

## Chapter Three

### Ava

It's nearly nine by the time Jules swings by to pick me up for our girls' night.

Even though I agreed to go out with her, my heart isn't in it. It's been two days since I spilled coffee all over Garrett, the so-handsome-it-should-be-illegal guy who told my asshole customers to go to hell.

I know he only did it because he felt sorry for me, but I haven't been able to stop thinking about him since that shift. I've been dying to go back to the café in the hope that I might see him again, but I don't work until the following morning.

It's freezing outside, so I'm wearing a ruched-sleeve black dress, leggings, and boots. When Jules pulls up in front of my apartment building, she rolls down the window and makes a face. "Who died?"

I look down at the dress and back to Jules. "What? I like this dress."

She wrinkles her nose. "It's giving religious-cult vibes."

"At least my boobs aren't hanging out," I retort, raising an eyebrow at Jules's C-cups, which are practically bursting out of her little black number.

She gives a shimmy then twists around to grab something off the floorboard, her raven waves falling across her face. "Here." She tosses me a shiny bundle of fabric, and I catch it. "Put this on."

Intimidated by what Jules considers appropriate clubbing attire, I hold the dress at arm's length and let the silky burgundy fabric cascade down. It's a short and strappy bodycon dress that looks as though it would fit a child.

"I'm not going dressed as a hooker!"

"It's sexy!" Jules exclaims. "And we had a deal!"

"I agreed to go out with you."

"Bup, bup, bup! You agreed to go out and make an effort to have fun."

I roll my eyes. Damn Jules and her freakin' transcript-quality memory.

Groaning, I turn and stomp back toward my apartment, which I'm subletting with two other seasonal workers. Having roommates is the only way I can afford to live in this town, and my rent still gobbles up about half my paycheck.

When I emerge wearing the skimpy little dress, Jules gives a loud whistle and an enthusiastic "ow, ow!"

I don't believe in doing anything halfway, so I paired the dress with my sexiest heels and applied dark-red lipstick. I also gave my hair a flip and an extra spritz of product to enhance that "come have sex with me" look that Jules seems so determined to achieve.

I figure it's all harmless fun. It's not as if I'm actually going to go home with someone. In all likelihood, I'll grab some New York pizza, come home, watch some trashy TV, and be in bed by one.

By the time we get downtown and find a parking spot, the club is already packed. I'm shivering in the skimpy dress Jules picked out, but luckily the bouncer waves us through.

The loud music and flashing neon lights overwhelm my senses, and Jules makes a beeline for the bar to get us our first round of drinks. The club is full of well-dressed men and gorgeous women, and I'm secretly glad that I didn't show up in my modest black dress and leggings.

When I first got a job as a maid, the woman I was working under told me you can always tell how much money a person really has by looking at their shoes. I secretly hope that none of the Jimmy Choos, Louboutins, or Manolos in attendance look too carefully at the heels I rescued from the sale rack two years before.

"Shots!" Jules yells when she comes up behind me, practically shoving a tall glass of tequila at me.

I down it obediently and make a face. I've never been a huge fan of shots, but I think getting drunk as quickly as possible is about the only way to enjoy this experience.

Jules seems to have the same idea, because within two hours, I've downed another three tequila shots and a very generous vodka tonic. I'm starting to shimmy to the music — a sure sign that I'm wasted — when I spot a very tall, very familiar figure in the crowd.

It happens just like that scene in every movie where two people's eyes lock from across the room and the crowd magically seems to part. Garrett slips through the mob of gyrating rich people with unimaginable ease and grace, and my whole body seems to burn as his midnight-blue eyes take in every inch of me.

"Ava? Earth to Ava!" Jules shouts.

I'm frozen in place. Jules wants me to keep dancing with her, but all I can do is stare at the god of a man making his way toward me.

All the other guys in here are plucked and tanned to within an inch of their life. They probably took more time getting ready than I did, whereas Garrett looks as though he just woke up this way.

