

# Beneath the Surface

By  
M.A. Stacie

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# About the Author

M.A. Stacie is never without a book or her e-reader. A voracious reader, with a love of sexy, yet angst ridden novels, she adores getting lost in new worlds. Her need to write did not grip her until after her second son was born, when her previous rambles became fully fledged stories.

She describes herself as one huge contradiction, and though not the most conventional of hobbies, she counts getting new tattoos as one of hers. Along with knitting, listening to loud music, and playing the Wii with her children. M.A. Stacie lives in the UK with her husband and three sons.

# Dedication

*For Denise, Jan, and Molly,  
The ladies who lived **that** David Beckham moment with me.  
The moment that sparked it all.*

# Acknowledgments

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# Chapter 1

“Tell Marc tough shit. That’s how this company works, and if he doesn’t like that, he can clean out his desk!” Kyran Reese yelled into the phone.

His head throbbed, his temples pulsing violently. Kyran’s tolerance was low for stupidity, and it was being tested to the limit. Today had gone from somewhat fucked to fully fucked, yet it was just approaching lunchtime.

Slamming the phone down, he swiveled his chair to look out his office’s large window across the city. He had the most amazing view of Sea Pointe from the twenty-fifth floor. Sometimes staring at the glass and metal cityscape would be the only thing that could calm Kyran. Each day seemed to stress him out even more than the last. In fact, he didn’t think it would be long before he developed an ulcer like his father. An ulcer would be the best outcome, he thought. With Kyran’s luck, he would have a brain-popping aneurysm considering the incompetence he dealt with on a daily basis.

Wincing, he smoothed a hand across his shaved head, feeling the short hair on his palm. He needed a diversion, but did he have the time? He’d sworn he wouldn’t step foot in Metro for the next two weeks. Work was hellish, and holding meetings while you had a busted nose or a black eye would not impress clients and shareholders.

The problem was he’d grown to need the pain and pleasure of the fight. Whenever he fought in the makeshift ring at Metro, he burned off the stress of the day. His sole focus, for those violent, bone-crunching minutes, was his fists and winning the match.

Kyran glanced down at his right hand, smoothing his fingers across his knuckles. He’d messed them up on more occasions than he cared to recall. Ice packs and hydrogen peroxide were his friends whenever he got home from the club, along with a decent amount of Scotch.

He longed for the buzz—the sensation that beat within him whenever he

saw the lights go out in his opponents' eyes. The glint of excitement he always saw there would diminish, telling him it would take one good punch to end the match.

His intercom buzzed, startling him. "Mr. Reese?" Lucy, his assistant, spoke. "One of Taylor's new assistants has arrived, but he is out of the office. I don't know where he is, or how long he'll be. I didn't want her to wait, and sending her home seems rather silly. This is her first day, Mr. Reese. Would you mind talking to her?"

Composing himself, Kyran stood and adjusted his tie. He could see how tired he looked as he focused on his reflection in the glass, and he doubted he would make it through the two weeks without a visit to the club.

He was an addict. It just wasn't of the chemical kind.

"I'll see her," he said with authority. "Although when Taylor does get his ass back here, tell him I want to speak to him. No excuses."

"Yes, Mr. Reese. I'll send her in now."

He didn't bother to sit back down. Instead, he walked around his large desk and across the room to the wet bar and poured himself a cup of coffee. The door clicked open and Kyran heard a timid breath exhale behind him.

"Hello?"

At the sound of her voice, an odd tingling sensation started at the base of his spine. Already disliking the feeling, he remained silent as he turned and looked her over, no doubt making her feel rather uncomfortable. The dark-haired woman fidgeted awkwardly, reaching up to twist a lock of her hair around a finger. It was such a childish action; Kyran didn't quite understand why he silently willed her to continue. She met his eyes briefly before scanning the room. It took her a moment to assess the space before she moved forward, holding out her hand to greet him. "Mr. Reese?"

Kyran nodded, lifting the coffee cup to his lips to smother the smile that threatened to appear. She was tiny, reminding him of a mouse caught in a lion's den. After another quick perusal of her body, he decided he would enjoy playing with her, but circumstances dictated that he should keep his eyes on her face and off her body. He was attracted to her, but he was her boss. Ms. Porter was off limits.

"Your receptionist said I was to see you as the other Mr. Reese—the right one—wasn't available. I'm—"

"Dale Porter," Kyran said.

"Oh, I didn't know you knew my name."

"I know everything, Ms. Porter," he told her.

Kyran didn't wait for her to acknowledge his statement before walking over and sitting down, gesturing for her to follow suit. She shot him a small scowl and adjusted her purse on her shoulder.

Judging by her actions, he'd confused her with his coldness. It was a reaction he was used to and found it always worked to his advantage. People showed their true selves when under pressure or when angry. He only had to work out which one applied to Ms. Porter.

She tottered forward, amusing Kyran with her inability to walk gracefully in heels. When she stumbled a little, he snorted, receiving a sharp glare in response. This woman was a feisty one and not daunted by his position.

“My brother will be back shortly,” Kyran said smoothly. He took a sip of his coffee. “I’m sure he will show you what is expected of you. For now, I will give you an idea of what the business does, how it works, and how you will fit in.”

“Sure.” She nodded before perching on the edge of the couch. “You must spend most of your day dealing with people like me if you give this talk to all new staff.”

Taken aback by her assertiveness, when he’d assumed the opposite, Kyran bristled but then smiled. It wasn’t often that he got someone wrong.

“My brother and I discuss this with all staff who are hired for the executive level. The office here is small in comparison to others, so there is no issue. However, I do thank you for your concern.”

“You’re welcome,” she said, smirking as she got more comfortable on the couch. She began to toy with her hair, twirling the brunette corkscrews around her finger before letting them bounce around her face. She met his eyes, and now that she was closer, Kyran could see they were almost the same green shade as his own. Ms. Porter’s were far more welcoming, though—all wide-eyed and emanating with honesty—whereas his were guarded. He let very few see beneath the surface.

