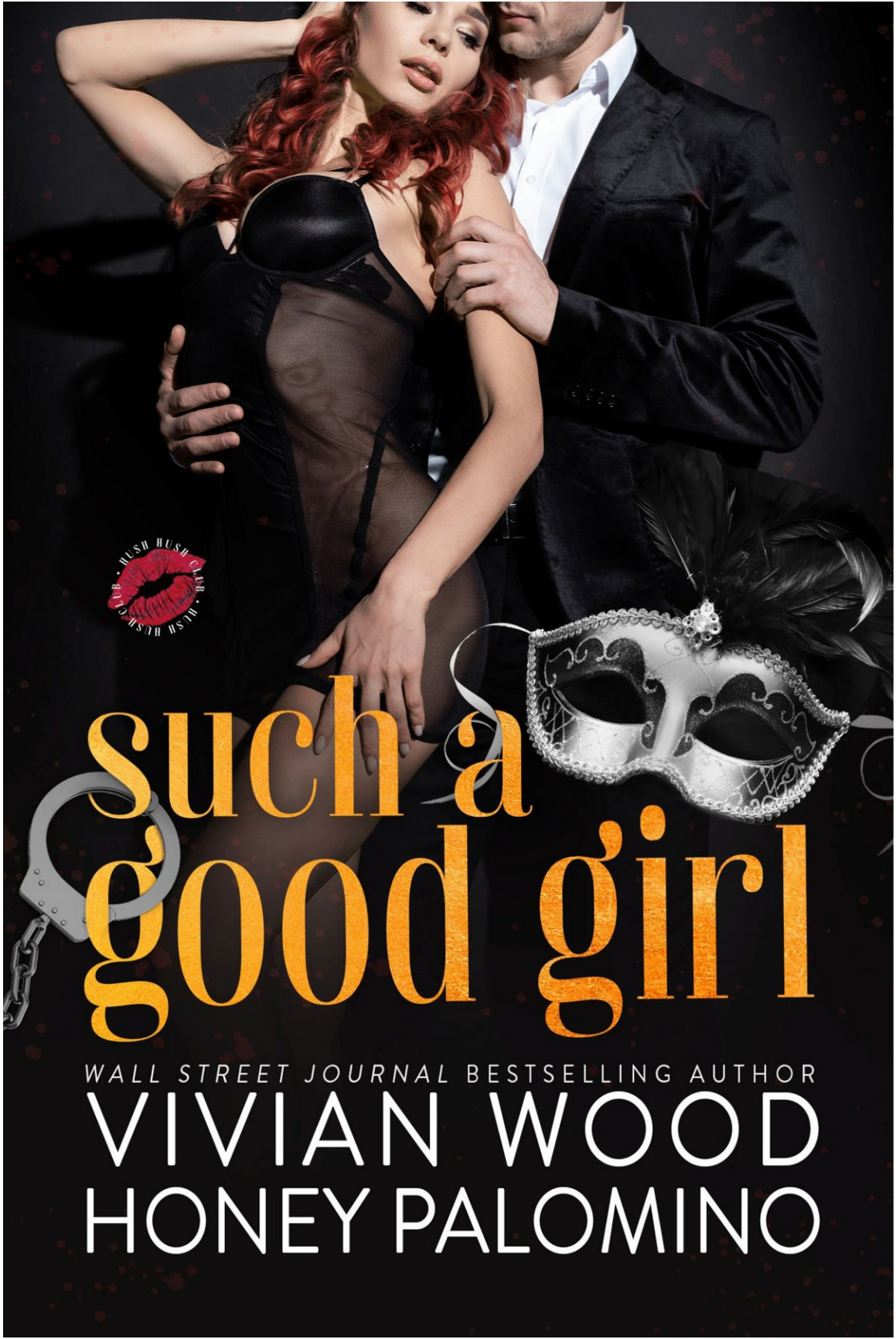


such a good girl

WALL STREET JOURNAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR

VIVIAN WOOD

HONEY PALOMINO



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Hush Hush Club

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Prologue

KAYLEE

West Foster stared at me so deeply that I was sure my skin had become translucent, and he could see right through me. His gaze was direct in a way that made me feel like I was squirming underneath his magnifying glass.

“Once you sign this waiver, you can’t back out. Do you understand, Kaylee?”

His words were solemn, laced with an intensity that matched the flame burning in his dark blue eyes.

Urgent.

Insistent.

As if he was trying to make me understand the enormity of what I was agreeing to.

As if I didn’t know. I almost laughed. He didn’t understand just how ready I was.

I craved excitement with every cell in my body.

Would signing this flimsy piece of paper give me what I desperately needed? I had no idea. But at this point, I was desperate to try anything. Not just to solve the case. That was secondary, as selfish as that sounded.

No, I would sign the waiver to learn about myself at the same time. He’d opened something up in me that I’d become incredibly curious about.

And if my signature — scrawled in blood red ink, bleeding into the pores of the thick white stationery — is what finally opened the door to the depths of pleasure that I suspected resided in the darkest places inside of me, then I was ready to step over that threshold with my head held high. And with my heart open to possibility.

A promise waited there, floating just out of my reach in the shadowy depths of my soul.

An answer to a question I'd searched my soul for. That long journey had finally brought me there, with a pen in my hand and a spark of hope in my heart.

Could I finally be close enough to touch it?

I'd dreamed of this. The ultimate fantasy, an adrenaline rush I'd chased my whole life. It teased me, letting me come so close, only to deny me the chance to touch it. The deepest pleasure. My own darkest desires. I'd been called to seek the truest love I could imagine inside myself.

I knew it existed.

Intoxicating. Hypnotizing. Magical.

Dark.

That siren's call was always lingering just out of reach.

I was always so close, but never made it. I thought I'd find it in my work, but it was always just out of reach.

Never was it as close as it was now.

Just a few more steps to complete, and all I'd ever desired could be mine.

Gripping the pen with trembling fingers, I scratched my agreement with the enthusiasm of a kid entering a candy store.

Give me all I can eat, I thought.

I wanted to devour everything on offer.

“Very good,” West nodded, his eyes darkening even more as they raked over my frame, my nipples hardening to attention, as if they, too, were anticipating his next move.

“Come with me,” he said, walking me out of the board room. This time he led me up a discreet set of stairs located in the back of the club.

We began to ascend. When we reached the top, he parted a heavy black curtain.

In that moment, everything changed.

We stood in a small foyer, the walls painted blood red, with red light bathing the entire space. A heavy wooden door, engraved with a huge dragon on the front and a black iron door handle wrought into another elaborate dragon.

In front of the door, a huge man in a black suit stood guard.

“You’ll need this,” West said from behind me.

Opening the heavy wooden armoire behind him, he reached inside and then turned back to me. He offered me a carefully folded pile of heavy black wool like a promise.

With both hands, I took it from him, nodding as I met his smoldering gaze.

I opened it up, its shape revealing itself as it dangled from my loose grip — a thick cloak with a heavy hood.

“Put it on now,” he commanded.

I nodded, wrapping it around my shoulders.

“No.” His brow furrowed with frustration. “Not like that.”

I cocked my head to the side, questioningly.

“Take off your dress first.” His insistence was careful, yet nonchalant. As if I should have just *known*.

I complied, averting my eyes and pretending the guard wasn’t there. As I peeled off my thin black cotton dress I silently praised myself for wearing my good underwear. I hadn’t been sure I’d be getting naked in front of West today. But still, I shed my clothes in front of him like it was no big deal... like he’d seen me naked a million times.

As if it wasn’t a first for both of us.

As if my fingers didn't tremble when I lifted the hem of my dress.

He watched, his gaze searing my skin, lingering on my hard nipples that were visible through my black lace bra. His scrutiny landed squarely between my thighs, as I let my dress fall to the ground at my feet.

"You're incredibly beautiful, Little Rose," he said. "I'll let you keep your bra and panties on. Eventually, though, I think you'll be comfortable enough to remove those, too."

I lifted my chin, boldly catching his eye as I pulled the cloak over my bare shoulders, my fingers trembling with anticipation of what came next.

He stepped forward, his breath hot against my cheek as he reached behind me and grabbed my hood, slowly pulling it up over my head. His fingers lingered on the edge of the fabric, brushing against my cheeks. His eyes peered into mine. He lifted the edges of my cloak. I leaned in and my lace-covered nipples scraped against the lapels of his suit.

"You're perfect for this place." The words slid across his lips like a prayer, like a verdict being read, like the door I'd searched for all my life finally opening to me.

Acceptance.

With a shaky breath, I replied, "I can't believe I'm here. I'm a little nervous, West."

His smile stretched across his face slowly, tugging up at the corners first, then lighting up his eyes as his cheeks rose. I was mesmerized by the transformation from darkness to light.

"You're safe now, Rosie. You're home."

He pulled me into his arms, pressing me firmly against his chest, his words permeating every cell of my body as I relaxed into him.

Could this be real? I wondered.

Was I finally home?

Was I finally safe?

Or had the true danger only just begun?

Chapter One

WEST

TWO WEEKS EARLIER

Crimson light set my skin aglow as I lifted the velvet rope and passed under it, ignoring the throngs of beautiful people anxiously waiting in line behind me. Nodding at Derek, the leader of my own personal army of security guards, I paid no heed to the cries of protest rising up from the horde.

Not just anyone could get in. It didn't work that way and it never would.

The Hush Hush Club demanded protection. Heavy security at the door was essential.

Before I could get to where I needed to go, I had to wade through the swarm of groupies that spotted me from the end of the massive curved bar. They intercepted me before I could hit the bottom of the stairs that led up to the owner's box, squealing with delight that at this point sounded like nails on a chalkboard to me.

"West! West! WEST!"

"Oh, my god! Look! Look, it's West!"

"It's really you! Oh, my god, I'm going to faint!"

Their shrill voices rose high above the loud music pumping through the dark club.

Any time I left the privacy of my own home, I was forced to surround myself in beefy security guards. But despite their excellent deflection skills, the women lunged for me. One of them managed to reach through the protective circle and brushed her fingertips across my forearm.

I resisted the urge to flinch. The smile plastered on my face never wavered. I hadn't made it this far in Hollywood without superior acting skills. Even under the pressure of constant assault from strangers, I kept my cool. I'd never let them see how I really felt about them.

They were vultures to me.

Impeccably groomed and stunningly beautiful, of course. But vultures.

Clinging to their curves like a second skin, their dresses probably cost them their month's salary, probably more. They'd never show up wearing anything but the best designer clothes if they expected to gain entry to this place.

At some point in my life I may have found them attractive, if that wild look hadn't flashed in their eyes the second they spotted me. It was like they'd spotted some rare endangered animal. If there was anything I hated, it was being looked at like that.

Like I wasn't human.

Like they owned me.

Like they were owed my time and attention, just because I was famous. It was absurd, the entitlement that I encountered daily. As if I'd signed away my rights to any privacy at all, just by being in the public eye.

But I knew, deep down, that without them I would have none of this. So, I played along. It was part of the exchange. I tried to remain grateful.

I pulled out my phone and snapped a quick photo with them and gave them one of my best flirtatious winks.

They lost their fucking minds, just as I'd predicted. They kept lunging and my bodyguards kept pushing back.

"West, I loved you in The Sanctuary! You were an even hotter vampire

than Brad Pitt!”

I swallowed my pride and smiled wider.

“Thanks, doll! Find me later, okay? We’ll hang out!” I lied.

I gave Derek the signal and he barreled past them, parting them effortlessly, like a red sea of sequins and oiled up limbs and hairspray. The space allowed me to continue moving, but now with the twinge of misery that came with her compliment.

The Sanctuary was a movie I’d done based on a book series by one of my favorite authors. And it left me with more insecurity than I’d ever felt.

Before I got the part, I’d heard the chatter about my career. Word was that if I landed the right role, I was destined to be the next Al Pacino. I’d thought my role as Apollo Youngblood was going to be that role.

I’d thought it was my best work.

I was tragically wrong.

It was supposed to be a blockbuster and launch my career to the next level.

Immersing myself in the character like I’d never done before left me so emotionally invested in the success of the movie that when it tanked miserably at the box office — not to mention the impact of the vicious reviews it received — I was devastated.

And now, years later, each time someone mentioned it, I had to keep smiling and pretend I wasn’t dying inside. Always smiling, never stopping — that’s West Foster for you.

My smile stayed fixed in place as I let Derek and his crew lead me through the rest of the dark club. We passed the most beautiful people of Hollywood, mingling together amidst the pulsing music, the flashing lights, the sparkling champagne. Passed the discretely formed and quickly snorted lines of cocaine. Passed the fake laughter and plastic body parts, the tailored suits, the tiny dresses. Passed the sky-high stilettos and shiny Rolexes, and up to the owner’s box that looked out over the club.

It was the same story here every night.

So much so, that I was terribly bored with it all. But, at this point, I was in so deep there was no getting out.

Rian and Theo were waiting for me, gazing out over the top of the club through the tinted, one-way glass that kept us hidden from the patrons below.

“About fucking time, dude, did you have trouble untangling yourself from last night’s orgy?” Rian, always the disagreeable asshole, barked as soon as the heavy metal door locked behind.

Rian always looked like he was about to either punch someone out or run away as fast as he could. He was our fixer. Of the three of us, Rian was the one who’d be tasked with hiding the proverbial body, if it was ever necessary. Thankfully, that hasn’t been the case just yet.

He barked his snide comment over his shoulder, his gaze remaining on the customers down below. Rian is sketchy. You never know what’s he’s thinking or what he’s going to do next — or even worse, when he’s going to blow up for no perceptible reason.

He’s the kind of guy you want on your side. I shudder to think of what it would be like to be on the wrong side of Rian’s anger.

His ridicule was bad enough. Besides, he was right. Trying to get the four chicks out of my penthouse this morning took much longer than I’d intended. Leaving them there alone was out of the question. I’d waited and waited, knowing I’d be late for my weekly meeting with my business partners.

So I took his verbal punch and shrugged it off, then offered up a little jab of my own. “When’s the last time you got laid, man?” I asked Rian. “You should try it. Let off a little of that steam you have built up.”

“Fuck off,” Rian muttered, barely shooting me a glance over his shoulder.

Theo laughed, shaking his head. “Come on, West, you know Rian has had his quota of dating and stalking for the year. He’ll start over next year.”

“That does seem to be his M.O.,” I agreed. Rian always got lonely during the holidays. He’d have enough of being a dateless loser by New Year’s Eve,

then he'd find a girl to seduce. They'd date until she realized he's more than a little crazy. She'd try to flee. He'd stalk her until she left Los Angeles entirely, just to get away from his obsessive ass.

Rinse and repeat.

He has a pattern, and he has a type. Theo and I always stepped in when we saw it happening and put a stop to his stalking. But Rian doesn't ever stop, even if we gave him shit about it.

"I'm sure his next victim is just waiting around the corner," I teased.

"Fuck off, assholes," he repeated. "Find someone else's sex life to dissect."

Now that we'd sufficiently gotten under his skin, we let up. Neither Theo nor I wanted to become intimate with Rian's meaty fist.

"Did you get any sleep, dude?" Theo asked me.

"Barely," I shrugged. I was unapologetic about my escapades these days. I deserved to get a little wild, after all I'd gone through.

"I hope you made them sign those NDAs Bennett gave you."

Bennett was our lawyer. Well, one of them. After every excruciating and scandalous detail of my divorce was strewn across the internet last year, he'd insisted I make anyone I spent any private time with sign those forms.

It was awkward and humiliating and one of the things I hated most about being a celebrity. I used to avoid it at all costs. But that's how I'd gotten myself into this fucking mess, so I did it now.

"Yeah, man," I said.

"So, how many did you take home last night?" Theo asked.

"Four." I shrugged.

"Damn, dude, you're going to go through the entire Profane clientele if you don't slow down."

"So fucking what? If that happens, I'll just start over," I laughed.

"I thought you said no double dipping? Isn't that what got you into this mess?"

“Yeah, well we need to increase membership anyway. A supply of fresh meat couldn’t hurt.”

“Now that we have a few empty spots, that won’t be a problem,” Rian said.

Theo groaned. “Dude...the bodies aren’t even cold yet. Maybe wait a little while?”

“Why? Why should we have to wait to fill their places? It’s not like they died in the club or something,” Rian insisted.

“I don’t know, it just seems morbid and a little too soon.”

“I’ve been saying we should increase the cap anyway,” I added.

“Fuck that,” Theo said. “That’s how things go south. Too many cooks in the kitchen and our recipe leaks out. No, maintaining secrecy is paramount. More important than any desire for more money or fresh pussy.”

I rolled my eyes, then looked over at Rian for support. Theo was always pushing back, the most concerned of all of us about maintaining not only the secret of Profane, the elite inner realm of the Hush Hush Club, but also the exclusive offshoot of Profane that we went to extreme lengths to conceal.

“We got into this business to fucking grow it, or do you not remember that?” I asked, my voice laced with annoyance.

“Yes, but the very thing we’re selling is discretion and secrecy and safety. Don’t you see how what you’re proposing — not just increasing the capacity, but that goddamned movie you’re hell bent on producing — threatens the very foundation of what we’ve built?”

His eyes were dark and angry, and reflected the passion we’d all possessed when we started this endeavor. We’d each done it for our own unique reasons, but it was equally important to us.

The Hush Hush club was only the front for what we’d really created.

The Hush Hush club was merely a nightclub. There was nothing unique about that, not in this city.

No, our masterpiece was much more exclusive than that — sacred, carnal,

and primal. The participants formed a tight circle that none of us wanted to break or expose.

“Profane, and everything else, is safe,” I insisted. “The NDAs protect us.”

“Not if you make a fucking movie about it!” Theo shot back.

“Fuck, Theo,” I growled, pushing my hair back and taking a deep breath. Rian watched quietly from the window, his eyes storming. I knew he agreed with Theo. They both thought I was crazy. “I wouldn’t do anything to risk this place. I can change the details. But I need this fucking win, man.”

I hated that my voice turned pleading. I heard the desperation myself.

Theo didn’t budge.

“I’m not signing off on it, West.”

I sighed, shaking my head. “We’ll talk about it later.”

“My opinion won’t change.”

“Fine!” I scoffed, opting to change the subject. “Anyway, what’s going on with that woman you met? At Gino’s?”

Theo had picked up some waitress a while back, a rare thing for him to do. He usually kept to himself, preferring to avoid drama at all costs. I’d encouraged him to go out with her last weekend, but he’d been closed-mouthed about her since.

“It was nothing.” He shrugged.

“Are you going to see her again? Have you already?”

“A few times.” He shrugged again, trying to look nonchalant, but I’d grown up with this guy. I knew what all his gestures meant.

“It’s only been five days and you’ve seen her ‘a few times?’ How many is a few?”

“Four,” he said, finally giving in, a small smile stretching across his face.

“Dude, seriously? Does she know who you are?”

“Are you implying she’s only seeing me because she doesn’t know who I am?”

“Well, yeah, kinda,” I laughed. “I mean, does she know about Profane

and everything else?”

“Of course not!” He looked offended that I’d asked. “What the hell did we just talk about?”

“I’m asking because if she knew what went on there, she might not be up for going out with you. This shit isn’t for everyone and you know that.”

“Shut the fuck up, man,” he said. “I’m not talking about her anymore.”

“He’s got it bad, dude, I saw him dancing after he got off the phone with her when he thought I wasn’t watching,” Rian piped up.

“Dancing? What the fuck?” I shot an incredulous look over at Theo. Despite owning a night club where lots of dancing occurred, Theo did not dance.

“You’re fucked,” I said. “If you get a fucking girlfriend, you’re done for. Why would you do that? I thought you were just going to fuck her once, that’s why I encouraged it.”

“Should I be more like you, Foster?” he asked, sarcastically.

“Well, yeah,” I answered, seriously. “I have all my needs met now. Fuck marriage, fuck relationships. Now that I’m divorced from Danika, I can focus on recovering from that nightmare. I can do who I want, wherever I want, when I want. You can’t fucking beat that.”

“Whatever, dude, you do you.”

“Love you, too,” I laughed, knowing that was his way of ending the conversation.

“I still want to talk about the film later. I just think —.”

The buzz of my phone interrupted me and when I saw it was Derek, I answered quickly.

“Boss, Danika is at the front door.”

I groaned, my stomach knotting instantly. My ex was the last person I wanted to see, let alone talk to.

“She’s insisting on seeing you.”

Danika was the definition of drama. I knew she wasn’t here because she

had something nice to tell me. She wanted to stir up shit. That was the only thing she knew how to do.

Derek interpreted my silence correctly. "I'll send her on her way, boss."

Danika's shrill voice broke through the line. "You better fucking let me in, West! Don't make me call TMZ!"

"Bitch," I muttered. I was going to need to deal with this in person. "I'll be right down, Derek."

"Yes, boss."

"I gotta go," I said to Theo and Rian. "It's fucking Danika."

"She's never gonna let you go, West. You need to deal with her, once and for all," Theo chided as I walked out.

His words echoed in my brain as I trailed through the club to the front door. Theo was right, and I hated that fact more than anything. I just had no idea what else I could do to make her leave me alone.

Chapter Two

KAYLEE

My gun thudded against my hip as I stomped through the doors of the precinct. Anger roared through my veins.
He was going to *pay* this time.

I zeroed in on my target sitting behind his desk near the window, his head bent as he inspected the contents of the case file spread across it. The smell of his cheap cologne smothering the faint odor of bargain-basement priced whiskey and foul sweat told me, without a doubt, that he was working today.

My lip curled into a sneer. I pushed up my sleeves as I approached his desk.

“Hoskins!” I growled.

Harry Hoskins was a colossal prick, I’ve always known this. But the stunt he pulled today proved it yet again. I don’t have proof it was his work but I’d bet my last dollar on it.

He whipped his head around when I called his name, and raised a brow at the items I carried like it was the first time he’d laid eyes on them. He stood up, a smug grin spreading across his pock-marked face.

He whistled and nodded, his eyes lighting up. “Looks like you’re finally letting your hair down, Carson! I love to see it!”

The snickers from the co-workers at surrounding work stations was not lost on me. But I ignored them, my eyes focused on Hoskins.

I stepped up to his desk and dropped the sparkling red G-string and obscenely-sized double-headed black rubber dildo on his desk. The dildo rolled as it landed and began vibrating, bumping around the table and knocking over a cup of coffee that spilled all over the open file.

“Dammit!” Hoskins protested. “Carson, what the fuck?”

“You put this shit in my locker?” I demanded to know. I’d found the items sitting on top of my extra set of clothes, the sequined G-string and lube-slathered dildo right on top of a pair of my good panties that had obviously been pulled out of my bag.

Instead of letting humiliation get the better of me, I latched onto my rage.

“What makes you think it was me? Are you sure those aren’t yours?”

He chuckled arrogantly, looking around at his good ole boy comrades for support. Predictably, they joined in, hooting and hollering like they were at a strip club. Hoskins grabbed the rubber vibrator and brandished it, one of its floppy tips waving in the air as it buzzed.

I resisted the urge to grab it and slap him in the face with it.

Instead, I stepped forward. Toe-to-toe, I glared into his beady black eyes and ignored the taunting I found there.

“You’re a fucking prick,” I growled.

“You wish I was,” he laughed. “Where did you find a vibrator this big anyway, Carson? Do you use this with your lesbian lover? We always suspected, didn’t we fellas?”

My fists balled at my side.

“Oh now we’re adding homophobia on top of blatant sexism? That’s bad, even for you. I don’t know what the fuck you think you’re doing with this shit, but it’s not funny. Try something like this again, and you won’t be laughing.”

“Oh, yeah, Carson? What’s your short little ass going to do?” He moved forward, his nose millimeters from mine. I could smell his rancid coffee breath and almost gagged.

“Want me to show you? Because I can’t think of anything I’d rather do than bloody that ugly fucking face of yours! Let’s go outside, prick.”

A crowd was forming around us now, taunting and laughing. His eyes widened for a moment, as if he were actually contemplating fighting me.

“Are you afraid?” I teased. “Nothing but a little fucking chicken, afraid a woman might kick your —.”

“— Carson! In my office! NOW!” The sound of our Lieutenant’s voice rose over the laughter, breaking through my rage.

The smirk on the asshole’s face made me want to punch him even more, though.

“Looks like you’re in trouble, Carson,” he laughed.

“Fuck off,” I sneered, pushing past him and ignoring the looks all the others were giving me.

As soon as I stepped into the Lieutenant’s office and closed the door behind me, drowning out the lingering laughter, tears began to sting my eyes. I blinked them away before sitting down.

“Was that necessary?” she asked, lifting a stern brow.

Lieutenant Veronica Addison was a twenty-year career cop, who’d worked her way up the ranks through literal blood, sweat and tears. She’d taken a shot to the head one night in a bad drug deal and ended up with a promotion and permanent desk duty. While a lot of others may have turned in their badge after such a traumatic experience and long recovery, she’d returned to the force stronger than ever.

“Did you see what they put in my locker?”

“They’re fucking assholes, Kaylee. You know that. You can’t let them get to you.”

“I also can’t let them get away with such sexist bullshit.”

“I’m sorry you have to deal with that.” Her words were the right ones. However, her tone brooked absolutely no compassion.

I gritted my teeth. “I’ve worked fucking hard to get here. I don’t deserve

that shit.”

“No, you don’t. That’s true. Nobody does. But look, I dealt with it. I made it through, and so will you. The trick is to not respond at all. They want to rile you up, otherwise they wouldn’t do it. If you don’t react, eventually they’ll give up and find another target.”

“Well, isn’t that the point of standing up? So they stop this shit and don’t do it to anyone else?”

“We both know it doesn’t work that way.”

I sighed, shaking my head. She was jaded, obviously. Was that in my future, too? I never wanted to just let this kind of behavior slide. Why should I?

“Listen, you gotta let that shit go. At least for today,” she said, sliding a file across her desk towards me. “Because today, I need you to focus.”

“What’s this?” I asked, opening the file. My eyes widened at the photos inside.

I saw a female form sprawled out on the ground near some piled cardboard. She was wearing a too-tight black dress. Her legs were splayed out awkwardly. Silky black ropes crisscrossed her body, neatly trussing her like a Christmas goose ready to be put in the oven. Her pink platform heel dangled from her foot. Her long pink nails were broken, torn away during a struggle. It was obvious that she put up quite a fight.

But I couldn’t tear my eyes away from her face.

She was turned toward the camera, her face painted white like a mime. Her heavily made-up eyes were wide, her red mouth an open *oh* of surprise. She resembled a caricature of a slasher’s victim in a horror movie, seconds before she was murdered.

Someone went to a lot of trouble to pose her this way.

“Jesus,” I said. “This is fucked up.”

Lieutenant Addison nodded. “Wait till you hear the details. And you’re going to need to hear them, because you’re being detailed to the special cases

task force. You are going to be placed on an undercover investigation.”

Her words piqued my interest. I glanced up at her.

“Obviously I’m interested. But... why me?”

“The lieutenant over on the special cases task force asked if I had a female detective that was the same age as the victims. And I put your name forward.”

“Oh.” My shoulders sagged. “I guess I am the only woman in my age range working here. I just thought...”

I allowed the words to trail off. Addison lifted her mouth in a grim smile.

“Sorry to be the first to tell you this, but you are not special. You just fit the parameters.”

I heaved a silent sigh. “Okay. Well... tell me more about the case.”

She took the folder from my hands and splayed the photos out, then looked at me with a serious, intent expression. I peered at the photos, each one more devastating and horrifying than the last.

“The vics were three beautiful up and coming actresses. Each of them were found tied up. Each of them strangled to death. Each murder was committed in a back alley of a different dive bar in West Hollywood. It’s obvious they’re connected.”

I didn’t say anything, so Lieutenant Addison reached over to tap all three photos, right by the victim’s faces.

“Besides the silver masks, the heavy white face paint, and heavy makeup they were all wearing, the only other connection between the three of them is the Hush Hush Club. Have your heard of it?”

I shook my head. “Nope. I’m not really much of a socialite.”

“It’s an exclusive nightclub that caters to the rich and famous. We think the victims may have frequented the place, or possibly known the owners somehow. We’re not sure if it’s relevant or not, but we need to figure out if the club is a link in their murders.”

I looked at the photos a little closer, disturbed by the way the women

were so tightly bound. Their bulging eyes were lined in thick black eyeliner, contrasting with the white face makeup and bright red lipstick smeared on their skin.

“This is fucked up,” I muttered. “Why are they tied up like this?”

“It’s Kinbaku.”

“Excuse me?” I asked, wrinkling a brow.

“Japanese bondage,” she replied. “There’s an art to it, apparently.”

I looked closer at the intricately tied knots, the tight ropes wrapped around the victims’ bodies and shuddered at the thought of dying while tied up like that. The girls must have felt so powerless.

“Why do you think there’s a connection with the club?”

“Friends and families of the victim have all mentioned it. Take this file home. Study it thoroughly. You’ll need to know everything about the Hush Hush Club and its owners.”

“Why?” I frowned. “What do you mean?”

“We’re sending you in. We need you to go and get a job there. See what you can find out. Strictly intel, Carson. You won’t have to do anything you don’t want to. But if you’re able to lure the killer out of hiding, then all the better.”

“You’re sending me in as bait?” I asked, my eyes wide.

“We have to catch this asshole before he does this to another woman. You have any other ideas?”

I sat back in my chair, the images of the strangled women now burned into my brain. Swallowing, I shook my head.

“Fuck. When do I start?”

“Soon.”

“This is why they put that shit in my locker, isn’t it?”

“I’m afraid so. They’re just jealous that you’re getting such a big case.”

I nodded, everything clicking into place now. Fuck Hoskins and his cronies. They thought they could intimidate me into leaving or doing a shitty

job, and they had no idea how wrong they were.

“I’m in,” I said, standing up and taking the file from the desk. “Call me with the details.”

“You got this, Carson. I have faith in you. Besides, you don’t really have any choice.”

I walked out silently, ignoring the snickering I heard as I walked back to my desk.

Chapter Three

WEST

Theo's point about Danika never leaving me alone was driven home as I walked out the front door and my ears were assaulted by the piercing voice of my nightmares. Danika was in Derek's face, stabbing a perfectly manicured, black-lacquered nail into the center of his massive chest. She was dressed in her signature all-black, but with a bit of a bondage flair tonight.

I recognized the leather collar with a sparkling ruby perched in the middle of it as the one I'd bought her right after we got married. She wore it around her neck just to fuck with me, just like she did everything else just to fuck with me. I had no doubt about it.

It seemed to be her favorite thing to do. I'd given her everything in the divorce — our main residence in Bel Air, a Mercedes, a Porsche, the biggest one of our two penthouses in Manhattan, and the beach house in Malibu. I'd kept only the house in the Hills, and agreed to an offensive amount of monthly alimony just to get her to go away quietly.

I'd been so naive to think that would actually happen.

And now, here she was, showing off every voluptuous curve and artfully etched tattoo that she'd used to craft her image. She knew it was my weakness. In fact, I'd probably never have gotten involved with her if it hadn't been for those very curves and tattoos. But not tonight. Nothing about

her petite and curvy frame was attractive to me anymore. I'd seen what was contained in that exquisitely wrapped package, and that ugliness far outweighed the outward beauty.

Standing next to her tonight was a nameless model I recognized from the latest cover of Italian Vogue. He was the opposite of me, of course — tall and dark and exotic, with big full lips and a flowing mane of long dark hair. He towered over Danika, keeping a vapid look in his cold blue eyes as Danika ranted.

Her sharp gaze turned to me, her famous green eyes flashing with anger.

“You can't keep me out, West!” she seethed, her voice dripping with venom.

“Why would you even want to be here, Danika?” I demanded. It was bullshit, her insistence on being allowed in. This was my club — partly, at least. “We're divorced, in case you've forgotten?”

She rolled her eyes, and poked my chest as she lowered her voice to a malicious hiss. “You fucking know why, West! I want back in to Profane.”

My fingers tensed to grab her arm. I could feel my own anger seeping through my tightly controlled demeanor. I clenched my fists and forced myself to take a step back.

“Shut up, Danika. You know you're forbidden from talking about that, let alone going there again.”

“I don't give a fuck!” She tossed her hair over her shoulder, trying to fool me with her words and gesture, but I could see right through her. I squeezed her arm harder.

“You signed a fucking NDA, Danika,” I warned, pulling her inside the club, her date following as Derek allowed him through. I pulled her into a dark corner, the pulsing lights flashing across her twisted face. “You can come in to the Hush Hush Club, but not Profane. If I catch you saying anything about this shit in public again, your world is going to come crashing down on you. Do you understand?” I gave her a shake. “I'll take everything

away. The houses, the cars, the alimony — I’ll sue your ass and take it all back. Don’t fucking test me, Danika.”

“Test you?” she shrieked, her voice rising to uncomfortable decibels. “You bastard! Who do you think you are? You can’t keep me out! And you certainly can’t keep me quiet.”

“You signed the agreement yourself, Danika.”

I was so tired.

Tired of fighting with her.

Tired of fucking thinking about her.

She reared back and smacked me right in the middle of the chest. “That was before I knew you were making a fucking movie about me, you asshole!”

I froze. My lips parted on an unspoken question. How the fuck did Danika know about the movie?

Deny, deny, deny. The advice of my agent rang through my head. No way was I going to tell Danika shit about this movie.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” I said, running a hand through my hair and looking away.

“Oh, really?” She scoffed, shaking her head. She reached up and used one finger to pull my chin down towards her. Her eyes sparkled with smugness. “Look at me, darling.”

She cocked her head to the side and lifted a brow. Anger spiked my heart rate as she confirmed my worst fears. She *did* know about the movie. I’d tried to keep it under wraps, but I’d obviously failed.

“You didn’t think to tell me you were going to make a movie called *Look At Me, Darling?*” She laughed. “I hear it’s going to be an exciting movie, too. Based on a woman with unusual kinks that she brings into a marriage. And how her devoted husband goes out of his way to create a world where she can explore those kinks to her heart’s content. Gosh, sounds so familiar.” She paused, shrugging my hand away, and lifting her chin. “I wonder where I’ve

heard that before.”

“Fuck off, Danika,” I said, starting to walk away. She stepped in to block my escape. “If I made a movie about you, it would be titled, *Cheater*.”

“I sought solace in a coworker because you spent eight months working on that movie in New Zealand!”

“I’m one of the most popular actors in America, Danika. I go away and work on movies. I did it long before you came along.”

“But not since.” She gives a cruel little laugh. “I don’t care about us anymore, West. I don’t give a shit about you. But I do care about my career. More than anything.”

“Yeah, I fucking figured that out, didn’t I? A little too late.”

“I’m glad things didn’t work out. And I’m not going to apologize for my dedication to my career. But you know me, West. I will stop at nothing to get what I want.”

“And what is it you want now, Danika?”

“I want to star in your movie.”

I scoffed, my heart pounding. “Fuck no. Never.”

She reached up again, flashing me a sickly-sweet smile as she cradled my cheek in her hand. I flinched and pulled away. “I’m going to pretend you didn’t say that. I’m going to give you a little time to think about things. A week, maybe. And then — if things don’t go my way, I’m going to tell the entire world about Profane and what goes on there. *Darling*.”

“You couldn’t even if you wanted to,” I insisted. “You signed an NDA.”

“And we both know there are ways to get around them.”

“It’s not entirely up to me, goddammit! I haven’t even gotten the project green-lit. I certainly won’t be making the final decisions about casting, you know that.” I was only half-lying, because when I met with the studio, one of the first things I’d stipulated was that I would be the one to narrow down the pool of actresses.

“If you want me to respect your privacy, and if you want to keep Profane

a secret, then I trust you'll find a way to make it happen. Don't test me, West."

"Fuck off, Danika," I said, stepping around her and stomping away, rage coursing through my veins.

Her laughter echoed in my ears and it took all my strength not to turn back to her and wrap my fingers around her skinny little neck. In reality, I would never hurt a woman, but I'd be lying if the fantasy hadn't popped up in my mind during the divorce. Danika had been a spoiled child about everything. I never should have married her in the first place.

I left her standing in the dark corner and headed to one of the only places that seemed to relieve my stress these days — Profane.

We'd built a magical place.

It was thrilling.

Discreet.

Tantalizing.

And like no other place on earth.

Theo and Rian had joined me in creating the answer to what so many others had fantasized about for years.

Hush Hush Club was only a cover for the real gem, Profane.

And Profane was a cover for a shadowy realm we hadn't even named.

Only the select few were invited into the secret space where the real magic happened. And that magic was so exclusive it had become almost mythical, only whispered of in certain Hollywood circles.

Was it a real place or just another fabrication in this city of professional liars?

We were all acting, on screen and off. It was our collective mission, in this city, to make things out to be bigger and better than they actually were.

But as for Profane, it was understandable there was controversy regarding the existence of the most exclusive sex club on the entire West Coast. While nobody was supposed to talk about anything that went on there — NDAs

were signed at the door before even one pair of panties dropped — rumors still leaked out.

The truth of it all was that my friends and I had created the perfect place to live out our darkest fantasies.

We'd created a safe space to anonymously indulge in a town that was not known for discretion. Or anonymity, for that matter.

We catered to one distinct fact — even famous people have desires. They have fantasies. They have dreams and sexual needs they want fulfilled, just like everyone else. And sometimes, those needs were very unique and risky.

Why not create a safe place for them? Free from the prying eyes of the public, absent from the vulturous hunger of the media, unshackled from the judgement of their peers and the control of their handlers?

I was fucking proud of what we'd built.

The services we provided at Profane couldn't be found anywhere else. Only the three of us knew the true identities of our exclusive members, and we steadfastly kept the names of the faces behind the masks they wore to ourselves. We understood that profound need for discretion. We understood because we shared that need.

Nobody wanted to know that America's Sweetheart liked getting choked out while taking a ten-inch dick up her ass from a stranger, all while being greedily gazed upon by a dozen other naked people every Saturday night.

No, they wanted to see her perfect veneered smile looking wholesome as fuck in the latest romantic comedy, and imagine she didn't even know she could take a dick in her ass like that.

Compartmentalization was key to keeping society from crumbling.

Because if America's Sweetheart didn't have a place to let loose every now and then, she wouldn't be smiling so prettily on that silver screen, would she?

It was the perfect illusion.

We were happy to provide the service.

And we were even happier to benefit from those services personally. Especially when we took the darkness downstairs to the next level with our secret parties.

My time spent at Profane, and what went on below, had become my main source of relief. The burdens of being a famous actor, the pressure of Hollywood, the stress of the endless hustling necessary even at my level, not to mention the bullshit torture of the very public divorce I'd just been dragged through, had left me searching for that relief in a lot of unhealthy ways. The drugs and drinking did nothing to provide that.

Only our club delivered the high and the release that I truly needed.

The carved wooden door to Profane was guarded by Johnny, a man I'd hand-picked. He was heavily armed, even though none of his weapons were visible.

He handed me my mask and robe with a silent bow.

With a deep breath, I brought the silver mask to my eyes, secured the velvet strap behind my head and draped the robe over my shoulders. Pulling the heavy hood over my head, I anxiously anticipated the moment I knew would soon come.

The stress would roll off my shoulders.

The worries would melt away.

Into the darkness of my desires, I would disappear.

Johnny stepped to the side, pulling the door open and allowing me to pass through it with reverent silence.

Rian and Theo waited just inside, their identities concealed by their own masks and cloaks, the darkness blanketing us in its anonymity and its promise of our primal release.

"Ready?" Theo asked.

"Ready," I replied.

We stepped into the darkness together.

The anger Danika had stirred up still lingered, but with every second,

with every step towards the forbidden pleasures offered by Profane, it lost the strength to control me.

Every cell in my body became focused on the fulfillment of my most taboo desires.

With a heavy thud, the door closed behind us, the promise of the evening laid out before us like a shimmering offering of our most decadent desires to the gods of passion themselves.

Chapter Four

KAYLEE

I *f she wasn't dead, she would have been a spectacular sight*, I thought. I tilted my head and took in her mussed red hair, her once-elegant clothing, the curves that made her body.

Her wide eyes still held the chilling look of fear that I'd seen in countless victims over the years. You never quite got used to it. I hoped I never did.

I shuddered, tucking my feet under me and pulling my green velvet blanket tighter over my body. Beside me, the flickering flames of the fire in my fireplace blazed merrily. But it failed to throw off enough heat to combat the deep cold I felt in my bones as I looked at the photographs in the file the Lieutenant had told me to study.

The murders had taken place exactly three weeks apart. Each dead woman was found within the hour of her death. The murderer stalked his prey into the alleys just behind streets that were full of partiers and people working in the midnight hour. Whoever he was, he was comfortable in L.A.'s famous late night scene.

The idea that someone could do that to another person, and then just leave their lifeless, tied-up body lying in a dirty back alley to rot, was an evil beyond comprehension.

The longer I looked at the photos, the stronger my anger grew. By the time my roommate, Violet, walked into the room, I was determined to find

the monster responsible for this. In the meantime, I tucked the photos behind the police reports, because the last thing I wanted to do was traumatize my dear friend.

I don't know what I'd do without Violet in my life. We lived together in the cozy little bungalow in Elysian Heights that she bought with the earnings from her first Vogue shoot for Calvin Klein. Since then, she's been in high demand as one of the most sought-after plus-sized models in the world. She could buy ten of these bungalows now, if she wanted to, but she insists she loves living here with me and doesn't want to change a thing. That's a huge benefit for me, because my measly cop salary pales in comparison to her supermodel earnings.

She held a plate with a half-eaten slice of cheesecake in her hand as she passed me, her fork waving in the air, her famous curves covered in baggy sweatpants that she managed to make look chic.

"I don't know if it's morning or night," she complained. "The jet lag is catching up to me."

"How was the shoot in Italy?" I asked. She'd just returned late last night from working on a campaign for Alexander McQueen and we hadn't had a chance to catch up.

"Exhausting, demanding, hot," she said, shaking her head. "I did have a fantastic threesome with a couple of hot Italian men, though."

"Of course you did," I said. "No wonder you're tired."

She shrugged, laughing, "When in Rome, darling."

I tried to laugh with her, but the memory of the photographs of the victims kept flashing in my mind.

"What's wrong?" Violet, ever the perceptive one, asked. "Wait — don't tell me yet. I'll be right back."

She hurried over to the kitchen and disposed of her cheesecake, returning with a bottle of wine and two wine glasses.

"Snagged a bottle of the good stuff from the shoot." She winked, pouring

us drinks before settling onto the couch and looking at me expectantly. “Spill it.”

I sighed, knowing there was no use in holding back with her. She could read me like a book.

“I got a new case to work on. It’s huge. The biggest of my career, if I’m being honest.”

“So why do you look like someone just killed your dog?”

I rolled my eyes, dreading what I was going to have to do to get through this case.

“It’s the misogynistic assholes I work with. Why do so many cops have to be such sexist pricks? I worked my ass off at vice — more than most of my colleagues if I’m being honest. And now that I’m where I want to be, I still have to put up with this shit.”

“What happened?”

“I got this case today, like I said. A big one. High profile. Lots of eyes on this one.”

“And?”

“You saw the news about Lily Paradise, Willa Francois and Jasmine Romano?”

“Of course, who hasn’t? Their murders are all over the news. Wait, that’s what you’re investigating?”

“Yeah,” I sighed. “It’s not as great as it sounds.”

“If you solve these murders, you could finally make detective, Kaylee.”

“I know! The fucked up thing is what they’re making me do to work on the case.”

“Okay...?” She looked at me questioningly.

I rolled my eyes. “Have you heard of the Hush Hush Club?”

“Totally,” she said, with a dismissive wave. “I just went there on a date last month. It’s not as great as everyone says. I think it’s owned by some Hollywood stars or something, but I’m not sure who.”

“The victims’ only connection is the club. They want to send me in undercover to work there, see what I can find out.”

“Oooh, fun!”

“No, not fun!” I protested. “They’re only doing it because I’m a woman. And the guys at the precinct are eating it up. They put a fucking vibrator and some stripper panties in my locker today!”

“Assholes,” she muttered.

“Yeah,” I agreed. “I’m used to their shit, though. But how am I going to get a job there? Look at me!”

“What’s the problem?” she said, wrinkling a brow as she raked a gaze over my blanket covered body.

“I’ve been reading the file and doing my own research. Rumors are swirling about that place. Some people swear there’s a secret sex club there, lots of talk of orgies and masked sex parties. Is there something more sinister going on? We don’t know yet. After months of having an open investigation, the team working the case — all men by the way — still hasn’t gotten very far and the murders keep happening. That’s where I come in, I guess. Strictly because I have a pussy. It’s humiliating.”

“You don’t think it could be because you’re good at your job?”

“What? No, I —.”

Her expression stopped me in my tracks.

“You know, your coworkers could be sexist assholes, they could be using you because you’re a woman, *and* you could be good at your job. All three could be true at the same time. Don’t sell yourself short, Kaylee.”

I sighed. She was right. I was fucking good at my job. And I was determined to make a difference in this case and not let the assholes get in my way.

“You’re a good friend, Violet.”

“Damn right I am!” she laughed, filling my wine glass and clinking the tip of hers against it. “To you! It’s bad bitch season, Kaylee. You’re the right

person for this job. You fucking got this.” She threw her arms around me and hugged me tightly to emphasize her point.

