

The Deep End

By Kristen Ashley

Teaser Chapter

one

There Could Only Be One

AMÉLIE

Amélie sat in the semicircle booth at the back of the club, her lips to the rim of her champagne glass, her eyes to the bodies moving through the large space in front of her, her mind wondering when it had happened.

Seven years.

For seven years, as a day passed that she knew at the end of it she would be going to the club, she felt a mild but persistent anticipation.

This, as she'd make her preparations to go, she'd allow to build into excitement.

But right then, as Amélie took a sip of her drink, she observed the bodies shifting around her in the early throes of the game as if she were in a mall, seated on a bench, taking a break from shopping to sip coffee and regard the mundanity of human existence, which was curiously watchable at the same time it was unreservedly boring.

She put her drink down and continued to inspect the specimens on display.

This was not a difficult task. From the moment she'd sat down half an hour ago, they'd peacocked in front of her table, the males, definitely, and even some females.

She found this annoying. It smacked of desperation, something that most assuredly didn't stir her—unless she was the one who painstakingly roused that emotion through hours of play.

As for the females, that caused deeper irritation.

She'd been a member of the club for seven years. In that time, she'd seen many come and many go.

Amélie had remained.

She was known.

Even if the member was new, they could (and should) talk to their equals.

If they did, they'd get more than an earful.

Further, they could go to the small room behind the luxuriously welcoming and highly secured foyer. A room that held the computer (a computer that was attached to no network, not even a modem, thus it couldn't be hacked). A computer that would provide them the information they needed.

Of the many strict, absolutely unbreakable rules that one must sign upon membership being granted to the club known as the Bee's Honey, keeping this information up to date was one of them.

This also wasn't a difficult task.

If you were trained and experienced, a true member from skin to blood to bones to soul of the decadent world these fabulously appointed walls contained, none of the rules was a difficult task. They were as natural to you as the knowledge of how to pick up a fork. How to swallow a bite of food that had been chewed. Indeed, how to just *chew*.

Therefore, Amélie kept her information up to date, checking it on occasion out of respect for her culture as well as out of respect for Aryas, the club's owner and her dear friend.

Although up to date, that information gave very little away. If she were to interact with one in any meaningful way, her superior class of membership would share the

essential traits in their nature with their inferiors in far more personal ways than a profile on a computer.

However, the fact that she did not—*ever*—choose female toys was part of her profile.

This information was provided with the aim to focus the hunt, offering details to the prey of who might wish to flush them out.

That was the kind way Amélie chose to look at it.

The purpose was more integral to the world in which they lived.

You did not waste the time or attention of your superior. It was disrespectful and it was intolerable.

Amélie assumed the females continued to strut with the dim and useless hope that she'd feel moved to teach them a lesson.

She never was.

If they listened to their peers, they would know this too.

When a lesson needed to be learned, Amélie was very willing to teach it.

But she had a certain way she preferred to play. She was known for that. *Well known* for that.

Kinder.

Gentler.

Not exactly a stickler for the rules, though there were some she enjoyed enforcing.

It was simply that Amélie liked to play.

She had no interest in slaves.

No, she was searching for toys.

This being well known, it continued the vicious cycle of why the females' maneuvers were so very irritating.

Or perhaps, she thought, taking another sip of her drink as she looked through a beautiful woman who had been a member for over a year (in other words, she should absolutely know better), the scene had become irritating.

In fact, the aimlessness with which the entirety of her life seemed to flow was irritating.

She felt her spine straighten as this thought broke through with naked honesty for the first time since the inklings of it started months ago (inklings that she'd denied).

A thought that shocked her.

But more, it dismayed her.

Regardless, sitting there experiencing those emotions, she could no longer deny the simple fact that that feeling had been creeping up for some time. And not just here at the Honey. Aryas owned seven exclusive clubs west of the Rockies. Amélie paid bundled membership, which meant she could go to any of them. As she traveled frequently, she availed herself of this.

And although she might find a toy to while away a few hours, as weeks turned to months and those months turned to *more* months, it was coming clear she was giving more than she was receiving. She was assuaging a need and not having her own needs assuaged.

No.

That wasn't it.

She wasn't finding what she needed.

In play *or* in life.

She licked her lips to hide discomfiture, something that was unusual for her, and looked down to her champagne glass, understanding with a strange sensation of a fist squeezing her heart, that wasn't it either.

She wasn't finding *who* she needed.

At the Honey and not at the Honey, Amélie was Mistress Amélie. A Dominatrix. A very good one. A respected one. A coveted one. Even a craved one. Her affectionate style of play, coupled with her experience and skill, made her highly sought after.

As that, she could easily find toys to play with.

She'd done that.

And she felt very real fear that she was becoming bored with it.

