



CAN SEX EVER BE *JUST* SEX?



THE
CLUB
A. L. BROOKS

PROLOGUE

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Mandy grinned as Laura pushed open the cubicle door and pulled her inside. The main door to the toilets swung shut behind them, muffling the thump of the music coming from upstairs in the main room. The rave was in full swing, the dance floor jumping with the movements of hundreds of people all sweating out a good time.

Laura slammed the cubicle door shut behind them, and Mandy pressed up close against her in the confined space. She reached for Laura as she pushed the bolt across. Laura turned, and instantly her tongue was in Mandy's mouth, hands pushing inside her tee shirt. She cupped the bare breasts, squeezed, and then groaned as Mandy's nipples hardened under her palms. Mandy pushed up into her, breathing raggedly through her mouth. The air around them stank; the toilets here were not ideal, but sometimes there was no other option. When the need took her, as it had fifteen minutes ago when she and Laura had met in the middle of the dance floor, she made do with what was available.

Mandy had noticed Laura some time before they'd started dancing. Her bleached-blond hair, cropped nice and short, smoking hot body, and those vivid green eyes that sparkled under the club lights... She was breathtaking. Mandy hadn't been able to look away. The heat between them had been instant and intense, and when Laura had bent to Mandy's ear and offered her a quick fuck with no questions asked, Mandy hadn't hesitated.

Just as Laura's fingers started to pop the buttons on Mandy's faded Levi's, the outer door opened again. Two women entered, chatting to

one another. Laura didn't pause, and Mandy ignored them in favour of concentrating on Laura's fingers as they worked their way into her underwear. Laura ran her hand through the wetness of Mandy's pussy and rammed two fingers straight into her cunt. Letting out a loud groan of satisfaction, Mandy threw her head back. It thumped against the cubicle wall, and she giggled at the sound.

"Yeah, you like that?" asked Laura, her eyes darkening to a deep jade colour.

Mandy panted. "Fuck, *yes*."

"Oh shit, are you fucking kidding me?" a woman said, followed by her hitting the partition, making the wall of the cubicle shake. "Hey, fucking carpet munchers, take it someplace else!"

Laura's fingers stopped mid-thrust, and she and Mandy looked at each other, grinning. Then Laura moved again, and Mandy groaned again.

The woman hit the door, twice.

"I'm fucking serious, lezzas! Get the fuck outta there. Some of us need to piss!" The woman was angry.

Mandy twitched slightly. This might get nasty. Laura stopped moving and met her gaze. Her eyes held the same hint of the doubt Mandy was feeling.

"Jesus, are you serious? Are they fucking in there?" The second woman sounded younger and considerably more amused than the first.

"Yes," snarled the first woman and followed up with a kick to the door.

"Shit," murmured Mandy, and Laura nodded slightly. She pulled her fingers out of Mandy, and Mandy did up her fly.

"Sorry," whispered Laura, shaking her head.

"It's okay; no point putting ourselves at risk. Sometimes you get away with it, sometimes not." Mandy shrugged and planted a kiss

on Laura's lips before she shifted to give Laura room to slide the bolt back.

They shimmied around the door in the enclosed space and met the glare of the angry young woman. She was tall, too thin, and wore her blonde hair pulled back in a tight ponytail. Her neck was covered in tattoos, and her face twisted in hate.

"About fucking time. Disgusting cunts."

"Oi, no need for that!" snarled Laura. "We're going, all right?"

"Fuck off, lezza bitch."

"Hey, get over it!" snapped Mandy as she pushed past the woman with Laura right behind her.

"Don't know why you lot don't just stay in your own clubs. Stop bringing your fucking queer shit to our places."

Mandy turned back to the woman. Laura carried on walking, calling over her shoulder, "Leave it; she's not worth it."

Mandy looked the woman up and down. "Yeah, you're right," she said with a sneer. As she turned to leave, the woman slapped her. Mandy saw it coming, but not quick enough to avoid it. When it connected with her face, it didn't have enough power to send her to the floor, but it still rocked her back on her heels. Her lip stung as if cut, and a moment later, her mouth filled with the coppery tang of blood.

"Jesus!" The younger woman pulled at her friend's arm.

Laura grabbed Mandy and yanked her towards the door.

"Come on, enough. Let's get out of here," she said firmly.

Mandy went with her, stumbling as she tried to get her brain to engage with the rest of her body. The bitch fucking *slapped* her! What the fuck?

She wiped the blood from her mouth with the back of her hand. The cut stung like fuck. People stared as Laura led her to the cloakroom upstairs. Mandy ignored them.

“Where’s your ticket?” Laura asked her. Mandy rummaged in her pockets, found the green stub, and handed it to the girl working the counter. The girl stared at Mandy’s mouth for a moment, and Laura gave her a dirty look. She hurried to retrieve Mandy’s bag and jacket.

Out in the cool evening air, they walked down Brixton Road towards the Tube station. After a few moments, they came to a bench. Laura tugged Mandy over to it, pushed her down, and stood in front of her.

“You got any tissue to clean that up?” She pointed at Mandy’s lip.

Still in a slight daze, Mandy nodded, undid her bag, and found a packet of travel tissues. She pulled one out and dabbed gently at her lip. After cleaning around the cut, she pressed the tissue against it to staunch the flow. It wasn’t bleeding heavily, but it was annoyingly persistent.

Laura ran her hands through her short hair and puffed out a big sigh as she locked her hands together behind her neck.

“Sorry,” she said, looking down at Mandy.

Mandy waved one hand in the air between them. “Shit, not your fault. You don’t need to apologise. It’s a risk we take in places like that.”

“I know, but... Well, it just fucking annoys me, you know?”

“I know.”

And she did know. Mandy didn’t like to take women home to her place—her flat was private, and she didn’t want strangers in it. But equally, she’d had one too many morning-after conversations when she’d gone back to other women’s homes. She wanted her sex life uncomplicated, no strings. The only way she’d found that worked was random encounters such as the one she’d been in the middle of with Laura, quick and hard in some secluded part of a club. Unfortunately, most times that meant mixed clubs, as there just weren’t enough lesbian ones available, even in a city as big as London.

Mixed meant risk. The risk of being found, of being verbally abused, of being thrown out, or—as she'd discovered tonight—worse.

“Look, are you okay to get home?” Laura dropped her arms to her sides and shuffled on the spot, clearly keen to get going. Mandy couldn't blame her.

“Yeah, I'm fine. You take off.”

“Look after yourself,” said Laura.

“You too. See you around.”

Laura turned and marched off, tucking her head down into the collar of her jacket.

Mandy shivered and pulled her own jacket tighter around her body against the wind that knifed up the road. She didn't blame Laura for disappearing, but it did rankle a bit. Left on her own in the middle of Brixton with a bleeding face wasn't exactly her idea of a great night out. But then, what did she expect? She and Laura had only shared first names and about five minutes of interrupted intimacy. She wasn't pretending it was something it wasn't.

