

Chapter One

Ridley Ethridge stared at her drink and wondered if she really had the gall to go through with this. It was something she'd been musing over for weeks, and now that the night had come to finally put her money where her mouth was, her feet were colder than ice. All around her, people laughed and drank and flirted, just like they would at any other club.

But this was Serve. While the main floor looked like any other club, albeit a quirky one, upstairs was a completely different story. She took a sip of her drink, barely tasting the alcohol and set the glass back on the bar with shaking hands. It had taken some doing—and more paperwork than she could have dreamed—but she was now one of the chosen few who could waltz across the dance floor, give her name, and go up to the exclusive BDSM club that occupied the space over her head.

She glanced at the elevator, the archway above it shaped like a giant mouth. The owner of Serve sure as hell had a strange sense of humor. Her gaze coasted over the hulking dude standing next to it. He was attractive in the way that all the employees seemed to be here, but this one she was actually familiar with since she knew Nolan from her interviews. He was the manager here and, while his glare was enough to deter even the sloppily drunk girls on the other end of the bar from approaching, he was actually a pretty nice guy.

He caught her looking and winked, his sudden grin doing nothing to calm her nerves. She'd gone through all the necessary steps to put this whole thing into motion. All that was left was to actually *get* into motion.

If she didn't do it soon, she'd chicken out. Ridley knew herself well enough to know that. She'd never met a bet that she wouldn't take, but there was no one holding her accountable here. Hell, no one even knew she *was* here except Sara, and her best friend wouldn't set foot inside

this place unless both her brothers Will and Garrett were out of town and there was no chance she'd run into them.

No, Ridley had no one to blame for this so-called brilliant idea except herself. But she was tired of sitting around, waiting for Fate to turn a kind eye her way.

Every other part of her life was kicking ass right now. Her business was booming, and she was well on her way to being ready for Fashion Week in a month. She was poised on the edge of greatness—if she didn't botch it. This was her shot to bring her name into the big leagues, and it might make her nervous enough to puke just thinking about it, but she was as prepared as she was going to be. She had her situation on lock.

Her love life? Yeah, not so much. She hadn't had a second date in two years, and it seemed like her prospects dimmed with each month that went by. It wasn't that she needed a man, exactly, but the slow tide of loneliness never hesitated to yank her under whenever she had a weak moment, and she was damn tired of it.

Not to mention sex. She missed sex in a big way.

Which was why she was here, stalling until she got up the courage to step into that elevator. Tonight she was meeting Will in one of the private rooms upstairs. The man was everything she was supposed to want. He was kind, and successful, and hotter than sin.

And, yeah, he had a boatload of issues just like any of the Reaver siblings—something she was well acquainted with, having grown up around them—but he was still loyal to a fault. Really, she never would have given more than a second thought if not for that night a few months ago. It was one of the rare times where she'd been spending time with both Sara and Will, all three of them hanging out at Sara's place and drinking while they watched one of those Ultimate Fighting Championships. They'd ribbed him about never dating anyone and he must

have been feeling the alcohol as much as Ridley was, because his mask had dropped long enough for her to see naked longing there. She hadn't been able to get that look out of her head, or the belief that Will might be exactly the right man to settle down with. He just needed the right motivation.

Unlike his twin, Garrett, who waltzed off wherever the wind decided to take him...

No. She was *not* thinking about Garrett right now. The memory of him had already ruined more than one blossoming relationship, and she refused to allow it to happen this time. Ridley downed the rest of her drink and pushed to her feet. If she sat down here any longer, she was going to talk herself right out of doing this, and that was inexcusable. She'd been taking the safe option for far too long when it came to love.

It was time to take that first step into the future.

She skirted the edge of the dance floor and stopped in front of Nolan. He grinned down at her, looking miles away from the glowering bouncer that he appeared as across the room. "I thought for sure you'd change your mind."

"Not me." Even if she felt a little bit like she might lose that drink she'd just finished.

"Relax, Ridley." He clasped her on the shoulder. "You don't have to do anything you don't want to do. If it's too much, just go up and watch for a bit."

Nolan was the one who she'd given the description of what she wanted—big, blond, and gorgeous. It had been a risk asking for an anonymous meet-up based solely on a description, even knowing for sure Will would be at the club that night, but she couldn't bring herself to put it out there so...bluntly. Ridley flushed remembering her exact words. *Norse god is the term that comes to mind.* It described Will to a T.

Though it also described—

She shut that thought down *real* fast, and offered Nolan a smile. “I know.”

He shook his head. “Stubborn little thing. Well, if you find Reaver not to your tastes, I’m more than happy to step in.”

“Ah, thanks.” Her heartbeat picked up. *Reaver. I’m about to have dirty, dirty sex with Will Reaver.* Her head spun, leaving her wondering if maybe she really was going to pass out.

No, she was better than this. So she stepped through the giant mouth and into the elevator. Nolan’s grin widened. “Have fun.”

The elevator doors closing on her felt like they were cutting her off from the rest of the world. There was no turning back now. She closed her eyes and pictured Will’s face—or tried to. The one that came to mind was nearly identical, but a little rougher around the edges and always wearing a mocking smile.