It wasn't the lifestyle that bored her, for Amélie didn't consider it a lifestyle. A choice. Something she could have or lose. Something she could move on from. Something she could grow out of. A curiosity she could satisfy and leave behind.

It was what she considered a *Lifestyle*, capitalized with appropriate emphasis. As essential as oxygen. And if she were not to have it, she fancied it would feel like climbing nearly to the peak of Everest. Every next step a struggle. Every breath a blow, for you were doing what came naturally, but it didn't fully provide the essential element that would allow you to continue existing. Every second a mental battle as to what level of insanity you'd breached that you'd even consider going on.

The problem was, Amélie had been born with champagne tastes. Tastes bred imperatively through her line for generations as to weave right through her DNA.

There were many ways she could find toys: other clubs, ads, parties, conferences, personally hosted weekends.

The Honey, however, was the only place that truly offered champagne. Aryas had a certain philosophy that even if an individual had the means to be a member, this didn't mean they would be accepted. In fact, he gave "scholarships" to those in both membership classes who could in no way afford to be a member at regular rates, but who would provide services to the club that were invaluable.

It wasn't about how someone looked. It was about how they played, their experience and training, their personalities. At the Honey, there were no boundaries, anything went as long as it was consensual.

That said, there were vagaries in their world, genuinely troubled souls who used the *Lifestyle* to work out issues that should be communicated in a certain kind of doctor's office.

This, along with the majority's resilient inclination to judge that which they didn't understand, cast a shroud of depravity on her world.

This, with his lengthy and highly invasive application policy, Aryas kept out of his clubs. His members were safe in every aspect they could be.

The people there not only practiced the *Lifestyle*, they embraced it.

She lifted her gaze and instantly saw Bryan. It wasn't difficult. He'd been around some time and she'd had him so he knew not to peacock. But he also knew to put himself directly in her line of sight.

Seeing Bryan, another realization came to her, hitting her with a cruel blow to the solar plexus that made her struggle with not appearing winded.

There were not many like Bryan.

When Bryan's membership had been approved and he'd started moving through the viewing floor of the club (the large space in the middle that had some high, narrow bar tables with plushly upholstered stools, all this surrounded by booths Doms could sit in to evaluate and make their choices), Amélie had felt a powerful curl of excitement gather in the pit of her belly the likes of which she hadn't experienced in years.

This was because Bryan's type was not often found, not only in D/s clubs, but also out in the world.

Darkly handsome with the air of an alpha vibrating around him like a visible aura, he was a large man, tall, six foot four, and very well developed. Indeed, when she'd had him strip naked, Amélie had found he'd pushed it right to the edge where he could be considered unappealingly overdeveloped. Fortunately, the appearance of his genitalia did not support her quick assessment that he was aided in the endeavor of bulking out his frame with certain substances.

This, of course, made him all the more appealing.

Amélie was five foot ten. Not only in the club but out in the world she easily dominated nearly everyone in sheer size, both men and women obviously intimidated by her. This was not helped by the fact that she was curvy yet lean, exclusively wore heels, high ones, and she was filthy rich and looked it.

Therefore, with men whom she was eye-to-eye to, or looking down on, who were slighter or leaner than her, part of the challenge, the fun of the game, was removed at the starting gate.

Playing with a six-foot-four, 240-pound toy would be a challenge, even to Aryas (who did not do men but that didn't negate the point), who was six foot six and not a small man by any means, and not simply because of his height.

However, Amélie had broken Bryan within fifteen minutes.

Not a true break. This was the heart of the disappointment in the loss of the promise of him.

But the façade of the alpha melted away to expose the pleaser, making him less of a challenge than many subs who read as recalcitrant and wanted (in other words, *needed*) a firm guiding hand to take them where they needed to be.

Nevertheless, as he physically was her type from the top of his dark head to the tips of his large feet, she'd tried him again.

It was not overexcitement during that first session that brought him to his knees.

It was the sub he was.

And that was not the kind of sub she needed.

Watching him sip his drink, though, doing his best to pretend he didn't know she was looking at him, Amélie moved her study from Bryan to his drink.

Whisky.

Not whiskey.

Whisky. The pure kind that didn't need another letter of the alphabet. Others had learned the art and mastered it, but there could only be one.

Yes.

Whisky.

She'd been mistaken in her taste in toys.

It was not champagne she was looking for.

It was that coveted, priceless, smooth, deep, incomparable burn of the finest scotch whisky.

Bryan might be sipping that.

But Bryan was not that.

In all her years playing, Amélie had not encountered that.

And to her increasing distress, it occurred to her that, even as it was with the actual liquid, there might be one bottle existing in the entire world, owned by another and never to be on offer.