She pulled the tissue away from her lip and then patted the cut tenderly with a fingertip. The blood seemed to have stopped, thankfully. She dipped into her handbag again and found the little tube of lip salve she always carried around with her. Using her fingertip, she gently covered the cut with the soothing balm and then stuffed it, along with the tissues, back in her bag.

She stood up, took a deep breath, and started for home. So much for an easy, fun Saturday night out. She was fed up with this—too many nights ended in disappointment these days. She was thirty-two, way too old to be slapped down by some stupid bitch in a toilet.

She needed a change of scenery.

CHAPTER 1

Manchester, present day

Kath held the steaming hot mug carefully in one hand as she flicked off the main kitchen light. By the soft light of the under-cupboard spotlights, she made her way out of the room and down the hall.

“Mum, I’ve got your cocoa,” she called and nudged open the door to her mother’s bedroom. She stepped into the warm room. The bedside lamp was on, casting its muted light in a small pool that left most of the room in darkness. At first it looked as though her mum was sleeping upright, but she was merely gazing off into space, eyes unfocused. Kath put the mug on the bedside table. Her mum slowly turned towards her.

“Is that you, Kath?” Her voice was tremulous as she clearly struggled to focus in on Kath’s face in front of her.

“Yes, Mum, it’s me. Got your cocoa,” she repeated; sometimes it took two or three goes for things to register.

Her mum managed a weak smile. “Oh, you are a love,” she whispered and tried, unsuccessfully, to push herself a little more upright.

“Here, let me.” Kath kept her voice light and cheery. She slipped her arms around her mum and gently pulled her up. Before resting her back against the headboard, she made sure the pillow ran dead centre down her spine.

“Thank you, love,” her mum whispered again.

Kath swallowed hard. Sometimes it really was just too much. The pain of seeing her mum like this and the energy Kath expended on

caring for her... All of it threatened to overwhelm her. But what was she to do? Care for her mum fell to her as her brother refused to help.

“We should put her in a home,” he’d said. “It’s too much for you to take on, and frankly, I don’t have the time to just drop everything when you can’t cope. I have a wife and kids. It’s not fair to them. It was your decision to take her in, your decision to leave the professionals out of this.” His words, delivered in his usual clipped tones, rattled around her brain, their sharp edges catching her like needles. There was a lot right in what he had said. But the idea of her mum going into care was far too upsetting for Kath.

Her mum sighed and reached for the cocoa. Kath intercepted her.

“I’ve got it, Mum,” she said brightly. She held the mug close to her mum’s lips, letting her come forward slightly to sip, trusting she still had enough awareness not to gulp the hot drink too quickly.

Later, after her mum had gone to sleep, Kath tucked her in, switched on the night light, and left the room. She leaned against the wall outside for a moment and breathed deeply. Today had been a long one. She rubbed at the back of her neck, trying to ease out some of the tension that seemed permanently knotted there these days. She rolled her shoulders, pushed herself away from the wall, and walked down the hallway to the kitchen. As she passed the table, she picked up her fags.

She stepped out of the back door into the cool May air and plopped herself down on one of the plastic patio chairs. She lit her cigarette, inhaled, and let the smoke trickle gently out of her nostrils as she gazed up at the night sky. It had been a beautiful spring day that had left a pink tinge on the horizon with the streaks of cloud stretched like layers of a creamy cake across the sky. It was almost perfect, and sitting out here, experiencing it alone, made her heart clench just a little.

Maybe she should call Julie, talk a bit more about their plans for tomorrow. At the thought of Julie, she smiled. Julie, with the long black hair that draped so seductively over Kath's face as she straddled her, riding out her orgasm as she thrust down hard on Kath's fingers. Julie, who didn't really understand Kath's home arrangements and didn't understand why Kath couldn't come running every time she called.

She stubbed out her fag in the overflowing ashtray and walked back inside for a cold beer. She popped the cap and strolled into the living room. Her phone was on the sofa, right where she'd left it earlier. Glancing at the screen, she noticed one missed call and a voicemail. She checked the missed call—Julie. As she listened to the message, the sound of Julie's voice made her smile. Then, as she took in the words, her smile faded. Key phrases zapped into her ears and ricocheted around her mind.

I need to end this.

Too difficult to find time to be together.

Found someone more reliable, more committed.

Sorry to do this.

Really thought we could have had something, but I can't share you.

Kath hit the "end" key and dropped the phone. She was numb. Sure, Julie had been struggling with Kath's need to put her mum first, but she hadn't realised it had got this bad. Briefly, she considered calling Julie back, but then she replayed the words from the voicemail in her head. It was a lost cause.

They had only been dating about three months, but she, too, had thought they could have had something very good together. But caring for Mum as she did challenged Julie's ideas of how a relationship should normally progress. Last minute cancellations. Too many nights settled in to watch a DVD rather than out on the town as promised. Quick sex sneaked into the few free hours she had.

She should have acted sooner. Instead, compressed under the weight of all she was juggling, she had hoped it would miraculously resolve itself.

Well, in a way, part of it had.

Kath exhaled, slumped back against the sofa, and took a long pull on her beer. Her brother's words mixed with Julie's and echoed through her mind. She had some difficult choices to make.



“So,” Jacky handed Kath her pint of lager, “how’s the new carer working out for your mum?”

They were in the Soldier’s Arms, their favourite haunt. Jacky was Kath’s closest friend; the one person she didn’t have a problem confiding in. Strange, as Jacky wasn’t the touchy-feely type at all. She was often thought of as all surface and no depth. But Kath knew differently. Jacky’s stocky, butch exterior, almost a mirror of Kath’s own, contained a warm heart and a lot of love for the people closest to her.

They’d not seen each other since Jacky and Tania got married back in April. Yet another reason why she’d re-evaluated her life, worked out her money and her priorities, and got in touch with a private home-care agency.

Leaning back against the bar, Kath took a big gulp of her beer and smacked her lips in pleasure as the cool liquid slipped down her throat. “Great, actually,” she said. “They’re not cheap, but something had to give. So it’s worth it.”

“How many nights are they in?” Jacky’s gravelly voice rumbled across the space between them.

“I’ve got them four evenings a week, Tuesday to Friday, seven until eleven. Just couldn’t afford the weekend option, as everyone wants that. But this way, I at least get some time out. I can go to the cinema or hit the bars or clubs if I want to.”

Jacky nodded. "It's good that you've done it. We missed you for sure, and Tania was getting so worried about what it was doing to you, cooped up at home all day and night."

"Well, it did get a little claustrophobic, I must admit."

"See, so it worked out okay in the end. I know Julie leaving was shit, but she kind of did you a favour; didn't she?" Jacky wasn't one to mince words.

Kath nodded ruefully. "Yeah, she did. Bit of a hard lesson to learn, but hey, I'm there now, and things can only get better, right?"

"Definitely. So, any hot chicks on your radar?"

