

The Ambrose Heights Vampires Book 1

Flesh Fantasy

Tonight, Rain Calisto searches for her man, and Rhys Matthews comes into focus. He is well-built and sinisterly sexy. In the same Denver nightclub, Armand Anastasio searches for his woman— Rain.

But the men are more than gorgeous.

They are vampires, and they are unmated.

A chance encounter lands Rhys and Rain together. Their attraction remains undeniably powerful and they fall prey to lust. With each passionate tryst, Rhys senses a connection that goes beyond the flesh. Unbeknownst to Rhys, Rain is a diabetic. Her insulin alters her biological makeup, disguising a revelation he isn't quite prepared for.

Rain is Rhys's fated mate.

As they struggle with this knowledge, another bombshell is dropped. Rain's insulin-laced tissue creates a rare vampiric blood that can fetch a hefty profit, and Armand has always known this.

Is his attraction to Rain genuine, or is he just out for her blood?

This is the diary of Rain and Rhys. Recorded here is their transformation from a flesh fantasy to eternal love.

Genre: Contemporary, Paranormal, Vampires/Werewolves

Length: 104,103 words

FLESH FANTASY

The Ambrose Heights Vampires *Book 1*

Maya DeLeina

EROTIC ROMANCE



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maya DeLeina was born and raised on the beautiful and romantic beaches of Oahu, Hawaii. Relocating to Colorado, Maya's crystal blue oceans and powdery white sands were traded for enchanting forests, mystic mountains and golden plains of promise.

Living just on the outskirts of Manitou Springs, the town's history of spiritual healing, eclectic flare, fabled underground tunnels and rumored lore of wizardry and witchcraft rekindled Maya's love for the paranormal, metaphysical and most of all, *vampires*.

One bite and she was hooked.

With a hint of incense lofting in the air and the majestic Pikes Peak sitting in picture perfect view from her windows, Maya can be found relaxing in the recesses of her comfy couch, sinking her teeth into crafting and weaving seducing and erotic tales of vampires that may or may not roam her beloved town.

One read and you'll be hooked.



DEDICATION

To all that I shared the early stages of The Ambrose Heights Vampires series with—thank you from the bottom of my heart. It was *you* that made me feel confident in my ability to captivate and entertain readers with my stories. Your curiosity, encouragement, absorption and sincerity strengthened my passion for writing sexy vampires and fueled my love for crafting their spicy romantic adventures.

Geralyn, Brion and Dawn—thank you for being my valued critics. Your suggestions and insights were priceless and shine through in the final creation.

B.J.—having a peek into your unconventional and fascinating life was not only an honor, but a pure jolt of inspiration. Tanya—your eye in capturing unseen gems is amazing—you are an enlightening soul. Suzanne—our laughter is infectious, your strength is captivating and your talent is immeasurable. I am so grateful that the road I traveled led me to cross paths with all of you.

To my editor—thank you for helping me see the forest from the trees.

Mom—thank you for allowing my creativity to blossom early. As creepy as it was, “Shirley” was one of my most memorable characters to date and I don’t even think I gave her fangs!

And to M.J.—your support, zeal and humor kept me sane and are the reasons for the smile on my face. You are my pillar, my best friend—my comfy pair of shoes.

FLESH FANTASY

The Ambrose Heights Vampires
Book 1

MAYA DELEINA
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Prologue

“Will you stop fidgeting?” Dimples stood, one hand resting on a jutted hip, the other waving in a flashy expression.

“I’ve been sitting in this chair for three hours straight. Cut me a break!” she barked in response.

“Hmmm...someone has their monthly visitor.”

“Look, it ain’t PMS! I just can’t stand it anymore. I need to move around. I’m getting restless.”

She adjusted in the chair, crossing her slender leg over a bare knee.

Dimples leaned in close to her face, returning to his craft. Sponge in tow, he gently traced her jawline in a dabbing motion, blending the makeup on the latex where it met her flesh. “Honey, perfection takes time. Why don’t you put the iPod back on and let me finish my masterpiece here.”

She looked up sternly, her words spoken with a sting. “Oh, I think I have heard enough of your techno crap. Don’t you have some rock on here?”

“Please!” Dimples hissed.

With her head cocked to the side, she asked, “Why are you so...?”

“So?”

“You know...”

“Flamboyant?” Dimples snapped his fingers.

