

Chapter 2:

Sitting across from you in the elegant restaurant, Jordan can't keep his eyes off of you. He can barely keep his hands off of you, either. He has never seen anyone look more beautiful, more radiant. The flush of your cheeks seems to hint at the burning he feels in his stomach- knowing your color isn't from embarrassment, but the lingering afterglow from your time together before you left the apartment.

But it's not just the pink in your cheeks or the glow in your eyes...He's falling for you harder everyday and here lately he has become acutely aware of that fact. Especially today. Each moment seems to sear into his brain. Even before you got ready this evening, from the time he came home and saw you sleeping on the sofa, to when he watched you slightly stumble up the stairs, swaying your hips in front of him; your lids heavy with sleep, becoming heavy with passion as he stepped quietly into the bathroom.

Ah, yes, the bathroom. He wasn't intentionally sneaking back into watch you- even now he is still unsure of whether he was indeed that quiet or if you were just so caught up that you didn't notice his entrance. Either way, it is a scene that is burned into his memory. He inwardly chuckles at his dramatic choice of words, but it is true.

Stepping into the doorway, steam swirling up around him, a fine mist settling over his now naked body, his gaze instantly locked on you, your hand massaging your breasts, his eyes followed the trail it made down your body... when he caught sight of where your other hand was massaging and realized what you were doing, his focus became tunneled and all that existed in his mind was you, himself, what was occurring- and what was about to. He stood there a long moment, unaware of his thoughts as he watched you. You looked so erotic, head thrown back, droplets of water trailing down your soft, milky skin, the passion evident in your expression. He watched your movements, exactly what you did to please yourself, keeping his feet planted on the ground. It was one of the most difficult physical urges he'd ever had to fight, yet it was somehow strangely easy because he was so captivated by your beauty. He took in every expression on your face, all your inhibitions gone. He could feel the heat from your body across the room and suddenly found himself close enough to touch you. When had he moved? He didn't know and didn't care. He only knew he was about to come, even with no penetration. It was a heady, exciting feeling- it took a powerful woman to be able to stimulate a man to that degree.

A woman he never before knew existed.

A woman every man dreamed of and fantasized about.

You.

And you are *his*.

You look up from your dessert at this moment and smile sheepishly, lowering your eyes the instant they connect with Jordan's. His heart flutters when your eyes meet and he wonders if you can hear it. He smiles coolly, however, and places his hand over yours on the table.

"Are you ready to leave?" he asks.

"I don't think I could eat another bite," you say apologetically. Although only a small portion of your tiramisu remains, you feel guilty, wasteful. You've learned that manners are different here, with the "upper class"- it is considered in "bad taste" to ask for a carry-out box. Jordan smiles warmly. He loves this about you, too, your consciousness, regard to others.

His right hand is still over yours and he picks it up with his left. As he raises it up to meet his lips, he slides his right hand around your wrist, squeezing gently for a moment before continuing up your arm, stopping at and cupping your elbow. He feels your pulse quicken and sees gooseflesh spring up on your arm. Your eyes close and in that second, his lips touch your hand. His eyes never leave you. His lips linger on your hand the length of time for him to take a steadying breath. He raises his mouth slightly, his lips brushing against the back of your fingers as he says quietly, "Let's go."

You open your eyes with a contented sigh. Jordan stands and pulls out your chair for you. You pick up your purse from the seat next to you- a gold satin clutch with rhinestone snap closure that matches the sparkle of the 1/2 carat diamond studs in your ears. *And the sparkle in her eyes,* Jordan thinks to himself. *Does that mean she's happy?* he wonders. He would like to think he makes you happy. Lord knows he's happy with you- more than he's ever been.

You stand and Jordan leans over to you. "I'll take care of this," he nods towards the table. "You go to coat check, and I'll meet you outside." He kisses you on the cheek.