Kath snorted. "Well, that's the fucking irony of it. Ever since I've had all this extra time to play, I haven't found anyone who interests me enough. Mind you, I'm still getting used to all this...freedom... so I'm not even sure I want anything serious anyway."

"You should get yourself down to the Ace, find a little one-night-stand action." Jacky grinned.

Kath thumped Jacky in the arm, laughed, and mimicked a vomiting action with her finger near her mouth. The Ace was a cheap club tucked into the bowels of Stretford, somewhere she and Jacky had frequented years ago, before they knew any better.

"Ugh, no thanks. The trash that goes in there, I wouldn't touch with a barge pole. And anyway, you're a happily married woman. What would you know about the pulling possibilities at the Ace these days?"

Jacky smirked. "Nothing at all. I'm just guessing it hasn't changed."

Kath smiled. "No, not one bit, so I've heard." She mock-shuddered. "I have no intention of setting foot in there again. Still, a one-night stand would be quite nice, actually. It's just knowing where to go to meet someone who'd be interested."

"Ever done the chat room thing? You could always use it just to find out where all the women go these days. Or have cybersex."

Kath grimaced. “No thanks. I want a real woman, hands-on, thank you very much. But yeah, maybe going online just to find out where everyone goes would be a good way to start.”



Kath sat back in her chair and raised her arms above her head to stretch. She moaned loudly, the pull on the muscles of her back feeling *so* good. She'd been at her desk since eight thirty in the front-room-turned-office where she carried out her tax consulting work. It was now—she glanced at the clock in the top right of her screen—two in the afternoon. Although she'd looked after her mum's needs during that time, she had neglected her own. Her water glass was empty, and she couldn't remember when she'd last filled it. Had she eaten? Her stomach growled. Okay, that would be a no, then.

She pushed back the chair and stumbled to her feet, her legs wobbling from their lack of use. She did some more stretches and then headed out of the room to check on her mum. Kath paused at the doorway of her mum's room, not wanting to march in if she was sleeping. Her mum was sitting up in her armchair, staring at the small flat-screen TV. Rather than stepping in and talking to her, Kath hesitated. She just didn't have it in her right now, and from the looks of it, her mum was off in another world anyway.

Kath sighed, stepped quietly from the room, and headed to the kitchen. Sun streamed into the large room from the patio door at the back, and she took a few minutes to have a quick smoke outside before she made herself lunch. The garden looked as though it needed some work again. Maybe Saturday she'd help her mum out to one of the patio chairs while she worked out there. Maybe.

She pulled together a glass of orange juice with a thick doorstep of a roast chicken sandwich and headed back to her office where she tucked in. When her mum had first started...drifting...and it

became clear she needed around-the-clock care, it had been a no-brainer for Kath to move back in to the family home. Her mum had been rattling around alone in the four-bed detached in Sale ever since Kath's father had died the year before. After tidying up all the remnants of her dad's will and estate, Kath had rented out her flat in Stockport and moved into the big front bedroom. She and her brother had reconfigured the house so that her mum could stay on the ground floor—there was a small walk-in shower room and toilet downstairs already, so they'd only needed to rearrange furniture.

With a small sofa and a TV, the old dining room became the new living room, somewhere Kath—and now the carers—could sit in the evenings and still be able to hear her mum in the next room. Her dad's study-cum-library was just big enough for a single bed and an armchair, so it was transformed into a bedroom for her mum. The front room had been turned into Kath's office. It was cold in winter and too distant from the rest of the house to serve as a bedroom. Kath had worried about keeping her mum within earshot.

As workplaces went, it wasn't that bad. And again, she was thankful that she was able to work from home, for the most part. She went into the city one afternoon a week to meet with Jude, her manager. Jude had been instrumental in transitioning Kath's role from office based to home based. Each Wednesday, she spent the afternoon catching up on clients and forthcoming work with Jude at the office, while Mrs Davey, a neighbour from across the road, sat in with Kath's mum. She always brought over a small cake and sat in the living room chatting around whatever TV programmes they watched until Kath got back at five. She seemed to genuinely enjoy her Wednesday afternoon visits. And the twenty quid Kath slipped her on the way out didn't hurt, of course.

Her phone rang just as she finished her sandwich. She swallowed the last mouthful quickly and answered it on the fourth ring.

“Hi Kath, it’s Jude.”

“Hey, how are you?”

“I’m good. Listen, just a quick call—any chance you could come in earlier tomorrow? I know it’s difficult with your mum and all, but I’ve got a family thing I need to get to and have to leave earlier than normal. Sorry, I would have asked sooner, but I completely forgot it was this week.”

Kath’s mind quickly spun with the arrangements she’d have to make. Mrs Davey probably wouldn’t mind, especially if Kath threw lunch into the mix. She’d have to scoot over the road straight after this call, though, to catch Mrs Davey before she went off to bingo. Tuesdays was always bingo.

“I’ll need to check with the neighbour, but I’m sure that will be okay. What time do you want me in?”

“Say noon, so a couple of hours earlier than normal? I need to get out of here at three to catch a train to London at three thirty.”

“Off to do anything nice? Oh wait, you said a family thing—I’m guessing not so nice then?” Kath made sure to put a laugh into her voice.

Jude snorted. “Yeah, you guessed that right. Father’s birthday. I have to meet them at some fancy restaurant in Covent Garden and then stay overnight before catching a red-eye train back here Thursday.”

“Okay, let me go and talk to the neighbour right now. I’ll send you a quick email once I know it’s going to be all right. If not, I could always see about coming in on Thursday instead?”

“Sounds good, let me know either way. Thanks.”

Her visit to Mrs Davey was short and sweet—yes, there was no problem with her coming in a little earlier to sit with Mum, and her eyes definitely brightened up at the thought of lunch. Kath made a mental note to pop out later to Tesco and get something nice for the pair of them to eat.

When she got back to her desk, suddenly she wasn't in the mood to work. She'd done pretty well this morning, so an hour off now wouldn't kill her. She sent the quick email to Jude, then, smiling to herself, she opened up her personal laptop and resumed her search of sites that could help her in her...research. So far, she'd signed up for a couple of chat rooms that looked promising, and through them she'd made contact with two women who sounded as if they knew of a place.

One of her contacts was online and in a chat room already. Another homeworker maybe? Or someone sitting at her desk in an office, bored out of her mind and sneaking a little lesbian chat to pass the day?

Kath sent a message and got an instant reply. The afternoon was definitely looking up.



Kath pulled on her black leather trousers and zipped up. God, it had been so long, she'd forgotten just how good they felt against her skin. Black shirt next, over the black bra she liked to wear for nights out. She smiled to herself as she did up the buttons on the shirt. She was excited, and it had been a long time since she'd been excited about a night out.

She'd lost a bit of confidence since Julie left, making her self-conscious and nervous on the couple of occasions she'd gone to bars in the Gay Village in the last month. She'd left early both times, unable to see the evening through to the conclusion she'd wanted.

