

A woman with vibrant purple hair is shown in profile, facing right. She wears an intricate black lace masquerade mask that covers her eyes and nose. Her lips are painted a bright red. She is holding a black whip in her right hand, which is visible on the left side of the frame. The background is a solid black color, and the entire image is framed by a decorative white border with ornate scrollwork and floral motifs.

LESBIANS
IN LEATHER
BOOK 1

**DOUBLE
ENTENDRE**

MISTRESS BLACK ROSE

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PRAISE FOR DOUBLE ENTENDRE

“... This is a story that is intense in its passions, full of pain and pleasure, with absolutely glorious BDSM scenes to enjoy. I lost myself in it, restricting myself to a few chapters each night so I could make it last...” - [Bending the Bookshelf](#) - VINE VOICE

“... She wove the romance blossoming seamlessly into the lifestyle while giving the story a little intrigue. Even if you are vanilla, you can appreciate the knowledge that Mistress Black Rose imparts and the patience She shows in explaining what can make for a wonderful D/s relationship... - Amazon Reviewer

“... this story is a love story, make no mistake. What it does is to carefully and gently reveal a subculture that most people have no understanding of, and within which most people would not be able to imagine as the setting for a love story...” – Amazon Reviewer

Synopsis

As a manager at Avery's Marketing Agency, Quinn is killing herself to make CMO – a promotion she's been gunning towards for years. Just when it seems like she's almost there, she nearly has a nervous break-down from the stress. She's got to figure out a way to blow off steam, or everything she's worked for will unravel.

Quinn starts to wonder how her beautiful co-worker Estelle deals with the same work stress and simultaneously keeps it all together. The answer surprises Quinn, and she soon finds herself in the D/s Lifestyle of BDSM.

As one of Mistress Jade's subs, Quinn realizes that handing the reins of power over to someone else for a change feels amazing! With each session, Quinn's iron walls start to crumble. As the relationship between Mistress Jade and Quinn heats up, Quinn agonizes as to whether she should pursue uncovering Jade's hidden identity. She's handling work better, entertaining ideas of relationships she never would have thought possible, and finally finding balance in her life. If she tries to find out who Jade is, it might rock the boat and cause things to change.

Figuring out who Mistress Jade is, suddenly takes a backseat, as Quinn is thrust into a dilemma of epic proportions. She'll have to choose between love and life, or her career. It will be the hardest decision she's ever had to make, and if she doesn't choose right, it could cost her everything she's built up for herself, including her beloved Mistress Jade.

*****This book contains bondage, submission, and sexually explicit scenes between women who identify as bisexual or lesbian. If you find this content offensive, please return this book right now, and get a refund!*****

Introduction – A Note To The Reader

Dear Reader,

Thank you for giving Double Entendre a chance!

Just a quick note of things to keep in mind as you read. These little details might enhance your reading experience.

I'm a bisexual woman who has been in a polyamorous relationship with my husband and wife for more than a decade now. I am active in the BDSM community. I am a Domme to my wife, and a bottom with my husband.

I have been in the BDSM community for five years at the time of publication for this book. My experience, while not as extensive as some, is more knowledgeable than your layman looking in from the outside. The experiences Quinn and Mistress Jade conduct in their sessions are pulled from my own - being on both ends of the spectrum – so there is a level of first-hand knowledge written into these scenarios.

When I read the most popular BDSM novel on the market, I was appalled at how the community was yet again depicted in a seedy light. Combined with my experiences, I also did extensive research before I wrote this book. I conducted interviews. I read academic papers, such as a fascinating doctorate dissertation about the psychology behind BDSM, and healthy relationships within the realm of bondage and submission.

Please note, that because the BDSM community is on the fringe of society, there is no proper English grammar for the context of certain terms. Different communities will use different vernacular based on their insular culture. For example, the word 'flog' can be used interchangeably as a noun and a verb, depending on your community. In my community, we use

the word flog as a noun more often than flogger, so that is what you will find here in this book.

The word 'scene' is capitalized on purpose because, in my community, we reference this word as doing Scene, not 'a scene' as English would normally dictate. A Domme being referenced as The Mistress, using capitalization, is a title of honor and respect.

I thought it prudent to bring this to the attention of those grammar enthusiasts and purists out there. These are not typos. They are written this way very consciously and based on my community culture. If your experiences are different from mine, they are different, not wrong.

It was my endeavor to both entertain and educate in a better light than some of the more popular books out there in the BDSM fictional universe.

Again, thank you for being here. I hope you enjoy this story!

Yours,

Mistress Black Rose

Chapter 1

Quinn pinched the bridge of her nose, exhaled a slow calming breath, and forced an even tone as she spoke into the phone, “I need those reports now, Jeffrey. Not in five minutes. Not in an hour. Now.” She hung up. She hadn’t even put the phone down when another member of her team barged into her office.

“I just need you to sign off on this really quick.” Eddie approached her desk, cautiously.

Quinn’s phone rang again, and she sighed. She answered the phone with her left hand, and scribbled out her signature with her right, then waved him away.

“Yes, yes. I know. I’ll have it done by today.” She hung up.

She took a moment to breathe. It had been like this all morning. Hell, it had been like this for six years, three months, and eight weeks, but who was counting?

She’d held the position of Senior Project Manager longer than anyone at Avery’s Advertising Agency. To her coworkers, she seemed the Zen Buddhist of marketing leadership; calm, self-assured, and in command. However, what was that analogy about a duck? Calm and serene on the surface, yet paddling like hell under the water, that was her in a nutshell.

Just then, Estelle came up to the doorway. She didn’t enter. Always polite, she knocked first. Probably the one person Quinn didn’t care whether she knocked or not, and yet she always did.

Despite her crazy work environment, Quinn stopped and subtly appreciated Estelle’s sexiness. She couldn’t help but scan the length of her curvaceous body, which was always adorned in a professional pencil skirt and business jacket. She had tight curly brown hair with soft honey-colored highlights, which was always pulled back in a loose professional bun. Her

intense green, yellow flecked eyes, which reminded Quinn of a feline on the prowl, were in striking contrast to her smooth, naturally tan complexion from her mixed ethnic roots.

“What’s up?” Quinn asked. Her phone went off again. This time she hit ‘ignore.’

“You breaking for lunch or you going to work through?” Estelle asked.

“We have to land the Speedy Spunk account. It’s way too important. I can’t take a break today.”

“I know, but sometimes productivity will increase if you just relax a bit. Just saying,” Estelle suggested lightly.

“Yeah, but I literally don’t have the time. I’ve got way too much to prep before the meetings this afternoon.”

“You want me to stay and help you?” Estelle asked.

Quinn sighed. “No, you go ahead. Bring me back a salad if you’re going to pass by Nick’s Deli.”

“You got it.” Estelle winked.

Quinn’s eyes wandered to Estelle’s voluptuous backside as she left her office. Estelle was a woman who exuded quiet confidence and sexual prowess. Quinn felt lucky to have her on her team. It was a shame they worked together, or she would have seriously considered wooing and seducing Estelle long ago.

Estelle was Quinn’s right hand “man,” in many ways, but with that wall of propriety always present, Quinn had to remind herself that she needed Estelle in her professional life more than in her bed.

The matter of dating had nothing to do with feelings of self-consciousness about her physical looks or wondering if Estelle was into women. She knew Estelle was bi, and Quinn didn't give two fucks who knew she was gay. Besides, it was kind of hard to hide.

Quinn wore her hair cropped short and spikey. She bleached it blond and wore no makeup. She was tall and lithe at five-eight, thin and well-toned from working out often. God knows if she didn't, she'd go crazy from all the work stress. She took pride in the fact that she looked younger than her thirty-nine years. She'd side-stepped the wrinkles of middle age without the use of beauty products. When she was younger, people said she looked a little like a more curvy yet masculine version of Annie Lennox, which suited Quinn just fine. She loved Annie's work, and she preferred being stereotyped as a more butch-type lesbian.

There were too many reasons to count why dating had to be put on the backburner.

Avery's Advertising Agency was one of the largest, high production, marketing firms in the Bay Area. Day after day, year after year, the job had continued to throw Quinn curveballs, and year after year, her "batting average" maintained a stellar record, knocking em' outta the proverbial corporate ballpark more often than not.

Avery dropped 'subtle-yet-not-so-subtle' hints about Quinn's potential to fill the shoes of their retiring Chief Marketing Officer. When Durant had announced his plan to retire at the young age of 46, it sent shockwaves through the company. If there was any semblance of smooth and seamless execution in the way things ran, it was because he was a major cog in the machine.

Durant was firm about leaving the corporate grind, though. He was going to move forward with his "crazy" plan to dump all his savings into an Internet start-up business, teaching people to fly-fish in Colorado. Avery had begged and bargained, asking him to stay on a little longer, but it did no good. His decision was made.

He'd given her a year's notice, which was more than generous to find a replacement. Maybe Avery didn't actually think he was serious.

He was serious.

When his year was up, to the date, he left. Everyone, including Quinn, was surprised. The greater surprise was as the weeks ticked on; Avery did not promote Quinn. Avery seemed to be dragging her feet in filling the position, but no one could figure out why.

Quinn couldn't identify any other serious contenders at the firm, but Avery was volatile. One minute she was your best friend, the next, a Dragon Lady out for blood. It was hard to gauge what she was thinking or planning. Quinn had considered, with rising anxiety, that perhaps Avery wasn't looking to fill the position internally. Maybe she was headhunting at other firms.

This caused Quinn to pour on the steam even more. Maybe her conscious brain didn't realize it, but she was acting on the premise, if she worked harder, proved herself far more worthy, she'd get the promotion. How could she not?

Being at the top would mean she'd finally get some goddamn rest by delegating instead of doing most of the legwork herself. She could kick her feet up and practically get paid to play, and who knows, she could maybe start entertaining thoughts of dating again. She just had to hang on a little longer.

Once Quinn secured the CMO position, she'd planned to promote Estelle to her current position as Senior Project Manager. Then maybe they could explore extending their relationship past the four walls of work. Sometimes Quinn felt like the chemistry was there. She knew Estelle wasn't married, but often wondered if she had a special someone in her life. She kept her personal life, well...personal.

The thought of dating Estelle warmed Quinn between the thighs and conjured up thoughts of her beautiful, flawless body, stretched out across her bed...

Ugh, stop this Quinn, she chastised herself for getting distracted. Right now, she needed to push thoughts of dating and sex aside. She was too damn close to getting everything she had ever worked for. *Hang on a little longer, almost there, almost there*. The mantra was something she chanted in her mind daily to keep herself level and grounded.

Just then, her door flung open, shaking her from her thoughts of Estelle.

“What the hell is this, Quinn?” Avery was waving a paper as she stormed into the office. She slammed her fist down as she slapped the paper onto Quinn’s desk.

Quinn looked down at the paper, calmly picked it up, and panned over it.

She also noticed out of the corner of her eye, that Eddie, one of her interns, was cowering behind Avery. He was barely standing just inside her office, hovering at the doorway, probably in the hopes that he could make a get-away. Quinn took a cursory glance at him. She could see that his Asian complexion had blanched to a sickly white color. He looked like he was going to bolt, cry or both.

“I’m so sorry, Ms. Redinger. I was—” Eddie stammered.

Avery cut him off. “Stop cowering in the doorway. This is the corporate world. Suck it up and get over here so we can discuss this.”

Eddie shuffled into the office but kept himself at arms length from Avery, as if she were a poisonous snake who might strike out if he ventured too close.

“What’s the problem?” Quinn asked. Her voice remained calm and betrayed no sign of the irritation she felt.

“Are you kidding me?” Avery glared. “This report has all manner of mistakes. I don’t need to remind either of you, we are down from last quarter’s projections. It’s the utmost priority we get those numbers up. I can’t have these kinds of mistakes, Quinn. He’s one of yours?”

Quinn nodded to affirm.

“He’s gone. I can’t have this.” She turned and started to leave.

Eddie paled an even whiter shade than he already was.

“I apologize, Avery,” Quinn called.

Avery stopped and turned to listen.

Quinn pressed on. “You shouldn’t fire him. This is my error, not his. I didn’t properly train him on how to input the data on the reports. Eddie is an asset to my team, and by extension, the company. I highly recommend you let me rectify the situation, and then you can reassess his position.”

Avery stewed for a moment, considering Quinn’s suggestion. “Fine, get him up to speed Quinn, or it’s your ass next time.” Avery stormed out.

Eddie blew out the breath he had been holding, quickly deflating like an overfilled balloon. “I’m so sorry Ms. Redinger. I only made two errors. I went over it three times. I’ll—”

Quinn held up her hand to stop his ramblings. “Eddie, it was an honest mistake. I know you’ve been trained properly, but Avery doesn’t leave wiggle room for mistakes. So, what can you do to avoid this next time?”

Eddie’s eyebrows furrowed. Quinn watched him. She didn’t really have time for this, but he was a good kid, a hard worker with sharp intellect, and she saw potential in him. He just needed more confidence in himself.

“I don’t know Ms. Redinger, what more I could have done?” He looked down at the ground, dejected like a kid bringing home a failed test to his parent.

“You can ask me, or Estelle, or Iona, or any number of your senior associates with experience in this area, to look over the reports before the final drafts get turned in.”

“I just didn’t want to waste anyone’s time,” Eddie said.

“I understand, but it’s better to ask for help than to lose your job entirely. I think you have the potential to be an outstanding marketer, Eddie. That said, you are new at this, and still have a lot to learn. I am busy, but if your request for assistance is genuine, it’s valid.”

“Okay. Thank you, Ms. Redinger. I really appreciate what you did.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. Now, you have a lot to do, so you better get back to work,” she said with a clipped tone. Quinn broke eye contact with Eddie and went back to her computer screen as if he weren’t there.

Eddie cracked a small smile, turned, and left her to her work.

The day simultaneously droned on and yet also sped by too quickly. Quinn looked at her computer’s email in-box and felt it had more tasks to complete than before she’d started her day. She groaned in frustration. She wouldn’t be leaving on time - yet again. What else was new?

Quinn sighed, squared her shoulders, and kept on working. She thought everyone had left. She started when Iona popped her head into her office. “Hey, Quinn, we’re going down to The Round Room. You want to join us for drinks?”

Quinn hesitated a moment. It was uncanny how many similarities there were between Iona’s and Estelle’s physique. Same height and toned figure. Iona also seemed to be of a similar ethnic background, and as such, the two shared the same unruly, yet sexy locks of light brown hair, green eyes, and full luscious lips. However, Iona didn’t frost her hair tips. Estelle’s face was

more heart-shaped, while Iona's was round. Estelle had slightly fuller lips and a thin elongated nose, with sharp, high cheekbones, while Iona had more delicate lips and big round eyes. There was no mistake. Both women were gorgeous in their own way.

"Um, not tonight," Quinn said.

"C'mon, woman. You're gonna work yourself into an early grave. You're not even forty," Iona tried again.

"Yeah, I feel like I've aged a decade in the past year. Let me see what I can get done in the next hour."

Iona gave her a knowing look. She didn't think her boss would simply work for the hour and then join them. "No, I don't trust you. Get your ass up. We're having a drink tonight."

Quinn narrowed her eyes. "Excuse me. Just because it's after hours, doesn't mean I'm not your boss."

"Yeah, and you won't be for long if you keep working yourself ragged."

"No, I really can't, but thanks, Iona," Quinn said stiffly, turning her attention back to her computer.

Quinn had mastered the 'no-nonsense demeanor.' She was stalwart at keeping it in place, which intimidated most of her staff. Iona and Estelle being the exceptions. Iona steam-rolled Quinn's 'Ice-Queen' front with her strong-willed temperament, which upon first meeting her, rubbed Quinn the wrong way. But Avery wanted her, and what Avery wanted, she got. Over time, Quinn realized Iona was an asset to her team. Slowly Quinn came to respect Iona's strength of character, and they developed a strong working relationship.

"Don't say I didn't try," Iona said. "Especially when I'm visiting you at the hospital, bringing your ass flowers in ICU, because of the heart attack you've had."

“Thanks. I’ve noted it here in my planner,” Quinn replied with withering sarcasm, but Iona had already left.

When Quinn first came to the company, she’d thought it strange that Avery didn’t mind her employees hanging out with their managers after hours. Most companies had policies on that sort of thing, or at the very least on dating. However, there wasn’t a company policy against internal friends or lovers. It was more of an unspoken rule of *‘don’t ask - don’t tell’*.

Avery, in her own subtle ways, encouraged it. Her surface reason was, “It creates strong bonds in the workplace.” Quinn was quick to learn that Avery’s motives were more self-serving. There were times Avery had been rumored to slip into bed with her underlings. Quinn realized that Avery was fine setting rules or letting things slide as long as it suited *‘The Gospel According to Avery.’*

Quinn didn’t have any personal qualms concerning socializing with her staff. She truly believed strong friendships outside of work would strengthen her team, and it had. Iona was not the only one who often tried to coax her into joining them after work. After long hours at the grind, though, Quinn was often too exhausted to think of anything other than getting done, going home, and melting into bed. Her energy reserves were so depleted she didn’t feel like doing anything else.

The building was quiet. Quinn pecked away at her reports, presentations, and proposals for the upcoming meetings for the week. She rubbed at her temples, trying to push back the tension headache she could feel brewing, and continued to work until she heard her phone’s alarm go off - a reminder to take her evening vitamins. She couldn’t believe she’d been at it for two and a half hours.

She was exhausted. She didn't know if she could force herself to keep going. As she made her way to her car, the idea of a nightcap and some company did sound nice. Her mind debated going home or stopping in at The Round Room. Sometimes she considered the idea of meeting up with her coworkers when they invited her. Lately, she'd been teetering on just giving in. It did get lonely being one's only drinking companion night after night.

It was late, though. Estelle or Iona might have already left the bar. If she was going to suck it up and drag herself out, her primary motivation would be interacting with either or both of them. There was something about Iona's personality that was easy to be around, and Estelle's demeanor made her feel relaxed. She couldn't date them, but there was no reason she couldn't hang out for a while.

On a whim, Quinn decided to head over to The Round Room. She'd never actually been there.

What the hell, why not?

Quinn walked into The Round Room and deflated with intense disappointment. The bar, a swanky upscale place, seemed more like a nightclub. Music thumped so loud it reverberated in Quinn's chest. The huge round room with a dome ceiling was decorated with abstract art and industrial fixtures. Flashing lights whirred around in time to the music. The booths lining the walls, and high bar tables scattered throughout, were created with junkyard castoffs, repurposed into furniture, and painted in various, bright, loud colors. As pieces of art, that added to the aesthetics of the room, it was great. As for actually being comfortable and relaxing, she surmised

sitting on the cold, hard, ground might be more pleasant. To even get to the bar, she'd have to wade through gyrating bodies, as the room's focal point was a large round dance floor, and it was packed.

She'd been picturing something far different. A quiet hole in the wall, where she could settle into a booth, maybe watch a baseball or basketball game, and nurse a local craft beer. She rubbed at her temples, feeling the headache notching up.

Just as she was about to turn and leave, Eddie, her intern, spotted her. He began to bounce up and down, waving an arm in the air and yelling her name to get her attention. The others in the group turned their heads in unison. They had spotted her - no backing out now. She groaned inwardly as they beckoned her over.

She made her way to the group sitting at a large oddly shaped, high top table with mismatched bar stools. Most of her team, including Iona, was there. Estelle seemed to be the only missing member.

“Oh-my-god! Is it really you?” Iona teased.

“Yeah, in the flesh. This is crazy loud. How can you hang out here?” Quinn complained.

“It's fun. We drink a little. Dance a little. Gear up for the next workday,” Eddie said.

“Uh-huh. Well, I had no idea it was like this. No offense - but no thanks. I'm gonna head out.” Quinn forced a half-smile and turned to leave.

Iona tugged on her arm. “No, stay for one drink, at least. You're here already, so why not?”

Iona's cat-like eyes bore into Quinn's with such intensity, Quinn felt herself flush with heat. It wasn't often she felt knocked off balance. She sighed with resignation. Iona's face broke into a satisfactory grin.

Quinn didn't stay long, though. Even if she were enjoying The Round Room atmosphere, her brain felt it was going to pulse out of its skull.

Iona had tried to chat with her, but the music was too loud. When Iona hopped off the stool and tried to get Quinn to dance with the group, that was Quinn's cue to exit. She emphatically shook her head 'no' and mouthed the words - 'going to head out, see you tomorrow.'

Iona shrugged and joined her coworkers on the dance floor. Despite herself and her throbbing head, Quinn couldn't help but smile. She indulged her sex-drive by allowing herself a last glance over her shoulder at Iona, who was bouncing around with wild abandon. The woman had rhythm. Quinn had to grant her that. She looked good. The thought briefly passed through her mind, "*I wonder if Iona is into women?*" Iona was probably five years Quinn's junior. *Not too young...* She mused briefly.

The second Quinn got into her car, she dropped a guillotine down on the idea. She needed to stop getting so hot and bothered over the women she worked with. It was causing her to lose focus, and focus was everything right now.

Hang on a little bit longer, Quinn. Almost there... Almost there...

Chapter 2

Another long, grinding week passed, and Quinn was packing up her things to leave. She didn't care how much was left to do. She had to stop, had to unwind, or Iona's 'ICU prophesy' would come true. She could feel herself coming apart at the seams, barely holding it together.

As she entered the elevator to head to the parking garage - speak of the devil - Iona called out, "Hold the door!"

Quinn pushed the button, and the doors slid back open. Iona shimmied in, a little breathless.

Quinn gave her a sidelong glance. Iona was beautiful. She had a sensuously toned figure, from working out. When Iona wore short-sleeved blouses and skirts, Quinn could see the definition in her biceps and calves. It was quite sexy.

Quinn might have been a tough-as-nails, career-focused woman, but she still had a pulse. It was certainly challenging to contain her arousal around the beautiful women she worked with. How long had it been since she'd had sex? Or even masturbated for that matter?

Too long.

"Okay, so The Round Room was a bust. Sorry about that. I should have figured," Iona confessed.

"No harm," Quinn said.

"Well, there is this other place I like to go when I don't want to be around the crowds. I don't really tell anyone I hang out there, cause it's a bit of a dive bar, but you're welcome to join me if you'd like," Iona said casually.

Quinn was going to decline and then thought *what the hell, it's been a long week. It's not a date — just two coworkers unwinding over a drink.*

“Sure, why not.”

Iona turned; her eyebrows arched in surprise. “Really?”

“Yeah.”

“Really?” she asked again. “You never relent this fast without a full-on argument first.”

Quinn just nodded.

Iona suddenly seemed flustered. “Okay, honestly, I didn’t think you’d actually say yes. It’s kind of a dive bar. Hole-in-the-wall downtown. I don’t want to offend you, but I don’t know if it’s really your cup of tea,” Iona flushed.

“And you know what my cup of tea is?” Quinn asked with a sly smirk. She had to admit she was enjoying this flustered side of Iona.

“Touché,” Iona smiled sheepishly.

“What makes you think it’s not a place I’d go?”

Iona sighed, “I think I’m about to insert foot into mouth here. I’ll just be direct since you’ve thrown me a curveball by accepting my invitation. It’s an LGBT bar, but it’s old and rundown. The owners don’t really advertise. People only know about it by word of mouth.”

Quinn arched an inquisitive eyebrow, “And you think it’s not my cup of tea because I don’t sip from that kinda cup?” She could barely contain her amusement.

“No, I— Honestly, I can’t tell if you swing that way or not. The way you dress and carry yourself... But ya know, you shouldn’t make snap judgments based on clichés. And I’ve heard office rumors, but I try not to pay attention cause it’s none of my business. Not really. But since no one has ever seen you date...” Iona flushed again.

The sudden crack in Iona's strong emotional armor bemused Quinn. "I'm gay, Quinn replied.

"Huh." Iona kept her eyes forward and was shaking her head ever so slightly as if she'd just solved a mystery.

"And you?" Quinn asked.

"I'm bi," Iona said.

"Huh."

The elevator stopped at the parking garage level, and they headed to their cars.

"So, what's the name of this place?"

"The Pink Peacock," Iona cringed as she said it.

"I see." Quinn cracked a wry smile. "If I put it into my GPS, will it pick up the address, or is it *that* underground?"

"I don't know. You could just follow me over."

"All right, sounds good."

After a fifteen-minute drive, they arrived at their location. A subterranean bar that merely looked like a random door wedged between two other businesses. It was in the older district of the downtown area. The door had a logo with a faded pink bird that might have been a bright pink peacock at some point. Its edges were now frayed from being weather-worn, and the color was a sun-bleached shade of peach.

They entered the dimly lit room a fraction of the size of The Round Room, old and worn to be sure, but Quinn was instantly in love.

The tables were rough, the finish faded. The flat industrial reddish carpet was threadbare. Low 70s style, stain glass lamps hung over the tables in a large rectangle room that made the place look bigger than the outside indicated.

Quinn continued to survey the room. Along the left-hand wall was one long bar paired with ten cracked leather stools. An old CRT TV was mounted over in the far edge of the upper wall, playing a muted WNBA game – you’d have to read the subtitles to follow the announcer, but that was just fine.

On the other side of the room were four booths, and in the middle were a few scattered small round tables. In the very back was a small pool table with worn green felt, an ancient pinball machine, and a dartboard. The only thing that stood out in the room was a jukebox that was grinding out classic rock tunes. It made Quinn feel right at home.

Quinn inhaled a deep breath, taking in the comforting scent of bar food, beer, and sweat. It took her eyes a moment to adjust to the low lighting. The place was only half occupied. A few patrons looked up, briefly scrutinized Quinn and Iona, then went back to their drinks and conversation.

Iona motioned towards the bar with a nod, Quinn nodded back approvingly. They took the last two seats by the old tv and ordered some beers.

Quinn immediately began to focus on the game going on between the Phoenix Mercury and the Minnesota Lynx. She relaxed into the environment. *This* was precisely the kind of place she needed to unwind after work. She could sit, enjoy a drink, watch a game, and not be bothered by thumping music and pretentious suits hitting on her because it wasn’t obvious she was gay.

Iona and Quinn sat in companionable silence for nearly an hour, making comments here and there about the game. They both polished off two beers, and Iona hopped off her stool.

“I’m gonna head out. I gotta get up early tomorrow to drive down to LA for my cousin’s wedding.”

Quinn nodded. “Thanks for the tip. This place is great.”

“I gotta admit. You throw me for a loop sometimes.”

“That makes two of us.”

“I’ll see you bright and early Monday, with bells on.” Iona flashed her confident smile.

“Sounds good,” Quinn replied with a smile of her own.

She turned back to the game and stayed until it ended. On the drive home, she exhaled, feeling something she hadn’t felt in a while – peace and rejuvenation. This surprised her. The Pink Peacock wasn’t the kind of place she would have explored of her own accord, but strangely it was just what she needed. Funny how that worked sometimes.

Chapter 3

Quinn's little trip to The Pink Peacock had seemed to start a thread unraveling, and she couldn't stop it, so she'd thrown in the towel and said 'fuck it.' She'd actually enjoyed her weekend, she put her laptop away and didn't do any work. Something she hadn't done in god knows how long. She'd sat around in boxers and a t-shirt, watching movies, re-organizing her pantry, cooking a full meal for herself, with real food, not the prepackaged stuff. It was liberating.

The problem with allowing yourself the time to relax when you're riding the razor-fine edge of burn-out is you have a hell of a time trying to pull yourself back together come Monday morning. This was Quinn's plight, and she was paying the price.

She was having a hell of a day. She needed to focus, but getting herself back into 'work-mode' was so difficult, she wondered if allowing herself the down-time was worth it.

She shuffled papers around on her desk, reorganizing stacks that were already organized. Estelle knocked on the doorjamb.

"Have you checked your emails?" Estelle asked.

"No, why?" Quinn replied suspiciously.

Estelle grimaced before delivering the news. "Mr. Campitelli wants to move the lunch meeting back to eleven, but looking at your schedule that will cut your meeting with the Speedy Spunk associates pretty close."

Quinn blew out a frustrated breath. "God damn it. I'd have to rush them just to make the next meeting with Campitelli. I really hate doing that."

“Yeah, I know. So, there are two ways we can do this. I know Avery wants you on both these clients. You could reschedule or...”

“C’mon Estelle. I’m on a tight schedule. Just throw it out there.”

Estelle, unphased by Quinn’s impatience, said, “Or you could let me take the Speedy Spunk account. They’re big, but not as big as Mr. Campitelli’s company. I’m great with the sexagenarians.”

Quinn’s brow furrowed. “Sex-a-what?”

Estelle settled herself into the chair across from Quinn. “People in their sixties. That’s our market for Speedy Spunk and it also just so happens to be the age of the corporate reps we have to pitch to, so it’s a win-win for me.”

“Uh-huh...” Quinn ran her fingers through her hair. “Fuck, I can’t believe this. Campitelli knows we want this. I can’t reschedule. I have to accommodate him. He’s being a dick on purpose.” She paused. “You know, you might be right. Allan’s been running point on this presentation. He might be too much of a Millennial and rub them the wrong way. Go over Allan’s numbers, and I’ll have you pitch the presentation instead of me. You *can* probably speak their language better,” Quinn smirked.