“Well, yeah! I mean, we all know you are gay. You don’t have to be that obvious. And this name thing, I hate it! We all knew you as Le—”

“Ah!” Dimples stopped her dead in her tracks, “You are not to say that name again. That person no longer exists. I am Dimples now.”

“But it’s so damn stupid! I hate calling you Dimples. Dimples is what you name a pet or a stuffed animal for a kid. I mean, talk about an identity crisis.”

“Identity crisis? Me? What about you, missy? I have no clue who you are day-to-day. In fact, I don’t think you even know who you really are!” Dimples said as he tested the latex. “I bet you can’t really remember what your real nose even looks like.”

“Bitch, bite your tongue! Go sashay your pretty ass over there and get me my eyes,” she said in a harsh tenor.

Dimples carried himself in a lively gait to the cabinet that housed various shades of colored contacts and eyeglasses. A look of confusion spread across his face.

“Which color again? I can’t remember what color you use on this one. Green or Blue?”

“Neither. It’s gray, remember?”

“Oh, yes.”

Dimples reached for the box of colored contacts that sat on the shelf and tore open the foil to expose the gray-and-brown speckled contact that sat in the liquid.

“You want me to put them in, or are you going to try this time?”

“I’ll do it,” she huffed.

She placed the contact on her pointer finger and examined it. No lint, no debris. Dimples held the mirror steady in front of her. With her ring finger, she pulled down on the soft tissue below her eye. With her index finger on the other hand, she lifted her top eyelid. Her finger shook as she approached her eye, slowly blurring in its detail. As soon as she felt the smoothness of her eye, she glided the contact carefully

along its curvature. She blinked back the momentary discomfort and blurriness until the contact settled in its rightful place.

“Good girl. Now one more to go.”

After inserting the remaining contact successfully, Dimples put down the handheld mirror and headed toward a corner of the room where a row of glass heads sat on the window sill, each displaying an array of wigs.

“Red. Long and sleek, correct?”

“Yes.”

Dimples affixed the headpiece to her and combed through the hair, framing it perfectly around her face. The headpiece held no visible signs that it was in fact a wig. It was made from human hair, silky and shiny, flowing naturally, its length ending just at her breasts. He stood back, admiring the finished product.

“My, my. I do beautiful work.”

“Exactly why I keep you around.”

“Hey!” Dimples said as he twirled her around to face the mirror.

Suddenly, their banter came to a screeching halt.

She was face-to-face with the woman that would transform her life. She leaned in close to the mirror, quiet and engaged. Her face was divine—a touch of perfection adorning every trace and shine in the facade.

Dimples did more than craft a masterpiece. He mastered creation itself, birthing an existence from nothingness.

Dimples chewed on his fingers in the long, dead silence of the moment. He watched her move slowly in front of the mirror, as if testing her movements with the image that reflected back. It made him think of his dog’s first experience with his own reflection.

Hopefully, this wouldn’t end with her pouncing on the mirror.

She raised a hand to caress her face then adjusted, running her fingers through her hair. Sheer admiration dressed her emotions.

“Dimples, this is simply amazing! Go into my purse and hand me the camera.”

A sense of relief washed over Dimples. She was happy. The world would continue to turn.

He walked to her purse and rummaged through. He found the camera case nudged up against a paperback book that was curiously sheathed in a black velvet cover. He made a quick glance in her direction. She was still locked in awe and fascination.

He lingered in the purse a bit longer, fingering the edge of the page where the bookmark sat. Lifting slightly at the corner, he had the urge to satisfy his greedy eyes. Without much effort, he glanced at the content. Distinct words jumped right off the page and his eyes widened in surprise. He removed his finger immediately, careful not to disturb her placement.

A low chuckle escaped him as he walked back in her direction.

She remained fixated on the beauty in the mirror as she spoke, “She is here, Dimples, alive and ready. We need to record everything. We need to get it correct each and every time or else this won’t work.” She paused, her reflection glaring at him from the mirror. “We have to be careful. You couldn’t even remember the eye color on this one.”

“So rather than give me their personality trait, why don’t you start giving me the name you are assigning to each of your women so I have something easy to memorize?”

She sighed and shook her head. “Just take the picture.”

Dimples fired off a shot.

“There should be a USB cord in the pocket there.” She pointed to the outer zipper of the camera case. “Upload this to the computer. We are going to start cataloging everything.”

