

PROLOGUE

Alexis had been screaming all day. Up and down the grand staircase of her home she paced, stopping occasionally to let out bone-chilling howls at the top of her lungs, over and over again, as if she were in some sort of trance.

In the kitchen, I hid behind the island, holding back tears of frustration and fear, hoping she wouldn't find me. I felt bad but I couldn't speak to her anymore. I was too exhausted.

Was she having a nervous breakdown? This had been going on for three days and she still hadn't slept—which meant that I hadn't slept either. I was starting to wonder who was crazier—her for behaving this way, or me for staying?

It had been days of paranoid rambling as she rattled off lists of her enemies and rivals, both real and imagined. The younger singer, to whom Alexis was often compared, she had nicknamed "Donut Licker." The rapper who was publicly dragging her was "Troll Doll." And the woman who'd tried to steal her career, actually *wasn't* from the block—instead, Alexis said she just "blew a lot of cock." She talked so fast it didn't warrant a response. The only thing I could compare it to was the cocaine-addled party girls I'd seen traversing West Hollywood on the occasional Saturday night out. But Alexis was in a full-blown psychosis.

"I'm the star, Hayden," she'd say, her body here but her eyes staring at some distant horizon only she could see. *"I am the star."*

Once an hour she disappeared for a few minutes to change her outfit, but other times she insisted I come with her to the closet. On our way there, she always gave me the same tour—as if I'd never seen it before—of this Beverly Hills compound, which she was renting to the tune of

\$150,000 a month. When I was a kid, I'd watched Alexis give a tour of her house to Robin Leach on *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*. She was in her prime then, and I never would have imagined I'd end up working for her. Now, the tour ended with her shutting me in her bedroom as she undressed, insisting I get underneath the sheets with her.

"I'm gay, Alexis!" I said.

"I don't care!"

Sometimes I got lucky and she'd tire of me. Walking out the front door, clutching her car keys in hand, she'd turn the car alarm on and off before telling her head of security she was taking the car to outer space. He'd eventually wrestle the keys from her, as she was forty and had never learned to drive. She got famous too young.

The house was quiet now. Too quiet. I pressed my back up against the island and closed my eyes, praying to wake up from this nightmare. After only three months, I knew I couldn't take much more of this. *What was wrong with her?*

A floorboard creaked, and I glanced up. Alexis was standing over me. We locked eyes.

"Hayden," she whispered, then let out another horrific scream. I whimpered, tears flowing down my cheeks. "Don't be scared, Hayden," she said. "You do believe in God, don't you?"

I rose to my feet and started for the door. I heard her running behind, trying to catch me. Just as my hand touched the cold brass handle, she screamed again.

"Don't leave me, Hayden! Please! Everybody leaves me!"

The woman behind me wasn't just anybody. Alexis Shane was the most famous woman in the world, the best-selling female artist of all time, the recipient of countless accolades and an idol to millions of fans.

And now, she was ruining my life.

Turning the handle, I sprinted out into the street, looking out at Beverly Drive, picturesque and tree lined. It all appeared so perfect. It was hard to imagine something so awful could be happening here.

As I ran toward Sunset Boulevard, not knowing where I was headed, one thought kept ringing through my head.

How the fuck did I get here?