“I’m great at speaking other people’s languages. It’s what makes me *so* good.” She winked and turned to leave.

Quinn’s temperature rose.

Is Estelle flirting?

God, that woman knew how to play the fine line of sexual innuendo. Every time this happened, she felt a pang of regret that they couldn’t be more.

Yet, Estelle always seemed to save her ass. She didn't know what she'd do without her. Whenever Quinn felt the walls closing in, Estelle was like some kind of Wonder Woman, flexing her corporate prowess, and flying in to save her ass. They'd been working together for over two years now, and she couldn't deny it had been better since Estelle was on her team.

Much as she wanted to linger on thoughts of Estelle's sweet – well, everything - she had too much to do. She rolled up her sleeves, booted up her computer, and pushed all thoughts of Estelle out of her mind. It was time to get to work.

By the end of the week, Quinn was looking forward to heading over to The Pink Peacock. She was hoping Iona would be there. It was nice to have a little company now and then. She'd meant to ask her if she'd be going but didn't get the chance. The office was like a mass exodus on Friday's. Employees practically hovering over their keyboards to hit the 'clock-out' button and vanish.

Quinn wrapped things up at her computer about a half-hour later, hopped in her car, and drove on autopilot to The Peacock. She settled onto a barstool at the long counter, ordered herself a beer, and wondered if Iona would turn up.

She'd just settled into watching the basketball game when someone sidled up next to her on the adjacent stool.

She turned fully expecting it to be Iona, but it wasn't. "Estelle? What are you doing here?"

“One might ask the same of you?” Estelle smirked. “Since when did you start coming here?”

“Since someone tipped me off about how lovely the artisan beer is.”

“Oh, I thought you were here to pick up chicks,” Estelle teased.

“Well, maybe, I am.”

Estelle shot Quinn a wry look that said - *doubtful*.

“What, you don’t think I have a love life?” Quinn feigned offense.

“I think work is the love of your life.”

“Fair.” Quinn pulled at her beer then asked, “Can I buy you a drink?”

“Sure. God knows you owe me one, or two, or twenty, for all the favors I’ve doled out for you. But who’s counting.” Estelle smiled sweetly.

Quinn chuckled. She bought Estelle a pint of pale ale, and they chatted about inconsequential things for some time. Turns out Iona found out about the place from Estelle, who’d been frequenting it for years.

After an hour, Estelle looked at the time on her phone. “Gotta go. I’ve got an appointment to keep.” Her tone was mysterious and playful.

“An appointment?” Quinn’s mind flashed to work-related appointments.

As if Estelle could read her mind, “Not that kind of appointment. Unlike some of us, I leave work behind once I walk out the metal doors. But I do need to get going. It’s not the kind of appointment you want to be late for.”

Quinn didn’t inquire, but her curiosity was piqued. What did Estelle do in her spare time? She knew Estelle was bisexual, beautiful, and ruthless at work, but they rarely spoke beyond marketing strategies for the next big account.

As she drove home that evening, her mind fixated on wondering about Estelle and her extracurricular activities. Her tone seemed provocative like she had been hinting at leaving for a date. It wasn't so unbelievable that Estelle would be dating someone and not divulge it to Quinn, or anyone in her work life.

It wasn't like Quinn was going to pry. That would be crossing a line. Yet the entire drive her mind whirled with possibilities about what kind of appointment Estelle was keeping.

Going to The Pink Peacock seemed to become something of a habit. The anonymity and strange peace of the dingy bar was becoming a welcome respite from the insanity of her workweek. A strange cleansing Friday ritual which helped her replenish her stores of "tenacity-glue," to keep it together in the following week.

Sometimes Estelle was there, or Iona, or both. Quinn had to admit a little quiet socialization was nice. She'd allowed her personal life to suffer far too long.

Every Friday, at six-thirty on the dot, Estelle would hop off her stool and say she was off to an appointment. Iona sometimes did this as well. She never stayed long after Estelle. Quinn couldn't help but wonder if the two were secretly dating. The more they did this, the more her suspicions grew.

Far be it for her to judge, but she couldn't staunch the tinge of a little green monster that crept in and nagged at Quinn's mind. Her coworkers had the freedom to get involved in romantic relationships while she had to put her own needs on hold.

It seemed unfair, but then she'd quickly reminded herself that it was all for the best. Once she got promoted, she could finally spend time indulging in other activities. She was so close, too. She could feel it.

Estelle always announced her departures with such a mischievous sparkle in her eye, Quinn couldn't help but become more curious, and perhaps a little suspicious of the two of them being an item.

Today she couldn't ignore it. It was just the two of them tonight, Iona had begged off on account of her cousin visiting from L.A. Curiosity had gotten the better of her, and her ale had helped her work up the nerve to attempt a sly inquiry to Estelle. They'd just settled into their second round and the game on tv was on an ad break.

"How was your appointment last week?" Quinn tried to sound casual.

Estelle didn't answer verbally. She turned and stared at Quinn as if contemplating something.

Quinn squirmed uncomfortably under Estelle's gaze. "What?" Quinn asked, tracing circles around the beer logo on her glass with one finger.

"Nothing, it was great," Estelle said nonchalantly.

Quinn made a *'hmp'* sound, trying to hide the burning curiosity.

They sat quietly for a beat. There was a heaviness in the air between them. Like tension before a lightning bolt strikes in a summer storm. Quinn wanted to ask, and Estelle seemingly wanted to speak. Neither of them was willing to disrupt the 'calm' waters.

Estelle finally dropped the first pebble, causing ripples to spread on the still surface of the quiet moment.

"Do you ever wonder how I'm able to stay so composed at such a high-stress job?"

“I can’t lie. It’s crossed my mind a time or two.” Quinn turned her body slightly to face her. “I just figured you’re one of those people who doesn’t get their feathers ruffled all too easily.”

“Wow, I’m impressed you think I’m so equanimous.”

“Equi-what?”

“Composed, even-tempered, level-headed.” Estelle laughed.

Quinn absorbed Estelle’s genuine laughter the way bread soaks up broth, warm, satisfying, and making her chest swell with something she didn’t want to dwell upon too long. She pulled at her beer to hide the flush in her cheeks.

“The truth is,” Estelle said, “I found a way to unwind. It’s unconventional, to say the least, but it works for me. It’s not really for everyone, though.”

Quinn thought there would be more of an explanation. She waited, but Estelle didn’t elaborate. Quinn’s burning desire for her to explain herself jumped fifty notches. She sat there, barely containing the urge to squirm, quietly pretending like there was nothing more to be said.

Quinn couldn’t do it. Her resolve to stay silent broke, and she asked, “Why are you sure it’s so unconventional? Unconventional by whose standards?”

Estelle contemplated this. “It’s just not for everyone. In fact, most people might find it to be an indulgence in the debaucheries of depravity, but you know me, I have an open mind.”

“I’m open-minded,” Quinn whined. She cringed at hearing herself. She had been trying to sound casual and pragmatic, but somehow Estelle had this way of drawing out the maturity and immaturity in her, all in one stroke.

Estelle seemed to consider this for a moment before answering. “Have you ever hired a woman before?” Estelle’s gaze locked onto Quinn’s face with intensity. It made prospective

clients who were waffling on a deal cave to her proposals. It was as if she said - *You asked, so if we're going there, then we're going there.*

Quinn was taken aback by this sudden change in demeanor towards her. Her eyes went wide with shock. “Uh, you mean like an escort, or a prostitute?” She laughed uncomfortably. “Uh, no, can’t say that I have.”

“Well, there is that. But that’s not what I am referring to. I’m talking about hiring someone who can help fulfill certain fantasies, help you completely unwind, and do it without having sex.”

Quinn shot Estelle a suspicious look.

Estelle plunged on, “I’m involved in the BDSM Lifestyle, and I have a Domme. She’s a hired Mistress who helps me — shall we say — disengage the tension from my body.” Estelle smiled serenely.

“Oh.” Quinn was quiet. “You don’t have sex, though?”

“Nope.”

“So, what does she do, exactly?”

“It’s hard to explain. I mean, I could tell you all about it, but it would be like trying to explain a roller coaster ride to someone who’s never stepped foot into an amusement park. Or trying to tell a person ‘imagine a color you’ve never seen before.’ It’s sort of ineffable?”

“Ineffable? You always use these words, Estelle,” Quinn chuckled and shook her head. “What do you mean by ineffable?”

“Exactly,” Estelle said somberly.

Quinn huffed with mock exasperation, and Estelle burst out laughing.

“I mean, it’s beyond being able to make you understand through words alone. You’d really have to just experience it. It’s truly amazing, though. I sleep better. I feel recharged after a weekend with Mistress Jade. She’s amazing.”

“Huh.”

Quinn felt a wash of embarrassment even entertaining the idea of BDSM. She always stereotyped that stuff for sexual deviants. Yet, here was Estelle, her esteemed and well put together colleague, sharing the secret to her sanity - and it involved a Dominatrix?

Again, Estelle answered in a way that uncannily seemed as though she was reading Quinn’s mind. “Ya know I concluded this Lifestyle was for the depraved sort before I knew about it. Then a friend of mine said, just give it a go, and if it’s not for you, it’s not for you. The nice thing about Mistress Jade is she’s very professional and discreet. You can give her a call, chat over the phone, and see if her skills even correspond with your fantasies. Different Dommes specialize in different things. What can it hurt?”

Estelle took a sip of her ale, then her tone changed. “Quinn, between you and me, I’ve been worried about you. I don’t like to discuss my personal life with coworkers, but I see how hard you’re working, and you’re going to crack. I’ve been there too, and getting involved in *The Lifestyle* did wonders for me. It is unconventional, to say the least, but if it would help you cope with the pressures you’re under right now...” Estelle let that hang.

“Does she have a website or something?” Quinn laughed uneasily.

Estelle already had her purse on the counter and was rummaging through it. She plucked a card out and held it between her fingers. “Promise you’ll at least call?”

Quinn sighed as she studied the card. In embossed scrolled font, it simply had a name and number. She hated making promises. Once she gave her word, her honor wouldn't let her back out. Knowing how headstrong Estelle could be, she'd follow up to make sure Quinn had called.

“Okay, at the very least, I'll ring her.”

Estelle checked the time on her phone. “Got an appointment.” She laid some cash on the bar, hopped off the stool, and smiled.

“So, these appointments you have every Friday, are they with her?”

Estelle's smile only broadened. “Just call her.”

Chapter 4

That night Quinn came straight home from The Pink Peacock and began to do research about what *The BDSM Lifestyle* entailed. She perused page after page online. Trailing through different blogs that, to her, seemed educational enough.

There were also no shortages of kink porn sites. She couldn't help herself. She was far too curious to know what kinds of things Mistress Jade might do to her if she followed through on this hair-brained idea.

She watched a few videos and was both appalled and fascinated.

Despite Estelle stating Mistress Jade had no website, Quinn did a cursory Internet search for the name anyway, but no one in the surrounding area matched up. On page four, there seemed to be this forum on Reddit, where a bunch of folks were squabbling over the validity of the Sisterhood of Jade, but she didn't think that was relevant.

She typed in the word *Mistress* and found marketing sites for various types of Mistresses offering their services. Apparently, several titles defined the different styles of dominating, though Dominatrix or Domme seemed to be the most commonly used.

Her head spun over the niches, *Goddess, Teacher, Mommy, Pro-Domme*. Some of these "niches" and their associated kinks seemed way too much for her. She never felt she was a judgmental person. Yet, her overriding practical personality couldn't break past a mental barrier that some men or women in this world could entertain such obscure fantasies. Being treated like children, forced to wear a diaper, and spoon-fed? Consensual non-consent or basically rape fantasies? OBGYN role-play? The list was endless. If there were people who enjoyed that kind of role-playing, far be it for her to judge, so long as both sides were truly consenting adults.

As for herself, definitely not! No thanks.

But a woman who would blindfold and bind her - tease, tantalize, and torture - leather and lace - pain and pleasure. Despite her reservations, her interests were piqued. She felt herself getting aroused after watching a few lesbian BDSM porn videos, and knew she'd end up masturbating before bed. God, how long had it been since she'd even done that? Fucking hell...

She picked up the card and started to dial, then stopped short.

She didn't have time for this nonsense. Sure, Estelle claimed this helped her relax, but Quinn was dubious it would help *her* relax and unwind.

Estelle was of a different ilk. She touted she wasn't naturally down to earth, but Quinn had a hard time believing that. Some people just harbored an inner calm. They were built that way. Estelle had always struck her as one of these types, no matter how much she argued otherwise.

Instead of calling, she downed another double, flopped down on her couch, and began to touch herself.

She stroked at her slick wet folds. God, that felt great. She stretched out on the couch as thoughts of Estelle's wrists, bound in silk scarves and her beautiful, voluptuous ass being spanked, passed through Quinn's mind.

Unbidden, a subconscious fantasy, of Iona sprung to life. Iona in skimpy lingerie, wielding a crop and smacking Quinn's bottom. Then Iona sliding a finger inside and slowly moving it in and out.

Quinn shivered and thrust two fingers inside, moving harder now. Her hips rocked as more and more imagery of Estelle and Iona flashed through her mind.

Then, oh god...

She came so hard, she didn't even realize sleep had taken her.

The next morning she cursed at falling asleep on her couch. She slept so deeply she woke with a kink in her neck, and vowed next time, she'd get in bed before letting her fantasies run wild.

The next few days at work, she was bombarded by her usual staff requests and took it all in stride. It was smooth sailing until Wednesday.

About an hour after lunch, Avery swooped into Quinn's office without preamble. "I need to see you in my office as soon as you get the chance." Her face was devoid of expression—serious as a heart attack.

Quinn's stomach clenched. "I can meet with you now. I've got a moment."

Avery nodded once and turned on her heel.

Quinn buzzed Estelle, and within moments she was in her office.

"Hey, Avery just popped in and said she wants to see me. Any idea what it might be about?"

Estelle's eyebrows rose in surprise and she shook her head. "No idea. Sorry."

"No matter." Quinn waved her hand casually. She felt anything but.

Estelle offered a sympathetic glance as Quinn squeezed by and made her way up to Avery's office.

Quinn did a perfunctory knock on the door frame even though the door was open. Avery looked up. Her grim expression caused Quinn's heart to sink like a stone in her gut.

Avery gestured towards the chair opposite herself. "Have a seat."

Quinn sat.

"Campitelli wants to change the contract details. Did you know about this?" Avery said.

"No, he didn't say anything." Quinn's mind raced with possibilities, and she mumbled to herself, "Why didn't he talk to me?"

"I don't know. Good question. Why didn't he talk to you?"

Quinn started to sweat. Her brain was groping for explanation and racing with a dozen other thoughts.

This guy is such a dick. I can't believe this. If I don't land this account, I'm never going to get this promotion.

Quinn replied calmly, "I'll get on it. I'll contact him as soon as we're done here. Figure out what's going on."

"Don't bother," Avery said. "I've got him coming in later today, and I'll take care of it myself. Do I need to be worried you're losing your edge, Quinn? You've managed to outlast everyone in your position, and I had high hopes for you, but maybe I was wrong. I know the accounts I've been throwing at your team are high stakes and high stress, but can you handle this?" Avery pierced her with a harsh glare.

"Yes, you have nothing to worry about. I'm sure this is just a matter of miscommunication. I'll get this cleared up. I can reschedule all my afternoon appointments and take care of this."

"No, I don't need you pissing off our other clients. Campitelli is big, but the cogs of this firm also run off the oil the little accounts provide. Take care of what you have in place. I'll take care of Campitelli myself," Avery said with unmistakable irritation.

“Okay. Anything else?” Quinn struggled to contain her stone-faced, business facade.

“No, I’ll touch base with you later.”

Quinn left Avery’s office and rounded the corner for the elevator before she exhaled hard.

The rest of the day, she tried to focus, but as each minute passed, it was getting harder and harder to fill her lungs with air. Something wasn’t right. She didn’t feel good. When the clock ticked over at five, she quickly gathered her things and made a beeline for her car.

Just as she was starting the car up, her chest began to hurt - bad. It felt as if some invisible force was squeezing the life out of her. She was finding it harder and harder to breathe, to think, to stand upright.

Oh, my god, I think I’m having a heart attack.

Quinn debated what to do. She couldn’t seem to bring the solution to the forefront of her mind — so much foggiess.

Hospital.

The one word kept fluttering through her panicked thoughts.

She pulled up her phone, and with shaky hands, realized there was a campus just one block down. She quickly put the car in drive and through her labored breathing and chest constrictions, somehow made it to the hospital. She pulled into the ER drive-through and stumbled into the waiting room and up to the checkout desk. Thank god – no line.

“I think I need to see a doctor,” Quinn huffed out in short labored breaths.

“What’s going on?” the receptionist asked.

“I’m having pain in my chest. I can’t breathe. I think I might be having a heart attack.”

“Okay, let me get you back here to check your vitals. Is there anyone with you who can take care of your insurance information?”

“No, but I have insurance.”

The receptionist buzzed the door, and a nurse with a wheelchair took Quinn into the back.

The nurse took her vitals, and Quinn studied the woman’s face. It was the epitome of professionalism – unreadable.

“Can I get your identification and an insurance card miss?” the receptionist asked as the nurse continued her routine.

Frustration surged in Quinn. Damn it, she might be dying, and they were fucking worried about insurance?

Quinn nodded and managed to pull her wallet from her back pocket. Her hands were shaking, and great beads of sweat were forming on her forehead. She pulled out her driver’s license and insurance card and handed them to the receptionist, who at least had the good grace to smile sympathetically.

They got into a “room” quickly, which was just a curtained off area around a small gurney. Her breathing had calmed somewhat, and the squeezing sensation in her chest had eased marginally.

What the hell is going on? Why aren’t they doing anything?

After lots of tests, more waiting, several more visits from nurses, and a few more tests, finally the resident ER physician came in.

“Hello Ms. Redinger, I’m Doctor Kelser.” He stood at the end of her bed reviewing her chart momentarily then said, “Do you have a history of anxiety or depression, Ms. Redinger?” He had a tousle of bleach blond hair and looked far too young to be a doctor.

“I don’t,” she replied.

“We’ve checked you out. You’re completely healthy, so you were not having a heart attack.”

“Coul’da fooled me,” Quinn said, her breathing still shaky.

“What you’re having is actually a panic attack. Anxiety can cause symptoms that sometimes mimic a heart attack, especially if the anxiety is extremely heightened. Any ideas what might have brought this on?”

She sighed with frustration. “Yeah, I’m sure I do.”

He raised an inquisitive eyebrow.

“Do you feel any threat of danger in your life at this time? Do you feel any need to harm yourself, Ms. Redinger? We can get you help.”

Quinn felt flush with embarrassment. She shook her head. “No, it’s nothing like that. I’m just under a lot of stress at work. I’m a senior project manager at a marketing firm. I just let myself get too worked up about something that happened today. Something big concerning a promotion I’ve been working towards for a long time. I can’t believe this. Anxiety? Really?”

The doctor stopped scrutinizing her. He’d obviously been studying her, looking for some clue of mental instability. His demeanor change. “Well, I can’t say I haven’t been there. Even so, stress leads to bigger health concerns, and if your job’s caused you to move into full-blown panic attacks, maybe it’s time to reassess your priorities?”

She refrained from rolling her eyes. This advice, coming from the ‘good ole’ doc’ who looked like he’d barely finished Med School last week. She merely nodded.

“I’m prescribing you a mild anti-anxiety drug. In the meantime, I’ll send up our resident counselor to go over stress coping mechanisms. You’ll probably want to look into reducing your

alcohol consumption for a while, find some time to exercise, maybe research meditation techniques. The important thing to remember is that stress can lead to other health problems if ignored. You may not have had a heart attack this time, but if you continue to have panic attacks, it raises cortisol levels, which can eventually lead to diabetes, stroke, and heart disease. It shouldn't be taken lightly."

"Kinda young to be worried about those issues, aren't I?" she half-joked.

"Not if you continue to allow this kind of anxiety to put stress on your body. No, you aren't too young at all." His eyes bore into hers. "There's no shame in seeking medical assistance for counseling or medication, but you need to make some life changes because the body won't endure attacks for prolonged periods without breaking down other systems. Anxiety spikes the 'flight-or-fight' chemicals in the brain. Prolonged levels of cortisol interfere with the body's ability to sleep, heal, manage mood swings, among other things. It's best to deal with this before it spirals into other chronic health issues. Do you understand?"

"Yeah, I hear what you're saying," she replied wryly. She didn't want to take him seriously, but Iona's joking words echoed in her mind - *I'll be visiting you in ICU...*

"After the counselor visits with you, a nurse will get your discharge paperwork all wrapped up. Take care, and have a good day, Ms. Redinger."

He was out of the room before she could even say thank you.

Well, this is just great, Quinn thought to herself. She had no choice but to wait and go through the motions of acquiescing to the doctor's orders before she could go home.

Chapter 5

The counselor at the hospital had led her through a long string of questions, prying for red flags to ensure she wasn't suicidal or in an abusive situation. When the counselor was satisfied that Quinn was not a danger to herself or others, she was released.

She'd refused to take any drugs at the hospital to help curb the anxiety. They would have impaired her driving, and she would not be taking a cab or calling a friend.

When Quinn got home, she tapped her foot nervously on the kitchen floor, turning the bottle of prescription anxiety meds over and over again in her hand. Her nerves buzzed like thousands of tiny insects biting her all at once. To say she was annoyed with herself for letting this happen was the understatement of the year.

Anxiety? Really? The doctor said it was *merely* anxiety. This had to be a joke. She was stronger than this. How could she have anxiety?

She felt that buzzing sensation increase. It rippled under her skin and through her scalp.

No, she couldn't even consider popping one of those pills. Her pride swelled like a tidal wave and crashed over any inclination she had to consume the meds. She pushed the bottle into the back of her kitchen cabinet.

She felt marginally better now that she was at home, but the annoying feeling that she was near breakdown kept nagging at her. She decided to take a long, hot shower. She was shaky and exhausted, but her panic attack had ebbed considerably.

Somehow just knowing it was not a heart attack helped ease the symptoms, which only hours earlier seemed life-threatening. Still, she felt raw, depleted, and on edge.

Her thoughts were still racing with the doctor's words. Iona's words. The phrases kept playing like a bad song stuck in her head.

It could get worse.

Major health problems.

ICU...

She had no idea anxiety could make her feel like she was dying. It was scary, and what if Iona and the doctor were right? What if she didn't slow down? What if next time it did turn into something life-threatening? Worst case scenario - death. Best case scenario - serious health issues that would put a damper on her quality of life.

Fuck it. The doctor said no alcohol. She figured the good ole' doc had only admonished her against libations because of the meds he'd prescribed her. The pharmacist had emphasized firmly that alcohol was not to be mixed with the prescription. It didn't matter because she wasn't going to take those meds. Now that she knew what this was, she could handle it on her own.

After downing a glass of Scotch, she laid down on her couch and closed her eyes. She was just going to rest for a minute. She was so exhausted. Too tired to get up and change into her pajamas.

Just going to rest my eyes...

Without any provocation, an image of Estelle sitting on the barstool at the Pink Peacock floating into her mind.

Just call her... Just call her... Estelle's soft lilting voice taunted Quinn.

Quinn's mind suddenly conjured up a nebulous figure of what Mistress Jade might look like.

A tall woman with waist-length black hair, long legs like a runway model, and clad in leather from head to toe, had tied a naked Estelle to the edge of a bed frame that had large iron filigree patterns. Estelle was on her knees at the foot of the bed with her arms tied above her head.

Quinn's imagination ran wild and vivid. She could see Estelle's beautiful nubs standing erect. The mysterious Mistress took a paddle to her round bottom. Then her fantasy morphed to Iona. Iona was being spanked, groaning with pleasure as the wood cracked against her behind, leaving it red and rosy.

Quinn's mind took an interesting turn. It was suddenly her tied to the bed being spanked. In her fantasy, she saw her back arch seductively at each strike of the paddle, just like the women in the porn videos had reacted.

Quinn wasn't aware, but she had slipped her hand down her pants and was touching herself. She rubbed two fingers in between the creases of her labia. Each time her mind produced another crack of the paddle against her bottom, Quinn became wetter and swollen with need. She toppled over the edge into blissful release. Her whole body quivered, and she plummeted into the relaxation of her afterglow.

Quinn was breathless, and sleep took her.

When she woke, she jolted. Momentarily disoriented, she viewed her surroundings and realized she was asleep on her couch with her hand in her pants - again.

She groped for her phone on the coffee table and realized she had only drifted off for an hour.

Then it all came back to her, the anxiety, the hospital, coming home and fantasizing about Estelle and Iona, and Mistress Jade, the staged scene in her mind, pleasing herself, drifting off to sleep.

Estelle's suggestion to use Mistress Jade's services as stress relief stood before her as a very viable solution. Before, she'd scoffed, but now it sat in her mind, like a naked woman on her doorstep: bold, brash, and impossible to ignore.

Was it arrogant or strange of her, that she was even considering Estelle's unconventional suggestion over the "professional's" advice?

The doctor said she needed to exercise more, but she already went to the gym four times a week. The counselor suggested she practice self-care, mindfulness, and maybe yoga.

Yeah, no, thanks. Not her thing. She wasn't about to become a hippie. Besides, getting all bendy in an incense-laden room wasn't going to calm her nerves. It seemed like utter nonsense.

Yet, going to a Mistress? She realized then, just fantasizing about this scenario the past two times had relaxed her immensely.

She got up and filled her glass with more Scotch.

Her nails tapped thoughtfully on the glass as she held it. If fantasizing about this sort of thing helped her relax, then maybe...

She looked at the time. It might be too late to call. It was nearing eleven pm. Then again, for some people, the night was only getting started.

She knew if she waited until tomorrow to call, she'd lose her nerve. So, she reached into her wallet and dug out the card, picked up the phone, and dialed.

Quinn's breathing quickened. It felt like the anxiety was welling up again. She couldn't do this. She almost hung up, but a softly accented voice filled her ear.

"Hello, you've reached Mistress Jade. What can I do for you?" Her voice was exotic yet professional.

Quinn momentarily lost her mental balance and could only focus on trying to calm her breathing.

"Hello?" The Mistress said again with a hint of playfulness.

"Yes, uhm, sorry. I'm a referral from one of your existing clients. I was interested, uh I'm not sure how to set up an appointment." She rushed to add on, "I'm not even sure I want an appointment. My friend recommended you." Quinn smacked her forehead with her palm. She shouldn't have had the Scotch. It was clouding her thoughts and inhibiting her composure.

Mistress Jade laughed lightly. "Of course you do. You've called me, haven't you?" Her voice was teasing and dripped languidly like warm syrup. Just the timber was causing Quinn's groin to burn. Jade continued. "Which client referred you?"

"Um, my coworker— I mean, friend, Estelle."

Again, she laughed. It was a light tinkling sound, like a wind chime brushed by a breeze. It played like a beautiful song in Quinn's ear.

"Yes, yes, my rebel client, little Estelle. Of course." She sighed with the easiness of a satisfied lover. "And what may I do for you Ms.—"

"You can call me— Jane," she said too quickly.

"Jane... is it?" Her voice stretched the name out, flitted up and down like a ribbon being teased and tossed in the wind.

"Yes, Jane," Quinn confirmed.

“Well then, *Jane*, tell me something about yourself. Why are you seeking the services of a Dominatrix? What fantasies are you hoping to have fulfilled? I must warn you. I am a rare flower blooming in the desert. I can only provide a particular ‘aesthetic’ pleasure for a certain ‘wanderer’ shall we say?”

My God, just the way this woman speaks, is getting me hot and bothered again. No wonder Estelle acted the way she did when she talked about her.

Quinn tried to slip into her reserved professional mannerism, but between Jade’s contradicting, soft, yet commanding words and inflections, it completely knocked her off balance.

“Well, I would venture to say I’m not really into the extremely kinky stuff. I have to admit, um, I’ve never been with a Dominatrix before, so I’m uncertain what my fantasies are. Just the normal stuff, I guess.”

That tinkling laughter filled Quinn’s ear again. “Well, I will first educate you. There is nothing *normal* about what you will experience with me. I will tantalize your mind. Your body will succumb to my will. That is a fact. *If* - I choose to take you on as a client.”

The Mistress let her words hang.

Quinn’s gut clenched at the emphasis on the word ‘*if*.’ What *if* she didn’t take her on as a client? The thought hadn’t occurred to her.

Sure, Estelle mentioned this, but for some reason, the translation of *why* played out differently in Quinn’s brain.

She thought acceptance or denial would be based on the Mistress refusing to fulfill far-reaching fantasies, unconventional scenarios The Mistress was unwilling to perform. Quinn

knew she wasn't going to present any such far-fetched fantasies, and therefore had already concluded that there would be no reason The Mistress wouldn't see her.

