I loved New York with the kind of mad passion I reserved for only one other thing in my life. The city was a microcosm of new world opportunities and old world traditions. Conservatives rubbed shoulders with bohemians. Oddities coexisted with priceless rarities. The pulsing energy of the city fueled international business bloodlines and drew people from all over the world.

And the embodiment of all that vibrancy, driving ambition, and world-renowned power had just screwed me to two toe-curlingly awesome orgasms.

As I padded over to his massive walk-in closet, I glanced at Gideon Cross's sex-rumpled bed and shivered with remembered pleasure. My hair was still damp from a shower, and the towel wrapped around me was my only article of clothing. I had an hour and a half before I had to be at work, which was cutting it a little too close for comfort. Obviously, I was going to have to allot time in my morning routine for sex, otherwise I'd always be scrambling. Gideon woke up ready to conquer the world, and he liked to start that domination with me.

How lucky was I?

Because it was sliding into July in New York and the temperature was heating up, I chose a slim pair of pressed natural-linen slacks and a sleeveless poplin shell in a soft gray that matched my eyes. Since I had no hairstyling talent, I pulled my long blond hair back in a simple ponytail, then made up my face. When I was presentable, I left the bedroom.

I heard Gideon's voice the moment I stepped into the hallway. A tiny shiver moved through me when I realized he was angry, his voice low and clipped. He didn't rile easily . . . unless he was ticked off with me. I could get him to raise his voice and curse, even shove his hands through his glorious shoulder-length mane of inky black hair.
For the most part, though, Gideon was a testament to leashed power. There was no need for him to shout when he could get people to quake in their shoes with just a look or a tersely spoken word.

I found him in his home office. He stood with his back to the door and a Bluetooth receiver in his ear. His arms were crossed and he was staring out the windows of his Fifth Avenue penthouse apartment, giving the impression of a very solitary man, an individual who was separate from the world around him, yet entirely capable of ruling it.

Leaning into the doorjamb, I drank him in. I was certain my view of the skyline was more awe-inspiring than his. My vantage point included him superimposed over those towering skyscrapers, an equally powerful and impressive presence. He'd finished his shower before I managed to crawl out of bed. His seriously addictive body was now dressed in two pieces of an expensively tailored three-piece suit—an admitted hot button of mine. The rear view of him showcased a perfect ass and a powerful back encased in a vest.

On the wall was a massive collage of photos of us as a couple and one very intimate one that he'd taken of me while I was sleeping. Most were pictures taken by the paparazzi who followed his every move. He was Gideon Cross, of Cross Industries, and at the ridiculous age of twenty-eight, he was one of the top twenty-five richest people in the world. I was pretty sure he owned a significant chunk of Manhattan; I was positive he was the hottest man on the planet. And he kept photos of me everywhere he worked, as if I could possibly be as fun to look at as he was.

He turned, pivoting gracefully to catch me with his icy blue gaze. Of course he'd known I was there, watching him. There was a crackling in the air when we were near each other, a sense of anticipation like the coiled silence before the boom of thunder. He'd probably deliberately waited a beat before facing me, giving me the opportunity to check him out because he knew I loved to look at him.

Dark and Dangerous. And all mine.

God . . . I never got used to the impact of that face. Those sculpted cheekbones and dark winged brows, the thickly lashed blue eyes, and those lips . . . perfectly etched to be both sensual and wicked. I loved when they smiled with sexual invitation, and I shivered when they thinned into a stern line. And when he pressed those lips to my body, I burned for him.

Jeez, listen to yourself. My mouth curved, remembering how annoyed I used to get at pals who waxed poetic about their boyfriends’ good looks. But here I was, constantly awed by the gorgeousness of the complicated, frustrating, messed-up, sexy-as-sin man I was falling deeper in love with every day.
As we stared at each other, his scowl didn't lessen, nor did he cease speaking to the poor soul on the receiving end of his call, but his gaze warmed from its chilly irritation to scorching heat.

