



## **Deeper**

**By Ronica Black**

## Prologue

*Sunday, August 24<sup>th</sup>*

*Baja Peninsula, Mexico*

"Cheek-lay, Senorita?" The young boy asked, a huge grin planted on his face. She eyed the large cardboard box of Chiclets chewing gum he was carrying in front of him with both hands.

"Sure." She reached in her khaki cargo shorts with her good arm and retrieved a neat stack of bills.

The boy immediately dug in the box and pulled out two packs of the small gum. He held them out for her and wiped the sweat from his brow. The large box was held secure by a thick piece of string slung around his neck. His Scooby Doo t-shirt was torn at the collar and his brown pants were two sizes too big made evident by the rolled up giant cuffs. She looked down at his feet, they were bare.

"Uno quarter." He said with his thick accent.

Elizabeth Adams pushed the gum in his hand away, causing him to look up with his big brown eyes.

She leafed out a fifty dollar bill and handed it to him.

"Gracias Senorita, gracias!" He lifted the string holding the box up over his neck trying to give her the entire cardboard box of gum.

"No, you keep it." She placed her hand on the box, gently resisting. She met his large eyes and smiled at him before walking away.

The boy shouted his thanks after her and she wove her way between people as she continued on her quest through the tiny beachside town.

Tourists walked and talked, stopping to browse at the various vendors selling hand woven blankets, trinkets, and t-shirts. Many dressed similar to her in tank tops, cargo shorts and sandals. She could smell their suntan lotion as she maneuvered past them, brushing against their fanny packs.

Up ahead, she spotted her destination. Pablo's Fish Tacos stood directly in front of her and she slowed her pace as she approached the window of the small building.

"Hola, help you?" A middle aged man with silver capped front teeth asked from the window. The smell of fish was strong and she pulled off her sunglasses as she ordered, trying to peer into the shady covered building where the man stood.

"Una cerveza por favor." Her Spanish was less than mediocre but it always got her by.

"Corona?" He questioned, holding up a wet icy bottle.

"Tecate por favor." She clarified for him.

He quickly retrieved another bottle, opened it for her and then slid it across the counter.

She leafed out a five dollar bill and handed it to the man not expecting change. She then grabbed her beer and silently wished she had some lime.

"You really should try the shrimp."

Adams turned at the sound of the voice behind her and made her way over to the table where the woman sat with a bucket full of ice and fresh shrimp.

Adams sat down across from her, replacing the sunglasses over her sensitive blue eyes.

"Help yourself." The woman with short brown hair offered, pushing the bucket toward Adams, as she herself continued to shell and peel the shrimp before popping them in her mouth. She was bigger than Adams, bulky with muscle mass. Adams had known her for years using her on many different occasions.

"No thanks, not hungry." Adams eyed her and crossed an ankle over her knee.

"Mmm, your loss." She looked up with her dark green eyes and licked her fingers. "How's the shoulder?"

Adams took a long tug from her beer, thankful at it's iciness. Her shoulder was healing nicely and she no longer had to wear the sling. But she winced as she set the beer back down with her injured arm as the dull pain made itself known. She relaxed her face and refused to let it win, using the sore arm every chance she got.

"Fine." She answered in the tone that let everyone who valued peace know that the topic was closed. Just because she wasn't on her home turf didn't mean the rules had changed. She was still a very private person when it came to her personal life.

"Yeah well you look like shit, you've lost weight, you're pale..."

"If I had wanted your opinion, I would've asked for it." Adams replied quickly, cutting the woman off, her voice deepening in anger.

"Sorry." The woman offered, opening her palms in a peaceful gesture. "It's just, you know that I care and I always sort of hoped that someday maybe you and I..." She leaned across the table and tried to cup her hand over the dark woman's.

Adams pulled her hand away quickly almost as if she were afraid of being bitten.

"Yeah well it's not happening. And unless I'm fucking you, my life is none of your business." She seethed, upset that she had allowed herself to be so easily read.

The woman sighed and sat back in her chair. She eyed the object of her desire carefully while mentally chiding herself for blowing her only chance. She had miscalculated with Adams, assuming by her pale and thinner appearance that the usually stoic woman was somehow now more fragile and maybe even...vulnerable. But it

had just been made very clear to her that she had been wrong. Adams may look weaker than she had ever seen her look, but she was still strong and very elusive.

"Why don't you tell me what you came here to say, what I'm *paying* you to say." Adams demanded growing irritable and weary of the idle chit chat.

The woman rested her elbows on the table, her muscles lined up on her arms and popping out on her shoulders like perfectly shaped pieces of meat resting under the skin.

"I found Jay." The woman replied while she fingered her dark beer bottle, peeling at its yellow Pacifico Claro label.

"Where?" Adams sat back in her chair and pulled her sunglasses off, her blue eyes never leaving the woman's across from her. The wind blew in off the nearby sea, rattling the umbrella over their table.

"Where you said she would be."

"Is she...ok?" Her tone had softened as she thought of her troubled sister.

"Seems to be."

Adams let out a long, shaky breath and stared out past the woman to focus on the teal sea. Relief wanted to wash through her but she wouldn't let it, not yet.

"Anything else?" she asked as she let her gaze fall back upon the dark green eyes.

"Yeah," The woman lifted up her beer bottle and drained the last of the dark liquid. "No one's looking for her."

Adams sat in silence for a moment, not sure she had heard correctly. She shook her head in disbelief.

"The police..." She started before the muscled woman interrupted.

"No one's looking for her. No one but you."

This time relief burst through her gates and she sat back and let a grateful grin etch her face.

The woman with the dark green eyes sat back and crossed her arms over her ample chest, pleased at the reaction of the beautiful woman seated across from her.

"So, how about dinner then? To celebrate?" She questioned not yet willing to give up but instead giving Adams her best smile.

Adams tugged another sip of her beer and rose from the table. She reached in her pocket and tossed the stack of bills at her companion.

"I've got a plane to catch." She walked quickly away from the table and back into the crowd of tourists. She pulled out her satellite phone and dialed.

"Yeah, it's Adams." She spoke into the phone. "Book me on the first flight to Alabama." She ended the call and continued walking back towards her Jeep Wrangler. She had been traveling throughout Mexico for a few weeks

now and she was somewhat relieved at the thought of finally leaving. Even if it meant returning to her childhood home in the deep south.

She picked up her pace as the muscled private detective's words replayed in her mind. "*No one's looking for her.*" No one was looking for Jay. Not even the police. No one.

She climbed into the Jeep and steered her way back out onto the main road. As she drove toward the rented sea side house, the salty ocean breeze ran its fingers through her hair massaging and relaxing, allowing her thoughts to drift to Erin McEnzie. It seemed that the young detective had heeded her request, she hadn't told about Jay.

Adams thought back to the last time she had seen Erin a few weeks before. The raw feeling of betrayal pitted her stomach once again as she remembered Jay telling her the truth about Erin, the truth about the woman who had somehow reached in her chest and squeezed the life back into her heart. The truth being that she wasn't really who she had said she was. She was a cop and not only a cop but an undercover cop pretending to be attracted to her in order to gain information.

It had all been lies. All of it. The feelings, the emotions, the sex. She cringed at the thought and hated herself for allowing anyone in.

She made a turn off the main road and onto the dirt road that led to the private beach house. As the Jeep kicked up the dirt and fought the road, she wondered if her sister was indeed ok and she wondered the same about Erin.

Regardless of the lies and betrayal, she couldn't bring herself to stop thinking of the woman. Her green eyes sparkling with life, the smile she had worked so hard to see, the way her body had responded to her touch. Could it really have been all lies?

And what about now and the fact that she hadn't told the police about Jay? What did that mean? Was it a set up? Maybe blackmail? Or was it something else altogether?

She skidded the Jeep to a stop in front of the beach house and climbed out to go pack her travel bag. She didn't have any answers to the plaguing questions in her mind. From Jay and her killing spree to Erin and her mysterious behavior, there were many questions to be answered, so many doors left wide open and unexplored. There was but only one thing she was sure of.

The time had come to find out.

## Chapter 1

*Monday, August 25<sup>th</sup>*

"How have you been doing Ms. McEnzie?"

Erin inwardly cringed at the sound of her own name. She stirred on the cushiony love seat, feeling as if it were swallowing her whole.

The woman who questioned her sat poised in her wing back chair, her hands clasped lightly in her lap. Her voice was light and soft, falling featherlike against Erin's sensitive and tightly strung emotions.

Erin cleared her throat and willed her own voice to come to life.

"Fine, and please, call me Mac."

She grabbed a throw pillow and hugged it firmly to her, gaining some sense of security with its presence.

The doctor of psychology eyed her silently, searching her own mind for another question that perhaps would elicit more of an answer.

"Mac, last time we met you were unable to remember much of what had occurred on the night of the shooting." Her hands remained delicately clasped in her lap, her voice equally as delicate, trying to diffuse with soft words. "Is that still the case?"

Erin felt her brow tense as images of that night invaded her mind. She saw Henderson on the floor, crumpled like a rag doll. She saw Jack nuzzling and pawing at her limp hand, whining at her lack of response.

She closed her eyes and shook her head, trying to fight the memories, not wanting to know the pain that they held. Yet, still they came, welcome or not.

She heard laughter. Strange, evil laughter rang in her ears. Then there was a flash of blood, deep red and penetrating the cotton fibers of a shirt. The shrill laughter pierced her ears and she clenched her eyes closed wishing she could somehow muffle the ear rendering sound. Her eyes flew open as the evil laughter gave way to a deafening pop of gunfire.

"Pop!!"

Erin jumped up from the couch at the sound of the loud noise. Her eyes were wide open with terror as she searched her surroundings for the source of the gunfire.

Dr. Greenberg stood across from her a surprised look on her face, a manila file folder in her hand.

"I'm sorry." The slender built doctor started. "I dropped a book while reaching for your file." She held out her hand and lightly grasped Erin's arm. "Are you ok?"

The doctor's hand was slight and fine boned like her frame. Her skin felt cool against Erin's arm.

She looked up from the hand to meet the doctor's light brown eyes. Her heart was hammering loudly in her chest and she tried to steady her erratic breathing.

"Here, why don't you sit down?" Dr. Greenberg suggested as the look of concern creased her forehead. She led Erin slowly back to her seat. "Would you like some water?"

"No." She managed to say with tight vocal chords. "No thanks."

The doctor resumed her poised professional position and began leafing through Erin's file.

"Are there memories now, Ms. Mc...uh Mac?" She corrected as she looked up from the file.

Erin shook her head. "Just flashes. Nothing I can make any sense of."

The doctor clicked her pen and made a note.

"Ok." She took a big breath before continuing, letting Erin know that she was about to say something important.

"Sometimes Mac, when we see or experience things that our mind can't handle, we block them out. Sort of our body's own security system." She paused and looked at Erin, waiting to see if what she was saying was sinking in.

"So what are you saying...that I may never remember?" Erin stared at the doctor in her wingback chair and noted oddly how gothic her frail body looked against the chair as a backdrop. She could've easily been staring at a 1940's horror picture.

The doctor thought before answering, searching the room as if the answers were going to materialize right before her.

"You will most likely regain your memory, but it may take some time. And even then you may not be able to make sense of all of it. It will come to you in fragments, brief images much like you are experiencing now."

Erin sighed her discontent and grabbed at the throw pillow once again.

The doctor watched her for a few seconds before continuing.

"We also talked about Mark last time I saw you. How is that situation panning out?"

Erin shrugged her shoulders like a lost teenager, the pain too close to the surface and the wisdom to handle it not yet developed.

"I packed my belongings this past weekend. Before he and his girlfriend came home."

"He's out of the hospital then?"

Erin shook her head. "I agreed to let him have the house and I wanted to be out before the girlfriend was in."

"That's certainly understandable. Where is it that you're staying?" She continued to make notes as Erin answered.

"I checked into a hotel."

The doctor looked up, a little startled by the answer.

"You haven't made arrangements for your own place?"

Erin stared straight ahead, lost in the blurred room. She couldn't explain it, but something inside had warned her against getting her own place.

"I...I haven't found a place I liked yet." She finally clarified, clawing her way back from the fog, knowing it was easier to lie than to explain her own mysterious paranoia.

The session continued and Erin did her best to stay attentive. She hated the sessions, but she continued to go because the department required that she do so. Every cop had to take a leave of absence and see a therapist if they were involved in a shooting. She had put in her time with therapy and the investigation involving the shooting was close to being tied up. She anxiously hoped that this meant she would be able to get back into the swing of things.

Lost in the deep sea of her own thoughts, she found it difficult to resurface when the doctor's alarm sounded on the table next to her wingback chair. Erin jumped up more than willing to let reality seep back in. She was glad her hour was finally up.

She walked out into the hallway and took in a big breath of fresh air. The trying session was over and she was more than grateful to be out of the tiny office. Stretching as she walked, she headed back towards the homicide division and away from internal affairs.

As she approached her desk she relaxed a little and glanced over at the whiteboard on the wall. There were several pending murder investigations and she frowned as she looked down at the empty basket on her desk. She glanced at her silent phone and blank message pad. The hope she had developed earlier in the day suddenly drained from her.

"Hiya Mac." Jeff Hernandez greeted as he tossed some files down on his desk across the room.

"Hey yourself." She smiled slightly and walked over to his desk where she made her hip at home, resting it against its side.

Jeff slid into his chair and dabbed at the sweat beading on his forehead.

"How are things going?" He opened his desk drawer and pulled out a Kleenex and used it to continue to wipe away the sweat.

"Everything's fine." She fibbed, wanting to sound ok.

"Be glad you're in here and not out there. It's 113 degrees today."

He tossed the damp tissue in the wastebasket next to his desk.

"So how come nobody's thrown anything my way?" She threw the question out there, hoping her long time friend would give her an honest answer.

He sat forward in his chair, surprised at the directness of the question.

"Mac, it's not because we don't want to." He looked up at her with sincere brown eyes.

"Then what it is?" She crossed her arms over her chest, preparing herself for the answer.



"Well, it's Ruiz. He told us not to."

Erin breathed in deeply. It wasn't the answer she expected to hear. She reached down and patted his desk as she stood back on two feet.

"Thanks." She tossed over her shoulder as she headed off towards Ruiz's office.

She stopped in front of his closed door and raised her fist to knock lightly.

"In!" She heard him shout in response to her soft knocking. She opened the door and was surprised to see the doctor she had just left.

Dr. Greenberg was sitting across from her sergeant, a familiar file in her hand.

"Oh, I'm sorry." She started to back out, completely surprised and a little embarrassed as she realized that they had most likely been discussing her.

"Don't be Mac. The doc and I were just finishing up." Ruiz explained as he nodded goodbye to the polite and gentle psychologist. She nodded at Erin as she breezed past her through the door.

"Sit." He gestured with his hand and repositioned himself on his seat before making a steeple with his hands.

"So, what brings you to my door, Mac?" He was studying her with his intense eyes, the wire frames around them doing little to hide their penetrating power.

"Well, sir I was just wondering why you ordered the guys not to give me any work. I was hoping I would be cleared for, at the very least, some desk work." She was surprised at how easily she had laid it out. Her nerves were doing double time, but her statement had sounded very focused and reasonable.

Ruiz pushed himself up from his chair and walked around his desk to shut the door to his office. He sighed as he walked back around his desk and he avoided her eyes as he returned to his seat. He looked like he was about to tell her that her best friend had died.

"As you know I just spoke to Dr. Greenberg." He looked up at her then; the intensity in his eyes had softened. "And she feels that it is in your best interest to remain on medical leave for at least a few more weeks."

"Excuse me?" She couldn't believe what she was hearing, her blood pounded angrily to her ears.

"Mac, she's diagnosed you with post traumatic stress disorder."

"What? What?" She was shaking her head, not able to comprehend his words. "She's wrong...I'm fine..."

"Mac." He demanded softly, needing her to look at him. "She said you nearly jumped out of your skin today when she dropped a book."

She swallowed hard and looked away.

"How can you be expected to go back out into the field when little noises affect you?"

She looked down at her hands and felt her throat tighten with tears and rage. She couldn't believe what was happening to her. Suddenly the life she had once known had been completely pulled out from underneath her.

"I understand sir." She whispered, lying. She didn't understand. She didn't understand at all. Her own mind had become her worst enemy, taking the last remaining crumb of her life with it, her ability to work. What was she supposed to do now? How would she escape her horrible life without a job to throw herself into?

She rose very slowly from her chair, unsure if her legs would hold her.

"I'm sorry." Ruiz offered softly as he rose with her to walk her to the door. He placed his hand gently on her shoulder. "You'll get through this Mac, I know you will. Keep seeing the doctor, she can help you."

Erin looked over at her superior; he stood at eye level with her.

"Did she say how long? Or what I could do?"

The intensity returned to his eyes as he thought.

"She suggested that you maybe, for whatever reason, were avoiding the memories. She said the only way to work through them is to face them, feel them."

She closed her eyes and remembered vaguely the end of her session not even an hour before. The doctor had said the same thing to her, but she had somehow not heard. She looked back over at Ruiz and gave him a tired smile.

"Thanks." She said softly before walking out the door.

Completely confused and suddenly feeling dangerously emotional, she quickly made her way into the women's restroom. She pushed open the door and ran to the row of sinks where she hastily began splashing water on her face, trying her best to force back the hot tears that so badly needed to escape.

"Mac?" She heard her name from behind but didn't turn to look. She recognized the voice and instead raised her eyes up to look in the mirror above the sink.

Henderson came up quickly from behind placing her hand on Erin's back.

"Oh my God, are you ok?" A look of alarm spread across her face as her eyes skimmed over Erin's.

Erin turned off the water and moved over to the side wall to dry her face with the provided folded white paper towels. Henderson moved to stand in front of her, placing both her hands on Erin's shoulders. Erin looked up at her to answer, to tell her she was fine but as she saw her face, flashes of violence invaded her mind.

She saw Henderson getting hit from behind. She saw her body collapse and lay limp on the floor. And in her ears, the evil laughter rang.

"Oh God, God no!" Erin grabbed at her ears and shook her head, trying to rid her mind of the images, of the laughter.

"Mac! Mac look at me!" Henderson had lost her grip on her shoulders and she tried to move in to touch her again.

Erin looked up at her and slowly eased her hands from her ears. Her lips trembled as she began to speak.

"I saw you. You were lying there...you looked...dead."

Henderson stood there, intently searching her face.

"Oh no, I'm fine." She tried to embrace her but Erin reacted again, afraid to be touched.

"Don't touch me!" She shrugged away from her and turned to look at herself in the mirror. Her face was red with emotion and her eyes looked wild and afraid.

Henderson stood still and let her hands fall to her sides.

"I'm sorry; I wasn't going to hurt you." She whispered, more than a little upset by their present encounter. She hadn't seen Mac very much since the night of the shooting and now seeing her like this...so terrified made her realize that she really didn't have any idea as to what really happened in that room that night.

"No, I'm sorry." Erin replied softly as she turned to face her friend. "I'm just really confused." Her voice quivered with raw emotion. "And scared." She laughed unexpectedly. "And I don't even know what it is that I'm scared of."

Henderson took a step towards her but then backed off, not wanting to upset her again.

Erin rubbed at her face which suddenly felt tight and itchy.

"Ruiz just told me that I'm out for at least a few more weeks." She confided.

"I'm sorry." Henderson offered feeling truly bad for her friend. "I'm out too."

Erin looked up at the soft statement, unsure of what she had just heard.

"What?" She asked disbelieving her own ears.

Henderson gestured towards the door. "You wanna take a ride? Get out of here?"

Erin shook her head in agreement. "Yeah." She declared with more conviction as she followed Henderson out of the restroom.

They rode in silence for a few minutes, enough time for Henderson to put some distance between them and the station.

"I've decided to resign." She said matter of factly as she drove.

"What? Why?" Erin couldn't get the questions out fast enough.

"A lot of reasons. One being you." She looked over at Erin as she said it.

"Me?" Erin asked completely confused as to how she had played a role in this drastic decision.

"I failed you, Mac. That night I was completely useless to you and you could've been killed."

"But that wasn't your fault...you were knocked out..."

"Knocked out? Come on Mac. You yourself can't even remember what all happened. The point is is that I should've never allowed myself to get knocked out. It was my home, my turf and I was there to protect you. And I failed." The last sentence was said in a softer tone laced with defeat.

"You can't mean that." Erin said looking at the auburn haired woman next to her.

"Oh and let's not forget the fact that I was completely wrong about Adams. Even if she was somehow involved, I couldn't bring forth the proof. So she walks without so much as a slap on the wrist."

Erin let the last statement pass, not wanting to think about the mysterious dark woman. Instead she preferred to think about Henderson and their current situation.

"I thought you said that you could never imagine giving up your job as a detective." Erin looked away from her, the new revelation of Henderson leaving too much to bear. If she looked away then maybe it wouldn't hurt as bad. So instead of focusing on her friend she allowed her gaze to drift out the window and onto the scenery that streaked by.

"Well, I've decided to take your advice." Henderson responded.

"My advice?" She turned away from the window and looked at her once again.

"Yeah. I'm going to write fulltime now." Henderson smiled at her, seemingly grateful.

"Oh." Erin didn't know what to say and it was becoming very clear that her life hadn't been the only one affected by the shooting.

"And...since you're not going to be busy the next few weeks you are welcome to come stay at my new place with me. Rumor has it that you're living in a hotel." She glanced at her briefly and then retrained her eyes on the road.

"You bought a new place?" Erin asked without confirming her present living arrangement. She didn't know why but the announcement of Henderson's new home surprised her.

"Damn right I did. I wasn't about to stay in that house after all that happened there."

"Of course." Erin responded softly. Of course Henderson couldn't stay there. Not after the intrusion and the blood shed

"So I bought a new place up in the pines, away from this inferno."

"Sounds nice."

"It is." She looked back to Erin with warmth and hope in her eyes. "And if you're up for it...you can see just how nice it is for yourself."

## Chapter 2

*Tuesday, August 26<sup>th</sup>*

*Arcane, Alabama*

She reached out to the left of the steering column, fingering for the wiper switch. Thunder ricocheted softly around her, not quite ready to demand its presence. The small droplets of rain dotted her windshield falling from the blackening sky.

Alan Jackson crooned from the radio, proudly singing "*Where I come from.*" The song was more than appropriate and she couldn't help but see how it closely paralleled the small town in which she was raised.

She slowed the rented SUV down to a crawl as she approached Arcane and its narrow two way road governed by a single swinging stoplight. The light changed to green and she continued through her home town, over the train tracks and up to the abandoned cotton mill. The vast brick warehouse stood where it always had, reminiscent of the town's better days when the mill had been a thriving and important part of Arcane.

Her grandfather had worked his fingers to the bone in the mill, sacrificing his lungs and eventually his life when he could no longer pull in enough air to breathe.

Across the street from the mill sat a string of old buildings, most of them equally vacant. A cardboard sign in the window of the old library offered the space for rent. Similar signs adorned several other windows in the town square.

It wasn't a surprise that the town stood beaten and defeated, its pride gone out with the mill. It had been this way for at least fifteen years, giving cause to the remaining residents to have to travel the ten miles to the closest neighboring town for groceries or a glimpse of civilization.

Her vision went back to her dashboard as the Alan Jackson song faded out giving way to a male deejay who reported that the weather was worsening and the current temperature was 88 degrees.

She continued to drive and listened mindlessly as Terri Clark came through the speakers declaring that life was a "*Catch 22*".

With the heart of Arcane in her rear view mirror she drove a little faster and watched as the small white homes streaked by. Many with people occupying the front porches, sitting and rocking with the rain.

She felt their questioning stares and knew that even if she had wanted to; her wave hello would not be returned. She was no longer a recognizable face in the town and strangers were seldom welcome. She turned off the radio, and eased down her windows to smell the rain.

If the storm was going to hit with force, it would have to catch her first. For the time being, it loomed behind her hanging above Arcane, randomly dotting her with sporadic sprinkles.

As the small houses became fewer and farther between, they gave way to the lush green vegetation of the Deep South. The summer song of the insects buzzed outside her window as she drove by, safely hidden in the thickets of the woods.

She slowed the SUV once again and turned left at the sight of an old faded blue mailbox. The name Adams had long since disappeared under the harsh elements of the Alabama seasons. The vehicle left behind the paved road and began to tackle the rich red mud of the road before her. Although she knew the path she was traveling well, she continued to mark her speed, not knowing the road half as well as the one about two miles back, closer to town. The road that led to her childhood home.

She drove carefully, winding her way through the overgrown kudzu looming down over the trees across the road as if it were waiting to envelope her. The road she now traveled was on her grandfather's property and where the private detective said Jay would be.

After driving on the tunnel like road for at least a half a mile, it eventually opened up into a clearing. She brought the SUV to a stop and killed the engine. The smell of rain hung heavy in the air, not yet falling where she now sat.

She looked through the windshield at the house before her. It stood just as she remembered it. Smaller than the one she was raised in, but a hell of a lot warmer.

Thunder made itself known in the distance as she climbed out of the vehicle and sank her hiking boots down into the lush green grass around her. The ground was rich and soft, giving way to her weight as she walked up to the old graying house. The front porch steps squeaked their protest as she made her way up them, walking between the pillars overgrown with more hungry kudzu.

The screen door stood equally as old and a little more tattered on loose hinges and she carefully pulled it open to knock on the door.

A dog barked in the distance, somehow hearing her light knock and determined to alert everyone around him. Getting no answer she knocked again and then let the screen door bang to a close as she walked to a window and tried to peer in. She cupped her eyes, blocking at the surrounding light and squinted into the dark house.

From behind, a twig snapped, followed closely by the unmistakable sound of a shotgun cocking, ready for fire.

She straightened up slowly and raised her hands before trying to turn around.

"Don't you move an inch." The voice warned from the yard below. "This is private property."

Adams tensed a little, recognizing her sister's voice, but worried that she had failed to recognize her.

"I know..." She started to say but was interrupted.

"Well if you know then I ought to shoot you right here and now where you stand." Her southern accent had returned full fledge, reminded Adams of times long since past. Bad times.

"Jay, it's..."

"How do you know my name!" The voice was loud and shrieking, alarming Adams and calling for desperate measures.

She turned quickly on the front porch and ducked just as a shot rang out and shattered the window behind her.

"Jay!" She shouted over the echo of the discharge. "It's me, it's Lizzie!" She was shouting from her crouch, praying that her sister would hear her before she fired again.

Silence prevailed and she dared not to even look up from her crouch. The steps creaked as Jay ascended them slowly, reloading the shotgun as she went.

Adams opened the palms of her hands and stared at the muddy boots of her sister as they came to a rest before her.

"What did you say?" Jay demanded, but not nearly as fierce.

Adams raised her eyes very slowly to meet those of the coiled rattlesnake standing before her in filthy overalls.

"I said, it's me. It's Lizzie, your sister." She met the eyes that so closely resembled her own.

Jay stared at her long and hard, contemplating as to whether or not to believe her. That maybe it was her sister's body, but not her soul. She continued to look at her, the shotgun raised, waiting for the alien in her sister's body to show itself. When it didn't happen she lowered the gun a little and spoke.

"You come alone?" She asked jerking her head around to make sure there was no one else hiding in the surrounding woods or sneaking up on her from behind.

Adams took full advantage of her Jay's wayward attention, springing up from her crouch to grab the barrel of the gun while sweeping Jay's feet out from under her.

The shorter sister fell hard on her back side, releasing her grip on the gun.

Adams quickly disarmed the weapon and tossed it out onto the grass.

She approached her sister and stepped on her throat, demanding that she stay down. Jay grabbed instinctively at the restraining boot on her neck.

"Easy, Jay. Quit squirming and I'll let you up." Jay struggled for a few seconds more before finally allowing her hands to fall at her sides in defeat. "Now what in the hell are you doing running around here shooting at everything?" Adams removed her foot and reached down to help her older sibling up.

Jay stood and rubbed at her back side. "I didn't know who you was." She answered, upset at the pain shooting up through her tailbone.

"You've been drinking." Adams stated, smelling it on her breath and knowing full well that her sister's paranoid behavior worsened when she drank.

Jay glared at her, upset at being pegged. "Maybe."

Adams scoffed. "There's no maybe about it." She took a step towards the screen door, raising her hand to pull it open and was surprised when Jay grabbed her hand, halting it.

"What are you doing here Lizzie?" She wiped the sweat from her brow with the forearm of her other arm, still holding tight to her younger sister.

Adams watched her and noted how filthy her skin was, her fingernails embedded with dirt.

"I came to see you." She answered knowing that she needed to reach her sister soon or she would be lost forever. Sucked into the dark abyss of her own mind and held prisoner there for the remainder of her life. And it was already happening, starting with the drinking and the personal hygiene, and leading into paranoid behavior.

"Why?" Jay was skeptical, showing off her paranoia.

"Because you're my sister and because I need answers." Adams answered in her straight forward manner.

"Heh...I knew it. I knew there had to be a reason for you coming all the way out here. You hate it here."

Adams looked around at the green, rich woods surrounding the house. "Yes, I do." She agreed with a whisper.

"Let's go for a walk." Jay stated and bounded down the steps, not waiting for an answer.

"No." Adams declared, remaining firm on the porch.

Jay picked up the gun and began searching her pockets for shells. "You want to talk, Lizzie? Then you'll come with me for a walk." She found a shell and opened the shaft for reloading. "Sides..." She looked back up at Adams who stood motionless on the porch. "You ain't still afraid of the woods are you?" With the bullet in place she closed the gun and cocked it.

Adams stared her wild eyed sister down, knowing she was trying to harass her, pushing her with mockery.

"I'll go, but only if you leave the gun." She squared her shoulders and waited as her sister thought about the proposal.

"You got something on you in case we run in to trouble?" Jay asked, completely serious.

Adams shook her head yes and Jay disarmed the shot gun and set it up against the house.

She then led the way around the back of house and out to the tiny path that led into the mouth of the woods.

Even though it was early afternoon, the darkening storm clouds had snuffed out the majority of the daylight, casting a dark and ominous feel throughout the woods.

Adams swallowed hard as she followed her sister, childhood memories reaching out for her from the wicked looking tree branches.

"Why did you kill those men in Valle Luna, Jay?" She asked from behind, hoping the topic would help to distract her mind from her current surroundings.

Up ahead of her Jay had stopped walking and she turned to look at her sister.

"Cuz, they was messing with you." She reached up and pulled off a Hickory twig and began shedding it of it's leaves. She turned and continued her trek through the woods as she groomed the Hickory.

Adams stood watching her for a moment before she started walking again, following her.



"You can't just kill people, Jay."

"I did it for you." She said as she began flicking the flexible switch, making quick whooshing sounds in its trail.

"But can't you see that you made things worse for me, by doing what you did?" She was trying guilt now, desperate for something to reach that last grain of reason deep within her. And she knew how much Jay loved her.

Jay stopped and turned once again, fingering the switch in her hand as if were alive and a pet that needed comforting.

"But I thought it would help you...those men were hurting you..." Her eyes grew wide as she spoke, excitement straining her voice.

"What about Kristen then? Was she hurting me too?" She was growing angry at the ludicrousness of her sister's mind.

Jay looked away, flicking the switch.

"You have got to stop this. I can take care of myself now Jay. You don't have to worry." She spoke calmly, swallowing back her anger hoping to soothe her into some sanity.

Jay looked at the ground as if mesmerized by the fallen leaves. "You can't Lizzie, the bad people are everywhere."

Adams sucked in a quick breath of air upon hearing the words. "Let's go back." She suddenly knew that she needed to get out of the woods, to get Jay back to a hotel where she could sit her down and talk some sense in to her.

These woods, they held too much. They were crawling with the sins of the past.

Jay raised her eyes slowly from the ground as an evil grin spread across her face. "No, let's not. Let's keep going."

She turned and jogged ahead, laughing as she trotted through the woods. "Come on Lizzie, just a little bit further!"

Adams clenched her fists and debated calling the police on her sister herself. She was almost willing to do anything to avoid having to follow Jay further in to the woods.

"Come on!" Jay shouted from up ahead.

Thunder growled again and she looked up, knowing it was almost directly overhead.

"Jay, wait up...it's getting ready to storm." She jogged after her sister, hoping that the promise of the storm would cause her to turn back.

She found Jay a few yards up ahead, her tracks in the soft mud leading off the path to where she stood atop a large rock, the switch hanging at her side.

"You know where we are Lizzie?" The grin once again claimed her face.

Adams looked around but knew at once exactly where she was. She looked down into the ravine.

"Let's go back, Jay." She said again, meaning every word.

"And miss all this?" Jay waved her stick in the air. "Not a chance. Let's reminisce, Lizzie. Relive our youth." She laughed out loud at herself.

Adams shook her head and clenched her jaw. "No."

"I gotta remind you of the bad people. To show you that you still need protecting."

"I don't."

"Think back Lizzie, to that day. Remember that day?" She jumped down off the rock and walked over to ledge that overlooked the ravine. She took the stick and pointed down into its heart, overgrown with ivy, weeds and bushes.

Adams stood next to her and as she looked down into the embankment, her mind flashed back in time, to the day Jay spoke of, to that hot summer day not long after she had turned ten.