In Quinn's industry, they clamored for clients. She naively assumed a Dominatrix would be in much the same position. Was there such an overwhelming market for this service? Could Jade capriciously choose her clients at will? Simply turn Quinn away because of the Mistress's fickle whims?

Suddenly Quinn felt crazy with desire - she must be her client. At the very least, one session, to experience the taboo of the unknown. She would pay double if it came to it.

Quinn attempted to retain a cool and detached demeanor, yet she could hear the anxious edge when she replied. "What specifications do I need to meet for you to accept me as a client? I didn't realize there was an application for the position. If money is your concern, I can assure you—"

Jade cut her off. "Money is not a concern." Then her voice softened a bit. Quinn could almost visualize a delicate hand waving away Quinn's insolent offer as Jade continued. "It's more about the chemistry of whether I can have this very special relationship with you— *Jane*. I refuse to work with anyone whose fantasies I cannot fulfill. If the bloom does not fit in the vase, then the bloom will need to find a more fitting vase."

Quinn couldn't place the accent and wondered at her pronouncing the word 'vase' with a long vowel, making a simple word sound exotic. She found herself feeling irrationally drawn down the rabbit hole to becoming Jade's client.

Quinn formed her answer carefully. "How— does the flower— find the right vase?"

Jade laughed, sounding pleased, and Quinn exhaled in relief.

Jade answered, “If you are the right vase for my bloom, I need to get to know you a bit more. First, I require you to use a different alter-ego. The name Jane is too simple. It does not suit you. I do not require you to use your legal name, but Jane is not acceptable to me. Pick another.”

Quinn was surprised that Jade had picked up on this detail so quickly, but Quinn didn’t have time to consider it further. As she thought of a new name, her palms began to sweat, and she paced faster. Did Jade mean pick one now, or later? Did this mean she was in? She felt flustered beyond control. She never felt flustered like this!

She pulled the phone away from her mouth slightly and exhaled a nervous breath. When she came back on the line, she asked, “Do you want me to do that now or later?”

Jade’s pleased laughter filled the phone again. “Now, if you please.” Her voice had dropped to a husky command. “But take your time. We are in no hurry, are we?”

Quinn’s breath quickened. She could feel heat pooling in her core, slowly oozing down between her thighs. Quinn tried to force her brain past her arousal and think. What name did she want to hear when Jade addressed her? It suddenly dawned on her. She didn’t have to give her last name. Jade would never know who Quinn was. There had to be privacy disclosures in her line of work going both ways.

She blew out a nervous breath and said, “Quinn.”

“Mmhh... Quinn. That is a good name. I approve.”

Quinn could picture Jade’s appraising smile, her full luscious lips, soft and velvety like rose petals, framing perfectly white teeth.

“Okay,” was all Quinn replied. Inwardly she felt satiated with Jade’s simple words - *I approve*. Part of her logical brain knew it was insanity to want the approval from a woman she didn’t even know.

“I think we should have a trial session and see if the chemistry goes beyond the phone call. Yes?”

“Um, yes, that would be great,” Quinn replied.

“I think I know exactly what you need, Ms. Quinn. Let us meet, say... six p.m. this Saturday? I will have some waivers and disclosures for you to sign. Boring, I know, but necessary. When we get off the phone, I will text you my private website address where you can download the forms, some protocols you must read over, follow and sign before you arrive, and my physical address. Good?”

“Yes, that sounds perfectly reasonable.”

“All right, I will see you in a few days. Goodnight, Ms. Quinn.”

“Just Quinn.”

“Goodnight, *Ms. Quinn.*” Jade hung up.

Chapter 6

Quinn received a text from Jade early Saturday morning. She was to shower, shave her legs, and have good hygiene. She was to arrive at Jade's apartment at six p.m. sharp. She had to bring along her list of fantasies written in - twelve-point Times New Roman font - bullet points. She needed to put her name on the upper right-hand corner, with an email address Jade could reach her at.

Jade sent a questionnaire listing many Scene activities that Quinn had to look up. Quinn was to research what *hard-limits* meant in reference to these activities. She learned these were the things she would never, under any circumstances, be willing to experiment with Jade. She was to list those in the second half of her document. Lastly, she had to sign the legal disclosures. She was to bring all documents with her.

She felt childish going through such great lengths. It was as though she were in college again, trying to please a naughty professor.

She wasn't used to being ordered around. The instructions were so precise and clear though, if not followed to the letter, Jade reserved the right to refuse to do Scene with her. Quinn learned quickly just from reading the document that this community was an entire subculture with its own language and vernacular. Such as the word Scene being spelled with a capital 'S,' and no preposition of the word 'a' beforehand. There were many nuances like this to set the terms apart in the community from normal usage.

Quinn felt torn between two prevailing thoughts. She was wasting her time with such anal-retentive requests. Yet, on the flip side, there was this crazy titillating appeal to please Jade by doing precisely what she'd requested.

She certainly felt nervous as a schoolgirl getting ready for her appointment. She had no idea what to wear. Jade had not indicated what type of apparel she should have on. She had anxiously changed into outfit after outfit - formal workwear, then casual, then back to formal. She finally settled on a plain white fitted t-shirt and comfortable yet form-fitting jeans.

When she showed up on Jade's townhouse doorstep, she realized with alarm that she was fidgeting. She tried to calm herself. She hadn't fidgeted over anything in years, not since her first date with a woman. She was both annoyed and surprised by her nervous energy.

She rang the doorbell and waited.

Nothing.

She waited for a few moments, wondering if she might be upstairs. It seemed to be a two-story townhouse. She was just about to press the button again when the door popped open, and Quinn saw *her*, the mysterious Mistress Jade.

Jade beckoned Quinn to follow her inside, and Quinn did so without saying a word. She couldn't help but ogle at Jade's backside as they walked down the short narrow hall. She had a great view of the Mistress's fantastic figure.

Quinn scanned Jade from the floor up. Black stiletto heels, accentuating her beautiful legs adorned in leather pants as if someone had painted them on. She worked out. The muscle definition was prominent. Quinn admired Jade's sculpted arms and back muscles through the lacing on her corset. Her jet-black hair was angled sharply, cut to the chin in the style of a flapper from the 20s. Maybe a wig?

When Jade turned around, Quinn halted, and her breath caught. Jade's eyes were blue. Unnaturally blue, creating a striking distinction from her tanned skin and black hair. Or perhaps the contrast came from the thick eye-liner and flirty silver filigree mask on the upper half of her

face. She wore purple lipstick, matching the accented designs on the mask. Even with the makeup and mask, she could see Jade was a heart-stopping woman.

Jade positioned herself on her luxurious white leather chair and extended a graceful hand, gesturing for Quinn to sit across from her. Jade crossed her legs and leaned back.

Quinn sat stiffly in the chair and took a cursory glance around. Modern and minimalistic decor accented the sitting room. Yet there was opulence in Jade's choice of white and polished steel furnishings and artwork.

"So, you did your homework as I asked?" Jade asked.

Quinn simply nodded and handed the papers to her.

Jade took them and as she read the document, her lips broke into a smile, revealing the perfect white teeth just as Quinn had envisioned. Jade was quiet as she took several minutes to read and study them.

"Do you have any questions?" Jade asked.

"No," Quinn said.

"Let's get started," Jade said and stood up.

"What do I need to do?"

"Follow me." Jade led her down a small hallway.

They turned right into a large room decorated in shades of deep purple and black. There were odd fixtures and furniture. A large boxy bedframe was the focal point situated against one wall, but the framework was unusual, and unlike anything Quinn had ever seen before. There were heavy wooden beams, forming an industrial-like canopy. Large metal rings lined each of the beam's sides. The mattress was situated higher from the floor than a standard bed because underneath it all, there seemed to be a— cage?

The other wall held an 'X' shaped contraption, which Quinn recognized from the porn videos she'd studied beforehand. Though she had no idea what it was called. On either side of the wall were cabinets that piqued her curiosity. In the middle of the room was a simple wooden dining room chair. Clothing was neatly folded and sitting on the seat.

Jade took a riding crop off a small table positioned about a foot away from the chair.

"First, you will undress and wear only these." She pointed with the crop to the folded articles of clothing on the chair.

Quinn picked up the clothing: a pair of leather pants and a leather bikini top. She flushed with embarrassment. She hadn't expected a costume. This seemed a bit much. Would they even fit?

"They will fit, I assure you," Jade smiled mischievously as if reading Quinn's mind.

"What makes you so sure they're my size?"

Jade responded with a mere hint of a smile. "No more questions. Undress, put those on, then sit in the chair."

Jade stood directly in front of the chair, allowing about five feet of distance between them. The Mistress stood at parade rest, a severe military stance, and stared at Quinn expectantly.

Quinn felt edgy with discomfort having to change into the costume, but she also didn't want to lose face. She'd hoped for a moment of privacy, but glancing at Jade's face, that was not going to happen.

Suddenly she became very self-conscious. Quinn worked out and kept herself trim. God knows in her profession, she'd lose her mind if she didn't spend an hour at the gym several days

a week. She had nothing to be ashamed of. She wasn't so arrogant to believe she was the best-looking woman around, nor was she the ugliest.

Undressing in front of The Mistress felt as though she was exposing more than skin. Quinn stole a glance at Jade, and the expression on her face hinted at playfulness but also something else. Quinn got the distinct feeling this was a test. If so, she resolved right then that she would pass. She would impress this woman.

Quinn pulled the t-shirt over her head in one fast motion and dropped it to the floor. She then unclasped her bra, freeing her ample breasts, exposing them completely. Quinn merely stood there for a moment, scrutinizing Jade's reaction. If she wanted a show, she would fake confidence until it manifested into a reality. It worked in business, why not here?

Jade nodded her approval and said, "Good, finish changing." Her predatory smile increased with each article of clothing that dropped to the floor.

Quinn sat in the chair, untied her shoes, and pulled off her socks. She unbuckled her belt, then wriggled the jeans off her hips and legs. She folded her clothing and tucked them neatly under the chair.

She still had her panties on when she picked up the leather pants, making a movement to put them on. Jade stopped her with a swift wave of the crop in front of Quinn's face. Placing the crop under her chin, she lifted Quinn's face to look up and into her eyes. "Remove those too," she commanded.

Quinn's confidence had slowly been ramping up, and then it halted like a truck slamming into a brick wall.

"You want me naked, huh?" Quinn joked, but her voice cracked.

Mistress Jade responded with a silent smile.

Quinn sighed and thought, *well, I've come this far*. Brazenly she stood up, removed the panties, and again allowed Jade to scan the fullness of her naked body. A warmth pooled through Quinn as Jade circled her and nodded approvingly.

“Beautiful,” Jade said softly.

Even a hint of this woman’s approval caused Quinn to flush with heat.

“You may dress now.”

Quinn shimmied the leather pants over her hips and zipped them up. She had never owned an article of clothing like this in her entire life. She felt silly, putting the leather pants on, but she was surprised at how soft and supple they felt against her bare skin. She pulled on the bralette and clasped it in the back.

Quinn looked to Jade for approval. It was written all over her face. Again, Quinn felt a warm satisfaction and excitement course through her.

“Very nice,” Jade said. “Sit.”

Quinn obeyed.

Jade took her riding crop then and prowled around the chair as she spoke. “There will be rules in our sessions. You have already read and signed my legal disclosures, so you should already know these rules, but we will review them verbally. See how good of a student you really are.”

“Okay,” she said.

“First rule. You will always address me as Mistress. If you are naughty, I will punish you. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Mistress.” Quinn watched Jade circle her.

“Eyes forward. You may observe my body when I pass in front of you. Understood?”

“Yes - Yes, Mistress.”

“Superb.” She stopped in front of Quinn. “You might yet make an excellent sub.”

Quinn tried to remain expressionless even though her pulse was fluttering faster by the second. There was something so sensual in the way Jade moved and spoke. The way she demanded Quinn’s full attention without force. She was *amazing*. No wonder Estelle said she had to experience it for herself.

“Second rule,” Jade continued. “Sessions are about your Mistress’s pleasure. The sub holds all the power, but these sessions are not about your pleasure. There will be a safeword. If ever we engage in activities that become too taxing on either your mind or body, I am usually adept enough to recognize this, and we will stop. On rare occasion, if I do not see your discomfort, or you have reached your limits, you may say your safeword, and I will withdraw. Understood?”

“Yes, Mistress.”

“You may choose this safeword now. I will wait while you decide what your word is to be. It should go without saying the word should not be commonplace, such as ‘stop’ or ‘don’t.’ Often subs choose the word ‘yellow,’ but this is boring. I want you to select something unique to you.”

Jade moved behind Quinn’s chair and came to a stop. She waited there. Quinn’s mind reeled with words; crazy words, silly words, sensual words, crass words. She honestly couldn’t think of anything. Then it came to her. She thought it silly, but it might work.

“Can it be two words?” Quinn inquired.

Jade rounded the chair swiftly. She smacked Quinn's thigh with a crisp swat of her riding crop. Quinn's eyes went wide with shock and moisture pooled between her legs inside the tight leather pants.

"How do you address your Mistress?" Jade demanded with a demure yet mocking tone.

"Oh, right, sorry. Can it be two words — Mistress?"

"That is better," Jade purred. She playfully ran the soft leather of the crop just below Quinn's collarbone then moved it down towards her mounds. Jade purposefully avoided the sensitive place Quinn wanted her to stimulate.

Quinn shivered.

Jade smiled.

"When you are a good sub, I will reward you. When you are a naughty sub, I will punish you. Understood?"

"Yes, Mistress." Quinn closed her eyes and sucked in her breath. It was quite possible that she had never been more aroused in her entire life.

"What is your safeword, then?"

"Pink drink - Mistress?"

Jade slid around to the front of the chair, giving Quinn a view of her face. Jade smirked and said, "I will accept this. Third rule is discretion and respect. I will respect your privacy, and you will respect mine. If I ever discover even a hint of stalking or you trying to uncover my identity, you will be cut off and blacklisted from all Mistress's in my professional circle. I will likewise not attempt to uncover your identity."

Jade paused, waiting for Quinn to acknowledge.

"Yes, Mistress."

“You are never to expect sexual acts of any kind, in exchange for my services rendered. Payment will always go on that table over there by the door before you leave. You will pay at the conclusion of a session - cash only - I will inform you how long the session is. Sessions will never go less than an hour or over three. I must test your stamina to see how long you will - *last.*”

Jade emphasized the last word so erotically, Quinn felt herself gush and worried the leathers might be ruined from her arousal. Her soft folds were quickly gathering heavy moisture.

As if Jade seemed to notice this, she stopped and stared right at Quinn’s crotch. She smiled seductively and then continued. “There have been rare occasions that your Mistress might see fit to satisfy herself by using *your* body for *my* pleasure, but this is my personal proclivity. Taking my own gratuity shall we say?” She stopped, surveyed Quinn with a critical eye, and smiled again. “I will ask for your consent, but I don’t think there will be any resistance,” Jade smirked.

Quinn ached with a painful pleasure that maddened her. She had never felt so aroused.

“However,” Jade stopped dead in front of her, taking on a serious tone, “you will *never* expect, demand, or even hint at wanting me to please you in any sexual manner. The second you do, consider the contract terminated. Understand?”

There was a severity in her tone, making Quinn never want to cross that line.

“Yes, Mistress,” Quinn said, breathing heavy like a horny teenager on the cusp of losing her virginity. Quinn couldn’t remember the last time she felt this stimulated and alive. God, the delicious mixture of pleasure through withholding any contact. Jade had barely touched her. It was unfathomable she was causing such arousal through her words and movements alone.

Her body was buzzing with anticipation, wondering what Jade would do next.

Chapter 7

“I will ease you into the possibilities of BDSM. Today’s session will be very light and easy. A little bondage and flogging?” She circled Quinn’s chair and stopped right in front of Quinn. “Stand up and go to the cross.” She gestured with her head to the ‘X’ shaped wooden piece of furniture.

Quinn did as she asked.

“Face the wood. Place your stomach against it,” Jade commanded.

Quinn followed her orders.

“I’m sorry,” Jade’s tone was severe. “Are you forgetting to acknowledge your Mistress, Quinn?”

Before she could get the words out, Jade swatted her hard on the left butt cheek. Quinn tensed, sucked in her breath, and turned to face Jade. The strike was harder than the last time, and surprisingly this increased her arousal.

“I’m sorry, Mistress. It won’t happen again.” Quinn smiled slightly, an automatic reaction to her nervous energy.

Jade faced Quinn, lifted Quinn’s chin with the tip of her crop, and forced her to look at her. “Do you think this is funny? You are not funny.” Jade ran a perfectly manicured nail along Quinn’s jawline and closed the distance between them. She made a motion like she might kiss her but stopped mere inches from her face. “I take my work *very* seriously.” Again, Jade brought the crop down hard against Quinn’s thigh.

Crack!

Quinn sucked in her breath and felt the folds within her stiffen with heat.

“Turn around and face the cross.”

“Yes, Mistress.”

Jade stood behind Quinn and pressed her warm body against Quinn’s back. Quinn sucked in her breath and held it. Jade lifted and fixed one of Quinn’s arms into a shackle and then the other. Then she fastened her ankles with leather cuffs to the bottom posts leaving her spread-eagle and feeling delightfully vulnerable. At first blush, the thought of being strapped to a board, helpless to the whims of another woman, would not have appealed to her. However, Quinn was enjoying her “plight.” Her rising urge to climax made it hard to deny how much she was enjoying being Mistress Jade’s sub.

Jade then went to a cabinet just to the side of the cross and opened it. Quinn watched her take something out, but she moved too quickly for her to get a good look.

“Have you ever been flogged, Ms. Quinn?” she asked.

“No, Mistress.”

“Would you like to try being flogged?”

“Yes, Mistress.”

Jade traced one finger down Quinn’s back and, in one swift motion, released the clasp on the bralette. Jade pulled the bralette away quickly. Quinn’s warm skin against the cold wood of the cross caused her to shiver. Then Jade clawed her delicately manicured fingernails down her back. Quinn thought she would unravel right there and then.

A pause, then a swift crack of the flog against her back. Quinn’s muscles tightened, and she exhaled the sharp breath she’d sucked in.

“Do you like that?” Jade asked tauntingly.

“Yes,” Quinn breathed out then quickly amended, “Yes, Mistress.”

Jade cracked the flog against Quinn's back, again, and again.

Quinn groaned and whimpered.

At ten lashes, she marveled at how the heady mixture of pain and pleasure coursed through her and spiked her adrenaline.

Just when Quinn thought she couldn't stand the pain anymore and was tempted to use her safeword, Jade would intuitively stop to allow for a break. Jade ran the soft leather tassels along Quinn's back and over her shoulders intermittently between strikes. She would murmur in Quinn's ear, asking if she was okay. Quinn would acknowledge, and the lashing would start again, escalating the emotional high to a new peak.

It was like being taken up and down an unpredictable amusement park ride, but far better than any carnival ride. The burning between her folds and in her core felt nearly unbearable.

Mistress Jade gently caressed the red welts with her soft fingertips.

Quinn lost track of time as she willingly succumbed to being Jade's play-toy. The submissiveness, the humiliation, she assumed would not have enticed her so greatly, yet it did.

Quinn lost track after the fortieth lash against her back. She melted into the pain. She felt the pain becoming too intense, and yet insanely, she wanted more! Just when she thought she couldn't stand it any longer, Quinn felt her bonds being unstrapped. Quinn's legs were shaking.

"Lie on your stomach, on the bed," Jade said.

"Yes, Mistress," she gasped.

Her body buzzed. Her legs shook. Quinn had never been one for religion, but her *spirit* felt somewhat disconnected from her body. It was a sensation like nothing she had ever felt.

Mistress Jade was there, placing a kind arm under her, lending support, and helping her to the bed. Somehow the contradicting actions, tenderness bestowed after the harsh and cruel sting of the flog, added to the emotional high Quinn was riding.

Quinn made it to the bed with Mistress's help. She lay face down and waited, breathing heavily with both exhaustion and unimaginable arousal. Jade ran her hand along the welts, inspecting them, then said, "You may roll onto your back."

Quinn rolled over.

Jade extended a glass of water. Quinn could barely prop herself up as she sipped at it. Jade took the glass back and set it on the nightstand by the bed.

Suddenly, Jade did something that surprised Quinn. She began to undo the button on Quinn's leather pants. Achingly slow, she unzipped Quinn's zipper, then slipped the pants off Quinn's hips. Quinn arched her back, obliging Jade. Her mind began to whirl with the anticipation of what was going to happen.

She had explicitly stated there would be no exchange of sexual acts. What was she doing?

Quinn huffed with sexual frustration as she waited. She was naked and bare, but she felt as if it were so much more than mere skin being exposed. As Jade moved off the bed and stood at the foot, Quinn felt as if Jade could see into her mind, her soul.

"Now touch yourself. I will fulfill my pleasure today by watching you climax. Start with your beautiful breasts, my pet," Jade instructed.

Quinn's eyes widened in surprise, but she didn't hesitate.

Quinn went to lick her fingers so she could touch her already hardened nubs, but Jade brought the crop down and swatted Quinn's calf.

Quinn's eyes shot up, confused.

“You did not ask for permission to lick your fingers, Ms. Quinn.”

“May I lick my fingers?” Quinn asked quickly.

Smack! Another swat to the other calf. “How do you address your Mistress?”

“May I - lick my - fingers - Mistress?” Quinn breathed out the words rapidly.

“That’s better,” Jade grinned. “Yes, you may.”

Quinn licked the pads of her fingers, then rolled the tips around her nubs, making them harder. The sensation of heat burned in between her thighs.

“Yes, that’s it, my little pet. Get yourself all worked up for your Mistress. I am going to enjoy this very much.”

Quinn wanted to touch herself further, but she continued to arouse herself by only caressing her nipples. She didn’t want the crop to smack her again – not right now. She’d wait for Jade to permit her to go further. It was blissfully agonizing.

Quinn moaned, and Jade said, “I think you are ready. Stroke your pussy, my pet. Stroke it and make yourself moan with pleasure. You are quite beautiful when aroused, so make beautiful music for your Mistress.”

Quinn’s first touch to her wet folds, caused her body to shudder so violently, she thought she might come right then. This was unlike any other time she had masturbated. Every nerve ending was alive and thrumming. She pressed her fingers deeper inside and slid them in and out. Her folds were hard and swollen. The slick soft skin of her cunt was begging to release. She moved her fingers back and forth. She was getting close.

Jade smiled and pulled the chair to the end of the bed, watching Quinn with an intensity that made her burn.

Quinn continued to stroke herself. Seeing Jade's predatory smile, and dominating approval, heightened her pleasure even more. She didn't think she would last long.

Quinn closed her eyes and reveled in the burning sensation, engulfing her body. Quinn was so close now. Then she heard Jade's soothing voice, "Does it feel good, my pet?"

Quinn nodded, yes. She couldn't speak, her body's temperature had surged. Her tongue was too thick in her mouth to respond.

She was about to come, and then Quinn heard Jade's commanding voice, "You will not come until I give you permission. Do you understand?"

Oh, fucking hell! I don't know if I'll last much longer...

Quinn's mind was only thinking of release - she was right on that precipice - yet Jade wanted her to control it? She eased the pressure of touching herself.

"Do you understand?" Jade pressed harshly with a playful, taunting edge in her tone.

"Yes — Mistress," Quinn choked out.

She slowed the rhythm of her gyrating hips. The thought of angering Jade seemed more unbearable than not being able to release.

Quinn opened her eyes and must have had a pleading look in them. Jade smiled at Quinn's compliance. "Good. You are going to be a superb sub. You may stroke yourself harder, and when you feel yourself burn to the point of no control, you will ask for my permission to come."

"Yes — Mistress."

Quinn slid her finger rhythmically in time with her rocking hips. Within moments she felt the heat pool inside her again. It notched up, moving like rapid burning wildfire through every nerve ending, about to explode—

“May— I come— Mistre—” Her pleading slipped into a wordless cry of pleasure. Quinn felt her legs shaking uncontrollably. A torrent of heat and electricity coursed through her. She moaned with ecstasy as she drove her fingers hard into herself. Wave after wave consumed her body like a backdraft of heat. Her mind roared like a crash of water, purging every thought.

As her orgasm ebbed, she chanced a look at Jade. She had stood up from the chair and was at the foot of the bed, smiling with approval.

Quinn’s body relaxed like molten gold, oozing out and across the bed. Quinn wanted to sleep, but she didn’t know if that was permitted. She wasn’t sure she could fight it. She closed her eyes and basked in the heat of her slowly declining climax.

“Roll over on your stomach again,” Jade commanded softly.

Quinn’s mind was trying to form a conscious thought of *why*? Weren’t they done? Her mind still had the essence of floating above her. Every care in the world was gone. It was amazing. She was entirely sure she had never felt like this - ever. Both weakened and heightened in a state of something she couldn’t place - didn’t want to. It was like being high on a drug.

She slowly attempted to roll over. Jade aided her. Quinn’s limbs were weighed down with heavy, blissful exhaustion.

What happened next surprised her.

Jade’s hands were moving across the skin on her back, rubbing alcohol over the welts with a small cotton pad. It stung furiously, but the gentle hand Jade used relaxed Quinn into a soothing cocoon of comfort.

Jade then massaged balm across Quinn’s back as she spoke. “You went longer than most do on their first session. I’m impressed.”

Quinn couldn’t form a verbal response. She smiled dreamily.

“You are still riding the endorphin high triggered by over-stimulation of your nerve endings. Heightened sensations you are probably unaware your body was capable of. This mind-body state you are in right now is called subspace. It is like being on a narcotic if you have ever experimented with that sort of thing. When you come down from this high, you may experience feelings of ‘withdrawal.’ We will talk about this later. You will sleep now for a bit. I will wake you when you are rested. If you wake before I come to you, stay here and relax. Do not try to find me.”

“Yes — Mistress,” Quinn whispered the words as she drifted off into the deepest state of sleep she had experienced in years.

Quinn woke to Mistress Jade, shaking her gently. She felt momentarily disoriented. She sat up abruptly and was about to question where she was, when it all came back to her - the session, the flogging, the exquisite orgasm. She remembered she was naked, but Jade must have covered her at some point.

“There is a bathroom over there if you would like to shower and clean up. Then join me in my living room. I will wait for you.”

“Okay.”

Jade gave her a severe and pointed look.

Quinn momentarily forgot why Jade would be staring at her that way, then said quickly, “Okay, *Mistress*.” This would take some getting used to. Apparently, the power exchange was to continue at all times. For some reason, this caused Quinn’s stomach to flutter.

Jade left the room, and Quinn went to the shower. She washed up, dressed, and joined Jade in the living room.

Mistress Jade had changed into a white robe, but she still donned the mask. Quinn also suspected Jade's hair was a wig, and the contacts were fake. It was a great disguise. Quinn normally would have itched with curiosity to unveil Jade's identity, but she was surprised to find herself not wanting to know. It was part of the appeal.

Quinn sat down. Jade stood up and retrieved a tray. She brought it back to the coffee table and set it down.

"How do you feel?" Jade asked as she poured tea from a Japanese teapot into two teacups, then handed one to her.

"I feel sort of numb. I felt so great, and now I'm just exhausted.

"What time is it?" Quinn asked.

"What time is it—?" Jade's tone gently chided Quinn to address her properly.

"Sorry, what time is it, Mistress?" Quinn asked.

"It's late — nearly ten.

"After experiencing subspace as deeply as you did, I was concerned with allowing you to drive home without coming down first," Jade said.

"What is subspace, Mistress?" Quinn asked.

"It is when you feel such an endorphin rush, your mind moves past the pain, and you feel completely euphoric. Sometimes you still feel the pain, sometimes not, but you move beyond caring. Or rather, your brain registers it as complete pleasure at that point. Those with higher pain tolerances can sometimes reach subspace quickly, as you did. The best I can explain this - it's like a runner's high. When you reach the point past the wall, you may feel a mind-body

disconnect. Some runners can get past their wall quickly, others not so much. In either case, it is my job as your Domme to ensure you do not push yourself past your limits. You went longer than most subs do in their first session. I'm impressed," Jade said.

She felt a rush of pride, even as her logical brain berated herself that it was ridiculous to feel proud of such a thing.

"I think the chemistry of our session went very well this evening - no?" Jade asked.

"Yes, I agree, Mistress. So, does this mean I am a client?"

Jade broke into laughter. "Yes, my pet. I will be your Mistress, and you will be my sub. I recommend we meet at least once a week, for now."

"Thank you, Mistress," Quinn said. "I'd like that."

"We will meet next Saturday again at the same time," Jade said. "We will then go over more of your contract details."

Quinn felt surprised that there would be another contract. *Didn't we already do that?* she thought. She didn't have the energy to ask, so she simply replied, "Yes, Mistress."

Quinn drank her tea, and Jade studied her quietly. It was a little unnerving, and Quinn squirmed under her gaze.

When Quinn was done with her tea, Jade stated how much her services totaled for this session. Quinn left payment on the little table in the bedroom as was instructed at the beginning of their session, then she left.

