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## Prologue

Today millions of fans across the world celebrate the thirty-fifth birthday of cult superstar Nick Angel, and the opening of his latest movie, *Killer Blue*.

A statement issued by Panther Studios disclosed that Nick will not be present at the Los Angeles premiere of *Killer Blue* as expected.

A personal spokesperson for Angel reported that the actor will spend his birthday in New York.

*USA Today*

December 15, 1992

*New York, Tuesday, December 15, 1992*

Mornings were always a bad time for Nick Angel. He lay in bed, eyes closed, unwilling to surrender the peaceful darkness, fighting the fact that he had to get up and face another day. Especially this day. His birthday.

Thirty-five.

Nick Angel was thirty-five.

Jesus! The newspapers would have an orgasmic overdose on this one. He was no longer the boy wonder. Age was creeping up on him.

He lay very still. It was probably past noon, but the longer he delayed getting up the better, for he knew that once he stirred they'd be all over him. Honey – his live-in girlfriend. Harlan – his so-called valet. And Teresa, his faithful karate champion assistant.

He heard a sudden movement in the room. A subtle rustle of silk and the faint aroma of White Diamonds – Honey was a big Liz Taylor fan. In fact Honey was a fan. Period.

So... why was he with her?

Good question. The problem was there were too many questions in his life and not enough answers.

Honey was on the prowl. Pretty blonde Honey with the lethal body and vacant mind. He sensed her standing by the bed staring down at him, willing him to wake up.

*Too bad, sweetheart. Get lost. Not in the mood.*

As soon as he was sure she'd left, he quickly rolled out of bed and made it to the safety of his steel and glass high-tech bathroom where he immediately locked the door.

Ah... Nick Angel in the morning. Not the man he once was, although still handsome in spite of ten pounds of excess flesh, bloodshot eyes, and an altogether dissipated demeanour.

He hated the way he looked. The extra weight he'd put on disgusted him. Had to stop drinking. Had to get his life together.

Nick Angel. Longish black hair. Indian green eyes. A pale skin, stubbled chin. At five feet ten inches he was tall without being overpowering. His handsomeness was not

perfect. More brooding... mesmerizing. And in spite of being bloodshot his green eyes were hypnotic and watchful. His nose – once broken – gave him the dangerous edge he needed.

And now he was thirty-five.

Old.

Older than he'd ever thought he'd be.

But the world still loved him. His fans would continue to worship because he was Nick Angel and he belonged to them. They'd elevated him to a rare and crazy place where nobody could expect to remain sane.

*It's too much*, he thought bitterly, splashing cold water on his face. *The adulation, the never-ending attention. Crushing... stifling... suffocating... Too fucking much.*

He smiled grimly.

*Welcome to the insane asylum.*

*Welcome to my life.*

Reaching for the phone he buzzed the underground garage, connecting with one of his team of driver/bodyguards.

'I'm on my way down,' he said, keeping his gravelly voice low. 'Get out the Ferrari. No driver. And call the airport, tell them to have my plane ready, I'm taking it up.'

'Right, Nick. Oh, an' happy birthday, man.'

Screw this birthday crap. He knew he'd hear nothing else all day.

Finishing in the bathroom he dressed quickly in the trademark black he always wore. Pants, shirt, leather jacket and black tennis shoes. All he had to do now was make it out of the apartment before he was forced to endure more congratulations.

As soon as he hit the hall they came at him. Honey, all pearly teeth and rounded breasts encased in a pink angora sweater, her short skirt swishing sexily around her thighs.

Harlan – a crazed black man with wild hair extensions and subdued make-up.

And Teresa – who was six feet tall with a face like a man.

What a mismatched trio! But they were his. He owned them. He paid for every move they made.

‘Gotta go,’ he said, edgily.

‘Where?’ Honey asked, thrusting angora-clad tits in his direction.

‘Where?’ echoed Teresa, staring at him accusingly. ‘I should come with you.’

