

TOM
THE PLAYERS
BOOK ONE



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Tom: The Players
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CHAPTER 1



In need of a wife

NOTHING COULD RUIN THIS DAY. TOM SAUNTERED INTO THE building of Monroe Media on First Street and gave a woman in the entrance hall a dashing smile. She returned it, of course. Why wouldn't she?

Tom took the elevator up and only then took off his sunglasses that hid his bloodshot eyes from last night's drinking and partying. If he was a better man, he wouldn't go out on weekdays, but he wasn't and there was no reason for him to ever change. At thirty-six years of age, he had everything he needed; he looked his best with all the time he spent at the gym or at his tailor's shop, he had a fantastic job as Art Director in his uncle's firm, and he was as single as can be.

He checked out some of the secretaries working on his floor before he was faced with the grim reality that his own assistant paled in comparison to them. Where most of the other women used everything at their disposal to make the

best out of themselves, be it plastic surgery or simply a better way to dress, he was forced to look at the textbook example of a plain Jane.

“Good Morning, Mr. Carter,” she greeted him and caught his recklessly thrown coat before it could knock over her cup of tea on her desk.

“Morning,” he said in a dismissive tone, once again asking himself what he had done to deserve someone as unsightly as his PA. “What’s on the menu today?”

Miss Young grabbed her notepad from her desk and followed him into his lavish corner office with a spectacular view across the city. Tom sat down in his leather chair behind his desk and waited for her to finally start her little briefing.

The omega cleared her throat and tugged on the lapel of her bolero jacket that covered parts of her slender neck. Every once in a while, Tom found himself staring at it curiously right before she did something stupidly unsexy like opening her mouth to remind him of a meeting with his cousin.

“You have a meeting with Mr. Monroe, Jr at one. Mr. Kent requested a meeting with you in two hours to discuss next month’s issue of *Metropolitana* and your uncle wants to speak with you immediately after you enter the building today. He didn’t sound happy.”

“And why would I care? He’s never happy. He runs a multimillion-dollar media company and my cousin is not equipped to take the reins any time soon. The old man will probably die at his desk because Chuck is too busy juggling numbers.”

And he wasn’t interested in that position just yet either. Although, the title of VP had a nice ring to it. Tom stood up from his chair with a sigh and buttoned his suit jacket again as he strode past his PA and left without another word. If his

uncle wanted to see him, who was he to let the old man wait?



A FEW MINUTES LATER, Tom exited the elevator on the management floor of the company. He greeted the front desk ladies with one of his usual charming smiles and sauntered through to his uncle's office. His secretary Neve stopped him from entering.

"Stop, he's busy."

"He wanted to see me, so I am here."

"Yes, he wanted to see you as soon as you showed up to work today. He didn't think you would be this late." She glanced at her computer screen. "11 a.m. is late, even for you."

Neve was probably the only secretary in this entire building who was immune to his charm and she knew it. The tall and thin beta and he simply had too much in common, first and foremost their sexual preferences. Tom leaned onto her desk and gave her a smirk. "I'm very sorry, I had a long night."

"So did I and yet, my tushy was right where it needed to be this morning."

"Perks of being the boss, I guess."

Neve returned his smirk and leaned in to make sure he still understood when she whispered, "But you aren't the boss, Mr. Carter. Your uncle is."

"When will you finally work for me, huh? We could get so much shit done in no time at all."

She let out an ugly laugh. And even that suited her. "Working for you would be a demotion, not a promotion. I'm the secretary of a CEO after all." She stood up and strode over to his uncle's office door. "And I know for a fact that

your secretary is doing a fantastic job, helping you to keep yours despite your frat boy behavior.”

“Now you’re being unfair towards me,” he chuckled.

“Am I though? Do you even remember the name of last night’s conquest?”

Tom pursed his lips. No, but it had been something sweet. Honey, Candy, Brandy? Something along those lines at least.

Neve shook her head, knocked on the door twice before opening it a little. “Mr. Monroe, your nephew is here.”

“Thank you, Ms. Fielding. Send him in please.”

She turned towards Tom and motioned for him to step in. As he passed her, he whispered under his breath, “Busy, huh?”

“Too busy for you to burst in. It’s called decorum,” she replied and closed the door behind him.

Why couldn’t his secretary be like her? Maybe he should change his monthly request letter at HR for a new secretary to “New secretary; Neve Fielding”. Perhaps that way he would finally get rid of Plain Jane Young down in his anteroom.

