

Collared

Vegas Nights

By

Rayanna Jamison

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Published by Blushing Books®,
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ABCD Graphics and Design
977 Seminole Trail #233
Charlottesville, VA 22901
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EBook ISBN: 978-1-68259-845-0
Cover Art by ABCD Graphics & Design

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Chapter One

The scream caught in her throat woke her up and she fumbled for the bottle that she had placed on the nightstand for this reason. Her eyes were still shut as her mouth closed around the cold glass neck, and the warm amber liquid burned its way down to her stomach.

She had fought so hard against sleep, hoping to stave off the dreams she knew would come. She drank faster, finishing off the bottle quickly. She had more stashed in her closet. As a rule, she never drank. Except today. Today was the anniversary of her mother's death. It was also her twenty-fifth birthday.

As hard as she tried, there was no escaping the ever present reminders. It would be all over the news and social media, posted and re-hashed a million times over by super-fans everywhere. Her mother, actress and starlet Elizabeth Barret had had an illustrious career that spanned over thirty-five years before her death. She was the original American sweetheart.

The fans meant well, they didn't know the effect of their memorial posts every year. They weren't thinking of her being in the car with her mother, or the gory details of the accident she relived every day. How could they? Her father had paid greatly to have those details kept from the media. So far, they had never come out.

Tossing the empty bottle on the floor, she debated opening her eyes and leaving the comfortable nest of her bed to retrieve another. Better not, she thought. I want to be numb, not dead. Getting completely obliterated before 10:00 am was not part of her birthday plan.

She snuggled back down against her pillow, drawing the covers over her head to drown out the lights and sounds of the Las Vegas Strip below her. The city never slept.

Luckily for Diamond, after a night performing in the lounge downstairs as a showgirl, getting to sleep was never a problem. Her small suite was comped as part of her pay, and set in an offshoot area of the casino, far from the hustle and bustle of the other rooms.

She could, and often did, sleep until noon without interruption, but not today. Her sisters wouldn't call out of respect for her wishes that her birthday not be acknowledged, but her father wouldn't be able to help himself.

Early riser that he was, he would call shortly before her alarm went off around ten, knowing that she hadn't worked last night, and wouldn't be sleeping in. Her father, jeweler to the stars, was as predictable as clockwork.

At exactly one minute before ten, her phone rang. "Hello?" she mumbled into the phone, hoping it sounded more like he had awakened her, and less like she had already been hitting the bottle.

"Listen, darling." Her father sounded rushed, not bothering with the niceties of wishing her a happy birthday. "I hate to tell you this, but someone leaked the details. It was bound to happen eventually. There were just too many damn cops and paramedics on scene to pay them all off. I must have missed one. I'm actually surprised it didn't happen before this, and I'm really sorry for it to have happened on today of all days, but you know how the media is. Damn vultures. Are you there?"

She wasn't. She was already running for the bathroom. She barely made it to the toilet before losing every ounce of her liquid breakfast. If this was how her day was going to start off, she shouldn't leave her room at all.

The alcohol tasted even worse coming up than it had going down, and she could hear her father calling to her through the phone which she had dropped in her rush to the toilet. Once she was sure every last drop of alcohol, and possibly a bit of her stomach lining was expelled from her rebelling body, she crawled back to the phone where her father was waiting patiently.

"That's it. I'm coming down. This ridiculous notion of hiding away and forgetting your birthday to honor her memory, and forget her death isn't working. For anyone."

"No, Daddy," she gasped. "Please don't, I'm fine. And I'll make sure to stay away from the TV and internet for a few days. Stay there. Emmy needs you more than I do. I'll see you next week at graduation." Her youngest sister was graduating from her prestigious private school with high honors, and Di couldn't be more proud.

She could practically hear her father grinding his teeth against his inner struggle as he fought his fathering instincts against her wishes. "Fine, but if you change your mind, you call me, and I'll be there in a heartbeat. I'll take the jet if I have to."

"I'm fine, Daddy. It was just... a shock. I'm going to climb back in bed, order room service and raunchy slapstick comedies, and ignore the rest of the world until tomorrow. It's a perfect day, really. I'm even looking forward to it," she lied.

“Okay, baby, if you say so. But remember, I’m here if you need me.”

“I know.” She smiled into the phone for a half a second before hitting the disconnect button and collapsing onto the floor in a sobbing heap, no longer able to escape the images that plagued her nightmares.

