

Necessary  
ROUGHNESS

G.G. ROYALE

Loose Id

# *Necessary Roughness*

*G. G. Royale*



[www.loose-id.com](http://www.loose-id.com)

## **Necessary Roughness**

**Copyright © March 2011 by G. G. Royale**

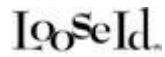
All rights reserved. This copy is intended for the original purchaser of this e-book ONLY. No part of this e-book may be reproduced, scanned, or distributed in any printed or electronic form without prior written permission from Loose Id LLC. Please do not participate in or encourage piracy of copyrighted materials in violation of the author's rights. Purchase only authorized editions.

eISBN 978-1-60737-977-5

Editor: Jana J. Hanson

Cover Artist: Anne Cain

Printed in the United States of America



Published by

Loose Id LLC

PO Box 425960

San Francisco CA 94142-5960

[www.loose-id.com](http://www.loose-id.com)

This e-book is a work of fiction. While reference might be made to actual historical events or existing locations, the names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

## **Warning**

This e-book contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language and may be considered offensive to some readers. Loose Id LLC's e-books are for sale to adults ONLY, as defined by the laws of the country in which you made your purchase. Please store your files wisely, where they cannot be accessed by under-aged readers.

\* \* \*

**DISCLAIMER:** Please do not try any new sexual practice, especially those that might be found in our BDSM/fetish titles without the guidance of an experienced practitioner. Neither Loose Id LLC nor its authors will be responsible for any loss, harm, injury or death resulting from use of the information contained in any of its titles.



<https://www.loose-id.com>

## Chapter One

“What do you think, So Fly?” Tucker asked and glanced back at Levi.

Levi shook his head, then stepped off the bus. He looked down at his agent. Sportswriters were right to make fun of them. Tucker looked just like Levi if someone had stuffed Levi in a dryer: blond buzz cut, bright blue eyes, tan. Tucker, though, stood about five feet five and probably had only 130 pounds of meat on him. Levi had an extra foot and more than one hundred pounds more muscle than his agent.

A fine tight end, most people said.

And they didn’t just mean his ass.

Still, Tucker didn’t have a problem with the whole Mini-Me twitterings going around the sports world, and Levi appreciated that. He was a good agent, after all, and had worked his ass off since December to salvage Levi’s career. A career Levi had worked *really* hard to destroy.

Levi focused his attention on the field in front of him, the place where his summer football camp would meet for the next four weeks. Weeds, patches of dirt... It certainly didn’t compare to the turf he’d played on with his old team, the Illinois Idols. Hell, their groundskeeper took home the highest pay in the league. That man could have worked wonders with this yard.

But the poor inner-city kids Levi would teach football to this month wouldn’t know the difference. They’d be happy just to play the game.

He could learn something from them.

He remembered a time when he'd loved the game like these kids probably did. He'd used it for escape, for forgetting, but once he realized he possessed some talent for it, it grew instead into a way out. A tool. And he'd abused it.

Boy, had he abused it.

And everything else.

"This is the best training you could get this summer," Tucker said softly as they both stood there, taking in the scene. "Might give you a chance next season."

Levi sighed. A player without a team. It pained him more than he wanted to admit. He needed to play again, to prove to himself he could manage that aspect of his life and stay healthy. He wouldn't go back to Idols, though, that was for sure. But who would take him? Tucker must think he had some promise otherwise he wouldn't waste his time here. And he knew his fans still loved him, even if he had jeopardized the team's play-off hopes last season. He glanced down at Tucker. The man had faith in him, more than Levi could say for himself. He wouldn't let him down.

"I'll find a team," Levi said. "I have to."

"Don't worry," Tucker told him and then gave him a swat on the ass any coach would have been jealous of.

The other volunteers on the bus got off one by one and began unloading the football gear and banners advertising the event—underwritten by the cross-trainer company who used to endorse Levi. Now they endorsed his community service. Levi looked down at his watch. Not a Rolex. He had to give up all the decadent trappings of wealth as part of his recovery program and to pay off some of the debts he had accrued. Eight a.m. The kids would arrive at nine. Everything needed to be set up by then.

He scanned the field again, trying to see the promise in it. He wished he'd had a little more notice. He could have called in some favors and had the field reseeded, some bleachers brought in, maybe a new scoreboard. That would have gone a long way in repairing his reputation. But then he remembered one of the lessons Tucker

had tried to drive into him: not all problems can be solved by throwing money at them.

Levi nodded to himself. "Let's get to work, people."

Just as the first kid arrived, the volunteers put the final touches on the various skills stations. They'd laid out the food table and made the coffee. Levi stood near the reception area, sipping a cup, shaking hands with single moms—who probably all wanted to sleep with him—and allowing them to snap all the pictures they wanted.

Without letting Tucker see, he checked out a few of the MILFs. The old So Fly would have slipped them his hotel room number on the back of a business card, with a time carefully written out: nine o'clock for one, nine forty-five for the next. Maybe eleven for the one after that. He could usually tell when a woman would be into his unique tastes for playing, but if she wasn't, he still did her right before sending her off. And he always had an excuse: interview with Japanese media or a phone conference with his sneaker reps in China, or an interview with British media, depending on the time of day.

But now... He shook his head. Tucker had put the kibosh on the women. A year, he'd said. The six months he'd already lasted felt like torture. He hadn't gone this long without a woman since high school.

One particular mom caught his eye. Tall, heroin-skinny, long brown hair. Probably of some Hispanic extraction. He wondered what she really did to keep that figure. She smiled at him and pointed the little boy she had with her toward Levi. She leaned over to whisper something in the child's ear, and Levi got an enticing look at her cleavage.

He looked away and took a long drink of his coffee. Better to get his mind off sex.

"Let's warm up with a few laps around the field!" he announced, threw his coffee cup in a trash can, and without waiting for any of the kids to join him, started off at a jog away from the reception and food tables. It felt good to move, to feel the

spring of grass—even if it was a little brown—under his sneakers. He felt right like this.

He could hear the children falling in behind him, joyous shouts filling the air. They still loved to run, like him. To them, it didn't seem like a chore.

Levi smiled. Yeah, he'd definitely learn something from these kids.

He just hoped he'd remember the lesson in the future.

\* \* \*

Denise Claremont Hynes stared out the window of the private plane her father, Big Al Hynes, had leased for her—well, for the team really—and popped her gum. Outside, huge clouds coming from the gulf filled the sky. She could almost close her eyes and imagine she winged her way to vacation in Cancun rather than to work. She wondered how the jet looked from the ground, with the large BILOXI BLOODHOUNDS logo emblazoned on its side in red and blue. She'd never flown in a more ostentatious plane, but her father had said he wanted to set her up right.

She didn't refuse him. She wasn't stupid enough to do that. Plenty of her girlfriends—sisters from her Alpha Kappa Alpha days—had turned their backs on their daddies' money and lived perfectly adequate lives, but Denise had higher standards, bigger aspirations. If that meant using her father to get there, then so be it. Some of her girlfriends scoffed at her for that, but they also didn't run their own football team. Most drove luxury SUVs, had a couple of kids, and served on the women's auxiliaries of their husbands' clubs. They had perfectly adequate lives. Really. Just not anything that Denise wanted. She wanted to be the first African American woman to own a world championship football team.

From the cockpit, the pilot called back, "We're almost there."

The one flight attendant that came with the lease—a polished, perfect blonde bombshell—strapped into her seat and smiled big at Denise. Her simple golden nametag read *CHRISSIE*. She said, "Well, I think we should just hit that casino straight away, don't you, Shug?"



Denise wished she could do something that frivolous. Instead, she'd have to go straight to work.

She looked out the window in order to get her bearings. She could see the muddy Gulf of Mexico, lots of green bordering it, a narrow highway that ran parallel to the coast, a strip of buildings along that. Definitely not at all like Austin. She folded up the copy of *Black Enterprise* and stuffed it into her designer carry-on. Her father had even bought her one of those houses right on the water. She laughed at the idea. Only a couple miles from Beauvoir, Confederate President Jefferson Davis's home. *My, how the neighborhood has changed.* She wondered what type of eligible bachelor she'd discover among her neighbors.

She shook her head. She'd hated leaving Manuel right when they'd started getting to know each other, but he hadn't shown a lot of promise, really. He left her sort of...cold. And he worried too much about making her father happy. She hated that in a man. She wanted her man to worry only about her.

Her ears popped as the plane descended. She looked down at her bag again, full of dossiers, schedules, stats on players. Everything she needed to start her team.

*Her team.* The Biloxi Bloodhounds. She still couldn't believe her father had finally done it. After working for years in his organization—the Austin Guardians—she'd finally gained enough clout with him to get her own team. One far enough away that he wouldn't be sniffing around all the time. Just how she wanted it. He may have signed his name to all the paperwork, but he'd assigned her general manager, and in his absence, she made all the decisions. Even the ones she didn't really like.

She would make sure he stayed absent if it killed her. So what if it was only a new development league team anyway. It still meant professional football. It meant giving her the experience she would need to run the Guardians full time someday.

The plane touched down, and Denise took a deep breath. She didn't know why her nerves acted up. She could do this. She knew everything she needed to for this

to work, and her father had given her everything money could buy to make it succeed.

The success of the Biloxi Bloodhounds rested 100 percent on her. Perhaps therein lay the root of her unease.

The pilot motored the jet to a stop in front of a somewhat run-down hangar. The attendant opened the door, and Denise stepped out into the damp heat of a Mississippi summer.

“Hoo-wee,” Chrissie said behind her.

Denise had to agree. She’d spent weekends here and there in New Orleans, some—during the preseason—when it felt like this, but standing out in the full sun, surrounded by dense woods on all sides, felt somehow worse. More primal. More primordial even.

Sweat beaded across her nose, and her bag suddenly felt too heavy.

But then she saw Jeff Stiles tottering toward her.

*God, he looks old.* Her father trusted Coach Jeff Stiles impeccably. He’d coached her father in college, had come on in the early days of Austin’s formation, and now...now he’d coach the Bloodhounds. Denise didn’t know how the old man would keep up with their schedule, but if his steady, slow, pace coming toward her from the hanger was any indication, he was at least tenacious.

“Jeffrey,” Denise said as she closed the final distance between them and hugged the old man. He squeaked like an accordion in her embrace, and it made Denise laugh. She could feel the metal of his whistle pressing against her. He never seemed to be without it, and she’d known him all her life.

He pushed away. “Please, call me Coach. It’s hotter than the devil’s scrotum at a barbecue. Let’s get to the car. Air-conditioning.”

Denise didn’t know if calling him Coach was better or worse than using his first name, like she always had. “How are things?” she asked as she looked down at

the slightly shorter man. He'd played running back in his day, so he'd never stood very tall, just wide. Now, though, he seemed to have lost some inches all around.

"Got a lot to do. Don't just stand there staring like a bandy-eyed possum in a hurricane. Come on."

She didn't even know what that last phrase meant.

He turned and started walking away with the same determination he'd approached. Denise followed, hefting her bag over her shoulder. She didn't worry about her luggage. Someone would take care of it.

Someone always did.

"Welcome to Biloxi, Shug," the attendant said behind her. Denise waved but didn't turn. She didn't have the time.

\* \* \*

Denise stepped out of the team's limo that had picked her up from the airport and stared. She looked over to Coach. He crinkled his eyes up, making the deep lines of his face even more obvious.

"It needs work," Coach said, and Denise couldn't agree more. She half expected one of his down-home, misconstrued sayings, but he just left it at that.

The place looked as if a hurricane had just hit it, and she said so.

"No, it's been a few years," Coach told her. "School district couldn't afford to rebuild after the storm, so it's been sitting dead going on five years now. Al got it for a song."

Denise didn't doubt that at all. Her father'd jump at the chance to buy property cheap, no matter what. And if it looked bad to be buying property from an impoverished school district, then he'd make up for it later by mandating volunteer hours for his players in the schools. That's how he worked. Denise had learned everything from him.

"But the bones are good. Everything we need. Gym, showers, weight room, training field. All those classrooms for office space, merchandising. We can even

open a store on the grounds. And the cafeteria of course.” He nodded, and Denise knew he had the perfect picture in his head of what their practice facility would look like once the renovations had finished. She tried to imagine the side of the old junior high school gym painted up in the Bloodhounds’ logo, the grass field green, the goal posts upright again.

It could happen, but it would take a lot of work. She pulled out her smartphone and stared at the calendar.

They only had four weeks before the players would arrive for training camp.

“Here comes the infantry now,” Coach said.

Denise glanced up from her phone as a caravan of construction vehicles pulled onto the field from the highway.

“I took the liberty,” Coach told her.

Denise smiled, nodded. Good man to reduce her workload like that. He didn’t have a lot to do until the players arrived, except—she realized—choose who they would be.

Building a team from scratch. She couldn’t remember the last time that had happened. She took a deep breath. She had plenty to do in the next four weeks. Plenty.

“We’ve got an office already set up,” Coach said. “We should get to work.”

Denise followed him to what had probably been the school’s main office back when it functioned. Inside, in a hastily painted and cleaned room, sat a few desks, computers, a huge flat-screen TV against one wall, presumably for viewing players’ clips.

Two other men sat in the room, and Denise immediately recognized them, the defensive coordinator and the assistant head coach she’d hired before leaving Austin: Thomas Sealey and George Riley. Coach had absolutely refused an offensive coordinator. He said that job was up to him and his quarterback. This staff had

woefully few people, though. The Guardians had a coaching staff of nearly twenty, not to mention front office, sales, all that.

“Gentlemen, which desk is mine?”

Sealey pointed to one mashed up against his, and Denise sat down. She pulled her files out of her bag and stacked them on her desk. Next her laptop came out. The bag she dropped. It wouldn’t do to worry too much about it here. She had other things to deal with.

“Looks like I need to do some hiring,” she said. “You look to the team.” She grabbed the collection of players’ files off the stack and handed them across to Sealey. “I’ve already done some scouting. They all look good. None of them are signed, and none are quite good enough to make it in the big time. Yet. Give them the chance they won’t get otherwise.”

Denise opened her laptop and turned it on. When she found a network she could connect to, she searched for the local paper and began posting classified ads there and then on craigslist. She had a lot of positions to fill.

## Chapter Two

Trainers, physical therapists, receptionists, coaching assistants, equipment managers, ticket sales reps, cooks. Coaches.

Players. Some had played professionally, had an injury, been released, and were now trying to make it back on the rosters of the big teams. A few players were just on the other side of their prime but weren't ready to retire. Others hadn't been drafted. As far as development teams went, they seemed like a good batch, except for one.

Denise leveled her gaze on him again, then looked away quickly, afraid he'd catch her. She didn't know why he had her so disturbed. It didn't make any sense. *Scratch that*. She knew exactly what had her on edge. She'd heard stories... Stories that at first sounded terrible, but then when she sat alone in bed at night, ones that had her shamefully excited. Ones that made her touch herself as she imagined pain mixed with pleasure.

She swallowed and glanced out the window. Outside, groundskeepers planted a few final shrubs around the facility, mulched beds, and checked sprinkler systems. One last painter finished the details on the logo on the side of the gym.

Training camp started now. The big day had finally arrived, and she needed to get her mind on the game. In the gym, the entire staff and team of the Biloxi Bloodhounds had come together for a big kickoff meeting.

Denise scanned the crowd. Hell, they'd even found cheerleaders.

Then her gaze fell on him again, as if he possessed some sort of magnetic control over her. She didn't want to look, but she couldn't help it.

The troublemaker. She shook her head. His little agent—resembling a scale model of him—stood nearby, furiously texting. So Fly Ballom. She'd groaned when Coach Stiles had suggested him. She'd read about all his antics last season, scoffing that the Illinois Idols would pay such a clown the prices he demanded. But the darker tales had her worked up for an entirely different reason.

And now *she* paid his salary.

For a development team.

She clenched her jaw, trying to lock her face into a mask of professionalism. She couldn't let him get to her. When he stayed on the straight and narrow, he could maintain Hall of Fame-level numbers. Outstanding at short slant routes, fingers like flypaper, even a good blocker when demanded of him. A few more seasons, and he could probably become the tight end with the most TDs in the league. All of that was well and good, but the rumors of his vices, the fact that he'd been too drunk the day of a play-off game to even make it to the stadium... That pissed Denise off. She didn't want that kind of attention brought to her team. She needed someone she could rely on. Someone she could trust.

But his agent, Tucker, had promised her he'd keep Ballom in line, and something about the agent convinced her. Her instincts told her okay, so she went with it.

