“Wow, what a roller coaster ride! Naughton nails her debut with a hot hero, a sassy heroine and a plot with more twists than a pretzel! Well done!”

—Karin Tabke, author of *Jaded*
“You couldn’t stop what happened that night any more than I could.” Rafe trailed a finger down the long, sexy line of her neck. “Then or now.”

“I don’t get involved with people I’m working with, Slick.”

Lisa’s skin was soft, like silk beneath his palms. He wanted to taste that delectable neck, work his way down her body, savor every square inch of her. “I hate to break this to you, querida, but I think we’re already involved.”

She stiffened. Then turned and looked up, those emeralds shifting from soft green pools to rock-hard stones in the length of time it took for his words to register. But lurking just behind the shield, he saw the desire brewing deep inside. She wanted him, dammit. She couldn’t hide it any more than he could. She was just a lot better at fighting it.

“We’re partners now, Sullivan. You made that choice all on your own. And I have strict rules about colleagues. Those rules don’t bend for anyone. Especially you.”

He braced his hands on the counter, trapping her between his body and the cupboards as he leaned closer. She tensed. That heady scent of hers made the blood rush to his head.

“Never?” He knew that was a lie. His lips curled as his gaze ran over her face and hovered on that oh-so-scruptious mouth. God, he wanted her. She was teetering on the edge, despite all her sanctimonious words and ideas. One brush of his lips and he could rock her right to her knees. One taste and she could take him with her.
For Dan, because he always believed.

*Babe, you get all the credit for making me think like a guy.*
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The floor was still at least twenty feet below her.

Surrounded by utter blackness, Lisa Maxwell tipped her head so the cone light from her helmet could slide over the interior of the cave. Then wondered what the heck she’d gotten herself into.

“You okay down there?”

The man’s voice echoing from above drew her back to reality, and she shook off strange feelings of self-doubt as she continued her descent into darkness. Her hand slid down the rope as she let out slack inch by inch. When her boots hit the slippery rocks at the bottom, she unhooked the rope from her harness and stepped back.

“Off belay,” she called.

“Belay off,” the voice yelled back.

She rested her hands on her hips and drew a breath of damp air. Mildew and the rich scent of earth filled her nostrils.

The ray from her carbide lantern bounced off thin, pointed stalactites hanging from the ceiling, orange and red sediments swirling through the fragile structures. Scattered throughout the room, large columns covered in white residue flowed from floor to ceiling, and everywhere, dripping water echoed through the vast dark space.

A shiver raced down her spine, so she pulled up the zipper on her coveralls. It might be nine million degrees outside in the Jamaican sun, but underneath all this limestone rock, it was downright cold.

Metal scraped against rock above, and she glanced up while her brawny guide descended the rope and dropped to the floor next to her. He unhooked his harness, letting the rope hang from the small hole in the ceiling they’d just come through.

“This room is bigger than the maps indicate.” His thick Jamaican accent hung in the air.

As she turned to get a better look, her light swept over the darkness, landing on a translucent structure suspended from the ceiling. Though she’d have liked to spend more time examining that drapery, there were more pressing issues at hand. She gestured to the left. “You start over there, Simeon. I’ll look to the right. Be sure to note any tunnels or passageways.”

“Ay, mon.”

He disappeared into the darkness, his light bouncing off structures he passed, his feet shuffling along the rock floor. Lisa began her own in-depth search while he worked. As she moved, she checked her watch periodically, calculating how long they’d been below the surface, as was her habit whenever she was caving.

Simeon wasn’t one for talking, and today she was thankful for the quiet. She skirted a small rimstone pool filled with murky water, picked her way around columns, careful not to touch any in the process. A gypsum flower jutted out of the wall, the presence of the curling, rosette-shaped calcium-sulfite structure indicating this cave was more stable than she’d thought. The knowledge calmed her.

“Anything?” she asked after they’d been searching nearly fifteen minutes.

“A couple small tunnels. None big enough for a man.”

Damn. She wasn’t going to get discouraged yet. They’d only been in this cavern a few hours. There were lots of rooms left to check.

She resumed her search. When she reached the far side of the room, she glanced up and a stream of light from her helmet spilled over the cave. The undulating drapery now hung above her, the banded structure blocking her view of the opposite wall.

She needed a wider perspective. Without looking behind her, she took a step back. A loud crack resounded through the quiet, followed by the rush of flowing water. Lisa lost her balance, and her arms flew out to the side to steady herself, but it was already too late. She managed one shrill scream before the floor dropped out from under her.

“Dr. Maxwell!”

Brisk air whooshed around her as she plummeted with the falling rock into a tunnel below. She hit the ground with a thud. Her light went out when her helmet cracked against the rocks. Pain ricocheted through her torso just as a surge of icy water washed over her body, pulling her through the darkness.

Instinct took over before she could panic. She kicked frantic legs, gasped for air and lashed out with her
hands to grab on to something to slow her descent. Her fingers slipped on the slick rocks as she made useless attempts to stop herself.

The rush of water yanked her over sharp rocks and cave formations. Jagged points stabbed into her back, sliced up her hands and arms. She fought the fear, tried to keep her wits as her body was bruised and beaten. If she could just get one good grip, grab on to one solid rock…

Then the tunnel took a steep drop. A blast of cold air hissed over her, and a terror-filled scream tore from her chest as she fell feet first into the blackness below.

Her boots hit a pool of frigid water. She plunged beneath the surface, wrenched down by the sheer force of gravity. The muscles in her chest constricted while her lungs burned at the lack of oxygen. Kicking as hard as she could, she tried to swim up, but her senses were so disoriented in the darkness, she had no idea if she was heading in the right direction.

Just when she was sure she was going to drown, she broke the surface, gasped and pulled damp air into her blazing lungs. Heart thundering, she tried to slow her breathing. Long minutes passed before she opened her eyes and peered into the darkness.

She couldn’t see a thing. The new room she’d tumbled into was pitch-black, the only sound the fall of water somewhere to her left.

Maybe caving in Jamaica hadn’t been the brightest idea after all.

With unsteady hands, she flipped on her helmet light, praying the whole time that it wasn’t damaged. Her fingers passed over dents in the metal cap, and her breath caught at the realization that without the safety gear, she’d probably be dead now.

As that lovely thought settled in, her light flickered on, and she heaved out a long sigh of relief. Not dead. Not yet anyway. She looked up and took survey of the new room.

The ceiling was at least thirty feet above, the pool surrounding her wide and vast, reflecting stalactites hanging down from above. Large columns and stalagmites jutted out of the cold liquid. A waterfall spilled from a hole in the wall at least twenty feet up and to her left.

She swallowed hard. Had she landed on one of those stalagmites, she’d have knocked herself out, drowned before Simeon figured out where she’d gone.

Don’t think about that now.

Shaking the fog from her head, she swam toward the edge of the pool and hauled herself out of the water, then sucked in a breath and shivered in the cool air.

In the fourteen years she’d been an archaeologist, she’d encountered her fair share of tight scrapes in the field—a mudslide in a trench in Asia when a wall of sediment had caved in after a torrential downpour, a rockslide in Peru that had seriously tested her resolve and almost taken her life, and an underwater accident that had made her wonder why she’d taken up scuba diving in the first place. But in each instance, she’d gotten back up and kept going, because that’s what she did. She was a woman proving herself in a male-dominated profession, and she was doing it pretty damn well.

And after all that, there was no way she was letting one measly cave in Jamaica do her in. Especially not on her vacation.

She stood on sore, achy legs, tried not to think about the throbbing cuts on her arms and back or the fact hypothermia would set in if she didn’t get out soon. What mattered most was figuring out how the heck she was going to get back up to the top of that waterfall. If she was lucky, Simeon was somewhere up there looking for her.

If, that is, she was paying him enough to stick around and haul her ass out of this dark pit.

“Dr. Maxwell!”

Simeon’s muffled voice echoed from somewhere above. Lisa was sure she’d never been as happy to hear another voice in all her life.

“Down here!”

“Thank God.” His deep voice bounced off rock and limestone. Lisa glanced toward the waterfall just as Simeon’s tense face came into view. He propped dark arms against the wall of the tunnel, kept his feet shoulder-width apart to keep from slipping. “You alright?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. It’s a big drop. Be careful.”

“I be right down. Sit tight.”

He secured the rope, braced his feet on the wall of the cave and slowly lowered himself into the room. When he was five feet above the water, he kicked his legs to get a good swing in the harness and propelled himself to the ledge of the pool. He dropped onto the flat rocks, unhooked the harness and looped the rope around a nearby stalagmite.
Lisa resisted the urge to lecture him about not touching the structures. Playing teacher wasn’t going to save her life. Instead she shifted unsteady legs forward and wove around stalagmites as she made her way to join him.

“You hurt?” he asked.

More than she was willing to admit, but there was no way she’d let that stop her. “No. I’m fine. Just knocked the wind out of me, that’s all.”

He didn’t look convinced. “I think we done for the day. You freeze in here if we don’t get you out.”

Disappointment flowed through her. He was right, but she hadn’t found what she’d come for. “Since we’re already here, let’s do a quick sweep of this room first, then we’ll go.”

“I don’t think that a good idea.”

“Why not?”

He nodded toward his left and shone his light between a massive column and a broken stalagmite. “Last guy not fare well.”

Lisa’s gaze followed, and her adrenaline spiked first with fear, then with intrigue, as her light illuminated the human remains Simeon had already spotted.

Carefully, she stepped across the slippery rocks and knelt by the remains. The skeleton was leaning against a massive rock formation, pieces of tattered fabric stuck to its bones. Leather boots still covered the feet, and a large knapsack was near the right hand.

“He’s been here a while.” She fought the excitement, tried to think rationally. This was probably nothing more than an unlucky caver. But something in her gut said it might be more.

Simeon crouched next to her on the rocks, a wary look in his eye. “Bad spirits in this cave.” He glanced around. “Not good to disturb the dead.”

Barely hearing him, she lifted the front pouch of the sack and extracted a worn wallet. She opened the leather folder. “Donald Ramsey. Born in 1946. ID reissued in 1982.”

Simeon glanced at the license in her hand. “He been down here close to twenty years.”

“That’d be my guess.” She looked up and around again. “If he was caving alone and tumbled in here like I did, he never could have gotten out.”

And that was the reason a sane person never went caving alone.

Lisa pawed through the front pouch some more and pulled out a worn map and a few sheets of yellow paper. “Looks like the guy was a treasure hunter.” She showed Simeon the frayed map. “There’s even an X on that one.”

A smile twisted Simeon’s dark face. “X marks the spot.”

“Yeah, right,” she said with a slight grin. “Only in Hollywood.”

But her smile faded as she took a closer look at the aged papers. They detailed the location of a sunken Spanish galleon off the coast of Jamaica.

Her heart thumped against her ribs.

Fingers shaking, she opened the top pouch of the pack and peered inside. And her pulse beat frantically as she drew out a rectangular piece of marble roughly nine inches tall by twelve inches wide. When she turned it, the relief on the opposite side came into view, and she drew in a sharp breath.

The marble depicted a woman dressed in a Greek toga. Her arms were crossed over her chest and her gaze was fixed down toward her feet. Small wings jutted out from beneath the robe, her bent knee indicating her weight was perched on one foot. Snakes encircled her head like a wreath.

“Holy Mother o’God,” Simeon mumbled, looking toward the relief.

The cold of the cave slipped to the back of Lisa’s mind. “Trust me, this isn’t the Virgin Mary.”

She turned the relief in her hands, ran her fingers along the smooth back. The number one was carved into the bottom right side.

“It looks like there are cutouts on the side,” Simeon said. “Like it fits together with another piece.”

Perspiration tickled Lisa’s skin in the damp air, and she swallowed. Six trips to the Jamaican caves over the past fifteen years, and she’d never found a single trace of the Greek goddess now in front of her. And today she’d simply stumbled across it when the floor had caved beneath her.

“Two other pieces,” she said quietly. “It’s one of three.”

“That? Where are the other two?”

Definitely not here.

Ignoring the question, Lisa shrugged out of her pack, extracted a thick piece of black fabric and wrapped it carefully around the relief. She slid the marble inside, latched the flap and stood as she slung the knapsack onto
her shoulder. “It’s time to go.”

Wide-eyed, Simeon rose. He didn’t question her, simply let her step past him and move toward the rope. She was paying him enough to keep quiet about their little excursion and not ask questions, and he knew that.

With the pack secured to her back, she strapped on the harness and started her ascent to the top of the waterfall. Simeon controlled the rope from the bottom. At the top, she waited while he scaled the wall of water, the pack heavy on her back. Heavier than one small marble relief should feel.

She pushed aside the thought as they silently made their way back through the cascade of water, careful to keep their feet wide to avoid slipping. Twice Lisa lost her balance, and the strong Jamaican stopped her from sliding back down the tunnel.

Okay, so he’d more than earned his pay. She’d have to give him a nice tip and a good recommendation.

When they reached the spot where the floor had given out beneath her, Simeon’s hand covered her arm. Lisa flashed him an annoyed look, but paused when he held a finger to his lips. “Shh.” He lifted his hand and flipped off his lantern. Hearing movement above, Lisa did the same.

Voices echoed from the vast room—thick Jamaican Creole she couldn’t understand, followed by a softer voice speaking English. She strained to listen, could barely hear the tones, but couldn’t make out any of the words.

With a firm hand, Simeon pressed her back against the wall of the tunnel. “No sound,” he whispered.


Crap, they’d found the Jeep parked outside in the brush. She thought they’d hidden it well enough to avoid a run-in.

Simeon tugged her back down the wet tunnel. For once, she didn’t argue and try to take control. He pushed her into a small tunnel to her right. She dropped to her hands and knees. The pack hit the roof of the cave, and she paused, wiggling out of the straps. Rolling to her side, she shoved the pack in front of her and slithered through the tunnel. Without light, she had absolutely no clue if the tunnel was getting bigger or smaller, or even where the heck they were headed.

Simeon’s breathing at her back was all she could hear. That and the pounding of her heart echoing through her head.

The tunnel took a sharp right turn, and Lisa curved her body to mold to the space. The walls closed in tighter. The oxygen level dropped as the tube grew smaller. Her helmet hit the ceiling, both shoulders brushed the walls, and she stopped, fearing she was at the end of the line.

“Keep going,” Simeon whispered from behind.

“I can’t. It’s too tight.”

“This tunnel goes through. I checked the map before we came down.”

He had to be kidding. No way she was purposely turning into a sardine without seeing the map or tunnel for herself.

“I’m going to turn on my lantern.”

“No!” he whispered sharply. “They still back there. Go.”

Holy crap. She didn’t want to spend the next ten years in a Jamaican clink, or worse, wind up dead. She’d been warned—in no uncertain terms—not to trespass on private property again. And obviously, she hadn’t listened. But then, she didn’t exactly take kindly to unsolicited advice.

Drawing in a deep breath, she peered into the blackness ahead, contemplating her choices. This was the stupidest thing she’d ever done.

Before she could change her mind, she kicked over onto her side, dropped her head against the floor of the tunnel and wriggled deeper into the tube. The walls pressed in on her, front and back. She couldn’t lift her head more than an inch off the ground. With the pack in front of her, she tried to slither through the shrinking space.

The tunnel took a sharp turn to the left. She folded her torso around the corner. This was it. She was going to get stuck in here and die, with the first of the Furies in her grasp.

No way. She wasn’t giving up.

Blowing out all the oxygen in her lungs, she kicked her legs and gave one last thrust into the tunnel. Her chest burned, every muscle ached, and just when she thought she was a goner, the cave widened.

Warm, sweet air filled her lungs. The steadily rising ceiling allowed her enough room to lift her head. Just ahead, the soft flicker of light shone through the darkness.

She suppressed the glee rolling through her and kept moving forward, slithering until the tunnel widened enough so she could push herself up to her hands and knees, then finally stand when the ceiling took a sharp rise.

Hands braced on her thighs, she bent over at the waist and drew in large gulps of musty air. She could hear
Simeon still struggling in the cave. If she’d been stuck, he had to be in serious trouble. The man was at least twice her size.

She crouched in the darkness, calling out to him softly.

“Almost there,” he croaked. Metal scraped against rock, and then she heard him scrambling across the tunnel floor toward her.

Lisa grappled in the darkness and reached out, wrapping her fingers around his thick arms. Mud covered every part of their bodies. She helped him to his feet. His muffled coughing filled the space.

“How the hell did you get through there?” she asked in a whisper. “I barely made it myself.”

White teeth flashed in the darkness as he straightened. “I pray to Olorun to make me small as a snake to slither through the cave. He answer my prayer.”

Lisa frowned and let his answer roll right off her. She wasn’t going to get into a religious debate with him, and there was no way she was touching that one.

She slung the knapsack over her shoulder, turned and headed for the crack of light ahead. “Come on. Let’s get out of here while we can.”

“Your goddess pull you through that tunnel?”

Was he serious? She suppressed a laugh. Sheer female determination had saved her ass, as always. “No.”

“She will,” he said behind her. “You let her, and she’ll pull you to the light.”

Lisa glanced over her shoulder. In the dim light she could just make out his serious expression. “Thanks.”

She shifted forward and kept walking, feeling the need to put as much distance between her and this cave as possible. “But I think I’ve got all the light I need.”

“You think that, but you don’t. You in the dark, Dr. Maxwell. Pitch dark. But things change. You see.”

Her guide had lost some serious oxygen in that tunnel, but he was right about one thing—something had definitely changed. She finally had what she’d been seeking for nearly fifteen years. With a little luck she’d be on her way to the second of the three Furies real soon. And she knew just where to start looking.
CHAPTER TWO

Dr. Lisa Maxwell wasn’t what he’d expected.

Sitting in the back row of the massive auditorium, Rafe Sullivan adjusted his nonprescription glasses, shifted in the uncomfortable charcoal suit and leaned forward to get a better view of the speaker. The redhead wore a short black skirt and fitted blazer, and kept pointing to a map of ancient Persia. He tried to listen to her words, but that husky siren voice of hers kept throwing him off, and those sinful legs were the biggest distraction God had ever created.

No way this woman spent her life digging in the dirt, searching for artifacts worth less than the Rolex on his wrist. Though he did enjoy the image of that lean body coated in mud as she wrestled for a broken scrap of history only a handful of nerds could possibly be interested in.

Rafe hooked his thumbs in his belt loops, leaned back in his seat. He didn’t give a rat’s ass what the woman was jabbering about, but he needed to pay attention if he was going to get close to her once this boring lecture was over. And the only way to do that was to close his eyes so he’d stop fantasizing about seeing her naked.

Just as he was thinking her droning lecture would never end, sharp applause echoed through the hall. He glanced around the emptying auditorium and sat up, stretching his sore back and rolling stiff shoulders.

Showtime.

Briefcase in hand, he wandered up the side aisle past exiting attendees, taking a careful sweep of those left in the auditorium. A few people lingered near the back of the room. Dr. Maxwell stood just in front of the stage near the center aisle, talking with a small group of men and women.


He checked his watch, bit back the impatience. He couldn’t make his move until she was alone, and he wanted to get this over with so he didn’t miss his flight.

A guy with a bad comb-over at Dr. Maxwell’s right kept cutting into the conversation. She flicked him an irritated glance, then angled her body toward the round, middle-aged man to her left. Pudgy seemed to be rattling off a dissertation about the Middle East and barely noticed her uncomfortable stance. Dr. Maxwell feigned interest, but she couldn’t hide her irritation at being trapped between the two men, or the fact she didn’t have any interest in talking with Comb-over, who continued to tap her on the shoulder in an attempt to dominate the conversation. There was no sign of the blonde assistant who’d brought Dr. Maxwell water and anything else she’d requested during her presentation.

Jaw clenching, she brushed Comb-over’s hand away and took a step toward Pudgy. The small circle broke up, and Pudgy handed her a business card, thanked her with an arm-pumping handshake, then turned and walked up the center aisle, leaving Comb-over alone with the sexy doctor. His eyes took on an excited gleam. Hers screamed Get me the hell out of here.

And watching, Rafe knew he’d just been given his in. He stepped forward.

“You discussion of the great city of Susa fascinates me.” Comb-over followed Dr. Maxwell up the steps and onto the stage. “I would very much like to continue the conversation, say, over dinner?” She stopped at the table and busied herself by stacking papers in a box at her left, but the guy didn’t take the hint. “Your insight into Darius the Great’s rebuilding of the city is riveting.”

With her back to Comb-over, Dr. Maxwell rolled her eyes. She darted a quick look around, as if searching for an escape. “That’s a very nice offer, Mr. Menlo, but I simply can’t. I already have…plans.”

A smile crept across Rafe’s face. Definitely his in.

He walked quickly up the steps, his dress shoes clicking across the shiny floor. They both turned his way at the sound.

“Querida, there you are. I thought you said you’d be done an hour ago.” He poured on the Spanish accent, dropped his briefcase at his feet and slipped his arm around Dr. Maxwell’s shoulders.

She looked up with a startled expression.

He pulled her against his chest and slid his other hand around her back. Man, the woman was small. Five-four, if she was lucky, but all muscle underneath. And she smelled like fresh gardenias. That was an unexpected treat.
Her body tensed in his arms. Her hand pressed against his chest, warming the skin under his cotton dress shirt. When her mouth opened in protest, he leaned close to her ear so only she could hear him. “Do you want to get away from this guy?”

She paused, as if thinking through her options, but when Comb-over coughed in annoyance, she gave a small nod.

“Good.” He didn’t hide the smile in his voice. “Then kiss me and make it look good.”

She hesitated a split second.

Comb-over coughed again and shuffled forward as if sensing something wasn’t right. “Dr. Maxwell—”

Hesitation forgotten, she quickly eased closer to Rafe, tipped her head up and rose on her toes to fit her mouth to his.

Rafe’s senses went into high gear when her lips brushed his. Soft and silky. And gone way too fast.

She dropped to her feet and eased out of his arms, but her eyes stayed locked on his. “You’re late.”

A smile curled his mouth. Quick on her feet. He liked that. And damn if those eyes weren’t the most amazing color he’d ever seen. Like emeralds polished to a high gleam.

“I arrived as soon as I could. Are you ready?”

She sent him a measuring gaze, her eyes sweeping from his tortoiseshell glasses down to the suit and tie, hovering on the soft-sided briefcase at his feet. With raised brow, she looked up, a sign of obvious interest, and his blood pulsed. Oh yeah, the accent had definitely pushed her over the edge. 

*Point in your favor, Sullivan.*

“I think I am.”

She turned back to Comb-over, standing with wide eyes and open mouth. It was all she could do not to smile, and the knowledge tickled a nerve in Rafe’s stomach. “Mr. Menlo, thank you for your generous offer. As you can see, I already have plans. However, if there’s anything regarding the lecture you’d like to discuss in more detail, you’re certainly welcome to contact my research assistant at the university. I’ll be sure to get back to you when I return to San Francisco.”

He mumbled something Rafe couldn’t hear.

Her assistant walked across the stage. “I’ll gather the rest of your things and have them sent back to the hotel, Dr. Maxwell.”

“Thanks, Greta.”

Dr. Maxwell’s gaze followed Comb-over as he made his way down the stairs and disappeared up the aisle. When he was out of earshot, she looked back at Rafe. “‘Thank you’ doesn’t quite seem good enough.” She held out her hand. “Lisa Maxwell.”

He brought her delicate fingers to his lips. No rings. No tan lines from missing jewelry. “Helping a damsel in distress is a gentleman’s duty. And the pleasure was all mine, Dr. Maxwell.”

Her expression said *You’re full of shit,* but the slightest blush crept across her cheeks as his lips skimmed her fingers. She pulled her hand back when he lowered it. “It’s Lisa.”

He couldn’t help but smile. This was going to be so much easier than he’d planned. Regardless of profession, women were way too predictable.

“Rafael Garcia. You looked like you needed a quick out there.”

She leaned a hip against the table. “Some men just don’t know how to take a hint.”

She definitely wasn’t sending him the same one. Her gaze traveled the length of his body again before landing on his eyes, and from the interest flaring in those shining emeralds, she obviously liked what she saw.

“Did you attend the lecture, Mr. Garcia?”

“Rafe. Yes, I did. I found it quite interesting. I’m a history professor at the University of Barcelona, and I have a personal interest in Ancient Greece. Your grasp of the Greek influence on Persia was right on.”

She grinned and eased away from the table, lifting her purse and slipping the strap over her shoulder. “Well, now. That’s a relief. I was worried for a moment.”

He didn’t miss the sarcasm. “My apologies. I didn’t mean to imply you’re green.”

She ran fingers through her short red hair. “I’m used to it. An American woman lecturing about archaeology in Europe is often discredited as not having a clue what she’s talking about.”

“Tough profession to be in.”

“You have no idea.” She extended her hand. “It was nice to meet you, Mr. Garcia. And thank you for coming to my rescue.”

He held her silky fingers, not letting her slip away. “You realize that man is probably waiting outside for you. If you leave without me, he will probably try to corner you again.”

She tipped her head. “I’m sure I can handle him. But just out of curiosity, what did you have in mind?”
“How about a drink?”
“So you can pepper me with questions about Ancient Greece and find flaws in my research?”

His lips curled. He had something a little more enjoyable in mind. “No, so I can listen to your husky voice and stare into those gorgeous eyes for an hour before I have to catch my plane.”

She laughed. “Now that’s the most honest answer I’ve heard all day. You know what? I’m suddenly feeling rather thirsty. You’re on, Mr. Garcia.”

That accent was going to do her in.

Lisa lifted her wineglass and glanced over the rim at the man seated across from her. She’d always been a sucker for an accent.

It didn’t hurt he was sexy as hell—an Antonio Banderas lookalike within her grasp. Dark, slicked-back hair with a touch of wave, piercing black eyes, golden skin and the cutest ass she’d ever seen in a pair of slacks. She’d almost asked him to walk ahead of her as they’d strolled through the streets of Milan, just so she could take in the view.

Rafael Garcia sure didn’t look like a boring history professor, but judging from facts he was rattling off about Greek mythology, he knew his stuff. If she were being honest, she’d have to admit she really didn’t care what he was rambling about; she’d been focused solely on the sound of his voice for the last half hour. Forget the Greeks. She could spend a whole day getting lost in that sultry Spanish accent.

Kissing him had been an impulse. She could easily have sidestepped the boring Professor Menlo from England, but she’d been intrigued by Rafe’s boldness. Not just that, but also by his spicy scent and that solid chest suddenly pressed against her. Lord, she was a piece of work. The sad truth was, she’d been buried in research too long, focused on the Furies way more than she should be. She’d neglected her personal life to the point where it was almost nonexistent.

Drinks in the hotel bar had turned into dinner, and if he kept looking at her with that roving gaze, she had a hunch it was going to turn into a helluva lot more. She had a nine A.M. flight she really didn’t want to miss, two hours’ worth of paperwork, a dozen calls to return, and a hotel suite to pack. But at the moment, she didn’t have any desire to get up and leave the table. Part of her figured she deserved a bit of relaxation after the last few crazy weeks. And there was something about this man that made her lose all sense of rational thought.

“So tell me of some of your excursions.” He lifted a spoonful of tiramisu and brought the tempting treat to his lips.

Her gaze followed, and she remembered that full mouth pressed up against hers. Heat shot straight to her belly.

She’d had enough business chitchat to last her a lifetime, and right now she was afraid she just might give in to temptation and crawl across the table to lick the frothy cream from his mouth if he didn’t do it soon himself.

“Do you really want to hear about dark caves and subpar living conditions?”

He wiped his mouth with the napkin. “I thought searching for buried treasure was romantic.”

She couldn’t stop her smile. He’d been teasing her all night, his dry sense of humor enticing her almost as much as his muscular body. “It’s dirty work. And there is no such thing as buried treasure.”

“Well, now. That’s a surprise. I didn’t expect you to be a pessimist, Dr. Maxwell.”

“No, I’m a realist. There’s a big difference.”

He leaned forward, waving a spoonful of the sinful concoction in front of her. “Why don’t you tell me just how dirty it can be?”

She hesitated, then opened her mouth and slowly used her tongue to lap the chocolate cream he’d smeared on her bottom lip. His gaze followed the movement. Her blood warmed at the heat she saw in his eyes. His foot brushed hers under the table, sending a tingle up her leg at the brief contact.

Oh, man. The wine was doing a number on her system. Or maybe it was the candlelight, or that alluring smile of his. She wasn’t sure which. At the moment though, she didn’t care. She had an overwhelming need to feel that hard body pressed up against hers again. While wild, unexpected flings had never been big on her list, the thought of one now wasn’t making her cringe. Unfortunately, some small part of her was still sane enough to know he was a distraction she couldn’t afford. Not right now.

“You missed your plane,” she said, changing the subject.

“There’ll be another.” He grinned. “Sometime.”

The waiter interrupted them. Happy for the distraction, Lisa sat back, wiped her lips with her napkin and listened as Rafe responded in fluent Italian. The waiter nodded, set the bill on the table and walked away.

Lisa reached for the leather folder. Rafe’s hand covered hers before she could lift it. Electricity ran over her
skin. “Please. Let me.”

“That’s nice of you, but you don’t have to.”

“Yes, I do. To thank you for the most enjoyable meal I’ve had in a very long time.”

His dark eyes were filled with desire and boring a hole right into her soul, chipping away at what was left of her resolve. Her stomach quivered under his intense gaze as she contemplated her choices. The promise of passion was as plain as the tiny scar on his chin.

Eyes locked on his, she let go. Before she could change her mind, she rose and slipped the strap of her purse over her shoulder while he paid the bill. When he stood, she ran a hand down his arm and smiled. “Since you already missed your flight, how about a nightcap?”

His lips quirked up, white teeth flashing against tanned skin. “I think that sounds like a delicious idea.”

She felt tiny tremors of heat trickle against tanned skin. “I think that sounds like a delicious idea.”

She felt tiny tremors of heat trickle between her legs. And knew she wasn’t getting any packing done to night.

This wasn’t going the way he’d planned.

He should have slipped the Mickey into her wine at dinner. He should already have been in and out of her room. And he should definitely be on a plane headed east right this very minute.

Instead, Rafe had enjoyed dinner more than he’d anticipated. Dr. Maxwell was quick on her feet, intelligent, and surprisingly, a lot of fun to be around. The more time he spent in the curvy doctor’s company, the longer he wanted to drag out his little charade.

Standing in the elevator next to her, smelling her racy perfume and listening to her raspy voice, his libido went into overdrive. Just how much of a bastard would he be if he let her wrap those shapely legs around his waist and screw him senseless before he got down to business? After all, the woman was sending him every I-wanna-get-fucked sign in the book.

If she kept it up, that’s just what she was going to get. That and a whole lot more.

The elevator pinged, the door opened and she stepped onto the twelfth floor. Swallowing his thoughts, Rafe followed her toward the suite at the end of the hall.

She slipped the key card into the slot and waited for the light to turn green. When it did, she smiled and pushed the door open with her shoulder. “I miss old-fashioned keys.”

So did he.

He followed her into the suite, hating that he had any sort of conscience where she was concerned. Guilt had never been a problem for him, but then he’d never been attracted to his target before.

She dropped the key and her purse on the rectangular table in the entry. Obviously, no one had taught Dr. Maxwell to be cautious.

Another plus in his favor.

Her heels clicked across the marble floor as she crossed to the bar on the other side of the living area. Tall windows looked out at a view of Duomo Square and the twinkling lights of a sleepy city.

He set his briefcase on the floor next to the white curved sofa and watched as she bent to retrieve a bottle of wine from the mahogany sideboard. Muscles flexed in her calves, her ass rounded out beneath the smooth black fabric of her skirt. Arousal seared through him, hot and urgent, as he took in every scrumptious inch of her.

She rose, grabbed two wineglasses from the top of the bar, turned and brought them to the table near the window. “Would you open this?”

He’d like to open a whole lot more. “Sure.”

A smile curled one side of her mouth as he stepped forward, and he felt that wicked flare in his gut again as he got closer. She licked her lips and let out a victorious sigh before taking a step out of his reach.

Her hands slid down to the buttons of her black jacket. She popped the first, trailed her fingers to the next and popped that one as well, revealing a cream-colored camisole with lace trim that teased her rounded cleavage. “While you do that, I’m just going to run to the other room. I’ll be right back.”

She disappeared down the narrow hall before he could stop her.

Alone, Rafe blew out a breath and rubbed both hands over his face. Not good. Ten seconds ago he’d totally forgotten why he was here. If she hadn’t taken a step back, they’d be rolling across the floor right now. One lusty look from her and he was ready to toss the whole assignment away? He never lost sight of the goal.

Shaking his head at his stupidity, he uncorked the wine and poured ruby red liquid into two glasses. He pulled the vial from his jacket pocket and tapped the white powder into one glass before he could change his mind, then used his finger to stir it around. Casting a quick glance toward the bedroom and not seeing her, he lifted the bottle and took a long swallow.
Son of a bitch, get it under control, Sullivan.

After replacing the vial, he removed his jacket and tossed it over the back of a chair while rolling his shoulders and mentally running through the schematics of the suite. He’d studied this hotel inside out over the past week to make sure everything flowed smoothly.

And it would. As long as he kept his pants zipped and his hands to himself.

“That feels so much better.”

He glanced up at the sound of her husky voice. Gone were the black jacket and ice-pick heels. Barefoot and wearing only the slim black skirt and tight-fitting camisole that accentuated her curvy figure, she walked back toward him. Arousal punched through his gut again, shutting down his brain in the process.

“My feet were killing me,” she said.

And she was killing him. His mouth went dry.

She accepted the wine he handed her. “Thank you. What should we drink to?”

A night of mindless sex.

His eyes followed the glass as she lifted it to her lips. For a split second he contemplated knocking it out of her hand, before reality kicked him in the stomach.

“How about to unexpected encounters?” he responded in a voice that was steadier than he’d anticipated.

“To unexpected encounters.” A smile tugged at the corners of her tantalizing mouth as she tapped her glass against his, then took a long swallow.

Hell, there went the marathon sex. Hiding his disappointment, he lifted his own wine and sipped.

Her glass lowered. “So, tell me. Do you make a habit out of stalking visiting professors?”

Only when they had something he really wanted. “No.”

“Hmm.” She sent him a disbelieving look before walking into the living area, where she sat on the plush couch with her wine. He followed and sank next to her. “Are you married, Mr. Garcia?”

He set his glass on the wrought-iron coffee table. “No. You?”

She shook her head and took another long sip. “Girlfriend?”

“Not at the moment.”

“Hmm,” she said again, her gaze traveling the length of his body before returning to settle on his eyes. She set her half-empty glass next to his. “And how about this? Are one-night stands your thing?”

“I don’t have a thing. Are they yours?”

With a smile, she shook her head and leaned forward, slipping the glasses from his face. She folded the stems and put them on the table. “Now that we have all the nice little lies out of the way, why don’t you kiss me like you did before?”

The scent of gardenias wafted over him. “Not like before,” he whispered when she got close.

She slid one delicate hand across his chest, the gentle touch stirring the coals in his gut, making his skin tingle with anticipation. Eyes heavy with desire, she brushed her lips across his, and he drew in a breath at the slight contact, his senses kicking into high gear at the soft and supple feel of her mouth.

Paradise. It was the only thought he had, the only one he could focus on as her lips skimed his. Her tongue licked at the corner of his mouth, coaxing him to open, and those smoldering embers burst to life at the feel of her silky wetness. A need to taste her rushed through him like a wave. His lips parted, searching. Then her wet and teasing tongue dipped inside his mouth, caressing his with soft, demanding strokes.

This definitely wasn’t what he’d anticipated. He was supposed to be the one doing the seducing, not the other way around. For a moment, he wondered if she was taking him for a ride.

Like he cared. Just the heat from her body was enough to make him forget his own name.

Ignoring everything but her and the way she made him feel, he threaded his fingers into her sassy short hair and pulled her mouth tight against his as he explored her lips and tongue and teeth. A soft moan echoed from somewhere deep inside her, and he wrapped his other hand around her waist in response, pulling her against him. Her firm breasts grazed his chest, her hip bumped into his, igniting the flames building in his loins.

So much more than before.

“Me vas a acabar,” he mumbled against her mouth.

She pushed a hand against his shoulder and levered up onto her knees. “I don’t have a clue what you just said, but God, that’s sexy. Keep saying it.”

Her mouth crushed over his again, tongue hot and greedy as it tangled with his. She straddled his hips and settled herself on his lap. His erection pulsed to life when she rocked into him, slipped her hands into his hair and kissed him harder.

Thought slithered out of his grasp. Instinct took over, the desire to feel her skin against his raging like a wildfire.
“¿Cama o sofá?” he asked between kisses, running his hands down her back to find the zipper at her skirt. She tipped her head so he could kiss her neck. “Yes.”

He laughed against the pulse of her throat. “Couch or bed,” he asked again. “Oh. Bed,” she said breathlessly, waving a hand behind her. “Back there. Somewhere.”

He slid the zipper down just as her tongue dipped back into his mouth. The sensation shot a hot rush of blood straight to his groin. With quick movements he pushed them both off the couch. He needed to be inside her, wanted it more than he’d expected.

She undid the buttons on his shirt one by one as she stepped backward toward the bedroom, her sultry mouth continuing to tease and taunt and drive him absolutely mad.

Not five-four. Without her heels she was more like five-two, and damn if that didn’t turn him on more. He wanted that tiny body wrapped around him as fast as possible, wanted to feel those legs lock behind his hips and draw him in.

She pushed the dress shirt off his shoulder. It hit the floor in the hall. He broke the kiss long enough to yank the camisole over her head and drop it behind him. His hands slid into the waistband of her skirt, pushing it down smooth skin and curvy hips to pool at her feet, revealing the lacy low-rise boy shorts underneath. He groaned at the sight, dropped to his knees in front of her and trailed his lips down her flat stomach.

“Ay, querida, eres una maravilla.”

She wove her fingers into his hair and let her head fall back in pleasure. “Oh, my God. You don’t have a clue what that accent does to me.”

Laughing, he kissed his way back up her torso, pausing at those tempting breasts covered in flimsy white lace. Her hands slipped over his shoulders as he rose, and she kissed him again, her wild tongue fanning the flames in his gut to explosive levels. Anxious for more, he wrapped his arms around her waist, lifted her off the floor and carried her into the bedroom.

A canopied bed covered in gold fabrics sat against the far wall. He dropped her on the mattress and climbed over her.

“Hurry, Rafe,” she whispered, reaching for him.

His thought exactly. He braced his hands on each side of her, lowered and claimed her mouth again. Her fingers flicked to his belt buckle, and he groaned at the simple touch, fought back the urge to help her so he could pick up the pace and bury himself inside her before it was too late.

He cupped one hand around her breast, nibbled the sensitive flesh of her ear and licked his way down her throat. Her eyes slid closed and she moaned, arching her hips against his at the same time she dipped her hands beneath the waistband of his slacks.

“Kiss me,” he demanded.

She didn’t move.

“Lisa, kiss me.”

Her silence finally got through to him, and he pushed up on his elbow only to find her eyes were closed, her head tipped to the side. That luscious cleavage rose and fell with her gentle breathing.

“No, no, no. Not yet.”

“Lisa?” He shook her.

Not a single muscle moved anywhere in her body.

“No.” A strangled groan rumbled from deep in his chest as he dropped his head and breathed deep. Ten minutes more and he could have taken them both to paradise before letting her drift to sleep.

More frustrated than he had any right to be, he rolled off her and stared up at the gauzy fabric covering the top of the canopy. He had a massive hard-on that wasn’t going away anytime soon, and the goddess he craved was sound asleep, thanks to him. Somewhere along the way, the woman had managed to send him into a fit of sexual despair unrivaled since his teen years.

He was losing his touch. That had to be the answer. He was getting too old to be doing this. Swallowing hard, he closed his eyes. Good thing this was his last job.

Options ran through his mind. He could lie here and wait until she woke up, but that would likely be hours,
and if he did that, he’d totally blow his cover. He couldn’t take the risk. Too much was riding on this hit.

*Shit.*

Frowning, he pushed himself up to sitting and stared at her. Her lips were flushed and swollen from his mouth. Her short hair stuck out at odd angles, thanks to his roving fingers. Her bra strap hung down around her arm, that plump breast just begging to be devoured.

*Get off the bed, Sullivan, before you do something you’ll regret in the morning.*

He rose, though he didn’t want to, then pulled back the comforter and lifted her limp body onto the sheets. With a supreme force of will, he tugged the covers up to her chin and resisted the urge to climb between the silky sheets and wrap himself around her.

Forcing himself to look away, he buckled his belt, turned for the living room and retrieved his shirt from the floor. His skin chilled from the loss of her heat. He slid the cotton over his arms as he found his briefcase, opened the zippered pouch and extracted his tools.

The safe was hidden in the back of the master closet. It wasn’t hard to find, and he shook his head at the stupidity of hotel guests. Why people thought their loot was secure in a hotel safe was beyond him. In less than one minute he had the metal contraption open and was staring at the marble relief of the Greek goddess known as Alecto.

The first of the three Furies.

“Hello, sexy.” He turned the marble in his gloved hands and examined the back. The numbering matched the one he had carefully secured at home.

Dr. Maxwell didn’t have a clue what she’d so carelessly left hidden in the hotel safe. If she did, she never would have been so blasé about the piece.

“Two down, one to go,” he muttered, sliding the relief into the velvet pouch he’d brought for it.

He walked back into the bedroom and paused next to the bed. Lisa was still sound asleep, her steady breathing the only noise in the room.

Before his body changed his mind for him, he leaned over and kissed her forehead. Regret snaked through him at the thought of what hadn’t been, but as he’d learned a long time ago, regret was for shit. What he held in his hand now was the key to everything.

“Thank you, querida,” he said as he straightened. “I sure do wish things could have been different.”
A pounding headache roused Lisa from sleep. On a strangled groan, she flopped onto her back and tossed an arm over her eyes to block the intense stream of light. She’d forgotten to pull the drapes last night, and the tall windows were now letting in every irritating ray of sun the Italian city of Milan could throw her way. Her retinas burned beneath tightly shut eyes, and the drumming in her skull wasn’t getting any better as she lay there waiting to die.

Two glasses of wine at dinner. Another half glass when she’d been back in her suite. She shouldn’t have a massive hangover like this. She could handle her alcohol better than that.

Muttering curses at no one in particular, she pushed herself onto her side, grappled for the phone and punched room service. The perky female voice only made her wish for a gun.


“Si, Signorina Maxwell.”

She replaced the receiver and flopped back into the pillows. The last thing she remembered was tumbling onto this big bed with that sexy Spaniard. She didn’t have a clue when he’d left, but judging from the silence in the suite, the man was long gone.

Her gaze swept over the yellow rose and folded note lying on the pillow next to her. She reached out and lifted the paper.

It was pure paradise, querida. I only wish we’d had more time.

Rafe

A frown tugged at the corners of her mouth. Too bad she couldn’t remember that paradise. She let out a long breath and fingered the golden bud he’d obviously swiped from the flower arrangement on the coffee table in the living room. At least he’d left her something.

Rubbing her forehead, she glanced toward the red numbers on the digital clock. Ten forty-five. Dammit, she’d missed her flight for a night of wild sex she couldn’t even remember.

She rolled to her side and lifted the cordless phone again. When the operator answered, Lisa gave directions for an outside line and rattled off the Greek phone number. Swinging her legs over the side of the bed, she closed her eyes and waited until the room stopped spinning before pushing to her feet.

A steady stream of Greek filled the line, making the pounding in her brain kick up a notch. “English, please,” Lisa said as calmly as she could.

“Art Institute of Athens,” the voice replied in a clipped Greek accent. “How may I direct your call?”

“Dr. Maria Gotsi, please.”

Music filled the receiver, then a click resounded as the line was transferred. “Dr. Gotsi’s office. This is Elise.”

Lisa rose on unsteady legs and pressed the heel of her hand against her throbbing head. “Um, this is Dr. Maxwell. I have a one o’clock appointment with Dr. Gotsi today.”

“Yes, Dr. Maxwell. She’s looking forward to your visit.”

“I’m afraid I’m going to have to reschedule. I’m still in Milan, and I’m not sure when I’ll be able to make the next flight.”

Paper rustled over the line as Lisa took a step toward the closet to retrieve her robe. When she dropped her hand and looked up, she noticed the open closet door. She was pretty sure she’d shut that after hanging up her jacket last night.

“Dr. Gotsi is available around four this afternoon, if that works better for you,” Elise replied.

Lisa reached for the light in the closet. She pushed aside slacks and jackets hanging from the bar above and stared down at the open safe in the back of the small room.

No way.

Her surprise was quickly blanketed by a wave of red-hot rage, as the reality of the situation hit her. “That lying sack of shit,” she muttered.

“Excuse me?”

The woman’s startled voice dragged Lisa’s attention back to her phone conversation. “I’m sorry. Um, it
looks like I’ve just had a sudden change in plans. I’m going to need to cancel with Dr. Gotsi for the time being. I’ll call her to reschedule.”

“All right. If you’re sure.”

Lisa barely heard the woman’s response. Staring at the empty safe, she clicked off the phone and tried to settle her bubbling temper.

It didn’t work.

She closed her eyes and ran a shaky hand through her hair. The prick had stolen the relief right out from under her nose, and she’d fallen for his ruse like some sex-starved American hussy. She was smarter than that, dammit!

Fury curled in her stomach. She tossed the phone across the room, set her hands on her hips and tried to walk off the anger. Nobody stole from her, not after everything she’d been through because of that stupid relief. Not when she’d spent fifteen years searching for it.

Her vision blurred, and she pressed trembling fingers against her eyes. She’d purposely kept the relief in the safe in her room, because leaving it with hotel security would have raised questions—ones she didn’t want to deal with and couldn’t afford at this point. No one here knew she had the piece. Which meant someone in Jamaica had spilled the beans. That, or someone had followed her here.

She looked up, steadier as she worked it all through her head. It didn’t really matter who had talked. At this point, there wasn’t anything she could do about it. The only thing that mattered was who had it now.

Thoughts of revenge raced through her mind. She dropped her hands and narrowed her eyes. Oh, he’d better pray she didn’t find him, because when she did, she was going to exact her own unique brand of vengeance on the bastard.

The son of a bitch had messed with the wrong woman.

“I don’t have ten minutes to give the press today.” Shane Maxwell ran tense fingers through his hair, brushed his jacket back and rested his hands on his hips.

Commander O’Conner wasn’t listening to him. But that was no surprise. With his eyes angled downward, the commander flipped papers as if he were alone. It wasn’t that Shane couldn’t fit ten minutes into his schedule. It was simply that he didn’t want to see the chirpy blonde reporter again. Ever.

And O’Conner knew that.

“The public’s screaming for a statement about the Hamilton murder. You’re the point man. Put your fucking personal life on the back burner and do your job, Maxwell.” O’Conner flicked Shane an irritated glare and waved a hand, dismissing him from the office.

Shane bit back a string of curses and let the glass door slam shut behind him. Son of a bitch, he needed a vacation.

Phones rang through the Detective Division of the Bureau of Investigative services in Chicago’s police headquarters. Computer keys clicked and printers whirred while the low hum of conversation drifted through the wide room.

The Windy City held less appeal these days than it ever had before. Part of it was career burnout—he’d been at this damn job way too long, had never responded well to being told what to do and was ready for a change. Although at thirty-eight, he didn’t have a freakin’ clue what else he’d do with his life. Part of it was a need to keep his distance from one overzealous reporter who wasn’t getting the hint he was no longer interested. And short of shooting her himself, he couldn’t figure out another option.

A vacation sounded a hell of a lot better than spending the next thirty years in prison.

The scent of coffee did little to brighten his mood. A hot beach, a bottle of beer and any woman who wasn’t blonde would suit him just fine right now.

“Hey, Maxwell.” The uniformed officer across the room lifted the phone in her hand. “You got a call on line four.”

So much for fantasies. Real life beckoned.

“Thanks.” He wove through the sea of officers and banged-up office furniture and settled into the seat behind his metal desk. His chair creaked as it rocked on its hinges. Lifting the phone, he prayed it wasn’t the press.

“Detective Maxwell.”

“Find any two-thousand-year-old dead bodies in that city today?”

He smiled as he leaned back in his chair. “No. You know of any I should be looking for?”

Lisa laughed. “Not yet. How are you, little brother?”

“Miserable. What else?” He picked up a pen and tapped it against the edge of his desk. “Where are you?”
“Still in Italy. Shane, listen, I need a favor.”
“Sure, anything.” She was the only woman in the world who could draw those words from his lips.
“I faxed you a picture a few minutes ago. You should be getting it anytime. The guy’s name is Rafael Garcia—or at least that’s what he told me his name was. He gave me the impression he was a professor at the University of Barcelona, but no one at the university has ever heard of him. No one fitting his description lives anywhere near Barcelona. Can you run him through the system, see if you can find anything?”
Shane glanced toward the fax machine on the corner of his desk. It beeped and clicked as paper fed into the tray. “Looks like the pic is coming through now. How do you know this guy?”
“I met him at a conference here in Milan.”
The tone of her voice had warning bells going off in his head. “Did something happen?”
“Sort of.”
“Lis?” he asked with concern.
“I’m fine, don’t worry. But I need to find this guy. I have a hunch he’s not Spanish, like I’d thought.”
“You think he’s American?” He took a close look at the photo. The dark-haired man was sitting at a table in a restaurant, the photo taken from the restaurant’s security camera. “Why?”
“The waiter said he paid for dinner with U.S. dollars.”
“In Milan?”
“Yeah.”
“So all you’ve got to give me is a photo of a guy who may or may not be an American, and a name that may or may not be accurate.”
“Pretty much.”
He frowned and tossed the photo on his desk. “Lis, this’ll take me ten years.”
“Would a fingerprint help?”
“Hell, yeah. But only if the guy’s got a record. Otherwise it’s still like looking for a needle in a haystack.”
“I’ll fax you one of those as well. My gut tells me he’s got a record.”
“Wait. How’d you get a print?”
“A cute officer with the Milan polizia got a partial print off a wineglass.”
Shane pinched the bridge of his nose. “Don’t flirt with the kid, Lis. It’ll just frustrate the poor guy.”
“I’m older than you. Don’t try to tell me what to do.”
“By five minutes, and you know that doesn’t count.” He dropped his hand. “Are you going to tell me what’s going on?”
“Not yet. But I will.”
He knew that was the best he was going to get. “Where will you be in an hour?”
“Here at the hotel.” He jotted down the number when she rattled it off. “I still have some more packing to do.”
He turned toward his computer. At least this gave him an excuse to ignore the persistent Shelley Hanson and her identical pair of silicone-enhanced microphones. “Okay, don’t go anywhere until I get back to you.”
“Thanks, Shane. I owe you for this.”
“You owe me for a lot more than this. One of these days I’m gonna call in all these little favors.”
“Anytime, cutie.”
He smiled at the warmth in her voice. For a second, it lifted his spirits. “I’ll talk to you later.”

With his hands tucked into the pockets of his slacks, Rafe stared up at the massive relief on the lobby wall of the Art Institute of Athens. The ancient marble depicted Apollo, Artemis, Aphrodite and Eros deep in conversation. The plaque just to the right of the relief dated the piece to ca. 420 B.C.
He let out a low whistle. Old. And probably worth a fortune. A burst of excitement raced through him at the thought. If the marble in his briefcase matched the one he had back in Florida, he was close to collecting the payoff he’d been waiting for his whole damn life.
“Mr. Sullivan, Dr. Gotsi will see you now.”
Turning at the sound of the deep female voice, he lifted the case at his feet and followed the lithe woman down a long hallway. He waited while she punched in a security code and pressed her hand against a fingerprint analysis screen. The metal door at the end of the hall opened with a swish.
“This way.”
She led him to a secure conference room and slipped an electronic key into the slot near the door. She waited for the light to turn green, then pushed the door open.
A woman rose from her seat at the end of a long gleaming table. Dark hair fell down around her shoulders, a pale pink suit molded to her sleek figure. The feline smile curling her bright red lips was meant solely for him. “Mr. Sullivan, I’ve been waiting for you.”

Her Greek accent was thick, her eyes large and black as onyx.

Rafe stepped into the room, waited until the assistant backed out and closed the door, then turned his attention toward Dr. Maria Gotsi. “The pleasure is all mine, as always.”

Her heels clicked across the marble floor, and she reached out with both hands to grasp his arms, pulling him close as she kissed both of his cheeks in the familiar European greeting. Her memorable jasmine scent wafted through the air, tickling his senses. She eased back and sent him an alluring gaze.

She was almost as tall as he was, easily six feet in her heels, a fact he knew gave her an advantage in her business dealings—and her personal ones, as well.

“I was thrilled when Elise told me you were in town.” She smiled, stepping closer. “As it turns out, I happened to have a cancellation just this morning.”

He hid his victory grin. He was pretty sure he knew who’d cancelled, and it was all the more reason to get this little meet and greet over with as soon as possible.

“Must be my lucky day.”

“Could I be so blessed as to discover you crossed the Atlantic simply because you missed me?” A bright red-tipped nail trailed down the sleeve of his jacket.

His eyes narrowed as he studied the chiseled features of her face—the prominent bone structure, flawless skin, supple lips. He knew from experience the body underneath all that pretty packaging was just as perfect as the face, and for the first time since he’d met the Greek scientist, he had absolutely no desire to see any of it for himself.

That little fact shocked the hell out of him.

He lifted the briefcase in his hand, refusing to give the thought any more time than it deserved. “I brought you something.”

Interest flared in the dark depths of her eyes. “You tease me with history, Rafael.”

And it was the only thing he was going to tease her with, period. He unfastened the straps, dialed a code on the latch and popped the top. Then he lifted the velvet pouch inside, sliding the relief from its careful wrapping.

Maria’s eyes took on an excited gleam. He didn’t even need the analysis he’d traveled so far to obtain. The look on her face confirmed his speculation.

She reached behind her on the table and grasped her glasses. Eyes riveted on the piece, she slipped the small round spectacles onto her nose and leaned closer. “May I?”

“Of course.” He gently placed the marble in her hands.

She examined the relic from every angle, running her fingers over valleys and ridges, looking closely at the way light played over the surface, holding it back to get a better view. Long minutes passed while she studied the relief with unbridled interest.

“Alecto,” she said softly.

“That was my guess.”

“The first of the three Furies.” Awe filled her voice. “Conceived when the blood of Uranus dripped onto Mother Earth after he was castrated by Kronos. The three sisters of vengeance were powerful divinities who punished crime by hounding their victims until they died in a furor of torment and madness.”

“Lovely way to go,” Rafe muttered.

She didn’t seem to hear him. Her focus was intent on the relief in her hands. “Alecto was the oldest, unceasing in anger. Magaera was next, retaliator of jealousy, and Tisiphone, the last, regarded as the avenger of murder.”

Rafe had heard it all before; he didn’t need another lesson in Greek mythology. But the woman adored the lore surrounding each piece, and he’d learned early on to let her have her moment before diving into the business behind the legends. “Three women you wouldn’t want to run into in a dark alley.”

She smiled at his comment and tipped her eyes up a split second before refocusing on the piece. “No, most definitely not.”

“Is it real?”

She set the relief on the table, leaned over and continued to examine it with a keen eye. “You’re asking if it matches the one you brought in three months ago. Magaera.”

“Yes.”

She crossed her arms over her chest as she stared at the aged marble. “I would have to do an in-depth analysis of the stonework, compare the chemical structure to that of the other piece, conduct a search of all
work done before and after our target date.”
“Gut reaction. Is it the same age?”
She leveled her gaze on his. “Upon initial examination, I’d guess it dates close to 450 B.C.”
Tiny tendrils of excitement raced through his veins. “Is it done by the same artist?”
“I won’t know for sure until—”
“Best guess,” he cut in.
She let out a breath. “There’s no record Kalamis even created the Furies. Speculation has swirled for
centuries, but—”
“Just tell me, Maria. Is it his work?”
She dropped her arms with a heavy sigh. “I think when we examine it in more detail, we’ll find it’s one of
Kalamis’s lost pieces.”
A smile curled Rafe’s mouth. “Thank you.”
“I haven’t done anything yet.”
“Believe me, you have.” He reached for the relief and slid it back into the velvet pouch.
Her gaze followed. “What are you doing?”
“Taking it with me.”
“But I thought you brought it here for inspection?”
“I did.”
“Rafael—”
He locked the briefcase and looked up. “All I needed was a cursory examination. You and I both know this is
exactly what we think it is.”
“And for that reason, you need to leave it in the hands of professionals to safeguard its authenticity.”
The only professional he trusted was himself. He lifted the case off the shiny table. “When I have the third
piece, I promise I’ll bring them all back for your review. You can examine the hell out of them then.”
Her eyes sparked. “You know where Tisiphone is located?”
Not yet. But he would. Soon. “I’m a man of many connections, Dr. Gotsi.”
She followed him to the door. “The Art Institute would be interested in acquiring the two pieces you already
have.”
Gee, surprise. Fighting back a laugh, he turned the knob and stepped out into the hall. “Thanks, but I already
have a buyer lined up.”
Her shoes clicked quickly down the marble floor to keep up with his swift pace. “We’ll match any offer
you’ve received.”
This time he did laugh. Any offer he’d already entertained was nothing compared to what he’d get when he
had all three in his hot little hands.
“Mr. Sullivan,” she said impatiently. “You’re a businessman. I don’t think you realize what you’ve got here.
One Fury by itself is a find. Two are worth a small fortune.”
He stopped and glanced her direction. “And three will set me up for life. Tell you what, Dr. Gotsi. You
figure out just what the Furies are worth to the Institute—all three together—and when I have Tisiphone, we’ll
talk again.”
He took a step away.
“Rafael.” Her hand on his arm stopped him. “If this gets out, a bidding war isn’t the only thing you’ll have to
worry about. The Furies together are the most sought-after reliefs in all of Greek art. Primarily because most
people don’t think they actually exist, but also because if they’re real, it means all theories about how and why
the Peloponnesian War began will have to be reexamined. They’re priceless. Treasure hunters will pour out of
the woodwork to beat you to the last goddess. You could lose everything.”
He already knew that. Was she genuinely concerned for his safety, or was she warning him of things to
come? He covered her hand with his and squeezed just hard enough to make her eyes widen. “Then it’d better
not get out.”

The phone rang just as Lisa zipped her suitcase. “Dr. Maxwell.”
“You got a pen?” Shane asked.
She caught her breath and eased down to sit on the edge of the bed. “You found him.”
“Rafael Sullivan. You were right. He’s American. Born and raised in sunny Florida. Thirty-nine years old,
arrested once for breaking and entering, charges dropped for lack of evidence. Address lists a place in Key
West.”
Lisa ran a shaky hand across her forehead. “Give it to me.”
She jotted down the information as he recited it.
“Now, you gonna tell me what this is all about?” he asked.
“Yes.” But not now.
“Lis?”
She stood, brushing off his concern. “I gotta go, Shane. I’ve got a flight in just about two hours.”
“Lis—”
She ripped the paper off the note pad by the phone. “I promise I’ll explain everything when I get back to the States.”
“I’m going to hold you to that.”
She smiled, knowing he would. “I love you, little brother.”
“I know.” She heard the frown in his voice. “Call me when you get home. And don’t do anything stupid.”
He knew her so well.
“Trust me. I learned my lesson.”
Lisa tugged off her sunglasses and peered into the dark windows of the small two-story home on Olivia Street in Key West. No sound echoed from inside the house, and she couldn’t see a thing past the small entry with its sage-colored walls and rustic pine flooring. She blew out a frustrated breath, pushed the hair off her forehead and frowned.

Sweat slid down her back, adding to her bad mood. Back home in San Francisco she’d be wearing a leather jacket and her snazzy black boots at this point in October, but down here in the southernmost city in the continental U.S., it was twelve thousand degrees. The tank top was a good idea. The denim capris were not. Only idiots lived in this kind of heat year-round.

“He’s not there.”

She turned at the fragile voice and looked toward the elderly woman with a big straw hat standing on the other side of the white picket fence that separated this house from its neighbor. Plastering what she hoped was a pleasant look on her face, Lisa eased down the front steps, moving around the dwarf hibiscus and palm shrubs.

“I’m looking for Rafael Sullivan. Do you know where I might find him?”

The woman snipped a flower with the shears in her hand, dropped it into the basket at her feet. “He came by and fixed my ice maker yesterday. Such a nice boy.”

Lisa frowned. Nice boy and Rafe Sullivan did not go together. He’d obviously snowed the old lady, too. The elderly woman looked like she weighed about fifty pounds soaking wet, her frail body covered in long sleeves, full cotton pants and canvas shoes. She had to be sweltering, but you’d never know it by her chipper mood.

“So he’s around today?” Lisa asked.

“Rafael? Oh, he’s probably down at the marina tinkering on his boat. He does love that boat of his.”

“I bet he does,” Lisa muttered. She couldn’t help but wonder how many sex-starved women he’d hustled to finance that little trinket. Shifting her feet, she tried to keep her tone even. “You wouldn’t happen to know which marina that was, would you?”

“Now let’s see.” The woman tapped her gloved finger against her lips. “It had a shell name in it, I think.”

Lord Almighty. Lisa forced a smile and stepped back. “Thank you. I’m sure I can find it.”

Luckily, there was only one marina in Key West with a shell name. Pulling into the parking lot of the Conch Harbor Marina, Lisa crossed her fingers and hoped this was the right one. Palm trees flanked the front lawn. Bougainvillea ran along the gray building.

She didn’t really want to spend all day looking for the jerk. But she would if she had to.

She slammed the car door, adjusted her sunglasses and followed the path around the side of the structure toward the docks. Her stylish pink sandals crunched on the white stones, and she paused when she reached the deck at the back of the building to look out over the vast view of water and sailboats lined up in neat rows. Lisa’s gaze swept over the patio as she searched for Rafe. Round tables with wide green-and-white-striped umbrellas littered the deck. A few people lingered over drinks, chatting in the afternoon sun, but no one reminded her of her almost Latin lover, the man she wanted to drop-kick with her bright-red-painted toenails.

