

## CHAPTER 1

Hello? That wasn't a body he recognized. Jace grabbed his towel and unnecessarily wiped non-existent sweat from his forehead so he could check out the curvaceous vision in the gym's mirror. Milton Fitness had a small, regular clientele and he knew all of them and certainly no one in town had cotton-candy-pink hair. That was definitely a city look. Maybe she was just passing through.

Hourglass figure which her over-sized t-shirt couldn't conceal and great legs in plain black lycra. She definitely wasn't calling attention to herself like so many of the gym barbies. Her biceps weren't bad either, he noted as she curled a pair of 5kg hand-weights. She wasn't watching herself in the mirror, so he couldn't see her face. She didn't like being watched? Jace grinned. Not his kind of woman.

He lay back on the bench and gripped the barbell above him. He didn't want to be caught ogling. There'd be more opportunity to check her out once he'd finished his reps.

She stayed in his peripheral vision as he moved through his circuit, still elusively keeping her back to him so that he wondered if it was deliberate. Now he was more intrigued by that possibility than by actually wanting to see her. Sure enough, as soon as he moved towards the (chin up thing), she moved on to her next station.

Ok, her rowing machine faced a mirror and even if she wasn't watching herself, if he did some kilometers on the treadmill behind her, he'd finally get to see her face. He hated the fucking treadmill. It was boring and he got enough cardio workout on the other equipment, but it gave him a great view of the sheen of sweat on the back of her neck, beneath her roughly pinned-up hair, and the play of her shoulder muscles as she pulled on the handle.

She was serious about her workout and there was definitely something sexy about a woman who put her all into physical exertion. And a woman who obviously looked after her body. Her eyes were down as she concentrated on her stroke but when the whir of the machine slowed, she lifted her chin, and her black-outlined eyes met his in the mirror.

Jace didn't look away immediately, holding their connection just long enough to give her a smile and take in the flush on her cheekbones. She didn't smile back and looked away, getting off the machine so quickly that she momentarily caught. As she turned in profile and headed towards the change-room something vaguely familiar sparked in Jace's memory.

But he didn't know anyone with pink hair. Or anyone who would dye their hair. He shook off the feeling and stopped the treadmill now that he didn't need his vantage point. When she walked out of the change area, she was astutely giving attention to the zip of her bag as she walked past him on the lift. Jace watched her walk away, as much as to check out her sweetly rounded ass as to see if anything else gave off a familiar vibe.

It didn't, but he was intrigued.

After his workout, as he headed back to his property, he was tempted to detour to his family home. His mother was always up on the latest local gossip. She'd know about anyone new in town. But as he came to the T-intersection he turned towards his own home.

He loved seeing his mother, but as he was now the only one of her three sons who wasn't married, he bore the brunt of her penchant for matchmaking. The hint of interest in a woman would have her declaring two grand children certainly weren't enough and that he wasn't holding up his end of continuing the Bedford line.

He wasn't anti-marriage, and he'd love nothing more than a woman to share his life with, but he knew there weren't too many women around who might understand his particular 'needs'. And if he was going to have an honest relationship, he wasn't going to compromise on being himself. Suppressing desires, he'd seen first-hand, too often lead to deception and that could be a one-way ticket to hurting the one you loved and killing a relationship.

He'd rather stay single.