*"Come on Lizzie, hurry!" Jay yelled back to her as they ran through the woods. "We gotta get to Papaw's house by suppertime!"*

*"I'm comin, I'm comin." She was running as hard as she could, but she never could keep up with her older sister.*

*They were deep in the woods now, a good ways from her aunt Dayne's house, the house where they lived. They were cutting through the woods to get to their grandfather's house. A feat they had done many times before, especially in the summer when there was nothing better to do.*

*Jay had stopped up ahead to wait for her and she stood there in her cut off jeans and tank top with her hands on her hips.*

*"You better hurry up; I got better things to do than to wait for your ass." She kicked a pebble at her with her worn sneakers. Her tanned and sock less legs were covered with tiny scratches and scrapes from her rough play outdoors.*

*"Oh yeah, well at least I ain't getting boobs!" She taunted back, earning herself a rough shove from Jay.*

*"Shut up you little shit! I ain't getting no boobs." She clasped her hands quickly over the budding mosquito bites on her eleven and a half year old chest.*

*"Are too. And if you ain't nicer to me I'm gonna tell Bobbie Hollaway that you got hair on your twot." She quickly scampered to her feet and ran ahead of her sister, knowing she was about to get pummeled.*

*"You wouldn't dare." Jay seethed after her, her face reddening with anger.*

*"I would!" She called back proudly over her shoulder. She turned back to quicken her pace and slammed her body to a stop as her eyes registered the ledge. Jay was gaining on her fast and she glanced down the embankment to decide whether or not she should try to run down it.*

*But as her blue eyes skimmed over the heavily overgrown area below, something caught her attention. Something so strange and out of the ordinary that she completely forgot about Jay and the impending ass kicking she was about to get.*

*"You're dead dickhead!" Jay shouted victoriously as she slammed into her from behind.*

*Lizzie lost her balance with the blow, but she quickly steadied herself by wrapping her arms back around her sister. Her eyes never left the strange sight at the bottom of the embankment.*

*"Git your hands off me, you freak." Jay demanded as she clawed her way out of Lizzie's embrace. "What's your problem?" She asked, looking at her dazed and confused sibling.*

*Lizzie raised her hand and pointed. "Look."*

*"What..." Jay said as she followed Lizzie's finger with her eyes. She stepped up next to her sister and peered with her down into the ravine.*

*They stood in silence for a brief moment before Lizzie spoke.*

*"What is it?" She asked, frightened at what she thought it might be.*

*"I don't know." Jay replied.*

*"It looks like..."*

*"I know what it looks like." Jay interrupted. "It's probably just some rolled paper from the mill. You know, like one of them giant rolls of paper they let us paint on in school." She said, trying to convince herself more so than her sister.*

*It was true, they couldn't see the entire thing from where they stood because there was a rotting log partially blocking their view. And Lizzie gave her sister the benefit of the doubt and seeing only what they could, it could've easily been a loose roll of light brown paper, just like they used in school.*

*But that answer didn't add up to her. She took a step back from her sister and walked a couple yards on up the ledge to get a better view. Feeling braver than Jay, she allowed the swell of pride to fill her lungs as she stepped back up to the ledge. And just as she took that last step, the soft red earth gave way and caved beneath her foot.*

*She shrieked as her body fell with the collapsing dirt.*

*"Lizzie!" Jay shouted after her, watching helplessly as her younger sister tumbled over and over down into the ravine.*

*Lizzie rolled down the hill limb over limb with incredible force until she slammed into something that stopped her momentum.*

*She lay there, her eyes clenched shut, her brain still spinning. She could hear Jay coming after her in the distance. Her heart began to pound angry blood to her body and the first pangs of pain seeped in. She lay in a heap on top of her left arm, and she knew at once that it was broken.*

*"Lizzie!" Jay breathed out breathlessly as she came to running stop behind her. "Oh my God Lizzie, get up." Her voice was coming out in strangled whispers.*

*Lizzie continued to lay there not knowing which limb to move first. A terrible, awful smell filled her nostrils, almost burning them.*

*"Get up Lizzie!" Jay shouted this time.*

*"I can't." She said as she opened her eyes for the first time.*

*"I said get up!" Jay stepped up to her and yanked her up and away by the waistband of her jean shorts.*

*Lizzie cried out as her left arm hung motionless and then cried out again when she saw what it was that had stopped her fall.*

*There, lying amidst the dead leaves and the rotting log stared the nude body of a young woman.*

*The sisters stood still very close together, staring at what lay before them. The body was strewn on her back, one arm cast back over head, looking nothing like rolled paper from this end. One of legs was tucked up underneath her in an impossible angle.*

*The pain in Lizzie's arm beat strongly with her heart but it took second priority as she stared into the lifeless eyes of the dead girl. She was close enough to see how they bulged unnaturally from her head along with her tongue which fell to rest outside of mouth.*

*Flies swarmed all over the body as it lay exposed in the Alabama heat.*

*Angry red and purple marks streaked across her neck where someone had squeezed the life out of her.*

*"Gaw, it stinks." Lizzie said, trying very hard not to gag from the stench.*

*"Come on." Jay nudged her from her trance, holding her nose closed. "Let's git outta here."*

*"But what about her?" Lizzie asked, unable to tear her eyes away from the dead girl's eyes.*

*"She's dead! She ain't going nowhere." Jay had started to make her way back up the embankment and she turned to make sure her sister was following.*

*"Here grab onto this root and pull yourself up." Jay instructed as she showed Lizzie by example, tugging on the durable root as she climbed.*

*Lizzie gave the dead girl one last look, to make sure she hadn't risen to chase after them with her lifeless, battered body.*

*Momentarily satisfied that she was safe, she grabbed onto the root with her good arm and began to carefully pull herself out.*

*It took her several tries before she finally managed to gain her footing back on level ground next to her sister.*

*"What do you think happened to her?" Jay asked as she looked beyond Lizzie to where the body remained twisted in it's awkward position.*

*Lizzie looked down into the embankment, staring down at its gory center.*

*"I don't know." She whispered, not wanting to imagine.*

*"Come on." Jay demanded. "We gotta go tell someone."*

*They turned to leave just as someone stepped out from behind them, blocking the path they now sought.*

*"Well looky what we have here." The man said with a sly grin, a worn toothpick stuck between his teeth.*

*Jay instinctively eased Lizzie back with one arm.*

*"Look, mister we don't want no trouble." She offered, meaning it.*

*He was looking Jay up and down jangling the keys on his belt loop with one hand. He had on worn jeans, stained with grease and dirt. His t-shirt was tattered and full of holes, sweat stains marked the armpits.*

*"Well it looks like you've done found it." He laughed out loud and pulled the toothpick from his mouth to toss it on the ground. He glanced back down beyond them at the body in the ravine. "I see you girls met Mary. See, she didn't play nice with me. But you will, won't you." He grinned again as he spoke.*

*He took a step towards them, knowing they couldn't back up much more. "Ain't you a purdy little thing." He reached out and tried to stroke Jay's cheek.*

*But she ducked away from him and came back up quickly, hitting him square in the balls.*

*The man bent over and grabbed himself, moaning in pain.*

*Jay grabbed Lizzie by the shirt and pulled on her, trying to get her to run past him.*

*"You little bitch." The man stood upright fueled by the anger the pain had sparked in him.*

*Jay ran as best she could with Lizzie and her dangling arm, but the man gained on them fast.*

*Lizzie shrieked as the man grabbed at her hair. Jay stopped and turned, clawing and pounding at him, causing him to lose his grip on the littler of the two.*

*"Run, Lizzie, RUN!" She screamed out to her younger, frightened sister. The man laughed as Jay continued to try and fight him. He bear hugged her from behind and carried her off back into the woods kicking and screaming.*

*Lizzie stared after them, torn as to what to do. She looked down at her arm for the first time and saw a white shaft of bone protruding through her forearm. With nausea threatening to take over, she swallowed back the rising bile in her throat and turned to run as fast as could back home.*

*As she ran, the sight of her sister being carried away by the man replayed in her mind, numbing her pain. She had both fists clenched and both arms bent as she ran, just like she would if her arm were fine. She ran hard and fast, fear close on her heels.*

*In what seemed like a lifetime later, she finally ran up the porch steps to her house and yanked open the door.*

*"What in the hell's wrong with you girl?" Her uncle Jerry stood just inside the door, a fresh can of Budweiser in his hand. He glanced down at her arm before she could gain her breath to answer. "Sweet Jesus, what have you gone and done to your arm?" He set down his beer and walked closer to examine it.*

*"It's Jay...she..."*

*"Jay did this?" He asked as he went to gently lift it. "I shoulda known. You girls are gonna be the death of me."*

*"No!" She shouted at him.*

*"Now I know it hurts, but you better watch your tone with me young lady." He glared at her, warning her.*

*"Jay...a bad man took Jay!"*

*"What's going on?" Her Aunt Dayne walked in from the kitchen. "Lizzie, what are you hollering about?"*

*"Shush up Dayne!" Jerry yelled to her. "Lizzie, what did you say?" He met her blue eyes, completely serious and finally ready to listen.*

*"A man in the woods." She had finally caught her breath. "He took Jay."*

*"Oh my lord!" Dayne exclaimed.*

*"What do you mean he took her?" Jerry asked.*

*"We found a dead body down in the ravine." She could hear her aunt gasp again. "And then this man came up and took Jay."*

*"Where did he take her Lizzie?" He asked, placing both his hands on her shoulders.*

*"Back towards the ravine."*

*Jerry walked quickly over to the gun cabinet which stood in the corner of the living room. Yanking it open, he grabbed one rifle and a shotgun before he filled his pockets full of shells and bullets.*

*"Dayne, get on the phone and call Jimmy and the boys, tell them to meet me out at the ravine."*

*"What about the sheriff, shouldn't I call him?" She was dangerously close to hysterics. And she couldn't handle much on a good day.*

*"There ain't gonna be nothing left of him for the sheriff." He said, deadly serious.*

*Lizzie watched as her uncle pulled on his camouflage cap, tugging the bill down snug before he banged out the screen door, guns in tow.*

*Her Aunt immediately ran to her side, and tried to look at her arm with trembling hands.*

*"Lizzie, let me see." She pleaded, sobbing close on her voice.*

*"Aunt Dayne! Go call Jimmy!" She pulled away as she screamed at her, needing for her aunt to pull herself together just this once before she fell apart.*

*Dayne jerked up, shocked at how her niece was speaking to her. But before she raised a hand to slap her, the reality of Lizzie's words set in and she briskly walked over to the phone.*

*Lizzie walked over and sat down on their worn sofa. She looked down at her arm and realized that she had been bleeding. Her head spun and she lay back, and listened as her hysterical Aunt spoke loudly to Jimmy on the phone, relaying information.*

*Dayne hung up the phone and came back into the room. Her eyes were red and irritated from where she had been crying.*

*"Lizzie, baby, let me look at your arm." She sat down next to her on the sofa and reached carefully for her arm. "Oh lord," She could hardly bring herself to look. "We need to get you to the doctor."*

*"No!" She screamed again. "I ain't going anywhere until I know Jay's ok." She stood from the sofa and ran to her room, where she eased herself down on the bed and cried herself to sleep.*

*She didn't wake until hours later when she heard her aunt scream as the screen door slammed shut. Lizzie pulled herself up and winced at the pain in her arm. The room was dark, night having apparently fallen.*

*Dayne was hysterical and crying in the other room. Lizzie immediately thought the worst as she heard Jerry trying to calm her down. Lizzie pulled open her bedroom door and*

*walked into the living room.*

*"I'm telling you she's ok. Jimmy's done gone and took her to see Doc Hill." He looked up at Lizzie as she walked in. Jimmy's two brothers flanked his sides, their guns slung over their shoulders.*

*"Well I need to go to Doc Hill's then!" Dayne shouted, ready to leave that instant.*

*"Just hold on a minute. Lizzie here needs to go too."*

*"Of course." She breathed as she saw her youngest niece in the background. She covered her mouth with a trembling hand and tried to smile, to show Lizzie that everything was ok.*

*"But first, I need to talk to her." Jerry said as he walked over to her and lifted her chin. "Lizzie, why don't you come outside with me?"*

*The brothers had already dispersed back out the screen door, as if on cue. She shook her head and followed the men outside, grateful to get away from her crying aunt. Jerry eased her down the steps by cupping her good elbow gently.*

*"You're one tough little girl, Lizzie. Sitting here at home with a arm that broke." He sounded proud of her and she realized that it was probably the first time she had ever been good enough in his eyes.*

*The brothers walked ahead of them making their way across the dark lawn towards the tool shed. Lightning bugs flew slowly around, lighting up at random against the evening sky.*

*Lizzie walked behind Jerry into the shed, led by his hand. She stood and waited and one of the boys tugged on the string hanging down from a bare bulb. Lizzie stood and stared, waiting for her eyes to get used to bright light.*

*Someone sat slumped on the floor, a burlap sack over his head. Jerry nodded his head and the bigger of the brothers walked over and pulled off the sack exposing a filthy man with dark, greasy hair.*

*The dirty man from the woods looked around wildly at those around him. A rag was bound tightly around his head gagging his mouth. His hands were tied tightly behind his back.*

*"Lizzie, is this the sick son of a bitch that took your sister?" Jerry asked her, speaking surprisingly softly to her.*

*She looked at the man and almost laughed at scared he looked sitting there, pissing himself in the shed.*

*The dirty man looked at her then and started shaking his head no violently. He was moaning and trying his best to somehow convince her that it wasn't him.*

*Lizzie shook her yes, never looking away from the man who had no doubt hurt her sister.*

*"You sure?"*

*"Yes, sir. I'm sure." She stated, this time looking up at her uncle.*

*Jerry placed a hand on her shoulder and led her back out of the shed. Dayne had walked out of the house in search of them.*

*"Go on ahead to Doc Hill's." Jerry instructed, as he handed off Lizzie and turned to head back to the shed.*

*"What about you, ain't you comin?" Dayne asked after him.*

*"Yaw'll go on ahead." He said over his shoulder before disappearing back in the shed, this time pulling the door closed behind him.*

*She never knew exactly what happened to the bad man from the woods. When she had returned home from the hospital a few days later, there was no trace of him. Only the blood stained rag that had been used as a gag.*

*And whatever the man had done to Jay during the few hours he had her also remained a mystery. Jay had never told her. She only knew that from that day on, Jay wasn't the same.*

*The light sprinkles of rain fell cool on their warm skin. She looked down and ran a finger across the scar on her left arm. An eternal reminder of that terrible day.*

*Jay looked up at the dark sky letting the drops tickle her face. She lowered her head and looked at her sister.*

*"I never told you what happened that day, with him."*



Adams met her gaze, feeling such empathy for the young girl who had sacrificed herself in order to protect her. Such sympathy for the young girl who at the same moment in time sacrificed her innocence.

"No you didn't."

They began walking again back towards the house.

"I'll spare you all the details. Lord knows even your worst thoughts couldn't come close to what he did to me."

"I'm sorry, Jay. It should've been me. He should've taken me." She said, meaning it.

Jay laughed and swatted at the rain with her stick. "Nah, Lizzie. It shouldn't have been anybody. Not me, not you...not that poor dead girl."

Adams remembered that the girl had been from a neighboring town, her murder never solved. Not in a legal sense anyway.

Thunder cracked loudly directly overhead. And Adams picked up her pace as the electricity in the air pricked the hairs on her arm.

"But that son of a bitch got what was his." Jay stated, seemingly unaffected by the close proximity of the storm.

"You mean with Jerry?" Adams asked, startled that her sister seemed to know more about the disappearing man from the woods than she did.

Jay shook her head, a smile spreading across her face. "It was the only time in my life when I can remember that drunk piece of shit doing right by me."

Adams nodded her understanding. Jerry hadn't exactly been the best father figure for her and Jay, but he hadn't been the worst either. He had been a man hell bent on control and he had ruled their aunt and their home with an iron fist. Always quick to dominate, he took no excuses and offered none either.

"That night, after they had found me and chased him down in the woods..." She tossed her stick aside suddenly finished with it as she concentrated in memory.

"Jerry come over to Doc Hills to get me. The doc had told Dayne that you needed surgery and to take you on to the hospital."

Adams shook her head, able to remember leaving Doc Hill's that night.

"Well, Doc Hill told Jerry what all he thought the man had done to me and Jerry liked to have killed him on the spot for saying such things. He grabbed me by the shirt and yanked me outside the whole time yelling at Doc Hill not to tell nobody." She continued walking by her sister's side, relaying the story.

"He drove me home in silence and I almost thought he was gonna whip me. But instead he took me out back to the shed. And they had that man in there, all tied up. They were taking turns beating him and burning him with lit cigarettes. I didn't know what to do; I think I was in shock. I just stood there staring, feeling nothing. And that's when Jerry did it. He handed me his shotgun and told me to shoot him."

"Jesus." Adams whispered as she thought of her raped and battered eleven year old sister standing there, gun in hand.

"Yeah, that sick fuck started talking about Jesus. Started begging me not to shoot him, crying and wailing like Dayne used to do when her and Jerry fought. I just stood there watching him, the gun feeling real heavy in my arms. Jerry bent down next to me and asked me if what Doc Hill said was true. I shook my head yes and he said then it was my right to take back from him what he took from me."

Jay paused and breathed in deep, shoving her hands down deep into the pockets of her overalls.

"So did you shoot him?" Adams asked looking over at her.

"I did." Jay responded looking at the ground. "I nearly blew his head clean off too."

"My God." Adams shook her head, wishing she could take it all away, to be able to give her sister a clean slate in life. Instead of the tarnished and scarred one she had been forced to make do with.

They walked in silence for awhile and Adams tried her best to make sense of Jay's life. The events of her past had done more than enough to steer her in the wrong direction, as she herself had suffered from many times as well. The only difference between them was the fact that she hadn't ever killed anyone. She wished she could say the same for Jay.

"Jay, will you promise me something?"

Jay looked over at her and shrugged. "Don't know. Depends on what it is."

"I want you to stop killing."

"But what if..."

"No. No what ifs. I can take care of myself, Jay. I don't need you worrying about me."

Jay looked away suddenly as if the words had stricken her physically.

"Can't you see that it's because I love you?" She asked, almost pleading.

Adams shook her head. "And can't you see that it is because I love you that I ask you to stop? You're going to get caught someday and sent away to rot in prison. How long do you think it would actually take them to find you here? Not long, Jay. Not long at all. And the only reason they haven't come for you is because I asked Erin McEnzie not to tell."

"And she hasn't?" Jay looked up at her completely surprised. "And I didn't think no one would know to look for me here at Papaw's." She said the words in a meek manner, completely oblivious to how obvious the location was. Their grandfather may have been long dead but it wouldn't take much at all to find out who his two grand daughters were.

"I can't figure out why she hasn't said anything." Adams confessed. "Maybe they still think I'm responsible and if you continue to kill, they will eventually start arresting me for the crimes."

"NO!" Jay said, whipping her head around. "I won't let that happen."

"You can't control it Jay. None of it. Just let it go. No more."

She didn't respond and Adams looked up as they approached the house.

"And there's one more thing I need you to do." She said with certainty. "I want you to promise me that you'll leave Erin McEnzie alone."

"Who? The cop! She lied to you Lizzie!"

Adams held up her hand to stop her rant. "She didn't tell about you, did she? And that's after you tried to kill her." She raised her eyebrows, finishing her point. "Promise me."

"Tell me why." Jay said, unconvinced. "The way I see it, I should off her so she could never tell."

Adams stopped walking and looked at her sister. "Because I care about her, Jay."

"I don't believe it! All the women in the world and you go and care about a lying cop..." Jay threw her arms up in the air unbelieving of what she hearing.

"If you have any respect for me at all, you'll honor this." She cut in, stopping her sister's rampage.

Jay looked around the yard, avoiding her sister's intense stare.

"I mean it Jay; I need to make some things right in my life."

### **Chapter 3**

*Wednesday, August 27<sup>th</sup>*

*Utopia, Arizona*

Erin stood looking out over the vast Utopian valley below. She rested her hands on the redwood beam that surrounded the large deck that was built on to the back of the cabin. She couldn't believe the view before her. It was breathtaking. Absolutely breathtaking.

There was movement to her left and she turned slightly to watch two squirrels chase each other up the large Ponderosa pine flanking the deck. She smiled at them and breathed in deep the cool, fresh mountain air. Coming with Henderson up to her newly acquired cabin had turned out to be an excellent idea. They were now nestled atop one of Utopia's numerous mountains. Away from the city heat, the crime, the crowds.

"Hey you." Henderson greeted with a relaxed smile. "How was your nap?" She walked up and joined Erin at the railing.

"Short." Erin answered with some disappointment.

"Still not sleeping well?" Henderson asked, having heard Erin scream out the night before.

Erin shrugged not wanting to share all the details of her nightmares.

"I'm still having the nightmares, but I think it's getting better." She looked away from Henderson and let her eyes skim over the thousands of green treetops and focus on a mountain off in the distance.

Henderson sensed that the subject was closed and she didn't want to upset her. She knew Mac needed her friendship and her support now more than ever. And she knew that meant being there for her with patience and understanding. She would talk when she was good and ready.

"Some view huh?" Henderson asked, leaning on the rail, loving her new surroundings.

"I'll say. You shouldn't have any trouble writing up here with a view like this. The view is pure inspiration alone."

"I hope your right." Henderson chuckled. "I'm still a little nervous with my decision to quite the force. What if I can't make it on writing alone?" She had always had her police work to pay the bills. The money she had earned writing had just been like an added bonus.

"You're kidding me right?" Erin looked at her and marveled at her doubts.

"No, Mac. I'm serious." Henderson said turning halfway to meet her eyes.

"I've read your stuff. Not all of it, but enough to know that it's damn good. You must have thousands of fans just drooling with anticipation for the next book."

Henderson looked away, a little embarrassed by the flattering words.

"You don't understand. What if I wake up one day, even tomorrow and it's gone. What if I sit there at the computer and the words don't come? And they never come again?" She had never admitted that fear to anyone before. But then again no one had ever known about her writing before Mac came along.

Erin watched her, a little surprised at the fears Henderson held. She had never considered that writers had fears such as this.

"That won't happen." Erin said softly. "I'm sure you may have a day or even days when things just don't click, if you haven't already."

Henderson shook her head in silent agreement.

"But they didn't last did they?" Erin asked, trying to reassure her.

Henderson met the bright green eyes across from her. "No, they didn't last."

"You see, you'll be fine."

"This last time, I had stopped for a couple of months because my head just wasn't in it. And the only reason I came out of it was because I found a new..." She looked off again, her cheeks burning with heat.

"New what?" Erin asked completely clueless.

Henderson rested her elbow on the railing and set her chin on her fist. She stared out at the green valley below.

"Muse." She answered softly, careful not to look at Mac.

"Oh." Erin felt her own face flush as she realized the meaning of the word. "Well whoever she is, you should tell her so she'll be sure to keep inspiring you."

Henderson stood suddenly and started walking across the lengthy deck to the double doors that led into the cabin.

"I need to get dinner started now if I'm going to grill. The sunlight will be gone soon." She tossed Erin a brief smile before heading in the roomy log cabin.

Erin turned back to the spanning view of the mountainous valley below. She reached behind her and pulled up a deck chair. Sinking down into it, she propped her feet up on the railing and rested her head back against the chair.

She had to admit, she needed the rest and some peace of mind, and she hoped escaping up to the cabin would do the trick. Maybe put a stop to the nightmares and the reoccurring flashes of her violent memory. But she hadn't had any such luck so far. But then again, they had only been here one night.

She breathed deeply again, willing the mountain air to heal her mind. She closed her eyes and a face entered her mind. The eyes were brilliant and blue, full of fire and desire. She shivered internally as she recalled her intimate encounter with Elizabeth Adams. Even though she had been high on Ecstasy at the time, it had done nothing to cloud her memory whatsoever. If anything, the drug had heightened her senses, sharpened them to the point of making her crave the physical contact, as well as to help her to remember every incredible detail.

*Crave.*

The word struck a frazzled nerve.

*"It's called Crave by Calvin Klein."* Adams voice spoke seductively in her mind. She remembered the very moment the words had been spoken. She opened her eyes and pulled her thighs together tightly as she remembered the scent of Elizabeth Adams. She had always heard that scent was the strongest sense tied to memory and now she understood why.

She tossed her head back against the chair again and sighed as her body instinctively reacted to Adams even though she was nowhere near. She closed her eyes and allowed her memory the free will to linger on Adams for awhile.

A vision of the dark woman flashed in her mind. She was standing in front of her in the black leather and the chain mesh vest. The mask was gone and she was looking at Erin so intensely, so soft and yet, so hungry. Erin felt herself shiver again as she remembered her long, talented fingers, playing her, pulling at her from deep inside.

"Wine?"

Erin jerked and sat forward suddenly in the chair, her eyes flying open with surprise.

"Sorry." Henderson offered, a goblet of red wine in her hand.

"You just surprised me is all." She rubbed at her cheeks, hoping the heat she had been feeling with Adams in mind wasn't displayed on her face for Henderson to see.

She held out her hands, grateful for the wine. "Yes, thank you." She gave Henderson a warm smile and sipped at the dark, flavorful wine.

"Dinner should be ready in a short while."

Erin watched the attractive woman pull a sip of the dark red liquid from her own goblet. The wine stained her lips, leaving them full and crimson, vaguely reminiscent of blood.

*"Make me bleed baby."*

She shook her head at the voice from the past. A vision of the sexy movie star licking the blood from her lips pooled in Erin's mind. Adams had sucked and bitten Angie's full lips with erotic force. Erin shuddered, remembering how she had watched the two and it turned her on even now just thinking about it.

The memories were coming quicker today. One followed closely by another.

"You ok?" Henderson removed the goblet from her mouth and watched Erin with obvious concern.

"Fine. Just memories, flashes really."

Henderson's eyebrows rose with hope. "That's good, right? I mean, you want them to come, don't you?" She couldn't imagine what it must be like for Mac. She herself had been the one who had sustained the blow to the head. She should be the one with memory problems.

"I'm not sure anymore." Erin looked up at her with tired eyes. "I'm not sure I want to know." She looked away back out at the green valley and took another sip of wine.

"I don't think you'll ever be at peace until you do remember." Henderson walked away quietly. Leaving her troubled friend to her thoughts, wishing she could somehow take away the pain that was so clouded in Erin's eyes.

Erin fingered the rim of her goblet and let her thoughts run freely in her mind. She didn't understand why she couldn't remember. She understood the scientific theory behind the post traumatic stress syndrome, but it didn't give her any answers.

What had happened that night that made her mind close off? She thought back to what the paramedics had said about that night. They had come in the house to find her on the floor with Henderson's head in her lap. She had been covered with Henderson's blood, the head wound having bled profusely.

They said that they had tried to speak to her but that she wouldn't answer. She gave no response whatsoever until they tried to remove Henderson from her arms. Then and only then did she react. She had screamed and

cried, convinced that Henderson would soon die and then she collapsed on the floor and cried until exhaustion set in. The paramedics had then sedated her and when she came to in the hospital the next morning, she couldn't remember the events of the previous evening.

She turned her head to watch the two squirrels run back down the tree. She couldn't remember the events the paramedics spoke of. But as she thought about them now, she imagined that she would react in a similar manner. She pictured herself on the floor, Henderson unconscious and bleeding in her arms. Her heart ached at the thought of Henderson hurt and bleeding. The older detective meant so much to her. And yet she had only known her on a personal level for a short while.

She thought of her now as she rested her head back on the chair. She had become in tune with her now more than ever. Being up in the mountains with her at such close proximity, had heightened Erin's already brooding attraction to the woman. She was noticing things she had never noticed before. The way she chewed her bottom lip when she tried to fight back a mischievous grin. Her hearty laugh, her kindness and intellect, her passion with words. Not to mention her body.

Erin closed her eyes and bit her own lip as her mind's eye looked Henderson up and down. She thought back to the previous night and how sexy Henderson had looked in a snug gray tank top and matching cotton panties.

She had about fainted on the spot as she had stumbled upon her in the kitchen well after midnight, awakened by a nightmare. She closed her eyes and pictured her standing there, leaning into the fridge in the little tank top and panties. The fridge light lit up her body, showing off firm, ample breasts, a smooth, flat stomach. Her vision carried down to Henderson's panties. She imagined touching her tight ass, running her hands over and down to come forward to her heated center.

What would she feel like?

She hugged herself as she shivered with desire. Her mind's eye then traveled down from Henderson's panties to her legs. Her beautifully muscled thighs, smooth and tan from swimming. She imagined kissing them, teasing them with her tongue, up and down the insides of her legs.

Her vision faded and she opened her eyes as the squirrels began to rifle through the feeding trough next to her. She sat perfectly still and watched them in amazement. She wished she could sit and continue to fantasize about Henderson but other thoughts weighed heavily on her mind.

She sighed and startled the squirrels, sending them scurrying back up the tree. Work, the investigation and her own current situation plagued her mind.

She had been on medical leave since the morning after the shooting. Thus, excluding her from the investigation itself as it had begun to wrap up with Tracy Walsh being pegged as the sole killer. She would've loved to have been a part of it. Especially since something continuously gnawed at her, telling her that her fellow detectives hadn't found all the missing pieces. They believed Walsh was responsible for the serial killings and that she may have had help from Kristen Reece. What's more they also blamed Walsh for her presumed death as well.

As for a motive, Erin's fellow detectives had found evidence in Walsh's apartment which showed she had a strong obsession for Elizabeth Adams. These included pictures all over her apartment walls of Adams, letters she had written to her, journal entries as well as stolen items from the club. Her obsession alone, the detectives believe, drove her to do anything in order to win the affection and attention of the powerful woman.

Erin gazed up at a hawk gliding over head and again felt the gnawing in the pit of her stomach. Something just wasn't right about the investigation. She just wished she could put her finger on it.

Jack trotted across the deck, his claws clicking against the redwood. He was panting from his latest adventure from down below the house and into the valley, chasing God only knew what.

Erin let her hand fall down beside the chair and he walked over wagging his tail and happily licked it. His normally stark white fur was dingy and dusty from all his running around outdoors. When she wouldn't scratch his back like he wanted, he walked away from her and headed over to his water bowl next to the back door.

She smiled after him, always endeared by the little deaf dog. Once at his water bowl, he dug in it with his front paws, splashing the water up on his fur, getting his water cloudy with dirt in the process. Once the water was almost completely brown, he lowered his head and drank from it heartily.

Erin laughed out loud at his behavior and Henderson emerged from the house carrying a long lighter and metal grill brush.

"What's so funny?" She asked as she set them both down on the shelf attached to the grill. She realized that she hadn't seen Erin smile in a long while.

"Jack." Erin said pointing.

Henderson followed the direction of her finger and looked down just in time to see Jack try to lie completely down in his water bowl.

"Jack!" Henderson shouted, smacking her palms up against her cheeks. "You're filthy!" She walked over to him and he looked up at with his tongue hanging large and flat from his mouth.

"He's hot." Erin said sticking up for him as she continued to laugh.

"If you feel so sorry for him then you can be the one who gives him a bath." Henderson turned and eyed her mischievously with her hands on her hips. She bit her lower lip and Erin noticed and felt emotion swirl in her tummy where seconds before the gnawing had been.

She stood from her chair and approached Jack with a large smile on her face. She looked over at Henderson and tipped her wine glass at her.

"Fine. I would be more than happy to. You cook and I'll..." She looked back down at Jack as he started to dig again at the remaining water splashing her in the process. "Clean." She finished as Henderson began to laugh.

"Ok, Jack. This is going to be fun, ok?" Erin eyed him cautiously, completely unconvinced herself.

Jack stood staring at her from the center of the bath tub with his ears back and his tail tucked between his legs, scared to death as to what she was about to do to him.



Warm water lapped at his belly and Erin dipped the cup in the bath to scoop up some water. Jack looked over at the cup as she brought it closer. She tipped it at his head, figuring she would wet the hardest part first. As soon as the water hit his head, Jack bolted from the tub, gripping the side with his front paws, pulling his hind legs up to spring up and over Erin who sat kneeling by the tub.

"Jack!" She screamed in surprise as she tried to catch him. His body was slick with water and he slid with ease right through her hands landing behind her and sprinting as fast as he could out the door.

She turned and crawled her way up into a stance and quickly gave chase. She rounded out the door of the bathroom and turned left into the kitchen area where Henderson stood staring in amazement with a pair of tongs in her hand.

"Jack!" Erin screamed again running after the wet trail that streaked along the floor. She caught a brief sight of him as he darted through the sitting room to the right of the kitchen, hopping along the sofa as he went, his butt tucked in hurried excitement. She threw herself across the end of the sofa, thinking for sure she could nab him, but Jack merely jumped over her and made his way to the stairs.

Erin shot up from the couch and glanced at Henderson as she reached the bottom of the stairs. The other woman was still standing in the same position, tongs in hand up in the air. Only now her mouth was open in complete awe of the scenario unfolding in front of her.

Erin darted up the stairs as quick as she could; knowing what was up there and promising that if Jack was doing what she thought he was doing...he was soon to be a dead dog, instead of just a deaf one.

She reached the top of the stairs and stood looking into the large loft area. The king sized bed sat in the center with a large window overlooking the front yard flanking it. She eyed the bed as she approached, her eyes squinting as she observed the disheveled covers.

Suddenly, the lump under the covers moved and Jack emerged, jumping and hopping about in circles.

"You little shit!" Erin said as she threw herself onto the bed. Jack avoided her easily and pounced like an agile kitten on top of her, barking at her with excitement while nipping at her hair.

Erin rolled again, trying to catch the wet dog with her hands but Jack had sprung to the other side of the bed, barking and nipping the air, tail wagging. She flung towards him and he ducked under the covers. Erin growled back at him in frustration and she too, delved under the covers in hot pursuit.

Feeling around for the wet, white fur she could so strongly smell she found him tucked into a ball near the edge of the bed.

"Gotcha!" she yelled in victory, encircling Jack in her arms and in doing so, tumbling to the floor in a tangled heap of wet fur and bed clothes.

Applause came from the loft landing and Erin looked over to find Henderson grinning from ear to ear as she clapped. *Boy would I love to be in Jack's position right about now.*

"You two are better than the Stooges." She smirked, trying hard to swallow back her growing desire for the blonde.

Erin lay on her back with Jack resting on her chest, the covers tangled around them.

"Funny." She said to Henderson as she tried to spit some wet white hairs from her mouth.

Henderson waved her hand at Jack who struggled to get free from Erin's vice like grip. More than happy that Henderson wanted him, Erin released him from her clutches and he sprinted across the room to his owner.

Erin pushed herself up from the floor and began trying to wipe the furs from her clothes. She looked up at the rumpled mess of a bed and sighed.

"Don't worry about the bed; I'll take care of it." Henderson offered while giving Jack another hand sign. The dog immediately sat obediently in front of her, his attention never wavering from her hands.

"You don't have to do that." Erin said as she walked to the bed and began to yank the covers off. "It's my fault he got away from me."

Henderson laughed again as the crazy scene replayed in her mind.

"Not entirely." She said, wiping the laughing tears from her eyes.

Erin stopped and stood with her hands on her hips, eyeing Henderson as she laughed.

"I should've told you that Jack hates water being poured on his head." Henderson said before she started laughing uncontrollably again.

"Ya think?" Erin said, trying hard not to laugh herself. Instead she glared down at Jack who was still sitting so politely in front of Henderson.

"Yeah, and I should've taught you some signs, to get him to listen." She took some big breaths and calmed her laughing. "I just got so caught up with dinner, I didn't even think about it."

"Hey that's what I'm here for." Erin said throwing up her hands and turning back to tackle the bed. "For laughs."

Henderson laughed softly behind her. "Come on Mac, I promise I'll stop laughing." She could barely get out the words before laughter overtook her again.

"I don't think it was that funny." Erin said over her shoulder with a smile starting to tip her face.

"The hell it wasn't." Henderson approached her, needing to get to her to understand. "The way you chased him, the way you two were wrestling on the bed and then falling on the floor." She bent down, her sides hurting from the laughter.

Erin turned to look at her and couldn't help but start laughing herself. Henderson's face was red and Erin helped her to stand upright.

"I guess it must've looked pretty ridiculous."

Henderson shook her head and breathed as they both tried to calm down.

"That's an understatement." She smiled, trying to stifle the last of the laughs.

Erin piled the comforter on the floor along with the sheets. She tried to spit out more dog hair as she wiped at her shirt unsuccessfully.

"Mac, leave the bed." Henderson said breathing deep, glad the pains in her ribs had left her. She hated the words as they spilled from her mouth. She Mac in her bed, not leaving it.

Erin reached down to pull off a pillow case, ignoring her.

"I'll take care of it." Henderson reached down and grabbed her hand, stopping her. *Let me make love to you, right here, right now.* Well, maybe once the bed was clean. "Besides you still have to finish washing Jack."

Erin turned to look at her with wide eyes. "Oh no. Uh uh." She started shaking her head which caused Henderson to start laughing again.

"Seriously." Henderson finally managed to say, releasing her grip on Erin and holding up her hand. She tried to breathe before the pains returned to stab her sides once again. "I'll just show you some signs and he'll be fine."

Erin raised her eyebrows, not quite believing her.

"Come on, I'll prove it to you."

"Ok." Erin replied reaching down in frustration and yanking off her shirt covered in wet dog hair. "This time, I'm playing tough."

Henderson let her gaze fall over Mac's body as she walked off in front of her on her way to the stairs. She swallowed hard and bit back her urge to reach out and touch her. She had wanted to explore Erin's full breasts and muscled torso ever since that first night at her house when she had watched her pull off her shirt for J.R. to attach the wire.

Erin disappeared down the stairs and Henderson looked down and gave Jack the sign to follow her. It was going to be a long night, made even painfully longer now that she had seen Erin bare some skin.

An hour later, Erin was towel drying her hair when Henderson called her for dinner. She had finished bathing Jack, who had indeed behaved himself after she had given him some hand commands. Then, smelling like a wet dog herself, she had jumped in the shower to cool off and clean up.

She turned and hung up the bath towel on the rack behind her.

"Coming!" She yelled out the bathroom door. She then walked out of the bathroom and across the hall into her bedroom to slip into a cotton button down sleeveless shirt and a pair of khaki linen shorts.

The cabin itself had four bedrooms. Three of them were side by side downstairs with the fourth being the loft upstairs. The room she was staying in was spacious enough, with a double bed, a night table and a dresser. All of it a light lumber, giving it its rustic appeal. Henderson had made one of the rooms into her office and the last room was currently being used as storage.

Every so often Henderson would walk in to retrieve some boxes to unpack. Erin always did her best to help, but mostly Henderson just insisted that she rest or spend her time doing things that she liked.

She ran her fingers through her wet hair and walked down the hallway into the kitchen. The sun had just set and Henderson had opened the doors and windows to let in the cool night air. Both the front and back doors also had screen doors, to ensure a summer breeze free of insects.

Soft jazz played from a small stereo and Erin made her way into the great room which opened up from the kitchen. On the left side, next to the kitchen was the dining room table. On the right side, the room opened up into a large sitting room which contained a stone wall fireplace and mantle. The ceiling in the great room was highly vaulted and the back window was floor to ceiling, allowing for a breathtaking view of the valley below.

Erin made her way to the table which was already set for two and lit up with candles. Henderson walked in from the back deck, a plateful of steaming chicken kabobs in hand.

"Here let me." Erin said, moving quickly to get the plate.

Henderson could smell the fresh scent of soap and shampoo on Erin and she looked away as the vision of Erin wet seared through her eyes. A brief image of her standing nude in the shower soaping her full breasts assaulted her senses and she nearly choked on her saliva at the thought.

"Thanks." She managed to cough out as she headed over into the kitchen, returning with a bowl of pasta salad and the bottle of wine.

"This looks terrific." Erin said, sitting down and placing a kabob first in Henderson's plate and then her own.

"Hope it's as good as it looks. I'm starved." Henderson said spooning out the pasta salad for them both before refilling their wine glasses. What she was hungry for wasn't food, but she dug in heartily hoping it would at the very least distract her.

Erin took first a bite of pasta salad and then the chicken. "It is." She chewed gratefully. "It's even better than it looks."

After several silent bites, Erin noticed that something was missing.

"Dare I ask where Jack is?"

Henderson grinned and sipped her wine. "He's pouting."

"Mmm." Erin replied, pulling off a piece of chicken and green pepper.

"He hates baths." Henderson said with a stifled chuckle.

"No kidding?" Erin said giving her a raised eyebrow as a warning.

*God she's gorgeous.* Henderson thought to herself and then grabbed at her wine for a much needed chug.

"Just for that," Erin continued. "You now have to answer me any question I ask." She grinned playfully at her dinner companion.

"No way." Henderson said with a grin.

Erin eyed her and noted how beautiful she looked even in the worn jeans and faded flannel shirt with the sleeves cut off. So incredibly beautiful while so incredibly rugged.

"Yes way." Erin teased, not backing down. "Let's see, what to ask." She contemplated as she ate, wanting to be sure to ask the perfect question.

Henderson continued to eat her pasta salad while Erin stared her down, searching her mind for the right question.

"You're wasting your time Mac. I never said I would go along with this little game." But she was enjoying the friendly banter. It was good to see Mac being so playful, so relaxed. And there was even the hint of contentment.

"You will." Erin countered.

"What makes you think I will?" *I'll do anything you want. Anything.*

"Because I have powers over you." She said, laughing at herself at how ridiculous it sounded. She looked over at Henderson who had stopped eating suddenly. "Super powers" Erin added, wiggling her fingers at Henderson.

Henderson finally moved and sipped her wine. Even though she knew Erin was joking around, the words had shocked her. They were true. More than true. And yet Erin had no idea. Why should she? She doesn't feel the same way so how could she possibly know or even understand. Terror shook through her as she realized how vulnerable she was and at the hands of this young, beautiful and confused woman. She couldn't let her know. She had to keep fighting it. Mac had too much on her right now to be dealing with her feelings.

"More wine?" She asked as she rose from the table.

"No, I'm good." Erin said, suddenly feeling a fool. She rose with Henderson to clear the table. "Thank you for dinner. It was very good." She carried the dishes into the kitchen and piled them next to the sink.

"I'm glad." Henderson said, coming to her side to start in on the dishes. She needed to do something with her hands. Anything. She needed to distract her mind and body from Erin MacKenzie.

"No, let me clean. You cooked." Erin said, grabbing her wrist softly.

Henderson wouldn't meet her eyes but she stood ramrod straight at the contact. Her touch was like a bolt of lightning shooting up through her, lighting up every cell in her body to the point of implosion.

"Patricia?" Erin asked concerned. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing." She walked away quickly and headed out the back door. It took all her power not to run at a full sprint out the door. Once on the deck she placed her hands behind her head and looked up at the millions of stars. She breathed in deeply and willed her heart to stop pounding so hard.

Maybe it had been a mistake inviting Mac up to the cabin with her. As much as she valued their friendship and cared about her, it was becoming plainly obvious to her that she was falling in love.

"Christ." She said aloud and into the black night. How could she have let it happen? Sure she had been immediately attracted to the rookie detective upon first laying eyes on her all those years ago at the academy.

But so what, lots of women are attractive and as soon as she had found out she was married, she had viewed her as just another pretty face.

But once she had met up with her that first night at her house, she had known she was in trouble. She hadn't expected to find such a passionate, naïve, and sensual creature underneath the gorgeous exterior. And to top it off, the blonde had a hidden attraction to women and an unhappy marriage.

Henderson walked down to the edge of the deck and stepped off into the yard. She should've walked away that night. Wiped her hands clean of Erin Mackenzie and the desire she so clearly felt creeping up within her. But she hadn't. And now she was stuck up here with her, miles away from civilization, miles away from a healthy distraction.