As she drove home, she found herself more relaxed than she'd been in weeks, possibly years. Her mind was still buzzing, fascinated that she'd found herself to be such a prime candidate for *The Lifestyle*. Even more surprising, she was suited for the role of being a submissive. This shocked her entirely.

As she went to bed that evening, she kept seeing Jade's blue eyes staring down at her,
and the erotic voice whispering in her ear - *very good, my pet.*

Chapter 8

Estelle had been right. She needed Mistress Jade. The workweek was just as grueling as ever, yet after her session with Jade, she felt strangely recharged. She thought about the doctor's suggestion of doing yoga and balked with a snide grin on her face.

As the week progressed, her upcoming sessions gave her something to look forward to instead of the idea of a weekend alone.

Estelle crept into Quinn's office at some point Monday morning. "So, did you call her?" Estelle asked.

"I did." Quinn tried to repress the smile tugging at her lips.

"And?" Estelle shut the door and sat in the chair across from Quinn's desk. "What happened? Did you schedule an appointment?"

"I did more than that," Quinn stated as nonchalantly as she could.

Estelle arched a perfect eyebrow inquisitively. "Well, that would explain the good mood."

"It would." Quinn pretended to busy herself pecking away at her keyboard.

"Are you going to share any sordid details?" Estelle smirked.

"Nope. Not unless you're willing to share your own."

"Touché," Estelle said, then stood up. "Well, I'm glad you called her. Maybe we'll swap details later at The Peacock."

"Maybe," Quinn teased.

"I'm just glad you seem to be feeling more at ease. Less uptight."

"I can't lie. I do." Quinn continued to type away but felt her face flush.

Estelle left, and Quinn found herself consumed with embarrassment. This relinquishing of power to a stranger, this lifestyle - especially as a sub - wasn't something she should feel so drawn to, but like a moth to the flame, she wanted to be drawn in. More than that, she wanted to be burned.

It felt too good, and this had worried her. After leaving her session on Friday night, she had pondered the whole event. Her mind felt at odds with itself all weekend.

She was amazed by her reaction to the session. She did not expect that she would enjoy herself so much. She never in a million years would have seen herself being a part of the underground world of BDSM, or being a submissive.

At some point over the weekend, as she lazily milled about her house, catching up on menial chores, the answer came to her clearly why being a sub suited her so well.

She'd always had to control her faculties, nearly every waking second. It made sense that she craved the release of having someone else tell her what to do, how to behave, practically how she should breathe, even if only for an hour or two.

It was a breath of fresh air, and she had been suffocating.

It was strange that Estelle had suspected Quinn might fit well into the arrangement with Jade.

Estelle.

Estelle alone knew her secret. Her rational mind told her she should be concerned with her secret being divulged, but Estelle was about as honor-bound and trustworthy as they came.

When Estelle first started at the company, there was a fluke incident where she and another coworker Sandra, had bought the same bagel sandwich from a shop around the corner except one difference. Sandra's had asked for no mayo. Estelle had grabbed the brown paper bag

with the bakery's logo on it out of the break-room fridge, and ate it before realizing her mistake. Sandra was allergic to eggs and had a mild reaction. Estelle felt so bad about the incident, she bought Sandra's lunches for the remainder of the week.

Remembering that incident alone reassured Quinn that Estelle would keep her confidence. She couldn't see Estelle going around spreading office rumors that Quinn liked to be whipped around like a little bitch. It didn't seem like her at all. Besides, it was tit-for-tat at this point. Estelle had the same dark secret.

Quinn did feel concerned with what Estelle would think of her. Would she see her as less because she enjoyed being bound and spanked? That would be ridiculous, though. Estelle was the one who roped her into it. Why would Estelle judge her?

Quinn supposed she was still feeling insecure about how much she enjoyed it. She hadn't quite come to terms with the fact that being in the sub's position was exhilarating. She was still trying to process the shock of it.

Honestly, though, the more she thought about Estelle's trustworthiness or opinion of her, a new feeling emerged. A strange yet warm and unfamiliar feeling engulfed her as she thought about Estelle knowing her secret. Something about sharing the same secret with Estelle made her feel close, in a way they'd never been.

It was kind of pleasant crossing that boundary from coworker to friend.

Quinn could barely contain her anticipation for their next session. All of Friday, she was antsy with impatience for the workday to end. She rationalized that when Friday was over, she

was that much closer to Saturday's session. For once, in her many years working at the company, she left on time with all the other staff. She couldn't keep her mind focused and decided she would clock out on time.

"Hey, I'm going to The Peacock. Want to join me?" Iona said as they happened to be walking down the corridor to the parking garage together.

"Yup," Quinn said.

"You're off early. This is completely unlike you."

"I love how getting off when I'm supposed to, qualifies as early." Quinn chuckled.

"You're off early *and* in a good mood. Have you met someone?" Iona teased.

"No," Quinn lied. Her mind flashed with images of Mistress Jade, and she smiled inwardly.

"Huh, well, that smirk on your face would say otherwise."

"I'll meet you at the bar," Quinn said as they approached their cars.

"Alright, see you there," Iona grinned.

At the bar, they sat talking about inconsequential things. At about six p.m., Iona hopped off her barstool and said, "Gotta split. See ya Monday at work?" She nudged Quinn lightly on the shoulder.

It was such a light gesture, and yet Quinn warmed at Iona's touch.

"Yeah, see ya Monday."

Quinn arrived at her appointment on Saturday night with Mistress Jade right on time.

She panned the length of Jade's body. The Mistress was wearing a tight leather skirt and a halter top with a delicate lace fringe that playfully tickled at her midriff. She was still wearing the wig and mask, and impossibly high heels which accentuated her long, sculpted legs.

Quinn felt a rush of warmth just watching Mistress Jade glide ahead of her.

"Sit, Ms. Quinn," Jade said as she motioned to the chair, Quinn had occupied last week. "I would like to open up a dialog about the details of your contract."

"Okay," Quinn said.

"In the beginning, we went with standard protocols and, of course, your initial suspected preferences, but as you ease into The Lifestyle, your preferences will change. Soft limits or curiosities can turn into hard limits. And on rare occasion, a hard limit can become a soft one. I will never persuade you to determine your limits, but I must know these limits. Every week we will go over the details and reassess the things you are comfortable with until I have a clear understanding of your psyche, and what kind of sub you are. After some time, we will not need to assess weekly. Acceptable?"

Quinn floated on the euphoria of merely listening to Jade's voice, laced with her exotic accent. "Yes, Mistress," she replied.

Jade required Quinn to go over the questionnaire again. She was to change any of her preferences. Quinn looked it over and stopped at the option 'mind games.' She couldn't lie that she was extremely curious about this. She checked the box that had been previously marked 'unsure' to 'soft limit.' She had learned that soft limit meant she was willing to try it, but with stipulations or qualifiers. Unsure meant that she was still thinking about it but wasn't ready to try it.

Quinn changed a few other options then handed the papers to Jade. She took the contract back and looked it over.

“I see you changed your preference for the box ‘mind games.’ Why is this?”

“I guess I didn’t know what it meant before. After doing more research after our first session, I think it sounds intriguing. Also, after doing a session with you, I’m more open to trusting you with trying new things in The Lifestyle, Mistress.”

Jade tilted her head. “Interesting. Very well. Would you like to discuss the specifics, or would you like me to simply try new things, and we can discuss them afterward?”

Quinn thought about this. She truly got a thrill from the anticipation of not knowing. “I think I trust that you won’t hurt me. I don’t have emotional traumas from my past, so you can experiment, and then we can reassess later, Mistress?”

Jade smiled and then stood up. “Follow.” She led Quinn to the *Playroom*. Quinn had recently learned this is what it was called. Or sometimes, people referred to it as a *Dungeon* as well, but Jade seemed to prefer the term *Playroom*.

“Today, you will undress and wear only this.” Mistress Jade held up a single item of clothing on the tip of her crop - a skimpy pair of black satin panties.

“Yes, Mistress.” Quinn wanted to smile but kept her face stoic.

She undressed and watched Jade watch her. Quinn was sure that even behind the mask, Jade’s eyes looked hungry. Quinn wondered if this was an act or if The Mistress was actually aroused by her. If she was acting, she was certainly good at it.

“A good sub will keep their eyes down or forward. Eyes down as you dress, Quinn.”

“Yes, Mistress,” Quinn said and averted her eyes downward at Jade’s shoes. Quinn shimmied into the panties. “Where would you like me now, Mistress?”

“Go to the cross. Face it.”

Quinn did as she was told, and Jade strapped in her wrists and ankles. Her bare breasts pressed up against the coolness of the lacquered wood sent an uncontrollable ripple through her.

Jade went to her cabinet and pulled out an item.

“Today, I think we will try something a bit more intense. Would you like that, my pet?”

Jade ran her manicured finger along the line of Quinn’s bare arm, extended down between her shoulder blades as she spoke.

Quinn sucked in a sharp breath. “Yes, Mistress.”

“This is a bullwhip. It will sting far more than the flog, and often it can take you to subspace very quickly because of the intensity of the pain it will inflict. Given how high your tolerance for pain is, I suspect you might do very well with a bullwhip. Do you remember your safeword? I’m going to push you to the limit today, where you might very well want to use it, my pet.”

“Yes, Mistress,” Quinn said, but in her head, she was thinking – *‘It can’t possibly be that bad.’*

She could hear Jade walking behind her. Nothing happened for what seemed like a long moment, and then it hit — a sharp sting across Quinn’s back. The pain was like the bite of a viper, quick and deadly - very different than the flog. While the flog created pain like a sunburn, this *was* far more intense. Mistress Jade had not been exaggerating.

“Did you like that?” Jade asked with coy sarcasm.

“Yes, Mistress.”

Quinn did like it. It still surprised her that the greater the pain that was inflicted, the more relaxed she became. Even more surprising to her was how her arousal increased.

Again, *snap*, and the terrible sensuous bite of the whip.

“Today, you will count for your Mistress.”

Count? Quinn thought. *Okay... strange, but I will.*

Snap!

“That is three now. Say it out loud as I whip you.”

“Three.”

Snap!

Quinn tensed and then relaxed. The sting was an intoxicating dichotomy of pleasurable pain.

Snap!

“Four.”

Quinn’s breath hitched. She felt the moisture of arousal pooling between her thighs.

Snap!

“Five.”

This was far more intense than the flog. Only five lashes and the pain was becoming unbearable. Quinn hung her head low and panted heavily, bracing for the next bite, but it didn’t come. Instead, Jade’s soft voice was in her ear.

“How are we doing, my pet?”

“I’m - fine – Mistress,” Quinn gasped.

Mistress Jade ran her soft, warm palms across the welts on Quinn’s back. Quinn closed her eyes and shivered. She could hear and feel Jade leaving her and crossing the room. When she returned, she was standing close to Quinn. She brought a glass of water to Quinn’s lips. “Drink some water,” Jade commanded.

Quinn sipped at the water and then said, “Thank you, Mistress.”

“Are you ready to continue?”

“Yes, Mistress.”

Jade pulled back and unleashed the bullwhip in three successive firm strikes - *snap, snap, snap!*

Quinn arched her back and groaned. The pain was so intense and yet so arousing. It felt *so good*.

“Are we forgetting something?” The Mistress’s voice was harsh.

“Sorry, Mistress. Six - Seven - Eight.”

“Good. Very good,” Jade purred.

Jade cracked the whip three more times.

Crack, crack, crack!

“Nine, ten, eleven.”

Quinn could hardly get the words out. Maybe she needed to stop. She felt lightheaded. Her back was on fire. The whip was so deliciously intense.

Crack, crack!

“Twelve... thirteen...”

Should I use my safeword? No, just make it to fifteen, even twenty. I can do this.

Crack!

“Fifteen.”

“I’m sorry, what happened to fourteen?” Mistress Jade mocked her.

“I mean, fourteen Mistress. Fourteen...”

“You are done,” Mistress Jade asserted.

“No, Mistress. I can do twenty. Please,” Quinn whined like a child.

Jade’s tinkling laughter rolled over her, and she shivered, all her senses on high alert.

Was she floating in subspace now? She felt so damn good.

“You are done when I say you are done. You will not do twenty today. Perhaps next time.” Her voice was firm but not unkind.

“Yes, Mistress.” Quinn couldn’t hide the disappointment laced in her voice. Fourteen lashes felt so weak.

“Do not be so sad, my little pet. You did well today. You should know, this is a tool I usually reserve for veteran subs.” Jade spoke as she unlatched the cuffs on Quinn’s wrists and ankles. “The bullwhip is very intense. I am surprised you made it past five or six. It almost always draws blood and inflicts great pain. I am impressed by your stamina. Your Mistress is very pleased with you.”

Quinn felt her entire body surge with joy and satisfaction. She practically collapsed when the cuffs were undone.

Mistress Jade wrapped her arm under Quinn. The warmth of Jade’s body and the throbbing from the welts caused a strange euphoric reaction. Yes, she supposed she was floating in subspace.

Jade assisted Quinn onto the bed. Then washed Quinn’s back tenderly with a clean washcloth, applied alcohol, and a cooling balm. When she was done, she commanded Quinn to roll over.

“Are you turned on, my pet?”

“Yes, Mistress.” Quinn was breathless.

Jade smiled knowingly. She strode over to the cabinet where the cross was, and drug the chair to the foot of the bed. Then she went to the nightstand by the bed and removed two identical pink, glass dildos. She put one on the foot of the bed next to Quinn's leg and kept the other one in her hand.

Delicately, Jade seated herself in the chair. She leaned back, and lazily slipped the skirt off, giving Quinn a perfect view. She then slowly and deliberately spread her legs wide, giving Quinn the perfect view of Jade's smooth lips and slick red folds.

Quinn bit her lip and felt herself gush. Her panties were soaked. She groaned from the exquisite anguish Jade was inflicting.

Jade smiled.

In response, Quinn propped herself up on the pillows so she could take in every detail of Jade's beautiful glistening cunt.

Jade then took the pink dildo and began to tease the end of her swollen folds. The noises of ecstasy pouring from her, surged like a tangible wave between the two of them. Quinn's pain intensified, the pain of being forced to sit and watch, enduring the increasing arousal, without being able to touch Jade or herself. It was quite possibly more intense than the bullwhip.

Jade worked the glass rod in between her lips. She teased herself by moving it slightly in and out. She groaned and sighed with pleasure. She acted as if Quinn were not in the room, as if she were entirely alone, stimulating herself.

The psychological mind-game of tender affections one minute to cold indifference the next was maddening, yet so intoxicating. Quinn gripped at the comforter on the bed hard. She wanted to touch herself. Badly. But she knew she couldn't. Jade had made it perfectly clear she was not to do anything of the sort without permission first. The second she crossed that line, the

session would end, and she would never get the release she craved. The torture was like pulling herself through a dry desert, just within reach of the well, forced to remain parched and agonizing.

Jade began to thrust the dildo deeper inside herself. Her mewls of pleasure heightening with each thrust. She took her other hand and licked her fingers, then slid them back and forth over her clit. Her fingers and the dildo moved in a synchronized rhythm of sensuality.

Quinn was enthralled and ached with need. She listened and watched rapt with attention. She dug her fingers further into the comforter.

Jade hips moved in erotic thrusts like a Latina dancer skilled in sensual choreography. Just as she came, she let out a cry of release, a beautiful sound. Quinn watched Jade's body quiver, watched her beautiful red swollen folds throb. Quinn's body trembled from the restraint she was still exerting.

As Jade's movements ebbed, she looked up and smiled a wicked grin. "My goodness! Such restraint! You are possibly the most obedient sub I have ever had."

If Quinn's head wasn't swimming in endorphins, she might have taken pleasure in the praise. She'd reached a point where she could barely stand it. The pain was pushing past pleasurable.

Jade picked up the pink dildo by Quinn's leg and handed it to Quinn. "You may now take your own pleasure, my pet."

Quinn took the dildo and slid it across her folds. She was slick with sweat and frustration. She moved the glass in and out, and within moments she came. She bit her lip hard, drawing blood. Her release, the waves of spasm, were both agonizing and euphoric. It was a high like no

other. She didn't think it possible to out-do her previous session, but as she slipped into near unconsciousness, it was her only thought.

I didn't think - it could get better...

I - didn't - think it...

Chapter 9

Quinn walked into work the next Monday, with a grin plastered on her face.

“Someone’s in a good mood. Again...” Estelle remarked, with a curious quirk in her eyebrow.

Quinn didn’t respond, her smile only widened.

Avery stormed into Quinn’s office. “Did you not get the memo I sent out this morning? I need all project managers in my office ASAP,” Avery grumbled.

“Sorry, I just got here.”

Avery glared at Quinn.

“On it,” Quinn replied.

Estelle gave Quinn a worrisome glance as she passed by. Quinn tried to move quickly to get up to Avery’s office. Estelle gently touched Quinn’s arm and caused Quinn to pause.

“Hey, if you need anything, don’t hesitate, okay. Avery has been irrationally grumpy lately. Not sure if she’s going through another divorce or what, but everyone’s noticed. Don’t let it get to you.”

Quinn stopped and nodded. Then in an uncharacteristic gesture, she placed her hand atop Estelle’s. “Thanks. I want you to know I appreciate you.”

“I know,” Estelle smirked playfully. “You better go. Don’t want to keep *‘Her Highness’* waiting.”

Quinn rolled her eyes and blew out an exasperated breath. “Right?” Then ducked out to head up to Avery office. Normally Quinn’s blood pressure would have been through the roof, but

for some reason, she wasn't panicking. Not like last time. She was still on edge, but something had shifted.

In the next few hours, all project managers endured a grueling "meeting," where Avery ranted and bitched about productivity being low, budgets being over, and everything in between. Basically, she wanted them all to get their asses in gear and stop dicking around.

On the way out, Avery had even left Quinn with a parting remark. She implied Quinn's incompetence was becoming unacceptable, and out of all the managers, Avery expected more of her.

Quinn seethed for a moment, bracing herself for the impact of anxiety to well up. She was more than a little surprised when it didn't. The all-consuming emotions that had engulfed her only a few weeks prior were no longer there.

She contemplated it on the elevator ride down to her office, when it suddenly hit her.

Son of a bitch, Estelle was right! Her sessions with Jade *were* helping! What else could it be?

When she made it back to her office, she was bombarded by her underlings and was further shocked at how seamlessly she was able to handle them. Usually, she'd have been using all her restraint not to bite their heads off at this point, trying to keep it all together, but she was calm and collected.

Estelle popped in at lunch. "You going to work through," she stated more than asked.

"Ya know what, I'm going to take my lunch break today."

Estelle's eyebrows rose in surprise.

Quinn stood up and grabbed her blazer off the back of her chair.

"Don't look so surprised. Where do you want to eat?"

“Tony’s is fine. They always have ready-made salads and pizzas for the lunch crowd.”

“Sound amazing. Let’s do it.”

Just then, Eddie rushed into Quinn’s office, looking a little more than flustered, beads of sweat dripping down his forehead. “Ms. Redinger, I really need you to go over this. I was going to have you do it sooner, but you were in Ms. Avery’s office all morning.”

Estelle sighed heavily, and Quinn gave her a sidelong glance. She turned back to Eddie. “Sorry, Ed, I can’t. I need to take my lunch today. I didn’t get to eat breakfast because of that meeting with Avery, and it’s too late to do a call-out order.”

Eddie’s face was dumbstruck. “But you said I should have you—”

Quinn held her hand up. “I remember what I said. It doesn’t always have to be me. Have Iona look it over. If she can’t, Estelle or I will do it when we get back.”

When they reached the elevator, Estelle burst out laughing. “Poor Eddie.”

“Eh, He’ll be fine. Besides, there *are* others he can ask for help.”

“Wow, Jade really has changed you. I’m seeing a side I didn’t think even existed.”

“What side?” Quinn asked.

“The non-work-a-holic side.”

“I guess so,” Quinn said.

Estelle seemed to want to say more but didn’t.

They walked down the street to where Tony’s was located. It had a wonderful patio section where Quinn and Estelle sat under a beautiful blue sky with wispy clouds. There was a cool breeze coming in from the harbor. It was a perfect day to dine *alfresco*.

They ordered a readymade pizza and salad and took it to a table.

Quinn bemusedly watched Estelle delicately pick off the pizza toppings. She first removed all the pepperoni and put them in a little pile on the corner of a napkin. Then she moved onto the black olives, creating a new pile on the opposite corner, then the green peppers...

Estelle looked up when she realized Quinn was watching her.

“What?” Estelle wore an expression as if she’d been caught doing something illicit.

Quinn shook her head ruefully. “You’re cute.”

“Cute?” Estelle pretended to be offended. “What do you mean cute? Because I don’t want these toppings on my pizza? How is that cute?”

“Why didn’t you just order plain cheese?”

“Because you like combination better.”

Quinn was taken aback. “How do you know that?”

“I know a lot of things about you,” Estelle said playfully.

“What kind of things?”

“I’m detailed oriented. I know lots of things about all my coworkers,” she said with supreme confidence.

Quinn nodded but felt disappointed. She was surprised at the let-down. She’d hoped Estelle’s ‘attention to detail’ singled Quinn out for some *special* reason. That would be silly, though. Why would she?

They sat quietly for a beat, then Quinn asked, “How did you get involved in BD— I mean *The Lifestyle*?” Quinn looked up, and her eyes darted around the patio. The tables were tightly packed with people. She flushed at her near slip.

Estelle chuckled lightly. “I had a friend who told me about it in much the same way. I had work stress and problems. I needed an escape, but as you know, we can’t very well run off to an exotic island and sip rum out of coconuts every weekend.”

Quinn suddenly had an illustrious vision of Estelle’s lithe body - clad in a skimpy bikini, lounging on a beach chair, glistening in the sun while sipping a cocktail. Quinn felt her face grow hot over the erotic imagery and quickly ducked her head. She poked at her salad, pretending to mix the dressing around.

Estelle quirked an eyebrow. Her signature facial expression for practically reading Quinn’s mind.

“What were you thinking about just now?” Estelle asked.

“Oh, nothing,” Quinn said and shoved a bite of salad into her mouth.

“Uh-huh,” Estelle said suspiciously. “So, what do you think of it?”

“Think of what?”

“The Lifestyle?” Estelle laughed then added, “Your brain wasn’t off in another direction. Not at all.”

Quinn blushed and wiped her mouth with a napkin. She considered Estelle’s question seriously.

“I have to admit, I wasn’t going to do it. Shortly after you told me about it, Avery went off on me about that damn Campitelli account. I was headed to my car after work and started having chest pains. Drove myself to the ER, just to be told I’d had a massive panic attack. I actually thought I was having a heart attack.” Quinn scoffed and added, “Stupid, I know.”

Estelle’s face fell, and she reached out her hand to touch Quinn’s arm. Quinn felt her body buzz with warmth at her touch.

“No, it’s not stupid at all. That’s pretty serious, Quinn. Stress of that magnitude can lead to really bad health issues if it’s causing panic attacks. I had no idea. Are you okay now?”

“I’m okay. More than okay, really. Thanks to you.” Quinn smiled warmly at her. “I went over my options with the doctor. They wanted me to take pills, or do some ‘kumbayah’ bullshit, but it just felt ridiculous. I’ll be honest, your suggestion seemed pretty ridiculous too, but for some reason, of all my options, I went ahead and gave yours a go because I trust you. I’m glad I did.”

She smiled sheepishly and broke eye-contact, hyper-focusing on her food again. This ‘feeling-sharing’ wasn’t something Quinn did very often. Certainly not with a coworker. She felt uncomfortable, but at the same time, a small flicker of warmth had ignited over the exchange. The feeling was quickly spreading. It was nice.

Estelle gave Quinn’s arm another final squeeze and then withdrew. “I’m glad it worked out for you. I’ve been worried about you.”

More of that warm feeling blossoming, warming Quinn from the inside out.

There was a lull in their conversation. They ate quietly, enjoying the ambiance.

Quinn felt a question nagging at her, though. She was reticent to ask, but finally, she looked up, “Estelle, can I ask you something?”

“You can ask me anything. I don’t promise to answer, though,” she teased.

Quinn rolled her eyes, then asked, “Why?”

“Why what?”

“Why were you worried about me? I’m an ice-queen. I don’t let my personal life or professional life cross over. Why were you worried about *me*?” Quinn couldn’t believe her bluntness, but she felt bold and brazen all of a sudden. She was going to run with it.

“I know you keep your walls up, but as I said, I have a knack for details. I paid attention to you these past two years, and there’s an authenticity to you, Quinn - a quality that is rare in our profession - a quality I like. I’ve wanted to be friends for some time, but I also don’t believe in pushing people until they’re ready. I waited. Felt you’d come around eventually, and well...” Estelle locked eyes with Quinn and smiled.

A wonderful gust of warm wind fluttered by them, but Quinn suspected the warmth enveloping her had nothing to do with the weather.

“Oh,” was all she could say in response. She knew her face was flush, embarrassed by the transparency of her reaction to Estelle’s answer, she became fixated on her salad bowl once again.

They were both quiet for a moment. Eventually, the conversation shifted to more mundane topics. They both shared a love of many things — the most surprising being sports. Quinn considered herself to be a dyke with a slight feminine edge that fit the stereotypical profile. Estelle seemed too feminine to be into sports, and yet she was.

That taught Quinn a lesson - don’t judge a person according to social constructs and stereotypes. But to be fair, she had a career that required she categorize people into stereotypes all day long.

Inwardly, Quinn berated herself for such narrow-minded assumptions concerning Estelle. She resolved she’d have to check herself on not making such quick assumptions going forward.

This pleasant discovery about Estelle’s sports interests also led to more questions.

Estelle was like an enthralling treasure chest with layers. Each time Quinn discovered one exciting layer, and thought there couldn’t be more, Estelle would surprise her yet again with some wonderful gem of information about herself.

Maybe being friends with her coworkers wasn't so bad, after all. She still wished they could be more. Perhaps she'd perceived this as a threat to her career when there was none.

If anything, Quinn had to admit, Estelle had been right, Quinn had walls. Yet, letting her walls down, and just interacting with another person felt better than she could have imagined.

Chapter 10

Things over the past few weeks had been flowing great. Campitelli signed a contract for a single test campaign. It wasn't their usual protocol, but landing his company as a long-term client would not only pay well but give the agency clout. Avery felt inclined to be more accommodating than she usually would. Campitelli's insistence on doing a test run was enough to keep her dragon breath to a dull roaring blaze instead of a full-on bonfire. Quinn was happy she was off her ass - for the most part anyway.

Scenes with Jade got more and more amazing. In each session, the boundaries of Quinn's limitations were pushed, and each time Quinn felt hesitant, but when she relinquished control, she'd find herself pleasantly surprised by her newfound proclivities.

Lunches with Estelle continued. Sure, they didn't have time to go out every day, but a handful of times a week was a vast improvement from sitting alone, and conversation flowed so smoothly. She looked forward to her lunch outings, as much as her Friday nights at the bar with Iona, and her sessions with Jade.

One day her and Estelle were having lunch at Tony's – their usual lunch haunt now - and Quinn noticed that Estelle was quieter than normal. Quinn poked her in the arm playfully.

“Everything okay?”

“Yeah, sorry. I guess I zoned out. Just thinking about something.”

“Penny for your thoughts?”

Estelle laughed. “Who says that anymore? That sounds more like something I would say.”

“It was something my dad always used to say to my mom,” Quinn told her.

“I was wondering what you’re doing tomorrow?”

Quinn eyes widened slightly; she taken aback by the sudden question. Her brain instantly thought of her Saturday night session with Jade. “What time of day?” Quinn asked.

“From eleven to two.”

“Nothing at that time. Why? What’s up?”

“A friend of mine is having his photography featured at a gallery, and the grand opening for the showcase is this weekend. I was wondering if you’d like to go. It’s not extremely formal as these things can sometimes be, but his work is quite good.”

Estelle’s eyes were fixed on Quinn with an intensity that she couldn’t quite decipher. Quinn hesitated for a moment. Was this Estelle asking her on a date, or extending their out-of-the-office friendship, that much further?

Then Quinn thought about it. Did it matter? If it was a date, maybe it would be nice to know that, but even if it wasn’t, she truly enjoyed Estelle’s company. “Um, sure. I’ve never been to anything like that, but it could be fun.” Quinn was surprised to hear herself agreeing, but she felt good about it.

“There’s champagne.” Estelle’s face broke into a smile.

“Well, I’m not going for the champagne or the art, but I’m sure both of those will be nice.” Quinn winked.

The corner of Estelle’s mouth tugged into a sly smirk. “Quinn Redinger, are you flirting with me?”

“That depends, is this art show a date?”

“That depends,” Estelle quipped.

“On what?”

“On what you want to define it as, Quinn.”

Quinn didn't know how to respond to that. She could only blush, and quickly looked down at her bowl of pasta. When she looked up, she asked, “So did you catch the Red Sox game?”

Estelle didn't respond right away. The smirk intensified. “Yeah, the fifth inning was pretty good.”

When lunch was over, and they were headed back to their desks, Estelle said, “I'll pick you up? Text me your address, and we'll drive in together. It'll save on parking garage fees.”

