

Chapter One

I'm a starving man. Get your delicious ass over here so I can feast on you.

Mmm, yes. The come hither text. Pun intended. Exactly what Lisa needed... a few steamy hours with Danny's hot body plastered on top of her writhing one. It was a necessary diversion to close the book on this week. And after that? Vodka. Anything to numb her mind. She'd tried to focus, holed up at the office, crunching numbers until her eyes grew bleary and bloodshot, all with the hope she could ignore the painful reality that reared its ugly head every time her mother established contact.

Sex was about the only thing she was willing to offer since her emotional state was about as stable as a one-legged elephant walking a tightrope. Her story wasn't unique – deadbeat dad took off with a busty blond mistress leaving his wife and daughter to pick up the jagged pieces of their once-happy lives. Yep, relationships equated to devastation, and carnal urges always trumped romance.

Ding!

The elevator door creaked open and she almost choked on her next breath. Holy crap on a cracker. The tiny enclosure was graced by the presence of a single passenger who could only be described as Eros personified. She allowed her eyes to rake the length of his muscular body with the ferocity of a tiger stalking its prey. Danny who?

Tall with thick, dark hair, sinful lips, and an amazing ass – that last observation courtesy of the mirrors flanking him on all sides. A tight, white T-shirt clung to his broad chest and her fingers tightened around the handle of her laptop bag, itching to trace every last ripple. Sweet Jesus, she needed to get laid.

His gaze never left the phone in his hand as she stepped inside. And damn, it was a huge, powerful hand. The other one was tucked into the front pocket of his low-rise, hip-skimming black jeans but good Lord, it would feel so nice burrowed somewhere *else*.

Her pulse throbbed as the car sailed toward the lobby much too quickly for her liking. A few more seconds and Adonis would wander out of her life forever, not that it mattered. His face was a mask of indifference; it never once shifted, nor did his eyes wander in her direction. Must be a model, and a gay one at that. She'd run into more than her fair share on this very elevator since one of the top agencies on the West Coast occupied a floor of the building. But she'd still give her right arm for another few seconds to indulge in the X-rated fantasies looping through her lust-tinged mind. Maybe her left arm, too.

A sudden and powerful lurch rocketed her against the back wall. She gripped the handrail, heart thundering in her chest. The lights flickered tauntingly until everything faded to blackness. *What the fu--?*

She blinked a few times, eyes struggling to focus. Shallow breaths escaped her lips. They were stuck in a metal box that weighed hundreds of thousands of pounds, suspended by cables that could snap at any second—Dammit! Why hadn't she taken the stairs? Another jerk made her stomach clench. "Oh my God, oh my God," she whimpered, clutching the rail. "I don't want to die. Not tonight."

"Big plans?"

"Don't talk! You'll use up all the oxygen." A lump formed in her throat, each gulp of air harder and harder to pull into her lungs. Beads of perspiration formed on the back of her neck, chest tight. What if they didn't know there were

people in the elevator? And how would they get help? It was too dark to see the alarm button—

She let out a bloodcurdling scream as the car dropped what felt like a hundred feet before it yanked back upward. Elevator cables weren't like bungee cords. There was no slack. They just snapped.

A small bright light revealed a lazy smile and deep-set eyes that could singe her insides under normal circumstances, when she wasn't a few feet away from meeting certain fiery death at the bottom of an elevator shaft. "Relax. Just hit the alarm button."

Teeth chattering, she shook her head. "I'm too scared to move."

He jabbed the button and nothing. No response, except the palpitations that assaulted her heart.

Tears formed in her eyes, her breathing ragged. "It's not working. We're going to die in here. They'll be too late to save us. Nobody knows we're even in here!" She clutched her chest, squinting in the light emitted by his phone. "I'm having a fucking heart attack. I'm going to die in an elevator. God only knows if they'll be able to recognize our mangled bodies after the crash." The golf ball-sized lump morphed into a grapefruit with the pass of each agonizing second. "Why aren't you talking?" she shouted.

"You told me not to."

"So why did you listen? I'm clearly hysterical!"

"Clearly."

Her hands grew clammy, sweat now drizzling down her back. This was it. No sex. No vodka. Just impending death. "I need to get to a hospital," she choked. "I'm too young to survive a heart attack. I won't make it!"

