

## Trust No One

A Mini Mystery by Gwen Koehler

Desiree Divine lay on the velvet covered chaise lounge in the parlor, blinking back tears as JD Scardeli, her bodyguard, wrapped her bloody hand with his handkerchief. Blood now spoiled its fine linen, yet the JDS monogram was still readable. His hands were rough, but his gravelly voice softened as he spoke.

“Don’t worry, Miz Divine, I won’t let anything happen to you...ever.” Desiree knew she should say she was grateful for his ministrations, but she wasn’t. She just wanted to get away from him. With her other hand, the one splashed with lemon juice, she rubbed her eyes, causing them to sting and water even more.

“How did you do this?” Scardeli asked. “It’s all my fault. I never shoulda let you outta my sight.” He took another handkerchief from his pocket and dabbed at a tear on her cheek. She swatted his hand away, leaving a trail of blood on his sleeve.

“Oh, I’m so sorry about your shirt,” she said, batting her lashes to blink away the lemon juice.

“It’s nothing. You know I’d give you the shirt off my back—whatever you need.”

“Well, I do need you to fasten the top button of this dress, if you don’t mind.” She twisted so he could reach the final button on the beaded gown she chose for tonight’s events. His calloused trigger finger scraped her skin, and she stifled a groan.

She couldn’t breathe in this arrangement. Scardeli reported her every move to his boss, Max the Man, who rewarded him, as he did all of his henchman, with power, money and those godawful Havana cigars. Her situation was more suffocating now than when Max had plucked her away from the smokey honky-tonk where her singing career floundered. At first, she was happy for Max to shower her with furs and diamonds. But along with these gifts, came Scardeli. Max the Man, as she later learned, trusted no one. The more she got to know Max, the more she understood why.

And the more she understood, the more she wanted out. Then Blanche, a drab maid rarely noticed in Max’s household, told her a government G-man was seeking someone in to household to squeal on Max. Blanche was scared to turn on her employer, but Desiree saw a way out and made a plan.

Of course, the Scardeli situation made it impossible to meet the G-man in person, so she smuggled notes to him through Blanche’s weekly laundry. From her bedroom window each Monday, she watched her G-man, disguised as a tall, dark, handsome laundry truck driver, heft the heavy basket onto his truck. Soon, she told herself, soon, he would rescue her from this misery.

“If you were dressing, why were you in the kitchen?” Scardeli asked, hovering like a lovesick puppy, his cigar breath making her nauseous.

“I needed to slice cucumbers and lemons.”

“I woulda brought a snack up to your room. All you had to do was ask.”

“Not to eat. For my toilette. Lemon water cleanses the complexion and cucumber slices freshen the eyes.”

“You have the most beautiful eyes I seen in my life, Miz Divine.” Desiree blinked furiously, and Scardeli reached the hanky to her face again. This guy had to go. She looked up at the clock. Time was running out. The police and her G-man would be here any minute.

“Stop,” she said flinging the bloody handkerchief at him. He stuffed it in his pocket. “Go get me a snack. I need to eat before we go to the speakeasy.”

She watched the bodyguard, like a bull in a china closet, bash through the swinging door to the kitchen. She held her breath. Had he found what she left for him? Headlights beamed through the parlor window, car doors slammed, footsteps stomped the porch, and fists pounded the door.

“Police. Open up.”

She picked up elbow length black gloves that matched the gown and slid them on, wincing as they brushed over her injury and a broken nail. She opened the door and pointed to the kitchen. Two police officers bolted in that direction. The G-man, far more handsome in a fedora and trench coat than his laundry disguise, remained with her. From the kitchen they heard thumps, moans and cursing. She breathed a sigh of relief. So much for Blanche’s threats to tell Max about Desiree’s snitching on him.

Thank goodness they found what she wanted them to find-- JD Scardeli leaning over Blanche’s lifeless body, a knife in her back. And Scardeli’s bloody handkerchief and shirt damning *him* for the deed.

While the police cuffed Scardeli, the G-man took her gloved hand and held it to his lips. Desiree, in turn, batted her eyes for real.

“You are as beautiful as described, Miss Divine. I thank you for providing me with everything I need.” He placed her full-length fur over her shoulders. “Now, come with me. I insist.”

Her eyes brimmed with genuine tears. Her own knight in shining armor was here to save her. Max the Man would go down with Scardeli, and she could live happily ever after.

The G-man opened the car door for her, helped her in, then got in behind the steering wheel. As they pulled away, she saw him tip his hat to someone. Max the Man stepped out of the shadows and returned the gesture. The G-man chuckled and lit up a Havana cigar.