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## Chapter 1

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**T**he man on door security checked his watch for the third time in as many minutes. 3:46 a.m. Fourteen minutes until the club closed and he could call it a night. Over the past six hours, he'd evicted half a dozen drunks, been spat on, had some bozo throw up on his shoes and now two loaded women were offering to test the mattress in his apartment. In other words, just another Saturday night for the Fortune Club's muscle.

One of the women tried to climb his six three, two forty-pound frame. "Hey big guy, what about a three-way at your place?"

Rule One of the bouncer's handbook: Don't take the clientele home.

Politely he eased her back, managed a stiff smile. "No thank you, ma'am."

She pressed in again. "Aw, c'mon."

A persistent one. "You need to go home and sleep it off."

Fingers hooked his belt. "Only if you come with."

Rule Two: Don't fuck them, period.

"I don't think so, ma'am."

The fingers inched into more intimate territory. “We’ll show you a good time.”

He extracted her hand, impressed with her determination. If she and her friend weren’t patrons, he might’ve been tempted to take the edge off with two leggy blondes well seasoned in the decadences of the one-night stand.

“Enjoy the rest of your evening, ma’am.”

Before she could set up an objection, he navigated her to one of the waiting cabs, opened the back door and seamlessly funneled her inside while deftly avoiding her grab for his belt again. Some people couldn’t take a hint if it bit them on the ass.

“Driver, take this young lady and her friend home.”

The cabbie grinned. “Right.”

The friend climbed in, giggling. Tomorrow they’d be nursing outsized hangovers and a week from now, they’d be doing it all over again, if not at the Fortune, then some other joint. The club might be on Sixth Avenue but in his experience, four in the morning turned them all into joints. Or maybe that was his sleep-deprived, to-hell-with-this-shit brain talking.

Retaking his position at the door, he rolled his tight shoulders, wishing he could loosen his tie and undo the top button of his white business shirt. His shirt had to be kept closed to hide his lower neck tattoos as inked bouncers didn’t go down well in this part of town.

Fuck this job.

Another check of his watch. Eight minutes to go.

Poking his head through the club’s entrance, he saw the place was down to the stragglers. They trickled out in small groups, milling around on the sidewalk, unwilling to call it a night. He could hear a group arguing about which bar to hit next and another in a heated exchange over who had started out as the designated driver. Both groups set off down the street, still quarrelling.

Four young women emerged and walked off in the same

direction, high heels clicking on the sidewalk. A minute later, one of the city's busiest paparazzi wandered out, lit a cigarette and headed for his vehicle parked across the street.

Thank Christ, that was the last of them.

Taking his hip flask from the inside pocket of his jacket, he swigged a nip of Scotch. Nothing tasted better after a long night standing guard over well-oiled humanity out on the town. He felt more tired than usual tonight. This job wearied a man. It'd be bed for the next eight hours.

Rehousing the flask, he was about to step inside and lock the front door when he had to wait for a group exiting the club. Three men and a woman headed for a limo that had rolled up, engine running, rear passenger door open. Wall Street types in suits. At first glance, they didn't seem out of the ordinary but taking a closer look, something was off. One guy had his arm around the woman's waist to support her weight while the other two men walked either side, casual-like but watching her, as though sizing up a lucky catch. She had her head down, eyes half-closed, mouth slack.

Immediately, he knew. Roofied and about to become the gentlemen's pleasure in the back of the limo.

He blocked the group's path to the car. "Ma'am, are you okay?"

One of the men—a big guy who apparently liked the odds of taking him down—got in his face. "Get lost."

"Sir, step aside."

"I said get lost."

This tool thought working a punching bag at a fitness gym made him pro material. He'd dealt with dozens of pricks like this although decking a Wall Streeter outside an exclusive Manhattan nightclub wouldn't be good for business or a bouncer's career.

Fuck it.

He jabbed the guy in the gut hard enough to send him reeling back to hit the sidewalk. While he lay curled up clutching

his abdomen, the second man came forward, fists up, so he got the same treatment, only twice as hard. He shouldn't have done that. Yeah, but it felt good.

While they lay writhing and groaning on the sidewalk, the man holding the woman's waist tossed her purse in the front seat of the car. "She's my wife, you moron. I'm taking her home."

A glance at the woman's ring finger said otherwise. "Like hell she's your wife. Let her go."

"Christ, Sutton, I didn't sign up for trouble. Leave her."

