A close-up photograph of a man in a dark suit, white shirt, and blue patterned tie. He is holding a cigar in his mouth with his right hand. The background is dark and out of focus.

#1 NEW YORK TIMES
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BESTSELLING AUTHOR

*Will a master game player
get played?*

THE GAME MAKER SERIES

**THE MASTER
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*“They say I’m heartless and manipulative,
that I amuse myself by playing with others’ lives.
They aren’t wrong.”*

MAKSIMILIAN SEVASTYAN



“A mal tiempo, buena cara. To bad weather, good face.”

ANA LUCÍA MARTINEZ HATCHER ALIAS: CAT MARÍN

CHAPTER 1

*M*i madre must be turning over in her grave right now.

As I rode the elevator to the penthouse of the ritzy Seltane Hotel—it'd taken two staffers to key me up to the fortieth floor—I chewed on a fingernail.

Was I really about to let some strange man have sex with me? For money?

The elevator arrived too quickly, forcing me onto a private landing with its own lobby and an elegant sitting area. An open newspaper lay on a coffee table, as if someone had recently left.

The entry—a pair of ornate mahogany doors—was just beyond, looming. Could I bring myself to ring the bell?

Apparently, this penthouse was one of the largest (more than ten thousand square feet) and the most expensive (thirty-two grand—a night) in Miami. Who in their right mind would spend that much money on a hotel? Clearly my first client was *loco*.

Other than that, I didn't know much about him. He was a Russian businessman, here in Miami for a week. He'd been not only vetted but vouched for by sister escort agencies all over

the world. In other words, he was a *hobbyist*, a routine user of escorts.

Tempted to bolt, I pulled out my phone to call my hookup, Ivanna. She was a Ukrainian immigrant and high-class escort, making bank; I was her cleaning lady. She thought my current employment was a waste of my “spectacular figure and fresh-faced beauty.” Yeah, yeah.

When she answered, I said, “I don’t think I can do this.” I began to pace the lobby, my stilettos silent on the plush beige rug.

“Of course you can. You don’t understand how badly I wish I could be there. If this man is renting the penthouse for a week, imagine how rich he is!”

The Russian had booked Ivanna, but she’d had a reaction to Botox (she was only thirty!). She’d thought she’d be okay by tonight, so she hadn’t called to cancel. A big no-no for escorts.

“If my eyes weren’t swollen shut . . .”

“Ivanna, I’m not at this point yet.” I’d been vacillating like crazy. Though I’d prepared to take a couple of dates—getting an exam and a waxing—I’d always suspected I’d balk. “I’m not *here*,” I insisted. But wasn’t I? Yesterday I could’ve sworn I’d seen Edward.

In Miami.

I’d been riding the bus home from a cleaning gig when I’d seen a tall, lanky blond stepping out of a bodega, striding toward a Porsche. The last time I’d seen him had been in the glare of headlights, his green eyes stark against his blood-coated face.

If he was here, then I needed to flee to a new city as soon as possible. But that took funds.

“You make this job sound so horrible,” Ivanna said. “You’re going to do great. You have the balls, and that’s half the battle!”

Despite my upbringing—or maybe because of it—I was

pretty shameless. Even with my, ahem, generous ass, I'd proudly strutted the beaches of Jacksonville in a micro thong bikini. I'd gotten hot and heavy with all manner of high school boys, doing everything but screwing, earning a reputation as a cocktease. When I'd started having sex with Edward, I'd studied tips and tricks, anything to tempt him. So I knew how to get a guy sprung.

Ivanna said, "You'll have inquiries from the agency site before you know it."

She'd gotten the web guy for *Elite Escorts* to toss up a make-shift page for me, by promising him an HR. Hand release.

I knew all the lingo, had chuckled as she'd recited acronyms, never imagining I'd be *using* the lingo. A BBBJ was a bareback blowjob. Swallowing was BBBJNQNS—bareback blowjob, no quit, no spit. MSOG—multiple shots on goal—meant the client could come as many times as he liked in the specified time limit. "You shouldn't have bothered with that web page for me." I'd told her I would only do this once or twice, but she'd just smiled and said, "That's what we all thought. Now pose for your site photo!"

"You only have a couple more minutes to be on time," Ivanna said. "Take a deep breath, remember my three key points, and you'll be fine."

First, I should look for a nondescript envelope of cash lying on a conspicuous surface—my "donation." I was to do nothing until I pocketed the money. And then? The name of the game was *upselling*, getting him to pay for services above and beyond the outcall, earnings that were all mine.

Second, since my client wasn't likely to inspire arousal—despite the fact that I hadn't had sex in forever and my libido was going crazy!—I'd need to figure out a way to furtively lube up.

Most escorts did. Lube made for safer sex and limited VF, vagina fatigue. Of course, a condom was mandatory.

ird, the majority of clients that used Elite Escorts liked ingratiating, sweet dates; I was a cheeky smartass. So I would have to curb my personality to succeed.

Damn it, I should never be in the service industry—in *any* capacity.

But I needed this money to run! I had my own rules, and in three years I'd never broken them.

1. *Never say anything above and beyond what is absolutely necessary.*
2. *Never create links between you and anything else.*
3. *Never stay in a place longer than six months.*
4. *Never get soft.*
5. *Never attract undue attention.*
6. *Forgodsakes, never, never, never trust another man.*

Without funds, I was going to break rule number three.

“Trust me, Cat, with your business savvy, you’re going to make a killing,” Ivanna assured me.

How savvy was I? Although I had six houses to clean each week—including hers—five of the women beat me up on my fee, assuming I was an undocumented worker from Cuba.

“Just have fun,” she said. “It doesn’t have to feel like work. Your waxing was probably more uncomfortable than your date could ever be.”

But . . . “It’s been more than three years since I slept with anyone.” And Edward’s pitiful attempts shouldn’t even count.

“ at is . . . hmm. How strange,” she said, as if I’d told her

I liked to wear other people's skin. "We'll discuss this later. For now, remember: sex is like riding a bike."

I turned toward the elevator. "*Mierda*. I can't. It was a mistake."

Ivanna sighed. "I didn't want you to get your hopes up too high, so I never told you my record for one night."

