

One With You – an excerpt from Chapter 1

By Sylvia Day

A Crossfire® Novel

April 5, 2016

St. Martin's Griffin

New York was the city that never slept; it never even got sleepy. My condo on the Upper West Side had the level of soundproofing expected in a multimillion-dollar property, but still the sounds of the city filtered in—the rhythmic thumping of tires over the well-worn streets, the protests of weary air brakes, and the nonstop honking of taxi horns.

As I stepped out of the corner café onto always-busy Broadway, the rush of the city washed over me. How had I ever lived without the cacophony of Manhattan?

How had I ever managed living without *him*?

Gideon Cross.

I cupped his jaw in my hands, felt him nuzzle into my touch. That show of vulnerability and affection cut right through me. Just hours before I'd thought he might never change, that I would have to compromise too much to share my life with him. Now, I stood in the face of his courage and doubted my own.

Had I demanded more of him than I had of myself? I was shamed by the possibility that I'd pushed him to evolve while I had remained obstinately the same.

He stood before me, so tall and strong. In jeans and a T-shirt, with a ball cap pulled low over his brow, he was unrecognizable as the global mogul the world thought it knew but still so innately compelling he affected everyone who walked by. In the corner of my eye, I noted how the people nearby glanced at him, then did a double-take.

Dressed casually or in the bespoke three-piece suits he favored, the power of Gideon's leanly muscular body was unmistakable. The way he held himself, the authority he wielded with faultless control, made it impossible for him to ever fade into the background.

New York swallowed everything that came into it, while Gideon had the city on a gilded leash.

And he was mine. Even with my ring on his finger, I still sometimes struggled to believe it.

He would never be just a man. He was ferocity sheathed in elegance, perfection veined with flaws. He was the nexus of my world, a nexus of *the* world.

Yet he'd just proven that he would bend and yield to the breaking point to be with me. Which left me with a renewed determination to prove I was worth the pain I'd forced him to face.

Around us, the shop fronts along Broadway were reopening. The flow of traffic on the street began to thicken, black cars and yellow cabs bouncing wildly over the uneven surface. Residents trickled onto the sidewalks, taking their dogs out or heading toward Central Park for an early morning run, stealing what time they could before the workday kicked in with a vengeance.

The Benz pulled up to the curb just as we reached it, Raúl a big shadowy figure at the wheel. Angus slid the Bentley into place behind it. My ride and Gideon's, going to separate homes. How was that a marriage?

Fact was, it was *our* marriage, though neither of us wanted it that way. I'd had to draw a line when Gideon hired my boss away from the advertising agency I worked for.

I understood my husband's desire for me to join Cross Industries, but trying to force my hand by taking action behind my back...? I couldn't allow it, not with a man like Gideon. We were either together—making decisions together—or we were too far apart to make our relationship work.

Tilting my head back, I looked up into his stunning face. There was remorse there, and relief. And love. So much love.

It was breathtaking how handsome he was. His eyes were the blue of the Caribbean, his hair a thick and glossy black mane that brushed his collar. An adoring hand had sculpted every plane and angle of his face into a level of flawlessness that mesmerized and made it hard to think rationally. I'd been captivated by the look of him from the moment I first saw him, and I still found my synapses frying at random moments. Gideon just dazzled me.

But it was the man inside, his relentless energy and power, his sharp intelligence and ruthlessness coupled with a heart that could be so tender...

"Thank you." My fingertips brushed over the dark slash of his brow, tingling as they always did when they touched his skin. "For calling me. For telling me about your dream. For meeting me here."

"I'd meet you anywhere." The words were a vow, spoken fervently and fiercely.

Everyone had demons. Gideon's were caged by his iron will when he was awake, but when he slept they tormented him in violent, vicious nightmares. We had so much in common, but the abuse in our childhoods was a shared trauma that both drew us together and pushed us apart. It made me fight harder. Our abusers had taken too much away from us already.

"Eva... You're the only force on earth that can keep me away."

"Thank you for that, too," I murmured, my chest tight. "I know it wasn't easy for you to give me space, but we needed it. And I know I pushed you hard..."

"Too hard."

My mouth curved at the quick bite of ice in his words. Gideon wasn't a man used to being denied what he wanted. "I know. And you let me, because you love me."

"It's more than love." His hands banded my wrists, tightening in the way that made everything inside me surrender.

I nodded, no longer afraid to admit that we needed each other in a way some would consider unhealthy. It was who we were, what we had. And it was precious.

"We'll drive to Dr. Petersen's together." He said the words with unmistakable command, but his gaze searched mine as if he'd asked a question.

"You're so bossy," I teased, wanting us to leave each other feeling good. Hopeful. Our weekly therapy appointment with Dr. Lyle Petersen was only hours away, and it couldn't have been more opportunely scheduled. We'd turned a corner. We could use a little help in figuring what our next steps should be from here.

His hands circled my waist. "You love it."

I reached for the hem of his shirt, fisting the soft jersey. "I love *you*."

"*Eva*." His arms came tight and sure around me, his shuddered breath hot on my neck. Manhattan surrounded us but couldn't intrude. When we were together, there was nothing else.

A low sound of hunger left me, everything inside me that yearned and craved him shivering with delight that he was once again pressed against me. I breathed him in with deep inhalations, my fingers kneading into the rigid muscles of his back. The rush that slid through me was heady. I was addicted to him—heart, soul, and body—and I'd gone days without my fix, leaving me shaky and off-balance, unable to function properly.

He engulfed me, his body so much bigger and harder than mine. I felt safe in his embrace, cherished and protected. Nothing could touch me or hurt me when he was holding me. I wanted him to feel that same sense of security with me. I needed him to know that he could drop his guard, take a breath, and I could protect us both.

I had to be stronger. Smarter. Scarier. We had enemies, and Gideon was dealing with them on his own. It was innate to him to be protective; it was one of his traits I deeply admired. But I had to start showing people that I could be as formidable an adversary as my husband.

More important, I had to prove it to Gideon.

Leaning into him, I absorbed his warmth. His love. "I'll see you at five, ace."

"Not a minute later," he ordered gruffly.

I laughed despite myself, infatuated with every rough-edged facet of him. "Or what?"

Pulling back, he gave me a look that made my toes curl. "Or I come get you."