A waiter rushed by with a tray of drinks. Lisa stopped him with a hand on his arm. “You wouldn’t happen to know where I could find Rafe Sullivan, would you?” She tossed a ten-dollar bill on the tray.

The kid’s eyes lit up. He reached for the bill and slipped it into his pocket. “Sullivan’s boat is moored on B dock. Sea Witch. You can’t miss it.”

“Thanks.” Lisa looked out over the docks and set her jaw as the kid walked away. Just the thought of seeing Sullivan again made her blood boil.

Sea Witch, huh? How appropriate. In a minute he was going to see just how much of a witch she could be.

She headed down the ramp toward the massive yachts and quaint sailboats and located B dock easily. As she rounded the corner, her gaze lifted and she focused on a man near the end of the dock dressed in loose-fitting jeans and a black T-shirt. His back was to Lisa, and he was waving his hands as he talked to a skinny brunette in a skimpy bikini, but Lisa didn’t need to see his face to know who he was.

She’d recognize that ass anywhere. And dammit, it looked even better in worn denim. Not giving herself time to change her mind, she strode down the dock toward the pair. Over the man’s shoulder, the brunette’s
gaze snapped to her, eyes narrowed and curious, but Lisa ignored it. All she heard was Rafe’s voice making some lame-ass comments about the weather, and fury welled up in her stomach before she could stop it.

He paused midsentence, noticing the brunette’s expression, and turned. A split second of surprise registered in his dark eyes. And Lisa didn’t even hesitate.

“Nice to see you again, querido.” Her flat palms connected with his solid chest. She pushed hard, catching him off guard, knocking him right off his feet.

His hands waved. A startled yelp slipped from his lips before he lost his balance and fell backward into the turquoise water.

The brunette’s eyes grew wide as they followed Rafe off the end of the dock. Startled, she held out her arms. The pink cocktail in her right hand splashed over the glass as water from his fall doused both her and Lisa.

Rafe broke the surface, sputtered and drew in a breath of air.

Lisa pushed the sunglasses into her hair, wiped her hands together and smiled. “Wow. That felt good.” She rolled her shoulders and turned toward the brunette. “I’m Lisa, and I don’t plan on catching your name.” She leaned closer as if she were sharing a dark secret. “A piece of advice. Run. While you still can.”

The brunette flicked her a quizzical expression. “I…”

Lisa straightened, raised her brows and waited.

The brunette looked back at Rafe in the water, then quickly skirted Lisa and stepped away. “Um. Okay then.” Her flip-flops echoed quickly down the dock.

Lisa crossed her arms over her chest and stared down at the shimmering water. Knocking him on his ass should have made her feel better. Seeing him in the midst of hustling another woman should have reinforced what a creep he was. Instead, she was remembering those sensual lips pressed against hers and that gorgeous face flushed with passion when he’d looked at her with those dark and probing eyes.

She tightened her jaw and forced the thought from her mind. No way she was going there again. Ever. And she was an even bigger idiot for even thinking about it now.

He didn’t make any attempt to get out of the marina, simply treading water as he watched her with amusement. It wasn’t the reaction she’d expected, and it only infuriated her more.

“Where’s my rock, Sullivan?”

A slow smile spread across his features. He ran his hands over his dark hair, wiping water back from his rugged face. He seemed to fit this atmosphere so much better than he had the suit and tie in Milan. Why hadn’t she noticed?

“And here I thought you came all this way ’cause you missed me.”

She tapped her foot against the dock. “Think again, Slick. Where’s my marble?”

Without responding, he swam toward a nearby yacht and climbed up the swim ladder. Water ran in rivulets down his body, the wet shirt molding to his broad chest, the jeans sculpting strong thighs and firm, toned muscles.

He wasn’t sexy, dammit. He was a thief. A no-good lying sack of shit.

He disappeared around the back of the yacht and reemerged on the other side as her temper bubbled and brewed. The dock swayed when he jumped onto the finger separating the boat from its neighbor. Eyes trained on her, he walked forward until he was only a few inches away.

Her pulse kicked up. The heat from his body slid over her, igniting an odd tingle in her stomach. Her gaze flicked from his hard eyes to his lips before common sense finally registered and she remembered why she was there.

“Feel better?” he asked, resting his big hands on his narrow hips.

“Nice accent.”

“Like it?” A sexy half grin curled one side of his mouth.

“There’s not a single thing I like about you.”

Laughter danced in his ebony eyes. “That’s not what you said the last time we were together.” He turned and climbed onto a pristine white, thirty-nine-foot Beneteau sailboat to her left and disappeared down the companionway.

She stood slack-jawed for a moment before she caught herself and straightened. He wasn’t going to turn this around on her again.

When his head darted back up from the depths of the fancy sloop, he was rubbing a towel over his wet hair. He moved up the steps to stand on the deck of the boat and leaned against the grab rail to look down at her. Sunlight glinted off his shiny hair. The black T-shirt molding to his arms and chest only accentuated his physique. “You come all the way down here to make sure I got a bath?”

Disbelief raced through her. She forced her eyes away from his broad chest up to his eyes. “No, you son of a
“bitch, I came down here to get back what you stole from me.”

“You’re not gonna go to the cops.”

“You think that’s funny?”

“Hand it over and I won’t press charges.”

He pushed away from the railing and laughed, a smooth sound that rushed over her like a wave, warming her stomach in a way that should have made her sick.

“You’re a piece of work,” she managed. “You seduced me, and then—”

“Wait.” He held up a hand and straightened. “Who dragged who into her hotel room?”

“Stole?” he asked as if the word shocked him. “I don’t have a clue what you’re talking about.”

He climbed over the side of the boat and dropped onto the finger. “Two reasons. First, if you had, you wouldn’t be here with me now. Some burly cop with bad teeth would be reading me my rights.”

“Wait.” He held up a hand and straightened. “Who dragged who into her hotel room?”

“Just give it back and I’ll be on my merry way.”

Panic slid through her. He wouldn’t have sold it already, would he? The moron probably didn’t even know what he’d taken from her.

“Anger pumped like hot lava through her veins. “What makes you think I even have it? What ever ‘it’ is.”

“Look, you want the marble back or not?”

He tugged keys out of his wet pocket. “Not here.” He cast her a tight look. “Take it or leave it, querida. You wanna see your goddess, you gotta trust me.” He stepped past her and headed for the end of the dock. “I know it’s a stretch.”

“Hey, Mr. Sullivan!”

He waited until their laughter disappeared inside the massive forty-eight-foot powerboat three slips down before swinging his gaze back toward her. “We’re not going to do this here.”

“Two reasons. First, if you had, you wouldn’t be here with me now. Some burly cop with bad teeth would be reading me my rights.”

“Wait.” He held up a hand and straightened. “Who dragged who into her hotel room?”

“Look, you want the marble back or not?”

“Just give it back and I’ll be on my merry way.”

Panic slid through her. He wouldn’t have sold it already, would he? The moron probably didn’t even know what he’d taken from her.

“Hand it over and I won’t press charges.”

He ran the towel over the nape of his neck and tossed it on the helm seat. “I think you’re full of shit, querida. You’re not gonna go to the cops.”

“You think that’s funny?”

“Hand it over and I won’t press charges.”

He pushed away from the railing and laughed, a smooth sound that rushed over her like a wave, warming her stomach in a way that should have made her sick.

“You’re not gonna go to the cops.”

“You expect me to do somewhere with you?”

“Boredom ran across his face. “Look, you want the marble back or not?”

“Just give it back and I’ll be on my merry way.”

Panic slid through her. He wouldn’t have sold it already, would he? The moron probably didn’t even know what he’d taken from her.

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He ran the towel over the nape of his neck and tossed it on the helm seat. “I think you’re full of shit, querida. You’re not gonna go to the cops.”

“A pathetic laugh slipped from her lips, and she turned to look after him. “How do I know you’re not going to drug me again and this time, rape or murder me?”

“He turned. “If I’d wanted to do either, I already would have. You didn’t exactly put up a fight.”

She drew in a calming breath. At her side, her fingers dug into her palms. The son of a bitch was right. She’d been primed and ready when she’d been in that hotel room, and if he’d told her he was a thief at that moment, she probably wouldn’t have cared. And that fact only infuriated her more.

He headed for the end of the dock again. “Pick up the pace, Maxwell. I don’t have all day.”

The bad-tempered mood settling over Rafe was a hell of a lot easier to deal with than a woman who didn’t want to have anything to do with him. A woman who looked hotter in a pair of low-slung denim short pants and a tight-fitting tank top that accentuated her full, round breasts than most of the women parading around Key West did in their skimpy bikinis.

Hell, he was a man. He noticed things like that. And she’d worn that outfit to tease him. He was sure of it.

But did she have to wear those strappy beaded sandals that showed off her tiny feet and red—hot-red—toenails? He hadn’t pegged her for red. And damn, if that little surprise hadn’t triggered a flash in his brain back there, stripping off her clothing piece by piece to see what other surprises she had underneath, starting with those sandals so he could lick and suck on her sensual toes as he slowly moved his way up her tantalizing body.
Oh, hell. He ran a hand over his face. One look at the curvy archaeologist and he’d nearly forgotten why he’d scammed the woman in the first place.

*Family. Future. A chance to make up for the past. Don’t forget it, Sullivan.*

He wouldn’t. Now that he was back in control, he could handle anything. Seeing her less than a week after their last sultry meeting was just a shock to his system. Those emerald eyes of hers had reminded him exactly why he’d almost tossed this chance away—all for one night of sex. He blew out a breath. Good thing there was no chance of that happening again.

With a grunt, he jerked open the passenger door of the Tahoe. “Get in.”

“I am not getting in your car.” She fisted her hands on her hips, tilted her chin up at him in a clear challenge.

“I have a rental that works perfectly fine. I’ll follow you.”

He hadn’t expected the fight in that tiny body. Heck, he hadn’t expected her to track him down so fast, either. It wasn’t like he’d covered his tracks all that well. He hadn’t, and on purpose. The truth of the matter was he still needed her, but he’d expected to use her on his schedule, not hers.

And being waylaid by her on the docks had not been part of his plans.

“You’re not the first to tell me that, querida.”

“I have a name,” she said, looking out the side window.

“Right. Lisa.”

“Dr. Maxwell, Slick.” She glanced his direction with steely eyes before looking back out the window. “Don’t forget it.”

Like he ever could.

He pulled into the drive of his small house and killed the ignition. She opened the car door and slipped from the vehicle before he even released the latch on his door.

Bitchy. Probably a good thing nothing more had happened in that hotel. Domineering, obnoxious women weren’t his type.

“Is there you are, Rafael.”

He tucked his keys in his pocket and looked up at the sound of the frail voice. “Hey, Mrs. Kimbel.”

Scissors in one hand, Anita Kimbel stood near the small picket fence and wiped her other hand down her long-sleeved cotton shirt, leaving a smudge of dirt in its wake. “Do you think you could take a look at my ice maker again? The ice is getting all stuck inside. You know I just can’t drink my lemonade without my ice.”

He shot a quick look at her front porch where her worthless grandson, Jimmy, sat in a plastic deck chair, shirtless in the afternoon sun, sipping a beer and scowling their direction. The punk was sucking the old woman dry of cash and beer and food. And she was letting him.

He glanced back at his elderly neighbor and tried to smile for her sake. He hated that she was being taken advantage of. She was a nice old lady who’d never done a thing wrong in her life, except help some whacked-out kid who didn’t deserve her generosity. And her situation rang just a little too true for his liking. “Sure thing. I’ll do it later.”

A grin brightened her face, and she straightened. “Thank you.” Her gaze flicked in Lisa’s direction. “Hello, deary. I see you found him.”

He looked toward Lisa. Found him? She’d already been here?

Lisa’s eyes widened. Her lips parted as if she were going to respond. Hell, he didn’t need her opening her big mouth out here on the street. After that little show she’d put on at the marina, he could only imagine what would come pouring out.

He ushered her up the porch steps before she could toss off some flip answer. “I’ll come over later, Mrs. Kimbel.”

“Oh. Okay, Rafael. You are such a sweet boy.”
As he unlocked the door, he heard Lisa harrumph behind him. Her opinion of him didn’t matter in the least, so why did he have this overwhelming urge to defend himself? He pushed aside the ludicrous thought, pulled the screen open and waited while Lisa stepped inside. She flicked an irritated look his direction before moving into the entry of the house.

Cool air washed over him when he followed, and he closed the door, blocking out the heat and humidity. Lisa ran a hand over her sweaty brow. For a moment, the aggravation dissipated, and she closed her eyes, tipped her face up toward the ceiling fan and drew in a long breath. “How the hell do people live in this heat?” she mumbled.

A sucker punch hit him low in the gut—the memory of her writhing beneath him on that great big bed, offering him her throat just like that in that faraway hotel room. With her face flushed, eyes closed and chin tipped up, she’d begged him to take her.

_Hurry, Rafe._

_Carajo._ He ran a hand over his face. He needed to get a grip. A golden opportunity had dropped right into his lap when she’d shown up. Common sense told him if he were going to find Tisiphone, he’d need to string Lisa Maxwell along a while longer.

And not in a sexual way. Although he could think of a thousand different ways he’d like to string her up. By her arms, naked and wet, moaning while he licked every part of her. By her feet, to the end of his bed, spread wide and waiting while he drove her to the edge again and again.

Holy hell. This was going to kill him.

He cleared his throat and stepped around her toward the living room. “In here.”

His mouth dropped open when he walked into the main room. The wicker couch was tipped over, cushions slashed, the stuffing strewn across the floor. The coffee table was a pile of smashed glass, lamps nearby broken and lying on their sides. A glass cabinet to his left sat open, his sports memorabilia shattered, pieces missing.

“¡Me cago en nada!” Wide-eyed, he turned a small circle, taking in the damage.

Lisa skirted a broken ceramic bowl on the floor and a smattering of seashells thrown across the carpet. “Let me guess. Maid’s day off?”

A hot rush of blood pumped through him, dousing whatever idiotic arousal he’d felt before. He whipped toward her and fought the urge to pick her up and hurl her across the room. “Find what you were looking for?”

“Who else would break in and trash the place?”

“I don’t know. How many other women did you hustle this week?”

“Obviously one too many.” He shook his head and tried to rein in his temper before he lost it for good. “You think you’re getting her back now?”

Fury flashed in her eyes. “You really are delusional if you think I did this. Why on earth would I bother coming back here with you if I’d already trashed your pathetic little house?”

“Because you didn’t find it. And because you wanted to gloat.”

She let out a smug laugh. “I don’t need to gloat, Slick.” She crossed her arms and cocked her head. “But since you brought it up, tell me. How does it feel, being duped?”

Anger coiled in his stomach. He took a step toward her.

A rap at the door made him stop short.

“Sullivan? You in there?”

His gaze darted to the entry.

Lisa moved toward the window and peeked through the curtain. A superior grin slid across her features. “Looks like I don’t have to call the cops after all.”

“Ah, _pues bien,_” he muttered, walking toward the entry-way. He jerked the door open and frowned at both the rush of humid air tumbling into the house and Officer Hailey Roarke’s amused expression. “Yeah?”

Hailey’s blue eyes narrowed. She hooked her thumbs in her gun belt. “Heard there was some trouble down at the docks.”

“You heard wrong.”

She glanced around the door into the living room, let out a low whistle, then stepped around him, her curly blonde ponytail wagging behind her. “Well now. This definitely doesn’t look like trouble.”

He slammed the door. Great. Might as well invite the whole damn neighborhood over, while they were at it.

Hailey stopped in the doorway to the shambled living room. “What did you do, Sullivan? Throw a wild party?”

He shot Lisa a look across the room. Her feline grin said she was enjoying every moment of this, just waiting for him to sweat. The realization had amusement trickling through his system, drowning the surge of anger.
Hailey’s gaze finally settled on Lisa, and she lifted her eyebrows in question. Rafe cleared his throat. “Lisa Maxwell. Officer Roarke.”

“Is she the one who was causing all the trouble down at the marina?” Hailey looked in his direction. Her eyes shifted from his damp clothing up to his face. “The one that got you all…wet?”

“Yeah. Same one.”

Lisa’s victorious grin faded. “Hold on—”

“Wanna press charges?” Hailey cut in.

“Hell, yes,” Lisa exclaimed.

Hailey glanced back at Lisa and held up a finger. “Not you.” She turned toward Rafe. “I can run her down to the station if you want.”

Lisa’s eyes grew wide. Unable to bite back a smile, Rafe slipped his hands into his wet pockets and rocked back on his heels. “If you strip-search her, can I watch?”

Lisa’s mouth fell open.

Oh, querida, if you knew what I wanted to do to that mouth, you’d close it, right now.

Hailey slanted a cheesy grin his direction. “You never change, Rafe Sullivan.”

Her words pulled him back from the fantasy taking root in his mind. “What made you think I had?” He turned for the kitchen. “I need a beer. You want one?”

“Gosh, yes. I had the day from hell.” Hailey stopped near an overturned wicker chair. “Are you planning to report this? ’Cause if so, you can’t touch anything yet.”

Rafe scowled and looked toward Lisa. “I already know who did it.”

“And?” Hailey asked, waiting.

“Can we just skip all this domestic squabbling and get down to business?” Lisa held up her hands. “Can we just skip all this domestic squabbling and get down to business?”

Rafe held out the third beer to her. She swatted at him. “I don’t want a goddamn beer, you ass. I want my rock.”

Hailey lifted her bottle. “I like her.”

He did, too. And that was going to be a real problem. Especially when she found out just what he wanted from her.

Rafe set her unwanted beer on the only undamaged end table in the room. “She’s got a mouth on her.”

Hailey frowned as she slipped her fingers around the beer he offered. “She made it for you, you big jerk.”

Lisa’s eyes widened, and understanding ran across her delicate features as she glanced between the two. Was it jealousy causing that startled look? Some juvenile feeling inside made him hope so.

“Look.” Lisa held up her hands. “Can we just skip all this domestic squabbling and get down to business?”

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Hailey grinned. “I thought you liked that in a woman.”

That tempting mouth of Lisa’s dropped open again, reigniting the arousal in his gut. “Hello? I’m standing right here.”

Lisa dropped onto the window seat and rubbed her temples. “I really like her. She’d keep you on your toes. Gonna keep her?”

Hailey laughed and leaned back in her chair. The beer in her hand spilled over onto the carpet. “Hey,” Rafe exclaimed. “I know the house is trashed and you don’t live here anymore, but show some respect.” He flipped over another chair and sat.

“Sorry.” Hailey tried to choke back the laughter. “I didn’t realize she was the one. Damn, she’s fast.”

“The one?” Lisa’s fiery gaze snapped to Rafe. “She knows?”

Rafe tipped the beer up to his lips and took a long swallow, eyes locked on Lisa’s over the bottle. A tingling ran through his stomach as she watched him. It didn’t matter that it was hatred making those emeralds shine, they were still just as piercing as they’d been when she’d wanted to screw the hell out of him in Italy.

“Yep. She’s the one,” he said, ignoring Lisa’s question.
“Well.” Hailey smiled. “You could have done worse.”

He still could. Knowing his damn luck, he probably would. He was running out of time to find the Furies, and if Lisa Maxwell couldn’t get Tisiphone for him, he was going to have to break his promise. And that wasn’t an option.

Rafe rose. Being trapped between his ex-wife and the woman he’d been fantasizing about for the past week wasn’t a place he wanted to be. “I need dry clothes. Keep an eye on her, would you? Make sure she doesn’t trash anything else.”
Lisa scowled as Rafe headed for the hall. The longer she sat there, the higher her blood pressure soared. Her gaze flicked to the blonde police officer seated across from her, the woman who was clearly more than just Rafe Sullivan’s friend.

Why did she care so much? He could screw whomever the hell he wanted. It wasn’t her business or her problem, and she sure wasn’t going to let it be either.

She straightened. “I don’t care what the heck he said, I didn’t break in here.”

Hailey’s smile faded. “He says you did.”

“Don’t believe that. He’s a liar and an ass.”

Hailey laughed. “No argument there. But he’s a damn good thief. You have to give him credit. He got by you, didn’t he?”

Unable to believe they were even having this conversation, Lisa grimaced. “You know he’s a criminal? And that doesn’t bother you?”

“Of course I know. That’s how we met. I busted him for B and E.”

“I got off for lack of evidence,” Rafe called from the other room.

“Let you off, pretty boy,” Hailey tossed back.

Lisa dropped her head into her hands and groaned. There were some things a woman shouldn’t have to suffer through. Listening to a man she’d almost had a wild one-night stand with—and one who still heated her veins —flirt with his girlfriend or lover or whatever the hell this woman was to him was one.

Fantasizing about kicking the girlfriend out so she could have her way with that man was two.

“And his record does bother me,” Hailey added, “which is one of the reasons we’re not married anymore.”

Married? Lisa glanced up sharply. Oh, this was getting better and better.

Hailey winked. “The other is that we just weren’t right for each other. Underneath this little hobby of his, though, he’s a pretty good guy.”

“And I thought you didn’t love me anymore,” Rafe teased from the doorway.

Hailey’s smile faded as she rose and set her beer on the counter. “I don’t. You’re also controlling, obnoxious and a royal pain in my ass. And if you aren’t planning on pressing charges, I’m going to head home, soak my aching feet, and fantasize about a long torrid love affair with Brad Pitt. Call me if you need anything.”

She cast Lisa a quick and speculative glance, then slipped out the front door.

Lisa’s pulse kicked up a notch at the thought of being alone with Rafe again. She was not relieved the man was no longer married, dammit. That thought was just too stupid to even entertain.

But she sure as hell didn’t miss the fact the ‘pretty boy’ in front of her put Brad Pitt to shame. Mayan god came to mind as she studied him from head to toe. His hair was combed back, wet curls teasing the nape of his neck. He’d ditched the dripping clothes and was now wearing a white cotton T-shirt that advertised a bar somewhere in the Keys, and fresh faded blue jeans slung low on his hips. His bare feet peeked out from beneath the cuffs of his jeans; his strong arms and broad chest filled out the snug shirt. And when he flashed that crooked smile her way, her insides went all liquid.

Thief, liar, jerk. Why couldn’t she remember those simple facts when he looked at her with those roving eyes?

“So, the relief,” she said, rising and clearing her throat, hoping that would refocus her on the real reason she’d tracked him down. Hoping it would at least get her mind out of the gutter. “Where is it?”

His smile faded. He slipped his hands into his pockets and leaned against the doorjamb. “It’s safe.”

“I want it.”

“I think I realize that,” he said, glancing around the room.

“I didn’t do this,” she said again.

“Well, someone did. And all the signs point to you, querida.”

Her eyes narrowed with understanding. “You’re not going to give it to me, are you?”

He studied her for a long moment, dark, piercing eyes locked on hers. “Not yet.”

Yet. Teasing, but no guarantee one way or the other. She crossed her arms over her chest and fought back the
obscenities lingering on her tongue. “What do you want, Sullivan?”

He pushed away from the door, crossed and stood right in front of her. Some leathery scent mixed with sage
and citrus washed over her, making her aware of his raw masculinity, making her forget what she’d even asked
in the first place. “I want Tisiphone.”

He was easily a foot taller than she was, close to six-two. Her size had never really been an issue before—in
her line of work it was actually an asset. She could get into nooks and crannies her colleagues couldn’t, and she
used that fact to her advantage whenever she could. But standing in front of him now, feeling the warmth
radiating from his body, looking up at his chiseled features and square jaw with a hint of five o’clock shadow,
his size made her feel small and feminine and just the slightest bit…intimidated.

“Do you think I have Tisiphone?”

“No. But I think you know where she is. And I think together, you and I can find her.”

You and I. The words echoed through her mind. Clearly a compromise. She’d never been good at
compromise. It was one of the reasons she was still single at thirty-eight.

One of the reasons.

“Why on earth would I know where to find Tisiphone?” she asked.

He shot her an incredulous look. “Your grad school mentor was hot on Tisiphone’s trail some fifteen years
ago. I know how to do research too, Dr. Maxwell. And I know you’ve been working that cute little ass off
trying to track down the second relief all by yourself.”

Lisa’s blood chilled at the mention of Douglas Stone. Just the thought of the man who’d all but broken her
sent emotions she’d kept buried for years roiling through her. She’d lost everything because of him. Everything
except herself. His death might have altered her life forever, but she’d learned one very valuable lesson because
of him: she was the only person she could ever believe in.

And that was the second reason she was still single at her age.

She fought to keep her emotions guarded. The last thing she needed was to leave herself vulnerable to
someone like Rafe Sullivan. Her relationship with Doug was long gone, but this thief had obviously dug up
enough dirt to know just whom and what she’d been researching the last few months.

She set her jaw. “And why would I help you?”

“Because we each have something the other wants. I want Tisiphone. You want Alecto.”

“Alecto’s already mine, Slick. I don’t need you.”

That smile returned, white teeth flashing against full, tempting lips. “Possession’s nine-tenths of the law,
querrida. And just for the record, you don’t have her anymore.”

Anger simmered just under Lisa’s skin. “So you want to make a deal.”

He rocked back on his heels as if they were having an everyday, friendly conversation. “You could say that.
But I like to think of it as a partnership. Your brains and connections, my resources and funds. I’m fairly certain
一起, we can find her. Hell, I know we can.”

“And then what?”

“And then we split the payoff at the end.”

He was lying through his pearly whites—she could tell by the glint in his dark eyes.

“It’s all about the money with you, isn’t it?” Her gaze narrowed when he only stared back at her, a blank
look in his eye. “Without Magaera, the Furies aren’t complete. You won’t get half what they’re really worth.”

His lips curled. “Don’t you worry that pretty little head of yours about Magaera.”

What the hell did that mean?

As if sensing her question, he shrugged. “I’ve already got a lead on the third Fury. And I always get what I
want. Always,” he added with just a hint of lust in his eyes that told her the Furies weren’t the only things he
wanted. “Right now we just need to focus on Tisiphone.”

She couldn’t trust this guy as far as she could throw him. He’d proven that in Italy. But without him, she was
screwed. His “partnership” made a sick sort of sense, if she really thought about it.

She was short on funds as it was, and he obviously wasn’t. That pretty boat down at the marina was clear
proof he had cash. And he was right: she had a fairly good idea where Tisiphone was hiding.

Although she wasn’t ready to tell him that. It meant having to dig through Doug’s old papers, and so far, she
just hadn’t been able to do that yet.

She didn’t for one minute believe Rafe Sullivan would split the find with her fifty-fifty, but maybe, if she
played her cards right, she could walk away with all three Furies before they were through. Maybe she could
beat him at his own game.

Because she knew the Furies didn’t mean nearly as much to him as they did to her.

They couldn’t.
“If I say no?” she asked, acting as if it didn’t matter to her in the least.
“You’re not going to,” he tossed back with confidence.
She turned and stared out the window as she ran through her options. After she’d found Alecto, she’d put in for a sabbatical from the university so she could go after the others. She was planning on focusing on Magaera next, but if he already had that one as well, Tisiphone was her only hope. She was risking her career on three pieces of stone, taking risks where, if she got caught, she could lose everything she’d worked for over the past fifteen years. But something in her gut said this was her time. If she didn’t try now, she’d spend the rest of her life wondering if this might have been her chance. Finding the reliefs wouldn’t change the past, but they might give her the validation she’d been seeking her whole life.
After everything that had happened to her because of the Furies, she needed them. And dammit, she deserved them.
There was her answer. Like it or not, she was about to go along with this outrageous idea.
She shifted toward him and fought back the excitement racing through her veins. If nothing else, he wouldn’t turn her in. And if things got hot, she could always flip the blame right back on him. After all, he was the thief. “Okay.”
“You’re in?” His dark brows lifted with a touch of surprise. And she knew then the guy wasn’t quite as sure as he’d looked before. Smoke and mirrors, she reminded herself. That’s all he was.
She dropped her arms. “I’m out of my freakin’ mind. But yeah, I’m in.”
The victory that flashed in his eyes made her stomach tighten and her thighs tingle without warning.
He was a liar and a cheat. And if she let him, he’d screw her in more ways than one.
Lord help her, she was in way over her head.

“You didn’t have to tag along.” Lisa tossed her suitcase into the trunk of the rental car. “This isn’t going to be a long trip.”
“Green on grass, white on rice. For the next few weeks, I’m stuck to you like glue, querida.” Rafe threw his duffle on top of her case and slammed the trunk. “Get used to it.” The cocky grin slanting across his face screamed I don’t trust you anymore than you trust me, and it sent Lisa’s blood pressure skyrocketing.
A plane rumbled overhead. The October chill cooled Lisa’s skin but did little to settle the smoldering temper she’d been fighting since the morning she’d awoken alone in Italy.
Muttering curses, she stalked around the car and jerked the driver side door open.
“I’ll drive,” he said, stepping up behind her and grasping the open door. “In your mood, you’ll probably plow headfirst into a pylon, just to make a point.”
She whipped around and bumped into his solid chest. Clenching her jaw at his closeness, at his attempt to dive in and take over, she brushed her hair back and looked up. “You know the mean streets of Chicago, Slick?”
When he rolled his eyes, she turned and slipped into the driver seat. “Just get in, Sullivan. And hold on.”
“You’ve got serious control issues, you know that?” He clutched the armrest as she jerked the small car out of O’Hare’s rental lot and pulled into traffic on I-90.
The guy had some nerve. She changed lanes. “You’re talking to me about control? Nice one.”
He only grunted next to her.
Red brake lights flashed ahead in the dim light of early evening, and she shifted lanes again, easing around a semi. In her peripheral vision, she watched Rafe’s knuckles turn white against the armrest of the sedan as she whipped in and out of traffic. A smile curled her lips, the first one she’d felt in days.
But it was quickly blanketed by the thought of what lay ahead to night. She’d have preferred that Rafe stay in sunny Florida where she’d told him to sit tight, instead of tagging along with her to her parents’ house in Chicago. The guy didn’t listen to a word she said, though. He was too worried she was going to cut and run with Doug’s research, go off and find Tisiphone on her own. Which, if she had any sense, is exactly what she’d do.
Insane. This whole idea was totally insane, and being a bright girl, she was going along with it anyway. That pretty much made her certifiable.
She was just waiting for the inevitable moment when she’d have to explain how she, a grad student at the time, had managed to procure Dr. Douglas Stone’s personal research papers. Thank the blessed stars above, the brainiac next to her hadn’t yet asked.
She hadn’t been back to the Windy City in over a year, and knowing her family, they were going to make a big production out of her return. She could already hear her sister Keira’s high-pitched squeal—the same one
that had set Lisa’s nerves on edge as a teenager and sounded like fingernails scraping down a blackboard. With her hands gripping the wheel, Lisa took a calming breath and tried to remember these people were family. She didn’t have to like them per se, just love them. Which she did without fault—but God, sometimes it was a struggle.

Add to that the fact she hadn’t touched Doug’s research boxes since he’d died, and also that when she did, she was going to be hit with memories she didn’t want to even entertain…Yeah, this was shaping up into a lovely evening. And knowing she was going to have to deal with all of it under the watchful eye of Rafe Sullivan? Holy crap. It was almost enough to make her swerve into oncoming traffic.

His focus was trained on the traffic around them, but his grip had relaxed slightly on the door handle. She swerved into the right-hand lane just to watch him tighten his hold on the armrest again. Scaring him shouldn’t make her feel so good, but damn if it didn’t kick her mood up a pathetic little notch. His eyes widened. When his legs tensed next to her, she tried not to smile again.

“So tell me about your family,” Rafe said.

Her family dynamics were none of his business, but at this point she realized there was really no way out of teaming up, and being bitchy wouldn’t help.

“My mother was a teacher. She’s retired now. My father owned a furniture store up until a few years ago, when he sold it so he could pester my mother in her golden years.”

Colleen Maxwell had been thrilled to learn her only single daughter was bringing along a “friend” to night. Too bad it wasn’t that kind of friend. “My mother will get the wrong idea about you, right from the start. Don’t encourage her. Smile, nod, but keep your mouth shut. Hopefully we won’t be there long.”

He slanted her a cheesy grin. “Oh yeah? What kind of wrong ideas?”

She ignored the sparkle in his eye and his question, instead maneuvering the car around a motorcycle. “My father will hate you on the spot.”

“Protective,” he said as he relaxed further in his seat, like he had a clue what he was talking about. “Got it.”

Lisa let out a disbelieving huff. Protective wasn’t a word she’d use to describe her authoritarian father. Steady, reliable, dependable, even caring at times when the mood struck, but definitely not protective. “He doesn’t like Mexicans.”

“Whoa. Rewind.” Rafe sat straighter in his seat and held up his hand. “I’m not Mexican, querida, I’m Puerto Rican.” She caught the hint of an accent when he mentioned the small island. “Half Puerto Rican. And 100 percent red-blooded American. Mexican, my ass,” he mumbled.

“Doesn’t matter,” she said, shaking her head, ignoring the contempt brewing in his eyes. “You could be the king of frickin’ Spain, and he’d still only notice you aren’t Irish.”

He looked out the window and muttered something she couldn’t hear.

Was that guilt trickling through her chest? Why? The guy had been flicking her crap since she’d met him, and she now felt guilty because her father didn’t like Latinos? Right. That made sense.

“Maxwell doesn’t sound very Irish to me, querida.”

Okay, so he was quicker on his feet than she’d assumed. She frowned and changed lanes. “Don’t mention that to my father, either. Some half-baked woman way back in the family line had the bad sense to marry an Englishman. According to my father, the only thing the jackass ever added to the lineage was his goddamn name.”

“Anyone ever mention you swear like a sailor?” Rafe said, looking back at her. “Do you mouth off like that in front of your parents?”

She glanced sideways at him. “It’s like osmosis, Slick. When you spend six months of the year with big, burly archaeologists who think swearing is an art form, it just kinda seeps into you.”

“You mean nerdy bookworms trying to puff up their image? Yeah. Got it.” He stretched out his long legs, crossed his arms over his broad chest. “So how are we going to play this?”

“We aren’t playing it any way.”

He nodded. “Gotcha. So we go in, I tell your racist father how you jumped my bones in Italy, try to sidestep your mother so she doesn’t think we’re still all hot and heavy, we get the loot from the attic and run for the sun. Works for me.” He glanced out the window up toward the sky, which was covered by dark clouds. “How the hell do you people live in the arctic anyway? And are we at least getting fed in this deal, or are we on our own? ‘Cause that bag of pretzels on the flight didn’t do it for me.”

This time she did smile. Then sobered quickly. He was right. Being honest wasn’t going to work with her parents. If either of them found out this was all about the Furies, she was toast. She might be almost forty, but her mother’s wrath was something she avoided at all costs—at any age.

“We’re colleagues,” she said, working it through in her head. “Collaborating on a project.”
“What project?” he asked dryly.

Her mind spun as traffic slowed, and she eased her foot off the accelerator. “Greek mythology.” She grasped onto a memory. “You know an infinitely large number of boring facts on the subject.”

“You were listening.” He smirked before closing his eyes and leaning his head against the headrest, finally looking relaxed. “Majored in art history in college. Want me to enlighten you? I can think of a number of different ways.”

Light from the dash illuminated his rugged face, the muscles in his jaw, the line of his throat. Art history? That explained a lot, actually. The honest truth was she’d listened to everything he’d said that night in Italy. She’d just been too hypersensitized by that fake accent and gorgeous face to think clearly. But now, she couldn’t help wondering if there’d been a smattering of truth in his ruse.

“What?” he asked without opening his eyes.

How did he know she was even looking? Unnerved, she glanced back at the road.

“You surprised I went to college?”

She didn’t miss the hint of disdain in his words, or the fact he was watching her with that amused expression again, the one that said I’m chock full of surprises, babe. Come on over here and find out for yourself. A tiny part of her considered it before she realized what a monumental mistake that would be. No way she was going to mess this up with sex. She didn’t even like the guy. And while love had never been a requirement for her to tumble across the sheets with someone, liking them was.

She refocused on the road. “My mother probably called in reinforcements. Don’t be surprised if Keira and Catrine are there with their broods in tow.”

“Sisters?”

“Yes. Both younger, taller, fairer, better looking.” Her hand tightened on the wheel. Both perfect, with their perfect husbands and perfect children. Both pointing out she was without either whenever the opportunity presented itself. Both reminding her she’d lost both a lifetime ago.

He was looking at her again. She felt his gaze drilling into her from across the tight space, almost as if he could read her thoughts. Her pulse jumped, even though she tried like crazy to keep it steady.

“I find any of that hard to believe,” he said.

Was that tenderness in his voice? It had to be her imagination. The guy didn’t have a tender bone in his body.

Shaking away the thought, she pulled off I-90 and onto the narrow streets of Irving Park. “Shane will probably breeze in at some point, too, so just be forewarned.”

Leaves danced across the road in front of them, the car’s headlights illuminating the deep golds, flaming reds and crisp browns of fall.

“And Shane would be…?” He left the question hanging, his dark brows lifting in curiosity.

Good old-fashioned haughtiness warmed her chest. “My twin brother. He’s what you would consider protective.”

“Great,” Rafe mumbled, looking out at the passing city lights. “A bigot, too?”

“No.” Lisa smiled, enjoying the fact this little bit of info would put him on the hot seat. “He’s a detective with Chicago PD.”

His gaze snapped her direction. “Your brother’s a cop?”

“Mm-hmm.” She nodded. “How in the hell did you think I tracked you down so fast?”

“Wonderful.” His cheesy grin deepened into a scowl as he turned back to watch the passing brownstones. She smiled wider. “I warned you to stay in Florida, Sullivan. Maybe next time you’ll listen to me.”

* * *

It wasn’t a normal family. Rafe’s first impression of the Maxwell clan was a white version of *The Cosby Show* buzzed up on too much Guinness.

Not that Rafe had a clue what normal was. His own family was more like *War of the Roses* than *The Brady Bunch*. Toss in a little bit of *The Outsiders* for good measure, and you had a pretty accurate take on his teen years.

Lisa’s mother met them at the door. She was taller than Lisa, with dark hair and a face that was all smiles. She immediately wrapped Lisa in a tight hug and crooned in her ear as if she hadn’t seen her eldest daughter in years, and the gesture made Rafe wonder just how long it had been since the woman had come home.

Voices echoed down the entry hall, followed by an ear-piercing shriek that had Rafe shaking his head and rubbing his ears.
Sisters. You couldn’t miss them. They were like a freight train barreling out of the shadows, all long arms reaching for Lisa, voices raising the noise level in the echoing front hall to a roar that rivaled a Sunday Miami Heat game. Both women were taller than their sister, one lighter, one a softer shade of red, and while there were definite similarities between them all, neither held a candle to Lisa.

Not in body or face or voice or aura. She shone like a beacon amongst the three, her emerald eyes shimmering in the low light, her porcelain skin radiant next to that fire red hair of hers. And when she smiled, her whole face lit up, her cheeks taking on a rosy hue, her sensual lips curling to showcase that oh-so-scrumptious kiss-me mouth.

Her intoxicating face was a play of emotions as she stood there greeting the two sisters she mistakenly thought were so much more than she was. How on earth could she be jealous of either one? She was the only woman in the room he could see, the only one he’d been able to think about since she’d almost rocked his world in Italy. Hell, in any other situation, he might think the other women were attractive, but right now, next to her, he couldn’t even tear his gaze away from her long enough to give the others a passing glance.

Mesmerized, he watched Lisa’s expression change from relief, to apprehension, to familiarity with a sprinkling of love, as the sisters jabbered on around her. And standing there, listening, his chest tightened, a feeling that caught him totally off guard.

Whoa. Back the gravy train up, Colonel Sanders.

He caught himself before his thoughts spiraled out of control. Admiring her looks and centerfold curves was one thing, feeling a stirring in his chest was a whole other ball game. He barely knew the woman and had no idea what made her tick, other than her desire to find the Furies and grind his ass into the ground in the process. He wasn’t the type of guy who fell for a chick after only a week—wasn’t the kind of guy who fell for a woman, period. Not really. Hailey had been a convenience, an attraction that had gone a little too far and ended up being one great big mistake. The fact his mother had loved Hailey and was dying to see him settled down was the only reason he’d stayed with the woman for six months instead of cutting ties after a week and getting the hell out, like he should have done.

There was no way he was going down that road again. Relationships definitely weren’t his thing. He had to get his brain back on track and find that damn Fury so he could cash in his score and get his mother back to Puerto Rico before her time ran out. He’d made her a promise, and he wasn’t breaking it.

But when Lisa turned toward him to make introductions, he forgot just what the hell he’d been rationalizing to himself. His heart did a slow thump before he could stop it. And he watched in amazement as her gaze raked his face, the look in her eyes shifting from soft to smart-ass in one long blink.

Well, hell. That was fitting. Since she’d leveled him in the Keys, it was the only emotion she’d tossed his way. He shouldn’t be disappointed. And yet he was.

Lisa’s mother heard nothing but his name, not the lame explanation Lisa was rattling off about why she’d dragged him along, nor her other daughters’ bickering. The woman braced both hands on his cheeks. “We are so glad to have you here, Rafe.”

She grasped his hand before he could respond and pulled him through the arched doorway into the living room. “Darin, get up off that recliner.”

Lisa’s father tipped his gray head toward the doorway and scowled but didn’t rise. Oh, yeah. Lisa hadn’t lied. The man hated him on the spot.

The old man glanced back at the television flickering across the room. “Don’t look Irish to me.”

“Daddy, try to be civil.” Lisa brushed past Rafe and kissed her father on the cheek. “Hello, cupcake.” His face softened ever so slightly before going hard and rigid again.

“Daddy, this is Rafe Sullivan. He’s a colleague of mine.”

“You’re Irish, Sullivan sounds Irish,” her father mumbled. “It is,” Rafe supplied, trying his damnedest not to huff it out. “My father was born in Galway.” A no-good Irish drunk, to boot. And judging from the empty Killian’s bottles on the end table next to Darin Maxwell, Lisa’s father wasn’t far off the mark either.

“Don’t look Irish,” he muttered again. “Looks like those spics who broke in and trashed the store.”

Rafe’s jaw went tight. Lisa’s hand on his arm only marginally cooled his raging temper, just enough so he didn’t let the old geezer have it. “Daddy’s store was broken into several times by some Latino gangs in the area. It’s not personal, Rafe.”

The hell it wasn’t. It was always personal. And she didn’t have a freakin’ clue what the hell she was talking about.
The only reason he kept his jaw tightly clenched was because Lisa had a death grip on his arm. That and the fact he knew once he started, he wouldn’t stop. And somewhere in the back of his head, his brain was telling him to grit his teeth and let it roll off so he could get his hands on the research locked in the attic upstairs. If he flew off the handle now, he’d never get what he wanted.

But man, it would feel good to let this ass have it.

In his peripheral vision he saw Lisa’s mother exchange worried glances with her daughters. She tugged on his arm. “Rafe, why don’t you come into the kitchen with me and tell me how you met my girl.”

Worry and a shadow of embarrassment darkened Lisa’s face. “Go on,” she said softly. “I need to have a word with my father.”

Yeah, right. Like that would make a difference. Stiff and rigid, he followed Colleen into the kitchen, contrary to every instinct in his gut telling him to go back in there and stand up for himself.

What the hell was Lisa going to say to the old man? You’re right? He’s a liar and a thief, just like those gangbangers? That’s all she knew about him, all she thought of him. He hadn’t given her one good reason to think otherwise. She didn’t have a clue why finding the Furies was so important to him, didn’t know it wasn’t just about the money. Didn’t know it was about life and death and a promise he wasn’t going to break this time.

Hell, she was probably having a good laugh with the old man right now. The thought sickened him more than the racial slur her father had so casually tossed out.

His jaw twitched involuntarily. The hunt to find the Furies warred with his need to stand up for what he knew was right. And for the first time since he’d laid eyes on Lisa Maxwell, curves or not, he wished he’d walked out of that goddamn auditorium and never looked back.
CHAPTER SIX

Oh, yeah. This was better. Sitting in a chair at the Maxwell kitchen table listening to Colleen drone on about Lisa’s accomplishments as she shuffled from cutting board to stove was better than stewing about what a jerk Lisa’s father was.

Right. Like that was true. But at least it was better than wondering just how much of an ass Lisa thought he was, deep down. And it was way better than analyzing why he even cared what she thought about him.

The only good part about the situation was he finally had a beer in hand. And while Rafe would never admit it, a tiny part of him was enjoying hearing about the smart-mouthed Lisa as a cheerleader in high school. Images of her in a short, flitty skirt all giddy and juiced up on adrenaline surged through his mind and warmed his blood.

Yeah. A smile tugged at his mouth as he lifted the bottle and took a long pull. Lisa in a cheerleading skirt. In the backseat of his Mustang. Cheering him on. That was definitely better.

Darkness pressed in through the windows. Garlic and spices permeated the air. The little fantasy taking root in his mind burst with a pop when Lisa stalked into the kitchen with her brawny-looking father close on her heels.

Keira and Catrine stopped bickering at the counter where they were chopping vegetables for a salad. Colleen paused midsentence and glanced up from the steaming pot she’d been stirring. From the doorway, Lisa’s gaze cut to Rafe, and in her emerald eyes, there was no way he could miss the pleading.

And dammit, it softened him. Just enough so he didn’t lurch out of the chair and go after her father’s throat.

“So, Puerto Rico,” Darin said, shifting his feet, looking anywhere but at Rafe. “Colleen and I took a cruise to the Caribbean. Nice island.”

Rafe’s eyes widened. That was an apology? Puhleeze.

Lisa’s big, green eyes did that pleading thing again, every muscle in her tense body begging him to just let it roll off his shoulders and go on.

Oh, hell. Rafe’s jaw clenched. He could make a scene or keep the peace. Neither sounded appealing at the moment.

On a long breath, he leaned back in his chair and frowned, finally giving up. “Yeah, nice island.”

As if that were good enough, Darin Maxwell nodded and stepped around Lisa into the kitchen. “How much longer ‘til we eat?”

Great. Brush the whole sordid mess under the carpet and be done with it. Nice tactic. Hell, Rafe’s parents had done it their whole lives anytime things got sticky. Why should Lisa’s family be any different?

Catrine and Keira returned to their argument over some book they’d both read. Lisa’s parents chatted about the meal. When Lisa slid into the chair at his right, he unclenched his jaw and finally glanced up.

“Thank you,” she mouthed.

Thank you?

The gratitude across her face made him feel like he’d done something great for her. She was actually thanking him? That was an interesting turn of events.

He should simply have shook his head and looked away, sipped his beer and gritted his teeth. But for some idiotic reason he didn’t. Instead, he made the biggest mistake since he’d stepped foot in the house. He looked into those glistening emeralds and felt the first stirring of…guilt. It shocked him more than her father’s half-assed apology. And it burned him deep inside.

The front door opened and closed. Male voices echoed from the entryway, followed by the low rumble of shuffling feet and high-pitched chatter streaking down the hall. Lisa glanced away, breaking the spell that seemed to be sucking him under, and within seconds the kitchen was flooded with more bodies than the small room could contain. Two men who had to be her sisters’ husbands walked in just before a swarm of kids talking nonstop.

Rafe’s ears rang as the noise level jumped. He blinked and shifted, happy to have something else to focus on besides Lisa. He counted two…four…no, five kids, had no clue who went with whom, and seriously didn’t care. Kids weren’t his thing either. In fact, he avoided them at all costs. Partly because the few he’d
encountered were brats. Partly because he’d had his fill from the years he’d taken over as father figure after his old man had finally croaked and he’d tried to set Billy straight.

That had gone over real well. Another ripple of guilt snaked through him. He took a long swallow of his beer and pushed down the familiar feeling.

One short, redheaded mongrel who couldn’t have been more than three launched himself at Lisa’s legs as she introduced Rafe to the newcomers. Laughing, she swept the boy up in her arms before he could do serious damage, lifted his shirt and blew raspberries all over his belly. The boy shrieked and laughed, tried to wiggle out of her arms, but from the look of pure joy on his face, it was clear he didn’t want to be anywhere else.

A memory flashed in Rafe’s mind as he sat there, one of him and Lisa and that steamy hotel room in Milan. And he instantly understood what the boy was feeling. When he’d been in Lisa’s arms, he hadn’t wanted to be anywhere else, either.

With a smile, Lisa leaned back and glanced down at the scruffy-haired boy. Her eyes lit up as she teased and tickled and gazed into irises the same color as her own. In one swift moment her whole face transformed from stunning to downright gorgeous.

And Rafe’s chest did that weird tightening thing again.

Me. Me. Me. Look at me like that.

He stared at her, consumed by the sparkle in her eyes.

Just once. Just long enough so I can know what it feels like.

Lisa dropped the boy on his feet, tucked her hands in the back pockets of her jeans and, stepping toward the stove, laughed at something her brother-in-law said. The boy tore out of the kitchen after his cousins.

And just like that, the moment passed, as if it had never even happened in the first place.

Rafe blew out a shaky breath and took another long pull from the bottle in his hand. What the hell was happening to him? He needed to get away from these strange people before he got sucked into their craziness. Or, at the very least, he needed to stop looking at Lisa, because for some reason the woman was doing a number on him he just couldn’t explain.

Their’s was a business arrangement, plain and simple. He didn’t have any desire to figure out what made her tick. God knows, he didn’t need that complication on top of everything else.

At least that’s what he told himself. All the way through dinner.

This was much better.

Rafe followed Lisa up the narrow stairs from the third floor of her parents’ house toward the attic. His stress level was already dropping, just by being out of the infernal chaos downstairs.

“You look a little shell-shocked, Sullivan.” Lisa pushed the door open with her hip and flashed a smug smile over her shoulder as she stepped into the dark attic.

“My ears are ringing,” he muttered.

“I warned you about tagging along.” She pulled a dangling cord in the middle of the room. Light from an unshaded bulb above flooded the area, blinding Rafe for a swift moment.

As his eyes adjusted to the brightness, he slowly took in the surroundings. Boxes were stacked four high where they met the steadily sloping ceiling and the naked trusses. Several trunks sat against the far wall just under a round window that let in a smattering of street light from below. A rickety rocking chair, an old coat hanger, framed art and pictures lay scattered around the space. The scent of mothballs was strong in the room, the sounds of cars passing on the street below easily discernible, drowning out the voices from downstairs.

Lisa moved to a pile of boxes in the corner. “I think this is most of it. Some of this is my research, some of it’s Doug’s.” She hefted a box and pulled it toward the old rocking chair.

Rafe took a step toward the mountain of boxes as she sat and started going through papers. He tilted his head and read Lisa’s name written in black pen across the cardboard. “So what exactly are we looking for?”

Lisa fingered papers in her hand. “There should be several boxes with research on the Furies. Doug kept binders and binders of information. He was anal about recording everything, keeping careful notes, doing in-depth research.”

He looked over his shoulder. Light spilled across her hair, casting her face in shadows. She didn’t meet his gaze, but the way she’d said Stone’s name made Rafe automatically dislike the guy.

He’d already figured out there’d been more than just a professional relationship between the deceased professor and his prize student. Why else would she have all his crap in her attic? And why was she suddenly interested in the Furies now, fifteen years after his death?

Shaking off those questions because he was sure asking any would be like diving into shark-infested waters
with a severed artery, he turned back to the box, lifted the lid and pawed through a pile of old clothes. Near the bottom he found a black and red cheerleading outfit. A smile slinked across his face as he lifted the tiny garment and took in the pleated skirt and sleeveless V-necked top.

“Stop drooling, Sullivan.”

The image of Lisa in the back of the beat-up ’69 Mustang he’d driven in high school seeped back into his mind. Only now he could see it in living color. And oh, man. It was better than he’d imagined. “What do I have to do to get you into this thing?”

“In your dreams, Slick,” she mumbled behind him. Papers rustled again.

“Oh, querida.” He didn’t hide the smile in his voice. “I’m not sure you want to know what I’ve been dreaming since Italy. This just kicked it up a dramatic notch.”

With a huff, she stalked across the attic and lifted the box lid he’d set on the floor next to his feet.

Gardenias. He always smelled the sexy flower when she got close. The scent brought a swift visual of her tugging the shirt out of his slacks, running tantalizing fingers along his skin while she pressed her sensuous lips against his.

His back tingled at the memory, and his stomach tightened as she leaned close to grab the outfit from his hands. Her fingers barely brushed his in the process, and electricity zinged through him, gathering low in his stomach.

She tossed the red and black outfit back in the box and dropped the lid on top. Bracing both hands on the outside of the cardboard, she leaned over to lift it, pausing long enough to look him in the eye.

Heat from her muscular little body slid around him. Her hot breath washed over his skin. Arousal speared through his stomach and settled in his groin.

“Clothes. Not research. Try another box, Slick.” She straightened and moved the box away, then shifted back to her papers.

If he told her he liked that little nickname, she’d probably stop using it. Hell, he’d be as slick as she wanted, however she wanted. All she had to say was when.

He was smiling as he reached for the next box marked Lisa, flipped the lid and glanced down at another pile of clothes. A tiny T-shirt with the words JUNIOR ARCHAEOLOGIST stenciled across the front caught his attention.

“I take it this isn’t research either?”

Her head didn’t move, but her gaze lifted to his. A blank look ran across her face. “My sisters saved all their baby stuff for me, figuring one day I’d get around to it.”

He chuckled and dropped the shirt back into the box. “You don’t strike me as the maternal type, Maxwell.”

She stared at him a long moment before looking down again. “Yeah. Hilarious, huh?” She pushed the box away with her feet. “Hand me the next one.”

They spent the next hour sorting through boxes, pulling papers and binders, searching for anything remotely related to the Furies. Several papers referred to someone named Landau. Rafe made a mental note of the name in case it came up again. He’d pulled a couple of notebooks filled with chicken scratches and had made a pile of papers that had anything to do with Greek mythology. Together they created a stack in the middle of the room.

He grabbed the last box and popped the lid, while Lisa moved to one of the trunks under the window. A couple more filled notebooks, a pile of research books, mountains of little sticky notes. Geez. Anal was an understatement. The guy had even saved napkins he’d jotted info down on. Complete with…yup, ketchup on the corner.

Shaking his head, Rafe lifted the last notebook and spotted a handful of photographs in the bottom of the box. He smiled at what had to be Lisa in college. Her hair was down past her shoulders, her face young and innocent, and she wore the baggiest sweatshirt and sweatpants he’d ever seen—obviously, he noticed looking closer, to cover up a much-chubbier body than she sported now.

He flipped through the stack. There were a few of her with her siblings. One with a guy who had to be the infamous cop brother (they looked too alike for him to be anything other than family), a few more of her working in the field with colleagues, one of her in front of a lecture hall, teaching. None were overly remarkable, except for the fact she was much younger, but the last one made him pause.

Her arm was around an older guy with brown hair slightly gray at the temples, sporting a deep tan and a worn, rugged face. She was smiling, he appeared to be scowling. Both were wearing sunglasses, and they were standing on a boat, cool blue water glittering behind them.

But it wasn’t the location that stopped Rafe. It was the fact her hand covered his on her stomach. And looking closer, he realized she hadn’t been chubby in those pictures, she’d been pregnant.

Pregnant? Lisa?
He glanced across the room to where she was busy sorting papers in the trunk, paying no attention to him. He looked back at the photo. It was definitely her. No question about it. And because these pictures were with Stone’s research, it was pretty obvious the guy with her was none other than the dead archaeologist.

She’d had his baby? He opened his mouth to ask that very question, then closed it quickly. Maybe she hadn’t. In the photo it looked like she was just starting to show. He flipped the paper over and glanced at the date: May 23. Stone had died sometime in the middle of June. Which meant this picture was taken just before his death.

Rafe bit the inside of his lip. Hailey’s cousin had looked like that when she’d been…what, five months along? Six? Fifteen years ago, how late could a woman legally have an abortion? If the guy had just died, would she have gone ahead with the pregnancy?

His gut said yes, but he couldn’t be sure. Maybe she’d given the kid up for adoption. That was always a possibility. Either way, it was pretty obvious Dr. Maxwell didn’t have any children now, and from all his research, he knew she was the ultra-career-driven female. He’d watched her with the kids downstairs. She was a good aunt, teasing them, playing with them when they begged for her attention, but when all was said and done, she kept her distance.

Lisa let out a long breath and stretched her back. “I think that’s about it.”

Rafe slipped the picture in his back pocket and replaced the others.

She stood. “Let’s get it boxed up, and then we can get out of here.”

He followed her lead and reached for the lid. Getting out of here sounded pretty damn good right about now. “Works for me.”

That hadn’t been nearly as bad as she’d thought it would be. Once Rafe had shut up and stopped making smart-mouthed comments, he’d worked fairly well and pulled his own weight. And, Lisa had to admit, going through Doug’s old papers hadn’t affected her as she’d expected.

She’d tossed all those old pictures—thank God. Not seeing his face helped. But she was still apprehensive about reading his notes in depth. It would invariably bring up memories and emotions she wouldn’t be able to hide. She hoped to do most of that away from the watchful eyes of Rafe Sullivan.

She rounded the curve in the stairs and stopped short when she heard Shane’s voice in the kitchen. Great. Just great. As much as she loved her brother, some small part of her had hoped she’d missed him this trip. He must have heard her footsteps—or read her mind—because he appeared in the doorway to the kitchen just then, dark hair mussed, darker eyes locked on hers.

“There she is.” He took the box from her fingers, dropped it on the floor and caught her in a tight embrace.

Her eyes slid closed. He smelled like wintergreen Tic Tacs® and stale coffee. “God, I missed you,” he said into her ear.

She missed him, too. More than she wanted to admit. He was the only man who could very nearly bring her to tears.

When he dropped her on her feet, she got her first good look at him. His eyes were tired, worn. Blue smudges under his lashes proved he wasn’t sleeping much. And he’d lost weight since she’d seen him six months ago in San Francisco.

“You look like hell, little brother.”

Little brother was her favorite joke. At six-one, he was anything but little. Broad shoulders, a trim waist, abs of steel. He was every woman’s fantasy, even ten pounds lighter than his normal one-ninety. But that didn’t ease her worry.

He flicked her one of his lopsided grins and tapped his fist against her jaw. “Nice of you to notice.”

Footsteps echoed behind her. Shane’s gaze lifted. When his expression hardened, she knew he’d just caught sight of her thief.

Wonderful.

“What the hell?”

She placed a hand on Shane’s chest and watched as he shifted into protective-big-brother mode. “Don’t get all bent out of shape. This is Rafe—”

“Sullivan,” Shane finished on a harsh breath. “Oh yeah, I definitely remember.” His gaze narrowed, flicked to Lisa and back to Rafe again. “Mind telling me what the hell he’s doing here?”

“The cop brother,” Rafe mumbled behind her. “Yep. This night’s just getting better and better. Lisa, I’m gonna leave you to argue about me while I put all this stuff in the car.” He moved past them with two boxes in his hands.
Shane took a step toward him. Lisa moved between the two men and waited until Rafe disappeared out the front door before looking back at Shane.

“Okay, don’t get pissed.”

“Don’t get pissed?” he asked with wide eyes. “The guy’s a criminal. One you asked me to check out. You’d better start talking. And fast.”

She bit her lip.

“Lis?” His hands moved to his hips.

Lisa tugged him into the guestroom and closed the door. “It’s kind of hard to explain.”

“Do it anyway.”

The tone of his voice said he wasn’t putting up with her excuses. She knew that tone far too well. On a long breath, she told him about the Furies, about meeting Rafe and their eventual partnership.

“Holy shit.” Shane dropped onto the end of the bed. “Are you out of your ever-lovin’ mind?”

“Apparently. But thanks for pointing that out.”

“You can’t trust this guy.”

“Do I look stupid?”

“At the moment, yeah,” he said on a pathetic laugh.

“Okay, look. He’s my best shot at getting Alecto back. And if I want to find Tisiphone, he’s my best shot right now at that, too. And I think he might know where Magaera is. So, yeah, I’m going along with it. Whether you like it or not.”

“How do you know you’re even safe with the guy?”

It was that cop instinct of his kicking in, questioning everything. Distrusting everyone. He’d seen too much in his life working the streets and at some point had stopped believing people were innately good deep down inside. She had her own belief issues, but Shane’s ran much deeper.

And knowing that softened her. “It’s a gut feeling.”

“Aw, shit.” He rolled his eyes.

There went her sympathy. “Just shut up and listen. Yes, he’s a thief, but he’s not violent. He’s had plenty of opportunities to stick it to me, if you will, and he hasn’t. No, I don’t trust him. But I’m not afraid of him either.”

“So you’re going to go along with this?”

“For now.”

“And what if you don’t find the Furies?”

She heard the skeptical tone. He didn’t believe they actually existed. She knew otherwise. “I will.”

He closed his eyes, opened them. “Lisa, at some point you have to let this obsession go.”

Her back bristled. She wasn’t going to let him talk her out of this. And she wasn’t going down that road with him again, either. “I will. When I find them.”

She stepped toward the door.

His hand stopped her. “Hold on,” he said softer, turning her toward him. “You got a place to stay to night?”

She couldn’t stay mad at him when she knew he was genuinely worried. “Yes. We have hotel reservations.”

“Screw that.” He fished a key out of his pocket and handed it to her. “You’re staying at my place to night.”

“Shane, we already—”

He held up a warning hand. “Don’t say no. It’s not a question. If you’re gonna go through with this crazy idea, you’re gonna stay at my place where I can get a read on this guy before you take off again.”

She rolled her eyes.

“Oh, that look doesn’t work with me, Lis. Now listen. I’m on duty to night. I only came over here for a few minutes to see you. I should be home sometime after midnight. Be sure you’re there. And don’t make any plans to run out tomorrow morning before I get up. We’ve got more talking to do.”

She frowned and reluctantly took the key. There was no sense arguing with him. She knew when he meant business. “Fine. One night.”