"Are you going to now?" She'd been vague, saying the sky was the limit, but she'd refused to give me hard numbers.

"My record for a six-hour outcall is over twenty thousand in cash and jewels."

Twenty thousand.

Money like that could catapult me directly into the next phase of my life plan! When I regained the power of speech, I sang, "And we're out to fuck the wizard."

She laughed. "I hope he's a wonderful wizard. Oh, one last thing, Cat. You're going to have a gut-check moment, and when you do, ask yourself: would I have sex with this guy for free? If the answer is yes, then why not view the money as a bonus?"

"Okay, *muy bien*. I can do this," I said, psyching myself up.

"Go get 'em!"

Disconnecting the call, I turned to check my appearance in a lobby mirror. December was usually mild, but this year had been downright balmy, so I'd worn a wrap dress of forest-green silk.

The style was understated, with a conservative neckline, in case he wanted to take me out, but the sides were held together by only a single bow at my hip. Stilettos gave a hint of naughty.

I twisted around to view the back. The thin silk was too tight across my ass, leaving little to the imagination. Nothing to be done for it now. I faced forward and eked out a smile.

I'd worn only lip gloss, mascara, and a touch of glittery bronze

eye shadow. Ivanna said it brought out the vivid copper color of my irises, making my eyes look exotic, especially against my dark hair. I'd left the length of it down in long loose curls.

Makeup: *in place*. Hair: *best that can be expected*. Conclusion: *If I were a horny Russian lech, I'd do me*.

I checked my cell phone clock. I had less than two minutes to make an on-time arrival. Stowing my phone in my purse, I pressed the doorbell, then gazed around, battling my nerves. I glanced at that newspaper on the coffee table again. Would a guy this rich have a bodyguard or something—

The door opened, revealing my first-ever client. In escort slang, he was DDG.

Drop. Dead. Gorgeous.

He looked to be in his midthirties, with a full head of thick black hair and a built body. He was well over six feet tall. His blue eyes were hooded, his penetrating gaze roaming over me.

He wore a lightweight cashmere sweater, winter white, that molded over his rigid pecs. The color made the piercing blue of his eyes pop. Dark, tailored slacks highlighted muscular legs and lean hips.

If I was ever going to lose my “escort cherry,” I couldn't imagine a more ideal client.

Yet the Russian glanced behind me, as if he expected someone else to be there.

“It's just me,” I said, surprised my voice sounded so casual when my heart was pounding.

Without a word, he turned, heading into a living area. I followed.

Accent lighting illuminated the tasteful modern décor. Floor-to-ceiling panoramic windows offered what had to be the best

view in the city. All the balcony doors were open, the sound of the waves reaching us even this high up. This place was huge, the size reminding me of my former mansion. Oh, to be rolling again . . .

He faced me. "I confirmed a woman named Ivanna. Your agency suggested her when I sent in my preferences." His voice was deep and rumbly, his accent tingeing the words.

I was a sucker for men with accents. Edward's slow Atlanta drawl used to light me up. Until I'd found out he was from England. "Ivanna was supposed to come tonight, but she had to call in sick."

"I requested a tall, slender blonde, at least in her late twenties. Ideally from Europe. Perhaps her substitute could have matched *any* of my requests."

Instead he'd gotten me—twenty-two, five feet two inches tall, curvy, brunette. Oh, and one generation away from Cuba. Giving him a fake smile, I teasingly said, "Isn't variety the spice of life, *querido?*" Sweetheart.

He wasn't budging. "You're not what I ordered."

I, above all people, knew that you shouldn't have to pay for something you never asked for. I had a flash memory of Edward edging toward his gun, moments after declaring his love for me.

"Are you even of legal age?" the Russian grated.

"And then some."

He looked unmoved.

I'd read and reread *Getting to Yes*, and I thought I could finagle one night out of this guy. But then, was I really ready to take this step? "I can't change your mind?"

When his expression grew even colder, I was glad he was about to kick me out. I would make a better outlaw than I would an escort. *Outlaw? Give it time, Cat.*

In a stern tone, he said, “I never reverse myself on decisions.”

I shrugged. “Okay, your loss.” How confident I sounded! Like a working-girl pro. Relieved, I turned toward the door, sauntering away—

I thought I heard him hiss in a breath.

Mierda. Knowing my luck, I’d split the seam in my dress.

CHAPTER 2

“Perhaps I was . . . hasty,” he said. “Stay for a drink.”

Had my ass worked for me? Was I happy about this?

When I turned and traipsed back, he headed to the bar area. This was actually happening. I was going to have sex for money.

Over his shoulder, he said, “I’m Maksimilian Sevastyan.”

I turned it over on my tongue, finding his name a mouthful. In my mind, I styled him *Máxim*.

“*Encantada*. Nice to meet you. I’m Cat Marín.” I glanced around for my donation. Nothing. Which made me uneasy, but I gamely bellied up to the bar.

“Is that your working name?”

My alias. “That’s what they call me.” And that was what my fake ID said, whenever I was forced to use it.

I’d chosen my grandmother’s name of Catarina, and her mother’s name of Marín, and then I’d assumed the identity completely. Though I missed being Lucía, that life was like a distant dream.

“What do you drink?”

Good question. I couldn't remember the last time I'd had alcohol. Maybe beer after a 5K race? “Um, whatever you're having.”

“Vodka martini?” Probably not a good idea. “You must have a preferred cocktail.”

I was about to say something stupid, like “Sex on the Beach!” but instead said, “White wine would be great.”

“You seem uneasy.”

I admitted, “I'm a little new to all of this.”

“Uh-huh. I've booked many escorts. Not one has ever said she's been at this awhile.”

He thought I was lying. I was the world's shittiest liar. Early on, I'd realized that anytime I'd been put into a position to tell an untruth, I'd resented it so much, I would stew for days. So I'd just stopped doing it. “I'm not lying to you.”

He waved my words away, turning to the wine collection.

As he investigated the offerings, I studied him up close. He was clean-shaven, with smooth skin that looked newly tanned, but he had no laugh lines around his eyes. Weird. No wedding-ring tan line either. At least he was single.

His lips were firm, his white teeth even. A wide masculine jawline complemented his strong nose and chin, his broad cheekbones. His hair was close-cut on the sides, longer on the top. What would it feel like to run my fingers through it?

