

Feather Light

By
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To Elise,
who will rise above every challenge that comes her way

Chapter 1

“What do I always say on Mondays?” Parker called out as soon as he walked into his Los Angeles branch of Knead Me.

“Lie down and allow me to ease your troubles away,” a chorus of masseuses, masseurs, and excited front office girls answered in unison.

Slaps of good-natured appreciation landed on his back, as Webster, his loyal assistant, pressed a half-filled, steaming, and lidded cup of Sumatra coffee into his palm.

“Three steps and the chair is to your left,” she whispered in his ear. “Glad to see you bright and early, boss.”

“Thanks. Happy to be back, Webbie. I missed this place.” Parker set the cup on the conference table and sat on the chair she had directed him to. “Got another one for my baby bro?”

“Of course. Here’s your decaf, Cork.” The crisp sound of a cup exchanging hands followed.

“Thanks, Webbie,” Cork answered from his left.

“Okay, folks, listen up.” Parker raised a hand to silence the people in the room. Through his hazy eyesight, he saw a blur of figures taking their seats, and also heard the scratching of shoes on the carpet, signaling that everyone was settling down.

He took a quick sip of his coffee before he spoke. “Well, NYC is doing great. Thanks to our loyal customers and word of mouth, our New York branch has kicked off with a strong first month. I’m going to accept applications for transfers in the next five days. Anyone interested in trying out the cold, wet winter weather and hot as fuck summer, pardon my French, is welcome to give me their application, beginning today.”

Laughter echoed throughout the room, letting Parker know everyone was in high spirits. Heck, he could practically smell their delight. Happy employees meant increased productivity, which, of course, would lead to

satisfied clients. Bottom line—business had nowhere to go but up.

The southern California branch of Knead Me, his very first, had opened its doors three years ago, right when he'd been at the height of his confusion over this terrible disease. Then had come the San Francisco branch six months ago, which had been a huge hit, too. With the success of their expanded locations, Parker had hoped that he could find some free time. Boy, had he been mistaken. Although his major clientele were happy with his massage therapists' work, they still clamored for *him*, which left little to no time for himself. To continue to be successful, his diminishing sight, along with the desire for some much-needed downtime, would have to take a backseat to running the business.

Enter Cork Davis, his younger brother. Cork had quit his full-time job as a high school football coach to work for Knead Me. Single and still very much into himself, his brother helped in managing the entire operation, and had also acted as Parker's chauffeur and go-to guy. Cork had never divulged his reasons for leaving coaching to work for Parker, and he hadn't bothered asking. Sometimes family and work didn't go together, but in Parker and Cork's case, it worked just fine as long as they stayed out of each other's personal business.

"Webbie, I can sense your indecision, so I'll give you an all-expense paid vacation to Tahiti if you just promise me you'll stay here and keep my chair warm."

Webster's distinct melodious voice rose above the din of chuckles and giggles. "Aw, do I stink that much, boss?"

Parker could almost picture her pout. He flashed a broad smile in her direction.

"Fine, I'll stay. Just make sure I fly first class and my return ticket is open." Good-natured banter and light conversation had been the secret of their success as a unit.

"My dear Webster, curse your father for giving such a gorgeous woman an outdated name. If I didn't know you were a woman, I wouldn't even give you a second glance." He laughed.

"But you know I'm *very* female." More giggles exploded around him, as well as some throat clearing.

"And what's this about an open return? Are you going to leave me to fend for myself?"

"I'm happy here. I just have to rattle you from time to time so I can feel I'm still needed."

"You're always needed as far as I'm concerned, Webbie." Turning his attention to the group, he added, "Get your asses ready. Our ten o'clocks are going to pound our door in . . . five, four, three, two . . . one. Happy Monday to all! And please, knead their hearts out!"

"And knead we shall," Andy, another high-demand masseur, said from the door. Snorts and chortles followed him out as everyone spilled from the room.

Once the sound of the departing footsteps faded, Parker breathed a deep sigh and turned to Webster. “Who’s my ten today?”

“New client. The name’s Madame Baba. Does it ring a bell?”

“Hmm . . . no. But we’ll find out soon enough, won’t we?” He waggled his eyebrows in her direction and saw, through his dot-sized vision, her head fall back in laughter.

“I’m sure we will. I have room 101 set up for you. I also placed all the invoices on your desk at the two o’clock position. All they need is your John Hancock, and they’re all set.”

Efficient, quick-witted, and attractive, Webster had been a trouper from day one and a valuable asset to his staff, considering the pounding his schedule and his personal challenges posed for her. She had taken on the role of his personal assistant with a fresh outlook and one giggle at a time.

“Thanks. If you find an opening in my schedule this week, keep it open. I’m dying to go out and try the new, remodeled track at Road Runners.”

Parker clicked his tongue, trying to remind himself to call Andrew, his running partner, before the day was over. He was adept in sighted-guide techniques and formulated ways to help Parker jog and run outside without the fear of falling and hurting himself.

“I’ll make sure you get some running time, boss. If you’re set, your client just walked in—raven hair, screaming figure . . . wait, beautiful, too.” Webster grabbed the cup and handed it to him before she followed him to the door.

He had started counting his steps, so he knew Webster didn’t expect a response from him. Multitasking in his head, he thought about the “beautiful” and “screaming figure” comments. He stopped and turned around. “You’re joshing me, right?”

Her laughter answered for her, but before he could start counting again, she added, “Well, the humongous glasses are hiding most of her face. Hard to tell.”

“You’re still messing with me.” He pulled her into a friendly hug before she stiffened.

“No more joshing. Hurry up. You don’t want to keep a client who ordered a Monday Delight waiting, right?”

“Fine. Then stop distracting me.” Parker turned around and resumed his descent to the first floor, where the majority of the massage rooms were located. The second floor was dedicated to holistic treatments, such as meditation and relaxation.

Counting had become necessary when his field of vision had deteriorated to dismal proportions. Parker’s left eye recognized shapes, but in his advanced stage, his central vision had been affected. His right eye registered blurry objects. It had been a year since he had been declared legally blind—a politically correct term used to make affected individuals feel good about their new reality. Retinitis pigmentosa had now gotten the best of him. It was a degenerative disease without any known cure, so he

was fucked.

For Parker Davis, his prognosis had ruled out the possibility of him ever driving a car. The disease had also ended his ability to read materials fully sighted people could, and most of all, it had terminated his visual appreciation of anything beautiful. On his good days, he saw specific shapes, but facial expressions and other small details were lost to him. Despite all that, he was never bitter. He was too busy to dwell on the things he couldn't do. He needed to concentrate on honing his remaining senses.

He reached room 101 and readied himself before knocking on the door. After his knock was answered with a soft and very feminine response, he walked in and smiled. "Good morning, Madame Baba."

Hers was such an odd name, but Parker knew better than to ask. These days, people seemed to run in weird circles. Maybe she was just looking for mystery and the added excitement of being on his table. He guessed he'd soon find out.