She bent down and began picking up logs. So what now? "Now," She told herself. "You go in there and act like everything's fine. Poor girl doesn't need to know how in love you are with her." *She's got enough on her plate.*

Erin had just finished with the dishes when Henderson returned, a couple of large logs in her arms.

"I thought we would fire up that fireplace tonight." She said as she walked in and tossed them into the large pit.

"Sounds great." Erin noted, glad that Henderson was back to sounding herself and at least speaking to her.

While Henderson got the fire going, Erin made them both some hot chocolate with Butterscotch Schnapps and then made herself comfortable on one of the overstuffed sofas in front of the fireplace.

"Here you go." She said, offering Henderson the steaming mug who then settled in next to her on the couch.

"Thanks." *Just drink the hot chocolate and try not to notice how beautiful she looks in the firelight.* She took a large sip. *Oh God, I'm gonna need more Schnapps.*

They both sat in silence for a few minutes, staring into the roaring fire.

"Patricia?" Erin asked softly from her end of the couch.

"Yeah?" She turned to look at the attractive blonde next to her. She gulped at her astonishing beauty.

"Have I done something to upset you?" Erin stared down into her mug and ran her finger along the rim.

Henderson was silent for a moment and she turned to look away from Erin. She cringed inwardly at having made her feel as such.

"No, of course not." She replied, trying to reassure her as she stared back into the fire.

"You sure?" Erin asked, wanting to believe her but unable to ignore her recent behavior.

"Yes." This time she met her eyes, needing to convince her. "And to prove it to you, I'll even answer that one question you wanted to ask me."

Erin smiled at her and looked back into the fire. She had no idea what to ask her, her own brain too occupied at how the firelight looked against her auburn hair.

"I was only kidding." She said, sipping her cocoa.

"I'm not." Henderson said leaning over to toss a throw pillow at her playfully. "Come on, ask me anything."

Erin blocked the pillow and set her cocoa down on the coffee table. "Ok, Miss writer..." She desperately searched her brain for a question, having no clue what to ask. She drew in a breath and asked the only thing that came into her mind.

"Who's this muse you speak of?" She tossed the pillow back at her and was surprised when she didn't catch it or even try to block it. She just stared at her, a look of obvious shock written all over her face. *Oh God. What am I going to do? Run. Don't let her see it written all over your face.*

"Patricia?" Erin said, swallowing hard. She looked like she had at dinner, like the blood had suddenly been drained from her body.

Henderson rose quickly, setting down her mug. She tried to walk past Erin to head upstairs but Erin reached out and grabbed her arm and stood up alongside her.

"Hey, what's wrong?" She asked softly, searching her blank face for answers.

*Run.* Henderson tried to shake her off, but Erin reached out with her other arm.

"Talk to me? What's going on?" She pleaded.

Henderson opened her mouth to speak, but stopped as her eyes met Erin's. *You're hurting her. Look at her, she thinks she done something wrong.*

"What is it?" Erin tried again, very softly.

Henderson looked down at her hands and Erin let go, not wanting to restrain her. She thought for sure Henderson would continue her flight, but when she didn't move, Erin looked at her and met her eyes.

She found them looking at her, burning a deep blue, just as they had in a dream she had once had. Her cheeks were flushed and her dark red lips quivered.

"It's you." She whispered her voice tight with emotion.

Erin shook her head, not quite understanding. "I don't understand." She said.

"My muse. It's you." She reached out and touched Erin's wrist, needing to feel her hot skin on her own once again.

"Me?" Erin asked overwhelmed with the revelation as well as the desire that was quickly spilling into her blood.

"Yes." Henderson replied huskily. With her grip tightened on Erin's wrist, she then gave into her long hidden want and desire. She pulled Erin into her and wrapped her other hand around the base of her neck.

Erin felt her move in and a rush of desire flushed her face and lips just as Henderson's warm, wet mouth claimed hers with surprising force.

Erin fell back onto the couch, wrapping her arms around Henderson, bringing her down on top of her.

Their tongues danced and dueled and Henderson groaned as Erin took her tongue and sucked on it hungrily.

Henderson knew she had lost the control she had been fighting to hang on to all along. Mac tasted so good, too good. She couldn't stop herself now even if she had wanted to. She kissed her harder, deeper and maneuvered herself between Erin's legs, pressing her thigh against her, rocking into her.

Erin moaned into her mouth and Henderson pulled away and looked down at her, gasping for breath.

"Why did you stop?" Erin asked, her green eyes starving with want.

"Is..is this ok?" Henderson asked, suddenly unsure.

"God yes." Erin said, reaching up and pulling her down again.

Henderson laughed at her new found freedom and she hungrily began licking and sucking the blonde's neck.

Erin arched up at the sensation and tried to raise her hips to grind against Henderson's firm thigh.

With her brain and body pounding with hot blood, she almost gave in and pressed her thigh into Erin's warm crotch. But the moment had been so long in coming, she wanted to make it last.

"Wait." Henderson pulled away again and pressed Erin back down softly. "We should do this..." She traced a finger across Erin's lips and down over her throat. "Slowly." She finished, meeting her eyes.

Erin tried to pull her back down again, needing to feel the heat of her. "Who says we have to go slow?" She grinned, wanting her now, needing her now.

Henderson bent down and kissed her softly, warmly, tenderly before pulling away again.

"Since this is your first time with a woman and all, I thought we should take it slow."

"But this isn't my first time." Erin blurted out without thinking.

Henderson continued looking into her eyes, the statement not yet sinking in.

"What?" She asked, turning her head. But before Erin could answer, she had already figured out what she meant. She pulled away completely and stood up.

"Wait." Erin said, following her.

Henderson stood there next to the couch, looking at her, but looking through her.

"Adams? Was it Adams?" She asked, needing to know. *I'm dying inside. Please, tell me it wasn't her.*

"Does it matter?" Erin asked, wanting Henderson regardless of the past.



"Yes it matters." She shook her head and then met her eyes. "Was she, gentle?" She asked, taking a step closer, suddenly realizing that her first time might not have been pleasurable in any sense of the word.

"Yes." Erin replied, unable to hold her gaze.

Henderson sucked in a breath of air, obviously surprised. *It hurts. Oh God how this hurts.*

"So, was it ok then?" Henderson asked softly although extremely afraid of the answer.

"Yes." Erin said, sitting back down on the couch.

"I see." She ran a hand through her hair. *Somebody kill me now.*

"I don't see why this matters." Erin said quickly, looking up at her. "You've slept with her too."

"You're right Mac. Perhaps we should compare notes." She smacked her hand down against her denim clad leg as it fell from her head. And then, all at once, horrible jealousy and anger overflowed and poured from her.

"Tell me, how many times did she make you come? Did she fuck you so hard you saw Christ?"

"What?" Erin sat up, alarmed. "No, of course not."

"I know what happens on leather night, Mac. You can't fool me. Did she tie you up? Make you her little suck pig?"

"No!" Erin shot up, wanting it to stop. "It wasn't like that at all."

Henderson stopped and ran her hands through her hair again. Her heart thudded loudly in her chest. She could feel the anger burning through her, the jealousy pitting her heart.

"It was wonderful." Erin added softly.

*Wonderful?* Henderson watched her for a moment more in silence before turning and heading out the back door, slamming it behind her.

## Chapter 4

*Friday, August 29th*

*Valle Luna, Arizona*

"It's good to have you back Ms. Adams."

"Thank you Tyson, it's good to be back." She replied while filing through stacks of mail. It was seven o'clock, a mere hour before the club would be hopping and throbbing, oblivious to any of the troubles its owner had recently come face to face with.

"How have things been here?" She asked her reliable head of security.

"Mostly quiet." He replied with his thick, booming voice. "But right after you left, the cops came around asking questions about Blade. They wanted to know if she was involved with you on an intimate level."

"What did you say?" She tossed aside several unimportant envelopes and opened another.

"The truth." He replied in his powerful voice. "I had never seen her around you."

"Thank you Tyson. You've always been a loyal employee, as well as a friend." She looked up at him and met his dark eyes.

Tyson uncrossed his massive arms, a little startled at her soft sincerity. There was a softness in her voice he had never heard before. He examined his long time employer and noted how thin she looked, and something else. The ever-present iciness in her beautiful eyes had seemed to have melted away, leaving warm pools of blue in its place.

"Ms. Adams, if you don't mind my asking, are you feeling ok?" Perhaps she was ill. That would certainly explain her pale and thinner appearance. Maybe even the change in her usually stoic demeanor.

She placed the mail aside, having finished going through it.

"I'm fine Tyson." She stood and walked out of her private room. She headed across the V.I.P room and stood at the railing, looking down on the large dance floor. Several men worked on one of the large light fixtures, having lowered it from the ceiling above.

She heard one of them yell for the power and she watched as the lights came to life, swinging and spotlighting deep blues and purples.

She heard Tyson approach from behind as the steel frame holding the lights began to rise up to its home just below the ceiling.

"Is it true?" He asked from behind her. "What they're saying about Blade?"

She continued her lean, now watching a couple of bartenders readying the bar for the Friday night crowd.

"It seems so." She answered, uncomfortable with the topic.

"What about Ms. Reece?" He asked, walking up to stand next to her.

"What about her?" She glanced over at him, wishing he would leave her be. The discussion was quickly becoming distressing.

"Is she really dead?" He asked softly, obviously affected by what he had heard.

"I don't know anymore than you do Tyson." She pushed herself away from the rail, ready to leave the troublesome conversation. "Now, if you'll excuse me I need to attend to business." She left him standing alone by the railing as she headed back into her private room to make a phone call.

Sitting down on the couch, she picked up her satellite phone and began to dial.

When the private detective didn't answer, she left a message.

"It's Adams. I'm calling to see if you found Erin McKenzie."

She ended the call and rose to go get her check book. She had been running La Femme from afar the past few weeks and had done a fairly good job. But now she was back and it was time to get down to business. She had bills to pay as well as the hiring of two new bartenders to attend to.

With her check book in hand, she pulled the neat stack of envelopes over next to her at the coffee table. She usually did most of her paperwork at her home in the Valle Luna hills, but tonight she needed to be here instead of alone in her big house. The club and its business were great distractions. And distractions were exactly what she needed tonight.

She glanced at her satellite phone, anxious for it to ring. Erin McKenzie was still first and foremost on her mind and yet she didn't know why. She should be able to forget about her; just like she had done every other woman she had ever come across.

Was it because Erin had beaten her at her own game? The game of seduction?

She had told Jay that she cared about Erin. Was that true? And if so, what did it mean? She ran a hand through her dark mane. She did care about her. Hell, she had done nothing but think about her since she had first laid eyes on her.

She opened her checkbook and began the dreaded task of paying the bills. While the work was boring and tedious, she welcomed it, allowing it to free her mind of the young detective who had somehow slipped in under the wire.

When she was done writing away her money, she leafed through several different employment applications, searching for some new bartenders. Tyson had attached a Polaroid of each applicant, knowing that she would want to personally pick each girl. Appearances meant a lot to her, especially since the women represented La Femme. Kris had gotten sloppy in the hiring process, and Blade had been a perfect example of that sloppiness.

And ultimately it seems that Kris had paid the price for her hiring incompetence.

She examined each applicant, leafing through them page after page.

Not a sexy one in the bunch.

Suddenly tired and frustrated, she stood up and stretched. She looked down at her Tag Haeur watch and saw that it was well after eight.

Her muscles felt tight and stressed and as she walked towards her bathroom, she pulled off her clothes to jump in the shower.

She let the hot water beat down on her shoulders and back, pounding the tightness from her tense muscles. She soaped herself and ran her hands down over her taut body. She had lost weight, giving the muscles in her abdomen a carved look and feel. Her legs had lost some muscle mass, but they still looked and felt long and powerful.

She turned to let the water rinse the soap from her front. Her nipples contracted at the forceful fingers of the water and a familiar rush of heat twinged between her legs.

She hadn't been with a woman in weeks and her body was finally starting to protest at being ignored. Under normal circumstances, she would've never gone so long without a woman warming her bed. But with things being as they were, she had been too busy worrying about Jay and thinking of Erin McKenzie too much to care. But now that she was back, there was no reason to continue to starve her ferocious sexual appetite.

In fact, if things went according to plan, Jay would ultimately behave herself and she would finally be able to forget about Erin McKenzie once and for all. She just had to see her again one more time before she would will her mind to forget her.

Rinsing completely off, she emerged from the shower and stared at her reflection. Her strong face and high cheeks appeared pale and tired. The past few weeks had been trying and she reached up and traced the angry red scar in her shoulder. It was there forever, just like the one a little lower on her forearm. They were scars of the flesh as well as scars of horrible moments in time, never to fade away completely.

She combed through her midnight hair and decided to focus on the evening at hand. With the thought of some long awaited female companionship fueling her, she quickly finished getting ready.

Standing in her private room, next to the large bed, she rifled through her closet and decided on her favorite pair of Lucky Brand jeans. They appeared weathered with their worn gravel wash and she pulled on a feather weight charcoal colored tee to go with the jeans. The t-shirt was soft and fit her snug, hugging her breasts and broad, strong shoulders.

With women on her mind, she sprayed on her favorite cologne and laced up a pair of well worn black Dr. Martins. She gave herself the once over in a full length mirror. Her hair was still wet and clinging to the skin of her neck in wet whisks. Her blue eyes were dark and clouded, mixing with the charcoal gray of her shirt.

She ran her long fingers through her bangs and headed out the door, leaving her recent troubles behind her in the room.

She walked out into the dimly lit V.I.P. room. As her eyes adjusted, she visually inspected some of La Femmes patrons. The club had a strict policy in regards to admittance to the V.I.P. room. A woman had to be one of three things. Famous, unbelievably successful, or unbelievably gorgeous. Of course she preferred the ones who had all three.

Continuing to scan and search the several women already up in V.I.P., she passed a few who were lacking at least two of the requirements. She shook off her disappointment and made her way to the rail to overlook the entire club.

"Hey there." A busty bleached out blonde leered at her, looking her up and down.

"Not interested." She said as she made her way past the bleached blonde to size up a more attractive brunette.

The woman had her back to the V.I.P room with her hands on the rail. Adams approached her from behind, laying a soft hand on her shoulder to get her attention.

The woman turned and smiled a familiar smile up at her.

"Hey stranger." Angie grinned and ran her hand lightly up the darker woman's arm.

"Hey yourself."

Angie angled her head up and pulled Adams in for a warm, lingering hello kiss.

The kiss was tender and unbelievably soft. But then again, Angie's kisses usually were. The famous woman's lips were undeniably the best she had ever kissed. All except for one. There was one woman who had felt better under her lips.

She shook the thought from her mind and leaned in next to Angie to overlook the crowd below.

"I thought you had a movie to shoot." She said, more than a little disappointed that she had yet to find an attractive, fuckable woman to take her mind off Erin McKenzie. Angie was hot, more than hot. But she had already had her. Many times and in many different ways.

"I fly out on tomorrow." Angie said, taking a sip of her beer. She was dressed similarly to Adams in worn jeans and black boots. But instead of a t-shirt, a very tight black tank top fit like a second skin across her large breasts, showing off the black Celtic band tattooed around her bicep.

"Shouldn't you be at home, getting your beauty sleep?" Adams asked as she looked down below. Scores of women were already dancing below, all of them up and ready for anything, and she knew that also included her. She knew she could have any woman in the club. The trouble was she didn't want anyone there. The one she wanted was nowhere to be found.

"Why sleep, when I could be here...fucking." Angie said in her sexy deep voice and then laughed and took another drink of her beer.

Adams glanced down at her dancers, the ones she paid to strut their stuff on the raised platforms. It was firefighter night and all them had on yellow firefighter bibs, the wide suspenders covering their bare toned torsos, barely hiding their full breasts.

Rebel Girl by Bikini Kill thumped in through the gigantic sound system and the dancers thrust suggestively at the large fire hoses riding between their legs. The women down below the firefighting dancers screamed with their arms raised in the air as the dancers turned the valves on their hoses and doused them with water. The cold spray of water soaked their white shirts, causing the wet cotton material to cling to their erect dark nipples.

"So how bout it hot stuff?" Angie said turning to trace a finger down Adams strong jaw to her neck. "Wanna fuck?"

Adams turned her head and held her gaze. Angie's beauty never failed to amaze her. The woman was gorgeous and damn near irresistible. But Angie wasn't going to be enough for her tonight and she suddenly began to wonder if anyone would be.

"Maybe later." She said turning back to the crowd, her quest to find another woman not yet dead in the water.

"Ok then." Angie pulled away from the rail. "I'm gonna go find myself a fine piece of ass. And when I do, I'm counting on you to let me use your room." She pursed her full lips and raised an eyebrow at Adams.

Adams laughed and turned to look at her. "You better hurry. I'm hoping to find a piece of my own."

Angie's lips spread into a devilish grin. "Hey, the more the merrier." She turned up her bottle of beer to her grinning lips and walked away.

Adams sighed and turned back to watch the crowd. There were many attractive women down below her, dancing the night away. And she knew that any given one would do anything at the chance to be with her. But it wasn't enough. They weren't enough.

No Doubt's *Hella Good*, blasted into the club from the speakers and she watched as the lights changed to darker hues of blues and purples. She looked across the dance floor and saw Tyson moving his large body through the crowd from the front entrance. A slim brunette was walking closely behind him with a few other security guards flanking her sides.

The crowd of women immediately around them began screaming in excitement and the guards had to push them back in order for Tyson to maneuver them through. She lost sight of them at the bottom of the V.I.P stairs and her interest carried back down to the dance floor.

She was becoming quickly bored and she rested her head on her hand and focused on one of the women with a wet white t-shirt. Her hair was darker, maybe a dark auburn or red. Her breasts weren't large, but rather smaller and firmer and very perky. Her nipples appeared to be a deep rose in color and her face was angular and attractive. Adams watched as her face changed from a smile into one of intense concentration as she raised her hands and danced harder to the music. Her faded jeans were dark with dampness around her waist and Adams noted her tight firm ass and long legs. This one was fuckable, very fuckable.

The woman looked up at her and caught her looking. Adams pushed herself up a little and smirked at her with obvious interest. The woman grinned back and Adams knew she had her. Pushing herself back from the rail, she turned to go after the wet t-shirt woman when she ran smack into Angie, who in turn spilled her new cocktail all over Adams shirt.

"Shit!" Adams whispered under her breath as she wiped at the dark pool the cold liquid had left on her shirt.

"Sorry Liz." Angie said with a chuckle. "I wanted to get you out of your clothes, but not like this."

Adams looked up at her briefly before she looked back down to wipe at her shirt.

"I was just coming to get you." Angie said causing Adams to look back up.

"Yeah, why?" She asked not even the slightest bit interested. Her mind was focused on the fuckable woman downstairs.

"I have someone who wants to meet you."

"Not now Angie, I'm busy. Or at least I soon hope to be." She stepped to the side of her, to walk past her when a breath taking brunette walked into her path.

"Is this her, Angie?" The mysterious woman asked with an aristocratic European accent. Her brown eyes held the fierce blue ones before her. "The ever elusive Elizabeth Adams?"

"The one and only." Angie said stepping back, obviously enjoying the immediate sexual energy between the two.

Adams knew who was standing before her, or she knew of her to be more precise. The strikingly beautiful woman was an actress like Angie, but not yet as popular. Adams straightened a little as her libido instantly kicked in, like a flame catching to gasoline.

"It's so nice to finally meet you Ms. Adams." The slender brunette said extending her warm hand. Adams had to pry her hungry eyes from the woman's breasts in order to see her hand to shake it.

"Please, call me Liz." She managed say in her ever calm and cool manner.

"And call me Kari." She smiled coyly and Adams continued to try and hold her gaze, instead of letting her eyes wonder up and down the seductive outfit Kari wore. The dark brown vest and matching dress slacks were tailor cut to hug her body in all the right places. The vest was open at the top, showing off a very nice and very revealing black lace bra.

"Well, ladies." Angie let out with a pleased smile. "If you'll excuse me...I need to see about getting another drink." She continued to watch them with a smirk as she walked away.

"Looks like you're wet." Kari said, looking Adams up and down and then focusing on her shirt.

"Excuse me?" She said, flustered for the first time in years. She didn't know what was getting to her more, the hungry way Kari was looking at her or the European accent.

"Your shirt." Kari added with a grin. "I'm not yet sure about the rest of you."

Adams swallowed hard at the leading remark. She hadn't been seduced by another woman in a very long time. And the last time had been Angie. It didn't happen very often, but when it did, it always managed to shake her up a bit. She was almost always the one in control and she didn't let go of it easily.

She continued to hold Kari's gaze and she watched as the woman with the lustrous brown hair stepped up to her.

"I've been coming to your club for the past couple of weeks."

"You have." She said in response trying her best to remain calm.

Kari leaned in and inhaled her cologne, careful not to yet touch her.

"Yes. And Angie's told me all about you."

"She has." Adams could smell her hair and her expensive shampoo.

"Yes." Kari stepped back and reached out to touch the cold wet spot on her shirt. "And I must admit, it's finally nice to be able to put a face with the name."

She pressed her warm palm against the wet fabric of the shirt, pressing the cold against the heated skin of Adams torso.

Adams inhaled quickly and flinched at the cold wetness pressed into her by a warm hand.

"You must want to go change." Kari said, licking her lips as she looked back up from the shirt to the fiery blue eyes.

Adams looked down at herself and at Kari's hand. "Yes, I probably should." She met the dark brown eyes and then let her eyes fall to her moist lips.

"I should go with you." Kari whispered, stepping closer to just a breath away from the taller woman's ear. "You might need some help."

Adams stood straighter as she felt her body respond to the words and the hot breath in her ear.

She reached down and took hold of Kari's hand. "Yes, I just might." She said, meeting her eyes once again before leading her across the V.I.P. room to her own very private lair.

A long, luscious night with Kari was just what she needed. And she was more than anxious to explore the beautiful woman first with her eyes, then with her hands and finally her mouth.

She opened the door and led the way in, feeling Kari's sexual aura hot and electric behind her.

"This is very nice." Kari said in her throaty sensual accent. Adams turned to look at her and watched as the European examined the room with her eyes, her gaze falling and fixing on the large bed.

"Can I get you a drink?" Adams offered out of politeness. She felt her desire ignite her nerves, a feeling she wasn't used to experiencing. But then again, this wasn't just any other fuck. This woman was sophisticated and from what she knew of her quite intelligent, fluent in several languages.

Kari looked back to her from the bed and grinned. "What was Angie drinking?"

Adams thought back briefly to Angie and what may have been in the glass before it was spilled.

Kari started to move towards her. "Because whatever it was, that's what I want." She stopped just in front of her and licked her lips again.

"I'll have to go find out then." Adams replied as her body heated with raw animalistic desire.

Kari laughed and hooked her hand in the darker woman's jeans. "Oh no need. There's enough right here." She tugged Adams closer while holding her gaze. And then with her free hand she eased up her wet shirt and bent to lick at Adams with her hot tongue.

"Mmmmm." She said as she licked all over her abdomen. "Yes there's plenty."

Her brain pounding with molten lust, Adams grabbed the European and pulled her up for a deep, heated kiss. Kari groaned into her and continued to pull at her t-shirt, but she was no match physically for the strength of Adams who held her hands down firmly by her wrists.



Kari pulled away as Adams began sucking on her long tongue.

"No baby, not yet." She grinned devilishly and took a step back. "If what Angie says about you is true, then there's no rush. We can go all night." Adams let go of her wrists and wiped at her own lips, the taste of Kari fresh and tantalizing, driving her mad.

Kari stepped up to her again and urged her back towards the bed. "Sit." She instructed as she shoved her back down on the spacious bed. Adams thought about resisting, about creating a powerful erotic interlude between them, like she had with Angie. But instead, she sat back on her elbows and decided to wait and see what Kari had in mind.

The beautiful woman slowly began to dance, the music of the club easily heard in the room. Adams watched as her hips began to sway in rhythm with the sultry beat, her hands working over them, her tongue darting seductively across her lips.

Slowly and surely her fingers found their way up to the buttons of her tailored brown vest. One by one she unbuttoned the vest while she continued to sway closer and closer to the bed.

Adams tensed in need as she watched the gorgeous brunette perform her sexy striptease. She watched as the agile fingers finished with the vest, spreading it open and then slipping it off to expose the black lacy bra. Her skin was smooth and olive, stretching beautifully across a toned mid drift.

Suddenly, an image of another woman flashed quickly in her mind. A firmly toned mid drift and ample breasts, slighter fuller than Kari's. She shook her head as the blonde's face cried out in pleasure at her.

She blinked and refocused on Kari who was inching closer, unbuttoning her dress slacks as she danced. She stood before Adams and straddled her knee and lower thigh where she grinded against her, allowing Adams to feel her hot center penetrating right through the blue jeans.

"Can you feel me?" Kari asked as she tugged Adams by her shirt. "Can you feel how wet I am for you?"

"Yes." Adams said just before Kari bent in to envelope her with her mouth. Kari's tongue plowed into her, claiming and conquering. Adams reached out to grab her thrusting ass and Kari pulled away with a loud smack as their mouths protested in parting.

"Not yet." Kari said, shaking a finger at the taller, darker woman. She stepped away from the firm thigh between her legs and began dancing again, easing her pants down as she swung her hips.

Adams watched in silence as a pair of black lace panties came into view. Kari turned slowly, revealing the thong as she teased, shaking the beautifully smooth globes of her ass at Adams.

The taller woman eased back on her elbows again, thoroughly enjoying the show. Kari held her gaze with her smoldering brown eyes. She then stepped out of her pants and tossed them aside to stand before Adams in the matching black thong and bra.

Adams clenched her eyes shut as another image of the blonde flashed in her mind. She blinked again, needing to erase Erin from her mind. But Erin remained, and on the bed where she now layed, arching her back up in ecstasy begging for Adams to release her.

"Are you ready for me now?" Kari asked, standing before her, watching her like a hungry tigress.

Adams managed to blink Erin away and she tried desperately to refocus. "Ye..." She started to say, but a loud ringing sounded from the couch. She sat up suddenly recognizing it as her satellite phone.

"What is it?" Kari asked, turning towards the sound. "Your phone? Let it ring." She approached and bent down towards Adams. "We were just about to get started." She tried to gently push Adams back down, but the stronger woman resisted and rose to jog to the phone.

Adrenaline surged through her as she ran. The thought of the information at the other end of the phone fueled her heart to pump at a maddening pace.

"Adams." She said as she snatched up the phone.

"I got your girl." The private detective said proudly.

"Where?" Adams ran her hand through her hair as she sat down on the couch.

"Utopia. And she's with your old flame."

"Patricia?" She asked a little surprised.

"They're up at her new abode on Spruce Mountain." The P.I. confirmed

"Are they..." A knot formed in her throat as the possibility of Erin and Patricia together intimately entered her mind.

"Fucking?" The P.I. finished for her with a chuckle. "I don't know Liz, they look pretty cozy all snuggled up in that cabin."

Adams sat in silence for a moment as her face rushed with heated jealousy. A feeling that had never before coursed through her veins. Its effect was instant and devastating, like tiny shards of crystals invading every cell.

"Thanks." She said as she ended the call and then rested her head in her hands.

"Are you ready now?" Kari asked from the bed. "Because I'm ready for you."

Adams lifted her head up and turned to look at the bed. Kari was lying on the bed, the bra gone, her legs spread. She was circling her nipples with the fingers of one hand, causing them to cluster with excitement. Her other was edging the black panties, slowly, carefully. Every once in awhile delving in and under the black fabric to stroke at her warm flesh.

"I saved the panties for you. I thought you might want to chew through them." She said in an accented voice saturated with sexuality.

The site should've made Adams cream her jeans on the spot. But shockingly it did nothing to her. Her cresting libido had all but dissipated down into the dark pit of her stomach, eaten up by the ravenous green monster of jealousy.

"Some other time." She said as she rose quickly.

"What?" Kari asked completely startled.

Adams ignored her as she dug in her pocket to retrieve her car keys. She then opened the door and stepped out of her private room, leaving a hot and horny Kari calling out after her.

She took two quick strides, suddenly anxious to leave the pulsating club and all that it held. But a large, thick muscled body stepped in her path.

"Ms.Adams." Tyson said in a worried tone. She knew immediately by the look on his face that something was wrong.

"What is it?" She asked as she watched his hand come up to press against his white ear piece.

He stepped closer to her, letting his hand fall to once again rest as his side.

"Sorry to disturb you ma'am, but some of the guards out front have alerted me of police presence."

"Where?" She said as she moved past him.

"They're currently demanding entrance to the club." He fell into stride next to her and they walked briskly to the stairs.

"I don't have time for this Tyson. They've harassed me enough." She walked quickly down the stairs, the wetness from her previous arousal suddenly feeling cold in her crotch. With her mind instantly firing in regards to the police and what they might want, Kari had all but become a distant memory.

"I understand ma'am. I'm getting word that they're insisting that you come with them."

"What for?" She asked, extremely agitated at the thought. They hit the ground floor and she could see a crowd forming at the door. She slowed her pace and walked once again with her stoic confidence. Agitated or not, she still had to give the impression of being totally in control.

A few of her patrons stopped in their tracks to stare after her. She gave them her sly grin and continued with Tyson out to the front entrance.

The guards gave way and she came face to face with a large bellied man who took it upon himself to shove his police badge in her face.

She smirked at him and his partner, having seen them both before. "Relax detective, I believe you."

He looked momentarily embarrassed and quickly tucked the badge back into his breast pocket.

"Elizabeth Adams?" He asked loudly, his voice a little raspy.

"Gentleman, you know who I am." She said as she moved them further out of the club. The last thing she needed was the cops creating another scene in front of her paying patrons.

The plump detective started to speak but then fell silent, a little startled at her soft and polite tone.

"Now what's this all about?" She asked, looking at the more attractive and far be it more sensible man standing next to the loud one.

"We need you to come with us please." He said, offering her nothing more.

"And why, gentlemen, would I want to do that?"

The fat man stepped in again. "Because if you don't, we'll arrest you."

She crossed her arms and raised an eyebrow at the two men wearing bad ties.

"You have a warrant?" She asked, trying to remain calm when what she really wanted to do was tear their heads off. She couldn't believe what she was hearing but yet she wasn't totally surprised. She had her suspicions as to the reason for their presence.

The quieter cop shook his head. "Yes we do."

She turned and looked at her head of security.

"Call my attorney. Tell her I went politely with these gentlemen downtown."

"Yes ma'am." Tyson said, eying the two men carefully before turning to head back into the club.

"Shall we then?" She asked, extending her arm to allow them to lead the way. Then, walking behind them, she clenched her jaw and willed herself to keep her temper in check. She knew had a long night ahead of her.

## **Chapter 5**

*Saturday, August 30*

*Utopia, Arizona*

Erin stood hunched down over the bathroom sink, splashing crisp cold water upon her face. She gasped as its chill seeped into her skin, forcing every pore to awaken and then to shrink into submission.

She stood straighter and turned off the water. The mirror over the sink told her grim tale. The nightmares held her once sparkling eyes prisoner, leaving them clouded and obscure. She leaned on the bathroom counter, her face dripping, her own eyes now a strangers.

It was six am and sleep had refused to visit her the night before. Instead it had toyed with her and teased her, allowing her to just drift off before attacking her with nightmares. She stared at her weary reflection as the last nightmare replayed in her mind, it having been the most disturbing of them all.

It had started off the same as the others with her in Henderson's bedroom the night of the shooting. But this time the dream had allowed her to see a face. A hauntingly familiar face. One so familiar that it had left her almost completely convinced that it was Elizabeth Adams. The blue eyes had been icy and fierce, just like Adams. The hair had been as black as midnight, contrasting sharply against the eyes. Even though the hair was

cut shorter than how Adams wore hers, the similarity was strong enough to lead Erin to believe that it had indeed been her in that room that night. She shuddered as the worst part of the nightmare invaded her mind. The beautiful dark woman had been the one who had attacked Henderson, striking her hard on the head, knocking the detective unconscious. And then the woman had raised her gun, aiming it at Erin.

She reached for a towel and patted her face dry as she tried to shake the nightmare from her mind. After all, she didn't know what the dream meant. Dreams were almost always fragments of strange and unusual subconscious thoughts or memories. How could she claim that it was something more tangible when she wasn't even sure herself? Her mind had, in recent weeks, become her own worst enemy and who's to say that it wasn't just playing another cruel trick?

Exhausted and frustrated she padded into the kitchen and put on a pot of coffee. Then, hugging herself from the early morning chill, she made her way over to the sitting room where she sat on the couch with her knees pulled up to her chest.

Outside the floor to ceiling window, she watched as dawn rose to burn itself through the mountain mist. A black and white woodpecker hopped about the redwood railing, making his way to the large Ponderosa pine the two squirrels called home. Once there, he positioned himself along its side and went about drilling into the bark, searching for his breakfast.

She rubbed the chill bumps on her legs and reached up to the back of the couch to pull down a warm throw blanket. In an instant, she was warm and relaxed and she happened to glance over at the coffee table where a copy of one of Henderson's books lay. Reaching down, she scooped it up and settled back into the warm blanket against the couch.

She examined the book carefully, running her fingers softly across the cover like a caress. It was hard to believe that the woman who had written the beautiful words lay sound asleep in the loft above. She inhaled deeply as she remembered the kisses they had shared on the very couch where she now sat.

Henderson had felt so hot against her own skin. Burning into her, searing right through her, going straight to her heart. She opened the book and continued running her fingers over the pages. She had upset Henderson that night, during their brief but heated encounter. And as it was, the writer hadn't said much to her since.

Every waking hour since then, she had considered going after the beautiful detective, taking her in her arms, enveloping her in another series of hot kisses. She was attracted to the writer in an unbelievable way. With this case, a new sense had invaded her body like a ferocious virus. And after her incredible sexual encounter with Elizabeth Adams, she had been feeling as if she would implode if she didn't have another woman and soon. And not just any woman, but Henderson. She was attracted to her words, her beauty, her body.

Christ, she was going insane with wanton lust.

She turned the book to the page she had last read, marked with the corner folded down. To help ease her tortured mind, she focused on the words and allowed the book to pull her into its world full of sexual innuendo, budding romance and raging passion.

Henderson awoke to the dark, powerful scent of coffee. The morning light poured in from the side window of the loft, caressing the room with light blues and grays. She pulled back the covers and walked to the edge of the loft where she stood in her tank top and panties, looking down into the cabin.

She knew Mac didn't drink coffee and she was more than surprised to smell it brewing. She braced herself against the top of the stairs and leaned over to see if she could see Mac. She squinted into the bright morning light, it cascading in more powerfully through the floor to ceiling windows she now faced.

Her blue eyes did their best to awake and adjust as they panned the room below. Movement from the sitting room caught her attention and she focused on the couch where Mac lay with a book open on her chest.

Mac was awake after all. Turning back towards her bed, she retrieved her satin robe and slipped it on over her shoulders. Jack peeked his head out from the covers and greeted her with a yawn before jumping off the bed to beat her down the stairs. She followed after him, thinking to herself that Mac must've had another sleepless night to be up so early.

"Good morning." She said softly once she reached the bottom of the stairs. Jack trotted over to the back door and scratched, anxious to go greet the morning. She moved along the back of the couch to the door where she opened it to let him out.

Mac had not responded to her and she turned from the door and this time walked in front of the couch to see what was going on.

"Good..." She started to say again, thinking that perhaps Mac hadn't heard her. But she stopped herself as she walked closer, observing that Mac wasn't awake and reading like she had thought. But rather, she had fallen asleep with the book open, and it lay on her chest under her hands.

Henderson smiled at the sleeping beauty, noting the dark smudges under her eyes from all her sleepless nights. She tucked the blanket in around her, careful not to wake her. As she stood over her, the older woman thought about touching her, of lightly stroking her beautiful sleeping face.

She thought back to how Mac had tasted in her mouth. About how her tight and muscled body had reacted beneath her, as if it were hungry for her. And then she thought about the confession. The confession that Mac had slept with Elizabeth Adams. It had been over twenty four hours since the words had torn into her soul and eaten her alive. She rested her hand over her heart as the pain set in again.

With her heart shattering beneath her chest, she turned from Mac and walked into the kitchen for some much needed coffee. As she poured herself a mug full of the piping hot liquid, she glanced back over at the couch to where Erin lay. She knew she could go to her, to declare her love and desire, to then take her into her arms and into her bed. But the jealousy she felt wouldn't allow it. Sure, she could tell herself that she could get past it, that she could forget. But she was realistic enough to know that she couldn't. It would always be there deep inside waiting for her to be happy just before it began to eat away at her again, devouring the happiness she so sought.

With heaviness weighing on her heart she sipped at her coffee. She hadn't bothered with cream or sweetener, needing to swallow it black and strong. She hadn't slept so well the past few nights herself and she needed the coffee to empower her wounded heart, to feed her blood with energy.

Since Mac's confession about Adams, the vision of the two together making wild, passionate love had invaded her mind, torturing her to no end. It was almost worse knowing what Adams was like in bed first hand. She

knew how powerful and amazing sex was with the dark woman. And hearing Erin confess as much had literally killed her inside. Killed not just her heart, but the hopes and dreams she had had in regards to Mac. And the word Mac had used, "wonderful." It still plagued her mind. She had slept with Adams many times during their brief courtship and "wonderful" was not a word she would have ever chosen to describe the sex between them. "Wonderful" made it sound beautiful and even *tender*. And the way Erin had said the word...so soft.

She cringed as the jealousy began gnawing at her insides once more. She stared down into her coffee mug, suddenly feeling nauseous.

"No...no!"

Henderson snapped her head up to look at the couch. Erin was writhing against it, her face contorted as if she were in pain. She was moaning and thrashing her head from side to side.

She was having another nightmare.

Henderson set down her mug and hurried into the sitting room. She made her way to the front side of the couch where she knelt down beside the blonde.

"Mac." She said softly, placing her hand on her shoulder to gently shake her. But Erin continued to squirm beneath her hand, whimpering with fear.

"Mac." She said a little louder, increasing the pressure of her hand.

Erin's hands flew up, grabbing the hand on her shoulder. Her eyes fluttered open and she sat up in an instant, fear written all over her face. Henderson pulled her arm away to rest both hands on Erin's clammy and flushed cheeks.

Erin's eyes were wide and searching, unsure of where she was.

"Hey, it's ok." Henderson offered, trying to ground the blonde back into reality. "It was just a nightmare."