“There's a cellar somewhere on this floor, but I think you'll like this wine.” When he uncorked the bottle, his muscles moved beneath his thin sweater. He wore a diving watch that probably cost more than my rat-trap apartment complex.

The only thing that could compete with the view of him was the view outside. The wraparound balcony had small torches

along its clear glass railing. Past an infinity pool that I would kill to experience, I could see the ocean. A nearly full moon hung heavy in the sky.

“Go take a look.” He poured a glass and handed it to me. “I’ll meet you outside.”

I wasn’t supposed to do anything until I got paid, but after a quick risk/reward assessment, I said, “Okay.” As I strolled past the pool, steam rose from the heated water. In fact, the entire pool deck was heated. I crossed to the balcony rail and sampled the wine, sighing at the taste. I could see the appeal of drinking with this on tap.

A warm gust blew, and I inhaled the salty air. My eyes went half-mast at the sound of the ocean. I could almost imagine I was on Martinez Beach. Nearly a century ago, my father’s family had bought a long tract of oceanfront property near Jacksonville, putting it into a trust, never imagining the fortune it’d be worth today.

Short of returning there, I would have loved to remain in this city. Unfortunately the only Miami in my future was M.I.A.M.I.: Money Is A Major Issue.

If I made bank tonight, I could reboot somewhere as exciting, maybe LA or San Diego. I’d leave right after my last college exam, then get on with phase two of my reclaim-my-life plan: *Disappear Forever*. I’d buy a real fake ID (oxymoron?) and a social security number that would hold up under scrutiny.

Here I was dreaming about bank, when I hadn’t gotten my donation, much less upsold him for more. I knew my hard limits, but other than that, I wasn’t sure what I would do.

As I drank, I recalled the article Ivanna had made me read to help with my first date: e Top Ten Ways to Wow a Client. Sug-

gestions included feigning breathless absorption when he talked, pretending a reaction, faking orgasms, and always telling him he was right.

Seriously?

Máxim joined me outside, with the wine bottle in one hand and his drink in the other. He set the bottle on a nearby table, then stood beside me. The moon bathed his face, lovingly highlighting all his chiseled features.

Though unpaid, I began to relax. Regardless of what else happened, I was presently in the Seltane penthouse with a client who might just give me the FOTC. Fuck of the century.

I took another sip. “Did you add crack sprinkles to this vintage?”

“I was fresh out of crack,” he said in a derisive tone. “What do you think of the view?”

I grinned over the rim of my glass. “I suppose it’s *adequate*. If you like this kind of thing.”

At my attempt at humor, he tilted his head. “I looked you up on your agency’s site.” Only a couple of the items Ivanna had listed about me were true—two-thirds of my measurements and my status as a CAN, certified all natural, with no surgical enhancements.

I recalled the fake bio she’d read to me: *I like dancing* (I hated dancing) *and yoga* (jogger here). *In my spare time* (as if I had any!), *I enjoy performance art* (no, *gracias*) *and shopping* (a form of torture).

“Your photo’s unusual,” he said.

“Is it?” Ivanna had taken pics of me on an out-of-the-way beach. I’d worn black boy-short bottoms that rode up my cheeks, no top, mascara only, and my hair piled up on my head. She’d chosen one taken from the back that I hadn’t posed for.

My head had been turned to the side as I gazed off at something. My eyes had been distant, because I'd been deep in thought—*second* thoughts—about this entire idea. Oh, and cursing Edward as usual.

*The blood arcing across our bedroom . . . those ugly sounds . . .
Shake it off, Cat.*

The Russian said, "It's not your typical boudoir shot with flattering lighting and risqué lingerie."

"A hobbyist like you would know, huh?" I drank more wine, frowning when I reached the bottom of my glass. "I'm not really a simulated boudoir kind of girl."

Without a word, he refilled me. "What kind of a girl are you?"

A dogged survivor who believed in living to fight another day. But I told him, "A girl who believes in topless beaches for everyone. *Viva la revolución!*" I thought that was funny, but he just tilted his head again.

"Your photo makes a man wonder what you're thinking about. That was by design, no?"

"I didn't choose the one that was uploaded." I'd only allowed Ivanna to use it because I'd looked a world away from the last pictures taken of me, when I was still a teenager.

"You're twenty-six?"

Ivanna had inflated the number. "Old enough to know better."

Máxim peered at my breasts. "Measurements: thirty-five, twenty-three, thirty-six?"

"Thirty-four and a half on a good day. I didn't put that up either. I like my size." I could go braless if I wanted to, but could still produce cleavage when necessary.

His brows drew together. I got the impression he was trying to fit me into a box, and having unexpected difficulties.

I could've told him, *My ass won't fit, yo.*

"You have a marked accent. Not native to the States?"

"I grew up in a Spanish-speaking household." With *una madre loca*, Catholic to the core. Despite her refusal to learn English, she'd homeschooled me until high school and kept most people away from our secluded beach. I didn't like thinking about my childhood, much less talking about it.

"In Miami?"

I shrugged. Questions like this made me nervous. The less anyone knew about me the better. Connections to others were breadcrumbs. That was why I didn't date, didn't socialize. Not that I had time between scrubbing toilets and going to school.

"You don't care to talk about yourself?" He gave a humorless laugh. "That's a first."

"Oh, you don't want to hear about my boring life. I have an idea: let's institute a no-personal-questions rule."

"And you think you can keep yourself from digging about me?"

If it kept him from doing the same? "*Sí.*"

"Very well, then let's get down to business. I believe this is the part where you upsell me."

Busted.

"I'll only need you for an hour or so," he continued, "but I don't like to be mindful of such things, so I booked half the night. How much will it cost to let me do anything I desire to you?"

What would a guy like this—gorgeous, rich, condescending—want? "Some things aren't on the table."

A flash of anger. "Everything is on *my* table, little girl."

It was turning into an issue. *No, no, remember your mantra.* When faced with a difficult, good businesswomen said, "It's not a problem," then went to work fixing it.

"Enough I'd love to get to know your body better"—I gave

him a brazen once-over that seemed to surprise him—"I can't provide some of the services you might desire. There's not enough money in the world."

