

Club Mystique

Crimson Rose

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I was just about to walk out the front door to go job hunting for the thirty-ninth day in a row when my cell phone rang. I did not recognize the number so slid it to ignore. On the front porch, pulling the locked door closed behind me it rang again. Same number. Sighing, I answered. "Hello?"

"Good morning. Is this Willow Hayes?"

"That all depends on who's asking. If you're a bill collector I'll pay when I get a job. If you're a telemarketer then take me off whatever list you've got me on."

"Thankfully, I'm neither. My name is Eva Briggs and I'm the owner and operator of Club Mystique. I got your name from Tori Newman. You do know her, right?"

"I do, but why on earth would she give you my name and number? I'm no stripper."

"We're not just a strip club. And she gave me your information because she said you've been out of work and having a hard time landing another job. Full disclosure, she also showed me a picture of you and her together in bikinis at the beach and if that really is you then I can guarantee you a position right now today."

"Oh yeah? Will that be head down, ass up or on my back?"

"Look, I'm offering you a job making well above minimum wage. The least you could do is accept or refuse without being snippy about it. I apologize for bothering you, Miss Hayes. You will not hear from..."

"WAIT!" I shrieked with far more urgency than intended. "I'm the one that should be apologizing. Thank you for the offer, but I don't think I have what it takes to be a stripper."

"Have you ever been to Club Mystique?"

"No Ma'am I have not."

"Then it's no surprise you think it's nothing more than another run of the mill strip club."

"It isn't?"

"No, no it is not. Some of my employees do strip to various degrees of naked, but that is not their sole duty, nor is it the only thing we do. Your friend told me about you at the perfect time, Miss Hayes. I'm currently looking to hire several sexy, open-minded girls and from what I've seen you fit the bill. How would you like to come in tonight for an interview and the chance to win a ten thousand dollar prize?"

"Ten thousand...and just what would I have to do to earn that prize?"

"Participate in what I lovingly call the gauntlet along with a few other women vying for a position. Make it through to the end and that's the top prize you keep even if you don't take the job. Second get five thousand, third gets twenty-five hundred and the rest will receive five hundred."

"And what is this gauntlet? What will I be expected to do?"

"I'm afraid I cannot tell you that, Miss Hayes."

"Please, call me Willow. And why can't you tell me? I thought you said you were the owner of the place?"

"I am. And I can't tell you as it would ruin the surprise and give you an unfair advantage over the other contestants. If you wish to participate please arrive at eight-thirty so that you have time to get dressed for the event which will start at nine. Please enter through the back door and tell Michelle at the ticket booth you are here for the contest. She will see that you are well taken care of. If you don't show up then I'll assume you're not interested in the job and I wish you luck in the search. Either way, enjoy the rest of your day."

“Thanks. You too.” Hanging up the phone, I immediately dialed my best friend Tori.
“What in the holy hell?”

“Um...excuse me?”

“You heard me! Club Mystique? Really?”

“Ah, so Eva called, huh?”

“Yeah, I just hung up from talking to her. She said you gave her my name and information and showed her pictures of us on the beach. She wants to give me a job.”

“You said yes, right?”

“Not exactly. I’m not a stripper, Tori. Hell, I don’t even know how to dance. At least not like that anyways.”

“You don’t have to be a stripper, Willow. There’s more to the club than that.”

“Eva said the same thing. She invited me to some contest tonight.”

“Please tell me you’re not going to turn down the opportunity to make ten grand.”

“What will I have to do? And don’t you dare lie and say you can’t tell me.”

“I wouldn’t be lying. I am forbidden from speaking of it to anyone including you. All the members are. If word gets out the one violating the terms will be banned and I’m sorry, but I like the place far too much to risk losing my membership. If you want to know you’ll have to show up and participate. What I can tell you, however, is that no matter what happens, you must complete the gauntlet. You may not think it to look at her, but Eva has a great deal of influence in many different fields and to piss her off could spell career suicide. So please do not show up if you’re not serious.”

“Can she get me a job that does not require taking my clothes off to earn a paycheck?”

“Absolutely. But it won’t happen overnight. You’ll have to earn her trust and respect before she even considers it and the quickest way I know to do that is to work at the club. So, you going to go?”

“Please be honest with me Tori. Even if you can’t tell me what I’ll have to do can you at least tell me if I’ll like it?”

“I honestly have no idea, but ten grand will go a long way towards keeping a roof over your head if you ultimately decide not to take the job. And before you ask, yes, I will be there in the audience tonight. I’d participate myself, but members are not eligible so I’ll just have to watch.”

“So, when did you get into watching women strip, or whatever the hell it is they do at that place? I thought you were straight?”

“Nah, if anything I’m pretty badly bent. We’re best friends, Willow, but there are some things I keep even from you. It’s nothing personal as I keep certain aspects of my life hidden behind walls and layers of secrecy so thick it would take a nuke to penetrate them. But if you show up tonight you’ll get a glimpse of what those secrets are. Unfortunately, I just pulled into the parking lot at work so I need to get going. Hope to see you tonight.”

“I’ll think about it.” Hanging up, I went back into the house, kicked off my shoes and placed my purse on the stand next to the door. “So much for job hunting,” I sighed. Going to my desk, I sat down, turned my laptop on and when straight to google to look up the club I’ve heard so much and knew so little about. At the top of the list was a dance club in Amsterdam, a restaurant and lounge in Miami and a gentlemen’s club in Connecticut – none of which were even remotely close to where I lived. Adding in the city and state and the owner’s name shortened the list to exactly zero and I wondered what kind of club in this day and age did not

have their own website. I suppose it added to the mystery of the place, but in my opinion made for poor marketing.

Unable to find anything definitive, I shut my computer down and went to the couch with the intent of passing the time watching meaningless programming, but it was nothing more than background noise as I thought long and hard about the options laid out before me. Yes, ten grand would go a long way to keeping me afloat until something else came along, but what would I have to do to earn it? While cryptic, I gathered enough from the tone of my best friend's voice to know it was something I most likely would not enjoy doing. Adding in her and Eva both admitting women did strip there and my mind began wandering into sexual scenarios that made my cheeks flush.

The minutes ticked away with the agonizing slowness of a snail on Xanax. Bored out of my mind, I did what little cleaning needed done, washed a load of laundry, soaked in a long, hot bath and gave more thought to what I should do. At five after seven my phone rang. Seeing it was Eva, I answered fully expecting her to tell me our earlier conversation was a joke. "Hello?"

"Hey, Willow, it's Eva. Are you free right now?"

"Just soaking in a hot bath. Why?"

"Is there any chance you could drop by in, say, the next half hour to prepare for the contest?"

"Um, I thought it wasn't until nine?"

"It isn't, but I wasn't thinking earlier and there's a lot more to do to get you ready than putting you in a dress."

"You're assuming I'm going to participate."

"You're right and that's my mistake. If you are going to participate could you please show up in the next half hour? Come in through the back and tell Chloe you're here to see me. If not, well, enjoy your bath."

The call ended and I sat the phone on the vanity. Exhaling a sigh, I drained the water and got out of the tub. After drying off, I threw on a pair of panties, a dress and pair of heels. Quickly doing my hair, I grabbed my purse and head out the door to whatever fate had in store for me.