

Chapter One

-One month before the events of The Ring Ch.01-

We locked eyes.

I smiled. She looked away quickly, but I caught her shy smile.

Long dark hair, beautiful green eyes, full lips.

She will do.

Taking my wine glass, I made the journey towards her. Even though she was just at the back of the bar, sitting alone and staring out the window towards the lake, the trip wasn't simple.

There were men between us, and that always meant problems. Most were respectful and just shot me interested smiles, but there were always the bolder ones. A couple of them whistled at me and one even tried to grab my arm.

"Fuck off." I shoved his greedy fingers away. Luckily, he got the hint and backed off, but not before giving me the evil eye and muttering under his breath.

"Bitch."

Anger boiled within me. I had a hundred different ways to ruin his life. All I needed to do was make a simple call. Any other day and he would have been fucked, but tonight wasn't a night for drama. I bottled up my emotions and journeyed on.

Fuck men. All they do is take, take, and take. I prefer the other side of the world's buffet. The nicer, more feminine side.

When I reached her, she still had her gaze towards the lake outside.

"Searching for ghosts?" I said.

That got her attention. For the second time that night, we locked eyes.

“I—I’m sorry?”

She had a beautiful voice. Soft. Very feminine.

“The lake.” I nodded towards it. “There have been too many suicides there. Especially recently. Three in the past month alone.”

Her eyes went wide. She turned back towards the haunted lake. “Really?”

I gave her a grim smile, and she returned it nervously.

“Do...” She cleared her throat, looking away. “Do you want to sit?”

“Sure.” I placed my glass down and slid to the bench opposite her.

“My name’s Linda.” She cleared her throat one more time, and that seemed to give her the courage she needed to look at me. She reached out for a handshake. “Nice to meet you.”

“Clara.” I glanced at her outstretched palm. “I only shake the hands of acquaintances.”

“Oh?” She retracted her invitation. “We’re not going to be acquaintances?”

I smiled. “No.”

She laughed, a sweet sound that brightened up the whole bar. “I—I’m sorry. I think you’re being mistaken.” She tucked a lock of hair behind an ear. “I have a boyfriend.”

“And?”

She laughed once more. “Even if I don’t, I... I’m not interested in women. I mean, you’re beautiful...” She exhaled, correcting herself. “You’re dead-drop gorgeous, Clara, but... I’m happy with what I have now.”

“Hmm.” I raised my glass, twirled the red around, then took a slow sip. “Have you ever been with a woman before?”

She chuckled, face growing flush. “Yes—once. I don’t know why I’m even telling you this. But, yes. And... I don’t think it’s to my taste.”

“Maybe she wasn’t good enough.”

She tried to stiffen her giggles, but failed miserably. “I think we should keep this conversation... PG-13.” She paused and leaned back in her seat, eyeing me from head to tits. “How old are you?”

“Guess.”

“Umm...” She took another look at me. “I hope you’re not under eighteen.” She blinked. “... are you?”

“Nineteen.”

“Cool. I’m just a year older.”

“Still studying?”

“No.” A smile. “I’m a writer.”

Before I could say anything, she quickly added. ‘But don’t ask me for my books or my pen name!’ She made a sound, like a half-squeal, half-laugh. “I hate it when people ask me that. I’d never give it away!”

Leaning forward, I propped my head up on my elbow. “You write smut.”

“How—” Her face flushed pink. No.”

“It’s okay. I won’t ask for details.”

“You?” She chewed on her bottom lip. “What do you do?”

“I sell trinkets.”

“Oh...” She straightened up. “What kind?”

“The best kind. I should bring you to my store one day.”

She glanced down and then there was silence. I didn't mind. I was fully comfortable with the quiet, but I could tell she wasn't. She was fidgeting with her fingers and chewing her lips a lot, every so often glancing up to see if I was still checking her out.

I was.

Finally, she sighed.

