

## Chapter Three

A girl walks into a bar. She's nervous. The bar is called Hook Ups, and Amy feels warm as she remembers all of her firsts here: first dance, first kiss. First sexplay. She glances around, wondering if Frankie is here, but doesn't spot her among the room full of faces.

Maybe it's for the best, Amy decides. She might just be tempted to go with Frankie again. It's safer. Easier. But she came here with a purpose tonight, and that was to find a man.

There's no one sitting at the bar, and Erin isn't here tending bar. It's someone else— a burly guy in a tight t-shirt that shows off his bulging muscles. Something primal in Amy responds to just the sight of those big shoulders, that square chin. He feels himself getting hot just looking at this *man*, and the guy catches him looking and smiles. Amy checks. He's an actual person. Some people take jobs in VR to earn money to pay for their fun time in VR, which isn't cheap. It's win/win for the company, as customers love having more "live" people to meet.

"Hey, cutie," the guy says with a smile. "Get you something?"

"A mojito," Amy says. It's the third most popular drink among women, and he's dying to try all the girly drinks. He hopes he likes it better than the cosmo, at least.

Amy gathers his courage. He promised himself he wouldn't do it again— sit there like a statue, staring at the mirror behind the bar, giving everyone a stay away from me vibe. He swivels on the barstool, a  $\frac{3}{4}$  turn, and crosses his legs, letting his eyes roam across the room.

Oh, shit. Guys are checking him out. A lot of guys. They're whispering to each other, letting their eyes roam up and down his body. Terror. Amy fights the urge to turn away, to go back to staring at the wall, but no. He wants this! The insecurities are there, those damn voices in his head: you're pathetic! The only way you can get anyone to even look at you is by putting on a fucking costume.

*Shut up*, Amy says, though he is shaken. It's true, he believes. He is disgusting, and this is all a lie.

He meets the eyes of one of the guys. He feels a connection, and the guy smiles, kind of raises his head like— what do you think? Omigod, Amy thinks, looking over his boyish but handsome face. He's so cute! Is he really interested in me? Amy fights the ever present fear and anxiety, the urge to run away from what he wants and needs and even the possibility that someone hot would want him. He has to do this. He has to try!

Amy smiles and drops his eyes to the side. He starts playing with his hair. He read this is how a girl flirts, how she lets a guy know she's interested. He realizes more than ever that he enjoys playing the girl. This role is comfortable to him. He'd never felt good being the aggressor.

The guy starts walking over. He has a good walk— and a good body. Amy smiles, still playing with his hair. The guy walks right up to him and says, "What's your name?"

"Amy." It's barely more than a whisper.

"You're a beautiful girl, Amy," the guy says, sliding onto the barstool next to Amy. "I'm Max."

*Beautiful girl.* It's like chocolate for his ears. Amy feels such a burst of joy. He's waited his whole life to hear those words. And now— what? He has no idea what to say, where to look, what to do with his hands.

Max makes it easy. He talks about himself, and he asks Amy questions— safe questions. Nothing about the real world, nothing that might give him away. As Amy talks about himself, Max is totally locked in, like he's hanging on every word, like Amy is telling him the most fascinating story he's ever heard, even when Amy is just talking about this dumb show she loves called Sunset Harbor.

They drink, talk and laugh. Somehow, Max seems to get closer and closer without moving his barstool, and there is gentle touching. Amy has been dying to touch him, to feel that hard body, and he finally finds the courage, putting his arm on Max' bicep and giving it a squeeze. Without even realizing it, Amy has grown comfortable talking to Max. He finds the courage to put his hand on Max's chest, and it's so hard and flat, like a piece of steel. The feeling of his soft little hand against that steel sends shivers through Amy's body.

They dance. They talk and laugh some more. "Come on," Max says. "Let's go back to my place for a nightcap."