Time was she could walk into any bar or club and get off with someone, even for just a snog and grope. But now, all these months of looking after her mum had taken their toll. Julie leaving had been the final straw, somehow knocking her confidence back decades to when she was a gangly eighteen-year-old, fresh out of the closet and not a clue what to do about it.

She splashed a bit of CK One on her wrists, slipped on her watch, and ran her fingers through her dark, shoulder-length hair. Okay, ready as she'd ever be. She switched off her bedroom light, ran lightly down the stairs, and grabbed her long leather coat from the hallway cupboard. It was August, but she went nowhere without that coat. She stuck her head around the living room door to say a quick goodbye to Milo, the carer who was in tonight, and then headed out the door to the taxi waiting outside.

Her insides did a little flip. The promise of the night stretched before her.



Twenty-five minutes later, she climbed out of the cab just up the road from the club. The black door was hidden in the shadows, but she found it easy enough, having done a drive-by in daylight the week before.

Through her chat room research, she'd ended up on a site where fellow lesbians looking for that no-strings action could swap stories. There, she'd learned about this club, and Kath's pulse had quickened at some of the stories. Hot femmes after a quick, hard fuck from a dominant butch. Straight, bi, gay, it didn't matter—it was all about the essentials, the basics, the needs. Behind that black door lay three rooms offering her all sorts of possibilities to quench her thirst for physical contact with another woman, without the long-term complications getting in the way. She was genuinely excited about how this could fit into her world, her life.

She paid the cabbie and watched him drive off before she lit a fag. As she strode up to the door with her head held high, she smoked it quickly, sucking down the smoke in long pulls. She smiled to herself. She was ready for this.

She was admitted to the club at the first buzz on the bell and handed over her money.

“Welcome,” an older, rather striking woman greeted her. “I’m Mandy, the owner.”

“Hi,” Kath replied as she accepted the change. God, the woman had the most amazing blue eyes. Kath tried not to stare, but they were incredible.

“We have a locker for your coat, if you like?”

Kath nodded and gratefully slipped out of the leather jacket. It was warm in the hallway. She followed Mandy’s directions to the small room further down the hall and stowed her coat. When she turned back, Mandy blinked rapidly and glanced away. Wondering what that was about, she cleared her throat slightly before speaking.

“So, through that door, then?” She pointed to the only other door in the hallway.

“Yes, sorry. That’s right. Do you need me to give you a rundown on the facilities first?”

Kath shook her head. “I’m okay, thanks.” She knew all she needed to know from her research; all she wanted now was to get in there. She straightened her shirt a little, hitched up the leather trousers, and then took a deep breath before heading along the shadowy corridor.



Mandy fanned her face after the butch walked away from her. Jesus, talk about pheromones. She heard a giggle and looked over her shoulder. Dee, her assistant, smirked at her. Mandy gave her the finger.

The club had been open for about nine months now, and Mandy had seen plenty of women of all shapes, sizes, colour, and looks come through that door. She was proud to give them this space to enjoy—a place to let themselves go, let themselves find something, whatever that might be. She hadn’t ever factored in her own needs, even though the idea of the club was based almost entirely on her

memories of those needs. But occasionally, like tonight, a woman would walk through that door who made Mandy's pulse race and her clit throb. And that woman, although nothing amazing to look at, had the kind of...charisma that worked for Mandy in all the right ways.

Maybe it was the leather trousers—she'd always had a thing for leather. Especially when they fit someone as well as that. She tore her gaze away from the woman's broad ass as the doorbell rang behind her.

Back to work, you silly bitch, she chuckled to herself.



Kath entered the Green Room—a space where it was just bodies, no toys or BDSM equipment allowed here. There were other rooms for that, rooms that Kath fully intended to explore at some point. Her body immediately responded to the darkened atmosphere, the dim lighting, the muted music, the carnal sounds, and the sex she could almost taste on the air. She bought herself a beer and sat at the bar. Her old self was quietly returning, and the buzz of the evening permeated her, setting her nerves alight. She settled in her seat. She wanted to watch first, check out what everyone else got up to before she made her move. She had no doubt she would fuck someone tonight—this was definitely not just a reconnaissance mission. It had been too long, and she needed it. Badly. Three months wasn't that long to go without sex, but somehow the way Julie had left and the toll of caring for her mum made it seem much longer. And her need that much greater.

She sipped her beer while her gaze roamed her surroundings, taking in all the action. It was gone eleven by now, and the room was fairly busy; she counted ten couples already hard at work and another half a dozen or so unoccupied women placed strategically against the walls. Her blood warmed as she watched the couples who

were active. There were hands, tongues, and fingers all being used to good effect, and she was getting wet at the ecstasy playing out on the faces around her. Oh God, to feel that again... She focused her attention on one couple in particular—a curvy blonde being caressed and kissed very slowly by a soft butch. The woman wore a black muscle vest and black jeans. Her dark hair was cut short in a feminine spiky look that highlighted her beautiful face. Though the two women were presumably strangers, they were totally into each other. What they were doing to each other made her realise that, for some, this place wasn't just about quick, hard fucks.

Tonight, however, quick and hard was what Kath wanted.

After watching them for a few more minutes, she finished her beer. With her arousal building rapidly, she was ready—there was no point waiting any longer. Her need consumed her, raging through her veins, making her skin tingle and her cunt throb. Her fingers ached to plunge deep inside someone's hot wetness, and she searched the room for that someone to feed her fire.

She passed over the first three women she checked out. None of them gave her a spark that flashed a "go." But she stopped dead on the next woman. Oh, hell *yes*. Blonde, curly hair tumbled over her bare shoulders where her clingy black top had slipped down to pull tight across very full breasts. A black skirt, possibly leather, with a long split up the side, showed off bare thigh. She appeared a little younger than Kath's thirty-six years and oozed sex appeal, and Kath practically drooled as she made her way over. Her target caught her movement and met Kath's gaze, and Kath's stomach lurched. The woman's eyes said yes in no uncertain terms, especially when she ran her gaze deliberately down the length of Kath's body and back up again.

The woman splayed her hands back against the wall just as Kath reached her, and that gesture of submissiveness sent Kath's pulse racing. She didn't bother with pleasantries; she didn't care what the

woman's name was. She just had to have her. Their lips met, and Kath pushed her tongue deep inside the woman's mouth. Bracing her hands on the wall to either side of the woman's head, she let their bodies barely graze each other, hinting at what was to come. She felt, rather than heard, the woman groan, and kissed her even deeper. And still the woman kept her hands splayed back against the wall. Kath was the one running this show.

After a few moments, Kath pulled back. The kiss sent hot blood coursing through her veins. It was all she could do to keep some kind of restraint on herself and not just rip every bit of clothing off the woman. With her teeth.

