

Bad Patient: A Bad Boy Mafia Hitman Romance
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Cover by Kasmit Covers

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Bad Patient: A Bad Boy Mafia Hitman Romance

Is he too good to be true ... or is she?

Jess:

I've spent the last year paralyzed by grief and guilt.
I need a way out, but there's nothing I can do.
The man in my ICU says he's innocent.
He says he needs me.
He even says he's in love with me.
They say he's a dangerous man. That he's mix up with the mob.
I want to believe him.
But is that only because I want him?

Brody:

I do need her ... more than she knows.
Maybe even more than I know.
I've got a job to do, and I can't tell her everything.
She wouldn't like it if I did.
But she's the only one who can get me out of here.
I have to trust her.
It's against the rules for me to want her.
But it's way too late for that.

Bad Patient is a standalone bad boy romantic suspense novel of 41k words with a HEA.

Chapter 1

Jess

"So, what are we doing this weekend?" I asked as I picked up a pile of charts off the ER reception desk. "A movie or drinks?"

"Let's do drinks at Captain Jack's. I heard the EMTs talking about taking that hot new trainee there tomorrow night."

The incessant ringing of the Lower Keys Medical Center Emergency Room telephone interrupted Madonna yet again in the short amount of time we had been talking and she held up her finger telling me to hold that thought. Things were really starting to pick up with the tourist season under way. Spring break may have been over, but in the Central and Lower Keys the high season was still in full swing. It was bringing in every kind of vacation warrior and filling the ER with wall-to-wall breaks, sprains, and jellyfish stings and the night shift was always the worst. I didn't miss working as a nurse in emergent care this time of year one bit, but it was for more than one reason.

"Lower Keys Medical ER. Let me check. What was the first name? No, he's been moved to the ICU. Hold one minute and I'll transfer you." Madonna put the caller on hold and looked back up at me. "His name's Johnny and I think he's your type, Jess," she said with a sly smile as she passed the caller on to the ICU.

"Oh, come on, Maddy. Don't try to set me up with someone again, ok? I'm not in the mood."

"You're never in the mood, Jess. What you need is a new man to help you get over all the shit you've gone through in the last year. Sad sacking around here and holing up in your house all by yourself isn't helping one bit if you ask me."

Well, I wasn't asking you was on the tip of my tongue but before I could get it out the phone rang again and Madonna was holding up her finger at me again. She turned her back to me as she rifled through a bunch of charts and spoke sternly to someone from another department.

"I'm telling you the chart you're requesting hasn't been entered into the system yet. You're just going to have to wait. Every department is having a hard time with the transition, you're not the only one ...," she said as she waved one of the nurses over to the reception desk. "Can you run these charts up to the lab, no one's here to enter them into the system and I'm slammed," she said as she rolled her eyes at me.

I turned around and leaned up against the reception desk taking in the action

around me for a few more minutes before I had to get back to the ICU. I knew I had been moping around the hospital for entirely too long, but I had to get over things in my own way and Madonna was just going to have to accept that. Too much had happened over the course of the last year and as far as I was concerned the death of my husband alone gave me license to be sad for as long as I wanted to.

"Okay, so you're off at seven tomorrow night, right?"

It took me a second to realize that Madonna was talking to me again. I turned around to see her looking at me expectantly.

"Yeah, yeah, seven. Do you want me to meet you down here?"

"Nah, the nurses lounge on five is fine. How much longer are you gonna be in the ICU? Has anyone talked to you lately? It's been a year since they moved you, right?"

"Yeah, my big anniversary is coming up," I said with mock enthusiasm. It was a year ago this week that I had been removed from my position of primary ER nurse to the ICU and I had just been promoted to head nurse last month. I didn't know if the hospital administration wanted me back in the ER or if I even wanted to come back to the insanity. "Man, I always forget how crazy it is down here," I said, laughing at myself after jumping almost a foot off the ground. The sound of a metal tray of instruments crashing to the floor didn't phase me one bit when I was in the swing of things back then, but now it left me wishing I was home in bed.

"So, you think you're ever going to want to come back? We all really miss you down here."

"I don't know, I'll just have to see how things go," I said as I looked around at the nurses and doctors running from room to room. "I would never be able to forgive myself if ... well, if I made another mistake. I don't know if it's just the fast pace or the fact that it's still the same hospital, but it makes me feel a little shaky just being down here."