I should've become used to the change that came over him when he looked at me, but it still hit me with a force strong enough to rock me on my feet. That look conveyed how hard and deep he wanted to fuck me—which he did every chance he got—and it also afforded me a glimpse of his raw, unrelenting force of will. A core of strength and command marked everything Gideon did in life.

'See you at eight on Saturday,' he finished, before yanking off the earpiece and tossing it on his desk. 'Come here, Eva.'

Another shiver slid through me at the way he said my name, with the same authoritative bite he used when he said *Come, Eva*, while I was beneath him . . . filled with him . . . desperate to climax for him . . .

'No time for that, ace.' I backed into the hallway, because I was weak where he was concerned. The soft rasp in his smooth, cultured voice was nearly capable of making me orgasm just listening to it. And whenever he touched me, I caved.

I hurried to the kitchen to make us some coffee.

He muttered something under his breath and followed me out, his long stride easily gaining on mine. I found myself pinned to the hallway wall by six feet, two inches of hard, hot male.

'You know what happens when you run, angel.' Gideon nipped my lower lip with his teeth and then soothed the sting with the caress of his tongue. 'I catch you.'

Inside me, something sighed with happy surrender and my body went lax with pleasure at being pressed so close to his. I craved him constantly, so deeply it was a physical ache. What I felt was lust, but it was also so much more. Something so precious and profound that Gideon's lust for me wasn't the trigger it would've been with another man. If anyone else had attempted to subdue me with the weight of his body, I would've freaked out. But it had never been an issue with Gideon. He knew what I needed and how much I could take.

The sudden flash of his grin stopped my heart.

Confronted with that breathtaking face framed by that lustrous dark hair, I felt my knees weaken just a little. He was so polished and urbane except for the decadent length of those silky strands.
He nuzzled his nose against mine. 'You can't smile at me like that, then walk away. Tell me what you were thinking about when I was on the phone.'

My lips twisted wryly. 'How gorgeous you are. It's sickening how often I think about that. I need to get over it already.'

He cupped the back of my thigh and urged me tighter against him, teasing me with an expert roll of his hips against mine. He was outrageously gifted in bed. And he knew it. 'Damned if I'll let you.'

'Oh?' Heat slid sinuously through my veins, my body too greedy for the feel of his. 'You can't tell me you want another starry-eyed woman hanging on you, Mr. Hates-Exaggerated-Expectations.'

'What I want,' he purred, cupping my jaw and rubbing my bottom lip with the pad of his thumb, 'is you being too busy thinking about me to think about anyone else.'

I pulled in a slow and shaky breath. I was completely seduced by the smoldering look in his eyes, the provocative tone of his voice, the heat of his body, and the mouthwatering scent of his skin. He was my drug, and I had no desire to kick the habit.

'Gideon,' I breathed, entranced.

With a soft groan, he sealed his chiseled mouth over mine, stealing away thoughts of what time it was with a lush, deep kiss . . . a kiss that almost succeeded in distracting me from seeing the insecurity he'd just revealed.

I pushed my fingers into his hair to hold him still and kissed him back, my tongue sliding along his, stroking. We'd been a couple for such a short period of time. Less than a month. Worse, neither of us knew how to have a relationship like the one we were attempting to build—a relationship in which we refused to pretend we weren't both seriously broken.

His arms banded around me and tightened possessively. 'I wanted to spend the weekend with you down in the Florida Keys—naked.'

'Umm, sounds nice.' More than nice. As big of a kick as I got out of Gideon in a three-piece suit, I much preferred him stripped to the skin. I avoided pointing out that I wouldn't be available this weekend . . .

'Now I've got to spend the weekend taking care of business,' he muttered, his lips moving against mine.

'Business you put off to be with me?' He'd been leaving work early to spend time with me, and I knew that had to be costing him. My mother was on her
third marriage, and all of her spouses were successful, wealthy moguls of one kind or another. I knew the price for ambition was very late hours.