"Hello, Mr. Davis." The voice didn't live up to the image he had in his head, sounding more timid than his initial expectation.

Parker smiled at the tiny form sitting on the chair next to the massage table—tiny in the sense that his vision procured small images. "How about we dispense with the formalities? Call me Parker."

The ruffling sound of cloth was the only response. Parker suspected she had shrugged, but he wasn't sure, since little movements tended to escape his notice. Most people didn't realize the extent of his blindness, which, in a way, had been good for his ego. He still felt like a big part of the sighted world.

"Let's start you off with a full body massage, and then we'll move down the rest of the menu. There's a white robe for you on the table. I'll move over to the other room while you get ready for me. Strip down to whatever makes you feel comfortable and remove all jewelry, navel ring included, and lie face down. Say 'woo-rah' when you're done."

"'Woo-rah'?"

Parker smiled. "Yes. It's my own unique way of knowing when my client is ready. So 'woo-rah' me when you are."

When he disappeared behind the curtain, he heard what sounded like plastic being folded and placed on the little table, which must have been her glasses or sunglasses. Parker pressed the first button on his left, and soft, ambient music filled the room. The light, though already set low, needed to be adjusted. He turned the knob down one notch before proceeding to wash his hands.

Parker strapped on his oil and lotion belt and heard Madame Baba's shy "woo-rah" a moment later. He returned to the room, using the flickering candle sitting in the corner of the room as his guide. Three steps to the left led him to the side of the massage table.

"Comfortable?" he asked, feeling the edge of the table until he found the

cotton sheet folded at the end.

“Uh-huh.” Madame Baba’s voiced sounded remote, as if she didn’t want to be bothered. That was understandable. Most clients wanted to be left alone, but Parker always found a way to draw them out and get more information on how to ease them.

With a gentle pat, he planted his palms on every pressure point, his way of marking the spots and orienting himself on the width of her body. Madame Baba had a long frame, judging from the length between her shoulder blades down to the base of her torso. She had a narrow waistline, soft skin, and baby-fine hair—and she was ticklish, made obvious by the way she jerked when he touched the small of her back. *Interesting!*

The name didn’t fit the owner of the body but instead evoked images of a frumpy matron, a deadly cougar, or an overly cajoling older woman. In his mind, he saw a young, inexperienced, waif-like little girl.

In a soft voice, he asked, “What do you find comforting, Madame Baba?”

Parker pulled out the oil bottle and squirted a generous amount of the warm liquid on one palm and then some on her back before replacing the container in its holster. Rubbing both palms together, he eased his hands onto her back and began working in rhythmic circles. She sighed, seeming content.

“I find long talks over an intimate dinner relaxing, rainy nights with a good book, and a nice person who’s willing to listen . . .”

“Take a deep breath for me,” Parker suggested. When she did, he increased the pressure, working on the knots in the back of her neck, her shoulders, and wherever else she needed release.



Kelly Storm had finally succumbed to her assistant’s goading to get a massage. It was not just a regular massage, but a Monday Delight from none other than Parker Davis, the well-known massage therapist who could bring his clients to tears. Skeptical, Kelly had decided it was time to shut Jessica up and secure an appointment at their LA location, which was closest to her home.

Since Parker had been out of town, she’d waited for a month until he had gotten back and a Monday slot had opened up. If Kelly had used her real name, getting an earlier appointment would have been guaranteed, but she preferred anonymity. She could do without a bunch of camera-flashing, question-hounding barracudas following her every move, so she’d decided to wait.

Kelly called for a cab to whisk her away from her Brentwood mansion under the veil of total secrecy. Most paparazzi camped outside her home would mistake her for Sima, her cleaning lady from the Middle East. Dressed in one of her many disguises, she walked into the Beverly Hills location wearing her black wig, a scarf to cover her head and mouth,

and dark sunglasses.

This Parker guy better be good! Kelly shook her head as the perky receptionist led her to a well-lit hallway and into a cozy little room to wait. She took off her face covering as soon as the door closed. When Parker Davis walked in, her jaw literally dropped.

If she had done her homework ahead of time, she would have known the famed massage therapist was gorgeous beyond belief. Even in the darkened room with the glow of the candle illuminating his features, she could see his sparkling blue eyes and the strong set of his jaw, showcasing a full mouth that offered a wide and precocious smile. Serious muscles bulged from underneath his black cotton T-shirt, and his chestnut-colored hair was a glorious mop into which any woman would love to tangle her fingers. Kelly couldn't pull her gaze away from him.

Keeping her disguise in place, she answered Parker's questions with as few words as possible. Only when his hand touched her skin did she turn into a crumpled mess.

"What do you find comforting, Madame Baba?"

His question was nothing personal, but the quiet way he asked it compelled her to give him more details than she'd intended.

Parker's hands glided across her back, sending her to a place she hadn't been before. Firm yet prudent in every touch, he treated her body like fine china. Kelly felt delicate and precious. His sensual touches evoked desires within her that no other man had ever come close to doing. The way his hands probed every inch of her body pushed her to tears. She had read that with a good massage, toxins were released at a rapid rate, causing the body to feel tired or sore afterward. Every firm stroke of his fingers on her skin, along with his soothing voice, released a flood of tension that she'd been keeping bottled up inside.

Being on top wasn't always what it was cut out to be. She had become an overnight sensation after one blockbuster movie and since then had been hounded by the media every moment of her life. Kelly had no idea what the words *privacy* and *downtime* even meant anymore. Her every movement caused a stir, and every outing became excruciating instead of enjoyable. She wanted fame and fortune, but she also wanted a little time still to be herself—to be able to talk and not worry about repercussions, shop without photographers snapping her picture, or dine out with friends without someone asking her for an autograph or to pose for a picture with them.

A buried memory surfaced. One particularly crazed paparazzo had hounded her during one of the lowest points of her life. While they lowered her mother's coffin into the freshly excavated earth, the persistent photographer had squeezed through the tight bodies that surrounded Kelly, snapping several pictures with no regard for her right to mourn in private. Nothing had been the same for her after that incident. She'd begun to closet herself away from the public eye unless necessary, and she'd kept her circle tight. People seemed to forget that even though celebrities were considered

public figures, it didn't mean every facet of their lives had to be displayed for everyone to see.

"If you could go out with a good friend, what would you talk about?" Parker asked, deepening his strokes. It felt as if he were digging into her soul, freeing her fears and allowing her to soar, even if only for a fraction of time.

Kelly listened to his even breathing, loving his tone's gentle caress and his unhurried rubdown.

"I want to share my innermost feelings without the fear of being judged. I want to be seen as me . . . simple but deep. There's more to me than what people see on the outside."

Parker moved to the head of the table, pumped more oil, and steamrolled his hands over her back in one long motion, like he was pushing out what had ailed her soul for a long time. With each thrust of his hands, she released a sob, and Kelly found herself crying like a small child.