Now that Ballom had arrived, though, second thoughts had started to creep in, along with that shimmer of excitement she couldn't ignore. It didn't help that he looked like some sort of Nordic god, either. She could envision him in a bronze breastplate, swinging a battle hammer while he clutched her against him, like some kind of pulp fantasy novel cover. She'd dated white guys before. Even a few football players, but none of them had ever looked so much like sin on the hoof. All those tattoos, and the biceps of his crossed arms bulging.

Denise took a quick breath to try to dispel the butterflies that had started batting against her stomach. She didn't need all these confusing sentiments rattling around in her head or heart. She had a speech to give. She'd given plenty before—

charity events, award receptions, that sort of thing. But this opening day speech was one her father always gave to the Guardians. She usually stood on the sideline, making notes in her leather notebook, while he rattled off promises and big ideas for the franchise.

Today, though, she would have to do it herself. When she heard Coach Stiles say her name, she stood and headed toward the lectern. The room fell silent. She had this one chance to set the tone for the franchise. Sure, next season would come, and the season after that, and each year she'd have to give some sort of speech to the team, but expectations would never be as great. She had a lot on the line.

Denise stopped, looked down at her hands. *My notes*. She smiled sheepishly, turned back toward her chair, and picked them up off the floor. Then, with a quicker pace, she went to the lectern.

She took a sip of water from the glass sitting there. She looked at her notes, the clicker to advance the slides on the giant plasma screen behind her, the piece of gum Coach had stuck to the surface before he started talking. He always did that, she remembered. A sort of ritual. She wondered what she could do now, at the last minute, to ensure her own success, but nothing came to her. She hoped Coach's luck was enough for the both of them.

Denise inhaled, exhaled, and inhaled again. "Welcome 2011 Biloxi Bloodhounds!" she cried, keeping far enough back from the mic. She picked up the clicker, and the screen behind her showed the team's logo, almost as big as the side of the gym.

And then she went into her speech. She told them about her plans for the team, how far they could go, what the best players could expect if asked up to one of the pro teams. Then she told them about her charity work and their requirements as team members. She showed pictures of the schools and hospitals where they would volunteer, the golf courses where they'd play charity tournaments, the stalls they'd erect at fairs and car shows to raise money for her favorite charities. If anyone in the crowd grumbled or complained, she didn't notice it. She'd found her



zone. The men respected her as their boss. They'd do what she told them to, or they'd shop their contract elsewhere.

As she finished the meat of her presentation, the screen went dark behind her. She lowered her voice and talked about passion, commitment, dedication—all big buzzwords she'd learned from Daddy. When she stopped, the auditorium was silent. It only lasted a moment, though, before the place erupted in applause.

Denise left the lectern. At least the first of her jobs was complete.

Now for training camp.

\* \* \*

Denise took her tray to a table in the cafeteria and sat down, just like everyone else did. She glanced down at the plate. She hired an excellent cafeteria staff, fresh out of a New Orleans culinary school, and today's selection—for the inaugural day of practice—looked delicious: fresh grouper, wilted greens with bacon, rice with gravy, plenty of whole grain bread, and lemon cake. Her cafeteria would be just another aspect of her franchise to feel proud of.

"May we join you?"

Denise glanced up to see Tucker Flynn, standing, holding his own tray, with Levi Ballom directly behind. She felt that flutter again in her gut, but she tried to repress it.

"Of course," Denise said, waving a hand idly at two of the empty chairs at her round table. She hoped this didn't turn into some sort of informal negotiation meeting. She certainly didn't feel in the mood for that. The two men sat, and the three of them fell to eating quietly. Denise tried to ignore them, particularly avoided meeting Ballom's eyes across the table. Something about him just had her too nervous, no matter how much she tried to talk herself out of it. And the feeling wavered back and forth between pleasant and very much like the first inklings of love.

Right now it seemed more like a panic attack. Denise figured some of that had to do with all the baggage, and risk, Levi brought to the team.

When she pushed away half of her lemon cake and promised herself to do extra reps in the workout room later, Tucker evidently took it as a signal to finally talk.

“We want you to know, Ms. Hynes, how committed we are to this team.”

“Of course.” So it was going to turn into one of *those* talks.

“Levi is on all sorts of strict regimens, and I can vouch for him. He’s going to play the best season he has in a long time.”

“I’m glad to hear it.” *Is Ballom just going to sit there and let Tucker talk for him?* She took a cautious glance at the tight end, but he just stared down at his plate.

“But you should understand that Levi’s ultimate goal is to make it back into the league.”

Denise sighed. “This is a development team, after all.”

Levi glanced across the table at her. She let herself meet Ballom’s gaze. She held it for a moment, and the panic feeling flipped to something entirely different. She felt her cheeks warm and hoped Tucker didn’t notice. She knew Ballom had figured out exactly what she was experiencing because he offered her a sly, lopsided grin. But how?

“Exactly. So when the time comes for a trade, we hope we have your full cooperation.”

Denise glanced back at Tucker. “I’ll—the team will regret it when he goes, I’m sure, but I wouldn’t be doing my job if our players didn’t move up in the league.” She stood and picked up her tray. “Excuse me, gentleman.”

As she walked away, she felt certain Ballom’s gaze followed her.

\* \* \*

Levi sat next to the hotel pool on one of the floating beds—a hammock-like thing suspended from a teepee—sipping an iced tea and watching the murky gulf.

Heavy metal thrummed through his earbuds from his MP3 player. He nodded his head to the beat, but he kept the volume low enough so he could hear what went on around him. Overhead, gulls screeched, but the noise didn't even compete with the squeals from the girls in the large pool behind him. They all seemed to know who he was. Southern girls loved their football; some of them had even thanked him for missing the play-off game the previous year, because it meant the local favorite team got one step closer to the championship. They'd offered to buy him a few drinks—and to keep him company—but he refused. No booze. No girls. He'd promised Tucker. And Tucker had followed through on his end of things so far.

*I got a job, don't I?*

Levi thought about his new gig. The first full practice would begin tomorrow, but the general manager seemed more worried about charity work than football. Hell, he respected Coach Stiles, knew his stats, his methods. He could turn out a solid team, but this Claremont Hynes sister... Levi leaned back on the rope sling and stared up at the blue Mississippi sky, just like the one he grew up under. Charity golf classics, fishing tournaments, volunteer work. He'd always avoided all of that when he played for the Idols. Clearly, though, he wouldn't have that option here. He could tell a determined woman when he saw one. Generally he liked to break that kind of woman, show her how useless determination was when confronted with a riding crop or nipple clamps. He closed his eyes and envisioned Big Al Hynes's daughter stretched out on his bed, her wrists and ankles tethered to the corners, her small, dark breasts jutting toward the ceiling. His cock twitched at the idea, and he thought for a moment about getting up and heading upstairs to his suite, taking care of himself to some of the BDSM porn the hotel had surreptitiously supplied as in-room entertainment when it had learned of his semipermanent residence.

He liked living at the hotel, even if he had to play it straight edge and not take advantage of all the amenities. His fans did have expectations, after all, but they

didn't need to know he drank Evian instead of single batch bourbon and spent every night alone in his king-size bed instead of with a bevy of submissive supermodels.

Levi sighed. He missed the good old days, but those days had nearly killed him. *Classic downward spiral.*

He'd stay changed this time.

Levi sat up and opened his eyes. He thought about jumping into the pool to cool off. The weather down here—though his body had quickly become accustomed to it—still felt brutal, and nothing beat the heat of a Southern summer like a dip in the pool.

But before Levi could get up, Tucker appeared in his view, blocking off the ocean in front of him. The small man stood there, his ever-present smartphone in his hand. He practically buzzed with energy, like the frequency that made up his body constantly shifted between two realms of reality.

Levi smiled. "What's going on, my man?" he asked, awkwardly climbing off the swinging apparatus and making it safely to the ground. *I could use one of these in my room.* He thought about the things he could do with it, if a woman joined him, but again... Off-limits.

"Dinner, Levi. Let's go." Tucker kept him to a strict schedule and a strict diet. The hotel kitchen had explicit recipes for each meal that Levi ate. Most of the foods somehow contributed to detox, but others built strength, ensured optimum potential of his body to repair itself, or did other things he didn't even bother to try to understand. From Tucker, he only heard the occasional buzzwords like "macrobiotic" or "superfood" and for the most part, the dishes tasted fine, so Levi didn't argue.

Tonight, Tucker led him to the steakhouse, and they took a quiet corner booth. Tucker set his phone to vibrate and placed it on the table. He took calls for the both of them. He didn't allow Levi a phone, which he could have used to contact prostitutes, dealers, or bookies. Levi had resented it at first, but after a while had

come to appreciate the fact that his life had grown...peaceful. He could worry about other things, like the game.

The way it used to be.

The waiter brought them salads without even taking an order, Levi's twice as big as Tucker's. He ate while listening to his agent review his agenda for the week. Practice, practice, and more practice. Levi sighed, but a small smile played at the corner of his mouth. A long time had passed since he'd started a season fresh like this. He felt good about that.

"What?" Levi asked, realizing he'd lost focus of the conversation.

"The manager," Tucker said, obviously exasperated at his lack of attention.

"What about her?" Levi realized he had no idea where the conversation had gone.

"She's your boss."

"And?"

"And off-limits."

Levi raised his eyebrows. How had Tucker already divined his innermost, if brief, fantasy?

"She looks like a freakin' model," Tucker told him. "I know your type. She's got that drive too."

Levi shrugged. The waiter removed their salad plates.

"No girls, So Fly."

"I've been good. You saw all them ladies at the pool. I didn't touch one of them."

"Keep it that way."

Levi waved a dismissive hand and glanced away. He couldn't bold-faced lie to Tucker and tell him he didn't feel anything for the Hynes woman.

"I know that look too."

Levi glanced back to see Tucker shaking his head. His phone buzzed on the table, but he didn't move to pick it up, only kept expressing his evident distaste for Levi's libido.

"I can't help it," Levi said, trying to keep any trace of a whine out of his voice.

"You'd better," Tucker said as the waiter delivered their main courses.

But with the image of Denise Claremont Hynes now firmly at the front of his thoughts, Levi could not wholeheartedly follow his agent's admonition.

## Chapter Three

*Shit.* The ball dug into the turf at his churning feet, and Levi pulled up short, panting. He hit himself with both palms against his helmet in frustration and then undid the chinstraps. He wanted to blame the quarterback for throwing short, but he just couldn't. Levi'd run the route wrong, and he knew it.

"Godammit, Ballom!" he heard from the sidelines.

*Okay, I definitely don't need to be reminded I got it wrong.* He'd recognize those words coming from the quarterback, or Coach Stiles, but not from the GM. He stood, staring, at Hynes. Right behind Coach Stiles, a clipboard in her hand and a headset over her ears, she fumed. Clearly, she had someone reporting to her from the viewing booth, and whoever that was knew what Levi had done wrong. Levi shook his head. She didn't ride the other players the way she did him. Maybe the heat got to her. He could definitely see a red tinge to her dark cheeks that didn't seem normal.

She bent forward, whispering in Stiles's ear, but her eyes never left Levi. He didn't drop his gaze either, not wanting to appear as if he gave into her will. He would never do that. Even if she did cut his paychecks.

She finally turned away, reached a hand up to her headset as if she listened more carefully to whoever spoke there, and sat on the bleachers. Levi scanned the crowd for Tucker. He sat on the bleachers too, gabbing away on his phone. He offered Levi an enthusiastic thumbs-up with one hand, but then immediately turned away, apparently concentrating on his phone call.

"Water break," Coach Stiles shouted.

Levi took his helmet off and stood for a moment, still catching his breath. The camp he'd run with the kids had put him in better shape than he had been in a long time, but he couldn't get used to practicing out of doors, in the heat. The Idols had an air-conditioned, indoor practice facility for the summer.

He turned toward the sideline. As he headed in its direction, the quarterback caught up to him.

"Sorry about that, So Fly," the kid, Josh Tavers, said. He'd just finished college, had pinned all his hopes on the draft, and been overlooked. Now he played here.

"Don't worry about it." Levi traded his helmet for a sports drink and then headed for the stationary bike on the sidelines. He climbed aboard and started a slow pedal as he squirted sports drink into his mouth.

"It was a terrible pass," Josh told him.

Levi lowered the bottle and leveled his gaze on the quarterback. He knew what the kid was trying to do. It wouldn't help either of them. "Listen, my fault, okay? It was a good pass. I got to move faster."

"It's just..." Josh's words seemed to fail, and the thing Levi had dreaded finally happened. "I mean, I grew up watching you play college ball, and I told myself, man, I want to be like him. Never got enough bulk, but at least I could throw." He chuckled uneasily.

Levi shook his head, looked away, and drank some more of his sports drink as a way to end the conversation. He didn't glance back at the kid, hoping he took the hint. He wanted a little time to himself, to get his head right.

After only a few moments, Coach called out, "Back on the field, ladies!"

Levi traded his bottle for his helmet again and trotted out with the offense. He put in his mouthguard and did his chinstrap. They lined up opposite the defensive line, the secondary in the back ready to charge like young bulls. They'd practice a play now where he had to block, allowing the running back to dart right behind him and up the sideline with the ball. He stood on the line, right up against a defensive



end who had six inches and at least another fifty pounds on him. While at the top of his game, Levi could have taken the monster, but now... He sighed and dug his knuckles into the turf. Best to prepare for the worst.

Behind him, Josh called the play, and finally the center hiked the ball. Levi bit down hard on his mouthguard as he lunged forward, throwing all his weight toward the defensive end.

But the defensive end ploughed right over him. Levi's world flipped as he went head over heels, landing on his back, the bottom of the DE's shoes just visible as the larger man made to tackle the running back.

Levi fought to catch his breath as he watched the clouds float across the blue sky.

Then she appeared in his vision, a scowl beneath her large Bulgari sunglasses. "Hit the weight room, Ballom," she growled out, making a note on her clipboard. "You got some training to do." She did it with an accent like Desi Arnaz on *I Love Lucy*, and Levi could only lie there, staring up at her, hardly fathoming how she could get away with talking to him like that.

She clicked her tongue and then turned away. Levi took his helmet off and finally sat up, watching her ass sway in that tight pencil skirt she wore. He thought about biting that ass hard enough to make her scream and beg for mercy, but then he realized his motivation for wanting that wasn't entirely to do with revenge. He wanted to see her dusky skin glow red for another reason.

*Ah fuck.* He couldn't deny he wanted her. His prick pressed against the hard surface of his cup. But he had to keep it in his uniform.

"Ballom!" She'd turned, lowered her glasses. Caught him staring.

*Shit.* Finally he climbed to his feet and headed off the field. As he passed Stiles, he mumbled, "Who's the coach anyway?"

"Tell me about it," Coach Stiles muttered back, but Levi could tell by the slight grin on the old man's face he didn't entirely mind Hynes taking a firm hand with the players.

Or at least with Levi.

Tucker followed him into the facilities. "What crawled up her ass and died?"

"Don't be crass." Levi offered him a lopsided smile. "That's my job."

"But seriously."

They went into the locker room where Levi changed from his gear into a tracksuit emblazoned with the Bloodhounds logo. "She does seem to be targeting me a bit much, doesn't she?"

Tucker sniffed. "And how. Want me to start arranging a trade? Bet I could get you back into an established franchise. You've been sober going on seven months now. That's got to be worth something."

Levi sat on the bench and put on his cross-trainers. "No, we'll stick this out for the season, show everyone I can handle the game again. But, shit, I got to get that woman off my back. She's driving me crazy." *In more ways than one.*

"Maybe a little talk. I'll do it. Tell her to back off."

Levi shook his head. He stood and grabbed a towel from his locker. "Nah, I got to handle it somehow. But maybe you're right. A little one-on-one might do the trick."

"She doesn't seem wholly irrational," Tucker said as he bent again to his smartphone. "I heard through the grapevine that she works out here in the evenings, after everyone else has gone home."

Levi headed into the weight room. "Really?" Interesting.

Tucker stayed glued to his heels. "Might be a good time to talk to her." Tucker moved to a chest press machine and set the weight for Levi.

"True." Levi sat down at the machine and began his reps.

"But So Fly..."

*Here it comes.* "What?"

"I saw the way you looked at her."

"So?"

“No women this season, remember?”

Levi thought about her model good looks, her love for the game. It would be hard to keep away from her. But he had promised. “I know.”

“I’ll drop you. Especially if she’s your boss.”

“I know.” But right now, he was Tucker’s only client. It didn’t seem likely the man would leave him when he had no one else to run to.