“Nice place you have. I walk past this building a lot. You lucked out getting the top floor.”

“Not at all. The corporation owns the building, Ms. Porter. *I* own everything in it.”

“Doubtful.”

Her reply was blunt but delivered with a keen smile. Her cocksure attitude was starting to get to him. It curled in his groin, tightening the flesh each time she shot him a quick-witted retort. The sensation wasn’t entirely welcome.

“Why do you doubt that?” Kyran took another slow sip from his cup, eyeing her over the rim of the fine china.

“You can’t possibly own everything within this building.”

“Why not?”

She rolled her eyes, sighing in exasperation. “Because there are people in here. You cannot own people, Mr. Reese.”

With no other agenda but to see her reaction, he replied, “I beg to differ.”

She shook her head, pursing her lips and waving her hand. “No. No way.”

The flush of her cheeks was enthralling. One he would like to see more often, he decided. This perplexed him. So he continued. “I find money allows you to purchase whatever your heart desires. People included.”

“I don’t think my first day at work is really the time to tell me all about your sexual deviances.” She huffed.

Before Kyran could stop it, he laughed. The sound shocked him. It



echoed around the office as if reminding him that the action had truly occurred.

“Touché, Ms. Porter. I think you’re going to be a great addition to the corporation, and maybe even give Taylor a bit of trouble.”

“Taylor?”

“My brother. The *right* Mr. Reese,” Kyran said in confirmation, using her earlier statement. “He could do with a little wake-up call.”

“Personally, I think you could use it more.”

Cocking a brow, Kyran asked, “Why, Ms. Porter?”

“You just seem very . . . focused. Rigid. The other Mr. Reese seemed more relaxed when I met him at my interview.” Her smile faltered a little as she answered him, showing Kyran she wasn’t as confident as she wanted him to believe.

Her response was what he’d expected. Taylor was the one people warmed up to. Usually they found Kyran too abrupt. Taylor’s attitude, however, had landed him in a whole heap of shit. Kyran didn’t want to end up with another possible lawsuit on his hands, so as intriguing as the woman was, he couldn’t break the rules. She appeared to be the exact level of feisty he enjoyed in his women. The kind who kept him on his toes and yet never took the situation for more than it was. At least that was what he saw from their short interaction. He had to keep telling himself to keep his hands off.

“You don’t know me. A wake-up call is not what I need.”

“You’re right,” she replied, her vibrancy fading right before his eyes. “The corporation needed an assistant. So here I am. Where’s my desk?”

The speed at which she changed demeanor caused Kyran to reassess his next move. She’d gone from playful to stoic in seconds.

He cleared his throat and placed the coffee cup on the glass table in front of them before standing. He needed to gain his composure and standing up helped that advantage.

It also allowed a perfect view down the front of Ms. Porter’s top, the swell of her breasts causing interesting reactions within his groin.

“I have no idea where your desk is. You are not my assistant, and truthfully, I doubt I could afford the distraction.”

“Excuse me?”

Waving his hand in dismissal, he muttered, “Nothing. Ignore me.”

“It’s a little difficult to do that. You’re my boss.”

Kyran’s grin faded. “I am, aren’t I?”

An awkward silence followed. He was enjoying this interaction but worried about how far he could take it. Ms. Porter had reminded him of his place and that he should not be overstepping the mark. Taylor would also do that if he saw the way he was interacting with her. His brother would know exactly what was going on in his head and how much she interested him. Annoyed at his internal confusion, he stalked across the room to the windows. Kyran took a few deep breaths, calming the tingling on his palms and the tightness of his crotch. He shouldn’t have this response or feel this

attraction. No woman had given him such a buzz within minutes of meeting.

Kyran didn't like it. Without question, the need to feel the sting of Metro was stronger than ever.

"So, as I'm the boss—the CEO—I think it's time to return to business," he stated, his tone cold. "The Reese Corporation was started many years ago by our father, Jacob. We basically buy failing companies and make new ones out of them."

"I know." She interrupted him as he turned to face her. "You're Edward Lewis."

Racking his brain, Kyran tried to place who the hell was Edward Lewis. It could be the mail boy—he was fairly sure his name was Edward—but then why would she be comparing him to someone who delivered the mail from floor to floor? He was lost. The woman was driving him crazy with her silly talk and interruptions. With anyone else, Kyran would have called a halt to the meeting, or at least put them in their place, but Ms. Porter had him fumbling for a grip on the situation. He didn't like it one bit.

"Okay, I'm confused. Who's Edward Lewis? Does he work here?"

Ms. Porter tossed her head back and laughed. He watched her, transfixed by her long, creamy neck and the way each inhalation of breath made her breasts heave. They swelled against the taut blue fabric, the lacy bra underneath popping above the neckline.

Kyran's mouth grew dry, his tongue danced against the back of his teeth as he longed for a taste of her flesh. He wanted to take the lace bra cup between his teeth and tug it hard until it tore . . .

"Hello? Are you all right?"

Ms. Porter interrupted his thoughts, dousing his dirty mind with cold water. She was certainly wearing more clothes in reality than she had been in his little daydream.

"I'm fine. What were we discussing?" he asked, disgusted for losing his train of thought again.

"Edward Lewis. I was explaining that he doesn't work here. Not unless your employee is Richard Gere."

Kyran stared at her, mouth agape. For the first time in forever, he had no idea what to say. This stunning female spoke in tongues. He couldn't follow a single sentence, and it was getting rather frustrating. A small part of him was pleased Ms. Porter would be working for Taylor rather than him. He'd need to stock up on antacids and pain meds because she'd drive him insane.

Needing some space from her, Kyran stood and walked over to the large windows near his desk. He took a deep breath, stared out across the landscape and tried to regroup.

"*Pretty Woman*? You know, Julia Roberts? Richard Gere? The prostitute and the businessman."