“For as long as you’re in Chicago,” he corrected.

She pulled the open the door.

“Lis?”

“Fine,” she huffed, walking toward the front door, knowing he wouldn’t quit until he got his way. The man was exasperating. No wonder he was still single. “For as long as I’m in Chicago.”

Which sure as hell wouldn’t be long, if she had anything to say about it.

Rafe was in the hallway talking to her mother when she and Shane emerged from the bedroom. He glanced at her, curious, his gaze flicking to what she knew was Shane’s rigid don’t-mess-with-me face behind her. Her
mother smiled, oblivious to the raging testosterone pumping through her entryway.

Lisa blew out a frustrated breath. The only bright spot in this whole gigantic nightmare was that her father had retreated to bed already.

They said their good-byes, Lisa managed to get out of the house with only one Tupperware container full of chocolate-chip cookies—sustenance, her mother told her—and they climbed into the rental car. Silence was a welcome sound. She drew in a long breath of cool air.

“Yeah,” Rafe said sarcastically. “That was fun.”

Lisa started the ignition and pulled away from the curb. “Stuff it, Sullivan.”

He was quiet on the drive across town. When he realized they weren’t headed back toward the airport, he sat up straighter. “You missed your turn.”

“No exactly.”

His brows lifted in question.

She shifted. “We’re staying at Shane’s.”

His eyes widened. “Do I even have a say in this?”

“No.”

“Even better,” he mumbled, settling back in his seat.

He could bitch and moan all he wanted. She didn’t care. She was letting him tag along as it was. He should be grateful she hadn’t drop-kicked his ass already.

Lisa glanced in the rearview mirror as she headed north on Pulaski Road. Headlights switched lanes behind her and looked to be approaching fast. She tightened her grip on the steering wheel and moved into the right lane.

“What?” Rafe asked.

“Nothing. Some idiot behind us is swerving in and out of traffic. Probably drunk.”

He turned in his seat and glanced behind them. She looked back in the mirror. The lights barreled closer.

Rafe tensed. “He’s gonna hit us. Pull over.”

Lisa glanced in the mirror again. He was right. Her adrenaline jumped. “There’s nowhere else to go.” A car had moved up along their left. Parked cars sat against the curb to their right.

“Step on the gas then!” His hand clamped over her knee, and he pressed down hard, making her jump.

The car shot forward. She swerved through traffic, tightened her hands on the wheel and tried not to hit anything. The vehicle behind them sped up, following her path, steadily closing the gap between them.

“Carajo.”

Rafe’s hands settled at her waist. He lifted her up as if she weighed nothing and slid over the low console until his big body was beneath her.

She jerked the wheel and corrected. “What the hell are you doing?”

His foot tucked beneath hers, taking possession of the gas pedal. “I’m saving our asses, Mario. Move over.”

She had little time to do anything else. His large hands closed over the wheel. He cursed as he dropped one arm and repositioned the seat back about a foot to make room for his long legs. Then he turned the car to the right with a hard jerk. Her body slammed against his before she had time to latch her seat belt. The side street was empty but for a car up in the distance. Rafe’s foot pressed down on the accelerator. He glanced in the rearview mirror again, his expression tensing more and more by the second.

Lisa whipped around. That wasn’t a drunk driver. The car was still with them. It had dropped back after that last turn, but was steadily regaining speed.

A loud crack resounded. The glass in the back window shattered. Lisa screamed.

Rafe shoved her head down between her knees. “Stay down!” The car jerked again, this time to the left.

“They’re shooting at us!”

“Yeah, I figured that out.” He swerved around a parked car, pressed on the gas and tore down an alley between two large buildings. Tires squealed. Metal pinged as shots rang out again.

“Get your seat belt on!”

Lisa’s blood pulsed. She scrambled for the belt, locked it with swift fingers. She looked up just as they shot out of the alley.

Pedestrians scrambled on the sidewalk to get out of the way. Rafe whipped the car to the right. Her hand braced against the dashboard. Through wide eyes she spotted a Cadillac coming from the other direction.

Her breath caught. Oh, God…they weren’t going to make it.

Metal clanged against metal as the Caddie clipped the side of their rental. The front right tire hit the curb. Rafe swore. His hands gripped the wheel as he tried to overcorrect.

They rolled before Lisa even felt the impact.
“Lisa?”

The hand against her shoulder shook her hard. Lisa’s eyes shot open at the jolt.

It took a moment for her head to clear. When it did, she realized she was upside down, hanging from her seat belt. Blood rushed to her forehead. Pain cut across her abdomen and shoulder as fuzzy memories of the accident flashed in her mind.

She craned her neck so she could see Rafe. He’d already unhooked his belt and was trying to get hers undone.

“Oh…God.”

“Hold on. I almost have it.” Muscles strained in his jaw and shoulders as he worked the seat belt free.

Someone had tried to run them off the road. Someone had shot at them.

A tangy scent hit her nostrils. “What is that?”

His head darted up. Fingers paused on her belt. He looked through the open space behind them where the rear window used to be. Seeing the disbelief race across his features, she twisted as much as she could so her gaze could follow.

A car—the one that must have hit them—was on fire.

“¡Hijo de puta!” He glanced back at her seat belt and worked faster.

Gas. Oh, shit. They were leaking gas.

“Hurry!” she yelled.

He swore again and yanked the belt harder. As Lisa looked back through the window, her heart rate kicked up in her chest.

Hurry, hurry, hurry…

The belt gave with a snap. She landed hard against Rafe’s chest. His arms closed around her, and in an instant he was wriggling them both out of the vehicle-turned-fire hazard.

When he was all the way out, he grasped her hands and yanked hard. “Go!” He half pushed, half pulled her away from the car.

“My pack!” She turned before he could stop her, dropped to her knees and reached back inside the vehicle.

“Fuck me! Let it go!” He gripped her around the waist and pulled violently. The pack slipped from her fingers.

Lisa kicked and struggled out of his arms. “I need it. Dammit, I almost had it!”

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Lisa kicked and struggled out of his arms. “I need it. Dammit, I almost had it!”

He swore again and pushed her hard away from the car. Her butt hit the pavement just as his head and shoulders disappeared inside the vehicle.

Shouts caught Lisa’s attention, and her gaze darted to the burning car only yards away. For the first time, she saw the trail of gasoline trickling from the rental.

She scrambled to her feet.

“Rafe!”

He jerked out of the vehicle and ran toward her, backpack in hand. Strong arms caught her around the waist and thrust her down behind a parked car halfway down the block.

Gasoline met flame. Fire raced along the ground. The rental ignited in a fireball of metal and glass, and the scent of burning rubber scarred the air.

Tires squealed somewhere behind the burning car.

Rafe’s head darted up. Before Lisa had time to grasp her surroundings, he glanced over the hood of the pickup they’d used as cover. In one swift movement he grabbed her hand and pulled her with him.

She shot to her feet as he set off at a dead run.

His legs were longer. She had a hard time keeping up, still reeling from the accident. Just when she’d matched his pace, he jerked her to an abrupt halt and darted into a smoky tavern.

He paused long enough for Lisa’s eyes to adjust to the smoke and swirling lights. A band in the corner was playing a bad version of Clapton’s “Cocaine.” Patrons filled the bar, and the dance floor near the stage was packed with bodies. Glasses clinked and voices resounded through the crowded room. A woman sitting at a
table to Lisa’s left laughed and threw her head back.

The door behind them wrenched open. Startled by the blast of cold air, Lisa turned and saw two men frantically searching the maze of smoke and people.

Her pulse jumped. Rafe tugged her toward the back of the bar before she could get a close look at either man. They skirted tables before tearing out a back door and racing across an alley.

Her lungs burned, but it was obvious Rafe wasn’t slowing down for anything, especially not for her to catch her breath. The memory of that fire convinced her she wasn’t slowing down, either.

On the other side of the block he pulled her into the shadows. They hugged the concrete building, moving swiftly, putting as much distance between themselves and the explosion as possible.

His pace didn’t slow until they were a good six blocks away from the accident. He finally loosened his death grip on her arm, letting go long enough so he could look around to make sure they weren’t being followed. Satisfied, he signaled a passing taxi.

Lisa leaned forward, braced both hands on her knees and tried to draw air into her searing lungs. She could still taste the smoke from the fire. Her ears were ringing, her eyes stung.

Streetlamps cast shadows across the concrete. Cars whizzed by on the pavement. Garbage lined the gutters in the dilapidated neighborhood, and a Walgreens sign flickered down the street. Rafe pushed her into the cab before she could get her bearings and figure out just where the hell they were.

“Where to?”

Startled by Rafe’s gruff voice, she rattled off Shane’s address on Sheridan Avenue near the waterfront.

When the car pulled out into traffic, Rafe darted a look behind them. On a deep breath he finally settled back in the seat, dropped his head against the headrest and closed his eyes.

Lisa tried to do the same, but her pulse was racing, making it hard to feel anything other than mind-numbing fear. Pain finally registered—in her back, in her legs, in her arm. If it hadn’t been for Rafe, she’d have gone up in flames right along with that car.

He stretched out his long legs, groaned. The backpack landed with a thud near her feet.

And that’s when it hit her.

Holy crap. He’d saved her life.

Not only that, but he’d pulled her pack from the vehicle before the explosion. He’d gone back for it knowing he could have been caught in a raging inferno. He’d gone back for it not knowing what was inside.

A wave of unease rolled through her as she glanced toward her feet.

If he’d known what was in that backpack, he’d have grabbed it and run. And she had a pretty strong hunch he wouldn’t have bothered to pull her to safety first.

Rafe waited while Lisa unlocked the door to her brother’s third-floor apartment. Her hands were shaking. She was having trouble getting the key in the latch.

The adrenaline was starting to go. He knew the signs all too well. She was about to crash, and from the look of her, she was going to hit hard.

He slipped the key from her hand and turned the lock himself. She didn’t protest, confirming his suspicions, and the door gave with a pop. He pushed it open and let Lisa go in first, then watched to make sure she didn’t lose it right there in the doorway.

She hadn’t said anything in the cab on the way over, which meant she was still processing everything that had just happened. Better for him. When it all finally hit her, he had a feeling the heat from that fire would barely register on the Celsius scale in comparison. The woman had a mean-ass temper. He’d already seen it in living color.

She stopped in the middle of the living room. Rafe stepped around her, dropped the dirty backpack on the floor near the couch and headed for the kitchen. He flipped a switch on the wall. Three small triangular lights over the granite island flickered on, illuminating the stainless-steel appliances in the adjacent room.

He moved to the cupboards and opened them one by one, searching for any kind of alcohol to deaden her senses before reality settled in.

“Oh, my God. Someone was shooting at us!”

Too late. He needed to work faster.

He flipped open another cupboard, swore under his breath when all he found was canned food.

“What the hell did you do to make someone try to kill us?”

Temper sizzled just under his skin. “You automatically think that was about me?” He pulled open another cabinet, a jolt of relief rushing through him when he spotted a bottle of Jameson.
“You’re damn right. No one’s ever tried to kill me in downtown Chicago before!”

He found glasses, poured a generous shot in each and pushed a tumbler into her hands. “Drink.”

“I’m not—”

“Drink it,” he said louder.

She studied him a second as if judging his mood, then downed the shot in one long swallow, her fight-ready eyes never wavering from his.

“Again.” He refilled her glass before she could protest.

She glared at him but drank the second without argument.

He swallowed his shot, set the glass on the counter and braced both hands on the granite as he tried to settle his own nerves. “Contrary to what you might think,” he said as calmly as he could, “I don’t like guns. I don’t like people who use guns, and I make it a point not to get too chummy with anyone who does.”

“So why was someone shooting at you?”

“I don’t know.” He took the glass from her fingers and set it on the island before she got smart and cracked it over his skull.

“Bullshit.”

Her eyes were still blazing, but some of the fight had slipped from her voice.

“I’m not kidding.”

She laughed—a smug, disbelieving sound that only jacked him up more—as she stepped away from him.

“Look, lady. In the last two days since you showed up at my door, my house has been trashed and I’ve been very nearly roasted like a Thanksgiving turkey. Neither one is an everyday occurrence for me. So why don’t you tell me who the hell you pissed off, and we’ll see if it gets us anywhere.”

She turned to face him again. “That’s rich. Blame this on me. You’re the thief!”

Adrenaline rush or not, the woman was bordering on hysterical. He moved around the counter toward her, pausing only when her words finally registered.

Maria’s warning ran through his mind: *Treasure hunters will pour out of the woodwork to beat you to the last goddess. You could lose everything.*

“Who have you told about the Furies?”

“What?” she asked, like it was the stupidest question ever.

“Who did you tell?”

“I don’t know.” When he only stared at her, she frowned. “Shane.”

“Anyone else?”

“No, Slick,” she mocked. “I didn’t go around advertising the fact I was looking for Alecto.”

“Neither did I, but you weren’t exactly careful about your Internet searches. I traced you. Someone else might have, too. Anyone see you in Jamaica with the relief?”

“The guide I was using. But he didn’t know what it was.”

“You sure?”

“Yes.”

He ran a hand across his chin, thinking. “You tell anyone you were headed to Florida to find me?”

“You think someone followed us from the Keys?”

“If you really didn’t trash my house? Then yeah, maybe.”

He took his first good look at her since they had gotten to the apartment. City lights twinkled behind her in the picture window. Her face was hidden in shadows, but her eyes were wide with understanding and just a hint of fear. He could practically see the cogs turning in her brain, the realization that whoever had chased them earlier might have been following her and not him.

And looking closer, his gaze darting over her tense shoulders and body held rigid, he finally noticed the gash in the upper right arm of her jacket.

“Mierda.” He crossed and tugged the suede jacket down her shoulders.

“What are you doing?” She struggled against his grip.

“Relax, querida. I’m not trying to cop a feel. You’re bleeding.”

“What?” She looked down.

He pulled her into the kitchen, lifted her around the waist and propped her up on the counter to get a better look before she could protest. Her V-necked sweater was sliced at the arm. She had a good-sized scrape across her bicep, blood oozing steadily from the cut. “Where does your brother keep first-aid supplies?”

“Um…” She placed a hand over the cut as her face paled. “In the bathroom, I think.” She nodded toward the hall.

“Stay here and don’t fall.”
The look she sent him was laced with mild irritation.

Indignation was good. He headed for the hall. At least it meant she wasn’t going to pass out on him. He could deal with a little blood. Scraping her off the floor was another matter entirely.

He rummaged through the bathroom cabinets until he found what he needed, and returned. Placing the items on the counter, he eased between her legs and focused on the wound.

She stiffened when he fingered her arm, reminding him she had to be sore after everything she’d been through. He’d handled her roughly after the accident. But dammit, she hadn’t listened to him. She’d darted back into that car without even thinking, all for her stupid backpack.

He should have let it burn. But getting it himself was the only way he’d been able to get her away from that car.

If they had rescued anything, it should have been Stone’s research. Now they were back to square one, starting over.

She hissed as he gently brushed the cut. He let out a breath and looked up. “You’re gonna have to take off the sweater. I can’t get to it like this.”

She shot him a contemptuous look.

“Look, querida. I’ve already seen the goods, remember? And sex is the last thing on my mind right now. Trust me.”

Her green eyes locked on his, held for a split second before darting away. Was that relief or regret he saw flash in those shimmering emeralds?

He couldn’t tell. And she was wriggling out of the sweater before he could find out for himself.

Carefully, he helped pull the garment from her injured arm. When she finally sat in front of him wearing only a peach-colored lace bra, he forced his gaze away from those tempting breasts, tried not to remember what they felt like under his hands and went to work on her wound.

Silence settled over them. A clock ticked somewhere in the apartment. The faint sound of cars whizzing by on the road below drifted through the closed windows. She watched with cautious eyes as he cleaned the cut.

“You’re good at this,” she finally said.

He kept his eyes glued to the injury, dabbed alcohol on the wound. When she drew in a sharp breath, he blew cool air across her arm to take away some of the sting. “Good thing for a guy like me to know.”

“Occupational advantage?”

Now why would he be surprised by that comment? “No. A younger brother who was always getting himself into tight scrapes. It was either learn how to take care of him myself or stick our mother with another ER bill she couldn’t pay.”

“You have a brother?”

The skepticism in her voice made him bristle again. “Surprise, surprise. The thief didn’t actually crawl out from beneath a rock.”

“That’s not what I meant,” she said softer.

Rafe looked up into concerned eyes and faltered. He wasn’t sure he wanted to know what she meant. The more he got to know her, the more he saw her as a real person, not simply his ticket to the easy life. And he’d seen a little too much of her to night at her parents’ house, had glimpsed more of the woman she was deep inside than he’d wanted to know.

He was starting to like her. Really like her, which was the kicker in all of this. She was kind and gentle when the mood suited her, smart and quick on her toes. She didn’t put up with crap from anyone—especially him—and he couldn’t help respecting that. He’d enjoyed spending time with her at her parents’ place, even if her family was a bunch of loons. And after that accident, he’d felt more than a frisson of guilt at her being hurt. He’d felt a tickling of fear at the thought of something happening to her.

And that insane emotion wigged him out enough to smack him right back to reality.

He looked back down, slapped on the bandage rougher than needed. “There. You’re done. It needs stitches, but you show up at the hospital now, they’re going to ask questions. And in your mood you’d probably spill your guts.”

Thank God he’d registered the rental under a different name so it couldn’t be traced back to them. A run-in with the police was the last thing he needed right now.

Lisa levered off the counter and turned away. “Thanks for the vote of confidence. You sure know how to make a girl feel better.”

His guilt seeped back in as her voice hardened. He slipped his hands into his pockets, watched as she pulled the sweater back over her head and slid the garment on. Soft light shimmered over her short red hair and the purple smudges forming near her temple.
He could see she was more shaken than she was letting on. Being curt just because he couldn’t get a handle on the stupid thoughts rushing through his mind wasn’t helping to settle her. And for some idiotic reason, he had an overwhelming urge to reach out and comfort her.

She’d probably knock him on his ass if he tried, which was all the more reason not to even bother. But damn, she looked good standing there, all wasted on adrenaline, about to hit rock bottom. His own nerves were still strung tight. He knew he needed to do something to get rid of this extra energy. Cushioning her fall right there on the tile floor suited him just fine at the moment.

She reached back and rubbed the nape of her neck. He lifted his hand before he thought better of it, ran fingers over hers and kneaded what he knew were sore and aching muscles.

Her shoulders tensed beneath him, but she didn’t pull away. When she dropped her arm, he read that as a good sign and added his other hand, working the tension from her shoulders one muscle at a time. Her body relaxed inch by gorgeous inch until she let out a long sigh.

His blood pumped. Because she’d sounded just like that when he’d had his hands all over her back in Milan.

He stepped closer, brushed his chest against her back and felt her draw in a quick breath that had nothing to do with pain. Arousal speared through his limbs, gathered low in his gut, shut down the rational side of his brain that said this was a really stupid move.

“What if I hadn’t left?”

Her head turned slightly, enough so he could see the spark of curiosity in her eyes. “You mean if you hadn’t drugged me, then robbed me blind?”

God, she had a smart mouth on her. A mouth he wanted to explore all over again, in a variety of different ways.

“Querida, I could have robbed you blind anytime I wanted.” His voice dropped. “I walked away before things got complicated.”

“Now I’m supposed to be grateful for the way you left? Gee, what a gentleman you are. Thanks, Sullivan.”

A smile curled his mouth. His breath brushed her ear-lobe. “I don’t remember anyone saying no as the night progressed.”

“Bad judgment on my part,” she said with the slightest quiver in her voice.

The woman was all about control. Some small part of him couldn’t help admiring that quality. It only heightened his desire.

“You couldn’t stop it any more than I could.” He trailed his finger down the long, sexy line of her neck. Smiled wider as she shuddered at his touch. “Then or now.”

“I don’t get involved with people I’m working with, Slick.”

Her skin was soft, like silk beneath his palms. He wanted to taste that delectable neck, work his way down her body, savor every square inch of her.

“I hate to break this to you, querida, but I think we’re already involved.”

She stiffened. Then turned and looked up, those emeralds shifting from soft green pools to rock-hard stones in the length of time it took for his words to register. But lurking just behind the shield, he saw the desire brewing deep inside.

She wanted him, dammit. She couldn’t hide it any more than he could. She was just a lot better at fighting it. “We’re partners now, Sullivan. You made that choice all on your own. And I have strict rules about colleagues. Those rules don’t bend for anyone. Especially you.”

He braced his hands on the counter, trapping her between his body and the cupboards as he leaned closer. She tensed. That heady scent of hers made the blood rush to his head.

“Never?” He knew that was a lie. Hell, he’d seen it for a fact himself. His lips curled as his gaze ran over her face and hovered on that oh-so-scrumptious mouth.

Doubt flashed in those shining green pools. She looked from his eyes to his lips, the suggestive move raising his body temperature ten degrees. Indecision ran across her face. He could see she was contemplating her options, that she was wavering.

God, he wanted her. And he knew he could break her with one swift kiss. She was teetering on the edge of an adrenaline rush, despite all her sanctimonious words and ideas. One brush of his lips and he could rock her right to her knees. One taste and she could take him with her.

But would that do it for him? If that was all he’d wanted, he could have had his way with her in Italy. Reality hit him as he stood there, waiting. He didn’t want to be the one doing the taking. He wanted her to come to him, to prove that after everything he’d done, she wanted him as much as she had in Milan.

More than she had in Milan.

That need was so strong, so overwhelming, he let go of the counter and stepped back before he changed his
mind and took her right there against the cabinets in her brother’s kitchen. Cool air washed over his skin, replacing the sultry heat radiating from her centerfold curves.

Shimmering gems laced with more than a hint of disappointment and confusion lifted toward his.

“No. If this happened—when this happened—she’d be the one to make the first move. She’d be the one begging.

He’d make sure of it.

In the meantime, he’d wait. And suffer. And pray she wasn’t as stubborn as she looked.

“Go to bed, Lisa.” He forcibly softened his voice. “It’s been a long night, and you need to sleep. I’ll take the couch.”

She was toast.

She sure felt like it, anyway.

Lisa flopped onto her back and stared at the ceiling in Shane’s extra bedroom. She’d slept all of about two hours last night. Partly because she’d still been anxious over the accident, partly because she’d spent way too much time fantasizing about the sexy Puerto Rican asleep on the couch on the other side of the door.

What the hell was she doing? She was in way over her head with this guy. She’d almost jumped him last night. Probably would have, if he hadn’t shuffled her off to bed like a recalcitrant two-year-old.

Thank God one of them had been thinking clearly, because it sure as hell hadn’t been her. As soon as he’d touched her she’d almost gone off like a firecracker, every muscle in her body enticed and overly aware. And when he’d stood there in Shane’s kitchen looking at her like she was the only thing in the world he wanted, she’d very nearly tackled him to the floor and taken complete advantage of him.

She ran a hand over her face, her cheeks burning at the memory. Too bad his look had had little to do with her and everything to do with the near-death experience they’d both lived through. Any woman would have had the same effect on him. Hell, any man would have had the same effect on her, right? Almost being torched would juice anybody.

What if I hadn’t left?

Groaning, Lisa tossed an arm over her eyes. Why did he have to ask that? It was the one question she’d intentionally been avoiding in her own idiotic thoughts, and now it was all she could think about. She didn’t want to wonder what would have happened if he hadn’t left her that night. She knew damn well where it would have gone, and she sure as hell didn’t want to ponder how amazing it would have been.

She dropped her arm, focused on a spot on the ceiling.

Okay, so she could admit he heated her blood. She was a healthy, mature woman, right? And the guy was hot. She’d thought that even before he’d hustled her. She wouldn’t be a woman if she didn’t feel some sort of attraction toward him.

The difference here was she wasn’t going to do anything about it. Thinking about sex and having sex were two very different things.

Thief, liar, jerk. That’s all he was. She needed to remember those simple facts and get over it.

He was a thief—one who’d saved her ass last night when he could easily have turned the other way.

A liar—who’d nursed her wounds.

A jerk—who’d obviously been as aroused as she and hadn’t taken advantage of the situation when he clearly could have.

Craaaaap.

She blew out a calming breath, closed her eyes and tried to steady the odd thump in her chest. She wasn’t going to start thinking of him as heroic. The guy didn’t have a noble bone in his body. He’d only saved her skin because, with Doug’s research gone, she was still his best chance at finding Tisiphone. He sure as shit hadn’t saved her because he’d felt anything for her. That thought was just too stupid to entertain.

If she kept it all in perspective, she could beat him at his own game and stay safely out of his bed. He was the last person on earth she could afford to get tangled up with. The events of last night had confirmed that fact loud and clear.

Frustrated with herself, she sat up and raked fingers through her hair. Her gaze drifted across the room, landed on the backpack in the corner. She rose, pushed up the sleeves of Shane’s gray Northwestern sweatshirt and pulled Doug’s journal from her pack.

She’d slipped it from the boxes before leaving her parents’ house. She hadn’t wanted Rafe to see it. Not yet. Not ever, if she could help it. Security, she reminded herself. The journal just might be her get-out-of-jail-free card if things got sticky.
The leather cover was worn and scratched. She ran her fingers over the spine, remembering the hours Doug had spent holed up in his office writing in the damn thing.

Another good reason not to get involved with a colleague.

Or a treasure hunter.

Their hearts were always focused on something else—the next big score, the next great discovery. She’d definitely learned her lesson with Dr. Douglas Stone. A woman had to be kicked in the teeth only once to get it.

She sat on the end of the bed, laid the journal on her lap and stared at the cover.

*For the love of God, quit being such a wuss.*

On a deep breath, she flipped it open. Even fifteen years later, Doug’s slanted handwriting made her chest tighten with emotions she thought she’d dealt with long ago. Forcing back the memories, she paged through the book with all the objectivity of a scorned wife.

Page after page of Greek lettering and symbols filled the journal. Long passages from Homer’s *Iliad* were hand copied, words and letters underlined in no apparent pattern. He’d spent his whole life working on this stupid diary, and now years later, it was all that was left of him.

Her fingers paused when she came across a Polaroid tucked between two pages. A startled laugh slipped from her lips. She covered her mouth with her hand and stared at the photo of herself.

She’d been about twenty-three then. Her hair was long, down past her shoulders, red and unruly, as it had been throughout her youth. In the picture she was covered in dirt, black smudges across her white tank top, dust smeared on her cheeks. But her lips were smiling, her eyes gleaming.

*Ecuador.*

The first dig she’d been on with Doug. The first time he’d looked at her as anything other than one of his grunts.

Man, she’d been blinded by lust, enamored of a man who’d been more emotionally closed off even than she was now. She could see it on the face of the naïve upstart staring back at her.

Oh, yeah, she’d played hard to get back then. She shook her head and frowned at the memory. She’d fallen into bed with him the second he’d crooked his little finger at her, not caring one iota about the repercussions or consequences or how it would change her life.

*Schmuck. What the hell were you thinking?*

She wanted to scream it at the photo, pretend the words could make a difference, that somehow the girl she used to be would wise up and listen.

How many people had told her she was making a monumental mistake? Too many to count. And had she listened?

Hell, no.

As Shane was known to point out anytime the opportunity arose, she was bullheaded to the extreme. Well, that had come back to bite her in the ass several times over, hadn’t it?

A thousand *what ifs* and *I should haves* ran through Lisa’s mind as she stared at a woman she barely remembered. None made up for her genuine stupidity. None changed the past.

Resigned, she tucked the photo back inside, closed the journal and replaced it in the pack.

Later. She’d read it in depth later. Right now she needed coffee.

As she found sports shorts in a drawer, pulled them on and rolled her eyes, why couldn’t she have had a twin sister? One with a gentle disposition, some sort of fashion sense and clothes she could actually borrow?

Dreading seeing Shane that morning because she knew exactly what he would say, she managed to find a way to keep the shorts from slipping to her knees by rolling the waistband down a few times. She brushed her teeth with a new toothbrush she found in the bathroom drawer, thanked the stars above for Shane’s practicality, finger-combed her hair and checked her reflection.

She looked like she hadn’t slept in a week. A good-sized bruise had formed near her temple. Her eyes were red and bloodshot, and her arm hurt like a bitch.

Screw it. She didn’t care what she looked like. She wasn’t out to impress anyone anyway.

She had more urgent issues, like what the hell they were going to do, now that Doug’s research had gone up in flames. His journal would only be helpful once they determined the right island. And at this point, it could be anywhere.

She headed for the kitchen. Her brain was fuzz without her morning shot of espresso. If it hadn’t been for the damn caffeine withdrawal, she’d have gone back to bed and slept for the next twelve hours.

Voices echoed from the front of the apartment, Shane’s distrusting tone followed by Rafe’s deep one. Fabulous. Male posturing. Just what she needed. There was so much freakin’ testosterone in the apartment, she could feel it clogging the air.
She rolled her shoulder as she moved down the hall. If they’d drained the coffee already, heads were gonna roll.
The both looked up when she stepped into the kitchen. Shane sat at the table, his eyes scrutinizing her face. Rafe stood quietly near the counter.
“Good morning,” she mumbled, avoiding Shane’s probing eyes as she skirted the table toward the coffee pot. Her brother lifted his mug to his lips. “Hook up an I V, Lis. ’Cause we’re gonna have words.” Suddenly, that burning vehicle didn’t look so bad right about now.
She opened the cupboard, avoiding Rafe as much as she could while she searched for a cup. Too many thoughts from last night were racing through her mind, too many other what ifs.
Holy cow, did the guy just pump out heat or something? It felt like it was nine thousand degrees in the kitchen, and he wasn’t even close to her.
A full mug of steaming coffee slid down the counter toward her. Startled, she glanced up, her fingers pausing on the cupboard door.
And her breath nearly stopped when she looked into Rafe’s smoldering, I-still-want-you eyes. A shadow of beard covered his jaw. His dark hair was tousled from sleep, his lips full and tempting. And that lazy half smile screamed of the thousand different ways he could make her beg for more.
Well, shit.
Spread some butter on her and call her done. She was still toast.
Burnt toast, from the looks of it.
“You look like crap.”

Thank God for Shane’s perfect timing. All that sultry heat she’d been feeling slithered away at the disapproval in his voice.

Lisa lifted the mug and took a long swallow of hot coffee. She could feel Rafe’s gaze searing her, and damn if it didn’t unnerve her more.

And royally piss her off.

She slid into a chair across from Shane, shrugged and took another sip. “You have such a way with words, little brother.”

Shane leaned back in his seat and studied her with that searching gaze of his. “Fidel over there isn’t giving me much to go on.”

Rafe huffed and pushed away from the counter. “I’m gonna hit the shower and let you two argue about me behind my back.” He flashed a droll look at Lisa and slipped from the room.

One down. One exasperating male to go. Lisa lifted her coffee.

“So start talking,” Shane said.

“Sullivan didn’t already fill you in?”

“She mentioned an accident. It wouldn’t happen to be the one on Springfield Avenue last night, would it?”

She rolled her eyes.

“Shit. You could have been killed. And you do realize leaving the scene of an accident can get you into serious trouble, don’t you?”

“I didn’t particularly want to end up as the scene of the accident.”

He pinned her with a look that said Enough, smartass.

“Where were you registered last night?”

She asked with surprise. “The Marriott.”

“Which hotel?” She asked with surprise. “The Marriott.”

“Fuck.” He ran a hand over his face. “At O’Hare?”

He nodded.

“Two rooms?”

“No.” His questions sent a shiver down her spine. “I booked a one-bedroom suite with a pullout couch.”

He groaned.

“Okay, you’ve got my attention.” She sat up straighter. “Now you spill.”

He let out a long breath. “Couple was found murdered at the O’Hare Marriott early this morning. Desk clerk said they checked in late last night after a cancellation.”

“Door was open. Night security guard found them. What time did you cancel the reservation?”

“Afetr we left Mom and Dad’s. Nine, nine thirty.”

“He mentioned an accident. It wouldn’t happen to be the one on Springfield Avenue last night, would it?”

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“Door was open. Night security guard found them. What time did you cancel the reservation?”

“After we left Mom and Dad’s. Nine, nine thirty.”

“Couple checked in around ten forty-five P.M.” His eyes sharpened. “What the hell’s going on, Lis?”

Lisa braced her elbows on the table, rubbed her throbbing temples. Tried to think coherently. “O’Hare’s not in your district. How did you find out about it so fast?”

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“Chicago’s not such a big place. We keep each other informed. What’s going on?” he asked louder with his you-can’t-distract-me voice.

No way she could keep him out of this. He was like a bloodhound chasing a scent when he got going. Relentless. Obsessive. Irritating beyond belief.

They were way too much alike.

She dropped her hand in defeat. “Did you tell anyone about the Furies?”

“Me?” His brow lifted. “No. That’s what this is about?”

“It could be.” She darted a look toward the hall. The shower was going. Rafe couldn’t possibly hear them.

“Someone trashed Sullivan’s house the day I showed up in Florida to track him down. Best guess? That someone was looking for Alecto. Sullivan says he knows where Magaera’s located.”

When Shane looked at her like she was rattling off unnecessary and completely useless information, she shifted in her seat. “That leaves Tisiphone. I realize you don’t know much about Greek mythology and ancient
“art, but all three reliefs together? They’re worth a small fortune.”

That piqued Shane’s interest. “How much are we talking?”

She shrugged and lifted her mug again. “Enough to buy a small country.”

“Shit.” His features hardened as he shifted into cop mode. He did it with such ease, she doubted he even realized when he moved from approachable to downright intimidating.

And judging by that look, she realized this was her one and only chance to keep him from going off the deep end and taking over. “My gut tells me someone’s onto us. That they followed us to Chicago thinking we know where Tisiphone is located. Or, at the very least, that they believe we know where to find her.”

“All the more reason to forget this stupid treasure hunt and get out now.”

She shook her head, set the mug down and wrapped both hands around its warmth. “No. That’s all the more reason to find it before someone else does.”

When he grimaced like she was the dumbest person on the planet, she softened her tone. “Look. I thought about this a lot last night. I’m not being stupid. If someone followed us here, then they think I have Tisiphone or know where it is. Walking away won’t keep me any safer. They’ll just follow me wherever I go. The only way I’ll be safe is to find it before they do.”

“What about Sullivan?”

“What about him?”

“How do you know he’s not behind this?”

“You think he hired someone to try to kill us?”

“To scare you, sure. To get you to back off.” He tapped his finger on the table. “He had Stone’s research in his grimy little hands last night. Why would he need to keep you around?”

He’d just voiced everything she’d already thought of, and she knew she didn’t have an answer that would satisfy him. Only a feeling. One that said the guy may be a thief, but he wasn’t a murderer.

She rubbed the heel of her hand across her forehead. “Okay, thinking rationally, I can see your point.”

“You don’t believe me?”

“Can you?” he asked with sarcasm.

She shot him a dry look. “But, if he were behind the chase and shooting last night, then he royally screwed himself, because we lost Doug’s research. I don’t think he’s that stupid. And he was with me at the time of that hotel murder, so there’s no way he could have been personally involved with that. I can’t see a connection there anyway.”

Shane rested both elbows on the table, pinched the bridge of his nose. No way Sullivan was off his short list of suspects. She could see it in his rigid body language. She could also see that he agreed with her conclusion that she wouldn’t be safer by letting this go—and that he hated it. “So someone else is looking for the Furies.”

“Maybe.” She sipped her coffee. “Maybe more than one someone.”

He looked up, his dark eyes softening with genuine concern. “If I ask you to let this go—”

“You won’t,” she cut in quickly.

“Dammit, Lisa.”

She smiled, and a warmth closed around her heart as she reached across the table to squeeze his arm. “You do love me.”

“Like a bad habit. You’re a royal pain in my ass.”

Her smile widened.

He blew out another long breath. “So what’s your plan now?”

She let go of his arm and rose to get more coffee. “Now I’m going to try to track down Alan Landau.”

“Why?”

“Because his name was all over Doug’s research when I was flipping papers last night. I vaguely remember him. I think they may have worked together on some of his research years ago.”

“He’s a big-time art dealer here in Chicago.”

“Landau? Really?” Eyes widening, she slid back into her chair with a full cup of java. “No wonder the name’s so familiar.”

“Has an auction house downtown. Specializes in rare sculpture and antiquities, I think.”

“How do you know so much about him?”

He grimaced.

“Shane?”

His eyes darted away before landing on hers again. “His assistant, Laura Hamilton, was murdered last week. Case has been a bitch crawling up my ass for the last seven days.”

Cup in hand, Lisa paused with the steaming liquid midway to her mouth. “You’re kidding.”

He shook his head, the look in his eyes screaming, *Fuck, this had better not be related.* “I wish to God I
Small miracles were a wonderful thing.

Lisa tugged Shane’s leather jacket tighter around her shoulders as she waited for the Purple Line to take her into downtown Chicago. She could have saved time by hopping a CTA bus then would already be cruising down Michigan Avenue, but instead she’d hoofed it several blocks to the El to make sure she wasn’t being followed.

So far, so good. She was a lone woman in a sea of grumbling Chicago commuters.

And lone was the key word in that thought. She was thankful she’d managed to get away from those stifling men for a few hours at least. Shane had been called out on work, and she’d convinced Rafe to stay at the apartment and do research on the Landau Gallery.

Pushing thoughts of Rafe out of her mind, she rode the train to the Chicago station and walked the rest of the way to Michigan Avenue. A crisp fall breeze blew off Lake Michigan. The scents of exhaust and fried food from a vendor down the street greeted Lisa’s nostrils. She breathed deep and felt her muscles relax one by one for the first time in days.

Home.

She might spend a good chunk of her life in subpar living conditions and dank caverns, but she would always be a city girl at heart. And part of being a city girl meant she knew a little about style. She didn’t need to look like a cave dweller in tattered clothes to study ancient artifacts.

After an hour in Banana Republic and another half hour in Ralph Lauren, she felt better. She found several outfits to get her through the next few days and a snazzy pair of black boots that propped her up at least two inches. Dumping her purchases on the counter in the last store, she pulled cash from her pocket and waited while the sales clerk rang her up.

She’d even managed to find a few things for Rafe, ingrate that he was. Her mood slid south again at the thought of her obnoxious thief. As the clerk handed her the bag, she plastered on a smile for the overly cheery employee’s benefit. Mister Macho could just pay her back and thank her for even thinking of him.

With the bag in one hand, she headed back out into the masses. She had one last stop before catching a bus north again. Turning south on Michigan Avenue, she wove between hurried shoppers and lingering sightseers and crossed at Huron Street. The Landau Gallery sat halfway down the block, towering columns advertising the entrance to the stately building.

Lisa pushed the glass doors open and stepped inside. The busy rush of city life faded into the background. Inside she was enveloped by art and antiquities from around the world in a two-story main room with marble floors and a wall of windows. Her back tingled with the familiar feeling of history.

The towering sculpture of a bull’s head made from polished black limestone captured her attention. Mesmerized by the intricate artwork, she crossed and stared at the artifact—truly, a wonder of ancient man—and could barely imagine unearth something so incredible. She’d found her fair share of astonishing relics over the years, but never something as awe inspiring as this. She lifted her hand to run fingers over the smooth surface.

“Please don’t touch that.”

Startled, Lisa turned toward the female voice. A slim woman wearing a knee-length black skirt and matching jacket walked toward her from across the room. Her blonde hair was pulled back into a tight knot. Wire-rimmed glasses sat perched on her straight, aristocratic nose. Her badge identified her as Christy Swanson, the gallery’s manager.

Lisa hid her smile, thinking she must have tourist written all over her. She turned back to the bull’s head. “It’s a beautiful piece.”

“Yes. It is.” The woman stopped next to her. “This bull once guarded the entrance to the Hundred-Column Hall of ancient Persepolis. If you’re not familiar with—”

Lisa nodded. Gallery managers were all the same, trying to make a sale, trying to sound smarter than they really were. “Which means it predates the fall of Persepolis in 331 B.C., when Alexander destroyed the great city. But actually, I’m looking for something a little different.”

The blonde’s eyes lit up at the idea of a knowledgeable buyer. “Of course, Ms.……”

“Maxwell.”

The woman’s eyes narrowed, and she nodded with a thin, tight smile and looked back at the bull. “What can I help you with?”

Lisa stepped toward a marble bust of Medusa on a nearby pedestal. “You wouldn’t happen to have more
pieces like this, would you?” She ran her hand over the cool marble, looked up with raised brow and watched as the manager’s eyes took on an excited gleam.

Dollar signs reflected in the woman’s pupils. “Why don’t you follow me into the office where I can show you a listing of what we have on-site and in storage. If we don’t have what you’re looking for, we have ways of tracking them down.” She was as giddy as a conservative suit could get.

Ms. Swanson gestured across the vast gallery floor to a woman dusting pieces on the other side of the room. “Marta, you have the floor.”

The brunette nodded. “Yes, ma’am.”

Lisa followed the rigid Ms. Swanson up a curved staircase to the second-floor suite of offices. Double doors at the end of the hall were marked LANDAU. “Does Mr. Landau oversee acquisitions for the gallery?”

Ms. Swanson ushered Lisa into an office with a view of the Mile and the hustle and bustle below. She gestured to a plush chair across from her desk. “Yes. He does.” Irritation flashed in the woman’s eyes before fading behind a well-kept shield.

“Any chance he’s here today? Maybe I could pick his brain about the piece I’m looking for.”

“I’m sorry. Mr. Landau’s unavailable at this time.”

Just what did that mean? “Perhaps I could schedule an appointment with him?”

Ms. Swanson straightened. “I’m afraid Mr. Landau doesn’t work with clients. He deals only in acquisitions.”

She handed a color-print catalog across the desk, dismissing the question. “These are the Greek pieces we have available at this time.”

Not conservative. Frigid. Lisa sat and scanned the contents of the desk as scrupulously as she could. There had to be something that mentioned how she could find the illustrious Landau.

The intercom buzzed as Lisa was flipping to the second page of the catalog. “Excuse me.” Ms. Swanson pushed a button on the phone. “Yes?”

“Paul Renault is waiting, Ms. Swanson,” a voice echoed through the speaker.

“Thank you.” She turned the speaker off and looked toward Lisa. “I’ll be just a moment. Please excuse me.”

“Of course. Take your time.” Lisa lifted the book in her hands. “I’ll just browse.”

The woman nodded and disappeared into the outer office.

Casting a quick look over her shoulder, Lisa waited until the ice queen was out of view, then moved to the desk. She shuffled papers, searching for anything of interest. Her fingers paused when she reached an engraved invitation to a gala for the unveiling of a new collection.

A reception hosted by none other than Alan Landau.

So he was around. Just invisible. And judging from his manager’s chilly response when Lisa had asked about him, untouchable by the general public.

Invitation only. To night.

Lisa chewed on her bottom lip. Maybe not totally untouchable. She still had connections in Chicago.

She moved back to her seat when she heard voices growing louder from the reception area. When Christy the snow woman returned, Lisa smiled and stood. “Thank you so much for your time. I’m afraid I’m not finding what I’m looking for.”

“I’m sorry. Mr. Landau’s unavailable at this time.”

“Perhaps you can give me a description and I will see what we can do.”

“That’s just it.” Lisa set the catalog on the desk. “I’m not completely sure. But I’ll know it when I see it.”

She shook Ms. Swanson’s hand, grabbed her bags and headed for the door.

When she was out on the street, she flipped her phone open and made a couple of calls. By the time she reached Huron Street, she already had her assistant in San Francisco arranging for two tickets to the Landau Gallery’s main event.

God love a woman who could get things done. God love the small but far-reaching academic world of archaeology. There was a reason she kept the chirpy assistant around, a reason she forced herself to bite her sharp tongue half the time so she could remain in good standing with her colleagues.

Checking right and left, she crossed the street and headed north. With a quick glance over her shoulder, she noticed a man dressed in a lightweight blue jacket weaving through pedestrians, brown hair peeking out of a Marlins ball cap, his gaze trained on her.

Strange. A chill slid through her. She was pretty sure she’d seen that same jacket on the street when she’d stepped into the gallery.

Probably a coincidence. For some reason, though, her gut wasn’t so sure.

Thinking of the accident last night, she turned right on Superior instead of left. She took another right on St. Clair and headed south again, hoping that she was just jumpy. Casting a look over her shoulder, she saw her tail was still there.
Shit.

She thought quickly. Her best bet at this point was to catch a bus on Fairbanks, but she definitely didn’t want to drag a tail all the way back to Shane’s, if in fact that’s what this guy was. There was still a chance he was just headed in the same direction.

She walked at a faster pace, pretended to turn right again on Ontario, then at the last second darted across the street in a sea of pedestrians. On the corner of Fairbanks and Ontario, she shot inside Timothy O’Toole’s Pub.

Three televisions over the bar were tuned to a college football game. Whoops and hollers resounded through the tavern after a play, as the announcer’s voice echoed across the room. The bar was half filled with afternoon patrons, glasses clinking amid an abundance of smoke.

Lisa scanned the room, looking for a place to blend in. When the door behind her opened, she headed for the bar without looking back.

She sidled up to the polished wood and gestured for the bartender. The blond guy sitting to her right nursing a glass of cola turned toward her and gave her the once-over.

“Water,” she told the bartender.

The blond smiled. “Well, now, sugar. Looks like my day just got a whole lot better.”

Lisa thanked the bartender, lifted her glass and sipped before turning toward the husky voice. Brilliant blue eyes with a hint of mischief sparkled back at her. It wasn’t exactly intellectually stimulating conversation, but at least it would help her disappear in the crowd. She rolled her eyes. “Does that line usually work?”

“Depends. How smart are you?” He winked.

“Very, I’m afraid.”

“Damn.” He grinned. “But I suppose I could make an exception for you, considering.”

“Gee, I’m so flattered.”

The blond’s grin widened.

Not wanting to get too comfy with the witty banter, Lisa’s gaze darted over her companion’s shoulder. Blue Jacket slid into a booth across the room, tugged his cap low over his eyes and lifted a menu, trying to look inconspicuous.

It didn’t work.

Okay. Not a coincidence. He was following her, no doubt about it. And from the way his gaze kept darting her way, he wasn’t hiding it too well either.

She’d never been one to run and hide. And the guy was obviously alone. The best defense she could see was a tough offense.

“Hold that thought.” Lisa set her glass on the bar and dropped her bags on the floor. “I just saw an old friend.”

She waited until the waitress moved away from Blue Jacket’s table, then slid into the booth across from him.

The man’s head darted up. Surprise registered in his light eyes. He rose an inch out of his seat before the sole of her new boot jammed into his groin. His face contorted in pain as he dropped back down onto the vinyl bench. His hand shot beneath the table to rescue his manhood.

“Ah, ah, ah.” Lisa applied more pressure with the sole of her shoe. “Keep your hands where I can see them.”

His palms hit the top of the table. He slammed his eyes shut and let out a pathetic groan.

Dammit, he was just a kid. Maybe twenty-five, if he was lucky. She was pretty sure she’d never seen him before. That didn’t make her feel better.

Her eyes narrowed. “Why are you following me?”

“I’m not,” he moaned.

She wedged the heel of her boot into his balls. “Wrong answer, cupcake. Try again.”

His eyes flew open, revealing hazel irises. The remaining color drained from his cheeks. “Okay. I was,” he croaked. “Please…please…for the love of God, let…go.”

No one could claim she didn’t have a heart. Lisa eased the pressure off his package but kept her foot within striking distance. “I’m listening.”

He drew in three deep breaths and kept his eyes down. “I was just supposed to find out where you were headed. Who you were with.”

“Hired by whom?”

“I don’t know.”

She flexed her foot.

“I swear!” He jumped in his seat. “A woman called. Gave me a description.”

“What was her name?”

“I don’t know.”
“Did you meet her? What does she look like?”
“Look, I don’t know, okay? I only spoke with her on the phone. Payment came in the mail. Half before, half after I found you.”

She watched him with sharpened eyes. Sweat rolled off his forehead and trickled down his temple. “Did you follow me last night, too?”
“What?” His head finally came up. A smattering of freckles graced the pale skin of his nose. “No. I came in on a plane this morning. I swear. I’ve got ticket stubs in my pocket if you don’t believe me. I was waiting at the gallery for you. She said you might end up there.”

She studied his face for any sign he was lying. She didn’t want to believe him, but something in her gut said he was probably telling the truth. He wasn’t old enough to have a personal bone to pick with her, and she had a strong hunch he wasn’t yanking her chain when he said he didn’t know who had hired him. He looked too scared to be lying and too stupid to make up a bum story.

Common sense told her there’d been two men chasing them last night. Two men she’d vaguely seen through the lights and smoke of that bar. One, she was pretty sure, had been black. Both had looked bigger than this kid. Although she wasn’t 100 percent sure, she was fairly certain he hadn’t been either of them.

And he was most definitely alone. Stupid, but alone.
Lisa’s boot landed against the floor with a thunk. The kid let out a long, relieved breath as she signaled the waitress. “Southern Comfort,” she told the girl when she reached the table. “My friend here is a little under the weather.”
“And ice,” he grunted. “A bag of ice. Please.”

When the waitress stepped away shaking her head, Lisa leaned forward. “Listen up, cupcake. You make a lousy shadow. Find another line of work.” She fished money out of her pocket and tossed bills on the table. “And crawl back under your rock. Tell whoever it is you work for you couldn’t find me, or I promise I’ll make your life hell.”

She eased out of the booth. The kid’s head hit the table just as the waitress eased by Lisa to deliver his drink. Lisa walked back toward the bags she’d left across the room. The blond, who had watched the whole scene from his spot on a stool, smiled and eased an elbow on the bar. “Sugar, where the hell have you been my whole life?”

Lisa lifted the glass and sipped her water. “In a cave,” she mumbled.

The comment was obviously lost on him. He shifted in his seat, one obvious thought on his mind as his eyes zoomed in on her breasts, then darted to her face. “Why don’t we blow this joint? I’m only in town for a few more days, and I could certainly use a tough chick like you to show me the sights.” He reached out, ran his finger down her arm. “Someone to protect me from the mean streets of Chicago. What do you say?”

Lisa considered the suggestion all of about two seconds before Rafe’s irritating mug flashed in her mind.

Shiiit.

Now she couldn’t even flirt with a good-looking guy without being hounded by the man? Sullivan wasn’t her boyfriend, for crying out loud, wasn’t her lover or even anyone she was interested in pursuing on a personal level. He was a business partner, plain and simple. Nothing more. She wasn’t tied to him, so why wasn’t she taking this guy up on his offer?

“I wish I could,” she heard herself say before she could stop the words spilling from her mouth. “But this isn’t the best time.”

Dammit. Sullivan was using her. Enjoying it, too. And she was falling right into his trap.

Dammit, dammit, dammit.

The blond fished a business card from his back pocket. He reached for a pen down the bar and scribbled on the back. “This is the number where I’m staying for the next two days.” He handed it to her, his lips curling in a knowing smile. “Of course, if you say yes now, you can save yourself a phone call.”

A couple hours away from the mess she’d gotten herself into wouldn’t be so bad, would it? She was running on adrenaline after the last few minutes as it was. Blowing off a little steam would probably improve her mood and her outlook. She glanced at the card in her hand as decisions raced through her mind.

ALEC MCCLANE
FREELANCE JOURNALIST

Not a thief. Not a liar. Definitely not a jerk.
And damn if that didn’t make up her mind.
Shane ripped a piece of steaming dough from the pretzel in his hand and walked along the bike path in Lincoln Park as he glanced out across the choppy water. A crisp breeze blew off Lake Michigan, rustling his hair and sending shivers down his back.

He tugged his jacket collar around his neck, hunched his shoulders and bit back a curse. He needed out of this city. Soon. Before the goddamn snow hit. If he had to face one more winter of biting wind and bitter cold, he just might shoot himself with his own gun.

He popped a salty piece of dough into his mouth and dropped onto a bench to finish his lunch. Ten minutes passed before Jack Taylor finally sauntered up from the other direction, a file folder tucked under one arm and two Starbucks in hand, tendrils of steam rising from the white paper cups.

“Thought you could use some real joe. Not that crap they’ve got down at headquarters.” He handed Shane a cup, sat next to him and set the folder on the bench at his side.

“You’re a saint, Taylor.” Shane lifted the drink to his lips and tasted the hot, bitter liquid as it slid across his tongue. Not the shot of Jameson he really wanted, but good enough, considering it was only two in the afternoon and he was still on duty. “Almost makes me want to move to the Pacific Northwest.”

“Nah, too wet there. You’d never cut it, Maxwell.” Jack lifted one large gloved hand and pointed toward a couple of teenagers dipping their toes in the surf. “Look at those idiots. Gonna freeze their asses off.”

Shane’s gaze followed. He watched as one stupid kid who couldn’t have been more than fifteen dared the other to go out as far as his knees. The dark-haired moron at the kid’s right rolled up his pants legs and headed out into the freezing water. “Serve ’em right if they catch hypothermia.”

Jack chuckled. “Anything to get out of sittin’ in class. Not too long ago you and I would have been doing that.” He watched two women dressed in thick sweats, hats and gloves as they jogged by. When they rounded the bend, he glanced up to the gray sky. “Smells like snow.”

“Smells like snow, my ass.” Shane leaned back against the bench, wrapped his bare hands around the warm cup. “You haven’t been able to smell crap since you took that bullet.” Three years and a handful of surgeries later, all that was left of that dark night was a thin scar on Jack’s cheek. But it had been enough to make Shane’s ex-partner say adios to the Chicago PD.

Jack shot him a grin. “You’re perky this afternoon. I sure do miss that sunshine-sweet temperament of yours.”

“I need a fucking vacation.”

Jack sipped his drink. “You need a career change, my friend. I keep tellin’ ya, PI work is cush. Set your own hours, choose your clientele. No one lookin’ over your shoulder, telling you what to do. Pretty sweet.”

Yeah. Sweet. Jack had been trying to lure him away from the department for nearly two years now. And there were days where he actually thought about making a change. About ditching Chicago and heading off to the sun and fun.

Damn, it was tempting.

“So I heard there was some action at the Marriott last night.”

Jack’s rugged voice pulled Shane from the little fantasy taking root in his mind: a sunny beach, a stupid tropical print shirt and no worries.

Not today. Not anytime soon as far as he could see. He shifted and leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees as he glanced toward the frigid water, the cup held gently between his hands. He and Jack kept each other informed. Sometimes Jack’s outside connections were just what Shane needed in a tough case. “Carl Tegan’s covering it. Brutal double homicide.”

“Any leads?”

“None so far. Carl’s gut thinks it was a professional hit, though.”

Jack nodded. Carl Tegan was a good detective, and his gut was usually right—but that didn’t make Shane feel any better.

Shit, Lis. What the hell did you get wrapped up in?

“I haven’t heard anything on the street,” Jack said. “But I’ll keep listening.”
Shane ran a hand over his face and tried to refocus. “What about Sullivan?”
Jack reached for the folder at his side. “Interesting fellow.” He handed the folder to Shane. “This related?”
Jack’s mind was always one step ahead. Shane set his cup on the ground by his feet, flipped open the file.
Jack’s cramped handwriting filled an entire page. “Maybe.”
Jack nodded, but didn’t push. “Degree in art history from Florida State. Graduated magna cum laude, worked his way through school with scholarships and the military.”
“Navy boy,” Shane mumbled, studying Jack’s notes.
“Yep. And smart. Did six years active duty after college. Naval Diving and Training Salvage Center. Traveled all over the globe. Got hold of a couple guys he served with. Had nothin’ but good things to say about him.”
Shane flipped a page. “What else?”
“When he got out of the service, he invested in a gallery a college buddy of his had opened.” Jack pointed to a name on the paper Shane was holding. “Peter Kauffman. Place was struggling until Sullivan signed on. Kauffman ran the day-to-day operations. Sullivan was the go-to guy.”
“How so?”
Jack shrugged. “Word is Sullivan had a knack for finding rare pieces. Anything the client wanted, he was able to get. Used his connections overseas to get what ever was needed.”
“Caught up with him, though,” Shane muttered, flipping to the police report on Sullivan’s arrest.
“Charges dropped for lack of evidence,” Jack corrected. “And this you’ll find interesting.”
“What?”
“The arresting officer? Sullivan ended up marrying her.”
Shane’s head darted up. “He’s married?”
“Was. Six months. Divorced about a year ago. Then some eight months ago he up and sold his share of the gallery.”
Shane’s brow creased as he studied the papers. “Why would he do that? Looks like they were raking in the dough.”
“Yeah. They were. Still are. The Odyssey Gallery has some big-name clients.”
Shane leaned back against the bench. “So why’d he pull out? Have a fight with his partner? Screwing the man’s wife?”
Jack turned the page for him. “Medical bills. His mother’s terminal. Cancer.” Shane looked closer. “Been in and out of the hospital for the last year. Started some experimental treatments that cost an arm and a leg. She’s hangin’ on, but doesn’t look like she’ll last much longer. My guess? Sullivan sold his stake to pay for her treatment.”
Shite. He was still a criminal, no matter what his reasons.
“Guy’s got a place in Key West, right?” Shane asked. “Why not sell that? Real estate down there has to go for a pretty penny. Why not pay his bills that way?”
“House is in both his and his brother’s name. Inheritance kind of thing. Maybe the mother wouldn’t let him sell it. I don’t know the family dynamics there, only that he didn’t go that route.”
No, because he knew he didn’t have to. Shane frowned. “Assuming that’s the case, then why not steal what he needed? Sell off a few prime pieces and I’m sure he’d have more than enough dough. A guy who knows how to get things like Sullivan shouldn’t have trouble in that area.”
“Morals?”
“Right.” Shane flicked Jack a disbelieving look. “Not this guy. And that’s what we’re talking about, right? He’s a high-class criminal who’s gotten away with it so far, all under the pretense of ‘in the name of art’ and the almighty buck.”
Jack shrugged again, looked out at the rippling water. “You can spin it however you want, Maxwell. Looks to me like he’s in a bind. Needed cash, sold his share. For whatever reason, he’s not scamming anyone to get his dough this time.”
No, not just anyone, dammit. The prick was scamming Shane’s sister.
“I think he’s working on his own now.”
“What makes you think that?” Shane asked.
Jack pulled a photo from the back of the file. “He cuts ties with Kauffman, gets his mama all set up in a cush Miami care facility, bills squared away, and two months later pays cash for a pretty new sailboat.”
Shane lifted the picture and studied the pristine white sloop. Envy stabbing him, he let out a low whistle.
“Damn. I need to get me one of these.”
Jack chuckled. “Yeah, me, too. We picked the wrong line of work, schmuck. Point is, Sullivan didn’t touch
his reserves from selling his part of the gallery to buy that little toy. Which means—"
  "Which means his sudden cash flow’s suspect."
  "Right. Unless he’s working for someone under the radar. Tracking down a few special pieces maybe?"
Three special pieces. The Furies. And if he happened to have double-crossed the hand that was feeding him, if he was going out on his own to find the best deal, pitting dealers against each other, the prick was in over his head.
  And dragging Lisa along with him.

Peter Kauffman’s phone shrilled. Five seconds earlier and it would have ruined the mood entirely.
  With a heavy sigh, he tucked one arm around the woman straddling his lap and breathing hot against his neck. “Hold that thought, precious.”
  Pushing them both forward, he reached for the phone. “Kauffman.”
  “You sound way too relaxed to be at the office.”
  Pete leaned back against the leather chair behind his desk and smiled at the sound of Rafe’s voice. The man had timing, he could say that for his friend. “And you sound a little stressed, buddy.”
  “I have reason to be stressed, Pete.”
  Maria braced both hands against Pete’s shoulders and sat up. A seductive smile curled her sensuous mouth.
With one hand, she pushed dark, silky hair back from her face and tightened her pelvic muscles.
  “Tell me about it,” Pete mumbled. Distracted by the increase in pressure, he ran a hand over the vee of her fire red suit jacket, exposing voluptuous cleavage. His hand drifted down her abdomen, across her hip where her skirt was pushed up and her bare thighs rested against his slacks.
  “I was nearly charcoal last night,” Rafe grumbled in his ear.
  The seriousness in Rafe’s tone drew Pete’s attention. His hand paused on Maria’s thigh. “Say that again.”
  “I said,” Rafe huffed, “someone’s onto us.”
  Maria pushed off Pete’s lap and tugged her skirt down, obviously sensing his change in focus.
  Pete repositioned himself and sat up straighter. “Tell me what happened.”
  While Rafe ran through the events of the previous night, Maria strode to the massive floor-to-ceiling glass bookshelf across the room. Pete watched as she ran slender fingers over an Egyptian pendant of a crouching pharaoh resting on the shelf.
  “I’m telling you,” Rafe said, “this wasn’t a coincidence.”
  “And you didn’t get a look at either of them?” Pete asked.
  “Not a good one. Both men were big. One was black. I didn’t stick around to find out their names.”
  That didn’t narrow things down much. Pete frowned. “What about Stone’s research?”
  “Kindling.”
  “Fuck.” Pete ran a hand over his forehead. Not the answer he was hoping for.
  “Maxwell’s got a couple leads we’re following today. I don’t think it’s a total loss. Yet.”
  “And if she’s wrong?”
  “She’s still our best chance at this point. The woman’s a bloodhound. She’s not quitting.” He paused.
  “Speaking of, what can you tell me about Alan Landau?”
  “Landau?” Surprise registered. Maria turned his direction. “Big-time dealer up north. Has a reputation for being involved in some shady dealings, if you know what I mean.”
  “Yeah, I have an idea. Do me a favor. Find out if he’s put out any feelers on Greek pieces under the radar.”
  “You think he’s involved?”
  “Maybe.”
  “I’ll look into it today and call you if I find anything.”
  “Good.”
  Pete ran a hand through his hair. “In the meantime, keep me posted. I wired some cash into your account. Let me know if you need more or if there’s anything else I can do on my end.”
  “Got it. Thanks, Pete. I’ll call in a few days if I don’t hear from you sooner.”
  The line clicked in Pete’s ear. Aggravated, he replaced the receiver, pushed to stand and zipped his slacks.
  Maria stood across the room, arms folded over her chest as she gazed out at the sparkling view of Biscayne Bay from his third-floor office.
  “I do so like America,” she said with her thick Greek accent. “Land of opportunity. It would be a shame to have to leave so soon and without what I came for.”
  Not an option. If she left, she was taking her business with her. He needed her bid to up the stakes. And
though she wouldn’t ever be the woman of his dreams, she was a good diversion from his own personal
demons.