“Alright, sounds good,” Quinn said.

Quinn hadn't felt this nervous since the night she'd gotten ready for her first session with Jade. Estelle left the ball in her court. Clearly, Quinn could define this however she wanted.

She'd decided this was not a date, but if things got a little heated, she might not try so hard to hold back either. It was unlike her to be so fluid and go with the flow, but it's what's she was going to do.

She also didn't think it would be a bad thing for her and Estelle to grow their friendship. Even though Quinn was firm in her mind that it wasn't a date, she felt okay giving herself a little leeway to indulge in having a personal life. It also made sense that she should try to test the waters and see if her and Estelle could maintain being friends. Then when she landed the promotion, it would make dating that much easier.

Quinn did end up texting Estelle, *‘What do you want me to wear to this thing?’*

Estelle texted back, *'Wear something sexy.'*

Quinn read the text, and her groin heated with arousal. Quinn punched out a reply, *'Everything I wear is sexy. Be more specific.'*

Estelle's quick reply, *'*laughing emoji* Touché. Business casual is fine. No jeans or t-shirts.'*

'Thank you.'

Quinn had a nice form-fitting business blouse and black slacks that accentuated her figure nicely. She chose that without further speculation and made her way downstairs. That way, Estelle didn't have to find parking, and they could just head out.

Estelle pulled up to the curb for the fire department. Quinn hopped in quickly, and Estelle zipped off.

"So this thing is a three-hour event, huh? Will it take that long to look at pictures?"

Estelle cut her eyes at Quinn and gave her a withering glare of disapproval. "First, they are not pictures, they are photos. Second, no, the open-house is actually longer than three hours, but I thought we could have lunch together afterward. My treat."

Quinn smiled and held her hands up in surrender. "My apologies—" Estelle's tone was so authoritative Quinn almost slipped and called her Mistress. She felt her face flush with heat. Quinn cast a side-long glance over at Estelle, but she seemed oblivious.

As they drove, Quinn mulled things over. Wouldn't it be something if Estelle was Mistress Jade? She couldn't lie. The thought more than warmed her. However, she knew this wasn't possible. Granted, their bodies were remarkably similar in skin tone, physique, and height, but Estelle had mentioned she was a client. Would Estelle be so audacious as to say she was seeing Jade, and then actually turn out to be Jade? Quinn thought this highly unlikely.

Also, Estelle had mentioned casually, over lunch one day, what neighborhood she lived in. She said she was within walking distance of their work building, and in the summer and spring loved to walk to work. Jade did not live within walking distance, so it wasn't possible.

They arrived at the gallery, and Quinn was able to get a better look at Estelle's outfit. She was wearing a form-fitting white sleeveless dress and white strappy sandals. Gods, that woman could walk in heels. Quinn bit her lip to hold back in saying something too overt, as she watched Estelle enter the gallery before her.

The gallery was crowded. Estelle casually hooked her arm through Quinn's. Quinn felt her core flush with fire. She inhaled the scent of Estelle's perfume, an intoxicating, light jasmine scent.

There were hors d'oeuvres and champagne. Quinn tried a few of the appetizers and didn't find them to her liking. She sipped at her champagne as they walked about, but she thought it was too dry. This wasn't really her thing, but she was enjoying watching Estelle.

Estelle found her friend, and they chatted for a moment. She congratulated him. Quinn was bemused at how easily Estelle interacted with people. It's what made her so good at her job, Quinn thought with amusement.

"Dan, I want to introduce you to my friend Quinn. We work together," Estelle said.

"Nice to meet you, Dan," Quinn said. "Your work is spectacular." She meant it. She wasn't much of an art lover, but she could easily see his work on her walls at home or in her office.

"Thank you. Thank you for coming. I appreciate it."

Quinn stepped back a fraction to let Estelle and Dan chat, then they left him to greet other patrons.

“Did you mean that back there? You think his work is spectacular? I don’t think this is really your kind of event.”

“What makes you say that? I do think his work is quite good.” It was true Quinn felt somewhat uncomfortable, but she was working hard to hide it.

“Well, when you tried that last hors d’oeuvre, you winced slightly. You haven’t eaten anymore, which would indicate you really don’t like them. Also, your posture is stiffer and more erect than normal. You seem a bit uncomfortable. And not to be pretentious, but you didn’t know what to wear.”

Quinn bit back a smile. “You are quite good at reading people.”

“Maybe I’m just good at reading you.” Estelle winked.

Quinn looked away to hide the blush creeping up her neck and into her face.

Stop it, Quinn. Yes, we shamelessly flirt with each other, but this can’t go beyond being friends. Not yet.

After an hour of wandering around the gallery, and Estelle introducing people to Quinn, they left. Estelle took Quinn to a little upscale bistro with homemade breads and pastas. It was phenomenal, and best of all, craft ales on tap.

“I think this place is more your speed,” Estelle said after their food arrived.

“This is great. I’ll have to remember this place,” Quinn replied. “Are you actually into photography and art?”

“I’ve been known to tinker with a DSLR now and again. I don’t consider myself a collector of photography or art, but it’s fun to indulge sometimes.”

“You never fail to surprise me,” Quinn said. “It just seems like someone into sports wouldn’t be into the arts as well.”

“Well, maybe I’m just an anomaly.”

“I think you are,” Quinn said with sincerity.

Silence.

Quinn felt her temperature rise. A non-verbal wave of something passed between them as their eyes locked across the table. It had been happening in little ripples all day, but sitting directly across from Estelle, in this romantic little bistro, it felt more intimate and charged.

Throughout their meal, the ebb and flow of this electric pulse continued to notch up. When they got back to Quinn’s place, Quinn found that she didn’t want the date to end.

Estelle seemed uncertain as they drove up to her apartment building as to whether she should park or not.

“The parking garage is down around the corner,” Quinn said with some hesitancy.

Without a reply, Estelle pulled into the underground parking.

“Um, that spot over there is for visitors.”

Estelle again nodded and pulled in.

Quinn’s mind was racing with warring thoughts. *Oh, fuck. I don’t know if this a good idea. Calm down, it’s not like anything will happen unless you let it happen. But, God maybe I want something to happen...*

Quinn truly couldn’t make up her mind. If she invited Estelle up, wasn’t that an unspoken invitation that the ‘hanging-out-as-friends’ had shifted to a ‘date?’ She wasn’t sure.

Estelle put a hand on Quinn’s knee. Quinn relaxed and looked over at her. She was smiling. Maybe Quinn was reading into this way too much?

“I had a great time,” Estelle said.

“Yeah, same here. We should do this again sometime,” Quinn said.

Just then, Estelle leaned in slightly. Her face closer to Quinn's, she pinned Quinn with her beautiful green eyes and searched her face.

Quinn's heart thumped so loud, she was sure Estelle could hear it. *Is she going to kiss me?* Her pulse was racing, out of control. *Should I lean in too? Should I do this?* God, her heart said yes, and her head said no. She wanted to. She felt herself wanting so bad to just let go and give in, but she couldn't. For some reason, it was like an invisible wall she couldn't scale past.

Estelle's expression shifted, and she pulled back. She smiled, but it had a wan edge to it. "Thanks so much for going with me. I'll see you Monday?"

Quinn felt her heart plummet into her stomach. She felt her eyes grow hot. Why couldn't she just cross the line?

"Yeah, see ya Monday." She got out of the car and thought to herself, *You idiot, why didn't you just kiss her?*

She wanted to scream or kick something. She couldn't help but feel as though she absolutely fucked up. She really hoped Estelle didn't think she was rejecting her. Something she couldn't define made her hold her back at that last minute. Was it truly about her career, or was there something else preventing her? It felt like more, only she couldn't figure it out.

Quinn flopped down on her sofa and blew out a long breath.

Fucking hell. If I ever needed a session with Jade...

Chapter 11

Quinn went to her session with Jade that Saturday evening. It did, in fact, help her blow off all the steam of her frustrations. The week passed at work as normal. Quinn had been afraid that Estelle was going to be distant, but their casual lunch meetings, edged with flirtatious subtext, continued on as if nothing weird had passed between them a week prior.

Quinn began to fret that she'd imagined the whole thing – that Estelle had actually made a pass at her. Maybe she'd gotten herself worked up over nothing. It was so subtle that Quinn was uncertain now, so she made every attempt to sweep it out of her mind.

Friday had finally arrived, and Quinn was seated on a cracked leather bar stool at The Pink Peacock. She was savoring a cold beer and great company. Both Iona and Estelle had shown up. Quinn truly looked forward to these Friday rituals now, the three of them winding down with a drink after work.

“I’ve never seen you smile so much, woman. Are you in love?” Iona teased, but Quinn noted there was a strangeness in her tone when she asked this.

“No, I’m not in love,” Quinn said, almost defensively. In reality, Quinn was just happy the workweek was over, and in less than twenty-four hours, she’d be in her session with Jade.

Both Estelle and Iona laughed as if sharing an inside secret. Quinn couldn’t help but bristle. She still felt there were times the two were secretly dating. She burned with curiosity, but in reality, it was none of her business. If they were dating - well, she didn’t want to think about it. She’d have to be happy for the two of them. They were her friends, after all.

“I think she’s found a new *outlet* for her stress,” Estelle offered.

“Oh? Do tell,” Iona pressed.

Quinn inclined her head, shook it *no*, then cracked a slightly mysterious smile. She could play that game as well.

“Well, whatever you’re doing, keep it up. Seems to be working,” Iona chuckled. “It’s like you have a *glow* about you lately.”

“You think so?” Quinn asked.

Estelle piped in, “I have to agree with Iona. You do seem healthier.”

“Thanks,” Quinn said. She hastily changed the subject. She hated being the object of attention like this. “So, Iona, you still taking your vacation soon?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Will you be staying home to enjoy some quietude, or are you going out to do something superfluous?” Estelle asked.

“Is ‘quietude’ even a word Estelle?” Iona laughed.

“It is.”

“Well, I’m getting out of the Bay Area for a bit, going to Vegas. I have family there. Plus, I have to attend to some details with my business.”

“Business?” Quinn asked. “I didn’t know you had a business.”

“I keep it on the down-low. It’s not that big a deal. Just a little side cash here and there.”

“It’s not a side advertising thing, is it?” Quinn chuckled. “It should go without saying that’d be a conflict of interest.”

Iona glared at Quinn for a moment. “I didn’t get where I am in the marketing business by being stupid.”

Quinn flushed with embarrassment. She’d meant it as a joke. She couldn’t tell if Iona was genuinely offended, so she dropped the subject.

Estelle could feel the tension and changed the subject to something trivial. Thank god. The three of them sat chatting for a good while about inconsequential topics.

At six-thirty sharp, Estelle left, followed not too far by Iona. Quinn was used to it by now, but it bothered her. She knew Estelle had her own sessions with Jade on Fridays, but she still wondered where Iona went. The more she thought about it, she became convinced Estelle hadn't come onto her, and that Estelle and Iona were probably dating. Why wouldn't they tell her, though? Didn't they consider her enough of a friend now?

Quinn only stayed a few minutes more after her friends left. She drove home and poured herself a Scotch. She was about to down it when her phone went off.

She picked it up and opened the text. Her heart thumped as she realized it was from Jade.

'Come to my place tonight. Be there at nine. Let me know ASAP if you accept this invitation.'

Quinn's fingers were trembling as she punched out her reply - *'As it pleases you, Mistress. I'll be there at nine.'*

'Good.'

Jade had instructed Quinn sometime after their first session that she loved the phrase, *'As it pleases you, Mistress.'* Quinn had been more than happy to oblige.

She looked at the time and set down her phone. She dumped the Scotch back in the bottle. No sense in wasting it, when she hadn't taken a sip. She tossed her clothes in the laundry bin and stepped in the shower to get ready.

This was odd. She wondered if Estelle had canceled. She knew Friday was Estelle's time with Jade. Maybe Estelle had canceled? Probably because her and Iona were out.

She really needed to let this go. If they were dating, they were her friends, and she had no right to be jealous.

Well, Jade wanted her to come over. Quinn learned quickly that obedience gleaned rewards of the best kind when you pleased your Mistress.

Quinn fidgeted on the townhouse stoop. Her mind was racing with questions as to why Jade had summoned her a day early. Would they still keep their Saturday appointment? Was changing the time merely a way of keeping Quinn on her toes? Maybe Quinn was overthinking it. Was she even allowed to ask why the date had changed?

She was more than eager to be a proper submissive. In the past few weeks, she'd come to accept and understand why she craved submission so much. She'd understood now, it felt so damn good to relinquish complete control to another human being. Her entire life seemed to be about making decisions for her team, controlling her time, keeping her emotions in check. She would never have guessed that handing over the reins of power to someone else could feel so good.

She knew this was the reason she relished these sessions with Jade. The one time a week she could really let it all go. Yet, she still felt insecure about her submissive role. Pleasing Mistress Jade was unlike pleasing anyone she had ever interacted with. Just when she thought she was doing well, Mistress Jade would knock her down a peg.

Quinn rang the doorbell, and it was taking a while, but she didn't dare ring it again. Quinn remembered in their third session she'd been impatient. She'd rang the doorbell twice.

Mistress Jade had come to the door, swung it open, and stared down at her with dominant scrutiny. Quinn cowered. Jade shuffled her in, and Quinn was on her knees in the entryway. Jade prowled around her, giving Quinn a thorough tongue lashing about patience. Jade informed her she would come to the door when she saw fit and ringing that doorbell more than once - ever again - would incur severe punishment of skipping their weekly session.

Quinn didn't dare repeat the infraction ever again.

So, there she was again, feeling rife with impatience as she waited, and waited, and...

Finally, the door popped open.

Jade allowed Quinn inside but did not reveal herself in the entryway as she always did. Instead she stood to the side.

Once Quinn was inside, she saw why.

Jade was wearing practically nothing. She had never worn so little before. Her bra looked as though it were made of ribbon, intricately crossing her chest in a beautiful star pattern. The 'cups' barely supported Jade's ample breasts, her nipples were completely exposed. She wore a thong. It was scant covering for the remaining patch of hair Jade didn't shave. Five-inch stiletto sandals adorned her feet. Of course, her signature mask and wig were in place as well.

Quinn's mouth hung open. A quick pulsing heat throbbed between her legs. If Jade's goal was to inflict sensual torture by revealing her body, it was working.

Jade paid no mind to Quinn's reaction and merely turned and sauntered off. It was a gesture Quinn unequivocally understood. She was to follow without question.

Trying to push all the questions out of her mind, she obediently walked behind Jade. Something different was unfolding, and Quinn was squirming with curiosity to know what.

Chapter 12

Jade led Quinn down the short hallway and into The Playroom.

“Take off all your clothes and lie face up on the bed,” Jade instructed.

“Yes, Mistress.”

Jade bent over and wrapped a silk blindfold across Quinn’s eyes, and then she bound each of her wrists with soft rope to the posts at the top of the bed frame.

Questions raced through Quinn’s mind. *Why is the session being conducted differently? What does this mean?* Despite her racing thoughts, Quinn was quiet, holding her breath with anxious anticipation. As she lay there, she stretched out her other senses for a clue.

Jade’s voice spoke softly into Quinn’s ear. “Sensation play can be both sensual and painful. Are you ready to try, my pet?”

“Yes, Mistress.”

Quinn waited for what seemed like forever.

Without warning, the sting of intense cold nipped at her stomach. Quinn jolted and sucked in her breath.

It was agonizingly painful as Jade teased and taunted Quinn’s skin with a cube of ice. She ran it along her nipples, making them ache with both longing and near unbearable pain. She ran it along her neck. She tilted her head back, allowing the sting of the ice to bite at her sensitive regions like a deranged lover’s kiss.

Jade smoothly traveled a course back down Quinn’s body again, landing right between her thighs. Then, she softly pushed the ice between Quinn’s lips and slid it back and forth. Quinn

screamed from the pain. The shock of the cold-fire ignited her senses, putting every nerve ending on high alert.

Quinn panted heavily, marveling at how a trite little ice cube could invoke such heightened pleasure. Jade continued to slide the ice in and out, inserting then withdrawing it intermittently until the ice had melted completely.

“My goodness, you surprise me with the levels of masochism you are willing to endure, Ms. Quinn.”

Quinn was panting heavily, but she managed to breathe out the words, “Thank you - Mistress.”

Quinn’s body trembled. Just as she began to settle, another sensation caused her to ripple with arousal. Jade started at Quinn’s ankle. It was like a little needle pricking her skin sequentially in a line up her leg. It was both biting and erotic. Quinn moaned as Jade ran the toy up her thigh, along her bikini line.

“Permission to speak - Mistress?” Quinn asked.

“Permission granted.” Jade’s tone was pleased with her sub.

“What is that?”

“This is a simple little instrument called a Wartenburg wheel, or some call it a pinwheel. It looks like a little spur. And when I apply just the right amount of pressure...” Quinn screamed out just as Jade pushed the little needle wheel into the sensitive skin across her breasts. “...it can be agonizingly pleasurable. Would you agree, my pet?”

“Yes, Mistress,” she panted.

“You like this.” Jade’s tone was mocking.

“Yes, Mistress. Please don’t stop.”

Quinn shivered with hot and cold sweats as Jade moved the spur up and down Quinn's naked body. Jade's movements of the pinwheel created a sensation like sensual kisses from a rose with tiny metal thorns.

Quinn loved it. She ached for moments like this. Allowing her Mistress full control over her mind and body.

Jade stopped using the pinwheel, and Quinn could hear her putting the instrument on the side table.

"Are you ready?" Jade asked.

Quinn nodded. "As it pleases you, Mistress."

Quinn noted off-hand that Jade had not asked her this question with the ice and pinwheel. She braced herself for something more.

Crack!

The flog came down across her thighs, and Quinn screamed. She hadn't been flogged from the front. Her shaking increased as she realized this would hurt intensely, and yet she wanted it. She yearned for the pain across her most sensitive regions, like the moment building towards orgasmic release.

Crack!

The flog came down across the top of her stomach. It wasn't hard, nor was it the flog Jade used on her backside. This one was much smaller, but it still stung just enough that her body heated up. The wetness between her thighs began to pool. Quinn knew what part of her body was next. She held her breath. Silence ensued except for her labored breaths.

Then, *crack!*

The sting that blossomed across her breasts was exquisitely agonizing and arousing. She could feel tears stinging at her eyes under the blindfold, her body burning and buzzing. Her nether lips were both wet and parched for release. Her other lips were dry from panting.

Jade was merciless tonight. She pushed Quinn to the precipice of subspace like she'd never experienced before.

Jade offered her a break from the flogging and gave her water.

"I know you are curious why I have asked you here tonight, Ms. Quinn."

"As - it pleases you - Mistress." Quinn gritted her teeth, barely able to speak the words. Release was now as agonizing as an addict craving a needle to the vein. She felt she would come out of her skin if she didn't get to release soon.

"I feel you are ready for total submission to your Mistress. I do not think I'm wrong. *Do you want to fully know me, Ms. Quinn?*"

Quinn's mind was floating so far above the fire blazing through her body; it was all she could do but nod. A passing thought occurred to her - she wasn't quite sure what *'fully know me'* meant, but she had no reason not to trust Jade implicitly.

She then felt Jade move between her thighs. Positioning herself and gently separating them. The motion of her legs being spread apart slowly, made Quinn unravel more than she thought possible. Jade removed the blindfold.

Jade was wearing a strap-on, and she looked at Quinn with a serious expression. "Do you consent to this, Quinn? I am going to fuck you as you've never been fucked before. No holding back. If you want me to. This is an intimate and personal session between you and I. I feel our relationship has evolved, and we can be more if you would like. I do not think my judgment on this is amiss. I refuse payment for this session. I am not a prostitute, but if you want this, you

need to consent to this. I would need to know this is absolutely what you want? And if you do not, I will not be angry or hurt. I will simply end the session as we have in the past. We will resume as normal.”

Quinn felt the folds of her labia rush with heat and throb with want as she took in what Jade was proposing. Her eyes were locked on Jade’s, and she nodded vigorously. She had all but fantasized going this far with Jade but didn’t think it would ever happen.

“No, you need to say the words, Quinn.”

“As it pleases you, Mistress. Yes! I consent! Please...” Quinn moaned.

“Are you absolutely sure, Quinn?” Jade’s voice was authoritative but neutral.

Quinn whimpered. “Yes, I want this. Please fuck me.”

Jade smiled down at her and pushed the dildo inside. Jade rocked her hips back and forth, moving the dildo in and out slowly for a beat and then more steadily. Quinn knew she wouldn’t last long, she was already unravelling.

“Mistress as it pleases you, please, may I...” Quinn couldn’t do it. She couldn’t finish her plea for permission. She drove her hips hard against Jade and felt the all-consuming fire of release take her.

Her hips moved in rhythm with the waves of pleasure, and her body shuddered with electricity. When her orgasm ebbed, Quinn expected Jade to leave her. She waited for the blanket to cover her, as she would drift into a small nap, and then leave. Such was their routine.

Jade pulled at the Velcro and unfastened the strap-on in one swift motion. She then raked her fingernails down Quinn’s trembling thighs and pushed her legs flat against the mattress.

“We are not done,” Jade said firmly as she repositioned herself to straddle Quinn’s body.

Quinn lifted her head and looked at Jade for an explanation, but Jade was moving up her body now.

“I will grant you permission, Quinn, to satiate your Mistress tonight.”

Quinn nodded. “As it pleases you, Mistress. Yes, let me please you, any way you want.”

Jade straddled Quinn’s midriff just below her breasts. She leaned in and pressed her lips softly to Quinn’s. As Jade pressed herself to Quinn and kissed her, Quinn’s body began to quake with anticipation. Quinn thought she caught a whiff of a scent. So reminiscent, the light fragrance of jasmine. She wasn’t sure and didn’t linger on the thought as Jade’s mouth overtook her, and she became consumed by the moment.

She couldn’t believe this was happening, and yet she unequivocally wanted this. She wanted this more than she could express. To be intimate with her Mistress. To please Jade and not fuck this up.

Jade moved her lips slow at first, then steadily into a more passionate fervor. They kissed for so long that Quinn’s sensitive regions ignited with a blaze of fire again.

Jade sat up and untied Quinn’s arms from the ropes. She placed each of Quinn’s hands around Jade’s breasts. Quinn thought she would come again just from touching her beautiful round spheres.

“You will make me come tonight, Quinn.”

“As it pleases you, Mistress.” Quinn smiled. “Instruct me, and I’ll make you come again and again if it pleases you.”

Jade returned the smile. “Cup my breasts. Play with them as you will. Suck on them, taunt me, tease me. I will let you know when I’m ready for more.”

Quinn propped herself up against the pillows and took Jade's nipple into her mouth. The scent of her skin, an essence of jasmine mingled with the sweat of her arousal, was intoxicating. Jade threw her head back and leaned into Quinn's mouth.

Jade stroked Quinn's hair coaxing her on. "Oh - god - yes – Quinn! Just like that, my pet."

Her excitement caused Quinn to ache for a release again, but she was transfixed on nothing but Jade's pleasure now.

Jade gently pushed Quinn's head back from her chest and moved away from her. She lay back on the bed exactly opposite from where Quinn had been.

Jade spread her legs invitingly. "Let's see how skilled you are with your tongue, my pet."

Quinn's heart clenched, and her pulse quickened. She positioned herself between Jade's thighs and motioned to remove the lace panties when she saw there was no need. They were crotchless. Jade's red, swollen blossom was open and gleaming, perfect and inviting, just waiting for Quinn to taunt and taste.

Quinn positioned herself on her stomach and moved one single finger teasingly across the outer lips of Jade's softness. Quinn was light and tentative at first, then moved her fingers in and out, creating a torturous rhythm. Jade arched her back and moaned.

"Oh, yes, my pet. You are going to please me just fine."

Quinn's confidence increased with each coaxing word Jade uttered. She ran her finger around the red petals of Jade's open blossom.

Slowly Quinn replaced the one finger with two. Jade clenched around Quinn's hand and screamed with the need for release. Quinn skillfully taunted the soft velvety warmth of Jade's internal core. Jade mewled with a sound between pain and pleasure.

Quinn moved her finger back and forth. Jade trembled. Suddenly Jade's hand was around Quinn's wrist stopping her.

“No - more. I want all of you. I want you to taste my nectar and make me come inside you, Quinn.”

Just hearing these words made Quinn melt with both eagerness and arousal.

She lowered her head obediently and touched her tongue to the wet glistening folds of Jade's beautiful pussy. Jade shuddered and moaned. Quinn slowly ran her tongue over and through the hills and valleys of Jade's secret places. This was truly a land unexplored, and Quinn wanted to savor every moment.

Quinn moved her tongue over and around, then faster and faster she began to lap at the wet nectar of Jade's blossom. Jade grabbed Quinn's hair and gently synchronized Quinn's rhythm with her rocking hips.

Jade arched her back as her thighs started to quiver. She screamed and gripped the sheets. Quinn pushed herself harder inside of Jade. Jade screamed louder.

Quinn grabbed at Jade's hips and pulled her firmly against her face as Jade's waves of pleasure rolled on and on.

Both momentarily collapsed, lying motionless, Quinn rested her head against Jade's thigh, and Jade softly ran her fingers through Quinn's hair.

Quinn lifted herself up on one elbow and noticed that in the throes of their passion, Jade's wig and mask were askew, but only slightly.

Jade sat up and adjusted them back in place.

Quinn had never dared to even entertain wanting to know Jade's true identity until now, but curiosity burned within her like never before.

Quinn felt that things between them had changed now. Maybe Jade would reveal her identity? But the way Jade righted herself and moved off the bed, she felt a wash of uncertainty as well.

Jade turned to Quinn with a wicked smile. “You did well, my pet. You far exceeded my expectations. You will clean up and go home. We will still meet for our regular session tomorrow, as well.”

Quinn nodded. “Thank you, Mistress. Will I be paying you for tomorrow’s session?”

“Saturday sessions will resume as normal. Yes, you will continue to pay me for Saturday sessions.” With that, Jade flashed one more smile and left the room, leaving Quinn wondering if she was mistaken in thinking something had changed.

It was late when Quinn drove home, but her mind was alert and buzzing with questions. She felt she was special, unique in some way. Was this something professional Domes did with their favored clients? Quinn realized she wanted to be exceptional in Jade’s book. She knew she didn’t have the right to be exclusive, but had the intimacy of this session granted Quinn some kind of favored status between them now - didn’t it? She didn’t know if she was allowed to retain that particular hope, but she wasn’t sure she could staunch it either.

Chapter 13

Quinn couldn't figure out the anomaly of why Jade called her on a whim sometimes. Quinn was invited to participate in more and more sporadic trysts as the weeks passed. They had unpaid sessions at least once or twice a week, and they always had sex. Jade always asked for consent, and Quinn would always reply, "Yes, as it pleases you, Mistress."

By no means was Quinn agreeing to this because she felt some obligation, though. As she found herself slipping into the role of being a sub, she found she took great pleasure in pleasing her Mistress. The greatest of pleasure!

Quinn's regularly scheduled appointments continued on Saturdays as well. These paid sessions were always more formal, following the pattern they'd first begun with. They were focused more on pleasure through pain, and sex never happened. She was always granted release, but not in the way the unpaid sessions unfolded.

In their next session, Quinn was handed her contract. She looked over the boxes. She had forgotten she'd checked that box 'mind games,' weeks ago. Why had she not seen this until now? Had Jade changed the nature of their relationship because she had checked this box? Was this Jade's way of fulfilling Quinn's fantasy?

Quinn was okay with this, but she couldn't deny that she wanted them to have a genuine connection. She wanted to be more than just a box that was checked. During the times they made love, it felt so real. This made her want Jade to harbor deeper feelings for her, but what if she didn't? What if it was only part of the job?

If she brought it up, and Jade didn't feel that way, wouldn't it make things awkward going forward? She didn't want to lose what they had, yet the suspense of not knowing was also

killing Quinn. If Jade had deeper feelings and wasn't merely playing a part in Quinn's fantasies, wouldn't she have said something? Yet, she had not.

Finally, she worked up the courage to ask, "Are we sleeping together because I checked that box 'mind games' some time back?"

Jade merely smiled at first, saying nothing. Then she replied, "Do you want to stop having sex with me?"

"No! I really don't. I'm just wondering why things have changed?"

Jade seemed thoughtful about this for a moment then said, "*Things* - haven't changed. You have, Quinn. It's a good thing. Embrace it."

Quinn didn't know how to respond to this, so she merely looked down at the floor. She'd been taught averting one's eyes at the floor was a gesture of respect as a sub. Jade stood and must have assumed Quinn was done with the conversation because Jade beckoned her to the playroom. Jade's answer had confused Quinn. She couldn't work up the nerve to press further, so she let it stand as it was.

Part of her didn't want to analyze the situation or question Jade any further. She feared the spontaneity of their random meetings would cease if she pressed it. If it was just 'mind games,' then she wasn't sure she wanted to know. If it was more than that between them, perhaps something would give, and Jade would give her a stronger indication.