“Don’t waste our time, okay?”

“I won’t.” But the memory of Hynes’s ass as she walked away wouldn’t leave his mind.

\* \* \*

The contractors had created a nice enough suite of offices for Denise’s personal use. Even installed a private bathroom, complete with multiple-head shower, compliments of her father. She used that room now to change into her tracksuit, just like the players had, before heading down to the weight room. She left through her office, taking a moment to admire the side of the gym through the long bank of windows, the huge logo lit up with floodlights from the ground. It looked impressive, even if was just an old school.

She headed into the hallway and out the front doors to walk across the field to the gym where the weight room was. The air still felt sticky, heavy, and warm. At least a slight breeze came up off the ocean, giving the impression of a tropical oasis. The giant palm trees, lit with more floodlights, also lent to that feeling. Denise didn’t need a vacation; she had all of this. Plus she did what she loved every day.

She pushed through the side door into the weight room. As always it was blissfully empty. The cleaning crew had already done their work for the night too, so the aroma of sweaty men had gone. The new equipment sparkled and smelled more like clean leather and chrome polish than anything else.

Denise liked these quiet nights to herself. She didn’t even bother with music. She enjoyed the sound of her body working, of the equipment as she went through

her reps. She stepped onto the elliptical and began her warm-up. A little light cardio to get her heart rate up; then she'd move on to the weights.

Someone cleared his throat behind her, and she stopped, the flywheel still whirring. She snapped her head around and met the tropical-water blue eyes of Levi Ballom. She swallowed as her heart rate kicked up just a notch. She narrowed her eyes. "What are you doing?"

"I didn't mean to scare you," he said. He wore a white T-shirt and dark blue jeans.

"Who said you scared me? Just seems odd to have you walking up behind me like that. Sneaking, almost."

"Suspicious much?"

Denise cursed herself. She did sound nervous, and that was the last thing she wanted. She had to keep her cool when the players confronted her like this. "It's hardly appropriate for you to be—"

"Why are you riding me so much, Ms. Hynes?"

She blinked. "What?"

"You always seem to single me out in practice. It's been going on since the beginning. Why?"

God, she had done that, and he'd noticed. What should she tell him? That she couldn't keep her eyes off him, which was why she saw every little mistake? That despite the fact that she needed to watch the other players, her gaze always slipped to him?

She couldn't explain her desire. It wasn't just the bad boy thing or the fact that he possessed a godlike body. It wasn't those blue eyes that always appeared to be filled with some kind of secret mischief. It didn't even stem from some twisted need to help heal him. Maybe all those little things added up to it. Denise didn't know. She did know, however, that she wanted him. But should she admit it to him?

Would it clear the air and let them move on, or would it only give him more fodder to torture her?

She climbed off the elliptical and faced him. Even though she stood five feet nine, he still made her feel small and helpless. Hard to do.

He took a step forward. She took one back. Her heart beat a little faster. *I can't let him intimidate me.* "I'm going to be frank with you, Mr. Ballom."

He took another step forward. "Go on."

Denise retreated again and felt the cold surface of the huge mirrors covering the wall at her back. A momentary bubble of panic filled her, but she swallowed it down quickly. She glanced around, wondering if Tucker hid anywhere nearby, maybe recording this to broker some kind of deal later. She didn't see him, and she didn't think Ballom would actually do something like that. She thought about kneeing him in the groin and running, but how would that look in tomorrow's paper? Instead, she decided to go with the truth.

"I am attracted to you."

He huffed out a laugh. "Ain't that just the shit?"

"What?"

"Here we are. You and me. Hot for each other, but we can't do anything about it."

"Each other?" It came out sounding like a squeak, and Denise winced.

Ballom leaned against the mirror, a palm on either side of her head. He lowered his face to within inches of hers. "Yeah, as in mutual attraction. And you can't do anything about it, and I can't do anything about it." He narrowed his eyes. "Did I stutter the first time?"

Normally a jibe like that would cut into her and she'd lash back in retaliation, but for some reason it didn't now. She saw a twinkle in his eye that betrayed the spirit in which he'd said it. Denise couldn't find her voice. All she could do was stand there, her eyes wide, taking in every detail of Ballom's visage. She raised a

tentative hand and brushed a finger down the hard plain of his cheek. She felt his skin twitch, tense for a flash, and then relax. Despite all the rough edges and muscle, his lips still looked soft and inviting. Lips meant for kissing. Denise cursed herself again, but she couldn't deny the sparks that zipped between them. She knew all about the rules Tucker had set up for him. And she knew all about her own position and what something like this would do to the team if word got out.

She pulled her hand back, but it was too late. A fire had lit in Levi's eyes, and her pussy had dampened in sympathetic response.

*Oh hell.*

Levi dipped his head the last few inches and kissed her.

She let herself go for a moment, absorbing his heat, wanting desperately to cling to him, but instead she balled her fists at her sides, squeezed her eyes shut, and ducked away from him. She opened her eyes as she walked away, but she wouldn't glance back at him. Head up, back straight, she told herself. Just get out.

"Stop," Ballom said behind her, and at the command, her entire body froze as if she had lost control of it. "We're not done here." His voice came out in a growl, and the threat of it sent goose bumps coursing over Denise's skin.

"We can't... The team... Your recovery..." She ground the words out past clenched teeth.

"We aren't going to ignore this."

"There's too much at risk."

Levi rounded on her, coming again into her view. She felt like a rabbit getting stalked by a fox. She could run, zigzag, dart away, but he'd be right there, waiting for her, once she popped back up again.

"There's no risk if no one knows about it."

True, but could they keep it a secret? Even if it was just once? She doubted it, particularly with someone the media loved as much as Levi. But she couldn't find that voice inside of her that normally told her to *Stop!*

“All right,” she said. “A secret.” But then a niggling sense of jealousy squirmed. “I won’t be one of your...” She didn’t even know what to call the women he used to date. “Groupie” seemed too light a term. The women she’d heard stories about had demeaned themselves in terrible ways for him. But she could see why they would. What if he used that voice to command her to do something more than just stop? She didn’t think she could refuse him.

“The media had a field day with that, didn’t they?” Ballom chuckled and sat on a nearby weight bench, giving Denise a little room to breathe.

She did, trying to force the tension from her limbs. A rational talk, airing their dirty laundry, might be just what she needed. If she got it out in the open, maybe she could move on. Better than burying it.

“They never did anything they didn’t want to do,” he told her quietly. “And they never accused me of anything, did they? Not like some of the others.”

The news had been rife lately with accusations toward professional football players: rape in the bathroom of a bar, sending pictures of penises via cell phone, stuff like that. No women had ever come out against Ballom. Or if they did, it was to support him, to promise they had his back no matter what. What was it about this man that, despite all his fuck-ups, he still earned that kind of loyalty? Denise realized she would find out, whether she really wanted to or not. He didn’t seem to be giving her a choice in the matter. The problem was, she didn’t want a choice. She wanted him to make it for her. *Oh God. What does this mean?* “Okay,” she said. It was the only word she could get out past the tightness in her throat, and it carried none of the authority or control she was used to having.

“You know I have...unique tastes.”

She had a distinct feeling that was all the warning he’d give her. Well, she was a big girl. She could handle it. Perhaps one fuck and she’d get it out of her system. Maybe she just needed a little experimentation to see what all the fuss was about—why her body was all in knots over him—and then she could move forward with her life, find someone more appropriate. She’d never been one for idle sex games, but

here, now... That was exactly what she needed. “I’ve heard,” she told him. He’d frequented a club in Chicago known for its dungeon nights. That had made the papers, probably bringing a whole lot of business to the club.

“Can you handle that?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you know what a safe word is? It’s like crying uncle.”

Denise nodded.

“If you don’t like something, use it. Say ‘Guardian.’”

The name of her father’s football team. She could remember that. But wasn’t he making some assumptions? “Anything else I should know?”

He dipped his head a little and offered her a feral grin. “Oh yeah. You might be my boss out there”—he waved idly toward the practice field—“but when we play, you do what I tell you. If you can’t handle that, we can’t play.”

This all seemed like it moved too fast for Denise. Sure, she knew everything there was to know about him, and she spent weeks working with him, watching him. Still doubt flooded in, replacing the self-assurance she’d felt.

“Maybe I—”

“No,” Ballom said, using that same tone he’d used to stop her. “You trust me.”

She did? Well, she’d find out for sure very shortly.



## Chapter Four

Knowing how young men pumped full of testosterone were prone to lead active sexual lives, the training staff had a fishbowl full of condoms on hand in the locker room. Ballom left to find some while Denise remained in the training room, her heart thudding as if she'd just run wind sprints. As far as relationships went, the term "sprint" would fit perfectly. How could she have gone from weeks of pent-up frustration to acquiescence in only a matter of minutes? He had to have some secret power, some superhero-like ability to sway women to do his bidding. Or maybe his *bedding* was more like it.

Denise turned a slow circle in the room, wondering how the evening would end. She couldn't imagine how she'd given in so easily. It went against everything she had schooled herself on since first seeing him. But now she couldn't go back. Couldn't turn away from him.

He appeared, standing in the doorway, a clear bulge at the crotch of his jeans. Denise sucked in a breath. His perfectly chiseled chest pressed against the T-shirt, inviting her to run her hands over its firm surface. He probably waxed, leaving the skin smooth and hard. And then she looked down. She knew he'd be well hung, but shit. She had to open her mouth to breathe, to get in enough oxygen in the suddenly heavy air of the room. She momentarily thought about running, but then pushed the thought aside. Now that she'd seen him, there was no way she wouldn't follow through.

"Undress," Ballom told her, and she could find no words with which to protest. She undid her track jacket and dropped it to the floor. Beneath her sports bra, her nipples hardened, but then she froze.

“Everything,” he told her.

She continued slowly, slipping out of her cross-trainers, socks, and pants, but then she hesitated. Her underwear and bra was all that separated her from going through with this. As long as she kept them on, she could always run, deny all of this later. Once she got completely naked, though...

“Are we doing this?” Ballom asked quietly.

Denise took a deep breath. She’d gone this far, hadn’t she? She pushed down her underwear and then pulled her sports bra up over her head, finally revealing herself completely to him. He made an appreciative sound deep in his throat and closed the distance between them. Goose bumps broke out over her skin before he even touched her.

He smoothed his big hands down her long arms, and Denise shivered in response. He circled her, seeming to take in every detail of her body. He pulled his T-shirt off and dropped it to the floor with her clothes. Then his gaze swept the room.

“There,” he pointed to a weight bench positioned in front of the mirrors. “Lie there.”

Denise did as he told her, crossing the room with uneasy steps. Her stomach kept trying to tell her she was making a mistake, but she refused to listen. She sat on the cool black vinyl of the bench and waited.

“I said lie down,” Ballom told her, his voice hard. He picked up a few things from around the room: some yoga straps, a half-round foam roller, a clean towel.

Denise finally did as he told her, head toward the wall so that if she arched her neck, she could see herself upside down.

“Weight benches are a lot like spanking benches,” he told her as brought the gear over to her. “Hang your arms down the side.”

She did as she was told without question. He used the two yoga straps to secure her wrists to the legs of the bench. Then he lifted her hips and placed the

foam roll beneath them. Finally, he rolled the towel tightly and slipped it under her neck, so she had to look back at the mirror.

“Your eyes don’t leave the mirror,” Ballom told her.

How could they? He’d pulled her arms taut, and though they didn’t hurt, he’d rendered her completely immobile. In the mirror, she could see him now standing at the base of the bench. “Bend your knees. Pull your legs up.”

She did, and all of the sudden she felt entirely too vulnerable. He straddled the bench and grabbed her ankles. He moved them ever so slightly, so that her toes gripped the edge of the bench and her knees spread even wider.

“Like that,” he told her. “Hold it there.”

Denise’s toes wouldn’t last forever, gripping the slick vinyl as they were. But she tried to do as he told her. She wanted to make him happy. Why, she couldn’t say.

He sat there for a moment, just watching her. Not even touching. The slight breeze created by the air-conditioning system brushed against her exposed, heated pussy. She squirmed a little, wanting to feel him against her. But still he did not touch her.

Then finally, he brought his hands down to her, running them up and down the flat plain of her stomach, then against the insides of her thighs.

His touch ignited her, and her cunt leaked. She felt sure a puddle had formed beneath her. He didn’t actually touch her sex yet, but nevertheless her nipples tightened to the point of aching.

She thought she knew this game, and she didn’t think he wanted to hear her beg. That would get her nowhere. Instead, she held on, waiting, trusting—why she didn’t know—he would give her what she needed.

He stood up and walked to stand next to her head. “You can look at me,” he told her.

Denise shifted her eyes.

“Straps aren’t too tight, are they?”

“No.”

“It’s customary to say ‘Sir’ with that, but I’ll let it slide for now.” He slipped his pants off, and Denise saw his cock straining beneath his briefs. He took a condom out of the pocket of his pants before dropping them to the floor, then set it on the bench between her feet. Finally he took off his underwear, letting them fall too, and Denise gasped. Of course a man his size would have a huge cock, she chastised herself. She’d even half expected it, but seeing it out in the open like that...

He sat back down, the bench between his legs. “I’m going to take you hard and fast this time. I need to get you out of my system. Maybe we won’t have to do this again.”

Denise didn’t know if she wanted that to be true or not.

He sheathed himself and slid up the bench until his cock nestled into Denise’s damp curls. The foam roll beneath her ass had her hips tilted to the perfect angle to take him. He grasped himself in one hand, her thigh in the other, and pushed into her.

Denise let out a keening wail as he filled her, and she squeezed her eyes shut. She hadn’t been sleeping with Manuel when she’d left him in Austin—they hadn’t reached that stage of the relationship—but now she gave herself over to someone who was nearly a stranger, and she had not prepared herself for it. She could not take him, no matter how much she wanted to. He was just too big.

“Eyes on the mirror,” he reminded her.

She forced her eyes open and onto the mirror.

Ballom towered between her legs, his strong, tanned thighs and calves taut with strain on either side of the bench. She wished she could run her hand over him, to hold him as he drove into her.

His grip on her hips did not allow her to move. Instead, she was completely at his mercy.

And he used her. He ravaged her, taking her with a force and urgency she had never before experienced. But somehow, he wasn't completely selfish, or maybe her body responded to giving up control entirely like this. Whatever it was, he had her climbing toward climax in no time. Faster than she could ever remember. She wanted to come quickly, to put an end to her suffering.

It rippled through her body like an earthquake, but he did not relent; he continued hammering into her until, finally, he too came with a bellow that filled the weight room.

He stilled for a moment, and Denise watched with wonder the expression on his face. In that time, he seemed to lose himself, to become completely at peace, and she understood how he could have treated this act like a drug. He seemed to have the same reaction—a high—and he probably got to forget about the bad things in his life. She could understand all that.

Then he focused on her, pulled out, and leaned over her. He looked down into her eyes. "Are you all right?"

Denise nodded as much as her position would allow. Ballom removed the roll from beneath her hips and then lowered each leg to the floor. He massaged her calves and thighs, making sure the odd position wouldn't pain her later. The attention surprised her, how someone could go from being so forceful to gentle in only a matter of moments. He stood then and untied her wrists. She sat up, rubbing the mild chafing.

Then Ballom helped her to her feet. His hands stayed on her shoulders, steadying her, and Denise was grateful for the contact. But, in a sudden wash, conflicting emotions raged through her, and she felt near to tears. *What have I done?* She didn't yet know if this night had the desired effect, but she desperately needed some time alone to think on what had just happened. If she stayed any longer in his presence, she didn't know what she'd do.

She stepped out of Ballom's grasp and headed for her pile of clothes.

“I have to...” She pulled her pants on, threw her jacket over her shoulders, and picked up everything else. “To go,” she finally managed and then ran out into the humid night, afraid to stay any longer.

Levi watched her go from the weight room door, but he didn’t try to follow. So much for aftercare, for petting and reassurance. He liked that as much as the girls did, though he’d never admit it. It helped him avoid the shock of reality after, to carry some of those blissed-out feelings into the real world.

He allowed himself a smile. He’d had her pegged from the beginning. He knew her better than she knew herself, and now she’d have a hard time learning to deal with the desires that had developed. But he’d be here to help her. No way this was a one-time thing. She’d found out something new about herself, and she probably wouldn’t want to admit it right away. He could deal with that. He could wait for her to come around. Certainly, she’d come around again. Eventually. He knew it for a fact.

