

CHAPTER ONE

HARPER O'MALLEY PUFFED a dark bang out of her eyes as she watched the clock. It was a quarter to five on a Friday, and she couldn't *wait* to get out of the office. It'd been a grueling week filling in for her brother Brian, who was sailing off into the sunset with his new bride. Literally. Right now, they were on his boat somewhere in the Caribbean while she was handling the cases he'd left behind at O'Malley and Associates law firm. But she was happy for him, even though the idea of being in a committed relationship made her gag.

She was about to shut down the computer when her email dinged with an incoming message. Usually, she'd let it wait until Monday, but this was from her brother. He'd only

use satellite Internet on his honeymoon if it were *really* important. So much for getting out of here. Harper dropped her purse next to the desk and opened her inbox with a sigh.

From: Brian O'Malley

To: Harper O'Malley

Subject: New Client (Important)

Jason Bold is referring a Miami Lightning player to us. I'm sketchy on the details, but from what I understand, his reputation is on the line. We need to avoid a full-fledged scandal. They're gearing up for the Pro Bowl, and this needs to be squashed ASAP. Jason is sending the client to the office Monday at 10 AM. I'll make you a partner if you handle this case while I'm away.

-Brian

A huge grin spread across her face as she read the email. She'd badgered her brother for the past three years to make her a partner. Hell, she'd earned it a hundred times over, but

Brian kept dragging his feet. She was one of Miami's most prominent defense attorneys and a renowned fixer. Harper was damn good at portraying controversial cases in a favorable light and keeping them out of court. This case would have probably landed on her desk even if her brother wasn't on a boat in the middle of the ocean. Harper wasn't bragging...she was just that *good* at what she did and never backed down from a challenge. The player probably needed to be cleared of drug use allegations or smooth over a drunken bar brawl. Simple enough. She could do that in her sleep. She practically tasted victory.

From: Harper O'Malley

To: Brian O'Malley

Subject: RE: New Client (Important)

No worries. I'm on it. You'd better believe you're going to make me a full partner! I'm holding you to it. -H

She clicked send and shut down her computer. She'd been waiting for this moment ever since she started working at her brother's

law firm. She'd followed in his footsteps and graduated from the University of Florida, then moved back to Miami when her brother offered her the job. He'd left a local law firm to open his own practice, and hiring her as an associate was his first move. Harper was adamant about proving her worth, and Brian expected nothing less. Although her summers had been spent in Georgia with family, they'd both grown up with Jason Bold. This case was a personal and professional favor to a long-time family friend.

She bubbled with excitement. Next week she would be swamped. Taking on this client could help her accomplish a professional goal she'd been dreaming of since she started law school. Of course, she was also meeting with her mother, which always tied her into knots. Her mother had always confided in Harper; they were more like friends than mother and daughter.

Her parents still lived in her childhood home, which meant nothing. Her father, an investment banker, ruled their house with an iron fist. Her mom sat on the board of several charities, giving off the image of a perfectly happy housewife. Unfortunately, it was

nothing but a charade they put on for everyone, including her brother and sister. Their marriage had died a slow and painful death.

She didn't understand why her mom stuck it out between her father's stinginess with money and infidelity. His affairs and attitude royally turned her off from getting married or even having a committed relationship with a man. She could never envision herself putting up with the bullshit her mom did. As a child, she envisioned having a family of her own, but finding out what her mom dealt with had turned her completely around. She valued being financially independent above having the stereotypical two kids, house, and dog to allow herself to become trapped in a living hell.

Harper grabbed her purse and pushed those thoughts aside as she left the office.

Employees Only—was a quaint little bar, formally known as a speakeasy. She was supposed to meet up with Maddie for drinks, and more than anything, she wanted to blow off some steam this weekend.

She pulled into the crowded parking lot, not seeing Maddie's car, but it was a popular spot for casual drinks after work and on the weekends. She walked into the semi-retro bar

and grabbed the last two empty chairs at the bar. Harper slid onto a mahogany barstool and placed her purse on the empty chair beside her, discreetly saving the seat for Maddie. She waved to the bartender.

“Gray Goose martini, two olives, dirty, right?”

Harper laughed. “You know how I love extra olives, Matt.”

The good-looking bartender turned with a grin and went to get her drink. A vibrating buzz told her someone had sent her a text message, and she checked her cell.

Maddie: I can't make it tonight. Sorry for the change of plans.

Harper: It's okay. Don't worry about it.

Maddie: Ugh, I'll tell you all about it later. I'm buying. Rain check? :)

Harper: Yeah, I'll call you next week if work doesn't bury me.

Maddie: kk... lol

Matt placed a martini in front of her and headed toward the other end of the bar, where someone was flagging him down. This place was her regular Friday night routine. She loved the casual, unpretentious atmosphere at Employees Only. It was the perfect place to unwind from the tight focus of her career.

And it was a great place to get hammered and take home a random stranger for a night of fuck-me-hard sex. She could handle *that*, even if the idea of connecting beyond a one-time hook-up scared her shitless.

