

A man sits naked on a bench placed at the foot of a woman's bed. As the man slides his legs back into his pants, he smiles ear-to-ear reliving the passion of the last hour.

"You, my dear, are just incredible! We didn't have to stop, you know. I could have gone much longer," says the man to the woman across the room.

Standing about twenty feet away hunched over a vanity, the woman zips up her dress and fixes her makeup. "And I'm sure you know, Mr. Allen, that any longer than that, I'd probably have to charge you," she replies.

Michael Allen chuckles, "And, it's Ruby, right? I'm certain you are worth every goddamn penny, no matter your rate." Michael walks over to the side of the bed, by the window, to retrieve his socks and shoes then returns to the bench to put them on. "I can't wait for you to find me again."

Ruby now sits at the vanity recounting the moment, only about an hour ago, when she walked down the staircase of the Lambert Hotel to its lower level and into a crowded room of people mindlessly socializing between a loaded and overpriced bar and a modern jukebox playing its music too loudly.

Ruby recounts seeing the man sitting at a table near the end of the bar talking to a lady wearing a black, pinstriped pantsuit, a pearl necklace, and her hair placed professionally in a tight bun. She approached the two, standing beside the lady, and placed her hand on her shoulder, drawing the lady's attention to her presence. "Ms. Angelica?"

The lady slowly turned to Ruby and smiled, placing her hand upon the woman's hand. "Oh, Ruby! You got my message! I'm so glad you found us so quickly."

Confused, Michael sat across from the two. "Angel, what's going on here? Who is this?"

"A bit of a surprise for you. You had mentioned that you have been feeling, I think the word you used was 'frustrated', right? So, when you asked to see me tonight, I thought I'd arrange for my friend Ruby here to help you," Angel paused for a moment for dramatic effect before she smiled and continued, "to help you 'release', as they say."

Ruby recounts the shock and awe that crossed Michael's face when Angelica said 'release'. She walked over and stood next to Michael, placing her hand in his as she motioned for him to stand. Michael, himself dressed in a black suit with a white button-down shirt and black tie, the jacket draped over the back of his chair, resisted the request, but never let go of Ruby's hand. Michael moved his lips, trying to form words, but his eyes had his mind otherwise occupied, seemingly enamored by the way Ruby's burgundy satin dress accentuated every last curve of her body.

Angelica saw the look of hesitation on Michael's face. She got up from her chair, walked over to Michael, and stood behind him. She ran her fingers down the length of his arm to the hand that was still holding Ruby's hand and placed them both on Ruby's hip. She slowly ran their hands along the curves of the satin dress down to the base of her short skirt.

Ruby recounts feeling Angelica's finger tap her hand, signaling for her to take control over Michael's significantly less hesitant hand. Ruby took a half-step with her right foot, creating enough space between her legs for Michael's hand to follow her thighs; moving high enough to discover her lack of underwear and apparent desire for attention. With Michael's handheld firmly against her genitalia, his finger sliding in between her moistened labia, Ruby leaned across Michael's body. With her cleavage prominently placed in his face, she spoke into his ear and with a breathy whisper said, "It's to die for."

Ruby recounts silently leading Michael away from the table, out of the bar, up the staircase, and down the hall to a pair of elevators. In silence, they stood in the elevator, still hand-in-hand, as the elevator climbed to the tenth floor. Once there, she led him to room 1022, removed a keycard she had tucked away in her breasts, unlocked the door, and ushered him inside, assuring they were the only ones in the hall as they entered.

Inside the room, sitting on a bench at the foot of the bed, Michael broke the silence with a confession. "Ruby, is it?" he said, "I'm sorry I'm bad with names. I feel I have to tell you that I'm a married man."

Ruby secured the door and removed her earrings, walking over to the vanity to put them away. She reached behind her back and unzipped her dress, allowing it to fall to the floor, revealing the entirety of her vivacious body. "Mr. Allen," she said as she walked over to Michael, knelt between his legs, and began removing his shoes and socks, running her hands up and down his legs before unfastening his belt, "I, too, must confess that frankly, I don't care if you're a married man." She unfastened his pants and reached in, stroking the newly formed bulge, "And very soon, you won't either."

"Miss?"

Ruby snaps out of her daze with Michael standing over her, fully dressed, with a hand on her shoulder. She pulls away startled.

"Miss, are you okay? Did you hear me? Do you think you'll find me again?"

Still sitting in her chair, Ruby stares at her reflection in the mirror. Her face is expressionless and cold. She inhales deeply and exhales with an audible sigh. She glances downward in the mirror at the reflection of a deck of cards sitting in the center of the vanity. Without lowering her head, she picks up the deck and hands it to Michael.

Confused, Michael takes the deck from Ruby. “Now, Miss, I don’t think we have time for strip poker,” he jokes.

