

Love that Kills –

2 New Job

I called the police. I debated whether or not it was a wise move, but once my panic subsided enough for my brain to reboot, I figured the police officers would never sign a terrified student on the list of potential suspects... or so I hoped.

Three police cars arrived to secure the crime scene and interrogate the only witness they had—me. I told my story to four different people and kept answering the same questions. I was exhausted and wished for nothing more than to finally lay my head on the pillow, but my visibly closing eyes and wobbling legs didn't make the officers any less relentless.

"So, let me get this straight." Detective Monroe, the fourth person interviewing me, cleared his throat and glanced at his notes. "The victim stole your wallet and ran to the back alley. Then someone killed him, and your wallet with all your documents landed next to his body?"

"Yes," I confirmed. "That is exactly what happened."

The detective narrowed his eyes at me. "You are surprisingly calm, Ms. Wallace. You, a twenty-two-year-old student, have seen a brutally killed man. I, as an experienced policeman, find this scene horrifying. Don't you think that your absolute composure is a bit strange?"

I wanted to tell him that I wasn't calm, only too exhausted to show vivid emotions. Then I slowly processed his words, and a bitter grimace twisted my lips. "I witnessed death before," I muttered, thinking about how my parents died in a car accident. I was six then, but their dying eyes haunted me even now. I sucked in a breath and rubbed my forearms. "The death scene I saw then was much more horrifying than this one."

The detective smiled wryly and scratched his chin. "I'm sorry to hear that."

I nodded, accepting his apology before giving him a firm stare. "Besides... before you begin to suspect me, I suggest checking the footage from the surveillance." I pointed at the camera placed on top of the building. "I was standing here when that happened, and the footage will prove it."

Detective Monroe laughed. "Why do you think I would suspect you?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. Just saying." But I did know why. I was Miss Bad Luck, and bad things happened to me all the time. And speaking about bad luck... I drew a deep breath and clenched my fists to muster more courage. "Sir... I would like to ask about the money from my wallet... I know that it might sound inappropriate, but I was going to pay the rent tomorrow morning, and—"

"I'm sorry, Ms. Wallace." He gave me a pitying stare. "We need to collect everything for the forensics. We can send a note to your bank, but the formalities may take a while."

"H-how long?" I choked out.

He sighed and scratched his chin again. "A month, perhaps two."

Air escaped my lungs in a rush. There was no way that my landlord would agree to wait that long! I could beg him for an extra day, maybe two, but a month?! A groan of desperation broke through my throat.

"You may go home now, Ms. Wallace," the detective tossed before giving me a curt nod of his head and walking toward the crime scene.

Perhaps there was something incredibly wrong with me because, for me, the gruesome death of that thief became completely irrelevant in comparison to losing a month's worth of money.

"What am I going to do now?" I mumbled, my face turning from pale to translucent.

"Excuse me." I heard a man's voice behind me. I turned around and saw another police officer in uniform. The police cap formed a shadow that covered most of his face, revealing only his full lips curved into a half-smile. "I sincerely apologize. I didn't mean to eavesdrop on your conversation, but it appears to me that you are in need of a job and money." The deep, magnetic tone of his voice, perfect enunciation, and strange accent sounded nothing like what I would expect to hear from a local policeman. In any other circumstances, I would have found a semi-polite way to tell him that my problems were not his business, but my desperation grew by the second.

I smiled nervously and nodded. "My money for rent sank in the blood of the dead man."

He chuckled, elegantly covering those lips of his with a hand. It was yet another gesture that felt odd. All the other policemen at the scene had either a frown on their foreheads or their lips twisted in disgust. This man seemed peculiarly serene, and now he was even laughing. "My friend owns a club. They are looking for waitresses. I believe that you might call the salary they offer... satisfying. I even think that you might earn more than four digits over a single night," he said, handing me a business card.

I swallowed hard. Was he serious?! If he was, a job like this could save my life! I looked down and drew my pads over the expensive, engraved paper. "Regale Sanguis," I read the club's name and stared at the policeman with suspicion-filled eyes.

He laughed and waved his hand, reacting as if he knew exactly what I was thinking. "Please, they don't sell drugs there, and it's not a brothel. This place is absolutely legal."

I smiled more than nervously. "I have never met a policeman recruiting waitresses for the nightclub. Isn't that a bit... weird?"

He shrugged. "You're not underage, and you are in need. I do not run a recruitment campaign. I nearly offered my assistance. I don't see anything inappropriate about it." Then his smile spread into a madly seductive grin. "By the way, I'm Calvel."

My mouth opened, and, for a moment, I forgot how to speak. Then I cleared my throat. "I'm Nala. Nice to meet—"

Suddenly, I heard someone shouting. The sound came from the crime scene behind us. I turned around and sighed in relief, realizing it was just a trivial argument among the technicians. I shifted back toward Calvel. I had a few questions concerning that club. I was about to ask the first one, but he was already gone. I tried to spot him among the same-looking uniformed policemen, but my struggle lasted the whole ten seconds before my low-on-adrenaline system directed my feet toward home, my bed, and my pillow.

The sleep hadn't come. Despite my agonizing exhaustion, I spent the rest of the night tossing and turning on the bed. My heart pounded at an erratic pace. My brain kept displaying images of the dead thief with the flesh of his neck splayed within a three-foot radius. Every time I recalled that bloody scene, a cold shiver ran down my spine. Maybe I wasn't as immune to grotesque as I thought I was, or maybe it was the awareness that if I had been seen by the killer, I could have ended up dead myself.

