

Double Cross: Chapter 3

Rico sat low in the driver's seat of his black Charger. The engine was off, the only light came from the dull orange tip of his vape every time he pulled. The night air was cool against the window. He liked it quiet like this. No music. Just the soft click of the vape and the occasional car passing on the wet street.

Up the block, the diner's window glowed. Through the big front window, he could see her clear as day. Riley. Sitting in a booth across from some old white guy. Gray hair, cheap jacket, he looked tired as hell. She was leaning forward a little, talking with her hands. Rico knew she was good with those hands. Even from here, he could make out the way that tight black shirt stretched across her chest. The same shirt she'd been wearing when he pulled her into the back office a couple nights ago.

He took another long hit and held the smoke in his lungs. The flavor was some mint shit that burned a little on the way down. He'd been watching them for almost twenty minutes already. At first he figured it was nothing. Girls in their world always had some old man on the side. Father figure, sugar daddy, whatever. Somebody they ran to when things got too real. He'd seen it a hundred times. But this guy sat wrong in his gut from the jump.

Riley didn't look relaxed. Not the way a girl looks when she's getting rescued or getting her bills paid. She looked focused. Like she was giving a report. The old man kept nodding, writing something down on a napkin or a little notebook, he couldn't tell from this angle. Every now and then, she glanced toward the window, and Rico sank lower, even though there was no way she could see him from this far back.

He remembered the weight of her head in his hand. The way her throat opened up when he pushed past that last resistance. How she looked up at him with those blue eyes while his cock was buried in her mouth. She hadn't been acting then. Not completely. There was real hunger in it, even if she'd tried to hide it after.

The door of the diner opened, and she stepped out. No hug. No kiss on the cheek. Not even a friendly hand on the arm. Just a short nod, and she was walking away. Heading the opposite direction from his car, shoulders straight, that perfect ass moving under those short shorts like she knew every man on the street was watching. He tracked her until she cut down a side street and disappeared.

He Didn't follow. Not yet. The old man was still inside.

Rico stayed put and kept hitting the vape. The cloud filled the car and drifted out the cracked window. His phone buzzed once on the passenger seat, but he ignored it. This felt more important. Something about the way she left. It felt clean, professional almost. Not the soft goodbye of a girl who just got her daddy to fix her problems.

Ten minutes later, the old man stood up, dropped some bills on the table, and walked out. He turned the other way, up the street toward a row of parked cars. Rico waited until the guy was almost out of sight before he turned the ignition. The Charger came to life with a low rumble. He kept the headlights off for the first half block, rolling quietly on the wet pavement.

The old man climbed into a beat-up gray sedan that looked like it had seen better days. Rico stayed three cars back as they pulled into traffic. The city was mostly dead this late, but there was still

enough movement that he didn't stand out. He followed through a couple of red lights, past closed shops and the occasional late-night bus. His mind kept circling back to Riley. The way she had ground on him in the office. How wet those little black panties were when he finally got his fingers under them.

They crossed into a quieter part of the city. Older buildings. More streetlights out. The sedan made a left and then another. Rico hung back even further. The best way to tail somebody was to drive like you weren't in a hurry to get anywhere. So he did. Slow and steady.

When the gray sedan finally turned into a parking lot, Rico kept driving past. He saw the sign. Precinct. Big blue letters. A police station.

He pulled to the curb a block away and killed the engine again. His heart rate picked up a little. Not panic. Just that cold focus he got when pieces started clicking. The old man got out, locked the car, and walked straight toward the side entrance. Rico watched him disappear inside.

He wrote the plate number down on the back of a receipt he found in the cupholder. Messy handwriting but clear enough. Then he texted one of his guys who had a contact in records.

R: Need a plate run. Old gray sedan. Number's 847-something. Send it when you got it.

While he waited, he sat there staring at the station doors. Vape hit after vape hit. The mint was starting to taste like nothing. His mind was already turning over the possibilities. Riley could be working for somebody. Or she could be something worse. A snitch. A plant. The thought made his cock twitch even while it pissed him off. He'd had her mouth around him while he was on the phone with Elias. She'd swallowed every drop and then looked at him like she wanted more. If she was a cop, that made the whole thing dirtier somehow. Better.

Twenty minutes passed. Maybe thirty. A couple of uniformed officers came and went. Then the side door opened again, and the old man walked out. This time Rico saw it clearly. A badge clipped to his belt. Gun on the other hip. He moved like a man who'd been doing this a long time. Tired but still sharp.

Rico's phone buzzed.

Plate comes back to James Keller. 54. Address on the west side. Former detective now listed as a consultant or some shit. Still has active credentials.

He read the message twice. Then a third time. James Keller. Not some random old man, police. Connected enough to still walk in and out of a station at early in the morning without anybody batting an eye.

Rico started the car and pulled away before the old man even reached his sedan. He didn't need to follow anymore. He had everything he needed.

Driving back toward the club district, he kept replaying every second he'd spent with Riley. The way she hesitated before taking him in her mouth. The little moan she tried to hold back when he gripped her hair. How she kept looking at the door like somebody might walk in. At the time, he thought she was just nervous about getting caught by the other girls. Now it looked different. Everything looked different.

He parked a few blocks from Sidecar and sat there a while longer. The city was starting to lighten at the edges. Not dawn yet, but close. His cock was half hard against his thigh just from thinking about her. About the possibility. If she was a cop, then every time she got on her knees for him was

something she wasn't supposed to do. Something that could ruin her if the wrong people found out.

That made him smile in the dark.

He pulled out his phone again and typed a short message to one of the guys who handled background work.

R: New waitress. Riley. Blonde. Blue eyes. Find out everything. Address. People she talks to. Where she goes when she's not at the club. Keep it quiet.

He hit send and leaned back against the headrest. The vape was almost empty. He took one last hit anyway and held the smoke until it burned.

She'd felt different from the start. Too sharp. Too good at playing the game. Now he knew why it sat wrong in his gut. The question wasn't whether she was a snitch anymore. The question was how deep he wanted to dig before he decided what to do with her.

And how many more times he could get that pretty mouth on his cock before the whole thing blew up.

Rico started the engine and rolled toward home. The city was still quiet, but his mind raced.

