KANE

GRAHAM HURLEY



An Aries Book

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'Los Angeles? Any further, *hombre*,
and you fall off the edge.'

– Gustave Leaman

To
John Mills
1937–2024

Book One

1

Just another Sunday. Quincy Kane awakes in darkness, aware of the soft pad of the dog patrolling the icy spaces of his modest DC apartment. The dog, renamed Dexter, once belonged to his elder brother. Danny called him Vasco for reasons Kane has never properly fathomed. Neither Washington nor 'Dexter' have been much to the dog's taste, and lately the skinny mutt has surrendered to insomnia. He misses Boston like he misses Danny, and the greyhound's plaintive whine has become the soundtrack of this never-ending winter.

Kane takes an upper-body wash, dresses and checks his weapon before pausing beside the door. The automatic is still in his hand, a round chambered, the magazine full. Lack of sleep has wrecked Dexter's appetite. Last week Kane returned from the butcher with yet another bag of soggy offcuts, but again the dog left the bowl untouched. Maybe, just maybe, they might still become friends, but the sweetest temptation is to bring Dexter's troubled tenancy of the apartment to an abrupt end. They study each other for a long moment, then Kane shakes his head and opens the door. No one in this neighbourhood shoots a dog on a Sunday morning.

*

'Mr Kane? Cold enough for you?'

The uniformed guard at one of the side entrances of Secret Service District Sixteen skips the body search and barely glances at Kane's proffered ID. A grey dawn has appeared over the nearby Potomac River and Kane can taste snow in the air.

Secret Service District Sixteen is the White House. A handful of agents work a regular shift system and eight o'clock in the morning is handover time. Mike Reilly, an Irishman, has been the overnight volunteer stand-in to release a fellow agent for his son's bar mitzvah, and can't wait to get home.

'Any word on the fire drill?' Kane has opened his monthly paycheque, retrieved from his personal mailbox in the usher's office off the north portico that now serves as the agents' retreat.

'Tuesday,' Reilly is frowning. 'The guy from downtown won't leave me alone. Our big mistake was letting him in here in the first place.'

Kane nods. The eager young inspector from Fire Department HQ has a big career planned for himself. He's figured the nation's best address as a catastrophe in the making and recently spent an entire working week walking the corridors, surveying room after room to tally the more obvious fire risks. The US Treasury is expecting his report any day now and are doing their best to head him off. Hence the imminent drill.

Kane pockets his payslip. The figure at the bottom, he's long concluded, is plenty enough for a single man with a taste for his own company.

Reilly is winding his favourite green scarf around his neck before reaching for his gloves. After a nap, he has plans to

take his wife for Sunday lunch at a place they like out in Maryland but the guy from the Fire Department is beginning to obsess him.

'Too much time on his hands,' Kane grunts. 'Maybe he needs a dog. Let me know, yeah?'

Reilly gone, Kane heads for the White House private quarters. Responsibility number one is protecting the President and the sensible place to start is making sure he's still alive. FDR's bedroom is on the second floor, up the modest sweep of the central staircase. He takes his usual route, passing the presidential valet on the long second-floor corridor. Alonso Fields is a big man, tall, black.

'Everything OK?' Kane asks.

'Washed and shaved, Quince. All yours, buddy.'

Buddy.

Kane pauses for a moment outside FDR's bedroom. One of the things he's grown to appreciate about this place is the feeling of home. People like each other here, by and large, and that's a tribute to the man in charge.

Kane raps twice, hears FDR clearing his throat, steps lightly inside. The first time he set eyes on this room, he'd fought his gut reaction. The word was disappointment. He was disappointed by how bare and spartan it was. By the narrow white iron bedstead, slightly angled towards the window. By the old-fashioned rocking chair with its scatter of cast-off clothing. This was the world's most important leader, the planet's most powerful guy, and here he was spending half his life in a bedroom that might have belonged in a rooming house.

That first week Kane had challenged himself to number the items on FDR's bedside table. After tallying the bottle

of aspirin, the nose drops, the stubs of pencils, the scraps of paper, the worn old prayer book, the watch with scratches on the back, the open packet of Camel cigarettes, he'd given up. And since then, nothing had changed. Same prayer book. Same watch. Probably the same pencils.