"Still no idea."

Ms. Porter stood up and pushed her skirt down, hiding the view of her

thighs. She wobbled on her heels walking across to his desk, and shocked him when she sat in his chair and began typing on his keyboard.

“What are you—”

“Here,” she said, pointing to the computer screen. “*Pretty Woman*. Richard Gere played the role of Edward Lewis. His job was just like yours. So you’re Edward Lewis.”

Understanding that she was referring to a movie, he exhaled, his impatience obvious. He couldn’t recall the last time he had watched a movie, or even sat in front of the television for a while.

Leaning over her, he went to switch the computer off but stalled. Her scent floated in the air, enveloping him in the sweetness of vanilla.

He wanted to lick her.

The Neanderthal within him raged. Taking a bite out of the fragrant skin of her neck would be divine. Sheer nectar, he knew it.

Inhaling, he closed his eyes. His heart began to pound, the tingling in his palms returning. Where seconds earlier his mouth was dry, it now began to water, desperate for a small taste of her.

Damn her!

A sharp knock on the office door was followed by the door opening. “Lucy said you had my new assis . . .”

Kyran ground his teeth, pulling away from Ms. Porter. He fisted his hands and shoved them into the pockets of his slacks. Kyran couldn’t meet his gaze. Not yet. He needed a moment to gain his composure.

Ms. Porter began typing randomly, letters and numbers filled the screen, but nothing made any sense. Not until she looked up.

“Hello. You must be the right Mr. Reese.” Ms. Porter shoved the chair back, hitting Kyran’s knees without apology. “I’m Dale Porter, your new assistant.”

Taylor nodded, his dark eyes thinning as he looked from Kyran to Ms. Porter. The man knew something was up, however he could back the hell off. Kyran was more than aware of the office interludes Taylor had been involved in.

“Truthfully, I think this Mr. Reese here needs a new assistant, too. I had to show him how to do the simplest Internet search just now.”

Taylor raised a brow. “That’s what I interrupted, huh?”

Ms. Porter nodded, walking over to collect her purse. Kyran shrugged. “She has a fixation on prostitutes and movies. I’m worried for you, brother.”

Taylor didn’t bother with a reply, the look on his face told Kyran he would return for a real explanation. Kyran would then be able to repeat the conversation they’d had yesterday. Taylor was being trusted not to fuck up this time. Kyran didn’t like it, but his father was confident. He had little choice other than to watch his brother like a hawk.

“Well, Dale,” Taylor said, opening the door wider for her to walk through. “I’m sure being with Kyran was entertaining, but the real fun is down the

corridor.”

Dale grinned, hitching her purse onto her shoulder. “Cool.”

The pair left, and Kyran felt as though he could breathe again. His heart slowed, but his head began to throb. He rubbed his temples in an effort to calm down further when Ms. Porter popped out from the side of the door frame.

“It was a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Reese. Our interaction was . . . fascinating.”

And with that she was gone, leaving behind a trail of vanilla perfume and a man with a raging hard-on.

## Chapter 2

Dale held her cell phone to her ear, trying not to raise her voice. Even though she wasn't within the Reese Building, she was standing just outside, and anyone could overhear her conversation. She wanted to make a good impression.

"Dad, I don't really want to hear *I told you so*. I get it. Joel is an asshole and was from the start. I messed up because I should have listened to you."

"Maybe next time you will. I've been on this earth a few years more than you. I saw through him right away."

Dale ground her teeth. She knew her father was trying to be supportive, but right now he was pouring more salt into the wound. She needed his comfort. However, a small part of her understood how difficult the last eighteen months had been for him. He'd never liked Joel or approved of her decision to come to Sea Pointe with him. So in some small way, her father was entitled to his *I told you so*. It was a bitter pill to swallow.

"I know. I'm sorry I didn't listen to you, and I'm sorry I haven't called. It's been tough." She tried not to cry, staring at her reflection in the glass panel that formed the side of the Reese Building and willing the tears away.

"And I'm assuming you've kicked him out."

"Packed his stuff up and left it out on the sidewalk within six hours. I added *her* stuff to the pile, too. I don't care how long we were friends. I don't want any reminders of either one of them."

"That boy had a wandering eye," her father added. Like she didn't know that.

"Dad, please!" Dale raised her voice, hoping he would pay attention. A couple entering the building paused to stare at her. Embarrassed, she turned her back on them. "Look, I don't want to keep going over this. I called because I have some news."

"I called you."

Okay, he had a point. “Sorry.”

“What’s your news?” he asked, the apology going unacknowledged.

“I started a new job yesterday.” She smiled, knowing he would be able to hear it in her voice. “I like it. One of my bosses is a little uptight, but the other one is kinda cool. I think it’s the right fit.”

“You said that about the other one. Don’t get why you needed a new one,” he grumbled.

“Because I was let go, Dad. I had no choice. Besides, this one is for a huge company, the Reese Corporation, in one of the large buildings. I have that feeling—the one where I just *know* it’s right.”

Her father’s snort of derision popped down the line. “Seem to recall you getting that feeling when you met the jackass.”

Again, another good point. “Can you at least try to be happy for me?”

Her father sighed. She hated this. Before her ex, they had been close, but the moment Joel had stepped into her life he had caused all sorts of problems. Her father had disliked him right away and made no excuses. There hadn’t been any foundation to his dislike, at least none that he had ever verbalized.

Blinded by love, Dale had jumped to her boyfriend’s defense, only to have it backfire when he’d walked all over her. She’d hoped that with Joel now gone they would be able to rebuild their relationship. It was proving far more difficult than she had initially thought. She was her father’s daughter through and through—both of them too stubborn to back down.

“I am happy for you, Dale. Sometimes you just make it so damn hard to —”

“What?” Her stomach clenched. “*I’m* the problem here? Again?”

More people glanced over at her, though this time her blood had begun to boil, and she no longer cared who looked her way. Nevertheless, she did step away from the building entrance.