Not even for a sip.

“Jesus, Amélie, are you on Mars?”

Startled, Amélie's eyes moved up to Mirabelle.

Mistress Mirabelle, a Domme at the club, her tenure there a little more than three years, her prevailing penchant exhibitionism, her indisputable talent restraint, her most important role being one of Amélie's closest friends and her co-conspirator in starting their Domme-exclusive book club.

“*Chérie*, you're right. I was in another world,” Amélie murmured in reply.

She lifted her chin for Mirabelle to touch her, even in Phoenix, doing this European—cheek to cheek and the switch to do the same to the other cheek, as Amélie's mother had taught her to expect, to teach those around her that she did and anything else was intolerable.

Mirabelle moved out of the way and Amélie was startled again, this time she hid it, when she saw Trey coasting behind her friend.

This was a surprise.

Amélie hadn't been to the club for more than a month.

The first two weeks this was at her choice, the beginnings of unease about what was on offer, the hope that when she returned, there would be something fresh to play with.

The second two weeks she'd been traveling, the first week to France, a duty visit for a cousin's wedding, the second on business.

She'd been home for several days and put off going to the club, hoping her long absence would bear fruit.

From what she'd seen, this had not occurred.

What she witnessed now, as Mirabelle slid into the curve of the booth opposite her, was that she'd left with her friend breaking in Trey, a tall (*ish*, a man had to be *tall* for Amélie to consider him tall) lean man who was very pretty. When he'd made his debut over a year ago, they'd both clocked him, seeing as he was an alpha-sub. However, they both were drawn to more rugged types.

Mirabelle experimented more in a variety of ways so she'd given him a try.

By the time Amélie had left for France, Mirabelle had had three sessions with him. She'd also declared she was besotted.

Mirabelle could get besotted. Then her attention would wander.

It hadn't wandered.

It wasn't as if Mirabelle wouldn't return repeatedly to a certain specimen. But it appeared she'd actually arrived with him or at the very least ordered his arrival time to coincide with hers so she could strut into the hunting ground with him at her heels.

A communication of ownership.

Mirabelle settled in and Amélie looked to Trey as he moved to stand at his Mistress's side in the booth.

Unlike many clubs, the bar/social area just inside the front doors of the Honey, known affectionately by all the members as the "hunting ground," was circumspect.

Another of Aryas's rules.

There was a generous variety of choices of places to play beyond the hunting ground, privately, publicly, on display, and socially.

But in the hunting ground, members came dressed well. They behaved well. There were things you could do, things that *were* done, more than likely nightly, that were not flaunted. But Aryas had a definitive feel he wished to nurture in his establishments. You couldn't even see any of the back playrooms from the hunting ground. There were no suggestive paintings or sculptures. And no one was wearing traditional BDSM or role-playing attire.

The walls were paneled in gleaming wood with beautifully designed light fixtures dripping with unpretentious crystals that sat over the booths and hung from the ceilings. At the back wall, there was a showstopper of a bar with beveled mirrors. And lining the other walls, semicircle booths upholstered in the deepest burgundy velvet.

It was an opulent but nevertheless relaxed and comfortable atmosphere where Doms could scrutinize and select which specimen suited their fancy.

Now, behind the doors leading off the hunting ground, the experience Aryas wished to provide (and succeeded in doing so) was a different story entirely.

Therefore, Trey was in a nice pair of dark slacks and a tailored shirt in light blue. His shock of thick ginger-blond hair was tamed. Amélie couldn't see his shoes, but they were no doubt polished to perfection . . . and not by Trey.

He looked, as did Mirabelle and Amélie, as if they were out on the town at a fashion able watering hole having a cocktail before they were going to go out and drop five hundred dollars on a meal.

Regardless if the rules of circumspection in the hunting ground were adhered to, even there the rules of play were never to be ignored.

In this vein, when Trey felt Amélie's attention, he did not lift his eyes to hers as he said, "Good evening, Mistress Amélie."

"Trey," she murmured, her gaze moving to her friend.

“Mistress Mirabelle, it would be my pleasure to get you a drink,” she heard Trey say.

“Vodka, rocks, my lovely,” Mirabelle replied, her eyes on Amélie. She tipped her head to the side. “Would you like Trey to get you a fresh drink?”

“Thank you, darling, I’m fine.”

Mirabelle nodded to Amélie. Given his unspoken order, Trey moved toward the bar.

He shifted away walking backward for a few steps so as not to show his Mistress disrespect by giving her his back, but as Mira’s attention was on Amélie, he eventually turned toward the bar.

When he was well away, Mirabelle’s attention turned to her toy.