Levi sat down on a chest press machine, not yet bothering to put his clothes on. He thought momentarily with regret about what he’d done, but quickly chased it off. He would have exploded if he’d put off women any longer, no matter what he told Tucker.

And Denise wasn’t just some woman. She was his boss, but more than that... She fit him better than anyone had in a long time, and his body had known that from the beginning, even if his mind refused to acknowledge it. As if she were made for him. He thought back to the crazy sex they’d just had, then realized he still had the condom on his waning dick. He stood, peeled it off, and tossed it in the nearest trash can. He couldn’t have lasted any longer with her than he had. She drove him crazy. Even when completely restrained, she exerted some force over him that had him coming in mere moments. He’d have to work on that when they did this again.

*If?* Even now, so soon after coming, his dick filled again, straining for her. *When for sure.* When was more likely. He’d just have to make sure Tucker didn’t

find out. Hell, he'd have to make sure a whole lot of people didn't find out. Had he ever managed to keep a relationship under wraps? He thought about it, but none came to mind. He'd have to work extra hard. But she'd be worth it. Definitely.

Levi began picking up his clothes and re-dressing. He thought about hitting the showers, but then realized he didn't want to lose the sweet scent of Denise Claremont Hynes that still floated upon his skin. He could have that at least, even if they hadn't snuggled for a few minutes.

\* \* \*

Denise dropped her clothes and nearly ran into the shower. The hot water beat down on her as tears filled her eyes.

"What have I done?" She sobbed, beating a fist against the stone walls. Betrayed her team, maybe caused Ballom to backslide in his recovery, given in to pure, animal instinct. And God, what would her father say if he ever found out? She shuddered at the idea, despite the temperature of the water cascading over her body.

But, God help her, when she thought about how Ballom had felt inside her while he had her restrained on that bench, the huge, blond god driving into her, she couldn't help but frizzle at the idea. Her well-used pussy even seemed to reignite with passion, wanting more. It would not be a onetime thing, she realized. She had not gotten him out of her system. She'd only gone and found out how much she wanted from him.

*Stop it.* That could never happen. No, she couldn't do that again. Maybe she hadn't gotten him out of her system, but she couldn't let herself indulge. She had too much at risk. She'd have to find other ways to cope. Maybe avoidance. Stop going to practices. Stop putting herself in the same room with him.

Denise wiped the tears from her eyes as her resolve took hold. *Onetime thing.* She nodded, turned off the water, and grabbed a towel. *I'm a grown woman. I can do this.* She'd never had a one-night stand before, but that was what this could be. A moment of weakness now passed. *Silly girl.* She hated herself for having such

twisted feelings, but she'd get over it. She smiled as she stepped out of the shower and into her office. She dried off, feeling better about herself, certain she could follow through on her promises. A few tweaks to her schedule—maybe start using the weight room at home instead of here. She could probably avoid him completely.

But then, through the bank of windows, she saw Ballom crossing to the parking lot, lit up by all those floodlights, and looking more like Thor or Apollo than ever. She wished he'd see her, turn, come to the window...

Her pussy answered with a flutter and a spring of moisture.

*Well, hell.*



## Chapter Five

Denise thanked her lucky stars she didn't get seasick. She also felt quite happy about the fact that she'd managed to avoid Ballom for a few days. And she'd made sure his boat for the celebrity charity billfish tournament was not hers. She'd put him on another, with a relatively well-known comedian. The comedian was also in recovery, for cocaine addiction, so she figured they'd have something to talk about on the overnight boat ride. She looked out toward the gulf. Some large thunderheads had gathered near the horizon, glowing orange in the setting sun, but other than that everything looked at peace. She wished she felt the same way.

"This will be such fun," Mrs. Sealey said from her seat on the deck. She'd already polished off one cosmo and a plate of canapés.

Denise had arranged for a boat for her and the wives of the defensive coordinator and assistant coach, Mrs. Sealey and Mrs. Riley. Mrs. Riley sat nearby, having a hushed discussion on her cell with the nanny about what the children could eat and when.

Denise liked the two older women fine. They'd volunteered to head up her charity work so she had more time to work on the team. They'd done a great job putting this event together, even if it wasn't Denise's cup of tea. She hadn't gone fishing for, well, literally decades, and when she had, it had been for bluegill in a small pond on the hobby ranch her father had owned for a short time. She heard some of these billfish—the blue marlin, for instance—could reach nearly one thousand pounds. She didn't know what would keep her in the boat if she had something that big on the end of her line.

"Ready, ladies?" Captain Stella asked from her position at the helm.

Denise glanced at her two passengers. Mrs. Sealey raised her glass, and Mrs. Riley offered a curt nod. She placed her hand over the mouthpiece of her phone and whispered, “Just get me out of cell phone range.”

Captain Stella moved to undo the lines that secured the ship to the dock, but before she made it to back to the helm to hit the throttle, someone shouted from the dock. “Permission to come aboard?”

Denise’s gut clenched. She turned from contemplating the gulf to look at the newcomer. Then she glanced at Stella whose eyebrows were nearly up to her hairline. Denise shook her head quickly, but Stella still said, obviously enjoying the discomfort she caused, “Permission granted.”

Levi Ballom threw his duffel onto the deck and then climbed aboard. As soon as he’d situated himself, Stella opened the throttle, the boat’s engines roared to life, and they headed out into the open water.

Ballom didn’t waste any time rounding on Denise, and she couldn’t hide her surprise from the coaches’ wives.

“Did you miss your boat, Mr. Ballom?” Mrs. Riley asked after finally hanging up with the nanny.

“Oh, no, ma’am. Just wasn’t compatible with the crew.” He narrowed his eyes and offered Denise a mischievous glare. “Can’t stand that comic. He never shuts up. And every other word out of his mouth is ‘fuck.’”

Denise’s heart did a little flutter as he said the *F* word. It wasn’t just that he said it, but how he said it, as if he meant it for her ears alone. It held too much suggestion for her to handle.

The other crewmember—cook and valet—brought up more snacks as the three women and Ballom settled in for the ride to the fishing grounds. The sea lay in darkness around them now.

After dinner, the two coaches’ wives went into the cabin to play cribbage before going to sleep. Stella stood at the helm, and the crew cleaned up in the galley.

That left Denise and Ballom on the deck alone together under the stars.

Denise kept her voice low, not wanting Stella to hear their conversation. “What are you really doing here?”

“What do you think?” He crossed his arms and leaned back against the white vinyl cushions of the bench. “I came to see you.”

“You can see me any time.”

“I don’t think I can. I think you’ve worked pretty hard to avoid me since the other night in the weight room.”

“Of course I have.”

“Well, it’s a little harder for you to get away from me when we are on a boat.” He stepped closer, and Denise could feel the heat radiating off his body.

“We should never have done that.”

“Or maybe we should do it again?”

Denise shook her head, not willing to entertain the idea for one moment. She couldn’t let herself. It could lead to too much ruin.

“I liked it,” Ballom told her, a level of sincerity in his voice she didn’t often hear.

“I’m sure you did. That doesn’t mean I’m at your”—she lowered her voice to barely a whisper—“beck and call whenever you get horny.”

“Come on. It was more than that.”

“No, it wasn’t.” Denise took a deep breath, trying to get her emotions in check. She lied, to herself and to him, but she couldn’t have it any other way. “It can’t be.”

Ballom lowered his hands to his lap, and Denise couldn’t help noticing how cut his chest appeared beneath the fabric of his T-shirt. She still wanted to touch it, to feel it, but she didn’t let herself. She raised her gaze to his face. He looked genuinely hurt.

“There are plenty of women out there for you,” she said. “You showed me something new, and I appreciate that, but I can’t—”

“Stop talking.” He used that voice, and Denise’s jaw snapped shut. Ballom inhaled, exhaled, then leaned toward her. “For some reason, you mean more to me than some idle fuck.”

“Well, yeah. I’m your boss.”

“My turn, Denise.” The first time he’d used her first name.

She swallowed.

“It’s against my nature to bargain. I like to get my way without question. But for you, I’ll make an exception.” He stood, stepped up to her, and grinned. “What do you say to a wager?”

*She can’t refuse.* She possessed a lot of pride, and she wouldn’t be able to say no to him.

“Let me get this straight,” she said, standing so his height advantage over her wasn’t as great. “I catch the larger fish, and you’ll move on. You catch the larger, and”—she lowered her voice again—“I’ll go to bed with you again.”

Levi chuckled softly. “More than just going to bed, but that’s the gist of it.” He watched as she pondered the idea.

The boat crested a larger-than-normal swell, and Denise lost her balance and pitched into Levi. He caught her, and for a moment relished the feeling of her lean, strong body beneath his hands. All the sensations from their night together flooded his senses, and his cock leaped to attention. He couldn’t not have her. He inhaled and smelled cocoa butter and something slightly spicy.

For a moment, it felt as if she relaxed, as if she might feel comfortable there, but then she pushed back, smoothed her camp shirt, and glared down at him.

“You’ve got yourself a deal, Mr. Ballom. You’d better keep your word.”

“Of course.”

With that, she turned and headed below deck.

When Levi got up the next morning, he found Denise with a line in the water and a breakfast sandwich in one hand. She had a white-knuckled grip on the pole she held, despite the fact that it was fastened to the railing of the boat and tethered with another line in case it got pulled in. Levi chuckled to himself.

The boat trolled slowly along, a nice easy pace. Levi fixed himself a breakfast sandwich from the plate of gourmet meats and cheeses the deck hand had put out. He accepted a cup of coffee, also top-notch. Denise certainly didn't skimp when it came to the nicer things in life. Coming from the family she did, she probably had everything she wanted. He wondered what it would have been like to grow up like her. She never seemed to let the excess of it overwhelm her, as he had. Once he'd had a little money, could buy a few luxuries, he'd quickly spiraled out of control. He still had the debts to prove it.

But if none of that had ever happened, he wouldn't be here now, beneath the beautiful blue sky, and the calm waters of the gulf below. And she wouldn't be standing there.

Everything happens for a reason, his grandmother used to tell him. She'd said that when his father died and his mother lost custody of him. She would have said it about his present situation too if she hadn't sort of written him off after his last debacle. She'd take a while to come around—the lady was stubborn in her old age—but she'd forgive him eventually. For everything. She always did. That's what he loved about her.

Levi ate his sandwich thoughtfully as he watched Denise, strapped to the boat so any large fish she did catch wouldn't haul her into the water. It reminded him again of the other night. He saw some potential in the safety rig. A few tweaks here and there... Once he'd paid off some of his outstanding debts and started living the

proper life of a sports superstar again, maybe he'd look into getting himself a yacht like this.

Hours passed with no luck for Denise. But then again, Levi hadn't caught anything either. Mrs. Riley had bagged a tuna of some kind, weighed it, and released it. It seemed big enough to Levi to do pretty well in that category, but he certainly wasn't an expert. Even though he'd grown up on the Gulf Coast, he'd never had the kind of money it took to fish for the big stuff like this. He'd done more of the twine-and-cheese catfish thing himself.

The deckhand served lunch, and no more fish were caught. Denise's mood seemed to deteriorate as the day went on. It would be time to motor back to the Biloxi marina soon in order to make it in time for the banquet.

Levi decided to call it a day and put up his rig. They hadn't discussed what would happen if neither of them caught anything. He supposed he'd have to find another opportunity to lure her into another wager.

"Yes!" Denise called.

Levi turned, and he could tell Denise had definitely caught something huge. Stella opened the throttle on the boat to set the hook. Then she and the deckhand began pulling in the other lures. They cleared the deck for Denise's fight. Levi watched as her well-toned arms worked the pole.

"How long is this going to take?" Levi asked the captain.

Stella shrugged. "Who knows?"

It seemed to take hours before they finally lifted the marlin aboard the ship. Levi couldn't help but admire the strength and fortitude Denise showed as she reeled the fish in. He knew some pro athletes who would buckle under that strain, but she screwed her face up and got the job done. She wasn't some spoiled rich brat. She had a fighter somewhere in there. A fighter he'd like to learn more about.

Stella stood there, staring down at the monster. "What's the state record?" she asked quietly.

The deckhand appeared equally stunned. "Over 1050 pounds."

"This is close."

But the tournament was catch and release. There would be no massive greeting and official weighing on the dock. They measured and weighed it in a sling, and Denise had her picture taken kneeling next to it, before dropping the monster fish back in the ocean.

As Stella set the boat toward home, Denise stood facing Levi, her sea legs working well, a huge grin on her face.

"I guess that means I win," she said. She held out her hand. Levi saw her arms shake as she waited.

*She must be exhausted.* And boy, would that hurt tomorrow. He took her hand tenderly. "Congrats. I'll stick to my side of the bargain."

"Good."

With that, she got a beer from a nearby cooler, popped the top, and sat down.

Levi turned away and headed toward the bow to be alone. Disappointment filled him. He wanted her again, but he'd agreed to leave her alone. Doing anything else would add more strain to their professional relationship. He didn't want to do that. He liked her. He liked working for Coach Stiles. He promised himself he wouldn't do anything to jeopardize his position on the team, even if his heart argued otherwise.

\* \* \*

Thousands of dollars. Six figures, they promised her. Denise smiled big for the cameras as pictures of giant checks made out to local charities were presented around the pool of the Hard Rock Casino. She even got a trophy, a bronze casting of a marlin by a local artist to remind her of her day's accomplishment. She knew the press would eat this up. Beautiful, black, strong—she'd probably make all the celebrity magazines. She already had someone begin to Photoshop her picture with

the fish. Her skin had just looked too shiny. Of course, all this attention would steer her toward a conservation stance on trophy fishing in the gulf...

Too much to think about. How bad would it look to get out her BlackBerry and start making notes? Exhaustion began to creep in. She needed a break.

She excused herself from a crowd of philanthropists and investors and ducked inside the hotel. Maybe a few minutes off her feet and a coffee would do her good. She headed toward one of the many bars in the casino and took a seat. She slipped her shoes off to the floor and wrapped her toes around the bar of the stool on which she sat, stretching them and her calves. She wished she could undo the zipper on her dress too, but she wasn't that gauche.

"What can I get you?" the bartender asked as she swiped the bar directly in front of Denise with a damp rag.

Denise read the young woman's name tag. "Hi, Tiffany. May I please have a coffee? Cream and sugar."

"No problem, Ms. Hynes." Of course the woman knew who she was. The staff had probably been briefed, even those not directly working the poolside party.

A French press filled with hot coffee appeared in front of her as if by magic, along with a porcelain cup, a small pitcher of milk, and a bowl of raw sugar. Just how she liked it. She glanced up to thank Tiffany, but the spry worker had already made it down to the far end of the bar, helping another customer.

Denise wiggled her toes as she poured her coffee. She added cream and sugar, stirred it, and took a sip. *Perfect.*

A smashing success all around, she realized. Big Al would be proud that her first major event—even before the opening of the preseason—had drawn such a crowd and raised so much money.

But then why didn't she feel happy?

"Everything all right, Ms. Hynes?"



Denise glanced up at Tiffany. "Fine. Thanks. Coffee's great."

"Okay." Tiffany smiled reassuringly, almost as if she understood Denise had more going on.

Denise knew what the problem was. She couldn't deny it, really, but she also couldn't talk to anyone about it, even a bartender who shouldn't know who she was. She had no anonymity.

"There's something I want that I can't have," Denise admitted, hoping that sounded vague enough.

"Oh, when have you ever not gotten what you want?" Tiffany laughed lightly.

Denise blinked. She didn't know whether to take that as a completely insubordinate jibe or sage words of wisdom. When *had* she ever not gotten what she wanted? She couldn't remember. Sure, she worked for everything she had in some capacity, even if that meant doing Big Al's bidding when she'd rather not. It had gotten her a team, after all.

And Levi was part of that team.

She finished half her coffee. "Tiffany?"

The woman stood before her in a twinkling.

"May I please get a shot of your finest bourbon to finish off my coffee with?"

Tiffany smiled, nodded, and turned. She strained to reach a tippy-top shelf and brought down a bottle of a twenty-three-year-old, single-barrel reserve. Denise had intended to pour it into her coffee, but when she saw how fine the finest was, she pushed the coffee cup away.

"Just a dash of water on the top, won't you?" she requested.

Tiffany did so and handed the glass to Denise. She admired the dark honey color of the liquor and then sipped it carefully. It burned a lovely trail down her gullet. "Liquid fortitude," she said, then drank more, and the rosy warmth spread through her limbs.

After a few more careful sips, she finished off the glass. “Make sure this ends up on my bill tonight, won’t you?” she told Tiffany.

“Yes, ma’am.”

