

CHAPTER ONE

Seated in a hole-in-the-wall restaurant located just off a downtown alley, Dawn Montgomery drummed her fingers on the tabletop. The dining room was a jumble of non-matching tables and chairs that seemed to occupy space with no thought or plan, and she had claimed a seat at the side of room, which was lit primarily by smoky candles in the center of each table. Stale air, flavored by smells of the food being prepared, circulated only because of the draft caused by overworked kitchen fans. She had deliberately picked the restaurant on account of its out-of-the-way location and poor lighting, and the cheap dinner fare didn't hurt since she would be paying for the evening's meal.

Dawn's nervousness was a stark contrast to her casual attire — matching gray breakaway pants and warm-up jacket. One long leg crossed over the other, the raised ankle resting on a knee and the basketball-shoed foot twitching nervously as she waited for her guest to arrive. Keeping her eyes on the restaurant door, she picked up a glass of water and took a long drink, sucking the cold liquid up through the straw.

Finally, to Dawn's relief, the door opened and a gust of fresh air accompanied a well-dressed woman into the gloomy room. It took only seconds before Dawn's eyes met the woman's and reflected recognition. "I was beginning to think you were going to stand me up," she said as her guest sat down.

"Your directions were a little sketchy." The woman pulled several napkins from the dispenser on the table and wiped the greasy surface in front of her, frowning when the results proved unsatisfactory. The waitress approached but was waved off by the new arrival.

"Why did you do that? I thought this was supposed to be a dinner meeting."

The woman's frown deepened as she studied her surroundings. "Maybe some other time. What I have to say won't take long."

"All right."

"I watched you last night and, to be honest, I wasn't impressed."

"What?"

"I wasn't impressed."

"I had a good game last night."

"You half-assed your way through it."

"That's not true. I put up good numbers."

"I wasn't looking for numbers, I was looking for effort; I saw very little of that. You couldn't be bothered to run the full length of the court. You missed easy rebounds because you were too lazy to jump. You played like you couldn't have cared less. Is that what you call a good game?"

"I played as good as my competition."

"If you want to play for me, you need to play better than your competition, and you need to do it every single time you take the court. I don't have lazy players on my roster." She stood, tossing the wad of napkins onto the table. "No matter how good they think they are."

"I *can* play for you," Dawn said angrily.

"You didn't prove it last night."

"Come to the game tomorrow night and I will."

The woman shook her head. "I don't have that kind of time to waste. But I'll tell you what I will do and only because I think you're a better player than you've shown so far. You get yourself on a team, any team, and prove yourself on the court, and I'll give you another look."

"It's a little late for that. Most teams have already filled their rosters."

"That's the best I can do."

"You said I had a shot. I turned down other offers so I'd be free—"

"Don't pull that with me. You're the one who limited your options. I never promised you anything but a look. You got that. Take my offer or not, it's up to you. Find a team; play a good year. We'll talk again."

Dawn slumped in the chair as the woman turned and walked to the door. A moment later she was gone.

The waitress returned. "You planning to order or just taking up space?"

"Do I look hungry to you?" Dawn snapped, pushing up from the table. "Here, this should cover the glass of water." She tossed a dollar bill at the annoyed waitress as she brushed past on her way to the door.

"Baby, what's wrong?" Mandy Christopher asked. They were lying naked on the bed in her hotel room, but all her efforts to engage the woman in sexual activity had been rebuffed. "I don't want to spend my last night in town just watching you lay there."

"I've got stuff on my mind." Dawn pushed away the hand inching up her leg. "Stop it. Damn, do you ever think of anything but sex?"

"Not when I have a naked woman in my bed." Mandy grabbed a breast and squeezed it hard. "I thought you wanted it, too. If you don't, what are you doing here?"

Dawn slapped the offending hand away from her body, then swung her legs off the bed to sit on the edge of the mattress. Looking over her shoulder, she saw Mandy glaring at her as she waited for an explanation. She stood and walked to the window to look at her reflection in the glass. Just shy of 6'-3", her body was toned from years of playing ball and hours spent in weight rooms. She was muscular, with broad shoulders and long powerful legs. Unruly sandy-colored hair, cropped short, stood out against pale skin that never tanned, no matter how much time she spent outdoors. Pale green eyes roamed over the body reflected in the window until they came to rest on the thatch of hair at the apex of her legs. She felt a sudden tingle and smiled, remembering how it felt to have Mandy's fingers playing in those curls.

What am I doing here? She turned to face the woman on the bed. "I do want that. It's just that I have a problem, and I can't concentrate tonight."

"You could tell me what it is," Mandy said, fluffing up a couple of pillows and shoving them against the headboard to lean against. "I might be able to help."

