

STRIPPED

SHOWDOWN STRIP  
*on the*



LAS VEGAS TRANSPLANT

JEFF GOTTESFELD



## MEET THE CHARACTERS

**ALANA:** Heiress Alana Skye, daughter of famous billionaire hotelier Steve Skye, is drop-dead gorgeous. But her life has been less than happy. And she has a difficult time living up to her father's demand for perfection.

**CHALICE:** Rich girl Chalice Walker is one of Alana's besties. Her ditzy, fun-loving nature masks an old soul. College is not for her because she's an artist at heart.

**CORY:** In the glitzy world of Vegas, Cory Philanopoulos was Alana's rock. Then he went to Stanford and everything changed. Back for the summer, rekindling a romance with Alana is not on his radar.

**ELLISON:** Why is Ellison Edwards working as a personal trainer in the luxurious LV Skye Hotel when he can afford any Ivy League school? And he has the brains to get accepted.

**KAYLEE:** No stranger to poverty and hardship, Kaylee Ryan literally falls into her dream job at the LV Skye. As Alana Skye's personal assistant, no less. Will poor girl Kaylee get along with Alana's rich besties?

**REAVIS:** From Texas like Kaylee, Reavis Smith is determined to make it big in Sin City. He's a street magician with a secret identity. And he's making a name for himself all over town.

**ROXANNE:** Supermodel Roxanne Hunter-Gibson is beauty and brains combined. She's managed to make a killing with an entrepreneurial start-up. Now she's Steve Skye's latest hot squeeze.

**STEVE:** Self-made man, cunning, rude (and some would say a lot worse) are some of the words used to describe hotel billionaire Steve Skye. And his crowning achievement is the luxurious LV Skye Hotel and Casino on the Las Vegas Strip.

**ZOEY:** Zoey Gold-Blum is the hottest rich girl in town. She knows it. And she uses it to her advantage. Deferring college for a year, she is out to keep her besties Chalice and Alana all to herself.



## CHAPTER ONE

What you're saying is we have a cluster-buster on our hands," Kaylee Ryan said to Alana Skye. They sat together in the spacious living room of the penthouse atop the LV Skye Hotel, smack in the middle of the Las Vegas Strip.

Alana's father, the hotelier Steve Skye, owned the hotel. The penthouse belonged to him, and he shared it with Alana and his new bride, Roxanne. Kaylee often marveled at how Steve had taken the top floor of his hotel for himself. When the president of the United States visited Vegas, he had to sleep in a suite one floor below the Skye penthouse.

Alana was Steve's eighteen-year-old daughter. Kaylee could still barely believe that she was here in this splendor. After all, she'd in Vegas at the beginning of the summer

with little more than what she was wearing and a cruddy suitcase on wheels she'd salvaged from a dumpster. She was now Alana's personal assistant. In fact, Alana had told Kaylee more than once that it would be impossible to run Teen Tower, the LV Skye's signature teen entertainment complex, without Kaylee's genius. Genius was the word that Alana had actually used.

"Cluster-buster?" Alana raised her eyebrows. "Dare I ask what a cluster-buster is?"

"A cluster-buster is like a cluster you-know-what, only so big, loud, and annoying that it eventually explodes," Kaylee explained. She pushed some of her blonde hair behind her right ear, then nibbled on a croissant. She'd barely ever tasted a croissant before she came to town. Now, she often ate them for breakfast in the penthouse with Alana, delivered and served by the butler, Mr. Clermont. Croissants, bagels and lox, eggs, fresh organic fruit, private label coffee, nothing was too good for Steve Skye or his beloved daughter. "True?"

"True enough," Alana agreed. She sipped her coffee. "Whoever scheduled these two groups at the hotel at the same time should be fired."

"I think your father already did that."

Alana nodded darkly. "Yeah. And now we've got to make sure there's no bloodshed."

“Well, we’re ending the summer with a bang,” Kaylee observed.

“You can say that again.” Alana lifted her coffee cup to her lips, then winced noticeably.

“You okay?” Kaylee asked.

Alana nodded. “Yeah. Pain in my stomach. It’s probably from Ellison kicking my butt in the gym. Again. And again. And again.”