This was what I loved about Violet. Normally shy and quiet in spite of her profession, when it came to lifting up another woman she turned into the fiercest cheerleader around.

I pulled away, smiling gratefully at her.

She grabbed her phone and typed on it for a minute.

“What are you doing?”

“Checking to see who the owners are — ooooh! Wow, Kaylee. West Foster is one of the owners! Did you know that?”

“I have no idea who that is.”

“Oh, girl, you have got to be kidding me.”

“Is he famous?”

She rolled her eyes. “Extremely — he was in that vampire movie we saw.”

“Oh, I do remember that,” I nodded.

“Okay, so what do you need to do to prepare?”

I sighed again, “I’m not sure. Research every detail I can before I get there. Figure out what the fuck is in my closet that’s appropriate to wear.”

She scoffed. “Um, yeah, you’re going to need a little help with that. I’ve seen the contents of your closet.” Her eyes lit up and she jumped up. “I have just the thing!”

She ran off to her room and much to my chagrin came back with what looked like a bunch of black straps tangled in her hands and not much else. She held it up, and while dangling in the air, it vaguely resembled a dress of some sorts. One that had been slashed into several pieces.

I laughed. “What the hell is that?”

“It’s perfection, is what it is! Up!”

“What?”

“This is what you’re wearing.”

“Uh...no.” I shook my head, staying firmly under the blanket of protection I was cozily sheltered under.

“Seriously. Up! Strip!”

“I think I can find something a little more...substantial...in my closet.”

“Shut up!” She reached down and grabbed my hand. I groaned, but let her pull me up. “You haven’t been to the club. I have. Trust me! I know what’s going to get you in, and what’s going to get you a job there. Do you want to find the killer or not?”

She had a point.

“Fine,” I sighed. Reluctantly, I stripped off my sweatshirt and pushed my sweatpants over my hips, suspiciously eyeing the bundle of straps Violet held.

“Take off your bra and panties, too,” she commanded.

“Easy for you to do,”

“Job hazard.” She shrugged. “You lose all sense of modesty as a model.”

“I’m not a model. I have lots of modesty!”

“Well, pretend you’re someone else. Like Beyoncé. A stage presence, so to speak.”

“Right,” I said, peeling off my underwear and standing buck ass naked in front of my friend.

“Damn girl, you are fucking hot, you know that right? Look at that ass! Those curves! Your nipples are perfect.”

My face heated instantly.

“Don’t be shy, mama. Own that shit. Do you know how many women would kill for a body like yours?”

“I just hope I can figure out who’s killing bodies in general,” I said, as we struggled together to get me into the strappy contraption. It took a few minutes and all I could think about was that I hoped I didn’t need to go to the bathroom while wearing it.

“You’re gonna knock a few people dead yourself in this outfit,” she said

once we'd succeeded. She stepped back with a nod of approval. "Damn, Kaylee. If I wasn't straight, I'd have my head firmly wedged between your thighs right now."

"Violet!"

"What?" she said, with a nonchalant shrug. "I'm serious. Go look in the mirror."

I padded off to the bathroom, shaking my head at her words.

The reflection staring back at me looked like it belonged to a stranger. Somehow the straps managed to cover all the private bits, even forming a tiny banded skirt that barely covered my ass and crotch. Everything else was completely exposed.

I hated it.

I couldn't imagine wearing this in public.

Violet appeared next to me, nodding enthusiastically.

"I can't wear this," I said.

"You already are. And you're fire, baby!" she said.

"I can't!"

"You have to wear this, Kaylee. It's a sure thing."

"Shit," I muttered, my stomach turning.

"Do it for the victims," Violet reminded me, as she held up a pair of thigh-high, black suede, stiletto boots. I groaned, gathering every ounce of strength inside of me to pull this shit off.

The crime scene photos flashed in my mind and the familiar rage bubbled up to the surface again. I had to hold onto that rage, or I would fail spectacularly.

I turned away from the mirror and headed back to the couch, anxious to get out of this get-up. My phone flashed and I grabbed it, reading the text message from the Lieutenant with a loud groan.

"What is it?" Violet asked, filling my wine glass again.

"My assignment starts tomorrow. And Hoskins is going to be my handler.

Fucking great. He's the prick that put the vibrator in my locker."

"Fuck him. You got this," she replied, handing me the glass. I grabbed it and downed it quickly, then sank into the couch, the dress digging into my fleshy bits.

"Bad bitch season," Violet repeated.

"Bad bitch season," I echoed, the warmth of the liquid courage the wine provided breaking through the wall of insecurity as I repeated the words in my head over and over like a mantra.

Chapter Five

WEST

When I walked into my office, the casting agents that the studio sent were already there. Spread across my desk was a pile of headshots of beautiful actresses, most of which I recognized instantly.

“Thanks for agreeing to meet here,” I said, sitting behind my desk. These meetings were so boring and unproductive. I was tired of carting my ass across town when nothing was moving forward.

I was too busy for this shit. I’d repeatedly described to them exactly what I looked for in a leading lady for *Look At Me, Darling*, and they’d failed to produce the woman I was envisioning.

So far, at least. I still held out hope, even if it was minimal.

“Of course, West,” Randy, the CEO of Face Forward Casting, smiled politely. I could see in his eyes that he was as irritated with me as I was with him. “We think we have some really good prospects today.”

“We’ll see,” I shrugged. I looked down at the photos, sliding them around as I studied them. There were eight of them and I discarded six immediately. “I know that the studio wants you on this project, but I don’t need a casting agent. I plan on auditioning and hiring all the actors myself.”

Randy was obviously prepared for this, because he didn’t so much as blink.

“We are just here to support your project. It’s actually common for an auteur such as yourself to cast roles in a small budget film. But I want you to know that there are tons of actors and actresses, that you probably haven’t even thought of, who are eager to fill your roles.”

I rolled my eyes, sighing as I looked at the headshots that were spread out before me.

“No, no, no,” I said, shaking my head. They were too tall, too short, too thin, too clean. I looked at the other two for a few minutes before discarding them as well. “These aren’t right. Do you have any others?”

“Well, there is one more. But I wanted you to see these, first.”

“Well?” I asked, my patience waning. “Who is it?”

With a sigh, he reached into the file resting on his lap and pulled out another head shot. He slid it across the desk upside down, with an apologetic expression.

“The studio is really lobbying for this actress to be the lead. They’re getting very aggressive about it, actually. They’ve hinted at pulling the funding.”

“It’s not their call,” I said. “It’s in the contract. It’s my fucking movie!”

“And that’s why they’ve only hinted so far. But you don’t want the studio execs unhappy if they’re the ones controlling the purse strings, West.”

“I understand,” I said, flipping over the photo with growing annoyance.

Danika’s face stared back at me.

“Absolutely not!” I said, standing up quickly and heading for the door. “We’re done here. Next time, do a better fucking job of listening, Randy!”

“West! Just talk with me, please. We need to make a decision soon,” he replied. “And they think casting Danika is a genius move. Considering your recent break up, with you two playing the lead roles, the chemistry would be off the charts. The natural promotion that would happen on the internet gossip sites would mean we could save a lot of money on marketing. Money that could go right into your bank account, West. Think about it.”

“Fuck that. I don’t give a shit about the marketing budget. I won’t work with Danika, Randy. Tell the studio that I’ll find my own leading lady.”

“If you don’t find someone acceptable, they’ll do it for you,” he warned. “Or, they’ll make me do it.”

“Fuck you, Randy,” I declared, before opening my office door and walking out.

Frustration and anger seemed to be my constant companions these days. I felt my blood boiling as I went to find Theo and Rian.

I found them seated at a table in the packed club, watching a group of applicants they’d called in to audition. We’d lost a few waitresses lately and we were doing cattle call-style tryouts tonight. We tended to be ruthless during the hiring process, putting the applicants through a rigorous interview and a difficult trial period before ever giving them jobs permanently.

I stopped by the table, taking in the room full of fresh talent. There were plenty of gorgeous girls with waitressing experience anxious to work for us. Several young women spotted me and blushed. They flipped their hair or pretended to pick something up off the floor to get my attention.

My gaze skated right past them. They’re too easy. I wanted someone I had to put a little energy into.

“Bend over,” Theo said to a young twenty something girl covered in tattoos, who held a tray full of drinks. “Don’t spill a drop.”

She bent at the knees and attempted to put them down on the low table in front of her, the tray wobbling precariously. She was obviously nervous, considering a table of customers watched as her closely as Rian and Theo did. Her ankles shook from the lack of support her stilettos provided.

She almost made it, but just as she put the tray down, one of the drinks tipped over and spilled its contents all over the table.

“Shit!” she muttered, quickly grabbing a towel and mopping it up.

“Thanks for coming,” Rian said over the pounding music, his voice cold and bored.

“Can I try again?” she asked, on the verge of tears. “I can do better. These shoes are a little challenging.”

“No. Have a nice night. Who’s next?” Theo barked, his voice laced with impatience.

“Damn, you two are so harsh,” I said, sliding into the booth with them and raking my eyes over the remaining applicants.

“Only the best for us, man.” Theo shrugged, his eyes glued to the ass of the teary woman gathering her things and fleeing the club. “How did your meeting go?”

“Uselessly unproductive, once again. I’m glad I didn’t drive all the way to their office,” I replied, my anger still raging as my voice rose over the thumping base of the music. “They’re pushing for Danika, if you can believe that. They said all the drama and gossip that would swirl around our pairing would drive down the marketing budget. Fucking unbelievable.”

“That would be a nightmare for you,” Rian chimed in.

“You’re fucking telling me,” I agreed. “Maybe I can find someone from the club to cast.”

“Dude, no,” he said. He instantly looked to Theo for backup.

“Why not? Everyone in this town is an aspiring actress. Maybe an unknown is just what I need.”

“Like the studio would ever agree to that,” Theo reminded me. “They want a name that’s going to draw an audience, you know that.”

“Fuck,” I muttered. He was right. I always hated when he was right.

“You’ll figure it out, West,” he said.

“Yeah, I will. How many more are we eliminating tonight?” I asked.

“We brought in a dozen applicants. We’ve eliminated three now. We only need to hire two people. So, watch them closely tonight and let us know if anyone stands out.”

“Right,” I nodded, raking my eyes around the club, spotting the unfamiliar faces. We had a few acting as assistants to the bartenders, some

walking around with champagne glasses for our free champagne service, a few behind the bar, and a few more handing out custom-ordered cocktails.

I felt sorry for them, knowing they were most likely going to be sent home and told not to come back. Working at our club was a highly sought after position. We paid well and we were one of the rare nightclubs that gave our employees full health insurance plus vacation and sick time. We took care of them because we needed them happy... and willing to keep their mouths shut about what they saw once they walked through the doors.

Especially the employees that worked in Profane.

My eyes landed on a waitress halfway across the room. She was bending over with her back to us. Auburn hair cascaded down her back, accentuating the soft curves of her voluptuous ass.

When she stood back up and turned around, my breath caught.

She was stunning. Beautiful in an unconventional way, her creamy skin complimented by the red curls framing her face. She saw me staring, her emerald eyes crashing into mine. Shyly, she smiled, her crimson lips tipping up tantalizingly at the corners. I nodded at her and she nodded back in greeting, before turning back to another table of customers and setting their drinks down.

The urge to talk to her overwhelmed me.

“What about her?” I said to Rian and Theo. “She’s fucking hot.”

“Indeed she is. Not sure she’s the right type, though,” Rian said, following my gaze.

I waved her over and she walked up with another shy smile that made me hard instantly.

“Hey.”

“Hello,” she replied, putting her empty tray down on the table.

“What’s your name?” I asked, entranced with her flashing green eyes.

“Rosie,” she said, her voice confidently rising above the music. She wore a silky white sleeveless blouse and a black pencil skirt that hugged her

curves. My fingertips twitched as my eyes trailed over her intoxicating body.

“I’m West,” I said, hooking a thumb at my colleagues. “This is Theo and Rian.”

She nodded and smiled politely. I gestured for her to sit down and she slid into the booth next to me. My pulse quickened as she drew near, my cock twitching in my jeans.

Fuck, she was beautiful.

“You’re doing a great job so far. I’m really impressed. I want to hire you. Do you want to work in our VIP room? Or…” I paused, knowing Theo and Rian would protest but I didn’t give a shit. “Maybe you’d be interested in auditioning for our private club?”

“There’s a private club?” she asked, smiling curiously at me. “I had no idea. That sounds so fun.”

Rian strode around to where I sat, and punched my arm. “Dude, what the fuck?”

Theo stood up and gestured for me to follow him.

“I’ll be right back, don’t move,” I said to her. She nodded and I slid out of the booth following Theo as Rian joined us. We walked a dozen feet away, where the loud music muffled our words.

I still stared at Rosie, though. Something about her lured me in like a sailor listening to a siren’s song.

“What the fuck are you doing, West?” Theo hissed.

“She’s great,” I said. “She’s fucking hot, she hasn’t spilled a drop, she’s handling the crowd effortlessly.”

“You don’t even know her. You can’t just invite her to work at Profane yet. You know it takes a while for someone to graduate to that. We have to trust them first. What if she’s a reporter or something? Why are you trying to screw us over like that?”

“I’m not, but you’re both fucking paranoid.”

“Hire her, fine, dude, but give it a few months first,” he begged.

“I respect you both, but you’re crazy if I’m not taking her to Profane as soon as I can get her to sign the NDA.”

“You just want to fuck her, West!” Rian insisted. He was one hundred percent correct. “The answer’s no. She’s gotta work here at least a month before we can move her up. Go stick your dick in someone else for a while, man. We need to know she can handle the pressure. Everyone’s going to come onto her, just fucking look at her!”

“Yeah, I know, man,” I said. “That’s why I want to move her up to Profane. But whatever, I’ll wait. I am putting her in the VIP room, though.”

“Whatever, dude,” Theo said. I could tell he was pissed at me, but I honestly didn’t care. I respected his need for privacy, but sometimes I hated his rigidity.

I left them there steaming and went back to the table where Rosie was waiting for me, clearly having witnessed the heated exchange.

“Come with me,” I said as I walked up. “I’m taking you to the VIP lounge.”

I might not be able to get her up to Profane so I could have my way with her just yet, but I wasn’t about to let Theo and Rian cock block me so quickly. I’d take her home with me if I had to.

“Is this the private club you were talking about?”

“No,” I said. “We’ll show you that another time. I’m going to put you to work in here tonight. Your job is to cater to the VIP’s every desire. If you see a glass half empty, fill it up. If you overhear someone talking about something they want, provide it if you can.”

“What does that mean, exactly?” she asked, tossing her hair over her shoulders and flashing me a flirty smile. “I’m sure there’s limits to what services you provide here, right?”

“It’s not a brothel, if that’s what you mean.” I winked. “Unless you want it to be?”

She laughed, her eyes flashing again. Every time she smiled at me, my

cock throbbed. I decided if I couldn't sink my cock into her right now, I could at least eye fuck her for a while.

I sat down at a table in the corner and settled in to watch the show.

"I'm just going to watch you for a while, see how you handle the customers."

"No pressure or anything, huh?" she teased.

"Don't be nervous," I shrugged, my eyes glued to the outline of her nipples poking under her shirt. I longed to suck one into my mouth. I wondered what she sounded like when she gasped. If she liked her nipples bitten. "You've done great so far. Let me know if you have any questions."

"Thank you, West," she replied, turning away and heading over to the nearest group of customers. The table was occupied by a group of Warner Brothers studio executives that could change Rosie's life in a second if they took a liking to her. I wondered if she was an actress, a singer, a model maybe? With those legs, she could be a dancer, too. I brazenly trailed my eyes all over her body as she worked, her captivating smile and graceful movements having me imagining what her mouth would feel like wrapped around my cock.

"Rosie," I called out.

She walked over, her hips swaying seductively with each step toward me. I forced the breath from my lungs.

What the fuck was wrong with me? I was completely enthralled.

"Yes, West?" she asked, batting her eyes.

I am going to fuck this hell out of this woman, I thought.

Hard.

Long.

Deep.

I couldn't wait to taste her.

"The couple in the right corner need attention," I said.

"Attention?" she asked, her brow raising slightly, as she scanned the

room. “Of course, right away.”

Her immediate obedience turned me on.

Honestly, it was me that needed attention. More importantly, it was my cock that needed her attention, but we’d get there. As she walked away, I stared at her ass, so round and full it invoked thoughts of drilling her from behind, my cock buried deep inside it.

As I watched her work the room, my desire for her grew. I’ve had hundreds of encounters with women, even a few men scattered in for exploration’s sake, and my instant attraction to Rosie was rare for me. I was more of a slow burn kind of guy, but my cock seemed to have other ideas today.

After a few minutes, she walked by my table on her way across the room. I reached out and grabbed her hand, pulling her close. Surprised, she stopped and looked at me expectantly.

“Yes?”

“You’re doing a great job, Rosie.”

“Thanks, West. Can I get you something? I can’t believe I didn’t ask earlier, what was I thinking?”

“Sit down,” I said, spreading my legs. She looked down at my lap, then looked at the empty seat across the table from me.

“Here,” I gestured, pointing to my open thighs. “It’s easier to talk.”

“Sure,” she said, giggling a little as she sat down on my lap, her thighs between mine. The brush of her body against me had my cock throbbing painfully in an effort to get closer to her.

I reached up and tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. Her thick red lips parted slightly, sucking in just a little. A glimpse of her tongue between her lips left me reeling. I wanted to lick it, suck it, pull it into my mouth and swirl my tongue around it.

“You’re fucking beautiful, you know that, right?”

“West, you’re too kind,” she said. If the lights weren’t flashing red, I may

have seen her blush.

“Why do you want this job?” I asked.

“Money,” she shrugged. “To be frank.”

“Why does anyone want a job, right?”

“Right,” she said, wiggling her ass on my thigh, and pushing her hair behind her shoulder. “But, since we’re being honest and all, the vibe is quite seductive.”

“The vibe? Are you the type that wants to be seduced, Rosie?” I asked, my voice lowering, certain my desire for her showed on my face. Why hide it? I traced her jaw line, stopping just before I reached her bottom lip. I paused there, waiting for her to answer.

A slow smile stretched across her face, her eyelids lowering slightly.

“What woman doesn’t like to be seduced, West?”

Her words were like a jolt straight to my cock. I smiled, my thumb landing on her lip and swiping across the length of it. A tiny gasp escaped from her lips, the breath rushing past my fingers.

“You’re going to be very popular here, I imagine,” I said. As soon as I lifted my thumb from the soft skin of her lip, her tongue darted out and licked the tip of it. I groaned, widening my eyes in surprise at her receptiveness.

“I’m sure you’re the popular one,” she said, the words sliding out of her mouth smoothly, like silk. “And the dangerous one, aren’t you?”

“Depends on your definition of danger, I suppose.”

She laughed, shaking her head. “I need to get back to work, if I want this job. Now, please, what can I get you to drink?”

“Negroni,” I said, reaching down and adjusting my cock. Her eyes followed my hand, her gaze widening as she watched me grip myself. “Please.”

Her eyes snapped back up to mine and her smile left me mesmerized. “My pleasure. Sir.”

“Sir? Damn woman,” I said. “How did you figure out my kink already?”

We haven't even kissed yet.”

She reached up and put a hand on my face as she stood up, bending over and providing me with a clear view of her perfect tits. “I like to think I’m good at reading people. Turns out I was right this time.”

I nodded approvingly. “What else are you reading?”

I wanted to snatch her up right then and there and drag her up to Profane and show her exactly what I needed. Patience was not a virtue I was familiar with. How the fuck was I going to wait a month? Theo and Rian were out of their minds.

Her eyes searched mine briefly, intense and dark, igniting my insides. Could she see in my eyes how much I wanted her?

Her eyes flashed down to the sight of my rock-hard cock throbbing under the fabric of my jeans.

The heat of her gaze answered my question. She bit her lip, her gaze slowly raking back up my body until she met my eyes. “Looks like there’s a lot to read.”

She stood up, flipping her hair behind her back again and smiling. “Be right back with that Negroni.”

I groaned as I watched her walk away, my cock swollen with desire.

Chapter Six

WEST

Back in my office, I spread out the headshots of six of our current club employees that I knew were actresses. Being asked to help employees get roles was nothing new. Looking for one for my own film was.

I was desperate to find the perfect lead.

My assistant, Joey, stood next to me patiently as I gazed down at them. I knew these women already, and knew they were each beautiful. But not everybody was photogenic or filmed well.

“Why is this so hard?” I muttered to myself.

“It’ll click soon,” Joey said. “I’m surprised the casting agents didn’t bring more options for you.”

“They were too busy advocating for Danika, the fuckers.” I was still steaming about that. They’d basically threatened me, and there was nothing I could do about it.

“Of course,” he said, nodding. “They do have a point, though, right? The buzz would be insane after all the drama from your divorce.”

“I don’t care!” I waved an exasperated hand. “It would be a personal nightmare. Why would I traumatize myself that way?”

“Yeah, you’re right,” Joey agreed. “It’s a bad idea. What about these girls?” He pointed to the photos.

“I don’t think any of them are right, either,” I sighed, turning them over one by one.

“No, probably not, You’re right, West.” Joey was the ultimate yes man, and if he wasn’t so fucking good at his job as my assistant, I’d have strangled him for it by now. I wasn’t sure the kid had an original thought in his head.

“Listen,” I said. “I need you to call around and shop for a new casting agent.”

“Aren’t you under contract with Face Forward?”

“The studio is, that doesn’t mean I am. There’s gotta be someone out there I’m not thinking of. Don’t involve the studio, I’ll pay for it myself. Call some places in New York. I can fly out to meet them.”

“Will do,” he nodded.

“And don’t tell anyone. I don’t want to hear shit from anyone until I’ve found the right woman.”

“Got it,” he said, standing with his hands in his pockets and staring at me, but not moving.

“So? Go, Joey!” I barked.

“Right, right,” he nodded, finally scurrying out the door. I sighed and got up to lock it behind him, my mind still on Rosie’s swaying hips as I walked back to sit behind my desk.

I was on edge today. Everything pissed me off. But I was happy for the distraction that flirting with her earlier had provided. It was just what I needed and a little release at her unknown expense was just what the doctor ordered.

I leaned back in my chair, unbuttoned my Levi’s, and pulled out my still throbbing cock. Closing my eyes, I let the images of Rosie flow through my mind.

Rosie, her shy smile spreading across her face...

Rosie’s creamy breasts nearly falling out of her low cut tank...

Rosie’s flashing green eyes, sparkling, teasing...

Rosie, the seductive sway of her hips as she walked away...

Rosie, knocking at the door.

I stopped mid-stroke as she called my name from the other side of the door. "West?"

Her voice both made me harder, and almost made me orgasm, at the same time. I stared at the door for a few seconds, contemplating opening it with my cock in my hand. Putting all restraint aside and bending her over my desk without a word.

But that wouldn't get me what I wanted. It would most likely scare her away. She obviously needed the job, which I was definitely going to give to her.

No, what I wanted was a good, long romp with her, not just some quick slam that would only leave me craving more.

So I tucked my cock away and fastened my jeans before walking over to the door and opening it.

She looked fucking beautiful standing there, her smile lighting up her face. She held up a sparkling cocktail.

"Your Negroni," she said. "When I came back, you were gone and Theo said I could find you here."

"Thank you." I accepted the drink from her and stepped to the side. "Come in."

"Oh," she said, looking past me into my office. "Okay, sure."

She perched on the edge of my desk, playing with her hair as she watched me sit back down. I wanted to pull her into my lap, but instead I looked at her silently.

"Did I do okay earlier?" she asked, "In the VIP lounge?"

"You did great," I said, nodding. "The job is yours, if you want it."

"Really?" she asked, Her eyes lit up. "Thank you so much! I'll do a great job, I promise."

"I know you will."

“So, where will I be?”

“What do you mean?”

“Where will I work? You mentioned some private club earlier? I assumed it was some kind of secret, is that right? Your partner’s reaction...”

Shit. I’d run my mouth, hadn’t I? As often as I let my cock guide me, I knew now that it was best to listen to my partners’ warnings and give it a little time before I told this perfect stranger our secret.

Despite my cock wanting to dive in head first, I first needed to test the waters. Anything else would be reckless.

“You’ll stay in the VIP room for a while,” I told her, ignoring her mention of the secret club.

My vagueness clearly wasn’t lost on her, but she let it go. “Sounds sexy.”

“Does it?” I asked, my eyes over her body again. With her hip cocked and her knees crossed, she was all sex and curves, soft hair and flashing eyes. My eyes landed on the hem of her skirt. I itched to lift it and bend her over my desk even more than I did before she’d walked in. Having her in here all alone only made the urge grow.

“Have you ever done any acting, Rosie?” I asked.

“Me? God, no.”

“Too bad.”

“Why do you ask?”

“I’m making a movie and looking for a lead actress.”

She scoffed, shaking her head. “I am not your girl, West. Trust me on that one.”

I stood up in front of her. She was so close. I could smell the sweetness of her perfume wafting off of her skin. I reached down to the plunging neckline of her top and pulled it down just a little more, exposing more of her ample cleavage.

Her moan was the approval I needed. I reached up to her lip again, running a thumb over it and yearning to press my lips to hers.

“You’re a fucking masterpiece, Rosie. You’d be fantastic on film, I bet.”

“That’s not the same as acting.” She shook her head. “My face gives everything away. Trust me on this.”

I stared down at her, my cock throbbing painfully, and tried to decide just how long I could wait.

“Can you start tomorrow night?” I asked.

“I can do anything you want,” she quipped with a sly smile.

“Be careful you don’t over promise there, Rosie.”

“Oh, trust me,” she laughed, heading for the door, “I’m not.”

Her laughter lingered in the air long after she’d left. My hand stayed in a death grip on my cock until I’d found the release I’d needed since I first laid eyes on her.

Chapter Seven

KAYLEE

The outfit West left for me in the dressing room made me wish I'd worn the scrappy contraption Violet had given me for the audition. I hadn't worn that, either, just like I didn't want to wear this one.

But West had given me the job, so I had no choice at this point. My first real shift at the Hush Hush Club started in ten minutes.

I pulled on the blood-red G-string leotard and looked around for the rest of the outfit, thinking it may have fallen behind the table or something. I was desperately hoping for a skirt or even a dress to put over it. Other than a pair of black suede stilettos that were somehow exactly my size, there was nothing else to cover my body with.

West's note had left no mistaking it was for me.

Rosie, I can't wait to see you strutting around the club in this. Have a great night!

I groaned as I put my street clothes in my locker and locked it up. My ass was completely exposed and the neckline plunged almost to my navel, leaving absolutely nothing to the imagination.

Obviously, that was the point.

West had made his intentions quite clear. And while I was completely shocked — and flattered — that he was coming on so strongly to me of all people, it did increase my suspicions about the man.

What was his angle? A famous movie star hitting on the new waitress? Why? When he could have anyone he wanted? Something didn't add up.

An hour later, I was resisting the urge to knee an unruly customer in the groin. He had me pressed up against the wall, his meaty, sweaty hand resting on my hip as he leered at me, his whiskey breath making me gag.

“Come on, baby, I heard there’s a secret club upstairs,” he slurred. He was drunk. Very fucking drunk and I was going to have his ass kicked out — as soon as I could extricate myself from his grip. “Kinky shit going on up there, isn’t there?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” I said, my leg twitching as I consciously put my foot firmly on the ground. My knee twitched of its own accord, aching to slam into his balls. When his hand crept up my side, towards my breast, I’d had enough.

I gripped his hand with a smile, slid my finger around his forefinger, braced his hand against my palm and bent it backwards. His eyes widened as he realized what was happening. I bent it back further, driving him to his knees, and he yielded with an expression of complete shock.

“Okay, okay, damn,” he said, his glassy eyes tearing up. “Mercy!”

“It’s against club rules to touch the staff,” I reminded him. I released his finger and stepped around his kneeling body with my heart pounding, leaving him there to drown in a puddle of humiliation. Fuck guys like him. The entitlement was astounding but nothing new. Just like Hoskins.

Women dealt with this shit every fucking day and I had absolutely no patience for it.

After stepping over the prick, I turned and saw West leaning against the wall in the corner. Irritated that he’d not stepped in, I walked over to him.

“You didn’t seem to need any help,” he said as I approached, as if he’d read my thoughts. It was true, though.

“I didn’t,” I said, lifting my chin. I certainly didn’t need his fucking help, so what was I irritated about? I pushed it away, needing to focus. Now that I

had this job, I needed to do my real job — solving these fucking murders.

“You look amazing,” he said, his voice a low growl that somehow hit right in my gut. “I knew you’d look great in that.”

“Do you always pick out the waitress’s outfits personally?”

“No,” he said, his gaze dark and intense. His eyes were ocean blue, sparkling with pure sex. “Only the ones I’m looking forward to watching all night.”

“I thought I already got the job?”

“You did,” he said, flashing me a smile. “And now I get to watch you every night.”

I swallowed hard, my stomach flipping. Every time I interacted with him, he flirted like crazy, and I had no idea how to take it. Obviously, he was only interested in fucking me, but his attention was definitely having an effect on me. I might be a hardened cop, but I was still a woman. And he was a fucking movie star.

The devastating grin he kept flashing at me told me exactly why millions of women lusted after him. Apparently, I was one of those women now, because he was hot as fuck.

But, lusting after him would not stop me from doing my job. I figured if I had any chance of discovering how the victims were connected to this club, I needed to start at the top. West, Theo, and Rian were at the top of the food chain and I was determined to get as close to them as I could.

If I had to endure West’s flattering flirtation, then I’d consider that a job perk.

I’d been watching closely. Outside of the security guards and the owners, the rest of the staff were women. Research says that strangulation is usually done by male perpetrators, and done by someone close to the victim.

I was starting with the men.

I leaned over and whispered in West’s ear, my lips brushing against his skin and sending electricity through my body.

“I like being watched.” I said the words as seductively as possible, hoping they had the desired effect and didn’t sound as cheesy as they did in my head.

His smile told me they worked. Maybe I wasn’t a bad actress after all.

I turned on my heel, letting him watch me walk away. I could feel the heat of his gaze on my ass as I sauntered off, my pussy noticeably wet from the chemistry flowing between us.

I caught West doing just as he said — watching me — on and off throughout the night. I’d turn a corner, and there he would be, silently watching me from the shadows. Another time, I was carrying a full tray of drinks to a table and he brushed up against me as he walked by, the heat of his body making my hands tremble as I struggled with the drinks.

It was a busy night, and I was slammed with customers in the VIP lounge, but somehow I managed to find a few minutes with each of the owners.

Theo was in the kitchen while I retrieved an order. I could tell he was trying to completely ignore me for some reason, but I made a point to talk to him.

“I appreciate the job,” I said, flashing him a big smile. He barely glanced at me, but grunted to let me know he’d heard me. “I won’t let you down.”

“You’re not who I would have chosen, but West seems to have taken a liking to you,” he mumbled, running a hand through his long dark hair. He was strikingly handsome — a complete contrast to West’s stereotypical blonde good looks. Theo was dark and mysterious, his eyes stormy and full of anger.

I let his words roll off my back. I wasn’t here to win a popularity contest. “Well, I appreciate the opportunity. A customer mentioned a private club or something earlier, what’s that about?”

“Just do your job,” he said gruffly, before walking away.

“Okay,” I muttered to myself.

Clearly, there were secrets about this place.

I was determined to find out where this secret club was. The handsy prick

talked about it earlier, and West's partners had been really upset when he'd mentioned it yesterday. The research the precinct had already done indicated its existence. I needed to find out more. And Theo wasn't about to dissuade me.

An hour later, I tried my luck with Rian.

Rian was the scary one of the three. He was huge, his over-exaggerated muscles slathered in tattoos of skulls and tribal patterns, his head shaved, his eyes brilliant and flashing and always darting around, as if he expected to be attacked at any moment and wanted to make sure he was ready for it.

He was behind the bar at the end of the night, taking money out of the cash register as I brought a tray of empty glasses back. He looked up for a second as I approached and apparently deemed me safe enough to go back to what he was doing.

"Thanks for the job," I said. "I love it here."

"Thank West," he said, shrugging. "The fucking prick."

"Prick?"

"West doesn't understand the idea of a democracy."

"What do you mean?"

"Theo and I had no say in hiring you. It's all on West," he said. His eyes raked over my body and he shook his head. "You're not the type of person we usually hire."

"I see," I said, ignoring his covert insult. "Well, as I told Theo earlier, I appreciate the opportunity. I won't let you down."

"I doubt you'll be here long, sweetheart. Don't get too comfortable."

Damn. The rudeness was brutal, but I wasn't about to let him get under my skin.

I left him there and went in search of a friendly face. I found one easily. West sat in a booth by himself, searching through his phone. The customers had left an hour ago and the few stragglers that were still hanging out in the VIP lounge sat with Theo at a separate booth, finishing their last drinks.

When I walked up to West, he broke out in a smile and gestured for me to sit next to him. I slid into the booth as close as I could get to him.

“Hey, how was your night?” he asked.

“I had a blast,” I said, rubbing my calves. The high heels were torture, even though I was sure they were designer. I’d gotten over my outfit’s lack of modesty about an hour into my shift, way too busy working to worry about my ass hanging out.

“I’m glad,” West said, reaching up and pushing a lock of hair behind my ears. He handed me a glass of champagne and I gladly took it from him, sipping it as he watched me. “What are your plans for the rest of the night?”

His eyes landed on my lips and I couldn’t help but smile as I wondered what it might be like to kiss him.

“Going home to soak in a hot bath,” I said, reminding myself that he could potentially be the murderer. Going home with him right away was probably not the best idea. “I’m exhausted.”

“And then what?”

“I don’t know. Probably scroll through the latest gossip sites on my phone. See if there are any updates on those actresses that got murdered. I heard they may announce new details soon.”

“You follow that stuff?”

“Don’t you? Especially with the rumored connection to the club?”

“This club?”

“Yeah, I saw it on TMZ the other night, didn’t you?” I asked, shooting him a curious glance. I was pushing it, probably. “Were you working the nights those women went missing? Were they here?”

“I really don’t know.” He shook his head. “It’s terrible what happened, but I trust the cops to do the right thing.”

“Of course.”

“I’d rather think about what’s real and right in front of me at this moment.”

He cocked his head, his azure eyes practically fucking me at this point. He reached down and traced a finger along the edge of my plunging neckline, his hand lingering at the skin between my breasts. My breath caught in my throat as he slid his finger suggestively up and down the front of my chest.

“Sure you don’t want to come home with me?” His voice was thick with lust, igniting something deep inside of me.

Was I sure? Fuck yes, I wanted to go home with him. But something held me back. Mainly, my job. And the fact that he might be a murderer, of course. I could hardly forget that.

The thing was, I desperately needed information. Pillow talk might just be where I’d find it, but my instincts told me jumping into bed with West right off the bat might not be the best way to obtain it. I needed him to trust me a little more first.

“Raincheck?” I asked, reaching over and cupping his face boldly. “I’m exhausted.”

“Another night,” he said, catching my hand and bringing my fingers to his lips. The heat of his mouth on my skin made my stomach flip with desire. I could hardly breathe as he stared deeply into my eyes. “I have every intention of tasting you someday, Rosie.”

He was bold. Uncomfortably so. Was he like this with everyone? I hated that I was reacting to his moves so intensely. I needed to stay professional and not let those lips brushing against my skin unnerve me so much.

“Oh, you’re bad,” I replied, playfully shaking my head. With a smile, I untangled myself from him and turned to walk away, knowing my ass was on full display for him to enjoy.

When I threw one last look over my shoulder before disappearing out of sight, it thrilled me to see he was still watching.

Chapter Eight

WEST

“How does it look?” I asked, stepping back and looking at the club. We’d hired an events company to decorate it for our annual festival, Carnival of Sin. They’d embellished the entire space with a glittery facade of black, gold, and silver, transforming the space into an opulent display of sparkles and shadows.

“What do you think of these?” Rian held a shimmering, silver-sequined mask over his eyes, the disco lights above him throwing dancing speckles of light over his ghostly smile.

“Looks familiar,” I smirked, as he placed it back on top of the pile on the table in front of us.

“Shut up, dude,” Theo, always the cautious one, chimed in. Any reference to anything that went on inside of Profane or below was strictly prohibited outside the doors. I was expected to know this and abide by those rules at all times, of course.

We both knew I’d not said a word about it, only made a brief reference to the mask, but Theo knew what I was referring to and that was enough for him. His worry was completely absurd. So, I ignored him as I always did. Which only pissed him off more.

We watched as the staff performed some last-minute tasks before the doors opened for the night. Tonight’s event was sold out, and in moments the

doors would open and the most beautiful people in Los Angeles would strut through the entrance. The glittering elites all hoped to see and be seen, be entertained and find their next friend or love interest or most likely — their next sexual partner.

In the middle of the room, two of our dancers were climbing up into their cages suspended high above the dance floor. They were two of the sexiest and most talented strippers in town, and were as naked as they could legally be. And, if I was being honest, real fucking wild cats in bed — as I'd just fucked them both at the same time last week.

But, like all the women I'd fucked in an effort to get Danika out of my mind after I broke up with her, once I'd had them, my interest faded and I was on to the next conquest.

Tonight, I wanted my conquest to be Rosie.

I'd been aware of her presence since I arrived to see her working quietly behind the bar, straightening up in the VIP room, and carefully maneuvering around the decorators before the club opened. We'd not spoken yet, but I felt like an invisible string connected us. I seemed to be subconsciously aware of her every movement.

I'd left her another outfit in the dressing room earlier and I couldn't wait to see her in it.

I was enchanted by her. I thought about her constantly. I couldn't wait to fuck her, so the obsession would end, though. It was enormously distracting. I had other things that I needed to be thinking about, and my mind kept drifting to the vision of her hips swaying as she walked away from me last night.

"I need to tell you both something," Rian said, breaking me out of my trance. "Privately."

Theo and I followed Rian up to the owners' box upstairs and closed the door behind us.

"What's up?" Theo asked, running a hand through his thick black locks as

he sank into the couch.

Rian stood by the window, watching everyone work below us. “I talked to my friend in the LAPD. He’s not exactly sure what’s going on, but he gave me a heads-up. Something’s going on in homicide. The team that’s investigating the recent murders of the actresses that are all over the news? They opened a case on the club.”

“Our club? What the fuck? Why?” Theo asked, his eyes widening in alarm.

“He doesn’t know. He overheard a conversation, that’s all. He’s going to look into it, but in the meantime, I wanted to give you both a heads-up. Be careful who you trust. Keep your mouth shut and your eyes open.”

“Fuck,” I muttered, shaking my head. “Those three women were Profane members, but I rarely saw them here. I wonder what the connection is? And how the fuck would the cops even know about Profane?”

“We don’t know that they do. My source mentioned the Hush Hush Club, not Profane. Still, I don’t know,” Rian said. “But I don’t fucking like it. The last thing we need is the cops digging deep around here, and you both know that. I was worried this was going to happen when I saw that shit on TMZ.”

“We aren’t doing anything wrong,” I insisted. “Nothing truly dangerous happens at Profane. Even if they found out about it, it’s all just fantasy and totally consensual.”

“That doesn’t mean what happens at Profane doesn’t lead to other, more dangerous situations.” Theo shot me a pointed look. “And you know that, West.”

“Anything that happens outside of Profane is not the club’s responsibility,” I reminded him.

“If I find out that any member of Profane, or someone on staff, fucking snitched,” Theo raged as he stood up and started pacing around the office, “I swear to God, they will regret it with every ounce of their fucking soul.”

“We don’t know that anyone did that,” I reminded him.

“True, we don’t really know anything yet.” Rian shrugged. “I don’t know, man. I’m just giving you the information. I’ll keep you posted if I find out anything else.”

“Thanks,” Theo said. “I don’t know what we can do that we aren’t already doing. Should we step up security? I can add a few more guys.”

“I don’t know how that would help,” I said. He was unhinged and paranoid, and I refused to mirror his fears. “Everything seems to be under control right now.”

“Does it?” Theo snapped. “This is terrible fucking news, West!”

“For all we know, Theo, they’ve opened files on every club these women ever went to. Don’t be so paranoid, for fuck’s sake!”

“That attitude is what’s going to get us fucked,” Rian cautioned. “We have to be diligent, dude. Making little movies and shit is not being discreet.”

“Well, at this fucking rate, the movie won’t be getting made anyway. I can’t find anyone that’s suitable for the lead role, so maybe stop bitching about it for a while.”

“I’ll believe that when I see it,” Theo said, his voice laced with sarcasm.

“Look, us turning on each other isn’t going to help shit,” said Rian.

“You’re right.” I was up with both of them. The stress of the club and the pressure from the studio to complete the casting was getting to me. I needed a release. And I needed it now. “I gotta go.”

I had every intention of going straight up to Profane, putting on my mask, and finding some partner willing to let me take out my frustrations on them. My cock was throbbing with need. My body was tense and painfully wound up with an itch that had only one way to scratch it.

By now, the club was rocking.

Music pounded, the lights flashed, and the drinks flowed. The dance floor was already filled with scantily-clad people pressing against each other, the crowd pulsing below the naked girls that gyrated in the cages suspended in the air.

The Carnivale themed party made the Hush Hush Club look eerily like Profane. The customers concealing their eyes behind sparkling masks lent an air of mystery and intrigue that only added to the seductive vibe of the normally hedonistic club.

As I walked by the VIP lounge, my eyes landed on Rosie working her ass off as she flitted around serving drinks. I couldn't help but smile to see that she'd donned the outfit I'd left her. We'd invested in a hefty wardrobe for our staff and I often enjoyed choosing things specifically for certain waitresses. Doing so for Rosie had been quite enjoyable.

Tonight's selection was inspired by my love for bondage. When I saw her encased in the shiny black latex minidress, my cock swelled with desire for her. The thigh high stiletto boots I'd left for her matched the dress perfectly, and I desperately tried to see if she also wore the black latex panties I'd added. When she bent over to place a champagne flute on a table in front of her, I caught the glimpse I'd been aching for.

Suddenly, nothing mattered but tasting her. I needed her thighs wrapped around my face and my tongue buried in her pussy before the night was over.

Knowing nobody else would satisfy me, I opted to sit in the corner and watch her for the next few hours. By the time her shift was ending, I was pulsing with desire for her. She was graceful and strong, curvy and feminine, her classic beauty making me wonder what I'd ever seen in anyone else.

Of course, I knew it was all infatuation. That's how it always went with me. I tended to get fixated on one person, get a taste of them, and then move on. I was sure Rosie would be no different, but right now?

I needed those shiny black panties sliding over her thighs.

All I could think about was what she might taste like...

What she might feel like with her naked body quivering while I pounded into her...

What she'd sound like when she moaned my name while I drilled into her from behind...

My eyes raked across her plump ass, and I knew I was done. I stood up, striding across the room straight towards her.

“Come with me,” I said.

She looked over at me in surprise, a full tray of drinks in her hands.

“Um...” She looked at me with uncertainty. I took the tray and handed it to the nearest waitress and took off walking, knowing Rosie would follow me. I was right.

I closed the door to my office behind us and walked over to the small credenza behind my desk. I pulled out a bottle of my favorite rye whiskey.

“Do a shot with me,” I said. She stood silently by the door, watching me. “Have a seat.”

She moved slowly, slinking towards the seat like a sultry cat. I put the glass down in front of her. She took it and sipped, while her eyes tracked my every movement.

Sitting on the edge of the desk in front of her, I finished my whiskey in one shot and poured myself another. She looked up at me, her position in the chair providing me with a tantalizing view of the luscious cleavage that I desperately wanted to bury my face in.

But I’m a gentleman, first and foremost. As much as I wanted to just bend her over and wordlessly sink into her, I knew that was unacceptable behavior. I needed to get to know her a little before I shoved myself into her so unceremoniously.

We’d get there. I had no doubt.

“How was your evening?” I asked, commencing with the torturous, yet required, small talk.

“Busy,” she replied, her eyes full of curiosity that I ignored.

“Where did you work before, Rosie?”

Her eyes widened with a glimmer of surprise. “I did some cocktailing at a few bars in Texas. I just moved here.”

“I see. Are you single?”

“Yes.” She flashed me that shy smile that made my cock twitch.

I wondered if that was enough small talk yet. Probably not.

“What about you?”

“Am I single?” I scoffed. “I just went through a nasty divorce. Surely you read all about it on the internet?”

“No.” She wrinkled her nose. “I don’t really keep up with all that. I mean, I know who you are, of course. But I only saw you in that one vampire movie — The Sanctuary? That was great. I mean, I liked the book better, but you were great. That’s what I meant.”

I couldn’t believe my ears. She didn’t know anything about the divorce?

“I’m shocked. I thought everyone knew about it.”

“Not everybody pays attention to celebrity gossip. I only do a tiny bit.” She shrugged. “Do you want to talk about it?”

My eyes met hers and my heart skipped a beat. Outside of my therapist, nobody wanted to hear me talk about my divorce. Rosie didn’t even know me, but there she was, looking up at me with her eyes full of compassion and kindness. For the first time in my life, I had no idea what to do with myself.

