

## Chapter 16

### A Whore Without Dignity

Ava stumbled out of the VIP suite feeling both physically and emotionally drained. But hell if she wasn't about ten grand richer.

She had just made in a single night, more than she had in her entire three and a half months living and working at the Green Light Club. And from a bunch of bastards who'd claimed to not even like her.

Sighing, Ava paused to slip her heels off. Leaning against a wall, she rubbed the aching balls of her feet and fought the sudden urge to burst into tears. A strange sense of pride and disappointment intermingled within her, filling her with dueling urges to laugh and cry.

Ultimately, she parsed out, she was glad to have been able to game the system she was a simple cog in, just like Madame Bella had urged her to

do. At the same time, though, Ava was deeply saddened to have once again ended up in a system that required her to trade her dignity for success.

At the very least, this time success came with a hit of power, along with the money. Ava had spent two hours in that luxury suite, and by the end of it, every single one of the jeering, debasing males in there had forked over their hard-earned because she'd told them to. And she hadn't needed to take off a single item of clothing to do it.

It was disgusting and fascinating, and fuck...it was a little thrilling.

It was a thrill that Ava didn't want and wished she had never had the opportunity to feel. She finally understood why some of the club's escorts stayed on after their contracts were up. She hadn't judged them for it, but she'd thought the need and want for money had been the primary motivator.

Now, she realized it was also the heady rush that came with having a grown male reduced to a besotted, quivering mess, just by the machinations of your hands. It was the delicious spike of revenge that occurred when a male who'd called you a clown only an hour before, moaned your name and came apart in his pants like a teenager.

Maybe that last part was just her.

Goddess, she thought. At this point, I can't even tell if this is better or worse than the dungeon.

Ava slid to the floor, pulled her knees up to her chest, and let the tears fall.

Then she thought of the freedom that came when she had finally stopped caring about what others thought of her, what Xavier thought of her, and started focusing on her own needs. She looked down at the money in her lap, the most money she'd ever seen in person.

Not bad for a little clown doll.

Then, Ava dried her face with a hundred-dollar bill, got up, and waltzed the rest of the way to her room with her head held high.

Ava opened her bedroom door, ready for a shower and the sweet oblivion of exhaustion-induced sleep. Instead, an arm reached out of the darkness and pulled Ava into the pitch-black room.

Ava began to scream when the warm, inviting scent of wood ash and violets filled her nose.

It was Xavier again, and this time he was turned on.

Ava couldn't fathom why. Right now, she was covered in the scents of a dozen other males; the smell of their sweat - and other fluids - was probably strong enough for even a human to scent it.

What was left of her garish make-up was, most likely, smeared across her face. She didn't think the mascara the other escorts had given her was waterproof, so her little pity party in the hallway had all but ensured that she had racoon tracks sliding down her face.

And yet, Xavier pulled Ava into his chest and buried his nose in her hair, inhaling deeply.

Maybe that's his kink, Ava wondered. Between forcing her to kiss another male in front of him and the hardness rising in his pants now, when he knew she'd just left a room full of males who she'd let do goddess-knew what to her - maybe that was what brought Xavier to the Green Light Club over and over again.

His big hands began roaming her body, sliding from her hair down to her neck, and onward. He leaned down and grazed her throat with his teeth, nearly drawing an involuntary gasp from Ava's lips. When his hands slid around her waist to cup her ass, she bit her lip, and when he suddenly tightened his grip on her, she lost her internal battle and moaned into his shoulder.

After giving the sensual performance of a lifetime just a few minutes ago, the sickeningly sweet aroma of their mating bond was creeping into her head, making her almost dizzy. Her heated skin responded to Xavier's every touch. When he growled deeply into her neck, the vibrations shot straight to her moistening core.

No, the thought didn't come from Ava, she'd lost too much of her discipline by this point. It was more of a feeling, an instinct.

Unlike Ava, Mia was fighting not to respond. Where the Wolf had stayed dormant all throughout the charade that had just occurred up on the eighth floor, she'd deemed now an appropriate time to tell Ava to cut and run. From her own mate.

From both of their mates. Mia was still uncomfortable around Xavier and Ava knew better than to ignore that.

Xavier pulled back to look at Ava; his amber eyes locked onto her swollen lips. His eyes went heavy right before he leaned in. Just before he made contact, Ava reached up to block his face with her hand.

