need to loosen him up. I bet he hasn’t had a date since you went away, and I tried to seduce him to make him forget you. You knew what you were doing when you left that puppy with him. He’d never have a date as long as he kept Sam. I told Daniel to give him away—”

“And did he?” I said in a panicked voice. “I loved that puppy.”

“And you left him as a baby with a man who didn’t really like dogs.”

“Don’t remind me. I thought he’d get used to taking care of a puppy, and when we eventually married we could adopt children of our own.”

“It was that serious?” Bryan questioned, then slanting his head and lowering his top teeth over his bottom lip.

“It was that serious, and I thought I’d be back from California in a day, but they had plans for me and didn’t tell me. It was either that, or throw away a career I’d dreamed of all my life.” My mind roamed the room along with my eyes. The sadness took hold of me, and I stared into space, because what I’d done was cruel and I didn’t know how to clean up the damage I’d caused all of us once I’d given in to the inevitable of not going back to Daniel and Sam.”

“Well, hopefully tonight, you can get your answers, and I can get back home with my balls intact.”

“What is it with you and your balls?”

“Some men are made for bondage, I just happen to be not one of them,” Bryan quipped. “I’m fragile and I don’t like, nor can I tolerate pain. You men into this kind of stuff love pain. You live for it. You can’t feel alive unless you have a little pain, or in Daniel’s case a lot of pain, and inflict it on someone you love. I guess he’s in a lot of pain by now. And the sad part he may enjoy it.”

“That’s mental pain. That is different,” I advised.

“Pain is pain,” Bryan countered.

I raised my hand. “Wait. I’m getting a call.”

“Did you put your number on the note?”

“No, but I had to text him your address. I got his number from his secretary, and she gladly offered it after I told her about the date. You know he’d text me when he received my text and ask me questions. My name, and because of you I had to lie to him. Some men don’t like lies.”

“You won’t be responsible for lying to him, I will. You’re just someone standing in for me, and don’t forget that. Now what the fuck is it with your hair? It’s curly now, what did you do?”

“I ran downstairs to the drugstore and bought this cream. That’s what’s giving me these curls.” Bryan turned around in the room as if he was modeling.

“And the earring?”

“I always had that and happened to find it in my jeans. One night—”

“We don’t have time, Bryan, for your stories about your love life. Daniel should be ringing the bell in a few.” I glanced over at my phone, and it was nearing the time for him to arrive. Then a text came in.

“I’m outside your town house. And I’m the one wearing a trench coat in the middle of summer.” I laughed. It seemed he’d developed a sense of humor. Not the serious dude I’d first met in his club. Although he’d wondered if he could make it

through tough times after closing his bar. But it looks like he did. He survived. Now it was my turn to survive this.

The bell rang. “Get the door, Bryan.”

“Why don’t you?” Bryan looked nervous and confused.

“Because it’s supposed to be your home, remember. I’m not even expected to be here.”

“Oh yeah. I’m nervous.” He flexed his fingers and cracked his neck.

“What are you nervous about? Just keep on this mask and there’s no chance he’ll recognize you.” I tossed the mask to Bryan. “That hair and earring should give you cover if you think there is a chance, he’ll remember you.”

“You know I have delicate skin. If I get a rash, you’ll have to pay my doctor’s bill.”

“Okay. Now get your delicate ass to the door. I’m going in the library. Sit there near the French doors, and talk so I can hear you.” Bryan had me nervous and afraid this was going to end badly, especially if the conversation went to his balls.

I heard the door open, and Bryan escorted Daniel into the living area. “You have a nice place here.”

“That’s not Daniel,” I mumbled. “What the fuck is going on?” *Does Bryan realize that the man in my house isn’t Daniel,* I wondered.

They talked about nothing, and then I heard them kissing and moans? This wasn’t supposed to be a meet and greet for two horny strangers. This was a fact-finding mission, at least that was what Bryan wanted me to believe, and clearly Bryan had strayed off course.

“Would you like a drink?” I heard Bryan ask. “Do you mind if I take off my mask? Because this isn’t working for me.”

“Me either,” the dude said, and I heard the masks being peeled off and a chuckle.

“Wow, you’re not...” Bryan must have recognized that it wasn’t Daniel, and instead of calling the dude out, he didn’t say a word except, “You’re hot. Not like I thought.”

“You too,” the dude said. “What do you say we forget about playrooms or any of that bondage shit, and get to know each other.” When I peeked, they didn’t see me, because they were too wrapped up in each other. Bryan stood and licked his lips as he stared down the imposter. Bryan sauntered in his tight jeans to get wine out of the wine fridge. He held it up for the dude’s approval, then strolled over with a wide grin. I’d grin too, because it was one of my best wines I’d purchased when I’d got the nerves to have Daniel over.

After he’d popped the cork, he brought two glasses and sat them down on the table with a closed smile, and what I’d call a twinkle in his eyes. He poured two full glasses of my expensive Bordeaux. A Chateaux Mouton I’d been saving for when me and Daniel celebrated our anniversary. He had the good sense not to pick the more expensive one, but I doubted he knew the difference.

I became bored listening to their conversation and nodded off. When I woke, it was early in the morning, and Bryan should have been at his job, but the door opened and Bryan was saying goodbye to the dude. When Bryan closed the door quietly, I was standing behind him. As he turned and saw me standing behind him with my hands on my hips, he jumped.

“You scared me.” And he breathed out. “Damn, dude, you scared me shitless. I didn’t expect you to be here in the dark.”

“Why would you be afraid? Didn’t you expect me to be in my own house? Get in here and tell me what that was about.” Bryan swiveled around on his heels with an unsteady stride. I hoped he hadn’t drunk another bottle of my wine. But then it was Bryan who never paid more than ten dollars for a bottle of Chianti.

Chapter 15

Cole

“It is my house, or have you forgotten? You should expect me to be inside, Bryan. It’s not as if I showed up when that dude was stumbling out at this time of the morning.” I turned and headed for the living area, and I knew Bryan would be behind me, but instead he was heading for the bedroom I’d let him crash in for one night.

“Where the fuck are you going?” I barked.

“It’s late, and if I’m going to get to work, I’d better get some sleep.”

“You know you didn’t have to keep him here the entire night. It’s four o’clock for fuck’s sake. I think you owe me an explanation before you crash. Now get in there and explain.” Bryan turned and headed for the living area, and reached for the empty wine bottle and glared in my direction.

“I’m going to pay you back for the wine.”

“You damn-well better, because that wine cost over four hundred dollars—”

“You’ve got to be shitting me,” Bryan bellowed, and held his chest as if he had a pain and he could take a heart attack at any moment. “I don’t think I can go to work today. I have to call in sick. No one will miss me anyway down in that basement.”

“That’s on you, and you’d better not lose that job until you pay me for that wine.” I didn’t want to be repaid, but I did want some information.

“Tell me what’s going on with you and that guy?”

“You knew he wasn’t Daniel?” Yes of course. From the minute he opened his mouth. Daniel from what I remembered, his voice was low and soft. Easy.