“Never said that, sweetheart.”

“Of course not.”

“Dale, don’t go all wild on me. I am happy for you, and I hope this works out for you. I miss you.”

Her shoulders sagged, guilt replacing anger. Taking a deep breath, she tried to calm down, tried to see a way through. “I miss you, too.”

Silence flowed, neither of them knowing what to say next. Eventually, Dale gave in and said, “Look, Dad, I have to go. It would look real bad if I showed up late from lunch on my second day.”

“Okay.” He sighed again. “I do hope this works for you.”

Unsure of how to answer, Dale said good-bye and ended the call. This time she was the one to exhale, her head falling forward. Tears stung her eyes but luckily her hair blocked her face from view.

“Are you all right, honey?”

Dale looked up, blinking at the woman in front of her. She was familiar, although Dale couldn’t place her. She racked her brain, scrutinizing the

woman's dark hair and horn-rimmed glasses. Her smile was warm, making Dale feel at ease with her, but she struggled to recall how she knew the woman.

"You're Dale, right? Taylor's new assistant?"

Dale nodded. "Yes, I am."

The woman continued. "I'm Lucy. I was in the reception when you arrived yesterday."

Recognizing the woman, Dale smiled. "Yeah, I remember now. I'm okay. Just had a bit of an argument with my father."

"Ah, I see. Well, take a few moments out here. Mr. Reese isn't one for bringing personal business into the office."

"Wow, everyone is so considerate today, aren't they?" Dale stated, making no attempt to hide the sarcasm in her voice.

"Just a bit of friendly advice. Take it or leave it."

"I'm sorry," Dale said quickly. "I shouldn't have snapped. My father just seriously annoyed me. We always grate on one another."

"I understand." Lucy patted Dale's shoulder, offering a small smile before leaving her. She walked into the building and didn't look back.

It was times like this that Dale would have reached for her cell to call her best friend, Shelby. That was now out of the question. She hated that she had put so much faith in two people. They had been her entire world, and now that they were gone, she felt rather lost. Alone. She wanted to share the news of her new job, drink wine, and laugh about her strange combination of bosses then fall into bed drunk with the man who claimed to love her.

"Ergh, move on, Porter," she said to herself. "Your best friend and boyfriend were assholes. They're welcome to each other. You need new friends, anyway."

Shoving her cell back into her purse, Dale began to walk back into the building. She dodged a few people, not really wanting to be shoved out of their way. Her stance in her heels was precarious at best; she saw no need to tempt fate and fall to the ground in front of strangers. She should have worn flats. Choosing heels, in the hope that they made a good impression, had been a stupid idea.

"Christ, I can't leave the office for five minutes without something falling apart!"

Dale turned, following the sound of the annoyed voice. She knew who it was. Kyran Reese's was not one she could easily forget; deep and seductive, with a huskiness that put her body on red alert. It was utterly unfair that he should be so damn attractive. The man exuded confidence, along with a dark sexuality. That dangerous edge called to her, and she surmised most women would feel the same, caught in the web he didn't even know he'd spun.

"I don't give a shit what Taylor told them," he said into his cell phone. "He's been back two days and cannot possibly know how this deal is working. Just do as I asked rather than what my brother advises." Kyran

added a terse “please.”

Dale continued to watch him, perplexed by what she had overheard. Moments ago Lucy had told her to keep family complications out of the office, and yet Mr. Reese was currently bellowing his business across the entrance to the building. The whole situation seemed somewhat hypocritical.

Kyran ended the call but immediately started a new one. “Dad? You need to come into the office. Taylor is about three conversations away from losing us the Poltak deal. The fucking moron needs to back the hell off.”

His face contorted as he listened to his father’s response. Dale glanced around, not wanting to be caught staring at her new boss. She didn’t really want to hide and spy on him either. Stalker much? She should go inside but the lure to watch him was far too enticing.

“I don’t understand your decisions. Taylor wanders into this place at any time he chooses, barely does a day’s work and yet you’re telling me to back down?” He paused. “I’m not making any more allowances for him. He fucks up. You know this. You have proof of it! Now I refuse to continue to deal with him alone. I’ll repeat what I said earlier—then get back to keeping this corporation afloat. You need to get down here and deal with him.”

Kyran looked up as he ended the call. He thinned his eyes in scrutiny at Dale, and she felt her face burn. Swallowing a lump of anxiety that had lodged in her throat, she wondered whether to go and apologize to him but he made the decision for her. Kyran spun around, turning his back to her, and walked into the building, leaving her staring at the space he had just vacated.

“Well done, Dale. It’s your second day here and you’ve made one hell of an impression. Kyran Reese won’t be forgetting you anytime soon.”



## Chapter 3

Kyran ran.

Kyran ran until he could just barely breathe. At least then he wasn't able to still smell Ms. Porter on his skin like he had yesterday after their meeting in his office.

He ran until his head was numb, because then he wouldn't have to think about her. And he ran until he couldn't feel his limbs, because then he wouldn't need to acknowledge the intense need to touch her. Or his need to get pummeled at Metro.

Disgusted by his reaction, he would do whatever it took to fight it.

Kyran had raced to his desk after he saw Dale outside. Ever since she had entered his office, he'd thought of nothing else but where he could fuck her: on the couch while she was draped naked across it, pushed over the top of his desk, or hard against the bookshelves. It drove him insane. The image of her tortured him slowly until he had no choice but to get away from the room.

He grabbed his gym bag and raced down to the basement of the building. Kyran didn't normally use the office gym, preferring to pay a membership for a larger one with much more equipment. He would use it now, though, because he needed it. Pushing his body to the brink with a vigorous workout was the only way he'd forget her.

The whole situation both confused and pissed him off in equal parts. Sure, when he met a woman who interested him, there would be a spark, but nothing like the raging sensations he felt when he hovered over her yesterday at his computer. Every hormone he possessed had gone wild, vibrating, and sending his system into overload.

