

TRICK DATE



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Chapter One

Jason Kendall wanted revenge.

For fifteen years he had kept Amanda Rawson close, with the pain of the past reinforcing his obsession.

Waiting for his chance to strike, he changed everything about himself. Relentless, he went deep, emerging as a powerhouse after losing sixty pounds and building a successful tech consulting business. Attractive, and with a hefty bank account, he never married, deliberately limiting his relationships to carefully selected partners, and many one-night stands.

Nothing eased the pain, which was stacked on the bullying he endured as an obese child; recollections that catapulted him back a decade and a half to a supervisor's office, at a place he once worked.

“Jason, I like you personally, and we haven’t had any issues until now,” his supervisor Walt Jamison said, who was just a few years older than him.

“Now?” He wondered out loud.

“Well, yes. There’s been a situation...”

Jason interjected. "The spreadsheet for Fielding had a few issues, but I fixed them and completed the report on time. Wilbur's already got it."

"It's not about your work, which is excellent. You're one of our best, and we appreciate that, that's why this is so difficult." He ran a hand through his blond hair, as his blue eyes turned misty.

"I don't understand?"

"We've gotten a complaint about you."

"Complaint? For what? Who?"

"Well, I'm not at liberty to say, but I think you can figure it out. They're saying you made an inappropriate comment about their appearance. Look, I don't approve of these new changes and policies. We're all walking around here on eggshells, not knowing what to say and how to act. She's adamant you said something to make her uncomfortable and even threatened to take it higher if we didn't take action. Plus, the race thing only adds to it."

"Cause I'm Black?"

The supervisor responded with a nod, his pale cheeks reddening.

"On both sides, but that's all I can say."

"This isn't right, I've never had a warning or a write-up before."

"I know, and until now your record's been clean. But unfortunately, there's a first time for everything, I just wish it wasn't you. We've got to let you go. Sorry, Jason. You were a good one, real good. It's just the way it is, though."

Stunned, he didn't have long to wallow in his confusion. After cleaning out his desk, a large security guard escorted him out of the building.

When leaving he couldn't look at anyone, the shame was too heavy, and their stares asked too many questions.

One person, however, was different. Her eyes were piercing and defiant as he walked past her. Immediately he knew the truth. She was the one that

had ruined him—Amanda Rawson.

Chapter Two

Jason wasn't the only person that suffered that day.

A wiz at computers since childhood, he started repairing them as a teenager to offset the cost of his mother's medical expenses.

Insurance only went so far and, in recent years, her diabetes had taken a serious turn. Without the income he provided, things didn't look good, and her future was bleak.

Driving home, he ran scenarios on ways to tell her. But knowing him as she did, he would be easy to read.

Irene knew something was up the second he hit the door.

"It's bad?" She asked, leaning forward on the sofa and taking his hand.

He couldn't deny the truth, no matter how distasteful. "Yes. The job, let me go."

"Let you go, why?"

Angry and confused, he lied, spinning the situation to spare her from more suffering. "They're cutting back. A lot of what we do can be done by computer and a full staff isn't needed."

“Damn technology. Good for some things and terrible for others,” she lamented.

“We’ll be alright,” he added, forcing a smile.

She looked at him, her eyes sparkling. “I know sweetie. You’re such a good son, thank you.”

Weary from even that little bit of discussion, she leaned back sinking into the pillows, her eyes slowly closing and her breath becoming heavy. He let go of her hand placing it gently at her side then covered her with a blanket.

He barely made it into his room before tears fell. Wiping them away, he tried to make a stand, reminding himself of past difficulties even more daunting.

Being frugal, he had enough money to cover their living expenses for a couple of months (giving himself time to find a job), but there wasn’t extra for medications.

Looking forward to an overdue promotion, Jason had planned to enroll Irene in an experimental program. It cost three thousand just to get a screening, and payments increased as treatments progressed.

