
Chapter 1

“Damn, Jim, I wish some of your luck would rub off on me!” Cal tried to put a good face on it as he wished his brother well on the way to the chartered plane.

Jim wasn’t fooled and it showed. “I can give you money, which you don’t need; I can give you a job, of which you already have two; I can give you my respect, which I do without reservation; but I cannot give you luck. You have to make that yourself—especially where women are concerned. Make a change and see where it leads you. Stir up the mix a little.”

They’d reached the plane, and it was time to exchange hugs with his older brother and freshly minted sister-in-law, Kiki. Kiki gave Cal a light kiss on the cheek, wishing him well while they were away.

Feeling slightly jealous, Cal Chesterfield waved *bon voyage* to the couple. Having spent several months there, he knew that the honeymoon they’d planned in Majorca was going to be a blast. Jim had spared no expense, and with his income, that

was going to be a blowout of a party. Fortunately, Kiki kept him from going overboard, because she kept him grounded.

As he watched the couple enter the plane, Cal thought about how badly his last relationship had ended. Ginny had been so perfect on the outside and so rotten on the inside. She never really wanted Cal. Her entire goal was to get closer to his wealthier older brother. But Jim only had eyes for Kiki at the time, so Ginny had gone after him, the younger brother, hoping for Kiki and Jim to break up. At that point, she probably hoped to swoop in and help Jim deal with the heartache. Yeah, right. Of course, where would that leave Cal? Cal had been fooled for a short time by her machinations, but her goals soon became apparent when she actively tried to sabotage Jim's relationship with Kiki. That had been too much for Cal to countenance and he'd broken off his relationship with Ginny right away. But it hurt, hurt like hell. He was always second fiddle to his more *everything* brother. He'd tried to get used to it, but it still rankled. It wasn't Jim's fault, either. He was the kind of guy who did the right things, in the right place, at the right time. Cal struggled with those things. He did pretty well, most of the time, but in his love life, he felt like a terrible failure.

The relationship before Ginny hadn't been any better. Janeka had been demanding, unreasonable, and selfish. Furthermore, she was resistant to the discipline he was inclined to impose with his hand or a paddle. Oh, she took the spankings, but her behavior never changed. Now she was vehement about getting back together. As far as she was concerned, Ginny, or anyone else, was no obstacle. Cal thought otherwise.

Instead of dwelling on it too much, Cal got into Jim's limousine and asked Ernie to take him back to his house. It wasn't a long drive, just to Cupertino. Cal considered dropping in at his nightclub to check on things being set up for the

weekend crowd, but he didn't need to be there 24/7—it just seemed like it. The place usually ran like a well-oiled machine.

As they drove, Cal checked his voicemail and texts. There was a minor crisis at the software company he owned. It had only been a year since he'd given up his position as a corporate attorney, but so much had happened in that year. And the consumer legal software business he bought had been the first of the changes. When he saw the opportunity to make a clean start in his life, Cal had grabbed it with both hands. Now he was a CEO and a nightclub owner; it was a far cry from his legal career. He loved it, though, really loved the challenges.

Unfortunately, work was about all he had at the moment. He wasn't involved with a woman, and hadn't been since Ginny, months ago. One-night-stands got tiresome pretty quickly. Cal wished like hell he could find the joy that Jim and Kiki had together. But maybe that wasn't in the cards for him.

Once at his house, Cal gathered up his gym bag and got on his bicycle to ride over to the gym where he trained. A good, hard workout would take his mind off his troubles and give him some exposure to friends he worked out with.

For an hour and a half, Cal worked on his fitness routine. He was tired, but oddly refreshed when it was over. After he showered, he got back on his bike, heading to the local Caffeine Habit for a strong cup of coffee. It was a ritual that worked well for him. The caffeine would keep him going for a long time, which in the nightclub business, often meant schmoozing with customers until the wee hours.

After locking his bike up, Cal entered the coffee shop; the smells of hearty coffee and sweet pastries hit him immediately, and his stomach growled in response. Caffeine Habit made a killer gluten-free coconut pie, and Cal wasn't in the mood to resist it.