Part of Amélie’s allure to a sub being that it was known widely in their circles that she’d gone above and beyond the traditional training, including painstaking hours manipulating devices, flogs, paddles, cats, switches, crops, straps, and so on, Amélie had also perfected the art that was, in her opinion, the single most crucial skill a Mistress or Master could hold.

Observation.

This being so, she easily saw that Mirabelle’s eyes were on Trey’s backside.

“Did you come with him or order him to meet you here?” she asked, and Mirabelle looked to Amélie.

“He’s been waiting for me in the foyer for twenty minutes,” she answered.

Amélie allowed her lips to curve in a small smile as she again lifted her drink.

Mirabelle, a large-chested, slim-hipped, dark-headed goddess with the dauntingly effusive and equally well tended beauty of a professional football team cheerleader, leaned forward and her eyes flashed with exhilaration, even in the subdued light.

“He’s exceptional,” she whispered.

Amélie felt something stir in the pit of her belly.

As mentioned, in the past, Mirabelle had fallen for many a sub, however one of those subs had gone very wrong. She'd come to the Honey in order to avoid him at the other clubs, only able to afford the membership at a pinch.

But regardless of this failed relationship, Mira had not lost hope.

It was certainly not unheard of that a Master or Mistress would enter in a lasting relationship with subs that would lead to them becoming spouses or life partners, including the minivan and the kids. In fact, it happened regularly.

Mirabelle wanted this.

As did Amélie.

Unlike her earlier reaction to understanding she was growing jaded in regards to pretty much all aspects of her life, the acknowledgment that she wished for a lasting union was not a shock to Amélie. She'd known it since she was a little girl. It had grown alongside her understanding of the side of her nature she would begin to research in her late teens. Find opportunities to observe. Form relationships where she would be afforded opportunities to train and gather experience.

Through this, she knew all along she held that delicate, pulsating hope many women nurtured that there was someone out there.

Someone you'd know you wanted to go to sleep next to every night. Argue with about whiskers in the sink. Plan vacations with. Have everything feel better when something terrible happened and his arms closed around you. Watch his features soften with delight when you told him you were carrying his child.

Someone you could tie to a bed and make perform for you, forcing mind-scrambling orgasm after orgasm, him needing that in all the forms you could imagine, unashamedly gifting you with the trust you'd give them to him.

And then the memory of each and every single one of those precious moments when time wore on and age made this no longer something you both could share.

Until you both quit breathing.

This was what Amélie was beginning to face with a sense a grief.

Grief for the loss of something she wanted desperately but was coming to terms with the fact that she would never have.

Grief for something she saw as hope that was budding that she'd found in Mirabelle's eyes.

The sub who had shattered her heart wanted Mirabelle to force mind-scrambling orgasms from his ringed cock and strapped balls.

What he didn't want, and shared with her with some revulsion, was to spend his life and make children with a woman who could do that to him.

Trey, Amélie could not read for certain. She'd not played with him. He'd also not accepted even club ownership from a Mistress in his tenure at the Honey. He wasn't a submissive whore (not that there was anything wrong with that), bouncing without any real connection from Master to Mistress thoughtlessly. But what he wanted, Amélie couldn't fathom.

She just hoped it was what Mirabelle could offer.

But more, if he wanted that, he could offer exactly what Mirabelle wanted in return.

"Mistress Romy had shared he was unusually enjoyable," Amélie noted cautiously in response to Mirabelle's assertion of Trey's talent.

She watched her friend's face carefully.

What she expected to see, she saw.

The slight tightening of her perfectly lined and filled lips.

Jealousy.

This happened.

Most checked it at the door. It was their world.

In play, subs were frequently shared, borrowed, ordered to serve another, and Doms, as was their nature, partook of whatever they fancied (if a toy was owned, for the night or longer, they did this with the Master's or Mistress's permission, of course).

Mirabelle's reaction was thus telling.

If this happened for her and Trey, she would not share. It was even doubtful she'd do so in social play. Exhibiting him, undoubtedly. Allowing touch or further, not a chance.

This, too, happened.

And this, too, was something Amélie craved to call her own.

It was, in fact, already part of her repertoire.

Not jealousy. Alas, she'd never felt that.

But she visited the social playroom on occasion, and when she did, she brought along a toy. She did this to show off that toy. She very rarely allowed touch or others to play. If she did, there was a point. Not for those who she allowed such privileges. A lesson that needed to be learned or an experience that she could gift to her sub that she knew he desired.

"Mirabelle," she called when her friend had no response.

Mirabelle continued to regard her but she said nothing.

"I just want you to be careful," she explained.

"Once burned . . ." Mirabelle stated.

Amélie nodded and grinned. ". . . twice shy. I get it. But I urge you to be three times shy. Or four. Or allow me to have a few quiet words."

It went without saying that confidentiality at the club was paramount.