He despised how volatile he'd become. The stress of being the CEO, coupled with his brother's ridiculous behavior, made the balance difficult to maintain. The urge to beat, and be beaten, grew with each altercation he

had with his brother. The fighting had now become integral when it came to him functioning like a normal human being. As a child he'd never been a pain freak or a cutter, but now he understood that need for an outlet, a way of releasing what he held inside.

He decided he was a special brand of sick, and he definitely needed therapy.

Growling in frustration, Kyran quickened his pace, pushing himself a bit more on the treadmill. His calves ached, his shins screamed for him to stop, but he continued. Pushing his body to the extreme was the only way to bury the desire. He would swamp it underneath a shitload of exhaustion.

His cell phone chirped and vibrated, diverting his attention. He stumbled but managed to steady himself. Pressing a few buttons, he slowed to a gentle jog to cool down before stopping completely and getting off the treadmill. It was impossible to hear the music playing through the gym speakers because his ears were filled with the sound of his blood thundering through his veins.

Kyran had pushed himself hard and it was all because of one annoying woman he'd talked to for twenty minutes.

The door to the gym opened, and a tall blonde entered the room. She wore tight leggings and a formfitting cropped top. Until recently, he would have stayed and talked to her, maybe even flirted a little. Kyran enjoyed the thrill of the chase. In the past it didn't matter if they worked for him or not. He would have talked to her, flirted, and turned on the charm. However, now he didn't even crack a smile.

Kyran wasn't interested.

He turned his back to her and grabbed his phone, scrolling through the various messages and e-mails while he caught his breath. Sweat trickled down the valley of his spine, pooling at the base of his back before soaking the cotton of his T-shirt. The fabric clung to his heated skin, irritating him enough to take it off.

After ripping his shirt over his head, Kyran tossed it on top of his gym bag, and reached for a towel to pat dry. Looking at the mirrored wall, he watched the blonde cock a brow, her eyes following the tattoos that adorned both of his arms. She didn't grimace in the way most people did when they saw how heavily inked he was. Instead, she licked her lips and drank in every inch of his skin.

Her reaction intrigued him. Very few people in the office knew of his artwork because it was concealed by his business attire. The tattoos also went against his well-known professional persona, but then there was more to him than the Reese Corporation.

Kyran stroked his hand up his left arm and stared at the series of random letters and numbers. The dark digits stood out sharply against his pale flesh, an odd code etched from shoulder to wrist.

He stared at her reflection, hoping to unnerve her enough to stop looking at him, but she was shameless. The woman's gaze trailed over his chest and

down to his tight abs before focusing on his right arm. Although the ink still covered the same amount of skin, the design was different. Waves lapped from his shoulder, forming a small whirlpool on his elbow and ebbing back down to his wrist. Both arms had taken a series of sessions and time away from Metro for a while. The pain of the tattoos was a good exchange for the pain of the club.

“Nice,” the woman said, moving closer to him, and it was clear from the glint in her eye she was impressed. Kyran turned to face her. “That’s some amazing work you have there.”

“I know,” was Kyran’s blunt response as he squatted down, pushing his belongings into the gym bag. He hoped she’d take the hint. When she hunkered down next to him, dragging her long, manicured nails along his arm, he understood hoping was futile.

Shooting her a cool glare, he stood up and hauled his bag over his shoulder. The woman clearly had no idea who he was, and touching him uninvited would get her fired.

“They must have cost you a fortune. The artwork is perfect.” She stood up, cocking her hip.

He took a long drink of water from his sports bottle, wondering if he wanted to get into this with her. It wasn’t that she was unattractive. His issue was more to do with rules, and it would be wrong for him to start anything with someone who worked for him. That issue remained with the curly-haired brunette who was right now settling into his brother’s office.

“Money isn’t a concern,” he replied, shaking his head and trying to forget Dale. “And, yes, the artwork is perfect.”

She flashed him a lip-glossed smile, licking her bottom lip again. He wondered if the gloss was flavored because she couldn’t seem to leave the damn thing alone.

“I haven’t seen you here before. Are you new?”

“No.”

She blushed at his abruptness. “Oh, well, what floor do you work on?”

A slow smile spread across his lips, knowing he was about to make her run and hide. “Twenty-fifth.”

She gave his shoulder a light shove, giggling like a child. “You work for one of the Reeses, then?”

He took his time, taking another long drink of water before he leaned forward, bringing his lips to her ear. He spoke low, making sure his mouth brushed the lobe. She giggled, obviously thinking he was teasing her.

“I *am* one of the Reeses.”

Her gasp of horror echoed around the small gym. She backed away, her hand at her throat, her eyes wide. “I d-didn’t . . .”

“I know. It was amusing to see your reaction. It’s not often someone has no clue who I am. Especially in this building. I can only assume you’re new to your position.”

“I want to tell you that was cruel, but now that I know who you are, I’ll

keep quiet.”

“Wise,” he said. “Very wise.”

Ending their conversation, Kyran began to walk away again, ignoring another weak apology from the blonde. Leaving the interaction at this point would keep her wondering if he was around the corner about to fire her. He wished he had the same possibility with everyone.

Checking his watch, Kyran cringed. He had another few hours’ work to finish before he could call it a day and head to the club. His body told him he didn’t need it. After his run he wouldn’t be on his best form, but his head demanded it. The need was there.

He absently pressed the button to call the elevator, still locked in his own thoughts. He had three meetings to attend tomorrow, so he would have to be cautious with the matches he chose tonight. Bruises from the shoulders down were fine. His face would need to stay clear.

“Is that the dress code around here?”

Kyran froze, looking into the elevator to see Dale. He hadn’t even been aware of the elevator doors opening.

“What?” he snapped, entering the elevator and checking which floor she had pressed. “What are you doing riding the elevator? Hasn’t Taylor given you enough to do?”

He turned his back to her, standing as close to the doors as he could while still allowing them to close.