"Such as?"

"BBBJ. In fact, bareback anything is out."

"I have no interest in that. You replaced another tonight—I'll expect you to do what she would have. What I ordered from your agency."

I recalled Ivanna's kink specialization: bondage, discipline, submission, and the like. She had gear all over her apartment. Had this guy requested her for more than her looks?

As a vetted hobbyist, he couldn't be *too* dangerous. If he offered me enough money, could I trust a strange man to tie me up? To make me helpless?

No, gracias. My ability to trust was broken, like a fractured limb that had never been set, now shrunken and useless. I even refused to trust myself when it came to men.

But I didn't want to lose out on this money. "Why don't we take tonight as it comes? See where it leads us?" *See where I can lead you.* "I promise we'll both be satisfied."

He narrowed his blue eyes, and it was like a blast of icy air blew over me. "Do not play games with me. And don't mistake my intent—I couldn't care less if you enjoy this or not, so don't pretend to."

What a dick! *Cállate la boca, Cat!* Shut your mouth—

"I won't tolerate feigned passion."

So much for Ivanna's article. Somehow I managed to say, "Understood."

"Then I'll pay you three thousand—and you'll be amenable to my interests."

My knees almost buckled. That much money would be life-

changing! Yet words were leaving my lips: “Make it five, and we have a deal.”

He stilled. Had I angered him? Blown everything? *Mima*, my island grandmother, had a saying: “Pigs get fat, hogs get slaughtered.” I was about to be bacon.

“Deal,” he said.

En serio? Wait, what had I agreed to? Amenable to his interests?

“I assume you’ll want to be paid in advance.”

Holy shit! “Yes, *por favor*.”

“Follow me.” He returned to the living room, heading toward a stylish briefcase on a console.

Once fifty bound Benjamins sat tucked in my purse, my fate had been sealed.

He took my empty glass from me, setting it down. I’d drunk that wine too? I might’ve been buzzed, but my nerves prevented it. Now that the thrill of the deal was fading, anxiety took its place.

He crossed to a suite, saying over his shoulder. “Come. I’m keen to see what five thousand buys me in Miami.”

I stilled at the reminder.

At the bedroom entrance, he turned to me. “What’s your hesitation? Feigning shyness won’t be tolerated either.”

My thoughts were in a tangle. Two stood out. *You’re going to be a hooker, Cat*, warred with *Five thousand dollars, idiot!* Gut check? Oh, yeah.

But Ivanna was right; I would have sex with this guy for free.

Besides, my situation demanded drastic measures. Nothing this man could do to me would be worse than what Edward would do if he caught me.

Since he was my husband, and I’d foiled his plan to kill me.

With that in mind, I joined the Russian in the bedroom. What I saw on the bed made me freeze in my tracks.

CHAPTER 3

a ball gag. A crop. Leather restraints.

Ni en broma! Not on your life.

No, no, surely I could figure out a happy medium. This man had to be interested in more than BDSM. “Explain what you’d do to me.”

He coolly said, “Once you’ve stripped, you’ll go to your knees at the edge of the mattress, buckling the gag on yourself. I’ll bind your arms behind your back, and you’ll lean forward resting on your forehead. Then I’ll whip your body wherever it occurs to me to. When I’m satisfied with that, I’ll fuck you from behind.”

This sounded like a script. Like he did this with every escort.

He’d said nothing about kissing my nipples, nothing about petting me. In his scenario, we’d share the fewest points of contact possible while still technically having sex. He wouldn’t see my face or hear my voice. He wouldn’t even touch me to gag me!

I would be just a receptacle. Which he’d pretty much warned me about. A faceless, voiceless receptacle.

I’m not there yet. So my options were to walk out or try to change his mind. Nothing to lose by the latter. Why not make

this into a fantasy? I could be anyone tonight. A femme fatale, a man-eater.

I told him, "While your script sounds . . . interesting, I don't think that's what you really want."

His brows shot up. "*You* don't."

I turned toward the suite's sitting area. All the windows and doors were open in the softly lit room. Gauzy moonlit curtains fluttered. I sauntered behind the couch. When I patted the back cushions, inviting him over, his lips thinned.

Long, anxious moments passed as we stared at each other. *Heartbeat . . . heartbeat . . . heartbeat*. Then it seemed like curiosity forced him to stride over.

When he took a seat, I smiled, sidling around in front of him. I stepped forward until he had to make room for me, spreading his knees.

I played with the sash on the side of my dress. "Would you like me to take this off, *Ruso*?" Russian.

Curt nod.

I slowly untied the sash. Letting my dress hang open like a robe, I gave him a curtained glimpse of my provocative black demi bra and thong set.

I couldn't read him, couldn't tell if he liked the view or not. He looked so cold.

So why was I getting hot stripping for him? I glanced at his big, masculine hands. What would they feel like squeezing my breasts or cupping my bare pussy? My nipples were taut, my panties growing moist. I never wore lingerie like this, and I felt hypersensitive after my waxing a couple of days ago.

I shimmied from my dress, tossing it to a neighboring seat. When I faced him in my underwear, he casually draped his arms along the back of the sofa.

“Turn in place for me.” He was so calm, detached even. This was like foreplay with a computer. A DDG computer. “Slowly.”

I reminded myself that I was playing the femme fatale. My two glasses of wine told me I was doing *fine*.

As I turned, I could feel his eyes on my cheeks, exposed in my tiny thong. Which only made me wetter. Furtive lubing would not be a problem. In fact, maybe I should leave my panties on for a little longer? It'd been a while since I'd had the time or energy to masturbate. What if I lost control?

Like everyone else on earth, when my body got turned on, my brain turned off. But mine was a total factory shutdown, a labor strike. I needed my wits to handle this guy.

I faced him again. Had his breaths shallowed a touch? “Show me your breasts. Let's see if I like your size as much as you profess to.”

I removed my bra, tossing it in the direction of my dress. I was secretly proud of my pert breasts. They fit my body but were plump, with jutting nipples that were not quite pink and not quite tan. My small areolas were raised, giving the peaks a slightly puffy look.

When I squared my shoulders, the Russian's nostrils flared—finally a hint of passion from him!