In reality, the fourteen-page contract she'd had to sign that she'd given her attorney for his perusal (something he'd done and two months after, his application had been accepted at the club) had elicited him saying, "Memorize this, Amélie. If you don't and you breach even a sub-clause to a sub-clause, if you were a man, Aryas Weathers would have

your balls in a vise, and not the way this type of club plays that. As you're a woman, you'll be homeless and cleaning his toilets with a toothbrush for the scraps his dog won't eat."

She didn't need to memorize the contract.

Even so, she'd read it three times.

So outside these walls, talk was forbidden. If you saw a member in public that was not a good acquaintance, if given the signal, you proceeded cautiously. Normally, you ignored them altogether.

On the other hand, as was human nature, inside the club, talk, and even gossip among members, was rampant, and for their play, essential. Who liked what. Who'd done who. The ones who'd left the blinds open on the playrooms you needed to be sure to take the opportunity to watch.

The ones who lived the life and left it at the club's door.

Amélie did not fancy Trey so she hadn't been paying close attention. She knew no Master had had him. She also knew, outside Mirabelle and Romy, he'd serviced Mistresses Felicia and Pasquel.

All of them repeatedly.

And all of them both Mirabelle and Amélie were friendly with for more than the book club they all belonged to.

"Let me think about that, okay?" Mirabelle answered Amélie's offer. "He showed no hesitation when I required him to wait for me in the foyer." She grinned a calendar girl grin. "Of course, he'd just ejaculated a parcel that would make a horse feel envy, but he knows what that means. He knows a note will be put in his file. And he could have balked, talked to me outside, or not shown up."

This was all true.

"If he doesn't broach it, ask me out, meet me in the humdrum, maybe I'll get you to snoop around before I ask him," she finished.

"I approve of your plan," Amélie remarked.

“I don’t need your approval, Mistress,” Mirabelle returned, still grinning.

Without taking her attention from her friend, she noted, “He’s returning.”

“Caught that, but thanks,” Mirabelle murmured, her gaze shifting to the hunting ground.

Trey returned and set her drink in front of her, taking his position standing outside the booth like he was her bodyguard, saying in a deep, pleasing, quiet voice, “I hope your drink pleases you, Mistress.”

“My gratitude, slave, I’m sure it will,” Mirabelle replied just as quietly, taking up the drink, her eyes still wandering, but not to Trey.

He settled in, leaning his ass against the side of the booth, her protector, her servant.

Amélie had had that, subs she’d decided to own for a spell in the club. Subs who had waited for her in the foyer and entered with her. Subs that stood sentry while she sat with her friends, sipping and chatting. Subs that, in their profile, staff made notes that they were not to be approached unless she gave permission.

“Slim pickins for you, dearest heart,” Mira, who knew her well, noted after she’d done her sweep. “Though, Mistress Delia is here and I know that not only because I’ve seen her but because from the minute I walked in, my flesh felt like it was crawling.”

Amélie searched for and found the Domme in question.

Delia, like Amélie, was in her early thirties. Unlike Amélie, she had a beautiful but cold face, an icy, black-haired beauty, and mean in her eyes.

She’d moved from New York City to Phoenix, coming to the club with the requisite for Masters or Mistresses— four references, two from Dominants, two from subs. Aryas had shared with Amélie that he knew the Master and Mistress who’d made the references. They were lukewarm, and as was his policy, he’d followed up on them. He then had, in a rare move, decided to accept her regardless of his tendency toward safety.

He’d shared his reasoning for this too.

There were no real reasons the New York Dominants could give for the fact that their references were unenthusiastic. She was a known player. There had been no incidents they knew of that would mark her as unwelcome.

They just didn't like her.

Amélie understood that.

In a world that was roundly judged, Aryas or any of them were not fans of judging one of their own.

Even with all of that, he'd regretted his decision immediately.

"Just a feeling, my sweet," he'd muttered, sitting with her, sipping his Hennessy and watching Delia work the room.

She was being given her head. If she overstepped any boundaries, it would be reported.

But Amélie knew he was hoping for any small infraction so he could bounce her. Even if she left a tuna sandwich unattended in her locker in the Dominant lounge, he'd get rid of her.

Amélie had this information because they were very close and she was Aryas's top Domme. He knew her discretion.

He also knew she'd keep an eye.

And that she did right then, seeing Delia move in front of the bar with the pretty, young sub named Tiffany dogging her steps.

It was Tiffany Amélie studied.

In her mid-twenties, Tiffany was the daughter of friends of Amélie's family. As any Dominant would do with any submissive, toys were looked after, even if they weren't yours.

