

# Chapter One

Candi was going to stay in her office.

It was not a normal day. If it had been a normal meeting on a normal workday morning, she would have been in the conference room going over the numbers with Lisa and Dave. She liked to prepare herself with the most recent figures, so she wouldn't be taken by surprise. Uncertainty was weakness, and Candi considered herself anything but weak.

On a normal day, she might even have sent Julie out for coffee and a mid-morning snack. Some refreshments now and then kept the team happy, and a happy team was a productive team. But she hadn't sent Julie for coffee. Instead she had instructed her assistant to buzz her when the meeting was about to start.

She pulled a small mirror out of her desk drawer and examined her face. Her makeup was subdued but attractive. She always wore a little bit of extra mascara and eyeliner when she was at work so that her deep blue eyes would stand out behind her glasses. She mentally pronounced herself looking pretty damn good for a woman in her mid thirties, and pulled out a tube of red lipstick to add some drama.

Candi was a small woman, so she had always made it a point at work to dress with an authoritative air. She had come a long way up the corporate ladder, and it wasn't because she was cute. She prided herself on her no nonsense approach to business and her direct style of communication with those in positions both above and below her own. She practiced the basics, looking people directly in the eye and adding a bit of a squeeze to her handshakes. That day she was wearing a black business suit with an ivory blouse. Her black pumps had unassuming three-inch heels, enough to add some height but not so high that she looked like she had something to prove.

She glanced out her office window and watched a bird make its way along the edge of the building. She wondered briefly where that bird went each evening after it was done exploring the highest parts of the city. Maybe it had a nest somewhere where another bird was waiting. Maybe

it turned itself into a fish and splashed into a world that was completely new and absolutely nothing like what a bird would experience from day to day.

The buzzer on her phone interrupted her thoughts. “Miss Sands? Mr. Reed has arrived.”

“Thank you, Julie,” Candi said, pushing and releasing the button on her phone. She stood up and smoothed her skirt. She took a deep breath and smiled to herself. Then she walked purposefully through her office door and down the hall to the conference room.

Four people were already seated at the large table. Julie was on one side ready to take notes on her net book. Her project managers, Lisa and Dave, were seated at the other side of the table. Lisa had a pen tucked behind her ear, held in place by a mass of red curls. She and Dave were looking at her open laptop and quietly discussing something.

The last person in the room was Tucker Reed. Candi was annoyed that Tucker had taken the chair at the head of the conference table usually reserved for the highest ranking person in the host company. She didn't let her feelings show, but instead set her sights on the chair between his and Julie's. Tucker had gotten to his feet when she had entered the room. She pasted a professional, slightly disconnected smile on her face as she approached him.

“Tucker,” she said, shaking his hand.

“How are you, Candace?” he asked, sounding like he didn't care very much about the answer. Tucker's handshake was firm and confident, as always.

“I'm well.” She took the seat next to him and hoped the others in the room couldn't hear her heart thumping against her chest.

Tucker was a feast for female eyes, and Candi found it hard to conceal her attraction. He wore a perfectly pressed black suit with a fashionable but business appropriate tie. His dark eyes had the look of liquid and his mouth was shaped for all kinds of decadent pleasures.

Candi forced her breath to a normal pace. She did not want Tucker to know she was burning for him. She knew Tucker Reed very well, and he would use it against her if he could. Business was business, and he was in a position to make her look great in the eyes of her company's higher ups. She was determined to be the one in control of this meeting, and she wanted to keep him off balance. She let her leg glide against his under the table, and she smiled at the surprise and then desire that registered in his eyes. Then she quickly abandoned her victim and turned her attention to Lisa.

“Let’s get started. I looked over the numbers, and it seems like everything’s a go,” Candi said confidently. “What did you and Dave come up with?”

Lisa glanced at her computer and then up at Candi and then Tucker. Candi saw the flush in Lisa’s face when she looked at the man, and Tucker saw it too. Candi mentally ordered Lisa to calm down and try to be professional. She didn’t want Tuck to think he had the upper hand with anyone in the room.

“Everything looks good,” Lisa reported. “The system is on target, and we’re ready to roll.”

Julie handed Candi a file folder. It was full of reports Candi had spent several hours poring over line by line. She was familiar with all the data, and she was ready for the attack. Candi knew exactly what she needed to do.