Denise stood, slipped her shoes back on, and plotted her next move. Levi lived in the hotel, didn’t he? She just needed to find out where.

## Chapter Six

Levi turned off ESPN when he heard a knock on the door of his suite. He carefully stepped over his discarded tux jacket, tie, and joke award for being the only person not to catch anything. He regretted living in the same hotel as the banquet. He should mention something to the coaches' wives about it so as to avoid this in the future. Whoever was at the door probably wanted him to come back down to the party. Maybe he hadn't done enough of an appearance. Or it could be one of the cheerleaders or players' wives or rich socialites that wanted a piece of him. He stopped for a moment. What would he tell them? Obviously he'd fallen off the wagon with Denise, and she'd made it more than clear she didn't want anything more from him. How bad would it be to indulge in a little casual sex?

But the idea didn't hold any appeal. Had his tryst with Denise been enough? No, that wasn't it. At the thought of her his cock twitched, telling him he certainly possessed an appetite. But envisioning whatever woman stood on the other side of the door didn't elicit the same response, even when he dressed her in the sluttiest thing he could imagine, gave her huge tits, and had her holding her own handcuffs.

"Shit," Levi murmured as he resumed his trip to the door. His potential visitor tapped again, this time more softly. Maybe he could pretend he'd fallen asleep? No, he should politely deal with whoever it was and then turn in. Hell, Tucker might be checking in on him. He did so randomly to make sure no backsliding had occurred. Levi still warred with himself on how to tell—or if to tell—Tucker what had happened. So far, he'd kept it under wraps.

Levi had early training in the morning, despite the fact that Denise had given the team the morning off. He knew he was not living up to anyone's expectations,

and he needed to change that. He planned on hitting the hotel gym early and then spending the afternoon at the Bloodhounds' facility. He just hoped any visitor didn't affect those plans.

Levi finally reached the door and threw it open.

He coughed, glanced back into his room to see if anyone was there to witness the visit, then looked at the visitor.

Denise Claremont Hynes stood there, her designer pumps suspended from a crooked index finger, her dress that probably cost thousands of dollars clinging deliciously to every curve. Even after a day of fishing and what was sure to have been an exhausting evening at the banquet, she still looked good enough to grace the cover of a magazine.

Levi shook his head. "Oh no." He moved to close the door, but she pressed her palm to it and exerted just the smallest amount of pressure. To Levi, though, it seemed as if she had the strength of Samson before his locks had been chopped.

"Please," she whispered, her voice making it sound as if it took all her willpower to utter that one syllable.

"Haven't we done this dance already?"

She just stood there, her eyes big and pleading, and Levi couldn't say no to her when she looked like that. He'd feel about as bad as if he'd kicked a puppy. He stepped aside and let her through the door, though he knew he would regret it.

"Have a seat, why don't you?" He motioned her toward the large golden leather couch in the living area of the suite. He stepped behind the bar and filled two glasses with ice. "Something to drink?"

Denise nodded. "Water."

Levi chuckled. "I wasn't going to offer you anything different." He opened a bottle of imported water and poured it into the two glasses. Good water to him had come to be like fine wine to those who drank alcohol. He came over to the couch and sat down next to Denise, then handed her the glass. "So."

Denise downed her water as if she drank a shot of vodka. Then she took a moment to look around the room. "Quite nice," she commented, as if he'd had anything to do with the decor.

"Serves my purposes fine." Levi wondered where all of this was headed. What did she want with him? She'd barely said a word since entering.

Denise set the glass down on the coffee table. Then she stood and began to slowly slip the straps of her dress down her shoulders. She closed her eyes and turned away from him. She reached a long, slim arm around and pulled the zipper down.

Levi swallowed as the narrow strip of her back, clad in a peach longline strapless bra, became revealed. His cock vibrated, swelled... He hungered for her.

In fact, her rash display brought a smile to his lips. She obviously hadn't learned very much about him if she thought she could seduce him this way. He didn't play girls' games; they played his.

"Stop," he told her, channeling all of his dominance into that one word. Denise froze, her finger still on the zipper. Levi took a moment to admire the way her arm arched, the flexibility she showed in being able to gracefully take off this dress, where most women would struggle, twist, and bend in unattractive ways. She made it an art form. Levi decided he'd like to see her work with the laces of a leather corset too. Maybe he'd get to buy her one someday. But the way she'd waffled so far... He couldn't put up with it for much longer.

"You can lower your arm," Levi said. She did and remained standing, facing away from him. She possessed some instinct for submitting. He wondered when or why she'd developed it. A woman in her line of work didn't often have need of a skill set like that. Maybe tonight he'd guide her, help her understand all the ways that she could use those skills to make him happy. But first he'd have to get a few things clear.

He leaned back against the posh upholstery of the sofa and eyed her for a few more minutes before speaking again. He loved the contrast of her dark skin against

the lace of her bra. He sipped his own water. "All right, Ms. Hynes. You and I are going to have to have some understandings before we move ahead with this." How did she get him to buckle so easily?

"Whatever this is," Denise said quietly.

"Don't speak yet." Levi shook his head. "Turn around."

She did as he instructed.

Levi couldn't believe he was about to do this. Tucker would consider it backsliding, but there was more to Ms. Hynes than sex. With her, it wouldn't be some casual romp. He knew that going in, could feel the ties between them more than he had with any other woman.

"I know you've heard rumors, Denise, and we experienced something of my likes on the weight bench the other day." He stood so he could look down at her. He inhaled, smelled her perfume beneath her natural scents. "But that's not a once-in-a-while kink for me. And despite all the counseling and rehab and treatment I've gone through—which did rid me of quite a few negative habits—my sexual tendencies... Well, they haven't changed, and they are not likely to." He sighed. "Tucker... He doesn't understand. Hence, the promise I made him. He thinks it's the same thing as the booze, but it's not. It's not the same at all." Would she understand or feel the same way as Tucker? "Don't think you can change me. This is who I am. Who I will always be. If you can't handle that, then we should probably end it now. Because, honestly, I don't see you as one of those girls I could pick up, tie up, and kiss good-bye. And not just because you manage my team."

He watched Denise's chest rise and fall as she listened. He knew millions of things had to be tumbling around in her head, but it wasn't time for her to talk yet, and she showed great restraint by not speaking.

"If we do this, we may have to keep it a secret for a while." Tucker would kill him if he ever found out. "You're right to worry that it could do things to our careers. But I don't see us being able to tiptoe around the attraction either. It's there. If we don't give into it, we both could just...explode." Now that he'd had her

once, he couldn't imagine using another girl as a surrogate. He needed Denise. He hoped she felt the same way, and that she'd bend to his conditions.

He stood there quietly for a moment letting her process all that he'd told her.

Finally he asked, "Can we do this?"

Denise nodded.

"Say, 'Yes, Sir.'"

"Yes, Sir."

*Good.*

Denise's world narrowed down to Levi's words. The room around her fell away, the concerns about charity and the team and Daddy... Everything seemed to tumble away like pieces of the rocket that launched a space shuttle.

"Now," Levi said, and he began to walk around her slowly. "You've been puttin' me through training camp the last few weeks. It's my turn tonight. You have a lot to learn if you are going to be my lover."

Denise tried to keep her breathing steady, to listen attentively.

"First, as I already mentioned, you can address me as 'Sir.' If it helps, pretend you're in the military and I'm your commanding officer. That's the type of response I want. Clear?"

"Yes, Sir," Denise said, hoping she got it right. Even something that simple, being so new, worried her.

"Your sole purpose in all of this is to make me happy."

Denise huffed out a breath. Would she get nothing out of it?

"Don't worry," Levi said. "It often makes me happy to see you happy. Aroused. Wet."

With each word, Denise's body responded more. When he said "wet," her stomach did a little flip, and arousal coursed through her.

“Sometimes, though, when you don’t do as I say quickly enough, or in the way I like, there will be some...necessary roughness.”

She smiled at the football reference, she knew what he meant. *Punishment.*

“But don’t worry; I’m very specific with directions.”

Levi began undressing Denise the rest of the way, and the feel of his fingers on her body caused goose bumps to break out across her skin. When he finished, her clothes a pile on the floor, he stepped away.

“Tonight, we’ll go easy. Work on posture.”

A flush crept up Denise’s body as she stood under his scrutiny. She felt a shimmer of doubt. She’d never done anything like this, had never explored this side of her sexuality. Hell, she’d never even read a book about it, let alone imagined that she would find herself in this type of scenario. Levi had to have something to do with it. He possessed some strange quality that made her incapable of saying no to him, and if he wanted this type of relationship, then she would have to give it to him.

“Kneel,” Levi told her.

She balked. “S-sir?”

“On your knees.” Levi crossed his arms, showing he gave no room for negotiation.

She thought briefly about what the civil rights leaders from years past would say to this—her on the ground in front of this Aryan-looking tough guy—but she put it out of her head almost as quickly as it occurred to her.

Finally she lowered herself to her knees.

“Sit with your ass on your heels.”

Denise complied, settling back.

“Now spread your knees.”

Again, she paused, nervous about exposing herself in such a way, but with Levi’s gaze steady on her, she did it.



“Hands on your thighs, palms up. Arch your back, but head down. Good. Don’t move.” Levi sat on the couch, and Denise wondered what would happen next. Levi sipped his water and swallowed. “Submission is not just about sex. In a lot of ways, it’s like yoga or martial arts. I know you can appreciate that. You have to learn discipline. Learn that the demands of your dom—dominant, me—are more important than the weaknesses or desires of your own body. It’s like training. You know that next crunch or lift is going to hurt, but you do it anyway, because in the long run, it’s better for you.” He set his glass down on the coffee table. “I know what’s best for you. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Good. Stay just as you are. I have to set something up. I’ll be right back.”

He left and went into the adjoining room. Denise, from her position on the floor, could watch him through the large archway that marked the division between the two rooms, but she kept her eyes down, as he’d instructed. There on the floor, alone in the room, she had plenty of time to reflect. She could stand up, dress, and walk right out, but if she did, she would never be able to approach him again. No, she had to stay, to follow through with what she’d promised herself she’d do.

As she sat there, she heard strange sounds coming from the bedroom—metal sliding against metal, chains clanking, an occasional grunt from Levi. *What is he doing in there?*

Denise’s legs started to ache. She wondered how much longer she would have to wait there. She wanted to stretch, but she dared not. He could return at any minute, and she didn’t know what he’d do if he caught her out of position. She imagined he had some kind of punishment for such instances—spanking, maybe a cane or something. Thinking back, she remembered she had watched *Secretary* once with some of her sorority sisters. She’d found it slightly titillating, but thought people had to somehow be damaged to do something like that. Denise had definitely never felt she had any kind of psychological damage. Nothing that would lead to wanting to be abused, but as she thought more about it, she realized it wasn’t about

abuse, but about discipline, as Levi had told her. And she exerted so much control in her life that she needed a time when she could give it up entirely, and that was now. Levi controlled her. She did not need to rely on herself.

“Come here,” she finally heard. She stood and walked toward the bedroom, keeping her gaze on the floor, her skin feeling hot and tight.

At the foot of the bed stood an elegant apparatus. To Denise, it looked like some sort of circus construct, like something performers from Cirque de Soleil would use in a show. A trapeze-style bar hung from a pyramid-shaped, tubular metal scaffold, and below that dangled a leather sling. Padded leather ankle cuffs were attached to two of the uprights.

This was definitely more serious than the weight bench.

“I get the impression that most of your sexual experiences have been what we call ‘vanilla.’”

Denise nodded but didn’t speak.

“I like that on occasion, but generally I have more exotic tastes. This sling is for you. I already know you don’t mind restraints. Do you remember what to say if you feel uncomfortable? If you want me to stop?”

“Yes, Sir.” Denise took a deep breath to try to steady her nerves.

“Climb on.”

Denise did just that, situating her ass on the narrow leather swing, grasping the bar over her head with her arms. Levi approached and lifted her ankles, one by one, and fastened them to the uprights.

“Don’t let go of the bar. If you do, I will restrain your wrists too.”

He gave her clear choices. Don’t do this thing and there will be one logical consequence. She could deal with that.

As she hung there from the sling, Levi undressed. Denise knew she should keep her eyes down, but she wanted to see him, to admire the lines of his body, to catch a glimpse of his cock without getting caught.

When he'd finished undressing, he sat on the edge of the bed, naked. Just sat there. She focused on his feet: big, well shaped, nails healthy. She waited.

"You can look up," Levi told her.

She raised her eyes just a little. He touched himself as he stared back at her.

"You make me so hard, I can barely stand it," he said as he ran his hand up and down his cock.

Denise's arms began to shake just a little. They felt heavier than they ought to.

"Don't let go," Levi warned again.

*Right. Consequences.*

But then one palm, damp with sweat formed by apprehension, slipped from the bar.

Levi clicked his tongue at her, stood up, and brought a pair of fur-covered handcuffs from the bedside table. He clicked one side to one wrist, then ran the chain over the top of the bar, and then secured her other wrist. If she let go of the bar, the handcuffs would prevent her arms from falling.

He stepped back and, without warning, slapped the inside of her thigh hard. The soft flesh stung, and Denise sucked in a breath. He hadn't told her he'd slap her too. Her brow furrowed, but then she realized she liked it, that the little flash of pain ignited something inside her.

Levi smiled, and just that look seemed to make everything okay. "A little reminder of who's in charge here." He sat back on the edge of his bed, stroked his cock a few more times, and then took a deep breath. "I can see how wet you are from here. You're positively dripping. I think you're ready."

She raised her chin just a little to watch him as he crossed the room and fetched a condom from out of the bathroom. He held up the package. "Didn't plan on needing this but...force of habit."

After rubbing the length of his cock a final time, he unwrapped the condom and slipped it over himself.

He stalked over to the swing and stood between her spread legs. She could do nothing, restrained as she was. She would have to take whatever he decided to give her.

The anticipation had already aroused her to the point of dampness. She didn't need anything more before she could take him, and he seemed to know that. He grasped her hips and pulled her toward him. In one fluid movement, he drove into her, sinking all the way to the base.

Denise didn't let go over the bar, but the impact of his thrusting made her arms go weak. She wanted to lower her arms, to clasp him against her, to feel his rippling back muscles beneath her hands, but instead she practiced the discipline he'd told her to. She trusted him to know what she could take.

And take it she did. The swing moved back and forth, meeting him at each drive. His pelvis ground against hers, and every nerve ending screamed at the contact.

He dipped a hand down between them and stroked her clit as he fucked her. That proved to be too much.

Denise came, screaming Levi's name as she did. Then he came only moments later.

He collapsed against her; the metal of the swing groaned under their combined weight. They sat there for a moment, the swing slowly rocking back and forth. Denise shook, but she did not let go of the bar.

Finally he pushed up and began freeing her ankles. She stood on wobbly legs as Levi removed the condom and dropped it on the floor. Then he scooped her up, carried her to the bed, and placed her on it. He joined her, pulling her into his arms.

Denise inhaled deeply, breathing in his musk. Her shivers slowly began to subside as she felt the security of Levi's arms.

It wouldn't hurt to just rest her eyes for a little bit...

\* \* \*

Denise blinked and wondered if she had to consider this a walk of shame. Many of the tournament's participants had stayed the night, and any number of them could catch her sneaking across the lobby in the same dress she had on the night before, her shoes in her hand, dark circles under her eyes. She prayed she'd left Levi's room early enough, thinking anyone from the party would still be sleeping late. She walked with a straight back, though trying to look inconspicuous, to the valet station, handed him her ticket, and waited, shifting her gaze furtively around. She didn't see anyone she recognized.

Before long, the valet pulled up in her sedan, she handed him a tip, and she climbed in, being careful as she sat. Once the valet had shut her driver's side door, she felt safe. The car insulated her from the outside world. In here, she only had to deal with the judgment she brought down on herself. No one else's.

Denise pulled out of the hotel's entry and headed west along Beach Boulevard toward home. To her left, the water of the gulf twinkled in the early-morning light. A few beachgoers walked their dogs or swept the beach with metal detectors.

Her vehicle purred reassuringly, and she settled in for the drive along the beach toward home. She turned on the ESPN radio station and listened to the news about the off-season trades and training camp news. Once the announcers switched to baseball, she changed the station and listened to R and B.

Denise couldn't believe she'd gone back to Levi. *Tiffany*. She'd have to remember that woman. It felt...right to blame the bartender rather than herself. Denise took responsibility for nearly everything she did in her life, but this time...*Tiffany*. She'd have to go back at some point and give that woman a piece of

her mind. Planning what she'd say as she drove made her feel better, but she knew she'd never go through with it.

