

Night Shift



DAY 1 • NIGHT • BUNGALOW

3. Night shift.

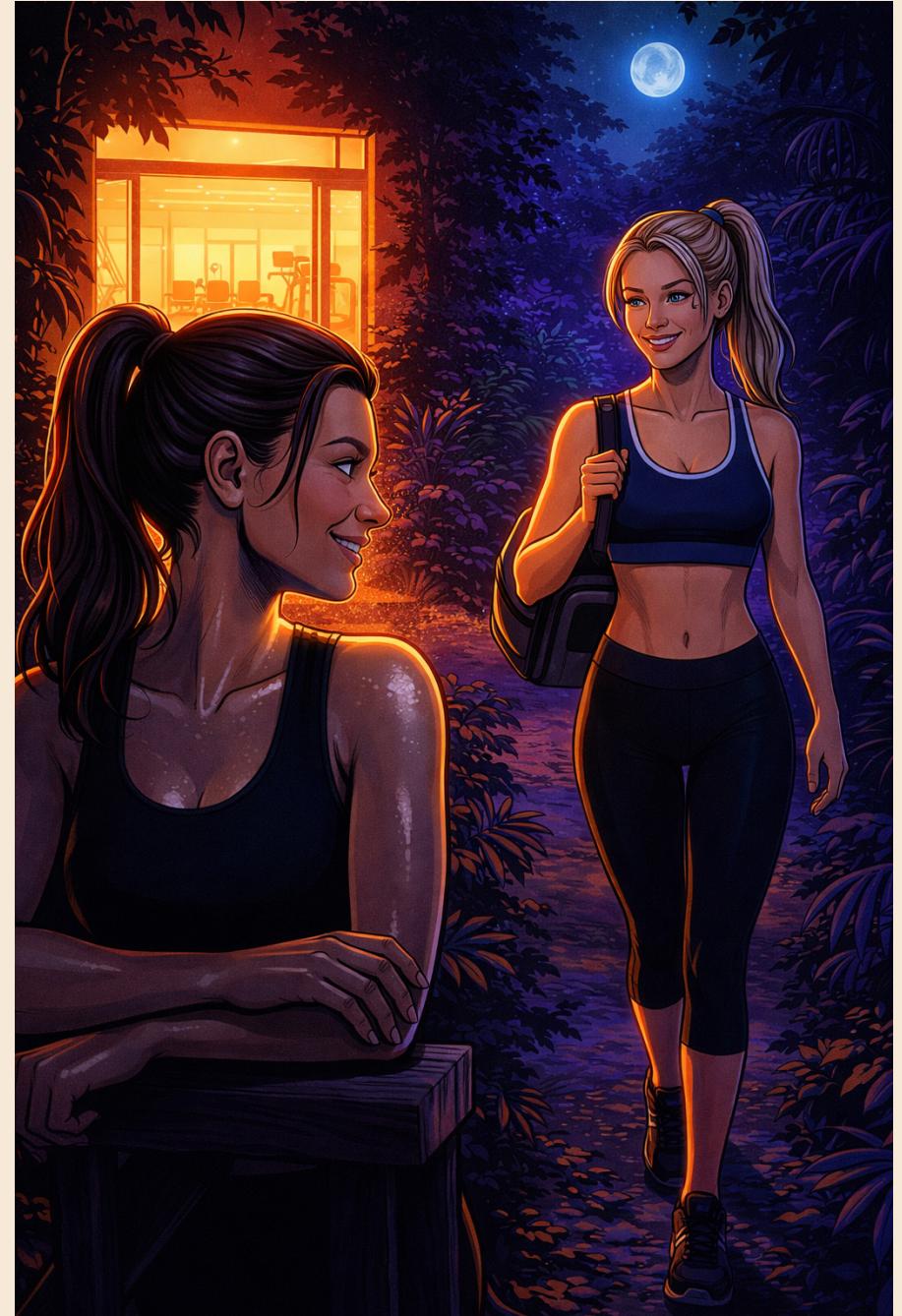
The jungle at night was a cacophony. Cicadas screamed, frogs croaked, and the wind rustled through the palms with a sound like silk against skin.