Erin moved her eyes over to lock onto Henderson's dark blue ones. Her heart was hammering in her ears, the nightmare still thick and sticky, difficult to claw completely out of.

She tried to steady her breathing and she held fast to the comforting blue eyes before her, allowing them to anchor her into reality. Finally, she shook her head to let Henderson know that she was ok.

The writer let her hands fall away from Erin's warm and damp face. She moved to sit next to her on the couch, where her hand found its way to Erin's back and tense shoulder.

"You want to talk about it?" She offered lightly, not wanting to pressure her.

Erin wiped at her face and took in a shaky breath. "It's the same dream." She said, meeting the blue eyes once again. "Only now I'm seeing more of the movie."

Henderson rubbed her shoulder with silent encouragement. "Like what?" She asked.

"Like, there's another person there now." She said as she braced her head in her hands and grabbed at her hair, not wanting the images to return.

"Another person? You mean other than us and Blade?" Henderson asked as her own heart rate began to pick up.

"Yes." The younger woman breathed out.

"Who is it?" The coffee was quickly rising up to her throat in an angry manner. She swallowed it back down, fighting the nausea.

"I...I'm not sure." Erin said not wanting to say what her mind already suspected. Something deep inside her told her to keep the memories to herself. And every time she considered the fact that Adams might very well have been there that night, her mind quickly reminded her of their night of shared passion. And then it became extremely difficult for her to imagine that such a tender, passionate and sensual human being could indeed be a cold blooded killer.

Henderson studied the troubled blonde with the sleep tousled hair. Worry lined her face, settling alongside the dark circles under her eyes. She hated the pain and agony that Mac was having to endure. She wished she could take it away for her, to somehow make it all better. But she couldn't. All she could do was stick by her and help to see her through it.

Henderson sighed and then gave Mac a soft pat on her knee. "Well, I'm sure it will come to you. Try not to force it, just let it come on its own." It was the best advice she could think to give her. And as she studied Mac's face she hoped the memories would come sooner than later. For Mac's sake.

Erin shook her head and silently hoped that Henderson was right.

"How bout some coffee?" Henderson asked, with a lighter more carefree tone.

"Coffee?" She asked, less than thrilled. She looked up as Henderson rose off the couch to head into the kitchen.

"Yes and don't try to tell me you don't like it." She smiled as she rounded the counter to fetch the pot.

"I don't like it." Erin confirmed as she stood to stretch. "But like it or not it's become my new best friend." Her taste buds protested at the thought of the bold liquid but her mind desperately needed it. It had become her fuel, allowing her to get through the day on such little sleep.

Henderson poured the rookie a mug full of coffee. With the cup full and steaming, she glanced up to hand it over as Erin reached the kitchen.

"What do you say we go on a little adventure today?" Henderson asked, watching Erin take small sips from the mug.

Erin raised her tired eyebrows and looked at the auburn haired beauty over her mug. "Like what?" She asked more than a little curious, but also afraid she wouldn't have the energy.

"I was thinking we could take the ATV out on the trail and head down towards Lynx Lake for some fishing." She suggested casually, afraid of overwhelming the tired blonde. As she let Erin ponder the suggestion, she busied herself with reheating her own cold coffee with some fresh from the pot.

Erin thought for a moment, thinking through how much energy her body would need in order to accomplish the tasks. Riding on the ATV would only require her to hang on to Henderson, a feat she was more than ready to do, regardless of her low energy. And the fishing, well she had never been but it sounded relaxing enough.



"Ok." She replied. "But I've never been fishing before."

Henderson looked at the young blonde over her mug. "Never?" She asked, truly surprised.

Erin merely shook her head and gave a tired smile. "Never."

"Well then, we'll just have to change that won't we?" Henderson said with a smile. "Now, how bout some breakfast?" Her nausea had given way to hunger and Erin looked like she could use a good meal, especially after staying up more than half the night.

"I don't know." The blonde replied, feeling like she just wanted to sit and stare into oblivion, too exhausted to even chew.

"You've got to eat Mac." Henderson said gently. "It will help with your energy."

Erin sat down at the table and continued to drink her coffee. "Ok." She said, less than enthusiastic.

"Spanish omelet ok?" The writer asked while clanging a frying pan free from the cupboard.

"Sounds terrific." Erin managed with a half smile.

An hour later and with a hearty breakfast behind them, the pair locked up the cabin and packed up the ATV.

Erin stood back while Henderson fastened the fishing rods and tackle equipment to the back cargo basket of the Honda ATV. With the exception of riding on a Harley Davidson with Adams, she had never before ridden on motorcycles or ATVs. As she watched Henderson finish packing their snacks and belongings, a stirring of raw desire began to flutter against her insides.

Just knowing that she would soon be nestled comfortably up against Henderson excited her tired body instantly. Intense and powerful memories of clinging to Elizabeth Adams invaded her head and she closed her eyes, wishing she could relive the experience. Adams had felt so strong and powerful under her own hands as they had hurtled away from the setting sun with the Harley roaring between their legs.

Suddenly, another image of Adams flashed like a brilliant burst of light in her mind. The dark, sexy woman stood leering at her, nearly nude in the black bikini.

Erin licked her lips as she remembered their various encounters, wishing she had been free to do as she pleased with the dark seductress. She wished even more that she had possessed the confidence to act upon her powerful desires. Instead of being the naïve, wide eyed and curious rookie detective that she really was and was most likely perceived.

She opened her eyes as a disturbing image attacked to kill the pleasant memories. Allowing the vision of the laughing, dark haired woman with the piercing blue eyes the freedom to disrupt and disturb. She shook the image away, not wanting to believe it what it was forcing her to see.

It just couldn't be real. Her memory was wrong, it had to be.

"Ready?" Henderson asked with a smile. She then climbed on board and scooted forward on the seat of the green machine. Jack ran from Erin's side to jump up in Henderson's arms. She patted his white head and set him in the front cargo basket on top of some folded blankets. He sat happily, wagging his tail with anticipation.

Erin stood and observed Henderson in her hiking boots, her olive green cargo shorts and faded gray Timberland t shirt. It was hardly an eye catching outfit, but the site stirred her nonetheless. She let her eyes travel up her toned arms and legs to her beautiful face, partially hidden under a worn and faded ball cap. Her thick auburn hair was pulled through the cap and it bounced against the top of her neck.

Erin wiped her hands on her own t-shirt and jeans and walked up to green ATV. A little unsure of herself, she mounted the back of the Honda and arranged herself on the black warm seat. She stared down at her own hands, knowing she had to hold on, but afraid of touching Henderson. So instead, she sat there behind the beautiful woman, blushing like a hormone driven teenage boy.

Henderson turned her head back towards Erin. "You better hang on so we can get started." She said with her chin touching her shoulder.

"Where exactly..." Erin asked, more than a little embarrassed and unsure.

"Hang on to me." She clarified, seeming at ease with the idea.

Shrugging, Erin puffed out a long breath and wrapped her hands tentatively around Henderson's hips. She then heard the ATV grumble to life and her body jerked as they started to move up towards the dirt road.

Erin held on a little tighter as they hit the road and increased speed. Her hands traveled forward to encircle Henderson's waist. Enjoying the feel of the cool wind, she leaned into Henderson, pressing herself against her and resting her chin on her shoulder.

Jack sat out in front, his front paws on the rim of the basket, piloting their journey proudly, barking into the wind.

Erin had expected her body to be overwhelmed with desire at the close contact like she had experienced with Adams. But instead, her body relaxed against Henderson and she was soon lulled to sleep by the wind and the steady rocking of the ATV as it carried them onward and forward.

When she opened her eyes again, Henderson was patting her hand to let her know they had arrived. Releasing her grip on the older woman, Erin blinked and climbed off the ATV while her eyes took in the beautiful scene before her.

The blue water shimmered in the summer sun, spanning throughout the tall green pines. Jack had already jumped out of his basket and he bounded back and forth between his owner and the water with excitement. Erin shaded her eyes and scanned the shore of the wilderness lake. There was no one around for miles. The lake appeared to be completely secluded.

"What do you think?" Henderson asked her as she moved to retrieve the fishing rods.

Erin quickly stepped up to help, offering her hands to help carry their items.

"It's beautiful." She said, completely relaxed and at ease from her nap.

They walked the few yards to a long dock and headed out to its end. Henderson spread out the thick blankets and they settled in under the warm sun and got under way with readying their poles.

Erin didn't have to do much since she didn't know how and she eased back on her elbows to watch the wind caress the surface of the water.

Henderson threaded the poles with fishing line, attaching weights and hooks, trying hard not to stare at Erin who looked like a blonde angel with the golden sunlight and the wind playing in her short hair.

"Here you go." The writer said as she handed over Erin's pole.

The younger woman sat up and took the awkward feeling pole in her hands. "What now?" She asked, eyeing the small golden hook.

"Now," Henderson said pulling out a Ziploc bag full of hot dogs. "We hook on the leeches."

"Leeches!" She looked at Henderson with wide eyes, truly alarmed and disgusted.

The older woman laughed heartily. "You're too easy Mac." She held up the Ziploc bag for Erin to see. "How about hot dogs? Do they put the fear of God into you?"

Erin slugged her hard in the arm. "Bitch." She whispered with a grin. "Someday I'll get you back for that one."

Henderson laughed. "Yeah right."

Determined, Erin set down her pole and quickly got up on her knees. She moved into Henderson, first easing back her ball cap, then placing her hands on the older woman's face. She gazed longingly into the deep blue eyes and pulled her closer for a warm kiss.

Completely surprised, Henderson had little time to react as she felt Erin's tongue gently probing her mouth seeking permission to explore.

Henderson's head swam with warm desire, her heart raced and swelled within her chest. She reached out with her free hand, unsure if she should embrace the blonde or gently push her away. Lucky for her, Erin made the decision for her and ended the kiss with a tender dislodging of their lips.

The blonde grinned proudly and sat back on her haunches. "Told you I would get you back. Bet you weren't expecting that."

Henderson licked Erin from her lips and stared at her a little dumbfounded. "No, I wasn't expecting that." She said quietly as she re-positioned her ball cap.

Erin repositioned herself and picked her fishing pole back up. Jack came running out on the dock, the smell of hotdogs carried to him with the wind. Henderson pulled off a piece and tossed it at him before she began hooking the remaining pieces onto their hooks.

The kiss had been unsettling to her in more ways than one. She knew she needed to talk to Mac, but she wasn't even sure what to say. Especially when her own feelings weren't exactly clear.

"Mac?" She said as she readied Erin's pole with the bait. She glanced up and saw that the younger woman was looking at her, listening. "We should talk." She stood and held on to her own pole, ready to cast it out.

"Alright." Erin said, as she followed Henderson and stood from her sit. She watched as Henderson flipped the fly wheel, brought the rod back over her shoulder and then cast the line out.

Erin looked down at her rod and did the same, feeling the line give quickly as she brought it back and then thrust it forward out into the lake. Her cast didn't go nearly as far as Henderson's but it went out far enough.

Henderson quickly flipped the flywheel back over for her. "Now just reel it in a little to pull it tight." She instructed as she demonstrated with her own rod before she sat down again on the blankets.

Erin did the same, returning back down on the blankets while holding her rod with both hands, convinced she was about to catch a large fish.

Henderson leaned back and turned on her side to face Erin, holding her rod with one hand. "Mac, when you kissed me just now, what did you feel?"

Erin looked at her, a little surprised at the question. "I don't know...I guess I didn't think too much about it."

"Are you attracted to me?" Henderson asked.

"Yes." Erin responded meeting the dark blue eyes before she looked away a little embarrassed.

"Is that all it is then? Attraction?"

Erin couldn't look back at her, and she swallowed hard as her face burned in response to the questioning. "I don't understand." She said softly.

Henderson reeled her line in a little more before continuing. "Do you have any other feelings for me, other than the physical attraction?"

"Of course." She said with conviction, this time looking up at her again. "I care about you a great deal." She didn't know what Henderson was getting at but she wanted to make sure the older woman knew that she cared.

"Mac, I think what you're feeling right now is normal." She said gently. "When a woman is first awakened, so to speak, to her sexual attraction to women, she often..."

"Feels like she's going to die if she doesn't have sex with a woman again soon?" Erin finished for her.

Henderson shook her head and softly chuckled. "Yeah. I guess it's safe to say you're having those feelings then."

Erin shook her head. "I guess it's pretty obvious."

"Yeah, it was that whole kissing thing that tipped me off." She teased as she tossed her a grin and reeled in her rod again.

"But it doesn't mean that I don't care about you." Erin said quickly, needing to clarify.

"I know." Henderson said, sitting up once again. "But I don't think it would be wise for me to act on our mutual attraction right now." It pained her to say the words but she knew that she was saving them both some future heartaches.

Erin looked out over the water, still holding her rod tight in her hands. The wind was blowing her line to her left, but she didn't care. She could hear Jack running and barking along shore, enjoying his new adventure.

"So you're telling me in a nice way to keep my lips to myself." She said, feeling a dark loneliness spread throughout her chest.

"Just from me, yeah." She said, not wanting to hurt her feelings. "It's not easy resisting you, you know. I care about you too, which is why I have to do this."

Erin shook her head in understanding. "I know." She said. "But that still doesn't change the fact I feel like I'm going to die if I don't have a woman again soon." She smiled as she said the words. As ridiculous as they sounded, they were true.

Henderson laughed and drew her line all the way in to recast.

"It's not funny." Erin said as she watched the older woman stand to throw her line back out. "What am I supposed to do now?"

Henderson sat back down and looked her way. "Find some hot babe with an insatiable sexual appetite and screw your brains out."

Erin scoffed. "Yeah right, easier said than done."

"Are you kidding me? With your looks and charm, you'll be beating them off with a stick."

Erin started to protest but her pole jerked in her hands. She let out a little scream as it jerked again, this time harder. Panicked, she stood and clung to pole as it bent in a stressed arch.

Henderson set down her own pole and came quickly to the blonde's side. "You got one." She said as she helped her to pull on the pole. "Reel it in."

Erin looked down at her reel and began painstakingly winding against the thrashing fish. Henderson yanked the pole up over and over, helping her to win the battle against the fighting fish.

"Ok, you got it. It's coming up." Henderson let go of the pole and went to edge of the dock with a net. "A little closer, Mac." She said as she knelt down over the edge, swooping the net down into the water.

"There! Your first fish." She said as she stood and turned with the silver flopping fish in her net.

Erin looked at the net, her hands still hot and charged with the intense battle. She pried the pole from her hands and walked up to look at the fish.

"That is what I fought for?" She said completely shocked at how small the fish was. "No way." She said placing her hands on her hips. "That's not my fish. The one I reeled in weighed at least ten pounds."

Henderson laughed and set the net and the fish down on the warm dock.

"They never are as big as they feel." She explained as she knelt down over the fish and yanked the hook free from its mouth. "Here, he's yours. Send him back out to grow bigger." She said, holding the fish up towards the younger woman.

Erin looked at the silver fish, his mouth opening and closing, struggling for oxygen. Jack trotted up behind them and eased his way up toward the fish, truly curious.

"You go ahead." Erin said, suddenly afraid that the fish would die if it didn't get back in the water soon.

Henderson stood and walked back to the edge of the dock where she knelt and released the fish back into the water.

Jack barked as the fish took off like lightning, back to find his family and his home.

Erin sat back down on the blankets, once again feeling exhausted. In a way, Henderson had done the same to her. She had set her back out to find her way. She looked up as Henderson once again offered to bait her rod, but Erin shook her head no, having had her fill of fishing. Instead, she lay back on the blankets and listened to the water lap against the shore and she relaxed as the warm sunshine melted her troubles away allowing sleep to once again find her.

When she opened her eyes again, Jack's barking was echoing throughout the lake. She shaded her sleepy eyes against the sun and heard Henderson walking on the dock. Sitting up, she turned and saw Henderson making her way up the shore to where a vehicle sat with its engine idling. Jack ran alongside his owner, barking at the car and its occupants as they emerged.

Erin stood and smoothed out her t-shirt as she walked along the dock towards Henderson and the vehicle. The car was an unmarked police cruiser and Erin picked up her pace as she saw Jeff Hernandez climb out to meet Henderson.

"Hey Hernandez, this is quite a surprise." Henderson said to the male detective as another person climbed out of the car.

Jeff rounded the front of the vehicle and glanced over at his passenger.

"Henderson, this is Detective Sinclair."

"Audrey." The woman clarified as she stepped up to shake Henderson's hand.

"She just transferred down from Seattle." Jeff said as he watched Erin walked towards them from the shore.

Henderson shook the woman's hand and got a good look at her before she looked away, careful not to stare. Audrey stood a little taller than she herself did, standing at about 5'9. Her dirty blonde hair was worn similar to Mac's with messy spikes but she looked very different from Mac in every other way. Her body wasn't as muscular or curvy. Instead it was longer and leaner, more like a swimmers build.

"Nice to meet you, Detective." Henderson said, sneaking another look. The new detective was strikingly handsome with a strong face, near perfect features and warm light brown eyes, which appeared almost gold in the sunlight.

"Likewise." Audrey said before slipping her hands into her dark dress slacks.

Henderson did the same, allowing her hands to find a home in the pockets of her cargo shorts. She tried not to notice the way Audrey looked, or the way she was dressed. But it was hard to ignore her dark dress slacks with the wider belt. Or the tight fitting collared v neck shirt which shimmered silver in the sunlight and did its best to accentuate her trim torso and firm breasts. If Audrey wasn't gay, it was a damn shame.

"If you don't mind my asking," Audrey started, catching Henderson off guard. "Are you the one who's the writer? Katherine Chandler?"

Henderson looked as if she had been struck. She had never been asked before and the question more than completely surprised her.

"Forgive me," Audrey said immediately. "It's just that I've read over the files on the Adams case and well...I saw Katherine Chandler and..."

"Yes," Henderson said softly. "I'm Katherine Chandler." She had kept it a secret so long she hadn't known what it was like to actually say the words aloud.

"I'm a huge fan," Audrey said with a gorgeous smile.

Henderson cleared her throat and felt her face flush with heat. "Thank you." She finally managed to say just before Erin reached them.

"Hey Jeff," Erin greeted. "What's going on?" She came to stand next to Henderson and she eyed the attractive woman standing next to Hernandez. Henderson was right, her hormones were raging and it was more than evident now as she imagined devouring the strange woman from head to toe.

"We've been trying to reach you for over twenty four hours," He said as he stepped up to stand beside the new detective.

Henderson brought her hand up to her forehead in frustration. "My phone line up here hasn't been put in yet. Not till next week. Did you try my cell?" She asked as she placed her hands on her hips, looking at Hernandez with concern.

"Several times," He responded.

Erin looked over at Henderson. "My cell phone has trouble finding a signal up here."

"That's what we figured," Hernandez stated looking at his long time friend. "By the way, Mac this is Detective Sinclair. Our new dic from Seattle."

"Please, call me Audrey," The handsome woman said as she shook Erin's hand. Erin openly stared at her, perplexed not just by her beauty but by her presence. She looked back over at Jeff, suddenly alarmed.

"So what's going on guys?" She asked, meeting both their eyes.

Jeff sighed and leaned back against the cruiser with his arms crossed.

"A lot," He said, always hating to be the one who delivered bad news. "We need you to come back with us Mac."

"Why?" She asked, almost afraid at the answer.

"We know Elizabeth Adams was there the night of the shooting." Audrey said matter of factly.

Erin swallowed hard and her mind spun quickly, leaving her feeling dizzy.

*No, it was just a dream. It can't be.*

Henderson looked just as shocked as Erin. "Are you sure?" She asked.

"Positive." Jeff said. "She bled all over your carpet."

Erin reached out and steadied herself against Henderson.

"We just recently got the DNA results back from the lab." Audrey clarified.

"Mac are you ok?" Jeff asked, pushing himself up from the car, a look of concern on his face.

Erin tried to smile as she offered reassurance. "Yes." She said softly.

"That's why you're here." Henderson thought aloud. "You're afraid she's going to come after Mac."

"Not exactly." Jeff said.

Henderson glanced first at Hernandez and then at Audrey, silently urging her to explain.

"We already have Adams in custody." Audrey stated.

"You're kidding." Henderson let out, completely amazed. "How on earth did you ever manage that?" She asked, this time looking at Hernandez for the answer.

Jeff shrugged, just as baffled as Henderson. "She came in willingly."

"Unbelievable." Henderson whispered to herself.

"And..." Jeff said looking back between Henderson and Erin. "She says she's only willing to talk to Mac."

## **Chapter 6**

*Saturday, August 30*

*1:33 pm Valle Luna, Az.*

"Are you sure you're up for this, Mac?" Sergeant Ruiz stood next to her, placing a soft hand on her shoulder.



Erin didn't bother to glance over at him. Instead, she kept her eyes forward, focusing on the dark hair of their main suspect. She couldn't see her face from where she stood behind a two way mirror, only the back of her head and the slouched shoulders of the once confident and strongly muscled back.

"I'll be fine." She responded, sounding cold and indifferent. Beyond exhausted, her nerves were strung out and fed up. The fact hadn't escaped her that the very department that had deemed her unfit for duty just a short time ago, was now insisting and counting on her to save their ass. That little thought had eaten at her the entire two hour drive back down from Utopia.

She crossed her arms over her chest as the resentment rose up to bite at her throat.

"I don't know if it's such a good idea." Henderson stated from behind. "Why does it have to be Mac.?" The idea of Mac in the room alone with Elizabeth Adams left her feeling uneasy. Even though she knew that they would be right next door looking in and listening, it still bothered her. She knew she no longer had a say as to what happened in the department. But she had insisted on coming in with Mac anyway, wanting to be there for her, to offer her moral support. Ruiz glanced her way, and she knew he was considering her statement. But she also knew that she couldn't fight him too much, her presence there was now a polite courtesy.

"We don't have much choice." Ruiz said, pushing his wire rim glasses back further on his nose.

"Tell me why." Erin countered in her cold voice, unafraid and uncaring for the first time in years. She felt almost completely disconnected from her body. Like she was a balloon floating high above her physical form.

"Up until a few hours ago," Ruiz explained. "Adams was cooperating with us. She came in willingly and she answered most of our questions. But when we asked about the night of the shooting she clammed up. And when we pressed her, she lawyered up and said she would talk, but only to Mac."

"Where's her attorney now?" Erin asked, finding it hard to believe that Adams had cooperated at all.

"She left about an hour ago, but she said she would return shortly." Detective Sinclair answered. Up until that moment the new detective had been relatively silent, an unobtrusive observer.

"Does Adams know I'm here?" Erin uncrossed her arms and moved towards the door.

"Yes. She's been waiting for you." Ruiz responded.

Just then, three of Erin's other colleagues entered the room. Jeff Hernandez gave her a warm, sincere smile of encouragement while Detective Stewart merely glanced her way and then coughed in his wheezy manner as he walked past her into the room. Erin moved her gaze beyond the unsettling sight of Stewart to Gary Jacobs who made his way quietly to whisper his greetings to his former partner, Patricia Henderson.

In no time, Erin found that she was ignoring their presence, just too damn tired to care. Rather, her focus returned to the dark head of Elizabeth Adams. Breathing in deeply, she grabbed the door knob and said aloud, "Ok then."

She pulled open the door to head inside, when, to her surprise, Henderson moved quickly over to her and pushed the door closed, hindering her advancement.

"Listen, if you get uncomfortable in there..." She started, looking at Erin intensely.

"I'll be fine." Erin said with focused determination.

Henderson looked into her eyes, not quite believing her. But she soon realized she had little choice in the matter. Like it or not, she had to let Mac do this. Holding fast to the focus and strong will she saw in Mac's eyes, she gave her friend a nod of encouragement and moved away from the door.

Erin tried to relax a little as she watched Henderson move from the door to let her question their number one suspect. If Henderson had faith in her, then it must be for good reason. Swallowing back some bitter tasting anxiety, she pulled the door open once again and walked into the room.

She approached Adams from behind, walking slowly and carefully, trying to get control of her quickly escalating heart rate. The dark haired woman didn't bother to turn around to see who was entering. Erin watched with curiosity as the woman quietly remained seated at the small table, staring straight ahead.

"Ms. Adams." Erin acknowledged in her best professional tone as she walked past her to round the table, not yet ready to meet her eyes. The memory of the hypnotizing and alluring blue eyes was one that was very fresh in her mind. So much so, that she was afraid to look into them, too frightened of getting lost in them like she had before.

Willing her nerves to calm, she did the first routine thing that came to mind. She reached down to pull out a chair across from the silent woman. But before she sat down she finally managed to look up and over at the dark woman's face. And in an instant, a powerful shock shot through her body as her mind began to flash like lightning behind her eyes.

"Hello Mrs. Mackenzie." Adams responded in her sexy, deep voice as her eyes met the green ones of the young woman across from her.

Erin stood riveted, her hand clutching the back of the chair so hard her knuckles whitened with restricted blood flow. As the strikingly handsome face and deep voice permeated into her head, the night of the shooting ricocheted through her mind, replaying like a movie in fast forward motion.

She saw the evil dark haired woman trying to kill her. *Flash.* She saw Adams step in the room. *Flash.* And in an instant, she saw Adams try to wrestle the gun from the woman with the evil laugh. *Flash.* Stifling the shot, saving her life. *Flash.*

She blinked and swayed against the chair as deep red blood stained her savior's shirt in her mind. She opened her eyes wide and let reality seep into her pupils with the bright lights of the interrogation room. Adams had been shot. Shot saving her life.

"Something's wrong." Henderson said in a panic from behind the two way mirror as she watched the blood drain from Mac's face. She moved to the door as Erin swayed like she was about to faint.

"It...you were there." Erin said, blinking and quickly refocusing on reality. The rush of memories left her feeling overwhelmed and slightly dizzy. But surprisingly, she also felt incredibly free. She was no longer a prisoner in her own mind.

"What do you mean?" Adams asked, rising from her chair, alerted by the far off look on the young detective's face.

"Mac, are you ok?" Henderson asked, taking a few hurried steps into the room. Jeff Hernandez stood close behind her, eyeing Mac with a worried expression.

Erin snapped her head up to look at Henderson and held her gaze. "I..." She glanced back down at Adams and noted the haunted look in the once piercing blue eyes. "I remember now." She said as she met Henderson's concerned eyes once again. "I can remember everything."

Henderson exhaled deeply with relief. "Are you ok to continue then?"

Erin shook her head, reassuring her two friends and then pulled the chair out all the way to sit down. Henderson backed out of the room, her eyes boring a hole in the back of Adam's dark mane. Jeff followed close behind and shut the door behind them.

Adams returned to her seat slowly, all the while feeling the heat of Henderson's hatred on her back. She hadn't bothered to turn to look at the detective, her own attention focused solely on the young blonde who had looked very close to fainting.

"Now, where should we begin?" Erin asked, looking at the dark woman thoroughly for the first time. She was surprised to see how pale and drawn her statuesque face now appeared. The dark night club owner looked as tired as she did, and even a little weak.

Adams folded her hands on the table and tried to sit up straighter. She took in the young blonde's face, noting her exhaustion and the deep dark smudges under her once bright eyes.

"What did you mean when you said you remembered now?" Adams asked, her brow furrowing in question.

Erin licked her dry lips, her skin burning suddenly in response to Adams' stare. Regardless of how tired and weak she now looked, the dark woman was still devastatingly beautiful.

"I..." She started, the words difficult to find. She had to look away from the incredible blue eyes in order to concentrate. "Up until just now, I had a hard time remembering the events of the night of the shooting."

The words came out slowly and they had a hard time penetrating her tired brain. The dark woman's eyes remained focused on the beautiful face before her, desperate to make sense of the words the blonde had just spoken.

"You mean, all this time...you just didn't remember?" She finally managed to ask. Her heart hammered in her chest as realization finally sunk in.

Erin shook her head slowly. "That's correct." She said softly. She watched as the blue eyes drifted down from her own to the table between them. Adams looked shocked and the little color in her face seemed to drain down into her neck.

"I see." Adams said softly as her insides felt suddenly sick. All this time she had thought that Erin had kept her secret out of respect for her, or maybe even because the young blonde had harbored feelings for her. But it wasn't like that at all. Erin Mackenzie had kept her secret alright, but only because she couldn't remember it.

Hurt beyond her wildest dreams, she clenched her jaw in silent frustration and pain. Never before had someone had the capacity to hurt her. Somehow, somehow, this young detective had that power and she hated herself for it.

"I've been told that you wanted to speak to me." Erin continued, suddenly very curious as to what the dark woman wanted with her. Her insides fluttered with excited butterflies as several ludicrous and impossible scenarios played out in her mind. It was ridiculous to think that the beautiful and mysteriously aloof woman wanted anything to do with her. But, nevertheless, she allowed the pleasant thoughts to continue to flutter throughout her insides.

Adams looked back up at her and removed her hands from the table.

"I did, yes." She said, her voice lowered back to its guarded tone. "But now it seems that I have nothing else to say."

"Oh?" Erin asked, a little surprised and very disappointed.

Adams looked away from her then, the hurt too much.

"Let's talk about the night of the shooting." Erin said, as the cop in her tried to refocus, burying her fluttering excitement under the weight of reality.

"Let's not." Adams stated with conviction in her tone.

Erin stared into the striking face, wondering what it was that bothered Adams so.

"We have a lot to discuss Ms. Adams. For instance, my fellow detectives already know that you were present at Detective Henderson's the night of the shooting." She continued to eye her as she pressed onward. "Your blood was on the carpet."

Adams didn't respond. She merely stared past the young detective, thinking that she needed to speak to her lawyer again and soon.

"And now I know why." Erin declared with swelling pride and relief. "You weren't there to kill me or to kill Henderson."

Adams returned her gaze back on the young detective.

"You were there to stop the real killer."

Adams stared into the green eyes as her heart began to pound once again.

"If..." Adams started, her voice held low and deep. "If you remember as much as you say you do, then you'll end this conversation right now."

Erin's head snapped back slightly as if she had been physically struck. Her eyes were held steady in the penetrating gaze of Elizabeth Adams as another image replayed in her mind. She remembered the words spoken by a strained Adams as she fought to hold onto the blood which had been seeping steadily from her injured shoulder.

"Your request." Erin whispered aloud as she remembered the plea to keep quiet. The mysterious dark woman with the familiar eyes and evil laugh had been Adam's own sister. Of course. It all made so much sense to her now.

The dark woman moved quickly and reached across the table to hold Erin's hand. The door to the room behind the two way mirror flung open as Henderson and Sinclair came rushing into the room. Erin held up her free hand to halt their pursuit.

"It's ok, guys. We're fine." She said, glancing at them only briefly before returning her gaze upon the blue eyes.

"She shouldn't be touching you." Sinclair said as adrenaline burned in her light brown eyes.

Erin shook her head reluctantly and removed her hand out from underneath the stronger woman's. The heat from her touch was almost too much to bear anyhow. Besides, how would she explain to her fellow detectives the reason for melting under a suspect's touch?

"We're fine, guys." Erin said again and watched as the two female detectives finally returned to the observation room behind the mirror.

"Mrs. Mackenzie." Adams started, as she looked at Erin with blue flames burning in her eyes.

"Please, don't call me that." Erin said, cringing at the name. "Call me Erin, or Mac even."

"Erin." Adams said, wanting to grab her hand once again, liking how it had felt beneath her own. But instead, she drew her own hand back and rested it there on the old table.

"You remember that I was at Detective Henderson's that night to stop the real killer?"

Erin shook her head in agreement. "Yes." She said. "You saved my life."

"Yes." Adams said softly. "I think then, that you know what it is that I need to discuss with you."

Erin fidgeted a little in her chair. "I'm not sure I..."

"Please." Adams said, once again reaching across the table to envelope her hand. "I know you will."

Erin stared into the fiery blue eyes and allowed the heat from her touch to penetrate into her blood. She knew what Adams wanted. She wanted her silence. She wanted her to promise.

She started to shake her head in protest but Adams squeezed her hand before she could. She looked into the drawn and pale face of the woman who had saved her life. The woman who had fought her own sister and taken a bullet for an undercover cop. The very cop who had invaded her life secretly in order to gain information to peg a serial murder case on her. As she realized all these things, her heart opened up to the troubled woman and her gaze lingered over her beautiful face and rested once again on her exhausted, yet burning blue eyes. There was something there between them. Not just a secret, but something more.

"If I..." Erin started, but then thought better of it. "I have questions." She said as she removed her hand from Adams before causing another excited reaction in her fellow detectives.

Adams shook her head and smiled a tired smile. "I know." She said, in her own way reassuring that they would be answered.

The door opened again and Ruiz motioned for Erin to walk over to where he stood. Erin pushed back from the table and walked over to stand before her superior officer.

"What the hell's going on in here, Mac?" He asked in an excited tone under his breath, not wanting Adams to overhear.

"She's not your killer." Erin stated in a louder tone, looking back to where the dark woman sat.

"Then who the hell is?" He asked as Henderson and Sinclair both watched from the doorway.

Erin sighed and folded her arms across her chest. "I'm not totally sure." She said, only half fibbing. She didn't know the name of their killer or even where they might find her. She had to ask Adams these questions, but she knew she couldn't do it here. And if Adams didn't answer them satisfactorily, then she would simply claim that she suddenly remembered the killer's identity and tell her superior. But until then, the department wasn't going to get the information from her. She owed at least that much to Adams for saving her life.

"What? What the hell do you mean you don't remember?" He asked, his temper flaring up. "I thought you said you remembered now."

"I remember Adams saving my life, sir. Jumping in front of the shooter and taking a bullet for me."

"But you don't know who the shooter is?" He asked, his face reddening.

Erin shrugged as she thought. "I remember Blade trying to shoot me sir." She said, knowing that that much was true. Blade had tried to shoot her.

Ruiz threw his hands up in the air and let them fall to slap his thighs.

Her own temper building on fringed and overtired nerves, Erin moved past him to the room where the other detectives stood. Ruiz followed her, closing the door behind him. He started to speak again but Erin wouldn't allow it.

"No," She declared quickly, her voice raised for all to hear. She wasn't about to listen to anything else from anyone. "I'm going to talk now." Ruiz snapped his head up to look at her in surprise.

"Let me get all this straight." Erin said, her voice loud and strained with anger. "First, I go undercover to try and save the department face by getting evidence on the 'supposed killer.' Then, I live through an attack on my life, leaving Henderson injured and another person dead. Then, I was forced to go on medical leave because I couldn't remember all of the events of the night in question. So, I go off to try to re-cooperate, to try to force my mind to remember, because otherwise, I'm out of a job. In doing so, I've had little to no sleep because the fractured memories of that night keep playing havoc with my mind, driving me closer and closer to insanity. And then, low and behold, out of the blue, you send Jeff and Audrey up to get me because, guess what, the department decides it needs me again. Being the loyal cop that I am, I come along to help out without question, all for the good of the department. And to my surprise, when I get here my memory returns and I'm more than thrilled, I'm ecstatic. Silly me, I actually thought my superior and the department would be just as thrilled as I was to have my memory return. But oh no, as soon as it is clear that my memory doesn't peg your girl, out you come, ready to scream at me because my memory doesn't fit with the case the way you want it to? Well fuck that Ruiz. It's not my fault you wasted time and money chasing the wrong person. Adams is innocent. And not only that but she saved my life." She breathed deeply as she finally finished, her eyes wide with anger, her fists clenched at her sides.

Henderson moved quickly to stand before her, a look of anguish on her face. "She's exhausted." She said, trying to diffuse the explosive situation. She gave Erin a silencing look, wanting her to shut up. Her hands found Erin's shoulders where they squeezed, trying to get her to calm down before she jeopardized herself any further.

Ruiz stood perfectly still, staring at his young detective, not quite believing what he had just heard.

"Where the fuck did that come from?" Stewart let out before he chuckled. "Damn Mac, I think going under as a dyke on this case caused you to grow some big hairy balls."

"That's enough!" Ruiz shouted. "From all of you. Now, I know we're all frustrated..."

"You know, Stewart," Henderson seethed. "I'm sick to death of your sexist and prejudiced remarks."

"ENOUGH!" Ruiz shouted deeply, glaring at all his detectives.

Erin ignored them all and walked over to the two way mirror to look out at Adams. Sinclair had gone into the room to talk to her, to question her some more, while the other detectives remained in the room to bicker at one another.

"How long has she been here?" Erin asked, referring to Adams as she moved past her yelling sergeant.

She opened the door and walked back into the interrogation room giving no one enough time to answer.

"Ms. Adams," Erin said, rounding the table to meet her eyes once again. "How long have you been here?"

Sinclair walked over to meet her, a questioning look in her eyes. Erin ignored her gaze and continued to focus on Adams.

"They brought me in yesterday." She answered calmly.

"You've been here that long?" Furry was quickly turning to hot anger as she looked into the tired and weary face of their innocent main suspect.

Erin turned with Sinclair hot on her heels and headed back into the small observation room. She slammed the door behind them.

"I want her released." She demanded crossing her arms over her chest.

"I don't care what you want." Ruiz challenged, the shock of his once soft spoken detective unloading on him now gone. "We aren't finished questioning her."

Erin knew that it was standard procedure to keep a suspect for hours of questioning. It was one of the ways in which they wore them down. But keeping an innocent woman overnight with little to no rest was ridiculous and Ruiz knew it. He just wasn't ready to let her go, to let go of the suspect he had spent countless hours pursuing.

"Well, you may not be finished, but I guarantee you she's finished with you. You have no grounds to keep her and you know it. She knows it too."

"It's not up to you or anyone to decide when we are finished with a suspect." He countered, his eyes boring into her with anger.

"I would agree with the exception of one tiny little thing." She moved back to the door and yanked it open. "She's no longer a suspect." With that, she walked hurriedly back into the interrogation room and faced Elizabeth Adams.

"Ms. Adams?" She asked, waiting for the intense blue eyes to once again focus on her. When they did, she continued. "I just came back in to let you know that I was finished questioning you." She looked up hastily as she heard the door open. Ruiz stood with his arms crossed, glaring at her.

"And, well..." Erin said, looking back down at Adams. "I wanted to offer you my most sincere thanks for saving my life." She extended her hand to the dark woman who stood slowly and then took the hand in her own.

They held each others eyes for a long moment while their hands meshed with warmth.

"You're welcome, detective." Adams finally said with a sincere smile.

"Perhaps we can meet up at a later time." Erin offered. "I would love to buy you dinner sometime as a gesture of my appreciation."

Adams nodded, still holding her gaze. "That sounds nice. I look forward to it."

Erin smiled back at her, and finally let her hand fall from the taller woman's. Her insides immediately screamed at the break in contact.