Ava had gone through a lot because of this male, recently, and she would be stupid to voluntarily put herself through even more of his special brand of hell.

She needed to nip this in the bud, and quick. Luckily, she always seemed to know the best way to piss him off.

"Cash or credit?" She asked saucily.

Immediately, Xavier reared back. "What did you just say?"

"Will you be paying me in cash or adding tonight's services to your club tab?"

His hands dropped from her like she'd just told him she was rigged with explosives. She licked her lips and trailed a finger down his chest, stopping when she hit his belt. "I've had a long night already, so, unfortunately, there won't be any discounts tonight, Mr. Michaels."

Xavier pushed her hand away, disgust heavy in his features. "Ava!" He was confused and pissed, but he could join the club.

"What? I thought this was what you wanted? Most guys want a whore for a wife, I just thought you took that the same way you do everything else." She leaned into him and leered at him suggestively, "Intensely." "This isn't you." He shook his head, "This isn't my Ava."

Now, Ava threw her head back and laughed in disbelief, "You threw your Ava into a prison cell and left her to rot there for the rest of her life."

Remember?" He backed away from her, but she dogged his every step. "I'm Number 446, convicted fucking murderer."

Ava took a deep breath and flicked the hair that had fallen in her face over her shoulder. Then she smiled, "So, if you want to fuck me, you're gonna have to pay like everyone else, Alpha."

The way he looked at her now was all new to her, but she couldn't pinpoint exactly how. It was almost as if whatever he saw in her...scared him, but that couldn't be right. Xavier would rather be flayed alive than admit to being scared, especially by the likes of her.

"Where is your dignity?" He asked, hoarsely.

Ava pointed to the pile of money she'd dropped on the floor, "There. Now stop wasting my time or get the fuck out."

Without another word, Xavier stormed out of the room, slamming the door shut behind him.

The morning light stabbed at Ava the next morning like a fire poker. When she went to take her first conscious breath of the morning, the air stopped abruptly as soon as it entered her nostrils, causing her to choke. The cough that left her body was deep and rattling. For fuck's sake.

She hoped that, at the very least, she'd given whatever this was to every single one of those asshats from last night. She even wished she'd let Xavier kiss her once, just to make sure he got a dose of her snotty karma, too.

Ava's bones creaked as she got out of bed and shuffled into a robe. She didn't have any medicine of her own, and after last night's makeover fiasco, she wouldn't trust the other girls to lend her so much as a bobby pin.

As she slowly made her way down the hall, she passed several club workers, both from the court and maintenance crew. At times, it felt as if their eyes lingered on her a bit too long, while others refused to meet her gaze at all, even when she raised a hand in greeting.

The only bright side Ava had at the moment was that no one in the club actively hated her, as far as she knew. Despite the cattiness of the prank last night, she didn't have any enemies here.

Ava rounded a corner to find a small group gathered around something hung on a wall on the second floor. As she drew closer, she caught more of the group's low murmurings. "Goddess, that's embarrassing."

"If that ever happened to me, kill me on the spot."

"If I ever met a client \*looking like that\*, kill me on the spot!"

Ava had a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach as she pushed through to the front. The gasps and snickers that followed her, didn't help. She stopped utterly mortified by what she saw.

On the wall hung a blown-up photograph of Ava from last night. In the photo, she was on all-fours picking up the cash strewn across the floor with a dopey grin on her face. From this angle, her big 'fuck you' to Xavier didn't look so empowering.

The few lingering onlookers began to laugh at her horrified expression.

"Not a good look, sweetie." One said before sashaying away, secure in the fact that whatever ridiculous things she'd done to please clients were safely locked away inside her memory.

Soon, it was just Ava and one other person. When she recognized them, she jumped. It was Madison, the girl from Room 803 who'd been harassed by Xavier's guard. Ava hadn't run into the girl again since that night, but she'd learned that she was a college student, waiting cocktails to pay for tuition.

Ava wasn't surprised that someone with such a bright future, so many options sneered at her with such derision. Although, the anger in her eyes probably had more to do with the fact that she remembered how long it had taken Ava to speak up to end her torment.

"A whore just like the rest of them." The girl spat, "You should be ashamed of yourself."

As the girl walked away, Ava's breath came quickly in short hard pants and her congested nose only ensured that her oxygen was further restricted. She grew more and more lightheaded as her vision began to tunnel.

At least she had the presence of mind to rip the picture off the wall, taking it with her as her vision went black.