“Stand up,” I whispered, my voice a low growl. “Please.”

She nodded and pulled herself to her feet, standing an inch away. Her breasts heaved between us, restrained only by the shiny latex.

“Thank you,” I whispered.

“For what?” She bit her bottom lip, the gesture driving me out of my mind. My cock throbbed between us, desperately trying to close the distance between her center and mine.

“Being human,” I said. “I forget that kind people exist.”

A slow smile spread across her face, lighting up her eyes. “You’re welcome. I had a difficult ex myself. I understand. At least a little.”

I knew I shouldn’t do it. I knew it could open up a window for danger. That it wouldn’t end well.

I didn’t give a fuck.

I did what I wanted.

When my lips met hers, it was like diving into a white-hot heat.

Fiery.

Loud.

Hard.

She gasped in initial surprise. But then her lips welcomed me easily, opening, inviting, melting under my kiss. My tongue darted out, flicking her bottom lip, her body answering with another gasp that escaped deep from her mouth.

She tasted like whiskey and peaches and pure lust.

My hand flew up, my fingers tangled in a handful of her thick, soft hair. I pulled her head back so I could delve deeper into her hot mouth with my hungry tongue. I kissed her with all the passion I'd been holding back these last few hours, my other hand gripping her hip and pulling her in close, my cock throbbing against her bare thigh.

The heat was electric between us, flowing as a rush of desire that seemed to ignite in both of us. Her hand found the back of my head, and she pulled me down, her kiss matching the intensity of my hunger, her moans escaping into my mouth as my tongue tangled with hers.

When she finally pulled away, her glassy eyes stared up at me in shock, her lips glistening and swollen.

“My god,” she whispered.

I cupped her cheeks, which had flushed a perfect shade of pink. “You’re blushing. You’re as pretty as a little rose.”

She blushed harder, shaking her head. “You’re a good kisser,” she whispered, not making any move to distance herself from me.

“You’re incredibly sexy, Rosie.” My voice was thick with lust. Moving my thumb to her bottom lip, still wet with my saliva, I pressed hard, slowly sliding back and forth over its plumpness. “I don’t know what you’ve done to me, but I plan on devouring you. I don’t know when...or where...but I think

it's important that you're aware of my intentions. If I don't do something to get you out of my system, I'm going to explode."

"Wow," she whispered, her green eyes widening. Her tongue darted out, licking my finger as she held my deep gaze. "Now I know."

"Now you know," I agreed, nodding slowly, my thumb circling her tongue.

Chapter Nine

KAYLEE

Jesus fucking Christ.

Staying in a professional mindset was almost impossible with this guy.

I'd never been more thankful I wasn't wearing a wire or a bodycam. Hoskins would never have let me live down the fact that West Foster had his fucking tongue down my throat and his thumb rubbing my lips. As happy as I was that Hoskins would never know about this, I couldn't wait to get home to tell Violet.

I could hear her shrieking already.

I stepped away from him, grabbed the bottle off the desk, and poured us both another shot. I needed space to think. West was so close, too close for me to even breathe properly.

I took a sip from my glass, the warmth spreading through me but doing nothing to put out the fire West had ignited inside of my body.

"I can't believe this is your life every night," I said, trying to find a way back to pulling information from him. All I wanted to do was let him shove his tongue back down my throat, but that wasn't what I was getting paid for. "This place is just...magical."

"I'm not here all the time. More so lately, than usual," he replied, his hand resting lightly on my hip, his eyes glued to my lips.

My pulse raced.

“I’m glad you like it here.”

“The reputation alone was enough to get me to visit. I never thought I’d actually get hired, so thank you.”

“Why not? You’re beautiful, Rosie.” He reached up and ran his hand over my cheek, and I felt the blood rush to my face. “Blushing again. Little Rose, I like that.”

“You’re very flattering,” I replied. “Are you like this with everyone?”

“No,” he said, growing serious. “In fact, just the opposite. Most women bore me pretty quickly.”

“I see. Seems like it would be hard to get bored around here, though. Everyone is so beautiful, so sexy...”

“Not as sexy as you, Little Rose.”

His attention was over the top. Intense and hot and bordering on awkward. But I was determined to use it to my advantage. I was here for information, not flattery.

“You’re the sexy one, West,” I said, flipping my hair over my shoulders and batting my eyelashes, hoping like hell it appeared natural and not like I was trying out for a fucking shampoo commercial. I leaned into him, pressing my breasts against his chest, and lowered my voice to a whisper. “I’ve heard a few of the customers say there’s some kind of private kinky sex club upstairs, only for the wealthiest celebrities. And you said something yourself. Won’t you tell me? Everyone’s so mysterious about it. Why? Is it true?”

His eyes widened, then raked down to my chest and back up to peer deeply into my eyes. At first, I thought he wasn’t going to answer. But then he grinned, a mischievous spark lighting in his eyes.

“Why are you asking?”

“Because I thought it might be fun to work there,” I said.

“Why?”

“I’ve always been curious about that kind of stuff. It turns me on, I think,

I'm not sure, really," I said, my eyes landing on his lips. I wanted him to kiss me again.

"Is that so?" he asked, his voice sexy and low, the heat between us rising.

I nodded, biting my bottom lip. I'd never been much of a flirt. More of a hardass, honestly. But this man was so sexy he brought it out in me, with his obvious attraction and desire to get into my pants, er, uh — latex panties. The very ones I couldn't wait to get out of, for more reasons than one.

"So?" I asked. "Is it true? Is there really a private sex club here?"

"What if I told you there was?"

"Then I'd ask you to show it to me."

He laughed, nodding, watching me carefully.

"I can keep a secret." I flashed him a smile. "Promise."

"Can you?" he asked, reaching out and grabbing a handful of my hair again. He pulled my head back, his lips coming dangerously close to mine once more.

I gasped and nodded, my gaze locked with his. "Yes."

"Then, yes, Rosie, there is a secret club upstairs. But I can't let you see it."

"Why not?" I asked.

He tightened his grip on my hair, sending shocks of pleasure through my body. "Because you'll need to prove yourself first."

He brought his mouth down to mine, kissing me again, so gently this time that I could barely feel the brush of his lips before he pulled away.

"How do I prove myself?" The words fell from my mouth in a rush.

It was my first glimpse, the first recognition of a side of myself that I'd never knew existed.

Yes, I was doing my job. Whatever it took to get there, right?

But just under the surface, another need existed. The pain of West's fist bunched in my hair, contrasted with his lips promising the sweetest, lustiest pleasure. I was lost in the sweet spot that existed between pleasure and pain,

and I now knew I was hungry for more and more of it.

“Let’s play a little, ourselves,” West said slowly. “If I think you can handle it, maybe I’ll show you.”

I searched his eyes, his words tumbling around in my head. What did he mean by ‘play’?

That could be anything at all.

I considered asking for clarity. Setting boundaries. Safe words and all that, just in case.

Instead, I just lifted my chin and leaned into him, determined to do anything required to get the job done. If this is what I had to do — *let West Foster have his way with me* — then so be it.

“I’m down,” I smiled, leaning forward and kissing him boldly.

He groaned into my mouth, gripping my hair even tighter and grabbing my hip again, pressing me into him. The fact that West’s cock throbbed against my hip bone was not lost on me. I reached down and gripped it brazenly, reeling at the steeliness of its heat.

He groaned again, then ripped his lips from mine. Grabbing my hand, he pulled me towards the door.

My heart raced with nervous excitement.

I had no idea what was coming next, but somehow that only added to the thrill.

Instead of taking me to some secret entrance, he entered one of the private VIP rooms in the main club. I tried to hide my disappointment, because I’d already seen these rooms. I was interested in the secretive side of the club, which must have had a completely separate entrance that I’d not found yet. Maybe if I could get through this night, he’d show me.

After locking the door behind us, he walked over to a closet in the corner and opened it, revealing a plethora of sex toys and bondage gear.

I swallowed hard, forcing my feet to stay put and not flee. I scanned the room instead, looking for anything I could use to defend myself. Of course, I

knew how to defend myself with nothing but my own body. I was highly trained. But any good fighter knows to never completely reject more effective weapons if they're available.

“What’s your pleasure?” West asked, glancing at me over his shoulder.

“Um, I’m not sure, to be honest,” I said. “I’m a bit inexperienced. Like I said, I’m just intrigued, that’s all.”

He pulled out a long, fringed, leather whip, letting the strands of leather stream through his outstretched fingers. The gesture was somehow completely sensual. My breath caught in my throat as I watched the play of his fingers.

“What specifically are you intrigued about, Little Rose?” Closing the distance between us, he lowered his voice to a hush as he brushed the tips of the leather strands over my cleavage. “Bondage? Pain? Power play?”

I had no idea how to answer. My sex life up till now was as vanilla as you can get. Outside of a few light spankings from my ex who thought that made him ‘adventurous,’ and in reality, he was about as adventurous as a monk. Throughout our entire sexual relationship, he barely got off his back, preferring to let me do the work.

Already, this was much more exciting. And I hadn’t even seen West’s cock. Yet.

“I’m interested in all of it. Maybe we can start light and work up to something a little more intense later?” I asked, hating the fear I heard in my voice. I squared my shoulders and lifted my chin, hoping to tap into my courage.

“Are you scared?”

His eyes darkened with pleasure at his question, sending a shiver down my spine, and reminding me exactly why I was here. This may be sexy and thrilling, but it was also dangerous. For all I knew, West was the killer. Emerging alive from this room was not a guarantee.

I hated that this fact turned me on even more.

“Maybe a little,” I replied. “But isn’t that the point?”

“A little.” He brushed the tips of the whip over the back of my neck as he stepped around behind me. “But it’s more about trust. Surrender. Pleasure…”

“And pain, too, right?”

“It tends to get a little blurred,” he said with a low laugh. His mouth landed on the back of my neck, jarring me into my body, my thoughts clouded by the sensuality of the kiss. It was intimate, gentle, tender. A contrast — again — to the pain promised by the whip.

“Let’s just start here, shall we? I’ll go slow. Gently,” he whispered, in between the light fluttering kisses he was landing on my neck and shoulders. “Pick a safe word.”

“Oh.” My mind spun with relief. Establishing a safe word meant he’d respect it, right? “Elephant?”

“Cliché and obvious, but if it works for you, fine,” he whispered, with a soft laugh.

Placing his palm on the middle of my back, he pushed gently. “Bend over.”

His command was firm, but soft, as he pushed me forward. My hands landed on the chair in front of me, my ass on full display for him. He slid his hand down my back, slowly moving towards my ass. The heat of his palm left a trail of shivers down my spine.

“Ready?” he asked.

I nodded in answer, my tongue frozen in fear. I gripped the side of the chair, bracing for the blow that I knew was coming.

Instead, I felt only softness.

He brushed the whip against the back of my knees, sliding it up my thighs with excruciating slowness. So gently it was but a whisper of movement against my skin.

The latex skirt rode up my hips, and I knew a narrow strip of panties was all that concealed my pussy from his view.

West's fingers traced the outline of my panties, starting near my hips and slowly moving towards the inside of my thighs, stealing the breath right out of my lungs. I squirmed, my hips shifting with desire. Behind me, his breath deepened. The heat rolling off his body washed over me, his fingertips teasing, promising, enticing.

"West!" I gasped, as one of his fingers slipped under my panties, sliding against my vulva.

"Mmm, just a taste," he moaned behind me. His finger quickly disappeared, replaced by the sensation of the leather against my ass. Lightly, he began slapping it against my flesh, playfully teasing me with harder and harder blows. He was quiet, but I knew he monitored my every reaction.

I was determined to give him exactly what he wanted.

Is this what turned him on?

Is that what would get him to trust me enough to open up to me?

Is that what would get me into that secret club?

I wiggled my ass in the air, moaning in pleasure as the hardest slap of all fell on my skin.

"You like that?" West asked, his voice breathy with excitement.

"Can you do it harder?" I asked. "Please?"

"A girl after my own heart," he growled, as he pulled the whip back and slapped it harder against my ass.

"Oh!" I cried out, the sting spreading heat over my cheeks. I blinked, hard, my mouth gaping open.

"Harder?" he inquired.

I nodded, unable to speak. The sting was still sharp, but somehow sent little shocks of pleasure right to my brain.

He hit me again, the tips of the straps biting hard this time. I gasped again, my eyes widening at the sensation spreading through my entire body.

Heat and pain seemed to mix with a primal pleasure that tapped into the core of my body. My clit throbbed with desire, and I wanted more.

“Pleasure, Little Rose?” he asked behind me, bending down to nip at my neck. “Or pain?”

“Yes,” I answered. “I love it. More, please?” I looked over my shoulder at him, surprised at the darkness I saw in his eyes. I was surprised at the dark feelings rushing through my own body that seemed to be reflected in them.

“I can give you more,” he growled, pulling his hand back. This time I watched his hand cut through the air. The blow landed hard on my ass, and a distinct wave of the most sensual pleasure washed across his face.

I understood now. At least a little. I felt it, too. That moment of letting the pure, unadulterated pain wash through my veins. It hurt, but it was absolutely freeing at the same time.

He hit me again and again, and I let my head fall, absorbing each blow with increasing pleasure. The pain subsided completely into heat on my skin. Ten blows later, I was writhing below him, lost in the intense sexuality of the encounter as an orgasm raced through my body like a wildfire. He’d only touched my pussy once, in the beginning, and yet I was quivering and shaking and soaked just from the spanking.

I’d come harder from that than I did with my own vibrator. *What the fuck had just happened?*

“God, Rosie, you’re so fucking sexy. You really liked that, didn’t you?”

I gasped, looking back at him again, and saw he gripped his cock through his pants.

If I didn’t take this in another direction, I knew he’d take it out and slam it into me. Not that I wasn’t down for that, but I needed to slow things down and keep his interest for a little while longer if I was going to get anywhere with him.

I stood up, shaking my head and smiling widely at him through my surprise.

“Yes, I fucking loved it, obviously. Thank you. I’ve never had that done quite like that before.”

“That was just the beginning. There’s more, if you’re interested.”

“Oh,” I nodded, enthusiastically. “I’m interested.”

“Good.” His eyes raked over me as he continued to stroke his cock. I could see the size and shape of it through his pants now, and it took everything I had not to drop to my knees and worship it. “Because I’m just getting started, Little Rose.”

“I hope so,” I whispered, biting my bottom lip and staring up at him.

“So fucking hot, my god,” he muttered, kissing me hotly again.

I kissed him back, willingly, losing myself in the slickness of his mouth against mine, the feel of his body pressing against me, his cock throbbing and twitching.

It took every ounce of strength I had to pull away.

“So? Can I see the secret club now?”

He laughed, and shook his head. “I’ll think about it, Little Rose. Get yourself cleaned up and meet me back in my office in ten minutes.”

He left me there without another word. I stayed there, stunned at my own body’s reaction, and wondered just what else I may find pleasurable with West.

After straightening my clothes, I walked into his office ten minutes later to see him spreading a pile of papers out on his desk.

“What’s this?” I asked.

“Ironclad NDAs.”

“Oh? For me?”

“Close the door,” he said. I did so and sat down in front of his desk. He looked at me, all traces of the earlier lust on his face gone and replaced with nothing but serious professionalism. “I’m giving you a job in our other club.”

“Oh, West!”

“You were right, partially. It’s for celebrities, sure. But not just them. Anyone with money and the desire for complete privacy can join.”

“That explains the NDA, I guess.”

“Indeed. It’s important you read it over and completely what you are agreeing to. This isn’t your usual nightclub, Rosie. And what I just introduced you to? That’s honestly child’s play compared to the things you’ll see in Profane.”

“Profane?”

“It’s the name of the club, but it’s not to be uttered outside of the club itself. Where our play should be kept confidential at all times. You can’t tell your friends. You can’t tell your family. You can’t tell them the name, anything about the club, or anything you may witness throughout your employment. Of course, we don’t ask you to keep these secrets without being properly compensated. You’ll see that we pay handsomely for your discretion.”

I looked down at the agreement and saw that the pay rate was tripled compared to the regular club, which only made me more suspicious.

What was the big secret, exactly? That celebrities wanted a place to screw each other? Or was it something much more scandalous? Something more dangerous?

“I appreciate your confidence in me, West. I can definitely keep my mouth shut.”

“I hope so,” he said. “Because once you sign this, you are legally bound to do so, with dire consequences should you breach the contract. There’s also another NDA that I should have had you sign earlier. I fucking hate it, but it’s specifically for me. My lawyers insist that anyone I have uh...relations with...signs it. I apologize. I know it’s weird and lame and awkward.”

“I don’t mind. But, you’ve got me so curious now,” I said, flashing him a flirty smile. “Do you...play...there?”

“Yes, of course. Profane is my baby, my dream.” He came over to me, and reached down to cup my breast, his finger sliding over my nipple. “Why do you think I’m putting you in there? I want easy access to you, Little Rose. I hope that’s okay?”

I wanted to be angry. Angry for all women in the workplace that suffered from sexual harassment. But goddammit, this was West Foster, whose moves were so damned smooth and sexy that I couldn't help but respond to them. I knew wanting more from him made me a very bad cop, but each time he touched me, it left me shuddering with desire.

Reminding myself that I was doing this for a very valid reason, I smiled again, holding on to that anger. Maybe I could enjoy him and bring him down at the same time, if he was indeed the killer.

“That turns me on, West,” I whispered, boldly kissing him again.

He groaned and grabbed my head in both hands, kissing me deeply, his tongue diving in again and sucking every ounce of resistance out of me.

“Fuck, Rosie,” he said, pulling away and shaking his head. “What is it about you?”

I didn't answer. I just pushed him to the side to look at the paperwork. “Let me sign this so we can move this along, shall we?”

“I like the way you think,” he said, his hand gripping my breast from behind as I leaned over his desk and started reading as best as I could with his incredibly sexy distractions.

Chapter Ten

WEST

Her curves were driving me crazy. I knew I was being inappropriate but she wasn't stopping me, and from the way she writhed under those blows to her ass earlier, her consent clearly wasn't fuzzy.

So, as she bent over the desk to read the NDA, I let my hands roam.

I started at her hips, slowly moving down over her ass, and then back up and over her waist, to cup the swell of her breasts.

"I need to point out some key issues you may encounter before you sign," I said, my voice on the verge of cracking with desire. I'd yet to sink into her, but with every moment I felt closer.

"Please do." She pushed her hips back into me.

"The customers can be challenging, demanding, handsy. They will all come on to you — men and women, alike — and it will be on you to decide how much you're comfortable with and find a way to politely steer them within your boundaries."

"I see."

"You're welcome to participate as much as you want, Little Rose," I said, caressing her cascading auburn hair.

"Are you saying I should have sex with them?" Her voice rose an octave.

I looked at her, trying to conceal my disappointment. "Yes, absolutely. If that's what you desire, and what they desire. We encourage everyone to give

in to their deepest fantasies. I'm sorry, Rosie, I thought you understood what you were signing up for."

"Well, I have a lot of questions, of course. But I'm not resisting, I'm just looking for clarity."

"I understand." I ran a hand over her cheek. My patience was wearing thin, but I tapped into my deepest reserves. She was beautiful and alluring. Scaring her away would not get her out of my system. "Let me be as clear as possible. We're selling a fantasy. Our members expect their desires to be met on a whim. You are being hired as a cocktail waitress, yes, absolutely, but there will be many times that a customer will see you — especially you, beautiful Rosie — and you will become the object of their desire. You will be a key component of their fantasies, at least for the night. If you are agreeable, we welcome employees of Profane to do whatever it takes to please our very well-paying members. Of course, nobody would ever expect you to do anything you don't want to do. Saying no, in a graceful manner, is always acceptable. But," I continued, my cock twitching, "so is saying yes."

She nodded. "It's clear now, thank you."

"Don't forget, though," I continued. "Once you sign this, you can't go back. If it doesn't work out, for whatever reason, you are still bound by this contract. If you break it, we'll sue you and you'll never work in this town again."

"That's how NDAs work, right?"

"This is different. No loopholes. You have to swear to complete secrecy, Rosie."

"That's fine." She shrugged. "I don't have a lot of close friends I would tell anyway."

"Any questions?"

"One."

I lifted a brow, waiting.

"How often will you be there?" she asked, with a sexy smile that almost

broke me.

“Often,” I growled, capturing her lips in mine again. She kissed me back, hard, both of us now completely aroused.

“Are you on-board, Rosie? Will you become a member of the Profane family?”

“I’d be delighted.” She signed the NDA with a flourish, and then turned back to me. “So, when do I start? Tonight?”

“No, darling,” I chuckled. “Go home. Get into the right headspace. Come back tomorrow night, but don’t go through the front door. Text me when you get here and I’ll guide you to the entrance.”

I kissed her again, my desire welling up from deep inside of me. Pulling away, I looked down at her, drinking in her beauty. I shook my head, unable to believe I was waiting so long to fuck someone.

Patience wasn’t something I was used to exercising, but I had a strong feeling Rosie would be worth it.

“Goodnight,” she whispered, reaching over and touching my cheek. “Thank you.”

“See you tomorrow.” She headed for the door. “Rosie,” I said, stopping her.

She looked over her shoulder, her big green eyes seeming to beckon me.

Should I invite her to my place tonight? Should I take her upstairs to Profane right now, while the whole damned place was empty?

No.

The waiting would make it all that much better.

“Yes?” she asked.

“Expect the unexpected.”

The sly smile that spread across her face threatened to make my cock burst right then and there.

“Can’t wait,” she whispered, before closing the door behind her and leaving me with the most painful boner of my entire fucking life.

Chapter Eleven

KAYLEE

“You’re enjoying this, aren’t you?”

Hoskins’s breath smelled like stale coffee and a million cigarettes stubbed out.

Crowded into the back of his dirty white surveillance van, I’d been listening to him drone on for way too long now. I couldn’t stand this asshole, and the fact that I’d been paired up with him pissed me off to no end.

“Of course I’m not fucking enjoying it, Hoskins,” I said, rolling my eyes.

“I don’t believe you.”

“I’m not a fucking perv like you, asshole.” I snatched the phone he held out to me.

“Everyone’s a fucking perv,” he laughed. “Some are just better at admitting it.”

“Just tell me what I need to know so I can get the fuck out of this dirty van,”

He’d been staked out at another location for the last few days, and it was apparent that cleaning up after himself was not high on his list of priorities. Fast food wrappers and empty soda bottles littered the floor.

“Leave your personal cell at home,” he said. “Use only the smart phone I gave you. It has fake photos and contacts in place in case anyone tries to search your phone. To contact me, use the burner I gave you and delete all

call logs and text messages immediately. Understood?”

“Yeah,” I said, shoving them in my purse. “Can I go now?”

“No, you can’t. I need a progress report.”

“There’s been no progress. I just got the fucking job, Hoskins.”

“Yeah, but you auditioned for days. Surely you saw something? Overheard conversations?”

“Not yet,” I said, heading for the door, ducking my head to keep from hitting it on the ceiling.

“I need you to record everything. Use the smart phone. You know how to do that?”

“How the hell would I record everything?”

“The important stuff. Don’t forget.”

“I’ll do what I can,” I said. “But I have to stay safe at the same time. I can’t get caught recording anything, especially since he’s letting me into the secret part of the club. I don’t think devices are allowed in there at all.”

“So, you’re just going to get paid to watch people have sex? Doesn’t seem fair, to be honest. This place is probably a dead end.”

“It’s better than all that porn watching that you do, and don’t get paid for!” I shot back at him as I opened the sliding door and hopped out. His face fell at my comment and his obvious displeasure brought me much joy. “Fuck off, Hoskins!” I flipped him off over my shoulder and walked away.

“I need you to check in with me daily!” he shouted after me.

“Like I said, I’ll do what I can,” I called as I re-entered my house. I was so glad to be done with him. For the day, at least.

“I can’t believe that asshole is my handler,” I muttered to myself before heading to my bedroom to retrieve my bag for work.

I was a nervous wreck today. All night, I’d done nothing but think about West and everything he’d said yesterday. More than that, I’d thought about his hands on me, his lips, his kiss, his tongue. I wasn’t exactly sure what I’d gotten myself into, and concentrating on the case when West was all over me

like that was going to be very difficult.

I could do it, though.

I had to.

Flashes of the victims' photographs kept popping up in my dreams all night, a nightmarish reminder of my true mission. I couldn't fail. I couldn't fail those women.

Someone out there was very dangerous. I needed to find them before they hurt anyone else.

Was it West?

I had no idea. But if I was going to rule him out, I needed to get close to him. I hadn't considered that I might actually have to get into bed with him when I took this case. I never expected that sleeping with one of Hollywood's hottest film stars would be a job requirement. I wanted to laugh at the absurdity of it all, but I was way too attracted to him to laugh about it.

I wanted him, and his obvious interest in me — or at least his obvious interest in fucking me — was flattering as hell. There was no point in denying that.

The next fucking Brad Pitt put his mouth on me? I hoped I'd never wake up from this dream.

By the time I made it to work, I was trembling with nervousness, excitement and pure horniness. All I could think about was West. I parked the car and texted him, as he'd requested.

Hey, it's Rosie. I'm in my car outside and ready to start my shift.

I opted out of using the heart emoji and waited for his reply.

As I waited, I tried desperately to get my head in the game. This was my chance to finally see what exactly was so secretive about what went on behind the proverbial curtain. I needed to ask the right questions, but I also needed to be alert to opportunities to discover information when others weren't around. I hoped there would be other waitresses in there that I could make friends with and pry information out of, as well.

In addition to West, there were also Theo and Rian to consider. They'd been remarkably less friendly towards me, though, if not downright cold and rude. Getting on their good side would take a lot more effort.

A knock on my window startled me. I looked up to see West's handsome face. I rolled down the window and he flashed me his million-dollar smile, leaving no doubt to the reason for his stardom.

"Hey," I said, after rolling down my window.

"Sorry to scare you," he said. "Ready?"

"Ready as I'll ever be."

"Did you think about everything I told you?"

"Yes, of course," I said, as I got out of the car. I followed him quietly as he led me around the back of the building, finally stopping at an unmarked red door that faced the alley.

"There's one more paper you have to sign, then you'll be ready." He punched in a number sequence on the keypad and the door clicked open.

"Another one?"

"It's a waiver, stating that the club isn't responsible for any injuries you may receive, things like that. I forgot it yesterday."

"Sounds like a worker safety issue," I remarked, winking.

He laughed and opened the door, gesturing for me to go inside. I walked into an empty room with concrete walls painted black, and a set of metal lockers lining one wall. He opened one up and handed me a slip of paper with four numbers on it.

"This is yours. You can put all your things in here," he said. "That's the code for the locker so you don't have to carry around a key."

"I put everything in here?"

"Everything. Purse, phone...clothes."

"Clothes?" I asked, eyeing the tiny black dress I was wearing. "I'm assuming you have another outfit I'll be expected to wear?"

"Something like that. Leave your dress on for now."

I nodded. Swallowing hard, I placed my purse in the locker and locked it up. I memorized the number of the locker combination and threw it away.

My body was on fire with excitement, and I was amazed the moment had finally come. Yes, I was ready to do my job. But after much contemplation last night, I'd come to realize that I was even more ready to explore.

I could work on the case and learn about myself at the same time.

The spanking West had unloaded on my ass had left me reeling. Left me fantasizing about more. Left me wondering what more would even look like. And left me lost in the haze of lusty desire that it ignited within me.

I'd spent the whole night in my bed, with one hand pressing my vibrator to my clit and the other one shoved inside of my wet pussy, thinking about West, thinking about this place. Thinking about what I'd see there, learn there, discover about myself there.

And now — there had turned into 'here.' I stood excitedly, staring at West with expectations that I wasn't even sure would hold up. I imagined that what went on here would cause me to feel emotions that I couldn't even dream of yet.

Or, maybe this was all a terrible mistake.

Either way, there was no turning back now.

"Once you sign this, there's no going back," West said as we entered his office from a different door than before. He grabbed a pen and a single sheet of paper from his desk, and handed it to me.

I read it quickly.

"I release the owners and staff of Profane from all liability from any injuries or trauma that may occur while I am on the premises, up to and including death and dismemberment. I recognize and assert that any and all expenses incurred from any recovery, medical or therapeutic care required due to my time spent at Profane will be paid for entirely by me and that the staff and owners of Profane have no responsibility for such expenses."

"Wow." I shook my head. "Will I be injured while working here? Death

and dismemberment? Really?”

“Highly unlikely. It’s just our lawyer’s way of covering our asses,” he said. “However, I meant what I said. “Once you sign this waiver, you can’t back out. Do you understand, Rosie?”

His words were solemn, laced with an intensity that matched the flame burning in his dark blue eyes.

Urgent.

Insistent.

As if he was trying to make me understand the enormity of what I was agreeing to.

As if I didn’t know. I almost laughed. He didn’t understand just how ready I was.

I craved excitement with every cell in my body.

Would signing this flimsy piece of paper give me what I desperately needed? I had no idea. But at this point, I was desperate to try anything. Not just to solve the case. That was secondary, as selfish as that sounded.

No, I would sign the waiver to learn about myself at the same time. He’d opened something up in me that I’d become incredibly curious about.

And if my signature — scrawled in blood red ink, bleeding into the pores of the thick white stationery — is what finally opened the door to the depths of pleasure that I suspected resided in the darkest places inside of me, then I was ready to step over that threshold with my head held high. And with my heart open to possibility.

A promise waited there, floating just out of my reach in the shadowy depths of my soul.

An answer to a question I’d searched my soul for. That long journey had finally brought me there, with a pen in my hand and a spark of hope in my heart.

Could I finally be close enough to touch it?

I’d dreamed of this. The ultimate fantasy, an adrenaline rush I’d chased

my whole life. It teased me, letting me come so close, only to deny me the chance to touch it. The deepest pleasure. My own darkest desires. I'd been called to seek the truest love I could imagine inside myself.

I knew it existed.

Intoxicating. Hypnotizing. Magical.

Dark.

That siren's call was always lingering just out of reach.

I was always so close, but never made it. I thought I'd find it in my work, but it was always just out of reach.

Never was it as close as it was now.

Just a few more steps to complete, and all I'd ever desired could be mine.

Gripping the pen with trembling fingers, I scratched my agreement with the enthusiasm of a kid entering a candy store.

Give me all I can eat, I thought.

I wanted to devour everything on offer.

"Very good," West nodded, his eyes darkening even more as they raked over my frame, my nipples hardening to attention, as if they, too, were anticipating his next move.

"Come with me," he said, walking me out of the board room. This time he led me up a discreet set of stairs located in the back of the club.

We began to ascend. When we reached the top, he parted a heavy black curtain.

In that moment, everything changed.

We stood in a small foyer, the walls painted blood red, with red light bathing the entire space. A heavy wooden door, engraved with a huge dragon on the front and a black iron door handle wrought into another elaborate dragon.

In front of the door, a huge man in a black suit stood guard.

"You'll need this," West said from behind me.

Opening the heavy wooden armoire behind him, he reached inside and

then turned back to me. He offered me a carefully folded pile of heavy black wool like a promise.

With both hands, I took it from him, nodding as I met his smoldering gaze.

I opened it up, its shape revealing itself as it dangled from my loose grip — a thick cloak with a heavy hood.

“Put it on now,” he commanded.

I nodded, wrapping it around my shoulders.

“No.” His brow furrowed with frustration. “Not like that.”

I cocked my head to the side, questioningly.

“Take off your dress first.” His insistence was careful, yet nonchalant. As if I should have just *known*.

I complied, averting my eyes and pretending the guard wasn’t there. As I peeled off my thin black cotton dress, I silently praised myself for wearing my good underwear. I hadn’t been sure I’d be getting naked in front of West today. But still, I shed my clothes in front of him like it was no big deal... like he’d seen me naked a million times.

As if it wasn’t a first for both of us.

As if my fingers didn’t tremble when I lifted the hem of my dress.

He watched, his gaze searing my skin, lingering on my hard nipples that were visible through my black lace bra. His scrutiny landed squarely between my thighs, as I let my dress fall to the ground at my feet.

“You’re incredibly beautiful, Little Rose,” he said. “I’ll let you keep your bra and panties on. Eventually, though, I think you’ll be comfortable enough to remove those, too.”

I lifted my chin, boldly catching his eye as I pulled the cloak over my bare shoulders, my fingers trembling with anticipation of what came next.

He stepped forward, his breath hot against my cheek as he reached behind me and grabbed my hood, slowly pulling it up over my head. His fingers lingered on the edge of the fabric, brushing against my cheeks. His eyes

peered into mine. He lifted the edges of my cloak. I leaned in and my lace-covered nipples scraped against the lapels of his suit.

“You’re perfect for this place.” The words slid across his lips like a prayer, like a verdict being read, like the door I’d searched for all my life finally opening to me.

Acceptance.

With a shaky breath, I replied, “I can’t believe I’m here. I’m a little nervous, West.”

His smile stretched across his face slowly, tugging up at the corners first, then lighting up his eyes as his cheeks rose. I was mesmerized by the transformation from darkness to light.

“You’re safe now, Rosie. You’re home.”

He pulled me into his arms, pressing me firmly against his chest, his words permeating every cell of my body as I relaxed into him.

Could this be real? I wondered.

Was I finally home?

Was I finally safe?

Or had the true danger only just begun?

He pulled away and held up a shiny masquerade mask.

“You need to wear this the entire time you’re inside. Everyone wears them to keep everything anonymous.”

I nodded and took it from him, slipping it over my eyes. He smiled at me, and leaned down to brush a kiss against my lips, before turning and grabbing a robe and mask of his own. He turned back to me with them on.

“Ready, Little Rose?” he asked, holding out a hand to me.

I nodded. The guard stepped to the side and opened the door, revealing a long, dark hallway lit with torch sconces. Their flickering flames danced on the red velvet wallpapered walls.

Hand in hand, West and I stepped over the threshold. My heart pounded wildly in my chest.

The vibe here was totally different from the party atmosphere of the Hush Hush Club. Soft, classical music played in the background, and the air felt thick and hushed with tension.

At the end of the hallway was a small, curved, marble stairway. We ascended slowly as West spoke, his voice echoing off the walls. “There’s a lot to learn about this sacred place, Little Rose. Take your time and observe the others. I have no doubt you’ll be just fine.”

At the top of the stairs, the landing opened up to a large, open space. My eyes traveled up further, and I saw it was divided up into different levels of overhanging rooms. They looked to be almost like half-private balconies, with half walls that opened to the space below.

The soft sounds of moaning and whimpering echoed throughout.

The lighting was so dim, it was almost impossible to make out the features of anyone’s faces. But customers still streamed through the place like an easy flowing river. As if they knew the layout by heart.

“Wow,” I whispered. West squeezed my hand, allowing me a moment to drink it up.

In front of us stood the main attraction. A large, black, wrought-iron cage was erected directly in the middle of the room. A huge bed was inside it. It was dimly lit, the deep shadows making things hard to make out clearly. But the bed was currently surrounded by customers clad in their own dark robes and masks, their attention consumed by whatever was happening inside the cage.

“Let’s move closer so you have a better view,” West whispered in my ear, his lips brushing against it and sending a shiver through my body. I let him lead me closer, my curiosity piqued.

The crowd moved to allow us room, parting like a curtain to reveal the first act of an erotic play.

On the bed, three men and two women were tangled up together in a sensual embrace. They were so entwined, it was difficult to discern where

one person ended and the other began. They kissed and writhed together, a mass of tongues and hands and moans and thrusting hips.

My breath caught in my throat, my lips parting with desire as I watched. Hand still in West's, I watched as one of the men slipped down, his head disappearing between a woman's thighs. Her moans echoed through the room, loud and high and filled with pleasure. The other woman stood up and walked over to a small table in the corner. Strapping on a large phallus, she covered it in a condom and thick lube before stepping behind the man and sliding it inside of his raised ass. He arched his back, removing his mouth from the woman in front of him for a brief few seconds as he cried out in joy, then went right back to devouring the woman's pussy.

It was hot. Way fucking hot. I was glad my panties were still on, because I was dripping with arousal. I swallowed hard, my breathing picking up in speed.

Just as the other man slid his cock into the other woman's mouth, West took my hand. "We have a lot to see, Little Rose," he whispered.

I nodded and let him lead me away, but I kept my head turned to watch as much of the show as I could.

In another corner, I noticed a man tied up against a St. Andrew's cross on the wall. Completely naked except for his mask, his legs and arms were restrained by thick leather straps. He was being violently whipped by a petite blonde woman who wore nothing but her mask and a pair of white leather boots.

With each blow he cried out, and then begged her to do it again. The look on his face was one of pure ecstasy and when I looked at her, her eyes were shining with lust. Another woman approached him with a thick black candle in her hand, the flame flickering as she walked. The first woman stepped back, allowing her access to the tied-up man. She lifted the candle and let the heavy black wax fall onto his chest. He screamed out, his voice rising above the Mozart that drifted from the speakers.

As West led me past them, I couldn't help but remember the feel of his whip on my ass last night. I wanted to feel it again, feel the warmth spreading through my cheeks and radiating to every inch of my skin. I wondered how the wax might feel, too.

West led me to another set of stairs. We went up a level, where the landing allowed us to look out over the main lobby below. This floor was divided up into rooms without doors.

"We call this our little Disneyland," West said. "Any fantasy can be acted out. Each room on this level is themed."

He stopped at each doorway to allow me a look inside.

The first one looked like a doctor's office on steroids, with a gynecological table with stirrups featured prominently in the middle. Lots of sharp looking instruments were mounted on the wall, along with straps and chains of every length and size. It wasn't being used at the time, its emptiness filled with the promise of what may come.

The second room was a straight up dungeon. A sex swing hung in one corner, and a small cage big enough for one person sat in another. More of the crosses like the one downstairs were mounted on the wall, and an open wardrobe revealed the largest selection of whips, chains, dildos, and strap-ons imaginable. This room was large, and two couples were playing together in it. The women made out while the men whipped their breasts with cat o' nine tails. I was again reminded of last night. Each slap against their skin made me feel like I was experiencing the blow, too, leaving me breathless.

"You're blushing, Little Rose," West said, watching my reaction. "Just like last night."

"I was just thinking about that," I admitted.

"Don't worry, Rosie," he said, his thumb rubbing against my palm, "we will have plenty of time to play together again."

"I hope so," I said, looking over at him. He pulled me close, kissing me again, harder this time, his tongue darting out and sliding sensuously against

mine.

“Your ass turned the prettiest shade of pink, you know,” he whispered in my ear as he pulled his lips away.

I knew I was blushing, but the deep red lights of the club hid it. I was thankful for that. I needed to be a bold and adventurous woman tonight, not a shy blushing girl.

The next room was made to look like a classroom, with lots of books and rulers lying around. The next was an office, and was being used by a woman dressed in a fitted suit. Her jacket hung open, revealing her bare breasts. In front of her, a naked man donned a collar that was attached to the leash she held. She laughed as he kneeled before her and enthusiastically licked the tips of her Louboutins.

I smirked, shaking my head.

“He’s the founder of one of the biggest tech companies on the planet,” West whispered.

“And her?”

“His stay-at-home wife.” He nodded as if that were obvious, as we left them to finish their scene. “Power play is very popular here.”

The next room was another cage scene, with a man sitting inside, all alone and crying.

“Is he okay?” I asked West.

“He’s never been happier,” West laughed. “He’s a judge. He pays to come here and pretend he’s been abandoned in jail for hours before a woman pretending to be the warden comes in and forces him to eat her out before she sets him free.”

“I see.”

“Your job is to watch, observe, but stay in the background mostly. Make sure people have what they need. It’s not always drinks. Sometimes, it’s lube. Sometimes, it’s a towel. Sometimes, it’s condoms or advice. A lot of the time, people just want someone to talk to. Our customers pay handsomely to

be here, but they pay for the discretion we provide. If you recognize someone, it's your job to pretend that you have no idea who they are, even if you just saw them on social media earlier in the day. And, if someone wants to talk to you all night, then you let them, and you enjoy it. Understood?"

I nodded.

"Speaking of social media, Rosie," he said. "I tried to vet you last night by checking out your accounts to make sure there wasn't anything concerning. We do that for everyone we hire. I couldn't find anything. Why not?"

"Oh, I don't do social media. I guess that's why I didn't know about your divorce. It's just a waste of time. Plus, I like my privacy. I don't want our corporate overlords to know about everything I do."

"So, what do you do with your time?"

I paused. Telling him I read my case files over and over, hoping for a new clue to surface, while watching episodes of House Hunters wasn't an acceptable answer. On the fly, I made up a few hobbies, hoping they sounded plausible. "I spend a lot of time watching old movies while slathering cheap face masks on my skin, mostly. Sometimes I hang out at the beach and read steamy romance novels. That's about it."

"That doesn't sound very exciting."

"No, it doesn't, does it? Especially not here," I said, as he led me up another flight of stairs, his hand still firmly holding mine.

"Maybe I can add some excitement to your life," he said, pulling me into a dark corner and kissing me again, his hands roaming over my hips. I leaned into him, moaning into his hot mouth, lust rushing through my veins.

"God, West, you already are." I shook my head as I pulled away. He grabbed my hand again with a smile, and led me down a small dark hallway and into a large open room that was filled with four different couples. I suppressed a gasp when I saw what was going on.

Three of the women and one of the men were suspended from the ceiling.

Their bodies were tied up in an elaborate weaving of ropes, knotted and bound in such an intricate manner that it resembled an art form.

Their partners worked diligently and quietly as they continued to bind them, as if they were sculpting them with careful precision.

“This is Kinbaku,” West said, noticing how enthralled I was. “Are you familiar with it?”

“No,” I whispered, the word escaping my mouth in a rush of excitement. They were tied up just like the victims. My heart was pounding in my chest. Maybe I’d finally found a link. “It’s beautiful.”

He nodded, slowly, a small smile spreading across his face at my obvious excitement.

“Are you intrigued, Little Rose?”

“Very,” I said, unable to tear my eyes away. “Are they uncomfortable?”

Some of the couples were farther along in the process than the others, with one of the women almost completely encased in rope. Her breasts, red and engorged, were bound so tightly it looked painful.

“Only as uncomfortable as they want to tolerate. We have safe words for a reason, remember?”

I blushed again, the heat rising to my face. “Yes. Elephant,” I whispered.

He squeezed my hand and nodded knowingly.

“Yes, let’s keep going.” He led me away and into a nearby empty room. This one held only a comfortable looking bed, and, like all the other rooms, a table fully stocked with lube, gloves, and condoms.

“What’s this room?” I asked, as he closed the door behind us. My pulse raced as he closed the distance between us, taking my face in his hands.

“This is just a private room,” he said. “A place where anything you want to happen, can...”

He kissed me again, his mouth hot and hungry against mine. His hands sank into my hair, pulling my mouth close. He pressed me into the wall, his cock throbbing between us.

Deepening the kiss, we stayed locked that way for a moment before he tore his mouth away, staring deeply in my eyes. His gaze was so hot and intense, demanding and hungry. It reached deep into my soul, mixing with the desire and yearning that I'd been holding back.

“Are you interested in exploring bondage, Rosie? Your eyes lit up when you saw those ropes.”

“I'm not sure,” I admitted. “This is all so new.”

His eyes were dark now, laced with a hint of danger that left me trembling with excitement mixed with fear. I reminded myself again that he could be the killer. Letting this man tie me up like that — as sexy as it was to think about being completely under his control — was probably not the best idea.

“I could show you everything,” he said, his finger lifting my chin.

“Maybe,” I said, unsure what I was agreeing to. What exactly was everything?

His hand slid down, his fingers slowly and sensuously wrapping around my throat. Images of the dead victims flashed in my head, their necks bruised, their eyes bulging from strangulation. Nervously, I reached up and grabbed his hand, pulling it away from my neck.

“Just say the word, Little Rose,” he growled, his voice thick with lust. “I'd love to see you all trussed up, at my mercy...unable to move as I eat you out until your juices run down my face.”

“West,” I whispered, his name like a razor in my mouth, sharp and dangerous, as he captured my lips with his once more.

“Yes?”

“I...um, I think I should get to work.” Reluctantly, I pulled away and walked out, fear and desire pounding equally in my chest.

Chapter Twelve

WEST

I *'ll be in town tomorrow!*

I groaned at the text message that popped up on my phone. My little sister, Everleigh, had a unique way of getting under my skin. We had the classic sibling rivalry dynamic, and while I adored her, she came with a lot of baggage when she showed up.

I didn't see her much these days, though, which had added a sense of peace in my life that wasn't there when she was around. It wasn't that I didn't love her. She just knew what my buttons were, and didn't hesitate to push them. Mainly, she was fond of making me worry about her when she was in Los Angeles.

When she was on set, which she was more often than not these days after she'd starred in last summer's blockbuster romantic comedy, she was disciplined and responsible. But once she returned home, she let her hair down and got a little too wild for my comfort.

Yeah, she's an adult now, I get that. But I'm still her big brother, and I will always feel responsible for her safety.

Can't wait to see you! Call me when you get in.

