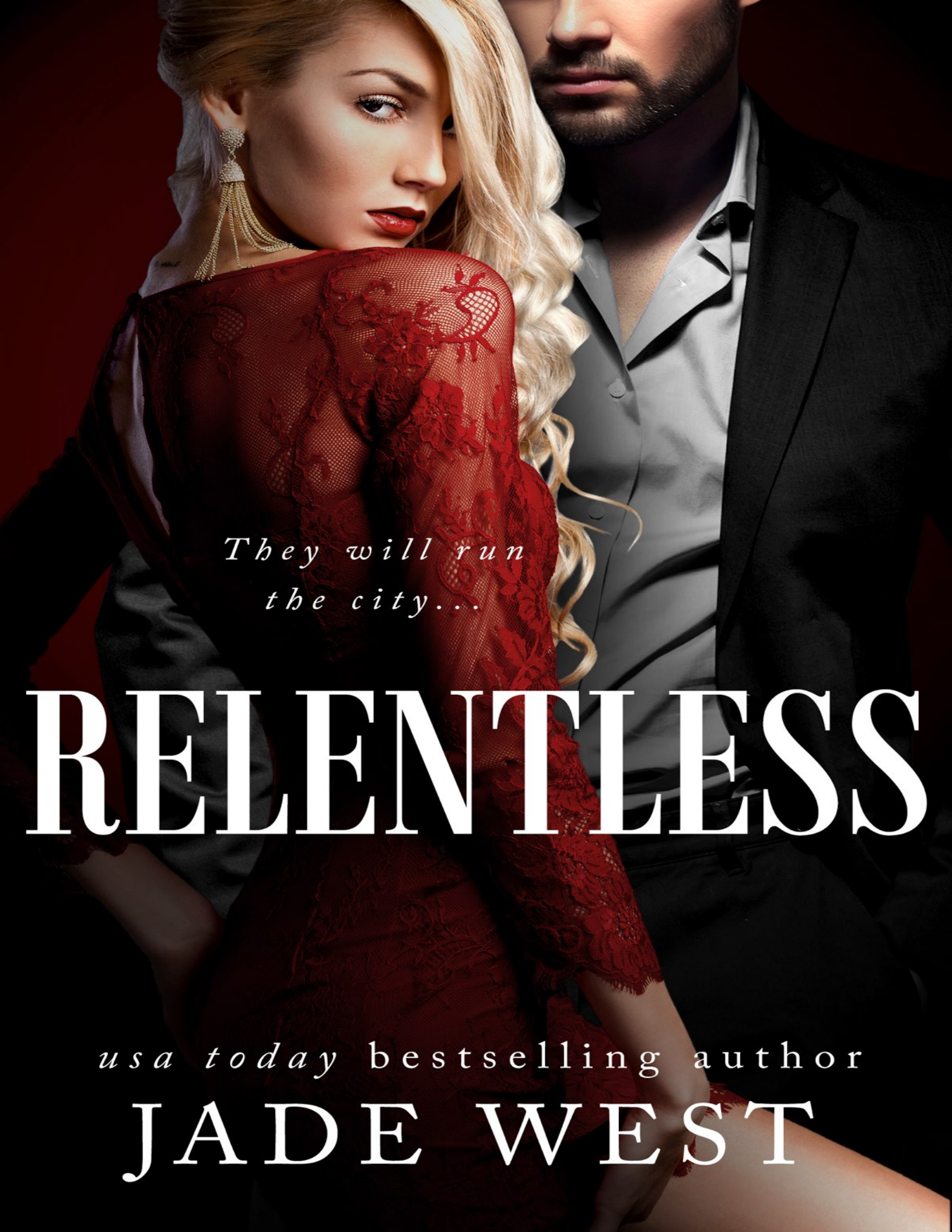


A book cover featuring a man and a woman. The woman, in the foreground, has long blonde hair and is wearing a red lace dress and large gold earrings. The man, behind her, has a beard and is wearing a dark suit. The background is dark red.

*They will run
the city...*

RELENTLESS

usa today bestselling author

JADE WEST

The book cover features a close-up of a man and a woman. The woman, in the foreground, has long, wavy blonde hair and is wearing a red lace dress with a sheer, floral-patterned overlay. She is looking over her shoulder towards the camera with a serious expression. The man, behind her, has a beard and is wearing a dark suit jacket over a light-colored shirt. The background is dark and moody.

*They will run
the city...*

RELENTLESS

usa today bestselling author

JADE WEST

RELENTLESS

JADE WEST

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ELAINE

FOR ALL THE WEIRDNESS IN MY LIFE, NOTHING FELT WEIRDER THAN waking up in bed next to the man I'd grown up believing to be my worst enemy. Weirder still was being madly in love with him. It was insanity. I was consumed by the crazy devotion I felt for Lucian Morelli.

