

• P R O L O G U E •

December 31st, 2015

I RACE-WALKED DOWN THE HALL as quickly as I could, trying to avoid bumping into partygoers spilling out of their rooms, already celebrating the New Year. My heart was hammering with the realization of what was about to go down, and beads of sweat trailed slowly down my back. *Calm down*, I kept telling myself. *Otherwise, Candy will suspect something's going on.* Fumbling with my key card, I had to swipe it three times before the door finally unlocked.

“Hey girl—are you here?” I asked, trying to keep my tone light as I opened the door. “I just stopped in to get something real quick.” My voice trailed off as the door creaked shut behind me. The atmosphere in the room seemed off somehow, and my body immediately tensed with anxiety. A cold chill ran over me as my ears strained to hear what sounded like muffled sobbing coming from within. I stopped dead in my tracks, but not before a hand jerked out from around the corner, clamping like a vise on my forearm. I let out a small shriek and struggled to yank my arm free, but it was no use. The sobs faded away as I felt the blood drain from my face and begin pounding in my ears. I held my breath, panic replacing any rational thought.

“Don’t you say a word,” he hissed, dragging me further into the room, a gun pressed firmly into my temple.

Too late, I thought, as an F-bomb quietly escaped my lips.