“The minute he strolled into this room, I knew it wasn’t Daniel. Daniel has the most interesting sexy powerful

seductive walk. He doesn't know he's doing it, he just does it naturally. He glides with his head held high and his hips swaying, and with me he always smiled—”

“That is until you up and left him and Sam. Oh, and my guy told me about Sam. He said Sam was being Sam. Out of control, and it must be because you left him when he was a puppy. You were his pack leader, and you disappeared. Sam should have therapy.” What the fuck does he know about therapy. I needed therapy, and my head examined for going along with Bryan.

“I'm tired of being blamed for Sam and Daniel. I know I have a lot to make up for, but I'm trying, but nothing is working out. Why did Daniel send him?”

“Because Daniel doesn't know what to do anymore. It's been so long that he's out of practice and the dating scene. He thinks things have changed. He's not meeting anyone the traditional way, and now it's all about being on apps and when it matches you with someone, they're never what you imagined, and they have absolutely nothing in common.” Bryan turned and glanced my way. It appeared he'd been suffering from something similar. “Can I ask a favor of you?”

I thought since Bryan tried to fulfill his promise I'd reciprocate. “Yeah, what is it you want?”

“Can I spend another night here and have my friend over?” He stared at me, and I rubbed my hand over my chin and let out a hard breath.

“Yeah. I guess so, but you have to remember this is my home. Just one night and you have to go back to your apartment.”

“My friend said that I could room with him as soon as he sold some property.”

“I've heard that before. What is your friend's name who Daniel sent in place of him? That was a dirty trick on Daniel's part.” Well, I had my nerve, because I'd put in a ringer as well.

“Sidney. And he’s ever bit as cute as his name. I like him a lot,” Bryan admitted.

“Sidney James? He’s Daniel’s brother.”

“I didn’t know Daniel had a brother,” Bryan said, twisting his mouth to the right side and passing his thumb over his bottom lip.

“Yeah, and I wouldn’t hold my breath waiting to move out of that cold-water flat you’re living in. I thought in two years you’d have moved by now.”

“Not everyone is as fortunate as you are, Cole.”

“If I remember your parents left you enough to get a nice apartment after you sold their home, they left you. You couldn’t wait to cash out. But your siblings stopped you.”

“There were a series of bad investment and a trip to Las Vegas after they died. I was distraught, so I tried to gamble my way out of depression.”

“Therefore, you decided to throw away their life’s savings when they thought enough of you to leave you something where you won’t be homeless at forty.”

“I’ve kicked myself over and over for this, and it’s not going to get any better. I think it’s time I moved on.”

“Well, while you’re moving on, you have one more night and that’s it.”

Chapter 16

Daniel

The doorman called and informed me Sidney was coming up. I'd been awakened from a sound sleep after I'd waited for Sidney to come back at a reasonable hour. Why would he take this long unless he'd falling in love again? I could see that happening. All sorts of thoughts tumbled in my mind, some ridiculous and some not so. Maybe that guy was the one who could make me forget Cole, and I sent Sidney who was known to plant his flag on someone else's property.

After considering what Sidney had done, I realized that this man wasn't right for me, but maybe the least I could have gotten would have been an orgasm, but then you could get that from anyone, and I wasn't into the one-and-done kind of thing. At my age, I wanted someone to hold on to. Someone I could love and who loved me.

I wasn't the type to hop into bed, or in my case hop on a harness with the first man who showed me a little attention. No, I wanted one man and that had cost me relationships in the past, and it looked like I'd have my palm to comfort me for the foreseeable future unless I did something. And that was not sending Sidney on a fact-discovery mission anymore. I knew now I would have to take control of my own destiny.

When I stirred before rising from the bed, I glanced at the analogue-alarm clock on the table near my bed, it was 5 a.m. I sat up after getting a few hours' sleep waiting for Sidney and hearing from Ryan.

Ryan and Jay hadn't found Sam, and I had to get up early and try to look for him. After reaching for my robe, I met Sidney at the door as he was tiptoeing in the foyer and then hardwood flooring.

"Tell me all about it. Was the guy cute?" I sounded desperate, while Sidney looked nonchalant and too relaxed, a bit cool for my taste. I wondered what he'd been up to for ten hours.

“That he was, cute I mean, in a sexy kind of way. Well, what else?” Sidney began walking away, and I strolled behind him waiting for him to tell me if it was worth pursuing the guy.

“How was he dressed? What did he look like in his harness?” These were important to me. It indicated that he liked the same things I did. I knew I should have gone on my own discovery, but Sam running away had me upset, and I wouldn’t have been good company if that was all the dude was looking for. I wouldn’t have been at my best.

“He had wide shoulders, and muscles, and the hardest ass —”

“What else?” I questioned.

Then Sidney turned to me, “I don’t think he’s your type.” Oh fuck me. He came to that conclusion so soon. I’d been interested in what he thought was my type. What did Sidney know that I didn’t. The very reason I agreed to meet with him was because he was my type, at least from what I was able to see of him.

“He’s not into bondage. He’s more of the vanilla type. He likes to walk on the beach, go away for the weekend, and spend his time in a cabin with a lake—” Well, Cole liked the same things, but we compromised. If I could convince Cole to experiment with me and he discovered that he loved it, then I had a chance with this dude. After all he did ask me out to his home.

I glared as Sidney raised an eyebrow, and I said, “And you two talked about cabins and lakes. Since when were you ever excited about a lake and a cabin? Father drove us to his log cabin to fish in upstate New York, and you complained the entire trip. You don’t like animals—”

“Well, yeah. There was something staring at me in the middle of the night, and the cabin was drafty.”

“It was a fucking Barn Owl that’s all, but you screamed and ran around the room, woke me up, and dad drove us back home the next day. Now you tell me that you’re willing to live

in the woods with this guy.” He must be cuter than Sidney let on.

“I didn’t say I would live in the woods, but I’m willing to try.”

“Bullshit. You wouldn’t know what to do if you couldn’t go down to the deli and buy a sandwich, or hail a cab to go from one corner to the next, so don’t give me this crap about falling for a man like that. Does he know your track record for not keeping a job?”

“I’ll have enough money soon. You’ll get your half don’t worry.” Sidney rose and headed for the kitchen fridge with me behind him. He opened it and snagged a bottle of water. Twisted the cap, swallowed then turned to face me. “I’m hungry.” I sat at the kitchen bar watching him saunter around as if he was on top of the world. I guessed if I’d found a new man willing to accept my bullshit, and Sidney was full of it, I’d be happy too.

“There’s no way I’m cooking for you. You can go down and buy something at the deli, or cook for yourself,” I said, laying down the law because Sidney always pretended to be helpless, because he was my baby brother, and he took full advantage of that with our father.

“Where’d your housekeeper and cook go?”

“After she survived Covid, Sam ran her away,” I said, glancing over at the pillows he’d lain on when I cooked breakfast for him and me. Then he’d eaten his food and stood near my bar chair and whined. I’d have my conversation about him eating too much which never went over well with him.

Sidney sauntered around and sat next to me. “I need something to tide me over until I get the offer on the apartment and the cabin.” He turned and waited.

