

# Chapter One

Amelia Danes swayed her hips to the music as she juggled alcohol bottles in her hands. She looked around her surroundings and took in the sweaty crowd. It was only nine o' clock in the evening, but people were already partying like animals. She finished up the drink she was making, and slid it toward her customer. The blonde girl smiled and thanked her. Amelia smiled back and accepted the tip the woman handed her.

She placed the extra cash into her pocket, and continued to mix drinks. It was a Friday night and people were going wild already. She ignored a couple of drunks who walked over to her, demanding to give them a free drink. In the last couple months she worked in the club, Amelia had gotten pretty used to the demands and silly outrages from other customers.

Her thoughts were cut off when a customer slid into a free stool. "I'd like a glass of beer, please." A deep male voice said.

Amelia looked up from her mixing, and found a pair of brown eyes staring at her. She felt a shock of electricity down her spine. Amelia didn't know why she felt this way, but there was something in his gaze that slightly unnerved her.

"Just a glass of beer?" she asked.

The man nodded. "Yes."

Amelia set to work and ignored the fascinated look he sent her way. She filled up the glass with beer and slid it across to him, making sure that their hands didn't touch. The man nodded his thanks and took a sip.

Since she had nothing to do but stare at the customer in front of her, Amelia ran her gaze over his facial features. She took in the strong cheekbones. His straight nose and those chiseled jaw that drew her eyes. Amelia glided her gaze down and took in those pair of full lips. He was a handsome man.

For a second, she thought imagined them moving. It was only when the man's voice penetrated through her hazy mind that she realized he was talking to her.

"Pardon?" she said.

The man grinned. "I said you seem busy."

Amelia blushed and didn't comment upon his observation.

"Busy night?" he asked.

She nodded. "Yeah. Friday nights are always busy. But the weekends are the busiest of the week."

“I gathered that,” the man said, his hand outstretched. “I’m Charles, by the way.”

Amelia reached out and shook his hand. “And I’m Amelia.”

She ignored the tingling sensation that ran down her back. Finally, Charles let her hand go. “So, Amelia, how long have you been working in this club for?”

“About ten months.”

“Do you enjoy working here?” the man questioned.

Surprisingly, Amelia found herself shaking her head. She didn’t know why she was being open to this stranger. Perhaps it was his relaxed posture and easygoing nature that had her opening up to him.

“It isn’t the best career anyone can have,” she found herself saying.

“Would you consider changing careers?” Charles asked as he took another sip of his drink.

Amelia nodded. “Definitely. I’d rather find a job that pays well and doesn’t make feel like one the strippers here. Some customers think that just because you work in a club, you’ll immediately lay on your back and perform.”

Charles frowned. “The club owner does not pay you well?”

Amelia smiled. “He does. Pays us well that is. The people that come into the club get out of hand sometimes. They’re usually not hard to handle, but we did have our fair shares of trouble around here.”

“Is that the main reason you want to find another job?” he questioned.

Amelia thought about it. She pushed a strand of red mane from her forehead, tucking that piece of hair into her ear. She was just about to answer when Amelia noticed Charles looking at her arm. She quickly brought her hand down and fidgeted with the bottles on the countertop. But it was too late. He’d already seen the bruise that stained her pale skin. Though it wasn’t as noticeable, Amelia didn’t doubt that Charles had seen the mark on her flesh.

“Not exactly,” Amelia said, answering his previous question. “The people are nice here. Things just get messy when they drink.”

“Have they ever hurt you?”

She felt her heart sank from hearing his question. “No.”

Charles nodded and Amelia nearly wept in relief. No one had ever asked about her bruise, and she wasn’t about to explain it now.

“Well, it was good talking to you.” He said, sliding off his stool. He slid a fifty note toward her. “Thanks for keeping me company tonight.”

She stared down at the note, then back at him. Amelia didn’t bode well with taking money from this genuine man. She made a move to hand it back to him, but Charles shook his head.

“Keep it.” He said, smiling at her. “You deserve it.”

He turned around before she could do anything. Unsure of what to do, Amelia took the tip and slipped it into her back pocket. She watched silently as Charles made his way to the dance floor. He was still wearing his work suit, giving her the idea that he’d just gotten off work. The gold watch he had strapped around his thick wrist glinted against the flashing lights. Amelia could bet her left hand that he was wearing an expensive suit. Perhaps it was a Tom Ford suit.

Whether it was expensive or not, Amelia didn’t care. She was never one for expensive stuff. Not only because she couldn’t afford them, but also because her father never taught her to be materialistic.

She went back to mixing drinks and served other customers. Minutes ticked by as Amelia mixed more cocktails, attending to each person that sat on the stools. As she wiped the countertop, she heard laughter coming from the dance floor. Amelia looked up to find Charles surrounded by women, their gazes meeting through the loud crowd. She looked away and continued to wipe the countertop.

It was fifteen past ten when Amelia was asked to take the garbage out. A cold gust of wind passed by and messed up her red hair. She tucked a strand into her ear and walked out to the back of the club, hearing Charles’s voice echoed around the vacated alley.

Amelia stopped in her tracks as she saw him standing outside – his back to her while he talked to someone on the phone. She studied his tall frame. He must be at least six foot two, judging by his height.

“Just send her in to the office. It doesn’t matter if she’s not yet qualified for the job, Luke. We’ll take her in. I can train her.” Charles said.

Luke—the man on the other end – seemed to be arguing with him until Charles spoke again. “Come on, man. She’s got three kids. You heard what she said. She needs the job and I’m confident she will do her best.”

Amelia listened intently as he made an agreeing noise in his throat, before she heard him hung up the phone.

“Oh, I didn’t realize you were there,” Charles said.