"Focus, Nala. Focus!" I told myself, trying to erase the whole horrible event from my head. Unknowingly, I pulled out the business card Calvel had given me and locked my eyes on the refined logo. I had waited tables before. I even worked as a bartender for five months. But I had never worked at a nightclub. The sole sound of that word made me think of girls dressed provocatively, trying to satisfy the customers with something more than just serving drinks. All my self-preservation instincts screamed in panic at the mere thought of going there.

My inner debate lasted until eight o'clock. I had made the decision a minute before the landlord came for the rent. I told him about everything that had happened last night, but, of course, he didn't believe me. Then I spent an additional thirty minutes begging him, which resulted in postponing my execution by three days. The relief forced tears from my eyes and a wide smile from my lips... until I realized my chances of survival were still slim.

I spent the next hour staring at the Regale Sanguis business card. Then I made a call. A female answered.

"Yes, the recruitment starts today at nine. Our candidates are requested to wear something... enticing for the recruitment process," she said.

I gulped. Her description seemed to confirm my darkest concerns about working there. "Enticing?" I repeated softly, and she snorted.

"Don't worry. No one will touch you... unless you are willing," she encouraged.

Hysterical laughter built in my throat. What the hell was I getting myself into?! I instantly recalled Sarah ridiculing my work... Now I started to think that she might be a prophet. The problem was, I was never the slutty type, and I would never sell my body. I would rather die than lose my dignity.

Of course, I considered selling my soul to a handsome demon more than once, but only while I was reading a smutty romance novel, and only because demons did not exist.

An hour later, desperation took the best of me. It was the final semester of my senior year. The graduation was so close. I worked hard to get that diploma. It was my ticket to a better life.

"Maybe I'm overreacting... Maybe it's just another job, only a well-paid one?" I calmed myself down while standing in front of a mirror and putting on makeup.

The only "enticing" piece of clothing I had was a little black dress that I bought several years ago and wore once—on a blind date that lasted only until I introduced myself. Unfortunately, I wasn't the only one who liked the dress. A few weeks ago, I found a rat in my closet. Now I realized that the annoying rodent used the black cotton and lace to sharpen his tiny claws, turning my fine dress into a pile of shreds...

I shouted out a curse or a few... hundred curses. Then I finally left my apartment wearing a white top, a pair of blue jeans, and sneakers—the only clothes that didn't have holes and appeared to not be too worn. I untied my wavy blond hair, letting it fall loose over my shoulders. That was the only thing that I could do to look "enticing."

After an hour-long ride on the bus, I got in front of something resembling an industrial building with a high-end touch. A long line of young women stood outside. They all looked like supermodels, and they all looked as if they were loaded with money, making me wonder what they were even doing here looking for a job. Among their designer brand dresses and shoes, I surely stood out, but not in a good way...

"Hey, Cinderella! Are you lost?" One of the girls laughed.

I ignored her and walked to the end of the line. We waited for a few more minutes before the door opened, and a tall man with reddish-brown hair greeted us at the entrance.

"My dear ladies, my name is Nicor. I'm the manager here. Welcome to the Regale Sanguis." He bowed low, gesturing at us to walk inside.

The club's interior resembled a subtle mix of the nineteenth-century castle's ballroom and modern hall, with raw bricks and metallic ornaments. There was a round bar in the center and rows of discreet alcoves with booth seatings on each side. The manager told us to stand in a circle.

"Now, I will select a few of you. Those few will get the job," he said.

"That's it?" one of the girls blurted out, crossing her arms over her overly exposed chest. "You won't even ask if we have any work experience?"

Nicor chuckled. "I don't need to ask, darling. I WILL know."

His answer sent chills down my spine. I took a deep breath, trying to ignore the uncomfortable sensation, but his sudden stare at me only increased the restlessness. He looked me up and down, scanning my sneakers, jeans, and top, and making me want to become invisible.

"Interesting," he commented, raising one eyebrow, before moving on to the next candidate.

My hands folded in my waist, and I stepped back as if a Cinderella could possibly hide among the crowd of goddesses. Then I felt someone else's gaze on me. It made my head turn to the side and drew my eyes to the upper floor. A wave of heat washed over me. "God..." I muttered breathlessly as my eyes swept over the man standing on the balcony.

He was wearing a black suit and a black shirt underneath a perfectly tailored jacket, which emphasized his broad shoulders and strong arms. A few strands of his slightly curly black hair elegantly fell on his perfectly carved face. But it wasn't his full, sultry lips, the sharp line of his jaw, the unbelievably underlined cheekbones, or these silky strands of hair that made my heart stop—it was his gaze on me. His black eyes pierced right through me as if he could strip me layer by layer until he could see my dreams, my fantasies, and read every shameful aspect of my soul.

Another heartbeat came only after he shifted his gaze elsewhere. The sudden relief made my whole body tremble. My head began to spin, forcing my eyes to watch over my off-balanced feet. It took me a moment to save myself from falling, but when I glanced back at the balcony, the mysterious man was already gone.

"Ms. Wallace, right?" Nicor patted my shoulder, startling me.

I turned toward him, stretching my lips into a nervous smile. "Yes?"

He smirked, once again scanning me from head to toe. "Congratulations," he then said. "You are hired."