Pete crossed to her and tried to keep his voice even and assuring. “No reason for that yet. This is just a minor
setback.”

She turned and met his gaze, dark eyes locking on his as if she knew exactly what he wasn’t saying. “Rafael
is a liability.”

Not in Pete’s eyes. “He’ll get the job done.” He tried to settle the doubt flickering across her face by running
both hands down her arms. “Trust me, would you? The man knows what he’s doing. He’s made me a ton of
money over the years. He’s going to make us both very rich.”

She frowned in obvious disagreement. “This is different, Peter. It’s personal for him. Emotion clouds a
man’s judgment. He’s not to be trusted. I read it in his eyes when he came to me in Greece. I told you we
should have gone with someone else.”

Yeah, emotion did cloud a man’s judgment. Pete knew that all too well. Shaking off the thought, he said, “I
know how to keep Rafe in line.”

“And what if you can’t? A wild card is the last thing we need right now. There are others more qualified—”

He held up a hand to stop her. She may be a client, but he was still in charge. “No one’s more qualified than
Rafe. You have to trust me on this. Give him time. He knows how to work this. He’s done it before.”

She pursed her lips and studied him a long moment. “And what of the woman?”

Pete shook his head even as a tiny place in his chest squeezed tight. “This is Rafe we’re talking about. The
only thing he cares about is getting his cut. He won’t be distracted by a woman. At least not for long. And not
when the payout’s as big as this. Trust me. No woman could change his priorities.” Not like me. “Especially not
Lisa Maxwell.”

The dry look she sent him said she didn’t agree. “I hope you’re right. Because if you’re wrong, my contact
will be very upset.”

Where the hell was she?

Rafe had passed “concerned” over an hour ago. Pacing to the windows overlooking the lake, he checked his
watch for the hundredth time and clenched his jaw. How long did it take to hit a clothing store and hightail it
back here? Not five hours, that’s for sure.

He glanced down at the street. Cars whizzed by. A few pedestrians in thick jackets jogged along the
sidewalk, but there was still no sign of Lisa.

Something had happened to her. He could feel it. He never should have let her go out alone. He grabbed his
jacket from the back of the couch and stuffed his arms into the sleeves. He didn’t have a clue where to look for
her, but sitting there waiting was making him nuts. He grabbed the door and wrenched it open.

Lisa jumped and pulled startled fingers back from the knob. “Oh, my God, you scared me.” She pressed a
hand against her heart. “Don’t do that.”

He turned when she pushed past him into the apartment and dropped an armful of shopping bags on the
leather couch in the middle of the room. She shrugged out of a winter white suede coat with fur trim he didn’t
remember her leaving the apartment in earlier and tossed the garment over the back of a chair.

“Where the hell have you been?”

She looked up from the shopping bag she’d already started picking through. “Close the door. You’re letting
in cold air.”

He blinked twice, unable to process her words. “What?”

“The door, Sullivan.”

Ring a bell, Slick?” Shaking her head like he was a complete moron, she moved back to the bag.

Good God. The woman was a piece of work. He glanced down at his watch, a mixture of relief and
confusion pumping through him. “You’ve been gone for five hours. You said you were shopping. What the hell
happened?”

“If I didn’t know better, I’d think you were worried about me.” She lifted a white garment bag.

Worried about her? Damn right he was worried about her. After what had happened last night, they had no
idea who was out there watching them. He’d been utterly stupid to let her walk out of the apartment alone,
when any number of things could have happened to her. He’d realized that shortly after she’d left, and he’d
been stressing about it since then.

“Don’t worry, Slick.” Her smart-assed voice dragged at his consciousness. “I didn’t run off and go after
Tisiphone on my own. I know that’s all you were worried about.” She walked out of the room.

Oh, shit. The blood drained from his cheeks. That thought hadn’t even crossed his mind.

He tossed his jacket across the couch and followed her into Shane’s bedroom. She still hadn’t explained where she’d been, and he wasn’t letting it go just yet. Not until he had some answers.

He stopped in the doorway, slipped his hands into the front pockets of his jeans and tried to settle the nerves still churning in his stomach before he laid into her again. His eyes took a careful sweep of the room. Her garment bag lay across Shane’s unmade bed. She stood at the closet pushing hangers and jackets aside, searching for God only knows what.

She’d changed. She wasn’t wearing the same ripped sweater and dirty jeans she’d left in that morning. A long-sleeved black-and-white horizontal-striped blouse highlighted her curves, dipped low at her cleavage and accentuated the swell of her breasts. Snug black slacks molded to her muscular legs, hugged her hips and perfect behind. Shiny black boots with thin heels covered her feet, and light-catching silver drops hung from her ears.

She looked chic and stylish, and not a bit like the woman who’d walked out of here earlier, although that one had sent his blood soaring even before this little transformation. This one made his jeans grow tight. Even her hair seemed different, all tousled and wild from the wind, like she’d just rolled out of bed, like she’d just had a lover’s fingers run through her silky locks.

He straightened and coughed. Five hours. She’d been gone five freakin’ hours. She’d better not have been off with some other guy. Not when his insides were tied in knots because of her. Not when he’d spent the last hour going out of his mind because he didn’t know where she was.

“There it is,” she said, pulling a tux from the closet.

“Where have you been?”

She looked up at him, green eyes sparkling in the artificial light. Stepping forward, she held the jacket against his chest. “Should fit. You and Shane are about the same size.”

Fit? What the hell was she talking about? “What’s going on?”

She laid the jacket on the bed next to the white garment bag. “You and I are going to a party.”

“A what?”

She pushed past him, and he stood slack-jawed while she sashayed out to the living area, grabbed a couple of shopping bags and returned.

“A party, Slick. As in, you and I both get dressed up and hobnob with the rich and famous.” She stopped in the doorway next to him, pinched his cheek. “I know it’ll be a stretch, but I think we can clean you up.”

She smelled like a sexy, exotic flower, looked like every man’s wet dream, and at the moment she was talking in complete riddles. He didn’t want to go to some party he couldn’t care less about. He didn’t want to discover what she’d been up to while she’d been gone. And tossing her onto that mussed bed so he could find something for that smart mouth of hers to do instead of flip sarcastic comments his way was sounding better and better by the minute.

He turned away, rubbed a hand down his face and tried to refocus. Holy hell, he was losing it. He needed to get a grip. Fast.

“You find anything on the Landau Gallery?”

Landau Gallery. Right. That’s where he was supposed to be focused.

He tried to remember what he’d found earlier in his research, tried to get images of her writhing beneath him out of his mind and glanced back at her, where she stood next to the bed, pulling items from the bag. “Specializes in rare sculpture. High-end clients.” If he wasn’t going to get lucky, he might as well get serious. “Your brother mention the assistant who was murdered last week?”

She stiffened. “Yes. What else?”

It was clear she thought the murder might be related to their predicament. A thread of guilt slithered through him as he watched the color drain from her cheeks. Guilt for bringing her into this, for putting her life on the line, all for a few bucks.

He raked a hand through his hair. “Not much. Doesn’t sound like they have many leads on the investigation. But the woman was definitely working on a new collection, and rumor has it she was more than his assistant.”

He shrugged. “Maybe. He hasn’t admitted to it, but that’s the word going around.”

“Alan Landau’s unveiling that new collection to night. I get the impression this little party is a way to get the public’s focus off her murder and back on his gallery. I think it’s our best chance to get close to him, find out what he’s up to. Get inside his place.”

“How do you plan to get into this little soiree?”
“I have connections.” A smile curled her sensuous lips, highlighting her sparkling teeth. “Had my assistant back in San Francisco arrange for two tickets.”

That explained the tux. And the men’s white dress shirt she pulled out of the bag. “I had to guess on your size. Hopefully it fits.”

Wonderful. Just what he wanted to do with his evening. He stepped forward with a frown and reached for the garment she handed him. His fingers slid over hers, and electricity zinged up his arm at the simple touch.

She wasn’t his type. Not by a long shot. He liked his women a lot more agreeable and a lot less mouthy. So how come every time she got close, he had trouble thinking straight? The woman had little use for him, had made that perfectly clear by ditching his ass all day and going off on her own. And the fact that that didn’t even seem to bother her only made him more frustrated and more determined to prove her wrong.

When she looked up, her eyes held his for a brief moment, shimmering gems that seemed to soften as he looked at her, as if they could read his thoughts, as if…as if they wanted him to prove her wrong. Eyes—to his utter surprise—that tugged on something deep in his chest and made the aggravation he was feeling slip away inch by inch.

Yes. Keep looking at me like that, querida.

Warmth pooled in his stomach, and he felt the overwhelming urge to pull her into his arms so he could find out if her skin was as soft as he imagined, so he could make her remember what it had been like between them in Italy.

She tugged her hand back and looked down before he was ready to break the contact. And just like that, what ever gentleness he’d seen flicker in her eyes faded behind her iron shield.

He glanced down and fingered the cold cotton in his hands. So much for that idea. He must have read her wrong. Just like every other time they’d been in the same room together.

She went back to pulling items from the bag. “I would have been back sooner, but I had to wait to pick up the invite. Then I had to find something to wear for tonight. It’s a zoo out there. Took longer than I thought it would.”

When she didn’t respond, his gaze snapped to her. Head down, she continued to paw through a shopping bag. “Lisa?”

She huffed and finally looked up. “I didn’t have a lot of time, and I didn’t feel like guessing about your style.” She pinned him with a look. “For heaven’s sake, it’s just underwear, Sullivan.”

“Real men don’t wear thongs. And I’m not wearing this.” He held it out to her. The scrap wouldn’t cover anything. Especially not anything he had. No doubt she’d bought it just to get under his skin. The woman wasn’t happy unless she was taking cheap shots at him.

“Fine.” She lifted one elegant brow. “Wear your day-old dirty Jockeys. Or go commando. Not my problem.”

“What the hell’s going on in here?” Shane’s voice from the doorway made them both turn.

Great.

Tension worked its way back into Rafe’s shoulders. Lisa’s brother’s gaze darted from the thong in his hand to Lisa to the rumpled bed and back to Rafe, and there was no missing the back-off-my-sister-you-sexual-predator warning in his dark eyes.

 Fucking fantastic.

Rafe crumpled the thong and tossed it into the bag in front of him. This day was ranking up there as one of his finest.

“Sullivan’s going to borrow your tux,” Lisa said. “We’re headed to the Landau Gallery’s unveiling to night.”

“No one’s going commando in my tux.” Shane’s scrutinizing gaze darted to Rafe again.

Lisa’s sarcastic smile followed.

Holy hell. Rafe pinched the bridge of his nose and blew out a long breath. Walking into that damn auditorium in Italy had been the biggest mistake of his life.
Okay, so this wasn’t the brightest idea she’d ever come up with.

Lisa clenched her hands until her nails dug into her palms and looked out the cab window at the passing city lights. Heat from Rafe’s muscular body slid across the small space. The clean scents of soap and shampoo from his shower drifted toward her nose. Each time he shifted on the bench seat and it dipped under his weight, awareness tingled in her stomach and she contemplated sliding across the imitation leather so she could curl into him and find out just how hot he really was.

Damn, he looked good in Shane’s tux. She was a sucker for a man in black, and this man was doing crazy things to her libido. The suit somehow made his eyes darker, his skin richer. And the shadow of beard from his morning shave gave him a sexy rugged look that ignited a fire deep in her core.

Glancing down at the green beaded gown she wore, she blew out a long, long breath and tried to steady her quaking pulse.

Bad, bad, bad idea. She’d purposely picked the low-cut, skin-tight number to knock the man on his ass and prove to him who was really in control. But as soon as she’d seen him step into the living room dressed to the nines, looking dark and dangerous, his more-than-approving gaze flicking over her, she’d realized she was nowhere near in control.

Dumb. That’s what she was. There was no way she’d make it through this evening without going after the guy. Especially not when he looked good enough to eat. She knew her body well enough to know when her willpower was teetering. Maybe, she considered, she should just get it over with now, climb over, settle herself on his lap and take him for a quick ride before they went into the lion’s den. Lord knew she needed to get this sex fuzz off her brain so she could refocus. A quickie would do that for her.

She closed her eyes tight, opened them again to stare out at the lights.

Should have taken the journalist up on his offer today at the bar. Should have found a way to work Sullivan out of your system.

Never would have worked.

Wasn’t that just the kick in all of this? Somewhere along the way, the game had changed on her. This need burning inside wasn’t just about sex—at least not with any guy. She wanted the one next to her. The one she didn’t for one minute believe in or trust. The one who was using her. The one who was a thief and a liar.

He shifted again, draped his arm over the back of the seat. Her breath caught at the subtle move, and sanity slipped from her grasp.

Don’t touch me, don’t touch me, please ease don’t touch me.

She knew that as soon as he did, she’d melt.

His hand drifted down to her shoulder—luckily, a shoulder covered by a black silk drape, so his touch couldn’t set her skin on fire. “You look amazing, querida.”

Hot breath with a hint of mint washed over her ear, warmed her all the way down to her toes. She swallowed hard and tried like hell to put calm and casual into her voice. “It’s just a dress, Slick.”

“A ‘wow’ dress,” he said all soft and sleepy, like a man did when he had sex on the brain. “You want me to suffer, don’t you?”

Hell, yes. That was the idea. Only now she was the one suffering. Big-time.

“Contrary to what you might think, I don’t plan my wardrobe around you.” She tried to inch away from his enticing body, but there was nowhere to go. “Why don’t we focus on something more important, like what we’re doing to night?”

“I’m focused,” he said in the same sultry voice. “Always focused. Nothing wrong with enjoying the scenery along the way, though.”

Her heart thumped, but she ignored it. Ignored the way his gaze slid from her lips down to her breasts. “Landau will probably make an entrance. He seems to like attention, which explains this little bash happening now.”

“Yeah, I got that. He’s making a statement.” His voice hardened, but his arm didn’t budge. “I want you to stick with me until we see him come in.”
“Sullivan—”

He held up his free hand. “We don’t know who will be there, if what happened last night is related, if he’s involved at all. So until I get a read on the place, stay by my side.”

It wasn’t a question but an order. She could tell by the tone of his voice and the rigid line of his shoulders. Though his eyes were all soft and dreamy, his voice left no room for doubt. Arguing with him wasn’t going to get her anywhere. It would only set him off. And right now she didn’t want that. She needed him.

She nearly choked on the thought.

Shaking her hair back, and the ludicrous idea along with it, she glanced sideways. “You think this will work? There’s going to be security there. You didn’t have a lot of time to study the blueprints your friend dug up.”

She frowned at the memory of his phone call to some “friend” after she’d told him of the party, of his quick exit from the apartment and eventual return with a wealth of information on Landau’s security. She didn’t particularly want to know the ins and outs of how he’d dug up the material, because she had a hunch it hadn’t been legal. But she was curious about whether he was really as good as he claimed to be. “Are you sure you can do this?”

Street lights illuminated his rugged jawline, the angles and planes of an entirely too-handsome face. When he smiled, a slow and sexy curve of his lips, a thousand butterflies took flight in her stomach. “Piece of cake. I’m good at what I do, querida. Trust me.”

“Hmm.” She’d stopped trusting people a long time ago, and he was the last person in the world she wanted to take a chance on.

She glanced back out the window and tried to find some sense of control. The man might be a sex god, but he was still a thief and a liar. And, ironically, she had to hope that in this case he was good at both.

He was good. He hadn’t lied to her. He knew how to work a situation so he always came out on top.

He was also a planner. One who calculated the risks and never went after a mark unless he was overprepared. In his line of work, you didn’t cut corners, you planned for the unexpected, and you never did a job on impulse.

Those simple rules had taken Rafe a long way, had saved his ass more times than he could count, but for some reason they seemed to be changing. Hell, ever since Lisa had walked into his life, he’d been operating on the fly, and he didn’t particularly like it.

He rolled his shoulders as they ascended the stairs at the entry of Landau’s stately mansion. One call to Pete and the ball had been put in play. His partner was a whiz at handling the details, and within an hour Rafe had received copies of Landau’s blueprints, a rundown on the man’s personal security system and all the tools he’d need for tonight’s little job.

He’d taken his time and studied the estate, worked through his plan for the evening. Security cameras wouldn’t slow him down. Locks were only a minor inconvenience. The safe posed the biggest time constraint, but nothing worth worrying about. And if Landau was after the Furies, as they suspected, then Rafe was pretty sure his research would be locked up tight in the one place he didn’t expect to be hit.

A quick and easy job. One he could probably do in his sleep. So what was up with that tickle in the back of his throat?

You’re distracted, that’s all.

Well, who the hell wouldn’t be? The woman standing next to him could stop a freight train with one sultry look. It was no wonder he was having trouble concentrating.

Thin little straps held her glittering emerald gown in place. A heart-shaped neckline scooped low at her breasts showed a hint of that plump cleavage. The tight dress fit her curvy figure like a glove, then dropped all the way to the floor. A slit on the left side drew attention to her toned leg with every step she took.

But it was the rear view that had his mouth watering each time she turned away. The dress plunged to the small of her back, the tiny straps doing some crisscross thing up near her shoulders, showcasing her toned muscles and creamy skin—making all thought slip right out of his head anytime he caught a glimpse of her.

Common sense told him he needed to stop looking at her and just refocus. But damn, it was hard.

With a hand at the base of Lisa’s spine, he ushered her across the entrance’s marble floor and took a careful sweep of Alan Landau’s private mecca in a posh suburban area of Chicago. No modest dwelling for this target. No, from the look of the mansions they’d passed on the way in, Landau was turning a pretty penny with his little gallery.

Two security guards at the main entrance. Another three that Rafe could see, circulating through the crowd inside. All probably armed, the way his luck was going.

Wide columns flanked both walls. A crystal chandelier hung from the ceiling, splashing light across the
guests just arriving. Luckily, the security detail wasn’t hard to pick out—grim looks on their faces, earpieces snaked behind ears. Even in black tie, mingling with the crowd, they stood out like a sore thumb.

Well, one thing was going right. It was a hell of a lot easier to keep an eye on them that way. And since their attention undoubtedly was focused on the collection waiting to be unveiled, it was all the easier for Rafe to sneak off and take a look around.

Lisa slid the wrap from her shoulders and handed it to a man checking coats at their left, then slipped her hand into the crook of Rafe’s arm. “Put on a smile, Sullivan. And act like you’re happy to be here.”

He would, if she weren’t pumping out so much damn heat.

A waiter passed with a tray of drinks. Lisa reached out and snagged two bubbling glasses of champagne and handed him one. She took a long sip and scanned the room.

Oh, hell. Watching her tempting lips pass over the glass and the line of her throat when she tipped the flute up and swallowed wasn’t helping. He lifted his own glass and drank deeply.

“Some powerful faces here to night,” she said beside him.

He lowered the flute and glanced around. The main living area had obviously been cleared for the event. Across the vast room with its soaring ceiling, a small stage had been erected. A three-piece orchestra played classical music that wafted through the air. Tall trees flanked the stage with twinkling white lights woven through the branches. Couples mingled on the dance floor. Ahead and to the left, a curved staircase swept up to what Rafe knew from his research was the second-floor suite of bedrooms; above that was Landau’s private office on the upper level.

He took a closer look at the crowd. A popular TV–talk show host, three state senators, a couple of sports personalities from the greater Chicago area, and a horde of nerds who could only be the scholarly types. “Our Landau’s a popular guy.” Glass in hand, he gestured to a salt-and-pepper-haired man across the room. “Who’s that?”

“Governor of Illinois. Up for reelection this year, I think.”

“Really popular guy,” he muttered.

“Don’t believe it.”

They both turned toward the male voice. The man striding in their direction had Lisa in his line of vision. He was tall, dressed in a tux like every other guy in the place, with slightly too long auburn hair and a wide grin. When he reached them, he grasped Lisa’s hands and took a long sweep of her body from head to toe.

Rafe’s back tingled.

“Now that’s a dress,” the man said. “I almost didn’t believe my eyes when I saw you wander in.”

A grin tugged at Lisa’s mouth, and a blush crept across her cheeks. “What are you doing here, Riley?”

“I could ask you the same question. I haven’t seen you since Tahiti. And oh, sweetheart”—his eyes hovered over her breasts, slid slowly up to her face—“I don’t remember you wearing anything as succulent as this.”

Rafe cleared his throat.

Lisa glanced his way. “Oh, I’m sorry. Cole Riley, this is a colleague of mine, Rafael—”

“Garcia,” Rafe cut in. Her curious gaze darted his way, but he ignored it. No sense sharing vital information. She might be well-known here, but that didn’t mean he had to be.

“Nice to meet you.” The man spared him a quick glance before refocusing on Lisa again as if Rafe weren’t even there. “I had no clue you’d be here.”

“Last-minute decision. I happened to be in town.”

He smiled. “Just my luck. God, I missed you.”

Deep, sexy laughter slipped from Lisa’s lips. She didn’t make any attempt to pull her hands back.

Holy shit.

Rafe tipped her half-empty glass to his lips and downed the contents. This wasn’t part of the plan,
although he should have expected she’d run into people she knew. The woman obviously hadn’t been listening when he’d told her to stick close. More frustrated by the minute, he lifted his own glass and drank that, too. When a waiter passed with a tray, he deposited the empties and grabbed another flute.

He turned away so he didn’t have to watch her flirting with some other guy. Why the hell was it bugging him? They weren’t a couple, weren’t involved at all, aside from their business arrangement. Just because she’d almost rocked his world in Italy, just because he was still fantasizing about stripping her naked, didn’t mean she wanted him. Aside from their brief moment in Shane’s kitchen last night—which he was sure now had been all about adrenaline—she’d made it pretty clear she wasn’t interested at all.

So pull your head out and focus on the real reason you’re here, man.

Head clearer, he wove through the crowd away from Lisa and took a closer look at all the players. He mingled, made small talk and listened in as guests speculated about the unveiling expected later, but didn’t learn anything he didn’t already know.

When the music changed, Lisa slid into the crowd with her friend. Every now and then Rafe caught a glimpse of her through the masses, talking with other guests, laughing, flirting. And each time he did, his blood pressure shot up.

He managed a few short conversations and kept an eye out for Landau. When Lisa finally rejoined him almost an hour later, he lifted his glass and sipped, barely sparing her a glance.

“You don’t blend well, Sullivan. Come on,”

She took his hand and pulled him toward the dance floor. Scowling, he followed, not because he wanted to, but because he didn’t want to cause a scene.

“Did you find out anything useful?” she asked as they moved to the music.

He shrugged and looked over her head, careful to keep his hand on her hip and not let it slink around to her bare back, as it wanted to. “Nothing we don’t already know.”

She nodded. Her breasts rose and fell with each breath. Warmth from her skin made his whole body tingle. Her thigh brushed his, the soft movement sending a jolt through him that only aggravated him more. He focused on a spot on the wall.

They turned a slow circle, and when he caught her friend grinning at her from across the room, he just couldn’t stop himself. “One question.”

“Yes?”

Don’t ask it.

“Is there a man in the room you haven’t slept with?”

Surprise registered in her features when she looked up, but she only pursed her lips, emotions hidden. “A t least one.”

“Yeah.” He looked over her head again, irritated he’d even mentioned it. He sounded like a jealous ass. Was one, to boot. “That’s what I thought.”

Her dry smile said she agreed. “Riley’s just an old friend.”

“Oh, yeah. I got that much.”

She studied him. Then wet her bottom lip with that succulent little tongue. “Seems to me you’ve got your panties in a bunch. How’s that thong working out for you, Slick?”

He pinned her with a look. The woman was like a tick, stuck in good and sucking the blood right out of him.

“Why don’t you reach inside my pants and find out for yourself?”

“Hmm.” Her sultry gaze ran over his face. “That’s tempting. I’ve always been curious about how something like that works on a man. Should I go for it right here?”

He tried not to smile but couldn’t help it. Any other woman would have found his response crude, but not Lisa. She could take it and dish it right back out. There was no way he was wearing that thong she’d bought, but it didn’t stop him from razzing her about it. And judging from the interest flaring in her eyes, she was curious. Very curious.

That realization sent sparks through his blood. Even with all her pious words about their being colleagues and nothing more, the woman wanted him with the same crazy need that had been clawing at him since he’d walked into that damn auditorium.

His irritation trickled away. “You’re full of surprises, querida.”

She didn’t push against him when his hands slid around her waist, only let out a long, satisfied sigh that confirmed his speculations. “You have no idea.”

They swayed to the music, and his muscles relaxed with every step, every brush of her warm body against his. She sank against him, turned pliant in his arms. And this, he knew, he could definitely get used to. Her
close, nothing but heat between them.

“Well, what do you know,” she mumbled against his shoulder. “I think our guest of honor has finally arrived.”

Arms still locked around her waist, Rafe turned to look toward the stairs. With a wide smile, Alan Landau stepped down and shook hands with a small group congregated at the newel post. His hair was nearly white, and a full beard covered his face. He dripped wealth, from the gold cuff links at his wrist to the Italian leather shoes on his feet.

“I guess that means its showtime.” Her feet stilled, and she eased back.

He immediately registered the loss of her softness, of her supple curves from beneath his hands. They’d come here to do a job, were nothing more than business partners per her conditions, but hell if he was going to let her slip out of his arms before he made one thing clear.

He grasped her hand before she could step away. “Before you go.”

With a tug, he yanked her close until she collided with his body. She braced her hands against his chest and looked up. Shock flashed in her wide emerald eyes just before his mouth closed over hers.

And he sank just a little deeper in lust with her.

Soft and firm all at the same time, and every bit as hot as he remembered. She managed one quick grunt, clenched her hand into a fist against his chest and opened her mouth to protest. And that one minor lapse in judgment was all the invitation he needed.

He slid his tongue along her lips, dipped into her mouth to take his fill. She was wet and warm and tasted faintly of good French champagne. The rigid line of her shoulders and the tension in her muscles screamed for him to back off, but the soft moan that rumbled from her chest as he deepened the kiss was a clear take-me-now sign only an idiot could miss.

God, he could lose himself in her right here, take things to a whole other level and never look back. If he let himself, he could easily forget everything going on around them and give her exactly what they both wanted, right now.

She had a way of doing that, of making him forget all lucid thought. She’d done that in Italy, and she was about to do it again. Knowing it, realizing it was the only thing that made him loosen his grip and finally let her go.

He braced himself for the slap of her hand. Knew he’d pissed her off. But hell if he cared. It had been worth it. She had been worth it. If they weren’t standing in the middle of the dance floor, he’d do it all over again.

She ran that delectable tongue along her lips and leveled him with an austere look. “Why don’t you just lift your leg and pee on me?”

Laughter pushed up his throat. The woman was a grade-A piece of work. “I’m pretty sure it wouldn’t have been as much fun.” He shook his head. “You know, one day that mouth of yours is going to get you into some serious trouble.”

“Hmm.” Her gaze flicked from his eyes to his lips, the suggestive movement sending the blood roaring to his groin. “It already has.”

She clasped his nape and yanked his mouth back down to hers, tangling her tongue with his in a way that made every one of his senses explode.

Rafe wrapped his arms around her small waist, pulled her tight against his hips and thanked the Lord above for the skimpy dress that left her skin silky and smooth beneath his palms. He wanted to feel her bare breasts against his chest, have her legs wrap around his waist as he drove into her. Wanted to do the things to her body her tongue was doing to his mouth.

Lisa broke the kiss long before he was ready and dropped to the soles of her feet. “Don’t do that again.” Without a backward glance, she disappeared into the crowd.

Mary, mother of God. He ran his hand over his mouth, could still taste her on his tongue, smell her on his skin. There was no way he was waiting. He was gonna have her. To night. As soon as this damn party was over. He didn’t care if it was in the cab on the way home or against the side of the building outside. One way or the other, she was his. And this time he wasn’t taking no for an answer.

Lisa squared her shoulders and shook back her hair. Probably not the wisest thing she’d ever done, but there was no sense dwelling on it now.

But oh, God, the man could kiss. Her insides were still molten from the heat of his mouth. And what a mouth, too. Strong, wet, demanding and supple. Practically on fire. So much more than she remembered from their brief interlude in Italy. It was a good thing they were surrounded by a roomful of people, because if they
hadn’t been, she was pretty sure she would have knocked his legs out from under him, straddled his sexy body and found something else for that smoldering mouth of his to do to her.

She zeroed in on Landau across the room as she wove through the crowd. She needed to get Sullivan out of her head, out of her system in general, so she could focus, although it was damn hard to do, considering every muscle in her body was quivering from his touch. Wiping a damp hand down her hip, she gave herself a mental shake. And told herself she’d fantasize about stripping him naked later.

As she got closer, memories flickered through her mind, and her gaze narrowed. She’d met Alan Landau before, she was almost sure of it.

A party. At Doug’s house. A small holiday gathering with friends and colleagues from the university. Landau had been younger then, with thick, dark hair and a smooth, youthful face, but the eyes were the same—deep chocolate brown with a hint of mystery. And he hadn’t been alone that night. He’d been with…a woman.

Lisa’s brow creased as she sorted through her mental files. She’d been invited that night because she’d worked with Doug on several projects, not because she’d been his lover. No one associated with the university had known about their relationship. He’d made perfectly clear it wasn’t to get out. And like the desperate and naïve girl she’d been, she’d gone along with it because she’d been blinded by love. A love he’d never once returned, not even after he’d learned she was pregnant. Not even when he’d reluctantly agreed to marry her.

Someday. Down the road. After he found his treasure.

A wave of sickness rolled through her stomach, leaving behind a hollow ache she didn’t expect after all these years. She pressed a hand against her abdomen and felt the loss as strongly as on the day it had happened.

Tears threatened to fall, tears she hadn’t shed in almost fifteen years. She drew in a sharp breath, blew it out slowly and willed her mind away from the memories.

She wouldn’t let it wreck her. Never again.

She waited while Landau chatted with the group around him. Snagging a glass of champagne from a passing waiter, she sipped and pretended to be interested in a nearby conversation, all the while keeping an eye on their host. When his small group broke up and he started toward the rest of the crowd, she stepped forward.

A smile curled his lips when he caught sight of her, his eyes taking a long sweep of her gown. She bit back the victory smile teasing her mouth. The dress had done its job, on more than one front.

She held out her free hand. “I was hoping I’d get the chance to say hello. You’re a wanted man.”

Landau brought her fingers to his lips and kissed them gently. “I’m glad you did, Ms.…"

“Maxwell. Dr. Maxwell.”

Recognition flickered in his mocha irises. “Not Dr. Lisa Maxwell, the archaeologist?”

Bingo.

She smiled her sweetest grin. “That’s me.”

His smile widened. “Well, now I’m the one who’s glad he got the chance to say hello. I didn’t realize you’d be here, Dr. Maxwell.”

“I have a confession to make.” She leaned in close. “I wasn’t exactly invited, but when I heard of the event, I had my assistant contact the gallery and arrange for an invite. I’m something of a Greek-history buff.”

“Really? I never would have guessed that.” Male admiration flashed in his eyes. “I’m certainly glad you did. I read your recent article in *Archaeological Digest* about your success in the South Pacific last year. The artifacts you recovered from the wreckage of the Matador were quite amazing.”

The man was thorough, and well connected. She had a strong hunch he knew of every major find on the planet. “Yes, it was a remarkable dig to be involved with.”

“Tell me, the part about it raining when you brought up the Mayan replica of Chac, the god of rain—was that true?”

She nodded. “Very. The day it was lifted the skies opened, and we were caught in a torrential downpour.” She saw the flash of interest in his eyes. “A coincidence, really. Afternoon storms are somewhat common there. But it did make for an interesting story for the article.”

“I’ll say. I was riveted, reading of your adventures.”

“I wouldn’t call them adventures. Just part of my job.”

“Hmm.” He stepped close enough so she could smell his spicy aftershave. His licentious gaze flicked over her face and lingered on her eyes. She didn’t miss the flash of curiosity. “Have we met before? I rarely forget a face.”

She drew in a short breath as a memory flashed, one of Doug and Landau arguing in his study. The night of the party... just months before Doug had left on his search. And just months before his plane crashed. She knew she couldn’t mention Doug’s name without setting Landau on guard and prompting questions she had no
intention of answering. “I’ve been asked that before. I must have one of those faces.”

A wicked grin curled his lips. “Unforgettable.”

He stepped closer, wrapped his hand around her upper arm and turned her toward the crowd. “I would very much like you to meet some friends of mine. And later,” he said, his hot breath washing over her nape as he maneuvered her into the noise of the party, “perhaps I could give you a private showing of the collection, since you’ve such an avid interest.”

In her peripheral vision, she saw Rafe slink behind closed doors. Her heart rate kicked up, and she fought to keep it steady. With a tense smile plastered to her face—one she hoped her host couldn’t read—she turned to look up. “I think I’d like that very much.”


Rafe slipped down the dim corridor and turned at the end of the hall. The party drifted to the back of his mind. He tuned out everything but the sound of the building, the whir of the heating vents, the click of the security camera high above. Pausing in a dark corner, he waited while the camera made a wide sweep, then counted to ten and skirted the wall until he was out of range.

One down. A handful more to go. Landau was more than a little paranoid—the man had cameras everywhere. Luckily, Rafe had a photographic memory and an inside line on where each one was mounted.

He headed for the back stairs, the ones the servants used, the ones he knew would be dark and empty at this hour. Another security camera at the base of the steps forced him to pause, but within a handful of seconds he had passed it and was onto the second level.

Common sense told him anything of personal value wouldn’t be in Landau’s office. It would be in his private sanctum. He hesitated at the master suite’s double doors, slipped on thin surgical gloves, retrieved the slim pick he needed and waited until the camera swept away. Fifteen seconds later he was inside.

He stilled and let his eyes adjust to the dim light from the window across the room. The safe was hidden in the back of the master closet. He pushed clothing aside, knelt and opened the front panel. Removing a palm-sized portable computer from his pocket, he interfaced it with the safe and waited as each number popped up on the readout. When the seventh number clicked, he whispered, “Go time.”

He grasped the handle, turned and pulled. The safe gave with a pop, and a smile pulled at the corners of his mouth. “Like stealing candy from a baby.”

He bypassed the stack of cash, a case he knew was most likely full of jewels and went directly for the back of the safe. A thin folder was hidden beneath legal documents and a stack of contracts. He pulled the manila file out and opened it.

Bingo.

Pages of notes on the Furies. References to Dr. Douglas Stone. Copies Rafe recognized from the papers he’d seen in Lisa’s parents’ attic. Lisa’s hunch about the man had been right. Had Landau and Stone worked together?

His mind spun as he paged through the materials, looking for anything that stood out. No locations, only dates and names of historical figures who may at one time have come in contact with the marble goddesses. Donald Ramsey, a treasure hunter who had gone after the Furies in the early eighties and disappeared. Seymour Tarkin, an explorer from the 1920s who’d spent time in Jamaica searching for a sunken Spanish galleon. Henrietta Sanchez, a merchant who’d made reference to seeing a marble relief sometime in the late nineteenth century.

All somehow related. He continued to flip pages, taking a quick scan. It all looked unimportant to him, but they’d mean something to Lisa. She was the research guru, not him.

The second-to-last page made him pause. Handwritten notes were scrawled on half a notebook page.

Annalise de Los Cruz. 1852–1897.

His heart skipped a beat. The woman had seen all three pieces intact. A hand-copied paragraph from what must have been a personal letter filled the bottom of the sheet.

Footsteps in the hall outside dragged at his attention. He’d dawdled too long, knew better than to spend time studying the goods. With nimble fingers he folded the few papers, stuck them in his inside jacket pocket, reset the rest of the items in the safe and closed the door. He put his tools away, made sure he left the closet the way he’d found it and headed for the door.

He waited until the guards passed, cracked the door and checked to see that the floor was empty. Twenty seconds later he was on the third level, repeating his steps until he was safely in Landau’s private office. He
closed the door at his back and took a careful sweep of the room.

He didn’t expect to find anything else related to the Furies, but if Landau was the one behind the attempts on their lives last night, he wanted to know.

Shifting papers on the desk, he ran his gloved fingers over the keyboard of Landau’s computer. The man’s security was impressive, but nothing a good tech couldn’t get past. It took roughly three minutes to bypass the passwords and access the system.

Ten minutes on the computer yielded nothing of importance, and he was just turning it off when voices echoed from the hall and the door handle turned.

He slipped into the adjoining bathroom but left the door slightly ajar so he could listen.

“I thought you said this was going to be an easy hit.”

“Quit complaining.”

Rafe didn’t have a clear view of the room, but there was no way he could miss the second voice. Terence Winters. The man’s deep Jamaican accent was one Rafe had heard several times and would never forget.

“Running all over Chicago isn’t my idea of a good time,” the first man said. His voice was younger, harder to identify, but Rafe was sure he’d heard it before, too. He leaned closer to the door and listened.

“Sullivan’s canny,” Winters said, “but he’s not the sharpest tack in the box. Don’t worry. I know how he works. He can’t outrun us for long.”

Rafe’s jaw clenched. He had no use for Winters. Never had.

The other man harrumphed. Leather gave as if he’d dropped into a chair. “Guy’s a prick.”

“What’s your beef with him anyway?” Winters asked.

Silence. And then the other guy said, “He meddles in everyone else’s crap. It’s time someone taught him a lesson.” Rafe’s mind spun as he tried to place the voice. Then the man added, “Where is she? She said to meet her here?”

Cigarette smoke drifted to Rafe’s nose, and he fought the urge to cough. Winters had a pack-a-day habit.

“She’ll be here.”

At least ten minutes passed, with the younger man grumbling about Rafe and the situation in general and Winters playing babysitter. Rafe stayed quiet and scanned his memory for the connection he knew was hidden somewhere inside. His familiarity with the first voice couldn’t be a coincidence.

The door clicked open and closed. “Gentlemen, I hope I didn’t keep you waiting long.”

Female. European. The accent was strong—Mediterranean. Italian? Greek? Rafe couldn’t quite tell, and he couldn’t see her through the crack in the door to make a visual identification.

“Bout damn time,” Winters said. “I don’t like hanging up here when Sullivan’s downstairs.”

“Sullivan is the least of your concerns.” The woman’s voice hardened. “You were paid to do a job, one you bungled last night. I said the cargo was most important.”

Springs creaked. Obviously, the other man had stood. “Hey, you can’t blame that on us. That was an accident.”

“The second job you’ve messed up, gentlemen,” she said ignoring the comment. “You were not careful with Laura Hamilton either. Her death has raised too many questions. I can’t keep covering for you. My employer is most disappointed.”

Silence stretched over the room. A clock ticked somewhere in the darkness.

“The situation is crucial,” she finally said, breaking the stillness. “Dr. Maxwell is most important, especially now that the cargo is lost. When she leaves here to night, follow her and pick her up.”

Rafe’s pulse jumped.

“Is that understood?” she asked louder.

“Yeah,” the younger man mumbled. “We got it.”

Recognition finally flared in Rafe’s mind. Son of a bitch.

“What about Sullivan?” Winters asked.

“Sullivan is inconsequential,” the woman replied. “He’s served his purpose.”

“He knows too much,” Winters interjected.

“Then make sure he doesn’t become a liability.” The woman’s voice sharpened. “I trust you know what needs to be done. And this time when you check in, my employer expects to hear success. Is that clear?”

“Crystal,” Winters said.

The other man chuckled.

“That’s all gentlemen.”

Muffled voices echoed through the door, but Rafe couldn’t make out the words. The shuffling feet told him his surprise guests were on their way out.
“Mr. Winters,” the woman said sharply. Rafe tried to peer through the crack in the door. Winters stood just inside the room. The other man had already left.

“Yes, ma’am?”

“Your young friend seems a little on edge.”

“He’s fine.”

“Hmm.” Her tone indicated she didn’t agree. The sound of paper rustling came from the direction of the desk. “Did you happen to read the newspapers? Double homicide at the Marriott near the airport. I trust that wasn’t your error.”

He cleared his throat in obvious discomfort. “I…there was a mix-up.”

“I see.” Her voice was calm, but the undertones of anger were evident in her words. “You’re not being paid for mix-ups.”

“It won’t happen again. I told him…” He coughed. “It won’t happen again.”

“I’m not so sure, Mr. Winters. You’re responsible for his actions. You brought him into this.”

“I—”

“You know what you have to do, Mr. Winters. He has become a liability. Either take care of the situation, or I will. And if it comes to that, you’ll suffer the consequences.”

Winters dropped his shoulders and lowered his head. “Yes, ma’am.”

“And stay focused on Dr. Maxwell,” she added in a chilling tone. “She’s the key.”
CHAPTER ELEVEN

Lisa glanced at the clock high on the wall. He’d been gone too long. Why the hell had she ever let him talk her into this?

Laughter echoed through the room, but she couldn’t focus on the conversation around her. Her palms were sweating. There was a reason she’d never become a criminal. She had guilt written all over her. How did he do this all the time?

“You seem distracted, Dr. Maxwell. Are we boring you?”

She turned at the sound of Alan Landau’s voice, blinked twice and looked up. When she registered his amused expression, she forced a smile. “I’m sorry. I was studying the tapestry on your wall. Beautiful.”

Landau chuckled, leaned in close. “When we’re done here, I’ll give you a private tour of the house. There are many beautiful things in more intimate surroundings.”

His spicy aftershave made her stomach roil. The obvious gleam in his eye told her she needed Sullivan to hurry his ass up and make his way back down here before she had to kick this guy in the balls and set him straight. She wasn’t interested. Not by a long shot.

“Sir?” A man stepped up behind Landau. “We’re just about ready in the ballroom.”

Landau nodded and looked at the group. “It seems the moment has arrived. If you’ll all follow me, I think you’ll be pleasantly surprised at what awaits us.”

Lisa remained at the back of the crowd, lifted her champagne and took a long drink. Okay, now she was really starting to worry. Where was he?

Just as the group was heading through the large archway at the end of the room, she caught a glimpse of Rafe slipping from a doorway down the narrow hall. Her heart stuttered in her chest. But her relief quickly dissipated as he approached and she took in his tense face.

He grasped her arm and pulled her away from the crowd. “We have to leave. Now.”

“What happened?”

He didn’t get the chance to answer. Footsteps echoed above. Her eyes widened when she looked up and saw a dark-faced man peering down from the top of the stairs. Recognition flared, memories from the bar they’d run through last night.

“Oh, shit.”

“Now. Go.” He clasped her hand and yanked her down a long hall.

Voices reverberated behind them. Rafe increased his pace. The glass slipped from her fingers and shattered against the tile floor at her feet. Just as her heart jumped into her throat, he jerked her into a room, closed and locked the door behind them.

He darted to the windows and flipped the lock. Darkness made it hard to see, but a sliver of moonlight near the window cast eerie light over his face as he worked the pane free. It seemed he’d pulled her into a library of some sort. “Who was that?”

He didn’t answer, instead placed his finger over his lips. Voices resounded from the other side of the door. Footsteps clicked along the floor. Rafe stepped up to her, pressed a hand against her shoulder and pushed her into the shadows beside a large potted fern to the left of the door.

He was a foot from her, back to the wall, silent and waiting. For what, she wasn’t sure, but from the way her heart was pounding, she knew it couldn’t be good.

The door handle jiggled, and her breath caught.

He didn’t answer, instead placed his finger over his lips. Voices resounded from the other side of the door. Footsteps clicked along the floor. Rafe stepped up to her, pressed a hand against her shoulder and pushed her into the shadows beside a large potted fern to the left of the door.

He was a foot from her, back to the wall, silent and waiting. For what, she wasn’t sure, but from the way her heart was pounding, she knew it couldn’t be good.

The door handle jiggled, and her breath caught.

Then the door pushed open, and he moved like a streak of lightning. She heard the whap of fist hitting flesh, a muttered grunt and metal clanging against the floor, sliding across the room.

It was over in seconds, but felt like a lifetime.

She jolted when Rafe grabbed her hand. “Come on,” he whispered, pulling her hard.

With her heart still thundering, she stepped over the groaning man at her feet, careful to keep out of his reach. She didn’t argue when Rafe tugged her to the open window and pushed her through, didn’t think to swear at him when her skirt caught on a sharp point at the edge of the sill and he wrenched the dress free, tearing the fabric as she fell into the bushes below.
And she was still too stunned to feel the rocks scraping her palms and stabbing into her knees as anything more than an irritation.

The dress pooled around her thighs, dirty and torn. He was out the window on her heels, pulling her to her feet just as conscious thought returned and she was about to ask him what the hell was going on.

She didn’t have a chance.

Light flooded the room behind them. Voices—several now—grew louder. He grabbed her hand and hauled her with him. “Run!”

Her protest disappeared as her adrenaline surged. The air was cold on her bare arms and back. She tried to keep her feet in the stupid heels she’d worn as they darted across the yard and into the cover of the trees at the edge of the estate.

Dogs barked somewhere to their left. She heard shouts and the rumble of an engine.

A muffled popping sound echoed behind them, but it was drowned out by the blood pumping in her ears. Rafe jerked her sideways. She tripped on a root sticking out of the ground and her hand slipped free of his. She hit the dirt facedown.

“Lisa!” He was on his knees at her side in a flash, pulling her to him. “Where are you hit?”

“What?”

“Mierda, you’re bleeding.” His hands raced over her body, hovered on her bloody leg. Above their heads, a sharp thwack resounded, followed by wood cracking and splintering.

Her eyes grew wide with realization as he shielded her with his arms. “They’re shooting at us!”

“Yes, I got that. Pissed off the wrong person, I think.”

She saw the fear in his eyes as he searched her body for wounds. Though he sounded calm and collected, those damn eyes gave him away, even in the dim moonlight. Alarm bells shrilled in her head.

Dried leaves crackled. Branches rustled behind them. She struggled against his hold and tried to stand. “I’m not hit. I’m not. I… I tripped. It’s just a scratch.”

Relief swept over his features as he pulled her to her feet. “Thank God. Can you run?”

“Yes.”

He peered over her shoulder through the dense forest to look back at the lights of the house. The voices were now coming from two different directions. Their pursuers had slowed down and split up, obviously unsure in which direction they’d gone. “Let’s get the hell out of here. Stay close. And quiet.”

He had her on her feet in a swift second. She kicked off her shoes, grabbed them by the straps. They stayed in the shadows and darted into the cover of the woods. She could still hear muffled voices somewhere off to the left, but for the moment it seemed they’d lost their pursuers.

She was sweating by the time they reached the road at least a mile from Landau’s estate. Cars whizzed by on the busy street. No sound echoed from the woods at their back, but that didn’t mean their thugs were far behind.

Leaning forward, she braced her hands on her thighs to draw air into her blazing lungs. One good breath. That’s all she needed. Just one.

“Here.” He slipped his jacket over her shoulders and took her hand again. “There’s a bus.”

Her feet were killing her. She’d broken the heels of both silver strappy sandals somewhere back in the trees, but slipped them on anyway. When the bus stopped and the door whooshed open, she followed Sullivan through the stench of exhaust and up the steps, then settled into a seat on a long breath. Ignoring the questioning looks from the few passengers seated around her, she let her head hit the window, closed her eyes and tried to calm her racing heart.

That’s all she needed. Just one.

“Head west,” she said, recognizing her surroundings.

She had to look like hell, in a ripped and filthy evening gown, sweaty and operating on the dregs of an adrenaline rush. But she didn’t care. At the moment, she was thankful to be alive.

When he nudged her some time later, she finally opened her eyes. The bus had stopped and city lights beat in from the outside. He helped her to her feet, gently this time. “Come on. We need to keep moving.”

She hadn’t paid any attention to where they were headed, but they’d obviously left the posh suburbs and were back in the city. The El rumbled by somewhere close. For the first time since she’d seen Rafe at the base of the stairs, she was able to think straight.

“Head west,” she said, recognizing her surroundings.

He didn’t fight her when she led the way toward the elevated station. Thankful they were the only ones on the platform, she dropped to a bench and let out a long, long breath.

This wasn’t what she’d envisioned when she’d gone looking for Sullivan in the Keys. Not running for her life in downtown Chicago, twice in two days.

Someone wanted them. Wanted them dead, from the looks of it. One attempt on her life she could chalk up to Sullivan’s shady career choice and a case of bad luck. After two, she was starting to think this was personal.
Common sense told her this was all about the Furies and Doug’s research. But she still couldn’t figure out why. Doug had been dead for fifteen years. If someone had wanted his notes, they’d waited a helluva long time to go looking for it.

Criminy. All that crap had been in her parents’ attic, not locked up like the U.S. Mint. One simple break-in and whoever wanted the damn boxes would have been set.

One simple break-in…

Her breath caught. Those boxes had been moved to her parents’ place only about two years ago. After Keira and Catrine had cleaned out their junk from her parents’ attic. Before that, they’d been stored in a back room of her father’s store. A place no one ever visited, let alone remembered was there. When the store had closed, her mother had moved all Lisa’s stuff back to the house.

And before that…how many times had her parents’ place been broken into over the years? Five, six times? Shane was always bugging them about the declining status of the neighborhood and the fact they needed to sell and relocate to sunny Florida in their golden years.

Her father had only shaken his head and scowled at each of Shane’s attempts. “Heat like that does things to people’s brains. Better to be here where it’s safe.”

Safe.

She’d never once considered the possibility that leaving her things—Doug’s things—with them would put them in jeopardy. The neighborhood was declining. Shane was right. Her father was just too bullheaded to listen.

Just as she’d always been too bullheaded to heed Shane’s warning that her little apartment in downtown San Francisco was a bad idea. She’d had break-ins there, too. And she’d always chalked them up to living in the big bad city. Now she couldn’t help wondering if it had been more. Maybe someone had been watching her a lot longer than she thought.

A chill spread down her spine, and she tugged the tux jacket around her shoulders. Paper crinkled in the inner pocket, distracting her from the dread settling in her stomach. Curious, she reached inside and grasped the slips—research Rafe must have pulled from Landau’s house. Something about it registered in her mind. Something she’d seen before.

Rafe passed in front of her, dragging her attention from what she was reading. He hadn’t stopped pacing back and forth like a caged animal since they’d climbed the platform stairs, and he didn’t show any signs of stopping. She couldn’t focus on the words in front of her.

“Give it a rest, Slick.”

When he didn’t seem to hear her, she folded the papers and replaced them in the breast pocket of his coat, sure they meant something, but lacking the energy to figure out just what that was at the moment. He’d obviously been spotted, which accounted for their quick flight from the party, but she still didn’t have a clue what had really happened and who, exactly, was after them.

And she was still a little staggered by what had gone down in that library. She’d watched—okay, heard—as Rafe had taken the other man out like he’d been trained in more than just the art of common thievery. Her sexy thief had been in stealth mode the moment that door had opened. Swift. Efficient. Dangerous. Her stomach clenched at the memory of how fast he’d disarmed and immobilized the other man, and she realized there were layers to Rafe Sullivan she’d had no clue existed.

Now that layered man was pacing by her again, making her stomach tighten with concern. His shirtsleeves were rolled up to his forearms. The bow tie stuck out of the pocket of his slacks, and his hair was disheveled from wind and his fingers. He didn’t seem to notice the cold and didn’t look her way, even when she spoke. Only rubbed a hand over his mouth and continued to pace.

She’d seen him ticked. She’d seen him in the throes of passion. She’d even seen him juiced on adrenaline. What she hadn’t ever seen from him was concern. He was always in control. But here, now, his brow furrowed in serious thought, her tough-guy thief was looking a little worried.

And it set her nerves on edge. The fact he wasn’t volunteering information only made her more suspicious.

“Sit down, Sullivan. You’re starting to stress me out.”

He stopped, but he didn’t look at her. Instead, he chewed on his lip a minute, then finally turned—careful, she noticed, to keep his eyes down as he dropped onto the bench next to her. “So I think it’s safe to say we’re back at square one.”

Back at square one. He was strategizing. She could understand that. He was a guy after all, always thinking a step ahead. Hell, one of them needed to strategize at this point.

“Okay,” she said cautiously, glancing sideways. His jaw flexed, relaxed, but he still didn’t meet her gaze. Her eyes narrowed on his tense profile, studying him closely. He didn’t look like he was strategizing. He
looked like he was stressing.

He leaned forward, braced his elbows on his knees and clasped his hands in front of him. “Right. So I think it’d be a good idea if we split up for the time being. No reason to stick together at this point, not until we get some major research done.”

“Research,” she said, still watching him.

“Yeah.” He cleared his throat. “Probably a good idea if we lay low for a while, all things considered. If I were you, I don’t think I’d go back to your parents’ house or your place in San Francisco, at least not right now. You’ve got friends, right? Be a good time to go visit them. When we’ve got something, we’ll hook up. Or e-mail.”

“E-mail,” she said slowly. “Now there’s a novel idea.”

“Right.” He braced his hands on his thighs as if it had all been settled, and stood. “So that’s decided.”

“Um. I don’t think so.” He finally turned and looked at her, eyes dark and serious. Oh, yeah, now it made perfect sense. Her blood pressure shot up. Suddenly what they’d just been through seemed small potatoes compared to what he was about to do to her. “You’re not getting rid of me that easy.”

“Lisa—”

“We made a deal, and I’m not leaving until we’re finished.”

“I don’t think you get it.”

“No, I get it. I get it really well. We lost Doug’s research, hit a dead end with Landau, and now you want to dump me and go after Tisiphone on your own. Well, tough. You’re stuck with me.”

“Carajo. It’s not about Tisiphone.”

“Oh, no?”

“No. Look. Those were the two guys from last night. They’re following me. It’s not gonna take ‘em long to figure out who I’ve been hanging with. The best idea all around is for you to take off for a while.”

She crossed her arms over her chest. “Nice try.”

He raked a hand through his hair. “I’ll give you Alecto, okay?”

“You have it on you?”

“No, I don’t have it on me. But I’ll get it for you if you’ll just promise to go.”

He was serious. She could see it in his eyes. He wanted her gone, and not because he was looking out for his own ass. What had happened earlier had more than shaken him.

That burst of anger faded. She dropped her arms. “Why don’t you tell me what’s really going on here?”

He tossed his arms up and turned away from her. “Ave Maria purísima. You are the most stubborn woman I’ve ever met.”

“Now that one I could translate. I didn’t realize you were so religious, Slick.” When he only glared at her, she flashed a smile, hoping to ease the tension in his features. “Ever notice you speak Spanish when you’re pissed or you’ve got sex on the brain?”

He obviously didn’t think her words were funny, because he muttered something she couldn’t quite hear, something that didn’t sound all sweet and sexy from where she was sitting.

“Look,” she said, rising and stepping toward him. “I’m not leaving. So let’s not even go there.” When he glanced away, she moved closer to get his attention. “They saw me, too. I’m in this as much as you are.” And if she was right, she’d been in it a lot longer than he had.

“So go somewhere else. Take a friggin’ vacation. Just back off this for a while.”

He was willing to give up what he wanted most to keep her out of harm’s way. In fact, at the moment, he looked like he’d do just about anything to keep her safe.

Her chest tightened, a reaction that threw her totally off guard. She shifted uncomfortably and swallowed back a jolt of panic. “Rafe, that’s not going to make a difference.” He rolled his eyes, and she reached out in response, wrapping her fingers around his forearm as she softened her voice. “Tell me what I’m missing here.”

His eyes slid closed for a brief second, opened. “James Kimbel was at the party.”

“I don’t recognize the name.”

“Elderly gardener. Rat-bastard grandson. Hates my guts with a passion. Ring a bell?”

“Young neighbor in the Keys?”

“Yeah. I think good ol’ Jimmy’s the one who shot at us last night, was one of the ones shooting at us to night. Which means someone hired him to follow me. Probably from Key West. Maybe even before. Someone who knows what we’re after.”

Before. Like Italy. Or Jamaica. The voices she and Simeon had heard in that cave rushed through her mind. Maybe they weren’t following him, but her. “I don’t understand. If he—”

“The black guy he was with? I’m pretty sure it was Terence Winters. Big-time player in the antiquities
circuit. I heard his voice when I was upstairs. Winters is the kind of guy who will do whatever it takes to get what he wants. Including convincing some pansy-assed kid who’s never liked me the quickest way to the easy life is to take me out of the game."

“Winters is what, a treasure hunter?”

“Yeah. You could say that. One who’s been implicated in a couple murders and is on several major wanted lists in a handful of countries. Always manages to stay under the radar though. He’s got connections. Everywhere. And if he’s working with Landau, then it means those connections are big. You saw the political power at that party.”

A chill ran down her back. “Nice.”

“No. Not nice. Dangerous. I had a run-in with Winters a few years ago. We were both after the same piece. He wouldn’t even think twice about popping me to get at the Furies.”

The honesty in his eyes sent her stomach churning. “If that’s true, then splitting up isn’t going to get me out of this. He’ll just come looking for me, too.”

He braced both hands on her arms. “Lisa, do me a favor and just disappear for a while, okay? When things settle down, I’ll get in touch with you. I won’t cut you out of it, I promise.”

She believed him. He might still be a thief, but he was telling her the truth. That fact cemented her decision. “I’m not leaving.”

He closed his eyes and dropped his arms. “Fuck.”

A smile tugged at her mouth even though her stomach was jumping all over the place. “You know, you’ve been using that word in English a lot more lately. Acclimating to the north?”

He frowned. “I’m not gettin’ any, right? Might as well at least enjoy the word.”

She couldn’t stop the laugh that slipped from her lips. She liked him, really liked him, which only made this strange relationship of theirs harder to comprehend.

He rested his hands on his hips and looked up the empty track with a frown. “So tell me, smartass, does this train go all the way to O’Hare?”

At least he sounded seminormal again. The chill was gone from his words, even if he still looked ready to pound something. “Yeah. You have to switch trains at Jackson Station, but the Blue Line will take you all the way to the airport.”

“Okay. So we’ll catch a flight and head back to Miami to regroup. I need to call Pete.”

“Pete?”

“My business partner.”

She nodded, curious but not really sure she wanted to know the details of his shady dealings. “But we need to stop by Shane’s first.”

He hadn’t just saved her life for the second time, he’d been honest with her. That meant more to her than anything else. At some point she had to trust him if they were going to make this work and find Tisiphone before it was too late. “I need Doug’s journal.”

“His what?”

“His journal. I pulled it from the boxes and slipped it into my pack before we left my parents’ place last night. He kept detailed notes in it, clues about each of the Furies. If my hunch is right, what you found at Landau’s fits in with what’s in the journal.”

She didn’t miss the flash of anger in his eyes and knew he was finally making a connection between her words and the rucksack she’d gone back for after the car accident. “And you didn’t tell me about it.”

It wasn’t a question. The ice in his voice made her back tingle. “I didn’t know if I could trust you. And it wouldn’t have been important until we had more to go on anyway.” When he turned away, a rush of guilt swept through her. “There’s still a lot more we need to figure out before his journal’s even helpful, but we need it.”

“Estás brutal.”

She blew out a breath. Definitely ticked. That didn’t sound sexy in the least.

“Look, Sullivan. I know you’re mad. But I’m telling you now. That’s all that matters.”

Tension slipped back into his shoulders. What ever softness she’d seen flicker over his face earlier was long gone. A chill spread down her spine at the knowledge, and she shivered again under the jacket, this time not from fear, but from something she didn’t want to acknowledge.

“Fine,” he said, careful not to look at her again. “We’ll make a quick stop, run in and grab it. Then we’ll get the hell out of here.”
But he didn’t seem happy about it. In fact, he looked down right pissed.

He’d waited until the last guest left before retreating to his private sanctum. Barefoot, Alan Landau paced the plush carpet of his office. As his feet dug into the thick pile, he focused on the threads beneath his soles, gripping and releasing the carpet with his toes as he worked the stress from his body. Head to toe, top to bottom, forcing the anxiety out through his feet. It was a calming exercise he’d learned years ago when a situation had threatened to overwhelm him.

This one wouldn’t.

Goddamn. Never in a million years had he anticipated she would be so bold as to show up at his unveiling, but when she had, he’d decided to play it calm and cool, let her think she was in control.

And now she was gone. He wanted to throw something. Instead he took a deep breath, paused near his desk and gripped the carpet again. He glanced at the note in his hand. His contacts would find her. If he was patient, maybe she’d take him right to Tisiphone.

The door pushed open behind him, and he turned. “What are you doing here?”

“We’ve got trouble.”

He frowned. “You bet your ass we’ve got trouble. The cops are hounding me about Laura’s death. The police superintendent was here to night eyeing me like a common crook. They know.”

“They don’t know. But I think you’re right. They do suspect.”

Alan resumed pacing. “That last shipment was too big. We need to call it quits for a while. At least until things cool off. Before they tie me to any of it.”

“The suppliers will be very upset to hear that. That’s bad business. We’ve made you a lot of money over the years.”

“I don’t need any more money. I’m up to my fucking ears in money. Look around you. And I have the final say in this, not you.”

Silence fell over the room. “Are you saying you don’t need me?”

Power was a tricky thing. Sometimes he gave away too much in his day-to-day business dealings. He needed to be careful here.

“Tell me, Alan. Just what do you need?”

Freedom.

He’d been stupid. Greedy. Way too fucking greedy. “Nothing. At least not right now.”

“Nothing? Not the Furies?”

Surprise registered. “How did you—”

“I know a lot more than you think. Dr. Maxwell’s presence here to night wasn’t a surprise. The fact you let her get away, though, reinforces just how useless you’ve become.”

What the hell?

“Hold on a minute. You can’t talk to me like that. You work for me.”