Instead, she took a deep breath and stared into the woman's eyes as she slowly, and very deliberately, ran her hand down the woman's body. Down her neck, over her bare collarbone, over the lush swell of her breast, registering the hardness of the nipple as she did so. Then past her hip and down to the split in the skirt. She skimmed her fingers over the—*yes*—bare skin and the soft, pliant warmth of her flesh. Gripping her thigh hard, Kath's desire flared brighter again. Jesus, this was sexy. She had no idea who this woman was, could possibly pass her in the street the next day and not recognise her. But here Kath was, about to run her hand up inside that skirt and find out what delights awaited her. The thrill of it left her breathless. She had finally found the solution to the imbalance that had plagued her life since her mum's condition had taken over.

Kath moaned loudly when she discovered the woman was, as she had hoped, not wearing any underwear at all. As she let her fingers move without hesitation into the—significant—wetness that awaited her, she stared into the woman's eyes. The woman gasped and thrust against Kath's hand.

"Oh no," whispered Kath, pulling her hand back. "No, no, no, that's not how it goes. You have to wait until I let you, understand?"

Kath dropped into dominant mode as easily as she had slipped on her coat earlier. She mentally grinned. *Oh yes.*

The woman, panting in front of her, nodded. Her eyes were bright, desire written all over her face, and heat surged through Kath's veins again. Oh, this fuck was going to be perfect. What a way to get back in the game.

"Stay still," said Kath, the strength of the command in her voice thrilling herself as much as it did the woman in front of her. "Don't move. Take everything I give you and... Don't. Fucking. Move."

Even during her best nights with Julie, she had never seen such utter surrender, such willingness to give everything—and take everything—written all over someone's face.

She pushed her hand back between the woman's legs and nodded slightly in satisfaction as the woman contained her reaction, keeping her legs wide open but not moving her hips. The control that must have taken... Her muscles quivered beneath Kath's hand. She ran two fingers through wet outer lips, down to the entrance of the woman's cunt where she hesitated, her fingers poised but not moving. She kept her gaze locked on the woman's eyes, kept her fingers still, and leaned down to kiss her, letting their lips just brush, nothing more. She pulled back and then kissed her again, just as lightly, this time keeping their lips in the merest of contact rather than moving away.

The woman moaned, and Kath smiled. The woman still hadn't moved, even though Kath's actions were clearly torturing her in the most exquisite way. She moved her fingers slightly, maybe a centimetre or so, letting them slip just inside, and then stopped. The woman whimpered and panted against Kath's lips.

"Do you want me to fuck you?" Kath said against the woman's mouth.

"Oh, Jesus, *yes.*"

"How much do you want it?" Kath moved her fingers in a bit further.

The woman didn't move a muscle, even though she groaned, loudly, and her breathing increased against Kath's mouth.

"God, like nothing I've ever wanted before," replied the woman, voice thick with desire, eyes hooded. For all Kath knew, she'd said the very same words to someone else only half an hour previously. But it didn't matter. That was the beauty of this club; they could all play the game because they could all win at it.

Kath's clit pounded against the seam of her tight leather trousers. Her boy shorts were soaked as her cunt released gushes of juice at the woman's words, her gasps, and the look in her blazing eyes. This was what she had missed these past couple of years. Kath was back, with a vengeance, and oh, God, it felt *so* good.

She pushed inside then, unable to delay. In future nights, she might play this out longer, but the consuming need was too great not to act, not to follow her true desires. Two fingers, straight in, all the way up to the furthest knuckles. The woman cried out against Kath's mouth, and Kath devoured her, tongue pushing deep, lips crushing lips as her fingers pumped in and out.

Bracing herself against the wall with her right hand, she pressed her body closer and used her thigh to force her fingers even deeper inside this beautifully wet cunt. The woman ground down on her, and it was Kath's turn to groan. She pulled back a little so she could look into those eyes as she fucked her relentlessly. Her own clit and cunt were throbbing from the sensations coursing through them.

And then she saw it in the woman's eyes, saw the orgasm growing, and she flicked her thumb over the woman's clit to bring it ever closer. The effect was instantaneous; the eyes widened then closed, the hips thrust upwards, and the woman gushed all over Kath's hand, arching her back to push her body tight up against Kath's as she rode it out.

Kath maintained their body contact even as the woman relaxed back against the wall, kissing her neck, her collarbone, her lips.

“Oh my God,” whispered the woman as Kath nibbled along her chin. “That was...incredible.”

Kath nodded, breathing heavily. Torn between giving the woman time to get her breath back and the desperate ache between her own legs that needed immediate attention, she withdrew her fingers.

“What do you need?” The woman brushed her lips across Kath’s. “I can see it all over your face—what do you need?”

Kath brought her hand up and wiggled her fingers.

“Lick these clean and then lick me,” she said, her voice so hoarse with desire she barely recognised it.

The woman groaned and lunged forward to take Kath’s fingers into her mouth. She sucked and licked with relish. And then, with a strength that both surprised and delighted Kath, she grabbed Kath’s shoulders and pulled her around to lean against the wall. With an oh-so-sexy smile, the woman dropped to her knees in front of Kath and reached for the zip on Kath’s trousers. Kath’s clit pulsed in response, and she helped with opening her trousers. She pushed her boy shorts down enough for the blonde to get her head—and more importantly, her tongue—into position. At the first touch of that warm tongue bathing her clit, Kath groaned from deep within herself and pushed her hips forward. Oh God, yes, she needed this...

She happened to glance across to the central bar and caught the approving nod of another leather-clad butch who, it seemed, had been watching their show. Kath grinned, and the butch laughed, and then all of Kath’s attention was drawn to the tongue and lips working between her legs. She closed her eyes and let herself be taken to a level of pleasure she hadn’t known in a very long time.

The blonde was *very* good at what she was doing—good, firm strokes that took Kath to the edge, then soft, gentle sucks that kept her hovering in limbo, just below orgasm. Then, with another few hard strokes with the flat of her tongue directly on her clit, the

blonde brought Kath to a spectacular orgasm that ripped through every fibre in her body.

She clutched at the woman's head as she gasped for breath. Before she could ask, the blonde rammed a finger inside her, giving Kath what she needed to finish off her pleasure. Kath ground her teeth and thrust against the finger, letting it perpetuate the aftershocks of her orgasm through her entire body.

After a few moments, the blonde withdrew and stood. She pulled Kath's underwear and trousers up as she did so. Kath drew her close and kissed her, tasting herself on the woman's lips.

They pulled back, and their gazes met.

"Amazing," said the blonde, smiling. "Thank you."

"No, trust me, I'm the one who's thankful," said Kath, surprised at the emotion that bubbled up and threatened to spill over into tears. "Thank you for being so perfect."

The blonde dipped her head in a display of coyness that really touched Kath. Then she raised her head for one more kiss before making her exit.

Kath slumped against the wall, breathing slow and deep. Her emotions were still very close to the surface. The encounter had restored her in so many ways, not just physically. Somehow, in all her planning, she hadn't anticipated that and was at a loss as to what to do with herself and the rest of evening. She didn't want to go home yet, but she was *almost* sated from just that one experience.

First things first—another beer.