He stayed quiet while her anxiety-filled sobs flooded out like an overflowing dam, keeping a steady rhythm until her tears were all cried out. His hands spoke for him, soothing her, clearing her muddled thoughts, and paving the way to a clearer perspective.

Parker handed her a tissue and kept going, adding different techniques geared to ease her troubles away. When it came to massaging her scalp, his thumbs and fingers worked in easy, wonderful strokes. His caresses released her coiled tension, allowing more positive reflective thoughts to move in.

By the end of the hour, Kelly knew Parker was the real deal. He wasn't just pleasing to the eye, but he was also able to get her to talk with his simple, thought-provoking questions. Now she understood why he was touted as magical—he worked magic. No wonder Jessica had sworn Kelly wouldn't regret showing up. Her friend had been right when she'd insisted the man known as Feather Light possessed the gift of touch—and could send anyone screaming for release.

Chapter 2

Parker's day went by quickly. On his breaks between clients, he'd gone back to his office to attend to some paperwork that needed his signature and just to take a much-needed breather. Massage, though relaxing for the client, was a whole lot of work for him. He enjoyed making the process seem simple, but in reality, each session left him tired and quite hungry.

This particular session with Madame Baba had left him wondering. Her sadness came from deep within, somewhere he sensed no one had been allowed to see. She'd cried, not just for a much-needed release, but also for help. Parker shook his head, having no idea why he felt the need to protect the woman. He had to be losing his mind. After all, he couldn't see, let alone slay Madame Baba's dragons.

When the massage had ended, Parker could tell she was grateful by the way she'd taken his hand in hers and the sincerity in her voice when she thanked him. The sound of her footsteps had been distinctly lighter when she'd left. A happy new customer meant repeat visits and definite referrals, which was why his business had thrived. Almost all their clients left with a feeling of wellbeing, not only of their bodies but also of their minds.

He tapped the button on his watch and listened for the time. Cork would be waiting out front with the car. Parker hurried to review the notes he'd written for his appointment that afternoon: the exact words to be uttered, the costume, and where he would find her. He smiled after going over the plan and hit send. With precise movement, he crossed his office to the hallway, saying quick good-byes to the few people who were still around.

As usual, Cork was already waiting in the handicapped parking spot up front, a small perk Parker allowed himself to enjoy. Parking in LA was horrible to begin with, and walking several blocks without an aid would be a bit problematic for him. He still didn't believe he needed the aid of a white cane or a guide dog, although it was recommended by his doctor. Parker could still get by with his limited vision. All he needed was good lighting, and he could pretty much get around on his own. Also, Webster, Cork, and the two assistants he'd hired for the two other branches made

sure he had everything he needed at his fingertips.

The smoggy air hit him as soon as he emerged from the air-conditioned building. As much as Parker hated the weather in LA, this was his home. Everything about the city was familiar, and he took comfort in that knowledge. Blindness was not an easy disease to deal with. He'd had to make some adjustments to his lifestyle and use adaptive measures to compensate for his lack of vision, but so far, he'd been coping rather well.

Parker saw the shape of a familiar car parked near the curb, exactly twelve steps from the building. He slid into the cool comfort of the front passenger seat. Soon after, they joined the already congested traffic as they made their way to the 405 Freeway.

"Hey, bro, can we drop by Gelson's first?" Parker reclined back in the seat and adjusted his sunglasses.

"Hot date tonight?" Cork's deep voice inquired. Parker's brother asked very few questions, but the one he *did* ask was one Parker wanted to avoid answering.

"Um . . . just hanging out." It was a nice, evasive answer—not giving away too much, but offering just enough without sounding trite.

"Fair enough."

Cork drove in silence, and Parker let the quiet relax him. His mind wandered back to his newest client, Madame Baba. There was something odd about the woman that he couldn't quite put his finger on. After a shy start where she'd given him three-word answers, she had broken down on his table and confessed her unhappiness. Parker had no idea what she did for a living, her status in life, or what her problems were, and he wasn't about to pry. If there was one important thing he had learned from this business, it was to let his clients do the talking.

He was the listener they needed or, better yet, the more affordable shrink. Parker often encountered clients who were willing to tell him their life story with very little encouragement. Most of them didn't come to sleep; they came so they could talk without having to deal with the stigma of seeing a head doctor. All Parker had to do was ask the right questions, and they'd take the cue.

Madame Baba had been the same. She'd babbled on and on about what others expected from her, and even though the circumstances she'd cited were vague, he'd begun to draw a mental picture of this intriguing woman in his mind. She had to be one of those rich women who had no idea what to do with their life—bored, unhappy, and lost.

"We're right in front of Gelson's. Do you want me to go in with you?" Cork broke into Parker's thoughts, and he opened his eyes. Open or not, it didn't do him any good. He chuckled at the thought.

Cork's shirt rustled against the leather seat, and Parker knew his brother had turned to look at him, probably wondering what the hell he was laughing at. "I'll be okay. I'll call you when I'm done."

He got out of the car with measured steps, using daylight as his guide to

find the entrance of the grocery store. It helped that he'd been there more times than he could count. Everyone knew him, and there wouldn't be a problem locating the things he needed. Parker grabbed a basket by the front entrance and proceeded to his first stop, the dairy section. He chose a can of whipped cream and placed it in the basket before moving on to the fruit section, where he picked up some fresh strawberries and bananas.

Afterward, he went to the deli, where his preordered dinner was already waiting for him.

"Here you go. Pasta with sundried tomatoes and mushrooms, chicken strips, and last but not least—your favorite—Black Forest cake." Jerome handed him the plastic bag and patted him on the shoulder.

"Thanks, man. I owe you one." Parker saluted before turning away.

"Just schedule me for an hour in that Beverly Hills office of yours, and we'll call it even." He heard Jerome chuckle.

"No problem. Just call Webster, and she'll set you up. Thanks, bro."

After he'd paid for the items, Parker phoned Cork and waited out front. His brother was there within minutes.

"Looks like you bought a lot of stuff," Cork said.

Parker was certain his brother was eyeing the bags on his lap. "Just a few munchies," he replied, trying to sound nonchalant.

His mind was already in deep concentration by the time he turned the key in his front door. He smelled the citrus candles he knew were perched all over the living room.

"Jane, I'm home!"

"In here, George!" The sultry voice of Jane Jetson greeted him from the bedroom. He loved role-play and was glad she was a willing and able partner.

Parker placed the food on the kitchen counter and took the whipped cream with him.

"Are the children home from school?" he asked as he padded across the hallway and into the first door on his left. The scent of burning candles intensified when he entered his bedroom. The lights were off, just like he wanted. The blinds were drawn tight, and "Space Oddity" was already playing on the MP3 player.

"They're going on an after-school activity with the rest of the Orbit children."