His usual barista wasn't at the coffee bar that day. Joe, a friendly sort of fellow, had been replaced for this shift by a

young woman. She was beautiful and exotic, wearing Goth makeup of dark red lips and heavily kohled eyes. And what blue eyes they were, crystal clear, surrounded by heavily mascaraed black eyelashes. Her skin was a nearly translucent, pale cream, and looked smooth as silk. She was tall, too. Cal stood six feet, three inches, and he estimated that this woman had to be at least five-ten. She wore the usual Caffeine Habit uniform, dark pants, dark Caffeine Habit T-shirt and a red apron, but the shirt suited her far more than it ever did Joe. Her nametag said "Astraea."

Forcing himself back from his admiration of the young woman, Cal gave her a smile. "Good afternoon, Astraea. I see Joe's not here today."

She smiled back, but it was a professional smile, impersonal.

"Joe's off today. What can I get you?"

"A double dose espresso and a coconut cream pie."

"Okay. Have a seat and I'll bring it to you."

That was nice of her. Normally a customer waited at the register until the order was up. But, of course, in the middle of the afternoon, there weren't many other customers there, so she had some time to wait tables if she wanted to keep busy.

It took about five minutes, but Cal waited patiently at the table. He normally chose one with a view out the picture windows onto the street, but today, he wanted to watch what was inside the coffee shop: Astraea. When she turned to get his coffee, he got a good look at the back of her where the apron didn't cover. She had a long, narrow waist and a butt that was tightly outlined in black yoga pants. It was a perfect butt, too. He wished he could lift her by it and take her right up against the wall. That was such an inappropriate thought, he almost blushed. But he was deeply drawn to her in a curious way. Although he'd seen Goth girls before, this one... this particular one, was different.

The coffee, pie, and Astraea arrived, and she gracefully set his order before him. Cal wanted to keep her close, if he could, so he started to make conversation. A little flirting, maybe, but nothing too intense.

“So, how long have you been working here, Astraea?”

“About two days. They’re trying me on different shifts before they decide which one will work best.” As she spoke, Cal watched those gorgeous, red lips form the words. All he could think of was putting her mouth around his cock.

Up close, he noticed that she had a little piercing on one side, just to the outside of her upper lip. A small diamond stud winked at him as she spoke. Damn, that was sexy.

Her hair looked glossy and soft, black, streaked with cobalt blue. He’d never gone for that kind of style, but on her, the strands of blue in her shoulder-length hair and bangs were a compliment to her features. She obviously took care of her looks.

“How do you like working here?” he asked, trying to keep his mind on the conversation.

She shrugged. “They’re nice and the location is good. I can’t complain.”

They stared at each other for a long moment, and then she smiled. It was a sexy, flirtatious smile. Cal returned it and saw his chance.

“So, do you live around here?”

“Not far. I walk to work. Don’t have a car.”

Astraea’s hands were slender and long-fingered, tipped with dark red, short nails. She wore no wedding ring. Yes!

“I bike over here from the Cross Roads gym a mile or so away. I’m here almost every day around this time.”

“Ah. Maybe we’ll see each other again.”

“That would be great.”

She looked around, about to walk away, but no customers were trying to get her attention, and none had entered the

shop. Instead of getting back to her duties, she lingered. “What do you do?”

“I’m a CEO, and I own a little nightclub near the mall.”

“I club a lot. Which one?”

“Bittersweet on Stevens Creek.”

“No shit! It used to be such a dive, but I heard it got cleaned up. I guess you’re the ‘new management’ that was behind it?”

“I suppose so. I’ve owned it for about nine months.”

“Wow, that is so cool.” She grinned again and winked at him. “So you can comp me in some Saturday, right?”

Cal laughed. “Sure. You and a few friends, if you like.”

“Fuck yeah! Thanks, man. What’s your name?”

“Cal Chesterfield. And I know yours from your badge.”

“Yeah, I go by Astraea. It’s my stage name. I’m a model.”

Cal looked around the shop and then raised his eyebrows at her.

“Well, I’m trying to be a model. It’s a tough gig.”

“I understand completely. So, Astraea the model, what do you do for fun?”

“Clubbing with my homies, mostly. But I like to read as well. I’m not really into TV.”

“Me, either. I mean, I’m not into TV. I have one, but it’s for news and sports, not ‘entertainment’.”

“Is there a ‘Mrs. Cal Chesterfield’?”