“Very nice. I hadn't thought the view from the front could compete with the back.”

Wow. An actual compliment. My attention was drawn downward. A very large erection pressed against the material of his slacks. *Muy grande*. Maybe *too* big? For all my fooling around, I'd only had intercourse with Edward, and he was nowhere near as well endowed.

“Continue.”

Strip totally? Deciding against that, I stepped forward, strad-

dling him. I rested my knees beside his hips, my hands on his shoulders. A breeze from the ocean drifted in, mingling with his intoxicating scent—a blend of sandalwood and simmering man. His scent made me tremble—it was like an unfair advantage, used to drug new escorts.

When I lowered myself atop the thick ridge of his cock, I could feel his heat even through our clothes. My eyes went wide; his narrowed.

I'd be taking his length inside me directly. The idea no longer filled me with hesitation. I shivered with desire. My nipples puckered even tighter, right before his eyes.

I wanted this man, this stranger.

I could count on one hand the number of guys who'd gotten me off. Most times had been accidental when I'd been fumbling in the backseat with a boy or grinding one at a keg party. Edward had never gotten close. Not that he'd cared. But this Russian—

“I did *not* invite you to straddle me,” he snapped. His body went tense—*angry* tense.

I froze with confusion. Most guys liked it when topless girls straddled them.

“You just assume I *wanted* you atop me?” He couldn't sound more cutting. He grabbed me, lifting me to the side—as if to fling my body off him.

Yet then he stilled. His hands were so big on me, his fingers covered a good bit of my ass. After a hesitation—when we seemed suspended in the moment—he began to knead me. When he lowered his hands to grip my curves, a low groan escaped him. But he still held me upright.

Again, something was happening that I didn't understand, as if some inner battle were being played out. In my lust-dimmed

mind, I wondered if he tied women up and fucked them from behind because he didn't like to touch too much of them.

Just when I'd decided that was the case, I found myself settled back over him, the raised bulge of his cock directly between my legs. Had I won this round?

His anger seemed to have been put on hold, but he wasn't ready to concede defeat. "You still refuse to give me what I want?"

And he was going along with my refusal? Emboldened, I leaned in next to his ear. "I'm going to give you what you *need*, *Ruso*." The wine and my arousal were making my own accent thicken even more. My stiffened nipples brushed the fine cashmere of his sweater, which felt incredible, so I skimmed them again.

What would it take to get this man's mouth on my breasts? When I imagined him sucking me . . . a soft moan escaped my lips, my back subtly arching.

He clamped his hand over my nape. "What kind of escort brazenly denies a client? You're either starving at this job—or making a fortune. . . ." He trailed off when I rolled my hips, running my pussy over his cock, with only my moistened panties and his slacks between us.

I gasped at the sensation, breaths shallowing. My clitoris began to throb.

He drew his hands away, resting his arms over the back of the couch again, as if he'd made a conscious decision not to touch me. I got the impression that I was being tested somehow—or that *he* was. "Put your hands behind your back. Now."

He probably expected me to clasp my elbows. "Of course." Instead, I dropped my hands directly behind my ass, grasping high on his thighs to hold my balance.

He tensed again, but before he could say another word, I whipped my hips over his length. My head fell back as I moaned. I'd forgotten how irresistible sexual play could be, had forgotten about uncontrollable urges and the hardness of a man's body.

I faced the Russian, beginning to ride him. Though his gaze was rapt on our point of contact, he refused to move his own hips to meet me. No matter. The bulge of his zipper had lined up with my swollen clitoris, my soaked panties rubbing that bud. *Fricción!* Sultry, damp friction . . . sent me ever closer to orgasm. Soon I was panting, grinding him like a pole dancer.

He clutched the couch, his long fingers gone white-knuckled. "Is this what you think I need?" His voice alone could make me come. The husky timbre had only deepened. "To be ridden?"

"I think you need passion." I certainly did.

"Maybe if it wasn't feigned."

I nearly laughed. "Oh, I'm not feigning anything." How to tell him I would climax soon?

"Wait." He seized my shimmying hips, holding me still. "Up."

Confused, I put my hands on his shoulders and rose up on my knees. Was he kicking me off again? Then I followed his narrow-eyed gaze.

His slacks, which probably cost thousands, now had a damp spot over his groin. I'd wetted him through my panties.

I should have been worried about his reaction, but I was too far gone to care. I dropped as low as his hands would allow, wanting my pussy back atop his hot hardness.

He grated, "*Blyad'!*" Whatever that meant. "You're truly wet for me. Very wet. You've been using me to get off?"

"*Por Dios*, why are you talking so much?" I said between breaths. "Want to come, *Ruso*."

He blinked at me. The cool, detached Russian looked stunned. “Then by all means.” He released his grip. “Continue.”

“*Gracias.*” I sighed with relief, letting my nipples skim his chest on my way down. If he’d allowed that . . . I threaded my fingers through his hair and leaned in to kiss his neck. When I gave a little suck over his pulse point, his head tipped back.

I lost the ridge of his zipper, so I writhed atop him, hunting for it. Had his hips finally moved? Did he want that contact too?

I found the perfect spot. “*Ay, perfección.*”

When I set back in, he faced me, his blue gaze flicking from my eyes, to my lips, down to my tits and thong and back.

As I pleased myself, his own lips caught my attention. They were as attractive as everything else about him. The fuller bottom one had a sexy dip in the middle. What would it be like to kiss him?

Ivanna said it bonded people too much, and that you had to save something special for a lover in your life. I had no lover, and no fear of bonding. Right now, hovering on the edge of orgasm, I had no fears at all! I gazed at his lips, licking my own.

“You think I need to be kissed?” His words were hoarse.

“Doesn’t everyone—”

He bucked his hips hard, rocking his unyielding cock against my panties.

At last! “Oh! *Fricción* . . . Do it again, *por favor.*”

He did it again. And again. Soon he was groaning with each thrust, but the sound was pained, as if he were getting punched in the stomach at the end of each one—or cutting himself off.

I’d think about all this—later. “Don’t stop!”

As he shoved against my pussy, I muttered incomprehensible things, switching from one language back to the other, strug-

gling to communicate that I was on the verge. “Oh, my God. *Ay, Dios mío.*”

“You’re about to come?” he asked in a strained voice.