It felt even more bizarre for the fact there was a body buried in the backyard and I felt happy about that. Relieved about that. Loving life with a passion I thought I'd never feel.

The Morelli monster had killed the monster who'd abused me all through my teens. He'd killed Reverend Lynch. For me.

Yes, I was consumed by the man.

It was early morning. The light was barely showing outside. I snuggled up closer to Lucian and took a breath, enjoying the steadiness of his.

He was a deep sleeper. Beautiful.

I don't know how long I lay there at his side before he moved and turned towards me. It felt like hours of perfect bliss, but in reality was barely more than minutes. The light was shining brighter outside, but not by much. The day was still only just beginning.

Lucian's arms were around me before he woke, holding me with the kind of strength that made my heart sing. He was possessive, even in a dream state.

His eyes focused on mine just as soon as he opened them.

Neither of us moved. Our faces were barely inches apart, breaths matching. His heat was divine.

It was him who broke the spell. "I have no idea how the hell we make this work, Elaine. The very second anyone finds out about this they're going to come for us with everything they've got. We're dead and buried."

I knew that. I had no answer. All I knew was that I'd do anything and everything I could possibly do to give us even the slightest chance. That wouldn't make any difference. Nothing could stop the truth. We were in danger with every passing second.

Out there in the big savage world beyond Kington Peak, and the quaint little shack we were holed up in, our families were part of one hell of a war.

Constantines vs Morellis, just like always.

Only now the Power Brothers were up against the Constantines too.

Blamed for my disappearance and kidnap.

Yeah, it would be getting seriously damn bad out there, and if anyone should find out that it wasn't the Power Brothers who had taken me from my NYC

central apartment... that it was Lucian Morelli I was with...

My thoughts were chaos.

I had nothing to say, so I didn't say a word, just kissed him.

That was the only answer I had to give.

I kissed the beautiful monster, and he kissed me back. Hard. Really damn hard. Love and lust are a heady combination, an ocean more welcome than thoughts of our doom.

His hands pinned mine above my head and he ravaged me, flesh to flesh. My legs parted and wrapped around his waist and his movements were raw. Fierce.

I was still sore from where he'd taken me the night before. He'd played me like an instrument into the early hours of the morning, teasing, tempting, hurting. Loving me.

I was more than ready for him when his cock pushed inside me on a fresh new day. My moans were as raw as his thrusts, my hips pushing back up to meet his.

We were still in the rhythm when his cell started ringing from the dresser. He ignored it.

It sounded out again. He ignored it, but I felt him flinch. I knew he was hearing the danger as loud as I was.

He hit the spot just right inside me when it sounded out again and I was coming for him, just as they were out there coming for us. I was squirming under him while he slammed, slammed, slammed, but it was more than the

want. It was fear that had my pulse racing along with my desperation for the man I loved.

He came at the height of my crescendo, breaths ragged when he let his weight crush down onto mine. His cell sounded out again and we were both feeling it. Both scared.

It terrified me even more to sense Lucian's fear than it ever would to feel my own.

"Are you going to get that call?" I asked him.

"I'm going to have to very soon." He rolled off me with a sigh and took my hand. "That was a lovely distraction but we really are fucked, you know. Hopefully your family and the Power Brothers will wipe each other out fast enough to avoid finding out the truth. That it wasn't the brothers who took you at all, they've all been played for fools."

"Maybe," I said, but my voice was weak.

His eyes spoke more than words. Heavy. "We both know that's not going to happen," he told me. "We're in serious fucking danger."

The thought stabbed me in the stomach.

The idea of the carnage happening in the world outside was a hard one to take. Families at war, over me, over us. People thinking they were lashing out to rescue me from kidnap or death—if they didn't believe I was dead and gone already.

Lucian squeezed my hand. "It's a good job you wrote the fake letter about Elliot Ree coming after you. Otherwise we'd be fucked already. If we're lucky, then your hand-scrawled lies might buy us a few more hours."

He was stating the obvious, but it still didn't ease the punch of the truth any less.

The warfare outside was because of me.

I let out a sigh. "Maybe we can stay holed up here for ever and nobody will ever think to look in Kington Peak. Maybe this can be the Lucian and Elaine paradise, immune from the world."

"I love your stunning optimism. I wish it had a scrap of a chance of being true."

The Morelli god got out of bed and slipped on some sweatpants as I watched him. I'd never seen him so casual and it suited him. His body really was a masterpiece, sculpted to perfection. His pants sat down low on his hips, the V of him proud.

