

Chapter 0002

Anastasia

Three Years Later

"Buttey, you're up!" Neeve, tonight's manager, called from within the club.

I stood from my dressing table and leaned across the sea of eyeshadow pallets, lip glosses, stage paint, and body sprays, to check my make-up in the mirror.

A shimmering azure powder coated my eyelids, the same shade as the butter had yet to slip on.

I grabbed the body glitter and dusted my hiked-up breasts. It would look incredible on the stage, and it didn't transfer to clothes, so our married patrons wouldn't have to worry about their wives learning their dirty little secrets.

Such was the standard here at Mystics Gentleman's Club.

Adjusting my sheer top, embedded with hundreds of tiny diamonds, I moved on to zipping up my skirt. The pleated scrap of fabric did nothing to cover my backside, but it was awfully cute. With the pattern of a monardella in blue, it matched the stage name I'd given myself when I started working here four months ago.

After spritzing myself down with some scent-blocker, I waved at Pixie, a red-headed vixen whose body piercings garnered so much attention I briefly debated getting my own done, and Mermaid, a dark-skinned Goddess with curves that would make any man or woman's mouth water.

I slipped on my mask and my favorite pair of pleasers. Twinkles prouted from the back of each one, completing my look.

As I emerged from the back to a sea of glossy-eyed stares, a pop song with a heavy beat sounded from the speakers mounted on the walls. The lights melted from cold white to pulsing blue and purple. They danced along my skin as I sauntered up to the pole at the center of the stage, illuminating the tattoos down both of my arms.

Since I'd refused to dye my honey-blonde hair three years ago, I had to do something to change up my appearance. Tattoos were easily recognizable, yes, but they went against everything my father had taught me.

As a woman, my job was to be sweet, quiet, demure. I was meant to blend into the background, not stand out.

Flashing the crowd a sultry smile, I wrapped my leg around the pole and did a few precautionary spins. My hands danced through the air, skimming along my tapered waist and wide hips.

I started with a few of the basics. Working my way into a backslide that left my legs spread, I did a few carousel spins, arching my back to show what hid beneath my tiny, pleated skirt.

Money began to pour onto the stage, but I ignored it for the time being. As I moved in sensual, fluid motions, I locked my eyes to each person in the crowd. With a single look I made them feel important.

Make a man feel special, and his guard slips down.

Murmurs kicked up as I pulled myself upside down. With one hand high on the pole, and one low, I dropped one of my legs, stretching it out behind me. My free ankle was pressed against the pole, rooting me in place as it spun slowly. Moving on from the extended butterfly slipped into a full moon pose.

When the song finally ended, I ended the dance with my back arched and hands roaming my chest. Smiling coyly, I waved at the crowd and sauntered backstage.

While the stage hands swept up my earnings to be deposited into a locked box with my name on it, I ventured to the back to grab a drink.

I'd just brought my bottle of water to my lips when Neeve appeared in the break room. The head manager of Mystics was short and pudgy with a solid gold tooth that showed whenever he got worked up.

He wasn't exactly attractive, but he was a good guy. Not only did he treat us girls with respect, but he also took after Otis, our bouncer. Neither were afraid to rip into the men that got too handsy.

He scratched the top of his bald head, "Aye, but get a man out there wantin' a private dance."

I was just about to pass it up, feigning exhaustion, when Neeve cracked a toothy grin.

"Take a look at 'em, will ya? He looks like he's got some serious money."

Trusting Neeve, because he'd never steered us girls wrong, I ran my hair over my shoulder and popped my hip out.

"Alright. After this I'm heading home. I've got a bubble bath waiting with my name on it."

"Attagirl! Get out there and make that money. He snapped his stubby fingers together. "Top up on that scent-blocker though."

Mystic's Gentleman's Club was located just outside the boundary line of the Falling Star Pack. This meant we had a mixture of both human and wolf clients. Of course, it was damn near impossible to tell the difference between the two when everyone was wearing scent-blocker, but it was better to be safe than sorry.

It was risky working at a place like this, so close to another pack, but with the Falling Star Pack's reputation for being full of ruthless, bloodthirsty animals, I could trust that my father and Jayden wouldn't come sniffing too close.

After dousing myself in the chemical-scented spray, I made my way back to the front of the club. With Neeve's help, I spotted the guy who had requested me for a private dance.

He sat in an alcove in the darkest part of the club. The padded booth was blood red, even beneath the colorful lights.