"Until later then." Erin said as moved to the door that led out of the interrogation room and into the main department. She could feel Ruiz's heated stare on her back, but she didn't turn to look. She was fed up and exhausted and she knew if she didn't get away she would pull her own hair out by the roots.

Back in the interrogation room, Adams turned as she heard the small man approach her from behind.

"Ms. Adams, if you wouldn't mind, we have some more questions."

She clenched her jaw and turned to face him. She could have easily bench pressed the slight and slender man and he was lucky her patience had held out this long.

"I do mind." She seethed.

"I can assure you, it won't take long..." He tried again as he made his way to the chair Erin had just recently sat in.

"I've been here long enough." She said as she shoved her own chair back into the table with force.

A little panicked, Ruiz immediately stood back up from his very brief sit to hold his palms in the air, a lame attempt to calm Elizabeth Adams.

"Now, Ms. Adams..." He said, as he watched her move towards the very door Erin Mackenzie had just walked out of.

"You can direct any future questions to my attorney." She said without looking back just before she slammed the door closed behind her.



"Damn it!" Ruiz yelled, slamming his fist down on the table. Detectives Sinclair and Henderson made their way hurriedly into the room.

"Do you want me to go apprehend her?" Sinclair asked.

"Who? Mac? Hell yes!"

"Adams sir." Sinclair specified a little more softly.

Ruiz began to pace the small room, his fury fueling his small frame. "No." He finally said, shaking his head. "We can't hold her."

"If I may," Henderson said, still feeling intimidated by Ruiz even though he was no longer her superior. "Mac's been under a tremendous amount of stress lately. She hasn't been sleeping, she's had countless nightmares..."

"I know." Ruiz said jerking his head up to look at her. "I know how bad off she's been. But it still is no excuse for her odd behavior here today with Adams."

"Actually, I think it's rather plausible." Henderson offered. "She just literally remembered that Adams saved her life. They share that now. That bond will always be there." As she spoke the words aloud, her tone softened almost to a whisper. Never in her wildest dreams had she imagined that Adams would turn out to be a "good guy" in all of this. But there it was, and it seemed that that was indeed the case after all.

"I don't care if she's saved the world!" Ruiz declared loudly, spitting a little as the words came out. "That woman knows something she's not telling us and Mac all but encouraged her to keep it from us!"

Henderson swallowed hard before she spoke. "I don't think Mac's encouraging her." She didn't know how in the world to explain Mac's strange behavior, but she knew she needed to downplay it to Ruiz or her friend could very well lose her job. "I think she's just overwhelmed right now with her memory returning, with finding out Adams saved her, with all of it."

"She has been through a lot." Sinclair offered up, which was awarded by a "thank you" mouthed by Henderson.

"So what's going on?" Stewart asked as he and the other two remaining dics poured into the room. "Is this circus show over or what?"

"No thanks to Mac it is." Ruiz said.

"That's not true." Henderson said, her frustration with Ruiz growing. "If we had done our jobs better, then you might have what you need on Adams or whoever else. But as it stands, you've got nothing and that's not her fault."

"She's right." Jeff said softly as he and the other male dics filed out of the room and out into the hallway.

"I'm going to do you and this department a favor." Henderson said looking at Ruiz. "I'm going to go after Mac to try and calm her down. You can't afford to lose her." She didn't wait for him to respond. Rather, she walked quickly from the room all the while thinking that she would have to dive deeply back into this case if she ever wanted her own questions answered.

"Hey Henderson, wait up!"

She turned at the sound of her name and waited as Detective Sinclair trotted up to her.

"I thought you might could use some help." Sinclair said as she fell into step alongside Henderson.

Henderson laughed a little, amused by the statement. "After all that, I think a little help would be a lost cause. Between the things Mac said and the things I said..." She shook her head in disbelief as she fell silent.

"Ok, it sounds like you're going to need a lot of help then." Sinclair said with a grin.

Henderson glanced over at the handsome woman at her side, suddenly realizing that she found the eager detective very attractive. The taller woman with the dirty blonde hair carried herself with comfortable confidence and Henderson liked the way she handled herself with the other detectives.

Sinclair turned her head slightly and caught Henderson's eyes with her own light brown ones.

Henderson sucked in a rapid breath of air and looked away quickly, afraid of the warm glowing embers in Sinclair's eyes.

"Something wrong?" Sinclair asked.

Henderson shook her head quickly. "I'm worried about Mac." She said, hoping it would cover the real reason for her sudden reaction.

"I can see why." The other woman said, while placing her hands in her pockets as they walked. "She's had a terrible time."

Henderson shook her head in agreement, realizing that Sinclair didn't even really know Mac, yet she was empathetic to her situation. Something that she knew she would never find in Ruiz or some of the other detectives.

"I need to find her, I need to try to talk to her." Henderson said as they turned down the hallway that would lead to the homicide division, her old stomping ground.

"Do you plan on taking her back up to your place in Utopia?" Sinclair asked.

Henderson turned to look at her once again, surprised by the question, but even more surprised when she realized she had no answer.

"I'm not sure."

"If you need to, feel free to stay at my place."

Henderson stopped walking suddenly and her face reddened as she realized the offer was sincere and purely professional. Sinclair didn't seem to notice.

"I know you two might not have a place to stay, so I thought I should offer."

"Thank you." Henderson said, feeling the warmth from the brown eyes. She smiled at the taller blonde and started walking again, making her way to the ladies room.

"Where are we going?" Sinclair asked, noticing their destination.

"To get Mac." She said, pushing open the door.

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"Pull in here." Erin said from the middle of the seat in Sinclair's full size pick up truck.

The newest member to Valle Luna P.D. did as instructed and slowed her truck to a stop outside of Erin's former residence.

"You want me to go with you?" Henderson asked, a little worried.

"No need." Erin said, sliding across the seat as Henderson got down out of the truck. "Mark said he would leave the keys under the driver's seat." She jumped down from the truck and shaded her eyes to get a look at the large house where she once lived.

"Gee, how nice of him." Henderson remarked with sarcasm.

Erin didn't respond, but instead made her way up the driveway to her BMW sedan. She ran her hand along the car's white paint and pulled open the unlocked door.

"Can I help you?" A female voice called from the front door. With her heart hammering, Erin thought briefly about just jumping in her car and peeling out of the driveway. But she was too tired to be afraid, too tired to be a coward. This was just something else she would have to face.

She stood straighter and looked directly at the pregnant blonde woman who had made her way out of the house. As her eyes studied her, she realized just how far along the woman appeared to be. Her belly was low and rounded, at least six or seven months along. She swallowed back the stinging daggers attacking her throat. The deceit still hurt, regardless if she had feelings for Mark or not.

"I'm here to get my car." Erin replied loud enough for her to hear.

The woman stopped walking and stared like a deer caught in headlights. Erin stood her ground and watched as the woman sized her up, letting her curious gaze travel up and down her body.

"Oh." She replied, a little surprised. Her hand came up and lingered at her chest as if she were slightly perturbed.

"Honey, what's going..." Erin looked past the woman in maternity clothes to see Mark emerge from the house. He was walking slowly, obviously still healing from the knife wounds. When his eyes found her standing by her car, his face took on quite a surprised and very uncomfortable look.

"Erin." He said more out of surprise than greeting.

"Hello Mark." She said, keeping her voice level and unemotional. "I just came to get my car."

"Of course." He said, giving his pregnant partner a comforting pat on the shoulder.

An unbearable silence ensued and Erin thought about asking Mark how he was feeling, but the pregnant woman was shooting poisonous darts at her with her glare.

"Well, I won't keep you. Looks like you're doing well." She offered with a little wave, before climbing into the car and searching for her keys. Digging down between her legs she finally managed to find them and when she looked back up, Mark and his mistress were gone.

"You ok?" Henderson asked as she approached the driver's side of the BMW.

"Fine." Erin said and then laughed a little hysterically. "I don't know about you but I'm getting out of here before his pregnant attack dog comes back out."

Henderson laughed and shook her head as she closed the door for her. Erin rolled down the window as she started the car.

"No kidding." Henderson said as she leaned on the car while looking at the house. "What a couple of rude assholes. They deserve each other."

"As long as he's happy." Erin said, looking back to the house she once so despised.

"I don't know about that, Mac." Henderson said, thinking how if she were Mark, she would be kicking herself for having taken such an incredible woman like Erin for granted.

She pushed herself away from the BMW and glanced down into the car. "You going to follow us to Sinclair's?" She asked.

"Yeah," Erin said as she put the car in reverse. "I hope she has something strong to drink because I could sure use one."

"She ok?" Sinclair asked as Henderson climbed back into the truck.

"She's been better." Henderson answered, wondering just how much Sinclair really knew about the situation.

"That was her husband?" She asked, as she drove her truck away from the house.

"Ex- husband." Henderson quickly added.

"They split up after he was attacked right?"

"Yes."

"I know I'm new to Valle Luna and this whole case, but doesn't it seem a little too soon after the fact to have a girlfriend who's that many months pregnant?"

Henderson laughed heartily at Sinclair's observation.

"You are very perceptive, Audrey."

"I'm no rocket scientist, but that one seemed a little too strange to ignore."

"Yeah, poor Mac. She really has been through it the past few weeks."

Sinclair exited out of the gated neighborhood to head toward her own new and virtually empty apartment.

"You care about her a great deal." Sinclair said.

"Yes." Henderson replied softly. "She means a lot to me."

"Are you two..." Sinclair asked, looking over at Henderson, afraid she had gone too far with the questions. "I'm sorry." She quickly added.

"Don't be." Henderson said. "No, we aren't together in that sense."

"I thought maybe you were." Sinclair said, thinking about how comfortable the two had looked up at the cabin.

"No, Mac is just a dear friend." She said and then fell silent.

"Well, she's lucky to have you." Sinclair said, offering her a sincere smile.

They rode in silence the rest of the way to Sinclair's apartment complex. Once there, they all three climbed the stairs together up to the second floor apartment.

Sinclair let them in and Henderson and Mac made their way into the one bedroom apartment.

"It's not much, but please, make yourselves at home." She said as she closed the door behind them.

It was a newly built apartment complex and Henderson could still smell the newly installed carpet and fresh paint. She stood next to Mac in the surprisingly spacious living room and noted the matching deep blue couches and oak side tables. She was more than grateful that Sinclair had offered to let them stay. There were still some things Mac needed to attend to with the case as well as with Ruiz and she herself was just too damn tired to drive back up to the cabin right away.

"It's nice." Erin said, making her way to one of the couches where she eased herself down to relax.

"I'm still unpacking." Sinclair said as she tossed her truck keys on the kitchen counter.

Henderson sat down next to Erin and eyed the stacks of boxes that sat in the adjoining dining room. A computer desk sat next to the boxes, an indication that the room wasn't going to be used for dining at all.

A chirping sounded from the area where the boxes sat and Henderson watched as Sinclair moved into the room behind one of the couches. The taller detective crouched down and raised back up with a large birdcage in her hands. Two parakeets hopped about inside, singing and chirping.

"How cute!" Erin said with new found energy as she jumped up and rounded the couch to look at the birds.

"No they're not. They're a pain in the ass." Sinclair said with a playful smile. "The live to harass me. Chirping until all hours of the night."

"What are their names?" Erin asked, not buying the negative remarks for a single second.

"The blue one is Gomez. And the green one is Morticia."

Henderson laughed at the names. "Cute." She said, walking over to stand next to Erin. Sinclair set the cage on the computer desk and picked up a canister of food which she popped open and then poured its contents into a cup in the cage.

"Yeah well, I named them that because the little blue is constantly trying to get the green ones attention. It's almost sad how hard he tries."

They all three stood and watched as the little birds hopped graciously down to their food bowl to dig in.

"So," Sinclair said as she returned her focus back onto her guests. "Did you guys bring your stuff?" She looked at their empty hands.

"Shit!" Henderson said. "We left it in my Blazer at the station."

She walked back and flung herself down on the couch, feeling like she was completely brain dead. Erin remained at the cage, watching the birds intently.

"We can go back and get it, it's not a big deal." Sinclair said.

"Maybe later." Henderson said, just wanting to sink down into the couch.

"If you don't mind then, I'm going to go change?" Sinclair asked politely.

"By all means." Erin encouraged from the bird cage. "Just pretend like we aren't even here." She grinned up at the attractive detective.

Sinclair smiled back and looked over at Henderson on the couch. "That will be hard to do." She said before walking from the room and heading into her bedroom.

"How are you feeling Mac?" Henderson asked, watching the woman leave the birds to come join her on the couch.

"Numb." She said as she sat down. "But not so numb that I didn't notice how hot Sinclair is." She elbowed Henderson playfully.

"Christ Mac, I really have created a monster." She slouched down into the couch and smiled back at her friend.

"Admit it, you think she's hot too."

"I'd have to be dead not to." She replied looking back towards the bedroom.

"I knew it." Erin said. "She likes you."

"What?" Henderson turned her head back to look at Mac.

"She does." Erin said with a smirk. "I may be tired and strung out, but I'm still alert enough to see the desire in her eyes when she looks at you."

Henderson shook her head. "She says she's a fan of my writing." She said, almost to herself.

"You see?" Erin elbowed her again. "Don't even try to deny it. That girl's got it bad for you."

Henderson outwardly let the comments pass but inwardly she felt herself warm at the possibility. She reached down and took Mac's hand in her own and she looked into her tired eyes.

"What about you, Mac?"

"What about me?" She asked, searching Henderson's deep blue eyes.

"What's going on with you and Elizabeth Adams?" She asked softly.

"Nothing." Erin lied and quickly removed her hand.

"I saw the lingering looks, the way she held your hand, I heard what wasn't said."

"And what was that?" She asked, her voice raised a little with agitated emotion.

"Like maybe there's something you aren't telling us." She replied, trying to hold her eyes, to keep Erin from looking away.

"Don't you start in on me." Erin said, sitting up, bringing her back up off the couch.

"I just don't want you to get in over your head with her." Henderson said, sitting up too, needing to explain.

Erin stood quickly. "Don't you remember Patricia...I already have." She moved toward the door and reached out for the door knob.

"Mac, wait." Henderson stood to look at her. "Where are you going?" She asked, her brow creasing with worry.

"For a drink." She said as she opened the door to walk out just as Sinclair walked in from her bedroom.

"What's going on?" The new detective asked Henderson, shoving her hands down into her navy blue cargo shorts.

"I wish I knew." Henderson said collapsing back down on the couch to rest her tired and frustrated head in her hands.

"Should we go after her?" She asked with concern as she walked over to the window that looked out over the parking lot.

"No." Henderson answered from her frustrated position on the couch. "She needs some time to herself." She lifted her head up to look at Sinclair. "I just hope it helps."

## Chapter 7

*Saturday, August 30*

*8:24 pm Valle Luna, Az.*

Erin pulled slowly into the large parking lot. Night had fallen over the valley, draping its entirety with dark purples and midnight blues which would ultimately mesh into the black of night. She pulled her BMW into a space back near the edge of the parking lot. Leaning back in her seat, she allowed the scent of the near new vehicle to fill her insides. The car, like her, had been one of Mark's perfect representations of the life he wanted everyone to perceive he led.

She closed her eyes and thought how much she would like to trade the BMW in for something more her. Something a little less showy, maybe an SUV. While she was at it, she needed to find herself a place to live as well. Doing these things would ultimately help her to shed her former life, to shed her of Mark and the sorrow filled mundane existence she had led with him.

She opened her eyes and focused on reflections off the windshield. She hoped moving on with her life would also help her to forget the betrayal. She sighed as she thought of the pregnant woman with the dagger stare. The betrayal still stung regardless of how exhausted she was. But it was time to forage ahead, time to forget Mark and all that he encompassed.

She looked around at the rows of cars and the cluster of women waiting at the front entrance. She didn't know how she had ended up here, having driven in sort of a daze after leaving Sinclair's. But here she was, worn out, defeated and unbelievably confused. She had told Henderson that she was going for a drink so maybe that's why she was here, simply for a drink.

She closed her eyes and thought of Adams. Would she be here? Would she talk to her? She opened her eyes again and sat forward, resting her hands on the steering wheel. The mere thought of Adams sent her heart hammering in her chest. She breathed in deeply and tried to relax, but it was useless. She sighed and clenched the steering wheel with white knuckles. She needed a drink and nothing and no one was going to stop her from getting it.

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"All I'm saying is that we can't just let her go off on her own." Sinclair insisted as she poured Henderson and herself a Coke for some much needed caffeine.

"I don't see that we have much of a choice." Henderson took the glass gratefully and sipped at it as Sinclair made herself comfortable on the couch across from her.

"We do have a choice. We can go after her." The new detective stated simply.

Henderson shook her head. "What for? She's needs some time to herself."

Sinclair sat in silence, eventually setting her drink down on the coffee table. "Do you trust her?" She asked, meeting her eyes.



"Absolutely, why wouldn't I?" Her voice hit a higher pitch, showing resentment in having being asked such a question.

"Do you trust Adams?" Sinclair asked, pressing forward, ignoring Henderson's counter question.

Henderson sat there, the cold Coke glass wrapped in her hands. "There was a time when I would have said absolutely not." She said as she raised the glass to take another sip. "But now, after finding out that she saved Mac's life, I'm...well I guess I'm not sure."

"Don't you wonder why Adams was at your house the night of the shooting to begin with?"

Henderson swallowed hard and met the light brown eyes. "I try not to think about it." She answered softly. "And besides, Mac said it was to stop the real killer."

"But if she knew the real killer's identity and she's as innocent as she says she is, then why didn't she tell the police about it...at the very least to clear her own name?"

"I...I don't know." Henderson said, shaking her head.

"She knows something." Sinclair stated. "She knows more than she's letting on. And I'm afraid your friend Mac does too."

Henderson jerked her head up as soon as the words were said. She reached out and set her glass down before returning her hands to clasp them together in her lap.

"Now wait a minute, Audrey. I know you're new here, but I think you're a little out of line with regards to Mac..." She was trying her best to speak calmly to the attractive detective. But her reserve was dangerously spiraling out of control as the conversation made its turn for the worse.

"Yes, I am new here." Sinclair clarified, interrupting Henderson. "But I'm also a detective. And I have strong reason to believe that your girl Mac is keeping something from us, along with Adams."

"You don't know what you're saying." Henderson breathed out, completely shocked by the accusation.

"Then how do you explain her behavior at the station today? The secrecy, the little remarks between her and Adams..."

"She's exhausted!" Henderson declared, rising up to her feet. "You don't know what she's been through." She said as she began to pace the room. The flood gates were now open and adrenaline and panic began cascading through them, flooding over into her bloodstream.

"What she's been through doesn't explain the secrecy, Patricia." Sinclair said, in a softer tone. She hated having to voice her concerns to the beautiful writer, a woman who obviously cared so much for one of the key players. And as she watched her pace and wring her hands, she knew she had to. Not only was it her job, but Patricia's life very well could be at stake if she wasn't made aware. With a sigh along with regret, she said softly, "I think there's something going on between her and Adams."

Henderson heard the words but she didn't trust herself to respond right away. She walked over to the window and glanced out at the darkening parking lot below.

"Look, there are things you don't know about Mac which could easily explain her behavior today." She said, her voice trembling with emotion.

"Like what?" Sinclair asked from behind, her voice revealing her disbelief.

Henderson turned to face the tall blonde. "Like the fact that Mac had her first intimate experience with a woman...with Adams." She finished in a whisper. She hated divulging Mac's private life to a near stranger but she didn't know what else to do. Sinclair didn't know Mac and she was jumping to all the wrong conclusions. She held the detective's brown eyes before continuing. "As you most likely know, that first experience can be a very powerful one. And it can create an incredible bond between the two women which suggests that right now, Mac is probably still very much enamored with Adams. Not to mention the fact that she just recently remembered that Adams saved her life."

She stopped talking, her voice almost too weak to go on. She searched Sinclair's handsome face while placing her hands on her hips. She so badly needed for the woman to hear her, to understand, desperately so.

"She's admitted to sleeping with Adams?" Sinclair asked immediately and with obvious concern.

"Well, yes." She stammered, more than a little surprised that that was all Sinclair gathered from her short speech. "She confided that to me while we were up at the cabin." She walked back over to the couch, careful to leave out the uncompromising circumstances she had been in with Mac when the confession came out.

Sinclair stood suddenly and sighed, running her hands through her hair.

"What is it?" Henderson asked, watching her from her place on the couch.

This time it was Sinclair who walked over to the window to stare out into darkness. A long silence ensued before she finally spoke. "It has been reported to me from an outside source that Erin Mackenzie is involved with Adams. Not just on a personal level, but in regards to this case."

"WHAT?" She asked loudly, rising back to her feet. She stood there trembling in complete disbelief. "Reported to you....reported by who?"

"I'm not saying she had anything to do with the murders..." Sinclair said, raising her hands in attempt to diffuse.

"Then what are you saying?" Henderson demanded, furious at what she was hearing.

"That maybe she's been covering for Adams all along." She turned away from the window and looked at Henderson. "Don't you think it's rather convenient that she claims to have not remembered the events of that night?"

"She suffered memory loss due to post traumatic stress syndrome." Henderson declared.

"Which isn't that difficult to fake if someone wanted to."

"Why would she fake it?" Henderson clenched her fists at her sides and began pacing wildly once again. The idea of Mac faking the horror she had seen her go through seemed absolutely preposterous and it infuriated her that someone would even think she would do such a thing.

"To cover for Adams." Sinclair said, watching Henderson pace. She had known that telling her would be difficult, but seeing just how upset the writer was first hand was disheartening, making her second guess her decision to tell her.

"But she ultimately did remember." She looked over at Sinclair as she said the words. "Guess that blows your theory, detective."

"Not in the slightest." She returned to her seat on the couch and sipped her coke, wishing Henderson would calm down long enough to listen. "She most likely didn't tell us right away in order for Adams and whomever else to tie up loose ends. And what's more is the possibility that she still didn't tell us the whole truth today when she claimed to remember. You were there; you saw the way they behaved together. Why do you think Ruiz lost his head today? Not just because he was upset, but because he, like you, didn't want to believe it either. But I'm afraid Mac's behavior today supports what I've been told. "

"Let's go back to that detective." Henderson said, walking over to stand in front of her. "What exactly have you been told and by whom?" She crossed her arms as she waited for the answers.

Sinclair looked up at her and spoke softly. "Because you are no longer in the department and on this case, I'm hesitant to reveal my source."

"Then why tell me at all?" She demanded.

"Because you are too close to this case. And because I fear for you."

She scoffed and walked over to the couch to plop down. She couldn't believe what she was hearing and worse than that she couldn't make Sinclair see just how ludicrous her suspicions were. She lay gazing up at the ceiling feeling overwhelmed and defeated.

"You're wrong detective." She finally said in between the clenching of her jaw. The information was too much to comprehend, too much to handle all at once. Her heart thudded madly in her chest and her head hurt from the mental strain. She absolutely could not believe what she was hearing.

"Then let's go find her tonight." Sinclair said, as Henderson turned her head to look at her with angry, blazing blue eyes. "Let's go prove me wrong."

"If you want my help tonight, then you'll tell me your source." She said unwavering from the couch.

Sinclair held her eyes for a long moment. "I'll tell you only what I think I can afford to divulge."

"Then it will only warrant a car ride tonight from me. Nothing more."

"Deal." Sinclair said before continuing. "I've been receiving phone calls from an anonymous female for the past couple of weeks. They started as soon as I arrived here in Valle Luna. At first, I didn't think much of them. I thought maybe they were pranks. But eventually she began to tell me things that I couldn't ignore."

"Like what?" Henderson asked, sitting up.

"I'm not at liberty to say." Sinclair said. "I will say that as of today, I have reason to believe that she is a very credible source."

"Is that all you want to tell me?" Henderson asked.

Sinclair shook her head. "At this time."

"With that being said detective, I think you should just go ahead and tell me that your source is Kristen Reece." She watched Sinclair look up at her as she said the words.

"Why would you..." She started.

"Please." Henderson said, standing. "Like you, Sinclair, I'm a detective. I always will be." She walked over to the door and opened it. "It's ok. You don't have to tell me."

"Where are you going?" Sinclair asked a little dumbfounded.

"We had a deal remember?"

Erin slammed the car door shut behind her and headed into the throbbing all women establishment. She walked with her shoulders back and proud, her jaw clenched, making her way to the bar. The bartender came immediately to her with a smile.

"What can I get you?" She asked, leaning on the bar.

"Kamikaze shooter." Erin replied, over the loud music. "Make it three." She insisted to the soft butch behind the bar.

"Something scary chasing you, darling?" She asked, trying to touch her hand.

Erin pulled back not wanting to be touched and dug into her pocket for money. "Just give me the drinks." She said tossing her money on the bar.

"Hey, ok." The woman with the short brown hair said, before quickly tended to her drink. Erin looked around somewhat impatiently as she waited for the woman to slide her shot glasses across the bar.

"Get me off" by the Basement Jaxx slammed seductively into her ears as her eyes adjusted to the darkness of the club. The laser and the lights pulsed across the dance floor in tune with the music.

"Here you go." The bartender said, placing the three shot glasses in front of her in a neat little row.

"Keep the change." Erin said without looking up. She downed the glasses one at time, one right after the other.

As the alcohol warmed down her chest and into her belly, she moved away from the bar and headed over to the dance floor. The music called to her and she suddenly felt the overwhelming urge to dance her troubles away. With her heart pounding in tune with the beat, she reached up and felt at the suddenly stifling material of her flannel shirt. She had worn the shirt down from the cooler cabin earlier that day and up until now she hadn't realized just how warm the material was. Suddenly feeling hot and somewhat suffocated, she tore the shirt free of her body, not caring about the buttons in the least. Her vision was on the dance floor and she peeled the shirt free from her arms and flung it in a dead heap onto the floor.

The thin white tank top she wore underneath was soaked through with sweat and the air on her wet skin felt remarkable. She breathed deeply in response to the freeing sensation as she made her way with a purpose to the

center of the dance floor. As she began to dance, with her arms held over her head, she closed her eyes and allowed her hungry and lonely soul to be fed by the music.

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"What!" She yelled as the pounding on her door continued. She pushed herself up off the bed and staggered to the door. She had finally fallen asleep only to be disturbed by the thundering knocks outside her private room.

With her sleepiness quickly giving way to anger, she yanked open the door. Tyson stood, looking a little unsure and more than a little frightened as he looked at the fury written on her face.

"Sorry to disturb you Ma'am." He said.

"What is it Tyson?" She asked, her voice heavy with sleep. She hoped it didn't have anything to do with the police. As strong as she prided herself in being, she didn't think she had anymore reserve strength left the deal with them.

"There's someone here I think you should know about." He said, gaining a little more confidence but worried at how tired his employer looked.

"Jesus." She let out with tired frustration. She pushed the door open further, giving him access, before she turned to make her way back inside the room.

She walked over the bar and readied herself a glass, not yet bothering to look up at the numerous television monitors. She heard Tyson close the door softly behind him as he made his way into the room.

"So who is it this time? Another fat cop? Another god damned detective?" She asked as she filled her glass with Red Bull. Whoever it was, she knew the situation would probably require her presence. Otherwise Tyson wouldn't have bothered her. She sipped the strong tasting liquid, wishing it would feed her cells full of some much needed energy.

"Yes ma'am." He said softly. "A detective."

"Great." She said as she made her way to the couch where she sat down and propped up her bare feet.

"I thought you would want to know." He said as he watched her.

"Yes, thank you." She said as she sipped her Red Bull. "So what do they want?"

"I'm not sure ma'am." He said, eyeing the sweat pants and wrinkled t-shirt she had obviously fallen asleep in. He wondered why she wasn't at her home in the hills. It certainly would be a more practical and quiet place to get some rest.

"Well, where are they?" She asked, finally looking up at her head of security.

"Making their way through the dance floor." He answered.

"What?" She asked, not sure she heard him right.

"They're on the dance floor. She's really pushing her way through..." Tyson repeated, as if he too, were in disbelief.

"Her way?" Adams asked, rising up from the couch to head over to the monitors.

"Yes ma'am."

Adams stopped before the monitors, scanning them quickly with alerted eyes.

"How long has she been here?" she asked, having to clear her tight throat to speak.

"Not long."

"Has she said anything?" She asked, finally tearing her eyes away from the monitors.

"No." He replied, noticing the brief flash of frustration on her usually stoic face. "Only her insistence that she be allowed entry."

Adams had already moved to her closet to rifle through her clothes, tossing a few shirts on the bed.

"Would you like me to tell her that her presence is requested up here?" He asked, turning away from her as she began to hastily strip off her clothes. He had seen her in various forms of undress over the years, but his eyes still couldn't handle the searing images of her beautifully muscled body. His employer was an amazingly attractive woman and it was times like these that he had to remind himself that she was strictly his boss and never would or could be anything more. And if he allowed himself to ogle at her physical form, innocently or not, it would jeopardize his ability to do his job in the excellent manner in which he prided himself upon.

"No." She said, making her way to the shower. "I will see to her myself."

"Very well." He said, just before he heard the shower come to life with rushing water. He let himself out of the private room to continue on with overseeing the club's security and leaving his boss to ready herself for the detective she knew so well.

"Do you see her?" Henderson asked in a loud strained voice over a few dancing heads to Sinclair.

The taller detective shook her head and then pointed across the dance floor to a cluster of women they hadn't yet examined.

As Henderson began to make her way through more women, "Master and Servant" by Depeche Mode began blasting through the speakers into the club.

She looked up and watched as the women on the platforms moved seductively against one another. They were wearing 1940's apparel, with a member from each couple wearing a zoot suit, topped off with a fedora hat pulled down at an angle over their eyes. Their counterparts in the newsboy hats wore see through tank tops with suspenders to hold up the wide legged, high waisted worker pants. The women in the newsboys busied themselves undressing the suited women, ultimately exposing a large strap on dildo within their pinstripe pants. She looked away as the women in the newsboys began sucking on the dildos.

"To what do I owe the pleasure?" A deep voice asked from behind.

Henderson stopped and turned, instantly recognizing the sultry voice.

"I think you know why I'm here." She responded, trying hard not to stare at the dark woman with the damp, midnight hair.

"To harass me some more?" Adams said, raising a black eyebrow.

Henderson gave a short laugh. "Harass you? No, I wouldn't waste my time. You're not worth it."

"Then why are you here detective?" Adams crossed her arms. "Oh, excuse me; it isn't detective anymore is it?"

Henderson glared at her, looking past the muscled arms and the sleeveless blue buttoned down shirt that so perfectly matched her eyes.

"Where is she?" Henderson finally managed to ask, looking beyond Adams to Sinclair as she approached. She believed Erin was there but not for the malicious reasons Sinclair believed. She believed that Erin was there simply out of lust and wonderment, if not merely to escape her current life problems with a drink.

"Where's who?" Adams asked, barely glancing at the other detective as she came to stand by Henderson.

"Mac." Henderson stated with hatred in her voice. Adams could act uncaring and aloof with anyone else she wanted to, but Henderson wouldn't let her act that way about Erin.

"Who?" Adams asked, eyeing Tyson who stood not far behind Henderson.

"Erin Mackenzie." Sinclair clarified.

Adams felt her face soften at the name. She looked around the club, suddenly anxious to see the young blonde.

"I don't know." She said, looking back to the detectives. "I haven't seen her."

"Bullshit!" Henderson seethed. "She said she was going for a drink and I know she's here."

Adams stared at Henderson, letting her arms fall to her sides. She had no idea why the detective was so angry, especially in regards to Erin Mackenzie. As she stared at her former lover, she saw Tyson walk away from behind the women and disappear into the crowd.

"Look, I'm telling you the truth. I haven't seen her." She said as she watched Sinclair and Henderson exchange a worried and disbelieving look. She had known Patricia well at one time, well enough to know that the woman didn't upset easily over nothing. With this in mind, she suddenly became worried that something was terribly wrong. Why else would they be looking for Erin?

"Is something wrong?" Adams asked, her heart suddenly pounding. "Is she...ok?"

"Why? You give a shit?" Henderson asked, whipping her head around to glare at her some more.

"I..." Adams started and then let the words fall back down into her tight throat, knowing it was useless to proceed. "Look around the club all you want." She said, once again squaring her shoulders. "She's not here." She made her way quickly past the questioning women and headed to the other side of the dance floor.

"This is ridiculous." Henderson said to Sinclair as they watched Adams walk away. "I told you Mac isn't involved."

"Is it though?" Sinclair asked. "Ridiculous? You saw how concerned she became as soon as she found out we were looking for Mac. I don't think that's just a coincidence. And what about how quickly she came down here to greet us? Erin's probably up in her room right now as we speak."

"No." Henderson said, disagreeing. "She's not here."

"How can you be so sure?" Sinclair asked her, not ready to give up.

"Because Adams is willing to let us look around. I've never known her to do that. So I have a feeling that if we asked her, she would let us see her private room tonight. She seems more than willing to cooperate." *Almost too willing.*

"Then let's go ask to see it." Sinclair said.

"No." Henderson said, stopping her. "Mac's not here. And if we go demanding to be let in to Adam's private room, don't you think it will set off more alarms in her? If you're right and she does have something to hide in this investigation, then I can guarantee you she's over there right now, trying to figure out why we're here. Adams is smart, Audrey. Way smarter than your average felon."

Sinclair thought for a moment in silence as she watched the dark woman talking to her head of security across the dance floor. "Maybe she's got her somewhere else." She finally said.

"Maybe she doesn't have her anywhere at all. Maybe Mac really just went out to blow off some steam." Henderson said, trying to convince the new detective as well as herself.

"I hope your right, Patricia." Sinclair said, turning to meet her eyes briefly before returning them to watch Adams. "But I just don't buy it. I think we should head over to her house in the hills, check it out, see if we get any movement."

"Why? Because you think she's got Mac there?" Henderson shook her head in disbelief. "If she does have Mac there we'll never know it. She's got that place rigged like Fort Knox and I'm not about to go and sit out there with my thumbs up my ass all night waiting outside the gate." She was tired and frustrated and she didn't feel like continuing this wild goose chase. "So if you want it done, I suggest you call in one of the other teams to do it."

Sinclair stood in silence with her arms crossed over her chest. "The higher ups are insisting that this case is closed. The department isn't able to spend anymore resources on it."

"Ha! So I'm not only one who thinks this needs to be dropped."

"Come on, Patricia." Sinclair said, looking at her.

"Wait a minute, you're saying that even with your little phone source, they're still insisting it's closed?" She asked, bewildered.

"Yes. We still can't get anything to stick to Adams."



"Jesus." Henderson declared. "This is nuts! What am I even doing here?"

"You're still a cop, detective, just like you said. You always will be whether you're off writing best sellers or not. And I know that there are things about this case that are eating away at you. I can see it in your eyes. Ignoring them won't make it go away."

"What are you, a public service announcement?" She let out in frustration.

"Fine." Sinclair said facing her. "If you're going to continue to take that stand then at the very least come with me to prove me wrong. Help me find Mac and prove to me that she isn't secretly seeing Adams."

Henderson looked into the light brown eyes of a stubborn and determined Sinclair. She knew the woman was wrong about Mac and possibly even wrong about Adams. But still, all the things Sinclair had brought to her attention that night kept nagging at her mind. And as she turned to walk with Sinclair back out to the front entrance, she realized she was going to help, but not to disprove the new detective or anyone else. She was going to help because she needed the truth.

"I overheard your conversation with the detectives." Tyson said, stepping closer to talk to his boss.

"Yeah." Adams said, still watching the two women from across the dance floor.

"They're here looking for that cute blonde, right?"

"Yes." She said, not quite interested in where he was going.

"They said she went out for a drink."

"So far you're batting a thousand Tyson." She said, looking over at him. "Now tell me your point because I know you have one."

"Well after hearing that I took the liberty of calling over to Chasity's."

She turned completely towards him, her interest peaked. Chasity's was the only other lesbian bar in Valle Luna. Located just down the street, it was a tiny establishment with just a bar, a small dance floor and a pool room. With La Femme's size, funding and popularity, no one else seemed to want to compete by opening a bar. But Chasity had opened her bar fifteen years ago before La Femme and she still had her regulars.

"And?" She impatiently asked, needing to know.

"She's there." He said.

Adams stood straighter at the revelation, her body instantly ready to go as Tyson continued.

"And Chasity said she's already cut her off. Said she's drunk and barely able to walk much less dance. I asked her not to kick her out, told her that you would be there shortly to get her."

She took a hurried step away from him, anxious to go. "Thanks." She said, giving him a sincere smile. "Will you please escort the detectives around while I'm gone? Including my private quarters, to show them that she's really not here?"

"Yes ma'am." He said moving away towards the two detectives, reaching them just before they hit the door.

"Excuse me, ladies." His thick voice thundered out, getting their attention. "I've been instructed to show you around the club. Anywhere you wish to go, I will make sure you have access."

Henderson opened her mouth to speak as if you to say "I told you so" but instead just looked at Sinclair and shrugged.

"Thank you, I think we'll take you up on that." Sinclair said, ignoring Henderson.

Adams pulled her Harley Davidson to a stop behind the small bar just a few blocks down the way from hers. As she killed the engine, she could hear the loud music drifting out from the door, which had always been left open just a crack during business hours. She dismounted the black and chrome machine and walked the short distance around the white brick building to the door.

A sign was mounted by the entrance, warning that no one under the age of twenty one would be admitted. But as she pulled open the door, no bouncer stood to check I.D. Only the eyes of the few patrons turned to examine her as she walked in.

"Hey, Liz!" Chasity called out from behind the bar. Adams looked over to her right at the bar and made her way over to tall chairs.

"Chas, long time no see." She greeted as she shook the older woman's hand.

"No shit, man." She said with her warm brown eyes. "So how you been?"

"Better." She responded, offering no more.

Chasity reached down with her hands to brush at her 1950's diamond patterned buttoned down shirt, feeling suddenly self conscious in front of the gorgeous Adams.

"Does that cute little blonde have anything to do with that?" She asked, looking past Adams to the dance floor where Erin stood swaying to music obviously very intoxicated. She took an immediate step to go after her when Chasity stopped her.

"Here's her shirt." Chas said, handing Adams the discarded flannel shirt from behind the bar. The dark woman took the shirt and ignored the questions in her old friend's eyes. Instead, she turned to focus on the dancing drunk woman, moving all alone to the music on the small dance floor.

With concern in her eyes, she made her way to the dance floor, stepping up in front of the intoxicated blonde.