"Come here, my space-age wife." Parker opened his arms after placing the can on the nightstand. A warm body slid into his. He skimmed his lips across the base of her neck before nibbling her earlobe. "Mmm . . . you smell like fresh cosmic flower."

She answered with a moan, and he smiled to himself. *Great!*

He slid his hand to the small of her back and pulled her closer. The polyester fabric of her dress hugged her curves. Lowering his hand toward her ass, Parker then lifted her skirt and rubbed one of her tight cheeks, loving the feel of her bare skin on his palm. She rasped a moan and pressed

her chest against his.

“Do you have anything to say?” He tilted her chin up so that he was looking straight into her eyes, or in the general vicinity. Allowing for the fact that he was a head taller than her, he calculated her head must be tilted about three inches for her to see his face.

“SSC.” Her warm breath caressed him.

“Same here.”

SSC—safe, sane, and consensual—a constant reminder they spoke to each other every time they got together. Parker picked her up and brought her to the bed. The feel of her bare leg made his shaft jerk as he laid her in the middle of the mattress.

He lifted her leg and placed it on the other side of his waist. “Remove my shirt,” he said, his George impersonation lowering into a lazy drawl.

She sat up with pleasing obedience. Her warm fingers grazed his skin when she lifted the hem of his black T-shirt up and over his head. After throwing his shirt on the floor, she settled back and he straddled her.

“How was your day, dear?” Parker touched her face, feeling her emotions with his fingertips before reaching for the bun crowning her head. He felt for and removed the small ring of elastic holding her hair in place, allowing her blond mane to cascade loose. The scent of coconut shampoo wafted around him.

“Marvelous. I want your dick inside me,” she said in a practiced voice with the exact words he wanted her to use. Parker twitched inside the confines of his jeans.

“Are you ready for me to taste you?” He leaned forward and trailed tiny kisses along her jawline.

She angled her head to give him more space to work with. “Yes, George. I’m ready.”

That was all he needed to hear. He moved down and lifted her skirt. Parker closed his eyes and let his mind do the work for him. The stellar scent of her wetness drew him closer. “Give me the whipped cream.”

He heard the snap of the cap being removed before the can was pressed into his outstretched hand. Inhaling deep, he let his other hand trace the contour of her inner thigh until it reached the juncture of her sweetness. She was bare, just the way he preferred. Parker spread her legs wide until her opening was facing him. He gave the can a vigorous shake and squirted a moderate amount of cream on top of her clitoris. A delightful moan erupted from her throat.

“Like that, Jane?” He couldn’t wait to taste the puffy cream and the dessert underneath.

“Oh, George,” she answered with yet another throaty moan.

Aching to taste the soft cream and licking his lips in anticipation, Parker inched his mouth closer. Sliding his tongue out, he touched the tip of the swirl. He circled the sweetness in a sensuous motion, tasting and swallowing until the whirly cream got smaller and smaller, until it

disappeared. Another moan escaped her lips, and her fingers dug into his hair.

“I’m about to eat you.”

He flicked his tongue once across her bud, and her hips bucked, her legs tightening around him like a vise. With the pressure of her hand on his head urging him on, he lapped the right side of her nub with his tongue. The purring response to his teasing was gratifying, so he moved to the other side of her clit while his hand slid underneath her ass. Parker pressed his face closer and let his teeth nibble away. She squirmed but stayed in place.

“Good Jane,” he murmured and began brushing against her nub faster and faster. She gasped, and her fingers clawed at his scalp. Parker circled, lapped, and stroked her bud until her screams of ecstasy filled the room.

“Shout my name, now.”

“Oh, George, George, George!” Her voice was raw with undisguised pleasure. His erection jerked, craving its own release.

With deliberate movements, Parker shoved himself up and slid off the bed—leaving her panting and aching for more. He pried off his shoes with his toes and pulled down his zipper. His steely shaft burst out of his pants and hung proudly in front of him. Shedding his jeans in one quick motion, he dove back onto the bed.

The breath coming out of her mouth in erratic beats was music to his ears and fueled the images in his mind’s eye. He touched the tip of his dick to her sensitive clit and rubbed over and over again. She inched forward.

“Ah-ah,” Parker said, stating his disappointment. She should have known better. She wasn’t allowed to move or say anything until he said so.

“I’m sorry . . .”

As much as he wanted to let it slip, she knew how he wanted things done. He slid off the bed, making sure she understood what was coming. Parker bent down, flashing his ass at her when he picked up his discarded jeans on the floor. He took the belt and looped it around one hand until a few inches were left hanging.

“I must do this, Jane. Turn around.”

“Yes, George.”

“Jane, what is your safe word?”

“Elroy.” Her voice sounded strong, and he nodded.

“Use it if you need to.”

Parker placed his hand on her face to feel her nod. Then he moved a hand to orient himself with her body. With one swing, he whacked one cheek. She pushed forward and stifled her cry.

“Good, Jane,” he said and placed another one on the other cheek.

“Thank you, George.”

“With every punishment, I intend to give you a reprieve.” Parker gathered her body and positioned her to his liking until her back touched his chest. He ran his mouth along the nape of her neck, making sure her sobs were replaced by moans.

He kissed, licked, and nibbled on her earlobe while the other hand groped one of her plump breasts. Her body moved in rhythm to his while he ground his erection between her thighs. "Remove your dress and let me see you."

Let me see you. It was funny how he could use the word *see* so loosely. He helped her ease out of her costume and then threw the garment on the floor. Parker reached over to the nightstand and grabbed the small foil package she'd left for him. He tore the wrapper and sheathed himself.

"Relax."

She did so without a moment's hesitation, reclining her body against his. He ran his fingers to her opening, and wetness greeted his probing. He smiled, and his arousal peaked. Parker spread her thighs apart with one knee and angled her body until she was bent forward on all fours.

"You're wet, aren't you?"

"As wet as you make me." She drew haggard breaths.

"Good."

With one swift move, he guided his erection and penetrated her from behind. She froze just before her walls tightened around him. A burst of fire raged within him, and he pulled out to tease her. A tiny moan slipped from her lips in disappointment, and Parker pushed back in again. He reached a hand around her body and took hold of her breast.

In rapid succession, he pounded into her while rubbing his forefinger on her nipple, teasing the tip until it stood taut and hard. Her cries intensified. Thrusting harder, he was on the verge of release but would hold out until she came first. Parker shifted both hands to her waist and increased the pace. In just a few moments, her strangled cry of relief echoed, prompting him to follow. He pounded even harder until he exploded inside her.

She shuddered and collapsed onto the mattress, bringing him with her. Parker rested his body partially on hers, not wanting to crush her with his weight. "That was great, partner." He kissed her on the cheek.

By the movement of her jaw, he was certain she smiled. "As always." He loved the sound of satisfaction in her voice.