Laughter rumbled across the room. “Not anymore. Did you think no one would find out? That we wouldn’t know you were planning to go after the Furies on your own? After everything I’ve done for you, did you think you could keep that secret?”

“Listen—”

“I’m done listening, Alan. And you know what? So are you. Sending Laura to Italy was a bad idea. Digging into things alone was the wrong business decision. You should have been happy with the money I pulled in for you.” The barrel of a gun glimmered in the dim light.

Alan’s eyes grew wide. “Hold on—”

“I will, you prick. To the Furies. All by myself.”

The gunshot echoed through the house.

All right. If he wanted to be mad, she’d just let him.

They’d made a quick stop at the apartment where Lisa had grabbed the journal and they’d both changed clothes, but when she’d tried to leave a note for Shane, Rafe had thrown a complete fit. Since then, he’d uttered only a few words to her in passing.

She sat at the gate and glanced around the quiet terminal. At this hour, only a few flights were scheduled to leave, and the usual chaos of O’Hare was down to a mild din. Confident they hadn’t been followed, Rafe had
booked them a flight to Miami and then disappeared to grab some food. But not before telling her to sit tight and wait.

She crossed her arms over her chest. She didn’t like the holier-than-thou attitude he’d been sporting since the train, and she sure as hell didn’t need him telling her what to do. What did he have to be upset about anyway? It’s not like she’d lied to him, or cheated him, for crying out loud. So why was his reaction bothering her in the first place?

That stab of guilt in her chest left her more ticked off than anything. And the fact she didn’t know why she felt that way was really starting to get on her nerves.

She looked up when he dropped a paper sack in her lap and tugged a White Sox cap over her head. “You don’t blend well, Maxwell. That hair stands out like an emergency flare.”

She tugged the hat off, glanced at the logo and pulled it back on. “I’m more of a Cubs fan, Slick.”

He sank into a chair next to her. “I didn’t know your style and didn’t feel like guessing. Deal with it.”

She frowned as he leaned back and laced his fingers behind his head.

He thought she was a smartass? Riiiight. That fit.

She wasn’t taking the bait. Shaking her head, she reached into the bag, nearly melted when she pulled out a cheeseburger. “Aren’t you eating?” she asked around a mouthful of food.

“Not hungry.”

She glanced his way and swallowed. He was wearing the black jeans and turtleneck she’d picked out for him when she’d gone shopping earlier, and damn if the outfit didn’t look better on him than she’d predicted. His eyes were closed in an attempt to look relaxed, but his rigid jaw proved he was a dangerous man on the edge.

The memory of that sultry kiss rushed through her, warming her blood. She hadn’t had a chance to think of it since the party, hadn’t really wanted to analyze why it had happened or how it had made her feel. The fact her chest was thumping now as she stared at him only made her realize just how much of an idiot she really was.

She lifted the burger and took another bite, averting her eyes. The man was ticked at her, and for no apparent reason. She needed to get a handle on the stupid emotions that kiss had stirred in her, forget the fact he’d saved her life…again. His attitude proved that what ever had happened before was a moment of pure insanity brought on by champagne and randy hormones. Well, she wasn’t dealing with either right now. He could be a moody ass all he wanted. It wasn’t her fault or her problem.

She ate her burger in silence, and when the flight attendant announced their plane was boarding, she crumpled the paper in her hand, grabbed her backpack and rose.

The flight to Miami was uneventful and long. Rafe slipped on headphones and tuned her out through most of the trip, and the few times she tried to strike up a conversation, he pretended to be asleep. When they started their descent, he finally opened his eyes and sat up.

“So what’s the plan?” she asked as they deplaned and headed up the jetway.

“I called Pete before we left Chicago. He arranged for a car and a place for us to regroup.”

She wanted to ask where, to tell him to quit being such a jerk, but his cell beeped before she got the chance.

He flipped the phone open and came to a stop. “Yeah.” She halted beside him, watching his features change from hard and rugged to concerned in the blink of an eye. “When?”

Something in his tone had worry skittering through her chest. When he closed his eyes and turned away, that worry jumped to fear.

“Yeah.” His voice hardened. “Mierda.” He wiped a hand over his forehead. “No, thanks, Hailey. I’ll be right there.” He flipped the phone closed.

“What happened?”

“Nothing that concerns you.”

He started walking again, and she had to increase her pace to keep up with his long legs. “Nothing that concerns you.”

Didn’t concern her? Well, it obviously concerned his wife. She clenched her jaw as they walked through the concourse, hating the fact she felt so damn jealous. Where the hell had that come from? She never got jealous. She had nothing to be jealous about anyway. And why did his comment bug her so much?

She stewed over that question while he signed for the rental and they climbed into the car. She waited until they turned south on I-95 before shifting in the Escalade’s leather seat and looking his way. “Where are we going?”

He switched lanes on the freeway. “I’m taking you to a hotel. You can just hang until I get back.”

Hang? Was he serious?

“I don’t think so, Sullivan. White on rice, green on grass, for the next few weeks I’m stuck to you like glue. Ring a bell?”

A frown tugged at his mouth. His irritated dark eyes finally flicked her way, the first time since they’d left
Chicago.

She smiled her most sour grin.

His jaw clenched as he looked back at the road. “It’s family stuff, Maxwell. Nothing you’d be interested in.”

She was, though, and the fact he didn’t think she would be made her sarcastic smile fade. “Nice try, Sullivan. We made a deal, and you’re stuck with me.”

“Fine.” His hands tightened on the wheel. “Tag along if you want. I don’t care. But my family’s not like yours, so consider yourself warned.”

She settled back in the seat, feeling smug and victorious. “So what happened and where are we going?”

For a moment she thought he wouldn’t answer, then he said, “My mother’s in the hospital. I need to stop and see her.”

She looked over. “Is she okay?”

Something in his eyes shifted, a look that tugged on her chest, but he kept his intense gaze focused ahead. “She’s got pancreatic cancer. Had a bad reaction to the chemo.”

A ball formed in the pit of her stomach, and she swallowed, feeling like the biggest heel on the planet. “Oh.”

He shifted uncomfortably in the seat as if he didn’t want to be having this conversation. “Like I said, you don’t need to go. I can pick you up when I’m done.”

The fact he didn’t want her to go with him convinced her that was just what she needed to do. Maybe because she sensed the anxiety radiating from him. Maybe because she remembered the fear on his face when he’d answered that call. Maybe because she felt like she was getting her first glimpse at the man he was underneath, and part of her wanted to know what made him tick.

Another part recognized that seeing him as anything other than a thief was a dangerous thing, but she ignored it.

She shook her head. “You don’t need to be worrying about running me all over. I’ll go and just stay out of your way until you’re done. They’ve got waiting rooms at hospitals. I’ll just hang there.”

He slanted a sideways glance her direction, no longer looking angry, simply exhausted. Her heart did that strange thump thing again at the vulnerability she saw in his dark eyes.

Oh, shit. That look was pure trouble. Trouble she did not need on top of everything else.

“Thanks,” he said softly. “I promise we won’t stay long.”
CHAPTER TWELVE

Lisa hated hospitals. Always had. Every time she walked into one, it seemed someone was dying.

Drawing in a deep breath, she followed Rafe into the lobby of Mercy Hospital, then waited while he checked in at the information desk.

Jeans and a V-neck sweater had been a bad idea. She’d forgotten how freakin’ hot it was down here. She fanned her face with her hand as she stared at a giant ficus in the middle of the room. Who was she kidding? She wasn’t sweating from the heat but from the stress of being in a hospital again.

When Rafe gestured toward the elevators, she willed her feet forward and followed. Beside her in the car, Rafe was silent, but she felt the tension hanging in the air like thick smoke. He didn’t want to be here any more than she did, and that knowledge helped ease her anxiety. At least a little.

The door opened with a ping. Hailey Roarke turned their way and dropped her crossed arms. Curly blonde hair cascaded around her shoulders and her porcelain skin glowed under the fluorescent lights, but worry lines marred her forehead. She wore a fitted white tank top, cute khaki capris, and beaded sandals that highlighted her purple-painted toenails. And while Lisa’s focus should have been somewhere—anywhere—else, she couldn’t help noticing that out of uniform, Rafe’s ex wasn’t just pretty, she was a knockout.

That didn’t endear her to Lisa any. Frowning and feeling frumpy, she hated the woman more than she had when they’d met only a few days before.

“You two look like hell,” Hailey said when she and Rafe stepped off the elevator.

Oh, yeah. Definitely hated the woman. With a passion. The emotion may have been totally immature, but at least it gave Lisa something substantial to focus on besides her stupid neurosis.

Rafe frowned. “Where is she?”

“End of the hall.” Hailey held up a hand when he tried to push past her. “Wait. There’s something I need to tell you first.”

Concerned dark eyes shot to Hailey’s face, and Lisa watched the color drain from his cheeks. Her heart kicked over at his reaction.

“Oh no. Please, God. Don’t say we’re too late.”

“What happened?”

“It’s not her,” Hailey said quickly, reading his expression. “She’s going to be okay. She had a bad reaction to the chemo, got pretty sick and dehydrated, so they brought her here for observation. But she’s already doing better.”

He closed his eyes, took a deep breath, opened them again. “Good. Then everything else can wait.”

He took a step but Hailey stopped him with a hand on his chest. “No, it can’t. Rafe, I got a call from the billing office at the care center yesterday. They couldn’t find you, and they still have my name on some of the paperwork. Your payment bounced.”

“What?”

“The account’s empty.”

Confusion crossed his face. “That’s impossible. There’s enough money in that account for the next six months of her care.”

Hailey didn’t drop her hand. “I know. But I’m telling you it’s gone.”

His eyes narrowed, then widened with realization. “I’ll fucking kill him.”

Hailey tensed and moved fully in front of him. “Not right now you won’t. I didn’t tell you so you could rip his head off. I told you because she knows about it and thinks it’s a bank error.”

“Bank error, my ass.” Rafe’s jaw clenched. “Where the hell is the little weasel?”

“Inside. Regardless of what he did, he cares about her.”

“He doesn’t care about her. He never has. All he cares about is his own selfish ass.” He pushed her hand away and stepped around her.

Hailey turned so her gaze could follow him. “Pull your head out of your butt, Sullivan. You lay into him in front of her and it’s just going to make things worse.”

“Oh, I won’t lay into Billy in front of her,” he said over his shoulder as he made his way down the hall. “I
can wait five fucking minutes to kill the prick.”

Lisa watched the conversation with curious eyes. When Hailey glanced her way and frowned, Lisa stepped cautiously forward. Even though the woman wasn’t high on her list, she was possibly her only friend at this point. “Who’s Billy?” she asked quietly as they walked.

“His brother,” Hailey said under her breath. “Black sheep of the family. Rafe didn’t tell you about him, huh?”

Lisa shook her head.

Nice. Oh, man, now she really didn’t want to be here. Rafe was already ticked at her, and this on top of everything else wasn’t going to help. She should have taken him up on his offer to hang in a hotel room for the afternoon.

The door was open when they reached his mother’s room. Lisa tried to blend into the shadows in the hall, but Hailey tugged on her sleeve. “He’s gonna need a distraction. Come on.”

The familiar scent of industrial cleaners stung Lisa’s nostrils when she stepped into the room, bringing a wave of memories. Painful days in a hospital bed when her head and heart had been in a really bad place. She swallowed back the bile sliding up her throat.

A slim woman with sparse dark hair sat up in the bed. Her skin was pale, arms frail as she lifted them to hug her son. Wires and tubes stuck out of her hands, ran to machines at her bedside. She looked like a gentle breeze could take her out, but her eyes were wide and shining and very much alive when she looked up at Rafe.

Eyes, Lisa noticed, that were just as dark and mesmerizing as his.

The anger she’d seen flash in those gleaming obsidians before slipped away, replaced with gentleness as he looked at his mother. His broad shoulders seemed to engulf the small woman as he leaned down to hug her.

“Hi, Mamá.”

“There’s my boy.” She kissed his cheek, ran bony hands over the day’s growth of beard on his jaw. “You didn’t have to rush down here. I’m fine.”

“There’s nowhere else I’d rather be. You know that.” His voice was soft and gentle, as if he were talking to a child. He slid his hand down to clasp hers tenderly, touching her like she was made of glass. Fragile. Special. Worth more to him than anything in the world.

And Lisa’s heart kicked over as she watched. In all the time she’d known him, he’d never once looked at her like that. Not in Chicago when he thought she’d been hurt. Not in Milan when he’d wanted her in his bed. Until this moment, she hadn’t realized just how much she wanted a man to look at her like that, like she was the center of his world.

Not any man. This man.

Oh, shit.

The tightness in her chest made it hard to breathe.

The man standing with his back to the room turned from the windows and scowled, shattering the serene image. “Nice of the prodigal son to finally show up.”

Rafe shot him a disinterested look and refocused on his mother. “How are you feeling?”

“I’m fine, m’ijo. I had a little trouble, but I’m better now. Mostly just tired and worn out. But that’s normal.”

He squeezed her hand and pulled a chair alongside her bed so he could sit.

She glanced over his shoulder toward the door, her large dark eyes lighting with excitement. “You brought a friend.”

Lisa’s heart banged out an unnatural rhythm when Rafe turned, still holding his mother’s hand in his. But the flash of unease in his eyes said he’d forgotten she was there. Forgotten she even existed. Lisa’s heart dropped into her stomach, fast, swift, unexpected.

Better that way, she told herself. Definitely safer, all things considered.

“Mamá, this is Lisa Maxwell. We’re…business associates. We were working on a project together when Hailey called.”

The man near the window coughed several times and shifted quickly away. Lisa’s gaze darted his direction, and in the time span it took for him to turn, recognition flared.

Blue Jacket. From the bar in Chicago.

No way.

Words choked in Lisa’s throat. She looked from Rafe to his brother and back again, unsure what to say or do. She’d been thrown for a loop from the moment she’d stepped into the hospital, and it was getting worse.

“Um…”

His mother smiled. “Call me Teresa. It’s so nice to meet you.” She gestured for Lisa to come closer. “I never get to meet any of Rafael’s friends. The last woman he brought home he ended up marrying. And then
divorcing.”

Lisa didn’t miss the disapproval in Teresa’s voice. Beside Lisa, Hailey snickered and pushed her forward as if she’d heard it a hundred times and was glad someone else was in the hot seat.

“Mamá,” Rafe warned.

“What?” Teresa asked, solemn eyes set on her son. “It’s true.” She glanced at Lisa and smiled.

“Mamá, Lisa and I are only professional colleagues.”

Lisa’s gaze swept toward Rafe. He was no longer zoned in on his mother. No, he was watching her with that dark, mysterious look that made her heart rebound from the depths of her abdomen and trip a beat to the tune of Al Green’s “Here I Am (Come and Take Me).”

“Let me get a look at you.”

She thanked God for the distraction, for the chance to claw her way out of the sticky web this thief was spinning around her. Lisa tore her gaze from Rafe and looked back at his mother.

A smile brightened Teresa’s face, bringing a warmth to her eyes that made them sparkle. “My, she is pretty. All that red hair. You’re Irish aren’t you?”

Oh, great. This was a helluva lot better. Now she felt like a piece of meat. A very uncomfortable piece of meat, trapped between a rock and a sheer drop-off. Lisa nodded, wishing she were anywhere else but in this room right now. “Yes. I am.”

Teresa’s smile widened, enveloping her whole face. “My husband was from Galway. Have you been there?”

“No. I’m afraid not.”

She waved her free hand, a wistful look in her eyes, and rested her head against the pillows. “Neither have I, but he used to talk about it often. Billy takes after his father, all light skin and hair.”

Beside her, Rafe’s jaw clenched as he glanced at his brother, a reaction Lisa knew his mother didn’t notice. She looked between her boys. “You’d never guess they were siblings.”

Lisa’s gaze shifted to Billy again. With his back to the room, he was doing a good job at avoiding her and the whole conversation in general. “No, you never would.” She glanced back at Rafe. “It’s definitely a surprise.”

“Well, you know,” Billy said, turning quickly, keeping his eyes down. “I gotta go. Mamá, I’ll be back later.”

Rafe was on his feet in a flash. “I need to talk to you before you leave.” His tone was even and calm, but danger brewed in his eyes. “Why don’t I walk you out? Make sure you don’t trip or anything on the way.”

Panic and a hint of fear crossed Billy’s pale features, and he tried to shrug in a nonchalant way that looked anything but casual. “Yeah. Sure. Whatever.” His gaze moved past Rafe to his mother, skipping over Lisa as if she weren’t even in the room. “I’ll see you later, Mamá.” He moved to the side of her bed and kissed her cheek.

“Te quiero.”

“Te quiero, m’ijo.”

Billy stepped toward the door, and Rafe slapped a hand on his shoulder in what appeared to be brotherly affection. But the way Rafe’s fingers dug into Billy’s muscles, Lisa knew the gesture was anything but friendly.

She darted a worried look at Hailey, who quickly dropped her arms and stepped toward the bed to keep Rafe’s mother from seeing too much. “Teresa, Lisa is an archaeologist.”

Teresa’s tired eyes brightened. “You are? Tell me, how did you meet my Rafael?”

Oh, geez. That wasn’t a story Lisa wanted to tell. Tearing her gaze from the door, she looked at Hailey who only smiled and lifted a shoulder as if to say You’re on your own.

Shit, shit, shit.

Lisa glanced back at Rafe’s mother. What she needed to do was talk to Rafe before he seriously injured his brother. She didn’t put it past him, considering the fire she’d seen brewing in his eyes.

And if her hunch was right, he didn’t know his little brother was tangled up in this mess with the Furies. Her stomach clenched at the thought of telling him. Billy might just be their best link to finding out who was after them.

The stairwell was the most private place Rafe could find in a pinch. He yanked Billy through the door and tossed him against the cement wall. The door clanged shut behind them.

“Hey. Watch it.” In a defiant show of attitude he’d perfected over the years, Billy straightened, more shocked than hurt, shook his hair back from his face and scowled.

Yeah, like Rafe had never seen that look before. He set his hands on his hips and did his best to smother his bubbling temper. It didn’t work.

“Where’s the money?”

Billy’s eyes darted to the floor. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”
“Bullshit. Don’t play games with me.”
Billy clenched his jaw, shifted his feet, but didn’t look up. Rafe could see he was contemplating his choices, that he knew he was cornered.
“I was just borrowing it,” he said after a long pause. “Like a loan.”
“Jodienda.” Rafe ran both hands over his face. It didn’t matter that Billy wasn’t even listed on the account. The kid was smart. He knew how to pull a scam of his own. And hell, who better to hit than your own brother, the one you’ve always despised? He had access to account info, social security numbers, knew Rafe’s signature and had a photographic memory. Piece of cake. The fact he hadn’t pulled something like this sooner was what should have surprised Rafe more.
Shit, he wasn’t even a kid anymore. He was a grown man who always managed to get himself into more trouble than he was worth. He might have a genius IQ of 165, but when it came to common sense, he was seriously lacking.
Hailey’s frequent reminder popped into his head. The one she’d uttered whenever Billy had gotten into trouble over the years—which had been a lot: You can’t kill family members. They put you in jail for that kind of thing, and I don’t think even I could get you out of that one.
“Where the hell is it?” Rafe asked.
“I used it to pay off a debt.”
“A what?” Rafe’s temper skyrocketed.
“Look, I’ll get it back, okay?” A hint of panic laced through Billy’s words. “I did a job for this guy, and it didn’t work out the way I planned. He’d already given me an advance, and I had to pay it back. But I’ve got other work lined up. It’ll be a bit, but I’ll pay it back.”
Rafe’s hands curled into fists at his side. If Billy hadn’t been his brother, he’d have beat the crap out of him. As it was, he loved the punk, even if he was a royal fuckup.
“When?”
Billy lifted one shoulder, dropped it. “I don’t know. A couple months.”
“Fuck that.”
“I swear.” When Billy glanced up, fear flashed in his eyes. “These guys were serious, Rafe. Said they’d break my legs if I didn’t pay up. I was out of options. I’m good for it, though. You know I love Mamá.”
He’d heard it all before. Rafe blew out a calming breath, pressed fingers against his tired eyes. This was messing up all his plans. Now not only was he on a time crunch because of his mother’s health, he had cash-flow problems to worry about.
He dropped his hands. “This is the last time, Billy. I’m tired of bailing your ass out when you get in a fix. Use those brilliant brains of yours and figure out a way to replenish Mamá’s account now, not in a few months. Even if you have to sell everything you own, you do it. I don’t have time to deal with this shit right now. And I swear to God if you cross me again, it’ll be the last time. Family ties only go so far.”
“Okay, I will.” Billy inched toward the door.
Rafe’s gaze followed. “Stay the fuck out of trouble.”
“Will. Are we done here?”
Not by a long shot, but Rafe didn’t have the energy to deal with the rest of it. And he knew where to find Billy when he was ready. “Don’t even think of upsetting Mamá with all this.”
“I won’t.” Billy slipped out the door before Rafe could stop him.
The corridor was empty by the time Rafe reached it. He ran a hand over his hair and headed back toward his mother’s room.
Lisa was sitting in the chair at his mother’s side, talking about God only knows what. Tired and in need of one moment of peace, he leaned against the doorjamb and listened to the sound of her husky voice, remembering the first time he’d heard it in that lecture hall, the way it had wrapped around him like a gentle caress, mesmerized him from the very start. Rich and thick with just a hint of sass. Like velvet and sandpaper at the same time.
Damn, he could get lost in that voice.
Who was he kidding? He already had. He wanted her in the worst possible way, with a frenzy that at times left him raw and exposed. But the overwhelming fact, the one that scared him the most, was the knowledge that this need burning up his insides wasn’t just a physical one. It was something more, something that left him totally off-balance in a way he’d never been before.
And wasn’t that just the icing on the cake? Here he was with one foot teetering off the cliff, and she was sitting there all calm and collected as if she didn’t have a care in the world. Part of him was awed by her strength, by the fact she’d held it together and hadn’t once fallen apart. But another part of him—the part that
wanted her with a reckless desperation—wanted to know if she felt anything inside. Especially anything related
to him.

She must have heard him, because she paused and looked toward the door, and that’s when he saw the flash
of unease, the indication that maybe she wasn’t as together as he thought. And his chest did that weird
tightening thing it had done in the hotel room in Italy. The same thing it had done at her parents’ house and
again when he’d kissed her last night.

Guilt slithered in as he watched. If he hadn’t pulled her into all this, she wouldn’t have that fragile look in
her eye and wouldn’t be running for her life now. He’d just laid into Billy for being a royal fuckup, but when it
came right down to it, he wasn’t much better.

Hailey glanced his way from the end of the bed and lifted her eyebrows. The questioning look and the way
her gaze darted between him and Lisa made him refocus.

What the hell was he thinking? Lisa Maxwell was a grown woman, one who made her own choices. He
hadn’t forced her into this. He’d even tried to get her to leave last night, hadn’t he? Had she listened to him?
Hell, no. She was too damn stubborn to do what someone else wanted, even if they had her best interest in
mind.

Feel guilty because of her? Bad idea. Sleep, food, and a chance to recharge his batteries was what he needed
now. Once he did that, he’d be more focused. He’d get these stupid thoughts out of his head, figure out how
to find that damn relief and get on with his life.

And get Lisa out of it for good.

He stepped forward. “Mamá, you look tired. We’re going to go and let you get some sleep.” He moved to the
other side of the bed, away from Lisa, and reached for his mother’s hand.

Her eyes had drifted closed while Lisa had been talking, but they opened to focus on his face. “Thank you,
m’ijo.” Concern spilled into her dark irises. “Is your brother all right?”

“Yeah, Mamá,” he said softly, hating the fact that she agonized over Billy when she should be saving all her
energy for getting well. “He’s fine.”

“I worry about him. You’re all he has. You need to remember that, Rafael.”

Pain sliced through his heart. He didn’t want to remember that, didn’t want to think of the day when she’d be
gone and his family was reduced to himself and his screwup brother.

He leaned over to kiss her cheek. “Get some rest, Mamá. I’ll be back tomorrow.”

She hadn’t said anything in the car since they’d left the hospital, and the silence was welcome relief to Rafe’s
ears.

“Where are we headed?”

So much for peace and quiet. Rafe frowned as he pulled to a stop at the toll booth on the Rickenbacker
Causeway. He pitched change into the coin slot, waited for the green light and pressed down on the gas. “Key
Biscayne. Pete’s sister has a house there.”

She arched one elegant eyebrow his direction. “His sister? What does she do so she can afford a place in Key
Biscayne?”

“Model.” He didn’t look her way but could tell by her silence she was curious. “She’s in Europe on some
shoot. The house is empty. No one will bother us there.”

“Hmm.” She let the comment settle, pursed her lips and looked out at the water on both sides of the West
Bridge. “So Billy wasn’t what I expected.”

His jaw clenched. He did not want to talk about Billy or his mother or anything related to the last hour.
She darted a look his way, not taking the hint. “You’re still pissed at me, aren’t you?”

More pissed at himself, but he didn’t need to let her know that.

At his silence, she looked ahead and folded her hands in her lap. “Well then, that’ll make this easier. There’s
something else I didn’t tell you.”

Now why didn’t that surprise him? With his elbow propped on the window ledge, he massaged his aching
forehead.

“When you asked me why I was gone so long yesterday, I wasn’t entirely truthful.”

Well, there was a news flash. He fought to keep his voice level. “Oh no?”

She shook her head. “Afer I left the gallery, I had the feeling I was being followed, so I doubled back
through downtown just to see if I was hallucinating. Turns out I wasn’t. I darted into a bar, and a man followed.
The same one who’d been following me for the last half hour.”

His first reaction was disbelief she hadn’t mentioned it before. The second was skepticism at why she was
bothering to bring it up now. “You get a look at him?”
She bit her lip. “Um. Yes. A pretty close one.”
“And?”
“And… I was sure I’d never seen him before.”
He looked back at the road.
“Until today.”
The hair on his nape stood straight up. He darted a look at her. “What?”
“It was Billy.”

No way. He pushed out a shaky laugh. “I don’t buy that. In a smoky bar it could have been someone who
looked like him. He wouldn’t be—”
She held up a hand to stop him. “It was him. There’s no way I could forget those eyes. And considering we
had ourselves a little chat, up close and personal, so I could set him straight on a few things, there’s no way
he’ll ever forget me.”
“You what?” The temper he’d been working hard to keep at bay came raging back. “You confronted a tail,
not knowing if the guy was packing or with someone? Are you naïve or just plain stupid?”
“Watch it, pal.” Anger flashed in her irises. “I made sure he was alone. Believe me, if I picked him out, he
wasn’t the brightest of tails. I knew he was an amateur by the look on his face. And I’m sure of it now, after
seeing him today at the hospital. He was scared shitless when he saw me.”
Scared shitless didn’t begin to describe Billy. And dammit, she was right. Billy had been edgy at the
hospital, and it hadn’t been just because he’d been scared his brother would lay into him. Rafe had sensed
something else there, although he’d been too ticked to seek it out.
“Fuck. You have got to be kidding me.” His hand clenched into a fist against the wheel.
“I know I should have told you sooner, but I really didn’t think it was a big deal. Now, though, after
everything that happened today…” She lifted her hands, dropped them. “I think it’s safe to say he’s involved
somehow.”
Not just involved. Up to his ears in it.
Rafe chewed on the information as they drove into the Village of Key Biscayne. He turned onto a side street
that led them into a posh area of the island and stopped at a large wrought-iron gate flanked by two towering
palms. He lowered his window, punched in the security code Pete had given him and waited for the gate to
slide open.
He’d been here a handful of times and was always awed by how the rich and famous lived. But today he was
too damn pissed to care.
He pulled to a stop in the circular drive and killed the engine. The noise and view of the road were blocked
by flowering trees and magenta bougainvilleas that towered above the eight-foot fence surrounding the property.
Sweet acacia and locustberry were scattered through the immaculately manicured front lawn. Various-sized
palms littered the landscape, and purple verbena lined the front walk. It was a tropical paradise only minutes
down downtown Miami, a secluded spot he was thankful for so they could disappear and refocus.
Because right now he really needed it.
Pete stood leaning against the hood of his shiny red Porsche, cell phone pressed to his ear. His blond hair
glimmered in the afternoon sunlight, and wearing crisp khakis and a lightweight silk shirt, he fit right in with
the surroundings. He waved a greeting at Rafe and Lisa as they climbed from the rented SUV, and finished his
conversation.
Concern filled his eyes as he pushed his designer sunglasses into his hair, snapped the phone closed and
stood. “You look like you’ve been through the ringer, buddy.”
“Feel like it,” Rafe said, massaging the tense muscles at his nape. He was suddenly dog tired and worn-out
and wanted nothing more than eight solid hours on his back.
He made introductions and watched a sly smile spread across Pete’s face as he took in Lisa for the first time.
Yeah, he knew that look. Pete was a ladies’ man. There was only one woman he’d ever been serious about,
but she was long dead. Rafe had never met her, but since her funeral six years before, Pete had been on a binge
of blondes and redheads and…any good-looking woman who could make him forget. At least that was Rafe’s
theory.
Friend or not, though, there was no way in hell Lisa was going to be his next conquest.
Rafe waited while Pete made idle conversation with Lisa about his sister, the house and grounds, and when
she finally darted a look his direction, he figured Pete had gone on long enough.
With a gentle hand he nudged her toward the house. “Why don’t you go on in and relax. I need to talk with
Pete for a few.”
She seemed relieved, smiled at both of them, then turned and climbed the steps to the entrance of the Mediterranean-style villa.

A grin cut across Pete’s face as he watched her go. “Wow. Not what I expected.”

Rafe frowned. “Not what I expected either. She’s ready to fall over from sheer exhaustion. Trust me, she’s not usually so docile.”

“Spitfire, huh?”

“Try a barracuda who’s been on a diet and craves fresh meat. The woman would chew you up for breakfast, spit you out and come back for seconds just to watch you squirm.”

Pete chuckled. “Sounds like she’s done a number on you.”

No. Not yet. But Rafe had a feeling she would. And not in the way he wanted. “Listen. We’ve got trouble.”

Pete’s smile faded when Rafe told him about Winters and Kimbel. And it turned into a frown when Rafe relayed the story of Lisa’s tail in Chicago and the trouble with Billy.

“Jesus Christ, that kid’s a time bomb waiting to go off.”

That was the understatement of the year. Billy was just like their old man. “Tell me about it. But he’s still family. Do me a favor and keep him busy. I want him out of this until it’s done. Somebody on the wrong side dangles money in front of him and he’s gonna jump on it, no questions asked.”

Pete nodded in agreement. “Amazes me you two are related at all. I’ll find something for him to do between now and then. Don’t worry.”

“And get me a lead on Winters. I’ve got a bad feeling about that guy.”

“What about this woman? The one Billy said hired him?”

Rafe frowned. He’d been tossing that around since Lisa had mentioned it—which hadn’t been that long—and he didn’t like where his thoughts were headed. “I don’t know. See what you can get out of him when you talk to him.”

“Sure thing.” Pete flashed his million-dollar grin. “Can I rough him up a little in the process?”

“Only if you wanna go a round. He shows up at the hospital all bruised and battered, and Mamá will lay into me. Which means I’ll have to lay into you. I’m not in the mood for that.”

Pete shook his head and bit back his teasing laugh. “Sullivan, you’re such a mama’s boy.”

Not for long, he wouldn’t be.

That thought was enough to send his bad mood spiraling downward. He rubbed his eyes. “I need to crash before I pass out. I’ll call you tomorrow.”

They said good-bye, and he made his way up the front steps as Pete climbed into his sports car. When Rafe reached the porch, he turned and looked back. “Hey, Pete?”

Pete paused in the convertible with one hand on the ignition and looked up. “Yeah?”

“Thanks, man. I owe you.”

“I’ll feel better about that when you return to the land of the living.” A lopsided grin pulled at Pete’s mouth.

“Stay out of the barracuda’s clutches.”

That wouldn’t be a problem. He planned to stay well away from Lisa.

Rafe let the heavy mahogany door slam shut at his back. He checked the locks, made sure the security system was turned on, and headed for the living room. With any luck, Lisa was already tucked into bed upstairs sound asleep. Preferably a bed on the opposite end of the house from where he would be sleeping. In a room with a triple locking system and an unbreakable security setup.

The sunken living room was decorated in plush cream-colored couches and tan accessories. Two-story windows graced one whole wall and looked out across the pristine beach to the water beyond. A large glass coffee table sat in the middle of the room, tall candlesticks with chunky white candles perched on top.

The place looked like a museum. No dust, no cobwebs, no personal pictures that he could see. It was all glass and silky fabrics, designer paintings and expensive rugs. And totally not his taste.

He flopped onto an overstuffed chair done all in white silk stripes and hoped he wasn’t leaving a layer of dirt behind. His head fell back against the soft cushion as he closed his eyes. When this was over, when they cashed in their chips, he was gonna buy that bar and grill on the beach in Puerto Rico, the one he’d already scoped out, get his mother set up with the best care money could buy, and give her the remnants of the life she’d always deserved. He could do that for her, at least before it was over. If he got to feeling tied down, homesick, he’d take his boat out and escape until he felt better.

Just the thought of his sparkling sloop made him wish he were back in Key West instead of stuck here. And thinking about being here brought him right back around to the mess they’d sidled into. He tried to work his brain around whom Winters could be working for. If it was really Landau or someone else.

Glass clinked against glass, the sound pulling his eyes open. Lisa left an open bottle of beer on the coffee
table in front of him and sat on an adjacent chair.

Purple smudges under her eyes proved she was as tired as he was, but the concern lurking in her irises was what captured his attention and brought his conscience screaming to the forefront.

“Thought you might like something to drink. It’s been…a day.”

She had sympathy written all over her face. Her eyes were a soft meadow green, her voice tender and sweet. He knew if he reached for her right now she’d probably let him, wouldn’t even think to push him away, because she felt sorry for him. For his mother, for his screwed-up brother. He could see himself taking advantage of her battered defenses, sinking into all that warm womanly softness so he could get rid of some of that ache in his chest for a few minutes, at least.

But that wouldn’t help. And it wasn’t the way he wanted her. Taking her to the hospital had been a monumental mistake, just as he’d known it would be. He didn’t want her empathy. He’d much rather have her pissed and fighting mad. That, at least, he knew how to handle.

He dredged up a nasty snarl that fit his surly mood, knowing it would get her to back off. “Careful, querida. You’ve got pity fuck written all over that pretty face of yours. I don’t think you want to dangle that out there in my current mood.”

_Stunned_ was a pretty good description of her reaction. To her credit though, she didn’t respond. Simply flashed him an in-your-dreams look, pursed her lips and left the room.

_Smooth, Sullivan._

Disgusted with himself, he ran a hand over his hair, leaned forward and scratched the back of his head. She might be tough as nails made of super-strength steel, but the past few days had obviously worn her down. He hadn’t missed the flash of hurt in her eyes before she’d drawn up her shield, although he wished like hell he had.

_Shiiiit._

What he should do is get off his ass, find a bedroom and lock himself in until he’d slept off the temper bubbling like lava in his blood. Before he said something that would make things worse. Before he _did_ something he couldn’t undo.

So, hell if he knew why he pushed off the chair and headed the other way.

She was standing at the refrigerator when he stepped into the kitchen. Soft white light spilled over her, highlighting the curves at her waist and the long line of her throat, as she tipped a bottle of water to her lips and sipped.

Arousal seared his gut even though he tried like hell to clamp it down. He slipped his hands into his pockets and balled them into fists so he wasn’t tempted to reach for her. “Look. That was uncalled for and totally out of line. I’m tired, and it’s been a pretty shitty day. So, I apologize.”

She closed the massive refrigerator and turned. “You’re apologizing? Wow, I…I just don’t know what to do with myself.”

He caught the smartass flash in her eyes. “Eat it up, querida. It doesn’t happen often.”

“I know.”

His eyes narrowed at her suddenly serious tone. “When I have something to apologize for, I do.”

“Ah.” She nodded, recapped her water. “Right. Like the pity fuck comment. Gotcha. Because that’s a biggie. Definitely bigger than say, lying to me. Or seducing me. Or, wait,” she scrunched her nose, “stealing from me.”

That did it. He’d had enough out of her smart mouth and the guilt she’d been laying on him since she’d shown up in the Keys. It was way past time he set her straight. “You believed what you wanted to believe in Italy. If I’d been honest with you about who I was and what I wanted, you wouldn’t have given me a second look.”

“That’s not true.”

“Yeah. It is,” he said as the anger welled up in his chest. “I know your type, Dr. Maxwell, and I know exactly what you think of people like me. You wouldn’t have given me the time of day. Sure as hell wouldn’t have had drinks with me, let alone dinner.”

She might have been hurt, but she masked it before he could tell. “You’ll never know now, will you? Fact is, Sullivan, you used me, and it doesn’t even bother you.”

“Used you? Do you think I needed you in Italy? No way, _chica_. I could have been in and out of your room in under five and you’d never have known what happened to Alecto.”

She tipped her head and shot him a droll look. “Then why didn’t you? Oh, wait. I already know the answer to that.” Fire flashed in her eyes. “Because you _wanted_ me to know you’d taken it.”

She was good and pissed now. Definitely no pity fuck being offered anytime soon. Ever, from the looks of it. Well, good. That’d make his life a hell of a lot easier.
“You’re right about that,” he said. “I did want you to know. But only so you’d come after me and I could talk you into working with me. And I could have done that without what happened in that hotel room. It sure as hell would have been better for me. What I should have done was slip the damn Mickey into your wine at dinner like I’d planned and gone in when you were sound asleep.”

“Then why didn’t you?”

Why? One simple reason. Her. He’d wanted her. More than he could remember wanting anything else in his life. More than made sense to him even now.

When he didn’t answer, she rolled her eyes. “I thought so. You’re a guy. You saw an opportunity to get lucky, and you took it.”

She didn’t have a clue what she’d done to him that night. What she was still doing to him. It hadn’t been only about getting lucky. There’d been more there. Right from the start. The fact she didn’t feel it told him everything he needed to know.

“I didn’t do the seducing in that hotel room.” He shook his head. “You might want to take a step down off that high horse and think back to what actually happened that night, querida.”

“I know what happened. You stole from me!” It took every last bit of strength he had to keep his voice even and void of emotion. “You want the truth? Stealing from you was the only smart thing I did that night. Wanting you more than that damn rock was my biggest mistake. It still is.”
Lisa stood motionless after Rafe left the room, unable to move or even think. She wasn’t sure what had just happened. She’d pushed, as she always did, but he hadn’t backed down. In fact, he’d pushed back so hard, he’d damn near knocked her on her ass.

Wanting you more than that damn rock was my biggest mistake. It still is.

The raw emotion she’d heard in his voice told her he was telling the truth, and it nearly stopped her heart. Her legs felt like jelly, her stomach a hot coil of nerves. But it was the erratic trip of her pulse that kept her from moving. That and the twenty-pound weights suddenly attached to the soles of her shoes.

Oh, God. He was right. She’d done the seducing that night. She’d wanted him with an overwhelming need that had made her throw all rational thought aside. She’d made every first move there was, had all but begged him to take her. She’d known—even then she’d known—she’d been in complete control in that hotel room. She’d read it in his eyes when she’d kissed him in the lecture hall, had felt it as soon as he’d touched her. The man had been so far gone he couldn’t have said no if he’d wanted to.

And he definitely hadn’t wanted to say no. He’d wanted her.

Still wanted her.

Her mind skipped back to the night in Shane’s kitchen when she’d been ready to jump him and he’d held back. To the kiss at Landau’s party when he’d told her with his mouth just what he wanted to do to her body. And it dawned on her that he’d kissed her that night in a public place where nothing else could happen between them. Each time he’d made it clear he was more than interested, and each time he’d backed away, leaving the decision of where they went completely up to her.

Her eyes darted toward the arched doorway leading into the living room. He’d done it again, this time with words, and she wasn’t about to let him lay that on her and then walk away.

He’d taken one of the five guest rooms on the second floor; she knew because she heard water running from the end of the hall. She pushed the door open and took a sweep of the room.

Guest room was a loose term. She’d peeked around when he’d been outside with Pete, and each of the “guest” rooms in the lavish house were bigger than her whole apartment back in San Francisco. This one was done in deep tans and dark wood tones, with gauzy curtains at the windows and a masculine-looking four-poster bed.

His open bag sat on a nearby leather side chair. His shoes and shirt were tossed on the floor as if he’d just ripped them off. When the shower started in the bathroom, her gaze darted toward the open door.

Steam billowed from the room. The thought of him naked and wet sent electricity zinging through her veins as if a live wire had gone off under her skin.

She found his wallet on the dresser, and in it—just as she’d hoped—a three-pack of condoms. Smiling at his practicality, she stepped into the bathroom, then caught her breath when she saw him standing under the spray behind smoky glass-paneled shower doors.

God, he was beautiful. Tan and firm from head to toe. All roped muscle and chiseled sinew. His hands were braced against the dark tiles, eyes closed, face tipped up to the water sluicing over him. Her mouth went dry at the sight of him, run worn and ragged after everything they’d been through the past few days.

Need rushed through her entire body. She was tired of fighting it, of pretending this wasn’t exactly what she’d wanted from the moment she’d laid eyes on him.

Her sweater hit the tile floor, followed by jeans and underwear. When she pulled the massive shower door open, he looked toward the sound, stark surprise registering across his handsome features.

Good. She wanted him off-kilter. As off as she’d been since he’d walked into her life.

His dark gaze swept the length of her naked body, making every inch of her skin tingle with anticipation and pure lust. She stepped in, closed the door at her back and let his heat and strong male scent surround her.

“Don’t.” Danger brewed in his eyes. He grasped her hands at the wrists to keep her from touching him. He was good and pissed and struggling to keep his temper in check, but it didn’t discourage her. If anything, it made her need stronger. “Just turn back around and get out.”

A muscle in his jaw flexed, warning her to back away, but the hunger lingering in his eyes contradicted his
words. She stepped under the spray. “I would, if I thought that’s what you really wanted.”

“What I want is for you to leave me alone,” he ground out. “I’m not in the mood for games, and you know
darn well you’re playing with fire here.”

She wasn’t in the mood for games either. She was in the mood for him, hard and hot and deep inside her.

“Maybe I want to get burned.”

The doubt that crossed his face told her she’d been right, that what held him back was the fact he didn’t think
she wanted him with the same searing need. He couldn’t be more wrong. And she intended to prove it to him.

“I want you, Rafe. Right now.”

He shook his head slowly. “No.”

“Yes.” She eased closer, until his fingers brushed her abdomen. When she felt his pulse kick up against her
skin, liquid heat shot straight to her core. “Oh, yes. More than before. I want to finish what we started. I want
you to take me like you wanted to back in that hotel room.”

He took a step back, setting her away from him. The rigid line of his shoulders, the tense set of his jaw
screamed for her to back off. But his eyes. They were the key. And they were wavering. “Trust me. You don’t
want me like this.”

This was exactly how she did want him. On the edge of control, exposed, greedy for the need of her. The
way he’d been in Italy. The way she’d fantasized about him since that night.

She moved closer.

His grip tightened, warning her his restraint was slipping. “There’s no more nice left in me today, Lisa. If
you touch me, it won’t be all sweet and romantic. It’ll be rough and hard, and I won’t quit even if you beg.”

God, yes. That’s what she wanted.

She smiled, knowing she’d just won, knowing he was as powerless as she was. “Romance has never done it
for me, Rafe.” She eased up on her toes to bring her mouth within millimeters of his. “Make me beg.”

The animalistic groan that tore from his chest sent excitement pulsing through every inch of her skin. He let

go of her wrists, looped one hand around her waist, tangled the other in her hair to yank her head back and

slammed his mouth onto hers.

Water streamed over them as he pushed her back against the tile wall and devoured her mouth, thrusting his
tongue into her in a way that made her yearn for the feel of his length deep inside her.

Her hands slid down his back, over sleek muscles and carved angles, to grip his hips and pull him against
her. His erection stabbed into her belly, confirming again what he hadn’t been able to hide from the second
she’d stepped into the shower. He did want her. Now.

Right now.

“God, Lisa. Te necesito.”

She didn’t have a clue what he’d just said, but oh, it made her wild. Just the sound. She tore the condom
open at his back, tossed the wrapper and arched against him to match his frantic kiss as she slowly rolled the
latex down his rock-hard length.

He groaned into her mouth as she ran her hands up and down his throbbing erection. But she didn’t have
time to explore as she wanted. Suddenly his hands were everywhere, his mouth taking her on a roller coaster of
sensations as it streaked down her neck to suckle and bite and send her into an abyss of desire.

When he pulled a nipple between his teeth, she moaned at the electricity coursing through her body. When
he nudged her legs apart with his knee and thrust two fingers into her wetness, she gasped, sure she’d break
apart from the sheer pleasure. But when he gripped her hips and lifted her, pinning her against the wall so he
could drive inside her, she knew she was lost.

She came in a blinding rush of light and heat that rippled out from her center to every cell in her body before
he’d thrust a handful of times. And even as it faded, as she felt his thickness plunge into her again and again,

another wave built, stronger than the first.

Her heartbeat hammered against her ribs, against his as he groaned, “Again,” in her ear and pushed her back
to the edge. Each deep thrust, every greedy stroke of his tongue against hers sent her higher until she was sure
she’d come out of her skin. Until that final moment when he moaned into her mouth, drove deep one last time
and took her into bone-melting oblivion right along with him.

Incredible. She couldn’t remember ever feeling so…so satisfied.

Slowly she came back to herself as his hands kneaded the muscles in her thighs. He let go of her hips,
released her legs so they could slide limply down his until her feet hit the shower floor. Breath heavy against
her skin, he nuzzled her neck while hot water cascaded down both their bodies.

Long moments passed as he fought to steady himself. She heard it in his labored breathing, felt it in the rapid
fire of his heartbeat.
“Are you okay?” he finally asked.

The quiver to his voice was so damn cute, she nearly burst from the sound. He’d kept his promise, and she hadn’t even had to beg.

She wrapped still-shaking arms around his neck. “Yeah. I think I’ll live.”

He eased back enough to look down at her. The driving anger that had pushed him before was gone, replaced with a lazy sated look in his eye that said he would, too. “You sure I didn’t hurt you? I wasn’t exactly gentle.”

She ran fingers through the silky hair at the nape of his neck, loving that he was worried. “No. Not hurt. At least not yet.” She lifted her brows. “Maybe you should think about roughing me up again.”

The smile curling his sensuous lips made her stomach tighten all over. “Tú sí que me vas a acabar.”

She groaned. “God, that melts me. You keep speaking Spanish and you may never get me out of this shower.”

He chuckled, visibly relaxed for the first time in days. “I’ll remember that. But if so, we’re going to need way more latex. Where’d you get the condom?”

“Your wallet.”

His brow lifted. “You stole it?”

A sheepish grin slid along her face. “Sorry I did?”

He shook his head, and heat rebuilt in her veins at the desire she saw in his dark eyes. “Never.”

She waited with a smile while he stepped out of the shower to clean up, then came back. Sighed deeply when he lathered her body from head to toe and washed her with a gentleness that made her heart skip and brought desire twining through her limbs all over again. He kissed her tenderly, deeply, in such contrast with the wild and reckless way he’d kissed her before, she wasn’t sure he was the same man.

His layers amazed her, surprised her, left her crazy with need for him. And just when she was ready to reach out and show him exactly what she wanted, he flipped off the water and pushed the door open.

He pulled a navy towel from the rack, ran it over her head, down her body and across her skin. Her nipples hardened at the rush of cool air, at the careful sweep of his eyes along her body and the approval she saw flash there.

The soft terry cloth landed at her feet. His mouth found hers again, wet, hungry, full of passion, and he wrapped his strong arms around her, lifting her so he could carry her into the bedroom.

He dropped her on the mattress, then reached for his wallet from the dresser and tossed it near her head. Cool linen pooled beneath her. The hottest man she’d ever met hovered over her. Déjà vu flared, and she smiled, looking up into dark and needy eyes that weren’t nearly as satisfied as she’d thought.

“I think we’ve been here before,” she said.

“Hmm?”

“You said something about taking you.” His tongue made one long lingering sweep. “Was this what you had in mind?”

She shuddered, arched and felt the room tip. Oh… “Yeah. Um. I think this works.”

Laughter rumbled from his chest and vibrated up her body as he leaned close again. “Ready to beg?”

And she had a feeling she’d be doing a lot more begging before the night was over.
The mattress dipped beside him hours later, rousing Rafe from sleep.

“Wake up, frog prince.”

His eyes fluttered open as Lisa’s tantalizing fingers slid across his jaw. She was propped up on her elbow looking down at him, eyes sleepy and sexy, red hair all tousled and wild from the bed and his fingers.

“Am I getting fed in this deal, or what?” she asked with a mischievous grin. “Because those pretzels on the flight didn’t do it for me, and I’m starving.”

He chuckled and reached for her, pulling her onto his chest. “Do you forget anything?”

“Nope. Have a perfect memory. So, what’s the answer?”

He glanced at the nightstand and the digital clock that read eight P.M., then back at her. “I’m up for a snack.”

He tightened his hold and lifted his head to plant a sloppy kiss on her lips.

She squirmed against him. “Not exactly what I had in mind, Sullivan. Three hours of raw sex takes its toll on this body. I need sustenance.”

She smiled and eased out of his arms.

He pushed up on his elbows to watch as she headed for the bathroom, enjoying the rear view. The sinful things she could do to him brought a fresh rush of arousal straight to his groin.

Damn, but they were gonna need more condoms.

When she came back, combing fingers through her hair, she was still gloriously naked and smiling. The first traces of moonlight spilled through the windows, highlighting the curves at her waist, the swell of her breasts.

She was tiny, a perfect package wrapped around a woman full of sass and attitude. One who made his blood pulse in more ways than one.

“Get out of that bed, you lazy bum.” She leaned down and lifted his white undershirt from the floor where he’d dropped it, then tugged it over her head.

The hem hit her almost at the knee. She looked like a little kid playing dress-up. And God, it was sexy seeing her in something of his. He slid to the end of the bed and grasped her before she could turn for the door.

She braced her hands on his shoulders as his slipped up under the T-shirt, over the curves at her hips to her sleek ribs. “Sullivan.”

He ignored her warning, kissed her breast through the soft cotton and felt her sigh at the gentle touch. Her scent was a mixture of clean soap and the remnants of his cologne, her skin silky smooth beneath his hands.

“Eres preciosa.”

She sighed and closed her eyes. “You don’t fight fair.”

He smiled and moved to her other breast, loving the way she turned molten in his hands whenever he touched her. “Me pones loco.”

She blew out a slow breath. “I’m serious. I need food before you rock my world again.” She bit her lip.

“But…okay, tell me. What did you just say?”

“I said you’re beautiful. And you drive me absolutely crazy.”

“Oh. I…oh.”

Speechless. He never would have thought he could reduce her to stuttering. And his chest did that weird tightening thing again.

Oh, hell. He froze. Pete was right. This woman was doing a number on him. If he wasn’t careful, he’d be in over his head before he even realized it.

Overwhelmed by the thought, he pushed up quickly, startling her back a step. When he saw the question in her eyes, he forced a quick grin and smoothed a hand down her shirt, dropping it back in place in what he hoped was a casual move. “I’m sure Pete had the fridge stocked. He’s good with details.”

Her eyes cleared and searched his face with a hint of confusion. He swallowed back the urge to grab her and dive in headfirst without thinking. The only thing that stopped him was the realization that if he did, he could lose all objectivity where she was concerned.

Until they found Tisiphone, he couldn’t let that happen. She’d tilted the playing field by coming to him in the shower, and now it was up to him to make sure they stayed on even ground. She hadn’t been thinking about tomorrow or next week when she’d made her move. She’d been thinking about the here and now and the sexual tension that had been building between them since Milan.

That’s what he needed to think about, too. Not the fact one night with her would never be enough. Not the fact he could easily see her sliding into his life in a more permanent way. Not the fact his heart was damn near tripping over itself while he looked at her.

“Rafe?”

Her soft voice brought him back around. He blinked twice.

“Are you okay? You look kind of…funny.”
He ran a hand over his face. *Funny* was an understatement. “Just tired. And I think my blood sugar’s a little low, too.” Was his voice shaking? Holy hell.

He coughed. “Why don’t you head down? I’m just going to grab my pants from the bathroom.”

“Okay.” Curiosity lingered in her eyes, but she turned for the door and disappeared without another word. Alone, he pressed a hand against his heart, closed his eyes and sank to end of the bed before his legs gave out. So much for even ground. He was up to his eyeballs in quicksand.

Lisa stood at the open refrigerator staring into a cavern of food, but she didn’t see any of it. All she saw was Rafe’s bewildered face as he’d looked down at her moments ago.

She’d seen that look before. Hell, she’d *given* that look before. Just before her world had turned to crap.

She tamped down the jolt of panic that threatened to seize her chest. Okay, she’d read him wrong, that’s all. She was tired and hungry and wasted on the most incredible sex she’d had in…well, forever. Not to mention she was operating on an estrogen binge. It was no wonder her emotions were hovering at the edge. That didn’t mean what she’d seen on his face meant anything at all.

Because, dammit, he hadn’t just looked at her like he was seeing her for the first time. And seeing her that way hadn’t, *hadn’t* scared him shitless.

“Find anything?”

The sound of his husky voice made her breath catch. She turned slowly, almost afraid to look in his dark eyes again. But when she did, the dazed look was gone and that lazy one was back.

He shot her a lopsided grin and reached around her into the fridge. “Thank you, Pete.” He held up a package of steaks. “How hungry are you?”

Suddenly famished. She’d totally misread things upstairs. A relieved smile curled her mouth. “Very.”

“Good. See if you can find makings for a salad in there. I’ll put these on this massive grill.”

He moved to the industrial-sized stainless-steel stove and started the grill while she rummaged through the fridge. She pulled out lettuce, tomatoes and feta cheese. He handed her a knife from the butcher block and pointed toward the cutting board as he moved across the room. “Feel like some wine?”

The quiver she’d heard in his voice upstairs was gone too. Definitely misread that whole moment. The knowledge calmed her.

“I don’t know,” she said as she arranged her vegetables. “Are you planning on drugging me again?”

He reached into a wine cupboard and pulled out a bottle of red. “Depends, smartass. Do I get to have my way with you?”

“I think you already did, Slick.”

His smile was pure victory, and God, it was sexy. He was wearing only low slung denim jeans, his hard abs glistening in the low light, chest broad and muscular. Dark stubble graced his jaw, his hair was mussed, his eyes sleepy. And watching him, she had a quick flash of his determined features when he’d had her pinned against the shower wall. Felt, all too well, her muscles clench at the sultry memory.

Bottle in hand, he crossed to the enormous sliding door that occupied one whole wall in the adjacent breakfast nook and slid it open. Water lapped at the beach just outside as moonlight glinted off its smooth surface. Crickets chirped, and off in the distance a seagull cried.

If he was trying to seduce her, it was working. The moonlight, the atmosphere, the sex fuzz still on her brain—it was all doing a number on her system.

He moved with grace, like a man completely at ease in a kitchen. She watched as he uncorked the bottle, poured ruby red liquid into two glasses and set one in front of her. Before he stepped back to the grill, he pressed a kiss to the nape of her neck that sent tingles all along her spine.

She lifted her wine to take a long swallow and calm her jangling nerves. Oh, boy. She was in trouble here. He didn’t know what he was doing to her just by being him.

Clearing her throat, she went back to chopping and tried to refocus. “You seem pretty comfortable in this kitchen. Been here a lot?”

“A few times with Pete.”

Now why did that comment make her suddenly feel jealous? Oh, right. Because Pete’s sister was a model, that’s why.

She chopped a little faster, hating that she had these idiotic tendencies where he was concerned. Irrational. Insane. Definitely not her.

“Lauren’s not really my type,” he said as if he’d read her mind. “The few times I was here with Pete for parties, we hung out in the kitchen away from the crowd.”
God, she was a complete idiot, and he knew it. Heat seared her cheeks, and she felt his gaze but refused to look at him. “Lauren…” And then it hit her. She glanced up with wide eyes. “Lauren Kauffman is Pete’s sister? The supermodel who does all those lingerie ads?”

He nodded.

“You mean to tell me blonde and stacked isn’t your type? I don’t buy that one. I met your wife, remember?”

He looked back at the grill and flipped the steaks. “Ex-wife. And no. Stacked is fine, but blonde and bitchy doesn’t do it for me.”

She resumed her chopping. “I see. Red and snarky’s a whole lot better.”

“Lately? Yeah.”

The surprise in his voice made her glance up again. He didn’t look her way, simply shook salt over the meat with a bewildered expression on his face.

And her stomach knotted all over again.

Determined not to touch that one, she filled a salad bowl with greens and tomatoes. She sprinkled feta over the top, added a splash of balsamic vinaigrette and took the salad to the table in the breakfast nook, where she found plates and utensils to set the table. When she discovered a drawer with candles, she thought about adding them to the arrangement and then quickly changed her mind. Already enough distractions going on here. She didn’t need to bolster the mood.

She slid onto a stool at the counter with her wine while he finished working the grill, and searched her mind for a neutral topic that wasn’t too personal. “So Pete seemed pretty nice.”

“Yeah, he is. We’ve been friends a long time.”

“How did you two end up working together?”

He turned the fire down, flipped the steaks again. “We were college roommates freshman year at Florida State. After graduation, I joined the Navy, he opened a gallery in Miami. When I got out, he hooked me up with a job.”

He’d been in the Navy? That was news. “Just like that?”

He shrugged, and she sensed there was more to it, but didn’t push.

She lifted her glass and took a sip. “So does this gallery have a name?”

“Odyssey.”

She paused, glass midway to the counter. “The Odyssey Gallery? In Miami? Are you serious?”

He nodded but didn’t look her direction.

She didn’t know quite what to say. This little bit of info shocked her. No, it floored her. “They’re big. I mean, well respected. And you worked for him?”

“Hard to believe, huh?”

His tone made her realize she’d just insulted him. “I didn’t mean it like that. I meant it’s hard to believe someone like you would work for such a big…” No, that was coming out wrong. “What I meant is that I just never expected a gallery like that would be involved with…” Oh, crap. She was making it worse. Heat burned her cheeks. “Not to say that you don’t…”

Humor ran across his features when he glanced up. “It’s okay, Lisa.”

Mortified, she brushed a hand over her hair. Holy cow, she was saying everything wrong to night. She took a deep drink of her wine.

“The gallery’s on the up-and-up now,” he said. “For the most part. I’ll be the first to admit, it wasn’t for quite a while, but about six years ago Pete changed things up.”

“Why?”

Rafe shrugged. “Personal reasons.”

She was curious what those personal reasons were, but more curious about Rafe’s involvement. “So what did you do?”

“My job was to track down rare pieces clients were specifically looking for. Nine times out of ten, if a piece was in an owner’s collection, we negotiated for a fair price.”

“And what about the other 10 percent?”

“The rest of the time we convinced the collectors that considering our offer was a smart investment. That nothing in life was guaranteed.”

Her eyes narrowed with understanding. “You stole it from them.”

“Sometimes.” He went back to his steaks like it was no big deal. “We never went for pieces that were worth a lot of money or would be missed. In fact, in every instance it was a froufrou collector who couldn’t have cared less about the piece in question but enjoyed the power of saying no. Art’s only valuable if someone else wants it.”
Except in her case.

He shrugged again and slipped one hand in his pocket. “We always over compensated the collector with either a piece from our own collection more valuable than the first or through donations to their charity of choice that netted them prestige in their social circles. Ultimately, that’s all they cared about.”

“So you’re telling me you’re an honest thief? Did they know about this?”

He chuckled. “No. Not specifically. But trust me. They got what they wanted. In the end, everyone was happy.”

“How?” She studied him, trying to make sense of a world that was completely foreign to her. The pieces she uncovered in her work went to museums, universities and occasionally private collections, depending on the muscle funding a dig. But the world he described, the one of art for money, wasn’t something she had much background in. “Compensation, huh? No one’s compensated me for my piece.”

“I’m not done with you yet, querida.”

She was starting to get a better idea of how things worked, and suddenly didn’t like it. “I see.”

He darted a quick look her direction, any hint of humor long gone. “What happened between us upstairs had nothing to do with the Furies, Lisa. That was strictly personal, between you and me and nobody else. That’s not the kind of compensation I was talking about.”

She could tell by the seriousness of his voice and the intensity in his eyes he was telling the truth. Hating that the thought had even crossed her mind, she glanced away.

He went back to the grill, and an uncomfortable silence filled the room, one she wanted to break. She propped her elbow on the counter, rested her chin on her hand and tried to lighten the mood. “So, aside from your career choice, Sullivan, let me see if I’ve got this straight. You cook, love your mother and are phenomenal in the sack. So why are you still single? Did you get burned by love?”

“Heavenly, huh? I’ll have to remember that.”

She rolled her eyes. “Don’t let it go to your head.”

He brought the steaks to the table and gestured for her to join him.

They sat, and he spooned salad on her plate. The ceiling fan turned lazy circles above. “Why don’t you ask what you really want to know?” When she looked up, he lifted his eyebrows. “You’re wondering why I’m divorced.”

The thought had crossed her mind a few thousand times. Especially every time she thought about the drop-dead gorgeous cop that was his ex. She lifted her fork and took a bite to keep from asking.

“Hailey and I never should have gotten married,” he volunteered as he cut into his steak.

“Why not?” The question was out before she could stop it. Before she could remind herself discussing personal topics was treading on squishy ground.

He swallowed a bite. “Because we didn’t love each other.”

Interesting. “So why did you get married, then?”

He leaned back and took a sip of his wine. “We dated, and one weekend we got this bright idea to take a weekend trip to Vegas. Ended up having too much to drink and wound up in one of those cheesy chapels, the ones you see on TV.” He shook his head and looked into his wine as if thinking back. “Anyway, let’s just say alcohol makes you do some pretty stupid stuff sometimes.”