“About to combust!” I clasped his face with both hands.

Our gazes locked. His was still defiant and angry, his chin jutting stubbornly—even as he met my undulations.

“No, no, *cariño.*” Rubbing my thumb over his bottom lip, I whispered, “*No te pongas bravo conmigo.* Don’t be angry with me. We’ll both feel good soon.” I leaned down and covered his mouth with my own. His lips were firm and hot. I licked the seam of them, whimpering. My movements quickened until I was bucking over the Russian’s cock.

He parted his lips; the tip of my tongue found his, the spark that set off—

Pleasure. Exploding. Electrifying me.

Currents sizzled through my veins to make way for . . . *fire.*

“*Mmmm!*” I cried out into his mouth. Bliss engulfed me, forcing my hips to gyrate on him. Lost, I rubbed my tits against his chest. I moaned, riding him like a toy as my pussy contracted over and over.

Only as sanity returned and the spasms faded did I realize he wasn’t returning the kiss. I drew back.

He’d gone completely still. That strain within him only grew. “You kissed me. You *came.* That was not supposed to happen.”

“It was the heat of the moment. *No te pongas—*”

He wrapped my hair around his fist, forcing me closer till our lips met.

When I gasped, he set in with a fervor. He kissed as if he hadn’t taken a woman’s lips in years, as if he’d only been storing up need. I panted; he heaved breaths. His hands dropped to clench my half-bare ass.

A growl sounded from his chest. An actual growl. The idea of inspiring that kind of lust turned me on so much, my arousal returned multiplied. I held his face between my hands and sucked on his tongue. He groaned, his fingers digging into my curves as I started grinding on him again.

I broke away for a breath. "What are you doing to me?"

"I could ask you the same," he bit out in a baffled tone. "I detest surprises. I don't tolerate them. And yet . . ." His brows drew together. He looked . . . not *calculating*, but something akin to that—as if he were working out the angles of a problem. "Still here," he muttered to himself. He yanked me close, burying his face against my breasts, lips seeking.

I arched to his mouth.

"The moment I saw these pouty nipples, I feared I couldn't let you go until I'd sucked them."

Fear? Why would he . . . My thoughts grew dim when he turned his head to take a nipple between his lips, dragging his tongue over the sensitive peak. When he suckled it with a groan, I cried out, "Finally!" I was on fire again! Raw inside. Needing *more*.

He turned to the other one, muttering, "So sweet and plump. They tease my tongue." Once he'd left that one wet and aching as well, he pulled me back to face him, excitement in his expression. "All of this is acceptable."

"I-I certainly think so."

"*Very* acceptable."

Okay? What was going on here? I sensed in him a seething need for me, barely contained—and building. Another woman might fear it; I drank it in like wine.

"Ah, little Cat." A gleam shone in his wicked blue eyes. "You're about to get fucked. Hard."

CHAPTER 4

*H*e laid me back on the couch, looming over me, predatory. Without warning, he grabbed both of my ankles in one of his hands, lifting my body up as he snatched my thong off and tossed the silk away.

“Spread your thighs.”

Confused by this turnaround, I tentatively did.

Eyes riveted to my pussy, he licked his lips. “So lush. I can *see* your need. Did you enjoy the orgasm you stole?”

“Stole?”

He knelt on the couch, reaching between my legs. He ran his forefinger along my lips, spreading my moisture, then rubbed me right over my entrance.

My lids went heavy as I watched his face. His gaze was keen with fascination as I grew even wetter for him. I got the impression that he hadn’t fingered a girl in forever. Of course, his “script” hadn’t called for it.

He teased my opening until I was squirming, about to shove myself down on his finger. “You just get wetter and wetter. I could make you come again, only from this.”

Yes, but I'd lose my mind! "*Más*. Give me more, Máxim."
He narrowed his eyes. "You call me Máxim?"

"I'll call you whatever you want if you finger me more." My toes were curling in my stilettos.

As he probed deeper, inch by inch, I moaned from the filling sensation.

"Your little clit's so swollen. Do you want me to rub it?"

"*Yes!*"

"Or do you need to be fucked?"

"Both! Either! Anything . . ."

Yet then he frowned. "Your pussy's tight. *Very* tight."

Would he know that I hadn't had sex in forever? *Need to distract him*. "I'll be this tight around your cock, *querido*."

He pumped his finger inside me. "Tell me you want it." He laid his free hand over one of my breasts, thumbing a nipple.

"Yes, I want your cock!" My thighs quivered. I tripped toward another orgasm, and he hadn't even touched my clit. I'd never felt so much pleasure with a man; I *loved* being an escort!

He pinched my other nipple. "Then I won't give it to you yet." He stilled the hand between my legs. "Fuck my finger." Again I sensed a surge of anticipation in him, as if he were a kid with a new toy.

Shameless with need, I began to move against his hand, sending his finger in and out of my pussy. I was already about to levitate when his thumb made contact with my aching clit. "*Ummm!*"

He rubbed it with slow circles while fingering my core.

My eyes rolled back in my head, and I arched my back, stiffened nipples pointed at the ceiling.

"You're about to come again?" he asked in disbelief. "Look at me."

With difficulty, I raised my head.

“You don’t come without my permission.”

Qué? I had no control.

“Ask me for my permission. Say ‘Can I come for you?’”

Confused, I whispered the question.

I didn’t realize I’d spoken in Spanish until he rasped, “In English, beautiful girl.”

“Can I come for you?”

“Not until I tell you.” He wedged another finger into my core, screwing them into my tightness.

The fullness sent me over the edge. “*Máxim!*” The fire was back, searing every inch of my body. As I thrashed my head, I dimly heard him telling me he could feel my pussy squeezing, that I’d been bad, and he’d punish me for coming without permission.

But all the while he thrust his big fingers and circled his thumb, drawing out my orgasm, forcing me to ride each mindless wave, each delicious spasm. . . .

When he withdrew from me, I moaned with loss, still not sated. For some reason, I was even hornier than when we’d started.

His smoldering gaze raked over my naked body, taking in my glistening pussy, my flushed chest, my swollen breasts—even my hair fanning out wildly from my head. He reached forward, grasping a lock. “You’re so fucking sexy,” he grated, and immediately frowned, dropping my hair. Was he surprised that he found me sexy—or that he’d told me? “You want me too.”