After they lay together for a long moment, Parker pushed away and rolled over on his back. He tapped his talking clock. "Eight PM," the mechanical tone announced.

"You hungry?" he asked.

"Famished."

"The food is on the counter. I'll meet you in the kitchen after I finish showering." He got up, and she slapped him playfully on his butt.

After they finished dinner, they talked for another half an hour about their common interests, such as hockey and music.

"The key is on your nightstand, six o'clock. I have to go and do my laundry. See you tomorrow at work, boss?" Webbie stood up and gave him a peck on the cheek.

"Not if I see you first." Parker smiled and popped a strawberry in his

mouth.

Easy and no strings attached. That was his relationship with Webster. They understood each other, and they both wanted the same thing—a good lay with a person they trusted.

He heard the door ease shut while he cleared away the dishes. Another good day.



Weeks later, Parker walked into his New York branch of Knead Me. Arianne greeted him with a hug, and then guided him straight to his office. He had yet to memorize the layout and positioning of furniture in his newest business.

“Coffee is at twelve o’clock. Your laptop is booted up and ready to go.” Arianne’s cheery personality and comforting presence added her to the long list of valuable people he couldn’t live without.

“Thanks, Ari. Who’s my first appointment?” Parker sat down and oriented himself with the objects on his desk. He activated JAWS, a screen reader program on his computer. The computerized voice announced ten e-mails.

“Your first is Mrs. Crawford.”

“Ah.”

He smiled, remembering the older lady all too well. Mrs. Crawford was a tiny woman in her late fifties with platinum blonde hair. She’d talked nonstop during their first hour-long session, and so far had been the only one to ask him questions instead of the other way around. Parker also remembered her telling him of an experience in one Asian massage parlor where the massage had been more like punishment instead of relaxation. She’d wanted a deep-tissue massage and had come out of the place with bruises, *and* she had ached all day.

“Your next one is Ms. Too Didley.” He recognized the lightness in Arianne’s voice, which meant she was on to something funny.

“You’re kidding me?” Parker watched her blurry figure pirouette to the door.

“Nope. I’ll take her to the room and come back to get you.”

He shook his head and listened to the first e-mail, having no idea why Madame Baba crept into his mind. *Could it be?* Well, there was one way to find out. His fingers were itching to know.

Chapter 3

Parker retraced his way back to his office to get a drink and catch a few minutes to relax. He had fifteen minutes before his next client. After an intense session with Mrs. Crawford, he needed a drink. Although he was hoping for a stiff one, drinking on the job wouldn't be a good example for his employees. Even so, Mrs. Crawford had used up his energy and tapped some of his reserves.

As he'd learned from Mrs. Crawford, she was filthy rich but had no heir. Her husband had died of cancer a few years back, and she was alone. Something was wrong with his favorite client.

She was a chirpy, older lady, who had come to their newly opened NYC branch and had demanded the best. Parker had stepped up to the plate and had given the woman what she'd asked for, and later she'd walked out looking satisfied and happy. Of course, he'd had no idea what the woman looked like, trusting what his staff had told him, but he'd heard the satisfaction in her voice.

Their sessions, for the most part, left him winded—not because the old lady demanded deep tissue massages—but because her constant chatter could bring even the most patient guy to tears. In fact, her usual request, a Hawaiian Lomi-Lomi massage that used long continuous strokes and a relaxing touch, was easy enough.

Parker would smile to himself when he ran his hands over her body and her wrinkled and loose skin would impede his movements. She'd chalk it up to old age, and he'd laugh every single time. Sure, he liked the old woman, but it didn't hurt that she was a generous tipper.

For some reason, today's session had been more difficult than usual. She'd been talkative in the beginning, but after a barrage of inquiries about his personal life, she'd turned quiet for a change.

Recalling the session with the old lady, Parker shook his head. Mrs. Crawford demanded too much from him with her unrelenting questions and nonstop babbling. Despite their business relationship, Parker could see a deeper connection with the woman.

“Parker, why aren’t you married?” she had asked.

That was a question Parker hated. The woman was a straight shooter, and holding back her tongue was never her strong suit.

He took a deep breath. It was going to be a long hour.

“Because I’m too busy?”

“Or you haven’t seen the woman of your dreams?”

That made him pause. Surely the woman knew that seeing would be difficult for him. He laughed. How difficult would it be to find the “right” woman?

“Mrs. Crawford, I’m not ready to settle down. I have a business to run and the world to conquer.” Parker masked his discomfort by attempting a little joke, hoping his client would ease up on him.

“You’re avoiding my question,” she said.

“I guess I am.” There was no point in hiding his uncertainty about what the future held for him.

Mrs. Crawford turned around and took his hands in her soft ones. “You’re a good man, and these little meetings made me think that I should’ve had a son. Someone like you. Please pardon my directness. I just want you to be happy.”

Parker couldn’t answer. Maybe he should tell her to keep her opinions to herself, but the woman meant well. At the back of his mind, he knew she was right.

Bringing himself back to reality, he tried not to think of the prior session and what Mrs. Crawford had said.

Try as he might, he’d been unable to get her to say much. After several attempts, he’d given up and let the silence take over. Parker wasn’t complaining. Well, maybe he was. As much as he tried to distance himself from his clients, there were still a few people who managed to get under his skin, either in a positive or a negative way.

With measured steps, he walked toward the little refrigerator and took out a bottle of water. Flopping onto his leather chair, he chugged the drink and closed his eyes, trying to clear his mind for the next scheduled client. What was her name again? Something Didley?

Trying and succeeding were two different things. Parker tried, but he didn’t quite succeed in banishing his niggling suspicions.

Gulping down the rest of the water just in time for Arianne’s reminder call, he pressed the intercom button on the phone. “Yes, Ari?”

“Ms. Too Didley just walked in. I’ll set her up in room three, and then I’ll come and get you.”

“I think I can manage.” After a moment’s thought, he asked, “What does this Ms. Didley look like?”

He heard Arianne cup the receiver and then come back, her voice lower than usual. “Hard to tell. She has on big white sunglasses, but her face looked familiar. It’s as if I’ve seen her somewhere before. She’s wearing drab clothes, but her purse is to die for. Balenciaga, boss! Balenciaga!” she

said through the phone line.

Parker rolled his eyes. Why did women always look at the purses?

“Get her situated, and I’ll be there in three.” He released the button and sighed before slinging the empty bottle in the direction of the wastebasket. With a swooshing sound, the bottle landed inside the receptacle, and he grinned with pride. It was amazing how the little things gave him pleasure.

He strode out of his office, walked down the hallway, and made a left, counting doors while his fingers felt the Braille numbers on the outside. Once he was standing in front of room three, Parker tapped the door and a familiar voice answered. Pushing the door open, he walked in and focused in the direction of the chair.

“Good morning, Ms. Didley. How are you today?”

“Okay.” The response came from the opposite side of where he was facing. He turned toward the direction of the voice, a bit startled.