Dimples inserted the cord into his laptop that sat on the adjoining vanity and uploaded the picture into a folder he created that lovingly read “The Bitch Project.”

“All right, what is the personality on this one?” he asked as he created a new file in the folder.

“Seductress.”

He shook his head, “Seductress. Hair—red and sleek. Eyes—grey. Nose—pointy and narrow...” Dimples paused and looked up at her, “Mouth—can’t keep quiet.”

His fingers made quick in filing away the necessary details for the new identity.

“Don’t forget to transfer my notes on ‘Menacing’ and ‘Innocence’ from yesterday in there, too.”

“Seductress, Menacing, and Innocence—sounds like you are resurrecting a girl band or something. Any more we are going to attempt?”

“It all depends on Rain.”

“And what exactly did this woman do to you, anyway?” Dimples asked.

“It’s not what she did...it’s what she is *going* to do.”

She leaned in close to the mirror, taking in a deeper examination of Dimples’ masterpiece.

“Damn. This one is sure to catch Armand’s attention.”

Chapter One: Girls and Their Games

Rain

I was thirty-five years old. Correct that. Thirty-seven years old.

I seemed to forget just how old I really was then, my mind firing thirty-five as a knee-jerk reaction anytime I was asked. It was nothing intentional, like trying to shield my real age or anything. I just truly lost track of dates. Who knows, maybe a milestone birthday would've changed that.

I guess I'll never know.

But one thing is for sure, there was once a point where I was preoccupied with age. Actually, preoccupied downplays it. I was downright obsessed about it.

My views, they *transformed* you could say, when I emerged from my official midlife crisis. I don't really know how I got through it. In the end, I guess I just finally accepted what I could not control—reciting a mantra to the effect that Mother Nature would always win. It left me a stronger woman. I was resolute, spirited and confident. And I think it all showed quite nicely on the surface.

As corny as it may sound, I was living the best years of my life. I never felt more beautiful, healthy, or alive. And the body? Well, that is where that acceptance junk came into play again. At some point I had to accept that all the workouts and diets in the world couldn't give me that ultra-flat stomach, skinny thighs, and petite butt if the right genes weren't there. Don't get me wrong, I worked out like a fiend. But I did it to feel good, not to emulate the size two models out there, or from what I have read a few times, size zero.

Seriously, that's not even a number. It's a non-size.

No, I was a picture of reality, a real woman. I embraced my 38D chest, my rounded ass, and curvy hips that could be nicely packed away in a size eight, although a little more comfortably in a ten. Hell, one look at me and a man would know I could handle some rough sack time. Clearly I was not someone that would snap like a twig with any physical force.

And while on the subject of men, preferences regarding the opposite sex, the *'must-haves,'* the *'not in a million years,'* the *'I can learn to live with it,'* and the *'bonus'* categories were definitely re-evaluated and prioritized like a flow chart in my mind. My tastes definitely evolved with each passing year. An addition here and a re-classification there, my edits were relentless. And after the midlife crisis, my list grew more uncompromising. The task of finding my ideal man was quite challenging.

So, with all this said of my finicky concept of an ideal man and my life-altering acceptance breakthrough, why was I outside Zen Grooves, agreeing to play a very immature game?

Simple.

I was tired of my only form of intimacy being of the battery-operated nature.

Ideal or not, I still craved the touch, feel, and smell of a man. And, courtesy of commitment-phobic males that flocked to this club, the game allowed me to get what I needed, no strings attached. Not that you would see me admit this to Kimi, Rachel, or Erika. No, my cover was purely as a research tool. See, I was trying my hand at writing erotic short stories and my girls were very supportive, informing me that drawing inspiration from real-life experiences and fine-tuning the encounters with my wild imagination could produce some intensely naughty scenes.

Convenient cover, I would say.

Kimi, Rachel, Erika, and I were a tight-knit circle of friends. We were all professionals. Kimi was an attorney, Rachel a CPA, Erika a

marketing executive, and me, a financial crimes investigator. And we were all single. Denver's version of *Sex and the City*, as some had branded us.

I met Kimi first, in a coffee shop in the Lodo district. I still don't know what sparked me to start a conversation with her, but I remember looking at her sitting in that purple wingback chair, reading, and thought she looked like an interesting person to talk to. Turns out we both were born and raised in small towns that had recently picked up and moved to Colorado. Kimi was from Alaska, and I was from Hawaii. I think she would agree that if it wasn't for that chance meeting of ours, the adjustment to life in this town would've been much tougher.