“Does your new love know you’re selling the cabin too. Do you still have your broker’s license?”

“I just met the guy, and he doesn’t need to know my financial situation. Yes, I have my license, and don’t worry, we’re going to make money on those two properties.”

“You mean, you will—”

“If I don’t owe it all to you...” He looked at me, “If you can give me a soft loan to tide me over, then I’ll be okay, and you don’t have to see me if you don’t want to.” He knew I didn’t get out much, since I had to spend my nights working in my club, and he was all the family I had left. “I would like to take my boyfriend out to dinner.” *Is that all? Money for dinner. I think I could manage to lend him something.* However, I had to prepare for more things like presents, and if he liked the guy too much it would be something expensive, and I shuddered to think what it might be.

“What are you planning on doing with your half of the money from that sale?”

“I plan on opening a club myself. If you can make a living at selling liquor, I can too, and I’d add a restaurant. I forgot about the bondage club because that’s not his scene.”

The famous last words of a man who had opened several businesses and crashed and burned. The restaurant business was one of the hardest to make profitable. Maybe he hadn’t read a paper or picked up a book lately.

“You know if you fail, there won’t be any more money, and I know your track record, and you won’t get anything from me. I’m going to spend my money looking for Cole and Sam. I know now I have to do this myself, because I can’t depend on anyone.”

“I’m your brother. You can depend on me.”

I’d heard that a thousand times from Sidney, and he kept coming back for more loans when his real-estate business took a turn for the worse. I was just trying to stay afloat and keep my people employed, while he had his hand out looking for money to keep him afloat. I figured out how to do that, and now my bar was in the black, and I was bringing in more than I thought was possible.

The only thing that’s suffering now is my love life and having a satisfying orgasm, I thought, thinking about what to do next.

“I’m going to bed. It was an exhausting night,” Sidney casually threw that out, and sauntered away with me behind him. He’d better be glad he was my brother, because I would have tossed him out on his ass if he wasn’t. He’d had me up all night, and now he was deserting me.

On my way to question Sidney further, the buzzer rang, and I answered it. “Someone dropped off a puppy and said it was for you,” the doorman explained. My heart soared until I realized that Sam wasn’t a puppy. I waited until I heard the elevator and then the doorbell. At first I didn’t want to answer the door. I didn’t want to look out the peephole. I’d never been a dog lover, but Sam wasn’t like he was now. He changed when Cole left him and didn’t return to us.

Now I was wondering how Sam was doing. Did someone take him and give him a good home. All the things I never cared about before, but in the time Cole was gone good or bad, Sam was there, and I thought because we’d lost the most important person in our lives, we bonded in a weird sort of way.

I sucked up my breath and opened the door. It wasn’t Sam and my heart dropped. “He’s not my dog.” I attempted to close the door.

The doorman persisted. “Someone dropped him off, Mr. Daniel, and said he was a present for you. I hadn’t arrived and the night doorman told me to deliver him to you, and he had to leave for his vacation. This precious puppy was in this and had all the things a puppy would need for now. He said the puppy had been trained and slept through the night.”

Why me? I wondered. I had to work nights and I had no one to care for him, because Sam ran away everyone who needed a job. And then I thought about taking advantage of the fact that Sidney would be with me for a while until he sold those properties. He was perfect. He needed money and I need someone to take care of the sleeping puppy. The doorman handed him over to me, and he slept as I laid him in Sam’s bed. Sam never used it anyway.

I placed him in another room, the one Sam would never sleep in, and I left and knocked on Sidney's door.

“Sidney. I have a proposal you might like.” He opened the door with a smile. I was sure he wouldn't be smiling later.

Chapter 17

Cole

The next morning, I couldn't sleep, so I brewed some coffee. When Bryan smelled it, he wandered in scratching his balls. "None of that in my kitchen," I warned. He glared at me and dropped his hand as if his balls were on fire.

"What?" he exclaimed, glaring at me. "I said Daniel was the cause of my balls—"

"And I don't want to hear about your balls this early in the morning either. I have no interest in listening to you cry about your nut sac. I didn't ask you to keep Daniel company while I was gone. You did that at your own risk. You did that without consulting me. No one is responsible for that but you. And you should have known how to protect them, but instead you wanted the love of my life, and thought nothing of our friendship—"

"What friendship? You didn't tell me how important Daniel meant to you. If you had taken the slightest interest in being my friend when I asked you to talk to your boss about giving me a promotion, where I could get out of that damn basement at that law firm, then I *wouldn't* have made a play for him. Everyone knows you can't meet an eligible bachelor if you're confined where there's little interaction of any kind with men. I thought I could find me a rich boyfriend, and my worries would have been over."

"So all you wanted was to get yourself out of the mess you'd found yourself in by spending all your inheritance in some sleazy hotel with a male escort in Las Vegas. For your information, if it hadn't been for me, you would have lost that low-level job by now. And that's what you do, blame me for everything, and then go off and try to fuck my boyfriend."

"I'm sorry you feel that way, and as a courtesy to you, there's something Sidney told me, and I want you to know."

“Well, tell me. What is it?” Bryan acted as if he was going to disclose a treasure hidden somewhere. He paused while I glowered at him.

“I don’t want you to be angry. You know, they shoot the messenger.”

“Just fucking well tell me, Bryan.”

“It’s Sam.”

“What about Sam?” My voice gave me away. My feelings had been hidden and the guilt had lingered for so long that finally it showed itself. My heart pulsated and tears welled up in my eyes. Sam had been a beautiful little puppy I’d deserted, along with Daniel, and the guilt of what I had done finally caught up with me since I came back home to familiar surroundings.

“Sam is missing.” My heart fell, I tightened my jaw and shook my head, and I thought I’d lose my breath. I loved that puppy more than I’d ever loved any person until I met Daniel, and I hadn’t counted on leaving, but I knew he would be well taken care of, or that’s what I’d thought.

“What happened to him?” My voice broke, and my chest moved up and down trying to get my emotions in check.

“Daniel left the dog with his manager and his partner, so he could meet you tonight and get some rest, because Sam had been out of control since you’ve been gone. Daniel tried his best Sidney said. He just made the wrong decision in letting Ryan and Jay take care of him. They took him out for a walk, and Sam dashed across the street and headed uptown... isn’t that where you used to live?”

“Yes. It was a few years ago I first adopted Sam from a veterinarian. No one wanted him because he was the runt of the litter, and all his mother’s puppies were sold except him. He’d been passed down from one owner after the next in a short time and then I walked in, and we fell in love with each other. It was like that when I met Daniel. Everything was fine when we were all together. Sam was happy and Daniel was

joyful, and I thought I had the world until I didn't. I didn't know what to do when I left him."

"Why are you telling this to me? Don't you think it's time to tell Daniel?"

"Yes, you're right. But first I have to find Sam. If I don't, I think my relationship is doomed with Daniel. It's like when it was just Sam and Daniel. Something was off, but when I was around everything was great. Get dressed. You and I are going to go find Sam."

"I thought I'd have a day to rest. You know I'm having Sidney over tonight."