Soft honey-chestnut curls caress his chiseled features, and he's left the top few buttons of his white shirt unbuttoned. It's rolled up carelessly at the elbows, revealing strong tanned forearms covered in fine dark hair.

I'm pretty sure this club has a dress code — jackets for men and dresses for women — but somehow he just waltzed right in. He's wearing jeans, for crying out loud, and yet he still oozes money and good taste.

Jules seems to notice the source of my distraction, because she joins me in gawking at Garrett.

He doesn't say a word as he approaches. He just walks straight up to me — not stopping until we're less than a foot apart.

"There you are," he says, as if he expected me to be here. The corners of his mouth lift, revealing a single dimple that sends a surge of liquid heat spilling down into my core.

I suck in a breath and try to collect myself, but I can't seem to form a coherent thought.

Garrett leans forward — so close that I feel the tickle of his warm breath against the shell of my ear. "I was hoping I'd run into you again, but you haven't been at the coffee shop."

My heart gives an irregular stutter. He went to the café looking for me?

"I-I've . . . been off," I stammer, silently cursing that last tequila shot for turning my brain to idiot soup.

Garrett nods, those blue eyes twinkling. "Well, tonight must be my lucky night."

"Must be," Jules chimes in suggestively, and I grind my heel into her foot.

Shit.

My heart is doing erratic gymnastics, and my lady bits are humming.

Clearly, my body doesn't know what's good for me. Garrett probably came to the club tonight to get laid. Running into me was just a happy coincidence.

I know he can see the effect he has on me. To him, I'm an easy target. I'll bet rich locals like him see seasonal working girls like me coming a mile away.

"Can I . . . buy you a drink?" he asks, still in that soft husky voice that seems to go straight to the tingly spot between my legs.

"I think I've had enough," I say faintly. I need to keep my wits about me tonight. Garrett is definitely trouble.

He nods, completely unruffled by my refusal. "Dance with me?"

I open my mouth to tell him no, but Jules elbows me hard in the ribs. I nod to give the pain a chance to subside, and Garrett presses a gentle hand into the small of my back, leading me toward the center of the room.

The song is some upbeat remix of a pop song I've heard a million times. Garrett's hands slide down to my hips, leaving a trail of heat. He moves easily to the music, but my body feels disjointed and awkward as I try to match his rhythm.

All the while, Garrett just stares down at me as though I'm the only woman in the room.

"You look beautiful," he says, just loud enough for me to hear.

"So do you," I reply without thinking.

Garrett laughs, and I immediately want to make him do it again. The sound turns my insides to jelly. "Better now that I'm not wearing that douchebag's cappuccino?"

"Yes," I say, grimacing at the memory. "Sorry. Again."

"Why?" he asks, still grinning broadly. "It's a memorable story. I think that's what they in the movie biz call a 'meet-cute.'"

"A 'meet-cute'?" I repeat, cocking one eyebrow and trying not to laugh. "Like in rom-coms?"

Garrett shrugs. "What can I say? I'll watch anything as long as Drew Barrymore's in it."

This time, I can't hold back my snort. "You're so full of shit."

"Okay, fine." Garrett rolls his eyes. "It's Sandra Bullock that I like. I actually can't stand Drew Barrymore, if you want to know the truth — her or Adam Sandler."

"How dare you!" I retort in a tone of mock offense. "What's Drew ever done to you?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. Is she a friend of yours?"

I can tell from his tone that he's fucking with me, so I scrunch up my face to keep our banter going. "Mmm . . . more like a friend of a friend."

"I see." Garrett's eyes twinkle. "My apologies."

I have to bite down on my bottom lip to keep from grinning like an idiot.

Garrett gives a thoughtful pause and then adds, "Drew is actually a lovely person. I just don't like her movies."

"Okay, now I know you're fucking with me."

"Am not!" Garrett arranges his face in a faux-serious expression. "I swear on my mother's life. Though, in the interest of full disclosure, she is currently rotting in the family crypt, so take that for what it's worth."