"Has the superintendent said anything to you? He said he'd reevaluate your case in about a year, didn't he?"

"Yeah, that's what he said. I haven't heard anything ..."

The phone rang again just as the ambulance sirens blared less than a block away and I figured I should probably get out of there while I had the chance. Just as Madonna picked up the phone the ambulance bay doors slid open and the stretcher that came busting through was met by one of the ER doctors and a couple of nurses.

"What have we got?" a doctor I didn't recognize said as he ran alongside the

gurney. I was starting to get a little overwhelmed by the activity and I fell into a trance, remembering what it was like to be a part of the trauma team but not wanting to be a part of anything that was going on.

"Gunshot wound to the stomach. Patient is shocky and tachycardic, bp is eighty over forty and dropping. Pulse is fifty ..."

It felt like it was just yesterday that I had been a part of this madness, but back then, back before my whole world came crashing down around me, it felt more like excitement. I was starting to feel like I was going into shock like I had a year ago because it was all suddenly starting to feel eerily familiar.

"All right, I'm gonna need a CBC and CMP and get him down to X-ray for a chest and pelvis and CT scan of the belly. Then get him prepped for surgery." Everything that was happening in front of me slowed down and the room that just seconds ago had been filled with loud noises and yelling went silent. I looked down at the man who passed right in front of me on the stretcher with a blood-soaked abdomen and tears filled my eyes. He looked so much like Marcus it took my breath away and the feelings of that day a year ago came rushing back.

He had the exact same dark hair and chiseled features that my husband had, but what really brought it all rushing back was his wound and the intensity in the room. That day a year ago when Marcus had been brought in we were slammed and everyone kept telling me to leave, but we were short staffed and I just couldn't abandon everyone like that. But since then I had wished more than a million times that I had taken their advice. I'd wished as I lay in bed in the dark and stared at the ceiling night after night that I had let someone else take care of the little boy with the bee sting because if I had he would still be alive today.

I couldn't take my eyes off of the man they had just brought in. He was incredibly pale and his entire chest and abdomen were covered in blood, just like Marcus had been. As the doctor and nurses were working furiously to get him into surgery all I could think about was what kind of man he was. I wondered if he was like Marcus, kind and gentle and funny and always able to make me laugh or at least smile. And I wondered if anyone was worried about him or would miss his smile the way I missed my husband's. I hadn't felt any of those feelings that Marcus had brought out in me since the day he died and now all I felt was a sickness that spread from my stomach and up into my throat.

"Possible multiple organ lacerations and pulmonary contusion, as well as spinal cord injury. Do we have his blood type?"

"Not yet, doctor, transport is ready ..."

I could still see the man from where I was standing. They had taken him into

a curtained off room while he was waiting to be transported to X-ray and the curtain hadn't been drawn completely closed. They were packing his wounds with gauze to stop the bleeding, but there was just so much blood. I tried to look away but all I could do was stand there and stare while I used the reception desk to hold myself up. Just then another stretcher rolled through the ambulance bay doors, but it stopped right in front of me. This one had a man in uniform on it. A cop.

"Another gunshot wound to the chest. No pulse or bp."

"We need the crash cart, STAT!"

I was completely caught off guard by everything going on around me and felt like if I didn't get out of there soon I was going to wind up passed out on a stretcher right next to these guys. I watched them try to revive the man on the gurney in front of me, and by the time they gave up and called his death the man with the stomach wound had already been taken off to surgery.

"Do you know where they took that guy?" I turned and asked Madonna after the ER had cleared out.

"The guy that died? Down to the basement, I guess."

"No, the one with the gunshot wound to the stomach? What was his name?"

"Let me see if he's in the system yet. Oh, yeah, here he is. He was just entered in. Man, I wish all of our patients went into the system this fast. I'm getting so tired of this damn switchover to digital. They should have just hired a group of people to put in all the old ..."

"Madonna, I know about all that. What's his name?"

"Oh, sorry, Carmichael. Brody Carmichael. Why? Do you know him or something?"

"No, I mean, I don't think so. I was just curious. Okay, I'm gonna head out."

"Are you okay, Jess? You look a little pale."

"Yeah, I'm fine. I skipped lunch today and I'm a little tired. Plus, you know what it's like for me when I come down here," I said with a little laugh.

"Ok, I'll see you later. Don't forget about Captain Jack's ... and Johnny," she said with a smile.