As he strode into his uncle’s office, he was pleased to see his annoying younger cousin wasn’t present. Something about Chuck simply rubbed him the wrong way sometimes. Maybe it was Chuck’s constant urge to outdo him in front of his father.

“Hello, Thomas, please take a seat,” Charles Monroe said and Tom immediately knew this wasn’t going to be a fun conversation when he used the long version of his name.

He sat down across from the older alpha and crossed his arms over his chest, steeling himself for whatever he had been summoned here for.

“You arrived late to work today,” Charles began and gave his nephew a frown.

“I was busy.”

“You should be busy with work. You are the Art Director and that comes with a certain level of responsibility.”

Here we go again, Tom thought and rolled his eyes.

Charles slammed his fist down onto his desk and made Tom jump. Okay, usually his uncle was calm and collected. Something must have been eating him up.

“I will not allow you to disrespect me like this. Any other employer would have kicked you out years ago.”

“I do my job well. Our stock has only been climbing since I became head of the art depa—”

“Don’t interrupt me, Thomas.” Charles stood up and moved over to the grand windows behind his desk. “William Henderson is going to resign soon, which means the position of Vice President will become available.”

This conversation had just taken a very strange turn, Tom thought and perked his ears. He leaned forward and waited for the magical words where his uncle would ask him to take on more responsibilities and turn Monroe Media into a truly family run company.

“You know, I have always wanted Monroe Media to remain in the family after I retired. Your cousin is fantastic on the financial side of things and you are good with the creative part.”

There, he said it himself. Tom leaned back with a hardly disguised self-satisfied smile on his face. “But I simply cannot justify your behavior any longer.”

Tom’s smile faltered. *What?*

“Any other company would have replaced you years ago.”

“Like I said, my work can’t be so bad that I would lose my job over it. Our company value has only increased since I came on board ten years ago.”

Charles turned his head to look at him over his shoulder. “Yes, and I can assure you, no other company would have kept you this long. Being in a position of authority means

you have to act as a role model. I can't show up here at noon and expect everyone else to be here at eight in the morning. That's not how it works, Thomas."

Why couldn't he just say what he wanted to say and let Tom get back to work. Obviously, that's all he wanted. Chide him for being late to work and have him work harder so he can justify his decision to make him VP eventually.

"Your father would be ashamed of you."

Leave it to an old man to put down the younger ones. Tom rose from his chair and closed the middle button of his suit jacket once again. "Great talk, I'll go back to work now."

"No, you will not. I am not done yet."

Tom buried his hands in his pants' pockets to hide his white-knuckled fists. "Then say what you want to say but leave the dead out of it."

"I can't. I don't think you realize what you are doing to yourself and the company. Do you have any idea how many times I had to pay news outlets to not run a story about you this year alone? Your reckless behavior is threatening the company's reputation. Something your father and I worked our asses off for. He knew where his priorities had to lie."

Tom glared at his uncle, clenching his jaw so hard his teeth hurt. He had a lot of things to say about his father's priorities, but he was already on thin ice. The last thing he needed right now was to pull out the metaphorical hatchet and ruin any chances he had at getting out of Charles' office with merely a black eye.

"I can see you have a lot to say about this."

"I do, but like you said, I should set a good example. None of the things I would like to say right now would be very appropriate."

Charles turned around to face his nephew completely. "When your father was your age, he already had a wife and a

son. He had grown up. He knew what he was getting up for every morning. You do not. You live your life like a teenager without supervision and too much money. This will stop now.”

“And how do you intend to do that? Do you want to ground me? That didn’t work when I was still a teenager.”

Charles’ lips became a thin line. “No, you always climbed out the window. I remember. I also remember you broke your ankle once doing so but as soon as you could, you did it again. You don’t learn from your mistakes.”

And once again, Tom was holding onto his good manners. He wouldn’t have had to jump out of the window as a teen if his uncle hadn’t grounded him for shit his cousin had done.

“I think you are getting too old to behave like this.”

“Like a rich bachelor in Russlow? I don’t think so. I’m in my prime.”

Charles shook his head and let out a heavy sigh. He pinched the bridge of his nose. Tom noticed, he wasn’t wearing his glasses. Probably because he was having a bad headache again. The old man needed to slow down or he would have a heart attack or a stroke before he had a chance to enjoy his retirement.

“Let me say it this way then because nothing else seems to make it through your thick head. Either you start getting serious in your life, find someone to settle down with and finally grow up, or I will look for another Art Director and Vice President soon. I’ll give you a month to show me you are able to change.”

This had to be a joke. “What?”