Until this point, he hadn't noticed the limo's driver gesturing to his companions to get in the car. Sutton, unwilling to give up his prize, held on. "Get the manager now so I can clear this up."

And by then he'd have her in the car and into the night. He put himself closer. "You leave, she stays."

"She's drunk, that's all."

"Get going before I call the cops on you for spiking a woman's drink."

"Screw you."

Sutton shoved the woman so hard, she hit the limo's front passenger door, slid down and landed flat on her ass in the gutter. He curled his fist to deliver a handy right hook but hearing the scrape of shoes behind him, decided against the fight. Littering the sidewalk with club patrons would mean early retirement from his short career.

He settled for something less violent. "I suggest you listen to your driver and get the fuck out of here."

All three stood glaring at him, obviously weighing up whether to take him on, then abandoned the idea when the driver revved the engine.

"You'll pay for this," Sutton snarled when safely inside and out of reach.

Yeah, yeah. He'd heard it all before. They left on a squeal of tires, probably worried about ending their night in a police cell although there was no proof they were involved in drugging the

woman. Regardless, he made a mental note of the vehicle's license plate number.

The woman hadn't moved from the gutter. Squatting down, he checked her. Semi-conscious and apart from a bruised arm, she seemed fine. Picking her up, she slumped against him, the top of her head making a comfortable home under his chin. She smelled expensive.

Easing her back, he raised her face. "Can you hear me, ma'am?"

Her eyes opened and he caught a flash of emerald before they shuttered again. The drug mimicked alcohol intoxication so she'd be drowsy for several hours then wake up with a blazing headache and no memory of what happened. But now he had a problem of what to do with her as the club had a strict rule about not allowing customers to remain after hours. Moreover, she needed to be watched until the drug wore off. He'd have to take her to his place.

Texting the bar manager to do the lock up, he set off along Sixth Avenue with the woman tucked under his arm, the tips of her shoes scraping along the ground, her head slumped against his chest. He lived two blocks away and at the final hundred yards, he carried her in his arms the rest of the way, cursing as he tripped on the unlit concrete steps to the side entrance of his building. He owned seven stories of dilapidated 1920's bricks and mortar, rented out to a mishmash of small businesses that could barely afford to stay open let alone pay him enough rent to install better lighting.

He carried her into the creaking iron-caged elevator and when it ground to a shuddering halt at the top floor, propped her against the wall while he slid back the heavy steel door to his loft. He never locked the place as no one came up here and if they did, they'd get a nasty surprise in the form of his guard dog, Axel.

The German shepherd came to greet him, tail wagging and grinning as dogs do for their masters.

“Stay.”

Axel sat, then lay down resting his nose on his paws.

“Good boy.”

Carrying the woman across the expanse of concrete floor, he deposited her on his unmade bed. If he'd known he was having company, he'd have changed the sheets, although six weeks between changes didn't seem so bad on the slob scale. The last woman who'd been here, he'd paid for and she hadn't objected although as he remembered it, he'd fucked her over the table. Since his release from prison six months ago, he'd opted for a business approach to his sex. He liked the convenience of working girls, respected them and enjoyed their company, including their talk. He didn't give a rat's behind how they or anyone else earned their living. Besides, he wasn't exactly pretty. Bulked up, military grade buzz cut, heavily inked and carrying a few battle scars. Any woman who'd service him deserved his respect.

But this woman didn't look like any woman he'd ever had in his bed, or his life for that matter. One hundred percent class and the kind who'd always be out of bounds to someone like him.

“You'll be fine in a few hours, ma'am.”

She stirred although he doubted she'd heard what he said. Looking down at her slender form, she reminded him of a sleeping beauty—like in the fairytale that he'd seen on the TV as a kid. He wasn't good with ages but she looked mid-twenties, perhaps a year or so younger. Delicately made, medium height and legs for days. Her long dark hair lay in a fan around her pale face, her full lips parted as she breathed steadily. Pink lipstick and nail polish and a silky white dress completed the virginal image although her moving around had pushed the bottom up and he could see a triangle of white thong—the material so thin, her landing strip showed.

*Eyes up pervert.*

She moved again, sliding a leg wide over the sheets. Heck, he had to look. The thong had stretched between her pussy lips so there was nothing left to the imagination of what she'd look like without it. His cock stirred. A normal male response, he reasoned. Nothing that jacking off in the shower wouldn't fix.