A few months later, we met Rachel and Erika at a speed dating event and have been attached at the hip ever since. The four of us *romantic hopefuls*, as Erika coined, continued to attend events geared for singles. We went to mixers, joined networking clubs and even took cruises. Event after event, the selection of men fell short of expectation. The only time we all had a glimmer of hope was on a Mediterranean cruise. Talk about a strong dose of reality when the realization surfaced that the ideal man possibly lived on a different continent.

Yet we were accepting, knowing that the path that would lead to our future husbands would be a long one. And brutally patient as we were, it was the thought of living one more day in abstinence that frayed on our nerves and gnawed at our self-regulated discipline. I mean, we tried to be good and principled, but I think it was one too many cozy sessions with the spin cycle that made us crack under the pressure.

So it was then that the girls agreed that physical needs were a necessity, and I remained impartial, citing my thirst for raw material as the primary objective instead.

Deep discussion over dark chocolate and red wine ensued, and we all came to the decision of making it all a game, where the right guess

would determine the reward. Somehow, the idea of letting luck and rules of a game guide your actions was less sluttish than asking a random guy if he wanted to bump uglies for the night. All right, so we rationalized, kind of like arguing the need for an expensive purse or pair of shoes. We went back and forth, arguing points in the game. By the end of the night, our game was hatched.

The Junk Trunk.

The next morning, we each received a bound handbook, a product of a print shop's overnight service. Complete with a laminated cover, section tabs and a signatory page, the handbook read like an ironclad contract. It addressed every rule and regulation from the honor code, selection process, approach, and most importantly, the oath to unequivocal secrecy.

Leave it to the attorney with a touch of OCD in the group to have created this.

The Junk Trunk, in a nutshell, no pun intended, was this. Sticks were pulled before entering the club. The shortest stick determined the winner. The lucky lady took her time to observe her surroundings. Then three potential contestants were selected. Once the final choice was made, the winner stated her guess on the type of underwear her unsuspecting contestant was sporting before she headed off to start the game.

As simple as it may sound, our handbook called for details. And playing this game for months had not only proven that underwear options for men had really evolved, but that men were actually open to experimenting with some of the trendy and risqué options out there. I mean, it wasn't just the basic knit and cotton boxers, boxer briefs or tighty-whities to consider. There was an amalgam of styles that we had to account for in the details. Silk, sheer, mesh, personalized, metallic, and spandex were always the obvious considerations. Then there were more of the off-the-wall alternatives to keep in mind. Thongs, chaps, jockstraps, novelty, and bodysuits—yes, bodysuits, were unfortunate realities of the game. Add to this list, as we then

discovered on the Internet, anatomical pouches. Now that was something I wouldn't have minded seeing in the flesh, no matter how weird it sounded.

It was also prudent to bear in mind the contradictory option to all of this. The one option that said he was free-spirited, broke the rules, didn't follow mainstream, a real man's man...or a man that just couldn't do laundry on a regular basis.

That option was commando.

As far as the approach angle was concerned, this was all left to interpretation. But there was one steadfast rule. The question of what he was wearing on his trunk to contain his *junk* had to be addressed within the first ten minutes. If you guessed right, you were allowed to reward yourself with all the erotic adventures you were willing to indulge in with your contestant for the night, guilt-free and without judging eyes. If you guessed wrong, it was a simple kiss on the cheek and a good-bye, no matter how much further you may have wanted to take it with the guy.

And yours truly drew the shortest stick...again.

"Let the games begin," I said as we entered Zen Grooves.

Chapter Two: An Unexpected Contestant

Rain

“So, Rain...got a target yet?” Kimi inquired as she leaned in toward me, never taking her eyes off of the bodies gyrating to the eclectic loop of Zen-inspired techno beats.

“Still analyzing,” I practically yelled over the music in response.

I scanned the faces barely illuminated by the dim glow of the white paper lanterns that hung in varying lengths from the ceiling. Slated light panels along the walls and green-and-amber colored spotlights shining through heavy stalks of bamboo provided additional lighting, but they were ambient at best.

The venue was a fail-safe. Next to Liquid, this was one of the hottest clubs in Denver. As I suspected, it was packed as usual for a Saturday night. And I was banking on volume, hopeful that the sheer number of prospects that were drawn here would afford me the opportunity to be somewhat selective of what I was looking for.