Now, this would never happen. The guilt of letting his mother down turned into depression and quickly swallowed him up.

By year’s end, the inevitable threw salt on his emotional wounds: his mother passed one night, with him finding her in the morning. It wasn’t unexpected, though nothing prepared him for the reality of her laying there, face drawn and skin cold to the touch, like the ground she entered on a chilly afternoon.

Chapter Three

The old Jason died with his mother.

His resurrection started with extreme workouts. Alternating between calisthenics, weights, and cardio, in the year of his mother's passing, he lost twenty-five pounds. The next year fifteen, then ten; going from two-thirty to one-eighty.

Keeping his body tight with exercise and a low-fat diet, he upgraded his wardrobe, sporting a well-tailored conservative look, and moved around town in a fully loaded Mercedes.

During his time alone, he also built-up his computer business and was now a sought-after contractor for several Fortune five hundred companies. This, along with the sale of his mother's home, jacked his income to seven figures, which was more than enough to finally become his own man.

The taste, however, was bittersweet. Never far from his thoughts was the reason for these seemingly positive changes and the suffering they contained. Even his fondness for manosphere videos and books couldn't erase the shy

boy that used to get bullied. No achievements or money were enough. Inside of him was a hole impossible to fill.

Unable to sleep one night, he found a way to bring some measure of peace to his soul. Revenge—the exacting of punishment would be the closest thing to a resolution. After all, someone had to pay—she must pay.

Chapter Four

Amanda Rawson was doing her thing.

A tall brown-skinned beauty, there was no shaking her confidence, or the fact of her success. She worked hard, becoming the CEO of a flourishing tech start-up. A natural salesperson, with crazy sex appeal, she would lockdown men and women alike, getting them to the place she needed them to be—signing a contract.

She also played hard, having dealt with more men than she cared to remember. Searching for Mr. Right, she came across many good men, but none with staying power; that is, a guy that matched her energy and drive, not a feminized male.

After work one evening, she and a girlfriend had drinks during Happy Hour while lamenting their lack of relationship options.

“Ronnie, I don’t know,” Amanda said. “It’s hard out here. I met a guy, who looked good on paper, so I gave him a shot. We went to dinner Saturday, which is my sure thing day, and you know what this clown says? He only

dates bi-sexual women and he thought I went that way because of my attitude.”

“Girl, if that’s the case, let me get in on it. You can be my first.”

Amanda eyed her, then sipped her drink. “That’s sick, and you know better,” she said with a giggle. “Besides, Mike would kill you.”

“Hell no. He’d love it, the freaky bastard. I don’t put anything past him.”

“God, you can’t. They’re all the same, so easy and weak.”

“So just accept it and find someone to cover most of the bases, and get another one to take care of your *real* needs.”

“I’ve done that, and you know the hell I went through juggling two, three, or more. I’m not going to lie, it’s good at first. But when they start getting some, they always get possessive and needy, all that begging and shit. It’s annoying.” She took another sip, scanning the room before she spoke. “I guess I’m old fashioned—after all, and just want a strong man that can make me feel safe and take care of my needs. Is that too much to ask?”

Her friend was pensive. “I guess not. But your chances are slim and the shit just becomes a dream, then a nightmare if you end up alone. My grandmother’s sister was like that. All picky and shit, kicking men out of her life, good and bad, just to end up alone with a bird, one that talked and cussed like she did. Don’t fall into that trap. Sometimes the next best is best, roll with it and chill.”

The words lingered in her gut like a body shot. Everything Ronnie had said she’d felt for a while. Her greatest fear was to be old and alone. That was worse than death, so she imagined herself putting together some concoction that would take her out, to get this miserable ride called life over with. If it came to that, she had no doubt that she could make that move.

Chapter Five

“Quick and smooth, Mister. That’s how this works,” the scraggly bearded older man said, handing Jason a small bottle.

“It’ll take them right out?”

“Like babies, they’ll sleep.”