It took Parker several seconds to regain his composure. Not too many things could give him pause, but he didn’t like being reminded of his inadequacies.

“I’m glad to hear that. So, what can I do for you on this great, humid day?” He plastered a smile on his face, hoping she wouldn’t notice his momentary discomfort.

She moved toward the table, and he caught a whiff of her perfume—Hermes Perfume 24. Considering he relied on his other senses to compensate for his loss of sight, it wasn’t surprising that he recognized the names of so many fragrances. His growing clientele in each of three major cities included a number of affluent athletes and people in the entertainment industry. Parker always asked them what scent they wore, and then committed their answers to memory.

“Swedish sounds good right now,” she mumbled when she moved past him. Judging from her voice, she must have been several inches shorter than his five-eleven height. He heard shuffling of fabric and realized she’d sat down.

“Good choice. There’s a robe at the foot of the table.” Parker gestured toward the general area of the massage table. “Strip down to the level you’re most comfortable with and put the robe on while I wait for you in the other room. Once you’re ready, just say ‘woo-rah’ and we can—”

“Oh, I know the drill,” she said.

Parker inclined his head and said nothing. Could his suspicion be true? *It has to be*, he thought.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to cut you off.” There was a sad, if not apologetic, hint to her tone, and he took note of that fact.

“It’s okay. Let me know when you’re ready for me.”

He smiled and turned to the small adjoining area divided by a heavy curtain. Parker pulled back the fabric and walked in while he pondered his suspicion. He was sure Ms. Didley was Madame Baba, even without the benefit of touching her. What was behind the name change? That was a lot

of trouble for someone to go through. And why did she seem to be following him? He wasn't the only expert in Los Angeles.

Parker had built a solid reputation in the business and had been dubbed Feather Light for his efforts. It had started out as a joke. A famous singer had been interviewed by a local LA magazine, and one of the questions that had come up was how she'd managed to stay happy and focused despite her grueling schedule. She'd mentioned his name and had even gone so far as to describe the experience at his hands as orgasmic. Everything from that point on was history.

His popularity had skyrocketed after that glowing endorsement, which had enabled him to expand his business. But with every success came adversity. The challenge had come in the form of one tenacious reporter. He'd accused Parker of using methods that bordered on exploitative and improper. The article had gone on to state that his techniques were sexually charged, malicious, and disrespectful. Parker had shrugged it off and had continued to do what he believed was best for his clients and his business.

After washing his hands with warm water, he towed off and strapped on his lotion and oil belt. Ms. Didley's "woo-rah" sounded, and he took a deep breath. He had no idea why she intrigued him, but everything about her made him ache to know more. His tactile sense told him enough about her physical aspects. If he could only get a chance to feel her face, then he'd have a better sense of the person.

Pushing the heavy curtain aside, Parker slipped back into the room to the soft, soothing sounds of cascading water and relaxing flute. The aroma of lilac floated around when he heard her adjust her body on the massage table.

"Before you start, I want to know what you can see and cannot see," she whispered. "You don't have to answer if you don't want to. I'm just curious because you don't seem blind to me. Your movement is so . . . so precise and tender. It's as if you're looking at me and know what I want and what pleases me."

Whoa! That was the most she'd ever said to him, not counting her monologue from their last meeting. He shrugged and laid his hand on her head, which she'd turned to the side. Gently, he started massaging her head, moving his way in a slow, rhythmic pattern down to her neck, then her shoulders and her back, until he reached the soles of her feet.

"I don't mind at all. I haven't always been blind. In fact, upon diagnosis, the disease gave me enough time to prepare. It wasn't an overnight change. It took years for my vision to diminish. I won't go completely blind. I still recognize blurry shapes, but that's about all I can see at this point. I guess, in a way, I still move and act as if I can see. It makes people less uncomfortable in my presence." Parker shrugged. "Does my blindness bother you, Ms. Didley?"

Silence, and then she coughed. "No . . . not at all. In fact, and please pardon my forthrightness, it's liberating. It's like getting a fresh start."

Parker's brows furrowed. "Liberating? What do you mean by that?"

She pulled away. "Uh . . . nothing. Can we just move along?"

In response, Parker slid his hand to the base of her neck in light, easy strokes. She wanted to get personal, yet she held back when he prodded her to explain what she meant. That could mean she wasn't comfortable in her own skin. He moved his fingers behind her ears, rubbing and applying light pressure—another technique he used to feel someone's emotion by touch. Depending on one's mood, a heated face, temple, or neck could suggest discomfort or embarrassment. It could also mean the person was trying to hide something or a particular subject affected them. In Ms. Didley's case, he felt she was hiding something.



Kelly tried to keep her erratic heartbeat in check. She had said so much in such a little time, haranguing the man for information about his eyesight and then dismissing his question without explanation.

His sensual hands on her body didn't help at all. All she could think of was his fingers moving to places that hadn't been touched for a long, long time. Too long, actually. With fame came loneliness. Yes, there were friends and family, but Kelly needed intimacy. She wanted someone she could trust to share her bed at night. Famous actors had their own agenda, and the ones she'd associated with in the past had either wanted her as a red carpet accessory or just a one-night stand. They'd been too into themselves to understand or care about what she needed.

She'd had many massages, but none of the massage therapists had induced the response she had to Parker. Not only had he successfully punctured the barrier around her, making her break down and show her vulnerable side, the part of her she closed for everyone to see, but he had unearthed memories she'd rather forget.

Her mind flashed back to Matthew. The bastard. He had screwed with her head and made her afraid to trust men—and people in general. Exhausted, Kelly wanted nothing more than peace of mind and a chance to be herself again. But who was she nowadays? She shook off the reminders of her past mistakes and concentrated on Parker's hands on her body.

Parker Davis seemed content in his own skin. His blindness added to his aura because he acted so sure of himself. It didn't diminish his ability in her eyes. How could it even matter when he was one of the most gorgeous men she'd ever seen? Kelly worked in the entertainment industry, and she'd seen them all. Parker had the confidence of a man and the charisma of a boy. Add in the sculpted arms, the tapered waist, and the well-built physique . . . she was a goner from the first moment she'd laid eyes on him.

Kelly had gone home after the first session with him feeling like she could take on the world. Parker had the ability to listen and had made her feel good about herself. She'd worked ten days straight after that session

and had even been able to endure the paparazzi hounding her. Without being aware of it, Parker had helped her in ways she couldn't explain. He'd lifted her spirits, and his gratifying touch had seemed to convey an unspoken sentiment. Could he feel her attraction to him?

He continued to trace his hands along her back—heaving, kneading, and taunting her into a relaxed state in which all she felt was pure bliss. How would it feel to have his arms around her? To hear him tell her how much he wanted her?

When he moved to massaging her scalp and the contours of her jawline and neck, Parker wasn't just touching her; he was looking at her. Kelly kept her eyes open and watched with guilty pleasure while his mouth twitched into a smile and his eyes closed.