“I’ll answer you if you face me,” she said.

She exasperated him. No one dared to speak to him like that. Dale and the blonde from the gym were polar opposites.

“You can talk to me whether or not you can see my face, Ms. Porter.” He spun around, dropping his bag to the floor as the elevator began to rise. Using her last name would make him keep his distance. It would keep things professional.

“But your face is so pretty.”

His brows shot up, his mouth opening a little. She clutched a stack of folders to her chest and like a child, stuck her tongue out at him.

Damn it all to hell, he wanted to suck on it.

He fisted his hands and took one step closer to her. A war raged within him. He should turn back around and get out of this elevator as soon as he could. Her scent was pulling him in, escalating his need to devour her.

“Okay. Fine. I was dumb. I got into the elevator and didn’t press anything. I was . . . thinking. Next thing I know I’m on the way down, when I really wanted to go up. I tried pressing the right floor but it had its mind set on coming down to see you.”

She lifted her chin in defiance, not flinching in his proximity. He snapped, losing all control. He reached out and locked his hand around her wrist as he pressed her back toward the wall of the elevator. The folders she was holding dropped to the floor, scattering around them. She sighed, never breaking eye contact.

Kyran knew he was crossing a line, but couldn't stop himself. His rigid control was shot to shit when he was around her. Driven, he slammed her against the wall, grasping both wrists above her head, laying her out like an offering from the gods. Pushing a solid thigh between her legs, he suppressed a moan, watching her chest heave. Those delicious breasts rose closer to his mouth with every breath. He licked his lips, suddenly rather thirsty.

"Wouldn't this be considered sexual harassment, Mr. Reese?" Dale asked, breathless.

She began to wriggle her hips in an attempt to free herself. However, with each movement, she ground herself against his thigh. He groaned, gathering every ounce of strength he had not to take this further.

"Only if you feel harassed, Ms. Porter," he whispered, bringing his face closer to hers. The vanilla scent grew stronger. He hated vanilla. It now reminded him of his crumbling control. Nevertheless, her smell, coupled with her constant writhing, was turning him on. "And if you do, I suggest you report it to your superior."

Her cheeks grew darker, the light petal-pink blush now bursting into a rosy hue. Fire blazed from her green eyes, and his body went on lock-down, concentrating on the woman pressed against him.

"Maybe I'll do that."

Moving his mouth to her ear, he delivered a quick flick of his tongue to her lobe. Her flavor burst along his taste buds, his mouth salivating, his groin tightening, and the little voice that told him this was wrong was buried in a landslide of lust.

"If you would like to make an appointment with my assistant, I'd be happy to hear your complaint, Ms. Porter."

He felt her shiver at his words; Dale understood what he meant. His erection flourished in response. He sniffed the crook of her neck, drinking her in. His hormones drove him now, all reasonable thought lost in the deluge of desire.

Dale stopped squirming, but her breathing increased. The blush that had lit up her cheeks was now spreading down her throat and blooming across the swell of her breasts.

He wanted her. It was that simple. He wanted her like this; hot, grinding, and ready to rip him to pieces. For a man who had complete control of everything in his life, it shook him to the core that it all dissolved so quickly around one woman. She was like a siren calling to him. Whenever he was around her, he felt a need to touch her and possess her.

It beat at him now, yelling at him to take her, make her his, and again that instinct overtook him.

He opened his mouth and touched his tongue to the base of her neck. This time the moan of arousal came from Dale as he began licking up to her ear. His senses intensified the further he climbed up her flesh with his tongue.

His hard cock twitched even more when Dale gasped and pushed her

neck closer to him. She thrust her hips against his thigh, her silent demands increasing. The urge to mark her and bite down on her skin was strong. So intense that he had to bite his own lip to stop it from happening.

Blood bloomed on his tongue from his teeth breaking the sensitive skin of his lip. But it wasn't the first time he'd tasted his own blood, nor would it be the last. His body was used to the mutilation and healed quickly.

His entire system vibrated with lust, his crotch tightened each time Dale writhed against him. Her breath floated across his cheek in short, sharp gasps, mirroring his own breathlessness.

Moving her wrists into one hand, it left his free one to roam her delicious body. Dale's tight dress covered her body like a second skin, flaunting her every curve. Images of hot, sweaty nights in his bed, wearing nothing but each other, blossomed in his head, and Kyran cupped her ass to drag her further up his thigh.

"We . . . should . . . stop," she said, breathing heavily, her actions contradicting her words as she rubbed her sex faster on his thigh.

"Why would we do that?"

"Door." She pushed her chest against his, trying to lower her leg. "The elevator stopped."

Her words doused him in ice-cold water. He dropped her arms like they were on fire, tearing himself away from her. What the hell had just happened, and how had he lost himself so completely?

Dale looked to the floor, smoothing her dress before squatting to pick up the files. Kyran cleared his throat, his arms feeling bereft without her heat pulsing against him. Disgusted by his body's reaction, he battled with his composure, trying to figure out how things got so out of hand.

She clutched the files to her chest. "I should go. Taylor will be wondering where I am."

"I'm surprised he knows *who* you are. He's usually too messed up to notice."

Dale shot him a confused look. "He seems very nice so far. He told me to be careful around you, you know? Guess he was right."

Irritation pulsed within him. "He did what? He's got some fucking nerve."

She smiled, seemingly unconcerned with his outburst. The thought of his brother implying things about him made his blood boil, and he wouldn't let it rest there. He was going to talk to him about it.

"What did you mean before?" he said, hauling his gym bag back onto his shoulder.

Dale stood, still trying to correct the files, and scowled at him. "Huh?"

"You asked me about the dress code. What were you talking about?"

She rolled her green eyes to the ceiling of the elevator before fixing on his. "Seriously? You're asking me that after what just went on in here?"

"Yes," was his blunt response.

