

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

If the cleaning staff were to misunderstand the sign outside and enter Jeremy's hotel room, this is what they would see.

A sense of carelessness and disregard.

What one would expect from a hotel room thrashed by a rockstar in an alcohol and drugs binge.

The mini bar open, wasting power. The ice melted and forming a dark semi-circle on the carpet. Tiny bottles of gin, vodka and juice open and piled on the counter; half had been drunk, the other half spat out in failed experiments at cocktails. A bag of peanuts had been opened rashly and was torn in two, launching some of its contents throughout the room. All visible peanuts had been eaten, but one day the two that had sneaked beneath the TV would be found. Chips, the first to be eaten, were now nothing but a few crumbs here and there. A couple of Mars bars, no more than brown fingerprints on the toilet seat and empty packaging.

Two shirts dirty and crumpled on the corner, awaiting washing and ironing. They were white, no other colour would do with Jeremy. Another pile of underwear and socks next to the bed - smelly but unstained. The first pair of shoes, brown and well-worn, parked neatly next to each other right by the door. The other pair, black and shiny, separated by the room. The left shoe was in the bathroom almost behind the toilet. The right shoe was upside down next to the window, behind the curtains, and soaking up the UVs. A few more hours of exposure and they'd never match in colour again. Jeremy wouldn't be happy.

The bathroom was almost undisturbed by comparison. The soap had been taken from its packaging but was unused. The toilet had seen some action the night before but showed no signs of it. The perfect sparkling porcelain of the sink was covered in dark blond hair. Jeremy had attempted to shave but failed. A streak of pale red marked where the razor had lain on the sink before falling to the floor.

On the bed, the current occupant of the room - Jeremy Gould. He was thirty-nine years old, Caucasian, English, married with one small child. He was surprisingly slim for his age, background and habits. Girls at his office considered attractive with his silver-streaked hair, strong features and determined demeanour. At the moment, maybe not so attractive lying in bed spread-eagled, naked and snoring. A corner of his face was shaved and the rest had a couple of days' stubble. The pillow had been sprinkled with red

dots from the dry cut on his face. The sheets had been thrown back in a sweaty daze before the air conditioning kicked in and brought down the temperature to fifteen degrees Centigrade.

When the alarm clock eventually rung at 8 am sharp Jeremy was cut, freezing, with a nasty cough and with his head pounding from the hang over. Still, he was only a shower and a Full English away from being ready for office. Business as usual.