Amy giggles. He knows what that means. Is this really going to happen? Is he really going to do this? "Sounds fun," he says, getting up. Max takes his hand, and those tingles again and Amy realizes all that talking and flirting has gotten him in a state. His body is humming, and his mind is even hot. There's a connection here with Max like he's never felt before, and he wants more, a deeper connection, a physical connection.

Soon they are walking side by side, and Max has his arm around Amy's waist, his hand resting on Amy's hip. He feels safe and protected as he fits his curves into Max's hard angles. They laugh and talk about nothing, but the words mean everything.

They are surrounded by skyscrapers, all flickering with lights, and old fashioned looking yellow cabs zoom down the streets. They pass other couples, groups of friends laughing. When they pass a single man, walking along, staring into the distance, Amy feels for him. She can see the loneliness. She has been that man most of her life, and she is glad now she is walking with a friend and a cute one at that.

When they get to Max's place, he makes drinks. "A mojito for the lady," he says, and Amy is so flattered he even remembered her drink. "Lighting: Romantic Evening," Jeff said, and now the room is softly lit by the golden glow of dozens of flickering candles.

They sit on the couch, and Amy is nervous, playing with his hair. Max brushes the hair away from Amy's face, cups his chin, and Amy is freaking out inside as he leans in and kisses him. They linger in that first kiss, Max's hand against Amy's soft cheek, each one tasting, testing, getting to know each other on this new, more intimate level. Amy is stiff at first, but it feels so good, and he feels so safe with Max, and he doesn't want Max to feel weird or rejected, so he begins to answer Max's passion with his own, and Max is lowering him onto his back, and kissing and Amy feels Max's hand on his breast, and wow! So, that's what it feels like!

Clothes start coming off. Skin slides against skin. Flesh against flesh. Max's hand finds its way between Amy's legs, and Amy squeals, pushing back, away. It feels so good, it's terrifying and much as she needs and wants it, she shakes her head.

"What's wrong?" Max says.

Amy sighs. Don't do this, he tells himself. Don't ruin this like you ruin everything. He looked at Max, expecting to see he doesn't know- anger? Disgust?

But Max's eyes are soft and filled with compassion.

"I just got scared," Amy admits, and then, "This is my first- I'm a virgin."

Amy feels vulnerable now in a way he has never felt. He's just been honest about something that shames him on so many levels, and he's terrified Max will connect the dots and realize that a hot girl in this world who's also a virgin must be a guy.

If Max is thinking any of that, it doesn't show, which is still all puppy dog compassion. He puts a hand on Amy's calf. "It's okay," he says. "We don't have to do anything you're not comfortable with."

Omigod. Those words, the way he says them. Amy practically leaps on him now. She needs to kiss him and be held by him, and when Amy feels his hard member pressing against her body the fear is all gone and she just wants him and needs him.

Max is on top of her now, kissing, caressing. Amy can't wait. She reaches down and finds his dick, and it feels so good, and she guides it into her, and Max makes this grunting sound like a bear, and it drives Amy wild as she feels him inside her, thrusting, and it hurts and it's the best hurt she has ever felt and there is a heat building in her center, a tension and it grows hotter and more intense and hotter and more intense and then it explodes, a supernova of pure pleasure through every cell in her body and Amy hears herself scream, "Yes! Oh, God, yes."

When it's over, a dazed and happy Amy doesn't know what to do. Is she supposed to leave now? She should probably head back to her place. But Max surprises her again. "You should sleep over," he says. "I don't want you walking home this late at night."

The city, Recon Junction, is perfectly safe. In the social setting, there is no violence, no crime. But it's the gesture, the protectiveness that has Amy swooning. It's all been a dream— her dream of her first time.

The tears come. It's too much. She still doesn't think she deserves this, to be this happy. Max holds her. He doesn't speak. He doesn't need to. He just holds her and kisses her on the head, and somehow she feels everything is going to be okay.

Sure, those hateful voices say. As long as he never finds out you're actually a fat, disgusting pig.