Amelia looked at him and noticed his eyes glide down to her bruised arm. She tried to hide it, but the bright lights that highlighted her faint bruise made it impossible.

“I don’t mean to pry in your business, but is that a bruise on your arm?” he asked, peering at it closer.

She hid her arm behind her back as Amelia shook her head. Denying it. “No, it’s not a bruise. It might just be dirt I caught on the bar.”

Amelia knew that Charles did not believe her. Seeing as there was nothing to be said, she quickly threw the garbage into the bin and made a move to go inside. Amelia stiffened when she heard a familiar voice called out to her. She turned around to see her ex-boyfriend, Ben, walking toward her direction.

She tried not to flinch from seeing his. Amelia knew he was drunk. She could smell the whiff of alcohol in his breath the closer he got to her. She studied Charles’s expression, surprised to see a protective concern flash in his brown eyes. Amelia glanced away and took in her ex-boyfriend’s drunken state. Ben’s gaze turned jealousy and rage.

“You!” he yelled, pointing at her. “What are you doing talking this man?”

“Ben,” Amelia began.

“Whoa, chill out buddy. You don’t talk to a lady like that,” Charles said.

Her drunken ex-boyfriend turned to Charles, making Amelia nervous about what he might do. “Mind your own business, bro.” Ben slurred.

“What are you doing here, Ben?” Amelia asked, trying to get his attention.

He turned to her and his teeth clenched as he grabbed her arm. “I’ve been waiting for you to come out, you bitch. Fucking froze my balls off waiting to get your ass outside. When you gonna finish your shift?”

“Look, Ben—” she began, but he cut her off and tightened his grip on her. Amelia squirmed in pain. She dug her teeth on her lower lip, stopping herself from crying out.

Charles noticed and stepped in. “Take your hands off her, man. You’re hurting her.”

“Don’t fucking care if I hurt this bitch. She deserves it,” Ben slurred. He leaned toward Amelia’s face, gripping her arm even tighter. A pained moan slipped past her lips and tears welled in her eyes.

“Let go, Ben. We’re over. I’m not going anywhere with you,” she fought. Amelia tried to grab her arm back, but he wouldn’t budge.

“You heard the lady. Let her go.” Charles said as he placed a hand on her ex-boyfriend’s shoulder.

Amelia watched as Ben shrugged Charles off. He stared at him for a second, saying, “Piss off man. This ain’t any of your business.”

Ben turned to her and grasped her arm again. He shook Amelia until she thought her head would snap off. A jolt of pain shot down her spinal column. His fingers dug into her bruise, making it worse.

“Ben, stop!” she cried, trying in vain to get him off her. He didn’t seem to hear her because he shook her again.

Amelia tried to snatch her arm back but he wouldn’t let go. Amelia saw him raise a hand, ready to smack her on the face if he was given the chance. Luckily, Charles was there to stop him. She watched in shock as he gripped her ex-boyfriend’s hand, stopping his blow.

Amelia stepped back in surprise as Charles puts him in an arm bar. She watched in a daze as he fished his phone out with his other hand, pressing a few buttons on his keypad. He was calling the cops.

In less than a 7 minutes, Amelia saw a flash of lights on the police’s car. They made their way toward her, Ben squirming but still subdued in the arm bar hold. The cops separated Ben from Charles and handcuffed Ben. Ben struggled and looked at Amelia rage and hatred.

“This is the fourth time we’ve gotten a call from you. Are you going to drop the charges again, ma’am?” one of the cops said, staring at Amelia expectantly.

She cast a look at Ben and shook her head. “No, officers. Take him. I’m not going to drop the charges this time. He’s getting out of hand and I don’t want him around me any more.”

The cops nodded and took a shocked Ben into their car. Amelia turned to Charles and thanked him.

“You alright?” he asked, sounding worried.

Amelia nodded and massaged her bruised arm. “I’m fine. Are you okay?”

“You shouldn’t worry about me. You should be worrying about yourself,” Charles said, as he took her arm gently, examining the forming bruise that stained her skin.

She blinked past the sting of tears that welled in the back of her eyes. No one had cared about her this way before, apart from her father who had passed away last year.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” Charles asked, looking deeply into her eyes.

Amelia nodded and smiled at him. He smiled back. She felt a bubble of desire. A bolt of electricity ran up her spine when he again took her hand in his hand, his eyes lowering to study the faint bruise. Amelia felt the rough pad of his thumb brush against her skin and she wanted more. Amelia became aware that she was attracted to this handsome man, Charles, who she had only known for a couple hours.

He finally let her hand go and she hid the disappointment that crossed her features.

“You’re a beautiful Lady, Amelia. I’d love to see you again. Can I have your number?” Charles asked, surprising her.

Amelia stared at him, astonished and flattered. “Sure,” she said. She gave him her number and fished her phone out, handing it to him to enter his number into her mobile. He did so and then said that he couldn’t stay long and needed to go home.

They said goodbye and embraced each other. Amelia watched as he hopped into his BMW and drove away, waving to her. Amelia waved back, sighed, and went back to the club. The crowd was thinning and some people were already heading out. She walked back to the bar and mixed a few more drinks, entertaining herself as she swayed her hips to the music once more. Time passed by and she was allowed to leave.

As she walked along the dark alleyway, Amelia wondered whether Charles would call. She figured he probably wouldn’t. It wasn’t as if he was interested in her, right? She kicked a pebble that got in her way and adjusted the strap of her bag on her shoulder. She thought, men like Charles would never be attracted to her, not only because they were so different financially, but also because businessmen like him were more likely to date supermodels and well-known actresses. Amelia reached her apartment in twenty minutes. During her walk, she tried to forget about what happened tonight – to forget Charles and his genuine ways. In her experience, such things were too good to be true.