“Fuck it,” she muttered. “I have a room booked nearby. Wanna come and continue our conversation there?”

I raised a brow. “I thought you weren't interested in women?”

“I'm hoping you could change my mind about that.”

“I certainly will.” I stood up first and motioned for her to take my hand. “We're going to mine. It isn't that far away.”

She took my hand, and I led her through the thick bar crowd. There was a live band playing, but I didn't like the lead singer's voice. It was too harsh.

Thankfully, we didn't run into problems getting out, and soon we were breathing the chilly night air.

“You're used to getting things your way, aren't you?” she asked. “I can tell with how you talk. Your body language too.”

I shrugged.

“I’m not from around here,” she said as we were walking. “I’m only staying for the weekend. I had writer’s block and needed some inspiration, so I came here.”

“You came to the right place.” I turned, catching her green eyes. “I’ll give you enough inspiration.”

Linda blushed. “Do you do this often? Because I don’t.” A giggle. “I’ve actually never done this before. You must do this a ton.”

“I don’t,” I said. And I meant it. I was *extremely* picky about my women.

She kept talking, trying to fill in the holes between our conversation, not comfortable with the silence.

“You don’t go up to random strangers in bars and seduce them?”

“I didn’t seduce anybody.” We reached my car, and I unlocked it. “All we had was a nice chat. The seduction comes later.”

Her giggles were cut short when she looked at my ride.

“Is this yours?” She stood in front of the Porsche and waved at it like it was some mystical beast.

I nodded. “Get in.”

During the twenty-minute drive, I learned more about Linda.

She didn’t come here just because of writer’s block. Linda needed to get away from her monotonous life. It was killing her creativity and her drive for life. She needed something new. Her boyfriend was an architect, and although she loved him—they were even planning to get married within the next three years—she always felt something was missing in her life.

"I guess that's why I'm here in a stranger's car, not knowing what's about to happen," she said. "I've always been the 'good girl' and followed the books." She sighed. "Graduate university, find a job, get married, have kids, die. Boring. I need some... spice."

"And I'm supposed to be the spice?"

"Fingers crossed."

"We're almost here," I said as we made a left, stopping in front of a gated entrance. The guards took one look at me, then allowed me to pass.

"A private beach?" She sounded surprised, glancing around. There were only a few houses along the shore, and I made a stop in front of the middle one.

Linda turned to me. "You live here?"

"Sometimes." Killing the engine, I got out, but it took Linda a few seconds to compose herself.

"Sometimes?" she repeated just as I reached the porch and keyed in the passcode, then bypassed the tedious biometric scans. "Just how rich are you?"

I ignored her, pushing the door open and stepping into the foyer. The lights were on and even though I hadn't been here in months, the place was kept pristine.

There were footsteps to the right. Jasmine came into view just as Linda stepped behind me.

"I'm sorry, my lady," my housekeeper hurried towards me then bowed. "I wasn't expecting you. Your room is already prepared. Shall I get you anything?"

"No need." I motioned Linda to follow. We crossed the living room and headed up the stairs.

The house wasn't large, and I liked it that way. Everyone loved the idea of mansions until they lived in one. It was always too big, too dark, too gloomy. A nightmare.

"My lady?" Linda whispered as we made our way through the hallway. "Are you some kind of princess or something?"

"Not quite." I didn't like the fact that she was asking so many questions. But I understood her curiosity, so I kept my annoyance at the minimum.

We made it to the Master bedroom. I stood at the doorway, motioning for my companion to step into the darkness first.

Linda obeyed, breezing past me. I liked her perfume. It suited her perfectly. Fresh, sweet, and fruity.

I clicked on the lights and closed the door, striding towards the mini bar area I had installed for occasions like these. It wasn't that I brought women home often, but I guessed tonight had me feeling a little lonely.

I took two wine glasses and retrieved my favorite red. I wasn't looking at Linda, but I was aware of her movements. She strolled around the place for a while before setting her nice ass down on the sofa.

