

FOR THE BEST

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Chapter One excerpt:

I don't like to sleep naked, but "Drunk Me" doesn't negotiate. I shift against the pillow and scoot away from the strands of cool, damp hair clinging to my bare shoulders. My head throbs from the movement and will need to be dealt with, but I'm distracted by the smell of my special-occasion-only honeysuckle shampoo. What should be wafting my way is cigarette smoke and rail gin.

I've never taken a shower before passing out.

Flopping an arm over to my husband's side of the bed, I sigh into the cool sheets. Ethan hasn't been cuddled beside me for a while. If I'm out late, which really isn't that often, I want Ethan next to me in the morning. To reassure me everything is okay.

Did I say anything stupid when I came home?

Of course not, Jules. Don't worry about it. You were having fun.

I smell bacon, our son's favorite, so it's likely they're having breakfast.

Then I remember: The Genius Grant launch last night. Too much champagne. I gag at how that bubbly sweet taste coated my tongue. How many glasses did I have? Three? Four? Fifty?

I sit up, and my skull feels pierced in the middle, so I lie back down. That also hurts. The room spins, even as I'm flat. This hangover was inevitable with the stress of my new job as CEO of the Poe Foundation. I shouldn't lean on alcohol. But I did. I'm never drinking again.

Shit, shit, shit.

I do the memory scrape where I try to think of anything stupid I said. Shifting to jam my face into the pillow, I claw for truth that'll ease this anxiety already building in my chest. The night goes by in flashes like video snippets: Funder conversations, pep talks to key members of my staff, my speech to every major funder in Rhode Island. Not perfect, but no disasters. Nothing I can't handle the morning after.

After I shift again, pain sizzles in my knees. I lift my legs off the bed despite my throbbing head. There are large scrapes on both of them, red and still oozing. I drop my legs back onto the bed, cursing those damn Providence sidewalks. Did that happen when I got home from the launch? Wait. No. Oh, no.

I went out *after* the event. Good Lord, that champagne really got to me. I should have had dinner. Or lunch. Or switched to water. Or stuck to my two-drink plan.

I feel a spasm in my chest at the thought that maybe I was already tipsy during my speech. I can't quite remember. Surely it wasn't that bad? It has to be fine. It must be fine.

There's a knock on the front door, loud and firm, echoing from downstairs.

"Ethan?" I call out to my husband and flinch at the effort.

The house is silent except for the TV. Another knock, this one even louder.

Mumbling a curse, I have to hold my temples to yell again. "Ethan, do I need to get it?"

I throw my legs over the side of the bed in one fluid move, and just as quickly, I have to brace myself on my scraped knees in a vertiginous double-over.

Conscious that I'm about to be seen, I hobble—that's the only word for it—over to examine myself in the mirror: damp bangs over my bloodshot eyes, dehydrated pale skin, and my dark-brown shoulder-length hair chilling my freckled shoulders. After taking a long steadying exhale, I release a breath that could peel wallpaper.

No "Hot Moms of Rhode Island" contest for me today.

I have to answer the door. It could be important. And I don't want Fitz to do it alone.

Another firm knock. I grab Ethan's clean workout clothes and slip on my strapless bra from last night. His mesh shorts go past my knees, and I have to pull the drawstrings tight to keep them up.

"I'm coming," I call toward the door as I continue my hobbling down the stairs. My breath catches at the perfectly hemmed gray-blue pants leg with a stripe running up the side. It's a cop.

I hurry the few steps to the living room to make sure Fitz is safe. He's lying on his stomach, brownish-blond hair sticking up, as he grabs for another piece of bacon.

I bolt over to the door. "Officer, please, my son is inside. Can we talk—" I step into his personal space before he can answer.

The cop looks about fifteen and a day, and he's suddenly red faced as he stutter-steps backward. He's completely off the porch like a windup toy when I see he's not alone.

A bald man freshly peeled off a Mr. Clean bottle steps forward much more confidently in his ill-fitting suit and decent tie. He wipes at his face in the July morning sun. “I’m Detective Frank Ramos,” he says. “You’re Juliet Worthington-Smith?”

“I am,” I say, the panic only heightened seeing two of them here. The sun is directly in my eyes, and I shade them with my hand for a moment. “What happened? Is it my husband?”

The detective’s palms goes up. “It’s not him. We need you to identify something for us. If you don’t mind.”

I swallow thickly, feeling the sweat rolling down my chest. The smell of smoke from last night floats up from my too-padded bra. “Sure,” I manage to say.

“Do you know this object?” the detective asks as he waves the uniformed cop forward. The kid cop holds up my red leather Celine wallet in a plastic bag marked **EVIDENCE**.

“Oh.” I shake my head, embarrassed tingles spreading all over my body, as if I’ve been caught. “I must have left it . . .”

I try to remember the end of the night. After the event, I was in a Lyft to . . . Hope Street Pizza Kitchen, which is only a block from our house and open late. I had a gin and tonic, I think.

“Your wallet was next to a body,” the detective says. “The body of a person we believe was murdered last night.”

“What?” I close my eyes and brace myself on the porch rail. All the blood has dropped to my feet. “Who?” I whisper. “Who?”

“I’d like to bring you into the station for questioning,” the detective says.

“What?” I say again, and my vision blurs. “You cannot be serious. I mean, who was killed? Do I even know them?”

“Why don’t you get your phone and come with us?” he says softly, almost too nice.

That’s what cops do at first, my dad told me once—act like they care. Then they get what they want, which means you’re either tossed aside or tossed into jail.

“My son . . .” I hear the panic in my voice, but there’s no stopping it. I know what the police can do to a family. How even after they leave, the wake is felt for years, decades, a whole lifetime if you let it. “My son . . . he’s . . . inside alone. Yes. Alone. I can’t leave him.”

“Okay,” Detective Ramos says, but he can’t hide the annoyance. “We need a full statement. When your husband returns, we’ll drive you to the station.”

I blink at the evidence bag in the young officer's hand. My chest aches that someone is dead. But I won't lose sight of what it means to have a cop knock on my door. I need to remember how to act. Remember how to protect myself and my family.

"Now is not a good time," I say. I hate that I have on Ethan's gym clothes. I need my CEO armor of a good suit and tall heels. "You will get a statement from me as soon as possible."

"Now is better." Detective Ramos widens his stance and ambles forward, as if he's about to cuff me.

"You will get a statement," I say firmly as he continues to approach me. "After I speak to my lawyer."

At the mention of counsel a vein throbs on his shiny head. "I'll need that statement very soon, Mrs. Worthington-Smith. Or I come in a cruiser with the lights on."

"No need to threaten me," I say, liking the spike of anger.

His jaw ticks as he steps toward me. "What do you think your neighbors would say, seeing you hauled away in cuffs?"

God, they'd love that. "You'll be hearing from me," I say with a smile we both know I don't mean.

I hurry inside to watch them through the big picture window. My fingers pull on the sheer curtains. I have that feeling of every neighbor watching and judging. Though no one could have heard yet, it's coming. We're living in that tire-screeching moment before the crash.

Detective Ramos's parting comment was meant as a hypothetical threat, wondering what my neighbors would say if I was accused of murder. What he didn't realize was I already know.

Just like her father.

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