'I pay other people a generous salary so I can be with you.'

Nice dodge, but noting the flash of irritation in his gaze, I distracted him.
'Thank you. Let's get some coffee before we run out of time.'

Gideon stroked his tongue along my bottom lip, then released me. 'I'd like to get off the ground by eight tomorrow night. Pack cool and light. Arizona's got dry heat.'

'What?' I blinked at his retreating back as it disappeared into his office.
'Arizona is where your business is?'

'Unfortunately.'

Uh . . . whoa. Instead of risking my shot at coffee, I postponed arguing and continued on to the kitchen. I passed through Gideon's spacious apartment with its stunning prewar architecture and slender arched windows, my heels alternately clicking over gleaming hardwood and muffled by Aubusson rugs. Decorated in dark woods and neutral fabrics, the luxurious space was brightened by jeweled accents. As much as his place screamed money, it managed to remain warm and welcoming, a comfortable place to relax and feel pampered.

When I reached the kitchen, I wasted no time in shoving a travel mug under the one-cup coffeemaker. Gideon joined me with his jacket draped over one arm and his cell phone in his hand. I put another portable mug under the spout for him before I went to the fridge for some half-and-half.

'It might be fortunate after all.' I faced him and reminded him of my roommate issue. 'I need to knock heads with Cary this weekend.'

Gideon dropped his phone in the inner pocket of his jacket, then hung the garment off the back of one of the bar stools at the island. 'You're coming with me, Eva.'

Exhaling in a rush, I added half-and-half to my coffee. 'To do what? Lie around naked, waiting for you to finish work and fuck me?'

His gaze held mine as he collected his mug and sipped his steaming coffee with too-calm deliberation. 'Are we going to argue?'

'Are you going to be difficult? We talked about this. You know I can't leave Cary after what happened last night.' The multibody tangle I'd found in my living room gave new meaning to the word *clusterfuck.*
I put the carton back in the fridge and absorbed the sensation of being drawn
to him inexorably by the force of his will. It'd been that way from the
beginning. When he chose to, Gideon could make me feel his demands. And
it was very, very difficult to ignore the part of me that begged to give him
whatever he wanted. 'You're going to take care of business and I'm going to
take care of my best friend, then we'll go back to taking care of each other.'

'I won't be back until Sunday night, Eva.'

Oh... I felt a sharp twinge in my belly at hearing we'd be apart that long.
Most couples didn't spend every free moment together, but we weren't like
most people. We both had hang-ups, insecurities, and an addiction to each
other that required regular contact to keep us functioning properly. I hated
being apart from him. I rarely went more than a couple of hours without
thinking of him.

'You can't stand the thought, either,' he said quietly, studying me in that way
he had that saw everything. 'By Sunday we'll be both be worthless.'

I blew on the surface of my coffee, then took a quick sip. I was unsettled at the
thought of going the entire weekend without him. Worse, I hated the thought
of him spending that amount of time away from me. He had a world of
choices and possibilities out there, women who weren't so screwed up and
difficult to be with.

Still, I managed to say, 'We both know that's not exactly healthy, Gideon.'

'Says who? No one else knows what it's like to be us.'

Okay, I'd give him that.

'We need to get to work,' I said, knowing this impasse was going to drive both
of us crazy all day. We'd sort it out later, but for now we were stuck with it.

Resting his hip against the counter, he crossed his ankles and stubbornly
settled in. 'What we need is for you to come with me.'

'Gideon.' My foot began to tap against the travertine tile. 'I can't just give up
my life for you. If I turn into arm candy, you'll get bored real quick. Hell, I'd
get sick of myself. It shouldn't kill us to spend a couple days straightening out
other parts of our lives, even if we hate doing it.'

His gaze captured mine. 'You're too much trouble to be arm candy.'