"You haven't told me much about yourself," Linda commented as I came over to her to pass her a glass. "I feel like you already know my entire life story. Care to balance it out?"

I sat right next to her and swirled my wine around.

"I'm a pretty private person," I said, dipping my nose to smell the red.

"I mean..." she exhaled. "I won't pry, but you brought me here and I'm so curious... what do you do for a living? You can't just be selling trinkets and owning places like these. Something's not right."

"I told you—I sell trinkets."

“That’s it?”

“That’s it.” I took a sip of the wine. I liked this red. It was one of my favorites. Fruity and sweet. Just like Linda.

She let out a laugh, stealing my attention away.

I raised one eyebrow, and she explained.

“Look at you—so dark and mysterious. And sipping your wine like that.” She let out another laugh again. “It’s fucking sexy.”

“Mhm.” I let my gaze roam my companion for the night. One look at her and I knew she was different from the other women in the bar. The others all wore low cut dresses that screamed ‘I want attention’.

Linda chose a knitted top that left everything above her tits bare. Comboed with dark jeans, her outfit was simple and elegant. I liked it.

“You’re getting me nervous looking at me like that,” Linda teased me with a giggle.

“Drink your wine.” I took another sip, then set the glass down on the coffee table in front of us.

She took her first sip, and I knew by her expression she wasn’t the biggest fan of wine. But she didn’t complain, making me like her even more. She was obedient and didn’t make a fuss. Just my type.

“I still don’t know anything about you,” Linda complained, setting her glass down too. “I don’t want to make you uncomfortable, but could you care to share something simple? Perhaps... your favorite color?”

“Black.” I made the first move, setting a hand over her knee.

She bit her lower lip, her green eyes studying mine.

“How about...” I drew slow circles on her knee, and I could tell it was affecting her. She took a while to complete her sentence, her breaths growing heavier. “Your... your favorite dish?”

I didn't bother to answer that. I took her chin, then trailed my finger along her sharp jawline. I felt Linda shiver. Her breaths picked up.

She leaned towards me. I smiled, then pulled her in, completing the connection.

She moaned as I savored her, going slow, swallowing her little moans, meeting her breaths, feeling her submit to me completely.

When I finally had my fill, I pulled back.

“Shit...” She ran her thumb across her glistening lips. “You're a fucking great kisser.”

“Am I now?” I took her hand, leading us towards the bed. “Come.”

I guessed she thought she was allowed on my bed because she looked confused when I let go of her a few feet away and told her to stay right there.

I continued on, perching myself at the edge of the bed.

I nodded at her to begin, as if she knew what I expected of her. “Strip.”

She didn't question me. Never even complained. Linda started with her white top, clearing it off her head and dropping the unneeded clothing down to her feet. Her tits were covered with a dull bra, but her chest was amazing. Large, round, and full.

She stood there, letting me look at her like the good girl she was. Her body was lean and amazing. Good. I'd never fuck a girl with an unfit body. Swallowing my smile, I nodded for her to continue.

Her jeans dropped to her ankles, leaving her with only her underwear. She paused to let me admire, but I gave her another quick nod.

Her bra came off, revealing exactly what I had imagined. Full, round tits with perky nipples. Her panties came off next.

With her dark hair let down, tits out, her pussy shaven, lips glistening, Linda was a vision.

“Do you like what you see?” She tried to sound sexy and confident, but her tone betrayed her, failing to hide how nervous she was.

“You’re gorgeous, Linda.”

She preened at my compliment, and then it was my turn. Making sure she was looking, I dipped my hands beneath my skirt, and within a few moments, my panties were among the pile of clothing on the floor

I straightened myself. “Kneel.”

Linda stared at me to see if I was serious. She was smart, quickly noticing I was. She paused for a while, running over her thoughts, deciding whether she actually wanted to follow through with the command.