Not Mr. Right, of course...just Mr. Right Now.

I looked past all the men that didn't immediately fall into my '*must have*' category of preference. A man *thirtyish* years old with dark hair, fair to medium-toned skin, muscular build, over six feet tall and eyes to get lost in was what I craved. Of course, if I guessed right on his Junk Trunk, then this was all about having a meaningless encounter, as far as I wanted to take it. So all of the must-haves with any substance were axed from the list well before I even stepped foot into Zen Grooves. If luck was truly on my side, my unwitting game partner would also have an accent, European or Mediterranean to be

exact. And let's not forget chest hair. I always found a light draping of dark curls to allow my fingertips to get lost in a heavenly experience.

But reality was quickly setting in as I realized that I was swiftly dismissing my options one after another, some even with a cringe. Tucking most of the men in the "*not in a million years*" category, the task of making slight adjustments to my list in order to find something acceptable for the evening was inevitable.

"What the hell, Rain, it's been a tough week. Let's play a little," I said as I took a hearty sip of my blood-orange martini. It was an indulgence at twelve dollars a pop and to a diet that was riddled with carb-counting. But it was my weakness, and weaknesses were meant to be indulged when I was in game-mode.

Blood-orange martini—anyone that knew me could tell you that this was my signature drink. In fact, I calculated all of the ingredients that went into creating this sinful potion long ago, memorizing the overall carb count like my ATM PIN. 37.5 grams. And like clockwork, I administered just over one unit of insulin on the train, at the second-to-last stop of our final destination, to be exact. Yes, I had the timing down to a science so I could walk straight up to the bar and order my drink upon arrival.

"Oh no, Rain's already editing the list as we speak," Rachel uttered in response to my cryptic comment.

As usual, she speculated correctly.

I sighed, but remained quiet. As the vodka seared a fiery path down my throat, I made a mental note and adjusted the only item of preference I was willing to compromise on...for now. And while I am not exactly certain on what age difference would constitute the stereotype, the term *cougar* ran rampant through my mind as I cast a wider net, adding twenty-five-ish-year-old males to the list.

I made a silent plea, hoping I would find him soon. I was leery of the delectable elixir that sat in front of me. It was fruity, flirty and dangerous. And it would eventually, without a doubt, inhibit my judgment and allow me to adjust my standards further.

As I inspected the pool of male specimens without a hint of any possibilities coming to light, I suddenly blurted out in frustration, “What I would like to know is how I managed to pull the shortest stick again?”

“You know that the sticks aren’t rigged, if that is what you are suggesting. The handbook addresses this on page 167.” Kimi was a little defensive, a tinge of roughness in her voice.

“I know. I’m just saying—”

“Really, I don’t know what you are complaining about. While you are having fun tonight, I am stopping off at the convenience store and visiting aisle two on my way home,” Kimi said sharply as she interrupted me in mid-sentence.

I shook my head knowingly. My drawer full of fresh batteries was a testament to my close ties to aisle two of our twenty-four-hour drugstore.

“I would’ve gladly taken a trip to aisle two over what happened last weekend. I mean, I guessed right and had to end up doing *something* with the guy so I wouldn’t break any of the rules of the handbook. How was I supposed to know?” I said with disgust.

“C’mon...he was cute,” Kimi responded as a large grin broke through her sharpness.

Rachel and Erika both looked at each other and laughed.

“Cute, yes. Manicured, no.” I looked off in the distance as I recalled that evening and shuddered. “Nose hair. How was I to know from that far away? I swear that it was going to stab me in the eye as I leaned in for the kiss! And if he didn’t bother to take care of something as visible as that, who knows what other *manscaping* necessities he didn’t attend to.”

“Hmm, good point,” Kimi said as a look of scrutiny plastered across her face.

Oh boy, I’ve seen that expression before.

Kimi reached into her purse, fumbled about and retrieved her cell phone. As her thumbs went straight to work, she spoke decisively.

“All right, let’s adjust the game a little. Once a prospect is considered, one of us has to do a walk-by assessment and report back...sort of a recon mission.”

We all nodded our heads in agreement.

“And I am texting myself a notation of the revision as we speak. And...done,” Kimi responded.

A revised edition of the handbook was sure to be found on all of our doorsteps tomorrow morning.