Harper took a sip of her martini, appreciating how it eased her nerves. She looked around the bar for viable suspects to fulfill her quest for a quick, dirty romp. Her gaze skated across a handsome man with blond hair, but then his date returned to the seat next to him. Harper forked a vodka-soaked olive into her mouth when someone bumped the chair next to her. Then her handbag crashed to the ground, its contents spilling across the floor.

“Hey, I’m sorry. Let me get that for you.”

The man braced his hand on the back of her chair and bent to pick up her purse. At the same time, Harper stooped to pick up her wallet, keys, and cosmetics case, which had fallen out. Her pulse hitched up a notch as she noted a sexy smile was twisting his lips.

“It’s okay. I’ve got it,” Harper said, rising from the floor and tossing her belongings back into her bag, which he was still holding.

His hand brushed hers as he handed the purse back—awareness shot across her skin. The sexy scent of his cologne and his undeni-

able masculinity hit her, spreading heat throughout her body. It could have been the vodka, but she was sure the smoking-hot man, built like a linebacker looming over her, was the reason for the warmth. She swallowed away the sandpaper dryness in her mouth.

“Thanks.”

“I’m Parker, and I’d like to buy you a drink. Mind if I join you?”

It wasn’t original or clever. It wasn’t even what he said, but how it rolled off his tongue without sounding too smooth made her decide to take him home tonight. Just the right amount of coolness. And his air of confidence was such a turn-on.

Parker still had one hand on the back of her chair as he gazed down at her. He wore a gray t-shirt that rippled across his pecs when he moved. His abs seemed just as hard, and she had to hold back the urge to roam her hands across the cotton and test whether his muscles were as ripped as they appeared. It was hard to concentrate when he stood that close and smelled so deliciously, panty-dropping good. His dark blue jeans hugged muscular thighs and accentuated a bulge in between that sent her mind fast-forwarding to fucking him senseless.

She'd probably have been embarrassed about openly admiring him if he wasn't doing the same. Her nipples grew taut, brushing against her lace bra under the intensity of his gaze, which raked over every inch of her body as if he wanted to devour her.

She pulled out her sexy signature smile, moving her purse to a hook beneath the bar. "I'm Harper."

Parker sat on the chair next to her, moving it closer to hers as he took a seat. "I hope I'm not intruding. You looked like you were waiting for someone."

Although it didn't really sound like he particularly cared whether he was ruining her plans or not, and ironically, she found that sexy. Harper had always liked to control the situation, but for the moment, she enjoyed letting someone else take the lead.

"Well, I was, but my plans changed." She eyed him suggestively.

His hand on the back of her chair brushed her shoulder, sending a shiver down her back. "His loss, my gain."

"Her loss."

Parker's faltering expression was priceless, and it dawned on her what he must have thought she meant.

Harper laughed. "Not like that. I was

meeting a friend for drinks, but she canceled on me because something came up at the last minute.”

He leaned toward her, his breath brushing her ear as he whispered, “I’m glad something came up. You’re stunning.”

She was reasonably well-balanced and self-assured, but his mouth beside her ear made it difficult to form a coherent thought, much less an appropriate response to his compliment. Oh, man—he was fuck-me hot. Her breath hitched. She hoped they could get out of there soon.

“So are you,” she whispered back.

Parker laughed as she gulped down the rest of her martini. Then he waved to the bartender and ordered a beer for himself and another martini for her.

Harper could feel her strength, intellect, power, and control slowly slipping away. It was an entirely new experience, and she wasn’t sure what to make of it. He invaded her senses. His knuckles grazed across her arm, and heat shot straight to her thighs.

“You’re so tense. Rough day at work?”

Harper couldn’t help but groan. “Can we make a deal? Let’s *not* talk about work.”

“Fair enough, gorgeous. It’s been a tough week for me too.”

She watched his mouth curve with another playful smile and licked her lips. Now that Harper had made him agree not to talk about the one thing that defined her, that she was *good* at talking about, she wasn't sure what to say without coming across as needy and demanding. All she wanted was a few dozen mind-numbing orgasms. She bit her lip to keep from blurting that out.

Thankfully, Matt returned with their drinks, and she covered being tongue-tied by taking a calculated sip and deciding her next move.

"So, if we're not going to talk about work, do you have a better suggestion?" Parker teased.

Actually, she had several, and all of them involved licking every inch of him.

Harper swiveled in her seat, leaning toward him, and ran her hand up his back. Her nails scraped along each vertebra through the thin material of his t-shirt. "I might have a few."

"I'm trying hard to get to know you, gorgeous. But when you purr at me like a fucking kitten, it makes it damn hard not to take you somewhere private, so I can get to know every sexy curve of your body on a first-name basis."

She sucked in a breath. "What are you waiting for?"

Parker arched an eyebrow and threw more money onto the bar than was necessary to pay for their drinks. "Let's get out of here."