"Hi." She said, suddenly unsure as to what to say to the dancing woman who swayed with her eyes closed, obviously lost in her own little world.

Erin opened her eyes and looked around. She, and one other, appeared to be the only ones on the small dance floor. She looked up at the other woman who was standing before her.

"Hi yourself." She said with a sloppy grin, recognizing Adams and poking at her chest with a finger. "Wait a minute!" She suddenly declared. "I'm not at your club, I left your club." She looked around hastily, suddenly lost in her surroundings. "What are you doing here?" She asked, stepping closer to touch the dark woman's

strong arms. "Are you real?" She slurred out and then laughed hysterically. "Or are you just a figment of my imagination...imagination." She corrected just before laughing again.

"I'm real." Adams said, hugging the blonde to her, trying to steady her. "And you're drunk."

"Ohmygod really?" She asked with sarcasm, looking around with wide eyes as if she couldn't believe the possibility.

"Come on, let's go." Adams said, trying to lead her off the dance floor.

"Where to?" Erin asked, dragging her feet. "I wanna dance." She declared, flailing her arms dramatically.

"You've danced enough."

"I wanna dance some more." She said, stopping in her tracks, resisting the stronger woman. Adams looked down at her and eased up on her grip. The last thing she wanted to do was hurt her.

"Gah," Erin let out as she looked up into the darker woman's face. "You are so fucking gorgeous, ya know that?" She asked, slurring, trying to touch her face.

Adams grabbed at her hand, stopping her before she most likely poked her eye. Then quickly, and with relative ease, she hoisted the drunk blonde up and over her shoulder.

"Hey!" Erin yelled into the shirt on the stronger woman's back. "This isn't dancing!"

Adams walked the short distance back to the bar where she tossed a hundred dollar bill on the glossy wood counter.

"Sorry for the trouble, Chas." She said, looking at her old friend. "Will that cover her tab?" She asked, referring to the hundred.

"She's already paid up." Chas responded, wondering who the young blonde was to warrant such a response from Elizabeth Adams.

"Then, I'm sure that will cover the trouble she's caused." She said, feeling Erin try to resist briefly before giving up.

"Nah, man. She wasn't any trouble. Entertaining maybe, but no trouble." A few of the other patrons at the bar voiced up and agreed with the bar owner.

"Then, for your hospitality, drinks are on me." She said, refusing to retrieve her money. As she turned with the blonde slumped over her shoulder, she heard the hearty thanks from the women seated at the dim bar.

She walked out into the night and approached her bike where she set Erin down. She steadied her before she let go of her arms.

"You alright?" She asked her, trying to get her to focus on her eyes.

"Fucking fabulous." Erin slurred out, grabbing her forehead, as a wave of dizziness surged through her. She closed her eyes and leaned into Adams and swallowed back some nausea.

"You up for a ride dancing queen?" Adams asked, looking down into her face. Erin stood on her own once again and watched as Adams bent down to start the bike.

"Very funny." Erin answered as she stared at the large motorcycle. "I don't think I can." She said a little louder over the roar of the engine.

"Sure you can." Adams said, swinging her denim clad leg over the bike. "You can ride in front." She scooted back on the seat and motioned for Erin to climb on in front of her. She wasn't about to let the intoxicated blonde ride behind her. She was too afraid she would fall off.

Having little other choice in the matter, Erin shrugged, then staggered and then climbed on the bike.

"Here, put on your shirt." Adams said, helping the blonde to shrug into the warm flannel.

Too drunk to think about anything serious, she let the shirt warm her skin and allowed her mind to concentrate on the feel of Adams pressed up against her from behind. She watched as the dark woman reached out with her strong arms surrounding her as she grabbed the handle bars.

Erin grinned uncontrollably as her skin awakened, loving the feel of the dark woman's thighs encasing her, of the breasts pressing into her back. She inhaled the scent of her, instantly knowing what it was. As they drove off from the small lesbian bar, Erin leaned back into Adams, closing her eyes, loving the feel of the wind, and the feel of the beautiful woman behind her.

They hadn't traveled very far when Erin suddenly felt the bike slow down. She opened her eyes and watched as they pulled into a corner convenient store. Adams parked the bike and cut off the engine before she quickly and easily dismounted.

"Why are we here?" Erin said, blinking away her impending headache.

"I'll be right back." Adams said, giving her shoulder a gentle squeeze before she walked away to head inside the small corner store.

As she waited, Erin let her hands rest on the tank of the bike. She swallowed back more nausea while listening to the drone of the traffic behind her. She rubbed her temples and thought to herself that perhaps she shouldn't have had the sixth shot after all, not to mention the two vodka chasers she had insisted upon.

With the thought of alcohol making her sick, she instead tried to concentrate on the beautiful and mysterious dark woman that had shown up surprisingly to rescue her. She had no idea as to why Adams had come to get her, but drunk as she was, the idea of being with the dark woman once again, instantly excited her, encouraging her to sober up. Willing her constitution to return, she was suddenly very eager to be with the gorgeous woman on any level.

"Here." Adams said with a soft smile as she returned to the bike. Erin looked up and took the brown paper bag the dark woman handed her.

"What is it?" She asked, curious as to what was in the bag.

"Stuff that will help."

Adams climbed back onto the bike behind Erin and started the engine. Erin held fast to the bag as they roared back into traffic and headed away from the heart of the city.

Before long, the night air became cooler as they left the hot city streets behind. Adams drove them north until they hit some surrounding mountains just beyond the suburbs. Unlike her home in hills, the mountains to the north of Valle Luna had yet to be developed by home builders and she wove the bike up a popular mountain in the heart of a desert preserve.

Erin recognized the protected park as they climbed up the paved road. She had never been to the tops of the park mountains and she was awed by the breathtaking view of the valley below.

Adams slowed the bike as they hit the top where a large level area opened up into a fantastic view of the city below. She parked the bike parallel to the drop off so they both could enjoy the view.

She cut off the engine and encouraged Erin to turn around on the seat.

Erin reluctantly stood, hating to be out of the stronger woman's arms. Still holding on to the bag, she repositioned herself on the bike, looking directly into the beautiful face of Elizabeth Adams.

"Go ahead, look in the bag." She said. "I have a feeling you're going to need it."

Erin opened up the bag and pulled out a twenty ounce bottle of coke, some aspirin and two small bags of potato chips.

"What's all this?" She said, suddenly craving the coke.

"My own little hangover prevention kit." Adams said with a smile. "Thought you could use it."

Erin unscrewed the coke bottle and took a swig. "Thanks." She said.

"I know it's a little unconventional, but the coke always helped to settle my stomach and the chips always sated my salt cravings.

"Sounds like you've had a few wild nights." Erin said playfully.

Adams chuckled. "One or two."

"Uh huh." Erin said, taking another sip of coke, before looking back up into the incredible blue eyes.

"So why did you come get me?" She asked, suddenly curious. "How did you even find me?"

"Your two detective friends came to see me tonight at La Femme."

"Who? Henderson?" Erin asked, her mind suddenly sober and flying.

"And the other one, the tall blonde." Adams confirmed.

"Why?" She asked, suddenly concerned and worried that Adams was once again being harassed. "I told them that you didn't do anything, they should leave you al..."

"They were looking for you." She interjected.

"For me?" Erin asked with obvious surprise. She looked away from the blue eyes in thought.

"Patricia sounded upset and I thought you might be in trouble, so I came looking for you."

"Why would I be in trouble?" Erin had no idea what was going on with Henderson and she suddenly felt anxious butterflies beginning to flutter about in her stomach.

"Well considering the condition I found you in, I would say I was right."

"I just wanted a drink." She said and then realized she didn't need to explain. "Why was Henderson so upset?" She asked, still completely thrown by what Adams had just told her.

"I don't know." She answered honestly. "When I told her I hadn't seen you she got real upset, like she didn't believe me."

"She probably didn't." She said, knowing how much Henderson despised and distrusted Adams.

"Probably not." She admitted.

Erin sat in silence, thinking and re-thinking about Henderson and what she could possibly want. She felt in her back pocket for her cell phone and pulled it out. She flipped it open and saw that she had missed one call, a call from Henderson. There was no message. It certainly wasn't anything to cause great alarms. If something were really wrong, wouldn't Henderson have kept trying to reach her? Wouldn't she have left a hurried voice message, beckoning her to return her call as soon as possible? She closed her phone and slid it back into her pocket.

"You know, I felt bad tonight, when I saw you like that. I feel like it's my fault." Adams said as she looked into her eyes. Seeing the young detective so obviously impaired and hurting had tugged strongly on her heart. A feeling she wasn't used to experiencing.

"Your fault?" Erin asked, confused, not seeing how it could've possibly been the fault of anyone other than herself.

"Yes." Adams said. "That maybe you're all torn up inside over what you did for me."

Erin shook her head. "I did the right thing by you." She said, meeting her eyes. "I won't lie to you and tell you that it hasn't caused me some grief and possibly more in the future. And that does upset me. But I guarantee you that it's not the only thing troubling me right now. It's a lot of things."

"Your life." She said softly, knowing about Erin's husband and recent divorce.

"Yes." Erin replied. "We all have trouble in our lives, don't we?"

Adams swallowed as she looked into her beautiful face. "Some more than others." She finally said.

Erin looked at her and saw the glint of sadness in her eyes. She reached out and gently laid her hands on top of the dark woman's.

Adams nearly trembled under the warm and caring touch, the gesture almost too much. She was quickly losing the battle within herself over Erin Mackenzie. The incredible blonde was invading her dark and desolate soul, conquering it with light and love. She looked away, hating how emotional and easily moved she was quickly becoming. How could this have happened? How did this woman do what no other ever could?

She removed her hands out from underneath Erin's, the warming sensation spreading like a virus in her blood. She looked back into the green eyes and gathered her nerve.

"I need to tell you about Jay." She said, almost in a whisper.

Erin reached out and touched her hand again, unable not to.

"What do you want to tell me?" She asked softly.

"She's messed up." She admitted wishing she could remove her hand, but knowing she now needed it to draw strength from. "Really messed up." She continued. "She's got it in her head that she needs to protect me like she did when we were kids."

"Have you spoken with her?" Erin asked with concern as she searched her eyes. "Since all this happened?"

Adams shook her head and let out a shaky breath. She was never this emotional, not even about her own sister. It was Erin Mackenzie and the way she sat looking at her. With warmth, caring, and unconditional understanding. Things she had never seen in anyone's eyes before, things she knew she would forever be drawn to. Looking away, she finally managed to continue. "I told her to leave you alone, to stop the killing."

"Do you think she will?" She asked softly.

"I hope so." She looked back to Erin "I've got a private investigator following her to make sure. But last I heard, Jay had left Alabama and now I don't know where she is."

"Alabama?"

"Yes, that's where we grew up." She felt Erin squeeze her hand and she swelled with emotion deep within her chest, willing to tell the woman everything. From her horrible childhood to her countless lovers, she would tell her all of it. Because for once in her life she knew that she had found someone who would understand.

"And the detective doesn't know where she is?" Erin asked with concern, wanting more than anything to reach out and hold the hurting woman across from her.

"I haven't heard yet." She said, trying to gain a handle on her emotions.

"Why haven't the police found her?" Erin asked. "I don't remember reading anything in your file about a sister."

"That's probably because there's not much to find." She said, looking into her eyes. "Jay's my half sister." She looked away as she continued to explain. "My mother would breeze into town with an illegitimate baby, claiming she couldn't care for it. And her sister, my aunt, would take them."

"How many times did she do this?" She felt so sad for the dark woman and her lonely motherless childhood.

"Twice. Once with Jay and then once with me."

"She just dropped you off and left you? Never to see you again?"

Adams shook her head in silence. "We were raised and schooled for a long time by my aunt. I, for the most part, didn't even have a medical record until I broke my arm and needed surgery. And, well, after a certain traumatic instance, Jay pretty much lost her sense of reality and wouldn't even stray far from the house. Not many people knew her."

"My gosh." Erin breathed out. "I'm so sorry."

"Don't be." Adams managed, her throat tight. "It's something I got over a long time ago."

"Thank you for telling me." The blonde said meaning it. She knew Adams was putting up a brave front and she didn't want to upset her any further. She had questions about her childhood but she knew she couldn't push. If the dark woman wanted to tell her, she would.

"I told you I would tell you." She said softly. "And I'll tell you more as I know it, in regards to Jay. I just don't want you to go crazy over all this."

Erin leaned closer to Adams across the seat of the bike. She had sobered up quickly and her heart pounded within her, threatening to burst with feelings for the dark woman.

"What I'm going crazy over is you." She said, reaching out and lightly touching the perfectly sculpted face.

Adams breathed deeply at the warmth of the touch and she reached up to grab the hand that elicited such powerful reactions in her. She turned the hand over and kissed lightly at the palm. She finally knew some of the reasons why the young detective moved her so, but she also knew that she would most likely spend eternity trying to find out the rest.

Erin shuddered across from her as she felt the hot lips and breath on her sensitive palm.

"You don't understand how much I think about you." She whispered breathlessly. "You're the only one I've ever been with and..."

"The only one?" She questioned, suddenly alarmed.

"Yes." Erin answered, feeling her cheeks flush with heated embarrassment.

Adams sat in silence, dumbfounded. "Why didn't you tell me?" She asked, suddenly fearing that maybe she had rushed the encounter or been too aggressive.

"What was I supposed to say exactly? Besides, nothing happened that I didn't want to happen."

"That was weeks ago." She said under her breath, silently reliving the wonderful encounter in her mind.

"There's been no one since?" A dull, heavy sensation suddenly fell upon her insides as she thought of Erin with another woman.

"No." She said, looking away. "I've wanted to, but..." She let the words fall away, too embarrassed to continue.



"I understand." She said softly, gently leading her chin to look back into her eyes. She remembered how crazy with lust she had been after her first experience with a woman. She looked at her, still relieved however selfish it may be, that she hadn't been with someone else. Searching her green eyes she said. "Erin?"

"Yes?"

"I want to see you again. Soon." She said huskily.

"I want to see you too." Erin replied, feeling the warm heat in her cheeks spread throughout her body.

"Call me." Adams said. "Anytime."

Erin shook her head and looked down as Adams retrieved a pen from a small satchel on the side of the bike. Taking her hand, she then gently wrote a phone number in the very palm she had just kissed.

Then, with slow deliberation, Adams tilted her face and kissed her. Erin swayed under the warm, tender mouth as she felt Adams reach out to steady her, holding her, embracing her.

They pulled apart slowly and Erin opened her eyes, wanting literally to cry at the loss. She had never felt anything so powerful, never wanted anyone so much.

"Hey." Adams said softly, holding her face gently. "I'll see you again soon."

"I know." Erin said looking down. "I think it's just everything. It's all getting to me."

Adams stroked her hair away from her face. "It's going to be ok. I promise it'll all work out."

Erin looked up as a tear fell down her cheek. "I hope you're right."

"I'm always right." She said, kissing her forehead. "Now let's get you back to wherever you're staying so you can get some rest."

Erin shook her head and readied herself for the ride back to Valle Luna.

Henderson stepped away from the apartment window and looked at Sinclair. She was at a total loss for words as she heard Adams drive away on her Harley. She sat down on the couch and hugged herself as she waited, eventually hearing Erin climb the stairs to the apartment.

"I'm sorry, Patricia." Sinclair finally said. "I didn't want to be right."

Henderson swallowed hard as she heard Mac knock at the door.

"I don't know what this means." She said as she rose to answer the door. "But I do know that I refuse to think you're right." She opened the door and looked at her friend, hoping against hope that Mac could answer all the questions that she suddenly found she needed answers to.

## Chapter 8

*Sunday, August 31*

*Valle Luna, Az.*

Erin awoke to find Henderson staring at her from her seat on the opposite couch. Sleep, heavy and cloudy, clung to her tired body making it difficult to focus. She stretched against the soft cushions of her make shift bed and rubbed at her eyes.

Bright sunlight shone in through the window, cascading the living room in angelic like light. Squinting against the sun, she forced herself to sit up.

"Did I wake you?" Henderson asked, her own voice not yet awake.

"No." Erin replied. "I'm used to people staring at me while I sleep." She teased, offering her friend a tired smile but got none in return.

She looked around the apartment and noted that Henderson's air mattress had already been made up and put away. The writer had obviously been up awhile. Erin held up her wrist and tried to focus on the time.

"It's after eight." Henderson offered.

Erin stood and stretched some more before making her way to the restroom.

"Sinclair here?" She asked just before she reached the bathroom.

"She left about an hour ago." Henderson reported as she heard the bathroom door close. She glanced down at her hands and let her heavy gaze drift past them, unable to focus. She hadn't slept much at all the night before. Too many questions had plagued her mind, making her virtually sick with anxiety.

When Mac had arrived the night before, she had waved off any discussion or questions, too exhausted to say much of anything at all. The tired blonde had collapsed on the couch in her clothes and shoes and drifted quickly off to sleep.

Henderson hadn't had the heart to disturb the younger detective, knowing even if she had, Mac would've been useless in her exhausted state. So instead she had let the blonde sleep in peace while her own mind had tortured her throughout the night.

Henderson had replayed some of her previous encounters with Mac. Her mind revealing to her several instances, if not more, where Mac's behavior could be seen as suspicious.

She thought of the first time she had been kissed by Erin Mackenzie all those days ago. She had been sitting in Ruiz's office discussing the case with her superior and the young rookie detective. She had told Ruiz that she didn't think Mac was ready for the dangerous undercover assignment, having thought at the time that the blonde detective was too vulnerable, too easy of a mark for Elizabeth Adams. Mac hadn't taken the news well and she

had risen up from her chair to walk seductively over to where the older female detective sat, dazed and confused.

Henderson cleared her tight throat as she remembered the way Mac had held her eyes as she straddled her on the chair. Her cheeks flushed with heat once again as the memory of Mac taking her face in her hands flooded her mind. The kiss had been powerful, dominant and aggressive, demanding an instant reaction from the older more experienced detective.

She raised a trembling hand up to her lips as the thoughts invaded. At the time she had thought the kiss was just a ploy to get her to see that Mac could indeed hold her own as a lesbian. A desperate attempt by a rookie cop to be kept in on the case. But now, looking back, could such a passionate and consuming kiss been given by a woman with no alleged lesbian experience? One had to wonder.

The act itself had been skilled and seductive. Something that a nervous rookie would've had a hard time pulling off. She shuddered as she thought of Mac and how she had made her melt under her body. If the kiss had truly come from someone with no experience, then how had she been able to it with such passion and controlled sensuality?

Henderson rose up off the couch as the disturbing thought finally pushed to the back of her troubled mind. She walked into the kitchen needing something, anything to help distract her long enough to have a conversation with Mac. As she searched the cabinets, Mac emerged from the restroom, her cheeks red and alive from a fresh scrubbing.

"You gonna make me breakfast?" She asked the older detective, teasing.

Henderson pulled down a coffee mug and eyed some coffee but then decided against it. Her stomach just wasn't up for much of anything.

"So how'd things go last night with Sinclair? When I walked in you two looked like I had interrupted something." Erin raised a playful eyebrow at her friend. "I hope it wasn't something too important." She teased.

Henderson lifted her gaze to meet the bright green eyes across from her. She wanted to smile, to make a playful comment back but her face weighed heavy with her worry.

Erin continued to grin, waiting for her friend to fess up and tell her all the juicy details. But when she saw the look on the writer's face she knew something was terribly wrong.

"What is it?" She asked, immediately worried.

Henderson started to speak, to tell her it was nothing, but she couldn't. She had to talk to Mac. She had to know.

"Where were you last night?" She asked softly, holding Mac's eyes briefly before she looked away, not yet ready to try and read what the eyes held.

"Wha..?" Erin shook her head, not sure she had heard correctly. The look on Henderson's face was one of great distress, and her question didn't seem to fit with the pain in her eyes.

"I..." She searched inwardly, momentarily thrown by the question. "I went out for a drink." She finally managed still having no clue as to how it pertained to Henderson's look of sorrow and worry.

Henderson braced herself against the kitchen counter as Mac responded, leaving Adams out of the equation. She swallowed back the bitter taste of betrayal that was so ready to rise and conquer her, eating her from the inside out. Why hadn't she mentioned Adams?

"Were you with Adams?" Henderson asked, needing to know and not willing to wait any longer to find out. Her voice faltered, threatening to fail her.

Erin shook her head again completely confused. "For a little while." Suddenly alarms rang off in her head. Was something wrong? Did something happen? She thought of Ruiz and his determination to nail Adams with something, even over her innocence. "Why? Is something wrong?" She asked, physically and mentally coiling, ready to act and respond immediately if need be. Her heart thudded madly in her chest as the thought of Adams in harms way washed over her, threatening to drown her.

Henderson felt her throat tighten as she watched Mac react to the question. Was she worried that her cover had been blown? That the gig was up and that Adams had finally been arrested and charged?

"I'm not exactly sure Mac." She forced out, her voice thick and scratchy. "That's why I need to talk to you."

Erin swallowed hard and nodded. "Ok." She said, offering her assistance.

"Why were you with Adams last night?" Henderson asked point blank. She knew if she was going to make it through this that she had to hit the nail on the head right away.

Erin reared her head back, completely thrown by the question. What did this have to do with anything?

"What?" She asked, searching her friends face for answers.

"Why were you with Adams last night, Mac?" Henderson asked again.

"I told you, I was out for a drink."

"And that included Adams?"

"No, not at first." Erin clarified, still wondering where this was going.

"Then when?" She needed to know and she would keep pushing until she did.

"I don't know." She was so confused and the grilling was shaking her up. "Not until later. She found me and we went for a ride."

"She found you?" Henderson let out a shaky breath. How the hell did Adams find you when I couldn't?

"Yeah." Erin replied. "She said that you and Sinclair came to the club looking for me and she became concerned and went looking for me herself."

"Concerned?" Henderson scoffed out.

"Yes." Erin said not appreciating the tone in which her friend had responded.

"Do you have any idea how bad this sounds, Mac?" She asked, her voice gaining strength.

"Why would it sound bad?" She watched her friend's face. It had changed from one of worry to one of contempt within mere seconds.

"Are you involved with her?" She asked, fighting the rage she was feeling well up inside her.

"Who?" Erin asked, still thrown by the questioning.

"Don't bullshit me, Mac." She warned, her eyes growing big. "You know damn well who."

Erin shook her head, confused and a little afraid by the look in Henderson's eyes.

"Adams?" She had no idea why she was being asked. "Why does it matter?" It was her business and no one else's. And she knew it was no secret how Henderson felt about the night club owner. She didn't want Erin involved with Adams and that was why she was so angry.

"It matters, Mac." Henderson seethed out.

"Why? It's my business and just because you hate her..."

Henderson threw the empty coffee mug she was holding across the room, shattering it against the wall. Erin jerked at the sound of the ceramic mug exploding upon impact.

"It matters because there are people, police personnel, who think that you are covering for her." Henderson said, shuddering from her loss of control. She kept her voice low and level, her eyes penetrating Erin's. Her chest rose and fell with her heavy breathing. "They think you've been involved with her all along."

"That's not true." Erin said, turning her head away to stare down at the ground, her mind racing. What was happening?

"That's what I've been trying to tell them." Henderson managed. "But frankly, Mac. I can't keep it up. Especially when you're off secretly seeing her."

Erin snapped her head up and squared her shoulders. She didn't know what was happening or why. But she resented every word.

"What do you think, Patricia? Do believe them, what they're saying?" She clenched her fists at her side as she watched her friend.

Henderson looked away at the question and swallowed against her tight throat. She stared down at the kitchen counter wanting to tell Mac she believed in her, but knowing she couldn't. There were just too many unanswered questions.

"Well your silence says enough." Erin said, her own body wanting to scream and cry at the accusations.

"Maybe if you stopped seeing her, I could better plead your case..." Henderson started, looking up at her.

"No." Erin declared. "I will see who I want, when I want. To hell with all of you." She dug in her jeans for her keys and then remembered that she didn't have her car.

"Fuck." She fumed as she headed for the door anyway.

"Mac, wait." Henderson called out.

"What?" Erin asked stopping but not bothering

to turn around.

"Please, stay and talk to me. I can help you work this out." Henderson quietly pleaded wanting to make things right. Wanting it all to be alright.

Erin turned and looked at the woman she had called a friend. "No, Patricia you can't. Because whether you believe it or not there's nothing to work out. I haven't done anything wrong." With her heart shattering, she turned and walked out the door.

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*Tuesday, September 2nd*

Erin sat staring at her phone. She opened her palm and eyed the phone number still written on it in black ink. It appeared faded but still legible. She knew she wouldn't have let it wash completely off before she had a chance to write it down.

Sighing and sitting back against the couch, she looked around her new home. It was a modest, well kept townhouse, small enough to be cozy, but large enough for her to breathe. After she had left Sinclair's two days before, she had called a cab to take her to her car. Then she had stopped in a grocery store for a local home rental catalog. It hadn't taken her long to find one she liked and when she had offered a large amount of cash to move in immediately, she had found herself with a set of keys and her own covered parking space.

She gazed down and ran her hand over the soft fabric of the sofa. The living room furniture had just arrived the day before and she could still smell its newness. Lucky for her she had found a place that delivered quickly, hence shortening her nights on the uncomfortable air mattress. Last night she had slept on her new sofa and her new, large bed wouldn't be delivered until Wednesday.

She turned her hand over and eyed the phone number again. Henderson's words rang in her ears and she knew she shouldn't see Adams just to be safe. She didn't understand why the department had suspicions against her, but she didn't want to add any fuel to their fire either. She eyed her phone again, brand new and sitting on the table next to the couch. Maybe Adams would have some answers and if not then she should at least warn her that the police were still looking at her as a suspect. So much so, that they were now willing to tie one of their own in with her.

She cringed as she thought of the accusation. Was it because they now knew about Jay and that she had failed to tell them about her? Whatever the reason she had to talk to Adams. She reached over and picked up the phone. She stared at the numbers on the buttons. Who was she kidding? She could try to convince herself all she wanted that the reason she was calling Adams was to talk to her about the investigation, to warn her even. But she knew the real reason she was calling and it had nothing to do with the police or anything associated with them. She was calling because she couldn't get the dark beauty out of her mind for even a second.

She pushed the talk button and dialed the number. As she waited for it to ring, she briefly wondered if she was being watched. She had checked for a tail yesterday and today and hadn't seen anyone but it didn't mean they weren't there. One thing she had been adamant about checking though was her phone line. It had been made

available to her that very morning, giving her the chance to check it right away, which allowed her the confidence needed as she made the very private call to Elizabeth Adams.

"Hello." A voice sounded at the other end.

"Hello." Erin said, suddenly unsure and shy.

"Erin?" Adams asked.

"Yes, yes it's me. How did you know?"

"Your voice. I recognized it right away." She sounded genuinely happy to hear from her and still so damn sexy with her deep throaty voice.

"Oh." She said, laughing a little, feeling like a young smitten school girl.

"How are you?" Adams asked.

"Fine." She said quickly, trying to convince herself as well as Adams.

"I don't believe you. You said that too quickly."

"No, I am. Really." She started smoothing out her shirt nervously with her free hand, as if Adams could somehow see her. She looked down and eyed the new shirt, silently wondering if Adams would approve. Some new clothes, along with the townhouse and the furniture had become her newest necessities.

"I guess I'll just have to wait and see you to judge for myself." Adams cooed, instantly making Erin blush.  
"How about dinner tonight?"

Erin stammered a little, the conversation moving so fast. She hadn't even had time to ask the dark woman how she was doing in return.

"Uh, sure ok." She finally managed.

"Wonderful. How about my place? You remember how to get there?"

"Yes, uh Liz?" She had to speak fast before Adams side tracked her with more alluring dinner date conversation.

"Yes?"

"I think the police are still watching you."

Silence.

"Is that all?" Adams questioned.

"Well, no, but I really don't want to discuss it over the phone."

"I understand." The dark woman replied. "But just so you know this is my satellite phone. I use it for all my private calls."

"That is somewhat of a relief." Erin said, relaxing a little bit more.

"If they are still watching me, is that going to present a problem for you tonight? Coming to my place?" Adams asked.

Erin thought for a moment. She had thought of nothing else the entire night before, tossing and turning on her new couch. How would it affect her, if the department knew she was still seeing Adams?

"No. I don't care if they see me."

"In that case, it doesn't bother me either. I've grown used to their watching my every move. One more night of their pathetic surveillance won't make a difference." She laughed.

"Liz?" Erin asked again.

"Yes?"

"Why do you trust me? I mean, how do you know that I'm not still working undercover for them?"

"I guess I don't know that for sure." She confessed. "I hope you're not, but not for the reasons you may think. Not because of Jay or anything like that."

"What then?"

"Because if you are working for them, then I would know that this, that you and your feelings towards me were just a charade. And that would devastate me."

Erin sat in silence, no words able to travel from her mind to her mouth. "Oh." She said, completely taken aback.

"And besides, I've already discussed Jay with you and if you were really still working for them, I suspect she would already be in custody. I would already be arrested for interfering with an investigation as well as conspiracy and anything else they could conjure up on my behalf."

"True." Erin replied.

"So, with that being said, you still up for dinner? Sounds like you could use a nice meal with warm company"

*How warm are you? I would love to find out.*

She shook her head and blushed at her own thoughts. "Absolutely."

"Great. How's seven sound?"

"I'll be there."

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Erin walked up to the enormous front door carrying an expensive bottle of wine and a ferociously hungry attraction for the woman she was about to dine with.

On the drive over she had tried to calm her nerves and her butterflies but to no avail. She was nervous yes, but not just because of Adams. She knew the woman would be there, drop dead gorgeous and as warm and charming as ever. But what made her more nervous than Adams, was the fear that her own overwhelming attraction and feelings towards the dark woman would cause her to do or say something stupid. In short, she was nervous because she didn't trust herself.

She stood by the door and waited, already hearing the deep barking of the Dobermans. Adams already knew she was there; she had had to call her from the front gate, needing access to the driveway.

She heard Liz call out to the dogs, beckoning their silence. She hastily looked down at herself, anxiously examining her choice of wear for the evening. She rubbed a sweaty palm on her jeans and smoothed out her tight fitting black v neck shirt. She had worn her new black boots to match.

"Hey." Adams greeted in her sexy, throaty voice as she opened the door. She smiled devilishly as she unabashedly looked the blonde up and down. "Wow. You should definitely wear black more often."

Erin smiled back, feeling her cheeks flush with heat from the words.

Adams moved to the side and motioned for her to enter. "And she blushes." She said continuing to grin. "You're something else, Erin Mackenzie."

"Stop it." She pleaded over her shoulder as she walked in. "I'm just..."

"Embarrassed?" Adams asked, raising an eyebrow. She closed the door behind the blonde, her eyes never leaving her guest.

Erin turned to look at her, her cheeks now burning. "Well, yes."

"You're not used to compliments." Adams stated matter of factly.

"No, I guess I'm not." She admitted after briefly thinking about it.

"Well, that's something we'll have to remedy now won't we?" She stepped closer to Erin, walking very slowly. When she was directly in front of the blonde, she leaned in and placed her hands gently on the smaller woman's hips. Then, with her blue eyes piercing, she leaned in and placed a very soft, warm kiss on Erin's lips.

"I'm glad you're here." She said as she pulled away.

Erin stood completely still, almost afraid to move for fear that her legs would buckle.

"Thanks." She finally choked out. "Uh, I mean thanks for the invitation" She felt rattled and awkward. "This is for you." She held out the bottle of wine and tried not to stare at the smooth skin of her exposed chest. The shirt Adams had on was smoky gray and unbuttoned down below her breasts, offering a teasing and tantalizing view every time she moved. Feeling her face flush with another flame, Erin looked away, focusing instead on the dark woman's worn jeans and bare feet.

"Thank you." Adams said, inspecting the wine. "It will be perfect for later tonight." She moved past Erin and headed into the kitchen. "Make yourself at home." She said over her shoulder.

Erin followed her down the tiled walkway, as did the two obedient black dogs. Their claws clapped against the tile, their stubby tails wagging with excitement at their guest.

"I'm just finishing up in here." Adams said from the kitchen. "I hope you like stir fry."

"Yes." Erin said watching the tall woman busily slice some red pepper and zucchini. "I didn't know you could cook."

"I don't do it very often, but I do know how." She finished cutting and scooped the veggies up to drop them in the wok. They made a sizzling noise as they hit the heated sesame oil and cooking chicken.

"Smells great." Erin said as the scent of the fresh stir fry wafted into her nostrils.

"I've got a white wine chilled, would you like some?" Adams moved over to the stainless steel fridge and pulled it open, exposing more alluring flesh beneath her open shirt.

"Yes." Erin breathed out huskily referring secretly to the cream colored, soft flesh of her breasts.

Adams busied herself pouring the wine seemingly oblivious to Erin's reaction.

"Here you go." Adams said as she handed Erin the wine glass. "Start in on that while I finish up dinner."

Erin took the wine gratefully and watched from a small sitting room as Adams stirred the sizzling stir fry while adding in noodles. The dark woman moved like a seasoned chef as she worked. Adding in oils, soy sauce and spices to the mix.

Sipping the chilled wine Erin tried to relax as she glanced around the large home. The two Doberman's sat staring at her, entertained by even the slightest move on her part. She remembered the last time she was in the home and how nervous she had been. The nervousness she felt now was different, more hormonally based than before. Her previous visit to the expensive home had had her shaking in her boots while fighting her growing attraction to the then suspected killer.

She looked up as she saw Adams smile and carry over a large wooden bowl full of steaming food. Now it was just her and Adams. There was no longer any suspicion on her part in regards to the dark woman. Only her nervousness stemming from her fierce attraction.

"I thought we would eat in here instead of the dining room." She said as she set down the bowl on the low coffee table. She then walked to the small sofa where Erin was sitting and grabbed two large cushion like pillows which she placed on either side of the coffee table. "You mind dining from the floor?"

"No." Erin said lightly, rising up from the couch. "Is there anything I can help with?"

Adams had already moved quickly back into the kitchen. "No. You just sit there and look beautiful." She responded with a sly grin.

Erin positioned herself on the floor, making herself comfortable on one of the cushions. The remark and grin from Adams had left her heart beating wildly in her chest and she suddenly realized that due to all her budding excitement and desires towards Adams that she wasn't really very hungry.

"Hope you're hungry." Adams chimed in as if sensing her lack of appetite. She was walking back over with chop sticks and serving bowls in one hand along with her own full wine glass in the other.

Erin sat in silence, a smile displayed on her face. How was she going to explain that she had a ferocious appetite but just not for food?

Adams set the bowls down along with her glass and then bent to first serve Erin out a hearty portion of the steaming stir fry and then some for herself. She then settled down on the cushion lotus style and handed Erin a pair of chop sticks.

The young blonde fingered the sticks, unsure how to hold them. She looked across the small coffee table, and watched as Adams expertly pinched a bite of noodles and vegetables with the sticks and then slipped them into and out of her mouth. Erin looked down immediately, finding the site completely erotic.

"Your turn." Adams said as she finished chewing. She had been watching her beautiful dinner guest and she had noticed that she had yet to take a bite.

Erin met her eyes and then fessed up. "I uh, I'm not sure how." She admitted, feeling completely foolish.

"Mmm." Adams sounded as she scooted over next to the blonde. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have assumed that you knew how." She gently took Erin's hand in her own and positioned the chop sticks accordingly. "There, you see, you use this finger as a base and this one to move your main stick."

Erin tried to fight the lust that was washing through her body in response to Adams being so close. The hot blood pounding in her ears made it difficult to comprehend anything that dark woman had said.

"Go ahead. Give it a try." She encouraged.

"Can't we save us both some grief by letting me use a fork?" She asked, meaning it. She glanced down at her hand, her skin still burning from the dark woman's warm touch.

Adams laughed and Erin felt her breath shorten as the deep and seductive sound played in her ears. Everything about the woman was turning her on. She imagined making more of the same deep, throaty sounds pour out of her while in the throes of passion.

"Sure, I'll get you a fork." She said, completely clueless to Erin's lust filled imaginations. "But first I want to see you give it a try."

Erin swallowed, sure that her erotic images were displayed all over her face. She could feel the dark woman's eyes on her and her skin burned under the intense gaze of the piercing blue eyes.

With her hand nearly trembling, she held the chop sticks firm and grasped out a drooping bite of slick noodles. As best she could, she moved her hand quickly to her mouth, feeling the noodles starting to give way. Leaning forward, she attempted to plunge the food in her mouth before the food fell but she didn't quite make it, dropping some of the noodles on the table as well as on her chin.

As she chewed, she sucked in some wayward noodles hanging from her mouth. Adams chuckled next to her.

"It takes practice." The dark woman said, leaning in closer. "You didn't do half bad." Her hand found Erin's face as she helped to free the blonde of some remaining noodles. "Here." She said as she met Erin's eyes. She was holding up a noodle, wanting Erin to take it into her mouth.

Erin opened her mouth and waited as the dark woman placed the tip of the noodle on her tongue. Erin held the blue eyes with her own as she carefully and slowly sucked the noodle in, wishing instead, that she could suck on the fingers feeding her.

"Can I ask you something, Erin?" She asked, lowering her hand with a thoughtful look on her face.

Erin chewed and shrugged. "Sure." *Please ask me to now eat you.*

"Earlier today when you asked me why I trusted you, well I guess I'm wondering the same thing. Why do you trust me?"

Erin swallowed, a little surprised by the question. It was, however, an obvious question and she had no problem answering it.

"Because you saved my life." She answered quickly and truthfully and then sipped her wine.

Adams stared at her and then smiled. "Thank you for telling me." She said, the answer obviously satisfying her.

"You're welcome." Erin replied, giving her a smile in return. "By the way, this is really good." She said, pointing to the food.

"Glad you like it." She remained seated next to Erin, instead pulling her own bowl closer. "I seem to be fresh out of forks, so it looks like I'm going to have to feed you." She grinned a devilish grin before grasping another bite for herself.

Erin laughed. "Next you'll be telling me you're fresh out of swimsuits again." She remembered the very tiny white bikini the dark woman had given her upon her previous visit, claiming it was the only one she had.

Adams chewed while somehow managing to keep the grin on her face. "Now that you mention it..." She said, winning a quick slug from Erin.

Adams laughed again and pinched out another bite for her guest. Erin opened her mouth slowly and took in the bite seductively, lightly sucking on the sticks as Adams pulled them from her mouth.

Erin watched and saw the dark woman's blue eyes widen as she retrieved the sticks.