He grinned. “No. And a ‘Mr. Astraea’?”

“Hell no.” She sank down on her haunches at the side of the table, giving him a peek down the front of her T-shirt. Her breasts were small and round, snuggled in a bright pink lacy bra. “So, Cal, maybe we could get together sometime? A little fuck date?”

Cal had to blink. Was she a prostitute? Was she a girl with such loose morals that she’d proposition a guy on the first meeting? Cal knew he was relatively attractive; plenty of

people, especially women, had let him know, but damn! He had never been propositioned so boldly after only a ten-minute conversation.

“I won’t pay you for sex,” he said, trying not to be offensive, but also determined to make sure she wasn’t a whore.

She frowned and stood all the way up. “Did I ask you for money?”

“No...”

Astraea shrugged. “*C’est la vie*, Mr. Cal Chesterfield. We could have had fun.”

Cal reached out and put his hand on her arm so she wouldn’t turn and walk away. He was not above a one-night stand, and this girl was attractive to him in a way he hadn’t felt in a long time. “Wait now. I didn’t say no, did I?”

She slowly smiled. “No, you didn’t.”

“Well, the opposite of no is yes.”

“When?”

“Tonight?”

“I get off at ten.” She grinned again; it was a salacious expression this time. “I bet I’ll get off again soon after that, hm?”

Cal was captivated. He’d never met a girl like this before. “We aim to please, ma’am.”

Laughing, she gave his arm a squeeze. “You save that ‘ma’am’ shit for someone a lot older. I’m twenty-three and don’t need to be fuckin’ ma’amed, that’s for sure.”

“You know, Astraea, your lips look beautiful when you’re not cursing like a truck driver on a bad stretch of road.”

“Ha! Now you sound like my father. How old are you? You don’t look that old.”

“I’m thirty-six. Certainly not old enough to be your dad.”

“No. But he criticizes me like that. You hold that shit, okay? I don’t need to hear it.”

Cal wasn’t going to agree to that. She was so pretty in so

many ways, but that potty mouth had to go. Still, it was a one-night “fuck date” so maybe it didn’t matter.

A customer came into the shop and headed for the register.

“Gotta go,” she said quickly. “Meet me back here tonight at ten, ‘k?”

Cal agreed and she went back to work. It was something to ponder while he ate his pie. That firm butt was going to feel mighty good in his hands. But—the thought chilled his hot blood for a moment—how often did Astraea go on “fuck dates”? How loose was she? They’d have to talk about diseases and that kind of thing before their date went too far. He’d better buy a box of fresh condoms.

Assuming she was clean, it was going to be a helluva night.

As she helped the customer, Astraea kept an eye on Cal Chesterfield. He was so gorgeous; it was hard not to be drawn to him constantly. But more than that, he was different; unlike any of the guys she’d dated recently. Although he’d gotten confused over her “fuck date” comment, that was okay. She supposed a guy who was older like that might not use the term. He sure seemed to know what it meant, though.

She wanted to run her hands through his dark, wavy hair and tickle that little cleft in his chin with her tongue.

Maybe he was the one who could rock her world. Finally. If not...well, he’d be pretty to look at while he tried. It was even possible he’d call afterward. Astraea reminded herself not to get her hopes up. Disappointment was a bitter pill and she didn’t want one of those again.

Cal was having second thoughts by the time ten o'clock rolled around. What kind of self-respecting young woman casually slept with a guy after only a few minutes? If she was spreading her legs for everyone, he had no feeling of conquest, challenge, or even a sense that he was special to her. That sat badly on him. She was gorgeous in an exotic way, a way he hadn't ever thought attractive before. He usually went for business or academic types, never Bohemians, much less Goth chicks. Maybe there was nothing truly special about her but her looks. Cal couldn't possibly know based upon their brief conversation. It was possible that she'd be another one-night-stand that would come and go without a whole lot of thought or emotion behind it. He was sick to death of those. Still...it was a temptation he'd have trouble resisting. Her uniqueness was incredibly alluring.

Making a quick decision as he was driving, he rolled up to the curb at Caffeine Habit. It was empty except for one lone barista, Astraea. He got out of the car and went in. Astraea looked up from where she was counting money at the till.

"Hey," she said, smiling.