“Why didn’t you have it annulled then? People do that all the time, don’t they?”

“I don’t know.” He shrugged. “Neither of us was getting any younger, we weren’t involved with anyone else, and we liked each other, so we decided to give it a go.” He looked up. “Bad idea. We both knew a week later it was a mistake. Hailey’s got her own reasons why she stuck it out for six months.”

“And why did you stick it out?”

He looked out at the water and didn’t answer. She sensed there was so much about him she didn’t know. Wondered if she ever would. What kind of man stays married to a woman he knows he’s not in love with?

And then she knew. He had that same soft look across his features she’d seen at the hospital.

The kind of man who was trying to please someone else. The kind of man who would put his own needs aside to make someone else happy. Someone he thought wouldn’t be around much longer.

Her chest squeezed tight.

When he looked back at her, the ghosts were gone from his eyes. He forced a grin. “So aside from your career choice, querida, let me see if I’ve got this straight.” His tone lightened. “You’re smart, sexy as hell and amazing between the sheets. So how come you’re still single? Did you get burned by love?”

The smile teasing her lips instantly faded. “I don’t believe in love.”

“No?”
She shook her head, refusing to go down that road with him tonight. Ever, if she could help it.
His eyes narrowed. “What do you believe in?”
“Anything tangible.”
“Like what?”
She didn’t want to talk anymore. Talking would only get her in trouble, take her places she didn’t want to go. For one night, she just wanted to forget about Doug and the Furies and everything that had happened in her life to get her to this point.
Her appetite slid to the wayside. Intent on distracting him, she pushed back from the table and closed the distance between them by slithering onto his lap. “Like this.”
Her lips captured his. She felt the questions in his tense muscles, in his cautious kiss. But he didn’t push, didn’t ask. Instead he framed her face with his hands and opened to her mouth, taking her exactly where she wanted to go.
Away. For as long or short as this wild ride lasted.
In the morning she’d figure out how to be the tough-as-nails archaeologist he’d partnered with. Tonight she just wanted to be a woman without a past.
Shane popped open his Tic Tacs and shook three into his hand as he ducked under the crime-scene tape surrounding the ritzy Chicago mansion. Darkness pressed in, but patrol lights illuminated the quiet neighborhood, reminding him shitty things happen even in nice-looking places.

He flashed his badge and made his way up the front steps and into the house. A myriad of officers moved through the massive entry and first level. Shane pulled gloves from his jacket pocket as he headed up the curved staircase where his partner for the past two years, Tony Chen, was waiting.

Tony was second-generation Chinese-American, tall and slim, with dark hair and the weirdest light eyes, which unnerved almost every suspect. When Shane stepped through the open office door, Tony glanced up. “About time you got here, Maxwell.” He gave Shane the once-over and then went back to the sketch of the scene he was creating. “You look like crap. Hot date?”

Yeah, right. With his couch, trying to catch a nap. He stepped up next to Tony. “What have we got?”

Tony looked toward the body lying facedown on the carpet behind the shiny wood desk. The victim was barefoot, dressed in black slacks and a white dress shirt rolled up to his elbows. Blood had seeped into the carpet beneath his head. A small hole in his skull was evident through his blood-smattered silvery hair. The stench of death filled the room.

A camera flash popped, and Shane blinked twice. Several crime-scene techs milled through the room collecting evidence.

“Maid found him when she was cleaning this afternoon,” Tony said. “ME estimates time of death to be between twelve and eighteen hours ago.”

Shane knelt by the body, tipped his head to get a better view. The man’s hand was clenched in a fist at his side.

He turned, taking a careful sweep of the room. A leather couch sat against one wall, a marble-topped fireplace graced another. There was an oriental area rug on the floor and an oval glass coffee table in front of the couch. Nothing appeared disturbed.

A frown tugged at Shane’s mouth. Alan Landau had been their number-one person of interest in Laura Hamilton’s murder. Now, apparently, it looked like that theory had been blown to hell.

“Got Ruiz working on the guest list from last night’s brouhaha,” Tony said. “He’s calling them in one by one. So far nothing, but someone had to have seen something.”

Shane was in the process of studying the hole in the sheetrock left by what he guessed was a .22 when his blood ran cold. Landau’s party. Lisa had been here. He hadn’t made the connection until just now.

“We’ve also got a broken window in a library downstairs,” Tony went on. “But it looks like it was forced from the inside out, not the other way around.”

“We’re ready over here, boys.”

Perspiration pricked Shane’s skin, and they both looked over to where the medical examiner was preparing to turn the body. Shane stepped forward.

Two officers assisted as they rolled the victim onto his back. A bright red circle stained the plush cream-colored carpet when they moved him. Landau’s eyes were open, staring up at the ceiling, and a small hole pierced his forehead. Another officer snapped photos as the ME went to work.

“He’s got something in his hand,” one of the crime-scene techs said.

Shane waited until it had been carefully photographed, then knelt down and pried the paper from Landau’s cold, dead fingers. He unrolled the scrap and stared at it.

His eyes grew wide. Behind him, Tony swore.

He’d left her sleeping. And he hadn’t wanted to.

Crawling out of that big cushy bed when all he’d wanted to do was wrap himself around Lisa for a few more hours and lose himself in her softness had been one of the hardest things Rafe had ever done. Much harder than walking out of that hotel room in Italy.

Now, three hours later, standing at the wall of windows in Pete’s office, staring out at the bay as he waited
for his friend, he couldn’t get thoughts of Lisa out of his mind.

I don’t believe in love.

That one statement had kept him up most the night after she’d finally drifted to sleep in his arms. That and
the knowledge she’d used sex to distract him when the conversation in the kitchen had shifted her direction.

Her adamant declaration had been so matter-of-fact, he couldn’t help wondering what had happened to put
that cold look in her eye. The same look that had disturbed him long after their conversation had died.

It had to be related to Stone. Her drive to find the Furies was emotional, even though she’d never admit to it.
A niggling thought in the back of his head said it was also somehow tied to that small faded scar he’d found
low on her belly when he’d been savoring every inch of her last night. The one that looked suspiciously like an
old surgical scar.

The door behind him clicked open, and he turned.

“Sorry to keep you waiting.” Pete stepped in and shut the door at his back. He was dressed in tan slacks, a
white dress shirt and a sapphire tie that made his gray eyes look almost blue. He lifted a folder in his hand.

“Running some things down for you.”

Rafe moved from the window and dipped his hands into the front pockets of his jeans. “Thanks.”

“You look a little better, but not much.” A grin quirked one side of Pete’s mouth. “Barracuda keep you up
last night?”

Pete didn’t know the half of it. “Yeah. Something like that. You get hold of Billy?”

“Yes. Sent him to Kansas City with Betty for a few days. Antique-gem show there she’s checking out. Told
him he was running security for her.”

Rafe rolled his eyes. Betty, one of Pete’s employees, was one-hundred-seventy-five pounds of mean-ass
woman you didn’t mess with. She could hold her own. And most likely, Billy’s too. “You get anything out of
him before he left?”

“No lot.” Pete dropped the folder on the desk and sank into his leather chair. “He’s a bright one, our
William. Never got names, was paid in cash. All he can tell me is the woman who hired him had an accent,
although what type of accent, he can’t remember. The guy who threatened him after the fact was young, white,
no accent. Good ol’ Billy didn’t ask questions, just met the man in Hialeah somewhere, paid the money back
and left.”

“Jesus.” Rafe eased into a chair across from him. “He’s sure good with details, isn’t he?”

Pete chuckled. “Oh, yeah. One of a kind.” His eyes lit. “Speaking of details, where’s that sexy doctor?”

“At the house. She was sleeping when I left.”

Pete nodded, obviously curious about where she was sleeping, but not enough to ask. “You been to the
hospital today?”

“Just came from there.”

His smile faded. “How’s Teresa?”

“Better. Probably be moved back to the care center this afternoon.”

“That’s good.” Pete twirled a pen between his fingers. “The private nurse you got for her has to cost a pretty
penny.”

Yeah. And he didn’t want to think about that just now. He looked toward the folder next to Pete’s hand.

“You get me what I needed?”

“Yes.” Pete leaned forward and placed a hand on the file. “You sure about this? You know all you have to do
is say the word, and I’ll buy what you’ve got outright. No strings.”

It was the out he’d known Pete would offer. The same one his friend had tossed his way when he’d come
back from Italy with Alecto. Take the money and run. No questions. No worries. A good deal. With both
Furies, he’d have enough cash to do what he wanted for his mother, get himself set up for the next few years,
figure out what the hell he wanted to do with himself in retirement. Pete would spread the word he was out of
the game. He could walk away unscathed.

Except for Lisa. She wouldn’t quit. Not now. Not ever, from what he could see. He’d known his answer even
before Pete had asked.

“Yeah. I’m sure.”

Pete pushed the file across the desk and leaned back in his chair. “That’s what I figured. Had to offer it, just
the same.” His expression hardened. “Okay, then. A few things you should know. Winters left Chicago
yesterday on a flight headed for Miami.”

“Expected.”

“Yeah. What’s unexpected is the cops finding Landau dead in his mansion late last night.”

That got Rafe’s attention. “Shit.”
“Deep shit, my friend. No official statement yet, but my sources tell me it looks like a homicide. His death, coupled with his assistant’s murder only a week ago, is drawing a lot of attention. And the fact he bit it the night of that big soiree is more than coincidental.” He swiveled his chair. “You cover your tracks?”

Rafe ran a hand over his mouth. “Yeah. They won’t be able to link me to anything.” His brow narrowed in thought. “Winters was at Landau’s shindig. I assumed they were working together.”

Pete shook his head. “I’m not sure. I think we’ve got a couple players in this. If Winters is the one who did Landau, then either they weren’t working together or he double-crossed the guy—and both options are feasible, considering the way Winters works. Regardless, Landau knew something he shouldn’t, and since we know Winters is after Tisiphone, it’s safe to say Landau was wrapped up in all this the way your barracuda suspected.”

“What about Kimbel?”

“I don’t have a clue where he is.”

“Find him. He’s a loose cannon.”

Pete nodded. “I’ll work on it. In the meantime, you have the house as long as you need it. Lauren won’t be back for at least another five weeks at the earliest.”

Five weeks in that house with Lisa? Hell, he’d never survive it.

He rubbed a hand over his hair. “Shouldn’t need it that long. We’ve still got a couple leads.”

“Okay. Anything you need, you just ask.”

What he needed was for someone to crack him upside the head and tell him this was a dumb idea. Instead, Rafe stood with the folder and headed for the door. “When I have news, I’ll be in touch.”

Maria Gotsi paced the plush sitting room of her South Beach hotel. Beyond her veranda, turquoise water and miles of white sand sparkled back at her, but she barely spared the luscious view a glance. Her brain hurt. No, it ached. Alan was dead.

Her Alan was dead.

It didn’t matter that their relationship had fizzled out a lifetime ago. He’d taken her under his wing all those years before, had taught her everything she knew and was today. And even if some hidden part of her hated the fact that she felt any angst for him at all, after the way he’d broken her heart, she respected him. Always had.

She owed him.

Before she could change her mind, she grappled for the cell in her Ferragamo bag, dialed and waited. The phone rang four times before she swore, disconnected and dialed again. When the familiar voice finally answered, she drew in a breath.

“We wondered when we’d hear from you, Dr. Gotsi.”

Calm and collected. That’s how she needed to play this. “Things are getting out of hand. Alan was not a threat.”

“Alan,” the voice said, hardening, “was competition. Competition is always a threat. Especially in this case.”

When she didn’t answer, laughter echoed through the line. “Did you think he was going to let you broker this deal? Let me fill you in on a little information, Dr. Gotsi. He was going around you, playing both sides.”

No. The blood drained from her cheeks. Alan wouldn’t have done that. Not her Alan.

“I’ve covered my tracks well, but I will not let even a threat of this tarnish the Institute.” She’d worked too damn hard for it. “This needs to end.”

“When I have the Furies, we’ll call it finished.”

Maria ran a frustrated hand over her brow. “There’s no guarantee they’ll ever find Tisiphone. She could be buried under miles of rock at this point.”

“Oh, they’ll find her. I have complete faith in Dr. Maxwell.”

She felt a stab of guilt, envy and admiration all rolled into one for a woman she remembered meeting years ago at a party she’d attended with Alan. The poor grad student had been so over-the-top for Stone, she hadn’t seen what was right in front of her face. No wonder she was so driven to find that damn relief.

Maria lifted her head and looked out at a view she barely saw. Lisa Maxwell wasn’t her concern. At this point, the only thing that mattered was making sure her own ass stayed nice and safe. She still had a bargaining chip. “That’ll only get you one.”

“I’m confident we’ll get the others. If not, we have you as backup, don’t we?”

“Kauffman won’t sell. I’ve tried.” Not until he had all three. And even then, there was still no guarantee he’d sell to her. She wasn’t naive and stupid, as Lisa Maxwell had been. She knew he was using her. In the same way she was using him.
A means to an end. Everyone was after something.
“So convince him. You’re good at that.”
Catching the disgusted tone in the words, Maria’s blood ran hot. She’d picked some powerful men to tangle with over the years, but she hadn’t fucking her way to the top. She’d made herself with hard work, brains and a body she knew how to work to get what she wanted. No one was going to insinuate otherwise.
“That’s not part of my deal.”
“Fine. Find another avenue. Do what they do and steal them, for all I care. Just make sure Kauffman sells to you or me. Otherwise I can’t guarantee what will happen to the rest of the competition.”

When Rafe slipped the key into the lock and pushed open the massive front door of Lauren’s house, the sight that greeted him brought a wicked curve to his lips.
Lisa was on her hands and knees, leaning over a mess of papers spread out on the living-room carpet in front of her. She’d pushed the coffee table out of the way, had a highlighter clenched between her teeth and a pencil tucked behind one ear. And she was wearing the skimpiest denim shorts he’d ever seen, giving him a nice clear view of her fabulous ass.
His blood pulsed. This was much better than being at the hospital. So much better than stressing over everything he and Pete had discussed at the gallery. He dropped the keys and file folder on the hall table and eased down the two steps into the sunken living room.
She must have heard him, because she eased up and rested that gorgeous behind on her bare heels. Oh, baby, he wondered if she knew she shot a come-and-get-me look over her shoulder when she flashed a smile his direction. She pulled the marker from her mouth. “Hey. I was just thinking about you.”
And he was thinking about her. About getting her naked and on all fours again. Right now. On top of all those papers.
He slid to the floor behind her, one leg on each side of her body, happy for the distraction from reality she created. He needed that right now, just to touch her and know she was real.
He pulled her back against his chest until she shifted her legs out from under her. “Sullivan,” she warned. “That’s not what I had in mind. I’m working here.”
“So am I,” he mumbled as he nipped at her ear and slid his arms around her small waist.
His hand ran over her flat abdomen, up to cup her breast through the peach cotton tank top she wore. A soft sigh slipped from her lips, and when she tipped her head to the side, he saw her eyes were already closed, any fumbling protest long gone.
And it warmed him, all the way down to his toes.
“I see there isn’t any of that awkward morning-after stuff going on with you,” she said.
“Shh,” he mouthed against the soft skin of her neck as he sampled and kissed. “I’m working here.”
Her nipple pebbled through the thin shirt, and she relaxed back against him, running her hands over his thighs. Tingles raced down his spine at the simple contact. She wet her bottom lip, a purely unconscious motion, and the flick of her tongue made him remember those sexy lips taking him deep into her mouth last night. The erotic image had his erection pulsing to life at her back. He dropped his hand to her waist, slid it up under the cotton top, desperate to feel her skin, and palmed her soft breast as his lips moved over her throat.
His other hand grazed her shorts, across her hip, to the bare skin of her leg, over to her inner thigh. She drew in a breath when he fingered the hem, slid his hand under the rough fabric and brushed her silken panties.
“Mm.” Her soft moan was heavy with desire. “You’re an insatiable appetite.”
For you.
He pinched her nipple between his thumb and forefinger and felt it harden in his hand. “And you have got the sweetest body. There are so many things I want to do to you.”
A sultry oh curved her lips, encouraging him, enticing him. Her dark lashes made crescent shapes across the smooth skin of her cheekbones. When his fingers passed over her silk-covered mound, she drew in a breath and relaxed further against him.
He loved the way she turned pliant in his arms. The way she let down all her barriers and showed him exactly what she wanted when they were close like this. “You melt like butter, querida.”
A smile pulled at her mouth. “Proud of yourself, aren’t you?”
He nipped her ear and moved his hand a fraction of an inch. “Yes, I am.”
She shifted, positioning his fingers exactly where she wanted them. “And you’re a tease, Slick.”
He chuckled against the curve of her neck, slid his hand to her neglected breast and slipped his fingers under
her panties, into her satiny folds, to find her wet and warm and waiting. “Want me to tease you?”

She moaned, tipped her head and hooked her arm around his neck so she could kiss him in a clear yes-right-
now move. The slight shift gave him better access, and he pushed one finger deep into her core just as her
tongue passed over his lips and delved into his mouth.

He groaned at the hot, wet feel of her mouth, her steamy center that tightened around his finger and made
him think of nothing but burying himself inside her all over again. Tongue tangling with hers, he eased out of
her heat and felt her muscles clench, urging him back. He smiled against her mouth, pushed in two fingers and
circled her sleek knot with his thumb until she quivered.

“Oh, God,” she mumbled against him. Her hips pressed into his hand as his fingers slowly stroked in and out,
in and out, setting a gentle but effective rhythm. She tightened around him, against him, and moaned her
approval into his mouth.

Need pulsed through him, sending blood screaming to his groin, but he held back, wanting to feel her come
apart in his arms, to watch as she gave herself over to his complete control. To him.

“I don’t believe in love.

Hell, he was going to have to prove her wrong. That quicksand was up to his forehead and closing over him
fast. He didn’t doubt he’d get sucker punched when this was all over, but right now he didn’t care. He just
wanted her. All of her.

“Come for me, querida.”

Her breath quickened, and she grew impossibly tight around his probing fingers. “I…Oh, God.”

“That’s it.” He kissed her again and stroked deeper, searching for her sweetest spot. And he knew when he
found it, the moment she pulled back from his mouth and shivered uncontrollably in his arms with his name on
her lips.

If it were possible to get pleasure from someone else’s orgasm without actually having sex, he’d just done it.
He never stopped touching her, smoothing his fingers through her slick folds, his hand over her bare breasts, his
mouth against her neck and lips as he brought her down slowly and relished every pulse and quiver and soul-
searing sound she made.

She shifted quickly, turned in his arms and hooked one knee over his hip as she crushed her mouth to his.

“Enough teasing. I want you in me. Now.”

Thank God. He was about to come in his pants.

He was laughing when she pushed him onto his back and went straight for the buttons on his jeans,
straddling his legs. He reached for her face, cradled it in his hands and pulled her mouth back to his. “Come
here.”

God, she tasted good. Like mint and coffee and everything sweet and spicy he’d been missing in his life. He
kissed her harder, pulled her tight against his chest and rubbed his erection into the valley between her thighs,
needing to get closer. Incredibly close.

He was never gonna last. Not if she didn’t pick up her pace and take him right now. He saw stars when her
hand dipped beneath his waistband, and when those graceful fingers wrapped around his hard length, he was
sure he heard bells.

He pressed into her hand, back and forth, tormenting himself but needing the contact, and reached for the
button on her shorts. “Naked. You. Now.”

With her free hand braced against the carpet at his back, she eased away from his mouth. She stilled and
narrowed her brow as she looked back toward the kitchen. “Do you hear that?”

All he could hear was that little voice screaming Now, now, right now!

She let go of him and pushed up to stand. “It’s my cell.”

“Lisa—” He tried to grab her, but she disappeared like a bolt of lightning into the kitchen, her perfect little
ass waggling behind her.

His head hit the carpet with a thud, and he groaned in pure frustration. He had a lead weight sandwiched
between his legs, and the woman he craved had just run off, leaving him in mindless agony.

There was some sick irony going on here. If he weren’t dangling on the edge of control, he might have found
it funny.

Her surprised voice drifted out to him, cutting through his self-pitying thoughts. The shock he heard in her
words jolted through him, and he stood quickly, buttoning his jeans as he headed for the kitchen.

She stood near the massive sliding door looking out at the beach, the phone pressed to her ear, deep furrow
lines across her brow. “Are you sure? Yes. No. Oh, crap.” Her eyes slid shut, opened again to focus far off in
the distance as she massaged her forehead.

Carajo. She knew. He didn’t have to guess who was on the other end of the line.
He leaned back against the cabinets and waited. The arousal he’d felt before chilled and dissipated. “Don’t you dare.” Her voice hardened, and she dropped her hand. “Shane—” She turned away from the window and pulled the phone from her ear. “He hung up on me.” That wasn’t the only thing her cop brother was gonna do. Her cheeks paled as she closed the phone. “I…That was Shane. I was waiting for a call from my assistant in San Francisco. I asked her to track down a few research leads for me. I…” She swallowed and looked up, her voice dropping to a whisper. “Alan Landau’s dead.” “I know.” Her eyes widened. “You know?” He nodded. “Pete just told me.” “I thought you went to the hospital?” “I did. I stopped by the gallery when I was done.” She braced a hand on the glass table in the breakfast nook and eased into one of the plush chairs. “Did you also know he was shot in the forehead, that they’re calling it a homicide?” He shook his head slowly as his gut tightened. She didn’t need to know the details. Why the hell had her brother mentioned it? She set her eyes on his from across the room. “Then you probably also didn’t know he had a crumpled piece of paper in his hand when they found him. And it had my name and flight number to Miami on it.”
Lisa ran a shaky hand through her hair and tossed the phone on the table. She glanced up at Rafe, who was still standing on the other side of the kitchen looking a little shocked himself. “Landau knew I was after Tisiphone. He was playing me.”

Silent steps carried him across the Mexican tile in the kitchen. He crouched in front of her, resting his hands on her thighs. “Are you okay?”

She looked down at his long fingers splayed across her bare legs. His skin was shades darker than hers, golden instead of pale, rough and rugged instead of smooth. Five minutes ago those hands had taken her to heaven, and all she’d been able to think about was destroying him with her body. Now that seemed trivial compared to what Shane had just told her.

Someone was dead because of her stubborn resolve to find the Furies.

“Lisa?” He squeezed her thighs. “Querida, look at me.”

She finally registered his question and blinked. “I’m fine. I…” Oh, God. “Who would have killed him?”

“I don’t know.”

He had an idea. And he wasn’t saying. She could read it in his eyes. “Winters?”

He was silent for so long, she wasn’t sure he’d answer. “Maybe,” he finally said.

“You think someone else is in on this, don’t you?”

“Maybe.”

It bugged her that he didn’t trust her enough to confide in her, that he was holding back. Emotions were one thing, facts were another.

“They know we’re here,” she said, trying to fight back that pathetic hitch in her voice. She was tougher than this, dammit.

His fingers tightened on her legs. “They know we’re in the area. No one knows we’re here.”

She fought the urge to brush her hand across his stubbled jaw. Sinking into him wouldn’t solve any of her problems, no matter how much she wanted it to, and needing him for anything other than sex was a really bad idea. “Rafe, they know you work with Pete. How long is it going to take them to figure out Pete has a sister with a house in the Keys?”

“Are you saying you want to quit?”

Is that what she was saying? Was it worth all this? Risking their lives for a piece of marble? Putting others in jeopardy because she couldn’t let go of her past? Were the Furies really going to change anything for her—if she found them?

A thousand questions ran through her mind, and she only had the answer to one. She wasn’t ready to walk away from this yet. Not without trying. Not without giving it one shot. And it wasn’t because of Rafe.

It couldn’t be.

He pulled her to her feet, as if he already knew the answer. “By the time they figure out we’re here, we’ll be long gone.” He brushed his knuckle over her cheek and half smiled. “Would I lie to you?”

She chuckled, despite the fact nothing about this situation was funny, and dropped her head against his chest.

“Why don’t you show me what you were working on before I distracted you?”

Swallowing around the lump in her throat, she remembered that sweet diversion and wished he’d do it again to get this pit out of the bottom of her stomach. But his mood had changed. His expression was soft, guarded, concerned. No longer that of the hot Latin lover who’d nearly devoured her minutes before.

Probably a good thing. Every time he touched her, she forgot about her self-imposed don’t-get-involved-with-someone-you-work-with rules. And that little voice in the back of her head saying This time could be different was getting harder and harder to ignore.

She blew out a long breath, pushed back and led him into the living room.

Her papers were everywhere. She bent and gathered them into a pile while he slipped his hands into his pockets and looked down at the maps of the Caribbean she’d printed out and pieced together across the carpet.

He knelt down for a better look, taking in the small islands she’d circled. “Gonna tell me what these are?”

She sat back on her heels and reached behind her for Doug’s journal. Reading it hadn’t been nearly as hard
as she’d thought it would be, and part of her wasn’t sure if that was because of the situation they were in, or because of what had happened last night.

She shook off the thought and pulled out a piece of paper she’d tucked between the pages. She opened to a random portion of the *Iliad* copied out in Doug’s slanted handwriting. “Do you know what a cipher is?”

He studied the journal page with its underlined words randomly dispersed and the carefully listed letters she’d copied onto the blank page. “It’s like a code, right?”

She nodded. “A n algorithm for performing some kind of encryption. Codes tend to work at the level of meaning, so the words are generally translated into another word. Ciphers focus more on individual letters, rather than words or phrases.”

He nodded and sat next to her. She took that as a sign he was interested, and went on.

“During his research, Doug acquired a box of letters at auction written by and addressed to Frederique Rousseau. She was a young girl who lived in Jamaica in the early nineteenth century who supposedly saw the Furies washed ashore after a Spanish galleon sank in a storm off the island. According to the letters, all three pieces were carefully stowed in a crate that survived the wreckage.”

“I’ve heard this story,” he said, interrupting her. “A wealthy European collector was on that ship with our ladies. He drowned when it sank. Frederique had two friends, Annalise de Los Cruz and Sophia Le Blanc. The three girls were playing on the beach after the storm and found the crate. Each girl took one of the pieces. Sophia returned to Antigua with Tisiphone, Annalise’s family later moved to Puerto Rico with Magaera, and Frederique stayed right where she was in Jamaica with Alecto.”

“Right.” Obviously, he’d done his homework. “Doug was convinced Magaera had been passed down through family lineage and was in a private collection somewhere, because he couldn’t find any mention of it, besides in Frederique’s letters. That, he figured, meant it had probably remained with the de Los Cruz family.”

“Maybe,” Rafe said with a frown. “Could be her parents saw it and threw it overboard on the trip home and no one ever mentioned it. Not exactly beauties, those Furies.”

“You don’t believe that.” She shot him a look. “You wouldn’t be here if you did.” And they wouldn’t be running for their lives if that were the case. “Besides, the notes you took from Landau’s safe confirmed the same thing.” She handed him the pages and waited while he scanned through them.

“Now, Alecto,” she said when he’d finished reading, “is mentioned in various accounts from passing traders and a few historical documents across the island of Jamaica. The Rousseaus were famous for their parties, and from what Doug could find, it seemed Alecto had hung on a wall in the parlor of the Rousseau plantation among other works of art for nearly fifty years. Until it disappeared.”

A smile tugged at his mouth. “I know this one, too. They say it was stolen by a voodoo priestess convinced it was an evil spirit bringing destruction to their little village. She didn’t like all those snakes coming out Alecto’s hair and had it cast into the bowels of the earth.”

Lisa remembered sliding through the intestines of that bowel and shivered at the sharp memory. “Yes. And that information fueled more than one treasure hunter into looking for it in the caves of Jamaica.” Including Donald Ramsey, whom she’d met briefly in that dank cavern.

“Like you?” he asked with a lift of his brow.

Her? A treasure hunter? She’d spent her life loathing what they stood for, but when it came down to it, that’s exactly what she’d become. Her mouth went dry. “Including me… I guess.”

He looked back at the journal. “A treasure hunter and a thief. Querida, we were meant for each other.”

Her heart skipped a beat, and she darted a look up, but he didn’t meet her gaze.

“So that explains Magaera and Alecto,” he said. “But what does any of that have to do with Homer’s *Iliad*?”

She cleared her throat and tried to shake off that strange tightening in her chest. “These were young girls, twelve to fourteen years old. Pampered, aristocratic girls looking for a little excitement. Give them something new, something foreign and romantic like buried treasure and sunken ships, and, well, you can only imagine that their minds would take off. Girls are girls, no matter when they lived or died.”

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“Thank God for girls.”

Rafe’s cheesy grin relaxed her, and she smiled. “Doug found long passages copied from the *Iliad* in Sophia’s letters. Some from the beginning of the poem, some from the middle, other sentences pulled from here and there in no particular order. It was like she randomly chose passages that made no sense when examined as a whole, but did when you were looking at—”

“At a cipher,” he finished for her, eyes narrowing on the letters she’d listed.

“Yes.” A relieved smile pulled at her mouth. He got it. “The letters span nearly four decades. They stayed in touch. They talked about the Furies. About what they’d each done with their piece.”

“So why would Sophia hide it?” he asked. “I mean, the Rousseaus prominently displayed their piece. You
said you thought the de Los Cruzes passed theirs down through the family line. Why would the Le Blancs be any different."

  "Roberto Le Blanc was a missionary sent to the Caribbean. You've seen Alecto. Do you think that's something a man of God would want his daughter coveting?"

  He shrugged and looked down, his finger following the long list Lisa had made from the passage on page twenty-seven of Doug's journal.

  "Doug thought it was a code," she went on, pointing at the words he'd underlined years before. "He narrowed down the words that were important in each passage, but couldn't ever figure out how they translated into a clue about where Sophia had hidden Tisiphone."

  "Because he wasn't looking at letters."

  "Right."

  She pulled out a blank page and grabbed a pencil from the coffee table, intent on showing him what she meant. "I think this might be a Caesar cipher. It had to be simple for the girls to use it, and a Caesar cipher is the easiest cipher there is: a shift in letters in the alphabet. The key is figuring out which direction and how far. I've been playing with it all morning. I just haven't had enough time to work it out yet."

  He took the paper and pencil from her hand, grabbed a magazine from the coffee table as a hard surface to write on, and leaned back against the couch, drawing up his knees. His serious gaze was focused on the paper, his brow furrowed in thought.

  And she smiled, not irritated he'd tried to take over, simply amused he thought he could figure it out when Doug had never been able to, when even she was having trouble with it. "It's all about counting—"

  He held up a hand to stop her. "I get it. I'm good with puzzles. Give me a few minutes."

  She sat back with another paper and pencil and bit her lip to keep from grinning as she went back to work.

  A few minutes turned into an hour, and her stomach finally growled, reminding her she hadn't eaten yet today. She dropped her papers and stretched. "I'm going to get some lunch. Do you want anything?"

  Brow creased, he grunted something she didn't understand and continued to make chicken scratches on his slip of paper without looking her direction.

  She shook her head and pushed to stand. The man never did anything half assed, she could say that about him. She wandered into the kitchen and peered into the massive refrigerator. He was determined, relentless, sometimes bordering on obsessive.

  A lot like someone else she knew.

  Shaking her head and the ridiculous thought away with it, she closed the refrigerator and found bread and peanut butter from the cupboard. She was just pulling her finger from the jar for a taste when her notebook smacked the granite counter at her side, causing her to jump.

  She looked up into Rafe's smug face. He closed his mouth over her finger and smiled. Her heart kicked up when he let go of her finger and licked his lips in a sleepy, sexy way that sent heat pooling in her belly.

  "Berry Islands," he said in that deep, husky voice. "Bahamas."

  Her eyes grew wide, and she darted a look at the paper where he'd made a series of marks and notes. "No way. How did you come up with that?"

  He lifted the jar from the counter, found a spoon in a nearby drawer and scooped a mouthful of peanut butter. "The Le Blancs were French. You forgot to translate, querida."

  Translate? She looked back at him. He'd settled himself onto a stool at the counter, eating peanut butter right out of the jar. "You speak French?"

  He shrugged and licked the spoon. "I traveled with the Navy. Picked up a little here and there, enough to get by. The romance languages aren't all that different."

  They were to her. She knew how to say Where's the bathroom? and I'll have a beer in Spanish, and that was it. She remembered hearing him speak Italian in Milan. The man was a never-ending puzzle.

  "But where?" she asked, refocusing. There were nearly thirty islands in the Berry chain.

  He dropped the spoon into the empty jar and stood. "Not sure. But it's in there, you just have to wade through the rest of it."

  "Me?"

  His smile was all teeth. "Since I did the hard part, you should be able to figure out the rest, Doc." He reached for a map he'd stuck in the back of the notebook and smoothed it on the counter in front of her. "It's a two-day trip by sailboat to Great Harbour Cay. I already called Hailey and asked her to bring up my boat. Didn't figure it would be a good idea for me to be seen in Key West right now. I need to make a supply run before she gets here."

  "We're going to the Bahamas?"
“Yep. You and me, querida. First thing tomorrow.” He leaned over and kissed her, smelling like fresh roasted peanuts. When he pulled back, his face was set in a serious line. “You got a bikini?”

Good God, she was having trouble following him. “We’re on the verge of finding Tisiphone, and you’re worried about my having a bikini?”

“Don’t worry. I’ll get you one.” He grabbed a pen from the counter and jotted a number on a scrap of paper. “If you think of anything you need, call me. I’ll be back in a few hours.”

He was gone before she had a chance to digest all the information.

When she heard the front door click shut, she turned back to the notebook in front of her.

The Bahamas. Tisiphone was in the Bahamas. Less than one hundred and fifty miles away. Somewhere in Doug’s journal was the exact location where Sophia had hidden the goddess. Could it really be that easy?

Something in her gut said No way.

“He sure has a thing for that boat.”

Cleaning the kitchen after dinner, Lisa lifted her head at Hailey’s words and looked out the window above the sink. Rafe was hauling supplies onto the boat moored at the private dock just off the beach, chiseled muscles flexing in his shoulders beneath a thin blue T-shirt as he moved.

It was just a little strange. Having dinner with her new lover and his ex, listening to the way the two joked like they’d known each other forever, watching the way Hailey darted looks between her and Rafe as if she knew something Lisa didn’t. She wasn’t sure she’d ever get used to the relaxed relationship between Rafe and Hailey. Certainly didn’t understand it.

She glanced down at the pan she was drying and turned to place it in a cupboard. “How long has he had it?”

Dressed in denim shorts and a white T-shirt, Hailey sat at the kitchen table studying the maps Lisa had pieced together. Her curly blonde ponytail swayed behind her as she propped an elbow on the smooth surface and rested her chin on her hand. “A few months. He had an older boat he sold. With that and what he had left over after budgeting Teresa’s care, he bought this one.”

Lisa’s hand paused in the act of drying. He’d sold his share of Odyssey for his mother. Why hadn’t she realized that before?

Her heart slammed against her ribs, and she swallowed hard. More surprises. More reinforcement she’d pegged him wrong from the very beginning.

Forcing herself to keep working, she finished drying the dish in her hand and put it away. “You get along well. You and Teresa?”

“Yeah. She’s like the mother I wish I’d always had. It’ll be hard on him when she goes.”

Lisa stared out at the white sailboat shimmering in the evening light and the man on deck, who had more heart than she’d ever expected.

“I have a feeling he’ll be okay, though. You’re a good distraction for him.”

“What?” Barely catching Hailey’s words, Lisa turned.

“No ‘what’ about it. I’ve seen the way he looks at you. Teresa did too. We’re not blind.” She glanced back at the map.

Looked at her like what? Lisa’s pulse kicked up. “He only wants me because of Tisiphone.”

Hailey rolled her eyes. “That’s not the only reason he wants you. Trust me, I know the man. And I can’t tell you how many times I wished he would have looked at me like that. Just once.”

Reality formed a lump in Lisa’s throat. She set her dish towel on the black granite counter. “You loved him.”

“Yeah. She’s like the mother I wish I’d always had. It’ll be hard on him when she goes.”

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An uncomfortable silence spread over the kitchen. Hailey pushed away from the table. “I feel like some wine. Don’t you?” Without waiting for an answer, she found a bottle of cabernet in the wine cabinet. After uncorking the top, she poured two generous glasses and handed Lisa one. “Did he tell you how we met?”

Lisa took the glass, knowing a diversionary tactic when she saw one. Hell, she was a pro at the same exact thing. “No.”

“My father’s loaded. Runs a chain of five-star hotels up and down the East Coast. He also has an insatiable art-collecting habit. Buys junk all the time and never looks at it again. Pete had a client who was in the market for an abstract painting by some unknown artist out on the West Coast. Rafe tracked it down and found my father had bought it. The thing was in an attic collecting dust. It had never been hung, and I’m willing to bet my father forgot he even had it. Anyway, to make a long story short, being the generous man my father is, when Rafe approached him about selling, he said no.”

“So Rafe stole it,” Lisa guessed.

“Yep.” Hailey lifted her wine and sipped again. “I showed up at my parents’ estate in Palm Beach...
unexpected the night he went after it, and I caught him.”

Lisa couldn’t help smiling. The smart international art thief had been caught by a small-town cop. Just like that. “I bet that was a surprise for him.”

“It was. And my father, even though he never liked my career choice in the first place, made a big deal about me making the arrest and getting the credit.”

“Which, I’m guessing, you didn’t want.”

“No. And when I found out what had really happened, I made sure the evidence got buried. Just to spite him.”

Lisa lifted her wine to her lips. “I take it you don’t get along so well with your parents.”

“That’s an understatement.” Hailey shrugged. “Anyway, Rafe was grateful, took me out to dinner to say thanks, and one thing led to another from there. When my father heard through the grapevine who I’d been seen around town with, he blew his stack.”

“And that made the two of you go out again.”

“Bingo.” Hailey glanced out the window at the boat. “My parents pretty much disowned me when they found out I was dating a thief.” Her voice softened. “But then he’s not your normal run-of-the-mill criminal, is he?”

“No,” Lisa said, gaze following. “He’s not.” And every day she got to know him, he was turning into more. “He’s easy to be around, and he’s got a big heart. He’d do anything for the people he cares about, even if that means sacrificing something he wants in the process. I realized that pretty fast, and I thought it would be enough, but it wasn’t.”

“Why didn’t you ever tell him how you felt?”

Hailey turned away from the window. “It wouldn’t have made a difference.”

“You don’t know that.”

“I do.” Her voice softened. “I’m not stupid. I knew after we got home from that trip to Vegas he wanted out, but he was too honorable to ask for it. And I let it go on longer than it should have, using Teresa as an excuse. It upset him to have to ask for the divorce, because he thought he was letting everyone down, but it was the right thing for both of us.” She smiled. “Besides, I got over it, which tells me it wasn’t meant to be in the first place.”

Lisa looked down into her wine. Fifteen years later and she still hadn’t gotten over what had happened with Doug. They were obviously never meant to be together either, so why was it so hard for her? If she could go back and change the past, would she want to be with Doug right now?

No.

That reality slammed into her. What she wanted was what she already had. For so long, she’d been using the past to keep from feeling anything for anyone else. And now, because of the Furies, that was slowly changing.

Because of Rafe.

“No matter what happens with Tisiphone, promise me you won’t break his heart. He’s not as tough as he looks.”

Lisa closed her eyes. Oh, crap. She didn’t need to hear that.

Hailey chuckled. “Well, I think I’ve done enough damage here. I’m going to retire to one of the guest rooms, fall asleep in a big comfy bed and dream about a tall, dark stranger. You guys just pretend like I’m not even here.”

When Lisa pulled her eyes open, Hailey was already gone. She turned and looked out the window again. Darkness had settled in. Stars twinkled in the night sky, and moonlight spilled across the water. A light shone in the cabin of the boat, interrupted now and then as Rafe moved around inside.

Lisa’s chest tightened. If she were smart, she’d go upstairs, lock herself in a room and go straight to sleep. Because what she was feeling now was dangerous. She’d been here before, on the edge of taking a chance on a man she shouldn’t trust. And as stupid as she knew it was, she was still thinking about doing it.

“You’re certifiable,” she mumbled to herself. “How many times do you have to be kicked in the gut to get it?”

Not enough, apparently. Because her gut was telling her this time was different.

Nerves humming, she flipped off the kitchen lights and stood in the dark while she counted slowly to ten. When she finished, her pep talk still hadn’t gotten through her thick skull.

Dumb, dumb, dumb. Shaking her head, she took a step toward the door and a man that scared her more than any loaded gun.
The echo of footsteps on the deck above brought Rafe’s head up where he sat at the chart table in the cabin of the boat. Bare feet eased down the companionway, followed by two of the sexiest legs he’d ever seen.

Lisa slipped her hands into the back pockets of her short shorts. “Hi there.”

He smiled, a familiar warmth building in his belly at her presence. “Hey.”

When she took a step closer, gardenia wafted toward his nose. “What are you working on?”

He glanced at the charts in front of him. “Plotting out our course. There’s a shipping channel between here and Bimini.”

“Oh. Big ships, huh?”

“You just trying to figure out the fastest and safest route.”

She turned to glance around the salon. Her hair looked redder against the teak walls, her skin softer in the low light. She ran one hand over the shiny table to her left as she moved through the small room, her eyes taking everything in. “This is nicer than I expected.”

“Thanks.” He tried to imagine what she saw when she looked at it. He saw years of hard work and the only weakness he had. She probably imagined it was just a toy. Part of him didn’t want to know what she thought. Another part wanted to prove to her he wasn’t just a petty thief.

He pushed aside the thought. “You two done talking about me in there?”

She shot him a wry look over her shoulder. “Yes. Hailey went to bed.”

He leaned back against the curved navigator’s seat. “Let me guess. She told you what an ass I am.”

Lisa peeped through the small window to the darkness beyond. “I already know what an ass you are, Slick.”

A smile curled her sensuous lips. “Actually, if you want to know the truth, she made you sound like the perfect guy.”

He laughed and crossed his arms over his chest, knowing better than to believe that one.

She glanced around the galley before moving across the space, looked up at the skylights and the moonlight slanting through the cabin. “So, you never asked me how I ended up with Doug’s research.”

Surprise shot through him.

“Not curious at all?”

Hell, yeah, he was curious. He had a thousand questions he was too afraid to ask. And he sensed she was on the verge of telling him. Without his prodding. If he started hounding her for answers, she might just clam up.

Trying not to let his eagerness show, he propped one foot on the shelf under the chart table. “I figured you’d tell me if it was important.”

“Hmm.” She turned away and ran her hand over the white upholstered settee along the wall in front of him. “Did you ever do anything stupid you wished you could go back and undo?”

“Are you talking about regret?” When she didn’t immediately answer, he shrugged. “Sure. Everyone has things they wish they’d done differently.” He wished he’d had a stronger relationship with his father, had been a better role model for Billy, had caught his mother’s symptoms sooner. He had a lifetime of things he wished he could change.

“Regret’s a pretty mild word,” she said, looking out the window. “I regret not going after the Furies sooner, not that it would have made a difference. But I’m talking about the really big stuff. The things that change your life.”

He didn’t know how to answer, and he couldn’t quite read her mood, so he waited and hoped she’d go on.

She picked up a pen on the small side table. “Doug was fixated on the Furies long before I met him. He had a theory. Being an art-history major, I’m sure you’ve heard it before.”

“Is this the one about the Spartan queen commissioning Kalamis in the fifth century B.C. to create the Furies, thinking they would protect the Spartans in battle and ensure their victory over the Athenians? Yeah, I’ve heard it. Pretty farfetched.”

One side of Lisa’s mouth curved. “Doug didn’t think so. He was convinced the Athenians stole the reliefs from Sparta, and that their disappearance was a major, albeit overlooked, contributor to the Peloponnesian War.”

Rafe lifted his brows.

She smiled a little more at his expression. “Yeah. That’s the same thing most scholars thought of his ideas. Mostly because no one believed the Furies actually existed. But there are some historical annals that support his theory. Doug thought finding the Furies would ultimately prove him right and would thereby solidify his status in the world of academia once and for all.”

Rafe thought back to Maria’s warning. He didn’t care all that much about the academic repercussions finding the Furies would have in the world, but Lisa obviously did. He looked down at the table top. “How did you
meet him?”
She sighed and glanced at the pen in her hand. “He taught a class I took one spring semester when I was in grad school. At the time, I thought his theory had some validity. I wanted to know more. But he never noticed me.”
She shifted away, set the pen down and touched the smooth walls as she wandered around the room. “I applied for a dig he was heading up in Ecuador over the summer, and once I was there, made sure he took notice of me. It was a good summer.”
Jealousy twisted like a knife in his chest at the softness he heard in her voice.
“Didn’t last though,” she said, turning back and glancing his way. Something unsettling passed over her eyes, but it disappeared as she continued to move around the room. “When we got back to Chicago, he didn’t want anyone to know about us. Even though I wasn’t taking any of his classes, he thought it wouldn’t look good. I was twenty-three, he was thirty-six. The university frowned big-time on student-teacher relationships.”
“I bet.” What else was he going to say? That knife was scraping away at his insides at just the thought of her with someone else. A childish reaction, considering his ex-wife was yards away in the house.
“Anyway,” she went on, fiddling with the port blinds over the settee as if it hurt to stand still, “I was pretty stupid. Went along with what he wanted, even though I didn’t like it. In public I acted like nothing was happening, but in private it was a completely different story. Until I wound up pregnant.”
She finally looked his direction with big, green, unreadable eyes.
And he didn’t know what to say.
“I’m guessing by your reaction, that’s not a surprise.”
He pulled open the top drawer of the chart table and handed her the photo he’d swiped.
She glanced from the picture to his face. “Where’d you get this?”
“Your parents’ attic.”
He waited for her to lay into him for taking it, but she only bit her lip and looked down at the picture, her expression guarded. “Look at that long hair. Used to drive me nuts. It was always getting in my way.”
“I like it.”
There was disbelief in those shimmering emeralds when she looked up. She handed him the photo. “Doug didn’t.”
Doug was a prick. But he wasn’t about to say that. Not yet.
“He never said, but he thought I got pregnant on purpose to trap him. He couldn’t have been more wrong.”
She let out a short laugh that held no humor. “Biggest shock of my life.”
Then it started to make sense.
“He didn’t want the baby,” Rafe said quietly, fingerling the edge of the photo.
Lisa moved across the room to the settee where she lifted a throw pillow. “Nope. And things changed between us, then. He dove into his work, got really obsessed with the Furies. Said he couldn’t settle down with me—with us,” she corrected, “until he’d gone after the one thing that mattered.”
“Marble,” Rafe muttered. The man had tossed Lisa away for a goddamn piece of rock.
 Yep.” She said the word with no hint of feeling. “No one knew I’d been seeing him, and I never told anyone but Shane who the father was. And even though it was really stupid and unlikely, I held onto the belief that after he got back from his little treasure hunt, we’d settle down and have the perfect life. Do it all,” she said, turning toward him. “Have the career and the family and the house in the suburbs. Everything. I was six months’ pregnant when he left.”
When he died. She didn’t say it, but the reality hung between them like thick smoke.
“What happened to the baby?” he asked softly.
The first hint of pain reflected in her eyes. She tossed the pillow on the settee. “I heard from him once, a brief phone call after he’d been gone a few weeks, then nothing. I didn’t find out about the plane crash until a week after it happened, when it was announced by the university. And I didn’t handle the news so well, especially when no one would give me details. Three days later I lost the baby. The doctor said it wasn’t related to the stress, but”—she shrugged—“I’m not so sure. Until then, things had been fine.”
Jesus.
He closed his eyes, knowing then why she didn’t believe in love. “I’m sorry.” He opened his eyes and stepped toward her. “Lisa—”
“Do you want to hear the rest?”
Her sharp voice stopped his feet.
She didn’t wait for an answer, and there wasn’t pain in her eyes anymore, but anger. “I hemorrhaged on the table. The only way to stop the bleeding was a hysterectomy. I was twenty-three, and I’d just lost everything I
didn’t even know I’d wanted.”
His stomach rolled.
“The way I saw it,” she went on, “he owed me. My life changed in a heartbeat because of those damn Furies. His parents had no clue who I was. His sister turned up her nose at me when I went to the memorial service. So I waited until I knew his house was empty, used the key he’d given me, and I took his research before they could box it up and take it away.”

Surprise swept over him. “You stole it?”
“No,” she said in a hard voice he almost didn’t recognize. “I earned it.”
He wanted to reach out to her and pull her into his arms, but there was a clear don’t-touch-me look in her eyes that stopped him cold.
“I’m a damn good archaeologist,” she said. “I’ve proven myself again and again. I didn’t sleep my way to the top or cash in on my looks. After everything that happened with Doug, I made a pact with myself not to get involved with anyone I worked with ever again. And I did pretty well for about five years.”

Some of the anger faded from her eyes. “Until I was on a dig in Mexico, where I met a guy who made me believe in ‘happily ever after’ again. Even though it was stupid, I took a chance. He was everything Doug hadn’t been—younger than me, still in school, fair haired and quiet. I was crazy about him. Crazy, period.” She brushed her hair back from her face. “He was killed in a diving accident on that dig. And that was the last time I let myself feel anything for anyone.”

His heart ached for her. How much bad luck could one woman have? “Lisa—”
She held up a hand to stop him from stepping forward. “I didn’t tell you any of this so you’d feel sorry for me. No one feels sorry for me, okay? I was stupid. Everything that happened to me happened because I didn’t make the right choices. I only told you because…”

She swallowed and focused on his T-shirt. “Because, for the first time in ten years, I’ve got this little voice in the back of my head telling me to take another chance.”

Of all the things he’d expected her to say, that wasn’t it. He had trouble forming words. “You’re hearing voices?”
“Yes.” She didn’t meet his eyes. “Really irritating ones.”

He shifted his weight, careful about the words he chose. “Let me get this straight. You’re hearing voices telling you to take a chance on a thief? Did I hear that right?”

Her cheeks turned the slightest shade of pink, but she still didn’t look up. “When you say it like that, it sounds insane. I’m not totally nuts. I…crap, I obviously have bad judgment.”

The quiver in her voice kick-started his heart. “Bad judgment, huh? The voice in my head’s been trying to talk me into risking everything on a smart-mouthed archaeologist I hustled in Milan. Can’t get any worse than that.”

Surprised green eyes lifted to his. He didn’t wait for a response, simply stepped forward and finally touched her, as he’d wanted to do since she’d slinked down the stairs. He ran his hands over the smooth, bare skin of her arms and looked into the face of a woman he’d never planned on, never expected, but was thanking God above for bringing into his life. “The way I see it, you’ve got a lot more experience with this than I do.”

“No, I don’t,” she said quietly. “This is different.”

“How?”

Her eyes went all dreamy. “Because it’s with you.”

That did it. Quicksand. Over his head.

He pulled her into his arms and kissed her, his lips gliding over hers, soft and gentle and full of all the emotions he hoped she could feel. The ones he was too afraid to speak.

When he eased back to look down at her, she dropped her gaze to his chest and ran her fingertips over his shirt. “So, um, you got a bedroom on this boat?”

Her fingers set off a tingling in his skin, her words a tingling in his chest. One side of his mouth curled, and the relief warming his gut went white-hot. “Yeah. Through there.” He pointed toward the aft cabin door to the left of the companionway.

She pushed out of his arms, stepped into the doorway and shot him a come-hither look. “As much as I like your ex, I don’t think I want to take this back into the house where she’s sleeping. So tell me, Slick,” she said with a playful smile. “You ever made love on a boat?”

If he’d thought he was in deep before, he’d been utterly clueless. His chest constricted until it was almost too hard to breathe. “No. I’ve never made love to anyone. You’re gonna have to teach me how.”

“Oh…”

Speechless. Again. He’d never get tired of that, or the way it made him weak in the knees.
Her expression went all soft, and she held out a hand, lacing her fingers with his and tugging him gently toward her. “Tell you what. I’ll make you a deal. How about we teach each other?”
Her heart was racing. To the point he had to hear it.
Lisa eased back a few steps through the small hallway and into the bedroom. Moonlight spilled from the windows above, highlighting Rafe’s handsome face, eyes dark and intense, features strong and determined.
This was different. Not that frenzied need to explore, but deeper. Like it mattered. She could read it in his eyes, feel it in the sultry air around them.
“Your hands are sweating,” she said when she found her voice.
“I’m nervous.”
She didn’t think it was possible for her pulse to pump faster, but it did. “You never get nervous.”
He moved closer, placing the palm of her hand over his chest. “I am now. Feel what you do to me.”
His heart was beating just as quickly and erratically as hers, and when she looked up, he smiled that sexy half grin that melted her insides. “It’s been doing that ever since you showed up in the Keys.”
Oh, man. She wasn’t just going to take a chance. She was going to fall for this guy. With a man who was changing every one of her long-held beliefs. With one who had the power to hurt her more than anyone else ever had. And even realizing that didn’t stop her, because her need for him was stronger than common sense.
She ran her fingers over his T-shirt, down to the hem, to push the soft cotton up and over his head. His chest was tan and covered with a smattering of dark, silky hair that tickled her fingers. She leaned close, smelling his musky cologne and unique scent as she pressed her lips against rough, warm skin.
“Lisa.” His voice was rough and thick with emotion. He tangled his fingers in her hair, tipped her face up and slid his lips over hers until she ached with the need to have him closer. His tongue delved into her mouth, hot, wet, as he kissed her and pushed her backward toward the bed.
Her legs bumped the mattress, and he gently lifted her onto the navy comforter, his mouth never leaving hers, his hands grazing her bare skin to knead and mold her breasts. Heat raced through her veins, pooled in her stomach, trickled down between her legs. But it wasn’t that mind-numbing desire she’d felt before. It was richer, a stronger need than she’d ever felt. Not just for sex, for release, but for him.
Her fingers streaked to the buttons of his jeans, and she pushed his hands aside as she stripped free and straddled his legs, leaning over to bring her mouth close to his.
“Querida, you make me weak.”
She loved the sound of his voice, the way he said the Spanish endearment he’d used since their first meeting. She arched into him, urging him to strip her so she could feel every part of his body against hers.
His hands moved to the button of her shorts, fumbled and slipped. When he pulled back from her mouth, a sheepish grin graced his face. “My fingers aren’t working.”
Her heart swelled at his words, at the vulnerability this big, tough guy was showing her. “Here, let me.”
She pushed back and unfastened them herself, slid free and straddled his legs, leaning over to bring her mouth close to his.
His hand snaked out over the side of the bed and she knew he was reaching for his pants to find his wallet. Before he found it, she clamped his hand over his to stop his searching and eased back enough so she could focus on his eyes. “No barriers this time. Just you and me.”
His eyes softened. “Lisa—”
“I can’t get pregnant, Rafe. And I trust you. Maybe more than I’ve trusted anyone in a very long time.”
He ran a hand down her cheek in a barely-there caress. “God, you melt me. I would never do anything to hurt you.”
She leaned into his touch. “I know. Which is part of the reason I want you so bad. Right now. Skin on skin. Just like this.”
“Mi tesoro,” he whispered. Those mesmerizing eyes of his streaked over her naked body as he moved his
hands to skim and explore her curves with the slightest touch. He lifted his head to press his lips to the base of her throat, and she shuddered at the warm sensation. One of his big hands settled at her waist as the fingers of his other hand dipped into her burning wetness.

She moaned and curved against his probing fingers, against his thumb circling and teasing. The hot tip of his erection brushed her center, almost home, and with that one touch, anticipation bloomed into full-blown desire to have him hard and deep.

His breath caught when she shivered and pushed against his arousal, just enough pressure in her core to make her light-headed.

He swept his hands up her ribs to cup her breasts. “Go slow. I want to remember every inch sliding inside you.”

If the look in his eyes hadn’t nearly stopped her heart, his husky words would have. Forget *falling* for him. She already had.

“Kiss me, Rafe.”

He lifted his head and slid his tongue into her mouth just as she lowered and claimed him with her body. Their joining was slow and slick, heated rod against clenching glove. She pulled him tight, tighter, until long moments later he was buried to the hilt.

She sighed into his mouth, loving his hard length deep inside, knowing she could never tire of the way he made her feel.

“Love me, Lisa.”

Her heart kicked over. She was afraid she was headed in that direction. Knew she probably wasn’t going to be able to stop it.

She was the first to move, a slow rock of her hips that brought a groan from his mouth and a tightening to his hands as they darted over her back and pulled her against him. She knew it couldn’t last, but she wanted to draw out the moment, to memorize every sound and sensation and the smoldering look in his dark eyes as she rode him.

He thrust upward at her rocking, and her pleasure built until she couldn’t fight it anymore. She gripped tighter with her muscles, pulling him closer to the edge, wanting to feel him go over with her. And when he did, when she felt that deep pulse of his release, her orgasm exploded through every limb in her body, shooting her down a slippery slope and into an abyss as dark and frightening as the one she’d fallen into in Jamaica. Only this time, she knew there was no way out for her.

She was trapped.

And a thief had just stolen her heart.

Rafe jolted awake. He wasn’t sure what had startled him—a noise, a rumbling, a feeling. Still as stone, he stared into the darkness, listening for anything out of the ordinary.

Dim moonlight slanted through the small windows above. Water lapped rhythmically against the hull. Beside him, Lisa stirred and shifted, draped her arm over his belly and moved her head against his chest as she murmured something in sleep he couldn’t make out.

Nothing. Just his imagination. He’d been on edge since his conversation with Pete.

Closing his eyes, he relaxed and tugged Lisa tighter against his side, breathing in her sultry scent. He was pleasantly worn out from the most incredible sex he could remember, from the sassiest woman, who was all his.

*His.* A smile spread across his face. He could get used to that idea. Somehow he was going to have to figure out a way for her to get used to it, too.

Two loud pops wrenched him out of his fantasies. He sat straight up.

Lisa jerked upright. “What was that?”

*Gunshots.*

He scrambled from the bed and dragged on his jeans. “Stay here. Lock the door after me.”

“Rafe. Wait.”

Barefoot and ignoring her, he eased up the companion-way and looked over the deck. Nothing moved. He glanced across the lawn toward the house. A shadow darted behind a tree. He heard a muffled thwack, followed by Hailey’s terse voice.

*Hailey.*

He was off the boat in a flash, moving silently through the shadows toward the house. Crouched behind a palm frond, he waited for his eyes to adjust to the darkness so he could figure out just what the hell was going
Something grazed his back, and he whipped around, ready to throw a punch.

“Whoa!” Lisa whispered, jumping back.

“Me cago en nada.” His heart lurched into his throat, and he yanked her down next to him. “I told you to stay put.”

She shot him a dry look. “When have I ever done anything you’ve said?”

He couldn’t argue that point. The woman was too bloody in de pen dent. He gritted his teeth and tugged her closer to him, into the shadows. Knowing she wouldn’t listen and go back on the boat, he was stuck with her.

Fuck.

“Stay behind me and don’t make a sound.”

They crept around the corner of the house. Moonlight spilled over the lawn. At the far end of the patio, garbled voices echoed back to them.

“You have the right to remain silent…”

Rafe could just make out Hailey’s stern voice. He peered into the darkness to where it looked like two shadowy figures were lying on the ground. The bottom figure was facedown. The top one—Hailey—had one knee braced on the man’s back as she grappled for his hands.

“Get the fuck off me. I’m a police officer, goddammit!”

“Like I’ve never heard that one,” Hailey mumbled. “Anything you say can and will—”

“Oh, shit.” Lisa shook free of Rafe’s hand and ran around him out into the moonlight. “Hailey. Stop!”

“Carajo,” Rafe muttered. Was the woman brain-dead? He raced after her.

As Lisa and Rafe came around the corner, Hailey’s head darted up from where she was still struggling with the trespasser. “Get her back, would you?” she yelled at Rafe.

Lisa dropped to her knees next to them and reached for the man’s hands. “He’s my brother, and he is a cop. Let him go.”

“He’s who?” Hailey faltered.

“Your worst nightmare.” Shane wriggled against her. “Now get the hell off me!”

He jerked free of her hold, and Hailey lurched back a step. Shane twisted out from under her and whipped around to sit on his butt on the patio.

“Her brother’s a police officer?” she asked Rafe in complete bafflement.

Rafe rested his hands on his hips and tried to slow his breathing. He was staying out of this one. In fact, he wanted to drag Lisa back to the boat and pretend none of this had happened.

Hailey’s attention jumped back to Shane. “What the hell were you shooting at me for then? I identified myself.”

“I wasn’t the one shooting at you,” Shane tossed back, pushing to his feet.

That got Rafe’s attention. “Someone else was here?”

Shane’s gaze finally darted his direction, and there was a clear don’t-fuck-with-me warning in his eyes. “I don’t know, Romeo, but it sure as hell wasn’t me.” He held his hand out to Hailey, palm up. “Gimme my gun back.”

She set her jaw. “It’s against the law for an out-of-state, off-duty officer to carry in Florida.”

A vein pulsed near Shane’s temple. He ripped the gun from her hand. “So fucking arrest me then.” He looked at Lisa. “I’m gonna take a look around. You. Stay put.” His fiery eyes shot to Rafe. “You. Don’t even think about leaving.” He cast Hailey a withering look before disappearing into the shadows.

Lisa scrubbed both hands over her face.

Wide-eyed, Hailey turned toward both of them. “What the heck was that?”

“That,” Lisa said, “was one of the Windy City’s finest detectives.” She dropped her hands. “And you just pissed him off.”

“What’s he doing here?” Hailey asked.

“My guess? Making sure I’m not dead.”

That jolted Rafe back to reality. He ushered both women into the house. If there was really someone out there, he preferred having the cover of the house for protection. Right now he felt exposed in more ways than one. “Come on.”

They moved into the kitchen. Lisa started the coffeepot and pulled mugs from the cabinet. He resisted the urge to tell her it was three A.M. and too early for java, but he had a sinking suspicion their romantic night was over and things were about to get a whole lot more interesting. And not in any way he wanted.