Ruby turns around in her chair and looks up at Michael. “Listen to me very carefully. I’m going to leave the room. No less than ten minutes later, go to the front desk, hand them the Ace of Hearts, and leave. Do not try to find me. Do not try to contact your wife. Most certainly do not try to cause a scene or contact the police. Just go and quietly leave town. It’ll buy you some time.”

“Buy me some time?” Michael’s voice was getting louder and agitated. He opens the box and looks through the cards for the Ace of Hearts. “What the hell is this? Who are you?”

“You were supposed to die tonight and I was paid to kill you. Quite well, too!”

“To kill me?!” he yells, louder and more agitated than before, puffing up his chest in an attempt to intimidate Ruby.

Still calm and poised, Ruby sternly said, “Lower your voice or I’ll change my mind. I’m showing you mercy.”

“You call all this mercy?!” Michael angrily shakes the deck of cards in his hand.

“Not killing you after you cheated on your wife with a total stranger you met in a bar, in a hotel, for ten seconds before you had your fingers inside me, all while secretly being indebted to the Divine? Yes, I call ‘all this’ mercy,” Ruby mocks Michael, waving her hands in the air. “ but you’re starting to make me question my generosity.”

“The Divine? My debt?” Michael’s anger quickly shifts to more of a worried panic. “How do you know about...” Clarity washes over him. “This whole thing was about the money?” he asks.

“The details are Divine business, not my business, and frankly, I prefer it that way. Just do as I said and no harm will come to you. I leave first and ten minutes later, hand that card to the clerk at the desk and leave. Trust me.”

“Trust a woman working with The Divine that’s trying to kill me?” Michael counters.

“Trust the woman you just fucked that didn’t kill you when I had the chance. Lucky for you, you know what you’re doing with that thing.” the woman winks and walks towards the man. “Ten minutes.” With one hand on the front of his pants and the other on his collar, she gives Michael one last kiss on the lips. “Thanks again, Mr. Allen,” she says as she walks out of the hotel room.

Scared and alone, Michael waits for the instructed ten minutes before heading back down the hall, down the elevator, and through the lobby to the front desk, deck of cards in hand. Behind the front desk, instead of the clerk from before, Angelica, in her pinstriped pantsuit, smiles at Michael. “Ah,” Angelica says with a smirk, “had a killer good time I see.”

“A killer good time?!” Michael yells, Angelica’s obvious pun setting him off in a fit of rage. He throws the deck of cards over the desk, hitting Angelica and falling on the floor and across the desk. He holds up the Ace of Hearts in his hand. “What is this?” he exclaims, “What the fuck is going on here?! You work for them?! You fucking set me up?! This whole song and dance was a setup to kill me?!”

Angelica smiles as she collects all the cards on the desk into a neat pile. “Surely, before handing you those cards, my friend Ruby told you to leave quietly and NOT cause a scene.”

“Fuck your friend!”

“Apparently, you did, and quite well if she left you alive. She is, well, I’d never call her a whore, per se, but she is always ‘willing to have a good time’ and I thought she would enjoy you.”

Michael is fuming mad, visibly struggling to maintain his composure with his fist balled and his muscles tensing, when a very tall and very muscular security guard walks behind the front desk standing next to Angelica holding a pistol. Michael takes a step back, relaxes his muscles, and opens his hands. Staring at the security guard while still addressing Angelica, he says, in a much lower tone, “How could you set me up like this? We are friends! We go back years!”

“Listen, business is business. And you owe The Divine more than you either can or will ever pay back. I can’t change that. The best I could do for you was to try and find a way for you to wake up tomorrow. My friend will never murder a man that shows her a good time. That Ace is a mercy card. She spared your life and transferred your debt with The Divine.”

Michael looks down at the card in his hand, trying to make sense of it all. He looks up at Angelica and asks, “So, my debt is paid?”

“Not quite. Your life was spared and your debt was transferred. The debt is still live.”

“What does that even mean?” Michael asks, still eyeing the guard and the gun.

“Not my department, but if I was to venture a guess,” the lady sighs, “I’d guess your wife is the new debt.” Angelica glances at the clock on the wall and gestures to the guard. “There’s nothing else that can be done. It’s after midnight. The guard will direct you to your car. Get some sleep, wake up, go to work, and treat the day like a normal Friday. But be forewarned, it’s quite likely, given your outburst and your unwillingness to just quietly walk away like you were told, the live girl dies tonight.”

Michael begins to sob. “What? No?! They can’t!”

“Or Monday. It could be Monday. It just depends. I’m really sorry, Michael.” Angelica waves her hand and the security guard walks over to Michael, grabs him by the arm, and leads him to the parking lot exit.

Michael gets in his car, starts the engine, and drives home.

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