Grabbing a blanket, he tried to cover her but she sat up in her sleep and started tearing at her dress as though it was in the way. He helped her out—stripping her down to thong and bra before arranging her back on the bed where she stretched out and flopped her arms wide. A good rack plumped up over a half bra. Beautiful but he shouldn't be looking.

Quickly covering her with the blanket, he fed Axel and took his shower. Ten minutes later and she hadn't moved so he grabbed a beer and sat in an armchair to take in the early morning view of Manhattan. He'd inherited the building from his great uncle—a recluse who'd lived here for over fifty years and hadn't married or kept in contact with family. He'd never met the guy so it had come as a surprise to be the beneficiary of a Sixth Avenue building. Now this was home, complete with the old boy's ancient furniture, bad plumbing, rusty beams and peeling paint. The only good thing was the old bookcase crammed with books that he'd been reading in his spare time. The rentals covered the high property taxes and maintenance requirements but everything else came from his jobs. Neither paid much but at least he'd managed to make ends meet without having to sell his prime piece of real estate.

He glanced at the girl. She could wake at any time and when she did, she'd get the shock of her life coming face to face with him. She wouldn't be too impressed with his home either. This woman would have all the comforts money could buy. In that fancy dress, she must have been on a date and somehow ended up by herself. She needed a few lessons in self-care, starting with never leaving a drink unattended.

He heard her moan. On a light tread, he approached the bed, hoping like hell the sleeping beauty wouldn't scream her head off at the sight of him bearing down on her. Her eyes were open, fixed on the ceiling and when they shifted to him, they widened in fright. Damn, he should have put on a t-shirt to cover the chest ink. In the dim light, a big bastard like him had to look like her worst nightmare come to life.

"It's okay," he soothed. "You've been out of it for a few hours but you'll be fine."

She covered into the pillows as though he might jump her. "Wh-where am I?"

Apart from a slight slur to her voice, she seemed okay. "In my loft, ma'am."

Pushing the blanket back, she stared at her underwear and then at him. "What did you do to me?"

"I haven't touched you. I'm door security at the Fortune Club. You were roofied by three men who tried to get you in a limo but you won't remember any of it. I brought you here to sleep it off."

Obviously she didn't believe him as her hand shot between her legs. He watched her fingers moving around under the thong. Christ, what a time to wish his were doing that.

"Ma'am, as I said, I haven't touched you."

Her gaze went over his tats and he saw the contempt. "If I hadn't woken up, you would have, you dirtbag."

The assumption that only tattooed dirtbags took advantage pissed him off more than it should. But being the conscientious dirtbag that he was, he explained the realities of roofying. "Dirtbags come in all shapes and sizes, ma'am. You would've been gangbanged six ways from Sunday if I hadn't stepped in." He laid her dress on the bed. "I'll call you a cab."

She looked at him coldly. "First, I want an apology."

That floored him. "Excuse me?"

"You heard me. What's more I should have you arrested."

Every night he got that threat outside the club and he didn't like it, not from some drunk on the sidewalk and definitely not from some ungrateful snippet in his loft. The drug often made people aggressive, which apparently included sleeping beauties.

He shrugged. "As you wish. Now if you'll get out of my bed, I can get some shuteye." He grinned to crack her icy exterior. "Unless you'd care to join me."

She clutched the dress to her breasts. "Not with a big ugly Neanderthal like you."

Ouch. But in her defense, he'd asked for that. "Fair enough but this Neanderthal needs his sleep so if you'll get dressed, Ms.?"

"Mind your own business. Anyway, who are you?"

"The name's Gage."

She glanced around as though there were rats in the walls. "And where is this God-awful place?"

"Two blocks from the club."

With a glare at him, she slid off the bed swaying when she tried to walk. He caught her, supporting her weight but she twisted from his hold and fell flat on her back against the mattress. When she rolled over to wriggle upright again, his eyeballs latched onto a set of perky buttocks, neatly divided by thong floss. His mind fell straight to the gutter and as if she knew, she slapped her hands on her butt like he intended to stake a claim.

"Stay away from me."

He held up his own hands in mock surrender. "Look, I'm not going to touch you so take it easy. Put your clothes on while I call the cab."

She began rummaging around in the sheets, affording him another eyeful of ass and legs. The snippet was starting to be a problem on another level. From the moment he'd laid her out, his briefs had fitted a shade tighter.

"What did you do with my purse?"

Her complaining voice pierced his thoughts.

