

Chapter Three

A Meeting With Honey Pursamon

When Honey Pursamon left her apartment and climbed into a waiting taxi, every eye in the vicinity gave her a body scan. One man ignored the new conventions and gave a long appreciative wolf whistle.

Pursamon ignored the interest because she was used to being an object of male attention. After climbing into a waiting taxi, she gave the driver instructions. On the way, she rang Alan Fitorez's number.

Arthur Epistrone, alias Alan Fitorez just said, "Yes."

"Just making sure you're still available to see me," Pursamon replied

"Yes. As discussed, I'm at the Majestic Hotel," Epistrone said. "I'm in Room 25, but you'd better check in with reception. You will need an access card."

"Can't you meet me downstairs? Since the new surveillance laws came into force, I have to be careful," Pursamon replied

"You don't need to worry about the CCTV; it's been deactivated," Epistrone said

"How did you manage that?" Pursamon asked.

"I just pulled a few strings," Epistrone replied. "My company has shares in the holding company that owns the hotel."

"Impressive," Pursamon acknowledged.

"It's not what you know; it's who you know," Epistrone replied. "Besides, we wouldn't want our tête-à-tête recorded and handed over to the police, now would we?"

"So the CCTV is definitely off."

"Absolutely," Epistrone said. "One hundred per cent guaranteed."

"That will make life a great deal easier," Pursamon acknowledged. "I'll be with you shortly."

~*~

Once the taxi had arrived, Pursamon walked into the Majestic Hotel and rang the reception bell. When the front desk appeared, Pursamon said, "I have an appointment with Alan Fitorez."

Although Pursamon was smartly dressed, a businesswoman about town, the expression on Front Desk's face changed; the welcoming smile faded, and suspicion emerged.

The hotel had standards, sex workers were discouraged, and Front Desk was sufficiently experienced to surmise Pursamon fitted into that category.

Sensing that her presence would be queried, Pursamon handed over her ID card without being asked. She said, "Mr Fitorez is expecting me for a *private* business meeting."

Pursamon glanced towards the hotel's communal lounge, "We'd go in there, but it's hardly suitable. Too many flapping ears and an intrusive CCTV system. Why not call him and check?"

There was a hesitation, and then Front Desk did as suggested. After a brief discussion, the expression on Front Desk's face eased slightly, and she handed Pursamon an access card, "You can go up. He's in room twenty-five."

After thanking Front Desk, Pursamon took a lift to the second floor and knocked on her client's door.

A male voice from inside called out, "The door's open. Come in."

When Pursamon did as instructed, she found Arthur Epistrone, alias Alan Fitorez, sitting at a table, flicking through a photograph album. Epistrone glanced at her and said, "Are you, Honey?"

"That's me," Pursamon replied.

Epistrone half-smiled, "Can I see your ID?"

Once Epistrone had inspected her ID, he nodded and handed it back. He said, "I hope my colleague explained my requirements."

"More or less," Pursamon replied.

"Did he give you this?" Epistrone asked.

After handing over a draft contract, Epistrone allowed Pursamon time to skim through it and said, "Is that what was agreed?"

"I think so."

Epistrone didn't challenge the answer; he just continued, "Good, I'm glad that's agreed. It is agreed, isn't it?"

"Yes."

Epistrone added, "So let's recap. What's your understanding of what I want?"

"If I understand correctly," Pursamon said, "You want to honey trap a group of people."

She smiled slowly, "That's how I obtained my nickname. Honey!"

"Yes," Epistrone replied, "My associate told me about your nickname and that you'd done this type of work before."

"I have," Pursamon acknowledged, "Engineered indiscretions are my speciality. It's widespread in some business sectors. A compromising photograph adds leverage when hammering out a deal."

A slight smile formed on Epistrone's face; Pursamon hadn't used the word **blackmail**; she'd skirted around the issue.

"Good," Epistrone said, "So you've worked for the big boys then."

Pursamon clammed up, "I never reveal other clients or their business."

"Well, that's good to hear," Epistrone replied. "I expect you to keep anything you do for us strictly under wraps. Understood?"

When Pursamon nodded, Epistrone pushed the photograph album in her direction. He said, "These are the people I want honey-trapped, and there will probably be a few more later."

After flicking through the file and realising how many 'tricks' were involved, Pursamon said, "This many! Are you serious?"

"I'm deadly serious," Epistrone replied. "We have the finances to back up the operation. I will provide bank details, and you can check us out if you wish."

"I've already done that," Pursamon replied.

"Good," Epistrone said. "To business. I want you and your subcontractors to compromise the people in that album. I also realise that some might rebuff your approaches. But it's a numbers game. If we can honey-trap around eighty per cent, we'll win."