But knowing Tiffany in the outside world before she'd entered Amélie's domain, knowing her parents would excommunicate her with extreme prejudice if they knew about this part of her life, she'd kept a closer eye.

And now Tiffany looked pale even in the dim light.

And afraid.

This could be for a variety of reasons, most of them acceptable.

It could be something far darker.

The entire club had tight security and even playrooms were monitored. Cameras caught everything. This served many purposes, including a means to assure confidentiality, a threat Aryas had rarely used and wouldn't unless given no alternative.

It also kept the subs safe.

Delia's ministrations would be watched, likely with Aryas's concerns, closely.

"We all must have a care," Amélie said to Mirabelle.

"Always," Mirabelle replied.

Taking a sip of her drink, Mirabelle's attention focused on Bryan.

As did Amélie's.

When it did, he swiftly lowered his gaze and turned his head away.

He'd been watching her.

"You could give that a go again," Mirabelle suggested.

"He called Mistress Marisol 'Mommy.' "

The smooth, sultry voice came from behind Amélie and she turned to see Mistress Talia there, her lips curved in a cat's smile, her brown eyes lit with their usual good humor, her wild, wide orb of soft-curved, café-au-lait-with-bronzed-tips Afro adding to an overall exotic look of exquisite African-American beauty.

Her slender neck, Amélie noted not for the first time, was a tempting vulnerability. A vulnerability that Amélie knew Aryas found tremendously tempting. So much so, he'd agreed for the first time in what Amélie thought was at least three years to mentor her into the Dominant role personally.

Her training had been long and thorough.

He'd let her loose two months ago.

She was unsurprisingly very popular.

What she was not was a submissive. A capable, if rookie, Domme, Amélie had observed her in training and had observed her when she was set free to go it alone—and it was clear she had one bent.

Which meant Aryas would not go there for he had the same bent, and in that case, outside some interaction during social play, the twain didn't meet.

Trey making a noise that could be taken as amused disgust (or disgusted amusement) took Amélie out of her contemplation of the new Domme. Trey doing this was something not surprising from an alpha-sub.

“Seriously?” Mirabelle asked as Talia leaned the side of a hip against the side of the booth by where Amélie was sitting.

“Yep,” Talia answered, still grinning wickedly.

Mirabelle looked to Amélie. “Is Mari into that?”

“Nope,” Talia answered for Amélie. “Pretty sure that Latino lovely isn't gonna go for seconds.”

Amélie wasn't surprised this had slipped from Bryan. However, it did mean he was forevermore out of the question for her.

“What a waste,” Mirabelle murmured, her head turned, her eyes trained on Bryan.

But Amélie looked to Trey.

Mirabelle's comment was not meant to be insulting. Her words were meant for Amélie, who she knew would no longer have interest in Bryan for she didn't share the inclination he clearly had in order to give him what he needed.

Trey obviously did not know this.

He'd been leaning hips to the side of the booth, unlike Talia, facing the room straight on. His pose had been relaxed.

He was now tensed.

She observed his jaw.

It was tight.

Her lips curved.

Trey did not like his Mistress thinking Bryan was a waste.

Interesting.

She turned her regard to Bryan, and as if he felt her eyes, he looked to their booth.

His expression took on surprise as his focus shifted up over Amélie's shoulder.

"Okay, girl, serious? Are you gonna go there?" Mirabelle asked, causing Amélie to turn and look up to Talia.

She had one slim arm up, one long, slender finger pointed Bryan's way. She casually shifted it to the side, indicating one of the doors to the playrooms.

Very cool, and not the cool of the frosty variety.

She'd learned well from Aryas.

Amélie looked back to Bryan to see him up, his big body in its dark suit moving toward the door.

"Big, naughty boy stretched over my knees, getting his spanking, fuck yeah," Talia answered Mirabelle's question and Amélie again turned her gaze. "And I'll spank that fine, firm white ass until he vows he'll never utter that word again." The cat's smile came back. "As Ary taught me, there's *infinitesimal* ways to skin a cat. Give that baby what he needs in a way that doesn't make me feel skeevy."

There was the green.

Daddy and Mommy play was not frowned upon. Amélie didn't get off on it but she'd seen daddies do wondrous things with their babies, and the same with mommies, and she knew it had absolutely nothing to do with a psychological complex a vanilla needed to use to shove that square peg into their desperately round hole.

It was not okay in any sense to cast aspersions on any type of play.

Express surprise someone did something, went somewhere with a sub, coaxed something out, went to a place that was unexpected, most definitely.

Pronouncing it as “skeevy,” no.

It was a novice mistake and Amélie knew either she, or Mirabelle, would be having a word with Talia about it in the future.

Aryas would be livid.

Therefore, he could not know.

Now, though, Trey was there and you didn’t speak to a Mistress that way in front of a sub.