Riley stood in front of the cracked mirror in the bathroom of the undercover apartment, brushing out her shoulder-length blonde hair for the third time. The place still smelled like old carpet and someone else's cigarette smoke no matter how many times she opened the windows and cleaned the place. She hated it. The water pressure was shit, the fridge made a constant low hum that kept her up some nights, and the hallway floor dipped in the middle like the whole building was slowly giving up. But it was part of the cover. A single waitress living on tips in a building that matched the story they built for her.

She had a mission. Her own mission. She needed to find out what happened to her sister Nancy. That was the only thing that made the nights at Sidecar and everything that came with them bearable.

She was in a pair of soft gray shorts and an old tank top, nothing close to the tight black booty shorts and plunging shirt she wore at the club. Her shift started in a little over an hour. She had time. Or she thought she did.

A knock at the door came hard and sudden.

Her heart slammed against her ribs so hard she felt it in her throat. She moved without thinking, bare feet silent on the thin carpet until she reached the loose floorboard near the bed. The board always creaked worse than the rest. She hated that sound. It made the whole place feel even cheaper. She pried it up, grabbed the compact pistol from the hollow space underneath, and checked the chamber by feel. Loaded. Safety off. She kept the gun low against her thigh as she crossed the living room. Every step made the floor squeal.

She glanced through the peephole first. Rico Garcia stood on the other side of the door.

Her stomach dropped. He was right there, close enough that she could see the dark stubble along his jaw and the way his eyes scanned the hallway.

He knew where she lived. The realization hit her like cold water. Her cover address was in the employee file at Sidecar. Of course he could find it. That was the point of the identity they built. Still, seeing him here made her skin prickle. Flashbacks of the back office slammed into her without warning. The tequila on his breath. The thick press of his cock against her thong. The way he had guided her head down while he talked to Elias on the phone. The hot rush of his cum filling her mouth while she tried not to choke. She had swallowed it. All of it. And Toad had walked in at the end and seen everything.

Her fingers tightened on the pistol. She held it up, barrel pointed at the door right about where his head would be. He should not be here. She swallowed hard, resting her finger on the trigger.

From the other side of the door, his voice came low. "Riley. It's Rico. From work. I hope I'm not interrupting anything."

She stayed quiet for a second longer. Her pulse was still racing. She forced a slow breath out through her nose, then another. He could find out where she lived from work. This was her cover after all. This is why they'd set up this cover identity. She took her finger off the trigger and stepped back. She slid the gun back into its hiding place under the floorboard. The board settled with that same ugly creak.

She stood, smoothed her tank top, and opened the door only partway.

Rico's eyes ran over her the second the gap appeared. Slow and deliberate. From her bare legs up to the thin fabric of the tank top that did nothing to hide the shape of her breasts. She felt the shiver roll down her spine and hated that it wasn't only fear. He was enjoying undressing her with his eyes. A slight smirk tugged at the corner of his mouth, like there was some private joke she wasn't in on.

She needed to take charge of the situation before it slipped further. That was her training kicking in, "Rico...Mr. Garcia. I was just getting changed for work. I'm not late, am I?"

His smirk widened. He looked amused more than anything. "Mr. Garcia... that's funny, Riley. I think we're past that, don't you?"

Those piercing dark eyes stayed locked on hers. Against her better judgment, a smile tugged at the corner of her own lips. She could feel the heat rising in her face and hated it.

"Maybe you're right. Well, anyway, what can I do for you? I'm not late. Yet."

She kept the door only half open, body angled to block any view of the apartment behind her. She didn't want him seeing the bare walls, the single bed, or the way the place screamed temporary.

She also did not want to let him step inside. Not after what happened last time. Men like Rico never stopped once they got a taste of something. They pushed for more. Thoughts of Luke flashed through her mind. The way he looked at her that last morning in their real home. The secret marriage they kept hidden from everyone at the precinct.

The guilt sat heavy in her chest, mixed with the memory of what she had already done. She had betrayed him twice now. Once with Rico. Once with Toad in that same dirty office. She rationalized it the same way she always did. It was the job. It was the only way to stay close enough to find Nancy's killer. Elias Monroe was still out there. That had to matter more than the way her body had reacted both times. She was close to getting justice for her sister.

Rico leaned a shoulder against the doorframe like he had all the time in the world. “Don’t worry about your shift tonight. I’m taking care of it. I need a hand with some errands. I was hoping you’d be available?”

She blinked. That was not what she expected. Her mind spun through the possibilities. Going somewhere with him away from Sidecar could be dangerous. He could take her anywhere. Or it could open up new parts of the operation she hadn’t seen yet. It was risky, but there was a chance of real intel. Risk won out, as it always did when the case was involved. “How should I dress?”

His eyes moved over her again, slower this time. She felt the weight of that look. “You got a dress?”

“I do.” The words came out before she could second-guess them. “I’ll get changed.”

She closed the door before he could say anything else and locked it. The deadbolt slid home with a solid click that did nothing to slow her heart.

She leaned her back against the wood for a second and closed her eyes. The apartment felt even smaller now. The floor creaked under her feet as she walked to the closet. Most of the clothes hanging there were for the club. Shorts. Tight tops. One black dress she had bought on a rare day off.

She pulled it out. It was simple but fitted, the kind that hugged her waist and showed the curve of her hips and the full shape of her breasts without trying too hard. Sexier than an undercover cop should have in a place like this.

She stripped out of the tank top and shorts, stood there naked for a moment in the dim light, and felt the cool air on her skin. She couldn’t shake the memory of both men. The way Toad’s thick tongue had moved over her nipples. The way Rico’s cock had stretched her mouth. She pushed the thoughts down and stepped into the dress. She fixed her hair quickly in the mirror, slipped on a pair of low heels, and checked that the gun was secure under the floorboard one more time.

When she opened the door again, Rico was still there. His eyes moved over her from head to toe without any attempt to hide it. The look was hungry. She felt her nipples tighten under the dress and hated that her body answered him so fast.

He did not say anything at first. Just nodded once like she had passed some quiet test, then turned and started down the hallway. She locked the apartment behind her and followed.

The elevator at the end of the hall took forever to arrive. They stood in silence while it climbed. She caught a faint trace of his cologne and something faintly minty. When the doors opened, he stepped in first and held the door with one hand. She joined him. The space felt too small. His shoulder almost brushed hers. She kept her eyes on the floor numbers as they dropped.

Outside the building, the night air was cooler. His black Charger sat at the curb under a streetlight that flickered every few seconds. He walked ahead of her, opened the passenger door, and waited. She hesitated only a second before sliding into the seat.