“Ms. Didley?” His voice was a gentle whisper.

“Hmm . . .”

“What are you thinking at the moment?”

Parker moved over to her left leg. From her past experiences, most massage therapists started with the back, then the limbs, before graduating to the face. With Parker, he lingered on her face longer. She wasn't complaining. It gave her the chance to watch him, enough time to memorize his face with its slight bump on the bridge of his nose, sensual pink lips, and long lashes that framed his almost sightless blue eyes. *Talk about devouring someone with your eyes.* She feasted them on Parker like she had never done before, and it made her feel good. *Real good.*

“If there was anything you could have right now, what would it be?”

Kelly answered without giving the question much thought. “I guess I would want a man to tell me what to do.” As soon as the words left her mouth, they sounded too honest, even to her own ears. What could he be thinking of her candor?

If she read his reactions correctly, Parker seemed to understand what she meant. She heard his breath hitch before he let out a long sigh.

“You sound like you need a break.”

Her response was instinctive. Kelly curled her toes, and her center throbbed. She closed her eyes and let the warm sensation emanating from her girly bits engulf her senses. Those other people hadn't lied. This man could bring her, or anyone, to orgasm just by asking the right questions and saying the right things.

When the chime rang, signaling the end of the session, she groaned, unable to help herself. If it was possible to ask for an extension, she would've done it, but she realized his schedule was tight and he needed a break.

“If you're not doing anything tonight, would you care to join me in my hotel room for dinner? Maybe some drinks afterward?” she blurted out before she lost her nerve. “I know you're not from around here and you're just going back to your hotel room after the day is over. What could be better than two people getting to know each other over dinner and maybe

some drinks afterward?”

“Are you asking me out on a date, Ms. Didley?”

Kelly stiffened at the directness of his question but decided not to lie. “I find you fascinating, Mr. Davis.”

Parker shifted on his feet, seeming to considering her statement. “Does your fascination have something to do with my blindness?”

“Not at all. I’m sure you know how attractive you are. You’re charming, and it seems like you can carry on a decent conversation.”

“You sound like you’re in advertising.” Parker smiled and shoved his hands in his pocket. “If we’re to go out on a date, I would much prefer to take you dining at a nice restaurant with candlelight and soft music.”

Stunned, Kelly tried to search for the right words to say. The last thing she needed was to be seen in New York City dining with her massage therapist. She preferred her privacy, and she wanted him alone with her, no interruptions, and everything else that came with that.

“If you don’t mind, I’d rather stay in the hotel room. I promise you, the food will be superb, and the company will be excellent.” She sounded desperate, but she didn’t care. Parker was interesting, and she’d like to get to know him better. What harm could one dinner do, anyway?

He considered her for a moment. “Your offer is hard to refuse, so I will say yes. One condition, though. Please give me your real name.”

Parker stared at Kelly like he was looking straight into her eyes. She felt a sliver of discomfort but shrugged it off. The man couldn’t see, and she was being paranoid.

“It’s Ann Sutton.” She wasn’t lying. Her real name was Kelly Ann Sutton. Storm was her mother’s maiden name, which she used as her stage name because someone had once said it was catchy and easy to remember.

Parker reached out a hand in her direction and grinned. “It’s nice to meet you, Ann Sutton.”

She got up, not even bothering to cover her body, and clasped his hand. “Same here, Mr. Davis.”

He held her hand a bit longer than necessary before he released it. “Call me Parker.”

“Call me Ms. Didley.” Kelly laughed.



Parker went back to his hotel room to get ready. He felt like a teenager going on his first date. Arianne had warned him, in a good-natured way, that she didn’t trust the woman. “*Why would she use aliases if she isn’t hiding something?*” Her tone had been full of suspicion ever since Parker had mentioned the date.

He wouldn’t have said anything to Arianne if he’d had time to make the arrangements himself, but he had been booked solid for the entire day, leaving him with very little time to call a florist and arrange for his ride.

Parker barely had enough time to get back to his hotel to shower and get ready. Thank God for his fantastic dry cleaner. They sent back his outfits in the same bag they were delivered in, so the Braille label always guaranteed the right colors and combinations, eliminating the chance he'd end up wearing mismatched clothes.

After donning a dinner jacket over a black long-sleeved shirt and gray wool slacks, he worked on taming his chestnut hair. Parker should have gotten a haircut before he'd left LA, but his schedule had been too tight. He brushed back the wayward strands and applied gobs of gel until they felt right to him, worried about his appearance because she could see him. On the other hand, it wouldn't matter what Ann wore. She could be wearing raggedy clothes and have her hair all over the place, and he wouldn't even notice.

His car service was prompt and was waiting as soon as he emerged from the hotel. The flowers he'd ordered sat next to him, the scent tickling his nostrils. Ann was staying at the New York Palace, a favorite among celebrities. Parker wondered what she did, because only the uber-rich could afford that famous hotel.

A concierge met him at the front of the hotel and whisked him to her suite. It felt odd, considering he thrived on control, to be dependent on other people at that particular moment.

Ann's request had thrown him off balance. Her simple idea of a date had disturbed his controlled and methodical life, and he had let it. Parker had no idea where the evening would take him, but the mystery behind the woman piqued his interest enough for him to take a look. He chuckled to himself.

"Here we are, sir," the man said when they reached the door of the suite. Parker shook the man's hand with a twenty dollar bill and collected himself before knocking.

There were muffled footsteps, and fabric brushed the surface of the door before it opened. "Hello, Parker." Ann's velvety voice was a soft caress.

He smiled at the sound. "These are for you." He offered her the bouquet of flowers Arianne had ordered for him.

"They're wonderful." Parker heard her sniff the flowers before she took his arm and guided him inside the room. "You look . . . amazing."

"Thank you. I wish I could say the same, but I'm sure you're gorgeous. If I'm going to base my call on your Hermes perfume, I'll say you smell ravishing." He grinned while they made their way into what he guessed was the sitting room. Ann ushered him to a plush sofa, and they sat next to each other. She released his arm once they were settled and comfortable.

"Dinner is arriving in ten minutes. Hold on. Let me call for them to bring a vase for these beautiful flowers." Parker heard the sound of her footsteps padding across the room and listened as she called in her request. Ann came back and sat next to him.

He decided to start the conversation with a safe topic. "What are we having?"

Her laugh was sexy, and he couldn't help but smile. "Are you hungry?"

Parker nodded. "Been a long day, and there's one Ms. Didley who took a lot out of me—energy-wise that is." He winked at her.

"Well, Ms. Didley's going to make sure you're well-fed and satisfied by the end of the night."

Okay. If he didn't know any better, he would swear that there was something sexual about the way she'd said that. "Really?" He raised an eyebrow.