“Best go top that,” Talia murmured and looked down to them, doing this looking through Trey and finishing on Mirabelle. “Enjoy your night.” She turned to Amélie. “Happy hunting, honey.”

“Have fun,” Amélie replied.

Talia moved away.

Amélie watched her, wondering if her slim neck or her round ass was the key to Aryas’s infatuation with the rookie Domme.

She’d never know and understanding that, she lost interest and was about to turn away when Talia switched directions, heading to the booth where Stellan sat.

Stellan was a Master who had been a member of the club nearly as long as Amélie.

And in some ways, Stellan was Amélie’s Talia.

Not that she’d trained him.

That she’d always wanted him.

Physically her type, perhaps a little shorter than she’d like (but not much), a little leaner, but nevertheless powerfully built with dark hair and strong features so excruciatingly handsome, in weaker moments, she had to quell the desire to look away.

He’d slipped in without her seeing him and hadn’t come to offer her a greeting.

This would normally have annoyed Amélie.

At that moment, for the first time in years, she was paying no attention to Stellan.

This was because Talia's tall frame shifting out of the way offered an unhindered view of something else that had slipped in without her notice.

And gazing at him, Amélie went still.

As did her breath.

And her heartbeat.

Leaning a shoulder against the wall beyond the edge of the bar, six or seven feet from the door to the playrooms, he was surveying the scene as if he wasn't part of it.

Or as if it was *he* who was on the prowl.

But although a Dominant could mingle freely in the open space, this would be done with some intent.

If they were on the hunt, they'd be at a booth.

Subs were not allowed to sit in a booth unless the invitation was extended. They populated the floor, on display, it was requisite.

In the mesh of bodies, a sub could be identified in a variety of ways. The cast of their gaze. Their bearing. Jewelry that declared their status.

And their position in the hunting ground.

No Dominant would linger there like he was, partially for that reason. Clear communication and transparent messages were key in their world. No Dom would give the impression of being a sub.

This was explained at length during membership orientation.

That magnificent beast was a sub.

An alpha-sub, assuredly.

It came from his sheer size, like a cloak stitched to his skin he had no hope of shrugging off (not that he'd wish to).

He had to be six five, perhaps taller. His dark suit and monochromatic shirt necessarily tailored for his physique for there were very few men on this earth that had it. His shoulders as wide as a log. His chest a veritable wall. The muscles Amélie had no doubt were hidden under his clothing apparent in the exposed line of his throat. It wasn't that he had no neck. But that lethal shank of corded, sinewy muscle could not be established and maintained if the rest of him didn't match precisely.

She knew he was alpha beyond that. His stance at the wall, casual and self-assured, it was openly cocky. He knew his allure. He knew his beauty. He knew even if he wasn't exactly your type, every being would understand with base instinct his attraction.

He also knew how to use this. All of it. It was his art as sure as reading it on him was Amélie's.

From what she could tell, his hair was dark blond, the thickness of it, how it was longer at the top, clipped short at neck and ears was so appealing, she was willing to make that single allowance for she preferred her toys to have dark hair.

She made that allowance, but if she had her way, and she often did, he'd grow it longer so there'd be more of it to fist her fingers into as a means to use to make him serve her will.

His facial features only heightened his appeal that already, with the rest of him, defied belief.

A strong brow over eyes she couldn't see the color of from her distance. Hollowed cheeks under high cheekbones and over a firm, cut, clean-shaven jaw. And a large nose that was openly pugilistic, the dent at the top of the bridge not created by God but by a break that he didn't deem important enough to have set properly.

Staring at him, utterly incapable of not doing it openly, she felt the insides of her thighs tingle. And her nipples were hard buds, the restriction of the lace of her bra suddenly excruciating.

That . . .

Now *that* was whisky.

“Oh my, Leigh, are you seeing what I’m seeing?” Mirabelle asked. And before she could answer, her friend went on, “It’s like he was made for you.”

It was, indeed.

She watched in fascination as something caught his attention, shifting the half-amused, half-bored expression from his face and pulling him away from the wall.

His eyes focused on something a beat, two, three, then dropped.

That small movement, the respect of a sub given to a Dom, barely discernible from the distance, still convulsed the walls of her pussy.

“Trey, find a member of staff.” Amélie heard Mirabelle order.

“At your pleasure, Mistress,” Trey muttered in return.

Amélie didn’t look away. Now not because she couldn’t, but because what captured his attention was Mistress Delia.

“Fuck,” Mirabelle hissed the word that flitted through Amélie’s mind.

Stunned still again, Amélie watched as, within five seconds, words were exchanged. Words that made Delia toss her head, lift her hand, snap, and stomp toward the door to the playrooms, Tiffany following.