I came to a halt, unable to breathe as I drank in the specimen of pure male.

Broad shoulders strained against a perfectly pressed dress shirt the color of shadows. His slacks, a few shades darker, showed every inch of his powerful thighs.

My heart fluttered hard enough to alert my wolf.

Thick hair, long enough to run down his forehead, hung over his forehead. The sides and back were shaved short in a fade that looked soft to the touch.

Standing on either side of him were two men. The three of them had such blinding similarities that they had to be brothers, or possibly even triplets.

I took in their sharp noses, impossibly high cheekbones, and soulful eyes the color of liquid honey. They had the kind of classic beauty that could make a woman swoon.

They were, for all intents and purposes, unfathomably perfect.

However, there was something sophisticated about the middle one that drew me in. I couldn't help it; I'd always loved a man in a suit.

The other two broke off before I could listen in on their conversation. One of them, the shorter one, though he still stood a solid foot above my head, turned my way.

He ran his thumb along his jawline, the one sitting a loaded grin.

Without a single word, the two walked away.

I approached Mr. Dark-and-Handsome with the same confidence I held on stage. A coy smile hid the hammering of my heart. A flutter of my eyelashes hid the way my hands trembled.

Leaning forward, I felt my honey-blonde waves fall over my shoulders. I poised my lips into a smile. "Ready for your dance, sir?"

Sir.

How some of our patrons loved being called sir. It gave them power, and what man didn't long for power?

He grunted, and I fought the urge to snort. Man of few words, apparently.

I stood between his muscular thighs and stared down at him like a Queen approaching her throne. I blinked my eyes over his left hand, searching for a tan line where a wedding ring might've been. Surprisingly, there was none.

Just as a new song began, dark and pulsating, I tipped my head to the side and purred in his ear.

"You may touch me but get too handsy and you'll lose the hands. We clear?"

His eyes, sparkling like topaz's, slid up the length of my body. I repressed a shudder. Goddess, his stare was heavy. I could practically feel it coasting along my bare skin.

"Crystal."

And that voice, phew. All deep and low, caught in a perpetual growl. That was the kind of voice that talked you through it, telling you what a good girl you were for taking his —

Screw the bubble bath, I was going to need a cold shower after this.

I typically didn't enjoy the private dances I gave, but I had a feeling this one might be different.

Just as the beat dropped, I spun around. My mini skirt lifted as I leaned forward and began to dance. I ran my hands up my hips, feeling the pressure of his eyes watching my every move.

I nearly jostled as his fingers grazed my arms, trailing over the brightly colored tattoos that led up to my shoulders. They were rough with callouses, a surprise considering his clean, put-together appearance.

His hands trailed down to my hips, squeezing softly. I nearly gasped, my heart beating in tune with the music.

As I swayed to the beat, my bottom gliding over his crotch teasingly, I felt my own skin begin to heat. A familiar pressure started to build in my core, startling me so thoroughly that I nearly stumbled.

Turning around, I slid my legs onto the padded seat of the couch, forcing him to lean back.

I held my breath, willing my body not to react as his eyes, dark and hooded, seared into my own. Hard as I tried, I couldn't pull away. The gold tones within them sparkled, a beacon drawing me deeper and deeper in.

Now straddling him, I continued to dance. His chest heaved softly, air escaping his lips in soft puffs. It smelled of whiskey and butterscotch, a mixture that made my mouth water.

My fingers trailed through my hair, over my cleavage, and down my waist. I even glided them lightly down his chest, brushing over the buttons of his pristine dress shirt.

All of it, each movement my body made mere inches above his, was for a reason.

Slowly, the man was letting his guard down.

I knew in that moment that there was no way this man could possibly be a wolf. He had to be human. I'd given plenty of dances to some of the males from the Falling Star Pack, and they were brutes. Each and every one of them.

Not a single snarl escaped him, nor a growl.

Perhaps he was a bodybuilder-slash-business man. One with incredible genetics. That would explain the rippling muscles, perfectly symmetrical face, and tailored suit.

I quickly made up my mind and decided that the temptation was much too strong to resist.

Rolling my hips inches above his, I ran my fingers down his chest. Tapping into my magic, I felt time come to a screeching halt. The dancers on the stage froze, the music paused sending the club into deafening silence. Even the man beneath me wasn't immune. Then again, I never met a person who was.

Slowly, I slipped my fingers into his pocket and folded his car keys into my hand.

Time resumed, the song ended, and with a coy smile I slid off his lap.

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