I put my phone back on my desk, my thoughts drifting to Rosie. She'd done a great job last night, just as I'd known she would. I'd watched her all night, taking notice of what rooms she lingered in longer than others,

watching her expression as she took in all that she saw. It could be a lot for an inexperienced person. Hell, the things that went on at Profane would make even an experienced person blush.

Sometimes, I still found my own eyes widening with surprise.

I could tell Rosie was nervous. She kept running away any time I got her alone.

But she'd be mine soon. I could be patient. It wouldn't be fun until she was really ready, anyway.

So, I watched.

I waited.

I yearned for that right moment to present itself.

And when it did? I was going to strike so hard that there would be no doubt about how much I wanted her.

I'd let her go home after her shift last night without trying to get her to come home with me. But right before she left, she'd invited me to go to a distillery this afternoon. It wasn't something I'd normally do, but she'd said they were showcasing different variations of negronis and she'd remembered that I liked them.

I was so touched that I had to say yes. Plus, it would be one more way to spend time with her and get to know her better. One step closer to getting her naked and in my bed.

In the meantime, I had work to do. I'd gone home last night and slept like a baby after relieving myself to thoughts of Rosie's perfectly round ass. Today, I was ready to finally choose a lead actress once and for all. The uncertainty of everything was driving me fucking crazy.

Joey hovered in my office as I looked through the endless number of headshots the casting agency had couriered over this morning.

"How's your coffee?" he asked. "I ordered lunch from the Crescent Deli and got you that Monte Cristo you love so much."

"It's fine," I said, waving him off. He was practically drooling down my

neck as he looked over the photos with me.

“Oh, she’s pretty,” he said, pointing to a pretty blonde. “She was in River’s Edge, that movie that came out last year.”

“I remember. She’d be a good fit if she dyed her hair red, but she’s a terrible actress.” I tossed the photo aside and kept going.

“That one!” Joey said, pointing to a young, up-and-coming actress that I recognized from a limited Netflix series I’d seen a few years ago. “She’s perfect, don’t you think?”

“No, I don’t think, Joey!” I barked, increasingly annoyed with him. His breath smelled like coffee and he was way too close to me. “Can you back up, please?”

He twitched like a kicked dog and took two steps back towards the wall, lowering his head. All of which served to annoy me even more. Why the fuck was he even here?

“Joey, why don’t you take the day off? I’m all good. I can do this by myself.”

“But, your lunch —.”

“— I can handle the delivery on my own. Thanks for arranging it. I’m leaving soon anyway. I’m going with Rosie to visit a distillery.”

“Rosie, the new hire?” he asked, surprised.

“Yes, Joey.”

“Do you really think you should be spending personal time with an employee?”

My head spun towards him so fast I almost got whiplash. Anger raged through my veins instantly. “Fuck off, it’s none of your business!”

“Right, sorry, boss, so sorry,” he groveled. He was pathetic and irritating. “I’m leaving.”

If Joey participated at Profane, he would have been a total bottom. I wondered briefly what his specific sexual proclivities were, but to be honest, it wasn’t difficult to figure them out. He followed me around like a puppy

dog, and I was pretty sure he carried that same attitude into the bedroom. I'd never heard him talk about dating, or having a partner, though, so perhaps there wasn't anyone for him to submit to.

I almost felt sorry for him. I wasn't always nice to him. But then, I remembered how generously I paid him, and that feeling disappeared. I was grateful to see him heading towards the door without trying to argue with me.

"I could use some time off," he said, nodding as he opened the door. "But call me if anything pops up, okay? I can be back here in just a few minutes."

He'd recently signed a lease on a new apartment near the club so he could be close to work. Which cemented my belief that he didn't have much of a life outside of the club.

Alone in my office, I got back to work, hoping that my leading lady was hidden somewhere in this pile of headshots.

A little while later, a knock at my door raised my head. I was pleased to see Rosie standing there when I opened it.

"Hi!" My heart swelled when I saw her. What was that feeling? It was usually my cock that swelled. This was new.

"Ready?" she asked, her smile lighting up the room.

"I am," I said, resisting the urge to push her back onto my desk and take her right then and there. I put the photos away and grabbed my keys, heading out to my Porsche with her.

I opened her door for her, smiling at the flash of thigh I got when she slid into the seat. Once I was behind the wheel, I looked over at her with a smile. Was this happiness I was feeling? It felt foreign and new. And refreshing.

"Thanks again for inviting me to this," I said.

"Thanks for agreeing to come. I love gin and learning about new variations of drinks. I saw it, and thought of you instantly."

"I've been thinking about you, too," I said, resting my hand on her knee. She looked down at my hand and smiled, but didn't make a move to remove it. "But I'm wondering, Little Rose, is this just a way to get me drunk and

take advantage of me?”

Her laughter bubbled up, lighting up her face beautifully.

“I get the impression I don’t need to get you drunk to take advantage of you, West.”

“You’d be completely correct about that,” I said, squeezing her knee again.

The distillery was packed. We walked around the room together, tasting the samples and talking to the bartenders. Rosie was charming and gorgeous, flashing her beautiful smile easily.

“This one tastes like licorice, a little sweet, a little fruity, don’t you think?” she asked me, as we sampled our third negroni.

“I do. It’s kind of bitter, but the vermouth and orange peel balance it out nicely.”

“I also taste a little lemon and coriander, and something else I can’t quite put my finger on.” She took another sip. My eyes landed on her lips, and my cock swelled as I wondered what they might feel like on my skin.

“Maybe a hint of juniper?” I asked. I couldn’t help but smile at the way her eyes lit up.

“That’s it!” she exclaimed.

“Thanks for thinking of this,” I said, grabbing her hand and pulling her outside. The distillery had a back patio area, and we grabbed a seat to finish our drinks.

“My pleasure,” she said. “I’m glad we like the same drink.”

“I bet we have a lot more in common.”

“Perhaps,” she said, with a shy smile. “It could be a lot of fun discovering them.”

“Are you flirting with me, Little Rose?”

She laughed a small laugh. “Maybe.” She shrugged. “Is that okay? You are my boss...”

“I am. I’ve also shoved my tongue down your throat a few times already,

so I don't think we need to be so formal about it all. Do you?"

"No," she laughed. "Especially considering where we work and what happens there."

"Good point."

"How long has the club been open?"

"About five years."

"You, Theo, and Rian opened it together, right?"

"Yeah. Seems like a million years ago, now." I hadn't thought about the start of our venture for a long time. We'd come a long way since our rocky beginnings.

"Why is that?"

"None of us had owned a club before, so we had to learn everything from scratch. It wasn't easy. We had a lot of disagreements. They aren't the most pleasant business partners."

"Then why did you hook up with them?"

"Trust." I shrugged. "We've been close since we were kids. Theo and I grew up in Laurel Canyon together. As much as we fight, I'd trust them with my life."

"It's good to have people who would help you bury a body."

I couldn't help but laugh at that thought. "Well, I don't know if they'd go that far. Maybe Rian."

"What about you?"

"What?"

"Would you bury a body for them?"

I ran a hand through my hair, wondering if I would. "Probably," I admitted. "There's not much I wouldn't do for those two."

"That's nice. Well, not the dead body part."

I laughed and nodded. "Right."

She looked down shyly at the table, took another sip of her drink, then looked back up at me. She was beautiful. I had a feeling she had no idea just

how beautiful she really was. Her eyes were the deepest shade of green, a stunning contrast to all that sexy, long-flowing auburn hair. I couldn't stop looking at them.

“Speaking of dead bodies,” she continued, after a few seconds, “do you know if Theo and Rian have alibis for the nights those actresses were murdered?”

My blood went cold. What the fuck kind of question was that? I looked away, trying to control my sudden burst of anger.

“Trust me, nosy one,” I said, pushing the irritation away. “Those two had nothing at all to do with the untimely death of those women.”

“Of course. That's not what I meant to imply. Sorry about that.”

“No big deal.” I shrugged it off, realizing she was probably just making conversation. We had been talking about dead bodies, after all.

“Should we get out of here?” I asked after a moment.

She reached across the table and grabbed my hand. “Yes, let's. I've had my fill of gin!”

I kept ahold of her hand, hoping she wouldn't pull away as I led her back out to my car. The warmth of our palms mingled together, igniting my lust for her once more.

Chapter Thirteen

KAYLEE

I thought if I got him away from the club, I could dig a little deeper. But I'd be lying if I said I didn't want a little alone time with him for personal reasons.

Unfortunately, most of the time we were at the distillery, I kept getting distracted by his forearms as he lifted the glass to his lips over and over. He wore casual Levi's that fit him like a glove, and put his glorious ass on full display. He'd paired them with a black button down, his sleeves rolled up to expose those flexing muscles every time he lifted his hand.

I hated that his ridiculous hotness kept distracting me.

I was a strong, independent woman. Since I'd moved to this town, I'd focused on nothing but my job. When I needed a little release, I always had my trusty vibrator to take care of me. Then I could easily get back to work without the tedious distractions of a relationship.

A relationship with West was never going to happen. I wasn't fooling myself in that regard. But spending time with him, and enjoying his unexpected attention, wasn't a bad way to earn a living. I'd just never been so distracted at my job.

We'd gone our separate ways after leaving the distillery because West had a meeting with his casting agents at the club, and Violet and I had an appointment at our favorite spa. Well, Violet's favorite spa. I'd never be able

to afford a day of such luxury but Violet insisted I go with her. West had asked me out for tomorrow night, though, and the thought of going out on an actual date in the evening with him was exciting. Of course, I said yes.

Currently, Violet waited for me in the hot tub while I changed and took a few minutes to check in with Hoskins. He'd been insisting I check in everyday, but talking to him on the phone was the last thing I wanted to do, so I opted for a quick text.

I'm gaining the trust of one of the club owners.

Making progress. I'll keep you posted.

I groaned when I saw the three little dots immediately pop up. Did he live on his phone?

Which one? You're taking way too long. Speed things up.

Call me! Do better.

God, what an asshole. I started to text back, but did he really need more information? I didn't want to put Hoskins's focus on West right now. My gut told me he wasn't the killer, but I wasn't sure. And I had no real hard evidence to rule him out.

I opted to ignore Hoskins. I turned my phone off, threw it in my bag, and headed out to join Violet.

I found her in the hot tub, completely naked. The spa was clothing optional and as I looked around, I realized I was the only one wearing a swimsuit. Somehow, this made me even more self-conscious.

"You're so modest," Violet said, as I slipped into the water.

"That's true. But I'm working on it."

"Yeah, you are," she laughed. "All those skimpy outfits at work will wash that modesty away in no time."

"Yeah, I guess," I said. "West looks at me sometimes like I'm a supermodel. I don't get it."

"What's not to get, Kaylee? You're fucking hot. You're a bad bitch. Strong, independent, beautiful. What's not to like? West has good taste."

“He’s a movie star.” I shook my head. “It doesn’t make sense.”

“Of course it does. He gets his ass kissed all the time. That gets boring. He probably feels like a normal person around you. Plus, he obviously has a type. Look at his ex.”

I sighed, letting the warm water relax my muscles. “I look nothing like Danika, but you may be right about the rest.”

“How’s the investigation going?”

“I keep digging, but he’s so closed-mouthed about the business. His partners seem to thoroughly hate me, so I haven’t made much progress. Now that he moved me up to the secret club, I’m hoping to learn more.”

“How do I get into this secret club, by the way?”

“I overheard a customer say it cost a hundred grand just to get a membership, and then there’s a monthly fee of twenty thousand on top of that!”

“I guess I’ll just keep getting kinky at home,” she laughed.

“Yeah, me too,” I laughed.

She raised a brow. “You, too? Are you getting kinky, Kaylee?” she asked, incredulously. “Do tell!”

“Oh, it was nothing! Just a little light spanking from West...”

“What?” Her eyes lit up. “You didn’t tell me! How could you keep such juicy information from me? Your best friend!”

“I’m telling you now! We didn’t have sex. We were just playing around.”

“Well, we all know where that leads, don’t we?”

“I’m not sure. I mean...yes, okay, yes, that’s probably where it will lead. But I shouldn’t do that, right? I mean, I’m working!”

“You may be working, but you’d be the dumbest woman alive not bang West Foster if given the opportunity.”

“You don’t think it’s unethical?”

Her laughter echoed in the air. “You’re doing it for the murdered women, Kaylee. Take one for the team!”

I couldn't help but burst out laughing. She had a fair point.
Taking one for the team never sounded so enticing.

Chapter Fourteen

KAYLEE

West's Porsche hummed smoothly as he sped down the Pacific Coast Highway. He was going easily a hundred miles an hour, weaving in and out of traffic as I held on for dear life.

I was freaking out a little, recognizing the danger of the situation, of course. But I had to admit he handled the car with expert precision and seemed to enjoy every minute. The smile on his face was unmatched. His eyes gleamed with excitement.

"I went to stunt driving school for one of my movies," he said, his eyes trained on the road as we flew past the other cars. "I love this shit."

The top was down and my hair flew wildly around my face. It was exhilarating. My heart raced, and I tried as best as I could to tamp down my fear and lean into the adventure. It wasn't easy to do.

"Um, could you please slow down a little?" I finally asked when he'd almost sideswiped a truck.

He looked over at me and saw the fear on my face. He immediately looked apologetic.

"God, I'm so sorry, what an asshole I am," he said, slowing the car to a normal speed.

"No, it was fun, I just...you know, anything could happen. I don't want anyone to get hurt."

“Of course,” he said. “I have a bit of an addiction to adrenaline.”

“I get it. Maybe we can get our thrills some other way.”

His eyes lit up as he looked over at me. He’d been looking at me like that all night.

The first time was when he’d picked me up — showing up at my place with a bouquet of pink tiger lilies and looking as handsome as ever. Violet had met thousands of celebrities in her work, so when I introduced him to her, she took it all in stride.

I’d worn one of Violet’s nicest dresses — a red halter-top Gucci babydoll dress with a black belt and black stilettos — and I was so glad I’d listened to her because when he pulled up in front of Catch LA, my eyes widened.

“I’ve heard of this place,” I said.

“A friend owns it.” West pulled the car to a stop outside of the valet’s station. “They have amazing seafood.”

“My goodness, it’s so beautiful,” I said, as I took it all in, while West guided me inside. “Violet told me about it.”

“That’s quite a roommate you have.” He laughed. “I thought you didn’t know famous people.”

“Well, besides her. Although, I do now, I guess.” I flashed him a smile.

“I like that you aren’t in the industry, Rosie. It’s nice to hang out with someone that’s not always hustling, you know?”

“I get it. I was just never interested in being famous. I’m more of an introvert.”

The hostess did a poor job of not noticing West. Her eyes widened with glee as she led us to our table. West was charming and gracious as always, once again reminding me of how he’d become so successful.

It turned out our table wasn’t just a table at all — but one entire section of the rooftop that he’d reserved for us. It was discreetly tucked away from the rest of the rooftop seating and enclosed in a beautiful little alcove. A black, wrought-iron table sat against a rustic brick wall, surrounded with the most

charming collection of terra cotta pots, filled with bright pink bougainvillea, tiny white star jasmine and pastel pink hydrangeas. Fragrant pink roses climbed the wall above us.

“This is stunning,” I said, once the hostess left us alone. We sank into the red velvet couches that flanked the table, the soft candlelight flickering on West’s face. Behind him, the lights on the Hollywood hills sparkled beautifully.

He studied me for a while in silence. When he spoke, he surprised me.

“You know, I make movies for a living. And I bet you’re very photogenic. I can tell,” he said, as he smiled over at me. I couldn’t believe I was sitting across from this beautiful man, in this beautiful setting, on this perfect southern California night.

“I don’t know about that,” I deflected, trying to shake off any self-consciousness. “Are there menus?”

“No,” he said, with a dismissive wave. “I took the liberty of just ordering the tasting menu. They’ll bring a little bit of everything.”

“A little bit of everything?” I repeated, trying to contain my shock. “Sure, sounds great.” I hoped I sounded like I was used to this, but I absolutely wasn’t. Violet had done her best to drag me along to all of her fancy events, but ‘fancy’ was never something I was easily comfortable with.

We ordered drinks and the food began arriving in waves. Soon, the table between us was filled with tiny plates covered in artfully arranged sushi, garnished with tiny little pink and blue orchids. A platter of oysters arrived on a bed of dry ice mixed with river rock, creating a cloud of dramatic fog that rose over them.

West regaled me with stories of his life on set as we ate, but I was most interested in hearing about his childhood.

“I grew up here in L.A. My mother was a D list actress, and my dad was a studio exec. They came from relatively humble beginnings. They wanted a better life for my sister Everleigh and I. She’s younger than me. My sister

actually just got into town, maybe you'll meet her."

"How did you end up in movies?"

"Well, Dad didn't want us in the business. He had plenty of connections, but he felt like we could do any other job and be happy. Not my mother, though. Mom met a modeling agent in a coffee shop one day, and showed them a picture of us. The agent asked us to audition for a cereal commercial and we both got the job. After that, it was just a series of other commercials. My Dad didn't know I was even doing these spots at first. Then I got an audition for a small role in a sitcom pilot that never made it off the ground. But one thing led to another and I got offered more roles. When I got the part in my first series, Mom begged Dad to let me do it. I begged too, because it was more fun than attending regular old school. Eventually, he crumbled and let me act in the show."

"Looks like it was a good move," I said.

"Yeah. I mean, Dad was just looking out for me. He knew what kind of scum his fellow studio heads could be. He had good reasons to want me to do something else. And Everleigh... when she decided to follow in my footsteps, my parents fought about it so badly that I was sure they were going to get a divorce. Maybe we both should have listened to Dad back then."

What was that I saw in his eyes? Regret? Pain?

"So you met Theo when you were in school here in LA?"

He nodded. "Yup. He was from a lower class family. But of course, I couldn't know that. I just thought he was cool and passionate."

I smiled at that. "When did you meet Rian?"

"When I was a teenager. We all met and went our separate ways for a while after high school, but we found our way back to each other."

"They're both very intense guys."

"Don't take it personally. They're just protective."

"Of what? You?"

"Well, I meant the club, actually. But yes, me too, in their own way," he

said. The moon was rising in the sky behind me, reflecting in his deep blue eyes. Bathed in the soft glow of the twinkling lights and the moonlight, he was positively dreamy.

“Why does the club need protecting?”

The waiter appeared to remove our empty plates, and West waited till he walked away to answer, “Profane.”

“It’s not exactly a secret, though, is it?”

“It’s supposed to be. That’s what everyone is paying for. You know what? I really don’t want to talk about work.” He reached over and grabbed my hand, his palm warm over my fingers.

“What do you want to talk about, West?”

“You,” he said, his voice lowering.

That was exactly what I didn’t want to talk about. I felt guilty now for lying to him. He had no idea that I was a cop. He was opening up to me, buying me dinner, lavishing me with sweet attention and affection. I had nothing to give back to him.

Not legitimately.

I pushed away the guilt, reminding myself that none of this was personal. I was here to do a job, and if he got hurt in the process, so be it. It was absurd for this man to be interested in me, anyway. For the first time, the thought that he might know exactly who I was popped into my head. Maybe he was just playing me?

I pulled my hands back and gave him a polite smile, ignoring the pangs of guilt.

I turned my head, looking over at the other section of the rooftop. My eyes widened. “Oh my god, is that Jennifer Aniston?”

He smiled, nodding. “I thought you didn’t keep up on celebrities.”

“Well, I don’t, but obviously I know who she is.”

“Do you want to meet her?”

“What? You know her?”

He laughed, shrugging. “Yeah, I did that one movie with Brad a long time ago and we all went to dinner together. That was before she got with Justin Theroux, of course.”

“Right,” I nodded, slowly, trying not to seem so impressed. “I don’t need to meet her, but thank you... oh my god, is that Harry Styles?”

“Okay, I’m starting to not believe your story at all now.”

“Well, I don’t live under a rock,” I laughed, prying my eyes away from celebrity sightings. I couldn’t wait to tell Violet, she was a huge Harry freak.

“But you didn’t know about my divorce?”

“I try to stay away from the actual gossip stuff. It seems so invasive, you know? It’s nobody’s business. But I do appreciate a good rom-com and a good song.”

He cocked his head to the side, his dark eyes softening. “That’s a rare but refreshing attitude, Little Rose.”

His nickname for me made me blush every single time. It was intimate. Personal. Affectionate even, and it made me simultaneously want to crawl under the table and kiss him at the same time.

I shrugged. “I do feel that way. It’s hardly fair. Just because someone chooses to be an actor or model or whatever, they shouldn’t lose all sense of privacy. I’ve always felt strongly about that. So, I choose not to partake.”

“I like you,” he said, his voice soft in the darkness. He reached over and grabbed my hand again, the warmth of his fingers caressing mine comforting me and making my heart race at the same time. “Listen...I know I’m coming on strong. But I think I should say something, just so I’m not leading you on. And since we’re talking about my divorce. It was brutal. Danika almost ruined me. I love being with you, Rosie, you’re a lot of fun. And I want to keep exploring that. But as for right now, I’m not ready to start anything serious.”

I relaxed at his words. I appreciated his honesty and transparency, and it made me breathe a little easier now that I knew his real intentions.

“Thank you for saying that, West. I suspected as much. I’m not looking for anything serious right now, either.”

“Then we’re on the same page,” he said, his eyes lighting up.

“Yeah, I think so. I’m having fun, too. I don’t want to stop.”

“You’re incredibly beautiful.” His eyes peered into mine intensely. “I meant what I said. Maybe you should do a test shot with me sometime.”

“I don’t think so, but thank you.” His words were immensely flattering.

“That’s too bad, because I really, really need to find a lead actress for my new film.”

“What’s it about?”

“The club. My ex-wife, I guess? Seems depressing, but I’m on the hook now.”

I smiled over at him, reassuringly. “You’ll figure it out, West. You’ll find your girl.”

He stared at me for a moment, his eyes searching mine. I could barely breathe when he looked at me like that. He seemed to be looking right through me. I wondered what he saw. I wondered what he thought.

I wondered what it would feel like to kiss him again.

My eyes betrayed me, darting down to his lips for an instant before darting back up again. He saw me, and a knowing smile stretched across his face.

“I think I may,” he whispered, and I knew he wasn’t talking about the movie. His thumb pressed into my palm, suggestively tracing hot, slow circles in the center of it.

“You ready to get out of here?” he asked, his voice a low, lusty growl that cut right through me.

I couldn’t speak.

All I could do was nod and let him gently guide me out of the restaurant, right past Jennifer and Harry and a few other familiar faces.

On the street below, we waited a moment while the valet fetched the car,

West's hand gently but firmly holding mine. I felt like I was in a dream.

"West!" The shout of a man's voice pulled me out of my dreamy reverie. West's hand tightened around mine. Flashes went off, blinding me, just as someone shoved me backwards. It took a second for me to realize it was West, shoving me behind him.

"Back off, man!" West's voice rose angrily over the rush of the nearby traffic on Melrose.

"Just one shot, West — who's the girl?" the man yelled back, the sound of his camera shutter going off continuously.

"I told you to back off!" West blocked the man's way as he attempted to snap a photo of me. "Stay here, Rosie."

"What?" I asked, still blinded and trying to focus my eyes in the flashing lights. The smacking sound of flesh on flesh snapped through the air, followed by the sound of a body hitting the pavement, then the grunting sounds of a struggle. My vision cleared just as West fell on the photographer, his fist raised high in the air.

"West! No!" I shouted. My voice did nothing to stop him, of course. His fist landed squarely on the guy's jaw once more, blood splattering across the concrete sidewalk. I jumped in and grabbed West's arm before he could land a third blow. "Stop it!"

He shook his head and looked up at me with wild eyes.

"Let's go!" I insisted.

The valet stared at West with wide eyes, West's idling Porsche waiting behind him. West jumped up and let me pull him away, leaving the photographer lying there in a limp puddle.

"Fuck, sorry, Rosie," he muttered as we walked over to the car and got in.

My heart was pounding in my chest. I couldn't believe what I'd just witnessed. West had a temper, a temper I'd not witnessed before. My head was spinning.

Back in the low-slung luxury of his car, intimate and private and dark,

with the amber lights of the dashboard washing over our faces, he apologized once again.

“I have a problem with paparazzi,” he explained as we pulled away from the restaurant.

“Apparently.”

“I’m sorry you saw that,” he said, running a hand through his hair, a trickle of blood on his knuckles. I couldn’t tell if it was his or the photographer’s, though.

“The guy was an asshole. But, West, I did notice a person on the sidewalk with their phone out, recording the whole thing.”

“Fuck, it’ll be all over the internet in five minutes. That prick will probably press charges,” he said. “My fucking agent is going to bitch me out.”

“That guy doesn’t have a leg to stand on. He was all over you. And besides, isn’t all press, good press?” I asked, tentatively trying to lighten the mood. He was dark and angry now, and the vibe had completely changed.

“Fuck it.” He shrugged, reaching over and putting his hand on my knee. “I don’t want this to ruin our night.”

I put my hand over his, squeezing it lightly. “I really don’t think anything could ruin this night.”

He sighed, his shoulders relaxing finally just a little bit. “I like you, Rosie. I like you, a lot.”

My heart skipped a beat. I was beginning to like him, too. That most likely meant I was going to be the one that was ruined.

“Do you want to go to a photography exhibit tomorrow night?” he asked, with a sheepish grin. “Hopefully, there will be less paparazzi. But there are no guarantees on that. I’ll try not to punch anyone.”

“Sure,” I said. “Oh, wait, no — I’m working. My shift starts at eight.”

“Well, it just so happens that I pulled some strings with the boss and got you a night off, with full pay.” He smiled over at me, winking.

“Well, in that case,” I laughed. “Sure, I’ll be there.”

“Bring Violet, if you want. Or anyone else. I’ll text you the info and you can meet me there.”

“Sounds good,” I said, “who’s the photographer?”

A mysterious smile spread across his face. “Just a close friend.”

I nodded, and we were silent the rest of the way home. When he pulled up in front of my house, I knew the moment had come for me to finally decide if I was going to sleep with him or not.

He switched off the car and turned to me, his eyes peering into mine.

“Thanks for a lovely evening,” I said, as he leaned forward, brushing his lips against mine. I closed my eyes, leaning into him and kissing him back. His tongue darted into my mouth, teasing mine lightly. My pulse raced. The thought that I was kissing a famous celebrity never entered my mind.

To me, he’d just become simply ‘West.’

“Do you want to come —.”

West’s phone began dinging in his pocket. He shook his head, turned the volume down and turned to me. “Sorry.”

The vibrations didn’t stop. After a moment, he shook his head and finally looked at it.

“Fuck, my entire team is blowing up my phone. I’m sorry, Rosie. I gotta handle this. I’m such a dumbass for giving my security team the night off. I thought I could handle one night on my own. I should have known better. I just wanted to be alone with you, feel normal for once, you know? I should have ignored that asshole pap.” He looked at me with sincere regret in his blue eyes. “Can we pick this up tomorrow?”

I reached out a hand and cupped his cheek, kissing him lightly. “I can’t wait,” I said, sincerely.

“Thank you,” he said, pulling me close and hugging me for a moment. It was surprisingly intimate, and when he pulled away, he gazed at me lovingly.

“See you tomorrow,” I whispered, slipping out of the car.

My heart thumping wildly in my chest.
What the fuck was happening?

Chapter Fifteen

KAYLEE

“I can’t believe you were on fucking TMZ!” Violet cried as we pulled up to the warehouse in Silverlake.

The video of West punching out the photographer last night was splattered all over the internet. And there I was, standing behind him like a damsel in distress, and letting him defend me.

I was mortified.

“It’s horrible,” I said, shaking my head.

“Oh, yeah, you’re forever going to be known as the woman West Foster risked his reputation and freedom for. He’s lucky the pap isn’t pressing charges.”

“I would have gotten them dropped.”

“That would have been a fun thing to explain,” she laughed. “What are you doing, Kaylee? You two sure are spending a lot of time together.”

“I don’t know, to be honest.”

“Eventually, he’s going to find out the truth. Whether you tell him or someone else does. Especially with your face plastered all over the gossip sites.”

I groaned. She was right and it was painful to think about. If things kept going this way, it was only a matter of time. I needed to put some distance between us, keep things more professional.

The problem was that I liked West. Way too much. He was charming and handsome, of course. But he'd shown me a side of him that I wasn't sure everyone else saw. Maybe I was delusional. I was still shocked a man like that wanted to have anything to do with me.

Violet and I headed into the gallery, which was ~~actually~~ a large empty warehouse with grey concrete floors, and stark white walls lined with black and white photography. The place was packed with well-dressed people milling around with glasses of wine in their hands. A bar was set up in the corner, and loud rock music streamed through invisible speakers.

I searched the room for West, and spotted him in a corner, surrounded by people who seemed enthralled with whatever he was saying. I watched him tell a story I couldn't hear, his face animated, his eyes sparkling, his smile lighting up the room. The faces turned to him in complete worship.

"He certainly knows how to work a room," Violet said, following my gaze.

I laughed. "I'm glad you aren't impressed with him, Violet. It keeps me grounded."

"Please, Kaylee, you're the most grounded person I know. I don't even think West could uproot you."

"I'm not sure about that. I hate to say it, but I've been feeling like I'm floating on clouds lately. It's so gross," I said, wrinkling my nose, and forcing myself to tear my eyes away from West.

"Love isn't gross."

"I am not falling in love with West Foster!" I insisted, a little too loudly, as we stood in line for a glass of wine.

"I hope not, babe. For your sake," she said, rubbing my arm with sympathy. Or was it pity? I rolled my eyes and shook my head.

"I'm hanging out with him for work." I lowered my voice to a whisper. "I'll be out of there as soon as I can eliminate him and his partners."

"Right," she said, sounding completely unconvinced.

We made our way through the crowd to the photographs.

They were stunning black and white, high contrast, close up portraits of people in very sexy poses. The photos were very sensual, but not explicit at all. Instead of graphic body parts, it was an eye here, a calf there. A foot. A hip with a hand gripping it, fingers digging into flesh.

“These are so fucking sexy,” Violet said. She pointed at a photo of a woman’s tongue licking a person’s neck. “I’d buy that one, but it’s eight thousand dollars.”

I could barely breathe as I looked at them. They were striking and artful, but filled with intense emotion. I kept walking and saw another one of a woman’s ass, her perfectly manicured hand on one cheek, and a cat o’ nine tails pressed against the other. I squinted, something in the background catching my eye. I gasped when I realized it was the rug in the room that West had taken me into that night when he’d first showed me Profane.

My head spun. I looked at the name on the little placard beside the photo and saw the artist’s name for the first time — W. Foster.

“What the fuck?” I whispered.

“Hi, Little Rose,” West voice sounded softly in my ear, sending shivers instantly down my spine.

I turned and looked at him wide eyes. “Hi!”

“What do you think?”

“These photos are breathtaking,” I said.

“I thought you’d like them.”

“West — are these yours?”

He shrugged. “My side hobby.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I wanted to know what you thought of them before you knew they were mine.”

“I love them. Especially this one.” I pointed shyly to the photo in front of me and he gave me a knowing look.

“I’m glad,” he whispered, his hand landing squarely on the small of my back as he leaned into my ear. “That one reminds me of you.”

“It’s in that same room,” I said. “I recognized the rug.”

“Good eye.” He laughed. “You should be an investigator!”

I laughed nervously, my stomach flipping.

Violet walked up then, and I instantly felt like an imposter. My roommate managed to look like she stepped off the cover of Vogue any time she went out in public, and tonight was no exception.

“Hi, West,” she said. I watched carefully, gauging West’s reaction to her sunny beauty.

“Hey there, Violet, enjoying the show?” he asked, giving her a friendly smile. I watched his eyes, waiting for them to rake over her curvy frame, but they didn’t travel past her eyes.

“The prints are gorgeous,” she said. “Interesting theme.”

“They’re West’s photos!” I blurted. “He’s the artist. He didn’t tell me.”

“Oh!” She nodded, squinting a little. “That makes sense now. I assume you took these at the Hush Hush club?”

“Yeah,” he replied. “Just a hobby.”

“So, you’re into BDSM, West?”

I almost spit out my wine. “Violet!” I admonished her.

They both laughed at me. “It’s fine,” West said, with a dismissive wave. “I dabble, Violet. I don’t think that’s so unusual.”

“No, of course not. Looks like you’re into multiples, too?”

“Multiples?” I squeaked.

She pointed to a photograph I’d not gotten to yet. It was a point of view shot, looking down at two women kneeling at a man’s feet. They were both blindfolded, wearing collars and leashes, and had their tongues out and covered in what appeared to be cum.

My mouth dropped open.

Beneath them lay the same rug I’d recognized from earlier.

“Oh, that. It was just a photo shoot. Like a movie scene, it wasn’t real,” West assured Violet. “Like I said, it’s just a hobby. Got your attention, didn’t it?”

“They’re very good.”

“Thank you, Violet,” he said, nodding politely, his hand still firmly planted on my back. He leaned over to me, whispering in my ear. “I’d love to introduce you to a few friends. Are you up for that?”

Flattered, I nodded, and let him guide me away. We strolled past the photo Violet pointed out and I paused to read the placard beside it.

Sarah and Emily

July 24, 2023

My heart skipped a beat.

“What’s the date for?” I asked.

“That’s the date of the shoot,” he shrugged. “I like to give them simple names. Usually just the first name of the models. That shoot was actually an all-night effort, if you can believe it. I just couldn’t get the lighting right. The girls were troopers. We stayed at the club till dawn, it was ridiculous. All for one photo.”

My heart soared. That was the night of one of the murders. That meant West was cleared, and it was going to be easy to validate his alibi.

He grabbed my hand and guided me through the crowd, and I couldn’t contain the smile on my face.

“There you are!” A high voice sounded behind us. West froze, groaned and turned around.

“Hey, Everleigh,” he said.

The girl standing beside him looked very familiar. Blonde, petite, and bubbly, she was almost a clone of Reese Witherspoon.

“Sorry I’m late.” She stood on her tiptoes to kiss West’s cheek before looking over at me, expectantly.

“Rosie, this is my little sister, Everleigh. You probably recognized her.”

“Gosh, I’m sorry, I’m terrible at that kind of thing. Where would I know you from?”

Everleigh’s laughter bubbled up around us. “Oh, she’s cute, West. I like her already.”

I blushed. “I’m so sorry,” I said, realizing if she was West’s sister, she was probably famous, too. Why wouldn’t she be? “You do look familiar.”

“Everleigh is Hollywood’s new ‘it’ girl,” West explained. “She was in Pink Light this summer. Did you see that?”

“Oh! Now I recognize you!” I exclaimed, completely lying. “I loved that movie!”

Please don’t ask me anything about it, I silently pleaded. I didn’t want to offend her further. It was obvious she was used to being recognized, just like West, and Violet, for that matter.

“Nice to meet you, Rosie.” She laughed it off. “Is my brother being nice to you? He’s kind of a jerk sometimes.”

“Yes, actually,” I said. “He defended me from some aggressive paparazzi last night.”

“Oh, yeah, I saw it — and so did all of America.”

I groaned and West shook his head. “Fuck that guy. I had to pay him off to get him to not press charges, the fucker. My team tore me a new asshole.”

“God, West, I’m so sorry,” I said.

“Why? It wasn’t your fault. That shit happens all the time.”

“That must be a hard way to live.”

He looked over at me and smiled. “That’s why I like you, Rosie. You’re not jaded, and you see through the bullshit. Some people — like my ex — would have encouraged that kind of shit. Fuck, she’d have set up the scene herself. Probably even tip them off with our location just to make sure they saw us.”

“That’s horrible!” I was genuinely horrified. “Who would do that?”

“A fame hungry bitch, that’s who,” Everleigh laughed.

“Don’t call Danika names,” West said, impressing me even more with his reluctance to trash her. “It wasn’t right what she did, but I’m not gonna let you do that.”

“Oh, fuck her,” Everleigh said. “If I can’t stick up for my big brother, then who will?”

“We can stick up for him,” Theo said. He and Rian joined us, just as Violet walked up too.

“Is this the Danika’s a bitch party?” Rian said. “She’s a bitch. I can vouch.”

Everleigh stiffened immediately. She shot an angry glance towards Theo as she drained her wine glass, then reached for another. He looked away quickly, avoiding the daggers she was sending his way.

“Everleigh,” Rian said, giving her a formal nod.

“Hey, Rian,” she said, smiling politely, before giving another pointed look towards Theo. “Theo.”

“Hey.” He nodded, glancing at her for a hot second before turning away and pretending to look at the photos.

West cleared his throat and spoke up. “Thanks for coming, you guys. I appreciate the support.” He gestured at a passing waiter and asked him to bring us a tray of drinks. They appeared almost instantly.

Everleigh lifted her glass. “A toast to my talented brother!”

“To West!” Rian said.

“To West!” the rest of us said in unison, then sipped our wine. Well, most of us sipped. Everleigh took a large swig, which was probably why she was on her third glass already.

West looked on, looking slightly uncomfortable, but with a barely perceptible smile of pride.

After the toast, the awkwardness lifted, but I noticed Theo and Everleigh never looked at each other again. Everleigh stayed near Violet and me most of the night, with each one adorably expressing their fan girl status for the

other. They seemed to be quick friends, and I was happy to see it. Everleigh was fun and I liked her right away. It was obvious that she and West loved each other a lot and I was impressed with that, but it triggered memories for me that I tried my best to keep buried deep.

Only Violet knew the real truth of why I'd moved to Los Angeles, and why I didn't follow the news, celebrity or otherwise. There were way too many unexpected triggers. I missed my little sister like people missed their phantom limbs. It was an overwhelming ache that never faded. I just forced myself to move on in spite of my heart being torn and bloody.

Dee was only sixteen when she'd gone missing on her way home from school. I'd just moved away to college a few hundred miles away, and the news of her disappearance had shaken me to my very core. They found her body weeks later, viciously dumped in a river by some monster that was never caught.

My family was never the same.

I was never the same.

I'd been studying to be a veterinarian, but Dee's death changed everything. I changed my major and got a criminal justice degree instead. I became a cop, with the distinct goal to become a homicide investigator.

That's why this case was so important to me.

I may not be able to find Dee's killer after all this time, but I may be able to find others.

Seeing Everleigh's and West's love for each other made me miss my sister. I pushed away thoughts of her, as I'd learned to do many years ago, so I could move on with my life. She was never far away, though.

There were days when I felt like she was right by my side.

I excused myself for a moment to find the ladies' room. I passed by the photo with the two women again and smiled at the thought that I could cross West off the list of potential suspects.

Once inside the stall, I sent a quick text to Hoskins to let him know what

I'd discovered. He'd threatened to take me off the case way too many times recently, and I needed him to know I was making progress.

The thought of leaving West now, just as we were getting to know each other, was something I wasn't quite ready to do. I couldn't help but wonder if tonight was the night we'd find a way to finish what we'd started. Something had gotten in the way every single time and I was ready to take the next step. Whatever that meant.

I was nervous as I walked back into the gallery, wondering how we'd find a way to extricate ourselves from everyone. My answer was clear once I returned. West guided Everleigh out of the gallery, his expression clearly apologetic.

"Everleigh had a little too much wine. I'm going to drive her home," he said. "I'm sorry, Rosie. I was hoping to spend some time with you later."

"Oh, that's fine, I understand," I said. "Everleigh, are you okay?"

"I'm...fine! I'm fine! My brother is way too overprotective," she said, before swaying, stumbling and then tumbling to the ground. "Oh!" She collapsed into a pile of giggles.

West pulled her up, shaking his head. "You've always been such a lightweight, kid."

"I said I'm fine!" she insisted, still giggling. "It's these shoes!"

"Sure it is," he said, patting her back. "Rosie, raincheck, please?"

"Of course. See you again soon, I hope, Everleigh."

"Oh, my god, yessss! You're so cute! And Violet, too! Let's be friendsssss!" she insisted. "Get my number from West!"

"I will," I said with a reassuring smile.

As he began guiding her towards the door, I glanced around and spotted Theo watching darkly from the corner, his brow furrowed in disapproval. There was a story there, obviously, and I was intensely curious. I made a note to myself to ask West about it later.

Chapter Sixteen

WEST

Bright sun bore down on the top of my head, the pool in front of me sparkling under the bright rays. In and around the pool, the very scantily clad Hollywood elite partied and danced to the loud music streaming from Theo's house.

I'd tried to avoid the party altogether, but Rian and Theo had insisted I come. That didn't mean I had to engage, though. I had way too much work to do.

I sat on a lounge chair in the corner, working as much as I could on my phone, and doing my best to avoid the constant distractions.

Joey sat beside me, flipping through his phone to show me the photos of a gothic looking mansion he'd found in Bel Air.

"It's the perfect place to shoot, West. It's on the market right now and completely empty. We could easily rent it out for the film."

As much as I bitched about Joey, as much as he irritated me, I knew I couldn't get much done without him.

And for once, at least, he was right. The house was perfect.

"Good job, man," I said, nodding. "I love it. Let's lock it down. Check with the production company and get the schedule first, then negotiate the rental."

"I already took the liberty of doing that," he said, looking more than a

little cocky. “I hope you don’t mind. I was convinced you’d love it, and I’m glad I was right.”

“You know me well, Joey,” I said. “You know once this film is done, we should look at getting you a better job. I could pull some strings at one of the studios.”

“What?” he asked, his eyes clouding over. “Why would I do that?”

“Don’t you want to advance your career? Make more money?”

“No,” he insisted. “I’m happy working for you, West.”

“That’s great,” I said. “But I’m still going to look out for you. I’ll think of something.”

“Really, West, I’m not interested. Thank you, though,” he said, standing up and nodding firmly. “I’ll get to work on this and text you later.”

“Okay, sounds good,” I replied, wondering if that was anger I saw in his flashing black eyes.

I watched him walk away in confusion. Nobody stayed with me very long. I was the first to admit that I could be difficult to work with sometimes. I could definitely be an asshole, too. Most of my assistants used me as a stepping stone and I was perfectly happy with that. But maybe Joey was different.

Theo and Rian joined me a few minutes later while I was flipping through more headshots the casting agency had emailed me.

“Hey, brother.” Rian sat down next to me with a beer in his hand.

“S’up?” Theo asked.

“It’s fucking hot today,” I said, wiping my forehead with a towel.

“Those chicks are hot,” Theo said, gesturing to a group of bikini clad women giggling while they took selfies under a red canopy. They all looked exactly the same — same lanky bodies, same long beach waves, same makeup styles, same Botox, same boobs, same butts, same lips. Like photocopied cut-outs of some trendy doll.

“You think everyone’s hot,” I said.

“And so did you before you got yourself all tangled up with our new hire,” Rian reminded me. “I haven’t seen you with anyone else since she walked in the door.”

“Yeah, dude, I noticed that, too,” Theo said.

I shrugged. “Rosie’s great. She’s not like all those women over there. She’s got personality. She’s smart.”

“Not to mention a great pair of tits,” Theo said. “But still, I thought you were all about sowing your wild oats after all that shit with Danika. Not settling down with anyone. What happened to that?”

“Rosie happened to that,” Rian said, laughing as he took a swig of his beer. “Have you seen the way he looks at her? Have you fucked her yet?”

“You’re so fucking crude, dude,” I said.

“Is that a yes?”

“For your information, no, we haven’t slept together yet.”

“That makes it even worse. What are you getting yourself tied up in, West? What are you waiting for? Pound that pussy and get on with your life. You don’t need to get hung up. You know what happened last time. Danika damned near destroyed you.”

“Pound that pussy? Did you really just say that, Rian? No wonder you can’t keep a woman around.”

“Hey, man, some women like that kind of talk. Speaking of pounding, how is it that Rosie’s roommate is fucking Violet Vanderbilt, the supermodel? That was a surprise.”

“It’s a small town, you know that,” I said.

“Yeah, well, I got her number.”

“You did?” I asked, groaning. “Stop fishing on my porch, man.”

“Oh, you want both of them? Now, that’s the West we know and love!”

“No, that’s not what I meant,” I said. “Just...never mind.”

“Don’t worry, dude, I won’t fuck up your conquest. But hurry that shit up. I’m tired of seeing you like this.”

“Nobody’s making you watch.”

“Whatever, dude,” he said, shaking his head. “Let’s talk about the festivals, shall we?”

“Yeah, we need to firm up who’s participating,” Theo said. “They’re coming up soon. Electra is in just a few weeks and Eureka is the week after.”

“How many couples do we need?” I asked. “Six each night, right?”

“I’ve got each festival half-filled so far,” Rian said. “Maybe I can convince Violet to join me?”

I laughed, shaking my head. “You’re insatiable.”

“Like you aren’t,” he said. “I’m teasing though.”

“I know. Maybe you can put Rosie and me down for one.”

They both looked at me like I had two heads. “Dude, you just said you haven’t fucked yet.”

“So?”

“Well, maybe you should fuck the woman in private before you bang her in front of dozens of festival attendees?”

I hated to admit it, but they had a point.

“Put us down as a maybe.”

I ignored their laughter as I considered how I could escalate things with Rosie to the next level. My cock throbbed, the hunger for her growing every single day.

Chapter Seventeen

KAYLEE

“You moved up to Profane really quickly,” Lily, one of the other waitresses, mentioned as I put my things in my locker. We were the only two in the dressing room at the beginning of my shift, and I was happy to have a moment alone with her. I’d tried making small talk with a few other staff members, but hadn’t gotten very far.