"Sure thing," I said as I turned and walked toward the elevators. I got off on the fifth floor and made my way back to the ICU but I couldn't shake the feeling that I got from being down there in the ER and from seeing that man. I didn't know why he reminded me so much of Marcus, or why all those feelings from that day had come rushing back.

"You back from lunch, Jess?"

"Yeah, just let me put my stuff in my locker and I'll be back on," I said as I

walked up to the ICU nurses station. "Anything exciting happen while I was gone?"

"Nope. The open heart in 512 asked for dinner but other than that it's been pretty quiet."

"He only gets soft, bland foods for the next day or two. Did you talk to patient services?"

"Yeah, he won't be too happy about that, though."

"Well, he should have thought of that when he was eating all those foot-long baseball stadium hot dogs," I joked as I walked away from the desk. I pushed open the door that said Nurses' Lounge ICU and listened to the noise blaring from the TV that was always left on in that room and for some reason was always turned up to a deafening volume.

"Just across the horizon is the private dock of one of the world's richest men, a multi-millionaire tycoon who happens to be the owner of his own private island. And in our second segment, we'll take a look at resorts on the Florida Keys that only the richest of the rich have ever even heard about ..."

I stood there for about a minute watching people in bathing suits lounging on tropical beaches with crystal clear blue water and I wondered what it was that I was doing here. I loved being a nurse, at least I used to, but I just wasn't feeling it anymore like I had in the beginning. This last year hadn't gone the way I had hoped and even though I was grateful to have this job I still had to make myself get up and come into work every day.

I had wondered many times if maybe I transferred to another hospital if that would be the change I needed to get me out of my funk. I had started filling out applications at hospitals in Florida and other states at least ten times in the last few months, but something always stopped me. Maybe it was the knowledge that it's not the place that changes you, it's something inside of you that has to change. But no matter what I did I felt like I couldn't get back to the person I was before my husband died and I let that little boy die.

"Boy, some people have it real hard," one of the other nurses said as she sat down on the couch with a cup of coffee.

"Yeah, looks real tough to be them," I said as I took one last look at the picture of paradise on TV as I walked back out into the ICU.

Chapter 2

Brody

I felt my eyes open a bit but I couldn't see anything and I had no idea where I was. My eyelids felt like sandpaper and the room was so bright that it sent a searing pain shooting into my head every time I tried to open my eyes the tiniest bit. I didn't think I was dreaming because my dreams were always vivid and filled with feelings of paranoia and doom. My first thought was that I was blind, or that my eyesight had been damaged because everything had a white haze around it. I was somehow lucky enough to retain the feelings of paranoia and doom though because of the voices that were echoing around me.

"Get me an updated CMP. I want to check his electrolytes and liver function."

"Yes doctor, right away."

I saw vague outlines of bodies moving around me but I couldn't make out who or what they were. My throat was dry and when I tried to lick my lips my tongue kept getting stuck. Suddenly a wet sponge was on my lips and I felt liquid trickle into my mouth. It felt so good I almost started to cry and when I tried to open my eyes again to see who was standing over me I got that same searing pain.

"He's waking up doctor."

I turned my head from side to side but I still couldn't seem to get my bearings. The figures around me were starting to appear less fuzzy, but that didn't make identifying them any easier.

She said doctor. I'm in a hospital.

I heard other voices but I couldn't understand anything they were saying. Some of the voices sounded far away but some sounded like they were right next to my bed.

"Get them out of here. I told you guys that you couldn't talk to him until he was fully conscious. Yes, I am aware of that, Officer, but he is my patient and I will decide when he is well enough to have visitors, even official visitors. Now you and your partner need to step out into the hall."

Officer. Oh, fucking hell.

The half of the conversation that I heard kick started my consciousness a little, and when I opened my eyes again things were appearing even clearer. I could make out the doctor's coat on one side of the bed and the outline of a woman's figure on the other. I could feel them poking and prodding me and lifting my eyelids, which made me wince.

"How are you feeling Mr. Carmichael? Are you in any pain?" a woman's voice asked.

I opened my mouth to say something but all that came out was a scratchy groan.

"Would you like some more water?"

Apparently it was a rhetorical question because she immediately put the sponge back on my lips and I felt the cold water trickle into my mouth. The watery sponge pressed into my lips a few more times and I finally started to feel like I could actually speak.

"Where am I?" I asked, still trying to bring the outline of her body into focus.