She pasted a calm, competent look on her face and turned her eyes toward Tucker. “Are we ready to make this happen?”

Tucker grinned, but Candi didn’t take the bait. She shut down the butterflies in her heart, and she kept her poker face steady.

“We’re ready,” said Tucker, taking command of the room just like he always did. “I looked over the package Julie faxed me. Thank you, Julie.”

Candi was annoyed to see that Tucker’s attention had made Julie blush. Was anyone immune to him? She knew that the key to a successful meeting was keeping Tucker’s over-confidence in check.

Tucker continued. “The first set works for me as it’s laid out here. On the second set, I want to push the percentage to twelve.”

Lisa and Dave exchanged glances. Dave shrunk into his chair, obviously ready for a long and boring meeting. Twelve was a ridiculous offer. It was obvious that Tucker wanted to negotiate, and he was starting sky high. Candi was almost offended by the game Tucker was playing, but she kept her cool. She had a game of her own to win.

Candi pretended to look over the papers in front of her. She had known since early that morning what she was going to say. She looked up at Tucker. “I can’t do better than five.”

She was pleased to see his eyes open wider, but she didn’t allow it to show on her face. Tucker quickly regained his composure and looked directly at her. He was clearly surprised by her counter offer. “Five?” he said incredulously.

The tension in the room had gone from light to thick in a matter of seconds. Dave and Lisa were looking nervous. Every person in the room knew that she was low balling Tucker with five percent. But she and Tuck were the only ones who knew that Tucker's company stood to lose a lot of money if this deal didn't happen quickly. She knew more about Reed Enterprises than most of its employees. She was more than willing to use this information against the great Tucker Reed himself.

"Ten," Tucker countered. It was a command, not a question. His voice was low and serious. Candi could see that he was done playing and was ready to get tough.

Candi looked him straight in the eye. "Five."

She saw the tiny spark of anger flair up in his face, but she also noted the desire in his eyes. Her heart fluttered, but her gaze remained steady.

"Five isn't going to work for me," Tucker said evenly.

"Then we'll have to keep working on it. I'll have Lisa and Dave's team look over the specifics again, and we'll try for something next week," she said. "Set up a meeting with Julie for Friday."

She cocked her head and waited for his next move. She knew damn well that Tucker couldn't put this off any longer than absolutely necessary. Even at five percent he was better off taking it than walking away.

Both Lisa and Dave looked like their mouths were going to fall open from shock. Thankfully Tucker's attention was focused on Candi.

He lowered his voice and stared at her with intensity. "I'll agree to five, but I want it in the works tomorrow."

"I have no problem with that," Candi said brightly. "Julie will have the paperwork to you later this afternoon."

She stood, and so did Tucker. He shook her hand formally, gathered his things, nodded goodbye to the others and left the room.

They all stayed silent until they could no longer hear his footsteps in the hallway. Then Candi breathed a sigh of relief.

"What the hell was that?" Lisa asked, laughter and shock in her voice. "Five percent? Candace, you're a ball buster."

Candi grinned. “You put together a great package, and I know you two worked long hours on it. Take a long lunch. You too, Julie. You all deserve it.”

They began to put away their paperwork and laptops. “You were great,” Julie told Candi. “That Tucker Reed makes me jittery every time he looks at me or even talks to me on the phone.”

Candi knew the feeling but wasn’t about to admit it. “He’s just a man.”

“Just a fabulously wealthy and crazy gorgeous man,” said Lisa. “His eyes are to die for.”

“I wasn’t looking at his eyes,” quipped Dave. “Did you get a look at his ass?”

Julie and Lisa both nodded in awed agreement.

“Get out of here,” said Candi with mock irritation. “All I see when I look at him is a way to make money for the company.”

“That’s why you’re the boss,” said Dave. He gave her a high five on the way out the door.

The rest of the day went by quickly. Candi was distracted by work and barely noticed when the sun began to set outside her office window.

At six o’clock that evening, Candi used her key to enter Tucker Reed’s apartment. He owned a high end two-bedroom in the heart of the city. The space wasn’t huge, but it was in a luxury building and was stocked with necessities of only the best quality. A concierge was on call twenty-four hours a day, and housekeeping and maintenance services were available at the touch of a button.