He closed the door, walked around, and got in behind the wheel. The engine turned over with a low rumble that vibrated through the seat.

Riley stared straight ahead as he pulled away from the curb. The city lights streaked past the window. She kept her breathing steady and waited to see where he was taking her.

Riley sat in the passenger seat of the Charger with her hands folded in her lap, the black dress riding up a little on her thighs every time the car took a corner. The leather under her was soft.. Rico drove with one hand on the wheel, the other resting easy on the shift. He talked while he drove, pointing out blocks and corners like he was giving a private tour.

“This city’s got a heartbeat most people never hear,” he said. The window was cracked and the night air carried the smell of exhaust. “People think it’s all concrete and noise. They’re wrong. You grow up here, you learn the rhythm. The way the lights change after midnight. The way certain corners stay busy even when everything else goes quiet.”

Riley nodded and watched the streets slide by. She kept her voice light. “You make it sound almost romantic.”

He glanced over at her, that same half-smile from earlier. “Maybe it is. For some of us.”

She played along the way she always did when the job required it. Asked small questions. Which neighborhoods he liked best. Where he used to hang out as a kid. Anything that might open a door to something useful. Her mind stayed busy underneath the surface talk. Looking at the passing buildings, looking for anything suspicious. If he stopped the car, where was the closest place to find an exit?

She tried to map what kind of man she was really sitting next to. Every few blocks she caught herself thinking about Luke. The way his hands felt when he pulled her close in their real bed. Guilt gnawed at her. She had already crossed lines with this man. And with Toad. Rico’s thick cock stretching her mouth while he talked to Elias. Toad’s greasy hands and the way she had ground herself against his leg until she came. She pushed the images down and focused on the road.

Rico kept talking. About the people who kept the city running when the suits went home. The ones who knew every alley and every shortcut. He spoke about them with something close to affection. Riley watched his profile in the dash light. The hard lines of his face softened a little when he talked about the streets. She filed that away. Men like him usually only talked about power or money. This felt different. Or at least he wanted it to.

They turned down a darker industrial stretch. Warehouses lined both sides of the road, most of them dark. An uneasy feeling grew in her gut. Late at night, this place would be deserted. It’d be a great place to off someone. Like an undercover cop. Rico pulled into an open lot in front of a warehouse and put the car in park.

“Be right back,” he said. “Stay in the car.”

He got out and walked toward a large truck parked near the loading dock. A man stood in front of it. Broad shoulders. A heavy jacket, even in the mild night. He looked like he had never smiled once in his life. They talked close. Hands moved. Something passed between them that Riley could not see clearly from the windshield.

Her heart picked up. She kept her body still and slowly reached into the small clutch she had brought, pulling out her phone. She angled it low against the door so the screen would not light up the cabin. One quick photo of the two men and the truck. Then another. She opened the hidden folder she kept on the phone, dropped the pictures in, and deleted them from the regular camera roll. The whole thing took less than twenty seconds. She slipped the phone away and sat back as if nothing had happened.

Rico walked back to the car and dropped into the driver’s seat. The door shut with a solid thunk.

“Sorry about that,” he said. “Just some business that couldn’t wait.”

The truck’s engine rumbled to life. Headlights came on, and it rolled out of the lot and onto the street. Rico put the Charger in gear and followed at a distance. Riley kept her eyes on the road ahead, but her mind was racing. Business. At this hour.

With a man who looked like he collected debts for a living. She wondered what was in the back of that truck. Guns. Drugs. Something that could end the whole operation if she could get eyes on it tonight.

They drove deeper into a seedy stretch of the city. Broken streetlights. Closed storefronts with metal gates. A few people standing in doorways watching the cars go by. The truck turned down a narrow alley and stopped near a nondescript metal door. No sign. No windows. Just the door and a single bare bulb above it.

Rico parked a short distance behind and killed the engine.

“I got something to take care of,” he said. “You want to come with or wait here?”

Riley felt her pulse in her throat. This could be it. Whatever was behind that door might be the kind of thing that took Elias down. Or it could be the kind of thing that got her killed if she saw too much. She kept her face calm.

“Sure,” she said, nonchalantly. “I’ll come.”

They both got out. The alley smelled like garbage and piss. The truck driver climbed down and gave Riley a long, hard look. She saw the outline of a gun under his jacket when he moved. Her training kicked in. Mentally counting the distance between them, whether it was better to get in close and disarm or retreat. What was close by she could duck behind? How far to the alley exit? She stayed half a step behind Rico as they walked toward the back of the truck.

Her heart was thumping hard enough that she was sure he could hear it. Her thoughts raced. What if this was the shipment? What if she walked into a room full of crates with red circles and enough evidence to end everything tonight? She could almost taste the possibility. Elias doing the per walk in cuffs. Nancy’s case finally closed. Luke waiting for her when it was over. The fantasy lasted only a second before the darker possibilities crowded in.

One wrong look. One wrong question. And she would never leave this alley.

Rico knocked on the metal door. Three solid raps. The driver moved to the rear of the truck and unlocked the roll door. It rattled up. Riley tensed, ready for anything.

The alley door opened.

An old woman stood there in a worn apron, gray hair pulled back, a tired smile on her face. She saw Rico and her whole face lit up.

“Rico, mijo,” she said.

He stepped forward and wrapped her in a hug that looked real. She kissed his cheek and patted his shoulder like she had done it a thousand times before. The driver started pulling crates and boxes out of the truck. Not guns. Not product. Canned goods. Bags of rice. Fresh produce still in the shipping boxes. Loaves of bread.

They carried everything through the open door into a small kitchen that smelled like onions and garlic after long hours of cooking.

Riley stood there for a second longer than she meant to, trying to adjust. This was not what she had prepared for. The space beyond the door was clean but crowded. A few folding tables. A whiteboard with a schedule written in Spanish and English. Posters about after-school programs and free meals. It was some kind of center for underprivileged youth. Kids from the neighborhood. The kind of place that tried to keep them off the corners Rico claimed to love.

Rico noticed her standing still and waved her closer.

“Come on,” he said. “Give us a hand if you want.”

She stepped inside and helped move a couple of the lighter boxes. The old woman thanked her with a soft smile and a quick look that took in the black dress and the way Rico watched her. Riley kept her head down and worked. When the last of the food was stacked in the kitchen, Rico spoke quietly to the old woman for a minute, then turned back to Riley.