He shot the man a dubious look.

“No shit,” the man continued. “There ain’t no refunds though. You just gotta take my word for it.”

Jason dug in his pocket and slipped some bills into the man’s skeletal hand. “You’d better be straight, or I’ll get Jeff on your ass.”

“There ain’t no need for all that. I’m just the middleman. But I’ve got to tell you. This ain’t nothin’ to play with, if you use too much it’s over.” Before hurrying away, the man ran a boney index finger across his neck, signifying death.

Looking around first, Jason raised the vial examining its contents. Satisfied that it was as good as advertised, he slipped it into his pocket and walked to

his car. On the passenger seat was his laptop, which he boosted with the hot spot from his phone. He then googled Amanda Rawson.

Immediately, numerous pictures appeared both social and professional, lauding her business accomplishments. Appearing in a few shots with celebrities, her climb to the top was impressive. But he wasn't moved. He believed that behind the facade, there was a monster, a treacherous beast, that he was obligated to destroy.

Her work address was also listed and he drove downtown, parking across the street from the building. It was three in the afternoon, so he'd have to chill for a few hours.

About to recline the seat, he decided not to, fearing he'd nod off and miss her. A coffee shop was on the corner, giving him a view of the entrance to catch her coming out, and to get a much-needed jolt of caffeine.

He went over his options, and ultimate goal, which was to punish her for ruining his life. In his mind, she'd killed his mother. Which, of course, to a rational person wasn't true. Although, facts in this situation didn't matter.

Before he could indulge his thoughts, he saw her and a colleague exit the building and cross the street towards the coffee shop. For a second he was stuck, overwhelmed by her beauty—she was immaculate in a navy blue blazer and matching slacks.

Inadequacy gripped him, and fears from the past held tight. A menacing voice reminded him of who he really was, and that he could never have a woman like that. Every fear and insecurity that he'd worked so hard to overcome returned, sitting heavy on his soul. He tried to convince himself that nothing else mattered and that he'd do whatever was necessary to reach his objective.

Determined, he got out of the car and went into the coffee shop. Amanda and the staffer were conversing when he stepped behind them. Buffed and casually dressed in a thin black hoodie, blue jeans, and brown loafers, their heads turned with his nemesis holding her gaze just a little too long.

After placing their orders, Amanda couldn't resist.

"You look familiar?" She asked. "Are you a techie?"

Focused, he offered a smile. "Yes, I am."

"I knew it," she said to the other woman, then back to him. "What sector?"

"For the past few years, I've been consulting, troubleshooting for companies under, or overstaffed. It's been a little hectic since the pandemic."

"Tell me about it. We had a few desperate months, really the entire year, but we made it, and are now stronger than ever."

"A real comeback story?" Added the colleague.

"Absolutely. I've got a great team and we refused to give up." She then removed a card from her cell phone case, handing it to him. "Look, we're always interested in extra support, just in case. Why don't we stay in touch?"

He nodded. "Sounds good."

"Great, both of my numbers are on there. I'm Amanda by the way, and this is Evan."

Hesitating for a second, he reached for a name, anything but his. "Chris."

They shook hands.

Collecting their drinks, the ladies exited, with him doing so after getting his coffee.

Returning to his car, he sank into the seat. It had gone better than he ever imagined, with her doing all the work. The situation was nicely set-up for

him, though he'd have to close the deal. He wasn't naive enough to believe that it would remain this easy, but she was definitely open, and that was all the opportunity he needed.

Chapter Six

Not wanting to seem eager, he waited a week before calling her at the office. He didn't waste time pretending it wasn't personal. Getting right to it, his new alter ego, Chris, took control.

They made plans to meet that evening, after work, at her usual spot.

Waiting at the bar, she ignored guys trying to get in her business; nervous dudes eager to see who the fine, sexy, woman was running with.

When Chris entered, he more than held his own, as haters backed away, wishing they could be him.