"Okay," you sigh dreamily and make your way out of the dining room and into the lobby. You feel like giggling as you step up to the long counter. Who has a coat check anymore? You feel as if you are in a 1940's movie. *I look like it, too.* you think, as you resist the urge to fiddle with your dress. You don't necessarily feel uncomfortable, just not used to being *so* dressed up. Instead you reach into your clutch and hand the ticket to the young man behind the counter. His

eyes travel up your body before finally meeting yours. He fumbles with the ticket for a moment before grasping it. His cheeks flush bright pink and he mumbles an apology as he hastily retreats to find your wrap. He returns before you can fully process his reaction, and the next thing you know you are reaching for your wrap- a red silk to match your dress, with golden shimmering thread brocade in flowered detail. You glance up to see the young man staring intently at your face. Your eyes meet for only a split second, but you are surprised at the intensity you see there. This time, your fingers fumble, and the fabric slips through your grasp and onto the floor.

The moment is broken and you turn slightly to pick up the garment from the floor.

"Allow me," you hear a male voice beside you. You complete your turn and see a tall blond man in a blue suit, which shimmers slightly under the lights as he moves. The lights are dim, but brighter here than in the seating area, and they cause the illusion of changing his suit colors, from a deep navy to a steel blue, and back again. *Wow, his taste in fashion rivals Jordan's!* He flashes a smile at you before bending gracefully to retrieve your wrap from the carpeted entry.

"Thank you," you say when he stands. You return his smile and reach out to take the fabric, but he instead holds it open for you. You turn away from him, allowing him to place the silk across your shoulders. He somehow makes it feel like a very intimate gesture, multiplied by the feel of his fingertips grazing along the sides of your neck as he takes a step back. Chills course through you at this stranger's touch. You manage not to shiver, however, and simply grasp the edges of the silk. It could have been accidental, but you know it wasn't. You are not sure what to make of it as you turn a little more slowly than necessary, not wanting to feel awkward. To your surprise, however, the gentleman is now reaching across the counter for his coat- and a woman's fur.

"Excuse me, but this isn't mine," he says, handing his coat back. You remember the young man behind the counter did not bring you Jordan's coat, either. "And I need my..." you begin to speak up, then pause. Your what? 'Boyfriend's coat?' You suddenly realize you can't say that honestly. You live together, but you two have never had an actual talk about your "relationship." You never thought you needed to. Now, you're not so sure. 'Partner?' 'Lover?' 'Gentleman friend?' You almost laugh aloud at the ridiculousness of the last one. What exactly are you and Jordan to each other? You have been silent several seconds, much longer than intended. You hastily complete your sentence "...other coat." Mr. Blue Suit is looking at you out of the corner of his eye and you can see the corner of his mouth turn up into a slight grin. You don't know whether to be embarrassed or infuriated. You intend to say something, but a female voice stops you in your tracks.

How dare he! Right in front of me! The woman is seething inside as she watches your interaction

with *her* man. *I'll be damned if this happens to me again!* She quickly makes her way from the hallway leading to and from the powder room, and strides with purpose over to where you are standing. She examines you head to toe before she reaches you. *Look at her, all prim & proper. Right. I'll bet she's a slut in disguise- just like...her. This one's taller, prettier... but that just makes it easier for her to put out for what she wants.*

"What's the hold-up?" The woman's voice is dripping with saccharine sweetness and more than a hint of sarcasm. She looks pointedly at you the moment he turns to reach for her coat. When he turns back, she plants a smile across her face and gazes up at him.

You are taken aback, not only because of her apparent disdain for you, but also because she looks vaguely familiar. Dark hair, just past her shoulders, thick with a slight wave; short and stout with a heavy walk. *What is the opposite of graceful?* you wonder. Her gait isn't a waddle, but pretty damn close.

She's jealous! you realize suddenly. You stifle a giggle.

He smiles, not nearly as sweetly, but there is still little doubt his is not genuine. "There seems to be a slight mix-up in the back." He nods in the direction of the coat check closet as he holds her coat open for her. She hesitates a short moment before slipping her arms inside the nearly floor-length garment. It is a dark brown fur, obviously mink and obviously expensive. *And over-the-top*, you think. Too extravagant even for here. Judging by the rest of her appearance, when compared to the gentlemanly stranger, it is apparent she chose her own wardrobe. She looks extremely out-of-place; trying too hard and not classy at all. *My taste isn't quite as up to par as Jordan's, but at least I do have taste.*

As she turns again to face the object of her affection, her sharp gaze rests on you for a split second. His right hand dips into the pocket of his trousers and he pulls out a second ticket. He extends his arm to her, "Why don't you give this to the valet? I should be outside by the time he brings the car around."

