

Chapter 30

Gentleman

Ava nodded warily at the strange Alpha who already seemed to know her. She was certain she would recall if she had ever met him, even if it were only in passing. The raw magnitude of his aura was the sort that you didn't easily miss, much less forget.

The male stood and strode to meet her. Ava wouldn't call herself an expert in men's fashion by any means, but the clothes he wore looked expensive. Like, custom fit by a tiny family-owned tailor in Milan, expensive. The cut of the suit fit him perfectly, and the fabric seemed to mold to the curvature of his muscles without any of the stiff bunching that a regular suit might cause.

Ava had gotten to know plenty of males with money recently and compared to the rest of flashy high-rollers she'd seen, this male's money didn't roar - it whispered. She wasn't quite sure what that meant to her, but

like everything else about this mysterious male, it put her off-center. Equal parts anxious and excited.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Miss Davis." He grinned and extended his hand. "My name is Noah Thomas. I look forward to getting to know you."

When Ava placed her hand in his, his grip was sure and warm, like an embrace. "It's lovely to meet you, as well, Mr. Thomas. I don't mean to offend, but do we happen to know one another...?"

Ava went quiet, allowing him to pick up her trail. She was still struggling to get a read on the male. He obviously knew her name, but his lack of aggression implied that he wasn't aware of the baggage tied to it. Some of her suspicion faded when he gave an understanding chuckle, "Of course. We have a mutual friend in common."

"Oh?" She asked.

Even if he were inclined to personally set her up with a colleague, that fact very clearly ruled out Xavier. Could he possibly be a friend of Bella's? She was at a loss for how this enigmatic stranger had found her.

"Dylan Miller. He assured me that you make for excellent company." He smiled and gave her a deferential nod before gesturing toward the sofa. "Please, have a seat. Would you like a drink? I'd be happy to get one for you." Ava was baffled by the male, and was certain her puzzlement

showed on her face, "Isn't that supposed to be my job?" She anxiously smoothed down her dress, but took a seat, "Sir."

He only smiled and walked to the bar cabinet.

"Hopefully, not for long," he said as he poured them both a glass of wine.

"What do you mean?"

He handed her a glass and took a seat beside her, an arm casually slung around the back of the couch behind them. "I must admit that I came here with an ulterior motive, Miss Davis."

Ave shifted uncomfortable, "Most men do, Mr. Thomas." She thought of Liam and how what the grieving male truly needed was a shoulder to help bear his pain. "Not all of them are bad, I suppose. It depends on what you need."

Noah nodded thoughtfully, looking not at her, but into the space past her. When his gaze shifted back to her, there a newfound shade of finality in his eyes, as if he'd made up his mind about something only he was privy to. "I agree, Miss Davis," he said. "And what I need is a partner. A girlfriend if I may be blunt."

Ava ran her tongue over her bottom lip in lieu of a response. She wasn't sure what rabbit hole she'd fallen down, but this was the absolute last thing she would have expected this larger-than-life male to say. "You are having trouble finding a girlfriend?" She quipped, "It must be a minefield out there."

He smirked, "You'd be surprised."

Ava was already beginning to shake her head back and forth, "I'm sorry, Mr. Thomas, but I don't even know you." She widened her eyes emphatically. "What's more, you don't know me."

His smirk widened into a blinding smile, "Come now, you can't be all that bad. Slag that he may be, I haven't known Dylan to suffer fools. And the recommendation he gave for you was downright glowing." Ava clicked her tongue, "Is that right?"

This was the second time Noah had dropped Dylan's name. The male had recently taken it upon himself to get to know her, impishly inserting himself into her day, and whisking her off on tiny adventures. As a result, she'd grown begrudgingly fond of him.

Still, she was always aware of the fact that she didn't know anything about him, and he never volunteered information about himself. Of course, she never spoke about her own past whenever she was with him.