He was cool, and solid, kissing her lightly on the cheek after taking her hand. Relaxing, her disposition melded with his rhythm, as she flowed with the moment, ready to go wherever it took them.

"How was work?" He said.

For a second she was grim, then lightened up. "Stressful... I had two big presentations this week, so when you called I was like, should I? Nah, I'm way too busy."

"What changed?"

“I can’t just run until the wheels come off. I’ll go crazy.”

“Are you expecting sympathy?”

She smiled. “Maybe.”

“I’m not that easy,” he said, chuckling.

A bartender took their orders—red wine for both.

“I don’t want anything too heavy, it’s a work day,” she said.

“Hum, but you do want to relax, right.”

She cut him a look. “Sure, within reason.”

“Well, you never told me?”

“What’s that?”

“What changed your mind?”

“Yeah, I did, stress. You weren’t listening?”

Their wine arrived.

“It’s too soon for that. I stop listening around the third date.”

Conflicted, she took a sip, letting his sarcasm run its course. She was put off by his arrogance, though excited by his indifference to her feelings.

“You’re funny.”

“...and?”

“That’s it. What, you want more?”

“Say something positive, you know the old saying.”

“Or, maybe I’ll say nothing at all.”

Their sparring continued for an hour, resulting in a draw. He then took it up a notch with the unexpected, being the first to end the evening. He caught her in mid-sentence about her relationship struggles and why she was still single and childless at forty-two.

He didn’t care about any of that and humored her until his patience ran out. Besides, he’d heard enough to know what kind of woman she was, having

discovered her vulnerabilities.

Outside, walking to the valet, he had more tricks.

Waiting for the attendant, she extended a hand to shake, being formal since she didn't get her way.

"It was different," she said. "Have a..."

He ignored her extended hand and the comment, pulling her close and kissing her roughly on the mouth. She resisted at first by pushing against his chest, before submitting.

Stepping back she was breathless, like a balloon deflating. At a loss for words, she teetered between everything and nothing.

"You're full of surprises," she said, her pretenses neutralized.

"Keep that in mind. Gimme your phone." She handed it to him and he punched in his number. "Look, my car's in the shop, can you give me a ride?"

Weary from a long day, though stimulated by his company, she was open, taking the keys from the attendant.

Watching downtown blend into the warehouse district, he thought about working his plan to the finish right then, but it wasn't time. Things needed to stay on simmer for a minute.

Chapter Seven

Relaxing at home Saturday, Amanda and Ronnie were deep into a bottle of Pinot.

“You didn’t say much about the other day?” Ronnie asked.

“I know, sorry. I was busy with work, this week was a killer.”

“Girl, you’re always stressing about work, but you always get it right. I mean about dude, what’s up?”

She hesitated before speaking. “I don’t know.”

“Is that good or bad?”

“Well, he’s kind of a jerk and arrogant, wanting to do things his way. And he kissed me on the first date.”

“That’s cool, he was feeling you. Now it’s your turn.”

“It was a kiss girl, right on the lips, like he knows me like that.”

“There you go trippin’. He sounds like a regular dude to me, not one of those suckers you’re used to. Dealing with weak guys has softened you up. Maybe he’s just what you need?”

Amanda retreated, knowing the truth. “It’s that obvious?”

“Yeah, and working all the time is no excuse.” Ronnie opened her arms wide, as though encompassing the room. “You’ve got to let go and enjoy!”

“I guess, but you’re a pain in the ass.”

“I’m real, now call him.” Not getting an answer, she pressed. “Come on girl.”

“Fine.”

“When?”

“God, you’re annoying. Tomorrow, are you happy?”

The ladies frowned at each other, then burst out laughing before enjoying more Pinot and throwing in some Grey Goose for the hell of it.

Chapter Eight

One evening after dinner, they ended up at Jason's place.

"Nice," she said, getting off the elevator which opened into the living room. "I knew they were developing down here, but didn't know it was booming like this."