Quinn was nearly positive something had shifted between her and Jade, though. The sex had become so intimate it felt like they made love. Yet, Jade still held her disguise in place. That was another point of curiosity that burned almost as intensely as her desire to continue doing Scenes with her Mistress; her ever-growing desire to know Mistress Jade's identity.

If their relationship was more serious, wouldn't Jade want to unveil herself? Quinn remembered Jade telling her in their first meeting not to try and uncover each other's true identities. Quinn now understood the need for discretion in The Lifestyle, and why it was to be respected. Yet there was something that bothered her. Even though Jade had said this, she realized this wasn't actually explicitly typed up in their contract.

Quinn wasn't sure what it all meant, but she knew one thing. The Domme/sub (or D/s) energy, meant the Domme called all the shots. Regardless of whether something had changed between them, Quinn craved being dominated, and she would do anything to make sure that stayed intact. So, whether there was more between them or not she didn't dare do anything to lose her position as Mistress Jade's sub.

Bright and early Monday morning, Quinn was still riding the high of her most recent unpaid Scene with Jade on Sunday night.

Quinn wasn't expecting it when Avery popped her head into her office. "Can I come in?" she asked, entering without waiting for approval.

"Of course. What's up?"

"It's last minute, but I need you to reschedule all your appointments. Campitelli wants to sign. Friday - lunch - The Point - wine and dine him - close the deal."

"Okay, I can do that," Quinn said.

Avery continued to stand in front of Quinn's desk. She paused and then placed a jump drive on the desk. "I need you to use these reports when you go over final numbers with him."

Quinn's brow furrowed. The request seemed strange. Quinn had all the info she needed, even though Avery had taken over the account. This was in case something came up, and Quinn needed to jump in at a moment's notice. "Okay..." Quinn drew out the word waiting for a further explanation.

Avery didn't supply one. She turned to leave, then stopped at the door. "Quinn, it's not a secret to anyone you've been gunning for the CMO position since Durant retired. Least of all myself. I want you to have it. There's no one better qualified. You land Campitelli and consider the promotion yours."

Quinn's eyebrows shot up. She struggled to keep her face calm and devoid of showing her surge of excitement that had welled up. "Yes, ma'am."

Avery closed the door behind her and left.

Campitelli was already practically in the bag as it was! This would be all too easy. She couldn't believe this! Finally. Just like that. She was overcome with the situation being too surreal to be true.

Quinn inserted the jump drive into her computer and brought up the reports. She scanned them over. They seemed to be in order. The pitch for the final presentation was there. She moved through them with a fine-tooth comb just to be sure everything was straightened out.

Everything was fine.

Then it wasn't.

Like a punch in the face, it jumped off the screen. Her heart squeezed with consternation.

No, no, no, please don't let this be what I think it is...

Quinn pulled up her own files and began to cross-reference. The numbers were off. Not by much, but it was clear Avery had changed them.

What the fuck, Avery?

Avery wanted her to lie about the numbers because Campitelli was a hard nut to crack? She was afraid he would be an ass since their test campaign had come in just under the projections they'd promised?

Quinn raked both her hands through her hair and blew out a long breath of frustration.

She didn't want to do this. Sure, Campitelli was an ass. He probably wouldn't even notice, but lying was still lying. She didn't want to bring this up with the boss, but she had to talk to Avery first. Maybe it was a clerical error? Perhaps this wasn't what it looked like.

She pushed off from her desk and made the long trek to the elevator. She had to waylay several of her team members on the way, including Estelle.

Estelle took one look at Quinn, and her smile vanished. She was too perceptive. She knew something was brewing but had the good sense to not pry at the moment. Instead, she brushed Quinn on the shoulder and said, "Lunch? Later today?"

Quinn nodded and said, "I'll do my best."

Quinn knocked firmly on Avery's door. She squared her shoulders and lifted her chin. She felt anything but confident.

"Come in," Avery called. She was on the phone and held up a finger to indicate she'd be only a moment.

Quinn chose to remain standing in the hopes it would help bolster her confidence. She could feel herself beginning to sweat and hoped it wouldn't pool through her shirt.

Avery hung up and said calmly, "Have a seat. What's up?"

As a knee jerk reaction, Quinn took a seat and then inwardly berated herself.

She cleared her throat and crossed her legs, trying to look casual and relaxed even though her insides were swimming. “I was going over the info on that drive. I think there are a few clerical errors. I can fix them.” Quinn hoped beyond hope, they were simple typos. Deep down, she knew otherwise.

Avery didn’t say anything. She stared down at Quinn then finally said, “There are no errors on the report, Quinn, and I think you know that.”

Quinn’s face flushed with embarrassment.

Avery continued, “Do you have a problem with delivering the report?”

“Why aren’t we using the actual numbers?” Quinn had to refrain from face-palming. She already knew the answer to that as well. Her nerves were preventing her from explaining herself well.

“Maybe you aren’t the woman for this job. You know very well why we can’t use the actual stats. We came in close, but our deadline is up. The fact of the matter is, Campitelli is such an idiot, he won’t notice.”

“What if he does notice? It was a legal contract. He could sue us for misleading him.”

Avery stared hard at Quinn then spoke slowly like she was explaining herself to a child. “We’ll get the numbers up. They’re not off by that much. If he does notice, we simply blame it on a clerical error. By that time, we’ll have the numbers where he wanted them. We’re only missing the mark by 4% on his ROI. You know we can get that up in a few weeks.”

“But if we tell him we need a few more weeks to get the numbers up by 4% and that we are close, we—”

Avery held up a hand to silence Quinn.

“The reality is we do this kind of stuff all the time in upper management. I need my underlings to be straight and walk a tight line. In the CMO’s position, not everything is so black and white. You aren’t in upper management yet. You’re still middle management, so I can’t blame you for being naïve. We can’t possibly nail the numbers spot on every time - all the time.

“I won’t lie in telling you this. It’s a test, Quinn. Either you can handle working over the clients now and again, or you can’t. If you can’t, then you aren’t the right woman for the promotion. It’s as cut and dry as that.”

Quinn nodded slowly. She didn’t feel right about this, but she could kind of see the reason in Avery’s logic.

Avery was watching her closely, obviously giving her a moment to process the information and make her decision. She stood up and went to Quinn’s chair and said, “I count on you, right? You’ve never let me down before.”

Quinn stood up. “Yes, I’ll get it done.”

Avery placed a hand on Quinn’s shoulder. “I look forward to working closely with you in the future, Quinn. You’re a real asset to this company.”

“Thanks.”

Quinn left Avery’s office feeling worse for the wear. She had hoped to make herself feel better. Instead, she felt worse. She didn’t see that she had a choice in the matter. She’d been working for over a year on this promotion. The second Durant started hinting at retirement from his position of CMO, she knew she was the best woman for the job.

She didn’t like this one bit, but she also didn’t see any other way. Maybe she *was* being naïve, as Avery had suggested. Certainly, the numbers weren’t off by that much. Avery was probably right. It wasn’t something that jackass Campitelli would notice anyway.

Besides, once she was CMO, she'd have more power to ensure this kind of 'number-fudging' didn't happen again. She'd run a tighter ship and have a lot more leeway to do things her way.

Everything would be fine. She just had to get through the next few days, and she would be home free.

Everything would be fine.

Quinn spent the rest of the day going over the report and rehearsing the presentation. Despite it being a week out, she couldn't risk botching this. She'd have to skip lunch with Estelle.

Later in the day, Estelle popped into her office. "Everything okay? You seemed a little frazzled today."

"Um, yeah, it's all good. Avery wants me to finalize Campitelli this week." She snorted and tacked on with wry sarcasm, "Then the CMO position is mine."

Estelle paused. "Isn't that what you wanted? Your words indicate one thing, but your tone says something else."

"Ya want to get a drink at The Peacock after work?" Quinn asked. It was Monday, but what the hell. She was in for a restless night. Hell, it was going to be a neverending restless week. She knew Jade wouldn't contact her two nights in a row for unpaid sessions, so maybe hanging out with Estelle for a few hours would help her unwind.

"Sure," Estelle said. "I'll meet you there?"

“Sounds good. I’ll just wrap up here. See you there in twenty or so.”

Chapter 14

Quinn saw Estelle already settled into a booth at The Pink Peacock. The place was dead. Only one other couple was sitting at the bar watching the game on the TV. Quinn ordered a beer and took it to the booth. She sat down across from Estelle.

“So, what’s going on? You seem all wound up again?” Estelle jumped right into it.

“Is it that obvious?”

Estelle cracked a wry smile and sipped her beer.

Quinn was hesitant to tell her what Avery wanted her to do. She knew Estelle wouldn’t approve, but it was like Avery said, the underlings were trained to walk a straight line. She didn’t think Estelle would understand even if she tried to explain it.

“So, why aren’t you excited to get promoted? You’ve been working towards this for ages,” Estelle pried gently.

“I am excited. I’m just tired, I guess.”

Estelle narrowed her eyes.

“I guess I’ve just been working towards it for so long, it’s a little surreal,” Quinn added.

Estelle nodded. “I can understand that.” She reached across the table and patted Quinn’s hand. “But this is amazing, though! It’s what you’ve wanted since I met you.”

“Yeah, I can hardly believe it,” Quinn said with forced enthusiasm.

They were quiet for a moment. Estelle scanned Quinn with a scrutinizing gaze. Quinn squirmed.

“I feel like there’s more. You’re holding back,” Estelle said slowly.

“What makes you say that?”

“It’s hard to explain. Just a feeling. Something else is bothering you.”

Damn it, Estelle, Quinn thought. She sighed heavily. “Okay, if I share something with you, it should go without saying it would be in complete confidence, right?”

Estelle flashed her a withering look. “Of course. Who would I tell? Iona? I’m not an office gossip.”

“I know. Sorry, I didn’t mean it that way. I just—” Quinn huffed out a breath of exasperation. “I didn’t think you would. Avery has a presentation she wants me to pitch to Campitelli. It’s... not exactly the way I’d go about it.”

“Okay, so what’s the big deal?”

“It’s not a big deal. She just wants me to exaggerate the numbers a bit.”

Estelle stopped mid-sip and placed her glass down. “How much is a bit?”

“Four percent. It’s not a big deal. It’s like Avery said, we came in by a fraction on the test run, and we can get that up to speed in a couple of weeks. Once we have him in the bag, we’ll get the numbers up. He won’t know the difference. She does this kinda stuff all the time, and us gruntlings don’t even know about it.”

Estelle’s eyes flashed, but her voice remained calm. “Quinn four percent is a lot. You know that. It’s an outright lie. This isn’t a good idea.”

“I don’t agree with it, but once I’m the CMO, I can tighten things up.”

“Quinn, what if things do blow up? If we are under contract, and he finds out, he could come back and sue. I’m sure it would be a huge time and money waste to do so. He’d be more likely to just fire us, but people have sued for lesser things, many times. If you get involved, and this gets messy on a legal level, you’ll be involved. Can you not see what Avery is doing?”

“I think you’re blowing this out of proportion. Campitelli is an idiot. And what am I supposed to do? Tell the CEO and owner of the company, who’s been doing this longer than all of us, that I don’t trust her judgment?”

Estelle pursed her lips. “Yes, that’s exactly what you should do, and then you should walk.”

“I can’t do that,” she managed to sputter out.

“Why not?” Estelle asked evenly.

“I’ve worked there for six fucking years, Estelle. I can’t just walk!” Quinn hissed, trying to keep her voice low so she wouldn’t disturb the other patrons.

“You can walk Quinn, but you don’t want to.”

“Didn’t you hear me? Six years! That’s a lifetime in our industry. Everything I’ve done since I started working at Avery’s, I did to move up the ladder. You of all people should know it’s harder if you’re a woman in the corporate world. Avery may be a woman as well, but she hasn’t exactly made it easier for me. All I have to do is this one little thing. I can’t lie, I’m not exactly thrilled, but if it was truly serious, I wouldn’t do it. It’s not that big a deal.”

“Now it sounds like you’re trying to convince yourself.” Estelle paused. “Just walk.” There was a commanding tone when she said it, and it made Quinn stop short and look up.

Estelle’s eyes narrowed with intensity.

Quinn considered her suggestion for a fraction of a moment. Then she shook her head as if to sluff off the absurdity of giving such a notion credence.

“I’ve been working way too long for this. I can’t,” Quinn huffed.

Estelle stood up and stared down at Quinn with a hard look.

There was no mistaking the anger in Estelle's eyes. This ignited Quinn with her own surge of indignant anger. Estelle was not her equal. She had no right to suggest such a self-righteous act of simplicity. Estelle wanted her to throw in the towel after all this time? Just quit? Then do what? Star over somewhere else? No, that wasn't even an option Quinn wanted to remotely entertain.

She had to do this. This was everything she had wanted for years. All she had to do was bend the rules a bit, and she'd secure her place. It was one little white lie. Once she was CMO, she could tweak the protocols of how things were managed. If Avery wanted to adjust things just this once, it wasn't Quinn's place to tell her how to run her company.

Quinn couldn't maintain eye contact, but when she dared to spare a glance at Estelle, she looked furious. It caused Quinn to burrow further into her indignation.

Why should Estelle care so much? It's not like this affects her position at Avery's.

Estelle opened her mouth as if she was going to unleash her fury then closed it quickly. Instead, she inhaled a long breath through her nose and blew it out. "You don't have to do this. I think you know it's not what you really want."

Quinn whipped her head up and met Estelle's stare. She was knocked off balance by the look she saw in her eyes. It wasn't anger anymore. It was something else. Something softer? Quinn didn't care. She brushed past whatever Estelle was feeling and spat out the words, "Estelle, how do you know what I really want?"

Estelle's eyes widened with shock, the words were like a slap to the face, she looked – hurt? Estelle scanned Quinn's face quickly, then she shook her head mournfully, and left.

Quinn cursed under her breath. Estelle may have been the most supportive person on her staff, but she wasn't a manager. Also, as a friend, she felt Estelle should have understood how

much this meant to Quinn. Instead, all she got was some self-righteous lecture. She couldn't believe this bullshit. Just when she thought she could rely on Estelle for support, she'd turned out to be the goddamned enemy.

Chapter 15

Estelle seemed keen on keeping her distance from Quinn all week. Quinn barely saw her, and when she did have to interact with her, Estelle's demeanor was brusque and overly formal.

Quite frankly, Quinn was glad they weren't talking to each other much. She was still livid at the audacity of Estelle's suggestion. Estelle had no right to judge her so quickly. If she were in Quinn's shoes, Quinn was certain she would have felt backed into the same corner. It was easy to say 'just walk' if there was nothing at stake. What if everything was at stake? What tune would Estelle have been singing then?

Friday's lunch meeting couldn't arrive soon enough. As each day passed, Quinn's old chest pains were increasing in intensity. She could identify the discomfort now as anxiety, but she still had to remind herself that it wasn't a heart attack. The stress was also causing her stomach pains. She was worried she was developing an ulcer as well. She'd been popping antacids by the hour, and it did nothing to ease the knots that were ever-present.

The lunch meeting finally arrived. Avery decided at the last minute to attend and "oversee the details." Quinn bristled with resentment. She couldn't help but suspect Avery didn't trust Quinn to follow through and get the job done.

It made Quinn even more determined to show Avery up. However, it did nothing to calm her already frayed nerves. Quinn was surprised how easy it all went down. The remainder of the afternoon, they were half-drunk, laughing, swapping stories, and acting as if nothing had been hanging in the balance for weeks.

Campitelli signed the papers, and Quinn had to work hard to hide her begrudged feelings towards their new client. She was more than miffed it took going to such great lengths to get this *ass-wipe* to sign.

It was all over with now, and she needed to let it go. There was no point in feeling resentful. After Campitelli left the restaurant, Avery shook Quinn's hand. "Congratulations, you're in."

Avery told her to take the rest of the day off and come to see her first thing Monday morning in her office. There would be some changes made to the company, and they'd need to sit down and discuss signing the papers with the head of HR.

Quinn exhaled and smiled. She'd done it. She'd finally fucking done it.

As she walked down the street and made her way to her car, she was disappointed that she didn't feel better. She thought it should feel like flying on top of the world. Instead, she was exhausted.

It's been a long week, and I'm tired, she rationalized. I'll feel better once the promotion is finalized, and I'll have my session with Mistress Jade. Everything's going to be fine.

Her session was coming up. It did not elude her that Jade hadn't contacted her for a spontaneous tryst. A sinking feeling developed in her gut that she couldn't place, but she had been so busy all week getting ready for this meeting, she continually forced any thoughts of Jade aside.

All the possible reasons why Jade had not contacted her were gnawing relentlessly at Quinn's mind like termites burrowed in wood. She kept batting at the nagging thoughts, trying to prevent them from forming into a full-blown anxiety attack.

There was one foremost possibility that kept welling up inside her like rancid bile. She didn't want to believe it, but maybe Estelle in her self-righteous anger had interfered. Perhaps she'd told Jade something that would repel The Mistress's opinion of Quinn, and prevent her from wanting to do Scene with her anymore. Quinn trusted Estelle, though. She may have been angry at Quinn, but would she be so petty as to push Jade away from Quinn to make a point?

There was only one way to determine if this had happened - if Jade contacted her and told her not to come.

Saturday arrived. Quinn was on edge, waiting, hoping that everything would be fine.

Everything is going to be fine, she told herself.

She'd show up and have the session she so badly needed right now. She hadn't needed a release like this in weeks. If she ever needed a session with her Mistress, it was now.

What was she going to do if Estelle *had* interfered with her relationship with Jade? Wouldn't Jade have contacted her before she showed up on the doorstep, though? So far, she had not gotten any notifications from Jade, and it was only an hour from her appointment.

Quinn stepped out of the shower and checked her phone. Her stomach turned over. The text she was dreading came through.

'Not feeling well tonight. I will contact you when I am better.'

The disappointment that slammed into her chest was like a bolt of lightning, quickly followed by a stabbing jolt of fury. Jade never canceled. What the hell was going on? The sinking feeling in her gut opened into a wide chasm of blackness that felt all-consuming.

She didn't want to believe Estelle could betray her like this, but what other logical explanation was there? It had to have been her.

A fleeting thought did cross her mind - *What if Estelle is Jade, and she's so mad at me, she can't do Scene?*

No, she'd been over this before. Yes, the similarities of Jade's body and Estelle's were uncannily similar, but that was a coincidence. It seemed more likely that Estelle had betrayed her than Jade and her being one and the same person. There were many mixed ethnic women in the Bay Area. It was a huge city.

Quinn was certain Estelle was Jade's client too. They always met on Fridays. Quinn paced back and forth in her apartment. Then she stopped. She always assumed Estelle met with Jade on Friday's, but she'd never actually said that to Quinn. Not that she could recall.

She thought about it, considered it again, and kept feeling as though the whole possibility of Estelle being Jade just seemed utterly impossible.

The timing of Estelle being mad and Jade canceling seemed awfully coincidental, though. So, if they weren't the same person, it had to mean Estelle had betrayed Quinn's trust.

Well, maybe not...

There was a third possibility. It was probably the more likely scenario. She was exhausted, reading way too far into this, and was being irrational. Maybe it was just a coincidence. People got sick all the time. Maybe there was a family emergency. There were a dozen rational explanations.

Quinn went to her liquor cabinet and pulled out a bottle of Scotch and a glass. She flopped down on her couch and poured herself a heavy tumbler of the dark amber liquid. She

downed it in one gulp. Pouring herself another, she lifted the glass in the air, and said, “Congratulations, Quinn. You made it to the big league.”

With no one to celebrate with, the sarcasm of her own words was not lost on her.

Quinn moped around her apartment all weekend. She didn't bother to shower. She wore the same shorts and t-shirt all three days. She consumed way too many bottles of her best Scotch in lieu of meals. When Monday came around - all too quickly - she was sporting a pounding hangover rivaling her frat girl days.

When she stumbled into the office, she remembered her ‘first thing Monday morning’ meeting Avery had requested. She made her way up to Avery’s office, on the floor above hers. The elevator ride was too short.

She glanced at herself in the mirrored door of Avery’s office, groaning at her reflection. She looked like she shit.

“Hey, there she is! Woman of the hour!” Avery boomed when she walked in. “Party a little too hard celebrating this weekend, eh?” She nudged Quinn in the ribs with an elbow.

They were all smiles, and Quinn found it hard to plaster on the fake face today. Somehow, she managed.

They made small talk while waiting for Matthew, the head of HR, to arrive. They got down to business. The papers were signed, and she was taken to her new office. She’d been in here before when Durant was CMO, but she’d forgotten it was three times larger than her old office space. The furniture was plush, and the view of the ocean was breathtaking.

She couldn't wait to show Estelle— A guillotine sliced through the thought – she remembered how distant and angry they'd been with each other the previous week.

The morning was spent going over what her new position would entail. Avery instructed her that much of it would be learning as she went, but she had confidence that she could handle it.

Finally, Quinn was left alone in her new office. She twirled in her chair, letting it all sink in. She exhaled a big breath. It was as if she'd been holding it in all morning.

They would announce her position in the Friday weekly newsletter, but most of the staff already knew. As a formality, they'd grant her honors at their bi-annual gala that was happening in a week.

She looked out over the bay and thought about Estelle and Iona. She suddenly realized she wouldn't get to see them as often as she previously had. She sat chewing on the absurdity of the notion that Estelle had sabotaged her relationship with Jade. She'd been stressed out. She'd been emotional. Jade probably was sick, and Quinn was overreacting.

The source of their argument on Monday was about the interpretation of morals and ethics. Now that Quinn had some time to process it, why would someone with such a high moral bar stoop to sabotaging her friendship just out of spite? No, that made little sense. She'd been paranoid for sure. Jade would text her soon.

In the meantime, she needed to resolve her conflict with Estelle. They wouldn't see each other as often anymore, and she didn't want things to be awkward between them. She realized she needed to swallow her pride and apologize for being such a dick.

She pushed away from her desk and made her way down to her old floor. She rounded the corner to Estelle's cubicle, but she wasn't there. Not only was she absent, but her space was

also barren of all her belongings. Acid rose up in Quinn's throat and left a bitter taste in her mouth.

Quinn strode quickly down to Iona's cubicle. "Hey, do you know where Estelle is?"

Iona replied icily, "I thought you would have known? Being the new CMO and all. Estelle quit. Came in early this morning, collected her things, and was out."

Quinn stood with her mouth agape. She didn't know what to say, and she couldn't take the heat of Iona's intense scrutiny. Quinn closed her mouth and nodded once, then made her way to her old office.

She hadn't had the chance to move her things from the old space yet. She slumped down in her chair and saw the envelope propped up against her monitor.

It had her name on the front. Quinn plucked it up and sliced her finger on the paper, fumbling to get it open too quickly. She cursed while sucking on her finger.

Quinn unfolded the paper. In lovely handwritten calligraphy, the letter read:

Dear Quinn,

We have known each other for a long time now, and it would appear not long enough. I had supposed in these handful of years, and especially these past few months, I had come to know you well.

I have had mind-boggling opportunities to progress my daytime career in other ways but only remained at Avery's for one reason. I suppose you can now guess that

reason as you read this. It had not escaped my notice, the sexual tension, always present between us.

You chose the pursuit of a career over a love life. I wanted to honor your goals, but depriving oneself of love, in lieu of success, is not a wise path. As you might well know, telling a person and showing a person, what you wish them to learn, are two very different ways to teach.

I devised my own way of getting closer to you through the strategic plan of using the alias Mistress Jade. Forgive me for not telling you, but I wished for you to discover this in your own time.

I made a judgment call, one which I don't regret. I surmised that if you discovered who I was, then it meant you had come to know me well enough to make the connection. This, because our relationships both in the bedroom and outside of it continued to flourish. If you didn't realize it, then we would have remained in a professional relationship, and I would have continued to serve you as a Mistress who was willing to fulfill your fantasies, even if it could not be as my true self unveiled.

These past years it has been a pleasure working with you, and these past few months, it has been a pleasure getting to know you more intimately, but I must inform you our time has come to an end in both respects.

Despite my depth of feelings that I hold for you in my heart, I cannot in good conscience continue any further interaction with you or Avery's Agency. I would have been fine to continue our Scenes in a D/s capacity, going along at your pace, but the choices you made to obtain your promotion, have stunned me into realizing you are not the person I thought you were.

I misjudged you for an individual with high morals in an industry where snakes in the grass are prolific. I always saw you as an eagle who rose above the snakes, but I was wrong.

I would be lying if I said my heart was unaffected. I feel as though moving on is the only thing I can do now.

Yours Truly,

Estelle Reeves

Reading it through, Quinn's stomach sank further and further into itself. She was both shocked and not. She read the letter over and over — disbelief comingling with acceptance.

The signs had always been there. She wanted to slam her head against the wall. She felt so stupid! The subtle tells she'd suspected, seemed like glowing neon signs now. Yet, she had willfully ignored it all. Estelle's body shape and skin tone – the same as Mistress Jade's. The constant need for identity disguise. The faint scent of jasmine when they made love. The closer they became in their informal dates, the closer they became in the bedroom. Then, of course, Estelle's Domme tone as she stood over her that day and told Quinn, 'Just walk,' yet Quinn had dismissed her. Everything seemed so obvious now. Why had she turned a blind eye to the truth?

Quinn didn't cry often. She hadn't allowed herself the self-pitying indulgence of tears in a very long time, but she did now. Her eyes burned with the mistake of her stupidity.

Estelle was gone.

After reading through the letter several times, it was apparent she was gone for good. What could Quinn do?

She slunk into her chair, trying to will her brain into what she should do. Panic and defeat consumed her like a suffocating black hole. She groped at ideas on how to get Estelle to come back, but she felt hopeless. There was no viable way to undo what she had done. She knew Estelle well enough. No amount of groveling or 'I'm sorry' would change her mind.

This letter had that tone of finality, and when Jade/Estelle made up her mind about something, it was absolute.

She stood up from her chair and began to collect her things in an empty file box to move upstairs.

Her vision was blurred by the tears she fought hard to keep at bay.

Chapter 16

Quinn got through the week, distracting herself with learning all the ins and outs of her new position. It wasn't much different from what she had already been doing. In some ways, she'd be able to relax, but in other ways, this position would bring new stresses into her life.

At the company gala, she wanted to feel proud of herself, but looking into the sea of faces, her chest felt hollow. The two people she wanted to see weren't there. Iona had put in her two weeks' notice. She'd be gone as well, and there'd be no more after-work meetings at The Peacock. Quinn hadn't realized how much she'd valued their companionship until it was snatched away.

Yet this promotion meant everything to her. Even though Estelle said 'just walk,' she couldn't do it. This was her career, and her career was her life.

Every day Quinn got out of bed, put two feet firmly on the floor, and rationalized she would get used to not having Iona and Estelle around. She would make friends with other people. Find others to date. Maybe even find a new Mistress.

Yet, every day seemed like climbing a mountain. She didn't want to acknowledge the hard truth. Even in her most stressful times, having them around was easier than dealing with being alone. Having Jade in her life had relieved her stress more than she was willing to admit.

Two weeks passed. She slipped into a groove, and her confidence in the position increased, despite her depression and new work stressors. She'd handled her work stress before without friends or a Mistress, but the rationalizing did nothing to fill the gaping hole in her chest.

It will go away soon... became her new mantra. Honestly, if she was being real, the more she tried to tell herself this, the more unlikely it seemed to be true.

She stared at her work calendar. Many of the people on her old team were throwing a little lunch going-away soirée for Iona. Quinn fiddled with a pen, considering if she should attend. Iona hadn't spoken one word to her since Estelle's letter, and Quinn cowered under her icy gaze as they passed each other in the halls.

She knew she'd fucked up, but was it that bad? Who didn't tell little white lies once in a while? Especially in the corporate world.

She also didn't realize Estelle and Iona were that tight. Obviously, Estelle had told Iona everything, which somewhat ruffled Quinn, since she'd confided in her. Honestly, none of it should matter now, but she still felt the sting of betrayal whenever it crossed her mind.

Quinn sighed and decided to make an appearance. As a top leader in the company now, it was her obligation to mingle and support the staff interpersonally, even if they were mad at her. She made her way down to the break room. It seemed as though everyone in the company had shown up. Eddie, the 'intern,' who was no longer an intern, was making a little speech. Quinn inched her way into the room and stood in the back corner.

As Eddie finished up, Iona gave him a warm hug. They began to cut and pass out cake when Iona looked up and saw Quinn. Her eyes widened in shock, then her expression shifted. As their eyes locked, Quinn tried to hold Iona's gaze, but the emotion on Iona's face was inscrutable. The intensity caused Quinn to flush with embarrassment. She ducked her head and left the room.

This was a bad idea, she thought to herself. She hastily made her way back up to her office on the second floor.

After twenty minutes, she heard a soft knock on her door.

“Come in,” Quinn said as she scanned files on her computer. Quinn looked up just as Iona tentatively made her way into the office. “Oh! Hey.”

“Hey, yourself.” Iona stood awkwardly by the door.

There was a beat of heavy silence between them.