"Hey. Almost done?"

"Yeah. One minute." She took the register drawer and went into the back room, coming back a couple of minutes later. She was no longer wearing her Caffeine Habit apron, but still wore the uniform black T-shirt and black pants. A large, lacy blue- and black-flowered purse dangled from her shoulder. "Ready!"

"Great!" Cal gave her a big smile. He was glad to see her, he realized. Was that a good sign or a bad one? "My car's outside."

They exited and Astraea turned out the lights and locked up. Cal led her to his car and opened the door for her. She rolled her eyes, but she was grinning.

Once they were both seated, he reminded her to buckle

up. Again, Astraea gave him a look that said he was being uncool, but it was brief, and Cal put it aside.

“Nice Beemer.”

“Thanks.”

“New? It still smells like new car.”

“It’s a recent purchase.”

She put her hand on his denim-clad thigh. “Suits you.”

Cal laughed, but it was forced. That warm hand on his thigh was distracting, so he took it, gave it a squeeze, and moved it into her lap. “I’m driving,” was all he said by way of explanation.

“Spoilsport.”

He turned his head and caught Astraea’s pout. It was so child-like; it reminded him how young she was. All he could manage was a chuckle.

“Where are we going?”

“There’s a diner in San Jose that I thought we’d go to. Get a bite. Talk a little.”

“You wanna *talk*?” She sounded incredulous.

“Yeah.”

“Man, you are weird.”

Cal glanced over at her; her gaze was on the road. In profile, her face was perfect. It was highlighted by the streetlights, on, off, as they passed under each one. “Maybe. Aren’t you hungry?”

“I don’t eat much. I can’t. I need to stay a size two.”

“Right. But you have to eat sometime. Have you eaten today?”

“A little breakfast.”

“You must be hungry.”

“Yeah. A little.”

“Let me feed you before we get to the next step, okay?”

“All right. Thanks.” She put her hand on his thigh again, but he gave her a steely look and she removed it quickly

enough. Apparently, she could be influenced by a little bit of take-charge attitude.

They drove in silence until they reached the diner. It was brand new, but fashioned like something out of 1960, a big, shiny tin box with booths inside, a soda fountain, and a short order grill behind the counter. It was very well lit and there were a few customers there. It was a place that was safe for both of them, perfect for a first date.

Once seated in a booth, Cal watched her over his menu. Astraea looked a little nervous. Maybe she didn't go out on regular dates very much, or maybe the homely atmosphere of the place turned her off. Cal wondered where her sense of fun was.

He put a small pile of quarters in front of the tabletop jukebox. "You pick."

There was a pause, and then she gave him a little smile. "Okay."

The waitress came over before Astraea could make a choice. "What can I get you?"

Cal nodded at his date. "I don't know. Astraea?"

"Nothing sounds good." Her gaze was riveted to the Formica tabletop. She shrugged.

The waitress was waiting patiently, so Cal ordered for them both. "We'll have two bacon burgers with fries, and two chocolate shakes."

"Wait!" Astraea said as the waitress was writing. "Can I have vanilla?"

After writing it down, the waitress left them to their own devices. While Astraea stared at the table, Cal picked up a quarter and handed it to her. "Pick."

Nervously, she gave him a brief look, her blue eyes unreadable, but she took the quarter and made a choice. Cal nodded as Elvis began to croon. "Nice choice. Pick another."

Without a word, she made a few more choices and then sat silently.

Not much of a conversationalist, Cal thought. Or maybe she was too much out of her element. "So tell me about yourself, Astraea."

"Not much to tell."

"Hey, look at me. I'm not Frankenstein."

Her giggle bubbled up, to be cut off abruptly, as though she caught herself. But her eyes focused on his face with an expression that said she was uncomfortable. "Sorry."

"No need to be. So...earlier, you said you like to read. Do you have a favorite author?"

"Er...a few. But probably not anyone you've heard about."

"Try me. I read a lot."

"You don't read what I read, believe me."

No, probably not, but he was curious all the same. "Gothic horror? Sappy romances?"

She snorted her laugh. "Kinda. I read erotic romances with a...certain theme."

Ah. Maybe that's where this loose behavior came from. "Theme?"

"Yeah."

"Might I ask what it is?"