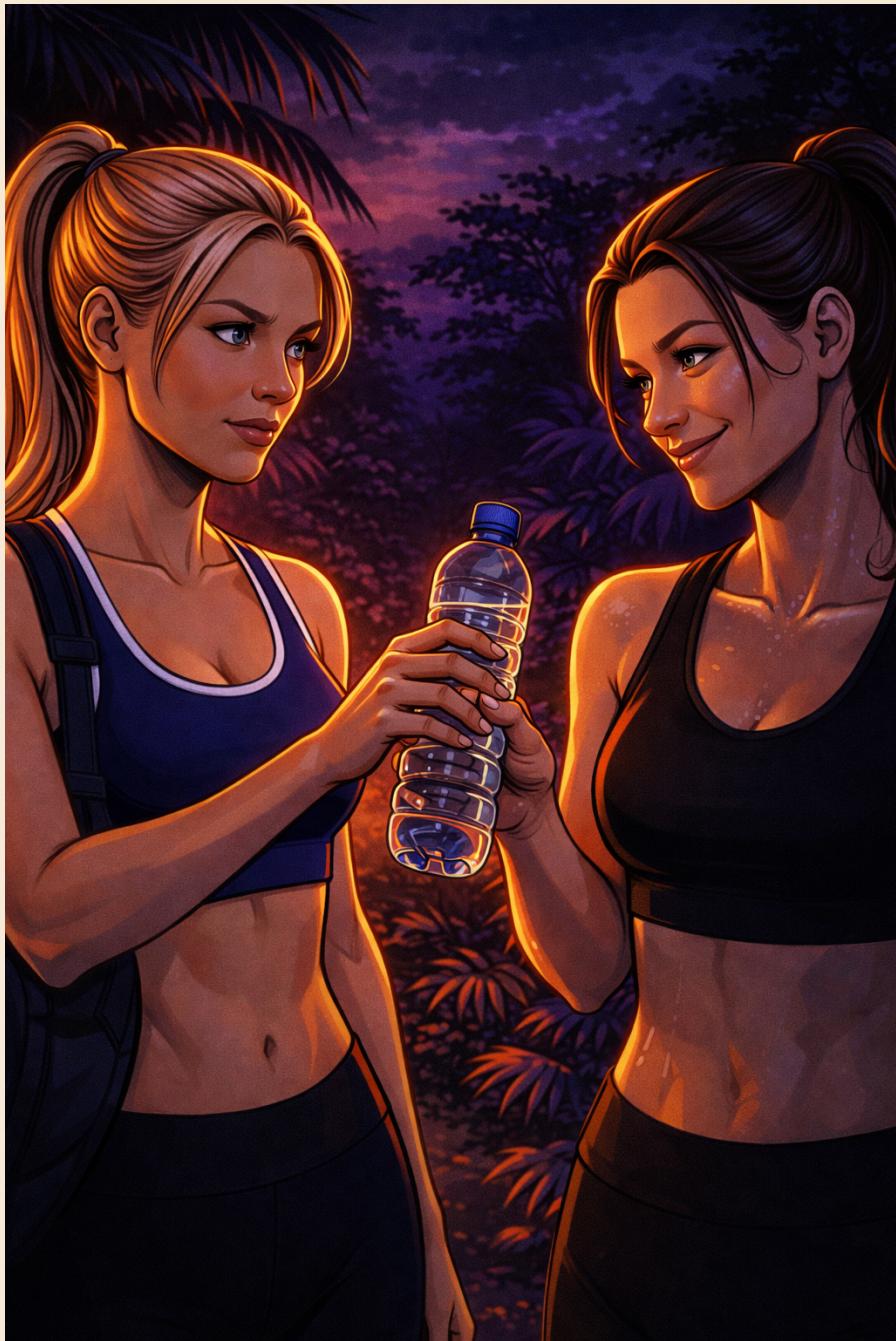
Rebecca stepped out of the gym and took a deep breath of the humid air. She hated the humidity—it messed with grip strength and precision—but she leaned into the heat, letting it remind her that on this island, logic was always at war with the body.

"Your form on the last set of deadlifts was impeccable," a voice said from the shadows.

Rebecca didn't flinch. She didn't need to turn her head to know who it was. The cadence, the scent of shea butter and salt, the heavy, grounded presence. Brianna.