“I grew up in this place,” he said. His voice had lost some of the edge it carried at the club. “My mom worked nights. This lady and a few others kept me fed and out of trouble when they could. I try to give back when I can. Food. Supplies. Whatever they need.”

Riley looked at him. Really looked. The same man who had held her head down while he came in her mouth. The same man who ran the floor at Sidecar for Elias Monroe. Standing in a tiny kitchen talking about feeding kids. She hadn't expected this side of him. It did not erase anything. It just made the picture more complicated. Men like him were not supposed to have soft spots. Or maybe they all did and just hid them better.

They finished up. The old woman hugged Rico again and pressed a foil-wrapped package into his hands. Something still warm. He thanked her and led Riley back out to the car. The driver closed up the truck and drove off without another word. The alley felt quieter now. Less dangerous. Or maybe that was just the leftover adrenaline fading.

They got back in the Charger. Rico set the foil package on the back seat and started the engine.

“Sorry about the detour,” he said. He glanced over at her. “Not exactly the night I had planned. You hungry? You like Italian?”

Riley settled into the seat again. The dress still felt tight across her chest. Her pulse had slowed but not all the way. She thought about the pictures on her phone. The food that had nothing to do with the shipment she had expected.

“Yeah,” she said, trying to sort her thoughts out. “I like Italian.”

He pulled out of the alley and turned toward the brighter streets. Riley watched the city move past the window and kept her hands still in her lap. The night was not over. She chastised herself for getting her hopes up and settled back into her training. Whatever came next, she would stay ready.

Riley watched the city lights blur past the window as Rico drove. The foil package from the old woman sat on the back seat. She could smell the garlic through the paper. Her mind kept circling the night's events. She stayed quiet and let him talk.

He pulled up in front of a place she recognized immediately. It was the Italian restaurant she and Luke had tried to book for their anniversary last year. Three different times they called. Always full. Always a waiting list. Her stomach tightened at the memory of Luke's face when the hostess had politely shut them down again.

The maitre d' saw Rico, and his whole posture changed. Warm smile. Firm handshake. "Mr. Garcia, good to see you. Your usual table is ready."

The VIP treatment this criminal was getting irked her. While law-abiding citizens like her and Luke couldn't get in, this place opened its doors to a known drug dealer and whatever else he did that the police couldn't prove. Yet.

They were led past the main dining room into a private corner with low candlelight and heavy curtains that muted the rest of the restaurant. Rico pulled her chair out. The leather was soft under her bare legs. He told her to order whatever she wanted.

She ordered carefully at first, then stopped caring and asked for the things she and Luke had only ever looked at on the menu. The owner himself came out halfway through the first course. He was an older man with flour still on his sleeves. He shook Rico's hand hard and looked at Riley with open appreciation.

"Your girlfriend is beautiful," he said. "Tonight your money is no good here. You know that."

Rico laughed and waved it off. Riley felt the word girlfriend land and twist in her gut. She smiled anyway and kept eating. The food was better than anything she had ever tasted. Rich sauces. Perfect pasta. Meat that fell apart under the fork. She caught herself wishing Luke was sitting across from her instead. That he could taste this. That they could have had this night without the lies, the danger, and the other men who had already experienced part of her.

They left full and a little warm from the wine. Rico drove them to a different club, not Sidecar. It had quieter music and dim lights. He led her onto the dance floor without asking. The dress moved against her skin with every turn. He kept her close. Closer than dancing required.

She felt the hard line of him against her hip when the song slowed. Her body answered before her mind could stop it. The same heat that had betrayed her with Toad and with him already. She drank whatever he handed her and kept moving, trying to assuage the guilt and arousal she'd felt.

When they finally left, the night air felt colder. Rico's phone rang as he pulled away from the curb. He answered with a short "Yeah." His whole face changed while he listened. The easy smile disappeared. He said almost nothing, just listened, then ended the call.

"I need to stop at my place for a few minutes," he said. Not a question. "Something came up."

Riley nodded. Her pulse picked up again. This was the kind of opening the job lived for.

They pulled up in front of a tall building with glass and stone. When they got out, a doorman held the door for them. The lobby smelled like money. The elevator was quiet as they rode up. It opened onto a private hallway and then the penthouse itself.

Riley stopped just inside the door. Floor-to-ceiling windows looked out over the whole city. Soft lighting. Leather furniture and dark wood built-ins. The kind of place that made her undercover apartment look like a joke. What had he thought when he'd come to pick her up in that dump? Rico tossed his keys on a side table and pointed toward the open living area. "Make yourself comfortable. I'll be quick."

He walked into an office off the main room and left the door open a few inches. Riley waited until she heard his voice on the phone again, then moved quietly across the thick carpet. She stayed out of sight and listened.

Elias's voice came through the speaker. She could only catch pieces from his side, but it was enough. Something about a late shipment and the timing with the Colombians. Something about numbers that did not match.

Rico pulled a stack of papers from a drawer and spread them across the desk while he talked. He flipped through them, marked something with a pen, and answered questions in short, clipped sentences. The call lasted maybe five minutes. When it ended, he stayed at the desk a little longer, looking at the pages.

Riley's heart was hammering. Those documents were right there. If she could get even a few photos or take one of the sheets, she might finally have something solid that tied Elias to the operation. Something that could put him away. Something that might finally answer what happened to Nancy. She needed to stay in this apartment long enough to get into that office.

She hurried back to the open kitchen, found two glasses, and poured whatever expensive liquor sat on the counter. Her hands were not completely steady. She was still deciding how far she was willing to go when Rico came out of the office and closed the door behind him.

"Sorry about that," he said. "Work never sleeps. You ready for me to take you home?"

Riley looked at him. The city lights framed his silhouette through the big windows. She thought about Luke. Then she thought about the papers on that desk and the chance they represented.

She set the glasses down. Reached behind her neck, found the zipper of the black dress, and pulled it down slowly. The fabric loosened and then slid off her shoulders and down her body until it pooled around her heels on the polished floor. She stood there in nothing but the small black underwear and bra she had put on earlier. "I'm not ready to go home yet."

Her heart was beating so hard she could hear it in her ears. This was the plan. Keep him here. Get him off. Get into that office while he was distracted or asleep. The documents were right on the other side of that door. She only needed a few minutes.