Shaking her head, Dale pursed her lips before replying, the flush to her

cheeks now melting away. “You have no shirt on. Don’t get me wrong, I love the muscles and tats and everything, but you don’t seem the kind to walk around here half naked. I was just pointing that out.”

Surprised, Kyran looked down to his chest. How had that slipped past him? How many people had seen him in such a state? Dale was the cause. She was responsible for his spiral into oblivion. He didn’t like it one bit.

Pointing at her and ignoring the tremble of his hand, he snapped, “It’s your fault. You!”

Her mouth hung open, ready with a retort. He didn’t hear it because he was already stalking out of the elevator and away from her.

He needed to smell something other than vanilla.

## Chapter 4

“I thought you were staying away from this joint for a while.”

Kyran shrugged as Sam wrapped his knuckles. “That was the plan.”

“And things didn’t go according to plan? That’s not like you, kiddo. What’s the deal?”

Switching hands, he watched Sam wrap. He clenched his bandaged hand, testing its tautness. “I needed the outlet. Work’s been hell.”

“Work was the reason you were staying away.” Sam pointed out the obvious. “So I’m not buying that.”

“Buy whatever you want. I refuse to give you anything else.”

Sam stepped away, grumbling. Kyran slid off the bench and adjusted his shorts, resting them low on his hips. He punched out a quick combination, ending with an uppercut underneath Sam’s chin. He stopped just short of a connection. The old man’s eyes glinted, and he raised his own fists. “I could still take you.”

Kyran grinned, bobbing and weaving out of the way of Sam’s fists. They always ended up like this. It calmed him and allowed him a quick warm-up at the same time. Sparring with the old man gave him the boost he needed to step out into the club and face his opponent.

“I see you picked an easy one tonight.”

It was clear to Kyran that Sam wasn’t about to give up his fishing. He wanted answers. The man had known him long enough to understand when something wasn’t quite right with him. Kyran often confided in him, sometimes wondering if Sam was the only person who knew the true him. Tonight, however, he kept it to himself.

He wouldn’t know what to say about Dale Porter even if he did spill. The woman had him lost for words.

“I picked who I could deal with without fucking up my face.”

Sam grasped Kyran’s chin, puckering his lips and making kissing noises.



“And we can’t scar something so beautiful, can we, darling?”

“Shut it, Sam.”

Kyran ripped himself free of the man’s hand and repeated his punch combination: jab, jab, uppercut. He bounced on the balls of his feet, warming his legs up before stretching out his arms. “Okay, I’m ready. Bring it.”

Sam gave him a short clap and opened the door to the main bar.

It was always the smell that hit him first. The mix of beer, sweat, and blood filled his nostrils and flooded his lungs until he could almost taste it. His adrenaline surged, pumping him up and increasing his excitement.

The patrons of the club cheered when they saw him, clapping at his entrance, and jeering at his competitor.

Kyran did a quick sweep of the club, assessing his surroundings. His opponent stepped into the ring, which was nothing more than a chalked circle on the concrete floor. Kyran stiffened his spine and stretched his neck from side to side.

Music pumped out from the speakers, slightly muffled by the sounds of the crowd but still enough to rev him up.

This was what he needed. This was what he lived for. No amount of buying and selling businesses could beat the buzz he got from it. Tomorrow would be better—his senses would be heightened and his rigid control would return.

Bouncing gently on the cold floor, he tested his feet. They were bare, but also bandaged. Kyran disliked the feel of any form of sneaker while he fought. It had cost him a broken toe or two in the past, but nothing compared to the feeling of leading himself by his baser instincts.

“You ready, kid?” Sam slapped him on the back. Kyran welcomed the sting and nodded. He twisted his head from side to side and entered the ring, greeted by a loud cheer.

His competitor stepped forward, and Kyran let his gaze drift over the man’s body. He’d known Cal for as long as he’d been fighting. They had sparred on many occasions, though Kyran would never describe them as friends. The man had a temper, and a fighter didn’t make friends with other fighters. He couldn’t really smash a guy he liked in the face.

A smirk teased the side of his mouth, testing the other man’s restraint. Newbies would often snap at that point, lashing out on an early quest for blood. At that point, it took only one swift punch to gain a knock-out.

This one held still.

Assessing the man’s height and weight, Kyran gauged their differences, trying to find his Achilles’ heel. The man’s frame was thinner, not as toned, and his arm was strapped tight in bandages, seemingly supporting a previous injury. When he bobbed before offering a quick jab, Kyran noticed he winced.

Bingo!

They circled each other, eyes locked, fists raised. They were taking their

time and jeers from the crowd started to rumble through the space. Kyran ground his teeth. He would not be rushed; this cat and mouse segment was all part of the fight.

Sweat began to coat his skin, trickling from his temples down the side of his face. He blinked once, breaking the eye contact.

His opponent struck. Kyran weaved to dodge the fist that flew at his face. A wave of warm air followed, warning him how close he'd come to receiving the black eye he was trying to avoid. The crowd clapped loudly, shouts and hollers increasing in volume. He could do this. He'd beaten guys bigger than this many times before, though on those occasions he hadn't been as distracted.

Another fist flew, this time connecting with his shoulder. The sting was enough to force Kyran into battle mode. He swung out, hooking his arm in an attempt to hit the side of Cal's face. He bobbed, squatting a little so Kyran's fist slipped over his head.

"Shit," he said, spitting onto the floor and struggling to gain focus.

Full of rage, Kyran punched out a one-two combo, the muscles of his shoulder twisting and contracting in pain. The combo paid off—each one he launched made impact: eye, cheek, jaw. Cal's skin reddened, a small cut giving Kyran the encouragement he needed.

With the adrenaline coursing through his veins, Kyran belted out three consecutive hits, all connecting. His breath came in short bursts while he pummeled the man in front of him. There was little time to comprehend any pain he felt, although his ribs ached terribly.

The crowd grew closer, the circle around the men tightening. It made the air thinner and the smell of sweat and stale beer stronger. Kyran's chest constricted, and each breath he took became a struggle.