"Spanking," she whispered. It was a sound so soft, Cal couldn't be sure he'd heard it right.

"Spanking?"

She nodded, her cheeks going pink.

Interesting. Astraea was embarrassed by her interest in a fetish. Considering how Goth and apparently loose she was, her embarrassment was rather charming. There was a tick-ticking sound coming from her side of the table. Cal glanced at her hands, but it wasn't her nails on the Formica.

"Do you hear that?"

"Um...no, I don't hear anything."

The sound stopped. Maybe he was hearing things. Cal went back to their conversation. “So how did you get into those kinds of romances?”

She shrugged. At that moment, the waitress came, laden with plates. She set them before Cal and Astraea and went back for the shakes. Soon, all the food was where it belonged, all the condiments applied, and they were back in their private bubble again.

“Tell me about modeling.”

That got her attention. She was animated as she explained how she found an agent and was actively seeking modeling jobs. It excited her to talk about it, that much was apparent. Her eyes went from her food to his eyes, and back, as she ate.

Cal soaked it all in, enjoying her enthusiasm for a topic. Being a model was harder work than he would have thought. Astraea certainly struggled with it. They ate for a while, with her adding a modeling anecdote here and there.

The subject turned back to books, and he found her well read in the classics. Apparently, she’d gone to college for a year and majored in English. When he added his opinions to their conversation, she asked insightful questions. Astraea was not just a beautiful face and figure.

“So...” he said during a pause. “Why me?”

“Huh?”

“Why pick me for your ‘fuck date’ today?”

“You make it sound like I do it every day.” Her dark eyebrows started slanting down.

“How often *do* you do it?”

She shrugged.

Cal finished his burger and focused on his shake. Finally, he tried again. “Really, Astraea, I’d like to know how often you do this. I mean, there are health matters that I need to consider before I spend the night with you.”

“I’m clean.”

“You’re sure?”

She nodded, but her gaze was back on the table again.

“Yeah. Tested recently.”

“How many, Astraea?”

“I don’t know. A few.”

“What does ‘a few’ mean? Because if you sleep with a new guy every night, I’m not interested.”

“I don’t. Not really.”

“Guys don’t usually respect a girl who doesn’t respect herself and act a little hard to get.”

“Heh. That’s all a load of old-fashioned bullshit.”

“Is it?” Cal leaned back away from the table. He realized that he’d been so focused on her that he might have been somewhat intimidating.

She shrugged.

“I don’t know what to think about you, Astraea,” he confessed.

“Why think? Can we just get out of here and go to your place or something? This is getting boring.”

Although Cal was unsure that it was the best idea, being near her did make him horny, so he paid the bill and escorted her back to his car. As they drove, he came back to their earlier conversation. “So you’re into spanking?”

Her breath was indrawn rapidly, and she turned her head to the side, looking out the passenger window. “Maybe. Does it matter?”

“I just want to know what you like. I’m not a wham-bam-thank-you-ma’am kind of guy.”

“Oh.”

“So what’s the attraction?”

“I dunno.”

“Astraea, if you want to call this off, that’s okay with me. I don’t want you to do something you don’t want to do. You seem...put off.”

“I just wanna fuck. I don’t like psychoanalysis.”

“And I want to get to know you better. I tend to want to like a woman I sleep with.”

“No sleeping,” she said firmly.

“No sleeping?”

“We fuck and then you take me home. None of that cuddling bullshit.”

“Geez, woman. You sure can’t be called sentimental.”

“Do you want me or not?”

Cal really wasn’t sure. He did and he didn’t. Astraea was the most unusual woman he’d ever met. He wanted to know how she ticked, but he was disinclined to screw her. She had an attitude that turned him off. He answered honestly. “I don’t know.”

She put her hand back on his thigh and rubbed. This time, he didn’t move it away. “Yeah, you do. Your cock tells me you do.”

He laughed. “You know it so well, huh?”

“I want to get to know it.”

A little surge of interest settled in his groin. She was so blatant and direct; it was a real novelty. Maybe taking what she was offering and then walking away wasn’t such a bad idea. But as he thought of all the guys who’d probably done that, his interest shrank. He’d never respected women who were sluts. They didn’t respect themselves.

Still, he drove to his house and took her inside.