She sat at the bar for her first few gulps, gazing into space, still enjoying how it felt to command a woman that way again. The ease with which she slipped into the dominant role thrilled her. Her confidence was back in bucketfuls, and it felt wonderful.

"She's something else, that one, isn't she?" a woman said. The butch who'd caught her eye earlier on eased her way onto the stool

next to Kath's. "Had her last week. Best fuck I've had in a *long* time," continued the butch. "Seen her sometimes in the Blue Room. She loves getting it from behind. A few of us have had her that way. Rumour is she's straight. Well, married to a bloke at least. Comes in here for a couple of weeks at a time, then no one sees her again for a few weeks. But fuck, she's worth it."

Kath didn't know how to respond, so she just nodded and grinned inanely. It should have occurred to her that anyone she met here had probably been before, but somehow knowing the blonde visited so often threatened to take some of the magic away. How stupid was that? It's not like she came here looking for the love of her life, so why should she care how many times the blonde had been here and who she'd been fucked by?

"First time here?" asked the butch.

Kath nodded, not trusting her voice just yet.

"Well, you certainly hit the jackpot, then, didn't you? Fuck!" The butch laughed and took a long swig of her own beer. "You should bring your cock next time and get in the Blue Room—you get some seriously good action in there, believe me."

"Yeah," said Kath finally. "I may just do that. Excuse me, I think I'm just going to go and check it out now." She didn't want to talk any more—she didn't want anything else the butch said to diminish her high.



Kath strode into the Blue Room without looking back at the action in Green—she definitely didn't want to see the blonde involved with anyone else tonight. The Blue Room was accessed from a door in the corner of Green. The door to the Red Room, the BDSM space, was in the opposite corner. The atmosphere changed the minute the door closed behind her. The Blue Room was...grittier...harder.

There was an edge, something she couldn't define, but it set all of her senses sparking again. She inhaled deeply as she looked around. She'd had a fair amount of sex in her life, a lot of it purely physical with no emotion involved at all, but the rawness in this room took her breath away. She walked to the centre bar and took a stool on the end to make sure she had a clear view of events. She drank it all in, and her body responded with an immediacy she wouldn't have thought possible so soon.

Immediately to her left, a naked woman was bent backwards over a stool. Standing between her legs, fucking her slowly with a substantial dildo was a tall, striking woman dressed entirely in leather. A femme dressed in a short skirt paired with a tight top that let her substantial cleavage spill over its very low-cut neckline stood opposite the butch. She had her hands full of the naked woman's breasts, kneading and pulling at them while she watched. Clearly all three of them were getting what they wanted from the evening. Kath glanced around. She wasn't the only one watching; they had quite an audience.

God, she loved this place.

She let her gaze roam across more of the room. In one corner, a woman with long auburn hair hitched up her skirt and straddled another woman—a solid black butch with multiple piercings—who was seated in a chair. Slowly, she inched herself onto the dildo her partner wore, her head thrown back in ecstasy as she did so. The butch pushed up her tight tee shirt and buried her head between the femme's breasts as she rode her. Kath watched until the red-haired woman came, and her own cunt contracted in response.

Kath kicked herself for not bringing her own harness and favourite toy. When she'd planned the night, all she'd thought about was skin and wetness and heat. But now, watching all of this, she was totally turned on at the thought of strapping on again. She drank more of her beer, shifting her gaze to two women directly in front of her.

One was braced against the wall, legs spread wide. Her skirt was pushed up to her waist and underwear down around the ankles. Her partner rammed into her from behind, hard and fast, gripping on to handfuls of the skirt to give herself leverage.

Kath almost groaned aloud. That was her favourite position for giving. Julie had loved it, absolutely *loved* it. Kath had taken her that way in nearly every room in Julie's house—against the bedroom door, across the kitchen table, over the sink in the bathroom. The idea of doing that again, in this room filled with lust and sex and desire, made Kath nearly tremble with need.

As she finished her beer, she sat and watched the room. She wondered about paying a visit to the Red Room—she'd dabbled in a little BDSM over the years—but that wasn't what she was looking for right now. Unfortunately, without her harness and dildo, she couldn't have what she really wanted.

She sighed, resigning herself to going back into the Green Room to find another woman to explore with her fingers and tongue. Not that it would be a hardship, but next time she came here—and there would *definitely* be a next time—she would come better prepared.

As she made to leave, she caught sight of a redhead leaning against the wall nearby. The woman smiled, cockily, and raised a hand to beckon Kath over. Kath ran her gaze down the redhead's curvaceous body. She wore black jeans tucked into knee-length leather boots and a tight-fitting, long-sleeved top that hugged her ample breasts and the top of her wide hips. She wasn't skinny by a long shot, but she wore her curves as though she was born to seduce anyone who took her fancy. Kath raised her gaze. This time, the woman's face featured a quirked eyebrow and a hint of impatience.

The redhead crooked her finger again, and Kath found her legs responding before her brain could question it.

She reached her in a few paces and discovered herself inexplicably tongue-tied when she got there. The woman, older than Kath by

some years, oozed a surety and sensuality that completely unsettled Kath, yet her body ached to connect with her.

“Hello,” said the woman, her voice like velvet, sending shivers down Kath’s spine. “My name is Vivian, and I want you to fuck me.”

Kath blinked, shocked at the directness from such a femme. She’d thought Julie could act the seductress when she wanted to, but Vivian could have given her lessons. To PhD level.

“I-I’m sorry,” stammered Kath, embarrassed by her inability to form a sentence. “I don’t actually have my strap-on with me.”

Vivian reached out a finger and laid it over Kath’s lips.

“Not to worry, honey. I brought my own.”

Kath’s eyes widened, and Vivian chuckled throatily.

“Don’t look so shocked.” She leaned forward until her lips were a breath away from Kath’s. “I know what I want, and I make sure I get it. You just get to enjoy the ride. Okay?”

Kath nodded, the power of speech having totally left her. All she could focus on was the lushness of Vivian’s lips and the warmth of her breath fanning over her mouth, sending bolts of heat straight to Kath’s clit. She moaned and attempted to lean in closer for a kiss of those plump lips, but Vivian pulled back sharply.

“Sorry, honey, I don’t do kissing. Just fucking. Now, you reach down and find what you need in the bag at my feet while I get comfortable.”

And with that, Vivian turned to face the wall and began undoing her jeans. Kath blinked a couple of times, then mentally shook herself into the here and now. While she normally wanted—needed—to dominate a situation like this, Vivian’s cool commands had had a profound effect on her. She obeyed without question, dipping down to find a large black leather handbag next to Vivian’s legs. Inside the bag, she found a soft harness and a six-inch ribbed dildo. It wasn’t as large as she would have expected. Somehow Vivian’s confidence

had led Kath to believe she'd want to be fucked by something big. As she fiddled with the bag, she glanced up, and her breath caught in her throat. Vivian had dropped her jeans to the top of her boots and pulled her tight top up over her ass to reveal two pale, very round, very squeezable buttocks. The strong scent of Vivian's arousal, along with the way her pussy glistened in the low light, made Kath clench down deep in her own cunt.