I'm not sure whether I'm supposed to laugh or look horrified, but laughter is what bubbles up first. Maybe it's the tequila or the heady, delirious feeling Garrett brings out in me. Either way, I'm in trouble.

Throwing caution to the wind, I reach up to straighten the collar of his shirt, which has gotten turned up in the course of our dance. I feel his chest expand, and then he holds his breath as my fingers brush the bit of exposed skin just inside his collar.

"So, besides name-dropping Drew Barrymore, is there anything else you'd like to get off your chest?"

"Like what?" he asks, and I'm pleased that he sounds almost as breathless as I am.

"Like . . . something besides your first name. I don't know anything about you."

"Well, let's see . . ." Garrett pulls a thoughtful look and tugs me closer until our hips are fused together. I suck in a breath as his hardness presses into me, but Garrett appears not to notice. "I'm thirty-one. Left-handed. I'm a Leo — and an organ donor, though I'm not sure anyone would really want my liver. My blood type is O negative. I'm a cat person, not a dog person. I prefer cake to pie . . ." He pauses and fixes me with an intense look that seems to make time stop. "And I'd really, really like to take you on a date."

I'm not sure if it's that look in his eyes or the feeling of his erection pressing into my stomach, but suddenly I can't think. I want to stretch up onto my tiptoes and kiss those perfect lips, but I doubt I'd be able to reach them — even in my bargain heels.

Garrett seems to read my mind, because he reaches down to brush a stray hair out of my face. That soft touch is enough to send a bolt of heat straight through my stomach to the apex

of my thighs. I swallow. We're standing in the middle of the dance floor, fully clothed, and yet my panties are completely soaked.

Garrett's nostrils flare as if he knows exactly what I'm thinking, and his eyes seem to lighten to an almost silvery shade of blue.

"I . . ." I open and close my mouth without knowing what I'm going to say, and Garrett's eyes flutter closed.

My chest squeezes as he stoops forward to kiss me, and the instant his warm lips brush my own, I feel some little piece inside me click into place.

His lips are soft and clearly practiced at this, and he tastes like rum. I open my mouth to deepen the kiss, and little warning bells go off in my head.

Garrett is dangerous. It's been years since I was even vaguely interested in a guy, but Garrett is charming, sexy, and kind. I don't know what it is about him that makes me want to give myself over completely, but he's just the sort of man who could make me lose focus.

I am so close to saving up enough money and getting the hell out of Colorado, but in this moment, I can't bring myself to care. I've worked so hard to have the life I want. One night of fun can't hurt . . .

Not that it matters at this point. My brain has fully checked out. I'm kissing him back, teetering on my heels, and Garrett is the only thing keeping me tethered to the earth.

I sigh as his warm fingers thread through my hair, not caring that we're in public as I smash my breasts against his chest and grind my hips into his erection.

A low growl rumbles through him at the sudden contact, and I feel his other arm lock possessively around my waist. In one smooth motion, Garrett lifts me off my feet, and I wrap my arms around his neck.

Nearby, somebody wolf whistles. I swear I'm going to kill Jules in the morning.

Everything gets a little fuzzy as Garrett spirits me out of the club. I think he must have called us a car, because suddenly I'm in the back seat, straddling his lap.

Garrett smells like citrus and sandalwood — fresh, clean, and masculine. My dress has ridden up along my thighs, and I can feel his hardness through the thin lace of my panties.

I'm drunk on giddy anticipation. I've never done this before — any of it. I've certainly never gone home with a total stranger. I know it's reckless and a little slutty, but with Garrett, it just feels right.

His mouth is all over me as he grips my thighs, and my heart starts to pound wildly against my ribs.

I've never so much as made out in a car, and I feel slightly out of control. It should be scary, but it isn't. With him, I feel safe.

My fingers are clumsy as I undo the buttons of his shirt, revealing his tanned muscular chest inch by glorious inch. This is so unlike me, but I can't help it. I have this unbearable ache between my thighs that's begging for release.