Once she'd played out the conversation in her head a few times, she switched over to what she'd tell Levi when they saw each other again. Denise shook her head slowly. She had no idea where to start with that one. She told him one thing—quite clearly—and then had done something completely different. She hated people who acted that way. What did it say about her? Could she tell him *again* that she couldn't be with him? That they couldn't do this? She really tried to picture the conversation in her head, but all she could see was a ripped and glowing Levi, naked, towering over her, holding a paddle and telling her to bite her tongue, to let her thoughts go...

God, she did need someone to remind her of that, to take away her smartphone so she couldn't check stats, to show her she couldn't control everything in her life, no matter how hard she tried. She had to find a way to make it work with him, even if that meant having a clandestine relationship. She just hoped the press and the league didn't tear her apart when they found out.

She pulled into her own driveway. She drove around the back of the house and let herself in through the kitchen door, meant for deliveries.

"Morning, Shug."

Denise froze, feeling like a teenager getting caught by her mom coming in after curfew. Chrissie stood in the kitchen, wrapped in a big fluffy robe, her hands clutching a mug of coffee. Steam rose off the surface of the liquid.

Denise inhaled deeply. "Can I get a cup of that?" she asked.

Chrissie set down her cup and went about fixing another for Denise. She sat down gingerly at one of the stools that lined the marble-topped cooking island. Chrissie put the drink down in front of her and then picked up her own coffee. She leaned across the island and looked at Denise knowingly.

Denise sighed. She'd been more than happy to give the team's flight attendant a place to live when she was in Biloxi, but sometimes she wished she didn't have a roommate, despite the ridiculously large size of the house.

Times like this, for instance.

"Was it a success?" Chrissie asked.

"What do...?" Denise stopped herself. Chrissie definitely couldn't know about Levi. Denise couldn't trust her to keep her mouth shut. "Oh, the fundraiser. Definitely."

"What else would I be talking about?" A flash of suspicion crossed her face.

Denise swallowed. "Nothing. I...yeah. The fishing trip and the evening took so much out of me that I thought it best just to grab a room there rather than come home. I wish I'd thought about it sooner. I can't imagine what anyone would have thought if they'd seen me crossing the lobby this morning in this dress."

"Probably that you'd gotten laid," Chrissie said matter-of-factly and then giggled.

Denise smiled weakly. "Yeah, maybe." She tried to laugh too, but it sounded forced to her own ears. She shook her head and drank her coffee. She needed a shower more than anything. She worried Chrissie might be able to smell the previous evening's events on her, but the coffee tasted too good to rush off right away.

"Well," Chrissie said, evidently trying to overcome the awkward silence that had fallen. "Who won?"

Denise looked up at her. "Oh, I did." But when she said it, Denise realized she didn't mean the just the tournament. She meant what had happened after. She stood up and pushed her cup away. "Thanks for the coffee. I'll clean up later."

"Sure thing."

Denise headed out of the kitchen, through the butler's pantry, and up the servants' stairs to her bedroom. She stripped out of her dress as soon as she closed

the door behind her and then headed for the bathroom. Her underthings hit the floor as she moved. She passed her tall vanity mirror and stopped for a moment. She couldn't see the marks Levi left on her dark skin—after their first bout on the swing, she'd fallen asleep, but he'd roused her for more, which had included her first foray into more sustained spanking. She could still feel the warmth of his handprint on her ass. A reminder of something she most definitely had to have again.

Soon.



## Chapter Seven

The team only had a week before the first game of the season, but Levi felt fairly confident they had a shot at winning. At least that game. Their first opponent would be the Omaha development team. He'd followed the news of their training camp rather closely, and it didn't seem that things had come together as well for them as they had for the Bloodhounds. Plus, the Bloodhounds would get the home-field advantage, playing in the Biloxi stadium.

Quickly he turned his thoughts back to practice. He and Josh had come a long way as far as receptions went. In fact, the entire team had started looking up to Josh. He wasn't just some hotshot kid. He really knew what he was doing. Their offense consistently outperformed the defense, largely in part to Josh and Coach Stiles.

But Levi knew there was someone else he had to thank. He glanced up from his position on the offensive line. He saw her, sitting there on the bleachers, a clipboard in her hand. A week had passed since their night together in his suite, and she'd found the time to give herself to him on a few more occasions. In fact, she'd proven an easy student. Almost too easy. He barely found reasons to spank her after that first night, and he really wanted to.

Levi heard Josh call the snap, and he launched forward, dodged his defender, and headed in a slant route across the field. His gaze found the ball, already sailing through the air toward him. When it hit his fingertips, he scooped it against his chest, straightened his path toward the end zone, and tried to cover as much distance as he could.

But before he could make it to the end zone, he felt someone grasp his ankles, and he went down in a heap to the turf.

But he'd achieved a first down, maintained ball control as he'd fallen, and he knew that's all that mattered to Coach Stiles.

"Nice work!" he heard the old man growl from the sidelines.

The cornerback who'd tackled him offered him a hand and helped pull Levi to his feet.

Levi dusted himself and jogged back to the line.

They ran a few more plays, using him to block and receive. It seemed everyone knew their role.

First showers, then lunch in the cafeteria before video work and a late-afternoon practice. Levi liked the structure the team gave him. The coaches didn't excuse him from the team activities the way others had, and even if he had tried to slip out, Tucker would have stopped him.

At lunch, Tucker sat down across the table from him.

Levi smiled. "Don't you want to maybe find yourself some new talent? I don't know that I need so much babysitting anymore."

Tucker harrumphed. "I'm going to get you through this first season. Then we'll talk about me branching out."

Tucker's tone told Levi something was wrong. "What's up?" he asked.

"I've been watching you," Tucker said quietly. "More to the point, I've been watching you watching *her*." He paused, and Levi realized what he was saying. "You've slept with her, haven't you?"

Levi had dreaded this conversation, had hoped that he would never have to have it, or at least he'd get to have it on his own terms. He didn't want it like this. Blindsided while sitting with a plate of chicken fettuccini. Could he tell Tucker the truth? That it was more than the quick fuck Tucker clearly thought it was? That

she wanted him as badly as he wanted her, that he hadn't looked at another woman for weeks, let alone thought about sleeping with anyone other than Denise.

He took a deep breath, exhaled slowly, and realized what he was about to do was typical addict behavior, but he couldn't stop himself. He couldn't risk losing Denise or losing Tucker or losing his spot on the team. "Once," he said, trying to sound as firm and finite as possible. "After the party at the Hard Rock."

Tucker slumped his shoulders and shook his head. "Were you drunk?"

"Hell no." At least that was the truth. Levi had stayed sober. "It won't happen again."

"And you can stop anytime you want to? Don't you hear yourself, Levi?"

"I know." He couldn't make any more excuses. Best to take Tucker's speech and try to move past it.

"We had a deal, man."

"I know." Tucker would leave him now. Leave him with his ass in the wind.

"Shit, you're lucky you have a contract." Tucker glanced to the left and right, then leaned forward. "Don't let this get out. It's between you and me. Keep it that way. And hope she doesn't go saying anything to anyone."

"She won't," Levi said. "I trust her." *More than that*, but he didn't want to think about the future right now.

"Good. I am going to have to talk to her, though."

Levi felt as if his heart thudded to a halt. "What?"

"Just to make sure."

"Make sure of what?" He should have known better. He should have seen that coming. Now he'd lied to Tucker, and Tucker would follow up with Denise. Once Tucker found out about the lie, he very well could walk away, and Levi would have no representation.

"That she has our best interests at heart. That this isn't going to turn into any kind of media zoo."

That hadn't occurred to Levi. He winced, but he knew Denise wouldn't do that. She had as much to lose as he did. Wanting to change the subject, he asked, "Any word on endorsements?"

Luckily it worked. Tucker fell into in-depth explanations about several deals he was working on with sponsors, old and new, and what Levi could expect from them. Levi tried to follow the thread of the conversation, but all he could do was worry about Denise.

\* \* \*

Denise came out of her private bathroom, dressed for her late-evening workout, to find Tucker Flynn standing in the door of her office.

She half expected him. Levi had texted a rather confusing message explaining that Tucker knew something and to not give anything away. She wished she had a chance to meet with her lover before Tucker confronted her, but... *Oh well.*

"Mr. Flynn, I didn't expect to see you. I'm just heading off for my workout." She opened an armoire and removed a towel. "Is this something pressing, or can it wait?"

"I'll walk with you, if you don't mind. We can talk now."

Denise could see how taut his jaw was. Obviously he didn't feel comfortable about this. Well, good. Neither did she.

She swept past him in the doorway, and he turned to catch up to her.

"So what's going on?" she asked as they exited the building and headed across the clearing to the training facility. "Is there an issue with your client?" Best to make it sound impersonal.

"Levi told me you slept together."

Denise nodded and swept her gaze over the grass. She didn't look up. "Did he?" *What to say?*

"It's true. I can tell when he's lying."

*So he confessed everything? No, that's not what he'd texted her.*

“He told me it only happened once, and he wouldn’t do it again.”

*So Tucker’s not that good at calling Levi’s bluff.*

“Ms. Hynes, I need you to help him keep that promise. I’m afraid this is just the beginning of what could be a terrible regression. I may even need to bring in his addiction counselor.”

Denise stopped, took a deep breath, and turned to the small agent. Her heart beat a little faster at the idea of lying to him. She looked down at him, hoping he responded to her authority the way most people did. “If you think that’s best, then do it. We have a lot invested in Levi—you and I—and I would hate to see his career jeopardized by a mistake like this.” She hated using that word, “mistake.” She didn’t feel that way about one moment she’d spent with Levi, but no one else could know that. Not yet anyway.

“So you’ll stay away from him?”

“We’ll have no contact beyond the bounds of our professional relationship. Is that what you need to hear, Mr. Flynn?”

“It makes me feel a little better, yes.” Tucker offered his hand, and Denise shook it. His palms felt damp, and that convinced her he was definitely worried about Levi. She smiled genuinely at him. “I do want what’s best for Mr. Ballom,” she told him. “No matter what.”

“I appreciate that. Good night.”

Tucker headed off across the field toward the parking lot. Denise stood and watched him until he got into his car and pulled out of the lot.

Then her nerves got the better of her, and her stomach churned with worry. She could only hope Tucker decided to keep his mouth shut. She couldn’t have accusations make it out into the open. He could ruin her and the team. If her father found out, he’d pull her back to Austin in no time, and she’d be hostessing his charity toy drives and showing investors around the locker rooms. *Sheesh.*

She headed toward the weight room. Levi was like a drug to her. She knew she jeopardized everything to be with him, but she couldn't stop herself. And this ignited a sympathy for Levi that went deeper than sex. The more time she spent with him, the more she realized she wanted him. Maybe even needed him.

Problem was, she didn't regret one moment of it.

Maybe she needed the addiction counselor.

## Chapter Eight

Levi flipped the pencil, erased someone else's name from a bracket, and wrote his own there. Then he hefted his brand-new golf bag over his shoulder and headed for the tee. He couldn't believe Denise had put him in another foursome, so he'd had to fix it. The only thing that would make this charity golf tournament worthwhile would be getting to play it with her.

Even if she had been avoiding him since Tucker found out about their affair. Their relationship, though secret, had been going well to that point. He'd loved what he had with Denise, and he hated himself for his inability to lie completely to Tucker—why did he have to give up the one time?—but he knew if he hadn't given his agent at least a grain of truth, Tucker would have kept harassing him until the entire thing was unearthed.

Denise already stood at the tee with the other two golfers who would make up their group. She chatted with them, clearly at ease and enjoying herself. Both were investors in the team, and she surely felt some obligation to keep them entertained. Levi hoped he didn't monopolize too much of her time, though he did have some choice things to whisper to her if they had some time alone with each other. Things that would hopefully cause her to dampen her panties a little.

Strike that. He didn't care one bit. He just wanted time with her, and this could very well give him the opportunity.

Without interrupting Denise's conversation with the investors, Levi strapped his bag to the back of their golf cart, pulled out his driver, and approached, the biggest smile he could manage on his face.

As soon as Denise saw him, her dialogue trailed off, and her eyes grew big.

One of the investors cleared his throat, and Levi's spell over Denise broke. She plastered on a polite smile and turned to her attention back to them.

"Forgive me. Mr. Fineburg, Mr. Yamamoto, please let me introduce Levi Ballom, our star tight end." She swept her hand in Levi's direction, and Levi stepped forward. He shook hands with the two investors.

"Seems some kind of mix-up landed me in this foursome," he said, trying for nonchalant. "But I couldn't think of anyone else I'd rather be playing golf with on this beautiful day."

It was not, in fact, a beautiful day. The heat index had soared to near triple digits, and giant storm clouds loomed, threatening thunder and lightning. If it began to strike during the tournament, they'd have to call it off.

"Glad to have you aboard, Mr. Ballom," Mr. Fineburg said. "Nice clubs, by the way."

Levi didn't know the first thing about golf. Tucker had picked these out for him, and he'd only had a chance to hit the driving range a few times before the tournament.

On his first drive, he did manage to hit it square down the center of the fairway, though he didn't get it as far as he figured someone with his upper-body strength ought to. The others—clearly regular players—kept up with each other. Denise even held her own against the two men on drives, and her chips and putts were far more accurate.

On the long third hole, Levi finally managed to find some alone time with Denise as he drove the car toward his ball. Fineburg and Yamamoto had driven theirs to the other side of the fairway.

"What's with the ice princess act all of the sudden?" Levi asked her, keeping his voice down despite the fact that they were practically alone.

"You told Tucker about us. What if he leaks it?"



“Not going to happen.” Levi stopped, climbed out of the cart, and picked up a nine iron. “Trust him.” He lined up, swung, and his ball landed in a sand trap just to the front of the green. “Trust me, for chrissakes.”

Denise folded her arms across her chest and looked away. When Levi climbed back into the cart, he rested a hand on her knee. He accelerated toward her ball, just on the apron of the green.

He could feel her tense under his touch. Whether it was from the caress itself or the fear of discovery, he didn’t know.

“I need you, Denise,” he whispered, then took his hand off her knee.

He could hear her breathing through her nose, clearly trying to get a hold of herself, over the sound of the golf cart’s electric motor.

*Nice to know I still have some effect on her.* But was it frustration or arousal? He glanced sideways at her to see if he could find any clue to her mood, but he couldn’t see anything that swayed his opinion one way or the other.

Everyone chipped and putted and recorded scores.

Denise had the most strokes yet. Her putts went off in crazy directions as if she didn’t know how to read the green, and Levi noticed her hands shaking as she tried to hold her clubs.

*I’ve definitely gotten to her.*

They joined up at the next hole and waited for the team in front of them to finish it out.

Denise, though she had a perfectly comfortable seat in the cart, moved away from the group and sat down on one of the benches. Levi watched as she fanned herself with the scorecard. He grabbed a bottle of water from the cooler on the cart and carried it over to her, opening it for her as he did. He handed it to her and, with a scowl, she accepted it. She drank the water down in one long draft, then pitched the bottle into the trash can.

“Thanks,” she mumbled.

"I know how to take care of my girl," he told her. "Everything okay?" he asked, knowing full well it wasn't. He couldn't help but feel mildly amused at her unease, but he wanted her to admit to what bothered her so he could fix it.

"Oh, stop," she hissed and looked away.

He put a foot on the edge of the bench and leaned down over her. Her gaze clearly rested on the bulge of his crotch, then snapped up to meet his.

"That's no way to talk to me," he said quietly. "You may have to suffer for it later."

He watched the column of her throat as she struggled to swallow.

"I guess some subs need to learn a little respect."

She let out a little whimper, and Levi smiled.

"I'll make a little wager with you," he said. "If you out-drive me on this tee, I'll cut you some slack."

Her eyes narrowed at the suggestion, and she seemed to shake off her unease and arousal. God, she did love a challenge, didn't she?

"And if I don't?"

Levi just chuckled. He finally brought his leg back down to the ground and then offered her his hand. She took it slowly and allowed him to pull her to her feet. Quite deliberately, Levi pulled too hard, and she stumbled against his chest. He took a moment to hold her there, to make sure she understood what she did to him, how aroused he was, and that he was in charge. Then he pushed her away lightly, chuckled, and headed back to the cart.

His turn had come to tee off. With each hole, Levi did better and better. This one made a few more yards than the previous drive had, and his aim was just as good.

Denise, since she'd done so poorly on the previous hole, teed off last. She placed her ball high up on an extra-long tee, raised her driver, took one look at Levi, and swung.