Rico did not rush her. He just looked at her like he had all the time in the world. His eyes moved over her breasts, the small black panties, the way her breathing made her chest rise and fall. He stepped closer but stopped a few feet away.

"You sure about this?" he asked. His voice was quiet. No pressure in it. Just the question. She'd expected him to leap at her like a hungry animal, but he was restrained.

She almost said no. Almost reached down and picked the dress back up. The thought of Luke hit her hard. His hands. His mouth. The way he looked at her when they were intimate and alone. What would he think if he could see her now? Standing half naked in a criminal's penthouse, offering herself so she could steal a look at his papers. Her colleagues would never look at her the same if they knew. The ones who already stared at her ass in the precinct would have a field day. Guys like Rico were supposed to make her skin crawl. They did. Most of the time. Yet here she was, under his gaze, body already reacting to him.

This was wrong on so many levels.

"I'm sure," she said. The words came out steadier than she felt. "Just... let me take care of you."

She stepped out of the dress and closed the distance. Her hands went to his belt. She could do this. Get him hard, get him off with her mouth the way she had before, then find a way into that office. She had done it once already. She could do it again. This wasn't cheating. It was just repeating something for the job.

Rico let her undo this belt. She slid the zipper down. But when she started to sink to her knees, he caught her wrists gently and stopped her.

"Not yet," he said. "Come here."

He guided her toward the open bedroom doorway. She went because she needed to stay in control of the situation, not because she wanted the bed. That was what she told herself. The bedroom was even bigger than the living room. Dark wood accents, a massive bed with white sheets that looked more expensive than her monthly rent. He turned her so her back faced the bed and kissed her. It wasn't hungry. It was slow and deliberate. sensual. His tongue moved against hers way too intimately. One hand stayed on her waist. The other traced up her side until it cupped her breast. His thumb brushed her nipple, and she felt it tighten under the touch.

She pulled back a little. "Rico. I can just..."

"Shh." He kissed the corner of her mouth. "Let me."

His hands slid down her back and over the curve of her ass. He squeezed once, then hooked his fingers in the sides of her panties. She felt the fabric start to move. Her mind screamed that this was the line. The line.

A blowjob was one thing. She had already crossed that. Letting him take her panties off led to a new avenue of possibilities.

She put her hands on his chest. "Wait. Maybe we should slow down."

He stopped. Completely, and looked her in the eyes. "You want me to stop, I stop. No hard feelings. I can take you home right now."

The offer hung there. She could walk. Get dressed, leave the documents behind, and go back to the cover apartment with nothing new to report. Or she could stay. Get what she needed. And pay the price with her body.

She did not answer with words. She just didn't pull away when he started sliding the panties down again. The black fabric moved over her hips, down her thighs, and pooled at her ankles. She stepped out of them. Cool air touched her bare skin. Rico's hands returned to her waist, and he guided her backward until the backs of her knees hit the mattress. She sat. Then he was easing her down onto her back, the soft sheets cool against her spine.

He stood over her for a second and pulled his own shirt off. The low light made the hard lines of his body look different. Then he was on the bed with her, kneeling between her legs, hands running slowly up the insides of her thighs. She tried to close them. He did not force them open. He just waited, thumbs stroking the soft skin, until her muscles relaxed on their own.

"You're shaking," he said.

"I'm fine," Riley breathed.

He leaned down and kissed the inside of her knee. Then higher. His breath was warm. When his mouth reached the place where her thigh met her body, she arched without meaning to. A soft

sound escaped her throat. She bit it back. This was not supposed to feel good. It was supposed to be a transaction. A distraction. Something she endured to get the evidence she needed.

Rico's tongue moved over her. Slowly. He was patient. Like he was learning her. She grabbed the sheets in both fists and stared at the ceiling. Luke's face flashed behind her eyes. The way he looked when he came home late and still made time for her. The quiet way he said her name. She was crossing a line she could never uncross. Her body did not care. It was already wet. Already opening under Rico's mouth. He licked her like he had all night, building the pressure gradually and steadily until her hips started moving against his face on their own.

"Rico..." Her voice cracked. "You don't have to..."

He lifted his head just enough to speak. "I know. I want to."

Then his mouth was back on her, and one of his hands slid behind her and unclasped her bra. His hand went up to her breast, rolling her nipple between his fingers. The combination made her thighs tremble. She tried to hold still. Tried to stay in her head, where the mission still mattered more than what he was doing to her. It wasn't working. Every pass of his tongue pulled her further away from the plan and deeper into the moment.

She lost herself in what he was doing. Only when he stopped did she realize how far she'd drifted.

When he pulled back, she was breathing hard. He moved up her body and kissed her again. She could taste herself on his mouth. His cock pressed against her thigh. It was hard and felt heavy. She reached down and wrapped her hand around him, thinking maybe she could still steer this back to what she had intended.

"Let me," she whispered. "I can make you feel good."

He smiled against her lips. "You already are."

He shifted his hips. The head of his cock slid along her wetness. She froze.

This was it. The point of no return. She could still say stop. He had already shown he would listen. Instead, she felt her legs open a little wider on their own. He pushed forward slowly. She held her breath as the head of his cock parted her lips. Her mind raced, conflicted as he started to push himself into her. Riley's mind swam as her body responded on her behalf. This hadn't been in her training.

Finally, she let out her breath, and he sank into her. The stretch was intense. Bigger than she remembered from the night in the office when she had only taken him in her mouth. He gave her time, inch by inch, until he was fully inside her and her body had adjusted around him.

"Fuck," he breathed against her neck. "You feel perfect."

She turned her face into the pillow so he would not see whatever expression was there. Luke. The word kept repeating in her head like a heartbeat. Luke. Luke. Luke. She was letting another man fuck her in a penthouse bed while her husband thought she was out gathering intel. The guilt was sharp enough to hurt. It did not stop the way her body clenched around Rico's cock when he started to move.

She was supposed to be at sidecar. Jim knew her schedule. But she was somewhere she wasn't supposed to. Like a cheating woman with an alibi.

Rico kept the pace steady and deep. No rough slamming. Just long strokes that filled her completely each time. One of his hands stayed under her ass, tilting her hips so he could hit the spot that made her breath catch. The other hand played with her breast, thumb circling her nipple in time with his thrusts. She tried not to make noise. She Failed. Soft moans slipped out anyway. "Mmmph..."

Her hands moved from the sheets to his back, nails digging into him. "Uhh... yes..."