‘Yeah, where ya goin’, man?’ added Harlan, joining the chorus.

‘I’ll be back soon.’

*Maybe.*

*Maybe not.*

Cleverly, he timed his words to coincide with the arrival of the elevator, and before they could nail him further he was out of there, downstairs, in his Ferrari, driving out of Manhattan as fast as he could.

It took him forty-five minutes to reach the private airstrip where he kept his two-engine Cessna plane. Several mechanics greeted him with birthday wishes.

Surprise, surprise. He’d known today was going to be a bummer.

He climbed aboard his plane, settled in the cockpit and guided the small aircraft down the runway until he was given clearance to take off into the unseasonably blue sky.

He sighed, a long heavy sigh. When did it all begin to get out of control?

Nick Angel.

Free at last.

But he had a solution. A plan he was about to put into action.

*Colour me dead.*

# **Book One**

## Chapter One

*Louisville, Kentucky, 1969*

‘Do it!’ the young girl gasped urgently, her breath coming in short frantic gasps. ‘Do it, *do it!*’

‘I’m tryin’,’ Nick Angelo replied, heatedly. And indeed he was, but to his dismay the girl was so wet he kept slipping out.

Her voice was shrill and commanding. ‘Do it!’ she insisted, wriggling back into position. ‘C’mon, Nicky. C’mon, c’mon, *c’monnn!*’

Beginning to panic he jammed the point of entry yet again, and thank goodness managed to stay in place.

‘*Uuuuummm...*’ The desperate shrillness faded from her voice and she began to sound pleased. ‘*Ooooooh...*’ She continued to sigh sweetly as he pumped away.

Nick hung on, even though he was sweating and uncomfortable, but he hung on anyway because jamming himself inside this girl was the most important act in the entire world.

Vaguely he remembered one of his friends telling him sex was like riding a horse – mount up – get in the saddle – and take the trip.

Nobody had warned him it would be such a dangerous, hot, sticky journey.

And then it hit him. The most exciting, throbbing, out-of-control feeling he’d ever experienced. Holy cow! He was coming! And he was inside a real female – his hand and some dirty magazine had nothing to do with it.

The girl screamed out her satisfaction.

He felt like doing the same thing. But he was cool, a guy had to stay cool – even if it *was* his first time.

Nick Angelo was finally making out – and he couldn’t think of a more mind-blowing way of celebrating his thirteenth birthday.

*Evanston, Illinois, 1973*

‘Please, Nick, *pleeease*... I can’t take any more.’

Maybe. Maybe not. But he’d been giving it to her for twenty minutes and she’d only now started to complain – although it was hardly a complaint, more an agonized cry of ecstasy.

‘Ooh, Nicky, you’re the best!’

Yeah? So he’d been told. Now if he could only teach them not to call him Nicky...

Making out was his specialty. It sure beat homework or any of that learning crap. And it certainly beat spending time at home watching his old man drink himself unconscious while his mother was out busting her ass working two jobs to keep the lazy slob in beer.

Family life. You could shove it. Just like he was shoving it up Susie or Jenny or whatever her name was.

One of these days he planned on taking off, getting out of this dump, and bringing his mother with him. But first he needed a job so he could score some bucks, then there’d be no holding him back.

Right now he was stuck in school because his mother thought education was important. Mary Angelo had this crazy fantasy that one day he’d get a scholarship to college.

*Yeah, sure* – a make-out college was the only place *he’d* get in.

Mary wasn’t into reality – she was into dreams. At thirty-seven she looked ten years older. A bird-like woman – slight and nervous, with faded prettiness and wispy hair. She’d met Nick’s father, Primo, on a blind date when she was sixteen and he was thirty. They’d gotten married exactly one week before Nick was born and Primo had hardly worked a day since. A carpenter by trade, he’d soon realized that picking up unemployment while sending his wife out to work was a far better deal than actually doing anything himself.