"You're in the hospital, Mr. Carmichael," the nurse said in a deep, throaty voice.

"Yeah, but where? What hospital? What city?" I asked still not entirely sure where the hell I was or how I got there. I was having a hard time remembering anything.

"You're at the Lower Keys Medical Center, Mr. Carmichael ..."

Oh, fuck, the job at the resort. The poker game. That damn asshole Joe Fontinella.

"You were shot in the stomach and were brought into the ER ..."

Holy shit, that's right. The cop shot me when I heard him behind us. Oh fuck, what about Joe? Is that little cocksucker here too?

"They operated and removed the bullet and repaired the damage that was done to your liver. You're in the ICU now. My name is Jess and I'll be your nurse for the rest of the day and this is Dr. Maxwell. She will be taking care of you while you're with us in the ICU," she said as she put the wet sponge on my lips again.

"Can you rate your pain for me, Mr. Carmichael? One being very little or no pain and ten ..."

"I'm ok. When can I get out of here?" I asked as I tried to move my arms to push myself up in bed. Suddenly every organ in my body felt like it was sinking into my stomach when I realized that one of my hands was cuffed to the side of the bed.

Mother fucker, I'm toast.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Carmichael, you won't be leaving here anytime soon. You're in the ICU. There was significant damage to your liver and you lost a lot of blood. I'm going to need to keep you under observation for at least a week," the doctor said.

"Do you know what happened? Do you know what happened before I got here?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Carmichael, I don't have any of that information. There were some police officers here earlier and they've been pretty insistent on questioning you but I told them to come back later. I don't want anything to exacerbate your condition while you're recovering and I'll decide when they will be allowed back into your room."

"Thanks, doc," I said as I looked at the two women who were standing over me. The doctor wasn't bad although she was a little on the skinny side. But from what I could see the nurse looked like she had a body that wouldn't quit. I was still confused and exhausted as hell, but I definitely had enough energy to admire a hot nurse when I saw one.

"You need to rest now, Mr. Carmichael. We're doing everything we can to take care of your injuries and you need to help us by resting and getting your strength back."

I looked up into the nurse's eyes, suddenly seeing them for the first time since I'd opened mine, and I was startled by their kindness and catlike beauty. She didn't appear to have any makeup on at all but her eyes were framed by the thickest lashes I'd ever seen that seemed to get longer at the far edge of each eye.

"Brody."

"I'm sorry? What was that?" she asked as she walked around to the other side of the bed.

"You can call me Brody. I don't respond to well to Mr. Carmichael."

"Ok, Brody. I'm Jess. My name is written on the board up there in case you forget. Is there any anything I can bring you? Ice chips or another blanket?"

"No, I'm fine. Thank you, Jess," I said as I continued to stare up into her eyes. What I really wanted was for her to stay and talk to me for a while, but I was starting to have a hard time keeping my eyes open. Besides, I figured she probably had a lot of other patients to take care of.

"I'll be back in to check on you later," she said in a soft voice as she set the cup with the sponge on a stick next to my bed. "The water is right here. Just press this button if you need anything at all," she said as she smiled softly and laid the call button next to my hand on the bed, then walked across the room and out the door.

I couldn't keep my eyes open a second longer, and even though all I really wanted was to drift off to sleep all I could think about was how unbelievably screwed I was.

How the fuck am I gonna get out of this mess? I thought as the image of Joe popped into my head again. I knew that if they had any idea at all that Joe Fontinella was involved with me the cops were going to keep a tight grip on my

room and I was pretty sure that they already had one posted outside. I was just going to have to wait to find out if that bastard made it out of the resort alive. I really hoped he was lying in a morgue somewhere, not only because my reputation and job were at stake, but because that guy made me sick.

Chapter 3

Jess

"I really hope that's not what you're planning on wearing tonight," Madonna said as she came busting into the ICU nurses lounge in a skimpy orange dress that clung to every curve of her body.

"What's wrong with this?" I asked, looking down at my jeans and striped t-shirt.

"You've got a pair of mom jeans on and a t-shirt that looks like you bought it out of a fifty-five and over fashion catalog. You're only twenty-six, Jess, and we're going dancing. You're not going to need a sweater," Madonna said as she picked a fuzz ball off the old gray sweater I had just pulled on.

"What's wrong with this sweater? It's my favorite. It's been with me through hard times."