If I made it home by morning, that is.

I adjusted in my seat and refocused on my task. I was vigilant, seeking, preying...and *praying*. My eyes observed every nook and cranny of the club, slowly and methodically.

Then it happened.

A high-pitched alarm sounded in my head. *And we have missile lock.*

I caught the attention of a green-eyed hottie that leaned up against the wall, just on the outskirts of the dance floor. I looked him over. Once, then twice. I cocked my head, flashed a naughty grin of an expression, and then looked away. It was an ‘*I see you. I like what I see*’ look. And from his slight nod that made his eyes dip seductively, it appeared he understood my look as well.

“One o’clock,” I said, unhurried and monotone.

I didn’t have to compete with noise to be heard. The music was a bit toned down now, more of an ethereal composition. The remaining people on the dance floor looked like they were performing a modern dance routine, jellylike and free-form in their movements.

One by one, Kimi, Rachel, and Erika ever-so-nonchalantly, each in her own way, took a peek at contestant one.

“Not bad, Rain. Not bad at all,” Kimi said.

Rachel stood up, immediately taking the reins as our recon agent and drifted toward the stranger. She sashayed past him, giving him a slight nod as she parked herself at a table of friends we noticed earlier in the evening. Rachel exchanged greetings and pleasantries, and

quickly made her way back to our table, but not before catching another up-close glimpse of the delicious green-eyed specimen. He remained still, knowing he was being evaluated on my behalf.

Good boy.

“No nose hair, good teeth, and smells terrific,” Rachel reported as she tried to climb back onto the tall bar stool as gracefully as possible. “He’s also drinking some homegrown brew. Nice choice, Rain.” Rachel nodded her head with a smile as she added to the report.

“Ok. Two more to go,” Kimi pointed out.

I went back to my task, my eyes seductive in their hunt, in pursuit of another laudable candidate. As immediately as I went back into the seeker mode, I discovered him.

Perched up against the bar in a one-elbow lean, his gaze locked with mine. His eyes shimmered with intensity, a sexy darkness washing over him the longer I assessed him. Those eyes. They were so damn sexy. I swore that he must’ve used black liner to define his dark brown eyes, making them shine with a very sinister and deviant look.

Hmm...eye makeup.

Well, it wouldn’t be the first time I had sex with a man that wore makeup...although it didn’t immediately appear that he was a member of some ‘80s tribute band like my previous bedmate.

But what did it matter, anyway?

I shook from my drifting thoughts and allowed myself to just soak all of him in.

As compelling as they were, I was able to break my connection with his eyes, slowly shifting my sights lower. I noticed the slight tracing of a tattoo that snaked its way up from his shoulders, cresting along the column of his neck, then dipping sharply, disappearing into the depths of his button-down shirt.

He wore a black-on-black ensemble. Black trousers, black shirt, black sports coat and black belt. The coat was open, his shirt neatly tucked. The first three buttons of the shirt were left undone, allowing

me a glimpse of the beginnings of a well-defined chest. Like a partially opened present, the garment teased and tantalized me, making me want to see more, to touch and claim what lay under wraps. The dim lighting masked it at first, but as I concentrated on his tattoo, I saw the light draping of dark hair that deliciously landscaped his chest.

Lucky me.

I darted back to his eyes, intending on giving him the same acknowledging look as the green-eyed magnificence to my right. But this...well, this look came out more like an "*I can't wait to see you above me...naked*" look. Even as I gathered myself, finding all of my strength to look away, I could feel his eyes on me, not letting go.

He was drawing me in the longer I was locked in his trance.

"Um, nine o'clock," I said as I cleared my throat and coughed out my words.

The guy was already having an effect on me.

"Hello! Talk about an intense stare. I don't think I've seen him blink!" Erika said as she quickly evaluated contestant two.

Kimi did a side-eyed glance toward the bar, "Well, I was planning to do the recon this time, but he is a little creepy with the stare, don't you think?"

"Creepy? I think it's sexy. There is something very naughty in that stare," Rachel sang with confidence as she bit on her lower lip, "And, if you don't pick him, Rain, I'll gladly take him off of your hands. You know that a man with a goatee and tattoo is like kryptonite for me."

I threw out a playful hiss at Rachel and flashed my nonexistent fangs. "Back off, hussy. It is I that has the shortest stick to start the night, and it is I that will end with the longest stick."