Cal's uppercut slammed into Kyran's jaw, causing his teeth to crash together painfully. He growled, anger fermenting in his bloodstream as he turned and jabbed, the bandage slipping off his knuckles when he pulled his fist back. Blood coated the abraded skin, and whether it was his or the other guy's, he didn't know. Nor did he have time to contemplate it as he blocked Cal's fist and bobbed out of the way to dodge another.

His feet slipped on the sweat- and blood-smearred concrete floor. He wobbled but remained upright. Cal's punches were flying thick and fast. However, for each one he dodged, he landed twice as many. The man's face was a disaster zone.

A copper tang hit his tongue—one Kyran recognized very well. He was bleeding. The fucker had cut his face. His vision clouded red, and his pulse pounded in his ears. The next punch he delivered with a roar, launching his arm forward and hitting with every ounce of strength he could muster. Bones cracked as Cal's head snapped back. Blood sprayed in all directions, wetting Kyran's strapped hand and dripping down his arm.

Elation blasted through him. Nothing could come close to the feeling he had the moment he realized he'd won. Not even sex. An orgasm was

satisfying, but beating a guy with his bare hands until he knocked him out gave him so much more. Here he was in complete control. He was good at it, and his ability was never questioned, unlike his father did at work. Kyran also needed this outlet to release every ounce of stress. It was a strange sport but one that worked well for him.

The crowd went crazy, and his opponent swayed as Kyran watched the man's eyes dull then close. Cal sagged to the floor with a thunk, his head lolling at an odd angle, an action reminiscent of a rag doll. A bellow of remaining rage escaped Kyran's lips, his fist clenching.

Sam slapped him on the back, his mouth close to his ear. "Good job, kid. Good job."

Kyran's whole body sagged, the tension that had been keeping his muscles taut finally fading away. Calmness surrounded him, the very feeling he'd been trying to get since Ms. Porter stumbled into his office in her silly heels.

"Let me see your face." Sam turned his face to the side. Instinctively, Kyran tugged away, and then pushed past the excited crowd and grasping hands, heading back to the locker room. His feet slapped against the floor, his bandages slipping a bit. His torso was drenched in sweat, every inch of skin slick, every muscle pumped. Sam followed close behind.

"Later, Sam. I need to get clean," Kyran said, opening the locker room door.

His pounding heart only now began to slow down. An ache had begun at his elbows, reverberating through his arms. He pushed past it with only the showers in his thoughts.

"Not later. Now." Sam stopped Kyran in his tracks. Groaning and relenting, Kyran sat down and unwrapped his hands. The bandages were soiled, bloody like his knuckles. They hadn't protected him. Cuts marred his skin, along with his feet. The floor of Metro wasn't the best place to go barefoot, so his feet usually ended up cut. What must his face be like if his hands and feet were this messed up?

"Is it bad? I've got fucking meetings tomorrow." Kyran snarled in pain as Sam inspected his forehead. He tried to stand and look in the nearest mirror, but Sam pressed on his shoulder, making sure he remained seated as he brought a cold cloth to clean the drying blood off Kyran's face.

"I don't know. Let me shift this shit, and I'll be able to tell you."

Not bothering to be gentle, Sam swiped the cloth around Kyran's face. Instantly, he felt the sting. It started at his eyebrow and zipped down the lid where his whole eye throbbed. Sam hissed at the same time as Kyran. "It's not good, kid. It's already starting to swell."

"Swell? It feels like a cut."

"Along with a mighty black eye. You're gonna need to borrow your girl's makeup to cover that up tomorrow."

Kyran ignored the comment about a girlfriend and reached up to touch his swollen face. "Fuck!"

He shoved past Sam, stumbling over to the mirrors to get an eyeful of what he looked like. It wasn't pretty, and it would be far worse in the morning.

"He only got one decent punch in," Kyran said.

"That's all he needed." Sam placed his hands on his hips, shaking his head. "Did you really think you could come here tonight and not get a little banged up? You know the score, kiddo."

Kyran picked up a clean towel and stomped across to the showers. "Go away, Sam."

The man laughed. "How many times do we need to have this conversation? I'm not your pet. Orders don't work on me."

Kyran ignored him by pulling down his shorts and turning on the shower.

"But I will leave you alone to clean up," Sam added.

The slam of the door echoed around the room, which only added to the pounding in his temples. He stepped under the spray of cold water. Nothing had ever felt so good. The coolness soothed his heated skin and numbed his stinging cuts. Every part of him ached, and yet he was refreshed. The club had given him just what he required tonight. Minus the black eye.

Kyran washed up, cleansing every inch of his body. He scrubbed himself dry, as he always did, before patting the abraded flesh. Kyran smiled when he saw a clean hoodie and jeans laid out for him.

The noise from the club could still be heard in the locker room. Kyran listened to the sounds of another fight as he dressed. The fabric was harsh on his sensitive body, but he couldn't go home naked, so he pulled the hood up over his head and hauled his gym bag onto his shoulder.

Thoughts of his comfortable bed filled his head as he walked out into the club. He hung his head, not wanting to be seen. All he wanted was to leave and get home. With the exit door within sight, he pushed past the crowd . . . until he heard *her*.

Ms. Porter.

Dale's voice filtered through all of the background noise, slamming into him so hard he caught his breath. He spun around violently as he searched the room for her. He gave the room a long, slow sweep, finally finding his prize. Drinking her in, he became enraged. Dale's short, very tight skirt and tiny top proved too much for his control. Did the woman have no modesty?

Glaring at anyone in his way, he thundered over to her, catching the horrified expression on her face.

"Why are you here? And what the fuck are you wearing?"

Her green eyes widened in shock as she faced him. He focused on her, ready to snap when pain burst at his temples. Spots appeared before his vision and a loud ringing clanged in his ears.

He was about to pass out, cold-cocked with a sneaky sucker punch.

Fuck.