

## • Chapter Three •

### Rodney

RODNEY HAD FIRST NOTICED the bleeding during pre-production. He had thought that perhaps he'd leaned his hand on the edge of a table with a loose nail or tack, and that was why his palm had that dot of blood right in its center. But by the end of the first day, when the little dot of blood had appeared on his right palm, the other dot of blood appeared on his left palm and then right on top of both his hands as if the dots had seeped right through to the other sides.

It was early July in Los Angeles, and once a few people noticed the blood coming through the Band-Aids and then the gauze wrapping, Rodney was forced to wear work gloves to hide the growing dots of blood. But TV preproduction for a production assistant was a week of copying schedules, making calls, and picking up various office supplies for the shoot. Nothing that needed work gloves, so it was difficult to explain away the gloves as a grip or an electrician might have.

And then there was the heat. It was a hot summer already, and Rodney's dark complexion sucked up the rays, and his tall stature made him feel even closer to the sun, so the gloves drove him to an itchy, damp distraction.

Finally, John noticed and made fun of him a little bit. Usually, when his cousin John did that, it would have made him give some explanation for whatever he was being mocked for, and he would have somehow changed his behavior out of embarrassment. But now Rodney said nothing and did nothing in response to the ribbing until John had to stop him in the hallway outside the office and ask.

“Rod, what’s with the gloves?”

“Listen, man. You’re not gonna believe this. It’s just ridiculous and kind of gross and I don’t want to upset the females in the office. It’s just that my hands are bleeding.”

“Your what?”

“My hands are bleeding.”

“So, go to the goddamn medic, Rodney! Jesus Christ!”

“Yeah, well, it’s nothing I can explain. Nothing happened to them! I think I need to get a whole checkup, and I don’t have the insurance yet. And I’m just now catching up on the bills for the lung thing.”

“Rodney, you are a man with one lung, and you need to take care of your health because you breathe harder than other people, and every little thing can be tougher on your body. You need to take care of this hand thing because you don’t want to seem like a fucking nut and lose this job I got you, man.”

“I know, I know.”

“Let me see.”

“What?”

“The cuts or whatever. Take off the gloves and tell me what you punched your hands through. Let me see.”

“I didn’t punch anything.”

“Take off the goddamn gloves, Rodney—I can’t fuck around and kid with you. Let me see, and let’s get you to the goddamned studio medic and take care of this before you make a fool of me.”

Rodney pulled off one glove at a time, immediately revealing the now nickel-sized bloodspots that were already soaking through the new gauze he had wrapped just an hour earlier. John winced at his cousin’s hands, and then his face went blank as Rodney flipped his palms back and forth to show the matching spots on the fronts of each hand. John grabbed Rodney by the arm, and they both instinctively knew to shuffle sideways right into the men’s room down the hall and quickly step into a stall, which they locked behind them.