"That's it," he murmured. "Just feel it Riley."

She hated how much she was feeling it. The way her body was climbing toward something she did not want to give him. The way the guilt and the pleasure were tangled so tight she could not separate them anymore. Every time he bottomed out, she saw Luke's face. She imagined the intense look of disapproval. His wife here on her back with one of the city's most notorious criminal lieutenants between her legs. Imagining that look did something to her. Something shameful. It stoked the fire inside of her. Every time Rico pulled back, she chased the next stroke. Her skin was slick with sweat. The expensive sheets were a mess under them. She could hear how wet she was every time he moved. "Oh god... mmm..."

She opened her eyes, trying to banish the phantom thought of Luke staring at her. She saw herself looking back at her. A mirror hung on the ceiling above them. She saw the tight, powerful muscles in Rico's back as he thrust himself into her. The betraying mask of pleasure plastered to her face as it contorted with each of his thrusts. She saw how lost she was in the moment. How controlled and measured and deliberate each of Rico's thrusts were. She had been kidding herself before, she had broken the cardinal rule of undercover work and lost control of her mark and the situation. Rico was in complete control. Admitting that to herself broke something sacred inside of her.

Rico shifted the angle, and the pressure inside her changed. Her legs wrapped around his waist on their own. She was close. Too close. She tried to hold it back. Tried to stay in control. To remember her training. His mouth found her neck, and he bit down gently at the same time his cock dragged over that perfect spot again, and she broke.

"Ah...,ah...ah....ahhh...fuck...!" she whimpered. The orgasm hit hard and sudden, her whole body locking up around him while a broken sound tore out of her throat. She came harder than she had with Toad. Harder than she wanted to admit. "...Hhhnnn..."

He kept moving through it, steady and deep, until her shaking slowed. Then he kissed her again, slower this time, and whispered against her mouth, "I'm not done with you yet."

Riley stared up at the ceiling past his shoulder, still pulsing around his cock, and tried to remember why she had started this in the first place. The documents. The office. Elias. Nancy. The reasons felt farther away than they had ten minutes ago. Her body was still open for him. Still wanting more even while the guilt sat heavy in her chest.

Riley felt him start moving again inside her while her body was still twitching from the first orgasm. Slow. Steady. Like he had decided he was going to take his time breaking her open. Every stroke filled her completely and then dragged back almost all the way out before sliding home again. She could feel how wet she was around him. The sheets under her ass were already damp. Her legs stayed wrapped around his waist even though part of her brain kept telling them to let go.

The realization hit her between one thrust and the next. No condom. A criminal was inside her, bare. Rico Garcia, Elias Monroe's lieutenant, the same man who had held her head down in a dirty

office while he talked about shipments, was buried to the hilt in her with nothing between them. The thought should have made her shove him off. Should have made her demand he pull out. Instead, it sent another hot pulse through her pussy, and she clenched around him without meaning to, "...Hnnngh..."

He groaned low in his chest and kept the same measured pace. His hips rolled against hers like they had done this a hundred times together. Like their bodies already knew the rhythm. She hated how well they fit. The way his cock seemed to find every sensitive spot on the way in and the way out. Perfectly complementing shapes moving together. The criminal and the police officer. She tried to hold onto the reasons she was here. The list kept slipping every time he bottomed out and ground against her clit for a second before pulling back.

Rico leaned down and kissed her. Soft at first. Then deeper. She moaned into his mouth before she could stop it. Too much passion in the sound. Too much need. His tongue moved against hers while his cock kept that slow, relentless stroke inside her. She could taste the leftover wine from dinner h. Her hands slid up his back and into his hair. She told herself she was only holding on so she would not float away. The truth was uglier. She was pulling him closer. "Ohhh fuck..."

The second orgasm built slower than the first. It started low in her belly and spread outward in heavy waves. Her thighs started to shake. Her breath came in short broken sounds against his mouth. He did not speed up. He just kept the same deep rhythm and watched her face while she fell apart under him. "Ohh... ohh... ohhh..."

"Fuck... fuck... nnnh..." When it hit, she arched hard off the bed, mouth open against his, a long broken moan spilling out of her as her whole body locked up and pulsed around his cock. Mind melting. Every nerve lit up at once. She felt it in her toes, the roots of her hair, and the tips of her breasts. For a few seconds there was nothing but the thick stretch of him inside her and the way her pussy kept clenching like it never wanted to let him go.

He kissed her through it. When the shaking finally eased, he stayed buried inside her and brushed hair off her face with one hand.

"There she is," he murmured.

Riley could not find words. Her chest rose and fell hard. The guilt crashed back in right behind the pleasure. Luke's face. The way he would look if he knew a man like Rico had just made her cum twice. She was undercover. She was supposed to stay in control. She was supposed to use her body as a tool and nothing more. Instead, she was lying under this man with her legs still open and her pussy still fluttering around him.

Rico started moving again. The urgency in his thrusts changed. She felt it immediately. The long, slow strokes shortened. He went a little deeper. A little harder. The wet sound of their bodies meeting filled the quiet room. She knew what the change meant. He was getting close. He was going to cum. Inside her. Unprotected.

The rational part of her brain screamed. Shove him off. Tell him to pull out. Do the smart thing. The undercover thing. The married thing.

Her hands stayed on his back. Her legs stayed locked around him. In that moment she bent. She let him take the lead even though every rule of the job said she should never give up control like this. Something about the way he looked at her while he fucked her made the decision feel inevitable. He was going to cum in her; there was no room for debate. Not anymore.

He kissed her hard. The kind of kiss that claimed her. At the same time, one of his hands slid under her and grabbed a handful of her ass, fingers digging in as he pulled her tighter against every thrust. There was a slight edge to the move. A dominant danger that made her heart skip hard in her chest. She could not tell if the skip came from some primal female place that answered to the strength in his grip or from her police instincts warning her that this man was still the enemy even while he was buried inside her. Both feelings sent a shiver through her.

Rico's rhythm broke. He growled low against her mouth and drove in deep one last time. She felt him swell and then the first hot pulse of his cum flooded her. Thick. Heavy, illicit. A criminal's cum.

He kept thrusting through it, short hard strokes that pushed more of his load deeper each time. She could feel it. The heat spreading inside her. The way her pussy was already too full and still taking more. Some of it leaked out around his cock and ran down between her cheeks onto the expensive sheets. He stayed buried in her while the last pulses emptied into her, breath rough against her neck, hand still gripping her ass like he was not ready to let go.