"Win what?"

Epistrone steepled his hands like a man in prayer, "You implied you didn't ask questions or reveal confidential information."

"Okay," Pursamon conceded, "No questions asked as long as I'm assured I'm not dealing with known sexual offenders, perverts or killers."

"No sexual offenders, perverts or killers," Epistrone replied. Then a smile formed on his face, "Just a group of normal men we hope won't be able to keep their dicks in their trousers when temptation beckons."

When Pursamon let out a slight laugh, Epistrone said, "Can you confirm you're interested?"

"Perhaps."

"Perhaps is not a good answer," Epistrone chided, "I'm offering you big money. If you take this contract, you'll be able to retire."

"Who says I want to retire?" Pursamon countered, "Believe it or not, I enjoy my work."

Epistrone let out a snort of annoyance, "I am not really interested if you enjoy your work or not. I need to know if we have a deal. I could engage someone else if you are not up to it."

He then began name-dropping.

Realising Epistrone knew the competition and might engage a rival, Pursamon said, "Yes. Of course, I'm interested. But I will require prompt payment."

"I've told you. You don't need to worry about funding," Epistrone assured her, then eyed her wistfully. At that point, Pursamon expected Epistrone to make a move on her and demand a free sample. But instead, he said, "There will be consequences if you renege on our deal."

"A deal's, a deal," Pursamon acknowledged.

Epistrone said, "Good. I presume your happy band of hookers won't renege either."

"Don't worry," Pursamon replied. "The job will be done properly, but with so many people on that list, it will take time. We must be in the right place at the right time to lure them in. And some men are less willing than you think."

Epistrone responded by pushing a large box in her direction, "This should help."

Pursamon opened the box and pulled out one or two perfume bottles, "What are these for?"

Epistrone tapped his nose, "Don't ask questions, just try them out. They're a freebie, and they are special. You won't buy those in a chemist's shop. Give them out to your girls to try out. If you need more, just let me know. Any questions?"

Pursamon said, "Of course I have questions. An issue we haven't discussed is the matter of expenses."

Epistrone flapped the contract at her, "It's all in there. I'm prepared to accept legitimate expenses but expect genuine invoices to substantiate all claims. No photocopies. And I fully anticipate it will take some time for your people to work through the entire portfolio. But there's a lot of money to be earned."

When Pursamon went quiet again, Epistrone said, "Is something the matter?"

"Your colleague led me to believe there would be bonus payments when milestones were reached."

"Correct," Epistrone replied, flapping the contract again, "Nothing like an incentive to get a job done. I *will* give bonuses once significant milestones are reached. The bonuses are yours, by the way. They don't have to be shared unless you want to."

"What about the photographs?"

Epistrone pulled out some cards, "We have eight photographers engaged up and down the country."

Once Pursamon had studied them, she said, "Are they experienced in this sort of work?"

Epistrone nodded, "We have used them all before. You will need to liaise with the most appropriate photographer for the areas involved. We will pay for their services."

"You say you've used these guys before," Pursamon queried.

"All eight are familiar with pornographic shoots," Epistrone assured her.

"Okay," Pursamon replied. "But if one of *your* guys messes up, I still expect to be paid. Right?"

"That's understood," Epistrone replied.

When Pursamon gave him a slight nod, Epistrone added, "The photographers may have preferred locations for the shoots. Hidden cameras in wardrobes and the sort of thing. I presume your colleagues have no problems with being photographed."

"Does that mean naked?"

"Naked and pumping away," Epistrone replied.

"Okay, but none of these shoots are to be released on porno channels."

Epistrone flapped the contract again, "Read clause 10. All recordings will only be used to apply pressure. They will not go onto porno sites."

Pursamon gave another slight nod and said, "For the money, you're paying, I've no problem with being ***naked and pumping away***, as you so tastefully put it. I won't have any objections from the others either."

"So we're set to go?"

"Back to payments," Pursamon replied, "There was an agreed downpayment. A golden handshake."

Epistrone smiled, "There is." He opened his briefcase and handed over a large envelope, "The agreed downpayment is all there. All used unmarked notes as agreed. Please count it and sign the receipt. I will also need you to sign the contract."

Once Pursamon had done as instructed, she said, "You do realise that our 'contract' wouldn't stand up in court. In this country, you can't have a contract for immoral purposes."

Epistrone gave her a crooked smile, "Illegal or not; it proves you agreed to assist us. And as I said before, if you let me down or renege on the deal, there will be consequences."

Epistrone placed the contract in his briefcase and pulled out another envelope full of money. Once he'd counted out the contents in full view, he said, "I know I'm being very generous, but I thought while you were here, I could utilise your services still further."