* * *

“Room service,” a voice called from outside the door.

Paxton Donovan, Pax, as he was known to his employees, and the rest of the Vegas nightclub circuit opened the door with a smile.

“Morning, Will,” he greeted the young college student who rolled in a cart boasting a six egg white and spinach omelet, a wheatgrass smoothie, black coffee and a copy of the New York Times.

“Morning, boss.” Will smiled as he efficiently unloaded the cart and set up Pax’s breakfast table, knowing by now, just how he liked it. “You working Rojo tonight, or Aubergine?”

Pax grunted. “Aubergine. Jerry has a wedding or some such he has to attend, so I’m bouncing.” Pax owned Rojo, a highly exclusive hotel and casino well known for boasting the only specialty BDSM club on the strip. Aubergine, next door, was where he had gotten his start. Over the years, the owner, Jason, had become his best friend, and now he was half owner, a fact that was well known at Rojo, but not anywhere else. He had become owner, simply for the sake of bailing Jason out of a jam, and he split his time between the two nightclubs with his main focus here at Rojo. Jason did the same, highlighting as a disciplinarian here at Rojo once or twice a week.

Will simply nodded in response. Will was your typical horny college student who enjoyed the perks of working at an exclusive Las Vegas casino. He could often be found at the bar on his nights off, simply taking in the scenery. So far, to Pax’s knowledge, Will never played, only watched, but he was respectful and followed the rules, so Pax hadn’t said anything. Will was a good kid and a good employee.

“Is there anything else I can get for you, boss?”

“No.” Pax gave a dismissive wave. He had a lunch meeting, and wanted to enjoy his breakfast and morning paper in peace, before his day began. Once it started, it didn’t stop until the club shut down for the night.

“Very good.” Will nodded as he left.

Sighing, Pax shrugged out of his robe. He wore it only as long as it took to receive his morning breakfast delivery. He much preferred to lounge in the buff, and the privacy to do so while still enjoying the view of the strip was one of the many luxuries his penthouse suite afforded him.

He downed his wheatgrass shake in one gulp, shuddering as it went down. He had never gotten used to the texture, but he was very picky about what went into his body. Spreading the paper out flat on the table in front of him, he pulled his plate into his lap, so he could read and eat at the same time. Today's headline read *New Details Emerge About Crash that Killed America's Sweetheart*.

America's sweetheart, being of course, the illustrious Elizabeth Barret. Four years had passed, you would think America would have a new sweetheart by now, he thought as he began to read. He wasn't cynical, just realistic. The show business industry was a fickle one.

A snapshot in the corner caught his eye, and he did a double take. At first glance, it had appeared to be a headshot, but upon closer inspection, he saw that it was something else entirely. What he was looking at, to his stomach's horror, was a snapshot of Elizabeth Barret's head lying in the road, completely unattached to her body, which, according to the story, was still strapped into her Lamborghini convertible.

In gruesome detail, the article went on to recount that her daughter, who had been celebrating her twenty-first birthday by shopping and doing lunch with her mother, had been in the accident with her—a detail that until today, had been unknown to the public.

Diamond Barrett, he read, was ejected from the vehicle on impact, and suffered only minor injuries. She was found unconscious, minutes after the accident in the bushes on the side of the road. Beside her on the pavement, was her mother's severed head.

"Damn." Pax whistled aloud to the empty room. "That chick's going to have some serious issues."

There was a picture of the daughter, which he found especially interesting. Elizabeth Barret had three daughters and she had always done a stellar job of keeping them out of the lime-light and away from the public knowledge. The snapshot was a fuzzy one, and he knew by looking at it, that someone had gotten lucky and made a lot of money selling this story. It was obviously a picture taken at the scene of the accident. Her pupils were dilated, making it obvious that she was still in shock. She probably didn't even notice the creep with the camera. She had pale blonde hair,

the lightest blue eyes he had seen, and high cheekbones. Those features combined with her mother's famous heart-shaped pout, made her a knock-out.

He frowned. He didn't think he had ever seen a picture of Elizabeth Barret's daughter before, it wasn't the sort of thing he kept up with, but there was something about her eyes. She looked oddly familiar, and he couldn't shake the niggling feeling that he knew her, or that their paths had crossed before.

The phone rang, and he pulled himself away from the haunting face.

