

BACKFIRE EXCERPT

Keri Lake

"You got some strange habits, Sparrow." Head kicked back, he guzzled a bottle of water while staring my way out the corner of his eye.

Following the path of his gaze took me somewhere in the neighborhood of my breasts. My bra still remained loose from the night before and had slid below them, leaving my nipples to pop out through the tight fabric like a goddamn confession of sin.

Hugging my knees tight to my chest, I did my best to hide them and caught his smirk.

"You've got one thing going for ya." He set the water bottle down and removed his shirt in front of me, his skin glistening with sweat. "Hottest set of tits I've ever seen."

Heat flushed my cheeks, and I shrank away at the attention on them. "You must be severely deprived."

Leaning against the bathroom door in a casual pose, he folded his arms across his chest and shook his head. "Not one for compliments, are you?"

"Was *hot tits* supposed to be a compliment?"

"Oh, right. You're one of those uptight chicks. I gotta be all, *your exceptional breasts are the fairest in all the land, Lady Sparrow.*" He bowed afterward, and I had to clip a laugh at his ridiculous English-sounding accent.

"I'm not uptight." I'd just always hated my breasts, but I supposed it was natural, having grown up with a mother who'd criticized her own body in front of me every day. To me, they'd always been too big for my smaller waist and made me feel sloppy and busty in my shirts. Unlike Jolana, who'd gotten implants at Viktor's request, and always seemed to be put together so well.

"You're afraid of swallowing spiders, afraid of getting trapped in bedsheets, and afraid to be touched. You're uptight."

"And you're an asshole." Glaring at him from across the room, I ran my tongue along the back of my teeth, silently ripping him apart where he stood. "For the record, I'm not afraid of spiders, and I'm not afraid to be touched. I happen to like being touched by the *right* man."

"Then, why'd you almost lose your shit when I tried to break you out of Bracatraz last night?"

“Because I thought you were going to ...” Damn, why had I freaked out? I’d had a hell of a lot worse done to me at the club, the night I’d performed lap dances. Again, I reminded myself that *he* hadn’t been one of the idiots who’d tried to cop a feel.

“Rape you?” He pushed off the doorframe and strode to the end of the bed. “Let me make this clear. If I’d wanted to, I’d have done it by now. I’m not a guy who hesitates, Sparrow. Remember that.”

True, I’d been left vulnerable with the man a few times, but that tattoo contradicted everything. Any time I let down my guard, the stupid thing would catch my eye and remind me of the woman dumped in a sump drain. *Provoke him.* “And if I was naked right now? Tell me you wouldn’t try something.”

He nudged his head toward the bathroom. “Come with me.”

Shit. “Why?”

His brow swung up. “Would you prefer to be tied up?”

Would you prefer a size eight in your ass? I let out a huff of frustration and, after sliding from the bed, followed him into the bathroom. Once inside, he locked the door, instantly sending my pulse soaring, and when he flipped on the water, my internal defense shot to DEFCON 2. “What are you doing?”

Instead of answering the question, he shed his athletic pants, followed by his briefs, and *God forgive me*, my eyes shot straight to his perfectly erect cock. “Take your clothes off.”

Swallowing a gulp, I frowned. “You just said—”

“I know what I just said. Take. Your clothes off. Now.”

Gaze on the circle seven tattoo, I steeled my muscles. With stiff arms and a confused mind, I lifted the T-shirt over my head and tossed the bra to the floor. Maybe I’d been wrong to assume he wasn’t dangerous. That he wouldn’t push my limits. Maybe I’d given him a great idea. Who the hell knew what twisted shit swirled inside his head?

His gaze devoured my breasts, his chest rising and falling evenly. “Panties, too.”

Biting the inside of my cheek, I frowned harder, desperate not to look at the massive distraction calling my attention from below.

He tipped his head and re-crossed his arms, lips set into a no-bullshit hard line. “Don’t make me tell you twice.”

I slid them over my hips and pushed them to the floor, until I stood completely naked and vulnerable in front of the man. A stranger. Crossing my arms over my chest, I did my best to shield what seemed to be gobbling up his attention. “Look, if this is about what I said—”

“Get in the shower.”

Narrowing my eyes, I planted my feet, but his fingers gripped my elbow. As he nudged me forward, I did as he commanded with hesitant steps, not knowing if it was fear or fascination that guided me along. If he did try to do anything, I’d surely stop him. *Right, Lucy?* I could damn near feel my instincts shrinking away in disappointment, as I failed to acknowledge their blaring warning signals.

For Milena, I told myself. No one knew anything about the club. I could be the first to know. *And die with the information.* Maybe falling to his whims might lead me to answers I’d been searching for.

Bullshit, my head battled back. Whether my mind cared to get onboard, or not, he turned me on. I liked bossy, and the twisted half of my libido seemed to enjoy the edge of danger.

He stepped inside the shower after me, his intense eyes igniting my skin as they roved my body. “I think it’s pretty safe to say I want to fuck you right now.”

My eyes fell to his erection, standing proud and ready, thick and heavy, and I had to swallow a gulp as I imagined him thrusting *that* between my thighs. “If you do ...”

“What are you going to do? Fight me?”

“I would.” I lifted my chin in defiance, hating the pathetic tone of my voice that echoed in the stall.

“I like it rough. You’ve got me hard as a fucking lightning rod right now, in case you haven’t noticed.”

I had. Holy mother of all confusion, his cock had me painfully aware it’d been a long time since I’d seen a man in all his naked glory. Yes, I would fight him, if he tried anything, but goddamn, he made for one hell of a distraction in the meantime. Like him, I had a thing for roughness, too. Sex with him would be crazy, no doubt, but his tattoo confessed that it could also take a turn for scary real quick.

Tipping his head back in the water, he released a groan as rivulets cascaded down his muscles. Turning his back to me gave a drool-worthy view of his ass—squat-toned and as magnificent as I’d imagined it’d be through his jeans. His body had a perfectly symmetrical appeal, evidenced in his wide back, the left side a mirror image of his right, absolutely flawless down to his sculpted calves.

Lathering soap in his hair, he twisted back around and stared down at me, his dick never once giving up the dream as it still remained hard. Was he having me wait until he was clean?

What the hell was he doing?

As he slicked soap over his body, I stood like an idiot, like a trained puppy, waiting for my master. *Bastard*. I eyed the shower door beside him, gauging whether or not I could slip past. *Probably not*. Rubbing the pads of my thumbs across each of my fingers, where I'd tucked them beneath my arms, couldn't even calm the anxiety brimming inside of me.

One-two, three-four, five-six ...

Discomfort had my eyes searching through the ingredients of the shampoo on the shelf, just to keep from staring at him.

After rinsing off the last of the soap, he stepped toward me, and I kicked back a step, leaving me crowded against the cold tiles.

"Here we are. Locked in a room. Both of us buck ass naked. Yet, I haven't laid a single hand on you." He bent forward, his arms planted at either side of my head, and the intoxicating scent of fresh sandalwood assaulted my senses alongside his intimidating stance. The heat of his body cast frissons of excitement that formed goose bumps across my skin. "Does that answer your question?"

He turned away and exited the shower—leaving me standing in the warm sprays and trying to wrap my head around what the hell had just happened.