You can't help yourself; you watch, fascinated as he elegantly dismisses her. There is no other way to describe it. Once again, she hesitates, not hiding her contempt for you now. You almost feel sorry for her. Almost- if she wasn't so obviously paranoid and bitchy. At best you feel slightly smug. She turns and stomps away in a huff. This exchange has oddly made you more comfortable and once she is out of sight, you relax your stance, leaning your hip up against the counter. You are facing Mr. Blue Suit, who has also relaxed and is now leaning both fists on the counter. He turns his head to face you, and you both break out into a grin. He pushes up off the

counter with his fists and turns to face you. He looks as if he is about to speak and you cock your head to the side questioningly.

At this moment, Jordan strides down the hallway from the restroom and covers the distance between you in a few short steps. He stands next to you, closer than necessary and touches your elbow. "All set?" he asks you. You see him giving Mr. Blue Suit the once over out of the corner of his eye and you fight the urge to roll yours. *Men*, you think. Still, your heart soars, but is suddenly pulled back down by the question that has already begun to nag at you- What is your relationship with Jordan?

"Almost," you say as the young man returns with two men's coats. Thankfully, they are the correct ones, however he hands Jordan's to Mr. Blue Suit and vice versa. The men take the coats and turn to one another to exchange. They smile at one another; Jordan rather stiffly.

"You look familiar," Mr. Blue Suit says. "Where would I know you from?" His tone is friendly, yet Jordan looks slightly annoyed.

"I'm a singer," he responds curtly. "Jordan Knight."

Recognition spreads across the man's face. "Of course," he reaches out to shake Jordan's hand. "My sister is a huge fan. I'm Jeff."

Jordan's shoulders relax a little. "Hi, Jeff; nice to meet you."

"It's nice to meet you, too." They shake hands firmly and briefly, then step back. "You have a beautiful...lady there with you."

Jordan puts his arm around you. Jeff glances approvingly at you, a glint in his eyes when they meet yours. You narrow your eyes slightly and he winks at you. It wasn't your imagination- he did purposefully pause before saying "lady", proving your previous hesitation wasn't lost on him.

Jordan tightens his arm around you and his shoulders stiffen once more. *What is this guy trying to say?* he wonders. *Lady?- as opposed to what?* He looks you up and down out of the corner of his eye. *She looks breath-takenly beautiful. Classy, tasteful, every bit the lady.* His thoughts are going a mile a minute now. *Unless...it's not the way she looks. Something she said? Did? No, that's absurd!* Jordan is immediately angry with himself for letting he thought cross his mind. *No way. She's not like that. She is a lady.*

"Thank you," he manages tightly.

Jeff finally looks as if he gets the hint to leave the two of you alone. "Well, I must be going. We are on our way to the theatre. West Side Story- one of my favorites. Don't want to miss the opening curtain." He smiles warmly at you, looking as though he is disappointed to leave.

"Oh, that's one of my favorites, too!" you exclaim. You are unaware that you are now gazing longingly at nothing in particular.

Jordan can't stand this little...'bonding' thing you are having with Jeff. Not to be outdone, he turns to you and reaches into his inner coat pocket. "Which is why I bought us tickets for tonight's show." A gleam momentarily returns in his eye as he sees the excitement in yours. He can actually see the giggles begin to rise up from your chest.

"So, this is your first time, then?" Jeff interjects. "Seeing the musical, I mean." he winks. The giggle that began to rise in you now releases from your throat. Jordan watches as you break out into a grin & his blood begins to boil as he sees is it not for him, but for Jeff. "Yes," you answer. "Yours?"

"No, no- this is the third time for me. You see, I'm having a difficult time deciding if I'm a Jet or a Shark." You both laugh, pissing Jordan off even more. "I'm sorry, I didn't catch your name..." Jeff continues.