Dawn studied her lover. Unlike her own tall frame, Mandy's was petite, barely topping out at 5'-5". Brunette hair stood out against her lightly tanned skin and hung down past her shoulders. Her face was round, and she had a single dimple on the left side of her mouth that Dawn found very appealing. As she stood there, she realized she knew practically nothing about the woman except her name. "I doubt you can help with this."

"Believe it or not, I do have some connections. I'm not just a good roll in the hay."

Dawn grinned. "Well, you are pretty good in that department."

"I'm glad you noticed."

"Be hard not to."

They had met three nights earlier in the hotel bar where Dawn had gone hoping to pick up a good-looking woman for another in her endless string of one-night stands. Being a tall, athletic woman usually meant she had no shortage of women wanting to share her bed for a quick fling. That night had been no different, except that she had ended up in Mandy's bed instead of the bed of her intended conquest. As she was being led across the hotel lobby by a cute blonde wearing a miniskirt and see-through blouse, Dawn had found the way blocked by Mandy, who had boldly informed the blonde that her almost-night of romance was over before it had begun.

"You're a cocky bitch," Dawn said as she walked back to the bed.

"So I've been told."

"What made you think I'd give up the blonde for you?"

Mandy laughed, patting the mattress beside her. "Oh, you big dumb ballplayer. I've had my eye on you for some time now."

"You have?"

"Yes. Ever since I saw you play in the NCAA tournament last spring. I knew there was only one place you belonged."

"And that would be?"

"Right here, with me. You don't really think I'd let that bimbo get in the way."

"I could have told you to get lost."

"Yes. But you didn't. And I knew you wouldn't."

"How?"

"I just did."

"Think you're pretty smart, don't you?"

"I have my moments."

"That you do." Dawn knelt on the bed, straddling Mandy's legs. Placing her hands around the smaller woman's waist, she yanked her from her sitting position to lay flat underneath her. In one smooth movement, she stretched her body on top of her lover's and pressed their mouths together.

Mandy wrapped her arms and legs around Dawn, pulling her closer.

Dawn pushed up just enough to slip a hand between their bodies, reaching down until her fingers came in contact with Mandy's clit. "I love how wet you get," she breathed as her fingers slid along silky labia lips.

"Inside." Mandy thrust her hips up, emphasizing her need. "And hard."

Dawn adjusted her position so she could enter Mandy as forcefully as she knew her lover wanted. Cupping three fingers together, she slipped them just inside the vagina, then spread them to stretch the tight opening.

“Do it,” Mandy demanded.

“Not yet.” Dawn withdrew her fingers. “First, you earn it.” She pressed herself back up onto her knees. Looking down, she inched her way up Mandy’s body until she was poised above her head. Spreading her legs, she slowly lowered herself. “First, you suck me. If I like what you do...”

Mandy wrapped her arms around Dawn’s legs. Opening her mouth eagerly, she darted her tongue out to circle the throbbing clit.

Bracing herself on the headboard, Dawn moaned as her clit was sucked into Mandy’s hot mouth.

“So, what’s the problem that almost kept us from having sex last night?” Mandy asked as she pulled her leg free from where it was trapped under Dawn’s waist.

Dawn groaned. “Let me wake up first, will ya?”

“No time. I have a plane to catch.” Mandy rolled to the side of the bed and stood. “I need a shower. So talk.”

“I need to get on a team.”

“Do you want to clarify that? I thought you were on a team.”

“Not an amateur team. I need a spot on a pro team.”

Mandy laughed. “Oh, is that all?”

“See, I told you, you couldn’t help.”

Mandy laughed again. “You joining me?”

Dawn thought the idea of a shower with Mandy sounded wonderful, but... “No. After last night, I’m not sure I’ll ever walk again.”

“Okay. You rest. I won’t be long. Don’t go anywhere.”

“As if,” Dawn mumbled as she wrapped her long body around the pillows and fell back to sleep.

“Why won’t you tell me?” Dawn asked again, lifting Mandy’s suitcase out of the trunk of her car.

“I told you,” Mandy stood in front of Dawn, stretching up on tiptoes to kiss her lover’s chin, “I need to make some arrangements. You just be ready to say yes when the offer comes.”

“But if I don’t know when or how it’s coming, how can I be prepared?” Dawn wrapped her arms around Mandy’s waist and lifted her off her feet to kiss her. “How will I know?”

“You’ll know. Now put me down. I’m going to be late for my plane.”

“All right.” Dawn gently lowered Mandy to the ground. “But at least tell me who you know that can do this.”

“Oh, didn’t I tell you? My aunt is Martha Ann Christopher.” She picked up her suitcase and walked toward the terminal, leaving her slack-jawed lover standing at the curb.

“Mac is *your* aunt?” Dawn called after Mandy.

“The one and only.” Mandy waved over her shoulder as she walked through the terminal doors.