Riley lay there under him with a criminal's cum filling her and tried to remember how to breathe. The city lights still glowed through the windows. She stared at the ceiling and felt every thick throb of what he had left inside her and wondered how much further she was willing to fall before the job was done.

Luke adjusted the straps on his bulletproof vest one more time and checked the magazine in his sidearm. The suburban street was quiet. Streetlights threw long shadows across the lawns. A dog barked somewhere two blocks over and then stopped. He stood at the back of the stack with the rest of the entry team, his heart already working hard. The mic in his ear was silent except for the soft hiss of open channel.

He thought about Riley while they waited. The intel that put them on this house had come from her. The Colombian connection.

Without what she had pulled out of Sidecar, none of them would be standing here in the dark with rifles and flashbangs ready. Pride sat in his chest right there with the constant low-level fear that never left him since she went undercover. She was still in there. Still playing waitress for men who would put a bullet in her the second they sniffed something wrong. He pushed the thought down the way he always did. It was time to focus.

The word came through the earpiece, clean and sharp. "GO."

The stack moved as one. Luke stayed at the rear, as the plan called for, eyes sweeping the side of the house and the dark windows on the second floor. The point man reached the front door, and the breacher swung the ram. The door frame exploded inward with a heavy crack of wood and metal. Two flashbang grenades went in right behind it. The explosions lit the whole front of the house white for a split second, and the sound hit like a physical slap even from outside.

Shouting started inside immediately. Spanish. English. Panic.

The first operators poured through the smoke, and Luke followed, weapon up, moving on the balls of his feet. The living room was chaos. The couch was overturned. The television was still on some late-night cable show. Two men near the kitchen doorway were already reaching for weapons. Luke put his front sight on the closest one and pressed the trigger twice. The man dropped.

The second one got a round off that cracked past Luke's left shoulder close enough that he felt the air move. Luke shifted and fired again. The second man went down hard against the cabinets.

More gunfire erupted from the hallway and the stairs. Rounds punched into the wall above Luke's head and showered him with plaster dust. He dropped to a knee behind the half wall that separated the living room from the dining area and returned fire toward the muzzle flashes.

Someone on his team shouted, "Contact rear," and another set of shots answered from the kitchen side. The air filled with the sharp smell of burned powder and the heavier chemical bite of the flashbangs. Luke's ears rang, but the training kept his breathing steady and his weapon moving.

They cleared the first floor room by room. One more shooter tried to break for the back door and took two rounds from the operator on Luke's right. The man collapsed halfway across the threshold. Luke stepped over him and kept moving. Upstairs was quieter but not empty. They found two more men trying to climb out a bedroom window. Both went down on the floor with their hands visible when the operator's rifles came up. No more shots after that.

When the last room was called clear, Luke lowered his weapon and let the adrenaline start to drain. His hands had that fine tremor they always got after a good fight. He walked back through the house while the rest of the team started the systematic search. The basement held the real score. Stacks of vacuum-sealed packages. Bricks of drugs piled high enough to fill the far wall. Scales. Money counters. Ledgers. Enough inventory to keep a mid-level network running for months.

They found the one they wanted in a small office off the kitchen. Spider. Real name still being confirmed, but the tattoos and the scars matched the photos from the file Riley's intel had helped build. He was already cuffed and on his knees with two operators standing over him. Blood ran from a cut on his forehead, but he was breathing and conscious. Luke looked at the papers spread across the desk.

Connections pointed to three other addresses they had been watching but hadn't had enough to hit yet.

Luke keyed his radio.

"Command, this is Walker. House is secure. Spider in custody. Significant product and documents on site. We need to move on the secondary targets tonight before word spreads and they scatter. Repeat, push the other warrants now while we still have the advantage."

The reply came back affirmative. Units were already rolling.

Luke stepped out onto the front lawn and pulled this mic off. The night air felt cold against the sweat on his face. Sirens were already approaching. Neighbors had started coming out onto porches across the street. He stared at the open door of the house and the controlled chaos still moving inside it. All of this because Riley had gotten close enough to hear the right conversation and pass the right details up the chain. He was proud of her. More than proud.

Worry crept in right behind the pride, the way it always did. She was still at Sidecar. Still surrounded by the same people who would not hesitate if they ever found out who she really was. He had no way to check on her. No way to know if she was safe. The radio on his vest crackled with more traffic about the secondary raids spinning up. Luke listened, answered when he needed to, and kept the rest locked down behind his professional face.

He looked once more at the suburban house, its door broken and its lights now blazing in every window. Then he turned and walked toward the command van to start the long process of statements and evidence logs. Somewhere across the city, his wife was still playing a part that could get her killed. He would not let himself think too long about what that part might be costing her. Not tonight. There was still work to finish.

Riley stared at herself in the mirror on the ceiling of the penthouse bedroom and tried to make sense of the last mind-blowing hour. Rico's breathing had gone deep and even beside her. He was asleep. One arm was thrown across the pillow near her shoulder. She had never been fucked like that before.

She could feel him pouring out of her. Thick and warm and unmistakable. Every small shift of her hips sent another slow trickle down between her cheeks onto the expensive sheets. The sensation made her stomach turn, and her face burn at the same time. Why had she let that happen? God why? She had told herself to stay in control. Just enough to keep him here. Just enough to get near the office. Instead, she had opened her legs and let a criminal come inside her with nothing between them. The second orgasm had wrecked her. She had moaned into his mouth like she wanted it. Like she needed it. The memory made her want to crawl out of her own skin.

She would need a Plan B tomorrow. Morning after. Something. God, what an idiot. She was cursing herself in the quiet dark while his cum kept leaking out of her. He would want more after this. Men like him always did once they got that far. She had given him the green light without meaning to, and now the door was open wider than she could easily close.

Riley moved slowly. Inch by inch she slid out from under the sheet and set her feet on the floor. The carpet was soft. She paused and listened. His breathing didn't change. She crossed the room on bare feet and slipped into the bathroom, easing the door most of the way shut so the light would not spill into the bedroom.

The mirror showed a woman she barely recognized. Hair messy. Lips swollen. A faint red mark on her neck where he had bitten. She turned on the water as low as it would go and cleaned herself with shaking hands. Soap and warm water.

