

HAUNTING VANITY

May 1, 2020 - Friday

Twenty-five-year-old Vanity Chase had the world by the tail. She had just released her first single record and it was shooting to the top of the charts. She was poised to be country music's next darling and nothing could stop her.

Vanity had it all: long blonde hair, perfect figure, beautiful face, and a voice the angels envied. She knew she was the whole package.

As she drove home, she mentally ran through the list of things she had procured for her birthday party at the apartment clubhouse. The band was set up and ready to go. The caterer was arranging the buffet tables around the party room, cases of beer, wine, and whiskey were stacked behind the bar, and her manager had scored some primo (joints of weed laced with cocaine) for her and her friends. *Yep, this is gonna be one hell of a party*, she thought as she drove to her apartment.

She hoped Pam was home and getting ready. She hated it when they both ended up in the bathroom trying to take a shower at the same time. *I really need to cut Pam loose*, she thought. *I'm certainly not taking her to Nashville with me.*

She parked the pickup in her designated space and sprinted to her door. "Happy Birthday!" Pam yelled, throwing open the door.

"You're naked!" Vanity exclaimed, looking around to see if any of her neighbors were outside.

"I thought I'd give you your present before the party." A lustful look gave Pam's face an unattractive appearance.

“We don’t have time,” Vanity croaked. “We’re supposed to be back at the clubhouse in an hour.”

“Van, just a quickie,” Pam whined.

“I’m getting into the shower,” Vanity said. “*Country Music People Magazine* will be there tonight. They’re doing a spread on me for my birthday. I have to fix my hair and makeup.”

Locking the door behind her to prevent Pam following her into the bathroom, Vanity stripped and stepped into the shower. Her mind was running a mile a minute as she thought about her recording session scheduled for Monday to cut her first album. For the first time, everything was perfect in Vanity’s world.

Vanity left Pam, who was still dressing, and headed for the clubhouse. As she pulled into the parking lot friends and followers engulfed her vehicle singing “Happy Birthday.” A stunning redhead latched onto her arm as she stepped from her pickup cab. “Roland sent me,” she whispered in Vanity’s ear.

“Are you my party planner or my birthday present?” Vanity asked.

“I can be anything you want me to be, honey.” The redhead placed her lips close to Vanity’s ear. “Anything you want.”

Vanity nodded and walked toward the door with the woman clinging to her. “Do you have a name?”

“Scarlett.”

“Of course, it is,” Vanity scoffed, eyeing her flaming red hair.

The clubhouse filled quickly, and Vanity wished she had hired more security guards to control the crowd. The photographers for *Country Music People* were taking photos from every angle as she approached the band, and a local TV station’s cameraman was videoing her every move.

She stepped onto the stage, greeted her band, and yelled into the microphone, “Let’s get this over with so we can party!”

They performed a couple of numbers then segued into their hit that was riding high on the country music charts. The merrymakers went crazy, clapping the rhythm and singing along with her.

May 2-Saturday

Vanity couldn’t remember when she passed out. She knew she had consumed an inordinate amount of liquor and smoked too many of Roland’s primos. A movement beside her confirmed the fear she was in bed with someone. Red hair tousled around the head on her shoulder. *Scarlett*.

Moving slowly, Vanity slid from the bed onto the floor and felt around for her clothes. She thanked her lucky stars they were piled in one place and not scattered all over the room. She dressed, ignoring the wicked clogger that was dancing inside her head.

Staggering around the room, she tried to decide the direction of her pickup. The faint light on one side of the room led her to the door going outside. Her vehicle was covered in streamers and shoe polish used to write happy birthday. She knew she was in no condition to get behind the wheel, but her apartment wasn’t very far away. She squinted her eyes, attempting to block out the rising sun.

She wiped her eyes with her fingers, trying to pull the cobwebs from her brain, but failed. She climbed into the truck, fumbled with the seat belt, then abandoned her efforts to fasten it. She put the truck in reverse and shot backwards much faster than she intended. “Okay, very little control of limbs,” she said out loud, giggling as she eased the gearshift into drive.

The Ford pickup shot forward and she slammed on the brakes. Trying to judge her reaction time, she hopped and

jerked the truck from the parking lot. She rolled down the windows hoping the fresh air would sober her.

She pulled onto the street and accelerated through the neighborhood. The faster she got home the quicker the streets would be safe. Her phone dinged receipt of a text message and she wiggled it from her pocket, finally reading, “Where are you?”

The screaming of brakes and grating of metal were the last things Vanity heard as she ran a stop sign, plowing into the driver’s side of a small car. The skidding and rattling of the vehicles locked in a death struggle seemed to go on forever. Her heart was hammering as if a wild mustang was galloping in her chest. *Chains, it sounds like heavy chains rattling*, she thought as she flew through her windshield and slipped into darkness. All that noise and she never saw anything. She only heard the sound.