"No. I didn't know and have you forgotten this is my home and not your love nest? You're going to have to show him where you live, and if he knows you and what he has to deal with and is willing to accept you the way you are, broke, and without a stable income, then he truly loves you, and you two can go from there. Let me give you some advice. Those quick euphoric stages of love won't last."

"Your love lasted two years with separation, and I suspect it could go on much longer, but you have to work on it. That's what I plan to do." I glanced at Bryan. Was he finally making sense and the right choices?

"Don't follow in my footsteps. I did something stupid, and I'm paying a price for it now. We all are. Me, Daniel, and more so Sam."

Chapter 18

Daniel

I looked all day for Sam, talked to people in my apartment building, hoping they saw that little Jack Russell terrier someplace. Trouble was they were seeing him everywhere. I had been on so many false leads that I'd almost given up. I combed the blocks and streets on foot, and then I had my driver take me through several neighborhoods, only to discover I wasn't tired, and I should be doing more. I decided to stop at my club and see what Ryan had attempted to further this along.

I left Sidney to babysit for a puppy I hadn't named yet. He'd agreed to take the puppy with him to see his new boyfriend. He thought it was a good impression to show his new love how compassionate and genuine he was.

"Drop me off at the club and pick me up in an hour." It looked like the bar was packed when I entered. Tonight there was a different crowd, and guys were dancing to different music. I'd forgotten it was all-dude's night, but it was welcome to everyone. Ryan had come up with that theme when I'd been moping around and was on his ass about just about everything. Not enough sleep would do that to you.

The first person I saw was Jay socializing with my bartender. When Jay saw me, he kept talking and my bartender moved away to service the waiters. They had a brief relationship if I recalled correctly, but lately I had other things on my mind besides Jay and Ryan's relationship. For all I knew they were into threesomes. I didn't judge anyone because of what I was into and had once enjoyed.

And just about now, I was ready to tie and spank anyone who looked at me twice. There was no way I could hold out any longer and with Sam gone, I would have no problem getting someone over to my place. Although there lay the problem. Sam and Cole had been like a specter, and they haunted me to the point where I didn't want anyone.

“Where’s Ryan?” I asked Jay after I caught up with him.

“He’s in the storeroom taking inventory.”

“He left you to watch everything?”

“You have codes on the liquor and beer, no one can have a drink without you knowing and what’s up with these cameras?”

“Only you know they’re there, and you can blame yourself for them. I wouldn’t have needed any if you’d paid your bill.” I left Jay standing around and smiling at every man who passed his way. He was a draw because he had an easy manner, and the men loved to talk to him. I couldn’t understand it, but he appeared to have a little knowledge about things and sports, and for some reason they’d go to him to ask about the local sports players in Manhattan. He did claim to have known the important ones, whether in baseball, hockey or football. He claimed “These are the hands that hugged... This is the fist that gave... And this is the mouth that sucked... cock.”

He was a celebrity in his own mind.

I strolled to my office, only to find Ryan sleeping on my couch. When the door closed, he sat up. “What’s up with you, Ryan?”

“I’m catching up on my sleep. What do you think?” He didn’t want an answer to that question.

“Since you lost my dog, we both haven’t slept—”

“Not with you threatening me every minute. I’m a nervous wreck,” Ryan said, looking up. “I bought you another one.”

“Supposed you loved something, and someone lost it and gave you a replacement, what would you do...?”

Ryan bit his bottom lip and thought about what I’d said. “You didn’t act as if you loved Sam.”

“It doesn’t matter what I said. No one can gauge what’s in a man’s heart. Only that man. I can’t fathom why you’re in love with Jay, but I’m not offering you a substitute for him. That’s how I feel, and if you think that puppy will make up for

you and your boyfriend being inept when it comes to small things, then you can forget it. I shiver to think what you will do with a baby.”

“There will be no children or babies. Didn’t you tell me that you didn’t want children either?”

“Yes, and I meant it, but Sam taught me a lesson.”

“And what is that?”

“I don’t have time to explain. I left the puppy with someone, and he’s charging by the hour.” *Dogs like children are costly*, I thought. From what Sidney borrowed from me, in the end it could be a costly situation to have him around.

Chapter 19

Daniel

My phone had been ringing, people were sending me pictures posted on their home cameras of every type of dog imaginable. Couldn't they see that my terrier didn't resemble any of those dogs? Sam looked nothing like a poodle. For god's sake, did they think in my pain, I would accept any dog? I did with the little one Ryan had forced on me. I'd been inundated with people from Brooklyn to Manhattan and the Bronx, telling me that they've found Sam. Even Long Island and New Jersey got in on the act. How the fuck could he have traveled that far? In this traffic, you could get run over for hailing a cab, much less crossing the Verrazzano Bridge.

Some of the people showing up at my door with a dog wanted a fee for just bringing their animal to me, or someone's dog they'd found wandering the street.

I regretted ever having offered a reward, yet I had to find Sam. I knew by now something had happened to him, and I'd become aware that I'd never be able to forgive myself, and that was why I continued to rush to the door when the bell rang, hoping beyond hope that I'd see him. I didn't know how long I would be able to continue this.

Previously I'd told the doormen to send anyone up claiming to have knowledge and physical contact of a Jack Russell terrier. I should have explained or left a picture at the desk, but I didn't, and because of that I had every kind of dog from a boxer to a poodle handed to me. I'd give it one more week, and then I'd correct my mishandling of the situation with Sam.

On my way to the door to be disappointed once again, I grabbed my robe and opened the door without looking. The door swung back, and I took a few steps into my foyer, because it was the man's scent that filled my lungs and got my cock's attention. I didn't see what was in his arms, I saw his face, and his smell was intoxicating. It took me back to when I

first met Cole, and his youthful musk where I'd enjoyed running my nose up and down his smooth skin, and licking under his arms as the seduction of his scent captured me, and my possessive nature wanted to own every part of him.

No, this can't be, I thought. In that moment of questioning, my eyes were able to focus and get a better look at his face, his blue eyes. It was indeed Cole, and in that moment of joy my heart skipped a beat, and a rush of greedy desire clouded my senses, and I wanted this man to the point I couldn't feel my legs or my feet.

"Come in and bring the dog with you," I said breathlessly, because I needed to sit. All I could see was a handsome young man, who smelled and looked like the Cole I had obsessed over to the point I couldn't eat and sleep for months, and months had merged into years.

Lightheadedness overcame me, and I began strolling backwards because I didn't dare take my eyes off of him for fear he'd disappear. I moved in the direction of the living area, not stopping to sit at the kitchen bar. I turned once I knew he wasn't going to leave, and managed to find a sofa, and plopped down on it.

I heard myself say, "Sit please." My voice was low and unsure. The silent beautiful young man offered me a small smirk. When my head cleared, and I had control of my body, I glared at the man sitting across from me, holding a peaceful dog in his arms.

I would have given my life just to get Sam the way he was now, quiet and obedient. Maybe my life would have been different had I gone on to meet and marry someone who I could love. But I would never love them the way I loved Cole, and therefore, I'd never be happy as I was now just being near him.

