

Chapter One

Simon Tsai stared at the rack of shimmering sequin-covered gowns and shuddered. There was no way in hell he was going to wear one of those to the costume party, invitation be damned.

This might be New Orleans, and he might be gay, but he wasn't *that* gay.

For a minute, he thought about not attending his boss Francis's fifth anniversary party, but that would be suicidal. At least, career wise. Although, if Simon had to wear one of those dresses, he might just slit his own wrists.

Besides, in this failing economy, the prospects of finding another job in his field that paid as well, much less anywhere in New Orleans, were slim and none.

Simon was no fool. It'd taken him a month to land his position as manager of Francis's small but highly rated French Quarter hotel and Simon wasn't going to piss it away, not even if it meant putting on high heels and a tiara.

He glanced again at the invitation clutched in his sweating hands.

Stag or Drag.

Seriously?

Simon sighed. He hadn't even had a choice. Francis had seen to that by designating Drag on the inside of the gold leafed invitation. Simon was so not a "drag," he was much more of a "stag." He saw himself as a young buck, assuredly male, and definitely horny. Sure, it had been ages since he'd last rutted, but still.

Well, that was Francis, God bless his little queenly soul.

Francis was the gayest man Simon knew, and in the French Quarter, that was saying a lot. But he was also the sweetest guy, a shrewd businessman, and over the last year, had become not just an employer but a good friend.

Facing the fact that there was no way he would slight Francis, Simon shoved the invite into the back pocket of his slacks and forced himself to look through the dresses.

How the hell was he supposed to know what size to get?

Of course, he'd flatter himself thinking his size surely had to be in the single digits. He took a dress down, size eight, and looked it over. No way would his shoulders fit.

Maybe something sleeveless? Off the shoulder?

Oh my God. He couldn't believe he was even having those thoughts. This surely had to be some lower level of gay hell.

"What are you looking for?" a deep rumbling voice came from behind him, almost next to his ear. Simon's knees wobbled and he shoved the black velvet empire gown he'd held up against him back on the rack, but he missed the rod with the hook of the hanger and the dress fell to the floor.

"Shit." Simon bent to pick it up.

"Let me get that for you." The voice purred.

"No. It's okay. I've got it."

Simon's hand and the voice's hand touched as they reached for the hanger, and Simon jumped back, bumping his ass into the man's crotch, then flew forward, nearly losing his balance.

“Sorry.”

Jesus, could he be anymore klutzy?

“It’s okay.” The voice chuckled.

Simon turned and stared up into the eyes of the voice. Deep blue eyes. Brown eyelashes. Prominent nose. Thin lips. Short cropped brown hair. Simon knew he should get to the man’s body, stop staring at his face, but it was such a nice face. And he was half a head taller than Simon, the perfect height.

Perfect.

“Yes?” The man tilted his head, one eyebrow cocked upward.

“I’m looking for a dress.” Jesus, did he just utter those words? He may have been gay, but he’d never had the least interest or desire to dress in woman’s clothing and pretend he was a woman.

“For yourself?” As the guy hung up the gown his steady gaze bored into Simon.

He lost brain function, then as if someone had pull started his mind like a lawn mower, Simon began his explanation, a speech he’d barely planned, much less practiced.

“It’s for a party. For my boss. No, not *for* him. For me. Wait, the party’s not for me. I mean, I have to *wear* it to a party. A costume party,” Simon stammered as he reached for the invitation and then shoved it into the man’s hands, offering proof that it wasn’t really his fault, and that he *never* shopped here, much less had *ever* shopped for women’s clothing.

“I see.” The fellow took the invite, opened it, then smiled.

Oh my God. He was gorgeous.

Simon tapped the card stock. "It's my boss's idea. He's British and thought it would be a lark, as he says." Simon giggled. "He called it a fancy dress party."

Oh shit. Did he just giggle?

If the guy had wondered if Simon was gay, that just answered his question.

"Fancy dress, huh?" No giggle from Mr. Gorgeous.

Simon looked at the floor, willing the ground to open.

Where the hell was a hole when you needed one to fall into? Like cops, there was never one around.

Simon looked up as the man handed back the invitation.

Charles struggled to keep his face straight. This was too easy. The poor man was practically dying of embarrassment, and Charles knew he should stop yanking the guy's chain, but he couldn't help himself.

The guy was just so fucking cute.

"So what's the problem?" Charles leaned against the counter, dead serious.

"Well. I've never..." He waved his hand at the rack of gowns.

"Never..?"