She was leaning against the railing, watching Rebecca with the patient focus of a hunter. She looked relaxed, sweat glistening on her skin like oil in the moonlight, making every muscle look like it had been sculpted for someone's specific pleasure.





"Form over ego," Rebecca replied, wiping her neck with a white towel. "Though the ventilation in there is sub-optimal. I need to speak to maintenance about the airflow in Zone C."

Brianna chuckled, bumping her shoulder gently against Rebecca's arm.

"You're the only person I know who audits the air we breathe with that much hunger, babe."

"If I don't, the system fails," Rebecca replied, her voice tightening as Brianna took the water bottle. Their fingers didn't just brush; Brianna let hers linger, a slow, possessive slide of skin against skin that Rebecca didn't pull away from.

"You were late," Rebecca noted. "Usually, you finish your run at sunset."

"Avoiding the circus," Brianna said, handing the bottle back. "Jillian was holding court in the cardio zone. High energy. Lots of shouting. I couldn't focus."

Rebecca grimaced. "The cheerleader."

"She hates you, you know," Brianna said casually, a hint of amusement in her voice. "She told me your new equipment organization system 'kills the vibe'. Apparently, color-coding dumbbells by weight takes the soul out of lifting."

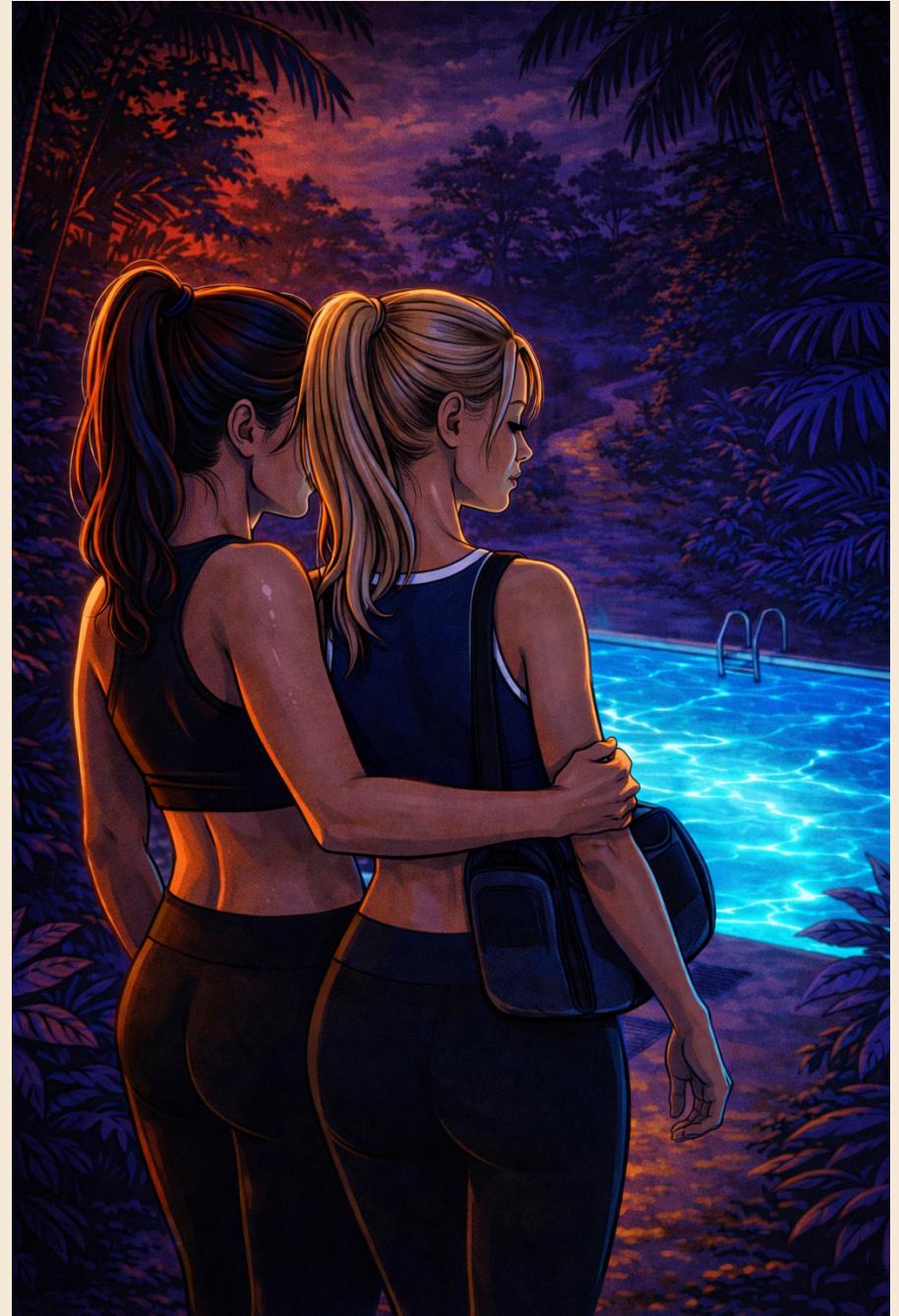
"My system optimizes flow and reduces the risk of making a mess by twenty-two percent," Rebecca said, her tone as sharp as a blade. "If Jillian's 'vibe' relies on chaos, then she's already lost. I don't tolerate variables I can't master."