“Yes, I guess I did,” I said. “I’m happy about that, I really like it. It’s fascinating, actually.”

“Is this your first time working in a club like this?”

“Oh, yes, definitely.”

“Well, the owners must really like you,” she said, running a brush through her long, silky, black hair. She was strikingly beautiful, with the brightest blue eyes I’d ever seen. “I’ve never seen them move anyone up so quickly.”

“How long have you worked here?”

“A few years. I worked the Hush Hush Club for two years before that, too.”

“Oh, wow, that’s a long time,” I said.

“Yeah, most people don’t stay that long. They get burned out, or too involved.”

“Too involved?”

“It’s an addictive lifestyle.” She shrugged. “If one’s not careful, things can turn dangerous.”

“How so?” I sat down on the bench in front of my locker, hoping she’d stick around a little longer and say more.

She paused. I could see she was weighing her words carefully. “People who play around with this lifestyle compare it to a drug sometimes. After a while, it takes more and more extreme things to satisfy you, so you keep chasing the high. When you’re already pushing the envelope, things can turn dangerous and ugly very quickly.”

I nodded slowly, her words ringing very true. “Well, I’m hoping that doesn’t happen to me. Although I am curious about experimenting.”

“Experimenting is fine,” she said, looking around and lowering her voice. “But listen, Rosie, from one woman to another, be careful, okay? Things aren’t always what they seem around here.”

“Any tips on staying safe?”

“Yeah, don’t go to any private play parties. Profane is the big secret downstairs, but up here? The real secrets go a lot deeper.”

“What do you mean?”

“Some of the members have started their own circles. Much more extreme. Much more private.”

“I see,” I said. “I suspected, but I wasn’t sure.”

“Just be careful. I wouldn’t want to see you get hurt. If you aren’t experienced with this kind of stuff, it can get dark really quickly. Not everyone is as concerned with your safety as you might think.”

“Thank you for the words of caution,” I replied.

She walked out then, leaving me alone to contemplate her words.

So, Profane had an even deeper level.

That made sense. As extreme as it was, I hadn’t really seen anything too dangerous occur there yet.

The night got off to a fast start, with Profane filling up quickly. When I

saw the main attraction for the night, I wasn't surprised to hear Joey say that West wouldn't be showing up.

Danika had showed up. She wore her mask, of course. But it was impossible not to know who she was, with her long red hair, curvy frame, and distinct floral tattoos covering her shoulders and back.

She held court in the center room, writhing the entire night away with a string of rotating partners in the bed inside the cage.

I watched, amazed that West was actually married to her once. I couldn't help but wonder what that marriage was like. Did he participate in things like this with her? Did he enjoy it? Did he enjoy sharing her? He didn't seem like the possessive type. But he didn't seem like the type to share, either.

Perhaps that's why they'd divorced.

Eventually, Danika went home, covered in cum and sweat. Her creamy skin was blemished with red marks and bruising from all the manhandling she'd endured. The look of absolute bliss on her face when I saw her later in the showers told me she was leaving as a satisfied customer.

Throughout the rest of my shift, I kept trying to find ways to talk to Lily again. I finally found the opportunity at the end of the night, after a long shift of dodging a woman, and the leashed husband she led around on his hands and knees, who wanted me to join them in a private room to play.

I was excited to experiment again, but I was only interested in doing so with West. And something about the leash completely turned me off.

Lily was making herself a drink ~~at the end of the night~~ and I sat down at the bar in front of her.

"How'd it go?" she asked.

"It was okay. I almost stepped on the fingers of the guy on the leash a few times, but overall, it was fine."

"He probably would have enjoyed the pain."

"Yeah, maybe," I said. "At one point, I walked by the room and saw his wife digging into his balls with the heel of her stiletto."

“Ah, classic move.”

“Hey,” I said, lowering my voice so the other staff members wandering around didn’t hear me, “I’d love to hear more about those private circles you were talking about earlier.”

“What do you want to know?”

“Well, who’s involved in that? Is it just the clients, or do the owners participate, too?”

“I’ve heard Theo and Rian do sometimes, but I’m not sure about West.”

“Where do they hold these private circles?”

She handed me a drink and took a sip of hers, her eyes darting behind me.

“Uh, I gotta go, Rosie,” she said, her face falling as she quickly left.

I looked up in the mirror behind the bar and saw Theo standing behind me.

“What were you asking Lily about?” he demanded.

“Oh!” I said, turning to face him. He looked furious. “Hi, Theo. Uh, nothing, really.”

“I heard you asking about a private circle?”

“Well, yeah...”

“Are you trying to lure business away from our club, Rosie?”

“What? Oh, god, no, not at all.”

“That’s what it fucking sounded like. I knew we couldn’t trust you. Get your shit and get out, you’re fired.”

“What?” I shouted, loudly enough to get Rian’s attention from the other side of the room. I looked around for West, but he hadn’t shown up at all tonight.

“I mean it, get the fuck out!” Theo roared.

“Theo, I wasn’t —.”

“What are you doing, Theo?” Rian asked, once he’d finally come over to us.

“She was asking about private circles and shit. I don’t know what she’s

up to. But we have a no tolerance policy and I'm not having it."

"Theo, you know West will lose his shit if you fire his favorite waitress just for asking innocent questions." Rian turned to me. "You aren't fired, Rosie. Go home, though."

"Thank you, Rian," I said, offering him a grateful look as I walked away, mentally kicking myself. I'd have to be more careful next time. But I really needed to find out more about these private circles. Were the victims involved? And if so, who else was?

I ran into West in the hallway as he headed to his office.

"Hey," I said. "I was wondering if you'd show up."

"Yeah, Theo sent me a message when the coast was clear. The last thing I want is to see my ex getting railed by a bunch of dudes. I'm pretty sure she does that shit just to fuck with me. She thinks it's going to make me jealous, but it doesn't."

"I saw that. Sounds like you're really, truly done with her?"

"Absolutely," he assured me. "Hey, can you come in my office for a minute? Are you leaving?"

"Yes, I was on my way out." As I followed him, I contemplated telling him about Theo trying to fire me. Theo would mention it to him, no doubt.

I opted to get ahead of the situation.

"I need to tell you something," I said, once he'd shut the door and sat down at his desk.

He glanced up curiously. "Yeah?"

"Theo...he...well, he um...he just fired me."

"No the fuck he did not!" he barked, standing up quickly and heading for the door.

"West, wait!" I said, putting my hand on his bicep. "Rian came to my rescue and said I wasn't fired. But I just wanted to tell you what happened, before you hear Theo's side."

"Okay, tell me," he said, sitting back down.

“It was innocent, I promise. I heard someone talking about private circles, outside of Profane, and I was just asking Lily about them.”

I fudged the story a little, taking the blame for Lily out of the situation completely. The last thing I wanted was to get her in trouble.

“Theo overheard me asking about it. I think he assumed I was trying to make my own private circles? He accused me of trying to steal business away from the club. I wasn’t.”

He nodded, slowly, squinting his eyes at me. I knew he was searching my face to see if I was being truthful.

“You want to go private with others, Rosie?” he finally asked.

“What? No!”

“You said you were curious.”

“God, I am,” I said, looking away shyly, before meeting his gaze again. “I am. But only with you, honestly.”

He raised a brow and a slow smile spread across his face. He was so deliciously handsome when his face lit up with mischief like that. “Is that so?”

“Yes,” I admitted in a hushed whisper.

“So, are you saying you liked it when I warmed up your pretty ass with the whip?”

I swallowed hard, feeling his words go right to my center.

“Yes,” I hissed.

“Are you saying you want more?”

“I think so. I’m wildly curious what it would feel like to go...further.”

“I’d relish the opportunity to tie you up, Little Rose. Just say the word.”

He was so far away, sitting behind his desk and not making any move to come towards me.

Did he truly want me? Or did he just want to play with me?

There were times he looked at me like I was just a piece of ass to conquer. Other times, like the other night after dinner when he opened up to

me and seemed almost vulnerable, it felt like this was something else entirely.

I wasn't sure which West I was dealing with right now.

If I asked, would he do all the things he kept talking about? The scenes I'd witnessed at the club tonight flashed in my mind. The woman with the leashed man digging her shoe into his flesh. The smacking sounds of flesh being beaten echoing through the place. The women suspended and tied up, her faced serene with complete bliss.

Danika with her legs spread wide, and the flexing muscles in the back and ass of the muscular masked man pounding into her.

It was a lot to take in.

It was a lot to feel.

Would I be able to handle any of that?

"I need to get out of these heels," I said, chickening out completely.

I left West alone in his office, hating that my courage had abandoned me so suddenly.

Alone in the locker room, I was changing back into my street clothes when a small, folded note fell out onto the floor. I picked it up and opened it, my heart racing when I read the elaborately scrolled words.

You aren't welcome here. Quit now. Or else.

Chapter Eighteen

WEST

There was a Kinbaku exhibit at Profane tonight, and if I'd thought about it sooner, I would have volunteered Rosie to be a part of it. Her eyes had lit up like a Christmas tree when she'd watched that first night. Her excitement was obvious.

Theo insisted that we have special events all the time. Tonight, he'd flown in the premier Kinbaku master in the world — Xi Xiang.

As soon as the doors opened, Xiang got started with his muse. The strikingly tall, raven-haired model submitted to him serenely as he worked on his intricate knots. He'd constructed a rope pulley in the process, which he now was using to suspend her body high in the air.

Her entire upper torso was encased in rope, but from the waist down, she was completely naked. Her legs swung in the air helplessly.

A crowd of onlookers gathered around in a circle, whispering and pointing as the Master continued his work.

I spotted Rosie at the edge of the crowd, entranced with the show. I walked over behind her.

“Do you like what you see, Little Rose?” I whispered quietly in her ear, my lips brushing against her skin with each hushed word.

She looked back at me quickly, then turned back to the show, silently nodding.

I wrapped my arms around her waist, pulling her close against my already throbbing cock. To my surprise, she didn't hesitate to lean back and press her round cheeks into my hardness. I twitched with desire for her.

"He's the best in the world," I whispered. "Men and women pay him thousands of dollars a night to do this to them. Personally, I'm not into being restrained. I'm more of a top." Moving my hands down, I grabbed her hips, pulling her even closer. "I could do that to you, Little Rose. You're curious, aren't you, sweetheart? I see it in your eyes."

She nodded again.

"Are you afraid?"

I smiled at her slow nod. When she glanced back at me, her eyes were full of wonder, yet laced with fear. That fear sent a thrill through me. I wanted to help her face it, guide her through it and show her the sheer bliss of getting to the other side.

The only way I could do that is if she trusted me completely.

"Do you trust me, Rosie?" I asked, holding her gaze in the dark.

"I do, but yes, I'm afraid. I've never given up control like that to anyone, West."

"There are ways to work up to it." I reached up and caressed her cheek. "Gentle, slow gradients that we can start with."

"What do you mean?"

"Silk ties, breakaway handcuffs, there's a plethora of ways. Ways for you to slowly give up power to me as you become more comfortable, as you come to trust me more. If you're really curious..."

Behind us, the suspended woman cried out and we both turned to keep watching. Xi stood in front of the bound woman, firmly pressing a large Hitachi vibrator directly against her clit. She writhed and moaned, her legs swinging freely in the air.

Seconds later, she she cried out again, her orgasm echoing through the room as it rolled over her quivering body.

In front of me, her backside pressed against me, Rosie shuddered, her entire body shaking.

I knew my time had come.

It was clear she needed someone to take the reins and guide her. It was clear that I was that lucky person.

“Follow me,” I growled in her ear, turning and heading towards the same room we’d locked ourselves in before. I had no doubt if she’d follow and when she appeared in the doorway, looking like she’d had to muster all her courage to do so, I pulled her into my arms and held her for a moment.

She melted into me, wrapping her arms around me. The warmth of her body was delicious against mine. I couldn’t wait to sink my cock into this beautiful creature but I was suddenly much more interested in pleasing her.

In teaching her.

“I don’t know how I’ll handle feeling so powerless, West,” she admitted with her head buried in my chest as I held her close.

“You are only as powerless as you want to be, Little Rose. As I said, we can take it slow. You’ll be the one in charge, always. You’re in the driver’s seat and I’m just the one holding the keys, so to speak.” I pulled her away, peering into her hesitant eyes. “I can tell you want this. It’s written all over your face. Don’t be afraid. I promise I won’t hurt you.”

She nodded, taking a deep breath. I kissed her gently, slowly, drawing her out of her shell with my tongue, teasing her until she pressed into me again, her arms wrapped tightly around me.

“What’s your safe word?”

“I think it’s still elephant,” she chuckled.

“What’s my name?” I asked, growing serious.

“West?” she asked, wrinkling a brow.

“No, not tonight. Tonight, call me ‘sir’.”

Her eyes dilated. She swallowed hard, and nodded obediently.

“Now, take off your dress. Strip completely.”

Her eyes widened in surprise.

“I said you were in control, Rosie. Trust me.”

She nodded, and slowly began stripping in front of me. All the hidden bits of her body quickly came into view as she pulled the tiny black velvet dress, that I’d left for her, over her head. Underneath, she wore a matching black satin bra and panties. As she stood there in nothing but those and her silver mask, I realized I’d never seen a more breathtaking sight.

“You’re exquisite, Rosie, I hope you know that.”

“Thank you,” she said, softly, shyly.

“Now, take off the rest.”

“Everything?”

“Everything, babe,” I demanded.

She sighed, reaching in between her breasts and releasing the clasp of her bra, her creamy breasts falling out between us like an offering to the gods. I couldn’t contain the gasp that spilled from my lips.

“My god,” I said, shaking my head. “Rosie, you’re incredible.”

“West,” she said, smiling, hesitating as she fingered the top of her panties. “Thank you.”

She hesitated now, and I could see she was contemplating if she should keep going. She didn’t realize yet that she didn’t really have a choice. We’d come so far...I knew I couldn’t turn back now.

“Keep going. You’re safe. I promise.”

My words did the trick. I watched with inner glee as the panties slid down her curvy thighs and fell to the ground. She kicked them away and looked back at me, her eyes full of questions.

I drank her in. Standing before me in nothing but the mask and her heels, she was a vision of pure beauty. My cock swelled painfully in my jeans. I’d been waiting for this moment. I longed to bend her over the desk and shove my cock up her gorgeous pussy, but I knew she needed more than that.

And for the first time in my life, I was more concerned with what my

partner needed.

“Have a seat,” I said.

I watched her walk towards me, completely enchanted with her. Her long red-auburn hair flowed over her shoulders, spilling over her bare breasts. Her perfect pink nipples peeked out from under the curtain of her hair.

It took me a few moments to gather everything from the armoire.

She sat down on the bed. Lifting a pile of pink satin ribbon, I placed it on her lap.

“Touch it,” I said.

She did so tentatively, her fingers sliding over the smooth surface. Her touch was sensual and light, and my cock twitched with anticipation of her touch on my skin like that.

“I’ll use this first. It’s soft. Harmless, right?”

She nodded with a smile, the first glimpses of trust filling her eyes. “Okay,” she whispered. “Where do you want me?”

Where did I want her?

I wanted her everywhere.

I wanted her on the bed...

On the floor...

...in the cage front and center at Profane, crying out my name in ecstasy.

But this small taste would have to do for now.

“Stand up and turn around,” I instructed her.

She stood in front of me, her bare ass tempting me. I wanted to bury my face in it, but I knew I’d eventually, too. This lesson in patience was uncomfortable but turning me on immensely. Unable to resist, I ran my hands over her skin. Starting at her shoulders, I trailed them down to her back and waist, and over her hips, my fingers lingering at the soft cheeks of her ass.

She moaned, her head falling back.

My god, I thought, I cannot wait to be inside this woman.

I shook it off, grabbed the ribbon and got to work.

Pulling her hands behind her back, I began by tying her wrists together. Then I worked the ribbon all the way up her arms, weaving and tying as I went along, until she was completely restrained with her arms firmly secured behind her back.

I stepped in front of her to check on her. My breath caught at the sight of her tits pressed forward, her shoulders pulled back.

Her green eyes were on fire.

“Oh, Little Rose, look at you,” I whispered, my words slow and deliberate, the familiar darkness of having a woman completely at my mercy falling over me like an evil shadow. “You’re even more beautiful now that I can do anything I want with you.”

Her eyes widened, that familiar fear popping back up.

“It’s powerful, you know. For me. Knowing I have you just where I want you.”

I reached up and slowly caressed her cheek.

“What do you think, Rosie? How does it feel? Do you like it?”

She took a deep breath before answering. “I think so?”

“Hmm, well we’re just getting started, aren’t we?”

She didn’t answer. She did the only thing she could do.

Wait.

Watch.

I slid my hand down her face and lingered gently on her neck, before moving down to her nipples. Pinching one delicious bud at a time, I watched them tighten and pucker with the deepest satisfaction. Her gasps of pain rang out like music to my ears.

I pinched even harder, gauging her reaction to see how much she could take. By all appearances, she was holding up quite well. This was going to be immensely enjoyable. I could tell already.

My fingers slid down even further, palming her belly, the tips of my fingers edging the fringes of her soft hair. She gasped as I approached her

pussy. Her belly contracted with anticipation.

“Oh, sweetheart,” I said, as I plunged further, my fingers between the lips of her pussy.

She moaned, her eyes widening at my touch.

“Rosie, you’re so wet.”

I dipped my fingers into her wetness, smearing it over the rest of her pulsing sex.

She moaned again, her hips pushing towards me. Her shoulders twitched, and I knew she was trying to find a way loose already. It only made me laugh. She wasn’t getting out of this until I decided she could.

Not until I was done with her.

I pulled my fingers away, brought them to my mouth, and licked her juices from them. I moaned, my entire body shuddering with pleasure at her taste.

“Woman, you’re delicious,” I said, taking my finger and putting it in her mouth. Surprising me, she twirled her tongue around it, greedily licking herself from my skin. “Oh, good girl...look at you!”

I removed my hand from her mouth and placed my fingers back inside her slick wetness, moaning at the heat I found there. She thrust her hips forward, obviously wanting more. I couldn’t help but give it to her.

“You want this, baby? You want my fingers to fuck you?”

She nodded, letting her head fall back as I sank back into her, pushing first one finger inside, then two and then three, until finally they were all thrusting into her together.

I opened her up slowly, at first. Her hips rhythmically pushed against me, her moans turning to whimper. When they sank into low, deep groans of pleasure, I started fucking her fully, hard and fast. Her breasts swayed with each deep thrust, sending me into a state of frenzy that threatened to make my cock explode without any contact at all.

But it wasn’t me that came.

It was beautiful Rosie, shuddering, crying out in ecstasy, her entire body blushing bright red as wave after wave of pleasure crashed down upon her, her hands bound tightly behind her back with the pretty satin ribbon.

I slowed my thrusting to match her breathing as she came down. Her juices were dripping down my arm, and I was completely enthralled with my new play partner.

When she collapsed on the bed, she was a shuddering, shaking, restrained mess, unable to speak or move. But she looked up at me with what I was sure was pure hunger and desire.

She was just as enthralled as I was.

“We’re going to have so much fun together, Little Rose.”

Chapter Nineteen

WEST

Enough was enough.

Rosie had been given enough time to ease into things. Now it was time to step things up.

I'd let her go home after I'd tied her up in the pink ribbon, but not without first instructing her to return to me tomorrow for more lessons.

She had no idea what was in store for her tonight.

I was determined to finally sink my cock into her. I'd waited long enough. It was excruciating. The sweetest torture is still torture.

The club was officially closed today, a Sunday, but that didn't mean the magic wouldn't still happen.

I'd planned this evening long ago, long before I'd ever laid eyes on Rosie, but I was happy to include her in the party tonight. I was convinced she could handle it. I would never make her do something she didn't want to do, but I hoped she'd be open to pushing her limits.

By the time she showed up, the participants were all in place. I was in my robe, nude underneath, white makeup smeared across my face, and wearing my mask when Rosie arrived at my office.

She looked like a siren, a vision of beauty, intrigue, and softness.

I pulled her into my arms and kissed her firmly, greedily, hungrily. Her passionate response left me breathless, her tongue rapidly finding mine as our

bodies reconnected.

“I missed you. I have a surprise for you tonight,” I said, as I pulled away.

“The club is closed, isn’t it? Why are you wearing makeup?” Her eyes were wide and curious.

“Yes, the club is closed, to the public and the usual members. Tonight is special.”

“What’s going on?”

“You’ll see,” I promised. “I don’t want to spoil anything. Are you ready?”

“I think so? But how can I know if you don’t tell me what I need to be ready for?”

“Just trust me, Little Rose,” I said.

“A lot of trust required around here,” she replied. “Is everyone as trustworthy as you, West?”

“I think they are. Let’s get you ready.”

I gave her a robe and a mask, and she hesitated before taking off the dress she was wearing. “Yes, that’s right, take everything off again. Please.”

She followed my directions without question. She was getting the hang of things, and that pleased me immensely. Her submissiveness was incredibly sexy—because I knew what a strong, independent woman she was. The trust she offered me was sacred, and it was not lost on me what a gift it truly was.

She donned the mask and robe—and stood in front of me. The robe parted slightly, giving me a glimpse of the incredible curve of her breasts and the puff of pubic hair covering her pussy. My cock throbbed with desire beneath my robe, the sight of her igniting the fire inside of me instantly.

I grabbed the container of face paint and approached her.

“Why the face paint?” she asked.

“It’s an extra layer of privacy. Another symbol of our sacrifice.”

“Sacrifice?”

“You’ll see,” I said, as I began smearing the paint across her face. “Trust

me.”

When I was done, I put her mask on and lifted the hood over her soft hair, framing the beauty of her face.

“You’re a vision, Rosie,” I whispered. “Please give yourself to me tonight, trust me.”

“I’ll follow your lead,” she said, her voice cracking with nervousness.

“I’ll take care of you. I promise.”

She nodded and smiled through her anxiety, her eyes peering deeply into mine.

“What I’m going to show you tonight may frighten you. But remember you’re safe. Everything will be okay.”

I grabbed her hand and led her out of my office to the back of the building. We entered the alley, then went through another side door. It led to the secret entrance of the basement, and into the deepest center of my primal creation.

The flickering flames of the torch sconces mounted on the walls were the only source of light, throwing dancing shadows of red and orange light over our faces, the silver masks sparkling in the stark darkness.

I held her hand firmly in mine, leading her into the inner realms where the others were waiting for us, robed and masked as well.

“Ommmm...” The slow hum of their chanting filled the space as we approached, the circle they’d formed silently parting to allow us to join them. Gathered around an enormous round bed covered in red satin sheets, they passed around a heavy chalice of mead, each of the thirteen of us taking deep sips of the sweet wine.

When the chalice arrived in Rosie’s hands, I was pleased to see her take a sip unquestioningly. Her eyes were wide under the mask as I watched her quietly observe the others.

When she began chanting with them, the hum of her voice low and sexy next to me, I felt my cock swell painfully. She handed me the cup and I drank

from it, relishing the warmth of the alcohol as I passed the chalice to the next person.

They'd all been waiting for us — for me — and I stepped forward to begin the ritual.

I'd chosen all of these souls carefully, drawing upon past rituals to pick those that I connected with on the deepest spiritual levels.

“Welcome,” I said, walking to the middle of the circle. I turned my head, meeting the gaze of each participant in a silent greeting before continuing.

“The darkness welcomes you. The gods welcome you. The spirits welcome you to our inner realm. We're gathered here to shed our inhibitions, to explore our darkest desires, to connect to the most primal instincts that make us human. Please, remove your robes.”

My eyes crashed into Rosie's with my final words. Her mouth gaped open as she watched the others silently let their robes fall to the ground, exposing themselves completely.

Waiting for Rosie to let her robe drop left me breathless.

She lifted her chin and stared back at me with bold courage. I couldn't help but smile with pride. Holding my gaze, she let it fall, exposing her beautiful curves to everyone in the room, her bare skin glowing under the flickering torchlights.

I nodded my approval. “Very well,” I said. “Who amongst us volunteers to go first?”

Instantly, four of them stepped forward, their heads bowed obediently.

I nodded, stepping out of the way and back to Rosie's side. The four of them approached the bed and stood next to it.

One of the women picked up a bound stick of sage and lit it with the flame of a nearby candle. Turning to the others, she slowly walked around them, cleansing them with the wafting smoke. The distinct smell permeated the air as she passed it to me, and I turned and waved it around Rosie's naked body.

I raked my eyes over her body. Soon, she'd be mine, and the image of her writhing on the end of my cock washed over me. My cock twitched in the sweetest anticipation.

I passed the sage along to the next person and took Rosie's hand in mine, squeezing softly. She leaned into me, sighing slightly, as we watched the show unfold in front of us.

The two couples approached the bed, the two women kissing as the men watched on with the rest of us. They tumbled onto the bed, their bodies sliding together sensuously, limbs around limbs, hands trailing over each other as the passion between them grew fiery.

The men stood around them, stroking their hard cocks, chanting over them.

Their voices echoed up into the air and the rest of us joined in, elevating the energy and calling forth the gods.

After a few moments, the men joined in — adding their hands and mouths and fingers, until the four of them were meshed together, knotted and entwined and interlaced in a lusty display of pure sensuality.

Watching these moments left my heart pounding so hard I was sure Rosie could hear it over the chanting.

My cock pulsed in the air as I looked over at her and saw the complete rapture in her sparkling emerald eyes.

Now, I knew what pure beauty was. I was completely enchanted with her.

The scene unfolded in front of us, the men now fucking the women from behind as the women kissed. The chanting quieted as we listened to the growing intensity of the couples locked in their own building crescendos of pleasure. Their cries of ecstasy floated into the charged air, offering a sacred prayer of lust to the heavens.

The chanting picked back up, crashing together with their passionate song of lust.

Rosie squeezed my hand hard as the men reached the edge, pulled out and

exploded over the women's backs, coating them in their thick heat and rubbing it all over their skin. The men fell back, leaving the women to continue kissing, their asses raised as they readied for the next round.

Two more men stepped forward and swiftly entered them.

I heard Rosie's gasp. "I don't think I can, um..." she whispered, nervously.

"No, Rosie. You're all mine. I'm not sharing you with anyone tonight. We're just watching for now."

Her face relaxed instantly and she nodded with a smile. "Thank you."

I almost laughed. She had no idea what she was thanking me for. No, I wasn't going to let anyone else touch her. Not tonight, at least. But I was going to fuck her so hard she probably wouldn't be able to walk tomorrow.

The women were on their backs now, watching the crowd around them. The men drilled into them, faster and harder, until they were a pile of sweaty limbs, moaning and grasping at each other as their desire took over. The savage, primal need for release gripped them in its sweet embrace, keeping them on the edge until they pushed themselves to the brink of that darkness. Dozens of eyes looked on, locked in the embrace themselves.

We all have kinks.

Some of us are fond of watching, and some of us are fond of being watched. Does it matter which is which? Does it matter if you don't even feel the difference between the two?

Let the watched be the watchers. That was the beauty of these rituals. We're all connected. We're all one. We were all engaged in the moment. We all felt the passion. We were all gifted with the fulfillment that we couldn't find anywhere else.

And that gift was sacred.

This was what I hoped Rosie felt. The same thing I felt. The magic of the darkness, the sacredness of the gift.

The gift offered straight from the very hands of the gods of passion

themselves.

The show would continue until those women were gifted the seed of every man in the room — except for mine. And I didn't need to stick around any longer. In fact, my desire for Rosie had reached its pinnacle. I knew that the time I'd waited for had finally come.

“Let's go,” I said, tugging on her hand and pulling her away.

“My robe,” she muttered.

“Leave it,” I insisted, guiding her back to another semi-private room.

I could have taken her there, in front of everyone, but the desire to be alone with her was overwhelming.

What I really wanted to do was take her home with me and make love to her in my own bed. That realization hit me like a ton of bricks. I rarely did that with anyone.

The taking home part, occasionally.

The love making part? That was nonexistent.

What had gotten into me?

The urge to be tender with Rosie — with anyone — was new.

I pushed whatever I was feeling away as quickly as it had arrived, turning my attention to the needs of my throbbing cock.

I closed the door to the room behind us, blocking out the sounds of chanting and moaning still echoing through the temple.

Then, I was on her.

Passion roared up inside me like a volcano threatening to erupt. When she wrapped her arms around me and opened her mouth to allow my tongue complete access to her hot mouth, I knew she was on the verge of erupting, too.

I gently pushed her onto the bed. The sight of her lying there, with her hair fanning out around her head, her naked body spread out below me like the finest feast I'd ever seen, sent ripples of pleasure through me.

My bare skin was hungry for her velvety skin. My cock throbbed

painfully, less than an inch away from her pussy. My mouth found hers again, our tongues delving and seeking, our kiss deepening along with our blossoming desire.

I tore my mouth from hers.

“I didn’t get enough last time,” I said, overwhelmed with the need to taste her again. She watched me inch down her body, placing feathery kisses along her belly, teasing her, going as slowly as my body would allow. Every cell was screaming at me to get inside of her, but I was determined to slow things down, to give her as much pleasure as I could before I took my own.

Each gasp from her mouth, every moan, every sharp exhale, left me shaking. And when my mouth finally found its way to her sex, I inhaled her intoxicating scent, before I dove in.

My tongue slid inside of her wetness, the delicious nectar I knew I’d find already dripping from her. Her hands found the back of my head, pushing me into her as she cried out. My lips captured her clit, sucking and nibbling until she was writhing above me, her thighs tightly wrapped around my head as I slid a finger inside of her.

Her hips flew upward, bucking and shaking, while I sucked on her clit and pushed in a second finger.

“West!” she gasped, and threw her head back.

I kept going, my mouth working against her, my fingers curling up into her g-spot as I slammed into her over and over and over. When she came, I felt the walls of her pussy tighten around my fingers and her thighs gripped my head hard as she writhed.

I knew what she needed and I kept going, letting her orgasm roll over her like a symphony, her moans and cries peaking in a screaming cry of passion before subsiding to a soft, satisfied whimper as I slowed my thrusts.

Releasing her thighs from my neck, I brought myself back up to her, loving the sight of her face. Softened from the aftermath of her release, her eyes glistened and her heart beat wildly against my chest.

I cupped her cheek in my hand and she smiled up at me.

“You’re beautiful, Rosie,” I said, kissing her.

“Thank you,” she whispered, softly. The velvety skin of her thighs brushed up against my cock. “Can I ask you something?”

“Anything.”

“Rosie is actually my middle name. I just used it because I wasn’t sure I wanted everyone at the club to know my real name.” Her cheeks blushed red.

My brows rose. “So you’re not a Rosie?”

“Only my grandmother calls me that. I’d much rather you call me by my first name. It’s Kaylee.”

“Kaylee,” I husked out. “It’s beautiful. Can I still call you Little Rose?”

Her blush deepened. “Of course.”

“Then Kaylee it is.” I brushed her lips with my own, fisting my hand in her hair and kissing her until she was breathless.

I reached over to the table near the bed and quickly grabbed a condom, sliding it on and discarding the wrapper.

She reached down, gripping my cock and squeezing it before guiding it towards her pussy.

“I need you, West, please,” she said, as I pressed forward, my hardness sinking into her quickly.

“God!” she cried out, her thighs falling open and her eyes widening as she held my gaze.

I thrust into her, my cock threatening to explode before I’d even gotten started. She was so tight, so wet, so fucking beautiful laid out in front of me, her pussy so beautifully spread out as it surrounded me.

“Is this what you wanted, Little Rose?” I growled, slamming into her harder.

Her entire body shook, her full, round breasts jiggling enticingly. I leaned down, capturing a nipple in my mouth, and bit gently until she cried out. Over and over, I slammed into her, my thrusts deepening with each stroke.

Chapter Twenty

KAYLEE

West's cock was absolute magic. Watching him on top of me, the feel of him inside of me, his cock throbbing deeply inside me, I felt like I was in a dream. Everything else disappeared as I drowned in the lust he'd ignited in me.

I would have done anything he asked in that moment. I would have given him anything just to keep him inside of me.

Luckily, I just needed to lie there and enjoy him as he gripped my hips, lifting them up in the air so he could drive his cock even deeper into me. My body submitted completely, opening up to him so that he could take me as he wished.

Harder and faster, he slammed into my soaked pussy, leaving me trembling and shuddering at his delicious assault. He kissed me, deeply, sensuously, waking something inside of me that had been dormant for a very long time.

His thrusts grew slower, purposeful, intentional, each movement of his hips achieving maximum depths while the tip of his cock raked over my g-spot, pulling every ounce of pleasure from the deepest parts of my body. My heart swelled with emotion for him as I opened my eyes, watching loom over me with a look of bliss and lust and raw sexuality storming over his features.

He reached down between us, thumbing my clit as he fucked into me with all his strength, his thrusts turning hard and rough again. I writhed under his thumb as it pressed little tiny circles into my clit until I exploded again. The warmth of my pleasure rushed through my veins. I cried out again and again, the waves leaving me spent and weak below him.

He grabbed my hips, and I let go of all the tension in my body, allowing him full control. He held onto me, slamming his cock into me as fast and hard as he could, his hips flying, his face twisted and focused, his heat swelling inside of me until I felt the first hot pulses of his release. His cock twitched uncontrollably as he slammed deep inside of me.

“West, yes, oh, West...,” I hissed, as he shuddered against me. His kisses turned to moans in my mouth as his orgasm gripped him.

He wrapped his arms around me and pulled me close. I sighed against him, letting him hold me quietly for a long time, until our breathing returned to normal.

“That was amazing, Rosie—I mean Kaylee,” he corrected himself, his voice low and serious.

I didn’t trust myself to speak. All the words that came to mind were not something that needed to be spoken now.

I wanted to tell him that he made feel like I’d never felt in my entire life...

I wanted to tell him that he excited me like no other...

I wanted more...

I lay there with him, wondering about everything. Wondering where this would lead, what this chemistry between us was all about. Eventually, he may find out who I really was. I knew that. And I knew when and if that moment came, it would be brutal and ruin anything between us.

I needed to keep my walls up.

Because I knew if I didn’t, I might not be able to recover once this was all over.

Lying there, wrapped together like a pair of devoted lovers, was not where I should be. I was there to find a killer, and instead, I'd lost myself in my own dark desires.

I had a job to do, and I was doing it terribly.

If Hoskins could see me now, naked and sweaty and covered in white face paint in some secret sex temple, he'd lose his shit.

"I needed that, Kaylee, thank you. Next time, we can experiment more, but I needed to feel you."

"I loved it," I said, having made no move to lift my head from his chest. The comfort of being in his arms was overwhelming and addictive.

"Me, too," he whispered, his voice low and sexy. "I'm glad we did this."

"I'd like to do it again," I said, tentatively.

"Oh, we will, Little Rose. I insist. I'm just getting started with you," he said, tracing a finger over my shoulder. "I'm going to tie you up, and gag you, and whip you, and fuck you all kinds of ways, Kaylee. You can bet on that."

I gasped, pierced with joy with each staccato word.

"You want that, too, don't you?"

He had a way of disarming me, leaving my head spinning, and my body shaking.

"Yes, I want it, West. I want it all."

It was true. I did. Despite the fact that the white face paint had left me reeling, considering the victims faces were painted the same way. I knew there was more to find out. I knew now there was a connection to the club, and the private circles did exist. The likelihood that the victims were involved was much higher now. Something had happened there that led to their deaths.

But I also knew, deep in my gut, that it had absolutely nothing to do with West.

He squeezed me tighter and I melted into him.

Chapter Twenty-One

WEST

Back in my office, Kaylee and I were showered, dressed and rehydrating. But each time I now looked at her, I saw her splayed out before me, my cock buried deep in her beautiful pussy, her face awash in pleasure in the darkness.

She sat on the sofa, watching me as I went through some mail on my desk and sorted through even more headshots from the casting agency. I was pretty certain I'd looked at photographs of every single actress in the world.

I opened the cabinet in the corner; and added the new photos to the quickly growing stack of rejections. A while ago, Joey had taken it upon himself to tack the few photos I'd deemed to be in the 'maybe' pile onto a storyboard for me. I had to move it out of the way for the photos to fit.

"What's that?" Kaylee asked, coming over to look at it more closely.

"Just me sorting through every face in Hollywood looking for a perfect match."

"For what?"

"For my movie," I said.

"They all look the same." She ran a finger over the headshots.

"Yep. Short, curvy, and tattooed," I said. "Shockingly, not the most common aesthetic in this town."

She gazed at the board. "Are these the ones you're auditioning?"

“Well, no. Unfortunately, as you well know, three of these people are now dead. Joey made this a while back, and I never got rid of it.”

“Did you audition these girls?”

“Yes.”

She nodded, her brow furrowing.

“Is everything okay, Kaylee?” I asked. She’d been oddly silent the last hour. I was afraid that being in the temple may have made her uncomfortable.

“Oh, yeah, I’m fine,” she said, with a dismissive wave.

I took her word for it, not questioning her any further as I put the storyboard back in the cabinet and closed it up with the rest of the photos. I made a mental note to tell Joey to get rid of them all.

“I’m going to head home now,” she told me.

I nodded, wishing she would be more open with me. I pulled her into my arms.

“Thank you for allowing me to be here today,” she said.

“The pleasure was all mine,” I assured her, brushing my lips against hers. Just having her body pressed against mine was amazing. My hands trailed over her hips, lingering there as I pulled her even closer.

An idea popped into my head. “Hey, I’m going to New York City in a few days. Will you join me?”

“New York?” she asked, her voice rising an octave.

“I have a few meetings there, but I’ll have a lot of time to spend with you, too. Will you come? Please?”

She hesitated, shaking her head. “Can I think about it?”

Was that a polite way of saying no? I wondered. I sighed, nodding my head. “Of course. I’m leaving Tuesday morning.”

“I’ll let you know by tomorrow.” She gathered her things and left my office after giving me another quick kiss.

It was painful to watch her leave, now that I’d had sex with her. The thought of spending a few days with her in the Big Apple was very appealing.

But I had no clue if she'd say yes or not.

As I sat alone in my office, I wondered if what she'd witnessed today had put her off.

It was all fairly innocuous, considering some of the other things that sometimes went on there.

Tension filled my body.

I knew I wouldn't relax again until I heard from her.

Chapter Twenty-Two

KAYLEE

As if watching the sun setting over New York City from the inside of West's private plane wasn't luxurious enough, a limo picked us up at the airport as soon as we landed. It carried us into Manhattan and straight into an underground parking garage.

West ushered us into a private elevator that took us to the seventy-third floor of one of the city's tallest skyscrapers. The doors opened up right into his penthouse.

I could hardly believe my eyes. Everything was glass and chrome, the only color found on the expensive abstract art that lined the walls.

"Is that a Basquiat?" I asked, incredulously. I'd taken an art class in college and was pretty sure I'd seen this before.

"Yeah, I bought it from Cardi B. She didn't want to let it go, so I had to bribe her a little."

"Cardi B has to have more money than God. What could you possibly use to bribe her with?"

He blushed and shook his head, winking. "Don't ask. Don't tell."

"Damn," I laughed, my imagination running wild. When I concluded that it could have easily been sexual favors, I pushed it to the back of my head. I wasn't so naive to think that West would only have sex with me now, but I didn't need to be imagining him having sex with anyone else. Especially not

with Madonna, for fuck's sake.

I turned to the rest of the penthouse, trying to look everywhere at once, but the view was the star of the show. Beyond the sunken living room, an entire glass wall of doors opened up to a large terrace that looked out over the city. The Empire State Building towered in the distance, and the early evening lights of the city sparkled below us. I walked out onto it, finding more color in the flowers and plants that filled the space.

“This place is stunning,” I said to West, as he followed me out.

“Yeah, I love it, I don't get to visit enough,” he said, snaking his arms around my waist.

“It just sits empty while you're in Los Angeles?”

“Everleigh uses it, sometimes.” His voice was low in my ear as we gazed out at the city together. “I can't wait to show you the city, Kaylee. I was so happy when you called to tell me you'd join me.”

“Thank you, West,” I said, turning around towards him. He kissed me and I almost swooned — standing on a penthouse terrace in Manhattan surrounded by flowers and kissing a movie star like it was the most natural thing in the world was not something I ever expected I'd do.

I had debated whether I should come here at all. His invitation had surprised me completely. Seeing the victims' faces on the storyboard in his cabinet had thrown me off. They were a stark contrast to the visions of them I had in my head — strangled and bloody, with bruised necks and bulging eyes, the paint on their faces smeared hideously with streaks of blood.

Seeing their glamorous headshots had left me reeling. It was a harsh reminder of what I was doing here in the first place. Those women were once vibrantly alive, and I was determined to find out who'd killed them.

But that storyboard, and the underground temple, had also thrown doubt on my certainty that the club wasn't involved in their murders. I just didn't know now. I desperately didn't want to believe it.

Just because he had those photos and knew them, didn't mean West had

killed them. But also, just because he had said he was with the other girls at the photoshoot doesn't mean he didn't do it, either.

Hoskins had been on my ass even more than usual lately, blowing up my phone when I wouldn't give him more information. We'd video chatted yesterday, and he'd laid into me, threatening to come right into the club and expose me to everyone if I didn't come up with something soon.

I knew he'd do it, too. He was that much of a prick.

My part of the investigation was only one piece. I knew Hoskins and the others were following additional leads. If I didn't step up soon, I'd be out. The thought of not being near West is what led me to say yes to this trip.

I told Hoskins I was going away to try to get closer to West, and for him to get off my ass, because it would only be for a few days. I'd have something soon. He didn't take too kindly to that, and I knew the next time I talked to him would not be pleasant. Not that it ever was, of course. He was the most unpleasant person in my life. A necessary evil, unfortunately.

In the meantime, I was in New York with West, of all people. I planned on enjoying every single minute of it — in between finding the right timing to pry more information from him. I was convinced I could multi-task and balance work with play, even if it was hopelessly tangled together.

“Let's go to bed,” West said in my ear. “It's late. I have an early meeting tomorrow at six. But after that, I'm yours all day.”

“You're mine?” I asked, raising a brow. My heart skipped a beat at his words. I knew what he meant, of course, and it was hardly that he was 'mine', but it sure sounded nice.

He kissed my forehead and inhaled deeply. “Kaylee, to be quite honest with you, that doesn't sound bad at all.”

“I was teasing,” I insisted, mortified that he took my joke seriously.

“I know you were,” he said, his eyes looking right through me. “But I wasn't.”

I bit my lip, staring up at him in awe. How could this man like me so

much? He could have any woman in the world, and while I knew I wasn't a bad catch, he was still a fucking movie star.

And yet, there were times when he gazed at me with something akin to love in his eyes. How was it possible West Foster was offering himself to me and asking me to go to bed with him? Not only that, but spend the entire night with him in this stunning penthouse?

I reached down and pinched my forearm, desperately needing reassurance that I was awake.

West grabbed my hand and led me back into the penthouse. Joey, West's assistant that had joined us on the trip, stood in the kitchen looking at his phone.

"You're still here?" West asked.

"I brought your luggage up," he said, putting his phone away. "I'll be here in the morning at five sharp."

Joey had been standoffish with me when I met him at the airport, and hardly said a word to me on the flight. I was sure he'd seen quite a lot during his employment with West and he probably just assumed I was another one in a long string of others. It was fine. I wasn't here to make friends. But I also wanted to try to get close to him — maybe he had some information I could use.

"Thanks for doing that," West said. "We're going to bed now, so you can leave."

West headed into the sunken living room, towards the bar at the far corner. He didn't see the way Joey's face fell. But I did. When he saw me watching him, he corrected his expression quickly, but I'd seen enough to know something was there.

"Thank you for bringing my luggage up, too," I said to him.

"Yeah, sure." He threw me a dismissive wave before he hit the button for the elevator. The door opened instantly. He entered and turned back to face me, his face stoic in response to my smile and wave. The door closed swiftly

and I glanced back at West. He was pouring whiskey into glasses, and hadn't noticed a thing.

I joined him and he handed me a glass.

"How long has Joey worked for you?"

"Joey?" He shrugged. "A few years now, I guess."

"How did you find him? He seems very devoted to you."

"He's professional. He does a good job. Sometimes, his boundaries get a little fuzzy, but he's okay."

"What do you mean?"

"He likes to stick his nose in my personal business sometimes. I have to remind him he is my professional assistant, not my personal assistant. Like, bringing up my luggage. The concierge of the building would have done that. He didn't need to come into the penthouse at all. He has a hotel."

"Why does he do that?"

He laughed, shaking his head as he sipped his whiskey. "Theo jokes that he's in love with me. It's ridiculous."

"Aha," I nodded, smiling. "Do I need to watch my back?"

He laughed again. "I think Theo is wrong, and Joey just wants a raise and a promotion. He most certainly is not in love with me. I'm an asshole to him, actually. Nobody loves that."

I didn't say anything further, but I made a note to keep an eye on Joey.

West walked over to a fireplace that lined an entire wall and flipped a switch. Flames ignited instantly, bathing the penthouse in a flickering amber glow. He motioned me over to the low-slung leather sectional and I sank into it next to him. He pulled me close, his arm casually draped over my shoulder.