Her ball sailed through the air, getting amazing height and distance, but it sliced to the left and landed in the thick grove of giant oak trees that bordered the fairway.

Levi shook his head. They'd never be able to find her ball in there.

"Guess I better go look for it," she said, put her club away, and started, empty-handed, toward the oaks. "Y'all play on ahead," she told the men over her shoulder.

Levi watched for a minute, then saw his opportunity—which he realized she'd probably planned all along. "She forgot a club! Say, what's the best for driving out of something like that?"

Yamamoto recommended a two iron, given the distance remaining to the pin, and then he and Fineburg got in the cart and headed toward their balls. Levi trotted off after Denise into the woods.

Just as he got to the tree line, the first drops of rain began to fall.

The oaks, draped all over with Spanish moss, created an idyllic, almost mythological feel. Levi imagined nymphs dressed in diaphanous gowns flitting from tree to tree, but he didn't need some anonymous fairy woman to make him happy. He just needed one flesh-and-blood woman.

He caught a glimpse of her white team polo deeper into the grove. He ran toward her, but when he got to the spot he thought he'd seen her, she wasn't there. Again, still farther in, he saw her again.

This time, when he arrived, he found her, kneeling in a small, grassy clearing, head down, back arched, palms up on her thighs, just as he'd taught her.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"If you wish to punish me for my disrespect, here I am."

Around them, fat drops of rain began to filter down through the leaves and moss, tapping against the dry leaves that littered the ground around the clearing. Levi glanced back toward the course. From here, he could see nothing of the

civilization that marked the existence of the country club behind them. No one could see them. *Good.*

Levi took a deep breath. He'd certainly not come prepared for this. Worst part: no protection.

"We can't do this now. I haven't got a condom," he admitted.

Denise's shoulders slumped slightly. He'd disappointed her.

"I get tested regularly, because of my history, but..." He shook his head. Even if she were on the pill, it was too soon to make that sort of commitment, even if he did plan on doing it someday.

But he couldn't refuse such a pliable and willing sub. He had to take advantage of it somehow. "Unzip your pants. Push them down to your knees." It amazed him how easily she'd become some adventurous woman, willing to risk discovery to be with him.

Denise did as he told her without question, her eyes never leaving the ground in front of her, but he could see they'd brightened a little.

Levi stepped up and circled her, admiring her ass, the line of her back, even under its shirt.

More water plopped in fat drops to the ground. Outside, without the cover of the oaks, it probably stormed hard.

Levi stopped in front of her. "Rise up a little," he told her. She obliged. Levi undid his own fly and pulled out his semihard cock. "I'm going to fuck your mouth, and you are going to touch yourself. When I come, you will come. Not a moment sooner, not a moment later. Do you understand?"

Denise licked her dark lips invitingly, nodded, and then added, "Yes, Sir."

A bolt of warmth at her willingness to obey shot through his core. "Spread your pussy lips for me. Let me see what they hide."

She reached down with both hands and spread them. He could see her clit, already hard and glistening with her wetness.

His cock responded, swelling the rest of the way and wanting to get inside her. “Good,” he said. “Open for me.”

She tilted her head back slightly and opened her jaw.

Levi closed the last bit of distance between them and pushed into her mouth.

Warm heat encased him, and he sighed as he buried his hands into her black locks. He thrust a few times, loving the feel of her tongue running up and down the ridges and veins of his cock. She certainly knew how to do this. He didn’t need to teach her how to perform blowjobs.

“Are you touching yourself?” he asked. He used her hair to hold her head off to one side while she sucked him, so he could look down the length of their bodies. He saw her fingers dipping in and out, their tips gleaming with juices. “Good.”

He controlled her fully, using her hair to steer her, to tell her what he wanted without words. At the same time, he could hear the wet sounds her fingers made against her own flesh, and the worsening rain. Periodically, water fell on them, leaving giant patches of wetness on their clothes.

Lightning flashed, brightening the clearing, and then thunder rolled not a second later. And still Denise sucked and licked, driving Levi ever upward toward climax. He could feel it building as his balls tightened.

Her lips seared the skin of his cock with every drive.

Then, with a little move of her head and a trick of her tongue, she took him all the way in. Levi held her there, hardly believing what she’d done. Then he pulled back nearly to the tip and thrust, quick and shallow. Her tongue laved his tip, flicking quick as the lightning striking overhead.

“Soon,” he told her.

He could feel the movements of her body change. She drove into herself more fiercely, working to keep up with him, to match him and give him what he needed. Levi smiled as he raised his head to look up at the raging sky through the oak leaves.

He roared like a bull as he came, and around his cock, Denise screamed her release too.

They collapsed together onto the damp grass, his arms around her holding her tightly to him as the rain poured down through the tree tops.

He couldn't give this up.

They found a ball, but surely it wasn't Denise's. A little moss had grown on one side, and mud was smeared all over it. Nevertheless, she held it up as they exited the woods, hoping to convince any remaining witnesses that, though it had taken a really long time, they had finally found her ball, and nothing untoward had happened out there. As she walked out of the oak trees, she felt good. Her body hummed with the memory of Levi taking her mouth, and even though she'd brought herself to orgasm, she still felt as if he'd been completely responsible for it.

She'd never done anything that wild. Couldn't imagine doing it with anyone but Levi. What was it about him that drove her to that? That made her capable of overcoming her fears and control issues so she could experience true, free pleasure? She still couldn't put her finger on it, but she couldn't deny that she loved it. Wanted more of it.

Rain still poured down, and the last thing most people wanted to do was get caught in a lightning storm with a golf club raised over their heads. Fineburg and Yamamoto were nowhere to be seen. Denise couldn't see their golf cart or clubs, and the tee behind them was deserted too. Across the fairway, a viewing stand stood. One lone spectator sat there, beneath a large Austin Guardians umbrella.

Denise stopped.

Levi pulled to a halt beside her and looked down at her. “What’s wrong?” he asked.

Denise pointed to the stand. Even through the rainwater running down her face, blurring her vision, she could not mistake the person sitting there.

Big Al Hynes.

*Daddy.*

## Chapter Nine

Finally letting her immature control issues about her daddy get the better of her, Denise slammed her bedroom door and stripped out of her clothes. She couldn't believe he'd had the gall to show up! The first game of the season—both his and hers—was only a week away. Didn't he have his own team to manage? No, of course not. Because he had a general manager and coach there he trusted. Which meant he didn't trust her.

All throughout the gala banquet that followed the failure of a golf tournament, Big Al had dominated—and not in a good way. He'd taken attention away from her, answered questions she should have answered, and even stopped for more society-page snapshots than she had. He drove her nuts.

But he is the owner, she reminded herself. He had a role to play, even if she didn't like it.

She pulled on terrycloth shorts and a T-shirt and then heard a tap at her door. She crossed the room and opened it a crack.

Chrissie stood on the other side, wearing a pink froufrou robe and looking worried. "There's a man downstairs to see you."

"Oh yeah?" Probably Daddy come to issue proclamations. He never told her what she did wrong, just changed things. When he changed things, you didn't have to get told whose fault it was.

"It's that man from the TV."

Denise furrowed her brow. "What?"



“The football player.” She lowered her voice to a stage whisper. “That did those things, with those girls.” She shuddered as if the very thought was too much to bear. “I made him stay outside.”

Right. Chrissie hadn’t flown with the team anywhere yet. And Denise had very carefully not mentioned that one particular tight end had ended up on the Bloodhounds.

“You mean Levi Ballom.” Denise slipped on a pair of flip-flops that sat by her bedroom door. “He’s on the team, Chrissie. You’re going to have to fly with him sooner or later.”

Chrissie seemed mortified at the thought. “You sure? Isn’t he dangerous?”

Denise laughed. “Hardly. He’s probably just come to make some kind of contractual demand. Like he won’t play unless he has a bowl full of green M&M’S before every game.” She headed downstairs. Chrissie stood at the top, watching fearfully. “Go back to bed,” Denise told her as she opened the front door.

Levi stood there, leaning against one of the pillars on the porch, looking out across the highway to the ocean.

Denise stepped outside and closed the door behind her. “You took a risk coming here, don’t you think?”

“I didn’t know you shared your house.”

“She’s the team’s flight attendant.” Denise sat down on the big porch swing. “What’s going on?”

Levi turned and sat down next to her. “I could tell you weren’t happy at the banquet. Your father?”

She nodded. “I need to suck it up.”

“Do you want me to help take your mind off it?” He had a glint in his eye.

Denise smiled, thinking of all the wonderful ways he would do that. But he couldn’t, not now. “Too much risk. We can’t be together until he’s gone.”

“What if I ordered you?”

“You won’t. You care about the team, and your career, as much as I do. We just need a little patience.” A nice breeze coming in off the ocean ruffled her hair. Denise sighed, feeling more relaxed than she had all day. She hated saying no to Levi; it went against all those feelings of submission he’d sparked in her, but now that she’d said it, she felt like she could live with her decision, at least for the short-term.

“Well, I’ll wait for you,” Levi said quietly, and that promise sounded more sincere and vulnerable than anything she’d ever heard from a man. He made it sound like it would be forever, rather than a week or so.

She melted at the promise, wanted to hold him, but instead steeled herself. They had priorities. “Keep your mind on the game, Ballom,” Denise said, all manager.

Levi laughed and said, “Yes, ma’am.” Something he’d never say to Denise his lover. Only to his manager. They both knew that.

Levi stood and walked down to the Hard Rock Casino’s courtesy limo. Denise followed him. At the door of the car, she leaned in for a kiss. Levi gave it to her, and Denise melted inside. She wanted desperately to crawl into that limo with him and let him do anything he wanted to her, but she couldn’t. Not tonight.

“It won’t be long,” she said to him.

“Already feels like an eternity.” Levi slid into the backseat and closed the door. The limo pulled out of the driveway and headed east down the highway, back toward the hotel.

Well, now two more people knew about them: Chrissie and whoever drove that car.

Denise shook her head. She looked back at the house, then out toward the water. Maybe a walk would clear her head.

She headed for the beach, walking across the deserted highway and then down onto the sand. At the water’s edge, she removed her sandals and walked west, the lights of the casinos at her back.

Denise had easily come to terms with her status as a submissive in the bedroom, but she couldn't come to terms with how a relationship with Levi would look to the outside world. She thought for the thousandth time about everything that could go wrong, about what her father would say, what the press would say. How *SportsCenter* would report it when the staff there found out. The team bylaws didn't explicitly forbid relationships between players and management. Hell, cheerleaders ended up with players all the time. Not much different, really.

Denise felt the damp sand beneath her toes. Did she care if the press thought she was just another one of Levi's bondage bunnies? Would that destroy any future for her in the league? Probably not. Not with Big Al Hynes to back her up, and despite how bossy her father could be, he would most definitely back her up when she needed it.

She stopped and looked out toward the small barrier island, little more than a dark hump in the moonlight. She'd finally made up her mind. She wanted more out of her relationship with Levi. They couldn't keep it a secret forever, and probably full disclosure early on would mean less ridicule and speculation in the long run. Hopefully, he would feel the same way.

Denise stood there for a while, appreciating the sense of peace and resolution she experienced from coming to her decision, but then a voice shattered it.

"Denise? What are you doing out here?"

Denise turned to look down the beach and saw her father delicately picking his way across the sand in his handmade Italian loafers. She took a breath, shaking her head. No time like the present, she supposed. No chance to chicken out.

"What are *you* doing here, Daddy?"

"That roommate of yours told me you'd come down here."

Chrissie must have been keeping tabs on her through the bedroom window, just to make sure Levi didn't do anything. "You hired her. Don't you remember?"

Big Al brushed the comment off with a flick of his gold-watch-wearing wrist.  
“You didn’t seem too happy to see me, Denise.”

“Get right to the point, don’t you?”

“Always have. You know that.”

“Daddy, do you remember when we hired that sweet little folk singer out of Austin to sing the National Anthem?”

“Vaguely?”

“But then you let that Kardashian woman sing because she just happened to be at the game because she was dating a player on the opposing team?”

“Sure. Crowd loved it.”

“Well, I feel like that little folk singer right now, Daddy. You’re that Kardashian woman.”

Big Al came up to stand next to Denise, his hands shoved in his pockets. Together they stared out at the water.

“I still have owner shit to do here, princess. You know that.”

“But I’m the manager.”

“And I ain’t gonna step on your toes. You hear me?”

“Yes, Daddy.” She paused. “But it sure felt like you were tonight. Stepping on my toes, I mean.”

“Sorry about that. I forget these aren’t the Guardians. These are your Bloodhounds.”

*My Bloodhounds.* Denise smiled, but then she remembered what she really needed to talk to her father about. “I’m seeing someone.”

“I know.”

“How?”

Big Al sniffed as if he caught a whiff of something he didn't like. "That scummy little agent came to me, in complete confidence, mind you, and told me you'd slept with the tight end." She could hear a certain level of strain in his voice. Of course, no man probably wanted to hear about what his daughter did with a man, but did it go deeper than that? Was he worried about her or the business? His tone didn't tell her. "When I saw you coming out of the woods yesterday—"

"We were waiting for the rain to die down." A lame excuse, but she felt obligated to make it, as his daughter.

"Right." He chuckled. "You're a grown woman, big enough to make your own decisions. The agent just wanted assurances that if things went south with you and his client, nothing would happen to Ballom."

Denise took a deep breath. "I'm always a professional. You know that. His position on the team is assured. Coach Stiles wouldn't have it any other way." She knew her father had something else to add.

"Well, you should tell that to the agent. I wouldn't have suggested Ballom for the team if I didn't think he had promise, and I know you'll keep him on the straight and narrow. Probably better at it than his agent is because you care about the team. Agent just cares about money."

"I can keep seeing him?"

"Will it get in the way of your job?"

"Please, Daddy." Denise huffed. "I've wanted a football team since I was six. I've only liked boys since I was fourteen. Where do you think my priorities are?"

Big Al laughed, a booming sound that sailors sitting out on their boats in the harbor probably heard. "Well, I wish you still only liked football, princess."

So that was that then. Daddy knew, and he expected her to keep it professional. She could do that. Easily. Tucker seemed to have an issue with it, but Big Al had silenced him. And Tucker didn't have to be Levi's agent forever.

But she did want to be his girl forever.

“Thanks, Daddy.” Denise leaned into her father, and he put his arm around her and gave her shoulder a squeeze.

“I am staying for the first game, though,” he told her. “Just to be sure.”

“Just remember who’s in charge,” Denise said, and laid her head on his shoulder.

## Chapter Ten

Levi checked his gear again, picked up his helmet, and headed into the conference room for a final pep talk and team photo. The first game of the season. He wished he'd had a chance to really talk to Denise before it happened, but too much had gone on. She'd been busy organizing concessions, arranging things with the police and paramedics, and making sure everything was ready for the visiting team.

Some of the team had taken seats. Others stood, stretching out sore muscles or leaning against the wall, trying to get into that mental space necessary for this type of competition.

Levi stood toward the back, loving the feel of being in a new uniform, the rush of adrenaline thinking about the game brought. He couldn't wait to smash the other team. He knew the Bloodhounds would win. He could feel it.

Kickoff would arrive in less than half an hour. They'd go out on the field, do some warm-ups, and then come back in. After that, the announcement, the fireworks...game time.

Levi took a few quick breaths as he found a spot next to Josh Tavers on the wall.

"Nervous?" Levi asked.

Josh frowned slightly and shook his head. "No different than college ball, right?"

"Suppose not."

A hush settled over the crowd as Denise walked in. She wore an impeccable black suit, black pumps, and a small Bloodhounds pin on her lapel. Understated. Classy. Perfect.

She crossed to the lectern and set down her clipboard. She grasped both sides of the lectern and swept the crowd with her gaze. When her eyes locked with Levi's, she smiled slightly. God, he wanted her all to himself right now. Fuck the game, he thought, but he didn't mean it. No, he'd play his damndest today. For her.

"Gentleman, I have a few words for you before turning things over to Coach Stiles."

She took a deep breath, and Levi admired the rise and fall of her chest beneath the Bloodhounds-red blouse she wore.

"I'm not that great with words. I'd like to give you some rousing inspirational speech about how far we've come as a team, how it's only the beginning. I'll leave that up to Coach. What I can tell you is that I have learned a lot in the weeks we've been together."

When she said this, she looked directly at Levi.

"I've discovered new things about myself. This team has made me a better person. I can only hope it's done the same for you." She broke her gaze from Levi, and he watched her peg several of the other players in the room. "Win or lose today, I know you've come to play your best game. I know each one of you can make it to the big teams, and I will regret the day that I have to transfer your contracts. Good luck, men, and go Bloodhounds!"