There was no protest from him today as I dipped straight into his closet and pulled out one of his shirts. I slipped it on over my head as he watched me right back.

"You really are a beautiful creature," he said, and it made me glow.

I could have flicked on the TV on our way through to the kitchen. But I couldn't face the barrage of news screaming about my abduction. I couldn't face seeing my sisters bawling, begging people to contact the authorities with any news of my disappearance. I didn't want to see the speculation, and the stories, and the hotlines for reporting information.

Lucian had his phone with him but he wasn't looking at it. That's when I got a sense of it again—that simmering tension under his skin, knowing even better than I did just how the world would be coming for us.

We headed right on through to the kitchen for coffee, neither of us acknowledging the calls he was trying his best to ignore.

I shot a glance out of the window, and my mind was right back on the body buried out there under the flower beds.

“What you did to Reverend Lynch, Lucian... I don’t even know how to say thanks for that. Is it even right that I’m happy he’s dead? Does that make me a bad person?”

“It’s perfectly right you’re happy he’s dead,” he told me, deadpan. “If I could have prolonged his suffering any more, I’d still be hurting the vile cunt now.”

I knew I was blushing. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” he said, and he meant it. I could see it in his eyes.

I chose to face up to the obvious. “How long do you think we’ll be able to stay here?” I asked him, and he shrugged.

“Days, tops. Questions will start needing answers. Weapons will start flying. Every scrap of the war will lead them closer to the core.”

Even the thought of it had my stomach twisting.

“What do we do, then? Do we run?”

“You would really do that?” he said. “You would run away from everything you’ve ever known?”

My nod was frantic. “I’d run right now. Together.”

He was quiet, pondering. Staring out through the window as I stared at him.

“Do you think we could do that?” I pushed. “Do you think we could run away?”

“I’m not sure,” he said. “I haven’t a damn clue where we would go. Our families have tentacles in every place we could run to. They’d be after us, chasing us down every single day for the rest of our lives.”

I couldn’t hold back my flood of emotion. “And every single day would be worth it.”

He leaned against the counter. “You might not be saying that when we’re running around the globe like a couple of convicts, living from a suitcase.”

“What’s the alternative?” I asked. “Waiting here until they find out you were the one who took me and hunt us down?”

“The alternative is that you head back into the city,” he said. “You tell them the Power Brothers did this, or some random criminal on the street, or whatever the hell you want to tell them, and go back home. I may get away from this without dying for it, I may not, but you would. You’d be back home safely.”

My reply was instant. Strong and fierce. “*This* is home.”

The stare between us was intense. My heart thumped, hard. I meant it.

This was home. *He* was home.

“I’m glad to hear it,” he said. “Just remember that I gave you the option once you have a gun barrel in your face, saying your holy goodbyes.”

His thumb brushed my cheek as he stepped up close, and my body was alive with the scent of him, the touch of him, the heat of him. “That wouldn’t

matter,” I whispered. “Saying my holy goodbyes, I’d still be happy that I’d spent the last of them with you. With you inside me. Loving me.”

That’s when the beautiful monster surprised me more than ever. “It’s not just your body I want to be inside. I want to be inside your mind, your hopes, your fears. Your quirks and your laughter. Your whole fucking soul.”

It slammed me, right in my heart. I felt like a little girl again, begging our lord above that I’d be good enough for someone to really love me one day.

Maybe, finally, our lord had answered me.

We were kissing when his cell started up again.

“Jesus fucking Christ,” he cursed, finally pulling away far enough to take hold of the phone. When he saw the name on screen, he stiffened, visibly shocked.

“Is it okay?” I asked him. “Is it something bad? Are they really coming for us? Now?”

“Sure fucking looks like it,” he said, and swiped to accept the call.

LUCIAN

MY FATHER NEVER CALLED ME. NOT UNLESS IT WAS SOMETHING SERIOUS.

I knew when I took the call that things weren't looking good for me or Elaine. Not in the slightest. The days were counting down to hours, to minutes. All of them leading to our doom.

"Good morning," I said, knowing full well that it would be anything but a good morning where my Morelli world was concerned.

"You need to get yourself the fuck in here," he told me, and his voice was laced with the simmering rage I'd come to recognize in him so well. "I mean it, Lucian, get your ass in here, right fucking now."

It was sinister. His ocean of assistants usually ordered and instructed everything on his behalf. For him to reach out in person told me more than words could ever say.

"Yes. Okay. I'm on my way," I replied, and my guts were twisting as I ended the call.

“What is it?” Elaine asked, and her beautiful eyes were open wide.