The phone light faded and they were once again immersed in blackness.

Lisa let out a gasp. “What happened to the—”

Soft, yet demanding lips pressed against hers, extinguishing all coherent thought. Sweet, sugary, bubble gum flavored lips. Strong hands caressed the sides of her face, stroking the loose strands of hair now matted to her neck. Tiny shivers danced across her damp skin as the coiling warmth of his tongue probed and plundered her eager mouth. Oh Lord, they must already be dead because this was heaven... a better one than she'd ever dreamed.

Minutes passed. Or maybe hours. Overhead light illuminated the elevator car, the motor roaring back to life. But his mouth was so insistent that she could do nothing other than comply with its very wanton wishes. Her hands tangled in his hair, pulling him close, longing to feel his—

Ding! It was the one sound that could break the intoxicating spell. He ran a hand through his tousled hair and strode through the elevator doors as they opened without so much as a backward glance. No effing way. Lisa Embry was not one to be ignored.

“Hey!” she sputtered as she followed, still breathless. “What the hell was that? You can't just go around assaulting random helpless women!”

“You're far from helpless. Besides, I didn't hear any complaints when I had you pinned against the wall. Maybe you need to have a chat with that tongue of yours... and some of the other body parts that were edging in on the action.” He turned, a wicked gleam reflected in his alluringly deviant eyes.

“Whaat?” Her stilettos clicked on the marble floor as she stomped toward him. “You're a disgusting pig. I panicked, you saw an opportunity and took it.”

Two could play that insidious little game. Standing down, her lips curled into a smirk. "Poor thing. Are you really that desperate?"

"That's supposed to be a rhetorical question, right?"

Her fists clenched at her sides, twitching, aching to knock that smug look off his beautiful face. "You're a real asshole. Who the hell do you think you are?"

A cocky smile appeared, revealing a dimple in his left cheek. "I just prevented a heart attack. Call me God."

Damned elevator. Unreliably reliable. A.J. hoisted the leather briefcase over his shoulder, signed contracts securely packed. Another impromptu meeting with this new client might not be so bad if there was a shot he'd run into Blondie again. Too bad they hadn't been trapped longer. He'd have loved to have those plump, pink lips wrapped firmly around his cock, licking and sucking with the same intensity she'd used on his tongue. And that body... those curves would dangle any sane man over the brink of insanity. Fuck, he wanted her, sprawled on her back wearing only those insanely high heels, dripping with pent-up desire, her tight thighs open and waiting, begging for him to drive into her, over and over and over...

It would have been fun of the most salacious kind. But the string of expletives she'd hurled convinced him to locate a suitable replacement... and fast, considering the growing erection he was battling.

A.J.'s lips lifted into a self-satisfied smirk.

Luckily, he was never without options.

He pulled open the door to Joya, one of his favorite restaurants. A quick scan of the post-happy hour crowd confirmed he might need to find that replacement somewhere else. But, business first.

Paul Emerson, his longtime friend and business partner, sat at the bar with two highball glasses, peering at his iPhone. He raised a piercing glare at A.J. “Did you really have to get caught?”

A.J. grasped one of the glasses and took a large gulp of the fiery liquid. Smooth and biting at the same time. How ironic. Such was his life. “It wasn’t my fault.”

“Is it ever? You know I don’t give a shit what, or *who*, you do in your spare time, but this new business deal is going to be huge and we don’t need the press breathing down our throats right now.”

“If I counted the times I’ve said the very same thing to you since our days back at Stanford, I’d be retired. Five times over.”

“I kept things interesting. Still do. It’s one of the reasons why our company is so wildly successful, aside from my brilliance.”

“Your humility is astounding.”

“I’m going to assume that’s a rhetorical statement.”

“You do that.”

Paul snickered and sloshed the liquor around his glass. “Look, all I’m saying is if you can’t keep your dick in your pants, at least make sure the world doesn’t know about it. We don’t need any bad press right now and your association with Hollis can cripple our plans. Let’s get the contracts finalized first, Counselor.”

Hollis as in Hollis Michaels, B-list actress and fame whore. How had he allowed himself to get sucked into her funnel cloud? The woman had paparazzi on speed dial, for Christ's sake. Add her to the growing list of his indiscretions. Just when he'd thought he was smart enough to dodge the media bullet, it came torpedoing after him.

