

EXCLUSIVE

From Eden Bradley's novella, SANCTUARY, in the EXCLUSIVE anthology:

Berkley Heat

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He was beautiful.

Even in the flashing club lights, she could see the honeyed shade of his skin. His hair was a short, spiky shock of brown tipped with blond, as though he'd recently been in the sun. His close-shaven goatee, a few shades darker than his hair, made him look purely devilish. It was too dim and he was too far away for her to see his eyes. They seemed dark, glittering. He looked back at the desperate, wild crowd and gave a crooked grin and a saucy wink, as though he were very much aware that he was performing. And then he pulled his shirt off over his head.

She only had a moment to take in broad, muscled shoulders and tight six-pack abs before he turned around and started to pick up some items scattered around the floor: a crop, the two paddles he and the other man had used, a variety of multitailed whips; Devin wasn't sure what everything was called. All she knew was that this man made her entire body surge with need.

If only he would turn around again.

When he did, he looked right at her. Even among a crowd of

hundreds, she knew it immediately. He looked at her and gave that small, cocky smile he'd given to the crowd of revelers before. But this time it was for her alone.

He moved forward, toward the front of the Ring, until he stood right in the middle of it. He stopped there and stared at her, locking his eyes on hers. Her stomach filled with butterflies. She couldn't believe he was looking at her, but the line of his hot gaze was perfectly clear.

She licked her suddenly dry lips. Her nipples went hard beneath her tight, stretchy top. His eyes seemed to instantly travel there, to almost caress her skin before his gaze returned to her face. That self-assured smile again, quirking just one corner of his mouth. Unbelievably sexy. He had a pair of heavy, black tribal designs tattooed around each bicep, those armbands she loved so much on a man. Sexy enough that lust sang in her veins, thrummed through her limbs.

The tattoos, the wicked goatee, him standing in the middle of this place, shirtless, he was the ultimate bad boy. She'd never been so attracted to a man in her life. The hot flood of music and the colored lights only seemed to add to the sensual aura as he stared her down, daring her somehow.

He beckoned with his head, his grin quirking a little more. Yes, daring her to join him in the Ring.

She couldn't do it, of course, no matter that every cell in her body screamed at her to go to him, to have this man touch her.

*Impossible.*

And then he walked right up to her, right up to the railing and put his hand out to her. She noticed then another tattoo on the inside of his left wrist, some sort of Chinese symbol done in heavy black lines.

She offered her hand to him before she had a chance to think about it. He took it in his, turned it, and laid a soft kiss in the center of her palm. A wave of lustful heat rushed through her body.

*Wow.*

He leaned in and yelled over the music, "I'm Shaye. Tell me your name." God, he was talking to her. His deep voice boomed over the noise of the club.

"Devin."

"Come play with me, Devin."

She pulled back and saw that evil grin on his face. He had perfect white teeth. His eyes were a dark and smoky hazel up close, with long, thick lashes.

"No, I...I can't."

"Of course you can. Just say yes."

He still held onto her hand. His was large and warm, the contact like an electrical current running up her arm and straight to her sex. But she couldn't bring herself to do what these people did in the Ring.

Could she?

She felt dizzy suddenly with the possibility. This wasn't her. She was no innocent virgin, but this was too much, too intense, too wild. She'd come to watch, not to participate. And she wouldn't even be here if it weren't for Kimmie dragging her along tonight. She glanced around. Where was Kimmie?

But he was leaning in again, until his mouth was warm against her ear. "Come and play with me, little Devin. You know you want to. I can feel it from here."

His voice was a low purr. Sexy as hell, like everything else about him. And he was close enough that she could smell him; a little bit of clean male sweat mixed with some earthy fragrance. Sandalwood? She allowed herself to take one long inhale, savoring the scent of him. It made her shivery and hot inside. It made her confused.

"I can't. Really. I'm uh...I'm here with my friend. I have to go find her."

"Come back. Later tonight. Any night."

She started to shake her head. He tucked a card into her free hand.

"This is my cell. Call me if you'd ever like to play. Here. Or wherever. I want to see you."

She looked up at him and the grin was gone. His gaze was hot, burning right into her. He lifted her hand and kissed it again, sending that shiver of heat through her system once more.

The woman with the bright red hair came and tapped him on the shoulder, said something into his ear. He waved her off.

"I have to get back to work. Call me, Devin. Come and see me here. Promise me you will."

"I don't know..."

"Promise, Devin."

He hadn't let go of her hand. He gave it a small squeeze. Her pulse raced, hot and fast as lightning. He scared the hell out of her. She wanted him so much it hurt.

"I'll...maybe..."

"You will." His devastating grin spread across his face. He took a step back, dropped her hand, took another step before turning around and walking to the back of the Ring.

She was left breathless, shaken. Who the hell was this guy?

She looked down at the card he'd given her. Shaye Vincent.

No title, just the name and a phone number in silver on a sleek black card.

When she looked up again he was already binding another young woman to the big wooden cross. She wanted to watch, yet somehow she couldn't bear it at the same time.

*It's because you want to be the one bound and helpless.*