Pursamon smiled, "You took your time getting around to it." She reached out and grabbed the pile of cash.

Epistrone stayed her hand and said, "I need to discuss my requirements first."

"I don't do anal," Pursamon cut in. "Some of my girls will but not me."

"That wasn't the service I was after."

"So, what are you after?"

"I need an alibi," Epistrone replied. "If the police question you, we spent the night together. For obvious reasons, I have given you an alias Alan Fitorez. If the police question me, I will tell them I booked into the Majestic Hotel using that name and that you spent the night with me."

Pursamon was suspicious, "Why do you need an alibi?"

"Do you want this money, or don't you?"

"Why do you need an alibi?"

Epistrone tutted, "I thought you believed in client confidentiality."

Pursamon said, "What's the catch?"

"No catch," Epistrone replied. "Just an alibi."

When Pursamon looked uncertain, Epistrone said, "This is how it will work. If the police pull me in, I will be reluctant to tell them where I was. But then, under pressure, I will be embarrassed to admit to meeting you and spending the night with you."

When Pursamon still looked unsure, Epistrone added, "If I'm unlucky, I will be fined. But I think it makes a credible alibi. I admit to a one-night stand to confirm where I was."

"Why will the police pull you in?"

"I didn't say they ***would*** pull me in," Epistrone replied, "I said, ***if***. There is ***little likelihood*** they will. So once again, you'll be making easy money."

Epistrone thought Pursamon would continue to demand reasons for needing an alibi. But instead, she said, "So that's it. All I have to do is say we spent the night together."

"Correct. You don't even have to say I paid for your services. In fact, I'd prefer it if you didn't."

Sensing she was agreeable, Epistrone pushed the money in her direction. After counting it, she dropped the cash into the downpayment envelope and said, "So what happens now?"

"You exit the hotel by the back door leaving your access card with me," Epistrone replied.

"Are you throwing me out?"

"I've paid you handsomely for your time," Epistrone replied, "What's the problem?"

Pursamon shrugged, "No problem. Have it your way."

"One more thing," Epistrone said, "Put these on."

He handed her a set of Antifr visors.

Pursamon looked at the Antifr suspiciously, "What is it?"

"It's an Antifr visor. It stops CCTV and facial recognition cameras from taking accurate pictures of someone's face," Epistrone replied. "Put them on now. I don't want you destroying my alibi when you leave."

"I thought you said the hotel CCTV was down," she challenged.

"Belt and braces," Epistrone replied. "Wear those until you're back in your apartment. As they look like sunglasses, no one is likely to comment. Also, don't do anything that would undermine my alibi, like sleeping with someone else when you're supposed to be sleeping with me."

As Pursamon opened the outer door, Epistrone called out, "Ah! One more thing, while I think on. When I leave this hotel in the morning, I am officially on holiday. So don't call me unless it's urgent."

"Going anywhere nice?"

"I'm driving to Melanson Hale to stay with my sister," Epistrone revealed, "I'll be out of town for at least a week, maybe two."

~*~

After Pursamon had left, Epistrone climbed out of the pinstripe suit he was wearing and changed into a pair of battered jeans and a well-used donkey jacket. To complete his disguise, he pulled on a latex full-head mask that made him look like an old man. He topped off his disguise with a working man's cap and an Antifr visor.

Once satisfied that he was unlikely to be recognised, Epistrone went to his briefcase, pulled out a handgun, a burner phone, a newspaper and another large envelope, and then left the hotel by the back door.

Once outside, he walked until he reached a small park. After slumping down on a bench seat, he called his contact.

A woman walked into the gardens ten minutes later and began glancing around.

Seeing Epistrone sitting on the bench, the woman came over, slid down at the other end, opened a book and pretended to read. Recognising the book cover, Epistrone surreptitiously slid along the bench and placed the newspaper containing the envelope between them.

The woman acquired the newspaper and just as surreptitiously checked the contents of the envelope. She glanced at the security codes he'd provided and then gave him a slight nod.

Epistrone said, "Don't let me down."

The woman gave him a slight smile, "The attack will happen as agreed."

"You have everything you need?"

"We have been preparing for this for months," the woman said. She rattled the envelope, "Now we have these; you'll get your wish."

"So, are we done?"

The woman nodded, stood up and walked away. After remaining on the bench for a few minutes, Epistrone stood and left the park. Not wishing to show his face in the hotel restaurant because it would undermine his alibi, he bought a takeaway and returned to his room without being seen.

As he ate the food he'd bought, he began thinking about what would happen shortly. If all went well, the terrorists would commit an atrocity that would shake the British establishment to its foundations. It would make Guy Fawkes' attempted attack on Parliament look positively tame.

