

Chapter 2

Mayson's booted footsteps sounded cautiously in the damp alley between First and Second Streets. The three whiskeys she'd had flowed pleasantly through her system, provoking a tuneless hum, a half dance through the darker than expected night; unexpected because she hadn't planned to be out much later than sunset.

She'd dropped Renée off at her condo hours before. The movie was good and at the end of the evening her friend had been laughing again, flashing the familiar white smile. One day she'd learn to keep her mouth shut about Linc. Obviously today wasn't the day.

Mayson sighed and kept walking. Something lurked in the shadows nearby, teasing her with its definite presence. She should have been frightened. She should have walked quickly toward a better lit street. Instead she sauntered peacefully with that presence, away from the women's bar that had been nothing but boredom, boozy girls, and too many drinks.

"Mayson."

The soft voice—with a hint of Southern peach—sounded like a hallucination. Peaches like that didn't often fall in San Diego.

"You left the bar too soon, darling. The fun was just getting started."

She slowed down to allow the peach to catch up with her from the hidden corner of the alley. Although it was a voice she vaguely recognized, she wasn't sure from where. After a few moments waiting in the dark with nothing or no one materializing, Mayson dismissed the voice as a definite hallucination and continued on her way. Her feet itched to move.

She emerged from the dark street onto University Avenue. It was alive this time of night. Boys in tight pants, their gestures urgent and electric. Chic gay girls with their short haircuts and newsboy caps perched to one side. Stylish heels tapping like music against the sidewalk.

"Mayson."

The voice came again, closer.

She turned around.

A woman stood under the streetlights. She had short hair just beginning to curl against her scalp, shining dark eyes, and a body like a high summer peach in the Southern California heat. Round. Firm. Delicious. The red dress she wore flattered her dark skin, fluttered around her knees as she walked. The woman came closer on high heels that brought her within kissing distance of Mayson's six foot height.

Ah. Now she knew why she recognized that voice. This was one of her students, someone who regularly took yoga classes at Dhyana Yoga. And she'd been in the club Mayson just left. She remembered her from the bar, leaning over to get the bartender's attention as every woman nearby leaned over to check out her ass. Mayson included.

"This is a far way to walk in those heels," Mayson said.

"Not too far since I have what I want in sight."

Oh.

Friday evening traffic trickled past, fluttering the hem of the woman's red dress. "I'm Fatimah," she said.

Mayson's mouth twitched. "And I think you already know my name."

They smiled at each other.

The dress Fatimah wore was one of those wrap-around kinds. It lay snugly over her breasts and the thick nipples that seemed determined to press back against the fabric. The tie at her hip fluttered in the breeze, and begged to be loosened.

A wicked grin curled Mayson's mouth. She reached out her hand. Between her fingers, the fabric felt like silk. Maybe it was silk. The tie slid between her fingers, whisper soft beneath the lazy caress of her thumb.

Under her light touch, Fatimah fidgeted, shifting from one leg to the other, rubbing her thighs together under the dress. Mayson didn't put her out of her misery. Fatimah had been so confident before. She released the bit of silk but did not step back.

"I was surprised to see you at the club tonight," Fatimah finally said.

"Why?" Mayson thought she knew the reason but wanted the other woman to say it.

"All this time I thought you were into women but I wasn't sure." Fatimah tossed her head back like she was used to having long hair. "You're always so impersonal in class."

Mayson hid a smile. She had noticed Fatimah in her classes, her subtle and not-so-subtle cues that she was available. But Mayson was very, very careful. There were always women in the studio giving those signals. But no matter what the women said with their bodies, she took care never to let her hand linger too long, avoiding the thrust of breast or curve of ass casually thrown in her way as she guided the students through their poses. Dhyana Yoga was her business, not a pick-up spot.

But she and Fatimah weren't at the studio tonight.

"Just how personal did you want me to get in class?" she asked the woman.

Fatimah lowered her gaze. "There are a lot of people at the studio who'd like to have you."

"Really? I hope they come for the lessons not just to look at me."

"Trust me, they want to do more than look." Fatimah smiled in renewed confidence, full lips parting over white teeth. "I want to do more than just look."

Mayson's smile joined hers. "Well, I'm pretty sure we can do something about that." She murmured. "Would you like to go back to my place for some coffee?"

The walk to her house was short. They didn't waste the anticipatory silence by talking, only walked close together, the backs of their hands occasionally touching, Mayson inhaling the night and becoming more sober with each step. She hadn't been looking for sex tonight, but she was glad it found her.

It felt like a long time since she'd had a woman in her bed. But it had only been two months. Two months wasn't a long time for her to go without sex, especially when she wasn't in a relationship. The last time Nuria, her sometime lover, came into town, they'd had eight days of incredible I-can't-bear-to-leave-your-skin-much-less-the-house-for-an-hour sex that left Mayson raw and her muscles aching for days afterward. She and

Nuria had had a mutually satisfying casual relationship for almost ten years now. The bloom had never gone off that rose. But Mayson knew it was only because they lived on separate coasts and only saw each other once a year.

In her house, she stood on the threshold of indecision. The kitchen for coffee or the bedroom for what they really came here for? She could feel the other woman's quiet but slightly accelerated breath near her, almost at her back. The anticipation rose inside her, flaring her nostrils, tearing her patience to shreds.

The decision made itself. "Come here."

The dress was beautifully easy to take off. With one tug the string loosened and Mayson unwrapped the body that had been promised to her. Fatimah's pleasure rumbled deep in her throat at Mayson's appreciative and hungry look.

The last time she'd had a woman in her house intent on sex, Nuria had backed her against the door as soon as they walked in and demanded that Mayson fuck her. It had been her pleasure to take the reins then, lifting Nuria against the door, tearing her panties away from the already wet and welcoming pussy, and sliding her fingers home.

But that was another time.

She and Fatimah came together, mouths, bellies, hands on skin. Through her clothes she could feel the other woman's heat. Her hard nipples. The damp skin already ready for the tasting.

"Fuck me," Fatimah hissed against her ear.

Perhaps that time and this weren't that different after all.