"Dressed up. In an evening gown. In any dress, actually," the poor man stuttered. "I'm not a queen," he declared. Charles didn't doubt him for a minute. To the unpracticed eye, he looked straight, but Charles had unfailing gaydar and all his blips, beeps and sweeps had gone off when he'd spotted the handsome Asian.

"But you are gay, right?"

The man licked his lips and Charles watched the soft wet pink tip of tongue make its way around before slipping back inside, mesmerizing Charles.

“Is it that obvious?” He looked down and then up at Charles from under thick black lashes and Charles’s dick responded with a hard jerk against his corduroys.

“No. A wild guess, that’s all,” Charles assured. Thank God, because he didn’t want to be wrong about this one.

With a sigh of relief, the man smiled at Charles, and Charles upgraded his “cute” to “adorable.” Charles had a thing for adorable men and it’d been a long time since he’d met anyone that embodied that word. He’d always been attracted to Asian men but had never dated any. No way was he going to let this opportunity go by.

A plan formed in Charles’s mind. A wicked, devious, delicious plan.

“What’s your size?” Impersonating a salesperson must be a crime somewhere, right? But only if he got caught.

“I have no idea.” The guy shook his head, panic showing in his slanted dark brown eyes.

“Don’t worry. These gowns aren’t right for you.” Charles couldn’t help but lean closer. The light fresh scent of the man’s aftershave reminded Charles of the beach.

“They aren’t?” He looked relieved.

“No. You need something else.” Charles turned and scanned the racks of costumes around the shop. “Something more...earthy.”

As soon as he’d seen the invitation clutched in the guy’s hand, Charles had approached, hoping to start a conversation. It was the same invitation Charles had left sitting on his table at home.

This was too perfect. His invitation declared him Stag. And he'd already set his mind on the costume he wanted.

A cowboy.

He'd always wanted to be a cowboy, had loved everything about them, from their silent steady ways, to their rugged good looks, to their sexy swagger. If Charles could go back in time, be anything in the world, he'd chose to be a cowboy of the old west.

Since he couldn't really be one, he might as well dress up as one.

And what fun would playing cowboy be without an Indian?

He headed over to a rack on the far wall. "This is just right for you." Taking down the tan leather and beaded costume, he held it out to show the guy.

With an authority that he'd pulled right out of his ass, he declared, "You'd be the perfect Pocahontas."

Simon walked over, maneuvering around the racks, to take a closer look at the costume. It was a long dress, nearly to his ankles, with fringe and beadwork down the sides, long sleeves and a wide bead covered collar at the neck. It came with a black braid wig and a feathered band.

"I don't know." Squinting, he tried to picture himself in it.

It would certainly cover him, leaving only the bottom part of his legs exposed. And he could wear boots or maybe he'd find a pair of moccasins.

But the wig? He'd never thought about wearing a wig.

“I tell you, this is what you want. A man like you wouldn’t be comfortable in one of those formal gowns, would you?” He gave Simon a killer smile, melting any doubts Simon had left.

“No, I wouldn’t.” Simon reached out and took the costume. “Will this fit me?”

“What’s not to fit? It’s basically a straight sheath. If it’s wide enough for your shoulders, it’ll be wide enough for your hips.” Sounded reasonable. And besides, it was getting late. The store would close soon and he needed to make a decision. The party was tomorrow night and he’d already wasted too much time that week trying to avoid the entire mess.

“Okay, I’ll take it.” Simon nodded and gave the guy a smile.

“Perfect.” There went that purr again. He could purr in Simon’s ear all day long, all night long, for that matter.

“Just take it up to the register and they’ll ring you up.” He jerked his head to the front of the store.

“Thanks.” Simon nodded and made his way through the racks to the counter.

“I’d like to get this.” He handed the costume to the cashier.

“Of course. Was anyone helping you?” she asked, not batting any eye that a man was buying a woman’s dress. You had to love the Quarter, especially if you’re gay.

“Yes. A young man.” Simon strained to see to the back of the shop to point out the guy. “Huh. I don’t see him.” He shrugged, bummed to not get another opportunity with the guy. Wrap *him* up, I’ll take him to go, Simon thought.

Why was it that all the gorgeous guys were straight?

She looked to the rear too. “Must have gone in the back.”

She rang Simon up, bagged up the costume, and handed it to him. “If you need anything else, come back and see us for all your costume needs.”

Simon thanked her, waved, and left the shop.

This outfit was so much better than one of those spangled, revealing evening gowns he’d look ridiculous wearing, not to mention how in the world he’d create breasts to fill it out. He would have had to buy high heels, fancy jewelry, maybe even a feather boa or stole and this was already setting him back enough money.

And since it was really a costume, he could wear it for Mardi Gras next year.

If he had to dress as a woman why not a Native American princess?