You are still smiling. "Jolanda." you say as Jeff reaches for your hand. It looks to Jordan as though Jeff is not about to shake your hand, but to kiss it. His entire body stiffens. Jeff hesitates only for a split second, then changes his course. The look on Jeff's face is a sure-fire give away to Jordan that his observation was correct; you didn't notice. "A pleasure to meet you." Jeff says, shaking your hand. *He is damn lucky that is all he did*, Jordan thinks as he openly glares at Jeff now. Jordan clears his throat.

"Well, as you stated yourself, Jeff, we better be on our way if we want to catch the opening act." He struggles to keep the coldness out of his voice, but seeing you look at him that way, he knows he is not succeeding.

"So I did." Jeff turns as if to leave before suddenly spinning around on his heel. "I have a great idea! Jordan, why don't you and Jolanda ride with us? There is plenty of room, and we would have ample time to become better acquainted."

Jeff seems to be enjoying this a little too much. *What is this guy's deal, anyway??* "I don't think so." Jordan says, not bothering to hide the coldness anymore.

Jeff looks entirely too smug. A hint of coolness touches his voice also. "Very well, then. Maybe another time. It was nice to meet you, Jordan." He turns to you. "And Jolanda," he takes your hand, "the pleasure was all mine." He brings your hand up to his lips & kisses it without breaking eye contact with you. You barely move; it appears to Jordan as if you are holding your breath. With that, Jeff turns and strides through the double glass doors.

You are standing stiffly at Jordan's side. Your thoughts can barely keep up with the not-so-subtle suggestions this man was making in front of your....Dammit! Your what? Your mind is reeling. And what is Jordan's issue? It would be obvious if it wasn't for the fact that he was acting this way before Jeff was. Is it jealousy? The evening had been blissful up til now. While a part of you understands Jordan's feelings, you wish his reactions would have been a little more smooth. Why let himself get worked up over someone that he just met & will most likely never see again? If Jordan had kept his cool, you doubt Jeff would have reacted as such- it just seemed to egg him on. And don't forget that stupid little mouse of a woman- ugh! What is the matter with everyone tonight??

You let out the breath you didn't realize you were holding. You thought Jordan was going to come unglued when Jeff kissed your hand. Yeah, you know he was putting on the charm, but Jordan was being a straight ass. You're not really sure how to react, here. You close your eyes briefly to gather your thoughts & take a steadying breath. You open your eyes to see Jordan staring at you. His expression is unreadable.

"Are you ready?" you keep your voice as neutral as possible, turning from Jordan & taking a step toward the doors leading outside. Jordan doesn't say a word, simply follows your lead, and in a couple of strides is falling in step beside you.

You make your way outside into the late evening. The temperature has fallen along with the darkness and you clutch your wrap around you tighter as Jordan hands his ticket to the valet. You both stand in silence for a moment. "Do you want to talk about it?" you ask finally, your voice still neutral.

"Talk about what?" Jordan asks, looking straight ahead. He is attempting to act as if nothing is bothering him. You can now tell his reaction to Jeff stemmed from something other than that moment, but you have no idea what. You wish you knew what he is thinking.

"About what happened back there."

The valet pulls up with Jordan's black Cadillac Escalade Hybrid. "Nothing to talk about." He looks at you then, his eyes dark with annoyance and anger. He pulls open the passenger door, not breaking eye contact with you. He motions with his arm in an "after you" manner. You step up on the lit running board & slide easily onto the heated seat. You stare out the windshield, trying to decipher his mood and stay calm. You don't want to feed into it or get sucked into it- you would like to make the most of the rest of your evening. You can hardly believe how quickly and at what magnitude it has turned...unpleasant. You smooth your dress & lay your clutch in your lap. You turn slightly, reaching for your seatbelt & see Jordan tipping the valet at the rear of the vehicle. You bring the seatbelt across you, still looking outside.

Jordan deftly slides into the driver's seat, fastens his safety belt & puts the car into drive. Without a glance at you or anyone else, he speeds off into the direction of the theatre.