But that male sub did not.

Crash and burn.

The beast didn’t even look over his shoulder to watch them leave. His expression settled into blankness again as his attention turned back to the gathering.

“You ladies wanted something?”

Before she was caught staring, feeling like a greenhorn Domme on her first prowl, Amélie tore her eyes from the beast and looked to Heather. She was a staff member of the club, none of whom had titles and all of whom were paid very handsomely because all of them had a variety of roles they could be called on to play—from server to someone who needed to mop a puddle of cum off the floor so a recently vacated room could be reused.

“That baby, against the wall, the one who looks in dire need of a lesson or seventy,” Mirabelle stated, not pointing even to jerk her head his way. “He’s new.”

“O.H.,” Heather stated, smiling big and giving them the code they needed. “He was approved two weeks ago. Not here every night, but as far as I know, he’s been in three times. A number of takers gave it a shot. So far he hasn’t felt up to playing. Think his profile is burned into the screens of pretty much every Dom who’s seen him.”

This was without a doubt, but even if it weren’t, Mirabelle digging in her purse would have proved it.

“Thanks, *chérie*,” Amélie kindly dismissed her.

Heather nodded, shot them another smile, and moved away.

Amélie attempted to unobtrusively deep breathe.

The system was set up as such that, if subs wanted to know about Doms, they went to the secure computer in the room behind the foyer. They could not access data anywhere else.

Hidden behind a site that you had to access through a username, a secure password with the requirement to change it monthly as well that it be twelve characters long, answering a security question and entering a captcha, Dominants could look up subs on their phones in the comfort of their booths.

These did not have full names or photos or anything of an identifying nature. In fact, the data provided was offered via code so if someone happened onto a hack, they wouldn’t know what they were seeing.

It wasn’t the enigma machine but it did offer another level of security.

What those profiles didn’t have were the notes a member of staff or another Dominant could add to a sub profile. All notes were approved by management, namely Aryas’s operating manager, Tina Marie, so catty, sulky or other inappropriate notes would not be communicated.

If there were notes, the profile would indicate this. And to get to this information, a Master or Mistress would have to go to another one of the computers on the premises (this in the Dom lounge) to read these notes that also weren't networked, even locally.

These notes in most cases included such things as toys who were owned, either literally (life partners or husbands and wives), or the agreement had been noted that a sub would serve only one Dominant at the Honey, a circumstance which Mirabelle and Trey communicated that very evening.

They also could provide information essential to a Dominant that a submissive would need to relinquish prior to being approved for membership. This could be anything from the sub being in counseling for a reason that a Master or Mistress would have to understand and appreciate before selecting them for play. It could be the brief description of a tragedy that could affect the scene, the loss of a loved one in an extreme way, a history of domestic abuse, a survivor of rape.

"Here you go, Leigh."

Mirabelle was extending her phone, which was good and bad.

Good because Amélie had not managed to unobtrusively deep breathe, her shallow breaths making her feel light-headed, and she needed something else to focus on.

Bad because what she was focusing on would be the profile of that beast.

She took Mirabelle's phone and turned it her way.

O.H.

Security: Kitten

Hobbies: Everything

Limitations: Nothing

Notes: None

Translated, this meant:

INITIALS OR OTHER IDENTIFIER

Safe word: Kitten

Inclinations: Into anything

Boundaries, Rules, Unacceptable Play: None

Even with those few words, it was a surprising profile. Experienced subs, the only ones allowed on the floor, knew their boundaries and most had them. In this club, the vast majority were extreme, such as branding, marking, scarring, strangling, sensory deprivation, and so on.

But they had them.

She hadn't seen a profile that open in a long time.

And the safe word "kitten" showed the beast had a sense of humor. He had the look that just uttering that cute word, which would bring images of the adorable creatures, would make him violently ill.

"Go hit that, tigress," Mirabelle urged, and Amélie looked to her.

Before she could say a word, Mirabelle continued.

"Get in there. Three times here, he'll have heard of you. He'll be holding out in hopes you'll be extending the invitation to initiating him to our playrooms. I know it." She leaned across the table. "Rock his world, lovely."

She studied her friend, the open excitement, the budding love she was experiencing with her submissive, that time when life takes on clarity so pure and extraordinary, you want everyone to experience it with you.

She turned her head to the beast.

Years of experience only marred twice by two toys she'd had who held great promise, but who eventually fell short of the real thing, taught her that tonight, she would definitely enjoy herself.

But he might be champagne. He might be bourbon. He might, surprisingly, be cognac or port.

The bottom line was that she had to keep expectations low so she wouldn't be devastated when he didn't turn out to be top-shelf whisky.

***This book will be out in all formats on all vendors on
March 7, 2017.***

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