"We're starting off with oysters in mignonette sauce. I ordered Cabernet steak with mushrooms for you and mahi-mahi with mango sauce for me. And for dessert, we're having chocolate truffle cake."

Parker coughed, unable to stop the surprise as soon as he realized everything she had ordered was an aphrodisiac. Mortified at his reaction, Parker was saved from further embarrassment by the knocking on the door.

He wasn't sure if he should feel flattered, because it was obvious the woman wanted him, or if he should start running. As much as he wanted her, his lifestyle wasn't for everyone, and he wasn't even thinking about his disability yet. Parker was thinking more along the lines of his sexual preferences.

It wasn't easy to come up to someone new and tell them he wanted a more controlled approach to sex. He wasn't tied to Webster by any means—they were mere sex partners who understood and trusted each other, and their shared preference worked out well for them.

Then Parker heard the sound of a cart being rolled into the middle of the room, judging by the echo of the wheels as their sound bounced off the walls. It was funny how blindness made him pay attention to details he had taken for granted in the past.

He couldn't hear what was being said before the person left. Ann spoke in hushed tones, which made it impossible for him to understand. Parker shrugged it off, but a sliver of suspicion began to creep in.

"Shall we?"

Parker got up and followed the direction of her voice. He looked down to catch any furniture in his way and made it to the makeshift dinner table without making a fool of himself.

"It smells good." He touched the edge of the table until he bumped into a chair. Feeling for the back of it, he pulled it out for her. Ann sat down, and he went around to his chair.

"Where do you want me to put your water and wine glass?"

Her attention to detail was touching, and he gave her a smile. "My one o'clock. Water on the left, and wine glass to the right." Parker listened to the sounds she made while she did what he'd told her. He fought the urge to compliment Ann on her obedience, something that came naturally to him.

"Thank you."

"You're welcome. Bon appétit." The sound of metal scraping against the china prompted him to pick up his own utensils.

They dug into the oysters first, and Parker's thoughts kept going back to the idea behind the food choice. "This is good."

"I knew you'd like it. You seem like an oyster man." Ann laughed but offered no explanation.

"What is an 'oyster man'?" he asked after he'd swallowed the first oyster.

"Someone who enjoys his *food*." Another innuendo.

Parker nearly choked and reached for his water. He must have drunk half of it, because Ann got up and refilled his glass. Wiping the beads of sweat from his forehead, he wanted to avoid the topic, but it seemed like he was being cornered.

"Yes, I do enjoy my food. There's a certain way I like to eat it, though."

He guessed she was trying to figure out what he meant when silence loomed between them. Instead of replying, Ann started clearing the appetizer plate and placed another one in front of him.

"Do you want me to cut the meat for you?" Her tone was laced with concern.

Parker shook his head. "Just tell me how big the steak is, and I can take it from there."

She leaned closer, enough for him to catch a whiff of her sweet scent. "Um . . . let's see. It's about the size of a CD."

"Thanks." He got to work, and after several minutes of biting and chewing, Parker leaned back in his chair and started a safe conversation.

"Tell me, Ms. Sutton, what do you do for a living?"

Ann didn't answer right away. He'd thought the topic was safe enough for two people trying to get to know each other, but he felt a subtle change in the room—some sort of tension he couldn't explain.

"I'm not doing anything at the moment," she said after a noticeable pause.

"Must be nice. I'm a slave to my work." He laughed.

"Let's just say I'm wealthy."

Parker had no idea what to say to that, so he went for whatever came to mind. "Even better. You're a rich bum. Tell me about your life as a bum, then."

There was another extended silence, which lasted longer than the first. "Nothing much to tell except I travel a lot. I have a sister in Chicago. That's where I grew up until I moved to Los Angeles several years ago. My parents are both dead. I'm twenty-six years old. That's about it."

"What's the color of your hair and your eyes?"

"I'm a natural redhead, and I have hazel eyes."

He inclined his head. "Light-skinned and freckles?"

"Well, I try to hit the tanning salon when I can." Ann laughed and took a sip of her wine. "And I have a gazillion freckles."

"I can just imagine."

"Tell me about yourself."

"I'm more of an open book, I guess, because of Knead Me's success. A

lot of what is written about me is almost right. *Almost.*” Parker chuckled before continuing. “I grew up in the San Fernando Valley, in Encino. I was into cross-country running before blindness got the best of me.”

“Must be hard, I mean, you know . . . having to adjust to another lifestyle.”

“As I said earlier, it didn’t happen overnight, so I had time to make some adjustments. I still run on the track with a sighted guide. I learned some things before profound blindness took over. I took a crash course in Braille, I let the light guide me for directions, if I can, and I try not to hassle people if I can avoid it. Driving was the hardest thing to give up.” He sighed.

“How do you get around? And how come you don’t use one of those sticks?” There was no malice in her tone, just innocent curiosity, which was a breath of fresh air.

“My brother, Cork, came to work for me when I couldn’t drive any longer. He lives a few miles from my place, and he handles the books. As for the white cane, I don’t want it yet. I can still recognize shapes and distance. It’s still good enough to get around. I try not to cross the street without company. Cork had inquired about a guide dog for me. The process takes some time, and I’m currently on the waiting list, if I ever want one.”

“You seemed well-adjusted to your . . .” Ann paused.

Parker supplied the word she was searching for. “Disability?”

“I don’t think that’s the word I’m looking for. *Challenges* sounds better to me.”

“In a way, I guess I am adjusted already. I have no choice. I have to live and make the most out of life, right?” Parker tried to look straight in the direction of her face, hoping his aim was right.

“Well, Parker, I’m happy for you. I wish everyone could be like you, happy with what they have in life.” Ann drew in a sharp breath.

Her sigh raised another suspicion he couldn’t ignore. “Are you happy with what you have?” he asked.

“Time for dessert.” She got up and cleared the dinner plates, placing another dish in front of him.

He raised an eyebrow but decided not to press. Dinner was delicious, and the company, even more so. Parker couldn’t remember the last time he had been out on an actual date and enjoyed himself since his business had taken off. He found it difficult not to give in to his curiosity about this interesting woman.

As the night progressed and the wine bottle emptied, they sat on the sofa, holding each other’s hands. They skirted around the topic of sex, since Ann refused to talk more about herself.

Judging from her rapid breathing, Parker was certain of one fact and one fact alone—he desired her as much as she wanted him. But he wasn’t about to say anything. Instead, he focused on rubbing her arm and trailing feather light touches along the back of her neck.

Ann moaned. “Parker . . . I think you have an idea how I feel about you.”

She got up and tugged on his arm.

He stood and pulled her close until their bodies touched. Inhaling her scent, he sighed. "I think I do . . . but . . . shit, how do I say this?"

"Tell me." Her voice was a husky whisper.

Parker shuddered. It was crazy, but he was about to tell a woman he hardly knew what he wanted. He had to if he wanted to give whatever they had a chance.

"I don't do regular sex, Ann," he said.