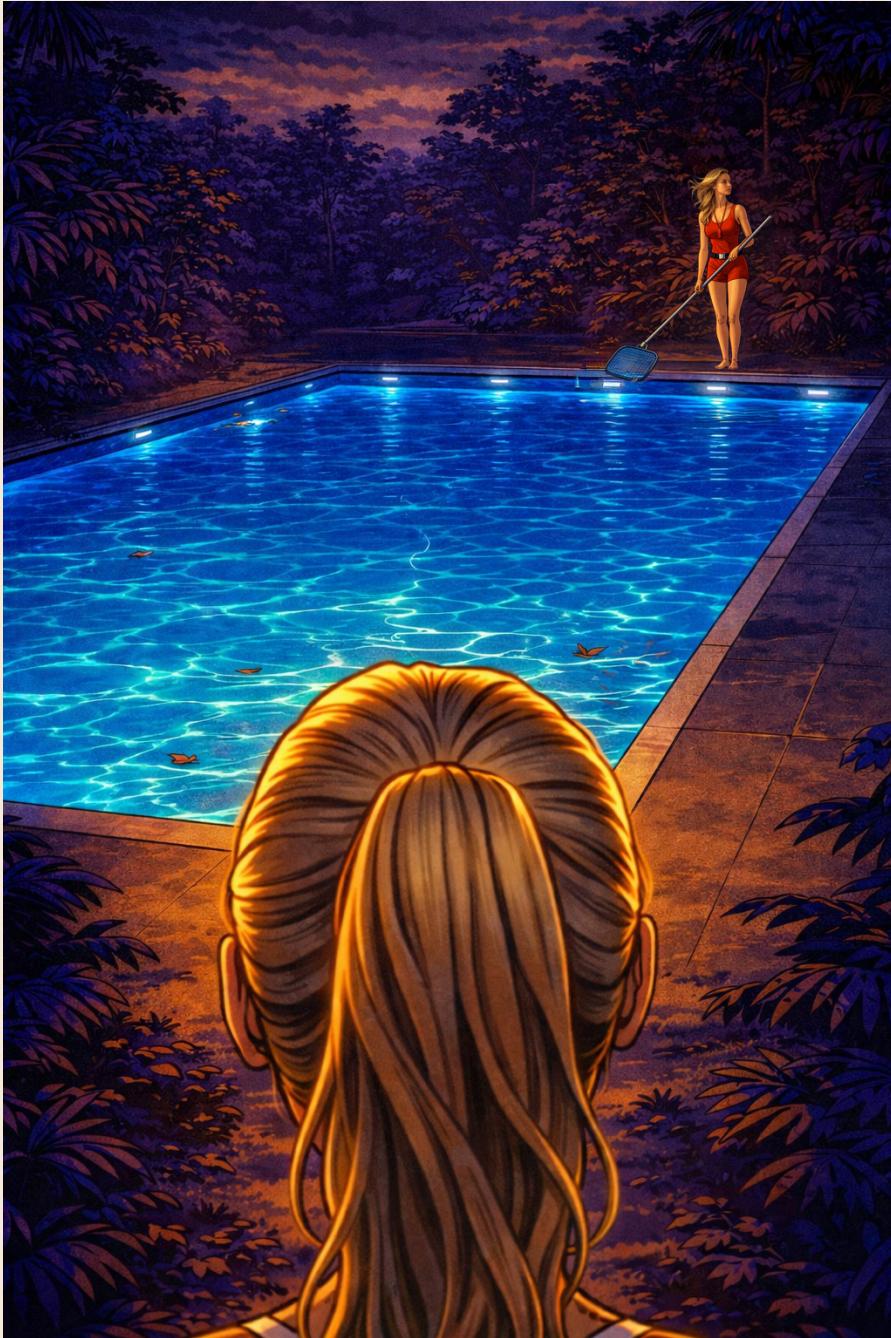
Brianna laughed, wrapping an arm loosely around Rebecca's waist as they walked down the dark path toward the bungalows.