'Takes a troublemaker to know one.'
Gideon straightened, shrugging off his brooding sensuality and instantly capturing me with his severe intensity. So mercurial—like me. 'You've gotten a lot of press lately, Eva. It's no secret that you're in New York. I can't leave you here while I'm gone. Bring Cary with us if you have to. You can butt heads with him while you're waiting for me to finish work and fuck you.'

'Ha.' Even as I acknowledged his attempt to lighten the strain with humor, I realized what his real objection to being apart from me was—Nathan. My former stepbrother. The living nightmare from my past that Gideon seemed to fear might reappear in my present. It frightened me to concede that he wasn't totally wrong. The shield of anonymity that had protected me for years had been shattered by our highly public relationship.

God . . . we totally didn't have the time to get into that mess, but I knew it wasn't a point Gideon would concede on. He was a man who claimed his possessions utterly, fought off his competitors with ruthless precision, and would never allow any harm to come to me. I was his safe place, which made me rare and invaluable to him.

Gideon glanced at his watch. 'Time to go, angel.'

He fetched his jacket, then gestured for me to precede him through his luxurious living room, where I grabbed my purse and the bag holding my walking shoes and other necessities. A few moments later, we'd finished the descent to the ground floor in his private elevator and slid into the back of his black Bentley SUV.

'Hi, Angus,' I greeted his driver, who touched the brim of his old-fashioned chauffeur's hat.

'Good morning, Miss Tramell,' he replied, smiling. He was an older gentleman, with a liberal sprinkling of white in his red hair. I liked him for a lot of reasons, not the least of which was the fact that he'd been driving Gideon around since grade school and genuinely cared for him.

A quick glance at the Rolex my mother and stepfather had given me told me I'd make it to work on time . . . if we didn't get boxed in by traffic. Even as I thought this, Angus slid deftly into the sea of taxis and cars on the street. After the tense quiet of Gideon's apartment, the noise of Manhattan woke me as effectively as a jolt of caffeine. The blaring of horns and the thud of tires over a manhole cover invigorated me. Rapid-moving streams of pedestrians flanked both sides of the clogged street, while buildings stretched ambitiously toward the sky, keeping us in shadow even as the sun climbed.

God, I seriously loved New York. I took the time every day to absorb it, to try to draw it into me.
I settled into the leather seat back and reached for Gideon's hand, giving it a squeeze. 'Would you feel better if Cary and I left town for the weekend? Maybe a quick trip to Vegas?'

Gideon's gaze narrowed. 'Am I a threat to Cary? Is that why you won't consider Arizona?'

'What? No. I don't think so.' Shifting in the seat, I faced him. 'Sometimes it takes an all-nighter before I can get him to open up.'

'You don't think so?' he repeated my answer, ignoring everything but the first words out of my mouth.

'He might feel like he can't reach out to me when he needs to talk because I'm always with you,' I clarified, steadying my mug with two hands as we drove over a pothole. 'Listen, you're going to have to get over any jealousy about Cary. When I say he's like a brother to me, Gideon, I'm not kidding. You don't have to like him, but you have to understand that he's a permanent part of my life.'

'Do you tell him the same thing about me?'

'I don't have to. He knows. I'm trying to reach a compromise here —'

'I never compromise.'

My brows rose. 'In business, I'm sure you don't. But this is a relationship, Gideon. It requires give and —'

Gideon's growl cut me off. 'My plane, my hotel, and if you leave the premises you take a security team with you.'

His sudden, reluctant capitulation surprised me silent for a long minute. Long enough for his brow to arch over those piercing blue eyes in a look that said take it or leave it.

'Don't you think that's a little extreme?' I prodded. 'I'll have Cary with me.'

'You'll forgive me if I don't trust him with your safety after last night.' As he drank his coffee, his posture made it very clear that the conversation was done in his mind. He'd given me his acceptable options.

I might've gotten bitchy about that kind of high-handedness if I didn't understand that taking care of me was his motivation. My past had vicious skeletons, and dating Gideon had put me in a media spotlight that could bring Nathan Barker right to my door.
Plus, controlling everything around him was just part of who Gideon was. It came with the package and I had to make accommodations for that.