“Ma’am, the dirtbags took your purse,” he explained, doing his best to maintain some basic politeness. “I’ve got the vehicle’s plate number if you want to report it.”

That just made her madder. “You’re lying. I know you have my purse.”

Yep, this woman could wear a man down and then some. “It’s not here but I’ll give you cab money to get home.”

“I’m not a whore, asshole.”

Whoa, Ms. Snooty had some mouth on her although from her rapid blink, she’d either shocked herself or thought she’d gone too far. The rich brat needed to learn good behavior.

“Someone should wash your mouth out, little girl.”

“How dare you call me a girl, you sexist pig.”

She sounded like an old movie. And getting snootier by the second. “Whatever,” he sighed. “Now I want you out of here pronto.”

Although she had looked good lying on his bed and that tail of hers was a sight for sore eyes.

“Not before I get my apology.”

Getting free of the princess could take a while. “If you don’t get dressed, ma’am, I’ll have to do it for you so I suggest you cooperate.”

She tossed her head as though working up courage for her next move. For some reason, she wanted to pick a fight, wanted him to react. He didn’t know why but there was no mistaking the dare in her eyes.

He heard Axel growl. Funny how dogs always know. “Down boy.”

That set the girl off. As soon as her little five and a half foot frame came at him, fingers out like claws, he had no choice but to act. Snaring her wrists, he wrapped them in one hand while she struggled and tried to knee him in the groin. He deflected the painful prospect with his thigh, jamming his leg between hers,

which must have hurt her as she shrieked, kicking like fury while trying to liberate herself from his grip. Spinning her around, he held her flush to his chest. She felt like a small bird trying to flutter itself free.

“Hey, hey, hey. Calm down. You’re not thinking straight.”

She went slack in his hold but as soon as he released her, she flipped around to drum her little fists on his pecs as if trying to make a hole in his chest. He could hardly feel it but she and her roofie after-effects were starting to get on his nerves. Holding her by the upper arms, he plonked her on the bed, held her by the chin, taking care with the delicate bone structure. His heavy hands weren’t built for princesses.

“Drug or not, you’re acting like a snotty kid with bad manners. But I brought you here and until your sorry ass is out the door, you’ll behave. I’ll fix you coffee, sort the cab and then you’re gone. Are we clear?”

She wrenched from his grip. “Don’t you dare talk to me like that, you creep.”

He rarely lost his shit but this woman had his buttons lined up in a row and intended to push every one of them. Taking a breath to stay calm, he held his voice steady. “If you say so. Now sit quietly while I get the coffee.”

He was halfway across the room when he heard something break. Turning, he saw his one and only table lamp on the floor—a heavy brass thing with a glass shade that had come with his inheritance. He liked it, dammit.

She picked up his alarm clock.

“Put it down,” he warned, striding back across the room when she waved it in the air. “I won’t tell you twice.”

It hit the floor, shattered.

“Oops.”

She had her bottom lip caught between her perfect white teeth, her knees over the edge of the bed and spread to give him an eyeful. As angry as he was and as much as he’d like to toss her

out, he couldn't stop his cock hardening at the beauty's assets and if truth be told, her gutsiness. Few men would risk his anger.

She tilted her head to one side, widened her legs. "Now what, Mr. Gage?"

The question tightened his balls before he found an answer. "I'm going to make you a promise, girl."

She lifted a shoulder. "I thought you were going to make me coffee."

From the start the wench had been asking for it, pushing him to snap and it finally dawned on him why. "I want an apology, princess, or I'll tan your backside."

A spark of curiosity lit her eyes, a marked change from her anger. "You wouldn't dare."

He recognized the signs. Five minutes ago, he wouldn't have believed it possible. "Apologize or you'll find out."

"Then I guess I'll find out."

Just like that, he knew for sure. Lifting her, he dropped himself down on the edge of the bed to flip her wrestler-style over his knee. "Maybe this will sort you out, princess."

He smacked her square in the middle of her ass, the sound echoing around the loft along with her yelp, making Axel bark. He smacked again, pausing to savor the satisfying sight of her ass blooming with a pink palm print. She howled, probably more at the indignity than the pain, seesawing her legs so hard, she managed to partially free herself from his lap. Hauling her back into position, he pinned her legs under his left thigh so her feet were on the floor but useless as leverage.

Another smack and she flailed her hands in the air. "Let me go, you freak."

"Is that all you can manage?"