She shoved the thought away. Again. *No. Absolutely not.* Garrett didn’t deserve a spare thought from her. Even thinking about him made her hands curl and her blood pressure spike. Eight years hadn’t been enough to dull the sting of what he’d done, and she didn’t anticipate that getting better in the *next* eight years. Both he and Will had been two years ahead of her and Sara in school, and she’d been ready and willing to give Garrett *everything* after he graduated.

Only to find out she wasn’t the only one he had slotted for that night.

“Goddamn it, *no*. He’s not going to ruin this, too.” He left after that weekend, went off and joined the Rangers, and she’d moved on with her life. It was *Will* who had stayed, gone to college, and become a successful business consultant, and it was *Will* who had spent the last few months oblivious to her advances.

The elevator doors opened two levels up, saving her from herself, and she plunged into another world. The color scheme was the same as downstairs—sleek and monochromatic—but

there was an air of hushed expectancy, broken only by the occasional groan or moan. She tried not to stare at what the man was doing to the woman bent over a bench, but there was another couple sitting by, watching avidly. She stopped, her heart in her throat as his hand came down on his partner's bare ass, reddening it further. The woman groaned, the sound a strange mix of pleasure and pain.

It was all too easy to imagine herself in the woman's place, bent and exposed and totally at the mercy of her Dom. Ridley's skin heated. She'd been fighting the desire to submit for too long, because the need was all tied up in her anger at Garrett. He was the one who first unlocked it, and so she'd refused to go there with anyone else because it was always associated with *him*.

When she'd found out that Will frequented Serve, it seemed like the answer to her problems. He was strong and steady and seemed to have kinks that complimented her own. *He* would be the one to help her get past the mediocre sex she'd had in the past and into something else. Not Garrett.

She came back to herself as the man's hands went to the front of his pants and he began undoing them. Face flaming, she turned so sharply she almost tripped, and hurried down the hallway, her heart beating too hard. She was actually here. The hallway was lined with numbered doors, which meant the room she was supposed to be in was three doors down.

The knob turned under her hand, and she almost backed out right then. It was only through sheer force of will that she opened the door and slid into the room. Ridley blinked in the low light and looked around. A bed with vivid red sheets took up the center, while a strange looking bench was positioned in the corner opposite the door. She eyed the trunk at the end of the bed, its surface containing things she'd only read about on the Internet. Her hand hovered in the air above each item—a flogger, a set of canes, a bullet vibrator, Velcro cuffs, and a dildo of truly

impressive proportions. Her skin prickled at the thought of it all being used on her. She'd known he didn't do things halfway but... It was a lot to take in.

The one thing the room *didn't* contain was Will.

Her gaze landed on a simple white card lying in the middle of the bed. She walked over and picked it up, skimming the words twice before they sank in.

Take off your clothes. Put on the blindfold. Kneel.

She dropped the card from suddenly shaking fingers. Holy shit. This wasn't exactly what she'd had in mind when she thought up the so-called brilliant plan. She looked around. Was he watching her right now? Testing her? From everything she'd read about BDSM, power exchange was the name of the game. If she wasn't up for this, she had no business being here.

Apparently that wavier she signed hadn't really sunk in—all those things she'd read on that list of hard limits really could happen to her.

Ridley stared at the note, the handwriting as recognizable as her own. This was Will. Whatever he was into, this was still the man she grew up with. Her mind tried to shy away to Garrett, but she firmly shut the door on that thought. Garrett wasn't even in town, and there was no telling when he'd fly through for a day or two, only to fly out again. God forbid the man put down any sort of roots.

She took off her clothes and folded them on the floor next to the chest. The blindfold was plainer than she expected, just shiny black padded fabric that would cover the top half of her face. Maybe she should have worn lipstick?

Ridley gritted her teeth and knelt in next to the bed. She tied the blindfold, careful to keep it from tangling with her long hair and took a deep breath. She could do this. She *would* do this.

Garrett strode through Serve, so damn glad to be home, it wasn't even funny. Normally, he was more than happy to do the back-to-back missions—anything to keep him constantly on the move—but lately there'd been a restlessness just beneath his skin that he couldn't get rid of, no matter how busy he was. He'd ignored it as long as he could, but eventually the siren call of home had been too strong to resist.

So, here he was, looking for a play partner to keep him occupied for a few hours. Even that thought didn't hold the appeal it normally did, but he'd told Will he'd meet him here, and so here he was.

The man in question leaned against the wall outside the private rooms, staring at his phone, a small frown on his face. Instantly, Garrett went into high alert. "Problem?"

Will shrugged. "Sara seems to have gotten herself into some sort of trouble."

When it came to their little sister, that wasn't even remotely a surprise. She attracted trouble like a high-powered magnet. "What kind of trouble?" It just figured that she'd called Will instead of Garrett. Once upon a time, he'd been her go-to brother to bail her out, but that had changed after their mom left—along with everything else. It never stopped stinging, though.