With that, she picked up her clipboard and left the conference room. At the door, she turned one last time and looked at Levi. He smiled and offered her a small salute. She grinned back and then was gone.

\* \* \*

Silence filled the stadium. Everyone had gone home or headed to the afterparty, but Denise needed just a little time to herself. Just a little time to take



in the victory, to revel in the success. Everything had gone well—not flawlessly, but better than she had hoped. Her father did not interfere when minor issues arose, and she handled all of them without disappointing a spectator, player, or member of the opposing team. The numbers had yet to come in, but she felt certain that they’d come close to a sell-out crowd. The concession take... She shivered in expectation of those numbers.

Denise took off her shoes and walked barefoot across the grass of the field. She liked the feel of the artificial turf beneath her toes, how it seemed real but oh-so-sanitary. No bugs, no dog poo, just yards and yards of pristine grass. She thought for a moment about running, shouting, acting like a little kid—something she never did. But her seriousness got the better of her.

She did spin in one circle, eyes up to the underside of the dome, and then stopped.

Someone had entered from behind one of the goal posts. Someone she recognized.

Levi.

She ran toward him, and he walked slowly up to meet her, but she pulled short of running into his arms at the twenty yard line. Just because she couldn’t see anyone didn’t mean they were alone. Any number of people could be standing in the reviewing booths, the luxury suites, in the darkness of the alcoves. Although her father said they could be together, professionalism had to be the order of the day, and that meant no PDA on the field.

Levi wore a pressed white shirt, the first few buttons undone, and purple pinstriped trousers with matching alligator skin boots. He’d taken to the flash and flair of a southern baller in no time. He had a duffel slung over one shoulder, and the game ball in his hand. He’d made two touchdowns, which unfortunately wouldn’t push him any closer to his professional record, but the team had definitely decided he deserved the ball after their victory.

“Hey,” he said as he tossed it a little in the air and caught it.

Denise swallowed. This was the first time they'd spoken since she'd sent him away from her house the week before. She'd wanted to tell him her father knew, that everything would be okay between them, but she'd never found the time. Either she'd worked her ass off, or collapsed in exhaustion. Navigating an awkward relationship had been the furthest thing from her mind. He had no idea what decision she had come to regarding them.

"You did good tonight," she told him, not really sure where to start their relationship conversation.

"You too. One of the best run games I've played in."

"Thanks."

They stood there, staring at each other, waiting.

"I have a wager for you," Denise finally said.

Levi raised a blond eyebrow. "Oh yeah?"

"If I make a field goal from twenty yards, you have to take me—full time—as your...sub. Your woman. No one else."

"I haven't been able to look at anyone else since I met you." Levi tossed her his precious game ball. Denise snatched it easily out of the air. "And if you don't make it?"

"I hadn't thought of that." She knew field goals were difficult, even from up close. She'd watch other players—cornerbacks, tackles, quarterbacks—try to make field goals. They usually failed. Kickers possessed a very special skill set. One she admired greatly. And she had played soccer in high school. "Everyone knows already," she said. "Everyone that matters anyway."

"Tucker told your father, didn't he?"

She nodded. "Maybe if I wear a cheerleading uniform during the games, rather than sitting in the booth... That might help. Not so suspicious."

"I like the idea of you as a Bloodhound cheerleader, but I think your talents are better utilized elsewhere during the games."

Denise felt a little heat in her cheeks. He thought she made a good manager.

“You going to do this or what?” he asked.

Denise hiked up her skirt all the way up to her waist so she could kick. She held the ball in her left hand, looked at it, then looked at Levi.

“Hold it for me?” She tossed the ball back to him, and he dropped his duffel, knelt, balanced the ball on the turf, and held it there for her.

Denise grasped her skirt and ran toward the ball. Her bare foot connected just as Levi pulled back, and the ball went sailing, right through the uprights. It fell into the seats behind the goalposts, and the sound of it bouncing down the steps echoed in the empty stadium.

“Guess I’ll have to follow through on that wager,” Levi said, still kneeling. “Come here.” He brought a knee up and created a platform. “Over,” he told Denise.

She knelt and then bent over his knee. Levi pushed her skirt up just a little farther to expose her panties, and then he spanked her.

“That’s for avoiding me.” He spanked her again. “That’s for not realizing sooner what you really wanted.” And a third time. “And that’s for not telling me you’d spoken to your father about us.”

He helped her to her feet as he stood.

“Now that we’ve got that cleared up, you do have to remember one thing.” Levi took a deep breath. Denise waited expectantly. “From now on, in this building—at the training facility—you are the boss. I do what *you* say. Not the other way round. You run the team. You run me. Do you get that?”

Denise felt tears stinging her eyes. She looked up at him, and he raised a big thumb and wiped the first wetness from beneath her eyes.

“But when we’re alone, it’s the other way around.”

She nodded as her womb heated at the idea.

“I know this is going to be tough for us,” he said to her softly and then wrapped his arms around her and held her close. “People have all kinds of notions. They’ve heard rumors. They think they know us.”

She could feel his heart beating. His words came as a rumble against her, vibrating through her. It was as if she listened with her soul, not just her ears.

“You make me a better person, Ms. Hynes.” She could tell he used her last name playfully. “You helped chase the last of my demons away, I think, because you took a chance on me.” He pushed her back, held her at arm’s length, and looked into her eyes. Denise had to bite back a sob. “I think this is going to be a love thing, don’t you?”

She nodded, swallowed, tried to find the right words. “Yes, Sir,” she finally managed.

Levi pulled her back in and brought his lips down to hers. Heat seared through Denise’s body, and it seemed to fuse them together right there, as if they grew into one being.

She felt as if she could give herself to him right there—she didn’t care who saw—but after only a moment, he pushed her away again. She felt a little wobbly on her feet, but he didn’t let her go. When she finally recovered from the kiss, he dropped his hands from her shoulders.

“We should probably get over to that party, don’t you think? Else people might get a little suspicious.”

“Let them,” she said.

But they headed for the exit nevertheless, hand in hand, the game ball forgotten.

## Chapter Eleven

Everyone associated with the team turned out for the afterparty at the Hard Rock. Even Coach Stiles and his wife, a small but sprightly woman in her seventies. But for the entire evening, Denise only had eyes for Levi, and anticipation filled her. What would happen after the party? Would he take her upstairs, or would he ride home with her? She felt as if ages had passed since they'd last been together, during the golf tournament, in the rain, under the oak trees. Just remembering it sent a thrill through her, and her pussy dampened. She'd never brought him home. Could see no reason not to now. But would his dominant nature allow for that? Or would he insist that he take her upstairs? She still had trouble navigating through all the different aspects of their relationship, as new as it was.

He approached her from where he stood, talking to the quarterback, Josh. The young kid had definitely proven himself out there today. Most quarterbacks had to take a couple of years in the pros to figure out the differences between college and professional quarterbacking, but he'd run the team like a seasoned veteran this afternoon. She'd probably lose him fast, but that was the entire point of a development team, wasn't it?

"Hey," Levi said as he stopped. He took a sip of his ice water, looked around the party. "Another nice shindig."

"Thanks." She smiled. "But I could head home soon."

"Want some company?"

She nodded, and they said their good-byes to the gathered crowd as if they'd always left together, as if this was nothing new.

Levi offered to drive her sedan home for her, and Denise gratefully turned over the keys.

They drove up the coast to Denise's big, empty house. Chrissie was still at the party, and given the interest she'd been showing in one of the tackles, could very well stay the night there.

Denise and Levi entered through the kitchen door. "Do you want anything to eat?" she asked as she turned on the lights and kicked off her heels.

"Only one thing." Levi scooped her up over his shoulder and headed up the servants' stairs as if he'd lived there all his life. His ridiculous strength made Denise feel as if she were made out of nothing but fluff rather than five feet nine inches of bone and muscle.

At the top of the stairs, he had to stop and ask, "Which room is yours?"

"Second door on the left," she squeaked.

He headed right for it, keeping her balanced with one hand on her ass.

He opened the door and then dumped Denise right onto the bed. She laughed. He seemed more playful, at ease than he had before. He'd always had a spark of humor in him, a taunting quality, but now...

"Everything's all right, isn't it?" she asked.

Levi stood at the foot of the bed, his fists on his hips, his legs spread. He grinned big. "It sure is."

Denise laughed again. "Are you drunk?"

"Only on you, babe," he said and then dived down onto the bed.

They wrestled and tousled and tickled before Levi finally had both her arms pinned over her head in one meaty fist. Given that he could palm a football, her arms presented no problem.

"Remember what I said?" Levi asked, his face inches from her own.

Denise swallowed, then nodded. "You're the boss." She paused. "Even in my bedroom."

“Any bedroom we are in together, unless we happen to be running a business meeting at the same time.”

She giggled. “I don’t see that happening anytime soon.”

“Me neither, but that’s your only loophole.”

“Okay, Sir. I’ll keep it in mind.”

Levi released her arms and pushed away from her. “Now, take off those clothes so we can have some fun.”

He propped himself up on a pile of pillows and crossed his arms over his chest, waiting.

Denise stood and began stripping off her clothes.

“Slower,” Levi demanded, using that voice of his.

She complied, making each movement a sultry gesture designed to get him hot and bothered. First, she removed her jacket, shrugging it off to her elbows, and then back on again, and then finally pulling it all the way off. Next came her skirt. She slipped it down over her hips slowly, turned, shook her ass for him, before dropping the fabric all the way to the floor.

She bent over, giving him a nice look at the round globes of her butt covered in the lace panties she wore. Then she straightened and faced him again. She undid a few of the buttons of her red shirt before Levi growled, “Leave it on.”

She smiled. “Go Bloodhounds!”

Then she slipped her panties down her legs and stood, waiting for the next direction.

She could see the bulge growing at Levi’s crotch.

“Sit,” he told her. He raised his chin toward the stool at her vanity. Denise pulled it out from the vanity and sat down, facing the bed.

“Spread your legs.”

She complied.

“Pull up the hem of your shirt.”

She grasped it in one hand and raised it so he could get a good look at her pussy.

“That’s it. Stay like that.”

Denise sat, not moving, waiting, the anticipation growing deep in her belly.

Levi undressed, but didn’t get up from the bed. When he lay there, completely naked, his cock stood up like a flagpole, but Denise couldn’t help notice all the bruises he’d gotten from the game. She wanted to make them better, to caress them, to soothe him. But she couldn’t move. He’d told her to stay there.

He must have seen the worry and indecision on her face, because he chuckled and said, “Don’t worry about it, love. I feel better than I have after a game in a long time. Being sober helped, actually.” He smiled, and Denise could tell it wasn’t forced, but as genuine and sincere as possible.

She felt better and relaxed into her seat a little. She let the worry melt away. She had to trust him, didn’t she? Or else none of this would work. Besides, he’d tell her if he didn’t feel like playing. He didn’t do this just for her; he wanted it to.

“Just stay there,” he told her. “I like looking at you. See what you do to me?”

He stroked his cock, and Denise whimpered. She wanted to be the one to do that, to wrap her lips around it or drive her pussy down over it. The images had her pussy growing more and more damp.

Her palms wrested on her thighs, but she crept one down toward the cleft of her legs, wanting to touch herself.

“No,” Levi said, and she stopped. He drew his hand away from his dick. “If you can’t control yourself, then I can’t let you watch.”

*Punishment? Really?*

“Too impatient, aren’t we?” he said.

Denise dropped her gaze to the floor in front of her and waited. She wanted some kind of contact desperately. She squirmed against the seat of the stool.



“Even that is too much,” Levi told her. He stood and crossed to where she sat. “Not doing a good job at following directions tonight, are we? I just wanted a nice quiet chance to watch you for a little bit, and you are so *horny* that you can’t even sit still.”

He knelt between her spread knees and touched her swollen lips. He brought back a shiny finger and held it up in front of her face. “Look at this! Look how wet you are just sitting here.” He shook his head. “Stand up. Hands on the chair. Ass up.”

Denise knew what to expect from that, and a thrill rushed through her.

She did as he instructed, and without warning, his hand met with her ass with a resounding *smack*. She gasped, nearly a squeal, but then bit it off. She had to take her punishment, else she’d not get anything else tonight.

Two more swats rained down on her ass, and then Levi retreated back to the bed. He lay down.

“Stay like that for a while,” he said. “I like admiring my handprint on your ass.”

He’d spanked her hard enough to leave marks on her dark skin? She craned her head around to look, but he snapped a “No!” and she resumed her position.

Minutes seemed to tick by. Denise could feel his gaze heating her back, never leaving her.

She heard a condom unwrapping, and Levi sighing.

Finally he said, “Come here.”

He lay flat on his back, his hands behind his head, his eyes on the ceiling.

“I’m fairly tuckered out from the game today,” he said. “You’ll make me come first. Then, if I’ve decided you’ve done a good enough job, I’ll give you permission. Do you understand?”

Denise licked her lips. “Yes, Sir.”

“Then get at it.” The mischievous glint in his eye called on her, and Denise practically jumped on the bed and lowered herself without hesitation onto his sheathed and waiting cock.

She worked him as if her life depended on it. In a way, it did. She felt if she didn’t come soon, she’d die, but she knew she couldn’t come until he had.

But Levi’s eyes stayed glued to the ceiling, his face impassive. “Is that the best you can do?” he taunted. “I thought you were a dirty little sub.”

“I can show you dirty, Sir,” she said, and while bracing herself with her left arm, she reached her right hand around and behind, first tickling her fingers over Levi’s balls, then his taint, and then finding the tight pucker of his asshole.

“Do you like it in the ass, just a little?” she asked him, then added, “Sir” as an afterthought. She ran her finger around the rim as she rode him, and his face contorted slightly before returning to its previous blank stare.

“Oh, come on,” she said, pouting. Then she found the center of the hole, and as she ground her pelvis down against him, she pushed in with her finger, breaching the tight enclosure of the sphincter.

Levi rose up off the bed, and his hands finally came out from behind his head and grabbed her hips.

She fucked him in the ass with her finger as she bounced up and down on his cock, his hands guiding her, pulling her against him with such force that she’d thought she’d split in two. Her own orgasm threatened, but she couldn’t let herself come. She tried to recite sports statistics—rushing yards, passing yards, quarterback ratings—to keep it at bay. What would he do to her if she came first? The fear of that helped her put it off just a little longer.

A massive grunt ripped from his chest, and Levi came, his entire body seizing and tensing. Finally he fell back to the bed, his entire body limp.

Denise pulled her hand away from him.

“Get yourself off, woman,” he growled at her.

And she did, rubbing her clit against his hard lower abdomen as his cock softened within her.

Within moments, she screamed her own release, stiffening above him, every muscle contracted.

Then she collapsed against him. His strong arms wrapped around her, and Denise couldn't believe the road of her life had taken her here, to this moment. Two months ago, all she cared about was her team, her future. Relationships didn't figure into it, but now she couldn't imagine her life without Levi. "*A love thing*," he'd called it. Sure, she could believe that. She *needed* that. Levi balanced her, gave her the opportunity to control and be controlled.

A full circle.

Levi brushed his big hand down her hair, and whispered, "I have one last wager for you."

Denise looked up into his face, battling to keep her eyes open. "Oh yeah? What?" she murmured.

"If I win," he began.

But she couldn't stay awake. As his deep voice lulled her to sleep and she fell into dreams, she heard disjointed words like "grandma" and "up at Picayune" and "fried pickles."

In fact, it wasn't until the next morning that she realized what she'd agreed to.

And that she'd already lost.

THE END

## Loose Id Titles by G. G. Royale

*My Two Doms*

*Necessary Roughness*

*The Adoration of Addana*

*The Flapper and the Fellow*

*The Lovely Kittengirls of New Orleans*

## G. G. Royale

G.G. Royale grew up in a small town on the Central Coast of California. She started writing erotica while in college. Her inspiration came from reading a copy of Anais Nin's *Little Birds* while traveling abroad.

She began working as an editor of erotic romance in 2004 with Liquid Silver Books. In 2006, she moved to Loose Id, LLC, where she still works.

Currently, she lives in the Deep South. Ms. Royale has had many short stories published under various names. Her first novella, *The Lovely Kittengirls of Mew Orleans*, received four cherries from Whipped Cream Reviews, which encouraged her to keep working. After long hours at her day job, she comes home and settles down to her computer to work even more. Ms. Royale loves writing in many genres, but particularly historic and BDSM.