“You heard me right, Thomas. Grow up, start a family of your own, or leave.”

An ugly laugh bubbled up in Tom’s chest. He would not let his uncle dictate how he lived his life. “Times have

changed, Charles. You can't simply throw me out because I enjoy my single life."

The older alpha sat down behind his desk and let out another exasperated sigh. "No, but I can fire you for your actions which are damaging the company's reputation. It's in your contract. You wrecked your car this weekend because you were going too fast and you were probably drunk too. I could keep it out of the media because you didn't hurt anyone else. You are a threat to yourself with your recklessness and disregard for other people. Change, or I will have to cut you off."

Tom ground his teeth. He hadn't been drunk and he hadn't been high either. He had wrecked his car because he had to swerve in order not to hit another car that cut him off. But who cared? He was the bad one in the family so it naturally had to be his fault.

"Are we done?"

"That depends on you, Tom. I am not your enemy. You are forcing me to take this step."

Tom turned around and mumbled under his breath as he strode over to the office door, "Sure, keep telling yourself that, old man."

Neve glanced up at him as he passed her desk, nostrils flaring and his skin oozing an angry scent that would cling to his suit until he would pick it up from the dry cleaners. She must have known what his uncle wanted to tell him. Otherwise she would ask him now.

"Next time, warn me before you let me walk into an open knife," he growled as he passed her desk.

"There won't be a next time, Mr. Carter. One way or another."

Tom punched the call button for the elevator and pumped his fists by his sides. She wasn't wrong. Either his uncle would come to his senses or...

No, Charles Taylor Monroe didn't make idle threats. That's not how he managed to become head of a multimillion dollar media company. Tom's jaws hurt from all the jaw-clenching. He needed to find a wife. That's what his uncle wanted.

The elevator door opened with a subtle "pling" and he stormed in.



A MONTH. How was he supposed to find someone to settle down with? His uncle had set him up to fail. But he wouldn't. Tom's anger left him breathing heavy. He wouldn't fail and lose his job that he worked so hard for over the last ten years. Maybe he wasn't a perfect example of a boss, but he always delivered his best at the end of the day.

A low growl vibrated in his chest as he left the elevator on his floor and marched all the way back into his corner office. He ignored the stupid look on his secretary's face and threw the door shut behind him with a loud bang.

Tom shrugged off his suit jacket and paced the floor. He needed to find someone. Someone who he would be able to stay with for longer than a week. Hell, his longest relationship... had been Laura. His steps slowed for a moment and he tried to ignore the knot in the center of his chest. He hadn't thought about her in years. Thanks, Charles, thanks for really bringing me down in thirty minutes or less.

A timid knock on the door announced his secretary. She probably wanted to add more insult to injury with her unnecessary presence.

"Come in!" he barked and heard the door open, but not close. Definitely Plain Jane Young as she never closed the door behind herself. She was probably scared he would pounce on her one day. But even he had his standards.

“Mr. Carter, your schedule—”

“Yes? What about it?” he interrupted her, still not willing to avert his eyes from the city scape that usually helped him during one of his current moods. He liked the idea that the city lay at his feet, but with her increasingly souring omega scent filling his office, not even that thought could pick him up. Tom swiveled in his chair until he faced her. He regretted it.

There was nothing attractive about her. Her hair and eyes had the same boring brown color, her clothes hid whatever curves she might sport under too much fabric and unfortunate cuts, and the colors she picked were almost as mousy brown as her hair. She was a walking range of boringness.

The omega swallowed thickly and avoided his dark glare, keeping her face turned downward and her head slightly tucked between her shoulders. “Your schedule was cleared while you were upstairs.”

Tom frowned. “What? Why? Who?”

“It looks like your uncle shifted all the appointments either to himself or Mr. Monroe Jr.”

He balled his hands into tight fists and banged one on to the top of his desk. Plain Jane jumped from the sudden peak in aggression in his heavy scent. She took two steps back and chewed on her lower lip. “He left a note saying ‘Changes necessary’. I assume you know what he means by that.”

“Tell my uncle—” He stopped himself mid-sentence and stood up from his chair to pace the floor. He wouldn’t tell his uncle anything. If he wanted to give him the day off as some sort of backwards punishment, he would simply go home and work on something else. Maybe his alcoholism or smoking habit. Maybe he could also throw his money at sparsely dressed women in certain establishments. He let out a humorless laugh when he suddenly thought about simply hiring one of the many call girls he frequented to act as his

wife. He had the money and the looks, none of them would actually deny him. Also, it wasn't a marriage for forever. Only a few months and they could fake a huge argument and divorce again.