"I'm taking you out to dinner tomorrow at my favorite place. And I'm going to take you shopping during the day. Maybe lunch at Katz's."

"I can't wait," I said, allowing myself to lean into him. Nobody was here to see that I was crossing the line. Hoskins didn't need to know that I was quickly developing feelings for one of my marks. I could keep that to myself;

and indulge in the pleasure of being around West without anyone needing to find out. I pushed away all my guilt and decided to enjoy myself.

West's hand caressed the top of my shoulder as we finished our drinks. His touch was driving me crazy, my body coming alive. A moan escaped from my mouth as I leaned into him. He took our glasses, setting them down on a nearby table, and gathered me into his arms. His lips found mine easily, effortlessly, his kiss as soft and gentle as could be. I melted into the bliss of being wrapped in his arms.

We made out for a while, his hands roaming slowly over my body, his mouth exploring every inch of mine, the chemistry between us flowing and growing into an exquisite, undeniable connection. He pulled away, looking deeply into my eyes.

“Let's go to bed, Little Rose,” he growled. “I need to feel you sliding over my cock again.”

I shuddered at his words, delighted by his brazenness. I nodded in silent agreement, letting him pull me up with him and lead me to his bedroom down a long, dark hallway. Our shoes clicked against the white marble floors, the soft light of the room beckoning us inside.

The bedroom was visually the softest room in the house, with a huge bed in the center covered in lush-looking black bedding that almost disappeared against the thick black carpet of the room. Two small glass tables flanked it, with two softly lit lamps providing the only glow of light in the otherwise dark room. Windows lined two walls; the sparkling lights of the city spread out below us. This view was even better than the one from the terrace.

West led me to the window and kissed me again; before putting his hands on my hips and turning me away from him to face the window. He stood behind me as I gazed down at the city, his hands sliding over the curve of my ass, and trailing down to my thighs. I shivered when his palms brushed the inside of my thighs, slowly traveling up almost to my center, and then retreating back down again.

When he sank to his knees behind me, my mouth parted in surprise.

“Spread your legs, Kaylee,” he commanded. I obeyed, my body on fire.
“Good, just like that.”

He reached under my skirt, grabbing my panties and pulled them down my hips. I stepped out of them, leaving myself completely bare for him.

“I love your ass, so round, so beautiful...my god.”

“West!” I gasped, as his lips pressed against the small of my back, then began trailing tiny feathery kisses down to my ass. He kissed all around before heading down to the back of my thighs, each press of his lips sending a shiver up my spine. His tongue darted out, licking the lips of my pussy from behind and sending shocks of electricity through my veins, before heading back up and licking the bottom of my ass cheeks.

When his tongue dove in, finding the bud of my ass and swirling his tongue around it, I gasped in shock.

“West!” I cried out, as he grabbed my hips and held me in place. My hands palmed the window. He pulled my cheeks apart and pushed deeper, the tip of his tongue darting in, the sensation like nothing I’d ever felt before.

I cried out, his name falling from my lips repeatedly until I couldn’t form actual words anymore. I fell against the window, awash in the unexpected, blissful pleasure.

He moved down between my thighs as his mouth found my pussy, my entire body shuddering and trembling.

His fingers found my clit, rubbing it in hard circles, as his tongue swirled around my lips, my cries now turning to deep moans that echoed through the room.

Below me, the city pulsed with life.

High above it, my body pulsed with pleasure, with the most intoxicating rapture I’d ever experienced. I knew it far outweighed anything anyone below might be experiencing.

His mouth found my clit and he slid a finger inside of me, sucking and

nibbling hard on my engorged clit until I trembled violently. My orgasm ripped through me with a ferocious release that left my knees weak.

“West! Yes! My god!” I screamed, explosions of pleasure rocking me to my very core.

I sank to the soft carpet. West gathered me in his arms as I gasped for breath.

My limbs wrapped around him, but he gently untangled me until he was between my spread thighs. His eyes stared down at me, filled with a dark storm of lust.

He stood up, rapidly shedding his clothes in a frenzied, sexy show that revealed his wildly famous, rippling muscles. I felt like I was lost on the silver screen myself, splayed out before him while I waited for him to ravish me.

“Take off your dress,” he demanded. Lost in the view, I’d forgotten I was still dressed. I sat up and pulled it off, kicking off my high heels at the same time. I glanced over at the empty bed, wondering where he wanted me. But there was only a second to wonder because he laid on top of me on the floor again, his skin pressing up against mine and making me forget where I was — or care where I was for that matter — instantly.

All I needed in that moment was West.

West, his lips sliding against mine, his hands caressing me everywhere all at once somehow, his cock — hard, throbbing, swollen — twitching against my still wet pussy. The heat of his desire hot against my own.

I needed him. Inside me, all over me...everywhere. All at once.

“West, please,” I said, gripping his cock and tugging him gently.

“What do you want, Kaylee?” he growled as my fingers wrapped around his shaft.

“I want you in my mouth.” My voice was unrecognizable in its boldness.

He groaned as I sat up on my elbow, pulling his cock up towards me. His hips followed as he straddled my face, his beautiful cock sliding between my

lips. His velvety shaft felt delicious against my tongue. I moaned in pleasure as I slid my mouth up and down it, twirling my tongue around the head each time.

His fingers sank into my hair, gently holding my head as I sped up. My fingers gripped his balls, squeezing gently as I sucked hard, my tongue sliding over him faster and faster until his body tensed up, his fingers gripping my head as he cried out.

“Kaylee, baby, that’s it!” The heat of his release exploded in my mouth, delicious and tangy, sending waves of oxytocin to my brain.

I loved pleasing him so much.

His cries turned to soft whimpers. Knowing I’d been the one to do that to him left me feeling powerful.

For a moment at least.

Because in seconds, his cock was at attention again and he was making his way back down my body. He grabbed my face in his hands, his eyes stormy and dark as he spoke. “Kaylee, that was amazing. But I need to be inside of you now.”

His cock slid inside of me with ease, my thighs wrapping around him like they knew they were home.

He didn’t go slow.

He didn’t take his time.

He fucked me, hard and long and fast. His raging cock hit deeply with each thrust. His body slammed into mine with all his might, the force it scooting us both across the carpet as I whimpered helplessly below him.

I let him have me, let him take me, submitted to the very power of his cock as I watched him above me. His face was stoic, his eyes raging with lust, his body was full of tension and had one focused mission — fucking me with the wildest abandon I’d ever witnessed.

I lost myself in his delicious assault, his cock sliding against my g-spot with each savage thrust, my pussy contracting and releasing over and over in

a series of rolling orgasms that left me a writhing, quivering mess.

“That’s it, baby, come all over my cock, that’s it, good girl.” His eyes darkened as he watched me, keeping the pace up as he fucked me through the pleasure rushing over me. When the waves subsided, and my breath returned, he slowed slightly, allowing me a moment’s respite, before picking up the pace and starting all over.

His eyes gleamed with dark desire, his lips finding mine as he kissed me deeply, his hips rolling seductively as he hit every delicious spot. I opened my thighs wider, needing him, wanting him, even deeper. He’d woken something up inside of me, leaving me wide open for my darkest desires to break through.

He broke the kiss, looking down at me briefly before grabbing my hand and bringing it to his lips, kissing my palm seductively. His eyes bored into mine as he continued thrusting his cock in and out of my pulsing pussy.

“Kaylee,” he growled. “Tell me I can keep you.”

His words made my heart swell.

“I’m yours,” I whispered to him, lost in the darkness of his eyes, in the promise of his words, in the beauty of how he made me feel.

He thrust into me harder. “That’s right,” he growled, sucking on one of my fingers. “And this pussy? It’s mine, too, isn’t it?”

I gasped, my pussy contracting around his twitching cock. “Yes, West, yes...baby, yes....”

“Say it, Little Rose!” he commanded.

My heart raced, my pulse pounding savagely through my veins, as he slammed into me again. I gasped at the force of his hips against mine.

“I- I- My pussy is yours, West...”

I had no idea what I was doing.

Promising myself, my pussy, to this man.

But there were no other answers to his questions but ‘yes’.

I knew it.

West knew it.

And when West came deep inside of me, his orgasm swelling up inside of him until he was roaring over the edge of ecstasy, I also knew that there was no going back.

I belonged to West now, for as long as he wanted me.

Chapter Twenty-Three

WEST

Jaded and bored was how New York City usually left me. But spending time there with Kaylee changed everything.

We were only there for two days, but she managed to make everything brighter and more fun. Skipping most of the fancy shit, I took her to Katz's for lunch, and to a little Mom and Pop Italian joint in Queens that my friend Nancy had turned me onto a few years ago. The quality was still just as superb and the owners knew me by name now.

In between, I took her shopping on Fifth Avenue ~~for shopping~~. By the time we were done, the car was filled to the brim with bags from Gucci, Prada and Dior, and the smile on Kaylee's face was filled with wonder and gratitude.

She was clearly uncomfortable in the shops, but I took the lead initially, making sure the clerks treated her well. After a while, she was spinning around freely showing me the outfits she was trying on.

Watching her left me dizzy.

I loved being around her. She was exciting and fun and so fucking beautiful I couldn't take my eyes off of her. When she was in the room, everyone else became just background noise.

It wasn't lost on me how kind she was to everyone we came into contact with. She treated everyone exactly the same, and it was refreshing to be with

someone like that. Someone who wasn't just mirroring the people in the room to get something from them. I thought of Danika,—and was filled with gratitude that I wasn't married to her anymore.

Kaylee was the most authentic and real person I'd ever known.

She was a stark contrast to Danika, who'd presented herself as something she really wasn't throughout our entire relationship. She pretended to be nice to people to their faces, and then trashed them as soon as they walked away. If they couldn't do anything for her, her words were even sharper and uglier.

I couldn't imagine Kaylee ever uttering an unfavorable word about anyone.

She was pure, and I loved that about her.

She sat across from me on the plane ride back to Hollywood, napping. I'd kept her up all night making love to her, and it was no surprise she was exhausted. I was, too, but I couldn't sleep.

The stress of my responsibilities was catching up with me. I'd gone to New York to meet with an entirely different casting agency, hoping they would have some new fresh faces I wasn't aware of. Someone that could fill the role of the heroine of my movie. But all that they'd shown me was more of the same.

At this point, I was ready to take Theo and Rian's advice and cancel the whole project. It would never work if I didn't have the right woman. I hated to admit that physically, no other actress came close to what I was looking for. Except for fucking Danika.

And Danika would be cast in this movie over my dead body.

I sighed, frustration filling every cell of my body.

The sound woke Kaylee. She opened her beautiful eyes, a slow, sleepy smile spreading across her face.

“Star in my movie,” I insisted.

She was perfect.

Of course, I had no idea if she could act or not. So yes, the idea was

flawed. But the way she looked? That stunning beauty that knocked me on my ass every single time she flashed those gorgeous green eyes my way? Surely that would translate on film. And we had chemistry. Real chemistry.

“What?” she said, shaking her head and laughing. “I told you, West. Never. That’s not my scene and never will be. I’m sorry.”

“That’s okay, I know you already said no,” I said, with a heavy sigh. “I’m just beginning to give up on ever finding the right person.”

“Don’t give up. You’ll find her.”

“Have you ever fucked on camera?”

“What? No, of course not!”

“We should film ourselves fucking sometime.”

She shook her head. “I don’t think that’s a good idea. Sounds like a plan for disaster and possible future lawsuits when TMZ gets ahold of it. Plus, all that shit goes into the cloud and never comes out. I just read an article about how Prince Harry is taking a sleazy newspaper to court over them hacking his phone and the cloud. Apparently, the prince claims that they were after gossip about his relationship status. No, thank you.”

“Fair enough, fair enough.”

“Oh, thank goodness,” she said. “I was hoping you wouldn’t push the issue.”

“I would never make you do anything you didn’t want to, Kaylee, remember that.”

“Right.” She nodded. “Elephant.”

“Elephant,” I said, leaning over and kissing her.

We made out until we landed, our kisses slow and soft, sexy and lazy after all the intense fucking we’d done the last few days.

It felt easy.

It felt peaceful.

It felt new.

What didn’t feel new was the chaos that ensued when we went to exit the

airport. The vultures were always waiting, if they weren't tipped off first. They spotted me despite my sunglasses and hat, and pounced.

With blinding flashes and frantic yelling, they pushed and shoved to try to get past my bodyguards and Joey. They threw elbows as they attempted to get a good look at Kaylee, and shouted questions right at her.

“Miss, what's your name? Who are you? Are you West's new girlfriend?”

Kaylee was clearly flustered. But she knew better than to answer. She just kept walking, flanked by my bodyguards and myself.

One of the pricks ducked around the back, grabbing Kaylee's arm and spinning her around.

“Hey!” she yelled, causing me to turn around. “Let me go, asshole!”

My team and I headed straight for the guy. But before we could get to him, Kaylee punched him solidly in the face, laying him out cold on the floor of the airport.

Stunned, everyone moved back for one frozen second. Then the other assholes started going nuts, filming and taking even more photos of Kaylee, shoving each other out of the way for the best shot.

Quickly, I grabbed her hand and pulled her out of there.

By the time we slid into the back of the limo, I was fuming.

The press could fuck with me all they wanted, but Kaylee was off-limits. The need to protect her at all costs washed over me. I'd have to be way more careful next time.

But I saw the look on her face, I suddenly wasn't sure there would be a next time.

Chapter Twenty-Four

WEST

I sat in the owners' booth at the Hush Hush Club. Kaylee sat close next to me. I was keeping her nearby as much as possible, giving her another night off with pay. I'd gotten her shift covered by another staff member that I'd paid double to for the favor.

After the chaos at the airport last night, I needed to be near her.

I'd replaced my security team as soon as I'd woken up this morning.

The fact that anyone was able to lay a finger upon Kaylee's creamy skin was unacceptable. Joey had tried to talk me out of it, insisting the team I had was the best around, but if that was true, none of that shit would have happened. Kaylee's face wouldn't be plastered all over TMZ and twitter or X or whatever the fuck it was called these days.

The headlines and tweets were atrocious.

Girlfriend or Bruiser? West Foster's New Pussy Punches Paparazzi!

Hollywood A-lister has a new security detail — petite, curvy, feisty — and with a mean right-hook!

And the worst one of all...

West Foster has a new girlfriend — an exact replica of his ex, Danika!

That one made me cringe. I never even thought for a second that Kaylee looked like Danika. They were nothing alike in my head. Maybe they had the same body type, but I liked curves.

Danika was hard and dark, haggard and washed-up.

Kaylee was — fuck. Kaylee was *sunshine*.

My hand rested upon her thigh as we relaxed in the booth. I grabbed her hand; and kissed her knuckles for the hundredth time today. They were bruised and one of them had a small cut on it.

“I feel terrible about this,” I said.

“And I told you that you shouldn’t,” she replied. “It’s nothing. I’m fine. It’ll heal quickly.”

“I still can’t believe you did that.”

“I don’t take being grabbed against my will lightly. He surprised me and I reacted without thinking. Honestly, I wish I hadn’t done it.”

“I’m so fucking sorry about the paps, the fucking media, the damned internet trolls.”

“Nobody can control that shit, West. It’s the fucking wild wild west out there. You know that better than anyone.”

“I do,” I sighed. “Still, I hate that you’re getting dragged into this bullshit.”

The usual media hounds were doing their damndest to figure out who Kaylee was. Without a social media presence, they weren’t finding much, thankfully. But I was terrified someone would find something eventually, so keeping her safe was my utmost priority right now.

I cringed when I saw Everleigh walking up to our table, followed by a familiar looking face. They scooted into our booth to join us.

“Hey, big brother,” she said. “Your face is all over the place right now.”

“Fuck, I know,” I said.

“This is Kajah,” she said, gesturing to the tall, statuesque blonde next to her. I recognized the name and realized now that she was one of the hundreds of faces that I’d considered for the movie. One in an endless stream of headshots that made me never want to look at another one again.

“Hey,” I said. “Kajah, this is Kaylee.”

“Hi,” she replied, coolly, lifting her chin. “That was some punch.”

Kaylee stiffened beside me. “Yeah, well...”

“He fucking deserved that shit,” Everleigh said, never one to mince words. “Putting his hands on you like that? Fuck that guy.”

“Thank you,” Kaylee replied, with a soft smile. “I just wish I’d handled it differently so it wasn’t plastered all over the place today.”

“It’ll pass before you know it,” Kajah said. “The next shiny story will pop up. That’s just how it goes.”

“Well, I can’t wait for whatever that is to happen,” I said.

“Be careful what you wish for,” Everleigh said, with a laugh. “But yeah, it’ll pass really quickly. Don’t worry, Kaylee.”

“Thanks,” she said. “I need to go to the ladies’ room. Will you excuse me?”

I hesitated. Should I allow her to go alone?

She raised a brow when I didn’t slide out of the booth to let her out. “Are you going to join me? Keep guard outside the stall?”

Resigning myself to the fact that I could not do that, I slid out of the booth. She gave me a quick peck on the cheek and walked off, leaving me alone with Everleigh and Kajah.

“Did you cast your heroine yet?” Everleigh asked.

“No, not yet. I can’t find anyone suitable. Trust me, I’ve been looking.”

“Have you talked to Mom lately?”

“No, why?”

“Because she was bitching about you never calling. You should call. She misses — oh, there’s Theo.” She gestured across the room, waving at him, which confused the fuck out of me. They usually couldn’t be bothered to say two words to each other. “I’ll be right back.”

Before I could question her, she was gone, leaving me alone with Kajah. She eyed me intently.

“Hey,” I muttered, awkwardly.

“Your sister is quite a character,” she said. “We’ve been hanging out for a few weeks. We met on the set of her last movie.”

“Pink Light?”

“Yep.”

“That’s where I’ve seen you,” I said. “You have a very unique look about you.”

She was tall, blonde, and gorgeous, but not in a trendy way. Her lips weren’t filled and her forehead moved. I was pretty sure her tits were natural. When she smiled, her face lit up in a lovely way.

“Thank you,” she said, scooting over towards me. Her thigh pressed up against mine, bare and exposed because the tiny black mini dress she wore rode up her long legs when she sat down. “I loved you in your last movie. So, you’re casting a new one now? What’s it about?”

She placed her hand on my thigh and I froze.

“I can’t really talk about it,” I said, gently removing her hand, and offering up a joke as an apology. “If I did, I’d have to kill you.”

Her laughter was exaggerated, and I inwardly cringed when she flipped her long, blonde hair over her shoulder at the same time. Flashing her blue eyes and long lashes my way, she tittered, “You’re so funny!”

“Yeah,” I said, shaking my head, but smiling politely. I looked over her shoulder, searching for Kaylee.

“So, is that your girlfriend? Kaylee?”

“My girlfriend? No, I wouldn’t call her that.”

“Oh, good,” she said, leaning in again, this time letting her hand rest on my bicep. “Because, I was going to ask if you wanted to maybe find someplace to be alone for a while?”

She batted her eyelashes at me again.

“That’s uh — very, um... Yeah, listen, I am dating Kaylee. I like her very much.”

She laughed again, but this time it was ugly.

“Please,” she said, wrinkling her nose. “You’ve got to be kidding. Why would you want to be with her when you could have me?”

Her words disgusted me.

I scoffed, shaking my head. “Maybe look in the mirror a little closer, Kajah. You’re lovely, but you aren’t as attractive as you clearly think you are.”

“How dare you!”

“Fuck off!” I growled, sliding out of the booth, my blood boiling.

I rounded a corner and ran smack dab into Joey.

“Wow, you look pissed, boss, what’s up?”

“That bitch over there.” I pointed to Kajah who had pulled out a tube of lipstick was applying it to her angry pout.

“Kajah? I saw her with Everleigh earlier.”

“Yeah, her. Keep an eye on her, will you? Make sure she doesn’t get close to Kaylee.”

“Kaylee?”

“Rosie. She goes by both names,” I explained.

His eyes grew wary. “You sure are protective of her all of a sudden.”

“Of course I am, Joey! But that’s not really any of your business, is it?”

“I was just asking because you told me to keep an eye on her.”

“No, I told you to keep an eye on Kajah. Not Kaylee. You stay the fuck away from Kaylee. She has nothing to do with your job.”

“Right, but.... Never mind. On it, boss.” He shuffled away like a kicked puppy, only adding to my irritation.

I rolled my eyes and kept walking, searching for Kaylee. I found her sitting alone at the bar, nursing a glass of red wine.

“Hey,” I said. “Everything okay?”

“Yeah, sure,” she said. Something in her eyes told me everything was not, in fact, okay.

“Spill it,” I said, sitting on the stool next to her, gesturing to the bartender

to get me my usual shot of bourbon.

“There’s nothing to spill,” she insisted. “I was coming back to the table but saw that you were talking to Kajah alone. I just didn’t want to interrupt.”

“Interrupt?”

“You were laughing together. Looked like you were having a good time.”

“I most definitely was not having a good time,” I answered wearily. I wasn’t going to tell her what Kajah said, what would be the point in that?

“You’re both gorgeous. I could see you two together.”

I groaned, shaking my head. “God, no.”

“Why not? Look at her.”

“What? Kaylee, what the hell are you talking about?”

She glanced away, and I could see the pain in her eyes. This just wouldn’t fucking do. I needed to put a stop to this shit right away.

“Look at me,” I insisted, grabbing her chin and pulling her gaze my way. “Listen to me, this is important.”

She nodded, her eyes glistening.

“Kaylee, you are the only one in this entire city that I have eyes for. The way we have fun together? The way you trust me? Those things are everything to me. The way you look at me like you actually see the real me? Nobody looks at me like that, Kaylee, nobody. As for who’s gorgeous and who’s not — let me tell you something I should have told you a long time ago. When I look at you, Kaylee, do you know what I see?”

She shook her head, glancing away quickly before looking back at me questioningly.

“I see sunshine,” I whispered.

“What?”

“Your face is like looking at sunshine. It warms my heart. It makes me so happy. It’s so beautiful, so bright, so stunningly filled with light that it’s like sunshine pouring straight into my soul. I can’t get enough of it. It radiates.”

Her lips parted in surprise and a little gasp of pleasure escaped. A soft

smile spread across her face, tears springing to her eyes.

“I think that’s the most beautiful thing anyone has ever said to me.”

“It’s the most beautiful sunshine I’ve ever seen.”

“Are you trying to make me swoon, West Foster? Because this is how you make me swoon.”

“I’m just being honest with you, Kaylee,” I said, grabbing that beautiful, sunshiny face and kissing her full on the mouth. “I meant every single word.”

Chapter Twenty-Five

KAYLEE

The next morning, West texted me.
*Pack your favorite swimsuit, sunscreen and your passport.
I'm picking you up in an hour.*

I showed the text to Violet, who was in the kitchen with a huge steaming mug of coffee. “How do I say no to this?”

“Why would you say no?”

“Because as sweet as West is, he’s still a suspect. Is leaving the country to some mystery destination with a suspected killer a good idea?”

“He told you to pack sunscreen.” She shrugged.

“So?”

“So, if he planned on killing you, would he care if you got skin cancer or not?”

“Good point.”

“Go! Get laid by a movie star, have fun,” she insisted.

“You make it sound so simple.”

“Isn’t it?”

“It might be if I weren’t lying to him about who I really am.” The guilt was fucking with me. The words West said to me yesterday were still ricocheting through my heart. It was clear that, despite what he’d said earlier about not wanting anything serious, things were deepening between us. The

urge to tell him the truth about who I was overwhelmed me, and the fact that I couldn't act on it was torturous.

“He’s going to find out eventually. May as well have fun before then. And hey, maybe if you build a good, solid foundation now, he’ll be able to forgive you when the truth comes out.”

“Isn’t that just building that foundation on a total lie? Sounds like a recipe for disaster.”

“You don’t really know how things are going to go, do you? So, ride the wave.”

“Ride the wave, huh?”

“Life’s short, Kaylee,” she said. “And just because he doesn’t know what your job really is, doesn’t mean he isn’t getting to know the real Kaylee at the same time.”

Her words rang true and soothed my soul a little.

I texted West back with a smile on my face.

I’ll be ready.

I showered and packed as best as I could without knowing where we were going or how long we’d be gone. The urge to ask questions was strong, but the mystery of the whole thing was thrilling.

By the time West picked me up, my body was pulsing with excitement. I would have gone anywhere with him, I’d decided. I trusted him.

The smile on his face when I opened my front door told me everything I needed to know. As he kissed me hello, his excitement was just as apparent as mine.

“Are you going to tell me where we’re going now?” I asked, as he grabbed my bag and led me out to his waiting SUV.

“First to the airport. Then, I thought we’d get away for a little escape. Have you ever been to Mexico?”

“Mexico? No.”

“You’re going to love Cabo!”

My eyes widened. I'd heard of Cabo San Lucas as the 'playground of the stars' and only lusted after it in photographs. Hanging out with West was like a damned fairytale come true.

"Wow," I said, as his plane touched down at the tiny airport a few hours later. "I can't believe we're here."

"I can't wait for you to see my place," he said. "It's beautiful. It's right on the beach."

Beautiful was an understatement.

We drove about half an hour before the limo pulled up in front of a sprawling, white stucco mansion surrounded by tall, swaying palm trees. We got out of the vehicle and I inhaled the salty air mixing with the bright sunshine like an intoxicating cocktail of paradise.

Situated on a tall cliff and secluded from any other homes, the grounds surrounding the mansion were lushly landscaped. Beautiful pops of color were provided by huge pots of flowers strewn about everywhere.

"It's so beautiful," I said.

West grabbed my hand and led me around the back of the house. "The pool is my favorite part."

We turned a corner and I gasped as I saw it. He was right. In the back of the house, built on the edge of the cliff, was a sparkling infinity pool, the far wall invisible and mingling with the horizon of the ocean below it.

"This is incredible," I whispered, shaking my head. At the end of the pool was a large pool house, twice as big as the house Violet and I lived in.

West turned to me and pulled me into his arms.

"I'm glad you're here, Little Rose," he said.

"Thank you for bringing me," I said. "It's quite a surprise. I didn't expect that today I'd wake up in Los Angeles and end up here."

"I needed to get away. I've had to create my own little sanctuaries over the years so I can get some privacy."

"Thanks for letting me tag along."

“Let’s go inside,” he replied, grabbing my hand and pulling me towards the back door by the pool. When we walked in, a blast of cold air hit my face. Minimalistic and modern, the furnishings were sleek and expensive, with straight lines that complimented the lines of the house itself. “I’ll give you a quick tour, then we’ll have lunch. My chef is here and she’ll cook for us during our stay.”

“Wow,” was all I could say as he led me around from room to room, the word falling from my lips with every turn. He’d not skimmed on the smallest luxury, with white marble lining the floors, and floor-to-ceiling windows showing off the stunning, 360-degree ocean view.

When we reached the bedroom, he paused. He smiled down at me and brushed a quick kiss across my lips.

“We’re going to have a lot of fun in here, Little Rose,” he growled in my ear, as he reached down and groped my ass. Shivers ran up my spine when he opened the door and I saw what was inside.

The biggest bed I’d ever seen held court in the very middle of the room. It was round, and surrounded by posts that held up a white satin canopy that draped over the side of the bed, the ends spilling onto the floor into an artfully sculpted pile. Matching drapes lined the windows, framing a view of the garden and the ocean that was even more stunning from this room. My eyes trailed upwards and widened at the sight of the glass ceiling.

“The stars are incredible from here,” he said. “You’ll see later.”

“I can’t wait, West,” I said, my heart racing at the thought of being naked with him in that bed.

Hours later, after we’d hiked down to the beach and laid in the sand for hours, we consumed a meal fit for royalty out on the terrace overlooking the ocean. In the distance, the sun was setting, throwing streaks of pink and purple light across the sky in a marvelous display of light and color that it seemed like Mother Nature had provided for us, and us alone.

Being with West made me feel like the world was full of magic.

I never knew what was coming next, what he'd show me next, or what feelings would wash over me when I was with him.

By the time the sun disappeared over the horizon and the stars were twinkling overhead, we were full of delicious food and happily buzzed on French champagne.

When he led me to the bedroom, the staff having dimmed the lights and lit candles everywhere before leaving the property for the evening, my heart was pounding with anticipation.

West led me to the bed and pulled me into his arms, kissing me gently. His lips were warm and hungry, the urgency of his mouth increasing within seconds. His hands were everywhere at once, pushing at my clothes until they were lying on the ground at our feet.

I stood naked in front of him, vulnerable and aroused, with a tiny sliver of fear slicing right through my heart.

West could do anything he wanted to me.

We were alone. Far from anyone. Far from help. Far from safety.

I pushed away all thoughts of the murders. Squaring my focus solely on West's lips, West's hands, West's warm body pressed up against my naked skin, I vowed to allow myself this escape, this night. To forget who I was, and why I was here. To forget the betrayal, to forget the dangers I faced.

All I wanted was pleasure. And if that was mixed with a little pain, even better.

"Do you trust me, Kaylee?" West asked, tearing his lips from mine. He'd asked me that before, and I had a feeling he'd ask again. Was it his way of obtaining consent? Was it his way of absolving himself from any guilt over using my body for his own pleasure?

"I trust you," I vowed, gifting him with the consent, gifting him with the words he needed to dive into his darkest desires.

He moaned as the words slipped from my tongue.

"Excellent," he whispered. "Now, lie down, Little Rose."

I obeyed. Lying back on the bed, I looked up through the glass ceiling at the stars high up in the black night sky. They winked back as if they were blessing our union with the approval of the universe itself.

West had walked away for a moment while I gazed up at the sky. When he came back, he was naked and spreading an assortment of things out on the bed next to my thighs. I looked them over and smiled, swallowing the anxiety at the sight of the ball gag and restraints.

“What do you think? Are you game?” he asked, lifting a brow.

My eyes raked over his naked body, my body already on fire for him. His muscles rippled under the moonlight, his skin glowing and beckoning to my palms.

I looked back at the gag and thick leather straps and remembered his words...Do you trust me?

It was time to show him how much I trusted him.

“Yes.”

His smile was soft, but filled with the promise of darkness.

He crawled onto the bed, his fingers wrapping around one of my wrists and bringing it up to the post of the bed. Slowly, he tied to me to it, the soft leather wrapped tightly around my wrist. He tied the other one, leaving my legs unrestrained, but it didn't matter. I couldn't move. Not even if I wanted to. He'd secured me so tightly, there was no chance for escape.

“I'm leaving your legs loose. Because I'm going to put this ball gag in your mouth and you won't be able to talk, Little Rose. Therefore, you can't use your safe word, can you?”

“Oh,” I said, my brow furrowing.

“Don't fret, Kaylee. You're still safe. If you need to stop, just lift your leg in the air. That'll be our sign, okay?”

I nodded, unable to speak already. I'd never been gagged before. I pushed away the panic as he straddled my chest and stared down at me, his eyes storming with lust.

“Ready?” he asked. I nodded slowly. “Don’t be afraid.”

He kissed me again, his mouth moving hotly against mine, his tongue delving in and tangling slowly around my own before he pulled away again.

“Open your mouth, baby.”

I took a deep breath and did as he asked. When the ball hit my tongue, the panic started to rise in my throat. I took a deep breath through my nose, determined to find a way to calm myself down.

He tied the straps behind my head to secure the gag, and pulled himself to his feet.

As his eyes raked hotly over my helpless body, a flush crept over me, starting at my face and traveling all the way to my toes.

“Kaylee, you’re the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen,” he whispered, his hand trailing down to his now throbbing cock. “I’m going to fuck you as long as I want. As hard as I want. As deep as I want.”

I moaned and whimpered, my tongue working against the ball in my mouth. My wrists pulled against the restraints, my hands itching to touch him.

When he reached out to me, his warm palm trailing up my calf to my inner thigh, stroking slowly and purposefully towards my pussy, it was clear I was completely at his mercy.

All I could do was hope he had a bit of mercy in him.

Chapter Twenty-Six

WEST

She was so wet. So fucking hot.

My fingers slid inside of her and she squirmed under my touch. Having her tied up like this, bound and gagged in my bed, made my cock harder than it had ever been before.

Kaylee set my entire soul on fire.

Having her completely at my mercy left me elated and intoxicated. Her creamy skin was bathed in moonlight. Watching her writhe, and seeing the fear on her face, was absolutely exquisite.

“You’re all mine now,” I whispered, as I played with her body. I pinched her right nipple hard as I thrust my hand inside of her, just to see her try to gasp with the ball in her mouth. I fucked into her harder, faster, just to watch her breasts jiggle and shake. I slipped a finger in her ass to see her quiver with uncontrollable pleasure.

Having her spread out before me was like my own private amusement park.

“I could do anything I wanted to you right now,” I mused aloud, as I ran a hand up to her neck and pressed my fingers lightly against her pulse. The spark of fear in her eyes lit up again, pleasing me greatly. “You know that, right? That you’re all mine? Your body is completely and utterly under my control?”

She shuddered and my cock twitched.

“You love this, don’t you?” I desperately wanted her to love it as much as I did.

She nodded, slowly, her eyes peering deeply into mine.

“But you’re afraid, aren’t you? Just a little bit.”

She nodded again. I moaned, unable to wait any longer.

“Good, Little Rose. A little fear can go a long way.” I lined my cock up with the wet heat of her ass, teasing her with the head. I grabbed a bottle of lube from the pile of supplies, spread it around her ass, letting the tip of my finger dip inside.

She moaned and wrapped her legs around my thighs.

“What are you doing?” I asked, lacing my words with anger. “I’m the one in control, remember? You want my cock, don’t you, Kaylee?”

She nodded, her eyes wide as I kept sliding the head around her entrance.

“You can’t have it until I say it’s time. I’m the one in control. And I’m not quite ready yet.”

She moaned, raising her hips, her body searching for my cock.

“Look at you, you little slut, your body is begging for my cock, isn’t it?”

Her eyes widened, searching mine, pleading.

“Oh, you’re so pretty. So fucking sexy.” I reached up and pinched her nipple, harder this time. Her head fell back and her eyes closed, her body shuddering under my assault. I pressed the head of my cock against her rosebud again, barely pressing forward inside of her before pulling away again. Her head popped up, her eyes crashing into mine again.

Waves of pleasure washed over me as she squirmed against her restraints. I loved the sight of the leather digging into the delicate flesh of her wrists, the flush of blood visible through her creamy skin. The way she wiggled and writhed, her hips constantly moving to try to get my cock deeper inside of her. The way she blushed deeply at my words.

“Kaylee, did you know what a slut you were before you met me? Did you

know how hungry you could be for cock? Look at you! Look at your body! You're starving for it, aren't you? You want my cock buried deep in your ass, don't you?"

She nodded, enthusiastically, tear springing to her eyes as she moaned against the ball in her mouth.

"You want to talk, don't you?"

She nodded.

"I'm not ready for that yet. I like the way you look right now."

I pushed my cock inside her again, just a few inches this time, before pulling out again.

"Mmmm!" she moaned in frustration and I couldn't help but smile.

"Oh, yes, baby you are so lovely," I hissed, before sinking into her fully this time, pressing my thumb against her clit at the same time. She was so fucking hot, so damned delicious, I was ready to explode inside of her right then. But I was having way too much fun teasing her, enjoying the sight of her frustration immensely.

I pulled out again, and this time she looked at me with anger.

I laughed, leaning forward and caressing her face. Placing my thumb on the edge of the ball, I traced the edges of her stretched lips and smiled into her eyes.

"You want my cock?"

She nodded firmly.

"Will you do anything for my cock in your ass, Little Rose?"

She nodded again.

"Your ass, your pussy, your mouth...they're all mine."

She nodded again, and I smiled as a tear fell from her eye as she looked up at me.

"Very well," I said. "Now that we know who you belong to."

I slammed into her this time, hard and fast, my entire shaft disappearing into her hot ass as it gripped me tightly.

“Kaylee!” I cried out, my body shuddering as I began fucking her. She wrapped her thighs around me, moaning softly in my ear as I rocked against her, taking her as mine. Showing her with every inch of my cock that she belonged to me and me only.

Spasming around my shaft, her ass milked my cock as I sank into her over and over until we were both shuddering together, our bodies crashing over the edge of ecstasy, our souls riding the waves of our darkness like they were made purely for the luscious and forbidden pleasure of this moment.

When I’d spilled every ounce of my desire inside of her, I pulled out and pulled her into my arms.

I embraced her tightly before untying the velvet strings behind her head, gently removing the ball from her mouth and then untying her wrists.

Immediately, she wrapped herself around me, her body folding into mine.

“Oh, baby,” I whispered, kissing her hair as I pulled her as close as possible. My heart swelled with emotion for her.

“West, that was amazing, thank you,” she whispered in my ear, her words full of every feeling swirling around in my heart.

We fell asleep in each other’s arms, under the stars, our bodies tangled up together like lovers whose souls had known each other a very long time.

We spent the next few days surfing and making love on the beach, far away from the prying eyes of Hollywood and lost in our own little intimate paradise.

I’d never known a woman like Kaylee before. She brought out the most intense feelings in my heart I’d been sure had died long, long ago.

She was quickly proving me wrong.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

KAYLEE

“Have I earned your trust?”

West’s question left me shaking. He’d asked me to stop by his office after my shift a few days later and when I showed up, he was cloaked and masked, and once again in the white makeup.

“Yes,” I replied, truthfully.

He nodded, then handed me a robe and mask and the little tub of white face paint.

“I’m happy to hear that, Kaylee. I have a surprise for you tonight.”

I knew what he wanted.

I knew I couldn’t say no.

Without a word, I took off my clothes and put the robe on, smeared the paint on my face, then placed the mask over my eyes.

“Good girl,” he growled, watching me intently. My pulse roared with excitement and fear; as he grabbed my hand and led to the entrance of the temple downstairs.

The place was hushed, but as soon as we passed through the doors and were bathed in the flickering flames of the torches, I sensed the excitement in the air.

Again, we weren’t alone.

The low hum of chanting echoed through the chambers. Ahead of us, a

group of three dozen people or so were circled around the bed. Each of them held a candle- the eerie glow washed over their faces, casting shadows that danced like ghosts in the room.

“They’ve been waiting for us,” West said, as he led me straight to the middle of the room. The chanting rose louder as West faced me.

My eyes widened, my heart racing violently. I’d only watched last time, but my senses told me West had something else in mind tonight.

“West?” I hissed, frantically looking around at the others, their masked eyes focused intensely on us.

“Kaylee, look at me.”

His voice was low, demanding. My eyes snapped to him. They were mesmerizing by the candlelight. The sternness I found there startled me.

A man stepped forward and held his candle high in the air.

“A sacrifice to Achelon will be made tonight,” the man declared loudly. “A sacrifice of sex. A sacrifice of souls. A sacrifice to the gods that make us whole.”

Sacrifice? What the fuck? My head spun and I really wished that West had prepared me better for this instead of just marching me right into this weird sacrifice circle.

“Kaylee, trust me,” West whispered, grabbing my hands and holding them as he spoke. “I’ve offered us up as tribute tonight. You’re safe, I promise. We want nothing but to give you pleasure, Little Rose.”

“West, I’m terrified, what is this?”

“You said you trusted me. You meant it. Now, it’s time to prove it.”

“How?” My stomach flipped with nervousness.

“By allowing me to give you pleasure, darling,” he said, reaching a hand up to my face. His gaze held mine, hot and hungry and demanding. A shiver went up my spine.

“Breathe, Little Rose,” he commanded.

I shook my head, trying to shake away the fear that threatened to

overwhelm me. Every cell in my body told me to run. I raked my gaze over the others, looking for any sign of danger.

West put a hand on the small of my back, leading me over to the bed.

Slowly, he pushed my hood down over my head, then gently pushed the robe from my shoulders. With a swoosh of fabric, it fell to my feet, completely exposing me to the room. I swallowed hard, trying to control the fear and anxiety that coursed through my veins. Standing in front of West, in front of all of these people like this, I'd never felt more vulnerable.

I'd never felt more seen.

West dropped his robe next, then gathered me in his arms, kissing me passionately. The others began chanting louder, their voices echoing up into the dark chamber like a dirge.

I was terrified. Self-conscious. Disarmed and unsure.

Every muscle in my body was tensed. West sensed this, and kissed me through it. His kiss was warm and soft at first, his tongue sliding in and finding mine, searching and prodding until I began to respond.

He seemed to be able to coax the fear to the surface, find it and make love to it until it dissipated completely. Once he had me, once he sensed my relaxation, once he sensed that I'd fully opened to him, he knew what to do then.

His kiss turned harder, and more insistent. His hands touched just the right spots to comfort me, to push away all my inhibitions. Finally, I began pressing forward, searching for more contact, wanting and needing more of his flesh against mine. The chanting faded away. While I was still aware of the eyes on us, now their gaze felt welcome.

I wanted them to see the way West touched me.

I wanted them to see the beauty in the way he kissed me.

I wanted them to watch, to receive their own pleasure from ours.

West possessed an uncanny ability to read me. He knew what my body was ready for and when. As my hands found his flesh, caressing his skin, my

touch turning just as hungry as his.

He knew what I wanted, what I needed.

He knew my fears had died away.

His kiss turned hard, his cock throbbing between us like a promise of glory. I reached down and gripped him firmly, my fingers wrapping around his throbbing hardness. Gently, he pushed me back onto the bed, and I sat on the edge, staring up at him.

My god, he was incredible. He gazed down at me with pure lust. The flickering light from the candles and torches bathed his smooth skin, and danced over his features in a ballet of radiance.

I ran my hands up his abdomen, caressing his chest. I trailed my fingers through the soft hair I found there. He cupped my face with his palm as he smiled down at me.

“Kaylee, who do you belong to?” His words cut right through me.

“You, West.”

The others were still chanting, their voices dropped to a low hum.

“Together we will sacrifice our souls to Achelon. Our souls will be free. The gods will make us whole.” West raised his voice, his words echoing through the darkness surrounding us.

I had no clue what he was talking about. In the back of my mind, I remembered that in Greek mythology, Achelon was a river, or some sort of entrance to the underworld. I had a lot of research to do.

“Here, in our sacred temple, we heal. Here, in our sacred temple, we cleanse and purge our sins. Here, in our sacred temple, we travel through our pain to find healing and forgiveness. We reject punishment. We replace punishment with pain. Through pain, through sex, through lust and love — we find our eternal souls. We give thanks to Achelon. We offer our bodies as our ultimate gift for this healing.”

Hypnotic and enchanting, West’s words left me reeling. What was all this?

West leaned over me, the weight of his body pushing me back on the bed as he hovered over me. His mouth found mine, his hands ran over my skin.

I parted my thighs, wrapping them around his hips as he entered me easily. My body was reacting to this entire scene with intense arousal, which surprised me. I might not understand his words, but I understood his body perfectly.

West's cock slid inside me with excruciating slowness. I writhed with hunger, wanting all of him. But he stopped halfway, his eyes transformed with darkness as he gazed down at me and pulled out.

"West!" I cried out, my thighs tightening around his hips in a desperate attempt to pull him back in.

"Tell us," he said, reminding me that we weren't alone. "Tell us all what you want, Kaylee. Tell the Gods."

I stumbled over my thoughts, struggling to form words when all I wanted to do was feel.

"I want you, West. I want you to..." I hesitated.

What did I want? Did I want him to make love to me? Did I want him to fuck me like a savage beast until I couldn't think straight?

"West, please," I begged. Wasn't that enough?

"No."

"West..." I shook my head, lifting my hips.

"Look at you, Kaylee," he teased, pleasure filling those stormy eyes. "Begging for it. Your eyes. Your body. You want my cock, don't you, Little Rose? You want my cock filling your sweet pussy, don't you?"

"Yes, West!" I cried out. "Please, I need your cock now!"

I writhed under him. I didn't care what I looked like. By now, I'd forgotten everything and everyone around us. I only wanted West. My fingers dove down into my pussy, wantonly rubbing my clit. West's eyes dilated and a groan escaped his lips. He reached down, removing my hand and shaking his head.

“This is mine, remember?”

I gasped, nodding slowly. His hot gaze was unwavering as he sank to his knees between my thighs. His mouth landed hotly on my sex, his tongue searing my tender flesh. It wasn't his cock, but his mouth was a delicious substitute. My fingers sank into his soft hair, gripping his head and pulling him into my pussy. His tongue slid deep inside of me, and then firmly licked up to my clit and captured it in his lips, nibbling, sucking, and biting.

My orgasm gripped me violently, tearing through my body until I was a quivering mess of flailing limbs and moans. His mouth stayed firmly pressed against my pussy until the waves slowly subsided into a bliss that left me floating on a cloud of dreamy pleasure.

I lingered there, drifting in and out of myself, lost in the afterglow of nirvana. The low hum of chanting still rang in my ears. When I felt West's mouth pull away, replaced by the sensation of his fingers digging into my hipbones and pulling me forward, I went limp, submitting to him completely.

He entered me again, swiftly, urgently, intently.

I watched him fuck me, his eyes closed, his head thrown back. The expression on his face was savage and primal. His body moved quickly, his cock slamming into me with powerful, fierce thrusts.

The chanting rose high above us. I'd been focused on West the entire time, but now the others closed in around us. The circle tightened until they were all inches away from the two of us, their humming growing to a loud roar.