I don't care where we're going. I don't care who's driving. I just need Garrett inside me.

As if he senses the intensity of my need, Garrett slips a hand under the hem of my dress and runs his fingers along my seam.

A choked moan escapes me at the light contact, and I feel my face heat up. My panties are completely soaked, and I'm sure he can tell.

"So wet," he rumbles, gripping the side of my neck with his free hand so he can plant a hot trail of kisses all the way down my throat.

I'm a little embarrassed by the force of my own desire, but the sense of awe in his voice shatters my inhibitions. I spread my legs wider to give him better access, and he cups my mound through my panties with a possessive growl.

I gasp and grind against him, chasing that delicious friction, but the car comes to an abrupt stop. I freeze with his palm still flat against my pussy, his index and middle fingers creeping dangerously close to my back passage.

Garrett smoothly withdraws his hand, tugs my dress down over my thighs, and hauls me out of the car. The chilly night air dances over my skin, but Garrett's jacket materializes around my shoulders, and I find myself staring up at a velvety blanket of stars.

"This is incredible," I whisper, my gaze going to the jagged outline of the snow-covered peak beyond.

"It is," Garrett murmurs, though I can tell from his positioning that he's not looking at the sky.

He takes my hand and leads me toward the house, which is absolutely gigantic. It's so big that I sort of wonder if he's brought me back to a weird old hotel, but the windows on the first floor are dark.

He leads me silently through the pitch-black entryway, and I can tell from the confidence of his steps that he knows every inch of this place.

We reach the end of the hallway, and Garrett presses me against a wall — capturing my mouth with his and kissing me hungrily.

Now that we're alone, I let out a wanton moan and drag my fingers through his silky curls. Garrett responds by thrusting his tongue into my mouth, and I feel my knees go wobbly.

I need to feel him against me.

Gripping his shirt, I rip it off in one jerky motion and run my hands along the hard planes of his chest. Garrett grins against my mouth.

His skin is hot — almost feverish — or maybe my hands are just cold. I explore every inch of him I can reach, my pussy clenching as my fingers race along the hard lines of his abs.

I hesitate when I get to his belt buckle. It seems indecent to rip his pants off in the hallway, but Garrett apparently doesn't share my hesitation.

Nudging my legs apart, he slips a hand under the hem of my dress. He takes a moment to caress my aching mound through the damp lacy fabric. Then he hooks a finger in the gusset of my panties and tugs them to the side.

A shaky moan escapes his lips as he parts my dripping-wet folds.

In this moment, I know I should stop him if I don't want things to go any further. There's a part of me that knows it's irresponsible and reckless to sleep with a man I just met, but I've never wanted anything as much as I want Garrett.

Then he slips a finger inside me, and my mind goes blank.

"Mmm. So tight," he moans against my neck.

I dig my fingers into his shoulders as Garrett pumps in and out of me. I start to move in rhythm with his thrusts, desperate for more friction.

His thumb works its way along my seam, and I gasp when he finds my throbbing nub.

He starts to work it in slow, torturous circles, and I bite down on my lip to stifle a moan. Then he eases another finger into my channel, and something inside him seems to snap.

His movements become faster — more frantic. I can feel his hot breath against my neck. His rich sandalwood-and-citrus scent overwhelms me.

As he works those long skillful fingers, the pressure inside me starts to build. Suddenly, I don't care that we're in some strange dark hallway or that my dress is scrunched up around my hips. I ride Garrett's hand with abandon, taking every inch he'll give me.



I find his hot, wet mouth in the darkness, and I'm lost in our clash of teeth and tongues as the waves of pleasure engulf me.

Gripping the back of Garrett's neck for dear life, I come apart all over his hand. My pussy throbs as an achy warmth seeps through me, but I find it just makes me hungry for more.

"So sexy," Garrett rumbles. "I need to taste you. Now."