Tom stopped his pacing and glanced at his secretary. "Anything else?"

"No, sir, I was waiting for you to finish your sentence."

"I'm not going to. Get out. Go home, I don't care."

She let out a heavy breath and thanked him in a whisper before she practically fled his office. A deep sniff of the air surrounding him also told him why. He was reeking of anger and aggression. Probably too much for little Miss Plain Jane and her omega senses.

Overly sensitive creatures with only one true meaning in life; pleasing alphas and helping them succeed. He wasn't a backwards or traditional thinking alpha, but he couldn't deny the appeal of someone doing everything he bid. On the other hand, omegas had heats and as far as he knew those might be fun, but they also came with a ton of responsibility which quickly took away most of the appeal for him.

Tom slumped down into his chair once again and turned back to the city skyline. He fished out his phone from the inside pocket of his tailored suit and scrolled through the numbers in them. Amber, Candice, Denise, etc. All girlfriends for hire, all trained in smooth conversation and some additional disciplines that came in handy in the bedroom... or in Candice's case a rooftop bar at one point.

Which one to pick was the other question.

Amber was a sight to behold, but she sometimes lacked a little class. After two strong cocktails her simple upbringing showed around the edges. Candice was brilliant, but too much like him. He wouldn't be able to stay with her for more than a couple of hours before he would want to send her home again. He needed someone believable, someone

demure almost. Denise was too old, clocking in at two years his senior. Experienced, but not what he would go for in a wife.

His mind drifted to Victoria, Chuck's wife and mother of the third Charles Monroe in a row. His cousin was a little shit, but he had definitely won the jackpot when it came to his wife. Victoria was beautiful, had been to a great school, had worked as a wedding planner before her pregnancy with Charley and was currently living her best life as a devoted mother. Her softness and quiet sophistication was probably what was appealing to him. She had an air of old money about her.

Tom scrolled through his phone top to bottom and back up again. The only option he had, who fit most of the criteria, was an escort named Grace. He blew out a heavy breath and pressed the call button.

Their last meeting hadn't exactly ended well, but with enough money, he might convince her to play along. The phone rang three times before the beta in question answered.

"You've reached Grace, what can I do for you?"

"This is Thomas Carter."

"Oh, you." All playfulness and seduction in her voice was replaced with coldness. "I thought we had agreed to never contact each other again."

"We agreed you wouldn't try to fob a fake pregnancy on me."

"It wasn't fake."

"But it wasn't mine either," Tom argued and felt very self-satisfied.

"What do you want?"

"Inquire how you are doing and if you would be up for a little deal between the two of us?" All of a sudden his palms started to become sweaty and his heart beat faster. She wouldn't say no if the money was right. "I need someone to

pose as my fiancée and also marry me. It would only be for a few months, maybe a year. Nothing serious.”

“No,” came the immediate answer.

Tom huffed a laugh. “I didn’t tell you the money you would—”

“The answer stays the same. I will not become your fake wife for whatever reason you need one. I am going to marry my baby’s father in two weeks and after that you will delete my number from your phone.”

“It can’t be that serious if you are still taking calls like mine,” he replied with a darkening mood. Grace would have been perfect for his plan.

“Goodbye, Thomas. Good luck finding a temporary wife.”

She simply hung up. Who did she think she was?

Tom deleted her number immediately and scrolled through his contacts again. He tried the same with Rachel, who denied on the grounds she was just starting out as an actress and couldn’t afford a pause for a year, and with Lisa, who also denied because she was currently too busy with her three sugar daddies and didn’t want to ruin her chances with the Russian one she had been pursuing for the last few months.

Tom leaned his chin onto the heel of his palm and threw his phone up before catching it again while deep in thought. Who else could he ask? He had already ruled out three from the get go and his top three were not interested. Suddenly he knew what all the nerds and uncool kids had felt like in his high school when they had come up empty for a prom date.

Another timid knock on the door pulled him out of his thoughts. Once again the door opened, but didn’t close.

“Do you need anything else, Mr. Carter?”

Tom glanced at his phone and was shocked to find that it was already five p.m.

“What are you still doing here? I thought I told you to go home.”

“You also said you didn’t care, so I did some administrative work I usually need to work overtime for,” she explained, sounding a little less like a squeaky mouse than what he was used to.

“Great. No, I don’t need anything else.”

“All right, good night then, Mr. Carter.”

He grunted something unintelligible and waved his hand dismissively without even looking at his assistant. He needed a wife and he needed one soon.