“I’m sorry you’re leaving,” Quinn finally offered.

“Yeah, me too,” Iona said. “Do you have a minute?”

“Yeah, have a seat. I’m not busy.”

Quinn wanted to clear the air before Iona left, but she wasn’t good at this sort of thing. She’d even attempted to call Estelle and say something, anything. It killed her to think they had parted on such sour terms, but when she finally got up the courage to dial, she learned the number had been disconnected.

She’d even showed up at ‘Mistress Jade’s’ townhouse, but a family with a small child had moved in. It seemed as if Estelle had disappeared completely. The least Quinn could do now was make an effort with Iona, but she had no idea what to say.

The silence between them was starting to become uncomfortable.

Iona sighed heavily. “It’s really none of my business, but I’m wondering if you might indulge me before I leave?”

Quinn cocked an inquisitive eyebrow.

“What exactly happened between you and Estelle?”

Quinn’s head jerked back slightly. She wasn’t expecting this. She assumed Estelle had told her everything.

“Wait, you don’t know?” Quinn asked.

“I know a few things. Not all the details. I know that you did some shady shit to get this posh corner office. She just said you’d lied to a client. That we, as a company, were in breach of contract, and the only reason she shared *that* in confidence, was because she knew I wouldn’t approve and that I’d probably want to jump ship. That’s all I got.”

Iona’s eyes barely blinked as she practically bore holes into Quinn. “Oh, and also that you and Estelle were moving steadily towards becoming a thing, but she’d decided to end it because of what you did here.”

Quinn was rendered speechless, and her face blanched. A weak flush of anger coursed through her and deflated just as quickly as it had surged. She sighed with resignation. She was just so damn tired. Tired of pretending she was okay. Tired of forcing a smile when she didn’t feel happy. There was no point in being angry or justifying her actions anymore.

No - point - at - all.

She had lied to get her promotion. She had lied to Campitelli. Their company had breached a contract and covered it up. And worst of all, she had lied to herself, and Estelle was gone forever because of it. She had not wanted to own it because Campitelli was a misogynistic asshole. Sticking it to him, even just a little, gave her an additional reason to justify her behavior.

The hard truth was, she *had* pulled some shady shit. She didn’t want to acknowledge it because her career felt like her entire life, but how wrong she’d been. She’d began to have a life outside of the four walls of Avery’s and it felt good. She didn’t want to accept she had flushed it all down the toilet with one bad decision.

Quinn withered under Iona’s intense stare as Iona waited for her response.

Quinn pulled her hands through her hair and rested her head on top of her hands, shaking her head back and forth. “I can’t deny I did all of those things. I didn’t know what else to do.

Estelle told me to walk, but it took me so long to work up to this point. I felt like going anywhere else would be starting all over again, and I nearly killed myself to get here!”

“When she told you to walk, you had no clue she was Mistress Jade?” Iona asked.

Quinn’s eyes widened with shock. “Wait, how did you know that Estelle— Wait, how much more do you know? I thought you said you didn’t know anything?”

“I said I didn’t know *all* the details, but as to the BDSM, I’ve known everything all along.” Iona paused for a beat, sighed, then said, “Estelle was Mistress Jade, but so am I.”

Quinn’s mouth gaped open. “What the fuck Iona! Start talking.”

Iona held up her hands in a ‘slow-down’ gesture. “Okay, that’s a completely fair reaction, but it’s not what you think. Just answer my original question first, when she told you to walk, did you know she was Mistress Jade?”

Quinn was so frustrated now. Her head swam with a million questions. “Okay, looking back, I think I did suspect, but I didn’t want to believe it, or I don’t know what I was thinking. I guess I wasn’t!”

“Well, that clears up a lot,” Iona said.

“What does?”

“You don’t get it, do you?” Iona asked. Her tone was softer.

“No, I guess I’m missing something?” Quinn said sarcastically.

“She was testing you. I’m going to go out on a limb because I know Estelle. I’m guessing she thought you knew that she was Jade, but for some reason, you hadn’t brought it to her yet. She was perhaps testing your limits of submission, Quinn.”

Quinn’s eyebrows rose in surprise. “What do you mean, testing me?”

“She wanted to see how far your D/s relationship could extend.”

Quinn closed her eyes and pinched the bridge of her nose. “I have a lot of questions, Iona, but now is not the time to have this discussion. I really need you to explain what you mean by ‘I’m Mistress Jade’ as well?”

“That’s fair. Let’s meet up after work at The Peacock and chat?”

“Yeah.”

Quinn’s phone rang. She wanted to let it go to voice mail. With a million thoughts running through her mind, how the hell was she supposed to focus? Had she been sleeping with two women? What the fuck did it mean that Iona was Mistress Jade as well? She was being tested? Fucking hell, five o’clock couldn’t come quick enough.

Chapter 17

Quinn sat in a booth at The Pink Peacock, running her fingers over the condensation on the beer glass, too anxious to drink it. Iona came in about ten minutes later, ordered herself an ale, and sat across from her in the booth.

Thank god, Iona wasted no time in beating around the bush. “Okay, so I know that was kind of a bitch move dropping a bomb on you back at the office, and then leaving you hanging, but—”

“You think?” Quinn snapped.

“Yeah, well, your ass kinda deserved it, so I’m not apologizin’.”

Quinn bristled but said nothing. Her leg bounced nervously under the table, waiting for her to explain herself.

Iona sighed. “I guess I should back up and start at the very beginning.”

“That would be good.”

Iona shot her a ‘don’t even go there’ look. “When I came to Avery’s, I’d moved from Las Vegas. My first career was as a professional Domme in BDSM. I won’t go into the specifics of how that unfolded. Suffice it to say, I’ve been doing it for ten years. I did Scene at night to put myself through school during the day. I majored in marketing, and when I got my degree, I wanted a fresh start in a career. I know Las Vegas is big, but I didn’t want to run the risk of even one crossover with my daytime and nighttime clientele. It would’ve been too awkward.”

“Okay, so you used to be a Domme in Las Vegas. Estelle’s a Domme too. It can’t just be a coincidence you’re both in The Lifestyle, and both go by the name Mistress Jade?”

“No, it’s not a coincidence at all. We were schooled under a group called The Sisterhood of Jade, which was formed under a strict old-guard order of how D/s relationships are to be conducted. Most of it’s evolved to be less formal, but some chapters in Vegas are still very high protocol-oriented.”

“Okay, so what does any of that even mean?”

“Have you ever heard of the Geisha’s from Japan?” Iona asked.

Quinn’s brow furrowed. “Yeah, I know of them.”

“Well, to become a Geisha, you had to train in an Okiya under another Geisha before you earned your title. Mistress Jade is more like an exclusive and proprietary brand name attached to an underground sorority. You can only hold the name if you train extensively with another ‘Mistress Jade,’ and the mantle is passed on by your Master Domme.”

Quinn shook her head slowly. “So, you’re saying Estelle trained you, or you trained her?”

“I trained Estelle. When she was ready, it was my prerogative to bestow the title on her if I deemed her worthy, which I obviously did.”

“So, I never did Scene or slept with you?” Quinn flushed bright red.

Iona chuckled at her reaction. “No, you didn’t. It was all Estelle.”

“Okay, not that I would have minded if it were you, but— I think you’re attractive and all— but—” Quinn huffed out a flustered breath.

“It’s okay.” Iona held up her hand. “I understand. You didn’t offend me. You can stop being embarrassed now.”

“While we’re on topics of embarrassing myself,” Quinn said, “can I ask you something personal? It’s none of my business, but I’ve always wondered...” Her voice trailed off.

“Shoot,” Iona said.

“Were you and Estelle— ya know - lovers?” Quinn asked quickly, avoiding her gaze. “I mean, I don’t care. I was just curious. It seemed like there was always that vibe there.”

“Were you jealous?” Iona goaded playfully with a wide grin on her face.

“I guess I was a little - if we’re being truthful.”

“We dated for some time. Estelle was quickly drawn to The Lifestyle. She started out thinking she would prefer being a sub, but we found out all too quickly, she was more suited to be a Domme. With both of us being dominant personalities, it just wasn’t going to work between us. Although, to hold the title of Jade, she had to train under me as a sub first. You have to learn what it’s like to walk a day in the other’s shoes, so to speak.” Iona’s face took on a wistful expression. “We had some good times, though.”

“I always suspected there was chemistry between you two,” Quinn said.

“It never quite dissipated because we parted on good terms and decided we were better off as friends. We became very close friends, in fact. Carrying the name of Mistress Jade holds a certain honor. I’d never chosen anyone to mentor, so when I told Estelle about it, she was excited. She was even more excited when I revealed that I could only bestow the title on two other protégé’s in my lifetime. She really was the perfect student. I was happy to pass on one of my mantles to her.”

“Wait a minute,” Quinn said, holding up her hand, “you mean someone actually keeps track of this Mistress Jade title? How many are there?”

“I told you it’s like an underground school and sorority. You have to register, and *The Madame Jade* keeps track. Professional Mistresses have to report in every other year to demonstrate that they’re still qualified to hold the title. No one knows who she is, because she appoints matrons to help her keep everything in place.”

“Huh, this is kind of fascinating.” Quinn pulled at her beer. “So, is there a physical headquarters, or is it a nebulous online thing?”

“Oh no, there are actual headquarters. It’s in Vegas, and as we grow, we have chapters throughout the country. It originated in Vegas, and once you’re inducted, we’re as tight as any academic sorority. And just like any other sisterhood, we help each other out.”

“I’d be lying if I didn’t say I had a million questions…” Quinn mused, however only one question was burning in her mind. She wanted to ask but felt hesitant. She wasn’t sure if Iona would help her get in contact with Estelle. Especially after revealing they were part of an underground sisterhood.

“How do you keep track of each other? Doesn’t that get confusing with everyone calling each other Mistress Jade?”

“Well, interesting you should ask. Domme’s who use the title ‘Mistress Jade’ are only in an interpersonal relationship. Domme’s who do it professionally hyphenate their title with an additional alias, and wear a nebulous badge on their corset of ‘Mistress Jade.’ When we convene for training, you would go by your hyphenated alias, such as Mistress Nadia-Jade.”

Quinn was fascinated. “So is Nadia-Jade your Mistress name?”

“I go by Mistress Nadia with clients. The hyphenation is only used at meetups. I’ll use Mistress Jade with the one I choose to be my exclusive partner or lovers. As of now, I don’t have any exclusive lovers/subs.”

“Wait, Estelle used Jade. Why didn’t she use the hyphenated name with me? Or some other alias?”

“She didn’t have one. She used Jade because she wasn’t interested in doing this professionally with other clients at the time she pursued you.”

Quinn stopped short for a moment. She placed her beer down as the implication of this hit her. “You mean—?”

“Yes, after some time, I could tell she was developing feelings for you. We had long talks about you. Both of us suspected you might be well suited for not only The Lifestyle, but being a sub. After you’ve been doing this for as long as I have, you kinda get a feel for who will jibe with it, and who won’t. We devised a plan to gain your interest. I helped Estelle with the initial details, but she did all of the rest.”

“You helped her?”

“Only with the parts where I got you coming here to The Peacock. We knew if we could at least get you to loosen up and come here, then Estelle could ‘*randomly*’ pop in, and she’d slowly work her magic piquing your interest. After that, it was all Estelle. She was hesitant to cross the line with you. Bringing you on as a postured client was one thing, but crossing the line of making love to you, was hard for her.”

Quinn chewed on this for a moment. “Wait back up, I don’t understand. Why was it hard?” She felt a sting of disappointment. Had Estelle not wanted her, as much as she wanted Estelle? Was this all just a mind-game?

“Well, a few reasons. The weight of being a professional Domme holds a lot of responsibility. It retains even greater weight and honors with the title of ‘Jade.’ When you’re inducted, specific protocols are expected to be maintained. If you cross lines, or overstep boundaries and hurt your sub, you could get blacklisted. Acting as a paid professional holds different boundaries than the relationship between lovers inside The Sisterhood, so there are different expectations and guidelines that are followed for each Domme classification. Because she was charging you money, technically, you were a client. But she wasn’t ready to formally

register with The Sisterhood as a professional Domme, so she had to get special permission to do this.

“By moving from paid client to lover, she took a huge leap of faith on you, Quinn, that your feelings for her matched her own for you. It was also a unique situation because she knew you were hesitant to pursue dating due to your career goals.”

Quinn huffed out a breath. She felt a rising emotion she couldn't quite place. She blurted out, “Part of me feels a little miffed that I was deceived. I mean, Estelle gets all righteous about morals and lying, but then she's running this game of double entendre with me for months?”

“Quinn, she never lied to you. Did you ever ask Estelle if she was Mistress Jade?”

“No, but I wish I had known, then maybe—”

“Maybe what?”

“Maybe I would done things differ—”

Iona held up her hand to cut Quinn off. “Differently how? Are you trying to tell me you didn't want to sleep with her?”

Quinn drew her hands through her hair in frustration. “No, that's not what I'm saying. I—I don't know. I just feel irritated that she didn't tell me.”

Iona's eyes flashed with anger, but she kept her voice level. “Let me ask you something? Did you consent to everything you did with her, fully and willingly, inside the bedroom with Jade, and outside the bedroom with Estelle?”

“Yeah, I suppose I did. I feel like she could have just told me. At some point, she should have said something.”

Iona's face replied with a 'are you kidding me' look. “We couldn't even get you to come out to the bar and have drinks. Do you want to know what I think? You aren't really miffed

about morals here or Estelle telling you. Estelle was quasi-dating you by day, and conducting a personal relationship with you, under a hidden Mistress identity by night. She wasn't obligated to tell you jack shit, as they were essentially two separate relationships going on. But that's not the point. The point is, do you actually feel she misled you or took advantage of you in some way by not telling you?"

"No, I guess not," Quinn said. She felt irrationally irritable and couldn't place why.

"The way I see it, she was being *more* moralistic by letting you come around and figure it out on your own terms."

"How do you figure that?"

"Look, she asked you some time back if you had a problem with dating coworkers, and you told her flat out - no. You said you simply needed to focus on work more than your personal life. Is that correct?"

"Yeah, I don't remember, but that sounds like something I would have said."

"So, you didn't have a strict code of morals concerning dating people at work did you?"

"No, I didn't."

"You just didn't want to date because you were a work-a-holic. If you'd said you had a policy against it, Estelle wouldn't have ever started this double entendre with you. So, by having dual relationships, it eased you into letting go of working and relaxing a little.

"She was willing to keep the double entendre going for as long as *you* needed, Quinn. If Estelle is nothing else, she's patient. When the time came, and you realized Jade and Estelle were one and the same, I can assure you she wouldn't have denied it. She wanted you to figure it out. She surmised if you did, you'd finally realize it was what you wanted. And if for some reason you didn't, then you were none the wiser, and you were simply a client who never would

have known, but both sides would have gotten gratification. Was there anything wrong with that, if you both walked away feeling good about it?”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right.”

“So, tell me, Quinn, do you really believe she was lying by omission? Acting selfishly against your best interest? Or are you pissed at yourself that you didn’t take off your own damn blinders and see it for what it was?”

Quinn shrank back. She felt like an idiot. Every word of what Iona said rang true. “Yes, I suppose you’re right.” She looked down, unable to meet Iona’s eyes. The truth hurt.

“Did she manipulate you? Can you sit there and say if you’d known Jade was Estelle, you wouldn’t have slept with her? By the time Estelle chose to cross that line with you, she felt you were ready too. Are you saying you weren’t?”

Quinn sighed heavily. “I was more than ready to cross that line with Estelle.” She laughed, but it was devoid of humor, as she started to realize how badly her work-a-holic behaviors had damaged her. “I remember that day in the car. I wanted her to come up to my place so damn bad. I really wanted to just kiss her. I couldn’t figure out why I didn’t, but I think I’ve been holding back for so long, not allowing myself to have a personal life, that I’d actually forgotten how to take things to the next step. And then Estelle – shortly after that was the first time we slept together. It’s like she knew...” Quinn ducked her head and forced back the tears.

Iona’s ire deflated, and her expression softened. They both took a breath and pulled at their beers.

Quinn hated feeling pitied. Yeah, she’d fucked up, but she didn’t want Iona to look at her that way. She tried to make light of the situation by cracking a joke. “Estelle is one hell of a marketer – that she was able to *rope* me into all this. Get it? Rope? BDSM? Ha-ha.”

Iona chuckled. “Yeah, she certainly used every marketing tactic in the book to ‘*rope*’ you in, Quinn. But you should know as well as anyone, marketing isn’t about ‘*roping*’ someone into a product they don’t want. That’s manipulation. Marketing is about matching people to a product they didn’t know they needed and showing them, in gentle ways, that it’s what they were looking for all along. And ironically, or maybe not so ironically, being a Dom or Domme, follows the same protocols and philosophies *if* they are wise and caring. I trained Estelle. She knew what she was doing.”

Quinn’s smile broadened, and she shook her head ruefully at the cleverness of what Estelle had done. How much patience and elaborate planning Estelle had put into it, for her sake. Because she cared.

Iona smiled knowingly.

Then, Quinn’s face fell as memories of Estelle started to pulse through her mind. She missed their lunches together. She missed the warmth of her body as they made love. She missed her soft caress and her heavy hand across her bottom. She missed all of it. Her eyes stung, and Iona seemed to notice the shift in Quinn’s demeanor. She stretched out her hand and placed it on top of Quinn’s.

Quinn looked up, trying to fight back the tears. “I fucked up. I think I was falling in love with Estelle, and I’ve lost her for good. I don’t know how to fix it.”

Iona paused. She was thoughtful for a moment, then said quietly, “Maybe Estelle did make one mistake, and that was expecting you to bend to the will of your Mistress without really knowing she was Jade, but I’m betting she thought you knew more than you did. Certainly explains why she’s so hurt and angry.”

“That doesn’t fix the fact that Estelle has concluded I’m not the person she thought I was. By taking that promotion, and lying to get it, she’s made it very clear she wants to have nothing to do with me. I don’t know what I can do to fix this.”

“I do,” Iona said with smug confidence.

Quinn narrowed her eyes, but that spark of hope in her heart grew more inflamed.

“Did you trust Estelle as your Mistress?” Iona asked.

“I did. I trusted her implicitly. She never failed me. If I’d known she was Jade, and she’d told me to walk—”

“Be real Quinn. Would you have walked? Even if you did know?” Iona’s tone was challenging. She was demanding that Quinn stare hard into the mirror of her soul, examine her excuses, and be honest with herself.

Quinn suddenly realized the measure of everything she had “accomplished” at Avery’s. It was shallow and insubstantial — a victory with a prize that felt like wisps of wind slipping through her fingers. Estelle wasn’t there to celebrate with her. She felt the weight of the loss and what it really meant. Losing Estelle over gaining her promotion meant nothing in comparison. She’d been so hellbent on that damn promotion. Yet, with each passing day, her doubts about whether it had been worth it, had only continued to mount.

She had to stop and consider what she would have done. If she had known that Estelle and Jade were one and the same at the point when Avery asked her to lie, would she have realistically listened to Estelle?

She chewed on it for a few moments.

The hard answer was - no. If she'd been willing to sacrifice her moral standing and friendships, she likely would have justified her career as being far more important than anything else.

Quinn bent her head shamefully and admitted to Iona and herself, "No. I guess I wouldn't have walked."

Iona let that hang for a beat, then said softly, "I know I'm not Estelle, so I'm not exactly the Mistress Jade you know, but I trained her. In a manner of speaking she's an extension of me; by way of the teacher to the student. If you trust me, Quinn, I can help you."

Quinn raised her eyes, and for the first time in two weeks, she felt a spark fully ignite into something warm, comforting, and real – a valid spark of hope.

"I trust you," Quinn said. "What do I do?"

Chapter 18

Quinn sat at rapt attention with Iona, who was now in her full Mistress Nadia Domme persona. Nadia was wearing tight leather pants and a leather corset. Her hair was pulled back into a tight ponytail.

Mistress Nadia had explained that if her plan was going to work, she needed to train Quinn further than Estelle had. Quinn needed to learn to fully submit to her role and prove herself worthy to Estelle.

Quinn was on her knees with her hands bound in cuffs. Mistress Nadia circled her. The floor was hard against Quinn's knees, and her legs were numb, but she wouldn't complain. Mistress Nadia had permitted her a single t-shirt, and nothing else to cover herself. She had explained there would be no sex between them, but she would pick up where Jade had left off. It would not be pleasant.

Quinn had to admit, it was strange at first, allowing this person who had been her underling at work to be in a position of power over her, but she soon relaxed into it. It was not as uncomfortable as she'd supposed it would be. It felt like coming home after a long vacation gone terribly wrong.

Of course, Nadia wasn't the same as Estelle/Jade, but Nadia's mannerisms were exactly like Jade's. It was easy to see how Estelle had been her protege.

"You have to understand Quinn, the Domme who takes care of a charge in a loving relationship, and sometimes even professional ones, will help guide the sub in making life decisions. Often, the Domme can see that the sub is making decisions detrimental to their

wellbeing. In this power exchange, the sub will trust their Domme to help them make good decisions for themselves.”

Quinn nodded. “Yes, Mistress.”

“Until we’ve repaired the rift that has come between you and Jade, I will act as your Domme. You will need to trust my judgment and wisdom. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Mistress. Permission to ask a question?”

“Permission granted,” Iona said.

“What if Jade won’t take me back? Even if I do everything you say?” Quinn felt like a child asking this. She’d felt juvenile the second she’d relinquished power to Nadia. In her confusion, she had inquired about this. Mistress Nadia explained that in Quinn’s training, she might regress emotionally. Nadia had been right. After being on her knees and in Scene for an hour, she felt small and vulnerable.

“Then you don’t truly trust me, Quinn. Do you understand the conversation we had earlier? When we talked about why Jade and I suspected you were well suited to be a sub?”

“Yes, Mistress. I believe I do.”

“I am not sure you do. The world of BDSM is a double-edged sword that balances on a precarious, razor-thin blade of good and bad. Many individuals who crave submission are ones who have been controlled their whole lives by some powerhouse individual or organization. They perhaps feel a deep insecurity with their ability to make decisions, yet simultaneously have been forced to put on the face of strength and power in their daily lives. There are other sub profiles, but it is not relevant to you.

“Suffice it to say, no matter what psychological profile a sub fits, what an inherent sub craves, is not really submission - but trust. They want to let go. To release their inhibitions and

trust they can let their walls down with someone who will take great care of their mind, body, and heart, and not abuse it in the way it has been, too many times previously. A good Dom or Domme will not misuse their position of power. Unfortunately, there are some in BDSM positions of power, who will fall on that ugly side of the blade, and they will do more damage to their subs than help them. Unfortunate, but it does occur. Do you believe I am that kind of Domme, Quinn?”

“No, Mistress, I don’t believe you are.”

“So, you believe I will act in a manner that is in accordance with your best self, and your greatest wellbeing?”

“Yes, Mistress.”

“Then you also need to trust that if you do as I say, I will help you win Estelle’s heart, and her riding crop back into your life.” Mistress Nadia smirked.

“Yes, Mistress.”

“Alright, you’ve done well. I’ll reward you by allowing you to sit in the chair now.”

Quinn bowed her head even lower, thanked her Mistress, and moved to the chair.

Mistress Nadia’s Dungeon was outfitted in the much the same way as Jade’s Playroom, sans the bed.

Mistress Nadia bent low and rubbed vigorously at Quinn’s calves to get the blood flowing. “Better?”

“Thank you, Mistress.”

“Now we will go over the plan. It’s very detailed, and you will follow it step by step. Step one will be the hardest. Are you ready?”

“Yes, Mistress.”

Quinn's heart sank as she listened to Mistress Nadia outline the first thing that she needed to do. This would be harder to accomplish than she realized. She wasn't sure she had it in her to follow through.

When Nadia was done explaining everything, she stopped in front of Quinn's chair. "You can do this, Quinn. Estelle believed in you, and so do I."

Quinn's mouth had gone dry, and she gulped at the lump in her throat as she squeaked out the reply, "Thank you, Mistress."

Chapter 19

Mistress Nadia had helped Quinn type it up, but she had to be the one to deliver it, and it would be in person.

Quinn had been flooded with an irrational desire to have Iona go with her and ‘hold-her-hand’ so to speak, but she knew that was a level of immaturity she couldn’t bring herself to.

She arrived earlier than the workday began and packed everything up in her car. She wanted to catch Avery first thing as she entered the office. She stood just inside the doorway of her own office, stealthily keeping an eye on the elevator. When she saw Avery coming, her gut tightened viciously, and her breathing came in short, shaky bursts.

You can do this. You can do this. Just think of Iona. Think of Estelle.

She did think of Estelle just then. An image of Estelle’s voluptuous curves, and her beautiful smile, the light in her eyes that never dimmed, her use of unique vocabulary words. Of Estelle as Mistress Jade and the wonderful mind-bending sessions and sex, they’d had together. She thought about the way Estelle laughed during their shared time at lunch. Every memory made her heart hitch.

Quinn forced her breathing to calm. She counted to ten and headed towards Avery’s. She knocked on the door.

“Come in,” Avery’s said. When Quinn walked in the room, Avery looked up and said, “I’m glad you’re here I wanted to go over—”

“I need to tell you something important.”

Avery stopped. She was obviously confused and intrigued. Her employees never cut her off mid-sentence – nor did they ever take such a tone with her. She rose one eyebrow, waiting for Quinn to go ahead.

“I’m resigning.” Quinn placed the resignation letter on the table.

Avery’s face broke into a wide smile. She didn’t even look at the letter. “Did you and Brian come up with this? A little early April Fools’ joke?” She began chuckling then stopped when she saw the look on Quinn’s face. Anger flashed across Avery’s face as she snatched up the letter. She looked up sharply. “Are you fucking kidding me, Quinn? This better be some kind of sick joke, and I’ll let it slide now.”

“No joke, Avery. I’m resigning. Effective immediately.”

Quinn felt her pulse racing. She was trying to keep the appearance of being calm and self-assured. She didn’t know if it was working.

She remembered Mistress Nadia’s warning. Avery would try to bully or manipulate her into staying. She’d told Quinn to hold her ground and remain strong – *“Put your letter on the desk, tell her what you need to say, and walk out.”*

Quinn somehow found the presence of mind to make her feet move towards the door. She felt almost paralyzed with fear over the confrontation. She needed to leave - now.

“Oh, no. Don’t you walk away from me, Quinn Redinger. After everything I’ve done for you! You don’t just get to walk out on me!”

Quinn turned. Against her better judgment, she turned around and faced Avery. She remembered Mistress Nadia’s words like a mantra in her head - *“Hold your ground, stay strong.”*

Somehow, she managed to find her voice and was surprised at the anger in her own words. “What have you done for me, Avery?”

Avery took a step back. If she was expecting anything from Quinn, it wasn't that. “I've put you where you are. Without me, you'd still be groveling at a cubicle. I saw your potential. Do you think other women have it so easy in the corporate world?”

Quinn snorted with derision, her temper fueling her courage. “Easy? You really fucking think that? You did anything but make it easy for me. I had to claw my way up, working hundreds of unpaid hours, doing favors for you. I'm done.”

“I'll see to it you don't ever work in this city again! I'll make sure they know you're a god damn flake! You're a pussy, and you couldn't handle it, so you're quitting! I should have known better than to promote you!”

“If being your little bitch means I'm a pussy, then no thanks. I'm out. You're a nightmare to work for, Avery.”

Quinn turned and left quickly. She could hear Avery screaming expletives. She tuned her out and left. Her hands were trembling uncontrollably, and she felt faint from her short rapid breathing. But, somewhere in the haze of the anxiety, she also felt something else. Something she had never felt before – self-respect.

She should have done this years ago.

Quinn made it to her car parked in the office's underground garage. She threw herself into the front seat and tried to calm down by sucking in slow controlled breaths. She was shaking

profusely. She'd held it together well enough inside, but as she made her way out of the building, she'd started to lose her composure.

Iona anticipated this would happen and told Quinn she'd be close by if Quinn needed her.

Quinn's hands could barely dial the number.

"I did it," she told Iona.

"Hey, girl, I'm proud of you. Are you okay?"

"No, I'm having a panic attack, and I don't think I can drive."

"Just sit tight. I'll be right there."

Iona had been sitting at a café around the corner. She walked to the garage and drove them back to Iona's place. Iona made Quinn some hot tea while Quinn attempted to recap the brief heated encounter.

"I know that was hard for you, but you did the right thing," Iona said.

"I know," Quinn replied, gripping the mug like a lifeline. "To be honest, I feel better about it than I thought I would. I guess I'm just scared now. Scared that the next parts of your plan won't work. Scared that Avery still has the power to fuck up my life somehow."

"You're coming down from the adrenaline caused by the confrontation. I think you'll be okay in an hour or so. Do you want to crash here tonight? The couch pulls out. We can order pizzas, watch old movies, and act like we're sixteen again."

"I don't think you'd want me to act sixteen again," Quinn said, "but a movie night and pizza sound great. I could use a distraction at the moment."