“Gotcha.” Kaylee looked Alana up and down. In the ten weeks between the middle of June and the end of August, Kaylee had seen Alana whip herself into incredible shape in the Teen Tower gym. Alana was naturally tall and slender, with pale skin and dark brunette hair. Over the course of the summer, what little body fat Alana once carried had disappeared. Her stomach and muscles grew hard and chiseled. And a new glow of health had settled on her. “You look amazing, you know.”

“Please. You could too, if you wanted to do the work. Stand up for me.”

Kaylee raised her eyebrows. “Really?”

Alana nodded. “Really. On your feet. Chop-chop. My practiced eye of beauty doesn’t have all day.”

Kaylee stood. Alana and she had experienced their ups and downs over the summer, to put it mildly. But Alana was still her boss as well as her friend. She figured

when a boss said to stand, the proper response was to get to one's feet.

"So. There you are. Before we dive into the magic world of the cluster-buster, let me tell you what I see," Alana declared. "I see a cute girl in jeans and a Teen Tower T-shirt. She's about five six and one twenty. She has blonde hair that's going to survive without hair color for about another five years. Then it will need some chemical assistance. And she's got great lips and an amazing smile."

Kaylee smiled. "Thanks."

"I also see is a girl who could stand to tone up a bit, drink fewer mochas at Teen Tower's Caffeine Central, and transform herself from a reasonably cute girl from Texas who used to clean offices for a living into a genuine Vegas dazzler who'll have to fight off the guys. And all you need to achieve that," Alana said, "is desire."

"I don't want to fight guys off. I've already got a great guy," Kaylee said.

She knew on some level what Alana was saying was true. She could transform herself from cute to babe, if she wanted. But that didn't seem to be what Cory Philanopoulos, her boyfriend who used to be Alana's boyfriend back in the day, wanted. Cory seemed to want Kaylee just the way she was.

But Cory was going back to Stanford in a few weeks.

What she'd do then, she wasn't sure. Another girl might have thought about going to Stanford too, but Kaylee couldn't even go to community college because she hadn't graduated from high school.

"True enough," Alana agreed. "And soon, he's going to have a girlfriend with a GED. When are you taking that test?"

Kaylee was scheduled to take her GED exam in a week. This was the General Educational Development test that would give her the equivalent of a high school diploma. The following Saturday, in fact. She'd been preparing for it much of the summer.

"Six days from now. Can I sit, please? We've got a war to head off."

Alana motioned toward the leather chair. Kaylee sat gratefully. She didn't like being put on display like that, even privately. And it was true. There was potential trouble at Teen Tower this week. The hotel booking office had brought in two huge teen conventions at the same time. The first one was a convention for a chain of rock-and-roll schools in the United States and Canada that catered to high school students. They were expecting a thousand young rockers with guitars, drums, keyboards, tattoos, crazy hair, and plenty of rebel attitude. There were all kinds of activities scheduled for the Rockers, as Kaylee

WANT A DIFFERENT

point of view?



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## CHAPTER ONE

There were just two weeks left in the summer, and Alana Skye could not believe that she still had not hooked up again with Cory Philanopoulos. They had so much in common. In fact, there was every reason in the world for the two of them to be together.

For instance, Alana and Cory were two of the richest teens in Las Vegas. Alana's father was the masterful hotelier who had built and ran the LV Skye Casino Hotel, universally acclaimed as the hottest, sexiest, and most luxurious joint on the Strip. Cory's father was a famous hedge fund manager who made billions for other people, and in the process made hundreds of millions for himself.

Next, Alana and Cory were each gorgeous as sin. Alana

was in the best shape of her life after a summer of training in the LV Skye's Teen Tower gym under the watchful eye of Ellison, the young African American gym manager who was eye candy himself. Alana had thick, lustrous dark hair and pale skin. After ten weeks of training with Ellison, there was zero body fat on her, and she sported triceps that were the envy of every girl and many guys on the Teen Tower pool deck.

Alana had enough money to buy any item of clothing that she wanted, and she wore everything well. Meanwhile, Cory was finer than fine, with sandy hair, a rangy build, expressive eyes, and habitual two-day stubble that made Alana want to throw herself in his arms every time she saw him.