He looked toward Hailey. “What happened?”

Hailey checked the kitchen doors and windows for signs of a break-in. “I had the terrace door open upstairs
and heard a noise. When I came down to check it out and realized it wasn’t either of you, I stepped outside to take a look. Someone fired three shots at me. I saw a shadow dart into the trees and went after it. That’s when I ran into Rambo out there.” She shifted toward them. “I’m gonna do a quick sweep of the house. Stay here.”

She disappeared into the living room.

Lisa stepped to the fridge, pulled it open and reached for the carton of half-and-half.

She’d been moving around the room like she didn’t have a care in the world. Like the last few minutes hadn’t shaken her at all. A mixture of relief and anxiety rushed through him. Followed by a surge of disbelief.

When she closed the door, he plucked the carton from her hand, set it on the counter, gripped her at the shoulders and pushed her back against the stainless-steel door. He kissed her hard and pulled back. “The next time I say stay behind me, listen.”

Her eyes widened in surprise. “Excuse me?”

“You heard me. That could have been Winters out there. Or Kimbel.”

“It was Shane. I heard him. I’m not stupid.” Her eyes sharpened. “And sleeping with me doesn’t give you the right to tell me what to do.”

No, but loving her did.

His jaw clenched at her blasé attitude. “You didn’t know who else was out there when you went running off. Who could still be out there?” When she rolled her eyes, he tightened his grip. “Don’t you get it, Lisa? Those aren’t squirt guns they’re shooting, and running out in the open without thinking is how people get dead. I guarantee they didn’t take potshots at Hailey for the fun of it. They want Stone’s research, they know you have it, and they thought Hailey was you.”

The color drained from her cheeks. “You said no one knew we were here.”

“I was obviously wrong.” Fear crept into her eyes, making him feel like an ass for being tough with her, but he wanted her to get it. He wasn’t going to lose her. Not now. Not ever. “You either listen to me, or I’ll get somebody to lock you up until this is over.”

“You wouldn’t dare shut me out of this.”

The hell he wouldn’t. If it meant saving her life, he’d do what ever it took. “Watch me.”

“I’d like to see that,” Shane said from the doorway.

Rafe let go of Lisa and turned.

Shane holstered his gun in his shoulder harness and stepped into the room. “Whoever it was is gone now.”

Lisa shoved away from the refrigerator and pushed past Rafe. She jabbed a finger into Shane’s chest. “What the hell are you doing here?” She was at least a foot shorter than her twin brother and half his size, but her temper matched his, ounce for ounce.

And Rafe knew that temper was raging because of him, but for the moment, he didn’t care.

“Saving your ass,” Shane huffed.

“I don’t need you to save my ass, and I didn’t ask for it,” she tossed back. “And normal people ring the doorbell. They don’t go slinking around in the dark.”

“I wasn’t slinking around.” Shane’s jaw twitched. “I was parked out front scoping the place out. I came in on a late flight and was planning on knocking on the door in the morning, like normal people,” he added with sarcasm, “but I saw a suspicious character go over the wall and decided to take a look around. Good thing I did, too.”

“Why aren’t you in Chicago?”

“O’Conner booted me off the case once my sister wound up as a person of interest in our homicide investigation.”

She cringed.

His eyes finally ran the length of her body, down Rafe’s blue cotton T-shirt she’d pulled on before darting out into the night. The only thing she’d pulled on.

Shane’s eyes narrowed. “What were you doing outside at this time of night?”

Hailey reappeared in the other doorway. “Rest of the house is clear.”

Shane’s gaze darted up. “And who, exactly, are you?”

Lisa blew out a frustrated breath and made reluctant introductions. “Hailey Roarke. Shane Maxwell. She’s a cop, too.”

“O’Conner booted me off the case once my sister wound up as a person of interest in our homicide investigation.”

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Shane’s gaze darted up. “And who, exactly, are you?”

Lisa blew out a frustrated breath and made reluctant introductions. “Hailey Roarke. Shane Maxwell. She’s a cop, too.”

“And?” Shane asked, obviously sensing more.

“And…” Lisa pursed her lips. “Sullivan’s ex.”

Shane’s gaze roamed over Hailey, hovered on her silky boxer shorts and tank top, her tousled blonde hair hanging around her shoulders. His gaze darted to Rafe who was wearing only jeans, then jumped back to Lisa. And when his eyes widened, Rafe had a pretty good idea just what Lisa’s cop brother was thinking. “Just what
in the hell’s going on here?”

Rafe pushed away from the wall, wanting to kill that idea before it even got started. “Hailey brought the boat up for us last night.”

“Boat?” Shane’s gaze snapped back to Lisa. “What do you need a boat for?”

When she didn’t answer, only crossed her arms over her chest like she wasn’t going to tell him, he tipped her chin up with his hand. “Somebody better start talking. And soon, before I haul her ass back to Chicago and lock her up myself.”

Shane clicked off the cordless phone, tossed it onto the couch in the living room where Lisa was sitting and scrubbed his hands through his short hair. “Got a John Doe in Chicago who matches Sullivan’s description of Kimbel. Tony’s checking it out now. Body was pulled from an empty lot near O’Hare this morning.”

Lisa blew out a breath. She’d told Shane as much as she could, and she didn’t like where any of this was going. First Laura Hamilton, Landau’s assistant; then Landau himself; now James Kimbel. She couldn’t see the connection, aside from the fact they all might somehow be tied to the Furies.

“Explain this to me like I’m stupid.”

Shane dropped onto the footstool, rested his elbows on his knees and clasped his hands. “If we use you as the centerpiece and fan out from there, there are a couple of ways this could have played out. You said Kimbel and this guy Winters were working together?”

“Yeah. Rafe said he saw them together at Landau’s party.”

“Then we have to assume something got screwed up. Maybe they did Landau together, Kimbel got cold feet, and Winters popped him to save face.”

“Oh?” she asked, seeing he didn’t exactly buy that theory.

“Or we’ve got another player in here who’s taking out the competition one by one. From what we know about Laura Hamilton, she was working on acquisitions for Landau. She’d recently made a trip to Greece, was interested in acquiring pieces for his new collection. Is there any chance she might have come in contact with you or Alecto?”

Lisa’s brow lowered. Since she’d changed into shorts and a T-shirt, she sat back, tucked one foot under her on the couch. “I doubt it. The name’s not familiar. Do you have a description?”

Shane reached for the file folder he’d left on the coffee table. “Yeah. Five-seven, one-hundred twenty pounds. Blonde hair, blue eyes.”

“Just your type.” Lisa winked.

Shane only frowned and dug a picture from the folder. “Here. Landau gave us this.”

Lisa reached for the photo. Her eyes widened as she fingered the shiny paper. “I know her.”

“Who?” Rafe walked up from behind with a mug of steaming coffee. He leaned over the back of the couch and drew in a breath. “Milan,” he mumbled.

“You both recognize her?” Shane asked, glancing from face to face. He flicked Hailey a look over Lisa’s shoulder when she stepped into the room after Rafe.

Lisa took the mug from Rafe and nodded. “The university in Milan had her working with me when I was there. She carted things back and forth from the hotel for me. She…” Lisa shook her head. “She said her name was Greta. She was around when I was working and could have seen my research papers.”

“You mean your research on the Furies,” Shane corrected.

Lisa nodded.

Hailey slid into a side chair and tucked her legs under her. “So why would someone kill her?”

Shane turned one hand sideways, leaned his weight on his thigh and glanced up. He looked more relaxed than he had when he’d first shown up, but Lisa caught the flash of unease in his eyes that said he was still on the edge. “If she was reporting to Landau, and someone thought she knew more than she was telling, then my guess is they tried to get information from her.”

“Jesus.” Lisa ran a hand over her brow. “And when I showed up at Landau’s party, someone figured he knew more, too.”

Rafe’s hand gripped her shoulder. “He already knew more. That wasn’t because of you. He’s been looking for the Furies for a while.”

His touch didn’t have the calming effect she’d expected. She remembered the papers Rafe had taken from Landau’s safe. The ones that were eerily similar to Doug’s letters from Frederique, Annalise and Sophia.


“Maybe,” Shane said. “But if so, then my gut says he was working for someone else.”
Rafe didn’t respond, and Lisa knew he was holding back about Billy and Pete and who he thought was behind all this. Part of her couldn’t blame him. Hell, he hadn’t even told her. He had no reason to trust Shane. But she did.

“There’s something else,” Shane said warily.

Lisa looked up.

Shane ran a hand over his mouth like he wasn’t sure he wanted to mention what ever was on his mind. “We’ve been watching Landau for a while. Even before Hamilton’s death. We’ve never been able to prove it, but there’s been speculation he’s using his gallery as a front for bringing drugs into the country.”

“What?” Lisa asked.

“Like I said,” Shane replied, “we’ve never been able to prove it, but a lot of times rare antiquities get through customs with barely a sideways glance. Convenient hiding places. Everything we have is circumstantial. Up until you showed up with all this about the Furies, I suspected Hamilton’s murder was related to that, not this. Not you.”

Lisa took a deep breath and studied her brother, face set in a grim line, forehead wrinkled in thought. Guilt for dragging him into this when he should have been back in Chicago where he was safe consumed her. “Are you gonna get dinged for this? For being here? For…me?”

He met her gaze. “I was ordered to take a vacation. That’s what I’m doing. If I happen to help Tony wrap up a case in the meantime”—he shrugged—“then that’s just my dumb luck.” He pushed up to stand. “I wasn’t exactly planning on a cruise through the Bahamas, but it looks like my luck might just be changing.”

Lisa’s eyes grew wide. “You’re not going with us.”

That irritating smile spread across his face. The one that always made her want to pop him in the nose. “Remember all those little favors, Lis? Well, I’m calling ’em in. Until this is over, I’m keeping a close eye on you.” He jerked his thumb toward Rafe. “And there’s no way I’m letting you take off with this cat to find Tisiphone.”

Rafe frowned and straightened.

“Besides,” Shane added, looking around the room, gaze resting on Hailey. “Seems to me you guys could use a little help.”
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Cigarette in hand, Terence Winters lifted the receiver of a pay phone outside the Ritz Carlton on Key Biscayne. He’d made sure to dress like a tourist, complete with cargo shorts, obnoxious tropical print shirt, flip-flops and a camera bag draped over his shoulder. He didn’t need to draw attention. He shouldn’t even be on Key Biscayne, after last night’s events.

Stupid. It hadn’t occurred to him Sullivan would have his cop ex hanging around. The only thing saving Terence’s ass right now was he’d used his silencer, so he was pretty sure no neighbors had heard the shots. That and the fact he hadn’t hit anyone. But she knew. The bitch cop knew he’d fired. Hell, now it looked like two cops knew.

That was all he needed. He wasn’t going down for taking shots at a fucking cop by mistake.

His gut told him this game wasn’t going to end well for him. He always trusted his gut. No way in hell he was about to ignore it now.

“Do you have news?”

He winced at that sharp female voice. Did she practice the bitch tone or was it just ingrained? He wished like hell he could deal with the big guy instead of her. “They left on Sullivan’s boat this morning.”

“Where?”

“I’m not sure.”

“Did you plant the GPS device onboard before they left?”

Fuck, yeah. He did everything she said, just like a friggin’ yes-boy. Which included plugging Kimbel, because the guy had a sick obsession with Sullivan that was making her nervous. “Yeah. It looks like they’re headed to the Bahamas.”

“Give me the coordinates.”

He recited where they’d been when he’d checked his computer in the rental car five minutes before. Sullivan’s boat had at least a four-hour head start, but he doubted it would matter. It was a two-day trip by sailboat from Key Biscayne to the Bahamas, longer if they were navigating the waterways and going deeper into the islands. But by air it was only a couple of hours.

“Keep tracking them. We’re on our way to Nassau.”

He hung up the phone, fought to keep from slamming it on the cradle. Taking one last puff, he blew out a long breath of smoke, ground the butt into the concrete with his shoe and slipped on his shades as he walked toward his rental around the block.

No, this wasn’t sitting well with him. If he were smart, he’d keep his options open.

Options. He was an options man. Not a yes-boy.

Before he could change his mind, he climbed into the tan sedan, pulled out his cell and dialed Odyssey.

Pete massaged his aching forehead as he ran through his latest inventory sheet. He really needed to schedule another overseas buying trip, swing through Europe, stop off in Turkey, maybe even head into India, but just the thought left a pit in the bottom of his stomach. It’d been a long time since he’d enjoyed one of those trips. An even longer time since work had been anything but a diversion.

He thought of Rafe and Lisa as he scanned the list, flipped the page. Then chuckled, because he’d recognized that shell-shocked look in Rafe’s eyes when the man had been here yesterday. The barracuda had definitely taken a bite out of him. And judging from his demeanor earlier, she’d knocked Rafe right on his ass.

Hell, six years ago, that had been Pete, hadn’t it? Rafe didn’t stand a chance.

His smile faded as he refocused on the pages in front of him. His storage facility was still full, but there were pieces he needed to add to his collections. A few special things buyers had asked for that he didn’t have on hand. As he made notes on a notebook at his right and turned to the last page, though, all thoughts about buying trips and demanding clients and his SOL partner slipped right out of his head.

His Egyptian collection filled one whole sheet. And even though he’d known it was inventoried with the rest of his holdings, the list still stopped him cold.

Line after line of Egyptian relics, jewelry, statues and artwork. All items he hadn’t been able to pass by
during the last five years without buying. All things he had no intention of ever displaying.

Shit. He needed to get rid of it. Every single piece. The smart thing to do would be to sell it all off, but each
time he’d tried, it’d been like taking a knife to the jugular. So far, he hadn’t been able to do it. So there it all sat.
In storage. Thousands and thousands of dollars worth of Egyptian artifacts he couldn’t look at, but didn’t want
anyone else to have. Because getting rid of it would be like getting rid of her.

And man, did that make him as fucked as Rafe, or what?
The knock at the door brought his head up. Seeing Billy standing in the shadows, he flipped the inventory
sheet over and pushed all thoughts of Egypt out of his head. At least for the time being. “William. I thought you
were in Kansas City with Betty.”

Billy shrugged and stuffed his hands in the front pockets of his jeans. “Was. Finished. Look, you got a
minute?”

Pete leaned back in his chair. It wasn’t even noon yet and he was itching for a beer. “What’s on your mind?”
Billy came slowly into the room, looking more than a little on edge. “Rafe’s pretty pissed at me.”
“You don’t say.”
“Look, I know you two are tight. I’m just…you know, I’m not the fuckup he thinks I am.”
“Rafe’s under a little stress right now, Billy. Your mother, the situation with you, this project he’s working
on.”
“I know. And if he’d told me any of what was going on, I wouldn’t have gotten in with those people.”
Pete smirked. “Your screwup isn’t Rafe’s fault.”
“No, but he’s not a saint like everyone thinks, either.”
Pete chuckled. Leave it to Billy to get all defensive when he was the one who’d come here looking for a
handout. “What do you want, Billy?”

Billy took a deep breath. “I need something to get back on Rafe’s good side. Mostly for Mamá, you know?
Contrary to what Rafe thinks, I don’t want her to suffer because I made a mistake. And hanging with Betty in
Kansas City isn’t gonna do it for me.”

Pete’s interest piqued. “What are he and that redhead really looking for? Maybe I could
help.”
Pete studied Billy and pondered if the kid was really serious or simply blowing smoke. He had a few skills
that might just come in handy if things got rough. And contrary to what Rafe thought, the kid had potential.
Pete’s phone rang as he considered this. Not looking away from Billy, he lifted the receiver. “Kauffman.”
“It’s Winters. Listen up because I’m only going to say this once.”

“Any luck?” Barefoot and dressed in loose jeans and a white T-shirt, Rafe eased down the companionway later
that evening.

Lisa looked up from her spot at the salon table where she’d been making notes from Doug’s journal, trying
to narrow down their target island. “Some.”

They’d left that morning, cutting a path through the Atlantic toward the Berry Islands. Lisa wasn’t thrilled
that Shane had tagged along, or that Rafe had suggested Hailey join them to keep the peace, but there wasn’t a
whole lot she could do about it. She was thankful to be away from that house, though, and whoever was
following them. Odds were they’d been seen leaving, but at least out here on the open ocean where they
seemed to be the only boat for miles, she felt safe.

Safe from a killer, but not from the man in front of her.
Rafe slipped his hands into his pockets, looking tan and fit, and rocked back on his heels. The remnants of a
postcard sunset marked by deep purples and bright coral pinks slanted through the port windows. The gentle
swish of water against the hull could be heard in the posh cabin. It was obvious he wasn’t happy with it,
though. He was watching her with that dark, brooding look she’d seen too many times. The one that said he
wasn’t happy with her.

That moment in the kitchen had unnerved her. More than she wanted to admit. Because her first instinct
should have been to lash out at him for telling her what to do. But she hadn’t. Instead, she’d understood. She
had been stupid running out into the dark without thinking. And he had been right to call her on it.

It was the look in his eyes when he’d held her against the refrigerator though that had really done her in. A
look that said he would do anything to keep her safe. One that told her much more than any words what he felt
for her. She didn’t need a man to take care of her, but some insane part of her wanted this one to.

And that scared the shit out of her.
Trying to steady the pounding in her chest, she shifted on the bench seat. “I’ve been doing a lot of thinking. About what Shane told us. And I have a question.” She tapped her pen against the table. “What are you planning to do with the Furies when we find Tisiphone and Magaera?”

Unease ran across his face. They hadn’t discussed what would happen when this was over. They hadn’t discussed much of anything about the future. But it was there, hanging between them. They both wanted the Furies for different reasons: she, for completion; he, for security.

When he didn’t answer, she felt that distance between them grow. Even after what they’d shared last night, after the connection they’d forged, there was still a wide ocean between them. Between who they were and what they each wanted.

“You’re planning to sell them, aren’t you?”

His jaw clenched. “Yes.”

“To who?” He didn’t seem to want to share, but she wasn’t backing down.

“Pete lined up a buyer.”

“Does this buyer have a name?”

He hesitated just long enough to make her think he wasn’t going to answer, then said, “Straithearn. He’s a collector. Lives in Coral Gables somewhere.”

The name wasn’t familiar, but that didn’t mean anything. “Maybe Winters is working for him.”

“I doubt it,” Rafe said with a frown. “The guy’s a recluse. That’s why he’s going through Pete instead of looking for it himself.”

Something about that didn’t sit well with her. “Why? If he gets his hands on Tisiphone first, he’s got more leeway to bargain with you and Pete over Alecto. If he’s a rich collector, he could be looking at different ways to get what he wants.” She glanced back at her papers. “The only thing that throws me is Billy mentioned a woman.” She bit her lip. “Someone this Straithearn works with maybe?”

Indecision brewed in his eyes. He was wavering between telling her or keeping what he knew to himself. And it bugged her that he was holding back—that when it came down to it, he didn’t trust her.

“You have an idea, don’t you?” she asked. At some point they had to believe in each other, if in nothing else. She was on the verge of reminding him of that when he nodded. “Maria.”

Her eyes widened.

“Gotsi,” he went on. “With the Art Institute of——”

“Athens,” she finished. Now it made sense. “You took Alecto to her. She verified it.” It was exactly what she’d planned to do with the marble relief. Take it to the expert, make sure it was real. Then go after the next one.

He nodded again. “She made it clear she wants them for the Institute. She warned me it could get dangerous. My guess? She’s the one who contacted Billy, tried to use him to get information for her. She could very well have offed Landau, or hired Winters to do it. She’s probably the one looking for you.”

Her blood ran cold. The one trying to kill her.

It all boiled down to money. About how much something was worth. What had Rafe said? Art’s only valuable if someone else wants it. Well, that was more than true in this case.

For fifteen years she’d wanted the Furies. Believed she deserved them, after everything that had happened to her. But sitting here, she realized they wouldn’t change anything. Sure, finding them would be an accomplishment, a type of closure, but keeping them wouldn’t bring her any joy. Not anymore. Not when people had died because of them.

Knowing she’d done something good with them, though, would.

She took a deep breath and pulled a map from the stack of papers she’d been checking and slid it across the table. First they had to find Tisiphone. And Magaera. Then they’d worry about what they were going to do with them. “I think this is our best bet. Sophia’s letters indicated her family sailed back and forth between the States and Antigua several times. There was a small settlement on Great Harbour Cay then. They probably stopped there for supplies or to rest for the night. It was a popular harbor back then.

“In one of the letters you took from Landau’s safe, she talks about how her father disapproved of Tisiphone and wanted her to get rid of it. She mentions a blue hole on the western shore of the island.” Lisa pointed at the map.

“What’s a blue hole?” He took the map and sat on the settee.

“Underwater cave. They’re called cenotes in Mexico and throughout Florida, and blue holes in the Caribbean, because of the typically blue color of the water.”

“And you think she tossed it into one of these blue holes?”

“Her father did. She was heartbroken when he did it. She wrote about it, even described the very hole in her
letter to Frederique.” She handed him another paper.

He studied it with creased brow. “So how come Stone never figured any of this out? Even without Landau’s letters, he could have narrowed down the island.”

“He didn’t know about the cipher.”

His brow lifted, but he didn’t look her way. “Must make you feel good, knowing you bested him.”

It did. More than she could describe. But what made her feel even better was knowing Rafe had bested him. This man who wasn’t an archaeologist, didn’t have a science degree, wasn’t a PhD in anything except life. He was the type of man Doug would have looked down on.

Rafe was still studying the papers when she glanced up. “You ever been cave diving?”

He shifted uncomfortably. “Yeah. A while back.”

She sensed from his posture this wasn’t something he’d anticipated. “You do dive, don’t you? I mean, I just assumed with this big fancy boat—”

“Yeah.” He cut in, frowning. “I just…I’m not wild about caves.”

Neither was she. Although she’d been caving numerous times over the years on her quest to find Alecto, she hadn’t been cave diving since the fiasco in Mexico. Since the last time she’d taken a chance on a guy.

She pushed the thought aside. This was important, and made fighting her demons and going back down worth it. “If you aren’t comfortable cave diving, I can get Shane to go with me.”

“I’ll be fine.”

He was definitely still ticked at her about what had happened last night. Part of her realized she should be thankful. If she poured on the bitch attitude, she could probably nip this little relationship thing in the bud right now. Save herself a helluva lot of heartache. Save him the same.

She closed the folder as her pulse skipped with indecision. “Speaking of my irritating twin, where is he?”

“On deck with Hailey.”

That wasn’t a surprise. Over the last few hours the two had rarely left each other’s sight. Shane wasn’t the type of guy to fall for a woman on the spot, but something in his eyes when he looked at Hailey said he’d done just that. And for the first time ever, Lisa understood that feeling. “They seem to have hit it off.”

He leaned his head back against the plush white cushions, looking worn out. “If I’d known it’d get him off my ass, I’d have given her to him sooner.”

“She’s not yours to give.”

He closed his eyes. “She never was.”

Her heart took a slow roll. Watching him, the logic she’d tried to follow the last few hours slipped right out of her mind. She didn’t want a casual fling with this man. She wanted to be what Hailey had never been for him. She wanted to be his.

His.

The knowledge shocked and excited her. She wanted a chance to see if what they had could be something more. Something solid. Something tangible. She wanted…the whole fair y-tale ending.

Somewhere along the way she’d fallen head over heels in love with a thief. And trying to deny it anymore wasn’t going to do anything but make her crazy.

Hell, she was already crazy. Crazy for even thinking about a future with a man like Rafe Sullivan.

Heart pounding, she pushed away from the table, stepped toward him. He opened his eyes and looked up with a startled expression. She’d told him about her past. She’d given him her body, but she hadn’t taken that last step. Even last night, when she’d felt his heart beating beneath hers, when she’d known this was different, she’d held something back. She’d been scared.

Well, she was terrified now. Of making another gigantic mistake. Of risking everything and being left heartbroken again. She could take the easy way out and run from what she felt for him, but if she did, she had a strong hunch she’d be running the rest of her life.

She swallowed hard and tried to sound calm, while inside, her stomach churned with fear. “Are you always going to be moody like this?”

“I’m not moody.”

“Are you always going to be so damn in de pen dent?”

Relief pulsed through her. She took the map from his hand, set it on the side table, straddled his legs and eased down to sit on his lap. “Probably. It’s a character trait.”

“Character flaw,” he mumbled, resting his hands on her hips.

Warmth flowed over her at the gentle touch, at the feel of his body pressed against hers. Yes, this was what she wanted. Him. Just him.
Smiling, she leaned close until her lips were millimeters from his. His musky scent made her light-headed. The tension she felt flow from his shoulders sent her stomach clenching with anticipation. “How about we make a deal?”

His gaze ran from her lips to her eyes, and she didn’t miss the flicker of desire she saw in those dark pools. The one that said he couldn’t stay mad at her for long. “You’re big into making deals lately.”

“Someone else started it.” Her fingers slid into his silky, dark hair, the wispy waves curling at her touch. “Tell you what. I’ll promise to listen to you if you promise to ask instead of order.”

He rolled his eyes, slipped his hands around her waist and tugged her closer. “I don’t order.”

“Yes, querido, you do.”

In one swift move he flipped her onto her back on the settee and kissed her hard. His tongue delved into her mouth, igniting more than just desire, more than just need.

She saw the same emotions in his eyes when he eased back and gazed down at her. The same hint of fear, the same knowledge that he couldn’t fight it any more than she could. It set off a chain reaction in her heart that told her this was right.

She ran her fingers over his stubbled jaw, over his handsome face, and knew—knew she was his. “Take me to bed, Rafe.”

A smile tugged at his tantalizing mouth. “That sounds suspiciously like an order.”

“It is.”

He pulled her quickly to her feet and ushered her toward the bedroom door. Before he followed, he grabbed a sticky pad from the table, jotted a note, peeled it off and slapped it on the cabin door.

“What does that say?” she asked from the doorway.

“That,” he said, kicking the door closed with his foot, “was a warning. It says ‘Intense love-making going on, don’t even think about bugging us.’”

“It does not.”

“Wanna read it yourself?”

She shook her head. “Nope. I just want you.”

“That’s my girl.” He was smiling when he wrapped his arms around her waist, lifted her off the floor and kissed her.
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Berry chain comprised thirty separate islands and almost one hundred cays distributed over about a dozen square miles of water. It was home to roughly seven hundred people, which Rafe figured in their situation was probably a plus. Fewer eyes and ears to pay attention to what they were doing. Fewer mouths to spread the word.

Lisa was confident the tiny mass of Great Stirrup Cay was their island. It was the northernmost one in the chain, home of the nineteenth-century light house that Sophia had made reference to in her letters. It also had a series of blue holes on the western shore, one of which fit the description in Sophia’s letter to a T.

Lisa and Rafe had hiked around the island, getting the lay of the land, taking careful notice of the landmarks and terrain. Lisa had radioed her assistant in San Francisco to get in touch with a geologist friend at the University of Miami for help in tracking down detailed maps of the island. It appeared their particular “hole” connected to several others through a series of tunnels and tubes beneath the ground. Though Lisa trusted her assistant, Rafe didn’t. The fact others now knew where they were was all the more reason to get in and get out, as far as he was concerned.

Hailey had stayed onboard to keep an eye on the boat, and Shane—hauling scuba gear and extra tanks—had hiked inland with Lisa and Rafe to watch their progress from the edge of the hole. Rafe was anxious to get going and see if Tisiphone was really down there. More anxious to get back. He didn’t like caves. He wasn’t exactly claustrophobic, but the idea of being below tons of rock didn’t sit well with him.

Tall flowering vines surrounded the blue hole. Palm trees swayed in the warm breeze above. The hole itself wasn’t even ten feet across, and anyone not knowing it was there would wander by without ever seeing it. Near the edge of the hole, the ground dropped nearly twenty-five feet before hitting the surface of the water. Lisa’s description was right: the water was a deep turquoise blue.

“What are the chances we’re going to find this on our first dive?” Rafe asked as he checked his tanks.

“Probably pretty good,” Lisa said, examining her own gear. “It’s been down there over one hundred years. This hole has a pretty straight drop thirty meters max before it turns. If Sophia’s father dropped it in, as we think, it should be right there at the bottom, maybe under a light layer of sediment. We’ll fan the sand, but if we don’t see it right away, it’s not there.”

“Tanks are ready,” Shane said.

They’d rigged a rope-and-pulley system around the trunk of a nearby palm so they could lower the tanks into the cave. Lisa and Rafe would rappel in and then dive. A rock ledge along the right side of the pool would give them a place to gather equipment and suit up. Shane wandered to the palm to check the ropes while Lisa and Rafe finished gathering their gear.

Lisa pulled up the zipper of her wet suit. “You know the rule of thirds, right?”


“Are you sure about this? If you’re uncomfortable, I don’t want you going down. Shane can—”

“I’m fine,” he cut in. The woman had been harping about his diving all morning. He was on the verge of telling her he’d worked Navy salvage in the service. Granted, it hadn’t been in a cave, but he knew a thing or two about diving and he’d been trained in all its aspects. If he hadn’t known better, he’d have thought she didn’t want him to go with her.

He glanced up to tell her to quit being a mother hen, and that’s when he noticed the unease on her face. Was that worry in her eyes? It wasn’t something he was used to seeing.

It was then he remembered the other guy. The one in Mexico she’d taken a second chance on. The one who’d died in a scuba accident.

He glanced up to tell her to quit being a mother hen, and that’s when he noticed the unease on her face. Was that worry in her eyes? It wasn’t something he was used to seeing.

It was then he remembered the other guy. The one in Mexico she’d taken a second chance on. The one who’d died in a scuba accident.

She was scared.

His frustration ebbed, and he leaned over and kissed her, wanting to clear her head. He didn’t need her worried about him when they were diving. He needed her mind on something else, so she could focus. “You ever think about adoption?”

“What?”

He snapped on his harness and smiled at how one simple question could throw her so off-kilter. “Lotta kids
need good homes.”

She looked at him like he had a third eye stuck in the middle of his forehead. “No one’s going to give me a kid, Slick. I’m a thirty-eight-year-old single woman who travels because of her career.”

He shrugged. “Lots of women are having kids later these days. And adoption laws aren’t as strict in Puerto Rico. Especially if you’ve got dual citizenship.”

Her cheeks paled. “Wh-What?”

That did it. Gave her something else to chew on. Rafe’s smile widened. He loved when she went speechless around him. “Come on, querida. We need to make tracks.”

Rafe gripped the rope, nodded at Shane to tell him he was ready and started his descent. When he was five feet over the water, he kicked his legs to propel himself to the rocky ledge of the pool.

He unhooked the harness and waited while Lisa made her descent. As she did, he took a look around and breathed in the damp air. The scent of earth was strong down here. Sunlight filtered through the roots and vines near the opening of the cave above, giving the room an eerie dark quality Rafe wasn’t wild about. He figured one good earthquake was all it’d take to bury them alive, and he said a quick prayer that wouldn’t happen while they were down here.

Stalactites hung from the ceiling in the dim space. Sediments created swirling patterns in the massive structures. Lisa probably knew the name of every single cave formation. If he asked her, he could get a crash course in geology.

He decided not to ask. He didn’t want to be down here any longer than necessary.

She landed on the rocks next to him and unhooked her harness. “Off belay,” she called back up to Shane.

“Belay off,” Shane replied. “Look out below.”

Shane lowered the tanks into the cavern. Rafe tugged them to the platform, and Lisa unhooked the ropes. They worked quickly, suiting up and readying for the dive without talking.

Shane’s head popped over the side when they were almost finished. “Sixty minutes. Check your watch and keep an eye on your gauge.”

Lisa frowned up at her brother. “I’ve got it. You just watch for unexpected guests.”

Shane disappeared over the edge, grumbling something they couldn’t hear. Lisa turned toward Rafe. “Are you ready?”

As ready as he’d ever be. He nodded.

“You sure?”

“Yeah, let’s get down so we can get back and celebrate.”

He pulled on his mask and waited while she slipped into the water. She still looked a little uncertain, but there wasn’t a heck of a lot he could do about it at this point. When all but her head was submerged, he followed.

He’d dived in some pretty amazing locations, but nothing prepared him for the underwater view he was getting now. As Lisa flipped on her light, he caught his first glimpse of a world few get to see.

The walls of the hole were magnified by the turquoise water. Stalagmites rose around the edges, surprisingly fragile looking in the eerie light. Below, darkness beckoned, indicating the tunnel went straight down. The water was warmer than he’d expected, and when he looked up, the dim sunlight at the surface glittered like jewels.

Lisa caught his attention, and he shook off the wonder as he gave her the okay signal. She nodded and pointed down. He waited while she secured the guideline that would lead them back to the surface and then followed as she turned for the bottom.

She’d been right again. It was a fairly straight drop with only a few small turns in the cave. His rhythmic breathing calmed him as they dove deeper, enough so he barely noticed the tube growing progressively smaller.

Twenty minutes into the dive Lisa pulled up and signaled they were near the bottom. Rafe checked his equipment, saw his tanks were fine and nodded at her.

The room was small, no more than ten feet by ten feet. Openings on both sides indicated the tunnel veered off in different directions. He’d glimpsed Lisa’s map before they’d come down and knew this cave went on for hundreds of meters below the surface.

Lisa’s light swept over the cave floor. Stalagmites rose from the ground as they had above, and she swam around each one, taking a careful visual exploration before fanning the sand.

Rafe hung back by the guideline and let her explore. He recognized the importance of this moment, that if Tisiphone were really down here, Lisa needed to be the one to find it. She was the expert, he was the novice.

Besides, hanging back gave him the opportunity to watch her work. To see her in her element. And damn, she was good. She was meticulous and careful, and absolutely gorgeous in her curve-molding wet suit without
even intending to be.

She darted out from behind a stalagmite and motioned for him to join her. His adrenaline jumped and thoughts of her sinful centerfold curves slipped to the back of his mind. He swam forward in anticipation. But when she pointed down, his heart nearly stopped.

Shane checked his watch, glanced at the sinkhole at his right and frowned. Lisa and Rafe had been down going on twenty minutes now. It was too soon to stress, but he couldn’t help it.

Sitting back waiting while someone else put their life on the line wasn’t easy for him. Watching Lisa do it for a piece of rock didn’t sit well with him, either. He felt better being here, but being here was a relative term under the circumstances.

He’d set up a beach chair along the edge of the hole, tucked the ropes into a bag underneath his seat and was now wishing like hell he’d remembered his Tic Tacs. A light layer of sand covered the ground. Beach grass grew like weeds everywhere. Flowering shrubs he didn’t have a clue how to identify were littered across the ground and around the edge of the hole.

Part of him wished he was back on the boat with Hailey. Man, she was a looker, blonde and stacked and exactly what he didn’t need. He sure as hell hadn’t expected her when he’d hopped a plane to rescue his sister.

They hadn’t seen another soul since they’d left the beach, so when a blonde in a yellow bikini sauntered up wearing dark sunglasses, a beach bag slung over her shoulder, he sat up and withdrew his thoughts from the voluptuous police officer who’d been occupying way too much of his mind lately.

The girl in front of him was long legged and wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat that shielded her face partially from view.

“Now this is a surprise,” she said as she got closer.

Shane stood, thankful for the leather holster pressed against his lower back where he’d concealed his Glock in the waistband of his cargo shorts. People on this small island were friendly, and her presence shouldn’t have thrown him off guard, but ever since Lisa had shown up in Chicago and told him about the Furies, he’d been on edge.

“The beach is that way, handsome.” She pointed over her shoulder and smiled. “You look a little lost.”

His gaze swept the length of her body. She couldn’t possibly be hiding anything in that low-cut bikini. “Looks like that’s where you should be headed.”

Her smile widened. “I was just there. Heat gets unbearable this time of day.” She pointed down the path behind him. “My house is that way.”

“You live here?”

“I wish. A friend of mine has a house I’m visiting for the week. I’m Chris.” She offered her hand. He shook it cautiously. “I haven’t seen you around here.”

“Just got in.” He watched as she tipped her head and looked from his beach chair to the binoculars lying next to his feet, then to him.

She tipped her hat up enough so he could see her face. Pretty, but it didn’t ring any bells. “So, um, you don’t look like a sport fisherman or a surfer. And this far inland, you can’t possibly be scuba diving. So what, if you don’t mind my asking, are you doing out here?”

She couldn’t have been more than thirty, and she had the pink cheeks and red shoulders to prove she’d been out sunbathing on the beach. He couldn’t see her eyes through the dark shades, but he guessed they were as nonthreatening as the rest of her. A bit of his tension uncurled. “Would you buy that I’m catching butterflies?”

She laughed. “No.”

Her voice wasn’t familiar, either. “Okay, then how about that I’m a biologist? I’m doing a bird study for the University of Miami.”

“Really?” she asked as if she didn’t believe him.

He nodded. “Yeah. Specifically watching for the Northern Parula. It’s a small bird with blue, yellow, green and white feathers that migrated from mainland North America. You haven’t seen it, have you? Darn thing keeps dodging me.”

She laughed again. “No. Sorry.”

He reached for the notebook he’d dropped next to his chair in case someone came snooping around. “I have a picture of it somewhere.”

“That’s okay.” At her quick answer, he smiled, thankful Lisa had thought to give him a cover, one guaranteed to bore the socks off anyone. “I’m not big on birds.”

He shrugged, notebook in hand. “Little bugger’s really important to us biologists. Not so important to the
rest of the world, I guess.”

“I guess. I know nothing about biology. Flunked it in college. Hey…” Her brow lifted as if she’d just had a thought. “Are you going to be around for a while? Because my friend—the one whose house I’m staying at—he’s having a party tomorrow night. Just a small get-together with some of the locals. He’s lived on the island for about a year. Maybe he or some of his friends have seen this bird you’re looking for.”

Shane tensed when she turned to dig through her shoulder bag. “No. Wait. I—”

“I have his address written in here somewhere.” She stepped closer and pulled the bag from her shoulder to drop it on his chair as if she didn’t hear him.

As a precautionary mea sure, he reached back for his gun.

“Man, I lose everything in this bag. Hold on, I know it’s in here.” She pulled out suntan lotion, a beach blanket, a camera, a paperback. “You’re gonna love him. He’s like all local even though he’s not really from here. He knows everything about this island, too, which could help you. And he makes this kick-ass rum punch.”

Fingers grazing his Glock, Shane stepped to the side as she bent over to paw through the bag. His gaze drifted to her backside and the cut of her bikini. The faintest tan line was visible when she moved and her bikini bottom slipped ever so slightly. This woman wasn’t anything more than a tourist enjoying her vacation. He dropped his hand, feeling foolish for being paranoid.

“Ah, here it is.” She stood with her back to him. “I know you’re just going to love my friend. He has a soft spot for anyone from Chicago.”

His gaze darted up as she whipped around. He tried to grab his firearm. A jolt shot through his body when the Taser in her hand connected, dropping him to the ground. The gun slipped from his hand. His body twitched uncontrollably, but through hazy vision he could just make out her catlike grin as she leaned over him.

She slipped off her glasses. No, not thirty. Older. Fine lines crinkled the skin around her eyes. Recognition finally dawned.

Christy Swanson. Landau’s gallery manager. The one he’d questioned several times after the Hamilton murder. Only then she’d been a tight-mouthed suit who hadn’t given him more than a cold shoulder every time he’d stepped into her gallery. Now she was a black widow about to devour her prey.

“You should have stayed in the Windy City, Detective.” Her Italian accent was thick now. “My friend is not so happy you’re here.”

Rafe’s heart started again in deep, soul-pounding beats as he stared at the cave floor. A square three-dimensional outline stuck out of the silty sediments. It was too symmetrical to be anything other than a man-made object; didn’t look like anything that would occur naturally.

Lisa’s fingers wrapped around his forearm, and he glanced up at her wide eyes. Slowly, he nodded for her to go for it. Then watched in amazement as she reached down and fanned the sand away from the object.

Sediment swirled through the water. The number three was clearly carved into the bottom right corner. Lisa lifted the square object and flipped it over, and time seemed to stand still as they both stared at the marble relief. It was exactly as Rafe had expected from his research. Tisiphone, with her wings spread wide, floated in the air, looking up toward the heavens. Notches were carved along the right side of the marble relief, a small chip across the top the only evidence it had taken any kind of beating when it had fallen thirty meters below the surface more than a hundred years before.

Lisa’s eyes glimmered with excitement when Rafe looked up. She smiled around her mouthpiece, hooked one arm over his shoulder and spun him in the water.

His arms came around her waist as her body pressed against his. As much as he wanted to celebrate with her, he wanted out of this damn cave more. He pointed up, and she nodded. She stowed the relief in her pack, and he waited so she could take the lead. They swam quickly toward the surface, using the guideline to propel them.

Relief swept through Rafe. In a matter of minutes they’d be free. Out of this cave and on the verge of a future he was looking forward to starting. For the first time in as long as he could remember, thoughts of next week, next month, next year didn’t leave a pit in the bottom of his stomach. And it was all because of Lisa.

He breathed deeply, thinking about what came next. He’d been keeping Magaera’s location a secret, but now there was no reason not to tell her. He knew she’d be shocked when she found out he already had it locked up safe and sound with Alecto.

Lisa hit the surface a good minute before him. He could see her feet dangling in the water, then disappear, as she hauled herself and her gear up onto the rocks. A smile pulled at his mouth as he swam up. When they got back to the boat he was going to break open that bottle of champagne he’d been saving for this moment, lock
her in the stateroom and tell her about Magaera. Together they’d have to decide what to do with the Furies, but he was confident they’d work it out.

Then he was going to tell her he loved her and make sure she believed him. He’d be stupid to let her get away from him now that their business partnership was nearing an end.

He broke the surface. Excitement and anticipation coursed through his veins as he yanked off his mask.

Lisa’s stark white face stopped him cold.

Strong hands gripped Lisa at the shoulders and hauled her out of the water.

She gasped as the regulator was wrenched from her mouth and managed one shrill scream when she realized it wasn’t Shane tugging her up. The man with the death grip on her arms was buff and bronze and no one she’d ever met before.

“Welcome back, Dr. Maxwell.”

She jerked around at the female voice. Confusion swamped her as she was dropped on the flat rocks and drew air into her lungs. Her tanks were jerked from her back by the silent man behind her. Looking up, Lisa tried to get her bearings. Recognition flickered through her hazy vision. “Who…? I know you.”

The blonde woman knelt at her side. Her eyes were a chilling blue, as blue as the inside of an iceberg. “I’m sure you do.”

Where had she seen this woman before? Lisa knew her from somewhere recent. She sorted through her mental files, looking for the connection she knew was there.

Then it hit her. “Landau’s gallery.”

A feral grin slinked across the blonde’s face. “There and elsewhere. I thought for sure you’d recognize me when you came into the gallery. Imagine my surprise when you looked right through me as if I weren’t even there. We see what we want to see, isn’t that true? We believe what we want to believe. Ironic, isn’t it?” She tipped her head. “Come on, Dr. Maxwell. You remember me. Think hard.”

She drew out the last word, one long syllable that echoed through Lisa’s mind. A memory flashed. Another blonde. A lifetime ago. One who’d been young, and cold, but with the same ice-blue eyes and the same Italian accent.

I don’t care how hard his death has been on you. You’re not getting into this memorial service.

Lisa’s breath caught. “You’re Doug’s sister.”

Christy Swanson pushed to stand. “Bingo. He always said you were smart.” She shrugged. “Half sister, really. We have different fathers and grew up on two different sides of the world, but we’ve always been very close. But then you know that, don’t you?”

“You…you’re the one who’s been following us?”

“I’m not the only one who wants the Furies. Just the first one to catch up with you.” She looked toward the pool. “Ah, nice of you to join us, Mr. Sullivan. Teddy will take care of your tanks.”

Lisa couldn’t take her eyes off Christy, but she heard the slosh of water, the clang of metal as Rafe was helped from the pool. She felt the tension radiating from him just behind her. “How long have you been following me?”

The gun in Christy’s hand glimmered in the sunlight slanting from the opening above. “A long time. It was clever of you to steal Doug’s research like that. He didn’t see it coming. He really thought you loved him. That you’d wait.” She reached for the pack Teddy the muscleman had taken from Lisa. “He had no idea your only loyalty was to the Furies.”

Something in Lisa’s stomach tightened. “You…Wait. You said you didn’t know who I was that day.”

Christy pulled Tisiphone from Lisa’s pack and grinned, a slow and menacing smile that screamed of victory. “I didn’t. I thought you were just another of his sappy students. He had such a reputation with the young girls, you know.”

Lisa refused to let Christy’s comments distract her. “Then how—?”

“How?” Christy’s brow lifted. “Fitting you ask that now, Dr. Maxwell. You didn’t once think to question it, did you? They never found his body. Didn’t that strike you as odd? That there were witnesses to the crash, people who saw his plane go down, but that there was no physical record of his death?”

She didn’t wait for an answer. Her voice turned hard and cold. “I did. I spent months looking for him, for some kind of answer. Because he was the only family I had left, and I had to know. And do you know what I found? Guess, Dr. Maxwell. Take one good guess.”

“I—”

“I found a man who spent six months in a Caribbean hospital with burns covering 80 percent of his body,
and legs that didn’t work anymore. A man who’d finally figured out the greatest treasure was the woman he’d left behind.”

Lisa’s eyes grew wide with disbelief.

“Imagine his agony when he learned that woman—that manipulative wench—had gone on with her life like he’d never even existed,” Christy said. “That she’d stolen his research and killed his baby even before he’d awoken from his coma. That she’d only been with him because of the Furies.”

Bile welled in Lisa’s stomach. “No,” she whispered. This wasn’t real. It couldn’t be. Doug was alive? All this time? “No. That’s not what happened. It—”

“Lisa—”

Shane? His weak and muffled voice drifted to her from somewhere at her back, but she couldn’t turn to look. She couldn’t find the strength to move a single muscle. Memories swept over her, emotions she’d buried long ago.

“Don’t lie to me!” Christy shouted. “Did you think you could steal from us and we wouldn’t ever know? That we wouldn’t figure it out?” She shook her head. “Oh, you were good, playing the devoted girlfriend, the innocent mother-to-be, and all the while you were planning your deception, like the conniving bitch you really are.”

An emotion other than shock finally coursed through Lisa. She pushed quickly to her feet. “How dare you. You don’t know anything about me.”

Christy rammed the butt of her gun into Lisa’s cheek, knocking her backward into Rafe.

The coppery tang of blood filled Lisa’s mouth. Rafe’s muscles went rigid against her back.

“Remember who you’re talking to!” Christy yelled, waving the gun. “I know everything about you.”

Controlled fury pumped from Rafe’s body, but he didn’t speak. Lisa shifted out of his arms, refused to wipe her bleeding cheek and forced her gaze back to the madwoman in front of her.

The gun in Christy’s hand shook. She took two deep breaths, struggling for calm, then let out a long deep breath as if to force herself to relax. “It looks like we won’t be doing business after all, Mr. Sullivan.”

Metal clanged as Teddy fiddled with the tanks behind them.

Christy’s grin turned smug when she looked back at Lisa. “Don’t tell me he left that part out.” She snapped the fingers of her free hand. “Probably forgot because he was too busy fucking you.” She moved the gun between her hands, ran her palm down her hip. “We made a deal. Well, Doug made a deal with Mr. Sullivan and his business partner. They were going to sell us the Furies when they had all three pieces. I was really looking forward to that moment. Doug was really looking forward to that moment.” Pain reflected in her eyes, and her voice dropped. “But things change. I know he would have wanted to be here.”

Would have? Lisa wanted to ask just what had changed but couldn’t find the words.

“That’s only one.” Rafe finally spoke, his voice hard and edgy. “You still don’t have the others.”

“But I will. Maria will get them for me. She’s been quite chummy with Mr. Kauffman.” Disgust ran across her face. “Men are so stupid. They’ll do anything for a piece of ass.”

The bodyguard moved back to Christy’s side and spoke for the first time. “They won’t be diving anymore.”

Christy eyes remained trained on Lisa. “Good. I’d hate to think she’ll get resourceful and find her way out of here.”

Reality swept over Lisa. The psycho woman was going to leave them down here to die. “You won,” she said, hoping Christy would see they weren’t a threat. “You have what you want.”

Christy shook her head slowly. “What I want is for you to suffer. The way Doug suffered. The way I’ve suffered all these years taking care of him. You don’t have any idea what it was like for him. For us. For me. If anyone deserves the Furies, it’s me.”

Teddy moved toward the ropes and slipped on the harness.

Christy pointed the gun over Lisa’s shoulder at Rafe. “The only thing I want is for you to suffer the way someone suffers when they’ve lost everything.”

“Ms. Swanson,” Teddy cut in, sounding nervous.

She ignored his warning. “Who means more to you, Lisa? Your lying thief of a lover or your useless brother? Choose.”

Fear squeezed Lisa’s chest. She tried to push forward, but Rafe gripped her by the arm and wouldn’t let go.

Shane grunted and tried to roll out of the way. The shot echoed through the cave.
Lisa jerked out of Rafe’s grip and stumbled toward the cave wall. “Shane!”
“That ought to keep you busy for a while,” Swanson said in a chilly voice.
She swung the gun back toward Rafe. A wicked grin moved across her face. “She has no loyalty, you know. She’ll fuck anything that moves. Better you know now.” She stepped back toward the ropes. “You got me, Teddy?” she called up.
Her bodyguard was poised on the ledge above, the gun in his hand aimed down at Rafe. “Yes. Go ahead.”
Swanson tucked the firearm into the waistband of her cargo pants. She slung the pack over her shoulder and snapped on the harness, then glanced at Rafe. “Don’t worry about your pretty wife, either. We’ll take care of her.”
It was all Rafe could do not to lunge forward and pound the woman’s face into the rocks. The only thing that stopped him was the hired thug above with the nine-millimeter pointed at his chest. He wouldn’t be any help to Lisa or Shane dead. And they’d need him if they were going to get out of this.
More agile than she looked, Swanson used the rope to maneuver up the slick walls to the top of the cavern, then disappeared over the edge. Scraping echoed from above just before darkness spilled over the cave as the opening was covered.
Rafe grappled for the helmet he’d dropped at his feet and flipped on his light. A steady beam filled the space, casting shadows across the rock walls. Lisa was bent over Shane, staring at her blood-covered hands.
Shane groaned and tried to roll to his side. Blood soaked through his T-shirt near his right shoulder.
Rafe pushed Lisa out of the way and checked Shane’s injury. On his knees, he pressed the palms of both hands against the wound to slow the flow. “Hold on.”
Lisa hadn’t moved from where he’d pushed her back.
“There’s a first-aid kit in my pack over there, Lisa. Get it. Quick.”
She still didn’t move.
He looked up sharply. Her eyes were wide, staring at Shane and the blood oozing between Rafe’s fingers.
“Lisa,” he said firmer. “Goddammit. Get me the first-aid kit.”
She blinked twice and looked at him like she didn’t have a clue who he was. Finally, she moved as if she were operating in slow motion.
Shane coughed and winced as Rafe applied more pressure.
“You still with me, Shane?”
“Yeah. Shit. That burns.”
With one hand on the wound, Rafe reached for the open first-aid kit Lisa held out. He propped it on the rocks near his knees, grabbed the bundle of gauze and packed it against the wound. “Gonna burn a little more. Lisa.” He looked up. “Take off your wet suit.”
She didn’t argue, which told him how out of it she really was. The zipper rasped as she slid it down and pulled the garment from her body. With one hand, Rafe took it from her. “Come here. I need you to put both hands here.” He took her arms and placed her hands over Shane’s wound. Blood soaked through the gauze.
“I…” Her face paled.
“Don’t let up on the pressure, okay?” He moved his hands to both sides of Shane’s shoulders. “I need to get this under you. On the count of three, okay?”
Shane nodded.
Rafe helped him sit up, checked the back of Shane’s shoulder for an exit wound and slid Lisa’s wet suit underneath him. Then he unzipped his own suit and ripped off his T-shirt.
Blood pooled around Lisa’s fingers. She looked down and paled further. “Oh, God. I think I’m going to be sick.”
Wonderful. That was all he needed. Rafe pushed her hands out of the way and pressed down on the wound again, freeing her. “Gimme your T-shirt first.”
She slowly peeled the cotton from her body leaving her in the black bikini she’d worn beneath her suit. He
was pretty sure her face turned green before she scrambled to the corner of the dark cave.

Shane coughed. “My tough-girl sister.”

Rafe tried to ignore the sounds of heaving from the recesses of the room. She wasn’t sick simply because of what had happened to Shane. She was still in shock from the news that Stone was alive.

He hadn’t seen that one coming. Rafe shook his head and pressed Lisa’s shirt against Shane’s wound. He couldn’t go to her like he wanted. He needed to get Shane stabilized first. “I never met the buyer. I didn’t know Stone was Straithearn.”

“They played all of us,” Shane said.

That didn’t make Rafe feel better. And it sure as hell didn’t make things better for Lisa. Rafe’s jaw clenched as he worked. “Bullet went all the way through. You’re a lucky SOB. Good reflexes. They teach you that in cop school?”

“Must have a fairy godmother.” Shane winced. “Bitch shot me with my own gun.”

Rafe pulled an Ace bandage from the first-aid kit and did his best to wrap it around the shirt pressed into Shane’s shoulder. “How’d she get it?”

Shane grimaced as Rafe pulled him up to maneuver the bandage underneath his shoulder. “Blonde... Bikini...”

Rafe nodded. “I’ve been distracted by a blonde in a bikini once or twice myself.”

He finished dressing the wound in silence. Water splashed across the cave, but Lisa didn’t make any move to join them. Her silence was worse than knowing she was sick.

Shane stared up at the dark ceiling. “What do you think that is?”

Rafe checked the bandage one last time. The bleeding had slowed significantly. He reached for the canteen he’d had the good sense to grab before they’d left the boat, uncapped it and helped Shane take a drink. Sitting back on his heels, he braced his hands against his knees and glanced up. “Looks like plywood to me.”

“That’ll stand out to Hailey.”

“If their plan was to trap us, they did it pretty well. Hailey doesn’t know exactly where we are. We hiked around long enough before coming down. She knows the area we were scouring, but there are a bunch of blue holes on this side of the island. And if they covered the hole with vines and dirt, as I suspect, she’d probably walk right by without ever seeing it.”

Rafe lifted the lantern and shone the light across the cave. There was no way he’d be able to scale the slick walls twenty-five feet up to the surface. No grips, no vines sticking down to grab onto.

“You got any ideas?” Shane asked.

Not one.

“There’s a tunnel ten feet below us.”

Rafe turned toward Lisa’s rough voice. He couldn’t see her, but she was close.

“I saw the opening when we went down,” she added, shuffling across the rocks.

She moved into the light. Her eyes were red-rimmed and bloodshot, and the sparkle he’d seen so many times was gone. She looked spent, exhausted...defeated.

“Our tanks are damaged.” He had to force himself not to reach for her. He sensed she’d just push him away if he did.

“I checked the map before we came down. That tunnel runs parallel at least thirty feet before opening to another room. That room, I think, has above-ground tunnels that run toward the beach.”

“You think?”

“I’m pretty sure.”

Pretty sure was the same as being knee-deep in shit, as far as Rafe could figure. Ten feet down. At least thirty feet across. An underwater tunnel that would most likely lead to nothing but his premature death.

Rafe took a deep breath. They were out of options as far as he could see. He’d stabilized Shane’s wound, but Lisa’s brother needed to be treated by someone with medical training. The longer they sat here, the worse off he’d be. He knew in his gut Hailey was never going to find them.

He pushed to his feet. “Okay, I’ll go.”

“You’re claustrophobic,” Lisa said.

“I’m fine—”

“You’re too big anyway. You’ll never fit through the opening.”

Her plan finally registered. “You’re not going down there alone.”

Shane moved slightly on the rocks. “Lisa—”

“We’re running out of time,” she said quickly. “Do either of you have a better idea? Because I don’t. I’m not going to sit here and watch Shane bleed out when I can do something about it.”
Panic squeezed Rafe’s chest. “You can’t hold your breath that long.”
“Lisa,” Shane said in a weak voice. “This is a bad idea.”
Ignoring them both, Lisa reached for the fins and mask she’d dropped earlier. “I’m a strong swimmer. I’ve
done this before.”
She tried to step around Rafe. He reached for her arm, stopping her. “This is different. And you’re not in any
shape to free dive right now.”
The cold look in her eyes nearly stopped his pulse. “Don’t try to stop me.”
He was losing her. He could feel it. The news that Stone was still alive had just changed everything between
them. Did she know he loved her? Would it make a difference? He dropped his hand and softened his voice.
“Lisa—”
“Don’t, Rafe. Not now.” She closed her eyes. “I can’t right now. I can’t think about anything but Shane.”
She grabbed her helmet, strapped it on and replaced her mask. When she was in the water, she drew in a
series of deep breaths.
Rafe pushed aside the ache in his chest and refocused on what was happening now. This plan of hers was
stupid, and not the least bit safe. But he could tell from the look in her eye there was no way he could talk her
out of it. His only hope was to talk some sense into her. “Lisa, if the tunnel doesn’t look safe come right back
up. It’s not worth taking the risk. We’ll figure another way out.”
She closed her eyes, almost as if she didn’t hear him. “Can you get it back?”
He paused, unsure for a second just what she was asking. “Tisiphone?”
“Yes. You said he was in Coral Gables, that Pete knows where to find him. If you’re as good as you say you
are, tell me the truth now.” She opened her eyes and looked up. But this time those shining emeralds weren’t
worn and defeated, they were hard and icy and very much focused. “Can you get it back?”
For her, he would do absolutely anything. He hoped she could read that in his words. “You get us the hell out
of here, and I promise I’ll get you Tisiphone back.”
Lisa drew in a large gulp of air and dove. Her light reflected off the wall of the blue hole, off stalagmites rising
from the ledge of the pool. Ignoring the massive structures, she headed straight down toward the tunnel she’d
seen on their earlier dive.
It was right where she’d thought, a tube no more than four feet across and three feet high. She kicked her
legs, used her fins to propel her through the water, and thrust into the tunnel. Her light reflected off the walls,
off small cave formations jutting out of the solid rock. She tried not to think about the way the enclosure grew
smaller and instead focused on getting from start to finish as fast as she could.
Her chest ached. How long had she been down? A minute? Two? She’d lost track of time. As long as she
stayed focused, didn’t panic, she’d be fine. She could do this. She’d held her breath for over five minutes
during a training exercise. Granted, she wasn’t as conditioned now as she’d been then, but then she hadn’t been
swimming for life and death either.
The tunnel jogged to the left, and she kicked harder, curving with the space. The cave was dark but for her
thin beam of light, the only sound her pounding heart echoing through her ears. Just a little farther. She had to
be close.
The cave turned to the left again. She rounded the corner expecting to see sunlight glinting through the water
ahead, but darkness met her. Panic rose in her chest. For a split second she considered turning around, then
reality washed through her. She’d never make it back. She was too far in, was already fighting the loss of air.
Stay calm. Keep going. Don’t give up.
She kicked hard one last time. The cave jerked to the right, then steadily rose. Blackness threatened to
descend, but Lisa fought it with everything she had. Above, she was almost sure she could see the flicker of
daylight.
Her lungs burned. Her legs ached. Intense pressure pushed at her from every side.
Give up. Let go.
No! Just a little more…
She broke the surface and gasped. Her chest heaved while she drew in deep breaths. Long minutes passed as
she struggled to find her balance.
When her breathing finally slowed, she forced her eyes open and looked around. This cave was similar to the
one she’d left, but the opening above was a lot less steep and not nearly as high. Victory flared in her veins. She
pushed herself out of the water and dropped her gear on the rocks at her feet.
It took four tries, but she finally found her footing on the slick rocks and managed to grab tree roots and
vines in the thick soil to maneuver up the ten feet to the top of the sinkhole. Sunlight blinded her when she reached the lip and hauled herself up over the side. Sweat slicked her skin. Dirt and mud covered every part of her body. Her hands were raw and worn, her bare feet scraped and cut, but she barely noticed. Right now all that mattered was getting to Shane.

Chest heaving, she leaned forward and surveyed the area. Tall palms towered above. Thick underbrush covered the interior of the island. Beach grass sliced like razors across her feet. She had no clue which way their original blue hole was or in which direction the beach was located.

_Think, dammit._

“Rafe!”

She held her breath and listened. Her first thought was that Swanson had come back, but then she realized it was a male voice calling for Rafe, not a female.

“Here!” Her throat was dry and raspy, and she coughed after the word was out.

Limbs crackled, the underbrush moved, and though she was having trouble focusing, she was pretty sure she saw Pete appear from the cover of the trees.

She blinked twice, sure she’d lost some serious oxygen in that tunnel.

“Lisa!” Pete jogged toward her. “Sweet Jesus, we’ve been looking all over for you.”

Lisa looked past Pete to where Hailey was following close at his heels. “How...what are you doing here?”

Pete grabbed her before her legs buckled. He eased her down to the sand. “I could ask you the same thing. Where’s Rafe?”

“Swanson...in the cave. She surprised us.”

“Where’s Rafe?” he asked again, tightening his hands on her arms.

“He’s still down there. With Shane.” She looked up sharply. “Shane’s been shot. We need to get him out.”

“Where?” Hailey asked in a frazzled voice over Pete’s shoulder. “How bad?”

God, her head was fuzzy. She was having trouble focusing. “In the shoulder. He...I don’t think it’s that bad, but...”

“Can you show us where?” Pete asked.

Lisa gave her head a firm shake. “Did you bring the map?”

“Here.” Hailey fished the map from her back pocket, unfolded it quickly and slapped it on the sand in front of them.

Lisa looked closely, followed the tunnel with her finger to her current location. “There.” She looked up and pointed through the trees.

“We just came from there,” Hailey said. “There was no blue hole.”

“They covered it.” Lisa pushed shakily to her feet. “We need ropes and harnesses. It’s a steep drop.”

Pete pulled a walkie-talkie from his belt as they started walking. “Billy, listen up.”