She closed her eyes, exhaled. When I saw her greens again, I knew she made her decision.

Linda sank to her knees.

“Good girl.” I didn’t hide my smile this time. “Now...” Patting my thighs, I issued another command. “Crawl towards me.”

This time, she didn’t hesitate, resigned to the power dynamic I had set for us. It was clear she never had this power play with her husband. A pity. Linda clearly enjoyed this.

She went on all fours and crawled towards me. When she was near, I clicked my tongue, and she stopped, returning to her kneeling position, waiting for further instructions.

I didn't need to tell her what to do. I rolled my skirt up, revealing my sex, and the instructions were obvious.

She gulped, looking between my pussy and me.

"I have never—"

"It's okay," I told her, my voice growing soft. Understanding. Just for a moment. "I don't expect world class treatment. Just do what I say and I'll derive my enjoyment from your obedience." I reached down and jerked her chin up, making her gasp. "Do you understand me?"

"Yes," she squeaked. "I understand."

I loved the look on her. Her green eyes showed everything I want my woman to have. Submission, fear, obedience.

God, she was sexy.

Linda gasped again when I let go of her chin. I nodded for her to begin, spreading my legs apart.

She shifted forward, gulped, then dived right in.

She didn't need to mention it was her first time. It was obvious. She didn't go for my clit. Instead, she used her lips to suck my pussy lips, and then her tongue came forward, eagerly licking.

I swallowed my chuckle and laid back against my elbows, enjoying her innocence.

"Good," I said, giving her encouragement. "Keep going, Linda."

She was slowly figuring it out. Her tongue found my clit, and I jerked a bit, not anticipating the sudden jolt of pleasure.

“Yes.” I exhaled. “Good girl.”

She licked and sucked on my clit for a long while, eager to please me. But she could be there for an hour, and I wouldn’t even be close to an orgasm—no fault on her part. I was notoriously hard to please, and the last time I actually had an orgasm was a far dream away.

“Stop.” I sat up and stroked her head.

“What’s wrong?” Her green eyes studied mine. “Did I do something wrong?”

“You did amazing, darling.” I pointed to the far shelf across the room. “Do you see the toys on my shelves?”

She laughed. “That’s the first thing I noticed when you turned on the lights.”

“Fetch the harness for me. The black one. And grab a dildo you’d be most comfortable with. Don’t worry, they’re all sanitized.”

She stood up, almost stumbling backwards from her weak knees. Another short laugh. “I can’t believe I’m actually doing this. All I had planned was a nice drink at a bar.”

I stayed silent, watching her ass sway as she turned and headed towards the shelves.

But just as she grabbed the harness, there was a knock on the door.

“Who is it?” I called out.

“My lady, I’m so sorry.” Jasmine said. “But—”

I was sure I locked the door, but a second later, Jasmine's words got cut short when the door burst right open, and a man strode in.

Linda yelped, turned away, used her hands to cover herself up. I stood right in my spot, sighing when I realized who it was.

Oliver surveyed the room. Linda shrieked again when his attention came to her, but she wasn't a threat, so after he made sure the room was clear, his sharp eyes drifted towards me. I still had my legs apart, and he could see *everything*. I shot him a scowl and stood up, smoothing down my skirt.

"It's okay," I told Linda. "Calm down."

"Who..." Linda was a confused mess, and I felt the tiniest tingle in me. I actually felt bad for her. She looked at the man who had just interrupted us. Oliver was huge, with broad arms, an overly muscular frame, and a stern military face—he was a walking danger sign. "W-Who is that?"

"Nobody you should worry about," I reassured her. "Relax. I'll deal with this. Stay here. It'll only be a moment."

With that, I walked past Oliver, heading outside. Jasmine was standing at the doorway and she backed off to let me pass.

"My lady..." She started to say, but I put a hand up.

"I know you didn't snitch," I told my housekeeper. "Return to your room and get some sleep. I'll handle this."