Adams looked down at her bowl, affected by the sensual site. "Before I forget, or better yet, before I get carried away and forget, what happened with Patricia that got you so upset?"

The dark woman watched as the question penetrated Erin's ears. The blonde looked away and swallowed, the color draining from her flushed cheeks.

"That is, if you don't mind my asking." Adams added, not wanting to upset her beautiful guest.

"No, it's ok." Erin answered softly. "They..." She looked up and met the dark woman's eyes. Eyes that looked so deep, so caring. "They think I'm covering for you." She finally finished.

Adams sat in silence for a moment digesting what she just heard. "Covering for me how?" Suddenly she became very concerned and fearful that the police had somehow found out about Jay.

"They think I've been conspiring with you all along. Covering for you, leading them away from you as a suspect." She felt sick just talking about it. She didn't understand it and she never would.

"They think that about one of their own?" Adams asked, her disregard for the Valle Luna police department and its male heads growing stronger by the second.

Erin shook her head. "Apparently so. They want you so bad they're willing to throw anyone in the pot with you."

"My God." She let out shaking her head in disbelief. "I'm sorry Erin. I never should've asked you to keep quiet about Jay. They don't know do they?" Perhaps that was what had sparked their suspicions to Erin.

"Patricia didn't mention it. But if they don't know, they will eventually. Maybe not tomorrow or even next week. But I can't see them letting this go anytime soon. Someone will always be at it and as long as they are, they will eventually discover your long lost sister."

"What happens to you when they do?" Adams asked very concerned. She didn't want the blonde to get into any trouble, especially on her behalf.

"Lucky for me I can simply claim that I didn't remember it."

Adams shook her head. "No." She said adamantly. "You shouldn't lie. Not for me or anyone else. It was wrong of me to even ask. I love my sister but I won't see you go down for this. I will go down there and tell them everything..."

Erin reached over and placed a gentle hand on the dark woman's, instantly silencing her.

"Don't." She said softly. "They'll spin it anyway they can to see that you're punished to the full extent of the law. They hate you Liz. They want to see you burn for these murders, one way or another."

Adams looked down at Erin's hand resting on her own.

"I..." Erin continued. "I couldn't bear to see that happen to you. You didn't kill those men, Jay did. And it was out of fierce love and loyalty for her that you didn't tell."

"I should've stopped her as soon as I knew." Adams said quietly. "I was just so afraid that by going after her, I would lead the police right to her. You don't understand." She said shaking her head. "She's so disturbed from what happened to her when we were kids."

"What did happen to her?" Erin asked softly.

Adams looked up and met her understanding eyes. "She was kidnapped and then raped and tortured by a murderer when she was eleven."

"Oh my God." Erin let out, truly horrified.

Adams continued to stare at their hands and she watched as Erin moved closer, turning the dark woman's hand over to hold it.

"Jay saved me that day." She said, the warmth from Erin's eyes and hand easing the pain in her heart. "She told me to run and she let him take her instead of me."

Silence ensued as Erin watched the dark woman virtually crumble in front of her. The bond between the two sisters was still very much alive and clearly evident as she listened to Adams speak. She could hear the strain in her voice, and the guilt she still obviously felt over the situation.

"You feel that you owe her." Erin stated calmly, truly feeling for the dark woman.

"Yes." Adams said, looking into her eyes. "She protected me and now I have to protect her." She looked away as she thought. "And I was willing to do that at any cost to me or anyone else." She looked back to Erin. "Until now. I won't see you get hurt in this, Erin."

"But it's your sister." Erin said. "You hardly know me."

"I do know you." Adams clarified, rising to her knees. "I don't know how it's possible, but I do. And I would do anything to protect you as well." She lifted Erin's hand and placed a soft warm kiss across her knuckles.

Erin felt her swelling heart race once again in her chest. Her emotions had changed from deep empathy and understanding to pure, wild lust within seconds as she felt the hot mouth brushing and breathing against her skin.

"You better stop doing that or I won't be able to think about dinner any longer." She breathed out, feeling the kisses linger longer with the dark woman's lips pressing and puckering slower and slower.

Adams grinned, looking up from the sensitive skin on the back of Erin's hand.

"You know, I've suddenly lost interest in dinner as well." She stood and held Erin's hand, helping her to stand. "I'll just put this in the fridge for later." She scooped up the large wooden bowl and walked over to the fridge. "I don't suppose..." She turned back to look at Erin as she opened the fridge, quickly giving the blonde a shot of the milky white skin of her breast. "You're up for a swim?" The devilish grin returned and she felt so good and so free at having discussed such troublesome things with someone, who for the first time, seemed to understand. She was eternally grateful to the beautiful blonde and she would do anything to hold onto her, to cherish her.

Erin couldn't help but flush in response to the grin and the offer. Images of their last pool encounter flooded her mind as well as her loins.

"That depends." Erin said, letting her raging libido give her confidence. "Are you fresh out of swimsuits?"

Adams slinked back over to her, holding her eyes the entire time. Her shirt was moving against her breasts as she moved, igniting an erotic fire within her nipples.

"I am." She responded in a deep voice laced with innuendo.

Erin tried not to shudder upon hearing the words. "That's too bad." She countered, not meaning it.

"Is it?" Adams asked, raising an eyebrow. She stood before Erin and began unbuttoning the remaining buttons of her gray shirt. Erin watched completely mesmerized. She licked her lips and swallowed hard as the last button was released exposing a muscled abdomen and the promising spheres of rounded breasts.

Adams grinned as she watched the blonde take delight in the striptease. "Your turn." She said for the second time that evening. Erin looked down at herself, a little taken aback.

"No fair." She said. "I don't have any buttons."

The dark woman smiled. "Darn." She said lightly, crossing her arms over her chest more than ready to watch.

Erin fingered her black shirt while thinking. Then, as she looked down at the dark woman's bare feet, she smiled in victory. Bending over, she pulled off her boots one at a time and tossed them over her shoulders. Then she pulled off her socks and stood grinning from ear to ear before her dinner companion.

Adams raised an eyebrow and uncrossed her arms.

"Your turn." Erin said lightly.

Adams trailed her fingers down her exposed skin as she watched Erin's green eyes take it in. As she reached the waist line of her jeans, she unbuttoned the denim and then inched them down slowly over her hips. The shirt she wore was rather long, covering her most sensitive area, but not before Erin saw the lack of underwear.

As her face and body burned with pure desire, Erin continued to watch with voyeuristic delight as Adams removed the jeans from her ankles and then tossed them across the room.

The dark woman stood before her guest almost completely nude, save for the smoky gray shirt seductively covering her erogenous zones.

Erin gulped at the site but tried not to show how shook up she really was. Instead she gave Adams a half grin and then lowered her hands to inch up her shirt. She brought it up agonizingly slow, watching the dark woman's face as she went. She could see the bold desire in the blue eyes and she found that the exhibition was turning her on ten fold. Her skin felt unbelievably sensitive as the shirt, along with her fingers, maneuvered up and over her body.

Bringing the shirt up over her head, she let it fall down next to her as she stood before Adams breathing heavily in her black lace bra.

The dark woman sucked in a quick hot breath of air as the very site that had haunted her for weeks melted into her eyes. She stepped closer to the blonde, reaching out to grab hold of her jeans.

"Your behind." She said seductively as she licked her lips and focused in on Erin's mouth. "I think I need to help you catch up." She yanked Erin closer and unbuttoned her jeans. As she lowered the zipper she watched as the blonde's green eyes flooded with a darker shade of desire. With her own blood throbbing angrily in-between her legs, Adams pushed Erin's jeans down over her hips and bent down to help ease them over her thighs and off at her ankles. She looked up at the beautiful detective and took in her matching black panties, her sculpted torso and her full breasts. The woman was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen. No other woman would ever compare.

She came back up slowly, careful to breathe against Erin's skin on the way up. The blonde twitched and jerked in response as Adams rose to stand before her. With the heat back in her cheeks, Erin reached out with her hands and placed them under the dark woman's shirt on her warm hips.

"My turn." She let out in an excited raspy voice. She took a step closer and looked into the hypnotizing blue eyes as she lightly ran her hands up and down the dark woman's skin under the shirt careful to avoid her nipples. Adams shuddered and Erin watched as her pupils dilated. With slow deliberation, Erin stroked the dark woman softly, rimming under her warm breasts, feeling them draw up with anticipation. As her own breathing increased and shallowed, Erin finally gave in and ran her thumbs across the taut nipples purposely as she drew open the shirt. Adams choked back a near cry of desperation as the sensation spread out like hot fingers expanding out from her breasts and igniting her very core.

Erin eyed the beautifully carved body before her. The dark woman was unbelievably gorgeous. Near perfect in almost every way. From her sculpted face and high cheek bones, to her broad strong shoulders and arms, to her creamy rounded breasts with the dark rose centers and her exquisitely etched abdomen, right down to her long, strong legs. Of course, Erin thought as she ran a light hand down to the thin patch of dark hair between the stronger woman's legs, she had saved the most delectable morsel for last.

Adams shuddered once again and grabbed Erin's hand, halting its pursuit to the nucleus of nerve endings between her legs.

"No." She managed to choke out. "It's your turn again." She stood still while Erin brought both her hands up to help her shrug out of the shirt. The blonde grinned mischievously and tried to run her hands once again over the dark woman's body. Adams caught her wrists, knowing immediately what she was up to. "Uh uh." She said with a grin. "I said it's your turn."

Erin looked at the dark woman's lips, wanting so desperately to take them with her own. She felt Adams let go of her but she was unable to move, completely mesmerized.

The dark woman stepped ever closer and ran her hands up and down Erin's sides, awakening her skin instantly. The blonde shuddered and braced herself on the stronger woman's shoulders. Adams felt her nostrils flare as she leaned in and inhaled against Erin's neck. She at once recognized the scent of her and she clenched her legs together against the mounting pressure between them. Then, as she allowed the scent of the blonde to swirl in her brain, she reached around and unhooked her bra, bringing it forward across her shoulders and then letting it fall as it freed her ample breasts.

"My God." She breathed out before she even realized it. She looked into the burning green eyes as she touched the gathering dark honey nipples. "You are so beautiful." She whispered as Erin clung to her wrists.

"Ah..." Erin breathed out, with her head held back in pleasure. "If you don't stop..." She said, finally able to look at Adams with fire in her eyes. "I'm going to come." Every stroke against her nipple felt like a hot stroke between her legs. She couldn't understand it but it was happening. Almost like magic.

Adams growled in response to the words. It took every last ounce of strength she had not to give in and make the beautiful blonde come right there on the spot. With great reluctance she removed her hands from Erin's breasts with the blonde still clinging to her wrists. Erin tried to regain control of her breathing but it was difficult. She could still feel the lingering of the hot fingers playing on her nipples. As she breathed deeply, she focused on the fierce blue eyes and loosened her grip on the dark woman's wrists, letting her hands once again fall to her sides.



Adams moved back into her, this time resting her hands on the black lace panties. As she lowered herself to remove them, Erin stiffened.

"Oh God." She said lifting the dark woman's head up with her hands. "I can feel you breathing on my skin." The hot breath had struck her nipples and she had nearly come on the spot. "I think you better leave the panties to me." She said, letting her hands fall to lightly stroke the dark woman's arms as she stood.

"You that excited?" Adams asked raising an eyebrow.

"You have no idea." Erin said huskily.

"I think I might." Adams responded, knowing how close to climaxing she herself was.

"If we're going to make it to the pool we better go now." Erin said, suddenly wondering if she could even walk.

Adams grinned and took her hand. "Let's go then."

As they stepped outside Erin realized she was nearly nude and she instantly covered herself, afraid that someone would see.

"Won't someone see us?" She asked as Adams released her hand to walk unabashedly to the pool ahead of her.

"There's no one around to see. I don't have any immediate neighbors." She offered as she dipped a foot in to test the water. "And if you're worried about air voyeurs..." She said teasing, "The sun's just about completely gone."

Erin glanced to the west and saw the last finger of sunlight bidding the earth goodnight. She relaxed a little and dropped her arms, allowing her aroused breasts to feel the warm night air. She watched as Adams stepped into the pool, wading in one step at a time, before diving in at the last step.

The dark woman surfaced in the luminous water, looking like she just stepped out of a magazine. Erin watched as she ran her hands back over her wet black hair and looked up at her with her blue eyes blazing nearly the same shade of blue as the pool.

"You coming?" She beckoned with a lopsided grin.

Erin laughed, thinking just how close she had been to coming moments before. Christ yes. She thought as she walked closer to the pool. She stopped and stood before Adams and then slowly ran her hands down over her body until she reached her panties. Then, while holding the dark woman's eyes, she carefully inched the panties down over her hips and thighs to her ankles. Stepping out them she then kicked them in the pool and dove in. The water felt cool and refreshing, a little cooler than the last time she had been in it. As she surfaced, she wiped her eyes and searched for Adams. The woman was gone.

With the sunlight quickly being eaten up by night, it was difficult for Erin to locate her right away. The lights in the pool changed color and she could see that the woman wasn't under the water in front of her. Just as she was about to turn to look for her, she felt her press into her from behind.

"I'm right here." The dark woman breathed in her ear.

Erin gulped and felt the hot hands running up and down the sides of her body. She tried to turn but Adams inched her hands up to the blonde woman's breasts where she pinched and held firm to her nipples.

Erin cried out as the wonderfully erotic sensation flooded through her. Adams nibbled on her ear and then found her exposed neck where she bit and sucked all the while pinching and rolling Erin's nipples with her fingers.

"Oh, god." Erin cried out. "I'm going to come." She said as she clenched her eyes closed trying desperately to ignore the overwhelming flames burning in her nipples, burning between her legs.

"No." Adams whispered, smacking her sucking mouth away from Erin's neck. "Not yet." She let go of the blonde's nipples and turned her around. "I want so badly to take it slow with you, but I don't think I can." She confessed breathlessly.

"I don't want you to take it slow." Erin told her. "I want you so bad it hurts." She reached up and cupped the dark woman's face with her hands. "Kiss me." She demanded, pulling her into her.

Adams closed her eyes and kissed the young detective. At first the kiss was soft, tender, and warm. She felt Erin's tongue lick her lips, tasting her. And then she heard the blonde moan and pull her tighter as the kiss became deeper, hungrier. Adams felt Erin's tongue claim her mouth with a vengeance, fueling her desire, shattering her control. She kissed Erin back with all her might, devouring her, conquering her. Her hands held the back of the blonde's head and she stepped into her, walking her backwards in the pool until they reached the steps. Once there, Adams pulled away from the powerful kiss completely breathless and dizzy.

"Don't stop." Erin pleaded, trying to pull the dark woman back down to her mouth. Adams pressed into her and Erin felt the step against her heel. "I can't go any further." She said as she looked down behind her.

"Yes you can." Adams said wrapping her hands around her hips and buttocks just before she lifted her. Erin clung to her shoulders and wrapped her legs around the dark woman's waist as she carried her up the stairs. Erin threw her head back as she felt the dark woman's hot skin rub against her overly aroused center.

"Oh my." Adams declared as she gently sat Erin down on the top step. "I can feel you." She said as Erin looked at her. "You're unbelievably wet." She ran a finger down Erin's chest to her belly before reaching her pubic region where a thin veil of manicured hairs sat bobbing against the ebb and flow of the water. "And this." She said maneuvering her fingers carefully into the folds. "Is something I've got to have right now."

Erin's eyes widened at first in response to the words and then instantly in response to the touch. She shuddered and melted as she grabbed hold of the dark woman's shoulders, leaning forward to rock against her fingers.

Adams groaned as she felt the blonde's abundance of hot silk in her hand. Then, letting Erin come forward, she eased her fingers up deep inside her. The blonde threw her head back and cried out as Adams carried her away from the stairs, back into the pool, as she supported her back with her free hand.

Erin moved in waves, grinded down against the incredible feel of the long hot fingers inside her. She clung to the dark woman's shoulders, digging her fingers into her skin, unable to keep her eyes open for any length of time. She pursed her lips and arched her back, the sensations unbelievable and still forthcoming in new and overwhelming swells.

"Feels so good." She said aloud, opening her eyes to look at the woman who was unlocking the doors to such pleasures.

"Does it?" Adams asked, wanting more of her. She eased her free hand up the blonde's back and held her shoulder down from behind. Then, with strength and grace, she pulled Erin back a little and curled her fingers up deep inside her. Erin bit down on her lower lip and groaned.

"Fuck me." She said, opening her eyes, deadly serious. "Harder." She declared, trying to bear down on the fingers, needing more, craving more, willing to kill for more.

Adams moved Erin back against the wall of the pool, ready and willing to do anything for her, anything to please her. She eased Erin off her and positioned herself before her, reaching down in the breast high water to open up her legs with her hands.

"Hold on to me." She said huskily in her ear as she plunged back into her.

"Uh! Oh God!" The blonde cried out, clinging to her. Adams stood over her, pummeling her hard and fast, feeling her tighten and grip from the inside. She bent down and bit the blonde's neck, needing to consume her in every way possible. Erin's voice became deeper and heavily strained and with every sound she choked out Adams could feel the orgasm loom closer. The blonde was clinging to her now, her arms wrapped around her back, digging her short nails into her.

"God don't stop." She rasped out, exposing the sexual demon that was currently possessing her. "Give it to me." She demanded.

Adams added another finger and bent her knees for more bearing. She pumped Erin harder and fuller than before, drawing her out slowly before shoving her back in. The blonde went from speaking her demands in demonic tongue to biting the dark woman on the shoulder. Adams could feel her own skin give beneath the clamp of the teeth, exciting her even more. She knew it was time, she had to release her before she herself burst forth with orgasm. Reaching up to grab hold of the edge of pool, she then braced herself to fuck with all her might. With Erin still clinging to her for support, Adams took her thumb and placed it over the blonde's engorged clit while her fingers still fucked her. Instantly, the blonde felt the pressure and she pulled her mouth away from the dark woman's shoulder to throw her head back and groan like a wild animal. Adams clenched her teeth and reached up deep within the blonde, curling her fingers, while stroking the excited flesh of her clit. Then, while looking into her face, she slammed into her. She rocked her hard and deep and fast.

Erin ran her hands up and while chanting illegible words, knotted them in the dark woman's wet mane. Her insides were on fire and her toes were curling as her feet dangled freely in the water, her entire body hinged on the dark woman's fingers. She closed her eyes as the heat from the fingers seared into her, while the strumming of her clit made her bite her own lip so hard it nearly bled.

The insurmountable pleasures rocked her body, consuming every last cell, possessing her like a prisoner. She opened her eyes as she felt the heat invade the last cell, lighting up all the other cells in her body from within. With her eyes wide and focused on the beautifully sculpted face of her lover, she felt the heat and light within explode and she opened her mouth to cry out but her voice was too weak and strained to shout. Instead, she jerked and rocked with the orgasm in virtual silence as the heat escaped her body through her open but silent mouth in a million invisible pieces.

Adams felt the blonde come but heard nothing until the blonde finally managed to choke out a strained cry just before she stopped spasming. She felt her collapse against her shoulder, her whole body limp and resting on her three fingers, impaled there from deep inside.

"Wow." Adams said down into her ear. "It was definitely good for me too." She said, laughing softly as Erin groaned and raised up a heavy head.

"Yeah?" She asked with a lazy grin.

"Oh god yes." Adams said, still feeling her insides throb.

"Did you..." She asked softly with an exhausted voice box. "Come?"

"No." Adams said as she carefully removed her hand from between the blonde's legs.

"Good." Erin responded, somehow finding the strength to stand on her own.

"Why is that good?" The dark woman asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Because I'm hungry." Erin said, reaching down and cupping the taller woman's cluster of excited flesh causing her to nearly jump out of her skin with excitement.

"Oh yeah?" She asked playfully, holding fast to Erin's wrist, so very close to orgasm herself.

"Yeah." Erin said confidently. "And you're just what I've been craving."

Henderson rose up off of Sinclair's couch. It was getting late and she still couldn't sleep. She eyed the bottle of wine the two had shared earlier and she remembered how kind the blonde detective had been to her. First she had shown up with Jack tucked under one arm, wriggling with uncontrollable excitement. The new detective had stopped at the "pet hotel" where he had been staying to pick him up as a surprise for her. Sinclair had said that there was no reason why the small dog couldn't stay here with her.

Henderson stretched and eyed her sleeping pup as he snoozed soundly in a tight little ball under the coffee table. Sinclair had also insisted that she stay as long as she wanted, shaking her head profusely at the mention of a hotel. She walked in the kitchen and poured herself a glass of cold water. Sinclair had soon sensed that something other than her current sleeping arrangement was bothering her. And when she had asked after Mac, Henderson had broken down and sobbed. The sensitive new detective had then sat by her side, rubbing her back while she fessed up her worries, her sorrows.

She sipped at the cold water and looked down the hall to where the detective now slept. The tall blonde had even offered Henderson her bed, claiming that she would gladly sleep on the couch. But Henderson politely declined and told her that her listening and understanding had been more than enough.

She stood staring at the dim master bedroom door almost wishing she had the nerve to walk in there and curl up next to sleeping woman. If she were honest with herself, she would admit that that was exactly what she wanted to do. As she continued to stare at the door a light came on under it along with the muffled sounds of a cell phone. She stood motionless as she heard Sinclair speak excitedly into the phone. She nearly dropped her glass as the door swung open quickly and Sinclair came bounding out in a tank top and panties, jumping into her shorts.

"Good, you're up." She said as she zipped up her shorts. Henderson stood staring at her, too shocked to look away. "There's been a fire." She said, running her fingers through her dirty blonde hair and tucking her cell phone in the pocket of her shorts.

Henderson simply stood and stared, noticing the absence of a bra under the white tank top. What was wrong with her? How could she be thinking about sex at a time like this? Mac was being accused of horrible things, things she couldn't herself make sense out of and here she was wanting to bed the department's newest detective.

"Patricia?" Sinclair asked, as she pulled on a t shirt over the thin tank top. "Did you hear me?"

Henderson shook her head as reality snapped back in. "What?" She asked, blinking at the handsome detective.

"I said there's been a fire."

"Where?" She asked wondering what it had to do with her.

"Mark Mackenzie's." She replied as tossed Henderson her shoes.

She shook her head, unsure if she had heard correctly. "Erin's Mark?" She asked completely dumbfounded.

"The one and only." Sinclair confirmed. "They think it was arson."

"Oh my god." Henderson breathed out, feeling immediately dizzy with shock. "This can't be happening."

## Chapter 9

*Wednesday, September 3rd*

*2:19 am*

*Valle Luna, Az.*

Erin laughed as a warm gooey noodle fell upon her chest. Her dark haired lover glanced down at the noodle and then swiftly stretched forward to suckle it up with her mouth.

"Mmm." Adams groaned with a grin while chewing. "Maybe I should just toss the bowl and eat right off of you."

"Be my guest." The blonde responded with a grin. "Although with all the eating you've done off me tonight, I would think you are full." She took the bowl of reheated stir fry from the dark woman and tried as best she could to pinch out some food with the chop sticks. With a silly grin on her face, she quickly tried to get the food to Adams before it fell upon the bed. The dark woman stretched out and allowed her lover to feed her, only able to get to a few noodles before the rest was caught in her hand as it slid through the chopsticks.

"Ugh. I'm terrible at this." Erin said as she watched Adams chew. The dark woman grinned and offered to feed Erin a noodle at a time from the pile she had caught in her palm.

"Now, now." She said calmly. "I told you it takes practice." She suspended noodle after noodle over Erin's tongue, thoroughly enjoying the spectacle. "And I'll never get full of you."

Erin chewed the last noodle and felt her body heat up at the sound of the dark woman's words. Her rumbling tummy would soon settle with the food but she knew the butterflies would always continue as long as Adams was around to arouse her. Feeling content and nearly spent from love making, she glanced back down at the near empty bowl and set it aside.

She looked at the beautiful woman stretched out before her on her belly, propped up on her elbows. The dark woman seemed almost surreal as the flicker of the warm candle light breathed upon her rhythmically, like the soft steady breath of a sleeping child.

As Erin let her eyes play upon the nude skin of her lover, she found herself overwhelmed with emotion. Leaning forward from the head board of the bed, she cradled the dark woman's face in her hands and placed a lingering kiss on her warm lips.

"Mmm." Adams let out again. "That was nice." She said opening her eyes after the kiss. She grinned as Erin relaxed once again back against the head board.

"It was." Erin agreed, unable to move her gaze away from the dark beauty. It was nearly three am and as relaxed as she was from their hours of lovemaking, she wasn't yet tired. She reached over to the night stand for the bottle of red wine she had brought earlier that evening as a gift. Nearly empty, she refilled the single glass they now shared. As she sipped it, she eyed her lover once again lying amidst the rumpled sheets on the king sized bed.

"I wonder," She said aloud. "How many women have been in this bed?" How many women have sat where I do now, taking it your incredible beauty after love making?

Adams stared at her a moment, searching her face for hidden meaning. She pushed herself up into a sitting position before she responded.

"To be honest with you, I usually don't bring women here." She said, wanting Erin to know how truly special she was.

"You don't?" She asked, surprised.

"No, I don't. My past lovers were just that. Past." She said, holding Erin's eyes, needing for her to understand. "They didn't mean anything to me."

"Yet you slept with them." Erin confirmed, suddenly very curious about the night club owner and her sex life. It was hard to believe that someone who had loved her so passionately for hours on end could separate herself emotionally from the lovers she took.

"It was just sex."

"Just sex?" Erin asked, reliving how the dark woman had ravished her that evening, sometimes gently and tenderly, sometimes aggressively, but always with great emotion and passion. Maybe there was more to loving

women than she understood. She knew for certain that she couldn't make love like that to a complete stranger just for kicks. But maybe that was just her. Maybe other women could do it. It was obvious Adams had done so.

"Yes, just sex." Adams confirmed as she saw the look of confusion on the blonde's face. "What we just had wasn't..." She was trying to explain, knowing she needed to, but it was difficult to find the words. "It was different with you, Erin." She finally managed.

"How so?" The blonde asked softly, watching her lover's sensuous lips, wanting once again to feel them beneath her own.

"I have feelings for you." The dark woman confessed. "What we just did...it wasn't just sex, it was so much more." She had never felt like this about anyone and what little feelings she had had for women she had never before spoke them aloud. Erin was different. The blonde made her feel comfortable and accepted and she knew she could speak her true feelings without fear of judgment or rejection or any of the other negative feelings that one can encounter when they open up to another human being.

Erin heard the words spoken so softly to her by the woman with the burning blue eyes. She felt her heart warm and swell in her chest knowing that she herself felt the same way.

"Liz?" She asked, feeling the dark woman reach out to lightly stroke her nude leg.

"Yes."

"Why did you forgive me?" She asked, suddenly feeling guilty and undeserving of such kind and gentle love.

"Forgive you for what?"

"For misleading you, for going undercover and letting you think I was interested in you."

Adams looked down in thought, her hand momentarily stilled on the blonde's leg.

"You were just doing your job." She looked back up. "You didn't know me. For all you knew I could've been the killer."

Erin sat in silence, staring into the wonderful blue eyes across from her.

"Besides," Adams continued. "You didn't tell them about Jay. And as risky as that was on your part, there must've been some reason why you did that for me."

The stroking started up once again and Erin shuddered under the gentle caress.

"I suppose there was." She said. "I think I've been drawn to you all along."

"The feeling is mutual." Adams cooed as she leaned in to kiss her.

"Tell me something else, Ms. Adams." Erin demanded lightly as their lips parted.

"Anything." Adams offered.

"When you made love to all these other women..."

"Oh God." She declared, dropping her head in her hand.

"Did you allow them to make love to you?"

Adams raised her head and peeked at Erin through the fingers that she held over her eye. She watched as Erin came forward from the head board to sit directly across from her.

"Because..." Erin said, pulling the dark woman's hand away from her face. "I'm still waiting my turn." She reached out and lightly caressed her, starting at her shoulders, leading down her arms to her hands.

"I've never really let anyone do it."

Erin looked up from her lover's hands to her blue eyes. The words had been said so softly she almost hadn't heard them.

"Never?" Erin gently probed, shocked.

"I always got off more or less by giving."

Erin just stared at her, completely dumbfounded. "Will you...let me?" She asked, wanting more than anything to physically lavish the dark woman with the same pleasures she herself had been overwhelmed by not long before. Every time Adams had brought her to orgasm, she had then tried to do the same in return. But Adams had been too much for her physically, and the dark woman had easily wrestled out from underneath her to once again dominate her and bring her to yet another powerful orgasm.

Adams stared into the warm green abyss of Erin's eyes. She could feel the blonde's fingers awakening her sensitive and starving skin.

"I'm not sure if I can." She confessed, truly wanting to, but not able to know how her body would react. She had always been highly sexual and it had never taken very much for her body to climax. The blonde turned her on so easily and she felt so much for her, that she feared she would come the second she allowed her to touch her. But the real question was whether or not she was finally willing to give the control she so desired to another human being. Was she ready to let someone love her? Physically as well as emotionally?

"Then we are quite the pair." Erin said, offering her a smile. "Because I have no clue what I'm doing and I'm not sure if I can either." She laughed a little, hoping it would help ease her lover's guarded state. But Adams didn't laugh, she just sat looking at Erin with vulnerable blue eyes.

"It won't take much." She whispered, holding Erin's hand. "What I feel for you is so powerful, it nearly does it on its own."

Erin nodded, and moved in to kiss the dark woman before the tears had a chance to well up in her eyes. Not in a million years did she think she could experience the emotion she was feeling for this woman. All her life she had read about love, first in fairy tales and then from the girly giggles of her school mates. When she met and married Mark, she had convinced herself it was love because it was like her parents, a partnership based on a friendship. It was what everyone did. They settled down and went about their daily lives. But it wasn't love. And she knew that now. She knew it because that was what she was finally feeling. Love.

"Lie down." Erin requested softly as she pulled away from the kiss. Adams stared at her a moment longer before she did as requested. Erin gazed down upon the nude woman in wonder as she lay on her back in the



candle light. She ran her fingers up and down her body lightly, watching as her nipples gathered in a cluster of deep rose. "What would you like me to do?" She asked, wanting to give her lover the utmost of pleasures, but a little unsure as to what they might be. With all the wild stories she had heard about Elizabeth Adams, she hardly recognized the confident night club owner lying so vulnerable beneath her fingers. And then she remembered that the wild stories were all one sided. That Adams herself had rarely been touched and she suddenly knew that she probably had no preferences. She just wanted to be loved.

"Anything you want." She replied huskily from the soft pillow. "It won't take much." She could already feel her center tense and tighten in anticipation.

"I think..." Erin said letting her hand trail down to the dark strip of hairs. "That I would like to taste you." Adams shuddered beneath her and she clenched her legs together in response to the touch.

Erin moved her body down alongside the taller woman's as she carefully and gently urged her long legs apart. She could hear the bated breaths of her lover as she positioned herself between her legs and began to ever so softly kiss her inner thighs.

Her skin was warm and unbelievably soft and Erin found herself lost in a whole new world as she continued to kiss and taste her way along the strong legs. In the far off distance she could hear Adams grunting and sucking in quick lungs full of air, but she herself was so immersed in her new world that she hardly paid the sounds of pleasure any mind.

"Erin?" Adams rasped out, lifting her head off the pillow to look down at the blonde.

"Hum?" She said, looking up just as content as she could be, and not yet even to the most wonderful part of her new world.

"It feels so good." She breathed out. "You better hurry, I don't think I can last much longer."

"But I haven't even touched you there yet." She said, not anywhere ready for Adams to climax yet.

"Doesn't matter." She said, collapsing back down on the pillow.

Erin watched her in silence, unsure what to do. She looked down at the mound of clustered satin just below her mouth. As she breathed, she could see Adams respond. The woman was so sensitive and so ready that a mere breath alone would send her over. She knew she had to act soon if she wanted to have any fun at all. With her eyes riveted on her lover's face, she slowly and carefully extended her tongue to touch the tip of the dark woman's clitoris. Then, with slow deliberation, she began to lightly massage the soft cortex of skin. She didn't know what she had expected a woman would feel like under her tongue, but nothing could have prepared her for what she was experiencing.

The mound of flesh was soft yet firm, giving and twitching as she pressed the length of her tongue down upon it. She marveled at its warmth, reveled in its quick movements, devoured its pink satiny texture, almost red with bulby arousal. But what she found the most exciting and fascinating was not the heated silky skin under her tongue, but the reactions of Adams. With every wonderful manipulation performed upon the raised cluster of fabulous flesh, the dark woman let out strangled muffled cries of her erotic bliss.

Erin watched the woman intently, enjoying the splendid display of her powerful muscles rippling under the dampened skin of her torso as she coiled and stretched, jerked and twitched with every lick the blonde imposed upon her. Not ever had the young detective experienced such an erotic encounter, witnessed such an incredible

display of raw pleasure with her at the helm, captaining the velvety voyage. The scenario was nothing short of miraculous and she knew she never wanted it end. She could bestow pleasures upon this woman for eternity and never tire.

As the dark woman writhed beneath her, she settled down more comfortably atop her, adding more weighted pressure upon her own tongue. She knew whether she wanted her lover to or not, the woman was dangerously close to climaxing. Savoring the feel and sweet taste of her, Erin swirled her heavy tongue all around the swollen bulby tissue, placing pressure on its edges while lapping at its center, driving the dark woman mad with intense pleasure.

As her own skin burned brightly with the lust and pleasure she was deriving from her panting lover, Erin braced herself as the stronger woman came beneath her, nearly bucking the young blonde right up off the bed. She could've never been prepared for the intensity, the sheer physicality of pleasing another woman. The reaction of her lover was so raw, so incredibly animalistic, and yet so intensely personal and intimate on every level. She did her best to hold on, to remain in her position atop the stronger woman's cluster of pleasurable tissue, but the dark woman was still convulsing and bucking so much so that when she finally did stop Erin could feel the swollen stinging of her own bruised and blood engorged lips from where she had tried to hold fast to her lover with her mouth.

She licked at her pleasantly tingling lips and lay between the dark woman's long powerful legs as she stilled, watching and listening to her breathe.

"Did I hurt you?" Adams asked, lifting her head to look down at the blonde who lay limp between her legs, her short hair tousled, her mouth dark and swollen from her heated feeding.

"Hurt me? Are you kidding? I've never experienced anything so incredible before."

The dark woman studied her for a moment while a crooked grin tipped her face.

"Come here." She finally encouraged softly.

Erin pushed herself up from the warm confines of the dark woman's legs and crawled slowly to her side, nestling herself in the piles of soft covers.

"Do you have any idea how good you make me feel?" Adams asked, gazing languidly into the blonde's face.

"If it's anywhere near as good as you make me feel, then I do have some idea." She smiled back, truly feeling relaxed and wonderfully content.

Erin snuggled up close to her lover, wrapping her arms around her, loving the feel of her so near. She closed her eyes to sleep and felt her breathing slow and match that of her lovers, their bodies own sweet lullaby. She didn't know how long she had been asleep, or even if she truly had when the deep sounds of the Dobermans barking pricked her ears.

With the noise not yet quite registering, she lay motionless in her lover's arms, certain that the dogs would soon calm down and silence. It wasn't until Adams stirred beneath her that she opened her eyes and sat up, the barks resounded like thunder throughout the house and accompanied by a pounding at the front door.

Erin looked around wildly, her eyes trying to hone in on her dim surroundings.

"What's going on?" She asked as she watched her lover jump out of bed and into her jeans and button down shirt.

"I don't know." The dark woman hastily buttoned up her smoky gray shirt as her ears continued to try and decipher the alarm of her dogs. Her heart raced in her chest as her mind quickly tried to awake to her surroundings. She glanced up at the beautiful blonde sitting up in her bed. Even with all the commotion, the sight of Erin instantly warmed her heart and soul. "Whatever it is, it can't be good." She moved quickly over to the bed where she cupped the blonde's chin in her hand for a gentle kiss.

"Wait, I'm coming with you." Erin said after the kiss. She bounded down off the bed and hurried into her jeans and black shirt. As they both walked out of the master bedroom and stepped into the hall, more pounding commenced on the large front door.

"What the hell?" Adams muttered as she stepped up to the door where her two dogs stood strongly, wanting the chance to get at whoever was on the other side. She looked to her side at her blonde lover as the realization of police presence sunk in. The red and blue lights from outside flashed and caroueled in through the windows and Adams felt the lump in her throat growing as the anticipation of dealing with them once again built up inside of her.

Erin stepped up beside her lover as she felt her own color drain from her face. Adams was right, whatever it was, it wasn't going to be good. She reached out and gripped the dark woman's hand in her own, making a silent vow to her that whatever it was, they could handle it together. She jumped as another series of pounding commenced.

"Police open up!"

Adams reached out and unlocked the door, holding Erin's eyes one last time before she pulled it open.

"Elizabeth Adams?" The gruff overweight detective asked, just as he had done countless times before.

"What's this about Stewart?" Erin stepped in front of her lover, making her way just outside the front door.

Stewart stared opened mouth at the two women, the shock of seeing Mac at the house apparent on his meaty face.

Erin looked past the dumbfounded man to the several other detectives inspecting the front of the large house. She stood still, the concrete cold on her bare feet as she watched the detectives shine flashlights in and around the dark woman's silver Range Rover.

"Mac, what the fuck are you doing here?" Stewart whispered to her in his wheezy voice. He had turned his back to Adams and he stood so close to her she could smell the thick stench of cigarette smoke clinging to him in an imaginary yellow layer of nicotine.

"Never mind my personal business." She proclaimed. "What are you all doing here?" She crossed her arms over her chest as a mental chill swept over her skin. She felt Adams step up next to her and they all three stood watching and listening as the numerous other police personnel scurried about the Range Rover wearing plain clothes and navy blue bullet proof vests with the word POLICE written in yellow across their backs.

"Detective." Adams stated, looking intently at Stewart. "I hope you have damn good reason for being here. And how the hell did you even get here?" She looked to her front gate and saw that it was pushed open all the way,

as if it wasn't powered. Her fury was quickly rising and Erin could feel her own skin prickle at the tone of her lover's voice.

"Through the gate." The two women turned at the sound of Detective Sinclair's voice. The tall detective stood in front of them in shorts, sneakers and the same navy blue vest the others were wearing.

"You broke it?" Adams asked, her blue eyes flashing with anger.

"No." Stewart scoffed. "It wasn't even on your majesty. All we had to do was give it a push."

"Not on?" Adams glared at Stewart and then at Sinclair.