'Okay,' I agreed. 'Which hotel is yours?'

'I have a few. You can take your pick.' He turned his head to look out the window. 'Scott will e-mail you the list. When you've decided, let him know and he'll make the arrangements. We'll fly out together and return together.'

Leaning my shoulder into the seat, I took a drink of my coffee and noted the way his hand was fisted on his thigh. In the tinted window's reflection, Gideon's face was impassive, but I could feel his moodiness.

'Thank you,' I murmured.

'Don't. I'm not happy about this, Eva.' A muscle in his jaw twitched. 'Your roommate fucks up and I have to spend the weekend without you.'

Hating that he was unhappy, I took his coffee from him and set our travel mugs in the backseat cup holders. Then I climbed into his lap, straddling him. I draped my arms around his shoulders. 'I appreciate you bending on this, Gideon. It means a lot to me.'

He caught me in his fierce blue gaze. 'I knew you were going to drive me insane the moment I saw you.'

I smiled, recalling how we'd met. 'Sprawled on my ass on the lobby floor of the Crossfire Building?'

'Before. Outside.'

Frowning, I asked, 'Outside where?'

'On the sidewalk.' Gideon gripped my hips, squeezing in that possessive, commanding way of his that made me ache for him. 'I was leaving for a meeting. A minute later and I would've missed you. I'd just gotten into the car when you came around the corner.'

I remembered the Bentley idling at the curb that day. I'd been too awed by the building to take note of the sleek vehicle when I arrived, but I had noticed it when I left.

'You hit me the instant I saw you,' he said gruffly. 'I couldn't look away. I wanted you immediately. Excessively. Almost violently.'

How could I not have known that there'd been more to our first meeting than I'd realized? I thought we'd stumbled across each other by accident. But he'd
been leaving for the day . . . which meant he had deliberately backtracked inside. For me.

'You stopped right next to the Bentley,' he went on, 'and your head tilted back. You were looking up at the building and I pictured you on your knees, looking up at me that same way.'

The low growl in Gideon's voice had me squirming in his lap. 'What way?' I whispered, mesmerized by the fire in his eyes.

'With excitement. A little awe . . . a little intimidation.' Cupping my rear, he urged me tighter against him. 'There was no way to stop myself from following you inside. And there you were, right where I'd wanted you, damn near kneeling in front of me. In that minute, I had a half dozen fantasies about what I was going to do to you when I got you naked.'

I swallowed, remembering my similar reaction to him. 'Looking at you for the first time made me think about sex. Screaming, sheet-clawing sex.'

'I saw that.' His hands slid up either side of my spine. 'And I knew you saw me, too. Saw what I am . . . what I have inside me. You saw right through me.'

And that was what had knocked me on my ass—literally. I'd looked into his eyes and realized how tightly reined he was, what a shadowed soul he had. I had seen power and hunger and control and demand. Somewhere inside me, I'd known he would take me over. It was a relief to know he'd felt the same upheaval over me.

Gideon's hands hugged my shoulder blades and pulled me closer, until our foreheads touched. 'No one's ever seen before, Eva. You're the only one.'

My throat tightened painfully. In so many ways, Gideon was a hard man, yet he could be so sweet to me. Almost childishly so, which I loved because it was pure and uncontrolled. If no one else bothered to look beyond his striking face and impressive bank account, they didn't deserve to know him. I had no idea. You were so . . . cool. I didn't seem to affect you at all.'

'Cool?' he scoffed. 'I was on fire for you. I've been fucked up ever since.'

'Gee. Thanks.'

'You made me need you,' he rasped. 'Now I can't stand the thought of two days without you.'

Holding his jaw in my hands, I kissed him tenderly, my lips coaxing and apologetic. 'I love you, too,' I whispered against his beautiful mouth. 'I can't stand being away from you, either.'
His returning kiss was greedy, devouring, and yet the way he held me close to him was gentle and reverent. As if I were precious. When he pulled back, we were both breathing hard.