"I told her you wouldn't care. She thinks you're a robot. I told her robots have their uses." She squeezed Rebecca's hip suggestively.

"Better a robot than a golden retriever with a whistle," Rebecca countered, though she leaned slightly into the touch.

They stopped at the fork in the path overlooking the pool. The underwater lights were glowing an eerie, electric blue.





"Speaking of chaos," Brianna murmured, nodding her chin toward the water. "Have you finished your... daily inspection of the wildlife?"

Rebecca followed her gaze. The pool was empty, save for one figure. Sophie. She was walking the edge, skimming leaves from the surface with a long net. Even from this distance, the messy halo of her blonde beach waves was visible. She moved with a lazy, almost arrogant slowness.

"The pool chemistry logs are inconsistent," Rebecca said, her voice changing pitch almost imperceptibly. "I need to verify the pH levels again tomorrow."

Brianna looked at Rebecca, studying her profile with the patience of a long-term partner. She knew that look. She knew the tension in Rebecca's jaw wasn't about pH levels.

"Right. Inconsistent logs," Brianna drawled, stepping closer until her heat was the only thing Rebecca could feel. "You've been auditing that tower for weeks, babe. Go ahead—analyze her. Just

make sure you tell me every detail of how she breaks your protocols when you finally get her under your thumb."

Rebecca stiffened, pulling away slightly. "I monitor safety protocols, Bri. Sophie is lax. She chews gum. She listens to music. She is a liability."

"She's a distraction," Brianna corrected softly, stepping in front of her to block the view of the pool. She smirked. "And you like looking at her because she's the one thing on this island you can't organize into a spreadsheet."

Rebecca opened her mouth to argue, to cite regulations. But Brianna's eyes were knowing, devoid of jealousy, just filled with that teasing challenge Rebecca couldn't resist.

"She bites, you know," Brianna added, turning back toward the path to Bungalow 7. "Just be careful, Engineer. You can't calibrate people. Especially not that one."

"I'm starving," Brianna said, shifting gears. "Let's just hit the Bistro. They've got that ribeye you like, and you can't run on fumes, Rebecca."





Rebecca cast one last look at Sophie by the pool. "I can't. The logs Monica brought me are a mess. If I'm going to run the 'Water Protocol' on Wednesday, I need to fix these spreadsheets tonight."

Brianna sighed, but her eyes softened with a weary, familiar acceptance. "Fine. Excel over steak. I'll just grab us some takeout from the spot then. You need to eat, Engineer."

"Medium-rare, Bri. And no garnish," Rebecca added, her mind already halfway into the data.

An hour later, the bungalow was thick with the scent of medium-rare steak and the artificial chill of the AC. Rebecca, fresh from the shower and wrapped in a thin silk robe, was hunched over her laptop, but the columns of pH levels were blurring.

Brianna closed her book and watched the line of Rebecca's neck. "The Water Protocol can wait five minutes, Engineer."

She stood up and slowly, deliberately, pushed the laptop lid down. She didn't say anything, just waited for Rebecca to look up, her gaze a low challenge that made the silence in the room feel like it was about to snap. "I think it's time you focus on a system you

actually know how to operate. Or do I need to rewrite your schedule for the night?"

Rebecca's pulse hammered against her throat. "Rewrite it," she managed to say.