Even in that moment of horror I couldn’t stop the flood of adoration I felt for the stunning creature before me.

Her blonde curls were messy in the most gorgeous of ways, framing her perfect face like a halo. She was a goddess. The most divine angel in creation.

I’ve never been a man to share anything with anyone. I never talked about any of my business, any of my personal associations, any of my actions, but with her it flowed naturally.

“That was my father. I have to go into Holdings. Now.”

Her fingers were jittery as they twiddled in front of her.

“It’ll be okay, won’t it? He wants to talk about work, right?”

“No,” I said honestly. “I want you to lock the front door when I’ve gone, and if I’m not back by dusk, I want you to head back into the city and do whatever it takes to stay safe.”

Her mouth dropped open, scared. “Then don’t go,” she whispered. “Please, Lucian, just don’t go. We could run now. We could run...”

I took her hands in mine. “We wouldn’t get very far, sweetheart. Not like this. We don’t have the network in place to get out of here without getting caught. If people are talking about us. If people know *anything* about us, then we are absolutely fucked.”

“Please...” she started, but I squeezed her fingers.

“We pray, Elaine. We pray that the tentacles are just twitching out there, and nobody has any concrete truth. I’ll do what I can to divert the attention. That’s the only reason I’m going in right now. The only reason I’d leave you alone for even a minute.”

She didn’t argue because there would be no point and she knew it.

My mind was already set.

I headed right on upstairs and jumped in the shower, nothing but a few minutes of hot steam to set me up for the day before I toweled myself down and got myself suited up and ready.

Elaine’s eyes were fixed on me every move I made.

“Surely your father can’t know all that much?” she asked as we headed back downstairs. “I mean, there’s so much that my family needs to work through with the Power Brothers before anyone asks any other questions.”

“I hope it’s only the beginnings of whispers,” I told her. “I’ll do everything I can to divert the smoke from the fire, but the fire is there, Elaine, and it’s burning bright.”

She wrapped her arms around me like a blanket before I walked out of the front door, pressing so tight to me that I could feel her thumping heart.

“I’m serious,” I whispered, right in her ear. “If I’m not back here by dusk, you head back into the city. You stay the fuck alive. Promise.”

“Okay,” she said, but I knew she was lying. I could hear it in her voice.

I pulled away enough to take hold of her jaw.

“You swear to me, Elaine. If I’m not back here by dusk, you head back into the city.”

I knew she was dithering. I could see the liar in her dancing behind her eyes.

“This is one thing we get straight, right from the beginning,” I told her. “You don’t lie to me. However bad the truth is, you never lie to me, sweetheart. Is that understood?”

The liar disappeared in her. I watched it shrivel and die. I saw it loud and clear in that moment. Elaine Constantine wouldn’t lie to me, not once she’d sworn her loyalty.

“I won’t lie to you,” she said. “I swear it.”

“Good girl,” I said and kissed her forehead.

Handing over the keys to her felt surreal. Handing control of anything to another person felt surreal.

I said it once more to be sure. “If I’m not back here by dusk—”

She was nodding when she interjected. “I’ll head back to the city. I swear it. I’ll stay alive.”

I said something I thought I’d never say. It rolled off my tongue like the easiest words I’d ever spoken. “I love you.”

Her smile was perfection. “I love you, too.”

I kissed her once, hard, and then I walked away.

The drive into the city was long and short, both at once. The traffic around me was a regular bustle of people going about their lives, at contrast with the way mine was potentially reaching its crescendo. I was running through the various possibilities in my mind. The snippets of information my father may have gathered from the people around him. From my chauffeurs, or speculations on the news, or—in the worst possible scenario—from Trenton Alto. Yet again, I realized the man knew far too much about me and my life. I should never have trusted a right-hand assistant for twelve years straight without wiping him out long before now.

I pulled up into Morelli Holdings and checked myself in the rearview mirror once more before climbing out. The Holdings headquarters was buzzing with its regular energy when I stepped foot inside, people oblivious to the potential drama I was walking into. People nodded their heads and waved with their *morning, Mr. Morelli, sir* at every turn. I tipped my head at them, keeping my expression as stoic as ever.

My father would be on floor nine. I knew he'd be at the very end of the management suite meeting rooms, awaiting me with his evil eyes and his pitted jaw.

I wasn't mistaken.

"Sit the fuck down," he said, and I did as instructed, sitting back in my seat with my foot up on one knee.

"What is this about?" I asked him, my voice barely more than a hiss to match.

He tossed a file across at me and I flicked it open.

Testimonials of clubgoers saying how they'd seen Lucian Morelli chasing down Elaine Constantine. The event where I'd floored the security guard