She nodded, took a look towards Oliver, who was just behind me, then scurried away.

I sighed again, then motioned for the big doofus to follow. "Come."

We headed downstairs to the living room, and I pointed towards the set of sofas in front of us. "Sit."

He didn't sit. Instead, he crossed his huge arms over his chest and I saw that he had two rings around his fingers. The ruby was not among them. The ruby

enslaved minds, but for Oliver, his loyalty was absolute, with or without the ring. Papa could snap his fingers and Oliver would follow any order without thought or question.

Instead, he wore the sapphire and the onyx ring. The onyx ring was for knowledge. One touch and the user would know everything about the person he just touched. All the secrets, all the knowledge. Everything. Extracting information has never been easier.

I wore mine from time to time, but I never liked it. I'd rather get to know a person organically. Stealing it all with just one touch felt cheap.

The sapphire ring wrapped around Oliver's index finger was the only piece of jewelry I never took off. It gave the user the strength of five grown men. Extremely important for me since I never bothered with security.

Oliver clearly didn't need the extra strength. He could already kill a man just as quickly as he could blink, but with the extra strength boost, he was deadlier than ever.

I glared at him. "What do you want?"

When I said 'you', we both knew I actually didn't mean him.

Oliver spoke out, his voice matching his looks. Confident and powerful.

"He wants to speak to you."

"How did you find me?" I crossed my arms too. "I removed the tracker from my car. Yeah, I found that. I cleared my phone too, and I wasn't being followed. So how the fuck did you know I was here?"

I didn't know why I asked. He would never answer that.

As expected, he kept his lips sealed.

“Doesn’t Daddy know there’s an invention called a phone?” I stepped forward, probably one of the few people not intimidated by Papa’s head of security. No matter how scary Oliver was, he wouldn’t lay a finger on me. “Can’t he just like... call?”

“He’s outside.”

“Out...” I blinked. “He’s outside?”

“Yes.”

I turned away, cursing under my breath. Shit. Why was he here? He was supposed to be on a business trip somewhere in Europe. And why today of all days?

Fuck.

Knowing I couldn’t escape my fate, I started towards the front door. I could hear Oliver right behind me.

There was a Bentley parked right beside my car, and I caught a figure in the far distance. A man standing on the beach, hands behind his back, his gaze set to the ocean.

Papa.

Something sharp hit my chest—nothing physical. I knew this feeling all too well. His presence always brought the same fear it always did.

Kicking off my heels, I made the journey towards him barefooted.

Papa didn’t bother to turn as we got closer. Oliver came to a stop at a respectable distance away, giving us a private conversation. I continued on, only stopping a few feet away from Papa.

He didn't say a word. He was still staring towards the ocean, and coincidentally or not, there was a full moon above us, illuminating Papa in a haunting gloom.

"Daddy," I greeted him, knowing I had to speak first.

It was a power play. In our world, talking first meant submitting power. On almost every occasion, people knew their place and spoke to me first. But with Papa... I had to play into his game.

He still hasn't said a word. He was a statue, unmoving, and I shifted my feet in the sand. I hated this. I hated the position I was in and I despised all the emotions bubbling inside of me.

Finally, he spoke out, making me shiver.

"Who is that woman with you?"

"She's nothing you need to worry ab—"

"Who is that woman?" He turned around, and I averted my gaze, looking down at my feet as he glared at me. "Answer me directly when I ask you a question."

"Her name is Linda." I sniffed. "I met her just now in the bar."

"In a bar." His voice grew lower, making it clear he didn't approve. "My daughter does not go to... *bars*."

He punctuated the last word with venom.

I looked to the side, still refusing to make eye contact. "I'm sorry."

"Come here."

Fuck.

I didn't dare hesitate. Walking forward a few steps, I stopped when I was within striking distance of him. I already knew what was coming.