"I know. I'm still your Mistress until Estelle is back in the picture, and if you declined, I would've just put on my Mistress Nadia 'pants' and told you otherwise."

"Yes, I bet you would," Quinn said and cracked a smile.

Chapter 20

Part two of ‘the plan’ was that Quinn was to start up her own marketing firm and proposition Estelle to be a partner. Mistress Nadia was there every step of the way, helping Quinn do research, fill out the appropriate forms, and everything in between. Iona had majored in marketing, but had minored in business, and knew a thing or two about starting her own company.

Things had been plugging along at a rapid and steady pace until they hit a snag ten days in. Quinn came back from the meeting at the bank completely flattened.

“What’s wrong?” Iona asked, after taking one look at Quinn’s face.

Quinn laughed sardonically. “Well, Avery said she’d make sure I never worked in this town again.”

“What happened?”

“I don’t have enough collateral to get the loan, so they want a reference letter from Avery to prove my business character and work ethic.” Quinn crumpled on the couch. “I can’t believe this. We’ve gotten this far. We have the paperwork put in place, the building picked out, and they need Avery to send them her stamp of approval. She’s not going to do it. She’ll gloat, rub it in my face, and then say no.”

“We’re not going to ask her for her approval,” Iona said. She’d begun to pace back and forth, her forehead furrowed in consternation.

“I have to. I don’t have a choice. I have to grovel at Avery’s feet and figure out a way to get her to write something up,” Quinn said with disgusted resign. She started to sweat, and her chest was clenching in that familiar pattern when anxiety began to take her.

Iona stopped. She said in her Mistress Nadia voice, “No - You - Don’t.” Her tone and posture left no place for argument.

“I don’t see how this is going to work.” Quinn closed her eyes and was trying to staunch the anxiety attack that was creeping in.

Maybe she shouldn’t have quit? Why was she so stupid to think this would all work out.

“Up now, Quinn,” Nadia commanded.

Quinn shook her head, “I can’t do this now.”

“Yes, you can, and you will. Now is the perfect time. Up.” Mistress Nadia stalked off to the spare bedroom she used as her Dungeon.

Quinn reluctantly pulled herself up off the couch and followed.

“Your t-shirt is over there. Put it on and get down on your knees.”

Quinn moved to do as she was told but startled by the smart swat on her ass. “Are you forgetting your manners, Quinn?”

“Yes, sorry, Mistress,” she said with a hint of attitude.

“Excuse me,” Nadia said.

Swat!

She brought the crop smartly across Quinn’s bottom again.

“Yes, sorry, Mistress.” Quinn’s tone changed to penitence.

She quickly finished changing into her t-shirt and knelt in front of Mistress Nadia.

“What have you learned in the past few weeks, Quinn?”

Quinn had to think about this. She couldn’t get her brain past the sinking feeling that it was all a wash. Everything was going to fall apart, and it was because Avery was a bitch. She couldn’t answer. She felt too disparaging.

“Up.”

Quinn stood up.

“To the cross, Quinn.”

Quinn obeyed. She stood in front of the cross waiting, her head hung in complete resignation. All she could feel was overwhelming defeat.

“Arms above your head,” Mistress Nadia commanded.

Quinn lifted her arms and held them there while Nadia pulled the t-shirt over Quinn’s head, leaving her completely naked and exposed.

Mistress Nadia strapped Quinn’s arms and legs into the cuffs on each end of the cross.

“As usual, use your safeword if you reach your limit.”

“Yes, Mistress.”

Crack.

Quinn tensed and then relaxed.

Crack, crack.

Tense, relax.

Crack, crack.

There was something subtly different in the way Mistress Nadia flogged her. Yet, she trusted Iona, and by extension, trusted Nadia. With each lash of the flog against her skin, Quinn tensed and relaxed.

Crack, crack, crack... The flogging went on and on for an indeterminate amount of time. Quinn lost track of how many lashes came down. Every so often, Iona stopped and asked her if she was okay.

Quinn's mind floated away from her distraught thoughts. The heady mix of pain and pleasure from each heated lash made her mind and body become like musical notes melding seamlessly with the open air.

When Mistress Nadia finally unstrapped her bonds, Quinn nearly collapsed on the floor. Nadia was there to ease her down.

She was deep in subspace. Possibly deeper than she'd ever been. Or maybe not deeper, but something was different than with Jade. Her body buzzed, her mind floated somewhere above.

Somewhere in her distant thoughts, she knew she should be worried about something, but she didn't want to remember what it was.

Mistress Nadia took Quinn under the arm and helped her up. She moved her to the small couch across the room. She made Quinn lie on her stomach, and she applied alcohol and balm to Quinn's welts.

Suddenly and without warning, hot tears stung at Quinn's eyes, and she began to cry. Huge, uncontrollable, embarrassing sobs came from her.

Mistress Nadia made a '*shss*' noise and gathered Quinn into her arms. "Just cry, Quinn. Let it all out. I'm not going to judge you. You need to let it all out. Years and years under Avery's thumb of abuse has left you worn and tired. You need to release all of that right now."

Quinn could only distantly hear Mistress Nadia's words. She felt like her entire body was consumed with emotions so visceral, she thought they would swallow her whole. As if every nerve in her body felt anger, injustice, betrayal, stupidity, and anguish, to a degree she'd never thought possible.

Nadia held her and rocked her as she sobbed. It was like a tremendous raging storm engulfing and threatening to tear her apart, but as all storms do, eventually her tears subsided. It did pass, and when it did, she was calm and felt cleansed in a way she hadn't in years.

Mistress Nadia lifted Quinn's eyes to meet hers. "You don't need Avery to accomplish your goals. You never did. Her company, her approval, or promotions - you never needed any of it. Estelle knew that about you. I know that about you, Quinn."

Quinn realized that now. She felt it deep in her bones. She was much stronger and more resilient than she ever gave herself credit for. Nadia was right. She didn't need Avery.

"What have you learned this past week, Quinn?" Nadia asked again. This time with a more knowing edge in her tone.

"I can trust you. I should have trusted Estelle. I can rely on people whom I trust. Most of all, I need to trust myself."

Mistress Nadia leaned back and smiled. "Very good. Remember Quinn, a good Dom or Domme will always teach you to trust those who value your heart as if it were more valuable than all the world's stores of gold. Avery used and abused your trust. Made you think you needed her, but you didn't."

"I trusted Avery too much. She burned me. I thought that pushing people away temporarily, so I could chase a career goal, was going to make me happy. It was all smoke and mirrors. Everything I was doing was ass-backward," Quinn said regretfully.

"Hey, look at me, Quinn." Nadia was firm, but not without kindness.

Quinn looked up. It was hard to meet her gaze.

"You need to learn one more lesson. Forgiveness. Be gentle with yourself. Take a life lesson from BDSM. After you've been flogged to the breaking point, what does your Mistress

do? Leave you out in the cold to pick up the pieces? No, she applies a loving hand and gentle aftercare. You'd do well to remember that life is your Mistress and because you're a part of your own life, allow yourself some aftercare after you've taken a beating, okay?"

Quinn cracked a wane smile. "Yes, Mistress."

Chapter 21

If Quinn thought handing in her resignation letter to Avery had been nerve-wracking, this was far worse. She waited on pins and needles. Iona had arranged a meeting with Estelle so the three of them could talk. Iona wouldn't tell Quinn what she had said to get Estelle there. She merely assured her that they'd chatted, and Quinn didn't need to fret.

Quinn couldn't help but worry, though. She'd hurt Estelle, and she wanted to make things right. She didn't have a clue how she was going to do that. Following through with the last part of this plan felt like it wouldn't be enough.

Quinn and Iona sat in a bustling café, in the back corner, waiting for Estelle.

"Relax. It's going to be fine," Iona soothed.

"I hope so," Quinn said.

Estelle walked in the door, and Quinn's breath hitched. She looked gorgeous. She was wearing a tight pair of skinny jeans, a simple blue shirt, and low casual boots. Her hair was down and cascaded past her shoulders in an alluring sweep of curls. Quinn couldn't recall ever seeing Estelle in casual street clothes. She was as breathtaking as ever.

Quinn scanned Estelle's face hoping to get a jump on her mood, but it was devoid of emotion. Quinn wasn't sure if that was a good or bad thing. Not being able to read Estelle caused her anxiety to spike.

Estelle sat down and looked from Quinn to Iona, and back to Quinn again.

Quinn fidgeted with the handle on her coffee cup and blew out a breath. She tried to collect her thoughts. She had this entire speech planned, but her mind had gone completely blank.

The chair screeched on the floor as Iona stood up. Both Quinn and Estelle looked up at her expectantly.

“I’ve got an errand I need to run—”

“Wait, you’re leaving?” Quinn asked.

Estelle’s eyebrows merely furrowed suspiciously.

“It’s all good, Quinn. You’re ready to do this.” Iona touched her shoulder reassuringly, she grabbed her shoulder bag and left before Quinn could object.

Quinn turned to Estelle and struggled to keep her face neutral. Overwhelming panic surged through her like she’d been shocked with a taser gun. Again, she tried to get a feel out Estelle’s emotions, but she couldn’t read her.

Quinn cleared her throat and downcast her eyes into her coffee cup. “Estelle, I don’t know what to say. I’m sorry. I should have listened to you.”

Estelle’s perfectly manicured eyebrows arched with a ‘go-on’ gesture.

“Has Iona filled you in on what’s been going on with me? Or even told you what I’ve learned?”

“A little, but I think you should tell me yourself. I’m not going to make this easy on you, Quinn, if that’s what you’re hoping for,” Estelle said pragmatically.

Quinn held her gaze for a moment. She felt a rush of embarrassment and shame wash over her. “I know you were playing a game of double entendre with me. At first, I was angry when I realized what you’d done, but then I had some time to think. I had a lot of pride I needed to swallow. When I finally came to my senses, I realized what you had actually done for me was exactly what I needed. I miss you. I loved our sessions. I loved our lunch dates. I loved how you

gave me advice and counsel about work and personal matters. I was working so hard for happiness, and it was right there in my lap the whole time.”

Estelle smirked slightly. She then studied Quinn thoughtfully. “And you think a mere apology is going to make everything all better? It’s awfully convenient for you to apologize after you’ve gotten everything you wanted at Avery’s.”

“I know it would seem like that, but I quit. Iona’s been fostering me as her sub. She’s instructed me to start my own agency. I went to the bank to get a loan, but they wanted Avery as a reference. Avery isn’t going to write it, and I’m not going to ask. So, I have to start this from the ground up with what little savings I have. I’m going out on a limb, and I’m liquidating most of my assets to get started. It won’t be as big as I had hoped. I’ll have to put in a lot of sweat equity in the first year, but it’s not anything I haven’t already done at Avery’s.”

Quinn looked into Estelle’s eyes. She was studying her with an unnerving gaze. “Is that all?”

Quinn took a deep breath and blew it out in a rush. “No, I wanted to ask you if you’d like to be my partner in this business? I can’t pay you much because I wasn’t able to secure the loan, but…” Quinn’s voice trailed off. She’d felt so confident before, and now, under the scrutiny of Estelle’s eyes, she couldn’t seem to form her words right.

“Is that all?” Estelle remained firm and authoritative.

Quinn hesitated, but when she looked up, there was a hint of a gleam in Estelle’s eyes. It was just enough to bolster Quinn’s courage. Quinn leaned across the table and whispered, “Will you allow me to be your sub again, Mistress? I want to be yours. As it pleases you, I hope?”

Estelle’s face broke into a sly smile. “I think it would please your Mistress very much. It should behoove you to know that I perhaps made my own blunders. Perhaps had I trained you

better, the choice would have been easier for you to do the right thing when Avery placed the precarious moral dilemma before you. I ignorantly assumed you knew I was Jade and didn't want to say anything until the promotion went through. The fault is mine as well. Perhaps, I was too afraid it wouldn't have made a difference, and it would have broken my heart more profusely than the situation already was."

Quinn dared to reach across the table and gently take Estelle's hand into her own. "I don't blame you, Estelle, or Jade. I was stubborn, hard-headed. I am ashamed to say I wouldn't have walked even if you had laid it all out right then. I think a part of me knew, but I looked the other way. I was so fixated on that damn promotion, I was like a bulldog sinking its teeth into a rotten piece of meat. I'm so sorry. You - should have been enough for me to let it go, but I think I had to hit rock bottom before I could look up and see the true light in my life."

Estelle's face softened, and the two stared at each other for a charged moment. "I missed you – so much," she said.

"I missed you more than words can say. You always were the one with words, though." Quinn laughed.

"Let's get out of here and go back to my place." Estelle's face was full of mischief as they both stood to leave the cafe.

"Did you move out of the townhouse?"

"I never lived there, Quinn. It was all part of the ruse. As my boss, you had access to my employee information. In the beginning, it was imperative I kept my identity concealed in case things didn't work out."

"You rented a townhouse just for our sessions?"

Estelle smiled. She took Quinn's arm, and they walked down the street to their cars.

The heat of Estelle's body next to hers felt like coming home again. The warmth settled over her like a cozy quilt.

"I didn't think it was possible for me to feel like a bigger idiot," Quinn mused.

"Don't beat yourself up. I'm still learning how to be a Domme. Just like with anything, you should never stop learning how to be a better version of yourself. I did approach Iona and ask about you two weeks ago. I realized my own mistakes before she even called me. She told me I needed to wait. These past few weeks have been torturous. Which mind you, in and of itself, is terrible for a sadist. I have no masochistic tendencies at all."

Quinn laughed. She leaned in and whispered into Estelle's ear, "I'm glad you're a sadist, Mistress. All the better for your completely masochistic sub."

"Is that so?" Estelle purred.

"It is."

When they reached Estelle's car, she said, "I'm surprised you never looked up my address."

"I didn't have a reason to until you left. After I found out you were Jade, I assumed the townhouse was where you lived. It didn't occur to me that it might not be. In all honesty, Estelle, I had fleeting hopes, wishing you and Jade were the same person, but the other half of why I didn't see it, was because I didn't think I could get that lucky."

Estelle nodded thoughtfully. "Iona said you've recently learned to embrace how amazing you truly are. I always believed in you..."

Quinn turned to her as she said this, and the love her in her eyes was so overwhelming, Quinn thought she might cry. "I'm sorry I didn't see myself the way you did."

Estelle leaned in and kissed Quinn ever so softly on the lips. Estelle pulled back and took her phone out of her purse. She punched out a quick text. Quinn's phone pinged.

"There's my address. Meet me there."

"Yes, Mistress."

Chapter 22

Quinn was writhing with impatience. She wanted to pull Estelle into her, lose control, rip her clothes off, and shower her with affection. However, she knew it would be folly to be so presumptuous with her Mistress. Instead, she waited at the threshold of Estelle's bedroom door for instruction.

Estelle was in her full Domme persona.

“You may enter, Ms. Quinn. Remove all your clothes except for your panties. Then kneel on the carpet over there.”

Quinn obeyed and waited as Estelle went into the bathroom to change. When she came out, she was wearing very little. She had on a black lacy bra, thong, and heels. Her stiletto heels made her already long legs, sensuously longer. Quinn's groin flushed with an aching heat seeing her attire, or rather lack of.

Quinn glanced at her Mistress, then bowed her head quickly, remembering her sub training. She wanted badly to raise her chin and gawk for a while longer, but she knew better. She kept her head tucked down, only catching glimpses of her Mistress when Jade afforded her a sidelong view.

“So, Mistress Nadia supplied you a bit more training, I see?”

Quinn couldn't tell if it was a question or statement, but she could hear the approval in Jade's tone.

Quinn replied, “Yes, Mistress.”

“Stand,” Jade commanded.

Quinn stood.

“To the cross, my pet. You’ve been naughty, and I think you’ve earned yourself a bit of discipline.”

“Yes, Mistress.”

Quinn placed her arms above her head.

She waited...

Nothing happened.

She continued to wait, resisting the urge to turn around and look. Quinn strained to hear what Jade was doing.

After a moment, Quinn felt Jade’s warm bare breasts pressed against Quinn’s back. Quinn gasped from the surge of heat that rushed through her, as Mistress Jade slowly placed each of her wrists into the cuffs above her head. Jade ran her fingernails down the soft part of Quinn’s arms. She shuddered.

Jade fastened each ankle into the lower cuffs, then ran her nails up the inner part of Quinn’s thigh’s stopping just before her softness, which ached with fire and longing.

A new sensation caused Quinn to gasp. Cold metal pressed against her hip. She turned her head just in time to witness what Jade was doing. The Mistress slipped a pair of scissors into the side of Quinn’s panties. In one clipping movement, she cut the seam of her underwear.

Somehow the savageness of it, only amped up Quinn’s arousal.

Jade slipped the blade under the other side of her panties and in one adept movement, snipped the other seam. They fell to the floor, leaving Quinn completely exposed.

Jade’s breath whispered on the back of her neck. “This is for both your punishment and pleasure, Quinn. Your punishment is that I will delay your pleasure for as long as I see fit, and your reward is that you will get to take your pleasure when I am ready. Do you understand?”

Quinn's body rippled with a quiver of sweet frustration.

We have barely begun. Gods, how I missed this. How I missed Jade. Missed Estelle...

Hearing Jade, which was Estelle's voice devoid of the fake accent and disguise, stirred feelings deep in the center of Quinn's heart and core, slowly building up a current that was firing in every nerve.

Smack!

The smart sting of the crop blossomed on Quinn's butt cheek. She winced and melted all at once.

"Are you forgetting your manners?" Jade taunted.

"No, Mistress. Sorry, I meant to say yes—" Quinn stumbled over her words then quickly added, "As it pleases you, Mistress."

Smack! Smack! Smack!

Jade swatted Quinn's ass with three smart smacks.

Quinn moaned, heat and wetness pooled between her inner thighs.

"I'm going to use a tool I've never used before. As always, you will use your safeword if you reach a threshold. Yes?"

"Yes, Mistress."

Quinn waited as she listened to the soft noises of Jade moving around behind her.

Jade sidled up next to her and placed her left hand on Quinn's upper back. Quinn readied herself for the strike. She turned her head to look into Jade's eyes, which were now Estelle's eyes, no more artificial color from the contacts, no more mask. Estelle's smile reached her eyes. There was warmth and kindness, and something else. Quinn's heart ignited with emotion as their eyes searched each other's for a beat.

“Are you ready, my pet?” Jade soothed.

“Yes, Mistress.”

Jade steadied herself and brought the instrument across Quinn’s backside as it struck both cheeks at once.

“Oh, god,” Quinn melted.

“Count, Ms. Quinn,” Jade commanded.

“One,” Quinn moaned.

Thwack!

“Two.”

Thwack!

“Three.”

There was a pause and then, *thwack, thwack, thwack!*

“Four... five... six.” Quinn panted with growing arousal.

Jade stopped and clawed her fingernails down Quinn’s back.

“Ahhh,” Quinn moaned. “Permission to ask a question, Mistress?”

“Permission denied,” Mistress Jade purred. She moved to the side of the cross and with her soft fingertips, lifted Quinn’s eyes to meet hers. “You are mine tonight. I own you completely, Quinn. Do you submit?”

Hearing the words, ‘You are mine,’ caused Quinn’s heart to flutter with pride and contentment. “Yes, Mistress. As it pleases you. Do what you will with me.”

“Very good, my pet.”

Thwack! Thwack! Thwack! The instrument came across her butt harder and faster.

Quinn was panting hard, only just breathing out, “Seven... Eight... Nine.”

She'd barely said nine when a great stinging lash fell across both cheeks.

THWACK!

Quinn bit her lip. She tensed and relaxed into the throbbing pain that spread across her backside. It blossomed out into a soft flowing electrical current coursing through every nerve ending in her body. The folds of her labia were throbbing and hard, wanting to be touched, but she knew Jade would not. Not until Quinn was begging for release.

Jade's fingertips stroked soothingly at Quinn's back, and buttock. Quinn shivered from the contrast of sensations - hard and soft, pain, and pleasure. She couldn't deny it anymore. She loved this, and her emotions for Estelle heightened the experience in ways she didn't think could be amplified.

"That was a leather hide, my pet. Used to herd cattle. Funny how it makes for a wonderful toy in a Scene. Wouldn't you agree?"

"Yes... Mistress," Quinn huffed out the words.

Jade ran her fingernails down Quinn's back one more time and then moved away from the cross. Quinn's breath hitched as she waited with growing anticipation of what Jade would dole out next.

Jade came back to the cross and pressed her naked breasts against Quinn's back again. Quinn let out an agonized mewl from her ever-mounting, tortured pleasure.

The Mistress was breathing softly at the back of Quinn's neck, something she'd never done before. Then Jade kissed it. Quinn felt herself unravel entirely. She moaned and shuddered. Her heart pumping furiously at the soft emotion laced in that single feathery kiss.

Jade moved down Quinn's spine supplanting whisper-thin kisses, further and further, until she reached the small of Quinn's back. Jade then bestowed one soft kiss on one butt cheek and then the other.

Jade stood and moved into Quinn's side. She took Quinn chin and turned her so they could stare into each other's eyes. Estelle pressed her lips against Quinn's ever so softly. Quinn closed her eyes. She felt the kiss resonate and bloom in every cell within her. Something new ignited between them, and Quinn strained to be closer to her Mistress and lover Estelle.

Jade pressed herself further into Quinn's side. Their parting lips and exploring tongues began to take on a loving yet urgent sensuality of its own. Jade's kiss, Estelle's kiss, was both rough and soft, everything Quinn expected and yet not. In the cadence of her lovers' proprietary language, a language written only for Quinn, she could feel the words of love flow through Estelle and flood through her entire being.

Quinn's head was light and swimming with the heady mix of contrasting sensations, tenderness, and urgency. She'd never felt so lost in another person from a simple kiss.

The fury of their kiss had reached a crescendo. Quinn was struggling against the restraints. She longed to touch her lover, her Mistress, to hold her in her arms.

Jade pulled back teasingly from the kiss. "Not yet, my pet. Not yet," she whispered softly, then smiled a wicked grin.

Quinn let out an agonized groan of frustration.

Jade moved away from Quinn's side and positioned herself where Quinn couldn't see her.

Quinn could tell Jade was behind her, close and purposefully doing nothing. Extending Quinn's torment by making her wait.

Quinn shuddered as Jade touched her between her thighs. She ran a finger between Quinn's slick folds, and Quinn bit her lip to suppress the outcry. Too late, the scream had already escaped.

Back and forth, Jade expertly taunted and coaxed the folds of Quinn's very soul, softly opening and running the pads of her fingers back and forth.

Quinn couldn't resist, she arched her hips back into Jade's touch – Estelle's touch. She was making love to Estelle now. Estelle pressed her own body into Quinn's. She used her other hand to move up to her breasts.

Estelle ran her hand softly across the top of Quinn's mounds and moved her fingers in circular motions, coming closer and closer to the center of Quinn's taut and begging nipples. She tweaked the soft pink nub between her thumb and finger and toyed with Quinn, applying the slightest touch of pressure. Quinn feared she would come right then.

Quinn's thighs began to shudder in response. She wasn't going to last. She could feel herself moving towards climax as Estelle softly and sadistically tortured her to the edge, moving her fingers in and out. Quinn choked out a cry as she felt herself losing control.

Then all at once, Estelle stopped. She unclasped Quinn's bonds. Quinn had to use every ounce of restraint not to turn around and reach out. She wanted to embrace Estelle but knew her place now. She belonged entirely to her Mistress.

“To the bed,” Estelle commanded softly. “On your back.”

As Quinn made her way to the bed, she marveled at how the persona of Jade was still present, but the softness of Estelle ran at the forefront. She would address her Mistress as such, always a gesture of respect, but tonight, she had to think of the woman before her as Estelle. She needed her Mistress – Estelle.

“To the edge of the bed, my pet. Lie on your back.”

Estelle had a wicked gleam in her eye as she slowly, agonizingly separated Quinn’s legs. Estelle knelt at the foot of the bed, and in one swift motion, pressed herself between Quinn’s thighs. She lapped at Quinn’s swollen folds. She taunted and teased with the skill of a woman who understood precisely what Quinn needed.

Quinn cried out.

Estelle withdrew and swatted her bottom hard.

“Did I give you permission to be that loud?” Estelle smirked.

“Sorry, Mistress. I wasn’t expecting…” Her voice trailed off.

Estelle was between her lips again, licking and nipping. Quinn bit her lip, suppressing her desire to scream.

“Permission to come?” Quinn panted.

“Permission denied.” Estelle stood up and swiftly walked across the room.

Quinn groaned and bit down on her lip too hard, nearly drawing blood. She lifted her head slightly and watched Estelle move to a storage cabinet. She pulled something out.

Quinn knew what it was and ached for Estelle to hurry. She watched Jade slip into the harness. Jade prowled like a feline on the hunt back to the bed. One at a time, she pulled Quinn’s knees up and forced her to scoot further up the bed.

Estelle positioned herself between Quinn’s thighs and barely brushed Quinn’s folds with the strap-on dildo. It was torture acquiescing to Estelle’s sadism, prolonging her anguish through delayed gratification.

Quinn needed to control herself, or she was going to come. She focused on Estelle's beautiful breasts, hoping the focal point would curb the intensity of her ever-mounting excitement. It didn't.

Quinn found herself wanting to reach up and touch them, play with them, invoke noises of pleasure from Estelle's beautiful lips. She clenched her fists in ultimate frustration.

Estelle noticed this and laughed, a small tinkling sound of amusement.

"Are you sure you and Nadia didn't train this far?" Estelle teased.

"No, Mistress. I belong to you. I please you, and you alone."

Estelle's lips pulled in a wry and cocky smile of satisfaction. She ran her fingers down Quinn's thighs. Holding the dildo in her hand, she moved it up and down, further into the creases of Quinn's folds. She parted them ever so slightly and delicately brushed at the sweet opening.

Quinn's entire body shivered, and she instinctively moved into the dildo then hastily withdrew, not wanting to upset her Mistress.

"I see how much restraint you are using, my love. You make your Mistress ooze with pleasure. In more ways than one."

Quinn's eyes widened at the pet name 'love.' She looked into Estelle's eyes, the implication of the word, was not lost on either of them

Before Quinn could stop herself, the words came pouring out, "I fell in love with you, Estelle. I love you. I don't know why I was so stupid."

Estelle leaned over, pressing the dildo's shaft further into Quinn's open and waiting blossom.

Quinn's breath hitched.

Estelle whispered in Quinn's ear. "Shhh, my love. I know you do. I love you too, Quinn."
She gently moved the shaft of the dildo all the way into Quinn.

Quinn arched her back and cried out.

Estelle moved with great skill, slowly drawing out the shaft and plummeting it deep inside Quinn. With each movement of her hips, Estelle's eyes never wavered from Quinn's. With each beautiful, stimulating sensation, the words - I love you - were etched in each thrust of Estelle's hips into Quinn's.

"Permission..." Quinn gasped.

"Yes, love, come for me. Look at me, Quinn. I want to see your beautiful face when you take your pleasure."

Quinn's eyes found Estelle's. She could feel Estelle's beating heart, her love for her, written in her eyes. As Quinn climaxed, she folded herself entirely into Estelle. With each wave of pleasure, the love of Estelle reciprocated itself back around her, and she savored it like a wine of the most exceptional vintage.

When her trembling body settled, Estelle cuddled up to Quinn and pulled her face into a kiss.

"When you are recovered, you will please your Mistress as I ask."

"As it pleases you, my Mistress. Nothing would make me happier. I will do anything for you, my love."

They made love long into the night, embracing, kissing, talking, nipping, climaxing, and holding each other as if the sun would never rise again.

Yet the sun did arise, and just as the rays were peeking into the window, Quinn was surprised to feel her adrenaline still surging. Estelle was like a smooth-running river which flowed seamlessly into her riverbed, giving her life, coaxing her on.

They were both quiet for a moment, catching their breath.

Quinn's mind wandered to the things she had wanted to say in the cafe but had been too nervous. There was one thing, in particular, she needed to ask. She hesitated.

Estelle ran a finger over Quinn's stomach, causing a tingling shudder to ripple through her. Estelle's distraction made it hard for her to focus, but she wanted to get this out before the moment passed, and they were furiously tangled around each other again.

"Estelle," Quinn bit her lip, "you never answered my question at the cafe yesterday." She sucked in her breath. "Would you come to work with me? Be my partner at my new marketing firm? It's going to be rough at first. I won't be able to pay you much until I can get things—"

Estelle put a finger to Quinn's lips. "I thought you'd never ask."

Quinn smiled sheepishly. "It sorta got away from us at the cafe, and then..." She chuckled. "I wanted to, but I was so nervous."

"I know." Estelle smiled thoughtfully.

"So, you will?" Quinn relaxed into Estelle's soft touch and gentle hand, as Estelle lovingly ran her fingers through Quinn's hair.

"I've got one stipulation."

Quinn turned her head to look at Estelle. Her gut was tightening as she waited for Estelle's response.

“You can run as the lead at work, but I’m the boss in the bedroom.”

Quinn let out a breath of relief. “As it pleases you, Mistress. As it pleases you.”

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