Kath stood and glanced at the harness in her hands and then down at her own clothing. Moving as quickly as she could, she undid the buckles on the harness, unzipped her trousers, and pulled them down just enough to slip the harness straps between her legs. Once it was in place and set, she pulled the trousers up over her ass; she felt a little too vulnerable with her hind end hanging in the wind. Then, finally, she stepped behind Vivian, who was looking over her own shoulder with an amused smile on her face.

"Comfortable?" she asked with a smirk.

Kath nodded, willing herself not to blush. For fuck's sake, she'd done this a hundred times or more. Why did Vivian make her feel like such an amateur? And yet somehow this didn't knock Kath's confidence. If anything, it was inspiring her to rise to the challenge, to show Vivian that she knew *exactly* what she was doing.

"Good," purred Vivian, her voice strong above the background music. "Then coat that little baby in my juice and fuck me."

The blood in Kath's veins came to a momentary stop as a tsunami of desire swept through her body. Never had a woman's words had such a physical effect on her. She nearly whimpered with it. Vivian caught her eye, one eyebrow raised.

"Problem?" she asked, glancing down once at the dildo between Kath's legs and then back up again to meet Kath's eyes.

"God, no," groaned Kath and ran her hand through the sexy, hot juice leaking out of Vivian's cunt. She eased the dildo through that

wetness, using the motion, plus her own very wet hand, to give it a good covering. To Kath's delight, Vivian trembled slightly as she did so. Vivian's composure wasn't total after all. Confidence surged through Kath, and she teased Vivian once more. She ran both hands through and over her wet cunt lips to brush ever-so-casually over her clit. Vivian groaned aloud.

With that groan, she decided to test Vivian's mettle and make her wait just a little longer. Show her who was really in charge now.

Leaving the dildo between Vivian's legs, pressed up into her lips lengthways, so that it didn't penetrate, she put her hands on Vivian's waist and inched her fingers under the tight top.

"Fuck, what are you waiting for?" Vivian growled.

"Shush," whispered Kath close to her ear. "This is my show now, babe."

Vivian growled again and turned to meet Kath's eyes. She paused for a moment and then swallowed. Kath had won this round. Vivian smiled, slow and sexy and turned back to the wall.

"Give me your best, then, honey," she said over her shoulder, her voice that soft velvet again, and Kath chuckled.

"Oh, I will." She pushed her hands up inside Vivian's top to grasp her abundant breasts, revelling in how they overspilled her hands. Vivian pushed into her, forcing her nipples into Kath's palms. Kath arched her fingers to pull at each hard centre and twisted them roughly. Vivian let out a guttural moan and pushed her chest harder against Kath's hands. As she did so, the arch of her back made her pussy ride along the dildo and pushed her ass back into Kath's groin. Thrusting gently, Kath helped the motion along, letting the dildo slide through Vivian's lips to tease her even more. Vivian's moaning grew louder as she murmured "fuck" and "yes" over and over.

Kath smiled to herself; it was time to put Vivian out of her misery. She grasped the dildo and placed the tip of it against the entrance

to Vivian's cunt and then gripped Vivian's shoulder with her other hand.

"Ready?" she asked, pressing her mouth close to Vivian's ear.

"Yes. *Jesus*," hissed Vivian.

Kath pushed and watched as the dildo slid into Vivian. There was a little resistance, and then Vivian opened herself and the toy sank into her. Kath groaned as the full length disappeared. With one hand clutching Vivian's shoulder and the other on her hip, she braced herself against Vivian's luscious body. And then she started thrusting, pulling about halfway out before driving deep inside again. With each thrust, Vivian's head arched back. She pressed so strongly against the wall, the veins stood out along the back of her hands. Vivian gasped, her ecstasy obvious, and Kath responded to each sound, thrust, and arch. Her clit pressed nicely up against the base of the dildo, and she had every chance of coming in this position. But first, Vivian. After a few more deep thrusts, Kath moved her hand from Vivian's hip around to find her clit.

"God, yes!" cried Vivian, and Kath didn't hesitate, starting slow circles over Vivian's engorged clit. She increased the pressure and speed with the increase in volume of Vivian's cries, all the while watching the dildo move in and out. As she brought Vivian to the brink, as she controlled the pace of it, Kath set aside one small part of her brain to register just how important this night had been for her. Vivian came, thrusting back against Kath, fingers clenching into fists against the wall, and Kath sucked in a deep breath.

A cry formed somewhere deep inside that threatened to become a sob in the next moment. The joy, the pure ecstasy running through her body was almost a physical thing in itself. In the instant after that realisation, her own orgasm crashed through her, weakening her knees. Vivian groaned in tandem with her. Kath stilled her thrusts, leaving the dildo buried deep inside Vivian, and she wrapped her

body over Vivian's to pull her close. Vivian tipped her head back and let Kath nuzzle her neck.

"Thank you," Kath whispered. Her emotions were of no relevance to Vivian, but the heartfelt words escaped her without warning.

Vivian turned her head slightly and stared at Kath for a few moments, her eyes not revealing any of her thoughts. Then she smiled. "Trust me, the pleasure was *all* mine." She winked, and Kath grinned.

"Oh, I don't know about that," replied Kath, also winking. She pulled out slowly, bringing one last hiss of pleasure from Vivian as the dildo left her body. As she removed the harness, Vivian rearranged her clothing. Then Kath passed over the kit to Vivian, who stooped to pick up the bag. With a final smile, Vivian walked away without so much as a backwards glance, but Kath didn't mind. She felt drained and elated all at the same time. She zipped up her trousers and stumbled over to the central bar. Her legs refused to cooperate fully with her brain's commands, much to her own amusement. She slouched on one of the stools, gaze unfocused, and closed her eyes as she replayed the last twenty minutes or so in her mind. Somehow, even though Kath hadn't started as the dominant one, this encounter had been even more fulfilling than the one with the blonde earlier. She'd had to work at this one, prove herself just a little bit, and the satisfaction was all the greater because of it.

Without a doubt, her weekends for the foreseeable future had a new, exciting look to them.

When she felt her legs could actually support her, she stood and stretched. She left the Blue Room, walked back into Green, and stopped for a moment to soak up a bit more of the atmosphere. She didn't focus on anything in particular beyond just being there.

Then she took a deep breath and made to leave and head home, only to have a cute little thing who'd just walked in catch her eye.

The short, tartan skirt showed off a fine set of legs, and the sheer top that covered her upper body left little to the imagination. The woman's eyes flashed a very definite "go." She couldn't, could she? Not three in one night? And then her clit butted into her thoughts. *Sure we can*, it purred. *What are you waiting for?*

Chuckling to herself, Kath took a step forward.