While the girls burst into laughter, Erika choked on her swig of beer in reaction to my comment. She was sent into a full-blown nasal intrusion.

It was at this point that Kimi must have looked the guy head-on this time, because she literally jumped in her chair. Her eyes widened in her stare as she immediately turned into our table, looking as if she had something to say. Instinctively, we all turned to each other and leaned our heads inward toward the middle of the table, almost touching one another.

“Rain, I think...I think I saw *it* move. And if I am correct, holy crap! He is huge!” Kimi said with a dazed expression.

“Well then, by all means, put the man on the list, no recon needed,” I said as I cleared my throat once again.

My pulse raced and I felt a little light-headed. Go figure, there was a bit of truth in what I had just said with the longest stick comment.

Lucky, lucky me.

“You sure, Rain?” Erika asked with a slight tinge of concern, her drink no longer creeping through her nasal passages.

“Positive.” I flashed a devilish grin to accompany my one-eyebrow lift. I remained staring intently at my drink, daydreaming of all the ways I would let this man take me.

Libido was sure on duty tonight.

“Well then, one more to go. Rain, remember that you still have to pick a third according to the handbook,” Kimi said blankly, estimating that I had already made my decision with contestant two.

I lifted my eyes from my drink and couldn't help locking into his trance once again. My glance turned into a full-blown ogle, which he was all too aware of. And wouldn't you know it, my eyes betrayed me, going against my willpower, and centered immediately down at his crotch region.

A noticeable bulge pressed against his black trousers. And when I say bulge, I'm not talking a little bump that would cause a slight protrusion of a darted pleat in the pants. No, I'm referring to an outright mess of material, a definite strain on the zipper. My mouth

dropped in an instinctive reaction, something to which he was all too aware of...again.

There were no subtle gestures that I left for this guy. No, short of knocking him over the head and dragging him back to my cave, every expression on my face told him what I wanted.

Chillingly, I took notice that my ears registered almost no sound. Earlier, I watched the people on the dance floor moving to the Eastern-flavored electronic beats, but all I could hear now was a low hum, almost natal in quality. It was so loud, so insistent on my senses. As we both were locked in our own little world among the crowded club, I was demanding on every fiber of my being, conjuring up the will to look away. The hum then turned into a vibration and I realized that it all was radiating from my own body. My body was singing in eager anticipation to go over to this man and have him sate every naughty desire I ever had.

Hell, libido wasn't only on duty, it was working overtime.

But I had a task to do. And so, I did it. I managed to pry my eyes off of him and do one last scan. This time, my eyes were lazy in their pursuit, drunken with desire. In my mind, candidate two was the one. Really, who could top Mr. Sexy-at-the-Bar?

"Oh. My. God. Ladies...*he* is here tonight!" Rachel let out a gasp.

"Who?" Erika and Kimi asked, following Rachel's worshipping eyes that were locked on the back of the club.

Instinctively, I followed suit, but not before catching the eyes of my bar man.

This time, his lustful stare melted into a look of confusion and dejection, his head ready to turn toward the back of the club as well. It was almost as if he knew I was about to set my sights on another man.

"Armand. He is sitting in the booth there!" Rachel exclaimed as she adjusted in her seat. "Rain, you have to pick him!"

Armand Anastasio.

To speak his name was absolutely captivating in itself. The sexy roll of the tongue with his first and the sharp hiss at the end of his last

could make the most bashful woman feel adventurous, daring and aroused. Yes, his name was meant to be articulated with a lustful breath, not just simply spoken.

Armand was definitely the talk among the women in Denver. He was handsome, wealthy, and mysterious. But thanks to countless articles and features on his local business ventures, there were snippets of this jet-setting entrepreneur's lifestyle revealed so that even the occasional Web search could find out the basics on the man.

He lived overseas, Tuscany, if I recalled correctly, but owned residences in all of the US cities where he established business interests.

And did he love his women.

I mean, the women were on him like white on rice. You never saw him with the same woman twice, and it wouldn't be unheard of to see him sporting two, three, or even four women as his companions for the evening. He was suave and had a way of commanding attention. Even seated, he looked like a king, radiating an aristocratic presence. Yet at the same time he had a rebellious spark. A striking eyebrow piercing, earrings and dark stubble deliciously finished his look.

Then there were his eyes.