"Talk to me." He knew before he answered that it was Jason.

"Pax, there is nothing on the schedule for tomorrow night."

"What are you talking about? It's Vanilla Night." Vanilla Night was his brain child, one of the things that set Rojo apart from other BDSM clubs. The other thing was that, while it was categorized as a BDSM club, it was pretty tame. They mostly specialized in spanking. They had special demonstrations sometimes, but spanking was what they were known for. On Vanilla Night, they dialed it down even further and opened the club to beginners. People new to the lifestyle, or interested in experimenting, could come and observe with no pressure. They gave mild demonstrations, but the punishments doled out on Vanilla Night were always real. Pax kept his showgirls, Pax's girls, as they were known, on a short leash. He had high expectations of them, but he treated them well. He gave them generous salaries, and comped their suites and meals, even allotting them each a small allowance to use within the shops that were housed within both Aubergine and Rojo.

Jason grunted. "I know it's Vanilla Night. I'm saying, none of your girls have broken any rules. According to the ledger, they've all been perfect angels."

His jaw dropped. "That can't be right. That never happens! There is always something. Hell, we have a dozen girls! You're telling me, not one of them did a single thing wrong this week? Nobody showed up late or overspent their allowance, or anything?"

"That's what I'm saying. Must be the full moon or something."

Pax grunted. He'd never bought into the full moon nonsense, and he wasn't about to start now.

"So, what do you want to do about tomorrow? There has to be a demonstration. Want me to call in one of the headliners?" The headliners, were the ones who did the harder core stuff. They were experts in things Pax wouldn't touch with a ten-foot pole. They were usually brought in as

special entertainment and advertised weeks in advance. They drew in a huge crowd from the more hardcore scene. Bringing them in for Vanilla Night would be a disaster.

“No, that won’t work. Let me think on it. I’ll come up with something. Maybe something will happen tonight. We still have twenty-four hours for somebody to mess up.”

He could hear Jason’s smirk through the phone. “Okay, you’re the boss.”

Pax hung up without responding and paced the room. His day was already packed, and he did not have extra time or energy to devote to this problem, but he would have to. Vanilla Night was just as big of a crowd pleaser as the headliners were. He had to have entertainment. All of his current girls had been with him five years or more, maybe that was the problem. His rules had become second nature to them. They didn’t mess up like rookies would. “I need some fresh meat,” he muttered to himself as he headed for the shower.

* * *

Diamond woke up on the floor hours later with another empty bottle beside her. Her eyes were bloodshot, her face was tear-stained, and her throat was hoarse from crying. To top it off, she was angry as hell.

“It’s my birthday, dammit,” she yelled to the empty room. “Fucking vultures.” Standing up, and grabbing a fresh bottle from her nightstand, she stumbled into the bathroom.

“Happy fucking birthday,” she told her reflection, as she took a swig straight from the bottle. And then to her horror, she started to cry again.

“No. No. No.” She was done hiding, finished letting them get to her. She could change her name, her looks, move away and hide in the busiest city in the US, but she couldn’t change her birthday. It was supposed to be a happy occasion, a day to be celebrated. Four years ago, a drunk driver in a semi had taken that from her, and today, a money hungry paparazzi and a bunch of detail starved media mongers had driven in the final nail.

Living well is the best revenge. The well-known and oft uttered quote popped into her head and she smiled. It was something her mother had often said when the media would publish lies and unflattering stories about her.

Diamond had thought that she was living well. The life of an Aubergine showgirl was a glamorous one most days, and she was having fun. Las Vegas was a city full of life—there was always something to see, and something to do. But, if she was really honest with herself, she wasn’t

really living. Not the way she should be. She had ended up here as a way to lick her wounds away from her well-meaning family and friends in California. So far, that was all she had done.

That, she vowed, ends now. She was taking back her birthday, and the rest of her life with it.

Running a brush haphazardly through her pale hair, and heaping her mascara generously, she added her favorite red lipstick to polish off her look. She squinted at her blurry reflection in the mirror. "Look out Las Vegas, Here I come." She said it aloud, then frowned when she realized she was talking to herself again.

Two minutes later, she was on the elevator dressed to the nines in her favorite white dress that was usually reserved as part of her costume, and four-inch diamond studded heels that had been her mother's. She had a flask full of liquor tucked into her garter belt, and she was ready to party.