West fucked me with precision, his cock hitting every single pleasure spot, until I was overcome by waves of pleasure again, my body on the verge of crashing over the edge once more.

I watched West, his body moving purposefully between my thighs.

I watched the others as they focused on West's cock moving in and out of my pussy. Their eyes were dark and sensuous, eerie and haunting.

West cried out in a guttural, earthly howl that seemed to escape from the

deepest, darkest parts of his soul. His body tensed up, jerking violently before he pulled out of me. Just as he started coming, thick streams of heat exploding from his body, the others laid their hands on us.

Dozens of hands caressed our flesh. Hums echoed through the air and mixed with our euphoric cries of ecstasy. My own body responded to their touch by bursting with rippling surges of rapture.

West's pleasure covered my skin and the roaming hands carried it over my body, rubbing it in and spreading the heat with their endless caresses. The waves of exhilaration extended into an intoxicating joy that left me breathless and quivering.

I looked up at West. He smiled down at me as he regained his breath. He looked satiated and warm, and his eyes glowed with love. The others stepped away, removing their hands one by one, until only West and I remained on the bed.

He brought his lips to mine, his smile leaving me trembling.

“I knew you could do it, Little Rose.”

His kiss was as warm as the sun, as comforting as home.

A home I'd searched for all my life; and knew that I'd finally found.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

WEST

I'd clearly done exactly what I'd never meant to do. I'd let Kaylee get under my skin, in the best way possible.

She'd become the subject of my every waking thought. Hell, she'd even shown up in my dreams.

The last few weeks had flown by in a haze of everything Kaylee.

I saw her everywhere I went. I saw the curves of her hips in a low-slung Lamborghini on the PCH. I saw the distinct shade of her hair in a gorgeous sunset off the coast of Santa Monica. I saw the sparkle of her smile in the stars high in the night sky over Topanga.

I had it bad. I was pretty sure she felt the same way.

Today, she'd tagged along with me to look at a beach house I was thinking about buying. I'd wanted her with me so I could see what she thought of it.

She didn't know it yet, but I was thinking about asking her to move in with me.

Yeah, it was crazy, I know. It was too soon. Everyone, especially Rian and Theo, would completely freak out. Everleigh would tell me I'd lost my mind, especially so soon after my nightmare divorce.

I was fine with all of that.

All I wanted was Kaylee with me all the time.

I couldn't tell her that, though. It sounded obsessive and crazy, even to my ears. I knew I needed to slow down, or I'd scare her away completely. I wanted to do this right. I wanted to make it last.

But my thoughts were consuming me.

"Do you think this place is big enough?" I asked her, after the real estate agent left us out on the top terrace alone.

"Big enough?" She laughed. "I think so, West. How much room do you need?"

I shrugged. "I thought I might grow into it."

"Grow into it? Are you planning on starting a family?" Her eyes were wide and I knew my comment surprised her.

"Someday. Why not?"

"We never talked about it. I guess I didn't know you wanted kids."

"Don't you?"

"I'm not sure. Maybe someday."

"A lot of women put their careers first. You don't seem like that kind of woman."

A shadow passed over her eyes, and she looked away.

"This place is really beautiful. The view alone is spectacular," she said, changing the subject.

"The view is amazing," I said, gazing at her. "You're beautiful."

"Oh, West," she said, blushing gorgeously and proving my point. I pulled her into my arms. The salty smell of the Pacific permeated her hair as I buried my face in its softness.

"Move in with me, Little Rose," I said, throwing caution to the wind.

She stiffened in my arms. "West, no," she whispered, her voice cracking. "It's way too soon for that, but it sounds lovely."

"We could live here," I said. "Have coffee out here every morning. Make love to the sounds of the crashing every night."

"Maybe someday," she whispered, as she looked up at me with sad eyes.

Were those tears I saw?

She pulled away and walked through the rest of the house, leaving me alone to look out at the waves crashing on the beach below. I knew she'd say no, of course. And she was right, obviously. That didn't stop me from fantasizing about being able to wake up with her in my arms every morning.

Encouraged by her 'maybe', I told the agent I'd be in touch if I decided to make an offer. I gathered up Kaylee and took her to lunch at my favorite Thai place. As she was in the bathroom washing up, I scrolled through my phone.

When I saw the latest post on the trendy gossip site of the day, I cringed, hoping like hell that Kaylee didn't see it. But when she returned to the table, her eyes were bloodshot and her voice was shaky, I knew she'd seen it anyway.

"Did you see what you're being tagged in all over X?"

"Yeah," I admitted. "Fucking assholes. Kaylee you can't take that shit personally. People are evil."

Since she'd punched out that pap, the media had been relentless in trying to figure out who she was. Since they hadn't found anything scandalous to report about her, they'd turned their ugliness into criticizing her weight.

"They called us Kermit and Miss Piggy, West," she said, her voice laced with sadness. I hated seeing that look on her face, and rage coursed through my veins that they'd hurt her.

"You have to ignore it, baby," I said. "I know it's hard at first. But it'll get easier."

"Easier? Like, this is just something I have to put up with forever?" Her bottom lip trembled. I reached over and grabbed her hand, flashing her a smile.

"You said forever. You want to be with me forever, Kaylee?" I winked at her and squeezed her hand.

"West," she said, shaking her head. "I didn't mean...but yes, maybe. I don't know. I have no idea how to do this."

“We’ll figure it out together. In the meantime, stop looking at social media and let’s get some lunch.”

“Okay,” she nodded, a small smile reappearing on her face.

“Kaylee, I need you to know something. Just for the record.”

“Okay...”

“I think you’re perfect, just the way you are. You’re a beautiful person, you’re kind to everyone, you’re gentle and loving. And I love being around you. But you need to know something else too — I think you’re incredibly fucking sexy. Your face, your eyes, your smile, your curves. There’s not a damned thing I’d change about your body, even if I could. So, please know that I’m massively attracted to you.”

She blushed, warming my heart. I was falling in love with this woman.

“Thank you, West, that means a lot to me,” she said, her hand warm in mine, her pretty eyes staring back at me and making me feel like I was the only man in the world.

Her phone vibrated. Reluctantly, she picked it up and read it. Her face paled, the blood draining quickly from her skin.

“Kaylee?”

“Oh, my god,” she whispered.

“What’s wrong?”

“There’s been another murder,” she said, her voice quiet.

“Fuck, who was it?”

She looked up at me with wide eyes. “West, it’s Kajah.”

“Kajah? Everleigh’s friend? What the fuck?”

Her eyes filled with tears and anguish. I went around to her side of the booth and put my arms around her. “I can’t believe this shit keeps happening.”

“Me, either,” she muttered, shaking her head. “I uh — I’ve lost my appetite. Do you mind if we leave? I’d like to go home.”

“Oh, sure,” I said, nodding and gesturing to the waitress for our check,

my head spinning. “I’ll check in with Everleigh, too.”

“This is awful,” Kaylee said, scrolling through her phone frantically as I paid the bill. “She was positioned the same way as the others. Discarded in an alley like a piece of trash.”

Anger now rolled off her body. It surprised me. I’d only seen her angry twice before this. When she’d taken down the customer in the Hush Hush Club, and when she’d punched the pap. I suppose murder would piss off anyone.

I dropped her off at home, and was a little disappointed when she didn’t invite me in. Instead, she ran in after a quick peck on my cheek. I sat in the car for a minute and texted Everleigh to make sure she was okay and to see if she needed me. Then I headed into the office.

Joey was there, pacing.

“What’s up?” I asked.

“Did you hear there was another murder? That friend of Everleigh’s?”

I nodded. “Fucking horrible. What the fuck is wrong with people?”

“The world’s a scary place these days.”

“I guess so,” I muttered. “Anyway, what are you doing here? Isn’t this your day off?”

“I just couldn’t sit at home,” he admitted. “I was just too antsy after hearing about it. I thought maybe you might have something you needed help with.”

“Actually, yes, you can give me your opinion.” I pulled up the photo app on my phone. “I want to buy a piece of jewelry for Kaylee, and I can’t decide between the bracelet or the necklace. What do you think?”

I showed him the photos of the two ruby encrusted pieces.

“Wow,” Joey said. “I wish I had a boyfriend that would buy me elaborate gifts like this.”

“Which one?”

“The bracelet, definitely. It’s very classy and chic. She’ll love it.”

“Thanks, I think so, too,” I replied.

“Is that from Harry Winston?”

“Yes.”

“I’m going to be near their Rodeo Drive store tomorrow. Do you want me to stop in and pick it up for you?”

“Yes, that would be great, thank you. Don’t say anything to Kaylee if you see her. I want to surprise her by sending it straight to her house. I’ll text you her address and you can arrange the delivery for me.”

“Will do. Lucky, lucky girl.”

“I’m the lucky one,” I replied, feeling it deep in my bones.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

KAYLEE

Everleigh's eyes were swollen and red. She sat on our couch, quickly going an entire box of tissues.

“I can't believe she's dead!”

Violet sat next to her, silently rubbing her back. They were both comforting each other. Violet had lost out on a million-dollar campaign for Chanel. She'd been passed over because Gigi Hadid had signed on instead.

As for me, I was silently raging inside.

I was mad at myself, mainly. I'd failed at my job. I hadn't moved fast enough, hadn't gotten enough information quickly enough to prevent another senseless murder.

I'd seen the crime scene photos of Kajah, and I couldn't get the image out of my head. It had haunted me all night. I couldn't help but feel responsible for her death.

And now Everleigh sat in our living room, broken down with anguish about it. I felt responsible for that too.

I watched her silently, my fury preventing me from forming any real words of comfort.

“I can't think about this anymore!” Everleigh said, leaning forward and grabbing her glass of rosé. “I need a distraction.”

“How can we help?” I asked.

“I want to know what’s going on with you and my brother,;” she replied, shooting me a pointed look. “You two have been spending a lot of time together.”

“I know,” I admitted.

“Is it serious?”

“I’m not sure.” A twinge of familiar guilt sliced through me. Violet looked over at me sympathetically. “Maybe.”

“Well, he hasn’t been one to spend more than a night or two with anyone since his divorce. So I’d say all this time spent together definitely thinks it’s serious.”

“Has he said anything to you about me?” I asked.

“No, not really. But those three usually keep things close to their chests.”

“Those three? You mean Rian and Theo also?”

“Rian is a walking volcano, actually, so no. I really only mean Theo and West.”

“You and Theo sure have some fiery chemistry between the two of you. What’s going on there?” Violet asked.

“You noticed?” Everleigh scoffed, then sighed deeply before continuing. “We’ve known Theo forever, since we were kids. There’s a lot of history there, unfortunately. We’ve attempted to get past it all, but I don’t know if we ever will.”

“Are you dating?”

“I wouldn’t call what we’re doing dating, not by a mile. And if West got wind of it, he’d probably strangle Theo to death. We hook up occasionally, but it never goes smoothly. I don’t know why we can’t get along.”

I raised a brow, visions of the strangled victims flashing in my head.

“Please don’t tell my brother.”

“I won’t,” I said, just as the doorbell rang.

“Is that the back door?” Violet asked.

I nodded. “I’ll get it.”

When I opened the back door off of our kitchen, there was nobody there. Lying on the ground were two cardboard boxes, both with my name on them. I picked them up and brought them inside, setting them on the kitchen counter.

I searched for a letter opener in a nearby drawer and opened the smaller one first. A huge smile spread across my face when I read the attached card.

“A ruby is almost as beautiful as my Little Rose.”

It wasn't signed, but it didn't need to be. Lying on a bed of black velvet, a ruby encrusted tennis bracelet sparkled up at me.

“West,” I whispered. I gingerly picked it up and held it up. Rainbow hued beams of light danced off the carved edges of the crimson jewels.

“What's going on?” Violet called from the living room.

“It's a delivery from West, I'll be right back.” I put the bracelet down on the velvet, turning to the next box. It was bigger and had my name scrawled across the top of it in flowery handwriting. Something about it tugged at my brain as I sliced through the tape that held it together.

I opened it up and saw another card inside. The handwriting was different on this one, and I glanced down to the bottom of it and saw it was signed by “West”. Starting at the top, I began reading, my heart racing faster with each word.

Dear Kaylee,

I can't believe I ever had anything to do with you. You were nothing but a pity fuck, and not that great of one either. I'm done. My life will now go on without you, happily and easily. I deserve better than you. I'm done slumming.

Love,

West

My mouth dropped open in shock. I must have made a noise.

“Kaylee, what the hell are you doing?” Violet called out again.

Everything seemed to move in slow motion after that.

My brain froze. The letter’s handwriting matched the handwriting on the letter I’d found in my locker. Nothing written in that letter seemed like something West would actually say to me. The tugging in my brain finally unraveled.

Inside the box was another smaller one , gift-wrapped meticulously with dark red and black floral paper.

“Kaylee!” Violet called out again.

Then, I heard it. The distinct tick-tick-tick.

My eyes widened as it all came together.

I turned, ran, shouted to Violet and Everleigh all at once.

“Run! Go!” I demanded, running towards the living room and hoping they’d listen.

My footsteps pounded down the short hallway — one, two, three, four, fi
—

The explosion threw me the rest of the way, my body violently crashing to the living room floor.

“Kaylee! Fuck!” Everleigh screamed. Violet stared down at me in shock.

“Run!” I shouted again.

Violet grabbed my arms, pulling me to my feet as the three of us stumbled through the cloud of smoke to the outside.

“What the fuck just happened?” Violet cried once we reached the front yard.

“I heard it before it went off, thank fucking god.”

“What was it?”

“A bomb, I think,” I said, my voice sounding like it was coming from outside of my body. “I — if I had been holding it, it would have killed me.”

“Are you sure you’re okay?” Violet asked, her eyes scanning my body.

“I think so,” I said, rubbing my arm. It would be bruised, but other than that, I seemed to be in one piece. “I need to call the cops.”

“The cops? Shit.” Everleigh said.

Violet gave me a wide-eyed look, and I nodded. “You two stay here. I’ll grab my phone.”

I went back in the house, shocked to see the damage in the kitchen. I felt numb. Confused. Everything in the vicinity of the package was destroyed. The floor was littered with the tiny rubies of the bracelet, remnants of the boxes and wrapping paper, and a mess of wires and pieces of metal.

I made a point not to touch anything and fetched my phone from my bedroom, my head working quickly as I dialed the phone. I told the dispatcher who I was, that I was working undercover and not to blow my cover when they showed up. I couldn’t risk Everleigh knowing who I really was. Not yet. Not now.

Had West done this?

None of it made sense. After I hung up, I walked back into the living room and saw the note lying on the ground where I’d fallen. I picked it back up and scanned it again. Then, I found my purse and dug the note from my locker out and compared the two. I was convinced they were written by the same person.

Now I needed to figure out who that was.

My gut told me it wasn’t West. While I waited for the cops, I dialed his number, my heart pounding violently.

“Kaylee! I was waiting to hear from you!” hee said, his greeting filled with sunshine. I was even more convinced he wasn’t behind this. “Did you get the package? Did you like it? I wasn’t sure if you’d like rubies...”

“West, can you come to my place?”

“What’s wrong? What happened?” He read my tone of voice instantly.

“I did get the bracelet, West, but...there was a bomb. In another package.

It doesn't make sense."

"A bomb? What? Are you okay?"

"Yes, we're all okay. Everleigh is here, too. And Violet. The police are on their way, can you come?"

Suddenly, all I wanted was to be wrapped up in his arms. I didn't feel safe. This kind of thing happened to celebrities all the time, I knew that. But I wasn't one. Unfortunately, my relationship with West had put me right in the very spotlight I didn't want to be in. And if some crazy person had figured out my address, then what else did they know?

It was only a matter of time before I was exposed completely. All I could think was that I needed to be in West's arms one last time before that happened.

I wanted to feel safe.

Just one more time before my world exploded just like my kitchen had.

Chapter Thirty

WEST

“You’ll be safe here,” I said, as my chauffeur pulled the SUV up in front of my cabin way up in the mountains of Big Sur. We’d taken a short flight to the Monterey airport and then drove a few dozen miles to get here.

“Is this like, a ski lodge or something?” Kaylee asked, looking up at the house through the windows.

I hadn’t let her out of my sight since I’d shown up to her house, frantic and furious. Hours passed as the cops processed the scene, driving me out of my mind. All I wanted was to get her out of there.

I’d immediately announced I was taking Kaylee away — and insisted Violet and Everleigh come, too.

The cops looked unhappy about that, saying they’d have more questions soon, but I’d insisted. Fuck them.

Getting those women away from there was all I could think about.

I wanted to be with Kaylee, far away from all the madness.

Somewhere along the way, things had gotten messy. It had started with the paparazzi. Then there were all these people trying to figure out who Kaylee was. The internet memes criticizing her looks started up, and now some psychopath had sent a fucking bomb.

Yes, getting away sounded really fucking great.

“It’s not a lodge,” Everleigh piped up. “It’s another one of West’s

mansions.”

“This is a single-family residence?” Kaylee asked, bewildered.

It looks like something a king would live in, I knew this. But I loved it. Because it was also way up on a mountain, far away from anything and anyone. No prying eyes to be found for miles.

“A single person residence,” Everleigh said, clicking her tongue disapprovingly. “Ridiculous, right?”

“What? I like to invest in real estate,” I said, defending myself. “And trust me, nobody is going to fuck with you here. Nobody even knows about this place. It’s registered under a secret LLC.”

“Well, I won’t complain about privacy and seclusion,” Kaylee said, her voice cracking. I squeezed her hand in a vain attempt to comfort her.

“Safety.” I nodded, leaning over to kiss her forehead. “I’m so fucking sorry that happened to you, babe.”

“I’m fine, West. Stop blaming yourself.”

The truth was that I was did.

I couldn’t fucking take it anymore.

I’d gone through so much shit over the years.

Stalkers. Crazy people trying to get onto my property.

Scammers.

Hell, half of Hollywood was intent on scamming you out of something.

Most nights, merely walking down the street was a gamble.

There was danger out there, I knew that.

But the fact that there was someone out there trying to blow up Kaylee, specifically? It was unnerving.

I was waiting for my nerves to settle, and I knew they would. I knew I’d regain my strength and be ready to face the world again. Soon. But not yet.

No, right now, I was furious. I needed to do whatever it took to protect my family. We’d stay here a few days and let the cops do their job.

We climbed out of the SUV, pausing to stare up at the house. Everleigh

was right to make fun of it. The size alone was outrageous. Constructed of huge gray stones that were bigger than some VWs, it spread out across the land like an enormous, sleeping elephant. Perfectly manicured gardens surrounded a large sparkling pool on one side. A matching guest house sat behind it, creating a beautiful estate that looked at once inviting and intimidating.

And way too big for one person. It was true. That didn't mean I didn't love it.

"Come inside," I said, leading them to the massive wooden front door. Kaylee's eyes widened when she saw it was etched with the same dragon as the front door of Profane.

No matter how many times I saw it, the interior never failed to take my breath away. The interior was just as impressive as the exterior, with tall wood-beamed ceilings throughout. We walked into the welcoming sunken living room, where the largest fireplace I'd ever seen already sparkled and sputtered with a roaring fire.

"I had Joey arrange for the staff to get here before us. They're most likely preparing meals and snacks. Everyone's bedrooms should be ready. Make yourself at home. I won't be playing host, so if you need anything, Violet — ask Everleigh, or someone on staff."

With those abrupt words, I grabbed Kaylee's hand and led her to the master bedroom.

"This is gorgeous," Kaylee said. I knew she was tired, and her body and words confirmed it.

"I think you should rest, babe," I said, tucking a strand of hair behind her ears as I pulled her into my arms. "You've been through a lot."

She nodded, staring up at me with gratitude.

"Thank you for bringing us here," she said. "I wouldn't have felt comfortable leaving Violet and Everleigh behind."

"Me, neither. I can't believe that handwriting, though. Fuck, I can't

believe any of this. How could someone copy my handwriting like that? I never would have written a letter to you like that, Kaylee, I hope you know that.”

“You said that ten times already, West. Of course, I know, babe.”

She reached up, her soft palm resting against my cheek. I grabbed her hand and brought her fingers to my lips to kiss them.

“I’d never do anything to hurt you, Kaylee,” I whispered. “You’re my girlfriend.”

Her eyes widened at my words. “Your girlfriend?”

“If you want to be,” I relented. If she said no, I would just have to work harder. Because I certainly wasn’t going anywhere.

She nodded, smiling through teary eyes. I kissed her, soft and deep and slow, until she began to relax in my arms. Then I led her to the bed, where we stayed for the next forty-eight hours, locked away from the world. I had our meals delivered to the room, and we spent our time making love to each other, laughing in each other’s arms...and healing.

Chapter Thirty-One

KAYLEE

As if returning to the city wasn't hard enough, Hoskins reminded me right away of just how hard work was going to be as soon as I got back.

I'd agreed to cover a shift for a sick coworker in the main club. I was rounding a corner with a tray full of drinks when I saw him lingering in the corner like a dark shadow, leering at a group of scantily clad women in a nearby booth.

As soon as I saw him, I turned around to avoid him, but it was too late.

"Kaylee!" he shouted over the music. I pretended not to hear him. But I knew I couldn't do it all night, so I decided to get it over with. I turned back to him with anger and irritation.

"What are you doing here?" I hissed, looking around for any sign of West.

Hoskins raked his eyes over my frame. A wave of disgust washed over me.

"What the fuck are you wearing?" His eyes looked like they were going to pop out of their sockets as they landed on my very exposed cleavage. "You look like a fucking slut! You're just asking for someone to assault you!"

Fury raged through my veins. I itched to throw the entire tray of drinks over his head.

“Way to victim blame, asshole. West makes me wear this shit. And, why are you even here? What are you trying to do? Blow my cover?”

“West, huh? Do I need to remind you that West Foster is a murder suspect?”

“No. He isn’t.” I lifted my chin. “West would never do something like that.”

He scoffed, shaking his head. When his gaze raked back down to my chest, I put the tray in front of me, blocking his view.

“You’re obviously way too close to this case now. You’re running out of time, Kaylee. The Lieutenant isn’t happy. You’ve got forty-eight hours or we’re pulling you out.”

He turned on his heel, leaving me there with my mouth open. How the hell was I going to get him more info in forty-eight hours?

My mind had been clouded by West. I needed to concentrate, to focus, to spend some time away from him so I could just think.

His face, his eyes, his lips, his wandering hands...they’d been the worst possible distraction. I knew I never should have gotten involved with him, but I also knew I never would have been able to resist him.

But for now?

I needed time. Space to think. Room to really get a handle on this shit and do what I did best — solve crimes.

There was a thread here, some connection that I couldn’t quite put together. My gut told me there was more to know about the victims’ involvement with the club. The white paint alone told me that.

I shuddered to think about who might be involved.

I sent a quick text to West that I wasn’t feeling well, then slipped out the back door after changing into my street clothes. Once I got home, I locked myself in, turned on some soft music, poured a glass a wine, and pulled out all my files. I spread them out over the kitchen table. Once that was done, and everything was laid out in front of me, I got to work. Half an hour later, I had

an organized display laid out on a large board. It contained photos of all the suspects so far, with the three identifying features that pinged them as suspects — possible motives, means and opportunities were listed below their photograph.

I hated that I had to add West's face but there he was with his gorgeous eyes shining back at me.

Theo, Rian, and Danika were there, too.

Of all three identifying features of a suspect, nobody had just one.

I was pretty sure I could rule Danika out. She had a vendetta against West, sure. But I really didn't see her murdering a bunch of women and framing West for their deaths. Danika was too focused on trying to tempt West into putting her in his film to have such an elaborate and murderous plan of revenge.

Which was good, because the last thing I wanted was to have to deal with Danika. West had tried to explain what she was like, and she seemed ~~the~~ like the kind of person I wanted to stay far away from. But I wasn't sure I could rule her out completely, so she stayed on the board.

At this time, West and Rian and Theo were almost equally suspicious. Except West had an alibi. I was tempted to rip his photo down. But something told me to keep it there until I'd confirmed his innocence.

I still hadn't checked out his story. All I was going on was my gut.

Chapter Thirty-Two

WEST

Danika knocked on my door and walked in without waiting for me to even look up. When I did, I groaned out loud.

“What do you want?”

“That’s a terrible way to say hello, West,” she said.

“What do you want, Danika?”

She walked over behind the desk and put her hand on my shoulder. I felt like I’d been burned. Twitching, I pulled away. She lifted her hand slowly, shaking her head. “Like I’ve never touched you before?” she asked, lifting a brow.

“Danika, I’m busy,” I said, ignoring her question.

“Too busy for me?”

“Absolutely,” I replied.

“You know, West, there was a time when you couldn’t wait to see me. Couldn’t wait to get me alone. Get me naked...”

“That time has passed, Danika.” What would it take to get her to leave me alone? An idea popped into my head and I went with it. “I’m seeing someone else now. It’s getting serious, in fact.”

She laughed, shaking her head. “Surely, you don’t mean that tart you were photographed with?”

“That’s exactly who I mean.”

“West, you can’t be serious.”

“I am serious, Danika. You and I are over. We have been for a long time.”

“West.” She reached out to touch my face. “Remember how you used to bend me over the desk here?”

I rolled my eyes, not replying. I just wanted her to go away.

I put my hands on her arms to guide her to the door. She looked up at me and put her hand on my chest.

“Wait, West. Just answer one question and then I’ll go.”

I groaned. “What?”

“Was it really all that bad? Every day wasn’t awful was it?”

Her eyes searched mine, and I thought I saw a glimmer of sincerity. It almost made me feel sorry for her.

“Danika, I —.”

Kaylee appeared in my doorway, the door left wide open by Danika. We turned to look at her, my hands still on Danika’s arms and her hand still flat on my chest. Kaylee’s eyes widened and she walked away immediately.

“Fuck.” I pushed Danika towards the door. “Go!”

“Oh, you’ve got to be kidding! That’s her, right? She’s a waitress? All this for a fucking waitress, are you fucking kidding me, West?”

“Get the fuck out, Danika!”

Once I had her on the other side, I slammed the door in her face. When she was gone, I went to find Kaylee.

She was in the locker room getting ready for her shift. We hadn’t spoken since she’d gone silent on me last night after texting me that she wasn’t feeling well.

“Hey,” I said, searching her face. She was cold, closed down. I saw it right away. My heart skipped a beat.

Fucking Danika.

I wasn’t going to let her ruin everything.

“Hey,” she said, putting her clothes in her locker and avoiding my gaze.

“Are you feeling better?”

“What?”

“Last night? You left early?”

“Oh, right, yeah, I think it was just something I ate. Sorry. I’m better, thank you.”

She moved to walk past me, but I blocked her path. “Kaylee…”

She stopped, looking straight ahead. I reached down for her chin, pulling her gaze up to mine.

“What’s going on? Are you okay?”

She sighed, then shook her head. “I don’t know, West…”

“Tell me.”

“What’s going on with you and Danika? You looked pretty cozy in your office there. I guess I thought everything was over with the two of you, but maybe I was wrong.”

“You weren’t wrong. I was being honest. I know it looked like something else, but what was really happening was that I was telling Danika how serious I am about you. She was trying to flirt with me, and I reminded her that everything was over between us for good.”

“You’re serious about me?”

“Kaylee, how can you ask me that?”

“I don’t know, I don’t know what’s going on, West.” Her eyes were storming with emotion and I wanted to put my arms around her and calm whatever was going on with her.

“Kaylee, here’s what’s going on, okay? Are you listening?”

“Of course.”

“Good, because this is important. What’s going on is that you’ve turned my whole world upside down. All I can think about is you. All I want to do is be around you. All I want is to look at your face full of sunshine and watch you smile. I want to be the one that makes you smile, Kaylee.”

“West...”

“I’m not done. I don’t know what it’s going to take for us to be together. I know my lifestyle is unusual and there’s so much you don’t understand. But I want to walk every step beside you, Kaylee. Only you. Do you understand? Do you understand what I’m saying?”

“I think so.”

“Kaylee,” I said, peering into those sparkling emerald eyes, my heart bursting at the seams. “I love you.”

Her eyes widened at my words. “West,” she whispered, her voice cracking, her lips quivering with emotion.

I captured them with my mouth, kissing her with all the love in my heart.

I had no idea what I was doing. I knew everything around me was spinning out of control.

But not this.

Nothing about my mouth on Kaylee’s was out of control. Nothing about my love, nothing about my desire for her, nothing about Kaylee being in my life felt wrong.

And that was really all that mattered.

Chapter Thirty-Three

KAYLEE

I couldn't believe he'd said it.

Three little words had rocked my world. I'd been ready to completely call things off with West when I'd arrived at work. Seeing him and Danika in each other's arms had only cemented my decision. It was for the best. I'd be gone soon anyway if I didn't find some kind of information that would be sufficient for Hoskins. And that seemed unlikely at this point.

All my suspects were dead ends without evidence.

I'd resigned myself to saying goodbye to West. Seeing him with Danika should have made it easy. I thought it had taken the decision out of my hands.

But I'd been wrong. When he'd found me, I was mustering every ounce of courage to stay for my shift and keep my head up.

And with three little words, a mere eight letters, he'd changed everything.

I didn't say it back. He kissed me and kissed me and kissed me and if I'd said it, it would have been swallowed anyway.

I felt frozen, lost, confused.

Was this really love?

Did I love West, too?

I'd never allowed myself to think such a thing. Even if every cell in my body was singing with love for him, I wouldn't acknowledge it. I couldn't. I

spent the rest of my shift on cloud nine, lost in my spinning thoughts, lost in a swelling bliss that I only dared allow myself to float in for fleeting moments.

At the end of the night, as I headed out to the parking lot, I was still lost in that fog. But as soon as I spotted Danika standing next to my car, I pulled out of it and went on full alert.

“Danika,” I said, nodding as if we’d met, even though we hadn’t.

“Look, bitch, I know who you are. Leave West alone or else.”

I had no idea what she meant by knowing who I was. At this point, that could be anything. Did she just know I was dating West? Did she know I was a cop? I wasn’t about to clarify, so I played along.

“Or else, what?”

“I don’t think I need to say it,” she said, leaning towards me. She smelled heavily like booze, her usually perfect curls slightly disheveled.

“Are you okay? Do you need me to call you a cab?”

I looked around the parking lot for her security team,—but didn’t see anyone. Confused, I kept looking, because America’s Sweetheart usually came with a team of burly dudes to make sure she stayed safe.

My heart sank when I spotted Hoskin's van parked in a spot in the corner of the lot. His ugly face peered out from behind the wheel, watching this whole scene unfold.

“Fuck you,” Danika said. “Just leave West alone. That’s all I have to say to you.”

“Sure, right,” I nodded, just wanting her to leave.

She headed to a nearby Mercedes and got behind the wheel. I contemplated stopping her but she was hell bent on leaving. She sped off quickly. “Fuck,” I muttered, heading to my car and ignoring Hoskins.

I should have known better because he was at my window in seconds.

I rolled it down, shaking my head.

“What the fuck are you doing here again?” I asked.

“Time’s up.”

“My time isn’t up until tomorrow, so fuck off,” I hissed. He was wasting my time coming here.

“The Lieutenant is pissed,” he said. “You’ve been undercover for weeks now and all you’ve accomplished is getting your face plastered across the gossip rags and turning into a downright slut for West Foster. If you don’t give us something we can use right away, then you’re off the case, understood?”

“Fuck off!” I shouted, a little too loudly. He laughed and turned on his heel, walking back to his van. I groaned and put my head in my hands. I hated that guy with all my heart. He was nothing but trouble.

“Rosie?” I looked up to see Rian at my other window. My blood ran cold. He’d heard every word of my conversation with Hoskins.

“You’re a fucking cop?”

“Rian! Oh, fuck! You scared me...”

“A cop, Rosie? Does West know?”

“Rian...I can explain.”

“I’m sure you can,” he said, shaking his head. “Unfucking believable...”

“Rian, please.” I hesitated. “Call me Kaylee. Rosie is an alias I just used for the club.”

“Your name isn’t even Rosie? Fucking hell. Is there anything real about you?”

I paused for a second too long, trying to decide what to say. Rian shook his head in disbelief.

“It’s the murders, right? I have a friend who told us there’s a case file on us.”

“Yeah,” I admitted, hoping honesty would get him to cooperate with me. “I’m sorry. I wasn’t trying to betray anyone. I’m just doing my job.”

“I get it,” he said. “Damn, poor West, though. He’s really fucking got it bad for you.”

“I have feelings for West, too,” I admitted. “Those are real.”

“Are they? That’s good. I hope that they really are, because you’ve been good for West. I’ve never seen him this happy before. Theo’s gonna lose his goddamned mind, though.”

“Do we have to tell him?”

“Well, I don’t know if I can keep a secret from either of them for very long. They can read me like a book. But, fuck. I’d like to help you out, purely for West’s benefit. You know...the club itself could use a PI sometimes. Maybe you should consider that? In any event, you should definitely think long and hard about what all this will do to West. He’s a good man. He deserves a good woman. Is that you?”

He walked away, leaving me sitting in my car with my heart in my throat. What the fuck was I doing?

Chapter Thirty-Four

WEST

Theo and I looked out over Topanga Canyon. We'd hiked up to talk about the club's scheduled events, but it ended up turning into an impromptu therapy session with the sun beating down on our backs.

"It's getting serious, isn't it?" he asked.

"Kaylee? Yeah, man, I think it is. I told her I loved her."

"Damn, dude."

"I know. Fucking crazy and unexpected, but she's so awesome. She's really good for me. I feel peaceful around her."

"You took her to the temple, didn't you?"

"Yeah," I admitted. I wasn't sure how he would take that. I didn't ask for permission. That was against the rules. I expected him to lay into me.

"You sure changed your tune fast. What happened to not settling down and fucking every woman in sight?"

"Kaylee happened," I said, growing quiet as I stared out at the view. I found myself wishing she was here with me to share it. I shook my head, wiping the sweat from my forehead. "It's doomed, though."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because of my fucking life, man. Look how they're attacking her already! Those fucking memes and TikToks? Why the hell are people so evil?"

“Because they’re jealous. It comes with the territory, you know that, West. This is your life.”

“I know. I just don’t know if Kaylee is cut out for it.”

“She punched that pap like a fucking champ,” he laughed. I couldn’t help but join in.

“Hell, yeah, she did.”

“Everything will be okay, man,” Theo said.

“I just don’t know what to do about it.

“All you can do is give Kaylee a chance to show you what’s she made of. Especially if you want her that badly.”

He was right. On the way back to the club, I vowed to do just that. What the hell would pushing her away now accomplish, besides ripping my own heart to shreds? Fuck that.

I wanted her.

I wasn’t giving up so easily.

When I returned to my office, Joey was there. He sat on the sofa scrolling through his phone.

“Hey, boss,” he said, quickly standing up when I walked in.

“Did we have a meeting scheduled?”

“No, I brought you lunch,” he said, pointing to a brown paper bag on the desk.

“Why?”

“You haven’t been eating much lately,” he said, shrugging.

“I’m not paying you to monitor my meals, Joey.”

“Oh, I know,” he said. “I went to the Crescent deli. I know you like it there, so I just picked up an extra sandwich.”

“Okay, cool, thanks,” I said, sitting by my desk. “So, what are you working on today? Did you secure that house for the set?”

“It’s in the works,” he said, then fell silent for a moment. I felt his gaze on me as I opened up the sandwich and took a bite. It was perfect. Just the

way I liked it. I needed to be nicer to Joey.

“Um, can I talk to you about a concern I’m having?” he ventured.

“Sure,” I said, in between bites.

“It’s just...this recent press. With Kaylee. It seems the two of you are being spotted all over the city now. It’s really whipping up a frenzy with the paps trying to get the best shot.”

“Fuck, I know, it’s so goddamned annoying.”

“Right,” he nodded. “I just think maybe it would be good if you cooled it for a little while. You really don’t even know anything about Kaylee. What if...what if she has a background that could damage your rep?”

“Damage my rep? Did you really just say that?”

“I did,” he said.

I looked square in his eyes to make sure he was serious before I unleashed on him. All I saw was sincerity.

“Joey,” I seethed, but kept my words measured and firm. “I told you already to stay out of my personal life. You didn’t listen. This is your last warning. I’m in dire need of a break from you, to be honest. Take a week off. With pay, don’t worry. But just leave me alone for a while.”

“Oh, West, I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean any disrespect. I was just worried about you.”

“That’s not your job. Your job is to perform the tasks I assign to you. That’s it.”

“I know. It won’t happen again, seriously. I don’t need a week. Really.”

I sighed, shaking my head. He looked sincerely upset and apologetic. I was such a hard ass sometimes.

“Fine, just cut that shit out about Kaylee. I’m not going to put up with that and she’s not going anywhere.”

“Yes, boss,” he said, ducking his head as he walked out of my office.

Chapter Thirty-Five

KAYLEE

The clock in my head ticked loudly as I walked into West's office.

I felt like I was being torn in half. My feelings for West vied with my dedication to my job for ownership of my heart. Now that Rian knew who I was, I was sure he'd tell West.

But one look at West's face told me he still had no clue who I really was, because his eyes lit up when he saw me. He pulled me into his arms, embracing me warmly, and kissing the top of my head.

"I'm so happy to see you!" he said.

I melted into him, guilt ripping through me. I want to confess. I wanted to tell him everything, explain that my identity was fake, but my feelings for him were wildly authentic.

But I knew if I did that, I'd lose him immediately.

I saw no way out of this awful situation. I was fucked completely. All I could do was hope a door would open. One I couldn't even imagine right now, but that would provide some sort of solution where I could hang on to both my job and West.

That hope was really hard to hold onto right now. Instead, I wrapped my arms around West and held onto him as tightly as I could.

"I missed you," he said, pulling me away after a moment and kissing me. His warm lips were like coming home, and I kissed him back with all the

love in my heart. He led me to the sofa, lying down on top of me and wrapping his arms around me as he kissed me deeply, our bodies tangling together in a delicious embrace.

I opened my eyes, watching his face as he kissed me, his own eyes closed tightly, lost in the feel of our bodies together.

He was so damned beautiful, it took my breath away.

Our time was so limited, but this moment was as close to perfect as I could get. I engraved every sensation deep in my brain so I could remember it.

Chapter Thirty-Six

WEST

After Kaylee left, I took a long walk down Sunset Boulevard with Seth, my new security guard, trailing close behind me. I wore a disguise of a long black wig and glasses to ward off the prying eyes. I did this from time to time. Sometimes the need for feeling like a normal person overwhelmed me.

Once I'd fine-tuned my disguise, it almost always worked.

Today seemed to be working just fine.

There was a movie set that had closed down a nearby street. I stopped to watch for a moment. The usual chaos of grips and light and camera workers fluttered around. In the distance were the distinct white trailers that I knew housed the stars of whatever show they were filming.

"Hey, what movie is this?" I asked a nearby grip who was busy coiling up a tangle of cables.

"It's Richard Hawley's directorial debut — *Second Chance at Happiness*. Pacino's producing. A romantic drama. It's gonna be huge."

"Who are the stars?"

"Vanessa Stevens and Halston Shaver. Do you know them? They were in that Netflix series."

"No," I shook my head.

"They're gonna be fucking huge and in demand after this," he said,

pointing to a couple walking out of one of the trailers. “That’s them!”

My jaw dropped as I watched them walk towards us. They looked exactly like Kaylee and me. They were exactly what I was looking for. Fuck, I could even take myself out of the cast completely and that appealed to me immensely.

“I need to talk to them right now,” I said, heading over the short concrete barrier that separated the public from the set.

“Sir, I’m sorry you can’t —.”

I reached up and ripped off my glasses and wig. “I’m West Foster. Let me in. I need to talk to those two.”

“— Oh! Mr. Foster! Yes, sir, this way, sir,” he said, flustered, letting me through.

I signed the two of them on the spot, emailed the casting agents to let them know, and then headed back to the office feeling relieved and elated.

Now, I could focus on everything else — the club, pre-production of the film, and most of all — my relationship with Kaylee. I’d told Danika in no uncertain terms I was done with her, and I was pretty sure she wouldn’t bother me anymore.

Everything was finally coming together.

When I got back to my office, I was determined not to let anything else fuck with my day. The club was in full swing and I went up to Profane to tell Kaylee I’d found my actors. She was the first person I wanted to tell my good news to, and that fact wasn’t lost on me. She’d become so important to me in such a short time.

I pulled her out of Profane, and asked her to come down to my office. I wanted to be alone with her.

But when we got to my office, Joey was there again, shouting at someone on the phone.

I suppressed a groan and tried to remain professional.

“What’s going on?”

“The owners of the house are playing hardball,” he said, holding a hand over the phone.

“We’ll find something else,” I said, determined not to let that one solvable thing upset me.

“No! It’s perfect!” he hissed, turning back to the phone. “Look, I hear you, but this is West Foster’s production. Do you realize how much the price of your property will go up after this film is released? You’ll get another million at least.”

I watched his face turn red as he listened to the person on the other end.

“No, you stupid motherfucker, we won’t increase the fee!”

My eyes widened, and I grabbed the phone from him and hung up it up.

“I’m not going to let you represent me like that, what the hell is wrong with you? That’s so unprofessional!”

He looked at me in shock. His eyes darted between me and Kaylee. “I’m just doing what’s needed to get the job done,” he explained.

“That was really fucking rude,” Kaylee piped up.

Rage filled Joey’s face as he turned to her. “This has nothing to do with you!”

“What the fuck, Joey? Get out. Go home. I mean it this time.”

“West...” he said, immediately contrite. “Please?”

“Go! Home!” I shouted. He’d gone too far. I needed a new assistant. Someone much less annoying and way more professional.

He left without a word, leaving Kaylee and I alone. I turned to her with a smile, still determined not to let Joey fuck that up.

“Forget about him. I have good news!”

“What?” Her gorgeous eyes smiled up at me.

“I found the actors for my film!”

“No way!”

“I’m so fucking stoked! They look...well, they look just like us, actually.”

“Us?”

“Well, the woman isn’t near as beautiful as you, but nobody is.” I pulled her into my arms and held her tight against my body.

She smiled up at me, her joy for me clearly written on her face. “I’m so happy for you! I know that was messing with you for a while.”

“Yeah,” I admitted. “Now, let’s just hope she stays alive.”

“What? What do you mean?”

“A few of the women who were murdered were being considered. They’d auditioned and I hadn’t decided. Their deaths decided it, unfortunately.”

She furrowed her brows. “I need to tell you about something.”

She looked serious. I let her lead me to the sofa where we both sat down. .

“It’s about Danika,” she went on. “She showed up at my car yesterday when I was about to leave and she threatened me. Told me to leave you alone.”

“Oh for fuck’s sake,” I said, shaking my head and taking her hand in mine. “I’m sorry, she’s absolutely ridiculous.”

“Do you think she’s dangerous?”

“Danika? Danika’s all talk.”

“You sure about that? She seemed real fucking serious.”

“I’m sure. I promise, Danika wouldn’t hurt anyone. Except maybe me.”

“Someone sent me a bomb, West.”

“I didn’t forget about that. But I can guarantee it wasn’t Danika. The cops will figure it out. You gave them the letters, they did forensics. It was just some random crazy fan, I’m sure of it.”

“I hope you’re right.”

“I am,” I said, sure that I was. If Kaylee hadn’t been seen with me, she wouldn’t have received that package. “Oh, that reminds me,” I said, going to my desk and pulling out a package from the drawer. “I know your bracelet was destroyed that day. I got you another one.”

She opened it with a huge smile and put it on her wrist immediately. It

looked beautiful. My eyes trailed over to her ring finger and I knew right then that someday I'd be putting a ring there.

"Thank you," she gushed, her smile lighting up the room, lighting up my heart.

"It's my pleasure," I said, drinking in her beauty and letting it deep into my soul. This woman was healing and beautiful. I was so grateful I'd met her.

Later, when I left, I found Joey at my car again, waiting. "I just wanted to apologize again," he said, before I could lay into him.

I was exhausted and didn't have the energy to fight. "Whatever, dude," I said, getting into my car. "Look, I know I'm hard to work for. I'm all over the place, I get pissed a lot. But again, I won't have you talking to anyone that way on my behalf. This really is your last warning, Joey. Get your shit together."

"I understand," he said. "Thank you, West."

I sighed, shaking my head. "I'm fucking tired."

"What's going on?"

"Fucking Danika again. She's fucking with Kaylee. I just wish she'd get out of my life, once and for all."

"I can talk to her, if you want."

"I do not. I'll text you a list of tasks I need you to take care of tomorrow for the film. Have a good night."

"Good night, boss," he said, walking away.

I sighed and headed home, wishing Kaylee was going home with me. She'd insisted she was also exhausted and needed a good night's sleep, so I'd said goodnight to her in the locker room while she was gathering her things.

I went home with visions of her swirling in my head.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

KAYLEE

Forty-eight hours had passed. I was ignoring Hoskins' messages completely at this point.

Eating breakfast at home, I sat on the couch flipping through a bridal magazine I'd bought on impulse while standing in line at the grocery store this morning. I shook my head, not sure what I was thinking. Yeah, I wanted a future with West, but how would that ever work?