“Want? *Estoy desesperada!*”

He stood to undress. “Desperate? Don’t worry, I’m about to give you what you need.” He removed his shoes and socks, then he pulled his sweater over his head.

As he revealed more of his body, I shivered with appreciation. His wide shoulders were muscled, his pecs rigid with dusky nipples, his arms brawny. He had sculpted washboard abs, and a tantalizing black goody trail that I wanted to nuzzle. His tanned skin sported a few raised scars over his chest and arms, but they didn't detract from his hotness.

His expression grew stern. "You disobeyed me. You came without permission."

I stretched my arms over my head, loving his gaze on my tits. "I regret nothing."

He unbuckled his belt, his movements menacing. So why did I feel no fear of this strange man? He snagged a condom from his pocket, then unzipped his slacks. As he worked them over his massive erection, I gasped.

His cock was a work of art. Distended, damp-tipped, with a plum-colored crown and a thick veined shaft. I wished I could explore every inch of it at my leisure. I'd never been a fan of head, but I licked my lips to imagine my tongue flicking that bulbous tip, teasing it. My mouth nursing that length . . .

He stood nude before me, his body the most mouthwatering I'd ever seen. All I could think: *Best job ever!!!*

He wrapped his big fist around his shaft, giving a stroke that rendered me breathless. More moisture beaded the slit. As he rolled on what had to be an extra-large condom, he said, "Show me what I'm soon to enjoy." There was no mistaking his tone. He'd given me a command.

Beautiful arrogant man.

I would follow his order, but I'd do it my way. I lifted one foot onto the couch back, resting the stiletto heel against the sofa's piping, then let my knees fall wide. I undulated in this position,

taunting him with my spread pussy. “How do you like variety now, *querido*?”

His cock pulsed in his hand, and he muttered something in Russian that sounded like a curse. He returned to the couch, kneeling between my legs. The difference in our sizes struck me. He made me feel tiny and fragile—while he was all hard edges and power.

He leaned over me, using one hand to restrain my wrists over my head. With his other, he gripped his shaft and aimed it. When the crown slipped down my slickened lips, he hissed in a breath. “So fucking wet for me.”

As he prodded that broad head, I had my first worry.

I was soaked, but he was *big*—

He shoved inside to the hilt, yelling with pleasure.

Too big! “Ow! Hold up!” I strained against his grip. “*Mierda*, give me a minute.”

Lips parted, he released my wrists and drew back on his knees, leaving me pinned on his cock. “*Ow?* Hold up?” This was the second time he’d flashed me that expression of shock/amazement; I termed the look *Máximo shockeado*. “You’re determined to enjoy your fucking?”

I guessed other women had let him shove away. “Let me get used to your size.” The fit was so tight that I could feel his dick throbbing with each of his heartbeats. “Can you do that?”

He held himself still, shuddering from the effort. His skin began to dampen with a sheen of sweat. He grated, “*Somehow.*”

Tentatively, I rolled my hips, sending his shaft in and out of me.

In . . . out . . .

In . . . out . . .

In. Out.

In.

Each time I could accept his length more readily, my body accommodating his. Pleasure subdued the pain. My lids grew heavy again.

“Good girl.” His gaze was fixed between my legs. “I see you taking me, *dushen’ka*.”

When he leaned over me once more, I threaded my fingers through his thick hair. At my ear, he murmured Russian words, then he took my mouth. He’d liked it when I’d sucked on his tongue, so I did it again—

He growled into our kiss, his hips shooting forward between my legs. It didn’t hurt this time, wrenched a moan from me. He withdrew, then sank even deeper. And it was . . .

Incréible! I broke away to cry, “Yes, yes! *Más, Máxim!*”

Leaning on his forearms, he began to surge into me. His black hair was mussed from my frantic grip, his eyes hooded. He stared down at my face, brows drawn, as if I’d confounded him. “You’re making me lose control.”

Did I appear as lost to lust as he did? “I don’t want you to hold back,” I panted, spellbound by him.

His gaze narrowed, as if I’d challenged him—or was giving him lip service. He withdrew, then rammed his hips forward, taking my breath away.

But I loved his strength, his intensity. “That’s all you’ve got, *Ruso?*”

He went to his knees again and gripped my hips. “That was a warm-up.” Seeming to use every muscle in his body, he yanked me close as he shoved. “*Uhn!*”

I cried out, lifting up to meet his next thrust. He rocked into me; I rolled up to him, the pressure hitting my clit each time. Once the two of us were in sync, our bodies moving together, he pistoned between my legs, railing me as I’d never been fucked before.

Fuck of the century? Try millennium! I was holding on for dear life, hovering on the very verge of orgasm.

“So *tight*,” he grunted, his jaw set as he pounded away.

Ay, Dios mío, he could move! Each time he snatched me to him, his biceps bulged. His pecs flexed, hard slabs of muscle beneath sweat-lathered skin.

Just watching his toiling body pushed me closer to the brink. He enjoyed watching as well, was transfixed by my bouncing breasts.

The tension gathering inside me was about to release—if he kept up those long, deep thrusts. So close . . . so close . . .

Accent thick as gravel, he bit out, “I love your nipples, your tits, your gripping pussy. The way you watch me with those stunning eyes. You like to watch me fuck you?”

“Yes! *Máxim*, you’re going . . . to make me come . . . hard!”

“Fuck. *Fuck*.” He swelled even more, until it was too much! “Can’t hold on! My cock’s about to explode!” The lines of his face grew tight, as if he were in misery. Then his body stilled.

No, no, no! *No, keep moving!*

His look of misery vanished, ecstasy lighting his face as he began to ejaculate. He threw back his head and roared to the ceiling, his throat working, tendons bowstring-taut. He gave a brutal stab of his hips, then another, bellowing, “It’s . . . so . . . fucking . . . *good!*”

His shattering thrusts hurtled me over the brink. “Yes, yes, YES!” I screamed, my vision blurring. My back bowed, my tits slipping across his sweating chest.