Kane had first met Roosevelt in Boston five years ago. Kane was a cop in his home city. The President was standing for re-election. The motorcade had been snarled in traffic on a busy downtown intersection. FDR, as everyone called him, had beckoned the rangy uniform on the sidewalk closer to the presidential limo. That moment, Kane has since reflected, changed his life. Forever.

'We can get this thing moving?' That ready smile.

'No problem, sir.'

'Good man.'

Good man. The phrase had pursued Kane through the intervening years, and now was no different.

'Good man,' FDR is sitting up in bed, an old sweater draped around the broadness of his shoulders, fondling his mutt, a bad-tempered Scottie called Fala. Kane has collected a copy of the *Chicago Tribune* en route to the second floor, and now lays it carefully among the spread of East Coast newspapers on the rumpled counterpane.

FDR takes a glance at the Chicago headlines and then wants to know about the fire drill. Kane is looking at the iron brace his president has to wear simply to stand erect. Pounds and pounds of ironwork, testament to the pinked, slightly raised welts on his skinny legs, paralysed and useless after an attack of polio.

'The guy from downtown is saying the day after tomorrow, sir. It may never happen.'

'You think it should?'

'Yes.'

'I agree. And me?'

'We carry you down. As usual.'

'And if the stairs are on fire?'

'There'll be another way.'

'That's why God invented fire drills. Am I right, Agent Kane?'

'You are, sir.'

'Good man.'

Kane lurks by the still-open door. His time here is done and both men know it. It was Reilly a while back who broke FDR's big secret. The man fears absolutely nothing, he'd told Kane, except fire. 'Which is why we need to make him safe here,' Reilly had tapped his own temple, 'in his head. A good night's sleep will keep the country safe. That's the least we owe him.'

True. After an affable exchange of banter about the Redskins' prospects in this afternoon's game out at Griffith Stadium, Kane retreats from the bedroom. This morning, like every Sunday morning, is minor key stuff. Downstairs, there's a pile of correspondence overdue for Kane's attention, thanks to a busy week. These are hundreds of letters sieved by the White House secretaries. Over a mug of thin coffee, Kane skim-reads them, looking for the trademark insults levelled at the guy in the second-floor bedroom.

Shit-for-brains. Commie-lover. Mr Hand-Out. No-good Russkie-loving bastard. Stuff like this would upset most folks. The more rabid threats upset even Kane. Who'd want to be garrotted with a length of barbed wire? Or drilled by a volley

of dumdum bullets? Simply because he was still trying to make life just a little sweeter for tens of millions of fellow Americans beached by joblessness and hunger and plain bad luck?

Each of these trash letters has to be traced to an address, wherever that may be. The details will go, in the first place, to the FBI's General Intelligence Division but, at Kane's insistence, local cops will pay a visit, make notes, suggest some other outlet for this rage, and if the campaigning FDR ever happens within shooting distance of the scribbled name at the bottom of the letter, then the guy – and it's always a guy – will be locked up for the duration of all the presidential hoopla.

Kane knows FDR is aware of all this, not in detail, not in terms of what might be coming his way, but as part of the complicated deal he's made with the American public. Listen to me, trust me. In return, on your part and mine, I will fear nothing. Except fire.

Good man.

A couple of minutes after half past one Kane is scanning a scrawled note from a cowhand in Montana who claims once to have been in uniform. His beef with the President is the much-loved fireside chat slot on national radio. Folks, he writes in big capital letters, have no need of nanny-crap like this. Out here in sight of the Rocky Mountains life teaches you a thing or two about getting by. At the bottom of the letter is a poorly rendered cartoon face inside a pair of crosshairs. The message, thinks Kane, couldn't be plainer. Keep your fucking distance.

Another file for J. Edgar Hoover's attention? A Category Two threat or Category Three? Kane is reaching for a pen

when the door to the Secret Service office bursts open. Shirley operates the White House switch on alternate Sundays and has long taken a shine to Kane.

'You're not gonna believe this.'

'I'm not?'

'The Japs have just bombed Pearl Harbor.'

'You mean Hawaii?'

'I mean Pearl Harbor. Battleships, Quince. Hundreds dead. Maybe more.'

'When?' Kane is on his feet, putting on his jacket.

'Half an hour ago, and it ain't over yet. No bullshit. I've been trying to get Colonel Starling but he's out of town. Next best has to be Mr Wilson.' She's nodding at the phone. 'Better the news comes from you.'

Frank J. Wilson is Chief of the US Secret Service. Kane has talked to him just twice in his life.

'He knows about Pearl?'

'I doubt it,' she's heading for the door. 'I'll put you through.'

Kane takes the call, trying to figure out how much to trust of what little he's heard. In the event, it doesn't much matter because Wilson has sources of his own.

'I'm talking to Agent Kane?'

'Sir.'

'Then listen up, son. The Japs are making war on us. God knows where this ends. We need to quadruple the standing guard around the White House. I'm waiting on a call from Fort Myers. We're talking machine-gun crews on the roof. Ack-ack batteries in the grounds. Tomorrow your man will be heading for the Capitol. We'll need armed soldiers every damn yard of the way and I want you, Agent Kane, to make

sure he gets there in one piece. Wraparound protection from start to finish. You got that?'

While Wilson pauses to take a breath, Kane can feel the weight of his automatic nestling in his shoulder holster. Are the Japs massing down Pennsylvania Avenue? Will the White House roof carry the weight of machine-gun crews? Is DC ready for a mass parachute drop as tomorrow's sun comes up? Should Kane be thinking about an extra magazine for his automatic?

'Something else, son.' Wilson is back on the line.

'Sir?'

'We reinstate armed protection around Roosevelt, including indoors. Twenty-four hours. We keep the bedroom door locked. Two guards in the corridor. More on the lower levels. You hear me, Agent Kane?'

Kane was gazing out of the window. Already he can see a scatter of hunched figures stamping the cold from their feet and staring into the White House grounds through the iron railings. Back when he first moved into the White House, one of FDR's first acts, according to Reilly, was to keep his bedroom door unlocked and ban armed agents to the far corners of the mansion. 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, to him, had always been a family home, not some damn fortress.

'The President may have views on that, sir…'

'And so may we, son. We're charged with protecting the guy. Constitutionally, Secretary Morgenthau is calling the shots.'

Morgenthau is Treasury Secretary and therefore Wilson's boss. Kane says he'll pass the message on.

'Order, son. Not message.' The line goes dead.

*

Shirley has returned to the White House switchboard. She has a checklist of every Secret Service agent assigned to District Sixteen and Kane asks her to call them all in. Using a spare line, he talks to the duty liaison at the Army's base at Fort Myers. It turns out that Wilson has gotten there first and that three machine-gun crews have already been despatched, with three more standing by in reserve. Shirley has summoned extra help at the switch, and Kane is looking at three pairs of hands patching incoming calls through to every corner of the building.

A brief moment of calm brings Kane to Shirley's side.

'FDR?'

'In the Oval Study.'

'Alone?'

'Harry's with him. Sandwich lunch.' Harry Hopkins is Roosevelt's trusted aide.

'And Rover?'

'She's hosting a lunch of her own. Thirty guests last time anyone counted.' Rover is Secret Service code for Eleanor Roosevelt, FDR's wife. These days they lead largely separate lives.

'She knows about Pearl?'

'Dunno,' she shoots Kane a look. 'Is that relevant just now, Quince?'

Kane takes the hint, tells himself to slow down, to focus. The guy he really needs is Mike Reilly. Just now he might be eating lunch with his wife in some fancy out-of-town Maryland restaurant. If so, news of the Jap raid will take him to a phone.

Reilly's on the line shortly after two o'clock. Kane updates him. The machine-gun crews have arrived and the lieutenant

in charge is up on the roof plotting overlapping fields of fire. Extra armed guards have been posted in the grounds, each detail accompanied by Secret Service agents with orders to detain or turn away anyone without ID and demonstrable cause for gaining entry. The latter group, including key secretaries plus presidential aides and assistants, have already appeared in the ground-floor corridors. Little groups gather around someone who may have fresh news. Disbelief, says Kane, has given way to something closer to bewilderment, often laced with anger.

'Sounds like the ball game you thought you had in the bag,' Reilly has the softest chuckle, good to hear. He'll drive straight back. Shame about dessert.

By the time he arrives, Kane has managed to snatch a moment or two of Roosevelt's time. FDR is sitting in his wheelchair in the Oval Study alongside his bedroom. Between phone calls, Kane does his best to brace the President for tighter personal protection but can tell he's barely listening. Within seconds he's back on the next call, leaving Kane with Harry Hopkins.

Hopkins probably sees more of FDR than anyone else alive just now. He has a bedroom of his own on the second floor and unlimited access to the Chief. He's a tall, thin, untidy looking guy with great eyes and some mysterious medical problem that no one seems to understand. His prowess with women has long been the talk of District Sixteen's secret agents and he drinks far too much, but for years he's been brushing down many of FDR's wilder ideas and standing them on their own two feet. Kane has never met anyone so conversationally direct. He has a talent for getting along with

anyone, no matter how mighty or how inconsequential, and he has a tongue – in Mike Reilly's phrase – that can scorch paint. Kane loves him. Always has.

'Wilson means it.' Kane has explained about the phone call earlier.

'You're telling me that's news? Wilson always means it.'

'But for real.'

'Sure,' Hopkins gestures across the office at FDR. 'You know who he talked to just now? Chiang Kai-shek. It's God knows what time in Peking. They had to get the guy out of bed. Chiang hates the Japs. Wants them all dead and buried. The moment the Chief told him about Pearl, and the Japs declaring war on us, he put a record on and danced round his goddam bedroom. The Chief put the phone on loud. Crap music, the worst. Our enemy's enemy is our very good friend. Never fails, even in China.'

Kane passes the story on to Mike Reilly, along with the news that FDR has summoned a Cabinet meeting for this evening. Reilly has been doing some thinking in the car. Two guys outside the Oval Study on the second floor where the Cabinet meeting will take place, the door an inch or two open for ready access. More agents on the first landing and the ground floor. Reilly, like Kane himself, can't figure how the Navy got caught with their pants down like that. Didn't anyone spot a bunch of aircraft carriers heading their way? Do brains turn to mush in all that Hawaii sunshine?

'Maybe it's down to bad habits,' Kane has been listening to Shirley, who'd eavesdropped on calls at the switch. 'Word is they don't pay much attention to the radar at weekends. Plus they line up all the aircraft wing to wing on that big

old airfield to cut down on security. A handful of sentries? Neat little targets just begging to be bombed? Even the Japs couldn't miss.'

'You're kidding me?'

'If only. The first most folks knew was a very big bang when the *Arizona* went to the bottom. Direct hit on the forward magazine. Maybe a bomb, maybe a torpedo. Some guys aboard never had a chance to wake up. This is a Sunday, remember. No one starts a war on a Sunday.'

The Cabinet convenes for twenty after eight in the evening. Departmental Secretaries from various corners of DC shuffle into the Oval Study, some sparing Kane a grim nod of greeting. Even in the depths of winter, they look greyer and more strained than usual. One pauses, his gnarled old hand on Kane's arm.

'They'll pay for this, son. And that's a promise.'

At this point the door is wide open and Kane catches a glimpse of FDR in his usual chair at the centre of the table. His head is bowed, his face drawn. Cabinet members have gathered round, a gesture of raw physical support, and after Roosevelt has waved them into their allotted seats he says he has an announcement to make. He's suffering from a cold and a headache, and his voice is low, barely a whisper. With the door open an inch or two Kane strains to hear properly.

This, according to FDR, will be the most consequential Cabinet meeting since 1861. Then, with civil war in the offing, the very future of the nation was at stake, and now is no different. Maybe four battleships have gone down, plus most of the rest of the fleet. Hundreds of planes have been shot to pieces on the tarmac at Hickham Field. Thousands of men are dead or dying. The Japs, meanwhile, are also turning

their attention to the Philippines, Guam, Wake Island and possibly Midway. As Roosevelt tallies the dead and dying, Kane catches a low collective murmur from around the table. Sympathy? Anger? He has no way of knowing.

The Cabinet meeting wraps up forty minutes later. Kane finds himself alone in an alcove on the second floor with Mike Reilly. The Irishman is a presidential favourite, a reliable source for the ripest stories, but even he has been unable to persuade FDR that a declaration of war might be grounds to keep his bedroom door locked.

'Won't hear of it, just said no,' Reilly shrugs. 'And you know something else? We're riding to Congress tomorrow and he wants to use the '38 Caddy. Can you believe that?'

Kane does his best to mask a smile. The V-16 Cadillac is FDR's favourite, an open limo he favours at election times. Barely even semi-armoured, it invites the attentions of any passing crazy but Roosevelt has never paid the slightest attention to sensible precautions or the workings of fate.

'So what do we do?' Kane asks.

'We double the on-board protection, wrap ourselves around him, keep the man warm, keep the man alive.'

The Man. Kane's last glimpse of him as this long day comes to an end occurs after midnight. Two presidential confidants, NBC's Ed Murrow and a buccaneer outlaw called Wild Bill Donovan, have been summoned to the White House for beer and sandwiches and it falls to Kane to take them upstairs to the Oval Study. Murrow has just returned from an assignment in London and wants to know about Harry Hopkins.

'He just got out of the hospital,' Kane says. 'A month of blood transfusions.'

'So what the heck's wrong with the guy? He looks like someone dropped him and broke the important bits.'

Kane says he doesn't know, raps on the door of the Oval Study, stands to one side as the two men file past. Roosevelt catches sight of him at the door.

'20–14, Agent Kane. Can you believe that?'

'Sir?'

'Out at Griffith, this afternoon. Philly Eagles brought down to earth.'

Kane nods, robbed for once of anything sensible to say. The Pacific Fleet in ruins. Thousands dead. Certain war in the offing. And yet this president has time to celebrate the score in the DC game. Truly remarkable.

That night, Kane remains on duty in the White House, fielding telephone calls, patrolling the corridors, ascending to the second floor to check out the presidential bedroom door. After years of keeping its distance from foreign wars, America is fast adapting to the prospect of a very different future. Rumours are sweeping DC that some of the Jap planes over Pearl Harbor carried swastikas on their wings and tailplanes. Might American boys once again be despatched across the Atlantic?

Next morning, just before noon, Kane joins other agents outside the southern entrance to the mansion. Here, in warm sunshine, a motorcade has assembled for the three-mile dash to Capitol Hill. Mike Reilly is in charge of the on-board protection detail and assigns Kane the mortuary slot to FDR's immediate right. Should anyone open fire on the President from the sidewalk the bullets will have to go through Kane first.

On a hand signal from Reilly, the motorcade begins to move. Overnight, the news from Hawaii has only become grimmer. More than two thousand servicemen and civilians confirmed dead. Hospitals brimming with casualties. The Pacific Fleet counted out in the first round.

At the bottom of Fourteenth, the Caddy slows for the turn into Independence Avenue. Kane is watching the faces behind the armed soldiers lining the route and detects none of the usual enthusiasm for FDR. Instead, folks are silent, watchful, maybe apprehensive. A disaster like this was on no one's Christmas list, and even the nation's president, normally so glad to be free of the White House and his bank of telephones, is grim-faced, his eyes fixed on some distant point way beyond the windshield. Kane can feel the heat of his body through his own suit. As they finally slow to a halt beside the Capitol, he pats Kane's thigh.

'Let's get this thing done,' he murmurs.

Transferring FDR in and out of limos is silky-smooth, a marvel of co-ordination: the wheelchair readied at the kerbside, two men on either side, the President using his upper body strength to lever himself across the gap. Blink twice, as Reilly always says, and you've missed it.

They're on the move already, wheeling the presidential chair across the sidewalk, up the ramp and into the building with a curt nod from the trio of armed Marines at the door. Inside, Kane hears the expectant murmur of hundreds of conversations from the House of Representatives before they round the final corner and pause at the entrance to the chamber.

FDR's son James is waiting to help his father to the podium. Kane knows the exact distance to the podium because he's

had to measure it. What he also knows is the immense effort FDR has to make to somehow convince a watching nation that a polio cripple can become their president. To onlookers, this walk has the makings of a conjuring trick. Only close family and secret agents know the price in effort, sweat and raw pain. Even the brief speech that follows will mean a shirt change within the hour.

At the sight of father and son, hundreds of senators and congressmen rise to their feet and give their president a standing ovation. They need leadership, they need reassurance. Stiffly, one careful step after another, FDR makes his way to the podium where his big hands grasp the wooden top while he sways a little, before gesturing for the applause to stop.