"She didn't say, but she needs me to retrieve her." Will typed something into his phone.

"Need me to come help out?"

"Not necessary." He finally looked up. "But I do need a favor, if you're so inclined."

This should be interesting. "Sure."

"There's a pretty little sub in there waiting for me." He nodded at the door they stood next to. "Nolan said her tastes run towards Dominants who are blond in a 'Norse god kind of way.'"

Garrett grinned despite himself. He knew how the subs talked about him and Will—especially the subs they'd shared—but it sure as hell didn't hurt his ego any to hear terms like

Norse god thrown around. “She order a two-fer?”

“No. She’s a new member, and if I’m not mistaken, this is her first time out.” His brother’s grin was mirthless. “Nolan has apparently taken a shine to her, because he threatened life and limb if she ends up traumatized and never returns.”

A newbie? And Nolan had passed her to Will? Not that his twin was a monster by any means, but his tastes ran the gamut. It was like teaching a person to swim by throwing them in the middle of the ocean and saying ‘Have at it!’ Garrett crossed his arms over his chest. “She take the entrance class?”

“I haven’t the slightest.” Will shrugged. “Would you mind standing in? She’s expressed interest in bondage with her sex, so she’s really more your cup of tea than mine anyway.”

“Yeah, no problem.”

“Thank you.” His phone chimed, and he sighed. “I’m going to go take care of our wayward sister.”

Garrett watched his twin walk away and took a deep breath, letting the bullshit fall away. Whoever this sub was, she deserved better than to submit to a Dom who was distracted by the rest of the world outside that room. He walked into the room and quietly shut the door behind him.

His twin sure as hell had a sense of showmanship, though Will would deny it to his dying day. The perimeter lights were all down, leaving only the cluster above the bed lit and bathing the room in shadows. The chest at the end of the bed was in every private room, but his twin had decided to start his mindfuck early, because he’d laid out a variety of toys for the woman to get a good look at. A little fear primed a subbie for greater pleasure, but this wasn’t the way he’d have gone about it.

Intentionally ignoring the woman, he surveyed the items. *Canes? Really, Will?* His brother was a fucking ass. There was no way he'd use them on a brand new submissive, no matter what the implied threat was. Garrett shook his head and finally gave in to the urge to drink in the sight of the woman kneeling, her head bowed, her dark hair trailing down her back.

The image hit him like a punch in the gut. Ass or not, he was going to have to give Will a bottle of whiskey or something, because this subbie was exactly his type. He'd stopped lying to himself years ago about why he was attracted to petite brunettes—it all sourced back to *one* particular petite brunette.

And now here was this woman, a first-timer who was a dead ringer for Ridley.

His cock went rock hard, and his heartbeat pounded in his ears. How many times had he fantasized about being the one to fully initiate her into the darker shades of sex and dominance? More than he could possibly count. They'd barely dipped their toes into the possibilities back in high school, just enough to whet his appetite for dominance, and to show him exactly how hot she found submitting. Closing his eyes, he forced himself to take a deep breath, and then another. He wasn't some fumbling almost-virgin, and this woman deserved better than to have him fall on her like a ravaging beast.

He almost felt bad that he was projecting the fantasy onto this stranger, but she was here to be initiated, and he was only too happy to be the one to do it. If he pretended she was that ghost from his past? Well, he wasn't a fucking saint.

He circled her, taking in every detail. She tensed, but she didn't move or twist around. He liked that—her willingness to trust him even though he was a stranger. *Holy fuck.* Her body was killer, arms toned, breasts exactly how he preferred them—more than a handful—and those lips. They were pretty and pink and it was all too easy to imagine them wrapped around his cock. He

caught himself reaching out to touch her, to see if her skin felt as soft as it looked, and snatched his hand back. Damn it, he was better than this.

To remind himself of his role here, he cleared his throat, and said, “From this point on, you will call me, ‘Sir.’ Do you understand?”

“Yes, Sir.” She licked her lips, and it was everything he could do not to groan aloud. The sub hadn’t done a damn thing and she was already killing him.

It was going to be harder to focus that he could have anticipated—at the rate he was going, he’d be shoving his cock inside her the second his pants came off. Another deep breath that did nothing to calm his raging desire. *Next step, Reaver. Focus on getting the foundation down so she’s right there with you.*

They had to get the nitty gritty out of the way before he would allow himself to touch her. “Good. Tell me your safe word.”

“Frankenstein.”

Holy shit, she really was tailor made for his fantasy. *Frankenstein* had been Ridley’s favorite old school monster movie in high school—barely edging out *Dracula* and *Creature From the Black Lagoon*. He was a damn fool for remembering that so many years later, but his head was full of all sorts of useless trivia when it came to that woman. He scrubbed a hand over his face, trying to keep himself in the present. “You will use it if you need to, do you understand?”

“Yes, Sir.” She tensed, and he waited for each muscle to relax before he reached down and gave into the desire to run his fingers through her hair. It was just as soft as he’d imagined. Softer.

“Good girl.” He was about to make this little subbie’s night.