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Opening extract from
Dangerous Girls

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TRIAL

The photo clicks up on the display projector overhead. Although everyone must have seen it a dozen times over, I still hear the gasps of shock ripple through the courtroom.

“Objection!” My lawyer leaps to his feet. The judge sighs, staring over her thin wire-rimmed glasses. “Your objections have been noted, counselor. Many times.”

I sit silently in the witness box. They’ve been trying to bring up the photos for weeks now, and for weeks, my lawyer has been fighting. They’re unrelated. Out of context. Prejudicial. If there was a jury, then maybe he would have won, but here in Aruba, there’s no jury deciding my fate. It’s just Judge von Koppel, and as she’s told him every time, she’s already seen them. Hell, everyone has. From the day some journalist browsed our profile pages and hit the tawdry jackpot, those photos have been printed and reprinted, emblazoned across every newspaper front page in the world.

“Miss Chevalier, if you could look at the first photo . . .” He clicks again, making it larger this time. “Can you tell us, when was this taken?”

“Halloween,” I reply reluctantly. “Last year.”

“And that’s you in the photograph?”

“Yes.”

“With who?”

“Tate,” I say quietly, picking at the skin around my left thumbnail. They said I’m supposed to keep my hands folded, unmoving, but I can’t help it. Every nail is bloodied by now, scabbed and torn.

He’s still waiting, so I take a breath. “And Elise.”

“The victim,” he announces, as if they didn’t know. “And what are your costumes, here?”

“Vampire cheerleaders.”

It sounds so stupid, out loud in court, but that’s what Halloween is for, right? Slutty nurses and zombie cats; guys with fake limbs and girls in trashy fairy-tale costumes. It

doesn't mean anything; it's all just a game. It's not supposed to be blown up as evidence on a display screen one day, like you planned it out from the start.

"Elise and I were vampire cheerleaders," I say again, "And Tate was . . . a bootlegger, I guess. Something from the twenties. He wanted to wear the braces and hat."

"And these photographs were taken at . . . the Newport residence?"

I nod. "I mean, yes. We were going to a party, but we all met at the twins', Max and Chelsea's, to get dressed, and take photos and stuff."

He hasn't put the other photos up from that night: Max in his zombie football player uniform; Chelsea as Princess Leia with her hair caught up in fat braided whorls; Lamar as Black Jesus, with the robes and a blinged-out cross; Melanie in her usual slutty cat outfit, whining that she didn't know Elise and I were going to match. We must have taken hundreds of photos that night—dressing up, and posing, and later, at the party—but of course, nobody wants the rest of them. Not when they have the ones they need right there: four pictures, saying everything they want to see.

"And the blood—"

"Fake blood," I interrupt.

"Yes." He gives me a patronizing smile. "Whose idea was that?"

"I don't know. We found it, online," I explain. "The same place we got the costumes."

"We. That's you and Miss Warren."

"Yes."

She had been so excited, showing me the website. Proper horror costumes, like the kind they use for movies and music videos. Blood and scars and fake wounds oozing puss. We'd scrolled through the options, laughing and crying out with disgust. Alien baby. Zombie spinster. Not that we picked any of them in the end. We wanted to look hot, too. Hot with an edge.

“And the knife, whose idea was that?”

I feel my cheeks flush. “I don’t know.”

“You don’t know? But that’s you holding it, isn’t it?” He clicks the photo even bigger.

“Yes. I mean, I don’t remember. There was a lot going on. It’s not mine,” I add, remembering my lawyer’s instructions not to seem sullen or withdrawn. I force a polite smile.

“Someone got it from the kitchen, for the photos.”

“Somebody.” He drags the word out, sounding skeptical. “But you don’t remember who?”

“No.” My voice is small.