"Where were you tonight, Ms. Adams?" Sinclair asked as she turned off the flashlight in her hands.

"Here..." Adams started before Erin gripped her arm to silence her.

"She's not answering any of your questions until you tell us why you are here." Erin demanded, locking eyes with the new detective.

"There was a fire tonight, Mac."

Erin watched as Henderson stepped out of the darkness to stand next to Sinclair. A giant flood light came to life behind the Range Rover, illuminating the front of the house.

"What's that have to do with Liz?" Her arms remained crossed defiantly over her chest as she studied the woman she thought was her friend.

Henderson inwardly cringed at the casual and familiar use of Adams first name. It was more than obvious now that Mac had something going with the shady night club owner and it pained her to witness it. Mac's presence there with the dark woman was like a slap in the face to her and everything she thought she knew.

"The house that burned was your former residence. Mark's house." She clarified, watching her face.

Erin took a small step as a wave of dizziness washed over her. "Mark's?" She asked in a near whisper. She felt the strong arms of her lover wrap around her for support just in time.

"Did anyone get hurt?" Adams asked, holding Erin upright while she studied Henderson's face.

"Like you give a shit." Stewart bellowed out next to her. The dark woman shot him a look of warning to which he quickly silenced his fat mouth.

"Luckily no one was hurt." Sinclair answered.

"This still doesn't answer why you are here." Erin said, regaining her strength and standing on her own once again. "If you came to tell me..." She knew it had to be more than them simply wanting to tell her. There were too many of them and they appeared to be searching for something.

"We have several witnesses who claim that a dark haired female was seen leaving the house in a silver Range Rover seconds before the fire started."

"So." Erin declared hastily. "It could've been anyone."

"We came to question Adams about an hour ago." Sinclair continued. "And upon our arrival we looked in her Range Rover through the back window and found accelerant."

"What?" Adams voiced out deeply.

"Several large cans along with rags and boxes of matches. That's when we called for back up."

"Bullshit!" Adams yelled out. She shoved her way past the women and made her way quickly over to her truck. She walked up next to several men, one of whom was taking pictures. She peered into her truck and stood completely rigid. Four red gasoline cans sat in a neat row along the back cargo space of her truck. She reached out and checked the latch. The door was unlocked. She never left her truck unlocked. She turned away from her truck as she felt the blood drain from her face. The men in the vest hurried to the open door, anxious for a better look.

"What is it?" Erin asked as she walked down towards her ashen looking lover.

"Something's wrong." Adams said, looking into her face but unable to focus. "Somebody put that stuff in there. And it's unlocked; I never leave my truck unlocked."

Sinclair approached before Erin had a chance to make sense of all that Adams was trying to say. "If you give us permission to search your truck and your property now..."

"No." Erin declared adamantly. "Tell your men to back off."

"We can't search her property without her permission, but we will continue to wait here and snap pictures of what we can see until we get a warrant."

Erin knew the drill and she knew it was late. They were just biding their time until a judge granted them the warrant they sought first thing in the morning.

"Call your lawyer." She said as she turned and looked up into the pained blue eyes of her lover.

"I need to just tell them the truth." Adams whispered to her, just wanting it all to be over. Someone was messing with her and endangering people's lives. If it wasn't Jay, then who? It had to stop. It had to stop before someone else got hurt. Namely, Erin.

"No." Erin said hastily, gripping her arms. "Call your attorney. They're going to want to question you about your whereabouts tonight. Don't say anything. If someone is setting you up then they've gone to an awful lot of trouble to do so. And the police aren't about to believe you no matter what you say."

"Where were you tonight, Ms. Adams?" Sinclair asked for the second time.

"She was here all night." Erin answered, truly afraid for her lover.

"Do you have any witnesses to back that up?"

"Yes, she does." Erin said. "She's got me."

Stewart whistled as he heard the statement. "Then how do we know you ain't in on it with her?" He questioned. "After all, it's your ex's house that got torched."

"What about my gate?" Adams asked. "Don't you find it a little strange that it isn't working?"

"You probably cut the power to it." Stewart responded with a shrug.

"Why would I do that?" Adams asked confronting the overweight detective.

"Because by doing so you disabled the front cameras."

Adams turned to look at Sinclair. "Then it's obvious, someone did all this to set me up." Why couldn't they see it?

"Or you did it to cover your own ass, knowing full well the cameras would be seized by us for viewing." Stewart wheezed.

"If she went to all that trouble then why would she leave her truck out in plain view with the accelerant still in it?" Erin asked, facing off with Stewart.

"Maybe she got a little tied up with her accomplice." He mocked shaking his fat head at her. "I always heard that lesbians like to fuck a lot. Maybe you two just couldn't wait..."

"You son of a bitch!" Erin took a step towards him wanting to beat the shit out of him right there on the spot. Adams clamped her strong hands down on the blonde's shoulders stopping her before she reached him. "Shh. Easy now. It's not worth it." The dark woman whispered in her ear from behind, trying her best to calm her lover down.

"We're going to need you to come downtown with us for questioning Ms. Adams." Sinclair stated as Henderson watched in silence from a distance.

Erin turned to look up into the dark woman's face. She wanted to scream into the night at the injustice she was witnessing but she knew it would do no good. She placed her palms on the taller woman's chest.

"Go." She whispered. "But promise me you won't say anything." She pleaded as she looked up into her eyes. "I'll find a way to make them believe."

Adams kissed her lover's forehead as she shook her head in silent agreement.

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"You two looked pretty cozy earlier." Henderson said as she watched Erin pace outside the interrogation room. The younger detective snapped her head up to glare at the writer, but the comment did not stop her maddening pace.

She glanced down at her watch and noted that they had been questioning her lover for the third time for a better part of an hour. Since arriving at the station a little after four that morning, the detectives had taken turns questioning them both in regards to their whereabouts around the time of the fire. Even though she herself had confidently declared that she and Adams were together all evening and at the house in the hills, the detectives merely smirked before they dismissed her claim along with the alibi, having already made up their own minds.

She shoved her hands down in her pockets as she waited. To her knowledge Adams hadn't said a word to the police other than her whereabouts. But it still didn't explain the lengthy time in questioning her. If she wasn't saying anything then why was it taking so long?

"This isn't right." She said looking up at Henderson. "She was with me all night. They have no grounds to hold her for this."

"They do." Henderson calmly said. "Sinclair just told me that they got the warrant to search her property. The first thing they found was a pair of boots in the Range Rover that matched a print left at the fire. Not to mention the cans of gasoline and kerosene, which were both used in the fire."

"That's not possible." She breathed out. "Someone is setting her up."

"Who?" Henderson asked, her face remaining expressionless.

Erin shook her head. "I don't know." *Jay?* She thought to herself. *But why would she?*

"I think you do know, Mac." Henderson stated. "You see, I believe you when you say that Adams had nothing to do with this fire. The evidence found...it's all a little too easy for me. But I do think you're hiding something for her. Question is...what? And why?" She walked away leaving the young blonde to stand alone and ponder her words.

Erin looked up as the door to the room opened. Two of her colleagues poured out, followed by Adams. The dark woman was handcuffed and Erin sucked in a quick breath at the painful site.

"What's going on?" She demanded to her male colleagues.

"They've arrested me." Adams said in a surprisingly calm manner. "They said they found some things that tie me to the fire."

"But you didn't do it." Erin proclaimed in a high pitch. "They won't listen to me." She looked around at her former friends, wishing someone would hear her and release her lover. But no one met her eyes, they all just kept walking forward like mindless heartless robots, leading Adams to a holding cell.

"There's a way to prove it." Adams whispered to her. "I just didn't know if you would be willing to show them."

"What..." Erin said. "I'll do anything, just tell me."

"The tapes." Adams whispered. "The security tapes from my house. The ones in the back of the house hopefully weren't damaged or drained of power. If they were working, they should have us on them."

"Ok." Erin said, ready to go and get them as quickly as possible.

"Wait." Adams declared a little louder. "Watch them first. And if you still want to use them, give them to Cynthia. She'll handle it."

Erin shook her head quickly before lightly kissing her lover just before she was led away.

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Erin stood waiting once again at the police department. As she waited, she looked around at the place once so familiar to her. A place where she had spent countless hours pouring over files, following up leads or doing mindless paperwork. All of it an attempt to distract her from her lonely, mundane life, her unhappy marriage. Now the place felt foreign to her, almost uncomfortable. She tried to sit down but found that she couldn't stay still. Her nerves were edgy, stabbing her internally as she waited for the word on her lover.

She had gone back to Adams house in the hills to retrieve the security tapes only to be turned away at the door by her colleagues. The house had been under siege with police personnel searching every last inch of the expensive property, convinced that Adams was their girl. She had at first pitched a fit and demanded entry but when her former friends threatened to arrest her for interfering an investigation she had walked away fuming.

With her temper boiling, she had then placed a call to the dark woman's lawyer, Cynthia and informed her about the tapes. That had been the last she had heard until an hour ago when Cynthia had called her, letting her know that she had possession of the tapes and that they did prove that Adams was home at the time of the fire. The attorney said that she was to show the police the tapes proving her alibi and that they in turn would be forced to release Adams.

As she waited now she paced and watched her feet. She didn't know what was on the tapes, but obviously it had to be something pretty convincing, otherwise they would've been able to keep her lover. She knew that she and Adams had spent a great deal of time that evening in the pool and then later in the spa. A door opened and she stopped walking and looked up. Several male detectives walked past her, eyeing her the whole way. She heard their snickers and laughter, but refused to look away from them, wondering what it was all about.

"Hey Mac." She turned as J.R. walked up from behind. "Are you crazy?" He asked. "You shouldn't be here."

"Why not?"

"Why not?" He scoffed as he looked past her to the male detectives. "Because you and Adams are the hottest thing out there right now."

"What?" She asked confused.

He cupped her elbow and led her further away from the stares and the snickers. "The tapes, man. It's all over the department. Everyone's dying to see the Mac and Adams pool porno."

Erin nearly collapsed on the spot. "Oh God." She said as she felt J.R. hold her up. That was why Adams had been reluctant to release the tapes. That was why the dark woman had told her to watch them first.

"Did you see it?" She asked, wondering who all had.

"Nah." He shook his head. "I tried like hell though." He teased.

"But everybody knows." She said, meeting his eyes.

J.R. shook his head. "Fraid so."

She sighed and finally took the seat she had been avoiding. She dropped her head into her hands.

"There is good news though." He said taking the seat next to her. "That video is one hot little *get out of jail free* card."



"It better be." She remarked, looking up and over at him. Two more men walked by, both of them staring openly at her.

"Is that her?" One asked. "Man she is hot." Came another remark.

"Hey, fuck face!" J.R. yelled out. "You gotta problem?" He stood, puffing out his chest like a pigeon. The two men walked quicker, eager to get away from the crazy man with the accent. "That's what I thought." He called after them. "Fucking assholes." He said under his breath as he sank back down into his chair.

"You ok?" He asked her, as he rested his arm around her slumped shoulders.

"Just fine." She said, sniffing back a tear. "Can't you tell?"

"Hey, it's gonna be alright." He rubbed her back slowly. "Look at it this way...porn pays a hell of a lot better than police work."

She couldn't help but laugh at him. She was too tired and overwhelmed by the situation to do much else.

"See? I told you it would be ok."

"Thanks J.R." She said, rubbing her burning face. "You're a real pal."

"Don't mention it. Now, I gotta go get to work. But the next time you girls wanna make a video...call me. I heard the sound on that thing was terrible." He jumped away from her as she swung at him.

She stood and watched him walk away. With her face heated with embarrassed blood, she shoved her hands down in her pockets and waited patiently for a few more minutes before the door opened once again. She looked up at the pale, drawn face of her lover as the dark woman walked into her arms with Cynthia close on her heels.

"I was so worried." Erin said into her shoulder.

"Why did you do it?" Adams asked, pulling away. "The tapes...your co-workers...I didn't know they were going to be so graphic..."

"I didn't know." She admitted. "I didn't get a chance to view them, they wouldn't let me."

"Oh my God." Adams said, suddenly very angry. "Cynthia..." She started, ready to lay into her attorney.

"It's not her fault." Erin declared as they started to make their way out of the building. "I told her to go ahead, no matter what."

"Are you insane?" Adams asked, having seen the tapes herself. If her present situation was different, the heated scenes taped in the pool and the spa would've definitely turned her on.

"I think I may be." Erin replied, laughing a little with nerves. "They were that bad huh?"

Adams wrapped her arm around her shoulders and pulled her in closer as they walked. "Let's just say that you are one hell of a responsive lover, Erin Mackenzie."

"Great." She said, feeling herself flush with embarrassment once again.

"I'm so sorry." Adams offered, feeling incredibly guilty about the whole situation. They headed out into the warm night air and she cringed as she thought of how much Erin had suffered throughout this whole ordeal.

"Don't be." The blonde said looking up at her. "At least the tapes freed you, that's all that matters."

"You're unbelievable you know that?" The dark woman asked, as she opened Erin's car door for her. "Sacrificing yourself like that for me."

"I..." Erin started but then stopped.

"What?" Adams probed gently, cupping her face in her hands.

"I love you." She confessed softly, looking up into the bright blue eyes of her lover.

The dark woman heard the words as she searched the green eyes with her own. With her heart bursting forth with swelling warm light, she leaned in and placed a gentle lingering kiss on Erin's lips. And as she pulled away she held her eyes.

"I love you too."

.....

Henderson stood watching one of the security tapes alongside Sinclair. They were watching the one that alibied Adams and Mac. A scene of the back yard alone. The cameras in the front had been purposely damaged, ruining any taped footage from the front of the house. She and Sinclair were alone in one of the department's conference rooms watching the heated tape in silence.

"Well, what do you think?" Sinclair asked as she stepped forward to stop the tape, freezing an image of Mac climaxing against the dark woman in the spa.

"Christ I don't know." She admitted feeling almost sick at the spectacle on the television. She didn't know what nauseated her more, the incredibly passionate way in which the two made love or the fact that she was standing there watching it, invading the privacy of two fellow human beings. One being her former lover, and the other being her friend.

"I was hoping to get some insight from you. Since you know them both personally." Sinclair ejected the tape and slid it back into its folder.

Henderson stood in silence, swallowing back the bile in her throat.

"Well?" Sinclair asked. "Do you think they've been intimate all along?"

"I don't know." She said rather shortly. "The only thing I've seemed to gather from this tape is that Adams and Mac were home while the fire was set. They were home and they were making love. What the hell else am I supposed to get from it?"

Sinclair stopped and stared at the writer with her mouth slightly agape. "I'm sorry." She said. "I thought you said you knew them both pretty well. One of them intimately. I thought..."

"Yeah well you thought wrong." She snapped back not letting her finish. "You want the truth...I'll give you the truth. I don't like Adams. On a personal level, the things I've known, I think she's scum. But that being aside, I will tell you this. I've never known Elizabeth Adams to bring a lover to her house. At least not more than once. I've also never known her to care about anyone other than herself. And not to mention the tender way in which she makes love to Mac on that tape, I've never known her to do that either." She paused getting her breath before she glanced back black television. "There's something there between them. Adams has changed." She looked back to the new detective before continuing. "But if you think for a second that that in any way implies that the woman is a murderer or an arsonist who tries to kill an unborn baby, you're dead wrong. At most, you've got yourself a very intimate, very private interlude between two women who obviously care about one another."

Sinclair stood watching her, holding the tape. "Ok." She finally said. "Thank you."

"Don't mention it. Now, do me a favor. Make sure that tape stays locked up. The department, at the very least, owes Mac her privacy."

"You got it." Sinclair replied as she watched Henderson get a hold of her swaying emotions.

"There's something else I want you to do for me."

Sinclair placed a hand in her pocket. "Sure."

"I want to meet your source."

"You can't." The detective with dirty blonde hair stammered.

"Why not?" Henderson was pushing the new detective, needing for this all to be over once and for all.

"Because she's in hiding." Came the reply.

"Why?"

"Because Adams tried to have her killed." At once Sinclair looked down, obvious that she had said more than she had intended.

"It's Kristen Reece isn't it?" Henderson continued to push, convinced that she had just broken the handsome detective.

"I can't say." Sinclair managed, looking back up.

"You just did."

Henderson made her way purposely to the door of the conference room.

"Where are you going?" Sinclair asked.

"Alabama." She said, turning to look over her shoulder.

"Alabama?"

"I'm going to find out what it is that Adams and Mac are hiding."

"How can you be sure they're hiding something?"

"I know them both remember? Besides...if you won't share your source, I have no choice but to go do some investigating of my own."

"When will you be back?" Sinclair called out after her.

"When I know something."

## Chapter 10

*Saturday, September 5th*

*Arcane, Alabama*

Henderson stood still in thought out on the front porch of the old unkept house. Inside, investigators poured over the dead woman covered in flies. The writer breathed through her mouth because even outside the body was still able to permeate her nose with the rotting smell of death. It was a warm humid day in Arcane which made her present situation all the worse. The air around her hung heavy, holding fast to the scent of the bloated dead woman inside.

Henderson held her breath and walked down the few steps from the porch. As she gained some distance between her and the house she thought back to how she had first come upon the body earlier that morning.

After flying into Mobile, she had rented a vehicle and made her way to Arcane. The only place other than Valle Luna that Elizabeth Adams had been known to reside in. She had come not knowing what she expected to find, but she knew whatever information the small town held, it would be difficult to uncover. A few of her colleagues had ventured to Arcane themselves when Adams had first become a suspect in the serial killings. The trip had proven fruitless with the detectives only able to find a few old medical records along with some school records. It had seemed that Adams had been raised by a very close knit, almost hermitted kind of family. So much so, that when the detectives pushed the townsfolk for information, many of them claimed to have never heard of an Elizabeth Adams.

With very little information to start from, she had driven to the last known address attached to the Adams name. It was all she had to go on and she had accepted the fact that the old house may not be willing to cough up the bones of its past, thus turning her trip into a lengthy one. One in which she would have to dig further and deeper than anyone had ever done before. With her mind set with fierce determination, she had set her sights on the first resource available to her. It was the house of Adams grandfather, run down and nearly condemned, nestled back in the woods away from any and all civilization. She had thought about visiting the house that Adams had

actually been raised in, but it was condemned and her colleagues had combed through it before, finding nothing.

She had slowed her vehicle down a bit as she had driven up to old house. She then got out to have a look around, anxious to explore a place that she knew Adams had once frequented.

As she thought back, she still remembered when she had first been assaulted by the smell. She had just walked up the steps to stand on the front porch when the scent caught her by surprise. She had known at once what it was. The smell of decaying flesh was one that was so powerful and so unique a person never forgot it.

She kicked at a muddy stone buried down in the thick green grass in front of the house. She had been glad she had worn her boots, having to have kicked in the front door to the house in order to get to the smell. The body had been easily found, sitting upright in the front room, propped up in an old worn recliner facing the front door. A sick and twisted greeting to whoever stumbled upon it. At first she couldn't tell if the body was male or female. Its state of decomposition so advanced, that the body appeared to be grotesquely bloated, blown up like a balloon from trapped gases. It wasn't until she had approached the body cautiously that she saw the woman's I.D. laying smugly open in her lap, as if she were on display.

Henderson had read the I.D. carefully and without touching it. The woman had once been Shea Wilson, a thirty five year old private investigator from Valle Luna, Arizona. Henderson had stumbled back a little then, at once recognizing the name as a former cop she knew, but not able to recognize the decaying bloated body that sat staring back at her with foggy glass like eyes. The realization that the body was that of someone she once knew, along with the overpowering smell, had sent her reeling backwards, nearly tumbling on to the front porch where she had quickly heaved the contents of her stomach over the side of the elevated porch.

She wiped her mouth now absently as she swallowed back the bitter taste that still remained. Turning, she looked back at the house busting at the seams with investigators. Some coming in, some walking quickly out. Even though she had found the body, this wasn't her scene, wasn't her jurisdiction even if she had still been on active duty. Her presence here had been noted and then dismissed as the local sheriff's office quickly began its investigation, swarming down on the house like a hungry hive of bees in their brown and tan uniforms.

Lucky for her, the cause of death had been pretty evident. A dime sized bullet hole pierced right through the center of the dead woman's forehead. Otherwise, she was sure she would still be out here alone, drawing her own conclusions as to what actually happened. The sheriff had yet to come back out to talk to her, too busy inside to pay the foreign girl any mind.

She reached in her in back pocket and pulled out her cell phone as she relived her brief conversation with one of the deputies earlier that day who had rudely referred to her as a Yankee. Her presence here wasn't welcome and the deputy had made no bones about letting her know it. She shook her head with disbelief at her current situation as she dialed Sinclair.

"Sinclair." The detective answered confidently.

"Hi, it's Henderson."

"Hey you. Find anything down south?"

"You might say that." She confirmed, glancing back at the house.

"What is it?" Sinclair asked, sounding instantly intrigued.

"Well, I've got a dead private detective here." She said as she wiped some warm sweat from her brow.

"Shea Wilson?" Sinclair asked immediately, seemingly assuming the answer.

"How did you know?" *Just how much information is the department keeping from me?*

"Shit, so it is her." Sinclair sighed into the phone. "We had been tipped off about a week ago that Adams was using her."

"What for?"

"Best I can figure she was trying to find my source."

"You mean Reece." Henderson chided in quickly as she ran a frustrated hand through her hair.

"You know I can't say."

"So right away this points to Adams again?"

"Seems so."

"Why would Adams kill her own P.I.?"

"Maybe she found something or somebody that Adams didn't want her to."

Henderson looked up as the same rude deputy walked back over to her.

"Excuse me, ma'am?" He stood waiting, fingering his thin downy mustache as he eyed her.

"I'm on the phone." She said to him, wanting him to wait.

"Sheriff Bowman asked me to come..."

It was obvious that he wasn't going to wait and she quickly tilted the phone back up to her mouth. "Sinclair can I call you back?" She snapped the phone shut quickly and looked back at the deputy, waiting for him to continue. "Yes, deputy?"

"Well we was wondering if you seen anyone else since you've been here?"

"You mean here at the house?"

He shook his head.

"No." She said.

"Are you a friend of the Adams?"

"Not exactly."

"What were you doing here then?"

"Investigating. Same as you."

"But you ain't with any department." He stated as he looked her up and down.

"What are you getting at Deputy?"

"I own property just up over the hill there." He pointed but she didn't bother to look back. "And I know for a fact that Jay Adams didn't appreciate people on this property snooping around."

Henderson shook her head as her frustration grew. "Well it's a good thing he's dead now isn't it."

"Who?"

"Jay Adams." She just assumed Jay Adams was the grandfather. She knew his name had been James.

"Shoot, Jay Adams ain't dead. I seen her just the other week."

"Excuse me? Her?"

The deputy looked at her like she was dumbest thing he had ever come across. "Yes, her."

"Who is Jay Adams exactly?"

He looked back toward the house, suddenly afraid that he had said something he shouldn't have in front of the foreign woman.

"Listen, I shouldn't have said nothing to you about it. I was just wondering what you was doin snooping around down here."

"Wait a minute." She said, insisting that he stay and listen. "When you say Jay Adams, do you mean Elizabeth Adams?" For a brief moment she thought that the two may very well be one in the same.

"No." He said sternly. "I hadn't seen Lizzie in years. I'm talking about Jay." Once again he turned around as if he were about to get scorned.

"And who is Jay?" She tried again a little softer. "You see," She reached out and touched his arm, trying to relax him. She even batted her eyes a little and readied herself to act stupid. "I only know Elizabeth. She's a good friend of mine and well, I'm just curious to know who Jay is. I would love to meet her while I'm here."

The deputy stood a little straighter and sucked in a big breath of air, filling his small chest up and out. "Well, I guess it won't do no harm. Jay is Lizzie's sister. But best I know it, she high tailed it outta here last week."

"Miller!" The big, brawny Sheriff Jimmy Bowman made his way over to where they were standing. "What's going on over here?"

"Nothing Sheriff. I was just telling this lady about Jay. She's a friend of Lizzies and..."

"Jay!" He snapped, his eyes growing wide.

"Yes sir."

"We don't know nobody named Jay."

"But sir, she's a friend of Lizzie's."

"Miller go help out inside."

The deputy looked quickly back to Henderson before he scurried off like a scared rabbit.

"Your deputy just told me that Jay Adams is the sister of Elizabeth Adams. Why isn't there a record of her ever existing, Sheriff?"

"Look I don't know who the hell you think you are. I called Valle Luna, they said you ain't no longer with them."

"I'm someone who's searching for the truth."

"Then you'll take my word as the law in these parts. I've known the Adams for a long time. Since back before you was even born I would suspect. I knew Lizzie's Uncle Jerry and Aunt Dayne well. Hell, I even remember the names of their dogs. And I'm telling you that there ain't no Jay Adams. Never was."

"What are you hiding Sheriff?"

"Not a thing. I'm just doing my best to keep the Adams name from getting torn to shreds from pretty little nosy things like you."

"If you aren't hiding anything then what's there to tear to shreds?"

"Looky here Ms. Henderson. We do things differently down here than you big city know it alls. Down here family and friends look out for one another. You ask your friend Lizzie, she'll tell you the same. She'll tell you the truth. She ain't got no sister."

Sheriff Jimmy Bowman nodded politely to her as he walked back towards the house. Henderson quickly opened up her cell phone to dial Sinclair.

"Sinclair. It's me again. You need to get your ass down here."

"What for?"

"If Shea's murder isn't enough of a reason then how about the fact that Adams has a long lost sister?"

"What?" She whispered excitedly.

"Get down here and start sniffing around. The sheriff here is crooked I can smell it. He won't even confirm the sister's existence, but I have a feeling his deputy will tell you what you need to know."

"Wait a minute...you're not staying are you?"

"No. I don't think this points to Adams. It's too obvious. Besides, I think I just found what it is that Mac and Adams have been hiding. And her name is Jay."



Sheriff Jimmy Bowman stood on the porch and watched the attractive westerner snap her cell phone shut just before she climbed in her vehicle to drive away. He didn't like visitors or strangers, never did. He prided himself on running a safe, quiet community where everyone looked out for one another and people allowed him to be the judge, jury and executioner no questions asked. That was the way things were meant to be. That was all he knew.

He glanced back in the house briefly, his eyes catching some of his boys scurrying around the dead body. He didn't know anything about the dead woman, only that she was a stranger to these parts. He could only hope that Jay Adams had nothing to do with her death. Even if she had, he would make sure no one knew. To him, Jay Adams didn't exist. She died years ago, on that summer day when she was eleven. The very day he and his brothers, along with his friend Jerry, caught and tortured the man that had raped her. He had watched the badly shaken little girl, stripped of her innocence hold up the heavy shotgun and blow the head off of her rapist. From that day forward, the girl hadn't been right. And from that day forward the innocent little tomboy who loved to play in the woods, ceased to exist.

.....  
*Valle Luna, Az.*

There was a knock at her door and Erin approached it quietly, not yet sure if she was going to answer it. She leaned forward and placed her eye up to the peep hole, very careful to remain quiet. Since the night of the fire she had been bombarded with press along with angry accusations from Mark and his colleagues, questioning her motives in regards to her hidden homosexuality. It didn't matter that the security tapes proved her whereabouts. All that seemed to matter was that she was no longer just the woman scorned. Mark had left her for another woman, yes. But now it seemed that she had left him for one as well. Motive enough for hiring someone to set the fire. They thought she was after his money. They thought she wanted to have her cake and to eat it too. But they were wrong. She wanted absolutely nothing to do with Mark or his money. All she wanted was peace. And love.

The past couple of days had been a walking nightmare, one in which she wished she could escape at any costs. She eyed the man at her front door in the FedEx uniform. It was dark out and she was suddenly grateful for her bright porch light. Opening the door just a crack, she watched as he held up a large envelope.

"Erin MacKenzie?"

"Yes."

"Sign here please."

She signed for the envelope and then closed the door behind her, careful to lock it. As she sat down to open it she noticed that it was from the city of Valle Luna, her employer. She pulled the tab on the envelope and took out its contents. It was a certified business letter informing her that she had been released from duty...indefinitely. She reread the letter over and over convinced that it was a mistake. That her mind was once again playing cruel tricks on her. But there it was. The words remained.

She let the letter fall from her lap and onto the floor, floating featherlike all the way down. A slight squeak escaped her mouth and she raised a trembling hand up to cover it. The department had let her go. They no longer wanted her. The letter had said it was partly due to her medical condition, and partly because she had compromised an investigation. She stared straight ahead as her eyes welled up with tears. The sobs tried to come but she choked them back, hating the way her throat burned and tensed and at the hands of the

department. The day she had been sworn in to the department had been one of the happiest of her life. And now that was gone. The department she had prided herself in being a part of had written her off. She was no longer good enough.

It wasn't right. There had to be something she could do. There had to be someone who would listen. Henderson. Yes Henderson. Henderson would understand. Wouldn't she? She glanced at her phone with the thought of calling her, of telling her everything. Her phone sat staring back at her, dead and cold. She had left it off the hook on purpose, tired of the harassing phone calls. And it had long since stopped its angry beeping at her. Now it just sat in silence. Just as she did.

Another knock came from her door, startling her. She jumped up angry, ready to scream at whoever it was. To tell them to fuck off and leave her alone. She yanked open the door and sucked in a big breath of air, holding it, aiming it at the person she was about to let have it.

"Hi." Adams said softly with a smile. "I tried to call but I kept getting a busy signal."

Erin nearly choked at the sight of her lover. The warm knowing look in her eyes, her god damned gorgeous face, framed by the midnight hair. It was truly amazing how a human being could look so incredible standing there in jeans and a thin gray tank top.

"What's wrong?" The dark woman asked as she studied the stricken face of her lover.

"I..uh..." Erin tried to fight the burning betrayal she felt rising up in her chest. She tried to fight back the stinging words from Mark, from the press. But as she looked into the face of the woman she loved, she caved. All of it came erupting up out of her, exploding like a powerful volcano, leaving her insides hollow and crushed.

"Oh, baby what is it?" Adams immediately walked in and embraced her lover, cradling the sobbing blonde in her arms as she kicked the door shut behind them. She walked Erin over to the couch and sat her down, stroking her tear streaked face. "Shhh. It's ok, tell me what's wrong."

Erin looked up and into the bright blue eyes. "It's...it's everything." She sobbed out, sucking in quick jerky breaths of air. "It's Mark, the press..."

Adams watched her, listening carefully. She knew that Mark had been bothering Erin. The man was furious and rightly so. He had nearly lost his life and his unborn child in the fire. But he was wrong about Erin. And if the man knew her at all, as he should having been married to her, he would know that she could never do such a thing. And as for the press, they were hungry vultures feeding off a scandalous story. She had made some calls to have it stopped and she felt good knowing that she at least still had some pull in this city. As she studied Erin and her drawn face, the far off look in her eyes, she mentally chided herself for staying away from her so much the past few days. Maybe she shouldn't have spent so much time at her house putting it back together again after the mess the cops made of it. Maybe she should've had Erin over. But she had been worried for her safety, knowing that for whatever reason someone was fucking with her and she didn't want Erin to be a target. She had thought that the blonde would be safer at her own place. At least for the time being.

"But that's not the worst of it." Erin declared as she began to hiccup.

"What is?" Adams asked, softly stroking her back.

"This!" Erin said, bending down and retrieving a business letter to which she plopped in her lovers lap.

Adams held up the letter and read it carefully, the heat rising to her cheeks as she finished.

"They can't do this." She proclaimed, looking at Erin. "They have no right. We'll sue!"

Erin collapsed against the dark woman, too drained to continue to cry. She leaned against the stronger woman's frame and inhaled the wonderful scent of her, wanting nothing more than to get lost in her.

"I don't know what I'm going to do." She said meekly.

"Don't you worry. We'll handle it." She cupped the blonde's face, wanting so badly to make everything alright. To take her away from all that plagued her. Some day very soon she would, but right now she needed to take care of her immediate needs. "You hungry?" She asked, searching her pain stricken eyes.

"No, I can't eat."

"You sure? I can go get us something....feed you in bed, just like I did the other night." She lifted her chin a little, trying to get to her smile.

Erin looked up at her, knowing she was trying but too weak to lighten up. She gave the dark woman a tired quick smile and rose up off the couch.

"I'm sorry honey, I just don't feel like eating." She held out her hand. "Come lay with me?"

Adams took her warm hand and walked with her back into the bedroom. They laid down side by side in their clothes on top of the bed. Adams reached down and pulled up a light blanket to cover her defeated lover. In no time at all, they fell fast asleep snuggled comfortably into one another.

.....

Henderson drove in complete silence, searching for the address in the darkness. As she drove, she thought. She had done nothing but think the entire flight back home from Alabama. While it was obvious to her that Adams and Mac had been hiding something, and that something was most likely Jay, she couldn't help but replay certain things over and over again in her mind.

Images and words kept coming at her one right after the other, plaguing her with thoughts of Mac's involvement.

*Erin straddling her in Ruiz's office. Kissing her so passionately. So easily seducing her.*

*The rookie detective's fierce determination to stay on the case, insisting that she be the one to go after Adams.*

She shook her head as another image came through.

*Erin and Adams on the Harley outside La Femme. Adams leaning forward, kissing the blonde so gently, so tenderly.*

She gripped the steering wheel tighter as another memory invaded.

*Erin opening the door after her first night at La Femme, already on the phone with Elizabeth Adams.*

More memories.

*Adams inviting Erin to her house for dinner when she had never been known to do it before.*

Madness, too many of them.

*Erin's refusal to wear the sound wire the last night she went in undercover.*

No...it was too much. She couldn't take anymore. She slammed on her brakes as she located the address. It was late but she didn't care. She had to talk to Erin.

Erin awoke in her lover's embrace. Darkness was all around, blanketing her surroundings. She eased herself up, careful not to wake her lover, able to tell that she was asleep by her breathing. She rubbed at her eyes and focused on her bedside clock. It was after eleven.

She yawned and climbed down off of the bed to head into the kitchen. Sleepiness had given way to thirst and she padded to the fridge for some cold water. Grabbing a cold bottle of water, she turned and shut the fridge, but not before its light spilled out into the living room. Blue eyes stared at her from a shadowed face and she yelped and dropped the bottle of water.

"Gosh, honey you scared me." She said, grabbing her chest, feeling the fool. "I thought you were still asleep." She bent down and retrieved the bottle. Standing back up, she watched the figure and waited for a response. When it didn't come, fear shot through her and she nearly dropped the bottle again. "Honey?"

The figure stepped closer and Erin at once knew it wasn't her lover. The woman stood shorter than Liz and she could smell her...she smelled foul.

The silent woman raised an arm at her and Erin stood completely frozen to the ground.

"What's going on?" Adams asked as she flipped on the kitchen light. She walked towards Erin and then stopped, noticing her unwavering stare. She turned her head as she approached, blinking her eyes profusely in the bright light.

"Hello, Lizzie." Jay remarked as her arm remained, holding the hand gun pointed right at Erin.

"Jay." Adams breathed out in shock. "What are you doing! Put the gun down!" She went towards her sister but Jay swung the gun around at her.

"Don't do it, Lizzie! Or I'll shoot you dead where you stand." When Adams stopped her advance, Jay continued. "You don't seem happy to see me sister. Yaw'll really should lock the door if you don't want company so late."

Adams stood still, her mind flying. She cringed as she realized that she hadn't locked the door behind them earlier, too worried about Erin at the time to remember to do it. She stared at her sister with wide eyes, trying to think of a way to reason with her own flesh and blood.

"Why Jay?" She asked, truly hurt and stricken by her sister's actions. She had to try to get her to talk, to stall her before she did anything rash.

"She's bad for you." Jay remarked, wiping her nose with her free hand. She stood wearing the same filthy overalls Adams had seen her in over a week before. She still hadn't bathed, Adams could smell her stench. "I set that fire so she would have to go to jail."

"Jesus Jay." Adams couldn't believe her own flesh and blood was doing such things. "What you did was wrong, you know that right?"

"I did it for you."

"For me? You almost killed two innocent people, one of them pregnant. Not to mention the fact that the cops found evidence pointing to me as the culprit."

"You?" The older sister asked. "No, it was supposed to look like she did it."

Adams looked at Erin, both of them confused. She looked back to sister; sure she had completely lost her mind.

"Then why did you put the gasoline and the boots in my truck?"

Jay shook her head and started to speak but she couldn't. Instead she waved the gun harder at Erin.

"No...no, it was her. It was supposed to look like it was her. She's bad for you. She's bad!" She screamed.

"No Jay." Adams said calmly. "She's good for me. I love her."

Jay shook her head and then grabbed at it, clutching her own hair. "No...no you don't mean that!"

"And I love her too." Erin said, stepping up to stand by her lover's side.

"No...no..." Jay was shaking her head and taking wild unsteady steps first towards them and then back, pointing the gun at them as if it were an accusatory finger.

"I mean it Jay. I love her. You wouldn't hurt someone I love, would you?" Adams could tell her words were getting to the disturbed woman. Almost as if they were penetrating her disillusioned shell, forcing her to see reality. She stood watching her sister, holding her breath, feeling Erin's hand slip into her own. They stood still, watching and waiting, a united front against anything and everything that threatened their relationship. Just as they had done days earlier when the police had come calling after the fire. Just as they would do for all eternity.

"I would." A voice sounded from behind Jay. Adams stood staring, completely stunned as Kristen Reece stepped in from the darkness of the hallway.

"Kris." Adams looked at both women in complete shock. Jay filthy and mentally unstable, Kris looking very healthy and well kept. "You mean..."

"That's right, it's been me all along."

"You? I was going to say...you're alive." Words weren't coming easy to her. The situation before her was overwhelming and she was trying desperately to make sense of it all.

"Alive and well. I look good for someone who was burned beyond recognition in a car crash don't I?" She looked down at herself and straightened her shirt as if it mattered.

"If it wasn't you, then who?" Erin asked softly as she thought of the remains found at the site of the wreckage. The remains that never had been proven to be those of Kristen Reece.

"No one anyone will miss, rest assured."

"I can't believe this." Adams breathed out, rubbing her forehead with her free hand. Words from the past rang in her ears. Kris telling her that she wanted out. That she would make everything ok and then disappear. And now it all made sense to her.

"Miss me? I missed you darling." Kristen laughed a high pitched, ear piercing laugh.

"But why?" She couldn't understand why Kris would do it. All along she had thought that Jay had been responsible for the killings. That Kris knew and was trying to help her stop Jay.

"Why? Why! I did it all for you sweetie. