

Read Novel Alpha Male

Alpha Male Chapter 2-Willow

“You pay how much a night?” I released a shaky breath. Tiny fluff balls ripped around my ankles and bounced off. A quick head count assured all my children were present before they darted off again in five different directions. “Oh.” That would cover every debt I struggled against in a single weekend.

A weekend.

That was all it would take. One weekend, and we would be free. How much could it hurt? A lot, my brain offered as a reminder service. We needed the money and ... it was one weekend. Two nights, and a handful of hours. I swallowed hard as tears sprang to my eyes.

“Are you sure, love? There are other routes we can work out. You get paid well to sit in a birdcage and dance,” the grandmotherly voice on the other end of the line reassured me. “You don’t have to do the private rooms at Fray. Although we do have some serial gropers on the dance floor.”

My shiver worked from toes to nose and left me shaking. That was what a shifter like me did in the face of adversity, even if it was a remote one. Quiver, quake, and run away. I grabbed whatever mettle resided in my mind and refused to crumble. “No. I’m sure.”

Not sure at all and a lot desperate, I gave my details from my driver’s license to the clean screening STI test that had come back in time for the phone interview.

I need to find a babysitter.

More fluffy balls rocketed around my feet and headed for the kitchen of our small, dilapidated apartment. One arm stuck out as it careened toward the doorway, diverting its path in time to avoid calamity.

I let my relief out in a long sigh.

Maybe an army of babysitters.

But after one weekend of work, I would be able to afford it.

“I’ll do it.”

I stood outside Fray’s imposing shadow and prayed I had the tenacity to make it through the weekend somewhat unscathed and not disgrace myself by screaming back to the safety of the street level. Music boomed from the nightclub as shifters of all sorts mingled around the entrance. Neon signs lit a small area around the doors that somehow made the rest of the street darker. Two red kangaroo shifters dressed in black manned the door, their red hair streaked in their uniform color, carding the drunk and underage.

I swallowed hard. My feet refused to move outside the nightclub I allotted my freedom to for the weekend in exchange for a hefty paycheck. A paycheck that would leave my remaining family in no doubt that we could afford the basic groceries without putting things back. And life-critical bills, like rent. Without counting every dollar for school uniforms, for instant coffee.

My one vice I refused to give up.

Until it came to starvation.

We’d come close. I’d spotted Fray’s ad on an online dating group that more than stretched the fringes of shifter life. The club shared those limits—a little online research opened my eyes to a much broader world than the narrow one I shared with Byron until his passing—and I knew my expectations were limited. That I would change after this experience.

Maybe that was a good thing after becoming a single mom, unplanned. I knew who the club catered to, and who ran it. From the line that wrapped around the nearest corner and halfway along the block beyond, Rafe Astor must be a wealthy, popular man. I’d heard stories about him, even in my limited shifter circle. A predator, in so many ways. That he played with shifter women, but never took them home or claimed one as his. Though, rumor had it, he’d come close once.

My research left me in no doubt of why. Rafe Astor was stunning. Dark-haired and golden-eyed, he emulated the perfect love child of Henry Cavill and Ricky Martin. Every girl from nineties music fans to current-day fantasy film addicts, plus more than a few boys, would swoon in his wake.

Not that I would encounter him. Fray’s enormous building spanned several floors, not including the lower level. That was where I would be. Because I’d

be paid more if I let them hurt me rather than fvck me. Everyone had their own kink. Maybe I could discover mine there too.

My cheeks flamed at the illicitness of it all.

“Screw it.” I said the words aloud and shoved my black, five-inch heels, the same I’d worn to Byron’s funeral, into the grit that lined the parking lot. Clutching my jacket tight, I approached the club, my license gripped in a sweaty palm.

Entry was all too easy. A doorman ticked me off on his phone and waved me inside. At the front desk, a girl who had let scales transform her arms into a golden hue pointed to a seat opposite her. Exposed and embarrassed, I crossed my arms over my chest.

“Willow Bonnier.” A tall man sporting a head of gray hair streaked with glossy silver strands that glowed beneath the club’s black lights stood in front of me, hand extended. “Killian Du Pont, manager and your employer for this evening. This weekend.” He checked his paper again. “Two nights, huh?”

“Wouldn’t that be Rafe Astor?” I took his hand in a warm grip and spoke without thinking. “My employer, I mean.” Swallowing hard, I dropped my hand and my gaze.

“He’s going to adore you.” A knuckle brushed beneath my chin, lifting my gaze to meet his.

Steeling myself, I stared into a dark caramel gaze. “Kangaroo? A gray,” I added, then wished I hadn’t, speaking out of turn.

The one thing Byron drilled into me, time after time. Being under this man’s attention—Killian—became one of the most intense experiences of my life.

It lasted all of eight seconds. I counted every single one.

He’d matched a black shirt and silver waistcoat to his hair. The highlights in the material shone under the club’s glow, and I took in his bulk with a small gulp I doubted went unnoticed.

“Astute, aren’t you? Most of the girls who come in here don’t bother to think. Or won’t.” His soft voice carried to me alone, leaving our conversation private.

“I’m sure they have their reasons,” I murmured. “Ah—where do I go to get—” I cleared my throat, unsure how to proceed.

I am so out of my depth right now.

“You’ll be perfect. If you head past Lux at the bar”—he pointed to a dark-haired girl dressed in tight jeans and a fluff of feathers wrapped around her chest who waved back—“she’s an emu, and best damn bartender I’ve ever hired.” A note of admiration entered his voice.

I smiled at the obvious affection between them.

“A sub, but I swear she’s in denial. Go past the big ’roo at the corner of the stage, see him? There’s a corridor. That leads to the locker room. Your partner for the night is listed on the board. Grab the key for the room allotted to you both, and do whatever you need. The stairwell that leads to the lower playrooms will be on your right when you leave the hallway. You have ... thirteen minutes.” He checked his watch. “Questions?”

“I don’t know where to start?”

Killian smiled megawatts that removed the rest of the world. “Start by being you. Listen to instructions and ... experience. Security has cameras. For your safety. If they see a threat, help will come. You’re safe, Miss Bonnier.”

“Mrs. Bonnier,” I said firmly. “Widowed.”

“Indeed.” Killian raised a brow. “A pleasure to have you, Mrs. Bonnier.”

“Thanks.” I took the key he pressed into my hand. I blinked at it, and by the time I looked up, he had already turned his attention to someone else.

I made my way between dancers, avoiding crouching subs worshiping at their master’s feet. The girl manning the bar on her own—Lux—waved, a bright smile on her face. She gestured me through to the locker room.

My lip sucked between my teeth as I studied the carpet and weaved through the crowd. I dipped my head to avoid making eye contact or seeing the faces I passed. Slipping behind the security guard, I wandered alone down the hall that ended at the locker room Killian directed me toward. I shoved my jacket into the allotted pigeon hole, stashed my purse in my locker, and flicked my hair from my face.

My attire matched the club's specifications. The harder the play, the softer the costume—on the surface. Slinky, transparent lace slid over my body in a baby-doll-style dress that barely disguised the pink leather harness I wore beneath it. I rubbed the toe of my shoe into the carpet, undecided. The heels gave me extra height on my five-foot-four inches, and who knew? Maybe my playmate might like that.

I checked the roster board, which gave a name and a number, plus an arrow that directed me to a keybox. After selecting the key to my room, I checked the level a few times and held my breath. Most room keys were already taken, so I assumed the night's other playdates had already started. With everything completed online, I had little actual contact with another person until tonight, and even that was limited. My isolation intensified when I gripped my key in my palm and pushed open the door to the main club.

Most of the patrons were ensconced by a show near the stage, and the remainder lounged around the bar area, surrounded by black leather seating. A dark, unmarked set of stairs disappeared into the bowels of the club to my right. I shuffled around a burly security guard, my key at the ready in case he asked for it, but no one questioned me or stopped me.

Until I reached the stairs.

Hands wound around my waist, settling over my stomach and pulling me back into a fully clothed, virile male. His *erection pressed between my exposed ass cheeks*, my negligee and his suit pants the barrier between us.

That he was dressed and I was ... not really, brought heat rushing to my cheeks. My thighs pressed together at the hot flush that also headed south, and the man gave a soft laugh in my ear.

Wait, all that—from a stranger's touch? What the hell was wrong with me? I wasn't here to have fun, or party or ... *fvck*. I shook my head, but my arousal refused to dissipate.

"Are you sure you're in the right place, little princess? Pleasure stops on this level. The sort I'm sure you're after. The one down there"—my unknown man ran a fingertip from my collarbone and along my arm, leaving goose-pebbled flesh in his wake—"that's a very different kind of pleasure. Dark and delicious. But that's not for you."

“No?” I spun on my heel, pushing it into the plush carpet that muffled my attempt at a stomp, but I couldn’t bring myself to look my aggressor in the face. I stared at the high shine of his black shoes, my state of undress reflected on its surface. Heat flushed from my br*east to my cheeks. “Well, then. You might be surprised.”

His hand caught the back of my neck, his fingers curving beneath my jawline to force my head up. I stared into black and yellow-shot eyes that could only belong to one man.

Rafe Astor.

“Oh, I do hope so.” He smiled, a terrible and wonderful thing, promising things all se*x and sin at once, every dark delight I could desire.

Heat flushed over me in a rush that left me heady. I twisted away from him, my heart racing, and I took the first few steps at a too-quick pace. My hand hit the banister, preventing me from toppling the remainder of the way down the flight.

His mocking laughter followed me to the lower level, but I didn’t look back.

I wouldn’t give him the pleasure.