She steadied herself before she let the door close behind her and called to him. She just wasn’t sure what kind of mood he would be in after the meeting that morning. “Tuck? Tucker?”

“I’m in the office,” Tucker answered.

She breathed more easily. She had been hoping he wasn’t mad about the meeting. His friendly voice told her that he understood that it was only business and that he was ready for a change of atmosphere.

Candi dropped her bag onto the sofa and went into the second bedroom that served as Tucker’s home office. It was a clean, efficient room with a desktop of clear glass and black shelving on the walls. Tucker’s desk faced a window that opened onto a breathtaking view of the city, which was especially gorgeous at night. He spun his chair around to face her. She came closer and he pulled her onto his lap.

“That was quite a performance today.” He began to kiss her neck and then lightly bit her ear.

She wasn’t surprised he had mentioned the meeting, but she was too busy melting into his arms to really think about it. She closed her eyes and let his touch envelop her. “I’m going to get an amazing bonus,” she murmured.

Tucker guided her face toward his and kissed her. It was a pressing kiss, insistent and almost rough. “When are you going to come work for me? You know I’ll double whatever Foster is giving you.”

She moved her legs to straddle him. Then she took off her suit jacket and draped her arms around his neck. “There is no way in hell I’m working for you.”

“Reed Enterprises needs you on our side, not working against us.” He reached for her bottom and squeezed. “Five percent?”

She smiled. “I might have had inside information.”

He raised his eyebrows and looked at her in a way that gave her a delicious shiver. “I guess I’d better be more careful what I let slip in the bedroom.”

“You never slip in the bedroom,” Candi whispered. She let him lift her toward him, her pelvis against the hardness on his lap.

He pulled her toward him a few times, teasing her. Then he slapped her bottom. “Go get dressed. I’ll wait on the bed.”

She bit her lower lip and smiled. “I’ll take a shower.”

He assisted her off of his lap. Then he tapped her on the nose. “Don’t be long.”

Candi let the warm water spill over her. She liked to use Tucker’s shampoo and body wash when she showered at his place. She loved the way that the masculine scent interacted with her own feminine pheromones, and the way she could smell his essence each time she took a breath.

They nearly always played at Tucker’s apartment. It was because Tuck ran his own company, or was leader of his own empire, as he liked to say. That meant he could work from home, and that he was constantly working. Candi had rolled out of Tucker’s bed more than once in the early morning hours to find him completely focused on his computer. It made more sense for Candi to stay where he had access to his work than for Tucker to try to run his company from Candi’s small apartment.

Candi massaged shampoo into her hair and smiled, remembering several times they had played while Tucker simultaneously worked. Tucker has massaged her in all the right places and sometimes even spanked her while he talked business. The person on the other end of the phone had never even known.

Candi had her own apartment in a building a few blocks from Tuck's. She dropped by to get clothes and other essentials and sometimes she even stayed there if Tucker had a business dinner or some other obligation. Tucker had mentioned the idea of moving in together, but Candi was a person who needed plenty of time to make a decision. If that meant three years, the time that she's been seeing Tucker, then that's what it meant.

Besides, she wasn't ready to open up about their relationship to the public in general. She was working for a company with competitive interests, after all, and a relationship with Tucker might signal a halt to her professional climb. She loved her job, was passionate about it, and she wasn't ready to risk her potential career. Having Tucker most weeknights and nearly every weekend was just fine with her. It added that much more magic to their play.

When Candi had finished her shower, she dried off with one of Tucker's navy blue, fluffy towels and then wrapped it around herself. It smelled like him. She smelled like him. She felt her body relax.

The bathroom's large dressing area was open to the bedroom, and she could see Tucker on the bed. He was propped up against some pillows, studying something on his phone. He'd taken off his shoes, but was still wearing the pants from his suit. The first three buttons of his shirt were undone to reveal a snowy white undershirt. His dark hair fell casually onto his forehead. Candi had to catch her breath. Sometimes when she looked at Tucker, all she could see was desire.

She turned toward the closet and reached for a set of hangers on the far end. Those last hangers held a schoolgirl uniform, a long nightgown and several simple dresses. In the bureau drawer she also had a pair of black skinny jeans and a long sweater, bought from a junior's shop at the mall. Next to them were some short shorts, a couple of t-shirts and a whole collection of panties in various bright colors.