"Yeah, and it looks like it's seen a hell of a lot better times too. You need to put on something sexy Jess. You need to get out there and have fun with a guy. I know you still miss Marcus, but there's a whole world out there that could actually help you move forward."

"Looking good for some shallow player isn't even in the top ten things I think about, Madonna. I want someone who's going to appreciate me for who I am and when the time is right I will meet him. I'm not interested in coming off as anything but who I am. I'm comfortable in this. If some dude doesn't like it that's his problem."

"Yeah yeah, you are woman hear you roar, I get it. But I still think you need to get out there. Show a little skin. Have a little fun. You never know, you might actually have some. And don't forget how long I've known you, lady. I've seen you in some incredibly slinky dresses that melted a few faces when you were out on the dance floor before you even met Marcus. I've seen you working it in a pair of silver strap-ons and a tube top dress that every man in the room was praying would shimmy right down off your tits and past your ass and then drop to the floor. You've got it going on, girl, and you're covering it all up with these baggy-ass clothes that aren't gonna be turning any heads."

"Yeah, you're right," I said as I shut my locker and turned back to Madonna. "I might need some help putting something decent together, though."

"That's what I'm here for, sweetie. I've got your back."

We walked into the flashing lights and thumping base of Captain Jack's and I felt an old familiar rush of excitement that I hadn't allowed myself to feel in a long time. Madonna was right, I used to have a lot of fun when we would go out dancing together and I really missed it. And I had been so down in the dumps for so long that I just didn't realize that I might actually be ready to get out there again.

Every night this last year I had stayed home alone trying to soothe myself over my loss and the loss that I had caused and I didn't even realize that I had gotten myself into a massive rut. And after all this time that rut had become my comfort zone. But that comfort had been turning into a deeper and deeper hole that I wasn't even sure I could dig myself out of anymore. I wanted to find someone that would make me feel as good as Marcus did, but I just wasn't sure how to do it.

"Everybody is over there," Madonna said as she pointed across the club. "That new EMT is here too," she said as she jumped up and down and clapped her hands like a little girl.

"Looks like you're getting some tonight, Jess, whether you like it or not," she said as she did a little twist dance and shook her ass.

"You better put a lid on those moves if you know what's good for you. You're gonna erupt right out of that teeny little dress you've got on," I said as I watched her breasts jiggle dangerously close to the edge of the fabric that was holding them in.

"How do you know he's even gonna be interested in me?" I asked, but she had already stopped listening. She was scanning the room for prospective dance partners and from what I could tell she had the pick of the room. It looked to me like every guy sitting within a ten-foot radius of the club entrance felt the same way. All eyes were on Madonna as we descended the short flight of stairs to the main floor of the club and made our way to the bar. The music in the club was pounding and every pair of eyes we passed looked her up and down.

It's not that I didn't have the assets that Madonna had, but I was a little shorter and a little curvier and a lot less confident so I never seemed to turn heads the way she did. Plus, she really knew how to sashay her ass through a crowd. We grabbed our usual margaritas, on the rocks with no salt. I was shocked to see that I had already sucked half my drink down before we even got to the back of the bar where all our friends were. As we approached the table I realized just how nervous I was. I hadn't seen a lot of these people in months, a couple of them I hadn't seen since the incident, and I realized how afraid I was

of being judged.

"Hey, girl!" one of the nurses said to Madonna. "Sit yourself down!" Madonna made a bunch of noise, squealing and kissing the other girls at the table then walked over to two empty seats, and I followed behind her but without all the fanfare.

"Hey, Jess!" the nurse said with a surprised look on her face. "I'm glad you came out. I haven't seen you in so long."

"Hey, Angie. Yeah, it's been a while. I guess I've been a little bit of a homebody lately. It's really good to see you."

"What's that?" she said as she held her hand up to her ear.

"It's good to see you!" I said a little louder with a smile. I was starting to lose my motivation. Madonna could pull off all this yelling and high-fiving, but it just wasn't me. I kept wishing I was at home wrapped up in an afghan and reading a good book instead of pretending to have a good time around a bunch of people I barely knew anymore. I felt like everyone here, including Madonna, was in a big gang that didn't include me. I wanted everything to be like it used to be. I wanted to yell and laugh and have fun and make jokes, but it felt like that part had been sucked out of me and I couldn't find it no matter how hard I looked.

"Is anyone going to introduce me to the new EMT?" Madonna asked while staring right at two of the men across the table from us.