“*Blyad!* I feel you!” As my core clenched him, he bit out, “Your greedy pussy’s milking my cock. You’ll have every last—*ahh!*—fucking drop out of me!”

Hot. Wet. Bliss.

Continuing on and on and on . . .

Just when I could take no more, he shoved into me one last time. A long satisfied sound rumbled from his chest. His lids slid shut, and he collapsed over me.

I lay boneless beneath him, my limbs splayed. I moaned when his cock twitched inside me; he groaned when my pussy continued to squeeze his shaft.

As if our bodies wanted more of each other.

He nuzzled my neck, his exhalations tickling my damp skin. His heart thundered against my chest.

By the way he'd reacted, I began to think I might've given *him* an FOTC.

CHAPTER 5

J patted his ass, sighing, “Not bad, Máxim.”

With a half frown/half scowl, he withdrew, revealing a condom filled with more semen than I’d ever seen.

“*Un hombre viril.*” I stretched out on the couch, grinning from ear to ear, finally understanding the term *fuck-drunk*.

Rising, he yanked off the rubber and dragged on his pants. “You’re pleased with yourself.”

“Pleased in general.”

“I don’t *ever* lose control like that. I never come until I’m ready to.” His harsh tone was accusatory, as if I’d done something unforgivable.

Qué cosa? Huh? “This took me by surprise as well.” I rose to look for my clothes.

“You don’t make a habit of getting off with your clients?”

“No.”

Again, he clearly didn’t believe what the hooker was saying. “Something about me in particular must be ‘special’ and ‘different’ among your clientele. I suppose coming with each of your dates, all day long, would be an occupational hazard.”

Wouldn't know. By the time I'd collected my clothes, he was already in the next room. Shame. I'd wanted to see him from the back.

I heard the shower running and had no idea what I was supposed to do. Leave? Get ready for round two? I donned my underwear, then grabbed my phone, ringing Ivanna.

After I'd given her a rundown of everything, she sputtered, "Maksimilian Sevastyan?"

"Yes. You've heard of him?"

"Of course! He's a politician and a *billionaire!*"

The former interested me more than the latter. My father had been in politics too. Not that I'd ever tell the Russian. And not that he'd ever believe me if I did.

Ivanna continued, "He's one of Europe's most eligible bachelors, but no one can land him. Damn Botox! Is he as gorgeous up close as he is in pictures?"

"He's DDG."

"Have you talked about me at all?" she demanded.

I rolled my eyes. "Tell me what I do now!"

"The payout was excellent, so upsell him for the whole night. You're already at his place, have spent money and time on clothes, makeup, and transpo."

The kids in my business courses had nothing on Ivanna the Escort's expertise. Or mine, for that matter. "You're right. Sunk costs." Economics informed the decisions I made every day.

"Act as if he rocked your world," Ivanna said, the phrase almost comical with her accent. "Like he is the best lover you ever had." *He is!* "Make him think he's the only one you'll give your private number to. They eat that shit up."

"But it *is* private." I hadn't even allowed her to give it to the agency. "I don't want anyone else to have it."

“We’ll get you a new number this week. For now, your job is to play to his ego and get him for the rest of the night—or to snag a future date. Though that isn’t likely to happen.”

“Why not?”

“He’s never booked the same woman twice. Oh! I could still get a date before he leaves town! Maksimilian Sevastyan, can you imagine?”

Yes, Ivanna, yes, I can. She was going to have sex with a guy I’d screwed. She’d know his mighty body, would get high on his scent. At the thought, my emotions, which had been up and down all night, took a header.

When the shower stopped, I hung up the phone, hurrying to the bedroom. I leaned against the doorway of the suite. Pulling my hair over my shoulder, I acted all alluring.

He exited the bathroom with a towel wrapped around his hips. *Por Dios*, that body. How could one man be so utterly blessed?

Before I could say anything about another go, he scowled. “You’re still here?”

My lips parted. He’d expected me to let myself out, without even saying good-bye?

Yes. Because my purpose had been served. He was looking at me like he might look at a used condom. Oooh, this man got my back up! He’d been all excitement and passion before; now the icy chill was back.

He sat on the edge of the bed, casting me a disgusted look. “I suppose you remain in the hopes of upselling me for the rest of the night. Maybe even offering me your *private line*?”

Although that was precisely what I’d been advised to do, I gave him a haughty smile. “I’m good for the night, and my private line stays private, *querido*. I’m just on my way out.”

When he dropped his towel and climbed into the high bed, I turned to find my dress. From the bedroom, he gazed out into the sitting area, rising up on an elbow. I caught him ogling my body, actually tilting his head for maximal viewing.

Keep looking—last time you'll ever get to see it.

Once I'd gotten my dress on, he lost interest and shifted over on his back, bending one brawny arm behind his head. I'd been so affected by what we'd done, while he behaved as if he'd just completed a bodily function.

It hurt. I wanted to hurt him back. "Apparently I need to remind you that tips aren't included."

In a forbidding tone, he said, "There's cash on the dressing room console."

I found a gold money clip filled with hundreds. Maybe two grand's worth. "How much?" I called.

"Take whatever you think your performance deserves."

Performance? What a dick! I'd come my brains out, and so had he! So I took it all, including the goddamned money clip. Passing the bedroom door, I said, "Thanks for the tip, *pendejo*." Asshole.

"I'm surprised you aren't acting ingratiating." He was still talking to me, engaging me?

I turned back to him.

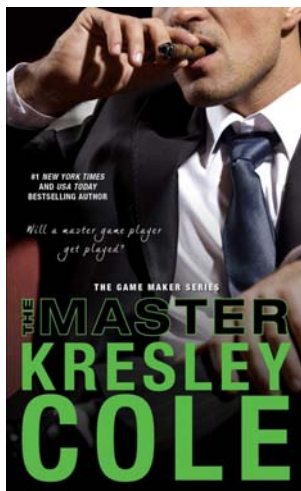
Mocking sneer in place, he said, "You're supposed to tell me how I moved heaven and earth for you. You're supposed to fawn over me, increasing your chances that I'll book you again."

I gave him an *aren't you adorable?* smile and purred, "Oh, baby boy, don't you know statistics? Chances can't be improved from one hundred percent."

I hope you enjoyed this excerpt from THE MASTER!

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