Silence filled the room, filled the empty space between us, and hid the sound of anything besides my heart beating loudly.

Cole had been giving and accepting of my dark desires from the first time I brought him into my office, when I asked

him to tell me what he wanted, and what he thought would go on between us.

I could inflict pain on him and ask for the same, and we would be in harmony in every part of our lovemaking. No there was no one like Cole for me, and that was why I couldn't move on with anyone else, and Sam couldn't move on either. We were both locked in this life that included Cole and when he moved on, we were left floundering in the dark and searching, but never finding that feeling of togetherness Sam and I had with Cole.

The silence in the room had become too much, and it boiled over, and I blurted out, "Where have you been all these years, Cole? Tell me, was it another man you left me for? I'm a mature man, I can take it." In reality, I couldn't handle him leaving without a word and even the sound of my words caused me to bite back tears pooling in my eyes.

I needed the truth, but I couldn't take it if he'd left me for someone else. I wanted the truth, and I also wanted a lie. I hoped he said he was in an accident and had just woken from a coma in another state, and another city. That was the lie I wanted, because it would have made things simple.

But life isn't simple, is it?

"I don't know what to tell you," he said. Then he placed the scraggly unkempt dog on the floor and when he trotted over and laid at my feet and looked up at me, I knew this was Sam, my Sam with the big brown defiant eyes, but now they weren't defiant, but somewhat sad and warm. I knew Sam was as confused as I was, and perhaps tired.

Tired of looking for Cole to come home, and wondering if he ever would.

Placing my hand on Sam's head and rubbing his matted fur from days of being lost, or running from people and eating from garbage bins, Sam closed his eyes at my feet and fell asleep. He was home now, and he knew it. I glanced over at the well-dressed man who looked remarkably like my Cole, but somehow along the way he'd changed.

He'd become confident and not at all submissive as I'd pictured him those long two years of not being in my care, or my life.

"Sam's home, and so am I." Did Cole mean he'd come home to me? Or was he talking about being in New York? I placed my closed palms into a fist, and I planted my elbows on my knee and my fist under my chin, then bit my finger, narrowed my eyes, and furrowed my brow to study him, hoping he meant that he'd come home to me and Sam.

Cole hadn't been with me a second before I wanted him. I needed to know he was mine again, but I was conflicted not with my emotions, but with Cole's. Why was he here, and why did he bring Sam back to me? Had he changed so much that he was placating me because he'd heard somewhere maybe in my club, I had been lost without him, and this was his way of pitying me? If so, I didn't think I could accept him coming home to me.

Maybe Sam, but not him, but then I thought Sam wouldn't stay with me without Cole.

Cole knew my body, he knew my eyes as we locked gazes. My desires, my cock ripping my pajama bottoms and the threat of pre-cum showing Cole that he was still wanted and desired by me. No amount of cool demeanor would cover up my tell-tale body. That alone would make me vulnerable to a different Cole.

My eyes followed him when he stood, and strolled over to me planting his beautiful lean hard body next to me with the matching lust that filled me to the brim, and his intoxicating scent of musk and flowers.

Cole's dilated pupils told the whole story, and I felt a sense of relief. He hadn't lied when he said he'd come home, and he did mean back to us.

Chapter 20

Daniel

••••

Cole reached under his shirt and pulled out a chain I'd given him. "See, I belong to you. I will always belong to you, my love." I stared, remembering the youthful man who'd walked into my bar, and had been afraid of me, but he wanted the type of sex life I'd introduced him to and that was coarse rough sex filled with bondage of all kinds. Ropes, cuffs, paddles, and all manner of restraints to heighten our senses and to create a sexual experience that we wouldn't soon forget.

It must have worked on my part, and I couldn't speak for Cole, but he was finally here with me, and I hoped he was looking for the same experience, because I couldn't make it another day without him. I had all these questions bursting in my head and I had to let them out.

"Then why, baby? Why were you gone so long?" I shook my head in confusion, especially since he didn't tell me where he'd gone to, or why he had come back to me after two years I'd been tormented by him leaving.

Cole turned and pulled me to him and leaned in staring at me. His mouth quivering, my mouth waiting, opened, and reliable. The mouth I'd vowed never to open for him again suddenly parted. His warm tongue slid through my traitorous lips, down my throat and we kissed hard biting each other. This kiss brought on my remorseless erection. That erection insisted we could talk later, because I needed him now, and all would be forgiven.

It would have been that easy, but I had been lonely and hurt for so long I couldn't just march into my playroom and pretend everything was all right. I needed to know, so I pulled back.

"Are you going to tell me what happened and where you were in those two years?" I stood and moved to get two glasses from the cabinet and a bottle of wine. I needed to relax

my throbbing length and get some distance from his intoxicating scent if only for a second. I had to clear my head, because I knew I wasn't thinking straight.

I opened the wine I'd bought to ask him to marry me, but that time had passed, and all I wanted was for him to tell me why. *Tell me something.*

While a weary, exhausted Sam slept at my feet to the right, Cole drank a glass of wine and then the next, and then he glanced over at me and placed his palm on my inner thigh sending a tremor of obsessive need throughout my body, washing away all my doubts and years of want for this beautiful perfect man.

Perfect in every sense I could want, except one.

I'd lost control of my young lover, and in his place was this self-assured man whom I'd allowed to make me his slave. I'd become his submissive boy now, and I'd give in to anything he'd ask just to have him with me, and in my bed once more.

Cole leaned and kissed me again, and my body pulsed spiraling out of control, because he'd placed his palm on my cock, and I closed my eyes and found myself eagerly fucking his hand. Desperation couldn't explain just how needy I'd become.

When Cole pulled back, he glared at me and told me everything that had happened to him, and why he hadn't called me to explain. He'd been confined to his apartment doing several backbreaking jobs, sitting in a chair all day because of Covid. I had the choice to believe him or not, and aside from him not calling, he'd never lied to me before. He told me how he'd left Sam as a present to keep me company until he returned. He said he had no intentions of leaving me for so long. It would have been a nice gesture if he'd only called or sent a text, because Sam and I missed him something terrible where we couldn't function.

I didn't want to rehash those years and I tried to let it go.

Cole stood and held out his hand the way I had when he strolled into my bar uncertain if he should be there picking up a stranger. I had to decide then what to do. Well, there wasn't really a decision. Cole was all I'd ever wanted, and I knew everyone deserved a second chance, and he swore to me that he'd never taken a lover in all that time. Since I didn't want to lie, I didn't say anything, because there were maybe one or two, but they didn't mean much to me. I couldn't even remember their faces or names anymore. I didn't think about them or recalled how they looked because Cole's face had masked them all.

It wasn't those strangers under the masks. It wasn't them in those harnesses, in the playroom bed, it wasn't them I was paddling and then fucking—it was Cole. Only him.

I followed Cole into my playroom where there was a bed, and benches. “What do you say we try vanilla sex for once,” he suggested. “I've never had that kind of sexual relationship with you, and I think it would be something different. In the years since we've been apart, I've felt in a different way. It had always been the ropes and paddles, benches, and wearing hoods. If you don't enjoy it, then we can always return to the crops and ropes, and I might have a few things you may have missed.” And he offered me a sexy smile, and slapped the crop against his thigh, and glared at me.