"Yo, Madonna, this is Johnny," said one of the EMTs that I recognized.

"Thanks, Freddy, I owe you one," she said with a wink as she leaned over the table and dropped her cleavage down right in front of Freddy's eyes. She had been flirting with him for a while now and I was pretty sure by the look on his face that she had just caught his attention for good. Madonna reached out and shook Johnny's hand while she sat down in her chair.

"Nice to meet you, Madonna. I see you at the ER reception desk a lot."

"That's me, ER reception. Feels like I'm there twenty-four hours a day every day, that's for sure. And this is my friend Jess."

"It's very nice to meet you, Jess," he said as he reached his hand out to me with a big grin on his face. He was incredibly cute and had those giant arms like tree trunks that usually drove me crazy, but I just couldn't get excited about anything tonight.

"It's nice to meet you too, Johnny," I said a little too softly for Madonna's taste. She put her arm around me and pushed me forward so my breasts were pressed together and resting right on top of the table.

"She used to be primary trauma nurse in the ER up until about a year ago. Now she's head nurse in the ICU.

"I hope you save a dance for me tonight," he said, his gaze wandering down to the cleavage that was being presented to him by the little black halter dress Madonna had picked out for me. I wasn't even sure if I was going to fit into any of my old dresses. I had been sitting at home on the couch on my days and nights off for so long that I was sure I had gained at least twenty pounds. But the dress fit, and it and my old silver strap-on sandals made me feel like I was making an offer to Johnny that I knew my brain wasn't willing to make good on.

"Oh, I don't know about that. It's been a long time since I've been out on the dance floor." I wanted to flirt with Johnny. I wanted to cut loose and have fun with everyone and forget about everything that had happened in the last year, but I just couldn't. The odd thing was, even with this cute guy with massive arms sitting in front of me, my mind kept wandering to the man that I had watched come into the ER the other day. The man who was now handcuffed to the bed in my ICU.

"You gotta be kidding. With a body like that? You should be dancing up on the tables where everyone can see you."

"Yeah, Jess. Get up and shake that booty," Madonna said as she did a little seat dance in her chair.

I started laughing and could feel my face get hot as I sucked down the rest of my margarita in one swallow.

"I'm gonna need another one of these before I get out there," I said as I raised my glass up. I was hoping some alcohol would help get my spirits up, or at least help me to stop thinking about things I that I really shouldn't be thinking about. Like the guy that reminded me so much of Marcus.

"What're you drinking, Jess? I'll go up to the bar and get you and Madonna another round," Johnny said as he stood up.

After a couple more drinks I was out on the floor with Johnny and the longer we danced the closer our bodies got. It wasn't long at all before his arms were wrapped around me and his hot breath was on my neck and I was starting to feel like I could get used to something like this. His big arms felt so good around my waist, his hard chest and shoulders made me feel all safe and cozy as I leaned up against him, and on top of all that I could feel his cock getting hard as it pressed into me.

"You're so beautiful, Jess," Johnny said as he pushed his hand up into my hair. "Your body is so amazing. It's taking everything I've got to keep from moving my hands down a little lower," he said as he started to kiss his way up

my neck.

It all felt so amazing and sounded so good, but suddenly I felt like I had to get out of there. I pushed Johnny back and staggered a bit on the heels I hadn't worn in over a year. Johnny grabbed me so I wouldn't fall over then let go of my arms when he saw that I was ok.

"What's the matter, Jess. Was I going too fast? I'm sorry, I didn't mean to ..."

"No, Johnny, I'm sorry. You weren't at all. I'm flattered, but I ... I have to go. I need to get out of here."

"Well, let me take you home. I mean, I'll *just* take you home. Let me drive you home," he said with a worried look on his face. I knew I was being dramatic, but I just didn't want to be there anymore. I felt like I was going to burst into tears at any second and I didn't want to do it surrounded by a bunch of people who I used to consider my friends but who hadn't made any effort to talk to me in the entire year since I had left the ER.

"No, really, I'm fine, Johnny. I'll take a rain check on the dancing. It was really nice," I said as I walked off to find Madonna.

"Really? You're leaving? Are you ok?"

"Yeah, I just need to be alone right now. Everything was just harder than I thought it would be. I just ... I can't stop thinking about Marcus and everything that happened."

"Oh, honey, I'm so sorry that I pushed you into this. I thought you were feeling better. Did something happen?" she asked as she put her arms around me.