His address extends to barely twenty-five sentences and Kane counts every one of them. This, he knows, is history in the making. He can visualise packed taverns across the country, bartenders turning up the volume on the radio, hushing drinkers for a little quiet. He can imagine his own family back home in Boston, his mom and dad probably at the lunch table, his little sister in charge of the volume knob on the big old Bakelite. FDR has already rebadged 7 December as a day that will live in infamy and he's in the process of confronting the many sacrifices that lie ahead when a strange noise overhead breaks the tense silence inside the chamber.

Congressmen peer upwards. Secret agents exchange glances. The noise grows louder, and louder still, and it's Kane who recognises the tell-tale patter of footsteps. This is serious. The executive and legislative heart of America, hopelessly vulnerable, is a sitting target, Congressmen trapped in their seats are at the mercy of something totally

unforeseen. Might it be a bomb? Might the ceiling shortly collapse on the beating heart of this hapless nation? First Pearl Harbor? Now the Capitol itself?

Mike Reilly has already disappeared towards the service stairs that lead to the roof. Another agent, gun in hand, follows him. But FDR, stubbornly upright behind the podium, pays not the slightest attention. He's closing his address, asking Congress to confirm that a state of war now exists between the United States and the Japanese Empire. His audience return their attention to the podium and, once again, rise to acclaim their President.

The vote goes through with a single dissenting voice, and FDR makes his way back towards the big doors through a forest of clapping hands. Kane walks behind him, scanning faces on either side of the aisle, looking – as ever – for anomalies and warning signs of yet more trouble to come. Out in the sunshine, Mike Reilly is already preparing to mastermind the transfer of FDR back to the Caddy.

'And?' Kane gestures up towards the roof of the House of Representatives.

'One of our guys,' Reilly shakes his head in mock despair, 'chasing shadows.'

That afternoon, Reilly and Kane conference with a guy from the Treasury Department. Among the Department's many trophy confiscations is a part-armoured saloon that once belonged to Al Capone, and Reilly is very welcome to have it as a sensible replacement for FDR's Caddy. Kane, amused by the thought of Roosevelt taking advantage of a gangster-ride of his very own, thinks it a fine idea but it

turns out that Reilly is already in conversations with Ford in Detroit, who – in the spirit of Pearl Harbor – have offered to build a bespoke Lincoln with guaranteed all-round protection. At this, the Treasury guy gathers his papers and departs, leaving Reilly with a long list of items still needing resolution.

One of them, anticipating Jap air raids over DC, proposes painting the White House black. Another suggests changing the course of the Potomac and Anacostia rivers to deny enemy pilots an obvious path to the presidential mansion. A third, truly radical, would involve moving the nation's capital hundreds of miles inland.

Reilly and Kane agree that this crazy stuff is time wasted but when Reilly does his best to co-opt Kane onto an emergency working group to troubleshoot the construction of an air raid shelter under the White House lawn, Kane shakes his head. What he really needs just now, after thirty hours flat out, is a decent night's sleep. He's phoned a neighbour to take Dexter for a walk but the woman is Chinese and might be nervous about showing her face on the street. For his own sake, and the dog's, Kane is off home.

A pat on the back sends Kane to the door. Tomorrow's another day, my friend, but get rid of that bloody dog of yours. Kane raises a tired arm, doesn't look back. Pearl Harbor in flames? Unbelievable.

The apartment is on a quiet street near Cleveland Park, normally a fifteen-minute drive from the White House. Heading north from downtown DC, the roads are virtually empty, and Kane does it in ten. Dexter is whining behind the door and the moment Kane steps into the apartment, he knows the Chinese woman hasn't appeared.

He finds one coil of shit, then a second, and he's in the process of looking for a third when he hears a knock on the door. Cursing the intrusion, he pads back to the entrance hall. Standing regulations stipulate every agent equips himself with a spy hole but Kane has only been in residence for a couple of months and has yet to get round to it.

And so he opens the door, wondering how to handle the smell, and then pauses. The last time he set eyes on this woman was more than a month ago at the Los Angeles airport out at Inglewood. She's way shorter than Kane and has an indefinable physical presence that turns heads in any bar. Kane had spent a very happy couple of weeks in LA, once again trying to put the essence of this woman into words, and had failed completely. Saying goodbye at the departure gate put her on tiptoes, her arms once again round Kane's neck, her body pressed against his. She smells now, as she smelled then, of a French perfume called L'Origan.

'Mahoney,' Kane gestures her inside. 'My apologies for the fucking dog.'