"Go to hell."

He probably would, but not right now as he had work to do.

Adjusting her so her ass was exactly where he needed it for his hand, he paddled her from the top of her curvaceous cheeks

all the way down to the underside, making sure he got every inch nice and bright before pausing to squeeze a buttock which had her calling him some name that he couldn't quite catch. If she'd had enough of his hand, she wasn't showing it.

He settled in again, using his open palm to deliver his hardest punishment yet. Maybe too harsh on such tender flesh but damn, it felt good to see her butt turning scarlet and hearing her complaining shrieks. When she tried to scratch his bare feet, he gave her several full-handed whacks that pulled her hands up to guard her butt. Swatting them away, he set to again, interspersing each with a decent thwack to her upper thighs to even up the color palette. To her credit she fought far longer than he would have credited a little thing like her, but finally the kicking, squawking, cursing princess fell into submission. She quieted, the last of her protests dropping to low, sniveling moans from under her dark hair. A half-dozen light smacks for good measure and he released her thighs from under his legs. As she wriggled forward, sobbing pathetically, he caught a glimpse of her pussy lips, slick and swollen and ripe, confirming his suspicion that she'd been angling for this all along. The girl wanted him to get her all hot and bothered and primed for play. Maybe the drug had given her a taste for rough handling, maybe it was just her, but either way, she'd feel those marks for a week.

She muttered something, and he moved his attention to more pressing matters. "Now what, princess?"

He felt her wriggle against his cock giving him his answer. And why not see his crappy night out on a high. Her willowy body would slot very neatly under his and he didn't doubt her sweet cunt would feel every bit as good as it looked.

"You wanna invite me in?"

"I hate you. You're an animal."

"I'll take that as a 'no' so this party is over, princess."

He went to lift her off his lap when she whispered, "Please."

He heard the shiver of need in her voice. "Please, as in you want me to fuck you?"

"Yes, damn you."

He kind of admired her fight. "Glad to oblige, ma'am."

Flopping her onto the bed, he stood to shed his jeans and briefs, while she leaned back against the pillows to watch him, sulky-eyed and with her lip back between her teeth. He freed his erection, massaging himself from base to tip, making sure he got plenty of pre-cum in all the right places to do the princess justice. As he climbed on the bed, she peeled down the thong to give him a nice view of pussy glistening in the early morning light. The spanking had the minx desperate for cock and fact was, he had one hell of a hard on.

He opened the bedside cabinet drawer, feeling around and finding nothing. Shit.

"I'm out of protection."

"Please," she whimpered. "I'm good."

"We won't have to get married or anything, will we?" he managed to joke through his agony.

"No, I'm covered."

As if to prove it, she thrust her hips up. Hell, who was he to argue the point with heaven inches away.

Kneeling between her legs, he skated his fingers along her slick lips, briefly teasing her clit before slipping a forefinger deep.

"You ready to tell me your name, girl?"

He always made the effort to know their names. Apparently this one wanted to remain anonymous because she turned her face away although there was no mystery when it came to her body. Her slippery channel had his finger gripped, prompting him to add another to see to her G-spot. She arched, core twitching to the deep caress. When he withdrew, ready to take her, his eyes fell on hers. The girl was so strung out with lust and so damned beautiful he almost came then and there.

Pushing up on one hand, he used his other to rub his dick

from clit to opening before slipping the head inside. A big porn star cock made for wet pussy, his hires liked to tease. Right now, he believed them.

She raised her head to stare down at it wedged between her lips. “Oh, God.”

He grinned. “No, ma’am. Just me.”

He pushed further in. Holy hell, she was tight. Her tasty inner muscles and the sheer novelty of being inside a princess could end this jaunt prematurely. Most times, he had good control but he couldn’t guarantee he’d last long enough for her to come first. He liked the woman to get the first one out of the way before he got busy. He saw it as being considerate, his way of saying ‘thank you’ for taking on his ugly ass. For sure, his regulars always went home a little richer and a whole lot happier.

A few deep draws of his lungs and more or less back in command of his balls, he slid home. “Okay?”

Her jerking hips gave him his answer. Safely anchored in her heat, he lifted her hips, positioned her so her body was parallel to his and thrust. The feel of her tight core resisting on the push, relaxing on the retreat had him groaning. “Good work, little girl.”