There was mischief in those sexy flickering blue eyes, and I wanted to know what plans he had, and how he would execute them.

“There is one thing,” I said, glancing up at Cole. His eyes wearing a dark passionate stare. “Promise me you'll be my Master some time in our relationship. I don't think that's for me anymore. I'm ready for you to take control, baby.” I was ready to turn over control to him because being away from him had taken a toll on me. I smiled.

Cole glared as if studying to see what had changed, and he appeared stunned at my words, because he slanted his head with curiosity. He didn't know what to say. I'd always been his Master and he appeared to be happy with that relationship. We

even tried switching when I wanted to experiment, but it didn't work out, but that was in the past and this was now.

We started out with me overpowering him. Perhaps it had been because he was younger and was having his first involvement with BDSM. It was how we hooked up and fell in love because we suited each other. Time had passed and perhaps we both wanted and needed something different.

I knew when I first met him, all I wanted was him. It wasn't my desire to dominate him it just happened that way. *I wanted him to be mine*, I thought. No matter what happened I knew he'd come back to me one day, and I'd accept him as long as I could have him.

When Cole disrobed, my heart melted, and my heartache disappeared. Our eyes locked, and Cole said, "Are ready for me to take over?" I took a deep breath not knowing what to expect, maybe sooner than I thought. "I want you in the bed, on your back," he barked in a gruff sexy voice, eyeing me with a quick naughty glance.

Before he could reach the bed, I'd stepped out of my pajama bottoms, dropped my robe in one fell swoop, leaving him standing watching me with a hard unyielding cock. My length only matched his in thickness.

It had been that relationship of me fucking him after all the play time with ropes tying him up where he couldn't move, and I'd have my way with his body. That was what I enjoyed, but I needed to know now how much he'd changed toward me. If he desired me on all fours, then that was what I wanted as well. From the gleam in his eyes it appeared he wanted to fuck me, and deep down I wanted that too.

Now I yearned for his lean cock inside my body, moving around and filling me, breaking my tight hole.

Cole glanced over at me as I lay on the bed. He bit his lip, and said, "I'm not sure I'm up to the task to satisfy you the way you have done with me." He stroked his cock, and I spotted a sheen of pre-come at his cock's head. He was ready and I was tight. That would make for an interesting exchange.

It was as if Cole could read my mind.

“Everything has changed, my love,” he whispered, when his leg dipped on the

mattress and when he crossed my chest, I wondered if our relationship would last, because now it was up to him to use his cock to bring me to orgasm. “Maybe I was too eager to take over this position and hadn’t thought it through,” Cole admitted when he leaned over me, and his slick cock warmed my stomach.

Cole’s eyes locked with mine, and he knew this would be a turning point in our lives. I reached for his ass cheeks, and looked up at him, dragging him to my chest. He appeared nervous and I didn’t know why. My hungry eyes covered him from his head down to his hard pulsating cock.

I reached for his length, and he closed his eyes and moaned as he straddled my chest. I worked his cock with a tight fist and strong hands. I had to take him back to our experiences of me seducing him when we first met, if only to bring him back to the point when he left me that day and never returned. The sex had been overwhelming and magnificent. We spent the entire day in bed with him in my arms after I’d ravished his wonderful body all night.

Placing two fingers on his lips, Cole opened wide for them as if it was my tongue, and he sucked them until they were wet with his spit. With one hand I felt his lean hard cheeks and opened one side and with the other hand, I found his tight ring and pressed against it and pushed inside.

“Oh, baby, I’d forgotten what you could do to me,” Cole murmured breathlessly.

“Tell me what you want now.” He didn’t answer, but leaned back and rode my fingers as I reached for his nipple with my free hand and pinched it hard as he groaned with pleasure and threw back his head, closed his eyes and his mouth opened as if he couldn’t catch his breath.

I captured his nipple in my mouth, and with my free hand I tightened it around his erection as much as he could stand, and

he could take the excruciating pain more than I could. *I've never known anyone who could tolerate pain the way Cole can, and because of that we are a match made in heaven, I thought.*

The question that haunted me was, could I take as good as I gave?

Chapter 21

Daniel

I had no idea what I was doing. I could have gotten away with manipulating Cole when he first came to me, but now it seemed I was trying to avoid what he wanted and I needed, therefore, I froze. He wanted to be inside me, and I thought that was what I needed, but the thought that I never had a cock inside my ring of muscle, had me screaming inside, *Stop. No. I can't do this.*

Those words resonated in my mind, but I wouldn't allow them to escape from my mouth.

I didn't want to start this relationship doing what we had done before, and I was heading down that path, so I pulled back.

Removing my fingers out Cole's body, he chased the loss, and his eyes opened. I pulled him to me and opened my mouth to his surprise. I sucked his cock and he drove it into my open mouth, riding it and the wave of bliss and joy that overtook both of us. Cole leaned forward, raking his fingers through my curly hair as he smelled my neck and chest. "I never told you how much I enjoyed the smell of your vanilla body wash," he admitted.

I chuckled, because here I was a man who wanted nothing but to live a life of restraints and paddles and a stern harness, not thinking about there being another pleasure waiting for me. The pleasure of Cole's voice telling me what he'd enjoyed about me. The pleasure of him controlling me.

Cole's hard ass and tight hole had been exposed and handed to me on a platter many nights, where I could fuck it at my leisure. He was my submissive then, and I'd commanded him to do whatever I wanted, and my desires were varied, and he met all of them. But now I would be the one lying exposed on this bed, and my openings would be his for the taking.

Cole enjoyed fucking my mouth, because with each thrust, I tasted his precum. As his cock drove deeper down my throat,

I knew he was closer to having an orgasm. I pulled back and fisted his pounding eager softening cock. “Come on, baby, give it to me,” I said with a breathless moan of desire, pushing his hard length back into my mouth as he flicked his hips and nudged deep with me almost gagging.

Finally, Cole said, “Here, take it. This is what you wanted, but I want more. I want you to scream my name, Daniel. The way I always called out yours.” Cole rolled off of me, and I swallowed his cum. He glared at me, his eyes ripping into me, then a mischievous smile rolled up on both sides of his mouth. He said, “I want to take you now, baby. I want to own you the way you owned me.” Was this a revenge fuck? Not at all vanilla, but did he come back just to torture me and then leave?

“On your stomach, on all fours.” I heard the tear of a wrapper, the sound of a small moan of pleasure as he placed one finger to cross the length of my ring of muscle. With one finger feeling it’s way around, I felt a hard palm over one of my ass cheeks, and I tightened my hole from disbelief.

The heat from the slap, the cold air from exposure for a brief second was replaced with a grunt, and dull pain when he drove inside my opening. I grabbed a pillow, and I suppressed the need to scream because of the invasion of a foreign hard long object. That object was Cole’s cock invading, shoving forward, with hardly anything to stop it but my inner walls, and places that had never been touched by a cock.

