

# Pantheon Girls

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## I

Cassie Burke's boots click up and down the sidewalk outside Pantheon as she contemplates her limited options in the glow of its gaudy neon sign. She just retrieved a text message from Maggie warning her that Deana Godwin is back on the scene and has already asked about her. If she goes inside, she's destined to go home with Deana, a move her body may ache for, but one to which her heart will undoubtedly object. She can return Maggie's text message, saying she's not up for the confrontation, but that only delays the inevitable. She's languished nearly a year nursing the raw wounds the breakup of her ten-year relationship inflicted. She let Lorna go—she didn't have a choice, but she refuses to let go of her pain, finding in it a perverse comfort, taking cover in its shelter. It is a sobering reminder of the certain anguish awaiting her if she ever allows herself to fall in love again.

"Like Roosevelt said, 'the only thing we have to fear . . .'" she reassures herself, yanking open Pantheon's heavy wooden door. As usual, the eclectic crowd of GLBTs in various states of fabulous packs the intimate nightclub to its stifling capacity. She meanders toward the bar, ambushed immediately by her best friends, Maggie and Jenn, who were staking out the entrance from the coat check cubby since their arrival an hour earlier.

"What the hell kept you?" demands Maggie.

"She looks really good, Cass," Jenn offers, ready to burst.

"She's been milling around us since we walked in," Maggie adds.