I couldn't really make out his exact eye color. They seemed to shift, as if iridescent in quality. Within shadows, his eyes shimmered with a gray brilliancy. Yet when captured by the light, they were coffee brown. And still, somewhere between shadow and light, I could swear that I saw a touch of honey shine through his enchanting gaze. Whatever his eye color was, there was no mistaking it—Armand Anastasio was simply gorgeous.

“Earth to Rain.” Kimi snapped her fingers in front of my face. “What's it going to be? The GEBD, Mr. I.S., or *Armand*?”

“GEBD, Mr. I.S.? What the hell?” Rachel stammered in frustration.

Rachel could never make out Kimi's obscure acronyms that she would spout at a drop of a dime. What infuriated Rachel even more is

that Erika and I never skipped a beat. We always knew what her acronyms stood for.

“GEBD—Green-eyed beer drinker,” replied Erika.

“And Mr. Intense Stare,” I added. “That was an easy one too, Rachel!”

“Whatever.” Rachel sulked. “Well, Rain?”

We had discussed the possibility, at length in fact, that we would probably run into Armand one of these nights. Rumor had it that Zen Grooves and Liquid were among his favorite clubs in the city. And since we were all too chickenshit, for a lack of a better description, to just strike up a conversation with the man, we thought that having him as an oblivious pawn in our game would give us the upper hand. It was a boost of confidence, if you will, to walk right up to him. But still, there was the fear of getting outright rejected since he was always well-stocked with female companions. Or worse still, asked to join his harem, as his eyes suggested in their trance with mine.

No matter how gorgeous the guy was, I just wasn’t ready for a ménage a trois, quatre, or cinq.

Call me greedy, but I had a definite problem in sharing my toys with others.

Incredibly, I found it effortless to tear my gaze from Armand. Even though he was sexier in person, and even though he made no attempt to mask his obvious interest in me, I couldn’t deny what my body wanted.

My body still hummed for my sexy bar man.

I gave Armand a polite smile and then set my sights back on the bar, primed to get in a little more eye-fucking in before I worked up the approach angle with the guy.

My eyes rolled seductively through the space leading to the bar. I held my breath in anticipation. Then, I landed on it. Empty space. My heart stopped instantly. My stomach dropped right out from under me. My body’s hum stopped, the silence piercing right through me.

He was gone. My sexy bar man was gone.

I panicked, scanning the club feverishly for him. My heart raced now, desperation and anguish leading the rhythmic pattern. My hands shook. “Where did he go?”

“Second to the last booth,” Kimi said as she pointed in front of her with her chin.

“No! Not Armand! The sexy bar guy...you know, Mr. I.S.? He’s gone!” I exclaimed as I dismounted from my bar chair and started to move about in a small radius. With each angle shift, my eyes searched vehemently for him.

“Oh, him? I don’t know. He was just there a second ago,” Rachel said as she remained fixed on Armand. “Hey, I wonder if Armand likes girls with tattoos?” Rachel drifted in thought as she rubbed her upper arm. A collection of red, yellow, and blue stars decorated her tanned skin that was toned perfectly for a woman.

“Maybe he went to the restroom, Rain,” Erika said.

“The restroom is clear on the other side of the club and from where he was standing, he would’ve had to walk in front of us to get there or anywhere else in this club. We were here the entire time and I never saw him.” Kimi evaluated the situation as she too searched the club.

Returning to the conversation at hand, Rachel interjected in a harsh tone, “Hold on a minute. You are worried about finding this guy when Armand is right over there...”—Rachel paused and pointed in his direction without much subtlety—“and showing obvious interest in you?”

“I know. Look, I’m confused here. Where did he just disappear to?”

“Who cares! Armand Anastasio is over there, Rain!” Rachel barked.

I shook my head as my chest began to ache. I looked everywhere. Kimi was right. We would’ve seen him pass our table to make his way to any other part of the club.

He was gone.

In fact, stools lined the bar where he once stood. There was absolutely no trace of him. He vanished into thin air, as if he was never really there.

“Rain, c’mon. This is insane!” Kimi pleaded. “You are not going to pass up the chance with Armand right? Who knows when he will be in Denver again?”

I didn’t respond as I gave in to defeat. I allowed my gaze to settle on Armand Anastasio.

Yes, he was absolutely delicious. And he was smiling at me as he dismissed the women that sat in his half-moon private booth.

“All right,” I said with a hint of dejection.

“The Junk Trunk is...”

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