Mandy watched as the butch she'd lusted after earlier departed Green and headed for the locker room. She emerged wrapped in her long leather coat again, and Mandy couldn't help but ogle as the woman walked towards her. She was taller than Mandy, probably about five nine, and carried her big build with a swagger that made Mandy grin. As she passed, she met Mandy's gaze and smiled. Mandy returned the smile with a blush and pulled back into her office to hide it, embarrassed beyond measure at showing herself up in front of a customer. The woman left, and Mandy let out a breath. She could almost hear Rebecca's voice next to her. *Oh, so that's really your type, is it? Big and butch?*

There would be humour in the tone, a hint of teasing, but it would be done with love. Mandy's smile faded as the pain hit her, stuttering her heart. Just over a year since Rebecca had gone. A year of battling her emotions while pushing on with opening this club. The joy of that tempered by the emptiness left without Rebecca to share it.

"You okay, Mandy?" Dee's voice was laced with concern. She had worked for Mandy as the assistant manager since the day they opened, and they'd become quite good friends.

Mandy blinked back tears and inhaled deeply.

"Fine," she replied, her voice quavering more than she liked. "I'm fine."

CHAPTER 2

Melbourne, 1997

The music was thumping through the floor of Toolbox, the small, dark club Mandy had discovered during her first week in Melbourne. Saturday night was in full swing with wall-to-wall dykes bumping and grinding to the beat, and the air was hot and sweaty. Just the way Mandy liked it. She urged Suzy to follow her to the back of the club, but Suzy was dragging her heels a bit, which Mandy *didn't* like.

She'd thought she'd read Suzy's responses to her overtures on the dance floor correctly, but now she wasn't so sure. She pulled her into the toilet cubicle anyway and locked the door shut behind them. She gently pressed Suzy against the door, and leaned into her firm body. If Suzy was having a few doubts, Mandy was happy to assuage them. She dipped her head and trailed open-mouthed kisses down the length of Suzy's neck. Suzy trembled beneath her, and Mandy smiled into the soft skin beneath her lips. Moving upwards, she found her earlobe and nibbled lightly before biting down a little harder. The small groan that Suzy emitted sent a nice little pulse of desire to Mandy's clit.

"Okay, baby?" Mandy whispered against Suzy's ear and was rewarded with another groan. Suzy latched onto Mandy's hips and pulled her closer. *Oh yes, job done.* Mandy pulled Suzy's tee shirt from out of her cargo pants and ran her hands straight up her body and over her breasts. It had been obvious on the dance floor that Suzy wasn't wearing a bra. Her breasts were small, not even a handful, really, but Mandy didn't care because Suzy's nipples responded just

the way she liked, hardening rapidly and pushing into her palms. Every touch she bestowed on them had Suzy grinding just that little bit harder against Mandy's thigh.

The night had started out so slowly. Her friend Stacey hadn't shown up, which had put a damper on the start of the evening. Mandy was perfectly happy to spend a night alone in a club, and had frequently done so, but she'd been looking forward to hooking up with Stacey. They hadn't seen each other in a couple of weeks and had a lot of catching up to do. No doubt a woman was the reason for Stacey's absence; it usually was.

So, Stacey had ditched her tonight, and Mandy had two choices—go home or make the most of it. She chose the latter, and Suzy's soft breasts in her hands vindicated that choice. She needed this—it had been a long week at work. She'd been in Melbourne for six months now and had landed a job in a friend's club. Despite her protestations that she knew nothing about running a bar, he'd waved her off.

“Look, love, I'll give you a month to try it—if you don't like it, no hard feelings, and if you're shit, you're out, simple as that.”

She'd started the following week and never looked back. She was a natural—having spent so many nights in clubs herself, she'd become adept at reading the crowd, picking up on the atmosphere, and understanding what the punters wanted. Mandy had found her new niche and was working flat out to build her reputation within it.

For now, as Suzy responded eagerly to the touch of her hands, all thoughts of her long, tiring week were fading into the recesses of her brain. Time to up the ante. Mandy reached down to the zip of Suzy's pants and started slowly undoing it. Suzy's hand shot down and stopped her in her tracks.

“No, wait,” panted Suzy against Mandy's mouth.

“Something wrong?” asked Mandy in her most seductive tone.

There was a slight hesitation, and then Suzy pulled her mouth away and looked at Mandy.

"I'm just not... That's not what I do, not with someone I've only just met." Suzy's soft Aussie twang trembled with a clear mix of desire and nerves. "I don't mind a bit of a pash and a grope, but... well, I'd rather get to know you a bit more before...you know."

Oh shit. There was a determination behind Suzy's words that told Mandy all she needed to know. She had definitely read this one wrong.

"Oh, right." There really wasn't a lot else she could say to that. Suzy's entire demeanour made it clear there was no point in going down the teasing, coaxing route, as she'd sometimes done in the past. And Mandy wasn't the sort of woman who needed—or wanted—to force an issue.

She stepped back and pulled her tee shirt down. Her skin was already cooling where Suzy's hands had been only moments before.

"Well, I guess I'll say goodnight, then," she said as she reached for the lock.

"Hey, wait." Suzy's voice registered surprise. "Don't you want to swap numbers, maybe arrange a time to see each other?"

Mandy breathed out an elongated sigh.

She turned back to meet Suzy's gaze. "Sorry, love," she said quietly. "Not my style. Have a nice night."

She unlocked the cubicle and left before Suzy could get a word out.

On her way back through the club, she immersed herself in the music once more. She was filled with a strange mix of denied arousal and exhaustion and didn't have the energy to make another conquest. She danced her way towards the front of the room, angling herself away from the angry looks Suzy and her group of friends were shooting her way. Lovely. Maybe it was time to call it a night—she really didn't need the hassle. *Get over it, girls*, she mentally threw their way. *Nobody died.*

She made her way to the exit. The night was balmy—February in Melbourne carried the warmth of late summer long into the evening, and she loved it. She strolled away from the railway arches that housed the club and wandered up Flinders Street towards the station. She had just enough time to get the tram home rather than a cab.

She shared the tram ride with a group of very drunk, very young girls who gave the conductor quite a hard time all the way back to St. Kilda. He took it well and caught Mandy's eye as she hopped off at the Esplanade, raising his eyebrows in a resigned manner that suggested this was nothing short of a usual Saturday night for him. She pitied him.

She walked the short couple of blocks to her apartment and rode the lift up to the fifteenth floor. Once inside she opened up the balcony doors and stepped out to gaze at the surf that crashed gently on the beach across the Esplanade. She couldn't really see the waves in the dark, but she could hear them, even above the traffic that rose up to her in fits and starts along the road below. That was enough. She stepped back into the apartment and pulled an ice-cold Carlton from the fridge. As she took a couple of quick gulps, she noticed the light flashing on her answer machine. Her mum's broken, aching voice came over the machine to deliver a message that crashed into her brain.

"Mandy, sweetheart, it's your mum. I think you'd better come home, darling, if you can." A pause, followed by a sob. "It...it's your dad. H-he hasn't got long. Please, come home?"

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THE CLUB

BY A.L. BROOKS

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