"And what were you planning on doing with her?" Papa asked. He never raised his voice, but he might as well shouted the question.

I hung my head and steeled myself for the pain. "To have sex."

It came next. The blow I had been anticipating.

My left cheek throbbed, but I kept silent, not wanting to react and give him the satisfaction. When I was much younger, I always cried when the pain came, but now I knew better.

"Look at me, Clara."

Gathering the courage, I looked straight into his eyes, trying my best not to flinch. Like mine, his irises were hazels, but darker. Much darker.

"Has there been a moment in your life when you wanted something and I didn't give it to you?" he asked.

I shook my head. "No, Daddy. You gave me everything I ever wanted."

"Don't you think it's about time you return the favor?"

"Yes, Daddy."

"So, why are you wasting my time? Why are you going out to *bars* and bringing whores back to my house?"

"I'm sorry, Daddy. It won't happen again."

"It won't happen again," he huffed, then looked away, finally breaking eye contact.

There was silence again. I could feel Oliver's presence a distance behind us. He couldn't hear exactly what was being said, but I briefly wondered how many times Oliver had witnessed this exact scenario.

He had been serving Papa for as long as I could remember, so he has seen *everything*. The ugly and the hideous.

Papa broke the quiet. "How old are you?"

He obviously knew my age, but he just wanted me to say it.

"Nineteen."

"Nineteen," he confirmed. "At nineteen, all your friends are already mothers."

I closed my eyes.

"Look." He showed me his right hand, pointing to all the colorful stones decorated around his fingers. "Long ago, I discovered an ancient power and harnessed it into these rings. And despite this power, despite all the years of trying to search for a way to slow down my aging, I fear my time might be running out."

I stayed silent.

"I'm getting older, Clara. And before I leave this world and pass all my worldly possessions to you. I must know my legacy will leave on. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"Yes, Daddy."

He shook his head. "Many men have tried to court you. Many fine men. Why have you not chosen a single one yet?"

"I don't know, Daddy."

"You do." He tilted my chin up with a finger, forcing me to look at him. "I don't care if you prefer women. All I need is a son. That's all I ever ask of you."

I nodded.

He dropped his hand, sighing. "You have all your mother's beauty, Clara. This should not be a difficult task."

I nodded again.

"I have never given you a deadline and I will not make that mistake again." He raised a finger and instincts had me flinching. "One year. You have one year to bear a child. If it's not a boy, you try again."

I almost made the mistake of looking down at my feet.

"I have more conditions," he continued. "The man you lay with. He doesn't need to be committed to you but he has to be of good standing. I don't want my child to be born from..." He thought of a suitable word. "Filth. No more bars, Clara. And only from men I approve of. Have I made myself clear?"

"Crystal."

"One year. Do not fail me."

"Yes, Daddy."

That was that. He walked off.

I watched him go, with his lap dog just a few steps behind him.

I stood there even until they were long gone. I wanted to wallow in my misery until the sun came up, but I had a guest waiting for me.

Sometimes I wished I wasn't an only child. Having a brother would ease all my duties.

But then again, I liked the attention my parents had given me, even if it was few and far between. I would lap up anything and everything they gave me. I also loved power. Having control of Papa's empire was a feeling I'd never share with anyone else. It was all mine and mine alone.

I huffed a short laugh, recalling a memory from my childhood. My mother pushing me on a swing with Papa looking on from a distance. I missed my mother. She left the world way too early, and Papa loved her dearly. After she passed, he refused to have a child with any other woman. He used the control ring for dominion and for politics—not for love. Unlike me.

Papa was proud of me. He loved me. I knew he did. But it was understandable why he had been pressuring me to have a child.

It was decided. I had to perform my duties. Bear a young, healthy boy that would grow up to be as strong as Papa.

Making my way back to the beach house, a single thought crossed my mind.

Would I even be a good mother?

I chuckled.

I needed to stop asking myself stupid questions.