Then again, Ava supposed that was one of the main draws of her spending time with Dylan - why she allowed him to follow her around the club and make himself at home in her room. Dylan lived in the here-and-now, his sole focus on whatever pleasures life would afford him at any given moment.

While the blonde male made his interest in her known - and she caught herself recalling the press of his lips more often than she liked to admit - he was just as happy to find enjoyment in her presence despite her inevitable rejections. However, the thought of him meddling this deeply into her affairs discomfited her. What strings was he trying to pull by giving her name out to strangers? And did Xavier know?

"And, if you don't mind my asking," Ava eyed him skeptically. "Why would a male like you need to purchase himself a girlfriend in the first place?"

She had expected some sign of irritation at her frank line of questioning, but instead, his every reaction was thoughtful and calm. When he looked her in the eye, she saw no acidic glint of superiority. When he spoke to her, his words weren't colored with condescension.

"Why else than to appease the root of all evil?" He smirked and then rolled his eyes dramatically. "Family." "That bad?"

"My dear, you have no earthy idea."

Ava begged to differ, but if anything could be said by the haphazard way he swirled his glass of wine, the topic was a sore one. Since that was the first sign of agitation she'd seen from the male, the situation must be dire indeed. "But why an escort?" She asked, changing the subject. His chaotic churning stopped, and he set the glass on the coffee table, doing away with it altogether.

Noah angled himself toward her, leaning in. "Please, correct me if I'm wrong, but you strike me as someone who appreciates candor, yes?"

Ava paused, thinking. She had never considered herself as someone who expressly required forthrightness in the past. And now, it felt like everyone told her exactly what they were thinking whether she wanted them to or not. She had always been a fairly blunt person, but she also understood that not all information was meant for all ears.

However, considering how misguided assumptions and outright lies had derailed her life up to this point, Ava guessed that she did prefer it when someone was willing to be upfront with her. At the very least, she would know where she stood. She nodded and Noah looked pleased.

"Good," he said. "People say there's no place for honesty in business, but I think clear air is refreshing for a reason, no?"

Ava tilted her head to the side, considering him. His deep black eyes were intent as they stared back into hers, "And our business, Mr. Thomas?" She posed, "What would it entail?"

"A rouse, ironically enough," he said. "I'm in need of a partner for hire. Paid, because I prefer to keep things simple, emotionless."

"Not interested in falling in love?"

"Or breaking hearts," he smiled, if a little sadly.

Ava sighed, "I'm listening."

"I'm prepared to pay you generously for your time, of course. I'm interested in exclusivity, so you'll be compensated accordingly."

Ava pressed her lips together before finally asking, "How accordingly?"

He smiled, unphased by the question. "Ten thousand dollars a day. With an upfront deposit, of course."

Ava's breath hitched in her throat. Ten thousand dollars a day. For her?

Noah reached into his jacket, pulled out a check, and handed it to Ava. Fifty thousand dollars stared back at her like a neon sign.

"I hope that's enough to get started."

Goddess, he was like a fallen angel, tempting her with his beauty and charm, promising her untold riches. Only, he didn't know that she came with a curse.

A couple hundred pounds of unhinged muscle stalked her like a shadow, hampering her at every turn. Judging by the refined bulk accentuated by the supple cloth of his suit, Noah could handle himself. But was that really a knot she wanted to get tangled up in?

Ava turned back to where he sat watching her, "You don't know what you're getting into by dealing with me."

Noah stood silently and walked to stand before her. He tipped her chin up with a knuckle so that she'd meet the blanket confidence in his eyes, "Nothing that I didn't pay for."

Ava's breath caught again at the assuredness he exuded as he spoke. He was the master of his domain, and as long as Ava was under his wing, she was under his protection. "Fine," she whispered. "You have a deal."

He grinned wide, "Excellent. Now, to seal the deal."

She looked at him in loaded silence.

"Just a kiss, Ava." Noah breathed, "Only a kiss."