"No, it's not your fault. I just ... I've just had Marcus on my mind lately and I think this just intensified everything. I'm just gonna head home."

"You want me to come with you?"

"No, I'll get a cab. I'm fine, Maddy, really. I'll talk to you tomorrow," I said as I gave her a hug. I walked out of the club and into the night air wishing I could get that guy in the ICU out of my head. I felt like everything I had said to Madonna just now was a lie. It wasn't Marcus I couldn't stop thinking about, it was Brody Carmichael.

Chapter 4

Brody

"We are going to need your full cooperation on this Carmichael. You're in a hell of a lot of trouble. A cop was shot and it's all on you if you don't tell us exactly what was going on at the Shady Palms. We have an eyewitness who identified known mobster Joe Fontinella as leaving the area in a black 2015 Lexus two-door convertible with plates that are registered under the name Sasha DiFazio. That's Vinny DiFazio's daughter. And in case this piece of information has slipped past your radar, Vinny DiFazio is not only the owner of that resort hotel, but he's also the head of the DiFazio family. You do know who the DiFazio family is, don't you?"

"You're gonna have to enlighten me, detective," I said to the stalky schmuck that looked like he was taking a bath in his own sweat. "I don't know any DiFazio's. I'm kinda new to the area."

"You're gonna have to do better than that. You were found at the scene of a crime that involved a high-stakes poker game at a mob-owned resort. You didn't just wake up one day and decide to take a stroll into the office where the safe was. Look, DiFazio is claiming his daughter was kidnapped and neither Fontinella nor the daughter have been seen or heard from since the robbery. If you can tell us where they are your charge will be reduced from first-degree murder to second-degree or maybe even manslaughter. We want to work with you, Carmichael, are you willing to cooperate?"

I was still groggy from the painkillers and a bullet ripping through my gut, but there was no way I was going to play that game with these assholes. I knew they weren't going to let me off that easy, and there was no way in hell I was going to spend even one night in prison.

"I'm telling you. I didn't even know the guy's name."

The two cops looked at each other like they had thought their strategy was working for them but just realized that they were going to have to up their game.

"We find that really hard to believe, Carmichael," the other cop said. I wondered if he was going to play the good cop or the bad cop, but it didn't really matter, all cops were bad as far as I was concerned. "We're not buying any of this bullshit, Carmichael. You're telling us that you traveled to a resort on a private island in The Keys with this man, Joe Fontinella, went directly to the office where the safe was kept on a night with a fifty-million-dollar poker game in progress, and you didn't even know the guy's name."

"I'm telling you, I met the guy in a bar in Key West. We were talking about being down on our luck and he told me that he had this big idea. He said he knew how to make a whole lot of money in one night and that he just needed a hand for a couple hours. He said it was a sure thing, that I would walk away with a couple hundred thousand dollars and that I could start a new life. He told me that there was no way we would get caught because it was his girlfriend's dad's hotel and he knew the combination to the safe. I'm telling you, that's all I know."

"Look, Carmichael, you are in some deep shit. You're not getting out of here, so why don't you just cooperate," the sweaty cop said, sounding like he was taking the part as the good cop.

"I told you, I didn't know the guy ..."

"We've had enough of this bullshit about you not knowing who Joe Fontinella or Vinny DiFazio are! You need to start talking and it'd better be now!" the other cop yelled as he kicked the foot of the bed a couple feet across the room.

Just then the door flew open and that incredibly sexy nurse and the lady doctor walked in.

"I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you gentleman to leave, now. This conversation is beyond inappropriate for my patient. I've already explained to you that you will have plenty of time to interrogate him after he has recovered ..."

"Doctor, this man is dangerous and you are obstructing our work here ..."

"I'm not obstructing anything, detectives. This man is handcuffed to the bed. He's not going anywhere. He cannot even sit up yet. If anything you are obstructing my ability to properly care for my patient. Now, please go out into the hall. If you have anything else to say we can discuss it out there."

"You're making a big mistake doctor. We're just trying to protect you and everyone else in this hospital."

"I'm willing to take that risk, detective. This is my patient and my rules. You'll have him in your custody when he is ready to be transported, but for now, I am going to have to insist that you both step outside."

That woman was not someone to be messed with and I was suddenly incredibly glad she was my doctor and that she took her job so seriously. I looked over at the nurse and her eyes were already on me like she had been looking at me for a while. She suddenly snapped out of her trance and looked at the doctor.