The Angelo family moved often, trudging from state to state, living in rented accommodations, always ready to be on the move whenever Primo felt that restless urge. And he felt it often.

Growing up, Nick couldn't remember being in the same town for longer than a few months at a time. As soon as he began to settle in they were on their way again. Eventually he gave up on any permanent relationships. New town. New girls to conquer. And on to the next. Now he'd gotten used to it.

'Can we go see a movie tomorrow?' Susie or Jenny or whatever her name was asked. 'It'll be my treat.'

'Nah.' He shook his head as he got up, pulling on his pants. They were in the back office of a small car showroom – a venue he used often on account of the fact he sometimes ran errands for one of the salesmen, and in return he got to borrow the keys.

'Why not?' the girl asked. At eighteen she was two years older than him. She had short hair, freckles, and a well-developed chest. He'd picked her up the day before behind the counter of a Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet.

He tried to come up with a quick excuse. He excelled at sex. Hated to stick around. Past experience told him she wouldn't appreciate the truth. A screw is a screw – who needs it to be anything else?

'Gotta work,' he said, brushing a hand through his unruly black hair.

'What do you do?' she asked, curiously.

'I'm an undertaker's assistant,' he lied, straight-faced.

That shut her up.

He waited for her to adjust her clothing, even helped her up. Then he took her to the bus stop, left her there and walked the mile home.

Currently they were living in a run-down house with Mary's sister – his aunt Franny – a big woman with dyed yellow hair and a bleached moustache. It was only a small house, but as long as Primo had a television to watch and a plentiful supply of beer, he was satisfied.

Nick hoped Mary was home from work. If she was, there'd be a chance of something to eat. Franny never bothered to cook. She was on a diet of Reese's peanut-butter cups and diet soda – screw fixing meals.

Sure. Franny got fatter and everyone else starved to death.

Sex always made him hungry. Right now he'd kill for a hamburger, but he was broke as usual, so the only chance he had was working on Mary with his charm. Not that he'd have to do much work, his mother adored him, she put him before everyone, including Primo when she could get away with it, which wasn't often, for Primo demanded most of her attention when she wasn't working.

Nick's goal in life was to have as little to do with his father as possible. He hated the way Primo treated Mary. He couldn't stand listening to him bitch and complain about everything. And most of all he despised the way Primo sat on his big, fat can doing nothing.

The truth was that Primo scared him. He was a huge, overpowering man, and whenever he was in a bad mood Nick felt the back of his hand or the sting of his rough leather belt across his backside. Mary always tried to stop the beatings – protecting him as best she could – even if it meant getting beat herself. Primo didn't care who got in his way – he lashed out good.

Sometimes Nick wanted to kill him. Other times he accepted the beatings as a fact of life. The rage he felt was muted, buried. There was nothing he could do – not until he was older, then he'd get him and his mother out.

Halfway home it started to rain. Pulling up the collar of his old denim jacket he bent his head down and began jogging along the kerb, thinking about how great it would be to have wheels, imagining that one of these days he'd get himself a car – a gleaming red Cadillac with chrome wheels and a real fine radio.

Yeah... one of these days.

Primo was sitting on the steps outside Franny's house. Nick could see him as he approached. He tensed up, something was wrong. Why else would his old man have deserted his precious television and be sitting outside in the rain?