More than good. She felt fucking amazing... like hot silk. Working his fingers under her flimsy bra, he inched it up to get a look at her full breasts. He enjoyed a good rack... and ass... and legs... the whole package. If that made him a sexist pig, then yeah, he was one of those.

Pushing up on his knees and keeping her fastened on his cock, he bent her back so her head was on the pillow, the rest of her high to take him straight. With each dig into her lush channel, her breasts swayed and when he enclosed a fat globe in his hand, thumbing the stiff tip, she moaned and pushed up. Dragging her higher, he took a mouthful, sucking and pulling while not missing a single rut of his cock.

She shuddered. “Oh... oh.”

Seconds later, she climaxed on a cry, her head thrown back, pussy rippling around his meat as the contractions set in. He maintained his thrusts until she came again, trembling and gasping and now looking into his eyes like this was all a big surprise to her. It hadn't taken long to get her into the swing of things and in gratitude he rode her fast to get her off for a third. As they both hit the point of no return, he closed his eyes to heighten the sensation of his ejaculate gushing into compressed warmth.

Nowhere near ready to end his ride, he rolled them both on their sides, squeezing her ass to help things along while pumping her to another climax. Give him five minutes and he'd join her. He had a high sex drive and with this luscious sprite, he could manage a marathon. Fuck, they were only just getting started.

The sound of a small snuffle coming from his chest pulled him up short. "Am I hurting your pussy?"

"No."

The sniffing stopped, started again. Pulling back he tried to read her expression but she pushed her face into his shoulder.

"Then what's wrong, girl?"

"This shouldn't have happened."

Random sex remorse was common enough although he'd never personally experienced it. "We're having fun here so things are good, right?"

Her wet cheek slipped around to his throat. "You don't understand."

"Try me."

She shook her head, her hair tickling his chin. "I can't." Leaning back, she looked into his eyes and he realized the irises had tiny flecks of black set in the bright emerald. Her cheeks were flushed from her arousal and the tip of her nose had turned red from her crying. She looked kind of sweet.

"If you tell me what's wrong then maybe I can help," he offered, stroking her back gently.

Her lashes dipped in a sign she'd shut him out. "It's complicated."

He kissed her, the only thing he could think of to comfort her. Her tear-stained lips barely parted to allow him a taste of the lush interior. Okay, time to wrap this up. Random, mindless sex he liked, preferred if given a choice. The emotional, heavy stuff with sniffing princesses? Not so much.

He slid out of her. "What about I make that coffee before you leave?"

Sitting up, she wiped her eyes. "I can't stay."

She dressed quickly with her back to him. Already her ass and thighs showed the deep tissue bruises from his hand and though she might hate having them on her little upper-class body, he knew she'd craved the discipline. Whoever the man was in her life, and there had to be one, he wasn't delivering.

Rolling off the bed, he gestured to Axel to stay put while he pulled on his jeans. "Can you handle a ride on a Harley?"

She wrinkled her nose. "A cab will be fine."

The supercilious tone said she wanted nothing more to do with him and frankly, he'd had enough of dealing with her problems. The sooner the princess left, taking her snootiness with her, the sooner he could get some sleep.

While he called for a ride from his cell, she stood by the window, staring at the view of the city. He couldn't see her face, but he imagined she had a whole bunch of regrets playing around in her head.

Sliding back the loft door, he waited while she walked past him into the passage. She paused by the elevator, fidgeting with her dress. "I'm sorry for hitting you and smashing your things, Mr. Gage. I don't know what came over me."

He grinned to ease her embarrassment. "Don't worry about it. The type of roofie you got can make people a little... shall we say, unfriendly." He paused, decided against telling her it also

caused horniness. “Anyway, next time you go clubbing, watch your drink. Who were you with anyway?”

The question narrowed her eyes. “A friend. Why?”

“No reason. Tell your friend not to leave you alone again. It’s a big bad world out there.”

“Mr. Gage,” she said coldly, her gaze now on his chest tattoos as if memorizing them. “I must ask you not to tell anyone about what happened here tonight. It would be...”

“Awkward?” he finished for her.

She opened her mouth to say something, then nodded.

“No problem. And there’s no mister. It’s just Gage.”

“Thank you.”

He’d like to thank *her* for the happy ending, but he held his tongue. The kid didn’t need the reminder.

Riding the elevator with her to the ground floor, he paid the driver. He didn’t hear the address she gave the cabbie, nor did she say goodbye when the car pulled into the early morning traffic. The mysterious, nameless ice princess had gone.