"Jess, I want you to stay in here and check Mr. Carmichael's vitals. I'll be

back in a few minutes," she said as she narrowed her eyes at the detectives, waiting for them to walk through the door ahead of her.

"Gentlemen, please," she said as she gestured out into the hall.

"We'll be back, Carmichael," the sweaty one said as they walked to the door. I didn't know if they actually thought that sounded like a threat, but it almost made me laugh.

"How are you feeling?" the sexy nurse said as she wrapped a blood pressure cuff around my arm. "You're going to feel a little bit of pressure," she said as she pushed the button and started the machine.

"Not bad, considering," I said as I watched her enter something into a tablet. "So, am I right in assuming that there's a guard outside the door?" I asked when she ripped the cuff off my arm and stuck it back on the wall.

"Yep, there's one out there twenty-four hours a day. You're just lucky he's not sitting in here with you," she said with a faint smile.

She had a really nice smile, a kind smile. That first day when I open my eyes and asked her where I was, all I really could see was her incredible eyes. Now that I was a little more aware of my surroundings, I could see that she had a lot more going for her than just that. She had all kinds of curves that were visible no matter what angle you looked at her from.

"Your name's Jess, right?" I asked, studying her face as she concentrated on putting info into the tablet in her hand. "You look way too sexy to be a nurse," I said as I watched her eyes look up at me while her head stayed pointed down at the tablet in her hands. A look of amusement spread across her face and her eyes flared a little, then she looked back down and continued to type something.

"Are you in any pain today, Mr. Carmichael?" she asked, clearly ignoring my comment, but I could tell she wasn't offended. In fact, she seemed almost flattered. At least that's what I was hoping.

"It's Brody," I said, watching her reaction.

"Are you in any pain, Brody," she asked again, looking up at me with those gorgeous eyes. Her lashes almost looked too heavy for her, the way her eyelids swept up in that lazy way. It was so incredibly sexy it almost made me hard just looking at the way her damned eyelids moved.

"How long have you been a nurse?"

"Long enough," she said, walking over to a cabinet and pulling out a few things before she returned to the side of the bed.

"So this is a life choice? You really like helping people?"

"Well, I'm not in it for the money, if that's what you're asking. Yes, I do like helping people. Open your mouth please," she said as she looked down at me

with a thermometer in her hand.

"You're still using those old fashion things? I thought they had infrared models nowadays."

"You've been watching too much TV," she said as a warm laugh spilled out of her throat. "Besides, this is a county-funded hospital. We're lucky that we're moving into the digital age with our charts. Everything we have works the way we need it to even though it isn't exactly top of the line equipment. Open..."

I opened my mouth and she slipped the thermometer under my tongue, then I watched her as she put more data into her tablet.

"That looks pretty fancy," I said through clenched lips.

"Yes, well I didn't say we were still in the dark ages." And there were those sexy, lazy lids again. I could watch those things go up and down for hours. The thermometer beeped and she pulled it out of my mouth then added more info into the tablet.

"I don't see a ring, Jess. Do they not allow you to wear jewelry while you're at work?" I asked, clearly not interested in the hospital's policies. She looked up at me with a kind but stern look.

"I think it would be best for you to keep your mind on your recovery, Brody. That's the only thing in this room that should concern you right now."

"I'm sorry, I wasn't trying to be ... I guess having a beautiful woman taking care of you really does a number on a guy," I said with a weak smile. "I hope I didn't offend you."

"Not at all. Is there anything I can get you?"

"Do you happen to know where my phone is? I had one on me when I ... the last I remember."

"I'm sorry, they won't allow us to bring in any personal items in for you. I can get you a paper, though, and there's a TV. One hundred and fifty channels of pure unadulterated crap at your fingertips," she said with a much bigger smile than before. I was really starting to like her. I wanted to get to know her but I didn't want to come off like a creep and send her running for the hills. I had to figure out how to play this.

"Yeah, the paper would be great. And if you have any free time a chat would be nice to," I said with a smile.

"I'll get you the newspaper. Why don't you close your eyes and try to get some rest," she said as she turned and headed out the door.

I stared at the ceiling trying to figure out what I was going to do next. I was furious with myself for getting into this situation, but I knew that wasn't going to get me out of there. I had to get the hell out of that hospital.

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