

# HOLE IN THE WALL

A JUDE MAGDALYN  
EXCLUSIVE



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PRUITT



“I’ll be there at seven, Ms. Talanger.” Before I could hang up, she asked another question and I bit back a sigh, answered. “Yes, of course. Yes, I look forward to seeing you as well. Good-bye, now.”

“Christ, I thought you’d never get the old bag off the phone.” Izzy tipped her bottle back, scowled when only a few splashes of beer dripped out. “Tell me again why you’re doing a party for her tomorrow night?”

“Isabelle Bordeaux, you know damn good and well why I took the job.” A customer down at the other end of the bar thumped a glass on the stained and discolored wood, attempted a whistle. The look I sent him made him drop his eyes, the whistle dying. “Because if I have to work here to save the money for the jacket, I’ll end up getting fired or killing someone.”

“You love Hole in the Wall.” She took the new bottle from me, popped the top herself. “It’s why we drink here so much.”

“Yeah, I love drinking here. I do *not* love working here.” Still, I worked my way down the bar, refilling drinks, taking cash, swatting hands when they got too friendly. The unofficial uniform for behind the bar was a simple white tank and jeans. I’d thrown my long, dark hair up in deference to the humidity prevalent in New Orleans in August. To keep the owner from bitching at me, I’d slapped some mascara and eyeliner on, fiddled with shadow to match my gray eyes. The overly friendly hands reminded me why I didn’t do so on a regular basis.

By the time I made my way back down to her, Izzy had drained the bottle, started rolling the tinted glass back and forth on the bar. She tossed her hair over her shoulder, the blonde sheet catching the dim light in the room. “How much longer are

you working tonight? I thought we'd head into the Quarter, see what was going on down at the Meow."

"I can tell you what's going on at the Meow. Tourists, drunk locals, and bad karaoke." Still, I mulled the idea over while I washed glasses, dunked them in sanitizer water before setting them to dry. I hadn't been down to the Quarter in a few weeks, content with the jazz clubs in the Faubourg Marigny. Bad karaoke actually sounded really good at the moment. "I bet I can get you to sing the DeVinyls again."

"Jude Magdalyn Henries!" Izzy bit the words out, her voice dropping to a whisper. "I thought we agreed to never speak about that again."

"No, you said we shouldn't. I didn't agree to anything." The clock on the opposite wall read eleven-forty; I could probably get Joe to let me leave at twelve. The bar was slow and he hated pooling tips with me, despite the fact he made more money when we worked together than when he worked alone. "How about we start at the Meow, make our way back down Bourbon toward home?"

"Sure. We can hit Lafitte's, maybe Napoleon's Itch. Definitely Clover Grill." She glanced down at her shirt, frowned. "Should I change into something else?"

"Why, did you have something that showed more cleavage?"

"It's perfectly acceptable to show the girls at night." Izzy adjusted the vee of her shirt, shifted until the aforementioned girls sat up the tiniest bit higher. "Besides, you're wearing a black bra under a white shirt."

"I didn't realize I was working tonight otherwise I would've done laundry yesterday." I wrinkled my nose at the

beer soaked wad of bills someone had left on the bar. “On second thought, maybe not.”

“Just rinse them off, they’ll still spend.” She fiddled with her phone, tapped a few keys. “Hey, did you remember what tomorrow night is?”

“Uh, August fifth?” The glare she gave me had me racking my brain. “It’s not your birthday, is it?”

“No, you have a few more months before that blessed event. And don’t even think about giving me another gift card. You’ve got time to shop.”

“I hate shopping.”

“The way you drooled over the black trench coat in the second hand store, you could’ve fooled me.” Izzy shook her head, sighed. “Anyway, tomorrow’s Cayenne’s first night at work.”

“Shit. I forgot.” Leaning back against the rail, I crossed my arms, rolled my eyes. “Do we really have to go?”

“We promised. And I heard you, so don’t even think about trying to weasel your way out.”

“Ugh. But the Mirror Lounge? Seedy, even by my admittedly lax standards.”

“All strip clubs are seedy. That’s why they’re strip clubs.” Izzy dug some money out of her pocket, slid bills over the counter. “By the way, she said to tip her if no one else does.”

“Right. Like she has to worry about *that*.” Snorting, I pushed the money back toward Izzy. “Keep it. Just remind me about the tipping bit tomorrow.”

“Your deal with Ms. Talanger won’t run late, will it? Cayenne said she’s supposed to go on at eleven.”

“Her name’s Pepper. Every time you call her Cayenne I have to stop and remember who the hell you’re talking about.” Stacking the dry glasses, I shook my head. “But to answer your question, I should be finished way before eleven. Ms. Talanger knows the deal. Five hundred for two hours, anything after is double. She’s loaded and spends money like water but she’s not that feckless.”

“You charge through the nose.”

“If they’re stupid enough to believe a deck of tarot cards is the solution to all their problems, they’re stupid enough to lose all their money to someone who ‘helps’ them with their problems.” I wiped my hands on a bar towel, reached for my bag. “Speaking of, want to do a trial run? Make sure I’m not rusty?”

Izzy snorted, shifted on her bar stool. “Yeah, why the hell not? You pulling for you or me?”

“I’ll pull three for me. See what happens.” I gave the tarot deck a quick shuffle, cut the deck twice before slapping the cards back together. “Eight of cups.”

Izzy whistled when I turned the first card over. “That’s not good.”

“How would you know?” The retort held little bite because she was correct. Severing of old ties, a turning away from the old toward the new. I shook my head at the second card. “The King of Cups, reversed.”

“About time you got a man.”

“Yeah, except this one is violent, unscrupulous, and lacking in all moral sense.” My fingers shook as I flipped the third and final card over. “Fuck.”

“Why do the prettiest cards always have the ugliest meanings?” Izzy pulled the card closer to her, spun it around in circles. “The Tower?”

“Conflict, change. Disruption, upheaval.” I huffed out a breath, closed my eyes as I struggled to remember what else the card represented. “Eventually, enlightenment.”

“So, it’s a bad card with good intentions?”

“More like the old saying about if you’re going through hell, keep on going.” More unnerved than I cared to admit, I gathered the cards together, shoved them back in my bag. “Let me find out if Joe will cut me loose. I feel like drinking tonight.”

“Which brings to mind another saying. Eat, drink, and be merry....”

“For tomorrow, you may die.” I shook my head, laughed. “Izzy, you’re so melodramatic.”

“I know. One of the reasons you love me.” She hopped off the bar stool, danced a little jig. “Cat’s Meow, here we come.”

## A First Look at Shades of Blood

### Prologue

*I have returned home. After all my years traveling, searching, learning, I have come back to the place of my birth. If it were possible to cry, I would weep tears of joy.*

*But like everything else, that simple pleasure is long gone.*

*In over fifty years, very little of New Orleans has changed. The Market, Café du Monde, the Mississippi-all are still here, all my old haunts. My old hunting grounds.*

*The foolish still flock to Bourbon Street, still take part in its crassness. I have seen the fall of civilization more on Bourbon than any other place in the world. The foolish still flock, will continue to, even while myself and others like me prey on them.*

*The building still stands. Still blood red. I thought I could stand the sight of it, that looking upon it would no longer cause me terror. In part I was right. I feel something beyond terror, something for which I have no words. I feel grief for the acts I have committed, will commit.*

*But most of all, I feel rage. Rage and a hatred that causes all other emotions, even that nameless terror, to pale in comparison.*

*I have returned home. And now, at last, I will have my revenge.*

-Taken from the  
diary of Felipe

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