Cole grabbed me around my chest and brought my torso up to lie against his fine smooth muscular body, then his hand reached around and squeezed my cock, and began working it with his palm tightening and bringing it back to life. He brought it to its fullness by tightening his fist and stroking it up and down. His hips shot forward as he thrust his long length in and out of my virgin ass. I held my breath, bit my lip, took his hard relentless cock which felt as if it was harder and longer than anything I’d experienced in my hole, and it was.

I didn’t want Cole to know that at my age, I was a thirty-something-year-old virgin, so I bit back a scream.

My only specialty was to tie up a willing subject, make him my submissive where I could satisfy my need for whatever it took to get me off. And then I met Cole and fell in love, and that was why I was being invaded by a man I loved. And I was experiencing another level of sex I never thought possible.

Cole's relentless cock was causing me to experience parts of my body containing sensitive nerves that heightened my sexual desires. He had firsthand knowledge of this pleasure zone, and he knew this was one more thing I had to experience with him to gain the connection I needed to put us on the same level as far as our lovemaking was concerned.

Because his cock was shorter and leaner than mine, we became a good match, because I couldn't have handled his intrusion into my hole if he was as large as I was.

I ground my ass against his chest as he continued milking my cock with his strong hands. When I fell forward once more on all fours, Cole released my cock into my hands, and I took over where he'd left me wanting. He palmed my ass cheeks tightly, and with one hard pull his length was outside before I could protest. I felt his fingers dig into my behind and then there was a hard push, and my hole was breached once more, my prostate hit, and I cried out, "Cole, baby, fuck me harder." And that was just what Cole did as I shot warm cum forward, and he pulled out, pushed in and worked my insides before my ring released him.

He snatched off the condom, and shot his warm cum over my ring of muscle and he laid his full warm cock on my ass, and I felt the heated fluid drip down to my sac. Cole leaned forward, getting on all fours, and licked my quivering hole.

When Cole was done to his satisfaction, I lay on my back, reached for him, and brought him into my arms, then we kissed softly and quietly. We had the smell of our bodies between us, and I loved the taste of him and his smell of fresh musk. "Let's sleep in our bed and close up the playroom for a change," I suggested.

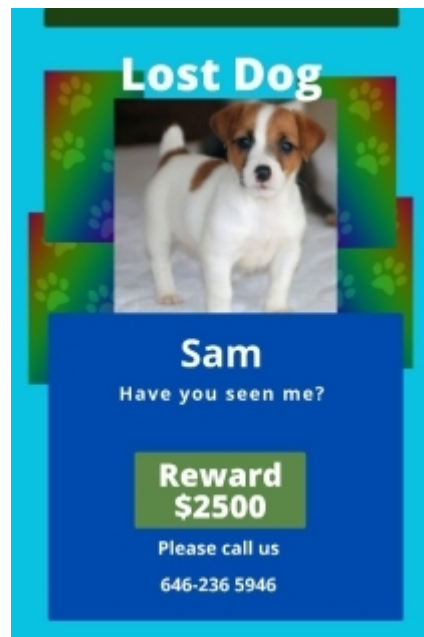
I opened the door, and it was unusually quiet, but then Sam was asleep, and I'd forgotten about the puppy who liked to sleep under my bed in Sam's deserted bed. As Cole and I made our way to our bedroom hand in hand, when we strolled into the master bedroom, Sam and the puppy were sleeping in the bed the puppy had claimed for now.

"I need to give Sam a bath," Cole said.

"Not tonight. If the little guy can stand him, who are we to interfere. Sam has what he wants, and I have what I want, and that's you, Cole. Should we take a shower," I asked Cole.

"And lose this scent and feeling, I don't think so. Besides, I'm tired."

We were in bed and Cole had been sleeping soundly in my arms when I remembered I had something to confess. But it wouldn't be tonight. And it would be only if it was necessary, like on the need-to-know basis.



“**R**yan, for fuck’s sake. This doesn’t look anything like Sam. For one, this is a picture of a beautiful, serene little puppy. Isn’t he cute?” I wanted to reach out and hug him. I remembered Sam when he was just a baby, and I almost cried.

“You never gave me a picture of Sam as he is now. I did the best I could, Daniel.”

“Where did you find that picture?”

“It was the Christmas card you sent out with you, Sam, and Cole. You know the one where you tell everyone how happy you are and everything you did as a family that year.”

I stared at Sam’s picture remembering him as a baby.
“Those were wonderful times—”

“And then he grew up,” Ryan said. A narrowed glance, a furrowed brow parading across his face.

[Dark Promises Book 1](#) [Dark Seduction](#)
[Book 2](#) [Dark Passion Book 3](#) on Pre-order

If you enjoyed [Dark Promises](#) you may
want to read Cabana Boys. Below is an
excerpt from chapters 1 and 2.

Chapter 1

Justin

Why did men think because you were younger than they were by a decade, you didn't understand things? Hello. Ten years of my life, and what I'd gone through would match anything Clay had accumulated in knowledge.

I bet he didn't live like me with a father who'd rather disown his son than tell anyone that he was my father. I bet Clay didn't have to listen to a father like mine blame his family or anyone else, because I was and always would be gay.

I bet Clay never lived on the streets in a tent, trying to avoid all the vices of street life filled with drinking and drugs, and the temptation of selling my body, but I made the hard choice of trying to find a job to get out of South Dakota, away from my father's reach with all the negative and malicious soul-sucking words aimed at me, and how he bombarded me night and day about how he'd thrown away his retirement, so I could become a starving suffering artist.

He'd even stand in the doorway of my room and rant about that, and how my mother was complicit in that scheme to bankrupt him.

Well, I was no longer starving and suffering for my art. I was happy and content with this man, because now I couldn't imagine a life without him, and I didn't want to leave him, but if he didn't reveal who Michael was, then I might have to go it alone. *I can't live with someone who has secrets that could damage our relationship*, I thought, looking at him lying peacefully while I was anxious about my future with him.

Did it occur to Clay that I'd just graduated from college? Maybe not from one of those fancy colleges or business schools he'd gone to. I knew I was being too critical and cynical for a man my age, however, I was allowed a few faults, I thought when my feet hit the floor and I headed in the direction of the door to find out who was ringing the bell.

I just wished he'd told me about Michael and not presented me with a ridiculous riddle. I strolled the length of this large room, and it appeared I was seeing it for the first time. Perhaps I was, because this was the only time I'd focused on it since I'd known Clay. And here I was, in a place I'd never dreamed of, and with a man who had to have been out of my reach as my father would say whenever we were out and a handsome man like Clay would pass and notice me.

My father would mumble, "In your dreams, Justin, and even then you'd be dreaming too high," and he'd thump me on the head to get my attention.

He no doubt got my attention, because even now I still thought I was dreaming.

The first time I was here, I thought as I slowed my walk to the door, I was too confused and believed what my father had said, therefore, I hurried out of this penthouse and hid like a dog that had been shaved too close by a groomer.