"Are you the pot or the kettle in this scenario?"

Paul's lips curled into a smirk. "Neither. I'm reformed now."

"I guess marriage will do that."

"Look, just try to lay low until we make the announcement."

Easier said than done. Contrary to popular belief, women weren't his addiction. They were the antidote.

A few blissful minutes. That's all it would take to suppress the chilling thoughts bubbling up from Lisa's subconscious. Well, that and a hard cock poised to plunder, just like the one grazing her inner thigh. It was a gratifying, albeit temporary solution. All thoughts of Cocky Asshole were extinguished and her sole focus was on... um... oh yes, *Danny*. Okay, so maybe not fully eradicated but they weren't enough to deter her from what she so needed at that moment.

Her breaths grew ragged, chest heaving as his tongue trailed the column of her neck and swirled around her taut nipples. Oh God, why was he teasing her like this? Why was he taking his sweet ass time, tonight of all nights, when what she really needed was for him to relentlessly fuck her until she forgot her own name?

“Danny,” she murmured, grasping his shaft and pumping it faster as it swelled against her fingers. “I want this inside me. *Now.*” His muscular chest, glistening with sweat, pressed against her but he still wasn’t taking the bait.

“Not yet. I need to tell you something.” A slow smile lifted the corners of his mouth. Why were his hands cupping her face? Why weren’t they grabbing her ass?

“Lisa, I think I’m falling in love with you.”

Cue the record scratch sound effect.

Love? *Love?* All evidence of her arousal dried up faster than a puddle of water in the middle of the Sahara.

“You *what?*” She shot up and shoved him backward. “What did you just say?”

“I said, I’m fall—”

“I heard what you said!” She leapt off the bed, gripping the bed sheet in her clenched fists. “You need to leave. Now!”

The look of dismay on his face made her stomach roll. But it wasn’t her fault. He’d known what this was... and what it most certainly was *not*.

“I don’t understand why you’re doing this. What’s the matter? I thought—”

“You broke the rules! I told you, I *warned* you!” She recoiled as his hand grasped her wrist. Sleeping with a colleague was such a huge mistake. If he got too clingy, there was no escape. “Besides, hello, it’s barely been a month. We agreed—”

“I know, and I tried but my feelings changed.” Danny inched closer and twirled a tendril of her hair around his finger. “Come on, we’re so good together. And the sex is amazing.”

It was, without question, fantastic, and the sole reason why she hadn’t run sooner.

Her back stiffened. “You knew the rules. We’re done.”

Chapter Two

A crisp chill hustled A.J. toward his car, one of two in the otherwise desolate parking lot. Moonlight glinted atop the roof of his brand-new Testarossa. Who the hell else could be here? The building was dark, save for the Blue Coat offices and that was only because he'd just left.

The driver's side door of his neighbor creaked open and a tall, lithe redhead stepped out clad in a short, black trench coat. Her collagen-plumped lips curled into a seductive smile directed at him.

He'd heard the stories and they should have been enough to keep him away but a little too much scotch impaired his judgment. Well, that and the demanding hands she'd stuffed into his jeans.

"It's about time you made an appearance. Although I wouldn't mind if you took me up to your office and screwed me senseless on your desk again."

"What are you doing here, Hollis?" Christ, talk about a bad call. If all other women were the antidote, this one was pure poison.

She stepped around the front of the car, her fuck-me-six-ways-to-Sunday heels clicking on the pavement. "I think it's obvious why." Her fingers loosened the belt of the trench, open lapels revealing the swells of her bare, silicon-injected breasts. "I thought we'd celebrate the *news*."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Knowing Hollis, the paparazzi were in position, ready to jump out of the myriad of foliage lining the office park once that trench hit the ground. Fuck that.

"Let's just say I landed a lead role in a very prominent director's next movie." She sidled closer, toying with the belt.

"Congratulations."

“Oh, come on, can’t you be a little more excited?” she purred, circling him like flies buzzing around an open trash container. The trench coat fell off one bronze shoulder. “I know you want to see what is, or what *isn’t*, underneath.”

