**Chapter 5: Touched**

💋 *"It wasn’t flirtation. It was a sacrament."*  
🎵 Track: “Almost Blue” – Chet Baker  
💦 Fluids: Lipstick, Sweat, Shame  
🕯️ Ritual Tag: First Desecration / Mirror Confession

The precinct smelled like coffee and old guilt. Phones rang. Typewriters clacked. Somewhere down the hall, a suspect cried like the building had secrets it didn’t want to keep anymore.

Detective Elena Cruz half-listened to a rookie stammer through a case update—drug bust, maybe. She nodded at the right moments, didn’t register a word. Her eyes drifted toward the doors like they were expecting a ghost.

And then she saw her.

Vivien Vale.

Walking in like she belonged there. Trench coat cinched. Heels clicking like accusations. Blonde hair curled just enough to fuck propriety sideways. She moved like she was solving a case no one knew existed. Like every step was a clue. Like the air kissed her wrists and begged for more.

Cruz’s throat closed. Her hands twitched toward her pockets, but found no comfort there.

Vivien made eye contact.

Didn’t smile.  
Didn’t need to.

She walked up to the front desk, leaned in, said something too low to hear. The clerk nodded like he’d forgotten his own name. She handed him a folded slip of paper—tip, threat, prophecy. Then she turned. Walked past Cruz like Cruz wasn’t even the cop in the room.

But as she passed, she dropped something.

Cruz looked down.

A lipstick tube.  
Crimson Psalm.  
The same shade smeared on the first victim’s thigh like a hymn in blood.

She didn’t pick it up right away. Just stared at it—like it might confess. Like it might bloom open and whisper *her name.*

The hallway stretched. No one looked. No one moved.

Then, slowly, she bent down. Slipped the lipstick into her blazer pocket like it was evidence. Or a sin.

One word surfaced in her chest.  
Not spoken. Not even thought. Just... *breathed.*

Touched.

That night, Cruz didn’t sleep.

She sat in the bathroom with the lights off, door locked, knees pulled to her chest on the closed toilet lid. The lipstick rested in her palm. Her other hand shook.

She stared at it like it might open on its own. Like it might hiss her secrets back at her.

It was heavier than it should’ve been. Or maybe *she* was.

She clicked it open.

The scent hit her first.

Not perfume. Not synthetic. Something ruinously human.

Lipstick, worn too long. Still hot with someone else’s skin. Like velvet licked clean and still warm.

It was Vivien.

Or it was her memory, rewired through scent. Sweat, smoke, something sweet rotting into sin.

The shade was rich. Deep. Like the bruise left by a mouth too reverent. Like shame that had dried on skin. Like grief that got kissed.

She twisted it higher. Brought it close.

It didn’t smell like perfume. It smelled like heat. Like sweat soaked into silk. Like a neck just kissed too long.

She pressed the tip to her fingertip. Just a dab.

Then—God help her—she touched it to her tongue.

Salt. Wax. Maybe iron. Maybe memory.

She gasped.

Pulled her hand back like she’d been burned.

The lipstick clattered into the sink.

She stared at it. Shaking. Breathing hard.

Then whispered, broken and low:  
“What the fuck are you doing to me...”

Later, she stood naked in front of the mirror.

The same lipstick—now reapplied—marked a single dot at the center of her throat. A fake birthmark. A confession no one could read but her.

Her badge lay on the counter. She didn’t touch it.

She stared at herself—at the hollow under her collarbone. At the way her nipples had hardened just from memory. At the smear of sin between her thighs, invisible but *felt*.

And when she spoke, it wasn’t to the room.

“You didn’t even touch me.”

She said it like accusation.  
Like prayer.  
Like maybe she wanted to be.

Then added, softer:

“Touched.”

She reached up. Traced the lipstick with her fingertip. Dragged it down to her chest. Smudged it over her heart.

She should’ve washed it off. She didn’t.

When she stepped out of the bathroom hours later, the apartment was still and swollen with silence. Her blazer hung where she’d left it. She reached for it—absentminded, guilty—and something shifted in the inner pocket.

Another lipstick tube.

Identical.

She froze.

Not the one she’d smeared. This one was unopened. Pristine. Cold.

She hadn’t put it there.

She stared at it, pulse rising. Did Vivien carry two? Had she planted it? Had she dropped it knowing Cruz would pocket the first—then left the second like a challenge?

Or a promise?

This one felt heavier. Or maybe she did.

Her breath caught.

Was it a trap?

Or an invitation?

The lipstick pulsed in her hand—and a memory surfaced, uninvited.

Not a scream. Not a moan. A whisper—hollow and stained like a church pew too long sat upon.

She was eight. Maybe nine.

The wooden booth was darker than it needed to be, lit only by a slatted window that cast a shadow across her knees. Her shoes didn’t touch the floor. Her hands were sticky from the communion wafer. Her mouth still tasted like flour and fear.

“Bless me, Father,” she whispered, “for I have sinned.”

A creak. A cough. Then silence.

She didn’t know what to say. So she lied. Said she had taken a pencil that wasn’t hers. Said she’d hit her cousin.

But what she didn’t say was the truth.

She liked watching the altar boys light the candles. Liked how close they got to the flame. Liked when her cousin Anna kissed her cheek too long. Liked it enough to want it again.

She thought about that when the priest told her to recite Hail Marys. She thought about it when she kneeled and bit her lip and felt something she couldn’t name pulse low in her belly.

The first time she confessed, it wasn’t to God.  
It was to the dark.

In bed, she lay on her back with the tube clutched between her palms like a rosary.

Somewhere inside her skull, a voice surfaced.

*“You’re not dreaming about her. You’re remembering me.”*

It wasn’t hers. It wasn’t Vivien’s. It tasted like Ellis—salt, breath, ghost.

She didn’t answer. She couldn’t. Not without moaning.

She didn’t open it.  
Didn’t wear it.

Just held it.

And imagined Vivien’s mouth.

On her neck.  
On her thighs.  
On her.

She whispered a prayer she didn’t believe.

“Don’t let this ruin me.”

Then added, breath trembling:

“But if it does… make it worth it.”

The tube still smelled like her. Even cold.