+120 Points at most

Chapter 9 EMILY

A week later, and I still felt mortified. I couldn't believe that I didn't think before I went to that club. Of course, a club like that would be expensive; I should've realized that given how exclusive it was. But no, I went headfirst into Desire's Den without any thought whatsoever. It was odd because that wasn't who I really was. I overthought and overanalyzed every situation before going forth with anything. I guess the reason I didn't do it now was that I didn't want to give myself an excuse to avoid going at all. And now I regret it.

I hadn't researched any other BDSM clubs in the city afterward, even though the craving to explore submission was heightened much more after seeing it with my own eyes. I just... if I got burned once, I usually avoided getting burned again. For the first time in my life, I stepped out of my comfort zone—way out of my comfort zone, and I was left humiliated. Did that make me want to try again? Hell no.

"Get me a dry martini with lemon peel, shaken, Sugar," a voice commanded to my right. I mentally rolled my eyes as I stepped up to the guy, my smile stiff.

"That will be fifteen dollars," I said as I waited for him to hand me either his card or cash. We always took payment before we made the drink to ensure they would pay. The drinks here weren't cheap. I'd heard people used to try to avoid paying before I worked here, and they had to adjust accordingly so they didn't lose any money.

"Keep the change," he said with the most obnoxious smile. The guy looked sleazy with his hair combed back with what seemed like an entire box of hair wax.

"Thank you." My cheek hurts from all the fake smiling. He'd given me a ten-dollar bill and some coins. Fifty cents were left after he'd paid for his drink. Keep the change. Ugh, jerk.

I got to work on the drink, grabbing both the vodka and dry vermouth and poured it in a shaker before shaking it. Next, I cut up a lemon and rubbed some on the glass. After straining the drink into the glass, I dropped the lemon peel in.

While I was working I could feel eyes on me, just like I had ever since we had opened. It made my skin burn, but it wasn't unpleasant. I should've felt nervous or scared—there were many creeps here—but it made me hot and bothered instead, knowing someone saw my every move... like I was on display. Was something wrong with me? Yeah, probably.

+120 Points at most

"Here you go." I put the glass in front of the customer and moved on to the next person.

Whenever I was at work, the time went by crazy fast, mostly because of how busy it kept me. There was never time to take a break longer than a five-minute breather before someone needed me. Thankfully, I wasn't on the ice shift tonight. I hated being on the ice shift, carrying heavy ice every forty-five minutes to fill up in the bar.

People at nightclubs were the worst, usually. They were either too drunk to have common decency or were just as much assholes sober. With my tight black crop-top with the Euphoria logo and black booty shorts—the standard uniform for women working here—I had many men and women hitting on me. As if showing skin meant I was interested in that kind of attention. Either way, getting hit on, I could manage, but when they got grabby... that was always uncomfortable. Luckily, I was only ever behind the bar. The bar gave me a foot worth of cover from the worst of the men. I felt terrible for the waiters. We did have a couple of bodyguards, though, and they always stopped the customers if it became more than one small grab.

I stepped towards the next customer waiting to order, only looking up when I was right in front of him.

Damn. I froze, staring at the most handsome man I'd ever seen. Brown rugged hair lazily styled, as if he's just rolled out of bed. Piercing green eyes framed by long black lashes. And that jaw... it could cut diamonds with how sharp it was. A 5 o'clock shadow made me fantasize about how it would feel against my skin.

He wore a white shirt, the sleeves rolled up to his elbows, showcasing tan, muscular forearms. He looked Italian.

I'd never had a type—not that I knew of at least—but if I'd had one, he checked off all the boxes.

Something about him seemed familiar like I should have recognized him, but I shrugged it off. I would have remembered him if I'd ever met him before, wouldn't I?

"What can I get you?" I forced a smile to my face even as my heart stuttered.

"What do you recommend?" His voice was like the softest silk, so smooth and deep. It did something to me, making my skin buzz with electricity as it enfolded me.

"You look like a rum and coke kind of man," I guessed. My eyes lingered for a split second too long on his chest, the shirt was fitted to his body, and boy, he was clearly a fan of exercising. I wondered what kind of exercise he preferred...

When I looked back up, he wore a smirk, like he knew exactly what I had

+120 Points at most

been thinkingabout.

"You're absolutely right. I'll take that." Once again, his voice was so damn smooth. I'd never heard a sexier voice before.

As I turned around to grab what I needed, I felt him watching me—It was intense. I had to hold in a shudder as I bent to reach the coke in the fridge, feeling his eyes on my ass just as clearly as if it had been his hand on me.

My hands shook slightly as I mixed his drink, too conscious of this ridiculously handsome man watching me.

"Here's your drink." As I placed the glass in front of him, he moved to grab it, sliding his hand slightly against mine when he did.

I jumpeda little at the contact, feeling an electrical current where he had touched it. I'd never experienced something like that with anyone, and definitely not from such an innocent touch.

The man's eyes had widened a bit as if he too had felt it. A millisecond later and the surprisein his eyes were gone, leading me to think I might've imagined seeing it in the first place.

"Thank you, Bella." And if that didn't make my heart beat any faster, I didn't know what would. I stammered out a "you're welcome," cheeks burninglightly as I stumbled over the words. Yes, definitely Italian.

With another smirk, he rose gracefully from his chair and walked away.

Standing there, staring at the man moving confidently throughthe crowd as if nothingand no one could touch him, I finally felt like I could breathe.

He had literally stolen my air but was now givingit back.

Too late, I realized I didn't get him to pay. Not before I made his drink, and not after. I was just about to yell after him when my eyes snagged on the bar top where he had been. The face of BenjaminFranklin stared up at me —that man had given me a hundred-dollar bill.

The drinkhad cost twenty-five, whichleft me with seventy-five-dollars in tips.

Holy shit.

I scanned the crowd after him, but he was nowhere to see. My hand still tingles from where he had touched it.