His cock twitched. *Get into the car and drive the hell out of here now.* This chick was all kinds of crazy. Hot as fuck, but cracked as a shithouse rat. Insane as it was, the sex just wasn’t worth the guaranteed aggravation. “Forget it, Hollis. It was fun while it lasted, but we’re done.”

“You sure about that?” Her hand grasped his growing bulge. “Seems like your dick is singing a different tune... the one where it wants to fuck my mouth and then my ass. Yeah, I remember how much it *loved* that number.”

He pulled back, shifting his laptop bag. “Look, I have enough going on without having my name dragged through the tabloids right now. It’s over.”

“I can be discreet. Nobody would know.”

He opened the passenger door and tossed his bag onto the seat. “You’re about as discreet as a hand grenade.” And his reputation was already on the verge of being blown to bits. He didn’t need any help from the one woman who could finish the job before he’d even gotten off.

Chapter Three

“These shoes are hot. Like, scorching.” Lisa could barely choke out the words; the pain was that intense. “I think the balls of my feet are actually smoking right now. Can you see... look closer...” Jesus Christmas. This must be what it felt like to dance around on tiny shards of broken glass.

Her best friend Jessica giggled, rubbing her swollen belly. “I wish I could fit my fat foot into one of those right about now. I’m lucky I can get by in a pair of flip-flops these days.”

Lisa teetered on the marble tiled floor, grasping shelves as she crept around. “It’s all temporary, love. You’ll be back in your stilettos soon enough.”

“If they still fit. I’ve read so many horror stories about girls’ feet never shrinking back to their original size. My collection is priceless. I can’t start over.”

“You’ve got bigger fish to fry right now. Like what the heck you’re going to do with a screaming baby at two in the morning.”

“Thank God James is such a night owl. He’s already volunteered to take the late-night feedings.”

“Jeez, can that husband of yours be any more perfect? Gorgeous, brilliant, doting, and oh by the way, has sold two internet companies before the ripe old age of thirty. Becoming Super Dad is just a given.” She limped the final remaining steps toward temporary salvation in the form of a plush leather chair. “Screw it, they aren’t worth the agony. At least, not at that price.” She kicked off the heels and flexed her toes, black lacquered toenails glinting in the overhead light. A quick scan of the shelves left her feeling completely deflated until...
“Those!”

Jessica nodded. “Yep, those are gorgeous. Super-high heel, though. You sure you can shake it across the stage without breaking your pretty little neck?”

“Without a doubt!” She beamed at the salesgirl. “Size nine, please.”

“I have to use the ladies’ room again. This baby is *really* making its presence known.”

“You have a long way to go. It’s only going to get worse.”

“Thanks for reminding me. I’m also starving so let’s hustle, huh?”

“Yes, ma’am.” Her own stomach growled in response. Shopping always superseded food, unless said food was pizza, dripping with pepperoni, black olives and banana peppers. There was just nothing better.

The salesgirl appeared with a pale pink shoebox. “Here you go.”

Lisa clasped her hands together as the girl pulled them out. “They’re perfect.”

“I’ve had my eye on them since they arrived.” She handed Lisa the left shoe. The black suede straps laced to the ankle, clasped with a gold buckle encrusted with clear crystals. Lisa narrowed her eyes at the skinny stiletto heel. “Five inches?”

“Add a half. Not that you need the height.”

“It’s not always about the height, but about the presence.”

The salesgirl snickered. “Let me know how they fit.”

The upcoming festivities would be such a welcome break from her mind-numbingly boring daily existence. By day, she crunched numbers to pick out viable investments for her fund’s portfolio. By night... well, she had quite a different job, the one she loved. The one that kept her going. For the millionth time during her career, Lisa wondered why she couldn’t be like all those startup

CEOs her firm funded. What a life – to be flushed with cash and inspired to follow your dreams. But it wasn't only inspiration that kept those companies chugging. They *believed* they'd be successful. They didn't fear failure or rejection. They welcomed the risk.

And those were the things that separated her from them.

At 6'1 in her new shoes, she wandered the boutique, stiletto heels clicking on the shiny floor. They molded to her feet as if they'd been made especially for her. She twirled a lock of hair around her finger and flashed a slow smile at herself in one of the wall mirrors. Yep, they were fabulous. Exactly what she'd needed and the primary reason why she'd continue a life of seemingly endless valuations for those prick senior managers. Her little shopping compulsion was just another temporary fix to fill the void, and dammit, she counted on nobody for happiness, security or stability. The future was up to her alone.