Lisa darted a look at Hailey’s grim expression. “Billy’s here?”

“Yeah. Long story.” And one she obviously wasn’t going to get into now. “Let’s hustle.”

She’d been gone too long.

With one hand over his mouth, Rafe paced the dark cavern and tried to keep the panic at bay. He refused to think about the fact she could have drowned down there. That the map might have been wrong, that she wasn’t strong enough to swim that far.

_Carajo._ He never should have let her go.

“Shane said from across the darkness. His voice was weak and tired, but steady. “She doesn’t listen to anyone, in case you haven’t noticed.”

Yeah, Rafe had noticed. But he’d thought they’d turned a corner.

Shane shifted on the rocks, grimaced and pushed himself more upright. “She’s stubborn as a mule. Would have gone after Tisiphone with or without you. Odds are pretty good she’d have ended up here anyway. Except then she would have been alone.”

Rafe’s eyes slid closed. “That doesn’t help.”

“It’s not meant to,” Shane said. “But it’s starting to look like Swanson’s had it in for her for a long time. That she and Stone have been following her and waiting for the”—he cringed—“right moment. I’m just glad she wasn’t here by herself when it happened.”

So was Rafe. But right now he’d give anything just to hear her voice.

Scraping echoed from above. Rafe shifted and looked up. Muffled voices drifted down from the top of the sinkhole. The wood over the opening pushed to the side, and bright sunlight shone through the hole above,
making him blink and cover his eyes.

“Well, well, well. Looks like I’m savin’ your ass this time.”

Rafe’s heart all but stopped as he squinted up toward the sky. A smile curled his mouth at the sound of his brother’s voice. A voice he’d never been so happy to hear in all his life. “Holy shit. I never thought I’d see the day.”

Billy’s irritating mug grinned down at him.

Hailey’s face popped over the ledge. “Rafe? Shane?”

“Here.” Shane croaked. “Somebody send down a harness and get us the hell out of here.”

“Pete’s coming down,” Hailey said with a hint of worry in her usually steady voice.

Pete was here? And Billy? Rafe tried to wrap his mind around just how that had transpired as Pete rappelled into the cave.

Pete’s feet hit the cave floor. He unhooked the harness, turned and grinned. “You got nine lives, man.”

As much as he wanted to breathe easy, he couldn’t. Not yet. “Where’s Lisa?”

“Relax, she’s fine. She’s above, waiting. Looks a little shell-shocked though. Kinda like you.”

Pete had no idea. Rafe closed his eyes and said every prayer of thanks he knew. She’d done it. Awe, admiration, love for her rippled through him.

He wanted to see her, to hold her, but he knew they had to get Shane out first. He quickly made introductions while he and Pete helped Shane strap on the harness. “Belay on,” Rafe called up to Billy who was at the top controlling the rope.

“Yo. Ready up here,” Billy called back.

Rafe shook his head at Billy’s word choice. Shane grimaced as he was lifted off the cave floor.

“Gotta love that kid,” Pete said with a grin.

Rafe watched as Shane was pulled to the top of the cave. When he disappeared over the ledge, he turned toward Pete. “Now tell me what the hell happened.”

Pete perched his hands on his hips. “Got a call from Winters.”

“You’re kidding me.”

“Seems something or someone freaked him out. Said he wanted out of the game.”

“Just like that?” Rafe knew Winters, and that didn’t sound like the hard-as-nails criminal he’d tangled with before.

“I think he’s up to his eyeballs in deep shit.” Pete said. “Trying to cover his ass. Offered up info for a price and a guarantee we wouldn’t try to track him down.”

“And you went along with it?”

“Had to. When I found out Landau’s gallery manager was Stone’s sister, I didn’t even barter with him. Just gave him what he wanted. She’s been pulling strings from all sides, right from the start.”

“She hired Winters and Kimbel to follow us?” Something didn’t make sense. “Why? If Stone’s the buyer you lined up for me, then they could have had all three, if they’d just waited.”

“Revenge is a sticky thing, my friend. Maybe they didn’t want to wait. Maybe something set them off. I don’t know their reasons, but when Winters told me Swanson was planning to corner you guys, I knew I had to find you first.”

“And Hailey?”

“Radioed the boat, had her move locations and remove the GPS Winters planted onboard.”

Thank God for Pete.

“Swanson has Tisiphone.”

“So we get it back,” Pete said as if it were fact.

Rafe studied his friend. Pete had been happy to finance his little treasure hunt, to get Rafe what ever he needed to make it a success because he knew he’d get a cut, but he hadn’t been personally involved. Something in his eyes now said he was. “You got a plan to do that?”

One side of Pete’s mouth curled in a knowing smile. “Yeah. And I know the perfect woman to help us.”
CHAPTER TWENTY

Maria smoothed her hair as she moved across the walk. Tall palms lined the front gardens. Bougainvillea ran along the edge of the building. Sweat slicked her skin under the blush-colored suit, but she ignored it, focusing instead on what she had to do next.

Beside her, Billy shrugged in the sweltering afternoon heat.

“Don’t fidget,” she said sharply. “And don’t speak. Do what I say and stay in the background. We don’t need you drawing any unnecessary attention.”

He rolled his eyes but didn’t respond.

Maria climbed the cement steps to the wide front porch of the stately Coral Gables mansion. She knew security cameras were watching their every move and that the guard at the estate’s front gate had alerted Stone they were here.

The front door opened, and a Latino woman dressed in an apron greeted them.

“Dr. Maria Gotsi and her assistant to see Mr. Stone.”

The woman nodded and gestured them into the two-story entry. A sparkling chandelier hung from above. Marble tile flowed from the front door through the long hallway ahead. To the right, a curved staircase swept up to the second floor.

“Wait here, please.”

The woman disappeared through a door at their left. Maria gripped the soft-sided briefcase in front of her with both hands. Billy glanced around and let out a low whistle.

She struggled to resist scolding him. She shouldn’t have brought him, but Peter had assured her he was necessary. Sure, she’d hired him to follow Lisa and Rafael in Chicago, but that was before she’d realized how incompetent he was. When he’d returned without the information she needed, she’d tried to scare him into getting it for her. It hadn’t worked. An odd twist of irony had her stuck with him here. Now.

She forced back the irritation. If this went as planned, it would all be worth it. She didn’t care about the Furies anymore. All she wanted at this point was for Stone to pay for Alan’s death. She owed Alan that much.

The maid reappeared, closing double doors at her back. “This way, please.”

They were led into a large open room at the back of the house with windows on every side. At the moment it was barren but for a long table in the middle of the tile floor.

Maria set her briefcase on the shiny surface and turned at the sound of shoes clicking behind them.

“Dr. Gotsi. Thank you for coming on such short notice.”

Maria nodded and held out her hand in greeting. “Ms. Swanson.” She gestured to Billy. “This is my assistant, Mr. Ramos. Will Mr. Stone be joining us?”

“No. He had a previous engagement.”

Maria set her briefcase on the shiny surface and turned at the sound of shoes clicking behind them.

“Dr. Gotsi. Thank you for coming on such short notice.”

Maria nodded and held out her hand in greeting. “Ms. Swanson.” She gestured to Billy. “This is my assistant, Mr. Ramos. Will Mr. Stone be joining us?”

“No. He had a previous engagement.”

Maria’s brow lifted. What kind of previous engagement could a crippled recluse in dwindling health have? But she didn’t ask.

Christy’s gaze swept over the table. “You were brought here to verify the piece, Dr. Gotsi. I don’t see any equipment.”

“It’s impossible to bring the necessary equipment for the in-depth analysis you’re after, Ms. Swanson. My assistant and I can give you a cursory examination and take scrapings from the back to compare the chemical structure of the stone with the other pieces. That will tell us if the artifact was created in the same time frame as the other two. However, for a more thorough analysis, you’re going to need to bring the relief to Athens.”

Christy’s brow lowered, considering. “When I have all three, we’ll discuss our options.”

Maria nodded at Billy. He extracted the small scale from the case, a digital camera, a leather folder with Maria’s tools, a note pad and pencil.

Christy disappeared through the arched doorway and returned moments later with Tisiphone cradled carefully in her hands. She set the stone on a velvet drape of fabric, stepped back and watched as they worked.

Maria photographed the relief from every angle, made notes and sketches. Billy weighed and recorded information she dictated to him. Like a pro, he kept his mouth shut and his eyes focused, but Maria knew he was scanning the environs.
Maria turned the relief over. Using a small tool, she took a careful scraping from the back of the stone and placed the result in a small vial. After capping it, she labeled the scraping and replaced it in her bag.

She turned toward Christy. “That’s pretty much all we need for now.”

Christy dropped her crossed arms and straightened. “When will you have the results?”

Maria waited while Billy stowed the tools. “I have an old friend at the University of Miami. If I can procure some lab time there, I should have the initial results within a matter of days.”

“Wonderful.” Christy didn’t smile, but her voice quivered just a touch. She pressed a button on the intercom near the archway. Within seconds, the maid reappeared. Christy lifted the relief, wrapped it again in the velvet drape and handed it to the lithe woman. She then turned back to Maria. “Now. About Alecto and Magaera.”

Maria watched the maid step quickly out of the room.

“Ah,” Billy cut in. “I’m sorry to interrupt. Do you happen to have a restroom?”

Christy’s lips thinned in annoyance. She waved a hand behind her. “Fourth door on the right.” Her voice hardened. “Stay to the right, Mr. Ramos.”

Billy nodded and followed the maid.

Swanson refocused when Billy disappeared. “The other two, Dr. Gotsi.”

Maria snapped her briefcase. “I want your word the information I pass on to you is strictly confidential.”

“Of course.”

“And your guarantee you’ll bring the Furies to Athens for my staff to examine. No one else.”

Christy pursed her lips, thinking. “Fine. You have my word. The Institute will handle the authentication. You’ll get the credit and media attention. Now, the other two reliefs. Please.”

Maria studied the woman in front of her a long moment. Sweat beaded Christy’s brow. Her jaw clenched and unclenched as she waited for the information she so obviously sought. Something about the line of her shoulders set Maria on edge. Would Doug have gone all the way to Chicago? Not in his poor health. As far as Maria knew, he hadn’t traveled out of Florida in several years. If Christy Swanson had killed Alan, losing the Furies was a small price to pay for justice.

“Kauffman has them in the second-floor safe at Odyssey.” Maria pulled a slip of paper from the front pouch of her case and dropped it on the table. “Security access code to the building. Safe combination.”

Swanson’s brow shot up. “My, that’s convenient. How, exactly, did you obtain these?”

Maria lifted the case from the table. “Kauffman talks in his sleep.”

A smile slid across Swanson’s thin face. “Men are all the same, aren’t they? Only after one thing in life.”

Not all men.

“If you have this information, Dr. Gotsi, why not take them yourself?”

The thought had crossed Maria’s mind for all of two seconds before she’d dismissed it. “As much as I’d like to have the Furies, stealing them would do me no good. I have a reputation to think about. The Institute would suffer, and I’ve worked too hard to let it be tarnished now. The media coverage from our authentication will be enough for me.”

She stepped away from the table. “Peter and I have dinner plans tomorrow night. Odyssey will be empty after nine o’clock. If you’ll excuse me, Ms. Swanson. I need to collect my assistant and be on my way.”

A feral grin crossed Swanson’s face. “Of course. We’ll be in touch, Dr. Gotsi.”

Lisa stood at the open patio door in Lauren’s kitchen, looking out at the waves gently lapping the sandy shore. Twilight was just settling in. A seagull swooped low over the sand and landed without a sound.

They’d been back in Key Biscayne for about four hours. After Pete’s arrival in the Bahamas, they’d flown Shane to a Nassau hospital where he’d been pumped with antibiotics, given a tetanus shot and patched back together. He hadn’t spent the night in the hospital, much to Lisa’s dismay, and Pete’s money had greased the wheels so there were no questions about the shooting. According to the doctor, the bullet had gone clean through and caused only minimal muscle damage. Shane had gotten off with a few stitches and a sling.

He’d slept a good chunk of the trip back to Florida. Now Rafe, Shane and Pete were in the living room discussing their options. Lisa had listened to their arguing as long as she could, then slipped out for some fresh air.

She couldn’t handle more male posturing. Shane was in rare form, gunshot wound and all. He’d tried to convince them to take what they had to the authorities in Miami, but was outvoted all around. He wasn’t thrilled with their plan to steal Tisiphone back, and he was adamant Lisa not be involved.

For her part, Lisa didn’t care how they got it back, only that they did. Her mind was a mass of thoughts and memories. She still couldn’t fathom the knowledge Doug was alive. All those years, he’d been alive as she’d
mourned his death. Everything she'd believed for so long was a lie. How could he think she would kill their baby, that she'd cared at all about the Furies? That hurt more than anything else.

“Hey. You okay?”
Lisa glanced toward the archway leading to the living room where Hailey stood leaning against the doorjamb in shorts and a blue T-shirt. “Fine.”

“You don’t look so fine.”
She’d already had this conversation with Rafe. And Shane. She didn’t need to have it again with Hailey.

“What’s going on in there?” she asked, hoping Hailey would get the hint she wasn’t interested in chatting.
Hailey pushed away from the wall. “Thought you’d want to know they’re back.”
Lisa dropped her arms. Without another word, she turned for the living room.
Billy sat at the dining room table, pointing to the blueprints Rafe had laid across the surface. “Safe’s here. Third-floor master suite. Back closet. Cameras here and here.”

“You’re sure?” Rafe asked, leaning over his brother’s shoulder for a closer look. With a pen, he marked where Billy indicated. “Looks like there’s an exterior door here.”

“Yeah. To a balcony. Had plenty of time to look around while Maria was with Swanson. Nice place.” Billy glanced up. “Tritech Securities.”

Pete’s gaze lifted from Billy, settled on Rafe. “Zack Tanner works there. Owes me a favor.” He pulled his cell from his pocket.

Maria Gotsi stood across the room wearing a fitted blazer and knee-length skirt. Dark hair cascaded around her shoulders. Her arms were crossed over her chest as she listened to the men near the table.

Pete’s gaze narrowed on Maria’s somber expression as he started to dial. “What?”

Maria dropped her arms and stepped forward. “Stone wasn’t there.”
All eyes turned her direction. Pete hesitated, then flipped his phone closed, suddenly interested in Maria’s words.

“I saw an empty hospital bed in a downstairs bedroom when the maid let us in,” she went on. “It looked like they were cleaning out the room. There was no indication a crippled man lived in that house.”

“What are you saying?” Rafe asked.

“Doug’s health has been steadily failing over the past year. Alan and I talked about it after you brought me the first Fury.”

There was a familiarity between Rafe and this woman. Lisa sensed it in Maria’s words, in the way she looked at Rafe. Ignoring it and the pang of jealousy it brought, Lisa instead focused in on Maria. “Landau knew Doug was alive?”
Rafe’s surprised gaze darted her direction as if he hadn’t heard her step into the room.

Maria looked toward her for the first time. “Yes. They’ve worked together over the years.”

“Worked together?” Lisa asked. “In what way?” When Maria didn’t answer, she added, “From what I remember, they didn’t get along.”

“Alan was Doug’s connection in the States. Do you know why he left for the Caribbean?”

“To go after the Furies,” Lisa answered plainly.

Maria shook her head. “That was only a side benefit. No, Doug was fed up with his academic posting. He wanted more—more money, more prestige. He wanted what Alan had. He never planned to come back to the States. He was going to stay in the islands, use that as his home base. He and Alan disagreed about the logistics, but together they planned to hunt for unique artifacts for the gallery.”

“What kind of artifacts?” Lisa asked with narrowed eyes.

“Originally, rare antiquities, pieces Doug couldn’t in good faith confiscate while working for his university. Things that might have been stolen or come from questionable countries, but were worth more than what he could make teaching. The Furies were part of that, only they were a personal interest. Alan never really believed they existed. He did, however, see an opportunity in Doug’s idea, his overseas connections and professional credentials, and he took it.”

“Their partnership didn’t last long though. It was nearly a year after the accident before Alan learned Doug was still alive. Another year before Doug was well enough to continue working and approached Alan about using the gallery as a means to import material into the U.S.”

“Drugs,” Shane said in a knowing voice from across the room.

Maria glanced his way. “Yes, among other things. Alan wasn’t happy about the change, but Doug was adamant they could use the profits to boost the gallery’s business. And since everyone thought he was dead, it was the perfect cover. Alan felt guilty over the injuries Doug had sustained. In the end, he went along with Doug’s idea.”
“And made a buttload of money,” Shane muttered.
“Yes.” Maria’s gaze dropped to the floor. “I didn’t agree with Alan’s new business dealings. We…well, we went our separate ways after that. When Rafael approached me about the Furies, however, I contacted him. Neither of us believed Doug would try to go after them now. We both decided he was too weak.”
Lisa swallowed around the lump in her throat. The man Maria talked about wasn’t the man she’d known. She’d been blind for so long. “You said he wasn’t at the estate today. Where is he now?”
Maria looked up. “That’s just it. I’m not sure. His sister has been with him for nearly fifteen years, has rarely left his side. The fact she’s alone now, well—”
“You think he’s dead,” Pete cut in.
Maria nodded slowly. “If Doug was handling this, he would have waited for you to bring him all three Furies. He wouldn’t have bothered hunting Dr. Maxwell down, following her and Rafael all this time. Swanson, however, was worried you might sell to someone else. She’s edgy, nervous, like she’s unsure what will happen. I sensed it when we spoke last week. I read it in her eyes today.”
“Do you think she killed him?” Rafe asked cautiously, darting a look at Lisa.
Maria shook her head. “No. If she’d killed him, she’d be less of a threat. This is a woman who’s hell-bent on revenge. Something set her off.”
Lisa’s stomach rolled at the implication. “You’re saying this isn’t even about the Furies.”
Maria met her gaze. “The Furies are one small part. If Doug died of natural causes before they could get them, then she’s got all the more reason to see you suffer. If she finds out you’re still alive, I think it’s safe to say the Furies will be the last thing on her mind.”

Rafe tugged the black turtleneck over his head as he ran through steps in his mind. He’d had plenty of time to go through the blueprints, the security setup, the logistics of the evening, and he knew he was prepared. But he felt rushed. For some reason he couldn’t shake the tickle in the back of his throat, the one that said something was going to go wrong.
“I want to go with you.”
Startled out of his thoughts, he glanced toward the open bedroom door. Lisa stood just over the threshold. Light from the hall spilled around her. Her face was cast in shadows, but it didn’t hide the circles under her eyes, the lines across her forehead, the scratch high on her cheek.
She hadn’t slept much the last few days. She had to be exhausted and overwhelmed, but she wasn’t talking to him about any of it. She’d stayed up listening to their plans well into the night and had finally drifted off on the couch. When they’d finished, he’d considered waking her, carrying her up to bed and reminding her just what they’d done in this room before they’d left for the Bahamas, but her weariness had stopped him. Instead he’d sat with her and fallen asleep himself. And when he’d awoken in the early morning hours, cramped and achy from sleeping on the side chair, she’d been gone.
He was trying to give her the space she knew she needed to work through everything in her head, but her silence cut at him just the same. Somehow he had to hang onto the notion that, once they got Tisiphone back, things would be different. She’d realize she still needed him. She’d want him, as she had before.
Ignoring her comment and the desire to grab her and never let go, he sat on the leather chair and bent to tie his boots.
She stepped farther into the room. “I’m not an invalid, Rafe.”
No, she was the strongest woman he’d ever met, and he wasn’t taking a chance on her life. “Billy’s going with me.”
“So have Billy stay here.”
“We’ve been through this,” he said without looking at her. “Billy’s running surveillance from the van. Hailey and Pete are waiting at the gallery for Swanson. You’re staying here with Shane.”
“This isn’t your fight.”
Yes, it was. He stood and looked at her. Didn’t she get that? It was his fight because it was about her. He’d do anything for her. Anything to make sure she was safe. And that meant not letting her get within ten feet of Christy Swanson and her twisted sense of revenge.
“You asked me not to stop you in that cave. I let you do what you had to do, even though it wasn’t what I wanted. Now you gotta let me do my part.” He reached for his denim jacket from the bed. “We made a deal, querida. I don’t order, and you listen, remember?”
“A lot’s changed since then.”
Back to her, he closed his eyes at the brutal honesty in her quiet voice. Nothing had changed for him. If
anything, he loved her more, because of the resilience she’d shown time and again.

He forced his arms into the jacket. Every minute that passed wedged a bigger barrier between them. He had one shot to change it back, to make it right. “Fine. Then I’m ordering.” He grabbed the bag at his feet and pushed past her. “You’re staying.”

She followed him into the hall and down the curved staircase. Billy waited in the foyer with his hands tucked into the front pockets of his black jeans.

“Rafe, Wait.”

Her fingers on his arm stopped him. He turned at the bottom of the staircase, frustrated because he didn’t want to argue with her before he left. More frustrated because what he wanted most was her to believe in him. On a deep breath he looked up.

She stood two steps up, at eye level. Gardenias drifted toward his nose, reminding him of every second he’d spent in her arms. Did it mean anything to her? He searched her eyes for a flicker of hope, for something to tell him he hadn’t lost her.

He couldn’t see it. All he saw was his own reflection in those shimmering green gems. “What, Lisa?”

Her eyes raked his face until every nerve in his body hovered on the edge. He waited for her to reach for him, to kiss him, to give him some indication there was still a chance for them.

“Be careful,” she said softly.

He steeled himself against the quick stab of pain in his heart and turned for the door. “I’ll call when we’re done.”

Lisa pushed up from the couch where she’d been sitting for the last ten minutes. She couldn’t focus on the book she’d pulled from Lauren’s shelf. Couldn’t listen to more of Shane’s grumbling about the ridiculous crime scene analysis show he was watching on TV.

Running a hand through her hair, she headed for the kitchen. She felt like she was in the witness protection program, with a big bad cop watching her every move. She knew he was just looking out for her and that he was worried, but the way he eyed her like she had a tumor growing out of her forehead was grating on her last nerve. And sitting here twiddling her freakin’ thumbs while Rafe was out there doing God knows what wasn’t helping her mood either.

She pulled the giant refrigerator open and reached for a bottled water. Muffled grunts echoed from the TV in the living room as she uncapped the drink. Frowning, she lifted the water to her lips.

She should have demanded Rafe take her with him. He was being overprotective and domineering again, and she didn’t like it. Didn’t he realize how that made her feel?

She took a long swallow and paused.

He didn’t know, because she hadn’t told him. He was risking his life for nothing more than a piece of rock.

Her stomach rolled. She lowered the bottle and pressed a shaking hand against her abdomen. In the long run, what did it really matter if they had all three Furies? If they sold Alecto, he’d have enough money to take care of his mother until the end. Would having the others change the past? Would it change who she was or what she wanted? Would it change what she felt for Rafe?

She already knew the answer to every question running through her mind. For the first time since she’d heard the news Doug had lived through that crash, she was able to think clearly.

The Furies meant nothing to her. She wasn’t in this for the prestige or to prove Doug’s theory correct. They were a trophy, one she didn’t need and didn’t even want anymore. The money wasn’t important. Whether Doug was alive or dead didn’t change how she felt. The only thing that really mattered was the man she’d let walk out the door because she’d been too stupid to stop him.

Heart pounding, she glanced at her watch. She still had time. If she radioed Billy, maybe she could stop Rafe before he went after Tisiphone.

She slammed the refrigerator door and turned.

Then stopped cold as ice blue eyes peered back at her.
CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Stone’s Coral Gables estate sat amid a grove of palms just off Biscayne Bay. A sliver of moonlight cast shadows over the grounds. Dark clouds had rolled in from the east, bringing a brisk evening breeze that whistled through the palm fronds and swept over the beach.

Across the bay, the lights of Key Biscayne twinkled in the dark. Rafe grimaced at how close they’d been to Stone all this time. If Lisa had known Stone was only a few miles away, would she have come to him in the shower? Would she have made her move at all?

He pushed the thought aside and refocused. He couldn’t think about Lisa now. He needed to concentrate so he could get this job done.

He’d waited in the shadows until Billy had signaled that Swanson had left the grounds in a green Mercedes. Lights burned in the east wing. A shadow passed in front of a first-floor window. House keeper, he knew from his research. Probably watching CSI at this hour. The rest of the sprawling house appeared quiet and dark.

He shook off the strange feeling of dread that had been dogging him all afternoon and moved silently across the grounds. Staying in the shadows, he reached the corner of the building, turned and pressed his back against the wall. “In position,” he said quietly into the microphone.

“Gotcha,” Billy replied in his earpiece. “You’re clear until you reach the second-floor balcony. Camera’s perched in the corner just above the door. You’ve got twenty-two seconds once it sweeps away.”

“Copy.”

For all Billy’s shortcomings, Rafe was glad he was here. He’d come through for him in the Bahamas, had been nothing but focused when they’d been planning the job, and now he was sitting in the van parked across the street from Stone’s main gate watching Rafe’s back. When something mattered, the kid was a stickler for details. A sense of pride swelled through Rafe.

He pulled the pack from his back, unzipped the pouch and extracted the rope and attached grappling hook. He tossed the hook over the balcony rail and pulled until he met resistance. After replacing his pack, he looped the rope around one hand and pulled himself up the wall, using his feet for traction.

He reached the veranda and hauled himself over the edge, then checked his watch. He counted seconds in his head as the camera took a long sweep. The machine clicked and whirred and turned the other direction. Rafe darted around the corner, pressed his body against the side of the building and slithered into the shadows, pausing directly under the camera to extract his tools.

The glass balcony doors were to his left. A camera scanned the entrance to the house, then swept across the space once more. Rafe hesitated a fraction of a second and said his usual prayer that Pete’s connections would come through for him. Not once in all the years they’d worked together had Pete ever let him down. He hoped this wouldn’t be the first. Fifteen seconds later, he was inside the second-floor office suite, closing the door at his back without a sound.

He paused to let his eyes adjust to the dark, to tune in to the building. Ventilation fans whirred almost soundlessly in the ceiling. A clock ticked on the wall across the room. If he’d tripped a silent alarm it would only be a matter of seconds before he was discovered. His adrenaline spiked. Familiar excitement prickled his skin.

“I’m in,” he said into his mike.

“Third floor,” Billy replied in his ear. “Northwest corner. Stairs are out the hall to your right. Security camera at the base. Another at the top.”

“Copy.”

Within minutes he was on the third floor and inside the master suite. A canopied bed sat against the far wall. Gauzy curtains covered the windows looking out across Biscayne Bay. Rafe located the master closet, pulled his penlight from his pocket and flipped it on. The safe was hidden behind a false wall panel in the back of the closet. It took roughly three minutes to locate it, extract his tools and interface his palm-sized computer with it.

His stomach tightened as the numbers clicked into place. When the last one popped onto the screen, he took a breath and turned the handle. The safe slid open with a soft sigh. Rafe shined his light inside and blinked twice.
Empty.

His mind spun with possibilities. Was there another safe they’d missed? Possibly. Would Swanson have taken Tisiphone with her? Not likely. Odds were better she’d left it somewhere else in the house. Somewhere she didn’t think anyone would find it.

He closed the safe and reset his tools while ideas swirled in his head. “Billy, it’s not here. Be my eyes.” He turned out of the closet and headed for the hall. “Check the blueprints for any space not accounted for.”

Papers rustled in his earpiece. “Bedroom, bedroom, closet…shit,” Billy said in a tense voice. “I don’t know.”

Rafe peeked out in the hall. “Calm down and focus. I’m relying on you, here. Don’t let me down.”

Silence filled the channel, followed by papers rustling again. “Okay, let’s see. Third floor…nothing. There’s a large closet on the second floor. End of the hall.”

Rafe timed the camera at the top of the steps and headed for the second level.

“Wait.” Billy’s voice stopped him as he moved out of the way of the second floor camera. “No. Basement. There’s a bonus room, then an exercise room, then it looks like there’s another room, but it’s unmarked. Blueprints show a heavy sliding door, almost like a safe room.”

Rafe’s blood pulsed. That had to be it. “Tell me how to get there.”

Billy relayed instructions in his ear. He timed the cameras and within minutes dropped three floors to the basement, where he stood in an exercise room staring at a wall of mirrors.

He turned a slow circle. “Talk to me, Billy. All I see is my ugly mug staring back at me.”

“It’s there, I’m telling you. There’s got to be a hidden switch, a release lever, something.”

Rafe ran his gloved fingers along the smooth glass. The three-panel mirror stopped roughly two feet from the ceiling. He stepped back and let his eyes sweep over the wall from top to bottom.

It had to be here. He hadn’t come all this way to walk away empty-handed.

Then he saw it. The smallest imperfection in the glass along the right edge of the third panel. It looked like a shadow, but Rafe guessed there was a sensor hidden behind the mirror.

He held his hand over the space and pressed his finger gently against the outside edge of the glass. A small button depressed. The middle panel popped open, swinging outward like a door. Rafe stepped back, grabbed his light and shined it into the small room.

The blood drained from his face. “Holy mother of God.”

“You’re in?” Billy asked.

“No.” Rafe stepped inside the space and glanced around. Hundreds of pictures of Lisa covered the walls, plastered against the bare concrete like a collage. Snapshots of her and Stone together, news clippings of her research over the years, digs she’d been on, projects she’d undertaken for her university. Personal photos of her with Shane and her sisters, of her alone in what Rafe guessed was her San Francisco apartment, of the two of them together in Chicago and here in Miami.

His stomach rolled. Swanson had been following her for years, waiting for the right moment to strike.

His gaze dropped to the table in the center of the room, a virtual altar to the Furies and Stone’s research. On one side, Tisiphone sat perched against a drape of red velvet. On the other, an urn was surrounded by a wreath of dying flowers. And in the center, photos of Lisa over the last day stared up at him—her tired and worn out as she stepped off his boat at Lauren’s dock, her somber face as she stood at the kitchen windows gazing out at the water, her asleep on the window seat in the living room while he planned to go after Tisiphone.

Dread swept over Rafe and a tickle lurched in his throat. Swanson knew Lisa was still alive. She’d been watching Lauren’s house, which meant she knew Maria and Billy had been there. She hadn’t left here to night headed for Odyssey and the other two Furies. She was going after Lisa.

“Mierda.” Frantic, Rafe reached for his mike and whipped around. “Billy. Goddammit, it’s a setup!”

Lisa swallowed a scream. The bottle slipped from her fingers and bounced off the tile floor. Cold water splashed across her feet as she took a cautious step back.

Christy Swanson narrowed her eyes and lifted the gun at her side. “Surprised to see me?”

Lisa’s heart thumped erratically against her ribs, but she refused to let her fear show. “I shouldn’t be, should I?”

Christy shook her head slowly. “You’re resourceful. I’ll give you that much. Doug always said you were the smartest woman he knew. Used to gnaw on every one of my goddamn nerves.”

The venom in Christy’s voice made Lisa’s adrenaline spike. She darted a look over Christy’s shoulder to the doorway leading to the living room.

Glancing back at the woman holding a gun in front of her, she spoke louder, hoping Shane would hear their
voices. “Not as smart as you, Christy. You tricked everyone.”

“That’s where you’re wrong. I was never good enough for Doug. He was the only family I had left. I would have done anything for him. But in his eyes I was never smart enough, never tough enough, never what he really wanted. He wanted the Furies, and I couldn’t get them. He wanted you to be the one taking care of him, not me, even after the way you betrayed him.”

Christy’s voice hardened. She moved forward. The gun wobbled in her hand. “Do you have any idea how that made me feel? I gave up my whole life to help him. The least he could have done was pay me an ounce of fucking respect. But no, he had the nerve to compare me to you.”

She laughed, an evil sound that echoed through the kitchen and sent a shiver down Lisa’s spine. “You! A lying, conniving whore with absolutely no sense of loyalty! When he learned you’d found Alecto, he was stupid enough to think it was going to bring you back to him. Can you believe that? He wanted Alan to help him find you. I couldn’t stand back and let that happen.”

Lisa’s stomach tightened with understanding, and she eased back another step until she bumped into the counter. “You killed him.”

Christy’s eyes blazed with both hurt and fury. “Mercy. That’s what I gave him. He should thank me for what I did for him. He would have died within the year anyway. I eased his suffering.”

Lisa glanced over Christy’s shoulder again. Where the hell was Shane?

“He’s not coming, you know,” Christy said in a mocking tone. “No one’s coming for you this time.”

Lisa’s eyes shifted back to Christy’s menacing glare.

“He’ll have a massive headache when he wakes up, but he’ll live. I want him to know you died because of your obsession with the Furies. I want someone else to feel an inkling of what I felt all these years.”

Panic squeezed Lisa’s chest.

Christy grabbed her by the hair and thrust her toward the patio door. “We have one stop to make first, though. Before this is over, you’re going to get me the Furies. I deserve that much at least.”

Rafe drove ninety on U.S. 1 north toward the Rickenbacker Causeway. He swerved in and out of traffic, swore at an old man out for a Sunday drive in the middle of the friggin’ night.

Billy hung onto the safety handle above his head with one hand and kept the cell phone pressed against his ear with the other. “Still no answer at the house. They’re not answering their cells either.”

“Hijo de puta.”

Rafe ran a hand over his face and tried like hell not to panic. He should have listened to his gut. Goddammit. He should have listened to Lisa and brought her with him.

“Try Pete again.”

Sweat beaded his forehead. He slammed on the brakes at the tollbooth, dug change out of his pocket and tossed it into the coin basket, then punched the gas before the light turned green and tore off across the West Bridge.

Billy lowered the phone and dialed again. He darted a worried look Rafe’s direction. “Signal keeps dying.”

“Carajo.”

Muscles rigid, Rafe drove the six miles in silence and turned into the Village of Key Biscayne. His hands clenched into fists against the wheel as they cut through town and finally pulled to a stop in front of Lauren’s house. He punched in the code, waited impatiently for the gate to slide open and eased into the drive.

The house was dark but for the blue-green flicker of a TV downstairs. He parked in the shadows and killed the engine. When they climbed from the vehicle, Rafe pointed at Billy then signaled for him to go around back. Billy nodded, crept along the side of the building and disappeared into the darkness.

Rafe held his breath and listened at the front door. The only sound was the gentle lap of water against the shore behind the house, a seagull screaming from far off, muffled voices from the television.

If he was too late, if something had already happened to Lisa…

He tried the knob and found the door unlocked. Panic welled in his chest. He pushed the door open and stepped inside. The living room was dark. It took a moment for his eyes to adjust, but when they did, he noticed that the large wooden candlesticks from the coffee table lay broken in two in the middle of the living room floor. Beneath it, droplets of blood stained the white carpet and disappeared in a trail toward the kitchen.

“No, no, no… “Lisa!”

He tore around the corner just as Billy swept in from the patio. Shane was on his knees in the kitchen, hands cuffed behind his back. Blood dripped onto the tiles from a gash in his forehead and spread across the white cotton shirt from the wound in his shoulder.
“What happened?” Rafe grabbed a rag from the counter and pressed it against Shane’s forehead. “Where’s Lisa?”

“Swanson. Was here. Surprised me.”

“When?”

“Not sure. Think I blacked out. Went to get some pain pills from my bag while Lisa was in the kitchen.” He gave his head a swift shake. “When I stepped out of the hall she cold-cocked me and jammed her foot into my bad shoulder.”

“Where are the keys to the cuffs?” Billy asked.

“My bag. Bedroom down the hall.”

“Where’s Lisa?” Rafe asked again, impatience and worry squeezing the air from his lungs.

Shane looked up. Guilt and fear plagued his features. “I don’t know.”

Rafe raked a hand through his hair and pulled so hard his scalp burned. Where would Swanson take her? Think, dammit.

What did the woman want? She wanted Lisa to suffer. She wanted the Furies. Odyssey.

His head darted up. “Call Pete at the gallery. Tell him what happened. Warn him Swanson’s on her way. Then call your cops in.”

“Swanson wouldn’t be stupid enough to go after the Furies if she’s onto us,” Billy said quickly from the archway, holding Shane’s leather duffle.

“She would if she’s got Lisa as a hostage.” Rafe headed for the patio door. He’d never make it in time by car. He just hoped Lauren’s fancy powerboat moored at the dock was full of fuel.

“Rafe.”

Shane’s worried voice stopped him. He glanced over his shoulder and felt his chest tighten with the same fear he saw on Shane’s face.

“There’s an extra gun in my bag. Take it.”

Billy dug through the bag and pulled out the Glock.

Rafe caught the firearm and magazine when Billy tossed them, then checked the chamber. He’d never taken a weapon on a job. In his line of work it was how people ended up dead, but this wasn’t a job anymore. This was personal. He swallowed around the lump wedged in his throat and looked at Shane. “You’re not the only one who loves her, Maxwell. I’ll get her back.”

“You’d better,” Shane said. “I’m counting on you.”

Lisa’s hands tightened on the wheel of Swanson’s Mercedes. Beside her, Christy sat rigid with the barrel of the gun pointed at Lisa’s chest.

The woman had been silent since she’d pushed Lisa into the car and barked directions. Lisa wasn’t sure which was better, the eerie silence or the irrational rants the woman seemed to go off on when the mood hit. Neither were high on her list at the moment.

The lights of Miami twinkled across the water. Lisa’s mind spun as she made the slow turn from Virginia Key onto the Bay Bridge on the Rickenbacker Causeway. Darkness pressed in from both sides, the water big black pools to the right and left.

If she made it to Odyssey, she knew Swanson wouldn’t hesitate to shoot Pete and Hailey to get the Furies. How many more people had to die because of this woman’s sick sense of revenge? If Lisa did something now, she could stop her before anyone else got hurt. She already knew Swanson planned to kill her as soon as she got what she wanted. It was only a matter of time for her at this point.

Lisa’s adrenaline surged. Traffic was sparse this time of night. They’d only seen a handful of cars since they’d left Key Biscayne. Her best chance for surprise was now, not after they got into the city.

Before she could change her mind, she wrenched the wheel hard into the right-hand lane and rammed the vehicle against the security barrier. The Mercedes skidded against concrete, shooting sparks into the darkness. Swanson’s body jerked to the side and bounced off the car door. She screamed. The gun slipped from her fingers and landed on the floorboards. Cursing, she tried to push herself upright.

Lisa slammed on the brakes. Swanson fell forward then back. Lisa thrust her elbow into Swanson’s face, and the woman screeched. Arm aching, Lisa jerked the driver’s door open and bent for the gun that had fallen and slipped under her feet.

“You bitch!” Swanson lunged across the center console, ramming her body into Lisa. They tumbled out of
the car. Lisa’s back and shoulders took the brunt of the fall as she hit unforgiving pavement. A car whizzed by on the left, the blare of its horn jolting through her whole body.

Swanson grabbed Lisa by the T-shirt, lifting her an inch off the ground. She jerked one hand back and landed a right hook across Lisa’s cheek. Pain exploded in Lisa’s face. Her head smacked the pavement with a loud crack.

Stars crept into the edge of her vision, but she fought back with everything she had. She was smaller than Swanson by several inches, but stronger.

She jabbed her fingers into Swanson’s eyes. When the woman howled and pulled back, Lisa wriggled out from under her weight.

Frantic, Lisa glanced around for the gun. It had fallen out when they’d tumbled from the car, been kicked across the pavement in their struggle. She spotted it by the front tire.

She moved quickly around Swanson, who was still kneeling on the ground, moaning in pain. Chest heaving, Lisa leaned down and lifted the gun.

Swanson plowed into her from behind. The weapon flew from her fingers and disappeared over the side of the bridge. The air whooshed out of Lisa’s lungs. For a frightening moment, her body sailed over the security barricade into the darkness below.

Her hands grasped the edge of the concrete. She dug bleeding fingers into the hard stone as she was jerked over the side by the force of gravity, and tried to hang on. It was at least a fifty-foot drop. If there was water beneath her, she knew she could swim to safety. If there was land below, she’d be dead.

Oh, God. She swallowed the fear and gripped the concrete tighter.

“This is so much better than I planned,” Swanson growled from above. Her shadowed face, highlighted by dim lights on the bridge, came into Lisa’s view. Blood ran down her cheeks. Dirt was smeared across her forehead. “Beg. Beg for me to save you, Dr. Maxwell.” She wrapped one hand around Lisa’s wrist and pushed slightly. “I want to hear the words.”

Terror clawed at Lisa’s chest. She wasn’t going to die like this. Not on a bridge in downtown Miami only a mile away from the man she loved. Not when she finally had something real to believe in.

Lisa’s blood ran hot as she looked up into ice-cold eyes. A memory flashed, one of the rare instances Doug had talked about his family, about his sister who was afraid of the water. She quickly twisted her wrist and wrapped her hand around Swanson’s forearm. “Still hate the water, bitch?”

Swanson’s eyes went wide with fear and realization. “Wh—What?”

Lisa yanked hard. Swanson’s body shot off the bridge. Lisa let go so she wouldn’t be pulled down. Swanson kicked frantic arms and legs as she plunged into the darkness below with a bloodcurdling scream.

Lisa reached up to grip the barricade. Her hands were sweating, her fingers slipped, and she dropped a fraction of an inch. Her muscles screamed from the weight of her body. She couldn’t hold on much longer.

Oh, God, she was going to fall.

Voices echoed from the bridge. Below she thought she heard the rumble of a boat’s engine and another voice. For a moment, a spotlight swept over her, highlighting the concrete barricade that had become her lifeline.

Her fingers slipped again. Her heart rate jumped. Sweat slicked her skin, and she fought against her own weight, but the effort was futile. Her raw fingertips slid against the gravelly edge, and she managed one shrill scream before she plummeted into utter blackness.

Brisk air whooshed around her. She hit the water feet first and rocketed downward. On instinct she kicked as hard as she could, held her breath and swam upward with every bit of energy she had left.

Just when she was sure she was swimming the wrong way, she broke the surface and gasped. Her lungs burned as she drew air in and out in shallow breaths. Above, faint sirens echoed in the night, followed by voices yelling down at her from the bridge.

She closed her eyes and tried to steady her racing pulse. Someone knew she was down here. She wasn’t going to die, not to night. Not when she had a whole life ahead that suddenly looked better with each passing second. She just had to hold on until a rescue boat came to get her.

“Lisa!”

Limbs aching, she treaded water and turned a slow circle, peering into the darkness for a voice she was sure she’d only imagined. Lights swept across her, forcing her to blink against the blinding beams. The roar of an engine sputtered and died somewhere close.

“Jesús, María y José.”

Rafe.

She hadn’t dreamt him. He was real. Her heart lurched in her chest.
Water splashed, and in an instant his strong arms were around her, supporting her and tugging her with him. “Are you okay? Jesus, Lisa, talk to me. Tell me you’re okay.”

Words choked in her throat. He hauled her up the swim ladder, dropped onto the floor of the speedboat and cradled her in his lap. His heart raced against her skin. Warm water ran in rivulets off both their bodies. His hands streaked over her, checking every inch to make sure she wasn’t hurt.

“I’m okay,” she managed on a shaky breath. “Rafe.” She placed a hand on his arm to stop his frantic search for injuries. “I’m okay.”

He let out a strangled groan, pulled her tight against him and dropped his forehead to hers. “Jesus, I…When I saw you dangling off the bridge, I thought I’d lost you.”

Her heart skipped a beat at the raw emotion in his voice. She sank into him and closed her eyes, for the first time in as long as she could remember feeling…free.

“You can’t get rid of me that easy, Slick.”

His arms tightened around her. “Don’t tease me. Not right now. I can’t take it.”

There was no humor in his voice. He pulled back enough to look down, eyes dark and intense and locked solely on her. In those gleaming obsidians she saw the same fear that had almost crippled her moments before, and it shot warmth through her whole body. She curled her fingers into his damp shirt and pulled him closer. “Rafe.”

A blinding spotlight swept over them, followed by the wail of a horn signaling the arrival of the U.S. Coast Guard Search and Rescue boat. Lisa dropped her head against his chest. His fingers slipped into her hair as he held her tight against him and waved to the Coast Guard with his other hand.

This was what she wanted. Him. Nothing else mattered. As soon as they were out of the water and back on dry land, she was going to tell him.

She wasn’t going to lose him, either.
CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

The early morning hours after the accident were a blur to Lisa. Rafe had been adamant she go to the hospital for observation, but she’d brushed off his concerns and let the EMT check her out instead. She now had a butterfly bandage across her cheek and bruises over most of her body, and felt like she’d been hit by a Mack truck.

But for all the bad things she could focus on, if she tried, for the first time in her life she was excited about the future. She’d never planned on falling in love at this point in her life, didn’t need a man to complete her, but she was counting her blessings for the one who’d had the good sense to hustle her in Milan.

They’d been separated for questioning after the accident. Lisa cooperated in any way she could, filling in details about Doug and the Furies and Christy Swanson’s demented need for revenge, omitting of course any reference to illegal activities she or Rafe had participated in, including theft, breaking and entering and how she’d come to acquire Alecto in the first place.

She sensed the detective interviewing her knew there was more to the story, but she didn’t really care what he thought. All she wanted was to curve into Rafe and fall asleep for at least a week. Shane, having cooperated as much as possible in the investigation, sensed her weariness and stepped in to help.

He’d needed three stitches for the gash in his forehead, had to have his shoulder wound redressed, and was given instructions to watch for infection. Even though he was probably more exhausted than Lisa, he hadn’t left her side. For that, she was thankful.

Satisfied she’d answered enough for the time being, the detective finally let Lisa leave the station and promised to track her down at Lauren’s estate if he thought of anything else. Back at the house, she went up to Rafe’s room, slipped out of her clothes and slid between the silky sheets to wait for him to come home. Sleep pulled at her within minutes of her head hitting the pillow, and in the morning when she woke, she sat up, surprised to find she was still alone.

As she was twenty-four hours later.

Rafe had left several messages on her cell, but every time she’d tried to call him back, he’d been out of range or unavailable. And she wasn’t sure just what that meant. So when Pete called that morning and asked her to come in to Odyssey, worry gnawed at her reserves.

A little voice in the back of her head said Rafe had left because their partnership was over. He didn’t need her anymore, not in the same way she needed him.

Shane pulled the rental to the curb and killed the engine. He glanced across the seat toward the massive double front doors. Palm trees lined the ritzy street with its quaint cafés and trendy shops. It didn’t surprise Lisa this was where Odyssey was located, in the heart of glamorous Miami Beach.

“Want me to stay in the car or go in with you?”

“Go in with me.” But she didn’t move. For some reason, she was almost too afraid to find out what was going on.

Feeling like a wuss, she pushed the door open and stepped from the sedan. She’d dressed in lightweight slacks and a silk sleeveless top, and though the Florida heat was already intense at ten in the morning, it didn’t bother her.

Lisa pulled the glass door open and was immediately surrounded by a cool breeze that sent a shiver down her back. Ceiling fans turned slowly in the massive outer gallery. Paintings lined the walls, statuary and pottery occupied every inch of space.

A brunette appeared from a door to their left. “Dr. Maxwell, Detective. Mr. Kauffman is waiting for you.”

Fighting back a little jolt of panic, Lisa followed the woman up to the third floor. The brunette knocked on the door at the end of the hall, and when a voice said, “Come in,” she gestured for them to go ahead.

Pete rose from the desk and smiled as they stepped into the office, looking every bit the consummate professional in slacks, a white dress shirt and red silk tie. Not for the first time, Lisa wondered just what it was that made Peter Kauffman tick. He was gorgeous and single and loaded. But in the few short days she’d known him, she’d sensed something was off.
Yeah, he was smart, and driven, and easy to be around. But lurking behind his stone gray eyes, there were a
host of secrets. Secrets and regrets that made Lisa wonder just what had happened in his life. Or whom he’d
lost. She recognized the pain he hid, because for fifteen years, the same things had haunted her. But not
anymore.

Pete shook Shane’s hand and greeted Lisa with a hug. “Thanks for coming by.”

She eased out of Pete’s arms and glanced around the empty room, refocusing on why she was here. “Where
is he?”

Pete’s smile faded. “He wanted to be here, but Teresa’s not doing so well. Rafe and Billy took her home to
Puerto Rico.”

That explained his sudden disappearance. Lisa closed her eyes and steeled herself against the quick stab of
pain in her heart. She would have gone with him. Didn’t he know that?

“I heard they pulled Swanson’s body from the bay early this morning.”

Pete’s voice brought Lisa’s eyes open.

Shane nodded, perched the hand of his good arm on his hip. “They’re still looking for Winters. Won’t be
long before they find him.”

Pete nodded and gestured toward the table. “I have something to show you both.”

Lisa looked toward the long conference table to her left where a black drape was laid out across the surface.

As much as her heart was hurting, her pulse beat just a little quicker at the thought of seeing Alecto again.

She and Shane stepped toward the table.

“You know,” Pete said with a smile in his voice, “this has got to be my favorite part. When a client finally
has what they’ve been looking for.” He pulled the fabric back, revealing not just Alecto, but Tisiphone and
Magaera as well.

Shane drew in a sharp breath at her side. “Wow.”

Lisa’s mouth fell open. All three pieces were joined together, the small notches in the sides uniting them as
had originally been intended. She recognized Alecto in the middle with her arms crossed over her chest, wings
jutting out of her back and her weight perched on one foot. Tisiphone floated in the air to her right, wings
spread wide, eyes looking toward the heavens. Magaera, seated to Alecto’s left, had her legs angled away from
her body, weight supported on one hand as she looked up at her sisters. Snakes encircled each of their heads,
and while they might have looked tame at first glance, there was no mistaking the seriousness of their quest:
eyes hard, cold and dangerous.

Daughters of darkness. Tormentors of evildoers.

They’d taunted Lisa for nearly fifteen years, but not anymore.

“They’re amazing, aren’t they?” Pete asked.

She forced thoughts of Doug from her mind for good and refocused on Magaera. “How did you—”

Pete smiled. “Teresa’s maiden name was Los Cruz.”

“What?” Lisa looked up sharply.

“Her grandmother gave it to her when she moved to the States with Rafe’s father. It’d hung in their family
dining room for years. Teresa had always liked it. And Rafe, well, he’s always had a thing for art history. She
passed it down the family line to him.”

Stunned, Lisa looked back down. “He had it all this time, and he never said anything?”

He’d kept so much from her. There were moments she thought she hadn’t known him at all.

A paper slid next to her hand, drawing her attention. “What’s this?”

Pete set a pen on the table. “Acceptance of terms. All you have to do is sign, and they’re yours.”

“Mine?” Lisa’s gaze shot up. “But…that’s not what we agreed on.”

“The deal changed.”

“He needs to sell them for—”

“None.” Pete cut in. “He sold the boat, got Billy to agree to sell the property in Key West. He paid back what he owed me for financing the search and has enough left over to get Teresa set
up until it’s over.”

*Until it’s over. Lisa’s chest tightened.*

“But what will he do after? That’s not what we—”

Pete shook his head, a wry smile curling his mouth. “Rafe’s resilient. He’ll figure something out. Trust me, I
tried to talk him out of it, but he wouldn’t listen.” His voice softened. “He wants you to have them, Lisa. You
earned them. All you have to do is sign.”

She lifted the pen when Pete pushed it toward her, stared back down at the paper. She’d never expected Rafe
to go back on his word. She’d never once anticipated he’d give up the one thing he wanted most in the world.
All for her.

You earned them.

She hadn’t. Not on her own. They’d earned them together. Without him, she never would have found the Furies. She never would have uncovered the part of herself she thought she’d lost. She never would have discovered a heart she’d buried long ago.

She had known him, the best parts of him. He’d made her think about a future that wasn’t bleak and lonely. He’d made her dream of things that weren’t centered around her career. He’d made her believe in love again.

She blinked back the tears threatening to fall, dropped the pen and looked across the table at Pete. “You’re a businessman, right?”

He eyed her with curiosity but didn’t answer.

“Lisa,” Shane warned.

She held up a hand to stop Shane from meddling and focused on Pete. “How would you like to make a deal?”

Rafe figured three weeks was long enough for Lisa to come to her senses.

He’d expected to hear from her after she found out he’d given her the Furies, but twenty-one days had passed without a single word. He knew because he was counting.

Pete had told her where he’d gone. Rafe had left messages for her she’d never returned, and he’d talked to Pete a handful of times since he’d met with Lisa. But every time he asked, his friend had said only that when he’d seen her, Lisa had been speechless.

That didn’t sit well with Rafe. Lisa was never speechless. Unless she was with him. Since she was more than three thousand miles away now, he figured that wasn’t a good sign.

His mother had perked up as soon as he’d brought her to San Juan. Just being home seemed to boost her spirits. He knew it wouldn’t last, but for the moment she was in peace, and that was the best thing he could give her. Billy had really stepped up, helping out, taking care of Mamá when Rafe was busy fixing up the three-bedroom bungalow he’d bought for her. His brother was even pitching in and pulling his weight with the remodel, which shocked the hell out of Rafe.

It seemed three ancient pieces of stone had bridged the gap between the two of them. He had hope that things might just turn out okay for his family, that he and Billy would get through what ever happened.

The only problem was, one important person was missing. One he hadn’t been able to get off his mind since he’d seduced Alecto out from under her in Italy.

“Mamá,” he hollered as he tossed his shaving kit into his bag. “Have you seen my keys?”

Muffled voices resonated from downstairs, but he couldn’t make out the words. He didn’t have time to seek out and search. He was already running late and didn’t want to miss his flight. He retrieved a pair of socks from the dresser drawer, tossed them in the bag sitting on top of the whitewashed piece of furniture and turned to grab his shoes. Patting his thighs with his hands, he tried to remember what the heck he’d done with his keys.

Jingling echoed from the doorway. He looked up, expecting to see Billy’s ugly mug, but instead his heart nearly stopped at the sight in front of him.

Lisa leaned against the doorjamb with her arms crossed over her chest and his keys dangling from her fingers.

She was here.

“Looking for these?”

No, he was looking for her.

Words clogged in his throat. She wore those sinful denim short shorts he’d been fantasizing about for weeks and a navy spaghetti-strap tank top that showcased her luscious cleavage. “What are you doing here?”

She tipped her head in a casual move. “I was in the neighborhood. Business. Thought I’d drop by.” She glanced around the sparsely furnished second-floor room. “Nice place.”

He hadn’t spent a lot of time in here and hadn’t bothered to decorate. The furniture was white. The walls were barren. The room boasted a queen-sized bed, a dresser topped with a round mirror and a small side chair where he’d tossed some clothes. Natural light flowed in through the windows, making it look bright and cheery. A fan turned lazy circles above, and a door led to a small porch. But the room wasn’t anything like his place back in the Keys. Didn’t even compare to his old boat.

“I…” He ran a hand over his hair, feeling oddly nervous and completely out of his element. “I wasn’t expecting anyone.”

“Looks like it.” She pushed away from the wall and set his keys on the dresser. “I saw Teresa downstairs.
She looks good.”

“Yeah. She’s doing better.” And why the hell were they talking about his mother, when the woman he loved
was finally standing in front of him as gorgeous as she’d been the day he’d met her?

Business.

“What do you mean you’re here on business?” he quickly asked.

She shrugged. “Turns out the Furies are worth a pretty penny.”

She’d sold them? He’d given them to her because she deserved them after everything she’d been through.

Because they meant something to her they’d never mean to him or anyone else. Not so she could sell them.

He opened his mouth to say that very thing, then closed it quickly. They weren’t his to worry about anymore.

He’d given them to her free and clear. What she did with them was up to her.

“Pete’s a smart guy,” she went on. “We decided to strike a deal. A business partnership, if you will.”

His eyes narrowed, and he watched her closely for a sign she was joking. If she was, he couldn’t see it. She’d
made a deal with his womanizing ex-partner? Unease roiled through him. Rafe knew all about her deals.

Suddenly, he wasn’t so sure he wanted to know about their “business partnership.”

When he didn’t respond, she lifted an eyebrow and smiled. “Interested at all?”

He wasn’t sure what to say.

“Oh,” she said. “Pete didn’t think you would be, but I told him it was worth a try.”

He was having trouble following her. All he knew for sure was he didn’t like where this was going. “What
are you doing here, Lisa?”

She faced him. “Well, as it turns out, I really don’t have a place in my tiny apartment for the Furies. And it
seems like a waste to let them sit in an attic collecting dust, so Pete and I made a deal. He wants to open
another branch of Odyssey where Annalise’s ancestors can view all three Furies together. Apparently there’s
some heavy tourism on this island, big bucks coming in, which translates to money in his pocket. None of that
really matters to me, so I pushed for a museum. In the end, we compromised. An eclectic combination of
archaeologically significant pieces displayed for the public to view, along with unique antiquities in certain
special collections available for purchase.”

He could hardly believe what he was hearing. “You sold the Furies to Pete, and now you’re opening a gallery
together, here in San Juan?”

She smiled. “I didn’t sell him all the Furies. Just a small percentage, to get the project up and running. And
San Juan seemed like the perfect place. There’s a lot of rich culture here. I think it’ll be a hit.”

Now he was the one who was speechless. When he’d seen her standing in his doorway, he’d been sure she
was here because she’d realized she couldn’t live without him. Not because she was embarking on a business
endeavor with his ex–best friend.

“Thing is,” she said, “I don’t know a whole lot about running a gallery, and I travel a lot with my job. I don’t
want to give that up. I don’t think I’ll be teaching so much anymore, but I still want to work in the field. And
Pete can’t really handle the day-to-day operations because he’s needed back in Miami. So…”

Holy hell. Now it made sense. “Are you offering me a job?”

“Well,” she said, “yeah. What do you think?”

He thought she was insane. No way he was going to work for her so she could run off with Pete and play
Indiana Jones, because he knew that’s exactly what Pete would want to do. He let out a smug laugh and turned
away before he said something he’d regret later. “I think you made a trip down here for nothing.”

His chest hurt. All those plans he’d been making over the last few weeks lay shattered at his feet.

“What if I sweeten the deal?” she asked.

She’d have to sweeten it a helluva lot to make him even turn around. Right now, he’d settle for her leaving.

He grabbed a shirt lying on the bed and stepped to the closet to find a hanger to keep his hands busy. Carajo.
He was gonna kill Pete.

“Okay,” she said. “I can see being stuck in the gallery isn’t your first choice. You like being out and about. I
guess I could let you tag along on a few of my trips.”

“You guess?” He could hardly believe what he was hearing. “I don’t think so.”

“What if I throw in a few perks?”

It was all he could do not to turn around and tell her what she could do with her little perks.

“What if…?” She hesitated. “What if I’m part of the deal?”

His hand paused in the act of hanging up his shirt. A tingling slide down his chest. When he finally forced his
body to turn, there was tenderness in her eyes, and warmth, and…love.

“You made me a deal back in Key West,” she said softly. “The Furies belong to both of us. The way I see it,
as long as they do, you’re not getting rid of me quite so fast. I figure a year is a good start at seeing how well
this partnership works out.”

That pressure eased around his heart. “Was that your lame-ass attempt at a declaration of love?”

Her mouth dropped open, then closed. “It wasn’t that lame.”

He tried not to smile. “Pretty lame if you ask me.”

She perched her hands on her hips in annoyance. “I suppose you think you could do better?”

“I know I could. If it were me, I’d just come right out and say it. No beating around the bush. You came all the way down here, querida. Don’t cave now. Tell me the real reason you’re here.”

She didn’t answer, only stared at him with the same damn fear he’d been fighting the past three weeks.

“It’s a gamble, isn’t it?” he asked quietly.

Still silent.

“Kinda like taking a chance on a thief.”

When her eyes softened, he knew he had her.

“There’s only one thief I want to take a chance on. I…” She closed her eyes. “I can’t believe I’m about to say this.” She blew out a long breath. “Oh, hell. I love you, Rafe.”

His heart swelled, and he smiled. He knew she was waiting for him to say it back, but he couldn’t. Not until she opened her eyes and looked at him.

Those shimmering emeralds finally popped open, and he didn’t miss the quick flash of anger at his silence.

“Aren’t you going to say anything?”

Before she could step away, he wrapped his arms around her waist, lifted her off the floor and dropped her on the bed.

“Let me go.”

“Not on your life, querida. I think you’re stuck with me.”

“Real funny. I changed my mind.”

He chuckled and eased down to kiss her. Her lips were soft and supple and every bit as tantalizing as he remembered.

Her temper faded. “I’m still waiting, Sullivan.”

And he’d been waiting for her. His whole life. He just hadn’t known it. “Why don’t you reach into your pocket and feel how much I love you?”

She braced her hands against his biceps and squirmed underneath him. “I can already feel your love poking into my hip, Slick.”

God, she had a mouth on her. One he’d missed way too much. “That wasn’t what I meant.” When she laughed, he reached in his pocket himself and pulled out the ring.

Her smartass smile faded, and she looked from the emerald in his hand to his face and back again with wide eyes. “What’s that?”

A hint of worry snaked through him. “I know diamonds are traditional, but you and I haven’t done anything in the traditional sense. And, well, this one reminded me of your eyes. If you want a diamond instead, I can—”

“No,” she said quickly. “It’s beautiful. I just…” She looked back at his face with a mixture of confusion and disbelief. “A diamond?”

He smiled slowly, reading her mind. “Yeah, that’s usually what you give the woman you love when you ask her to marry you.”

Her eyes grew even wider. “Marry her?”

He chuckled at her stunned reaction. “Where did you think I was headed? I was on my way to San Francisco to hunt you down.”

“I…Oh…”

Speechless. Again. It tickled every part of him.

“A year’s not gonna do it for me, Lisa. I figure fifty, maybe. Probably longer, since I plan on chasing you all through my golden years. There’s no one else in the world I’d rather spend my life with. What do you say? Marry me?”

A single tear slid down her cheek, and she shook her head. “A treasure hunter and a thief. What will people think?”

His smile widened. “That we were made for each other.”

She looked deep into his eyes and ran her hand over his cheek. Her touch sent warmth to every nerve in his body.

“Make me believe it, Rafe.”

“Always.”
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