'I'm not even your type,' I teased, trying to lighten the mood before we went into work. Gideon's preference for brunettes was well known and well documented.

I felt the Bentley pull over and to a halt. Angus got out of the car to give us privacy, leaving the engine and air-conditioning running. I looked out the window and saw the Crossfire beside us.

'About the type thing—' Gideon's head fell back to rest against the seat. He took a deep breath. 'Corinne was surprised by you. You weren't what she'd expected.'

My jaw tightened at the mention of Gideon's former fiancée. Even knowing that their relationship had been about friendship and loneliness for him, not love, didn't stop the claws of envy from digging into me. Jealousy was one of my virulent flaws. 'Because I'm blond?'

'Because . . . you don't look like her.'

My breath caught. I hadn't considered that Corinne had set the standard for him. Even Magdalene Perez—one of Gideon's friends who wished she were more—had said she'd kept her dark hair long to emulate Corinne. But I hadn't grasped the complexity of that observation. My God . . . if it was true, Corinne had tremendous power over Gideon, way more than I could bear. My heart rate quickened and my stomach churned. I hated her irrationally. Hated that she'd had even a piece of him. Hated every woman who'd known his touch . . . his lust . . . his amazing body.

I started sliding off him.

'Eva.' He stayed me by tightening his grip on my thighs. 'I don't know if she's right.'

I looked down at where he held me, and the sight of my promise ring on the finger of his right hand—my brand of ownership—calmed me. So did the look of confusion on his face when I met his gaze. 'You don't?'

'If that's what it was, it wasn't conscious. I wasn't looking for her in other women. I didn't know I was looking for anything until I saw you.'

My hands slid down his lapels as relief filled me. Maybe he hadn't been consciously looking for her, but even if he had, I couldn't be more different from Corinne in appearance and temperament. I was unique to him; a woman
apart from his others in every way. I wished that could be enough to kill my jealousy.

'Maybe it wasn't a preference so much as a pattern.' I smoothed his frown line with a fingertip. 'You should ask Dr. Petersen when we see him tonight. I wish I had more answers after all my years of therapy, but I don't. There's a lot that's inexplicable between us, isn't there? I still have no idea what you see in me that's hooked you.'

'It's what you see in me, angel,' he said quietly, his features softening. 'That you can know what I have in me and still want me as much as I want you. I go to sleep every night afraid I'll wake up and you'll be gone. Or that I scared you away . . . that I dreamed you—'

'No. Gideon.' Jesus. He broke my heart every day. Shattered me.

'I know I don't tell you how I feel about you in the same way you tell me, but you have me. You know that.'


'I'm caught up with you, Eva.' With his head tilted back, Gideon pulled me down for the sweetest of kisses, his firm lips moving gently beneath mine. 'I'd kill for you,' he whispered, 'give up everything I own for you . . . but I won't give you up. Two days is my limit. Don't ask for more than that; I can't give it to you.'

I didn't take his words lightly. His wealth insulated him, gave him the power and control that had been stolen from him at some point in his life. He'd suffered brutality and violation, just as I had. That he would consider it worthwhile to lose his peace of mind just to keep me meant more than the words I love you.

'I just need the two days, ace, and I'll make them worth your while.'

The starkness of his gaze bled away, replaced by sexual heat. 'Oh? Planning on pacifying me with sex, angel?'

'Yes,' I admitted shamelessly. 'Lots of it. After all, the tactic seems to work well for you.'

His mouth curved, but his gaze had a sharpness that quickened my breath. The dark look he gave me reminded me—as if I could forget—that Gideon wasn't a man who could be managed or tamed.
'Ah, Eva,' he purred, sprawled against the seat with the predatory insouciance of a sleek panther who'd neatly trapped a mouse in his den.

A delicious shiver moved through me. When it came to Gideon, I was more than willing to be devoured.