Fingers working between her legs, trying to get every trace of him out. She scrubbed harder than she needed to, like the shame might rinse away with it. It did not. The physical evidence lessened, but the knowledge of it stayed. A criminal had cum inside her. She had let him. She had cum on his cock while he did it. The guilt sat heavy and sin hrchest.

She shut the water off and dried herself with one of the thick white towels. Then she cracked the bathroom door and looked toward the bed. Rico had not moved. He was still on his back, breathing deeply. Riley left the bathroom and walked quietly through the living room to the kitchen. Her phone was still on the counter where she had set it earlier. She picked it up and checked the battery. There was enough left.

The office door was closed but not locked.

She turned the handle and slowly stepped inside. City light came through the windows here too. Enough to see by. The stack of documents was still spread across the desk exactly where he had left them. She moved to the chair and started taking pictures. One page. Then the next. Angles. Close-ups of names and numbers and dates. Her hands were steadier now that the job part of her

brain had taken over. This was why she had stayed. This was the only reason any of it could be justified.

She had gotten through most of the pile when a soft sound came from the bedroom. Sheets shifting and a low mumble. Rico stirring in his sleep.

Riley's heart slammed against her ribs. She took three more quick photos, locked the phone, and slipped back out of the office.. The door closed with almost no sound. She set the phone back on the kitchen counter exactly where it had been and walked barefoot across the living room.

The bedroom still smelled like sex and his cologne. She slid under the sheet again and settled on her side facing away from him. His breathing evened back out after a minute. She lay there, his cum still a faint sticky memory between her legs and stared at the dark until her pulse finally slowed. The documents were hers now. Whatever came next, at least the night had given her that.

Sullivan sat at his desk in the bullpen with a half-eaten glazed donut in one hand and a cold cup of coffee in the other. The place was the usual mess of ringing phones and overlapping conversations. Somebody's printer was jamming again. A couple of uniforms were arguing near the holding cells about paperwork. He ignored most of it the way he always did. Skating by had become a fine art, and he was good at it.

Then Luke Walker and his team came through the main doors like they owned the building. They laughed and clapped each other on the back. Somebody shouted something about Spider being off the street, and a few of the other detectives actually stood up to shake their hands. Pissants, all of them.

Sullivan watched it all over the top of his donut and felt the familiar burn in his gut. Conquering heroes. Fresh off a big raid that would look good in the papers and even better in the captain's next report to the brass. He took another bite of the donut and chewed slowly. The sugar stuck to his fingers. He didn't bother wiping them.

Walker looked tired but pleased with himself. His vest was still on. He had dirt on one sleeve. The kind of look that made the younger cops stare as if he had just come back from a war movie. Sullivan had seen that look before. It usually meant more work for everybody else and more credit for the golden boys. He slumped lower in his chair and muttered under his breath, "show-offs."

One of Walker's guys passed close enough to hear and gave him a look. Sullivan stared back until the man moved on. He finished the donut and licked the glaze off his thumb. The coffee was cold and bitter, but he drank it anyway. Better than getting up to make a fresh pot.

His desk phone rang. Sullivan frowned. It was the captain's extension. He let it ring twice longer than he needed to before picking up. "yyyellow."

"Sullivan. My office. Now."

The captain hung up without answering and Sullivan sat there for another thirty seconds just \. Then he heaved himself out of the chair. The belt around his gut dug in as he walked. The hallway to the captain's office always felt longer than it was. He knocked once and went in without waiting.

Captain Hunt was behind the desk with a file open and that permanent tired look he wore when the department was stretched thin. Sullivan closed the door and stood there with his hands in his pockets. "You wanted to seeme?"

“Sit down.”

Sullivan sat. The chair creaked under him. He already knew he wouldn't like whatever came next. The captain never called him in to hand out praise.

“We’re stretched thin with the new operations coming out of last night’s bust,” Hunt said. “Walker’s team pulled solid evidence, and we’re spinning up follow-up warrants across three other locations. I need bodies. Your name came up.”

Sullivan felt the familiar resistance settle in his chest. He liked his caseload the way it was. Light and manageable. The kind of work that let him leave on time and not think about the job once he was in his car. “Captain, I’m already carrying my share. You know how it is. Some of these cases need a delicate touch.”

Hunt looked at him over the top of the file. “Jim Keller fell down a flight of stairs earlier tonight. He’s in a coma. The hospital says it doesn’t look good. He was handling one of the undercover assets. That assignment needs a new handler effective immediately.”

Sullivan blinked. Jim. The older quiet one who always kept to himself. “That’s rough. But I’m not sure I’m the right...”

“You’re taking it,” Hunt said. “We’re out of options, and you’re available. The asset is Officer Cross. Riley Cross. She’s been inside Sidecar for weeks. The intel that led to Spider came through her. You’ll meet her on the regular schedule, take her reports, and pass anything actionable up the chain. No corner cutting. Clear?”

The name hit Sullivan harder than he let show. Riley Cross. The blonde with the blue eyes and the body that made half the precinct stare when she walked through the bullpen. He had watched her more than once. The way those uniforms fit. The way she carried herself like she didn't notice the looks. The way her shirts stretched across her chest. He kept his face flat and nodded slowly. “Clear, Captain.”

Hunt slid a thin folder across the desk. “Everything you need is in there. Dead drops. Meeting locations. Protocols. Memorize it and then destroy the paper copy. She does not know about Jim yet. You’ll be the one to tell her. Keep it professional.”

Sullivan picked up the folder and stood. His mind was already moving ahead. One-on-one meetings with Riley Cross. Private, away from the station. The thought of that sexy little thing sitting across from him, needing him for something, made something low and ugly stir in his gut. He forced the grin down before it could reach his mouth. “I’ll get on it,” he said.

Hunt was already looking at the next file. “Do it right, Sullivan. This op is bigger than any of us right now.”

Sullivan left the office with the folder under his arm and walked back through the bullpen. Walker’s team was still holding court near the coffee pot, voices loud with leftover adrenaline. Sullivan smirked at Walker and gave him a thumbs up. Walker’s eyes narrowed, but he gave Sullivan a curt nod.

Sullivan sat at his desk, opened the folder, and stared at the first page without reading it. Riley Cross. His asset now. He did love *her* assets. The idea sat warm and heavy in his chest while the rest of the squad celebrated a bust he had nothing to do with.

He reached for the box of donuts on the corner of his desk, pulled another one free, and took a slow bite. The night was turning out better than he had expected.