When I strode halfway across the room, past the luxurious white sofa, dining room and chairs, I peered outside and the sun was rising beyond the horizon, but it appeared as if I could touch it, and I thought about getting out and going for a stroll in the park, or just sitting on Clay's yacht. Suddenly I came to a full stop at a white piano with pictures lined along the top. This had been one of my dreams where I'd have a piano and there would be pictures, and I'd look at them and think about what a great life I'd had.

However, these weren't my pictures, and this wasn't my life displayed in this array of photographs. The few I had were hidden away on my phone.

Slanting my head, I murmured, "Why haven't I seen these pictures before? By the way they're hugging and kissing every picture is of the two of them, and they look so happy together."

I placed my finger on the glass of the frame over the man with his hand wrapped around Clay's shoulder. "This must be Michael," I whispered, as if I was in a room filled with strangers. I picked up the expensive frame to examine it

closely, and I came to the conclusion it was indeed Michael staring at me.

He was a handsome middle-aged man in this picture with salt and pepper hair, full lips, and a square jaw line, and much taller than Clay. His arms were thick, his chest wide and muscular, and molded with muscles. He wore a dark blue polo shirt and cargo shorts. He was all smiles, and it was infectious, but a curious one at that.

At his age, forties or thereabouts, he was still a looker as Rose might say. On the next picture, his smile was charming and engaging and loving, as well as his body language toward Clay. An odd smile at best, it captured him in a sexual desirable way, therefore, I had to know more about this man. A man if he were alive, I wouldn't have a chance with Clay.

There was Clayton leaning his head on Michael's wide shoulder, and Clay appeared to be my age then, and Michael was looking into the camera, and I thought he could be gazing at me, as if he knew some day someone my age would be holding this picture, and wondering who the fuck he was.

He had been someone exceedingly important in Clay's life, and I wanted to hear how important this man had been to him. I couldn't help but become uneasy because I was jealous of him, and yet I admired him because he'd captured Clay's attention and love.

I shook my head, and said, "No." I reached for another picture, and I saw the same look as before with that mysterious smile, as if to let me know that Clay would never love anyone as much as he loved him.

The feeling soon left when I reached for another picture of Clay and Michael, but this time Michael was an older man, perhaps in his late fifties, and his smile had changed, and perhaps there was some sadness in those grey eyes, and Clay appeared to be in his late twenties or early thirties. On the other side of Michael stood a young man, perhaps my age maybe a few years older or younger nineteen or twenty-one now. Tall and handsome, blue eyes. I thought, *Who is this?*

My mind did its usual confusing mental search, and I remembered what Rose had said, “*My husband traded me in for a younger woman.*”

Did Clay trade Michael in for a younger man, or was it the opposite? If it was Clay, then why was Michael standing between them? Was it a threesome?

“What are you doing, Justin? I smelled food and I find you here looking at pictures. I’m hungry,” Clay said, and he snuggled up behind me and nipped at my ear.

“Do you know how many steps it is to get to the foyer?” I pulled away and placed the pictures down. Not in the same order. Clay stood behind me and lined the pictures as they were before I’d touched them.

Clay then turned to me, “Yes. It’s my house and I’ve walked it a number of times. Now, let’s get to the table and eat before we have to watch my friend, Harlen, audition guys for the show.”

“I thought we could go to the park today and just walk around and take in the sea air.”

Clay sat and began eating, and with a mouth full he swallowed, and said, “That would be wonderful if I had the time today, but I promised Harlen that I’d show myself and approve the changes to the program.”

“You’re not thinking about firing Commando are you?”

“Of course not.” I relaxed with a sigh of relief. “I’m a businessman, I’d have to pay him too much for him to get out of that contract he’d signed earlier. I wanted you to be with me at the audition, because your friend Carlos will be there today, and if he doesn’t pass the audition, I didn’t want you to be angry with me. You can see for yourself if he doesn’t have the talent, or I had any influence over—”

“But I was hoping you would. That’s why I asked you to get him an audition,” Justin bawled.

“I promised you to get him in the lineup. I gave Harlen full control, because once I was forced to beg him to come to Miami, Harlen Rausch wouldn’t let me tell him who to put

into the show. He's the professional when it comes to getting a show ready for Broadway. My friend is a perfectionist—"

"Like you, I suppose." Clay raised an eyebrow and offered me a stern glare.

"I guess you could say that. He's the expert, baby, when it comes to selecting someone for my show. I can't tell Harlen to hire Carlos if he's not ready. Had he seen you, he would have hired you even with that salacious dance you did for everyone, and over my objections, but I knew you were meant for something different if not better, and I was correct."

Clay leaned close and took my hand, and offered me a warm seductive kiss on the lips. I could taste the coffee, and smelled his shower wash, and the grilled steak he hadn't cut yet.

"Isn't that the point?" I added, pulling away from his enticing hard body and handsome face. "If you're a stripper, aren't you supposed to seduce and use your body to create an erotic feeling for the audience?"

"There is a difference in putting on a production you can't find in the back of any sleazy club. You have to have the right balance, and Harlen knows that balance."

Something clicked and I remember reading about Harlen Rausch. "That guy is Harlen Rausch *the* Broadway producer and director in New York. He's the heir to the Rausch fortune?"

"Where did you learn all of this?"

"I'm not a baby. I'm twenty-one remember, and I do read."

"In my eyes you're my baby, and I will see that you remain so for a long time," Clay said, and offered a teasing wink.

"How long did the boy in that picture last?" I watched as Clay's eyes dipped, and he bit his lip and changed the subject.

"I was Michael's boy until five years ago when he died."

"What? I wasn't talking about you, Clay. I was talking about the young man standing on the other side of Michael."

“He’s not a boyfriend. That’s all I can say for now.” Clay cut into his New York cut steak and bit down on the piece, and instead of meeting my eyes he kept his head down.

“Then who is he?” I persisted, and he swallowed.

“I promised we’d discuss Michael first, and through that discussion you would know who the young man is... very soon.”

“I want to know what Wasabi I mean Wabi-Sabi had to do with Michael?”

“I thought you knew the difference in the words?” Well, Clay had me at that point, and I had to admit I didn’t know dick.

“I didn’t want to feel like a fool in your eyes when I said I knew the differences in the words.”

“You will never be a fool. The very fact that you’re sitting here with me says a lot about you. I haven’t been in a man’s company I cared about for five years. Not like this.”

“Not even to fuck?”

“I don’t fuck, I make love?” Clay said, and his voice was soft, and his eyes were hungry when he locked eyes with me. “Let’s take a shower and then let me show you that I only make love.”

“Before or after our discussions of Michael and Wabi-Sabi?”

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About the Author

Sky McCoy writes HEA M/M Romance and erotica books of men who enjoy being gay, hot, sexy and in love. Love is the theme of Sky's M/M books where you find drama, hot men, hot sex where the sex never cools, even if the drama does.

When Sky isn't writing, you can check the interstate, because you may discover Sky driving west after living in New York for years. You can reach Sky here skymccoy0@gmail.com anytime you want to chat.

Sky's favorite authors are, Elle Frank, J. R. Ward, Nora Phoenix, Gianna Holmes, Riley Hart, and Josh Lanyon. Sky is constantly adding more authors to the list of favorites.