He handed her a glass of Hennessy with coke. "We're due something stronger than wine, what do you think?"

"Sure."

While talking, he guided her to the sofa, which was in the middle of the large living room, placing his drink on a coffee table. "Don't be fooled, it's still rough on the docks, and you've gotta watch your back. All kinds of crazy shit happens by the water; drug dealing, smuggling, and the black market are going strong. Plus, lots of misfits are mixed in with the artists and legit businesses."

Relieved to just be herself, and giving into the moment, her defenses seemed to crumble as his approach hit all the right notes.

Still, he was hesitant, as if waiting for something; his rage holding him back, like a ruthless gauge keeping him locked in place.

He fumbled with the hem of her skirt, awkwardly rolling it up her thigh, revealing black silk panties. Shakily, his hand gripped her leg, clutching, wanting her but hating her too. He tried to play it off, looking into her eyes, like that day long ago.

“I knew you couldn’t do it,” she said, pushing his hand aside and straightening her skirt. “You were sorry then and nothing has changed.”

Stunned, his mouth barely formed words. “What’s this?”

“You don’t know? Didn’t you set this up? Some trap—big man!”

He tried to play stupid, offering denials. They were a waste of time. His game was slack.

“You think dressing up and trying to be something you’re would what... win me over...break me down? God, you’re pathetic. Nigga, you’re not in my league.”

He was desperate. “How’d you know, I covered everything?”

“When were you going to put that shit in my drink? And what were you gonna do after that—you can’t fuck.”

Starting with her blouse, she removed all of her clothes standing in front of him like a dominatrix.

“Here, come on, I’m waiting,” she taunted.

His lust, and hate, left him sobbing.

Grabbing the sides of his head, she forced his face between her legs. “There,” she said, pushing him back, and putting her clothes on.

Taking a phone from her purse, she made a call. “Yeah, come on. We might as well finish this.”

While she was speaking, he tried to lunge at her but couldn't move. In fact, what he thought was shock, was something else.

"How's it feel?" She asked.

He looked at her curiously, slipping to the floor and leaning on the sofa. Unable to speak, he could only shake his head. "No."

Laughing, she spoke. "Looks like you bought that crap for yourself. Why not? We sold it to you. A bum will do anything for a buck."

Wondering who the "we" was, he didn't have to wait long. She went to the elevator and pushed the button, allowing access to his floor. The grinding pulley signaled its approach. A few seconds later the doors opened and Walt, his old supervisor, entered the room.

"Hey, baby," he smiled, giving her a kiss.

"You remember Walt, don't you?" She said to Jason, whose expression didn't change, nor could it with the stuff in his system. However, he could hear just fine and knew everything that was happening.

"Damn, he does look different. I wouldn't have known him," Walt said.

"I know, it's amazing what a little determination can do. But he's still the same in the head. Soft as hell, trying to play games with me. I told you it wouldn't work."

The two laughed.

"True, he's got no answers now."

"Never did."

"You gonna tell him?"

"Why, what difference does it make? Soon, he won't remember anything."

"At least you would've said it, though."

She focused on Jason. "What you bought was saline, that's why I'm good. But you got the real stuff and it'll mess you up in high doses. You're locked

in your body right now, but soon your memories will fade and everything will get dark and you'll forget to breathe and... well, I guess you know what that means?"

In his mind, he was screaming with all his might to break this wicked spell cast on him. His struggling meant nothing, he was trapped, with eternity closing in fast.

"Walt wants me to tell you this. I don't know why," she said, bending down and speaking softly in his ear. "Why did I complain about you back then? Because I could. And just like my man, I was tired of seeing your slovenly fat ass every day. You were an eyesore, and nothing's changed—fat boy!"

Standing up, she petted his head like a dog then burst out laughing, with Walt joining in.

The couple entered the elevator, closing the door on their twisted connection to a man whose life was over.