I was convinced that when he found out who I really was, he'd be long gone.

Why would he accept such a betrayal? I wouldn't. I couldn't expect him to.

Nevertheless, I longed to tell him the truth. My heart held on to a flicker of hope that he wouldn't reject me entirely. The thought of not seeing him again killed me.

I was being dramatic, of course.

I threw the magazine to the side and walked over to the board I'd made the other day. I looked at the faces of the victims. All of them had been at the Hush Hush club at some point. Three of them auditioned for West's film. What was the connection?

I knew there was something there, but I didn't want to think that something was West. Could he have done this? Was it possible?

In my gut, I just didn't feel it.

My phone buzzed and I read a text from West, my eyes widening.

Kaylee, there's a woman at the temple that needs a rigger right now.

How would you feel if I offered my services?

It wouldn't go any farther than tying the knots.

I stared at the words, shocked and flattered that he's ask first.

I don't mind. Thank you for asking, though.

I put my phone down, smiling as I turned back to the board. I was impressed with his consideration for my feelings. If this were a real relationship, that would have given him many positive points.

But it wasn't.

It was nothing but a lie. I was a fraud. A fake. And as soon as he figured it all out, he'd hate me.

My phone buzzed again.

Will you come watch? Please? I'd feel better if you were there.

Wow. Major points. I shook my head, my smile widening.

Of course. On my way.

I got in the car and rushed to the club. There I found a group of members in the temple gathered in a circle watching West tie up a blonde suspended from the ceiling. My eyes raked over the scene and I stopped in my tracks.

The knots he tied were intricate and complicated. But they were different than the ones I'd seen Xi Xiang do before. And they were different than the ones West had used to tie me up.

Instead, they were an exact replica of the knots that bound the murder victims.

My heart pounded in my chest. My breath rushed from my lungs. Fear gripped my heart as I watched West work with precision, easily tying the elaborate knots until the woman hanging in front of him was completely helpless.

West turned to the crowd with a triumphant smile. His eyes met mine

with a look of dark joy shining brightly in them.

Was that the last look the women saw before they were strangled?

Was that the feeling West had when his fingers tightened around their throat, and the last traces of life faded from their frightened souls?

I shuddered at the thought, trying to shake away the fear.

I had no idea what to think anymore.

I slipped back into the darkness, unable to watch the scene unfold in front of me any longer. I dressed and headed up to the Hush Hush club, desperately searching for a drink.

Rian was behind the bar. I gulped when I saw him, not sure what to expect.

“Hey,” I said.

“Hi, Kaylee,” he said, throwing me a knowing, but friendly, smile. “Want a drink?”

“Yeah, please. Whiskey, neat.”

He nodded and slid the glass across the bar my way.

“Any progress?” he asked.

“No, not really,” I replied. I wasn’t about to talk about what I just witnessed. “Thank you for not telling West.”

“I’ll let you do that.”

“Thanks,” I said, sipping my whiskey.

“I can’t imagine how hard your job must be.”

I nodded.

“We aren’t the only club y’all are looking into, right?”

“I can’t really discuss it, Rian.”

“Right,” he nodded, running a hand through his hair. “It’s just...I don’t know if you know this or not, but I saw Kajah the night she died.”

“You did? Where, here at the club?”

“No, at the Frenzy. That new club in West Hollywood.”

“You were there that night?”

“Yeah,” he said. “She was kind of out of it, a little. We talked for a minute.”

“Did you see her after she left?”

His eyes darted around, avoiding mine. “No, not at all. Can’t believe she fucking died.”

“Yeah,” I agreed. “Pretty grisly, actually.”

“I know. Who fucking strangles people? What the fuck kind of monster does that?”

My blood ran cold.

The cause of death hadn’t been released to the public.

I finished off my whiskey as fast as I could and left the club and headed back home to think, my thoughts in a tailspin.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

WEST

It had taken some convincing, but I persuaded Kaylee to come back to the cabin in Big Sur with me again. I'd promised it would just be for the weekend. Nothing but a quick little escape for us, alone this time. She'd finally relented.

All I wanted these days was to be alone with Kaylee.

Now that I had the headache of casting behind me, I was only looking ahead.

The studio was pleased with my choices, thankfully, so everything was going smoothly now. And now that I had Kaylee, all alone in the privacy of my own home, away from the prying eyes of the public, away from all the fucking bullshit of Hollywood and everyone's opinions — it felt like heaven.

We lay in bed, wrapped in each other's arms, her soft hair across my shoulder, her beautiful eyes turned up to me — and while she hadn't said it — I could see the love there.

I'd only told her that one time that I loved her.

She didn't say it back. I sensed she wasn't quite ready, and that was fine. This had all happened so quickly and unexpectedly, but she was perfect for me. I didn't care that it was too fast. I didn't care what anyone thought.

All I cared about was how she made me feel when I was with her.

I could be patient with the love stuff. We'd get there. I just knew it. I

knew everything about her was just...right.

Everything about her was addictive.

Her face, her eyes, her lips. Her body, so voluptuous and curvy and soft and so absolutely divine when I sank into her. Her body set my soul on fire, and I couldn't get enough of it.

"Little Rose, do you have any idea how special you are?" I asked her, caressing her face.

"Thank you," she said, blushing beautifully. "You're so sweet to me, West."

"I give what I get," I said, brushing my lips against hers. It was late at night. The dim light of the turned down television was the only thing illuminating my bedroom. We'd been making love for hours. Now we cuddled under the covers, about to drift off to sleep.

A late night host's voice drifted through the air. I mainly ignored it as I trailed my fingers through Kaylee's hair, but then a familiar voice rang out. My eyes darted to the screen, and I groaned when I saw Danika's face. She seemed to be everywhere these days.

"Is that Danika?" Kaylee asked.

"Yes," I groaned again. I started searching through the covers for the remote control. Danika's voice was like nails on a chalkboard to me.

"Thanks for having me, Sam," she said.

"Tell us about your new movie," he replied.

"I'd love to, but first, I want to talk about something else, if that's okay," she said. He looked confused, but kept a smile on his face.

"Where's the fucking remote?" I growled.

"I think it may have fallen on the floor," Kaylee said, helping me search.

"I want to talk about my ex-husband," Danika said, her voice laced with defiance.

I froze, bracing myself with a curse.

"Okay," Sam replied, shrugging. "You two had a pretty public divorce."

“We did,” she agreed. “And it was anything but amicable, I admit. That doesn’t mean I don’t love West. I always have and always will.”

“Fucking funny way of showing it,” I shouted at the screen.

“And because of that love,” she continued. “I need to say something publicly, because everyone needs to know what’s really going on. Especially him.”

“This sounds juicy,” Sam Madewell said, rubbing his hands together.

“As everyone has seen already, West is dating someone else again already. I thought he’d wait a little longer but it makes sense. West has a hard time being alone. He’s not as secure as everyone thinks.”

“Oh, my god, what a bitch!” I wanted to jump through the screen and strangle her.

Kaylee stared intently at the television, her eyes wide.

“The thing is, West is having the wool pulled over his eyes. His new squeeze isn’t who he thinks it is.”

“What do you mean?”

“The woman he’s been seen with works at the club he co-owns. But that’s not the secret. She’s actually,” she paused for dramatic effect, always putting on a show, “an undercover cop.”

My mouth gaped open. The words didn’t register at first. As if they were out of sequence, or said backwards, or out of context.

“What?” I whispered.

“A cop?” Madewell asked, his own eyes wide. “Wow, that’s crazy.”

“West doesn’t know. Now he does. Anyway, about my movie...”

Her voice faded away and I slowly looked over at Kaylee. She was pale as a ghost and watched me carefully.

“Why did she say that?” I asked her carefully.

“West...”

“I don’t understand?”

“West...”

“Kaylee? Why would she say something like that?”

“I was going to tell you, babe. I’m so sorry.”

“Huh?”

“It’s true, West. She’s right. I’ve been wanting to tell you and I’m so glad it’s out now. I didn’t know how. I know it’s a shock, but you need to know —.”

“— Wait, you’re really a fucking cop? What the fuck?” I jumped out of bed, staring down at her. “This can’t be real. What the fuck is going on?”

“I work in homicide. I’m investigating the murders.”

“What? What the fuck does that have to do with me?”

“It’s the club. I’m investigating the club. They sent me in undercover to try to find a connection between the victims.”

My mind reeled. This whole fucking thing was a lie?

We stood in front of each other now, both of us fully nude, all the walls we’d torn down between us now back in place once again.

I shook my head slowly, trying to make sense through the fog of this immense betrayal.

“I was so sure of you,” I muttered, half to myself. “So sure of what we were building together.”

“West, please listen to me,” she pleaded. “Yes, I kept this from you. But I promise you, what I feel for you is real. This? You and me? That’s very real. I don’t know how we can fix this, but can we just talk through it? I know if you just listen, you’ll understand.”

I searched her eyes, the pain visible there as she looked up at me.

How could she have lied to me for so long? How could she have made love to me so intimately? How could she have laid in my bed and let me wrap myself up in her so thoroughly, and let me think she was doing the same?

“This was all just a job to you,” I said, shaking my head.

My heart was shattered.

I should have known. I never should have trusted anyone, especially my

own feelings for a woman.

What the fuck was I thinking?

“West, please...”

“Pack your bag. I’ll have you flown back first thing in the morning.”

I left her there and went to a different wing of the cabin to sleep. The sound of her crying out echoed in my ears the whole fucking night.

By the time dawn arrived, I’d shed my own fair share of tears. But as the sun rose, my anger had too. I was determined to shut down all my feelings for Kaylee.

They were strong and deep and I knew it would take a really long time.

But I was fucking done.

Chapter Thirty-Nine

KAYLEE

“How long are you going to mope around?” Violet asked, filling my wine glass.

“As long as it takes, I guess,” I mumbled.

“Kaylee, what can I do?”

“Nothing, I just have to feel this.” I’d been a complete mess since getting back home. I felt terrible.

West hated me now and who could blame him?

“I fucking knew this would happen,” Violet muttered, shaking her head.

“I’ll be okay.” I didn’t want her to worry about me. “I just need to jump back into work. Tomorrow. After I wallow in my misery today.”

“Just keep a low profile for a while,” she said. “I think I should hire a security guard for you.”

“A cop for a cop?”

She laughed, shaking her head. “No, a cop for someone who’s become an unwilling celebrity.”

I sighed, rolling my eyes. “Fucking Danika.”

“Fucking Danika is right. I can’t believe that bitch did that to you.”

“She wasn’t doing it to me. She was doing it to West. She wanted to hurt him. It worked.”

“Well, she’s an evil person. Karma will get her.”

“I hope so.” I wiped the non-stop tears that had been falling from my eyes.

My phone buzzed and I picked it up reluctantly. Hoskins had sent me a text.

If you aren't too busy fucking your famous boyfriend, bring your ass down to the Playhouse. Now.

“Shit,” I said. “I gotta go.”

“Where?”

“The Playhouse. Hoskins needs me there now. I hope this isn't what I think it is.”

“Another victim?”

“Let's fucking hope not.”

On my way.

I texted back and headed to the bathroom to wash my face, hoping my swollen eyes weren't too obvious. I may not have West anymore, but I still had a career to salvage.

When I arrived, the place was buzzing with police activity. The Medical Examiner's van parked in the alley confirmed my worst fears.

Hoskins waited for me by his car.

“Another victim?” I asked.

“Yep,” he said. “You won't believe this shit.”

He led me over to the covered body lying in the alley, lifting back the sheet with a flourish.

My eyes widened when I saw Danika's white smeared face staring back up at me, her eyes bulging, the familiar bruising covering her throat.

“Oh fuck.”

“Oh fuck is right.” The Lieutenant's voice rang out behind me. “The press is going to be all over this one. So far, we aren't releasing the identity of this victim, but you can imagine the chaos that will ensue when we do.”

“Lieutenant.”

She looked pissed.

“This has gone on too long. I need a name, Kaylee. You’ve got to have some leads on suspects by now.”

My head spun. I could tell her about West, about the knots. I could tell her about the face paint that everyone in the temple wore. I could tell her about Rian, about how he was with Kajah the night she was murdered.

Deep in my gut, I knew neither of them were involved. Naming them would unleash a storm of suspicion, and I knew that sometimes suspicion was enough to ruin a person’s life. Guilty or not.

I couldn’t do it to either of them.

“I’m close. But I don’t have anyone to name yet.”

I turned and left her there. I knew I was putting my job on the line. But I wasn’t about to ruin the lives of two men without being completely sure.

I’d rather ruin my own first.

An hour later, I walked into the precinct. Now that my cover was blown, there was no need to show up at the club, even if West wanted me there. I’d not heard a peep from him since I’d left him at the cabin in Big Sur. The lonely flight back home was excruciating, but it would have been worse to suffer his silent treatment, or worse, have to listen to him rage about how deeply I’d betrayed him.

When I walked past the conference room, I heard something that made me stop in my tracks. When I looked in, my blood ran cold. On the screen, in front of a group of my colleagues, was a video of me and West, naked.

I wanted to disappear into the carpet.

My colleagues laughed and clapped, unaware I stood behind all of them, while they watched the first time I’d been with West. The night he’d tied me up with the pink ribbon and spanked me. On the screen in front of them, I cried out in ecstasy, my ass turning pinker with each blow of West’s hand.

I thought I’d die right there on the spot.

I had no idea they had cameras in the club, but why wouldn’t they? I

should have known. They should have fucking told me, though.

On the screen, West's fingers disappeared inside of my pussy and I cried out as he fucked me, my body shuddering as I orgasmed.

The men in front of me howled with laughter as they watched my most vulnerable moments. Hoskins was the loudest of them all, crying out and imitating my cries as he mocked me.

In an instant, everything became clear.

I grabbed my gun from its holster, pulled my badge from my pocket and silently placed them both on the conference room table. I walked out without a word.

Chapter Forty

WEST

Theo and Rian had rallied around me and convinced me to get out of bed and go surfing with them at Hermosa Beach.

As we sat in the sand, taking a break, I watched the waves break in front of us.

Misery had wrapped its vicious arms around me and refused to let go. I missed Kaylee fiercely. I'd never felt this kind of pain and it confused the hell out of me, because I was pissed at the same time. Even when Danika and I had broken up, I didn't feel like this.

"I just don't understand how I could have been fooled so easily," I muttered, half to myself and half to them. They'd been putting up with my random comments all day.

"I told you not to trust her, I told you that you were moving too fast," Theo said.

"I should have fucking listened to you."

"Next time, I'll knock some sense into you."

"There's not going to be a next time!"

"C'mon, dude, you can't give up on love entirely," Rian said.

"Watch me."

"I gotta say, though, man. I do think Kaylee really liked you."

"Well, that doesn't matter now, does it? It's over."

“Why, though? Like, I don’t get that entirely. Yeah, she lied, but she had to, right? It was her job. And you gotta admit, it’s kinda interesting that she’s a cop. That’s a lot more intriguing than a waitress. She’s probably got a lot of stories to tell.”

I shook my head in exasperation.

“Sure, but how could I ever trust her?”

“I don’t know, man. I’m not an expert at relationships, as you both well know,” Rian said. “But I liked her. Yeah, she fucked up, big time. And maybe it would take a while for you to trust her again, but West — I’ve never seen you so fucking happy. Maybe it could work. If you really wanted it to. She seemed good for you. You’re gonna throw all that away? That shit’s rare, man. Might want to think twice about that.”

“He’s right,” Theo agreed. “When you find the right woman, the one that feels comfortable in your arms? That’s magic.”

“Okay, Mr. Romantic,” I said. “Who the fuck are you out creating magic with?”

Theo’s eyes clouded over and he looked away. “Nobody, man. I’m just saying...”

“Right,” I sighed, shaking my head. “I hear you guys. I just think I’m fucked. I don’t know how to live with Kaylee anymore. But I don’t know how I’m going to live without her, either.”

Chapter Forty-One

KAYLEE

I had nothing now.
No West to love.
No case to work on.
No fucking job.

I spent my days wallowing in agony, lost in feeling sorry for myself. All I could think about was West and how I'd hurt him so badly. I thought about my sister, how I'd worked my ass off for all those years trying to make up for not protecting her.

And for what? I had nothing left to show for any of it.

I'd stopped myself from calling West at least a dozen times. If he wanted to talk to me, he knew my number. He didn't. The silence was deafening.

"God, this is excruciating," I complained to Violet. She'd allowed me three days of burrowing into my bed and then announced this morning that I was done. She'd pulled me out of bed, pushed me into the shower, and then dragged me to the spa, despite my loud words of protest.

We sat in the hot tub, now. The bubbles were doing absolutely nothing to relieve the tension in my body.

"Look, I get it. It's West Foster. He's hot. Totally fuckable..."

"You have no idea. God, don't remind me."

"But he came with a whole fucking mess of drama, Kaylee. You can't

deny that. I know you have feelings for him, but your life is going to be a lot easier without him.”

“I know,” I said, even though I didn’t feel easier without him. I felt like my heart was a tornado, spinning with pain and regret. Longing for something I could never have.

“Hey, ladies!” We looked up to see Everleigh walking over to us. She wore nothing but a tiny pink bikini and a pair of oversized white sunglasses. With her long, flowing hair, she looked like Barbie come to life.

“Everleigh!” Violet said, shooting me a quick glance. My heart skipped a beat when I saw her. She surely knew everything that happened.

She held up both hands. “Truce!” she said. “I come in peace. We don’t even have to talk about my brother. I just want to be a part of your girl gang, please? I love you both.”

Her words put me at ease and I smiled. “Please join us.”

She slipped in the water with us, then came over and gave me a hug, surprising me completely. I hugged her back, gratitude filling my heart. She pulled away and sat down, leaning against the wall. She looked like the movie star she was.

“So, you’re a cop, huh? I never would have guessed, Kaylee!”

I sighed, shaking my head. “I was. Not anymore.”

“You quit? Why?”

“It’s a long story. It starts with hope and ends in misogyny.”

“Ouch.”

“Yeah.”

“Kaylee’s feeling sorry for herself. I’m trying to pull her out of it,” Violet piped up.

“Sounds familiar,” Everleigh said.

“What do you mean?”

“West is just as miserable as you, for the record.” She held her hands up again. “I know I said I wasn’t going to talk about him.”

“It’s okay,” I shrugged. “I feel terrible. To be honest, he’s all I can think about. Might as well talk about him.”

“I’ve never seen him so miserable,” she admitted.

“Great,” I said, sarcastically, shaking my head. “That makes me feel so much better.”

“Sorry,” she muttered. “But can I ask a question?”

“Sure.”

“Like, I get why he’s upset. You lied. But, not for a bad reason. You weren’t trying to hurt him, were you?”

“God, no.”

“I didn’t think so. So, I’ll just say this and then not talk about it again. I think if you apologized, West would hear you out. I think he’d forgive you.”

“You do?”

“He’s a fucking wreck, Kaylee.”

“It might be worth a try,” Violet added. “If you don’t at least try, you know you’ll regret it for the rest of your life, Kaylee. I’ve never seen you like this with anyone.”

I rolled my eyes and groaned. Slipping under the water completely, I wished the water would just wash away all of this pain.

Chapter Forty-Two

WEST

I couldn't sleep.
I couldn't fucking eat.
I couldn't fucking think.

I felt like everything was falling apart all around me. As if Kaylee's betrayal wasn't enough, this morning I'd learned that Danika was dead. Tossed in an alley like a piece of trash. It was all over the news, and of course, my phone was blowing up like crazy with everyone wanting a statement from me. I'd had to fight my way past a group of paps outside the club when I'd arrived this morning.

I couldn't fucking believe it.

As much as I hated Danika towards the end of our marriage, I'd never have wished that shit on her. Nobody deserved that.

I was miserable and angry...and sad. All of it weighed on me, my heart felt like a damned stone in my chest. I felt frozen, unable to work. Just stuck in place with no ability to move forward. I didn't even know what the next step was.

Lost in my thoughts, I almost didn't hear the soft knock at my office door.

"Yeah," I muttered, figuring it was Joey. I'd been rough on him lately, but we had a meeting in an hour and knowing him, he was annoyingly early.

“Come in.”

When Kaylee’s head poked through the side of the door, my heart leapt into my chest.

“Hey,” she said, softly, a tentative smile on her beautiful face. She looked beautiful, different somehow. Or maybe it was just me seeing her in a different light now that I knew who she really was. I’d not been in the same room with her since that last night at the cabin and the urge to gather her in my arms and hold her close overwhelmed me.

“Kaylee,” I whispered, standing up and closing the distance between us. “Shouldn’t you be at work? I heard about Danika this morning.”

“I’m so sorry about Danika, West. I know you weren’t on the best terms, but still.”

“Thank you. I hope you can figure out who’s doing this shit.”

“I’m not working the case anymore.”

“Why not?”

“I quit the force, actually.”

My eyes searched hers, a million questions forming in my head. “Why?”

“A lot of reasons.”

“Am I one of them?”

“Not exactly,” she said. “It was time. I thought it was what I needed to do a long time ago. Now, I’m not so sure. There’s a lot about me you don’t know, West. I’m so sorry I had to lie to you. I didn’t want to. I hated doing it. I wanted to tell you the truth as soon as we met, as soon as we connected, but I couldn’t. I’m not exactly who you thought I was, that’s true. But that’s only my job. I was myself with you. Everything we experienced together? That was all real. I know it was wrong. I really am sorry. I know you probably won’t forgive me, and you don’t have to. I won’t be able to live with myself if I don’t offer you my sincerest apology. West, I really do care about you. If you ever want to try again --.” She paused, tears falling down her face. “I would like that.”

I drank in her words. She looked like she meant every single one.

Most importantly, she looked like the woman I'd fallen in love with.

All of my fears melted away and my lips crashed into hers. I wrapped my arms around her and quickly pulled her body close to mine.

She whimpered as I kissed her, her body going limp as she wrapped her arms around me. We melted into each other, our kiss deepening until we were lost in the emotion, the passion, swimming in the delicious space that only existed when we were connected so intimately.

I tore my lips from hers, the words falling quickly from my lips.

"I love you, Kaylee. I don't care about anything that happened. I haven't been able to stop thinking of you. I'm sorry I was so harsh at the cabin. I should have heard you out, given you time to explain yourself. I was so shocked and hurt and I reacted too quickly."

"I know. It's okay," she whispered, smiling through her tears.

"You deserved better."

"So did you," she said, beaming up at me. "And West?"

"Yes?"

"I love you, too."

My heart soared at her words. I kissed her again, the love flowing passionately between us, her arms wrapping tightly around my neck.

"I'm never going to let you go, Kaylee," I said, breaking away again. "You're mine now, do you understand?"

"Yes, West," she whispered up at me. "I'm yours. All yours."

"That's right," I said. "And I'm all yours, too, Kaylee, if you'll have me."

"Oh, West —."

The door behind us burst open and we jumped apart.

"I don't fucking think so!"

Joey stood there, shaking his head, his eyes wild.

"Joey, what the fuck?"

He rushed over, grabbed my wrist, and pulled me to my desk. Confused, I

went to pull away.

But he already had a pair of handcuffs out and quickly cuffed me to the handle of my desk.

“Joey!” I shouted.

Kaylee stepped forward. “Hey!” She grabbed Joey’s arm just as he pulled a gun out of his jacket and pointed at her. She threw her hands up and stepped back.

“Joey, what the fuck are you doing?” I shouted, pulling at the handle of my desk drawer. It pulled out a little but wouldn’t come out completely, leaving me stuck in place.

“Back up, bitch!” Joey said to Kaylee, ignoring me.

“I’m going to fucking kill you, Joey!” I roared. “Let me fucking go!”

He glanced back over his shoulder at me quickly. “I’m sorry, West, but this is for the best.”

He turned back to Kaylee, pointing the gun towards the door. “Move!”

She hesitated, looking over at me, her eyes wide with fear.

“Move!” Joey said, moving next to her and digging the gun into her side.

I watched helplessly as he marched her from my office.

Chapter Forty-Three

KAYLEE

The temple was dark, with not a soul inside. Joey forced me down the stairs, the end of his gun painfully pressing against my back. We got to the main door, and he stopped outside of it and sneered at me.

“Strip!” he ordered.

“What?”

He handed me a tub of face paint and shouted again. “Take off your fucking clothes now! Put on the paint!”

“I’m not taking off my clothes, Joey. You can shoot me now.”

“Whatever, bitch, I don’t want to see you naked anyway. Put the fucking paint on.”

I wanted to stay alive as long as possible, so I did as he said. I opened the jar and smeared the paint over my face.

“Joey, this is a really bad idea,” I said, when I was done.

“Shut up.”

He pushed me forward down the hallway. Without the light of the usually lit torches on the wall, I could barely see.

“You won’t get away with this. I’m a cop.”

“I just heard you say you quit, you fucking liar.”

“You were listening to us?” I asked, stopping in my tracks and facing him. He pushed me forward again, refusing to look at me.

“Of course, I was. Are you a fucking idiot? I know everything that goes on there. I have the whole place wired.”

“Why?” We entered the main room, the caged bed looming in front of us, dark and uninviting in the empty room. It was so much different with lights, people, and chanting. Now, it was scary and cold. And dead.

“Because I have to. West keeps so much from me. I don’t know why he does that. I only want what’s best for him. He makes me do this shit.” Joey’s voice cracked in the darkness.

“What else does he make you do?” My head spun.

“Fucking all of it! He wants me to do everything, but then pretends he doesn’t. He says he doesn’t want me to get his lunch, but then he gets mad when I don’t. He gives me a list of things to do, then forgets half of it. He doesn’t know what’s good for him. He sabotages himself constantly, and doesn’t even realize it. If he didn’t have me, his career would be ruined.”

“Why?” I had no clue what was going on, but I knew I needed to keep him talking.

“Because all those women would have ruined him. They weren’t good for him. Not like I am. He would never admit it out loud, but he knows I’m what he needs. It all came out one night a year ago, but he doesn’t remember. That’s okay, because I remember.”

“What came out?”

“West’s true feelings for me!” he insisted, tears flowing down his face now. “He was drunk. That’s how I know he really meant it. He hides his feelings when he’s sober. He knows he would never be accepted as a gay man in Hollywood, not with his reputation.”

“You think West is gay?”

“He kissed me! Well, he let me kiss him, rather.”

“You kissed him while he was drunk, and you think that makes him gay?”

I hadn’t even thought for a second that Joey might be the killer, but now?

He was frantic and wild, and he'd clearly snapped. The hair stood up on the back of my neck as I realized just how much danger I was in.

And with West handcuffed to his desk upstairs, nobody else even knew I was down here.

“Did you kill those women, Joey? The actresses?”

He scoffed, shaking his head. “What does it matter to you now? You gave up, didn't you? You were supposed to come here and solve the murders and what did you do? You just became one of them! Just another slut trying to get into West's bed.”

“It's not like that,” I said. “We love each other.”

“Yeah, I heard your sickly sweet words to each other. You barely know each other. That's not love. I don't know what it is. Lust? Either way, it's stupid and shallow. It's nothing like what West and I have. We're connected, on a spiritual level. We're fucking soulmates, Kaylee, have you ever had one of those? I know what he wants before he knows himself. I can anticipate his every need.”

“I think West needs to be set free right now.”

His hand sliced through the air. The gun hit me square on my cheekbone and the force of it sent me crashing to the floor.

“Don't fucking tell me what West needs, you dumb bitch!” He towered over me, pointing the gun straight at my head now.

“Joey, please,” I whispered, putting a hand to my cheek. I could feel it swelling already, hot and throbbing.

“I don't even know why he likes you, I did everything to make him see that you were wrong for him, but he wouldn't listen. He's an idiot. But he'll see soon enough. I'm going to convince him that it's me he loves. I can make him happy.”

“By killing everyone he cares about?” I tried to sit up.

“By doing what's necessary. That's what I do. I fucking get things done.”

I nodded, moving my hand to the top of my boot. I'd carried my personal

weapon with me today, knowing anything could happen once Danika outed me on television. I'd never been more glad to be prepared in my life. Joey was frantic and unhinged. I only needed him to take his eyes off of me for a few seconds for me to pull it out.

Unfortunately, his focus was squarely on me.

"You know what's necessary now, Kaylee?" he asked, the gun pointed straight at my face.

"What?"

"You need to die. Just like the others. Once you're gone, the problem is solved. It's quite striking how simple it is."

"There's nothing simple about what you've done, Joey. You're going to jail."

He laughed, shaking his head. "I don't think so. Look how far I've gotten already. Nobody's figured it out, why would they figure it out now?"

"Are you going to kill West, too? Because now he knows."

"He'll see things my way eventually. Get up and get on the bed."

"Joey..."

"Now, bitch!" He put the gun right against my forehead. I got up and headed into the cage, my heart pounding violently in my chest.

"Sit down," he commanded. I sat on the edge of the bed, my fingers inching down to the top of my boot. He was about to follow me in when the sound of the heavy door slamming echoed through the temple. He looked over his shoulder and quickly closed the door to the cage, locking me in, and putting the key in his pocket.

"Joey! Let me out!"

He ignored me and headed towards the front hallway. I took the opportunity to pull out my gun and hide it behind my back.

The sound of footsteps echoed through the air, drowning out the sound of my pulse pounding in my veins.

When West, Theo, and Rian burst into the room, I let out a sigh of relief.

But Joey tensed up, raising his hand and pointing the gun at them.

“Don’t fucking move!” he cried out.

“Joey, put the fucking gun down!” West said, as they all came to a halt in front of him. West’s eyes darted to mine just briefly. I wanted to tell him I had a gun. I wanted to tell him I was safe. I wanted to tell him I was sorry.

I should have figured out Joey was behind all this shit from the beginning.

I’d failed us all.

“Joey, what’s going on, man? Why are you doing this?” West asked, lowering his voice to a gentle tone. He stepped in front of Rian and Theo, facing Joey directly. I watched the gun between them, Joey’s trembling finger lingering close to the trigger.

“You know why!” Joey hissed, his face crumbling.

“Tell me,” West said.

“Because I fucking love you, West! I’ve given you everything!” he exploded in a burst of emotion.

“Joey, I’m sorry. You know I value you as an employee. But I’m not gay.”

“You kissed me!”

West’s eyes widened. He shook his head. “I don’t know what you’re talking about, Joey. I didn’t kiss you.”

“Yes, you did!” he insisted, sniffing. “In the hotel in San Francisco when we were there for the film festival. I knew you didn’t remember the next morning, but West, if you just give me a chance, I can show you how right it can be.”

“Joey, I’m sorry. That’s never going to happen. Please put down the gun, you’re scaring me.”

“Scaring you? What about me?” he cried out like he’d been hurt. “I gave you everything, West! All of me, all my time, all my focus, all my energy. What did you give me in return?”

“A hefty salary,” West replied.

Which only pissed Joey off. He pressed the gun into West’s chest and I held my breath. If I shot him now, he could shoot West in return. Or worse, I might hit West by mistake.

I caught Theo’s eye and flashed him my gun. If he could somehow get Joey away from West, I’d have a clear shot.

He gave me a slight nod and took a step towards West and Joey. Joey turned to him, pointing the gun his way.

“Don’t fucking move, Theo!”

“Look man, it doesn’t have to go down like this,” Theo said, holding up his hands and taking another step forward. “Just put the gun down.”

“Don’t fucking tell me what to —.”

West pushed Joey to the ground and pounced on him as he fell. The gun was still in Joey’s hand and they wrestled each other, rolling around and around. I had my gun out, ready to shoot, but I still wasn’t able to get a clear shot.

Joey squirmed around, getting on top of West and pointing the gun right in his face, causing Theo and Rian to freeze and stop trying to pull him off.

“Don’t make me fucking shoot him!” Joey cried out, his face red with angry tears.

He sat up, straddling West, providing me the clearest shot I’d had yet.

I squeezed the trigger, the sound of the bullet exploding from the chamber echoing through the temple with a deafening roar.

Chapter Forty-Four

WEST

Joey's body collapsed on top of me. I pushed him off quickly and jumped to my feet.

"Holy fuck!" Theo shouted.

I stood over Joey, looking down in shock. My eyes darted over to Kaylee, standing in the cage, her face smeared in white paint. Tears streaked down her face. A smoking gun hung from her hand at her side.

"Kaylee!" I shouted, running over to her and unlocking the cage. I pulled her into my arms and she melted into me. "Are you okay, baby?"

"Yes," she whispered. I kissed her hard and pulled her close, unable to let her go. I looked over her shoulder, watching as Rian checked Joey's body for a pulse. He looked over at me and shook his head.

"He's dead."

"Fuck," Kaylee whispered. "Fuck..."

I held her tighter against my chest. How the fuck had all of this happened? My head was spinning.

"What the fuck do we do now?" Rian hissed. "The cops will be all over us — we're in the fucking temple, man. Nobody can know about this place."

"It's too late. Kaylee's a cop," Theo said.

"Not anymore, she isn't," I replied.

They looked at me with disbelief. I had no clue what to do, either.

“We gotta move him upstairs, at the very least,” Rian said. “Otherwise, we’re gonna have a whole lot of questions thrown our way.”

Kaylee lifted her head and nodded.

“He’s right,” she said, staring up at me.

“Let’s move him to Profane,” Theo suggested.

I looked at Kaylee and she nodded again. “That’s a good idea. I’ll help you stage the scene and then we’ll call the police.”

“Oh, thank fucking god,” Rian said, running a hand through his hair and heading upstairs. “I’ll go get a tarp.”

“Rian?” Kaylee called out.

“Yeah?”

“Turn off the fucking cameras first,” she said.

He nodded and disappeared.

An hour later, the three of us closed the heavy door to Profane and made one more quick trip to the door of the temple, pulling the heavy outer door closed to make it look like it never opened at all.

Chapter Forty-Five

KAYLEE

Another hour later, and the place was crawling with cops. Our story was that we'd found Joey inside Profane, his face smeared with white paint and a confession typed up on the notes app on his phone.

Everything was neatly tied up. With the killer off the streets, the case was now over. Hoskins and the Lieutenant were patting me on the back like I'd never left the force.

I wasn't about to go back though. I had no interest in that.

"Good job," Hoskins said, reluctantly. I knew he was only giving me credit because our boss was standing there. "You'll surely get promoted now."

"I don't think so," I said, shaking my head. "I quit. I'm done. I'm going into private practice. This job isn't for me, I'm sorry — I thought it was, but I was wrong."

They looked at me in surprise.

"You're a damned good cop, Kaylee. You sure about this? Anything I can say to change your mind?"

"No," I said, as West walked up and put his arm around me. "You can send my last paycheck to my house."

And with that, I lifted my chin and looked up at West, smiling up at him,

his face a comforting beacon of safety.

He kissed me gently, then pulled away, looking in my eyes lovingly.

“I love you, Kaylee,” he said. Everyone heard him, the Lieutenant, Hoskins, Theo, and Rian nearby. He didn’t care and it was evident on his face that he was in fact, proud of that fact.

He kissed me again, and I melted into him, incredibly grateful this entire chapter was behind us.

Chapter Forty-Six

WEST

My heart swelled with pride as I sank my cock into Kaylee's quivering pussy, the chanting of the others rising around us.

Weeks had passed since Joey's death, and we'd spent the time getting to know each other all over again.

Kaylee told me about her sister, about her decision to change the entire course of her life to avenge her death. My heart broke for her. She'd gone through so much and her strength radiated from the very center of her soul.

I'd fallen in love with her all over again.

Now that I'd had the opportunity to figure out what about her was real and what wasn't, I was beyond thrilled to discover that her desire for the darkness of the temple was as strong as ever.

In fact, she'd asked for this night herself. I was so happy to set it up for her.

I drove into her, deep and hard, relishing in the heat of her spasming center gripping me tightly as she came over and over. She was in rare form tonight, unleashed and uninhibited. I had her spread out and tied up on the bed, just as she requested — completely at my mercy.

As we picked up speed, my hard cock slamming into her faster and faster, the others moved forward, surrounding us and laying their hands on Kaylee's quivering, helpless body.

Her eyes held my gaze as I exploded inside of her, the passion between us crashing into a roaring crescendo, the dozens of hands sliding over our skin sending us into the eye of a frenzied storm of delicious darkness. Our pleasure an eternal offering to the god of Acheron.

Chapter Forty-Seven

KAYLEE

West was an absolute dream.

He treated me like a queen. A very desired queen.

The fact that he couldn't keep his hands off of me obliterated any self-consciousness I'd possessed before. He left me feeling like the most beautiful woman in the world. I had never been more grateful for anything in my entire life.

He never left me guessing, never let me think for one second that he wasn't serious about me.

His hands, his mouth, his cock — his pure heart — it was a dream come true.

A month after Joey's death, I moved into the cabin in Big Sur with him. We'd been glued to each other the whole time anyway, so it seemed like the most natural thing to do.

I wanted to experience everything by his side.

That meant everything that happened at Profane, too. We'd kept the temple locked up tight for the time being, leaving all the secrets of that place behind. In the meantime, we were having a blast playing at Profane together.

I'd submitted to things I'd never imagined. I'd learned just how far I could push my boundaries. West was patient and kind and applied just the right kind of pressure at just the right times, leaving me breathless and in awe

at the way he handled my body.

His instincts were excellent.

He'd managed to figure out how to draw every ounce of pleasure from my body, coaxing out the deepest parts of my sexuality, tapping into the darkest of my desires.

Tonight, we were planning on partying at the Hush Hush Club with Violet, Everleigh, Rian, and Theo. We'd been holed up in the cabin for weeks, and they'd all been complaining about not seeing us anymore.

As we reached the front door, West stopped me. "Kaylee, wait."

I looked at him curiously, smiling up at this beautiful man that made me feel so amazing. Every time I looked at him, I felt blessed. I still couldn't believe this was my life.

"What's up?" I asked.

I searched his eyes, drowning in the love I saw there.

When he sank to a knee, I thought he'd fallen or tripped. But then he dug into his jeans pocket and opened a box, showing me a humongous sparkling sapphire ring. My mouth fell open and I was pretty sure I squealed.

"Kaylee, I know things started out rocky, but being with you has been nothing but right, every single day. You bring the purest joy to my life. I want to spend the rest of my days giving it right back to you. Will you please marry me?"

"West," I whispered, my heart swelling with euphoria. "Yes, of course! Yes!"

The smile that spread across his face could have lit up the sky. He pulled the ring from the box and slid it on my finger — a perfect fit — just like the beautiful man in front of me.

He pulled me into my arms and swept me off my feet, spinning me around and around in circles.

The door of the club burst open and our friends erupted into cheers, clearly in on the secret. They led us inside, and I saw they'd set up an entire

engagement party for us. The club was decked out with silver and black art-deco themed decorations, a DJ in the corner, and a full buffet set out for us.

“You did all this?” I asked West.

“Not without the help of Violet and Everleigh,” he admitted.

They giggled next to me and I jabbed at them with my elbow. “I can’t believe you hid this from me!”

“It wasn’t easy,” Violet said, throwing her arms around my neck. “You’re gonna be so fucking happy. I’m so jealous.”

“You’ll find your Prince Charming someday.”

“Meh,” she shrugged. “I’m eyeing those three hot waiters over there.”

I rolled my eyes and shook my head. “You’re insatiable.”

“I am,” she winked. “Be right back.”

She headed their way and I couldn’t help but laugh.

Some things never changed.

West took my hand, walking me onto the dance floor and pulling me into his arms.

“You said yes,” he whispered in my ear, holding me close.

“I did,” I said, nodding, tears springing to my eyes.

“Thank you,” he whispered, his hands caressing my back.

“West,” I stared up at him, hoping he could see the truth shining in my eyes. “I’d say yes to you a million times.”

When he kissed me, it felt like he was planting flowers in my soul, our future laid out in front of us like a beautiful garden that we’d grow together, with equal parts water, dirt, sunshine...and darkness.

Because we all need both the darkness and the light to bloom.

Chapter Forty-Eight

EVERLEIGH

Watching West and Kaylee dance made me green with envy. Don't get me wrong, I was happy for them. He was my brother, after all. Of course I wanted him to be as happy as he could be. And I loved Kaylee. I had no doubt their future would be filled with happiness.

I just wanted that for myself.

I'd dated lots of guys the last few years — some famous and some not — and I'd still never found the right fit.

My eyes wandered around the room and landed on Theo, just like they always did.

That man drove me absolutely crazy.

When he glanced over my way, I looked away quickly. Which was a perfect metaphor for our relationship.

There was a lot of history between us. Some of it darker than others.

My relationship with Theo was this constant back and forth. Pushing and pulling, the two of us never able to meet in the middle.

I'd have given up long ago but he was like a fucking drug.

I had no idea what to do about it. As often as I pulled away, I found myself seeking out his attention.

There were times I was convinced he hated me. That lasted for a long

time.

But then, years ago, during a particularly heated argument where a lot more was said than just in words, I kissed him out of the blue. I was still a kid, not even eighteen yet.

I fully expected him to push me away. And he did — but not before kissing me back. The intensity of his kiss matched the pent up passion and desire I'd been holding back.

I was shocked. I'd wanted him secretly for years, but knew it was useless. I was way too young to want a guy like him. He was way too old for me. He was my older brother's friend, too, and off-limits for both reasons.

And yet, still, the passion behind that kiss was undeniable.

I'd never forgotten it. It was clear he hadn't either, because the tension between us bloomed to unbearable levels over the years. So much so that it was almost impossible for us to be in the same room together.

His words to me had lingered in my mind for almost a decade. Once he'd pushed me off, he looked at me like I'd bitten him.

“Try again when you're older, kid...”

Of course, I didn't try again. I'd pretended to hate him after that, giving him the cold shoulder each time I saw him. I knew it made him uncomfortable, but he never said a word about the kiss, and neither did I.

The chemistry between us now that we were older told me that the silence likely wouldn't last much longer.

I found a seat in the corner and scrolled through my phone, forcing myself not to look Theo's direction.

I checked my text messages and saw a number I didn't recognize. I pulled up the message and my blood went cold.

I know your secret, Everleigh. And I'm willing to keep it...for a price.

What the fuck? My fingers trembled as I hit reply.

Who is this?

My head spun as I waited for a reply. I had a lot of fucking secrets. Some worse than others. Some were harmless, but others?

Not so much.

One, in particular, could destroy everything I'd built.

My eyes landed on Theo again, my heart racing as images of the past flashed in my head, the biggest secret of all ripping through all the walls I'd put up in my head in order to forget it.

When I saw the reply, I knew the worst of my fears had come true. The very thing I'd buried the deepest had finally come back to haunt me. I stared at the message with complete disbelief and dread.

It was just seven words.

But it was everything I feared. It was the worst secret of all....

I know what happened in Laurel Canyon.

TO BE CONTINUED.....

Chapter Forty-Nine

WANT MORE?

Is that the sound of wedding bells that I hear? I think so! I've written an extended epilogue about West's proposal to Kaylee just for you!
[Get it here by signing up for my mailing list.](#)

Chapter Fifty

COMING SOON

West and Kaylee might have found their happily ever after. But Theo and Everleigh's story is next... and it is *explosively* hot. Their story entails:

- her older brother's best friend
- good girl/bad boy
- descent into darkness
- spice and kink
- spanking
- blackmail
- a secret buried in the backyard
- she's America's sweetheart
- "you're such a spoiled brat"
- he's the only man she's ever been in love with

GET THE PRE ORDER RIGHT HERE!

When I first laid eyes on my older brother's best friend Theo, I committed a deadly sin. I knew lust for the very first time in my young life and pined for

him the way little girls do.

Years later, Theo saved me from danger by committing a second deadly sin. Theo swore me to secrecy as we buried the evidence.

I was never to speak of his heroism again.

Years later, Theo was still in my brother's life. He still watched me with shadowed eyes. I wondered if he knew that I still loved him.

Theo saw how I'd grown into my shapely, curvy figure. He saw how I'd blossomed into a woman.

Still, he told me that I was nothing but a spoiled brat.

I had no idea just how depraved Theo actually was... until I stepped into the shadow. I teased him enough times that the dam broke. Now he was leading me down a sinful and decadent path into corruption.

But our shared secret couldn't stay buried. And now I am owned by secrets long buried that may threaten my very life.

About Vivian Wood



Vivian likes to write about troubled, deeply flawed alpha males and the fiery, kick-ass women who bring them to their knees.

Vivian's lasting motto in romance is a quote from a favorite song: "Soulmates never die."

Be sure to [join her email list](#) to keep up with all the awesome giveaways, author videos, ARC opportunities, and more!

VIVIAN'S WORKS

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THE FAKE FIANCÉ PROPOSITION

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FORBIDDEN BILLIONAIRE ROMANTIC SUSPENSE

[SUCH A GOOD GIRL](#)

SUCH A SPOILED BRAT

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About Honey Palomino



Honey Palomino lives amongst the breathtaking beauty of the Pacific Northwest.

She's best known for her Gods of Chaos Motorcycle Club Series. The heroes of the Gods of Chaos MC series aren't your usual bikers — they're loyal and strong and protective — but the real stars of the series are the fierce heroines that overcome tragedy and trauma to emerge as victorious survivors!

Most days, she can be found meandering through the forest and dreaming of twisty new plots to entice her readers with.