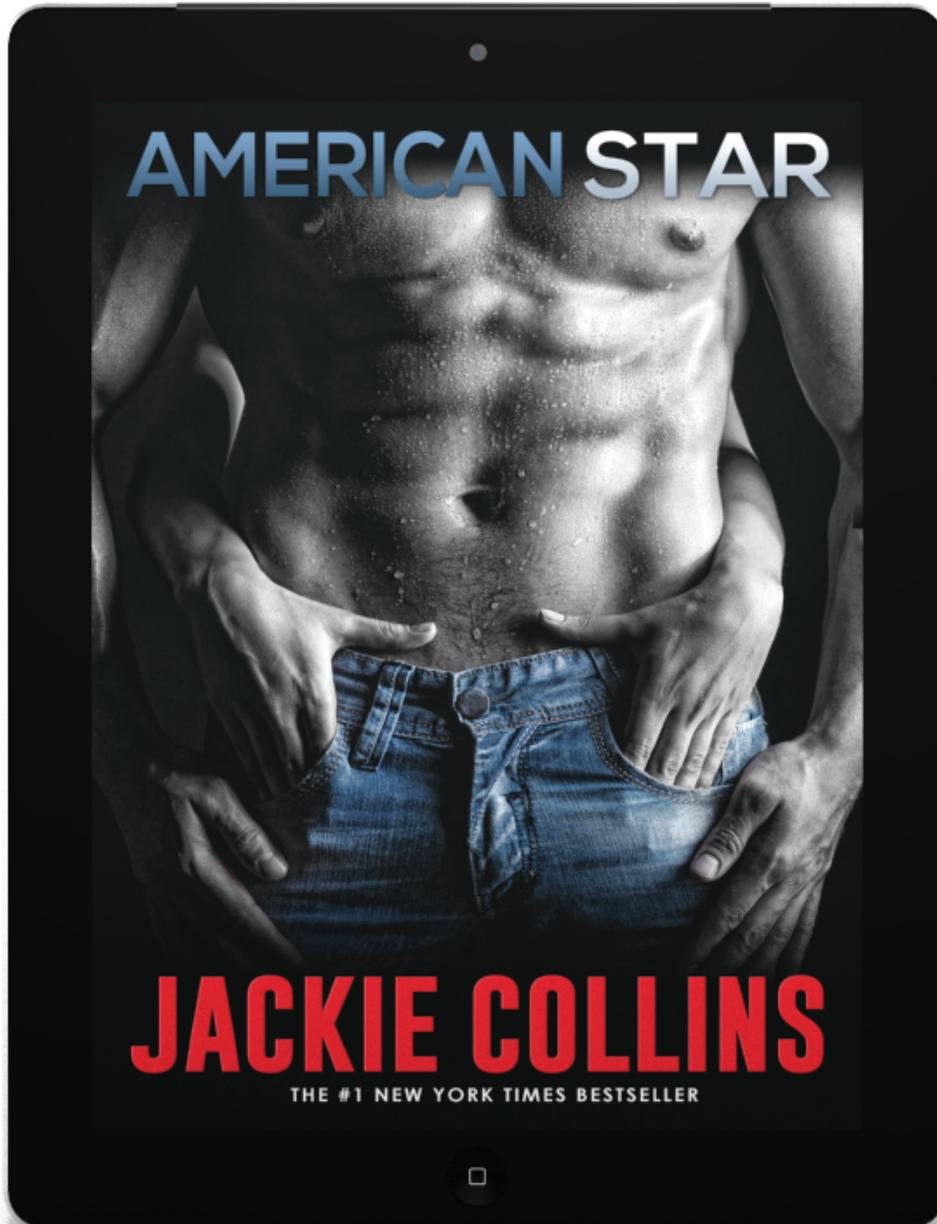
He approached warily. 'What's up?' he asked, stopping and jogging in place.

Primo wiped the back of his hand across his nose and glared up at him, bloodshot eyes bulging. 'Where've ya bin?' he demanded, slurring his words.

Nick felt the cold rain trickling down the back of his collar and he shivered – anticipating bad news. 'Out with friends,' he mumbled.

Primo heaved a mournful, beer-soaked sigh and hauled himself to his feet. His shirt was stuck to his body. His thick greying hair fell in greasy clumps on his prominent forehead. Raindrops continued to drip from the end of his nose.

‘She’s gone,’ he said, glumly. ‘Your goddamn mother went an’ died on us.’



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