She smoothed the front of her skirt and twisted in a slow circle. Jessica would be back any second, ready to gnaw off her arm if she took a minute longer to pay for the shoes.

"Excuse me, would you like—"

Startled, she pitched forward. "Ow! What the hell--?" Something hard smacked into her bare shoulder, making her stumble in the sky-high heels. A loud clanging sound followed by shattering glass greeted her as she spun into the salesgirl who had been carrying a platter of champagne flutes, a platter that was now sitting in a large puddle of liquid and smashed crystal. Cold liquid dripped down her arms, pooling on the floor in front of her brand-new and not-yet-paid-for suede shoes. One of the things she loved best about this place was the very thing that could make her cry in that instant.

With a gasp, Lisa quickly tiptoed away from the champagne to avoid collateral damage but one of the fabric soles didn't cooperate. Her leg slid out, arms flailing as she skidded to gain the slightest bit of traction. *Argh! Can't fall, can't ruin the suede!*

After one final spin, she stumbled, landing cleanly in the muscular arms of a delectable specimen of a man who had eyes resembling swirls of melted brown chocolate with flecks of gold dancing around in the depths.

Oh.My.God.

Her mouth dropped open, mind paralyzed. Words eluded her... not that there were enough expletives on earth to satisfactorily convey her disgust. But those eyes sent her floating off into the abyss with no recollection of how she'd ended up there in the first place and no immediate desire to return.

Telling him to go fuck himself would be so gratifying, if only her lips would cooperate. Her skin tingled under the pads of his fingertips. Ugh, wasn't it just like her body to completely betray her like that?

"If you're about to have another heart attack, I'm ready and willing to stop it again."

Lisa shook her head, opening her mouth but still no words emerged. Her pulse raced like a thoroughbred; that sparkling white smile had rendered her mute, until... "In your dreams," she finally squeaked. *Really?* Her mouth decides to kick it into gear and that's what comes out?

Egomaniacal Asswad's grin deepened, that damned dimple making her heart quake. A heady scent swirled in the air. If he hadn't had such a tight grip on her, she'd have ended up on her ass since her limbs refused to operate under

his intoxicating spell. Her fingers itched to crawl through his thick dark hair despite the animosity bubbling in her veins.

“Well, if this were a dream, we’d be on that very cushy couch right about now.”

Argh! He may have the face of a Greek god, but damn, he was arrogant as all hell. “You are such a jackass. I wouldn’t go to the hospital with you if I was wandering around barefoot on hot coals, bleeding out my eyes, and you were the only person on earth with a car.” But despite the caustic tone, the fluttering in her belly persisted. What was that all about? It was new, an unfamiliar sensation, one she’d never experienced.

“You’re not exactly running away.”

“I can’t run in heels this high, but trust me, I’d love nothing more than to put as much distance between us as humanly possible.” She settled her stiletto-clad foot on the still-slippery tile and lifted herself out of his firm grasp. Who the hell did he think he was? She’d rather her ass land in that bubbly puddle than remain in his sleazy clutches a second longer.

“That’s too bad, although the view from behind would be worth it.”

She furrowed her brow, steam practically blasting from her ears as she cocked her head in mock confusion. “Sorry? I didn’t quite get that. But then again, I don’t speak scumbag.” With a swing of her hips, she nearly collided with a brunette saleswoman rushing toward Tall, Dark and Delicious-But-Still-A-Total-Dickhead. Smooth, real smooth.

The woman handed him a large shopping bag and flashed a bright smile. “Here they are! Please give Kayla my best.”

Lisa stifled a snort as she hurried back to the register. *Kayla*. What a total sleaze, propositioning her while he was picking up shoes for another woman. She spotted Jessica glowering at her. "Don't be mad, Jessie. I had a little altercation with some champagne glasses but I'm ready to go." Cocky bastard didn't even warrant a mention. She grabbed the empty shoebox and handed it to the salesgirl along with her credit card. Her gaze wandered toward the front of the boutique. Empty, save for the cleaning guy who was mopping up the alcohol-soaked mess. So why the heck was her heart still pounding like a block of cement in a dryer?