Most of all, Alana and Cory had a romantic history. Before Cory had gone off to Stanford for college—Alana was a year behind him in school—they'd been boyfriend and girlfriend for several glorious months. They'd broken up only because Cory said long-distance relationships didn't work. That had been a foolish decision on his part, Alana thought, but she'd gone along with it because there was nothing else she could really do. Still, she knew in her heart that Cory was the right boy for her, even if he didn't necessarily know it himself. Guys could be dumb that way.

Things had gotten complicated over the summer because Cory had come back to Vegas following a serious depressive episode, and then had linked up—figuratively, they surely *hadn't* had sex—with Alana's assistant at Teen Tower, Kaylee Ryan. Alana's friend Chalice Walker had counseled Alana to be patient. Chalice was close with Kaylee and told Alana that if she knew Cory at all, Kaylee-Cory would be over at the end of the summer as surely as Alana-Cory had ended the summer before.

That would be Alana's chance. Now that Alana was the chief executive of Teen Tower, she wouldn't let something like the Mojave Desert get between them. After all, why had God invented Steve Skye's brand-spanking-new ten-passenger corporate Learjet, if not to jet Alana back and forth from Vegas to Palo Alto?

All that said, it didn't make it any easier to sit across from Kaylee at breakfast. The meeting was to plan the day at Teen Tower and anticipate any problems that might arise. As a rule, Alana rose two hours before breakfast to go to the gym and train with Ellison, and then shower in time for breakfast with Kaylee. That meet up often took place in the penthouse Alana occupied with her dad and his new wife, Roxanne Hunter-Gibson.

Alana's workout had been particularly intense. Ellison had pretty much killed her abdominals. Even an hour

afterward, she was feeling crampy, with sharp pains to the right of her belly button.

“Pain is weakness leaving your body,” Ellison liked to say. If that was the case, Alana felt ready to bend frying pans with her bare hands.

Mr. Clermont, the butler, brought in their breakfast. Coffee, juice, brioche, pastries, and fresh fruit with yogurt. The yogurt was a new addition. Ellison had not only revamped her body, he had revamped her diet. As she and Kaylee ate, they talked about the coming week. There would be two teen conventions at the hotel. One was for a national chain of rock-and-roll schools called Rockers, while the other was a family-values teen group, Lamplighters International. She and Kaylee referred to them as the Rockers and the Lamplighters.

“It’s like a bad teen movie,” Alana lamented. “They shouldn’t be here at the same time.”

“So what you’re saying is, what we have on our hands is a cluster-buster,” Kaylee said.

“Cluster-buster?” Alana raised her eyebrows at Kaylee. Kaylee was a pretty girl, but she could use a fresh haircut and prettier clothes. It probably wasn’t reasonable to expect more from someone who’d grown up in a trailer in Texas and cleaned offices before she’d come to work at the hotel. How Kaylee had become Alana’s assistant

was one of those only-in-Vegas stories. “Dare I ask what a cluster-buster is?”

“A cluster-buster is like a cluster you-know-what, only so big, loud, and annoying that it eventually explodes,” Kaylee explained. “True?”

“True enough,” Alana agreed as she looked around the penthouse. One entire wall of the living room was glass and looked north across the Strip. Since the LV Skye was the tallest hotel on Las Vegas Boulevard, Alana could see clear to the distant mountains. Beyond that, she knew, was the daunting expanse of desert that had swallowed up so many pioneers. “Whoever scheduled these two groups at the hotel at the same time should be fired.”

“I think your father already did fire them.”

“Yeah. And now we’ve got to make sure there’s no bloodshed.” Alana had visions of the two groups getting into shouting matches on the pool deck. Her father would hate that. It would definitely get written up in the *Stripped* gossip blog that everyone read. The blog was written by her former best friend, Zoey Gold-Blum’s, two mothers. Zoey was now working at a rival hotel after her falling out with Alana earlier in the summer. Yep. Zoey would love for Alana to get some bad publicity.

“Well, we’re ending the summer with a bang,” Kaylee decided.



## JEFF GOTTESFELD

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