She slid on one of the dresses and stepped into a pair of hot pink panties. The dress was red with a blue floral pattern, and the hem came just to mid thigh. She added some white socks and slid on a pair of leather Mary Janes that she had tucked away in the back of the shoe rack.

Candi brushed out her long hair. It was a deep brown with red tones, and it hung nearly to her waist. At work she always kept it twisted up on top of her head. None of her co-workers would have guessed how long it was. She turned on the hair dryer for a few minutes and then braided it when it was still just a bit damp.

She wore no makeup or jewelry. When she looked in the mirror she could see behind any lines and discoloration of age. She saw herself as innocent and young, with bright blue eyes and a natural glow to her cheeks. She had stripped away Candace Sands - the tough businesswoman who oversaw a team full of professionals and who had responsibility for millions of corporate dollars. Here she was only Candi, and she loved herself that way. It made her long for someone strong to take her in his arms, to dominate and discipline her. And Tucker was waiting in the next room.

She stepped into the bedroom, and Tucker put down his phone.

“Well hello, Candi,” he said, appreciatively.

She smiled. “Hello, sir.”

He pulled himself up and sat on the edge of the bed. Then he extended an arm toward her, and she instinctively moved into it. She sat on his lap and fell against him. She had no responsibility, not even for the weight of her own body. Tucker was running the show now.

He smoothed her hair away from her face. “How’s my little girl?”

She let her head rest on his shoulders. “Tired,” she said.

“We’ll see if we can wake you up,” Tucker said. His eyes were soft, but his voice became a little less gentle. “I wanted to talk to you about something.”

Candi blinked. Usually there was a bit more cuddle time before jumping right in to the main event. “What is it?”

Tucker’s hand traveled to the part of Candi’s body that was perched on his lap and patted her bottom. “I heard that you were involved in a bit of a conflict today.”

She looked at him warily. “A conflict?”

Tucker nodded. “I heard that you took advantage of some other kid.”

She tried to suppress a grin. What was he doing? “Well, I got the best out of a negotiation. Is that what you mean?”



“You know I love it when my girl is a superstar,” Tucker said. “But I heard that you used special information to take advantage of someone, and that it cost him some money. That isn’t nice, is it?”

“But...”

Tucker interrupted her. “Is it?”

She lowered her head and looked up at him through her eyelashes. “No.”

Tuck looked stern, and Candi felt her stomach flip. She wasn’t sure if Tucker were playing, or if he had something more serious in mind. It caught her off guard and made her nervous in a way that shot tingles throughout her body.

Tucker shook his head. “I can’t let my little girl behave that way. I’m afraid some discipline is in order.”

Candi swallowed hard.

Tucker grinned. “You look nervous, Candi. I know you don’t like spankings, but I think you need to learn a lesson tonight about how we treat the people around us.”

Candi actually felt herself blush. “I...”

He shook his head. “I’ll do the talking, young lady. You may answer my questions, but that’s all I want to hear from you. Understood?”

“Yes sir,” Candi answered. She knew she was in for it now.

“Stand up,” he told her. She got up and let him guide her between his legs. He put both hands on her bottom and rubbed her with his fingers. “Now then, what’s going to happen here tonight?”

Candi took a breath. He was lightly tapping her bottom, but she felt it throughout her body. “I’m getting a spanking,” she answered. It was always hard for her to say these things out loud, and Tucker knew it.

“You certainly are,” Tucker told her. “You are getting a good, hard spanking that you are going to remember.”

Anxiety welled up in Candi’s chest.

Tucker went on. “Now Candi, where do I spank my naughty little girl?”

She caught herself before she groaned. She hated this part. “On my bottom,” she said softly.

“That’s right. You learn your lessons on your little bare bottom. And tonight I’m going to make that bottom very sore so that you know just how serious I am. Do you understand?”

Tucker’s eyes bored into her own, making her feel like a fly caught in a spider web.

“Yes sir,” she said. She squeezed her legs together. Her anxiety had gotten mixed up with sexual tension, and the pressure was building.

Tucker took her hands in his and looked her dead in the eye. “Candi, you were a very bad little girl.”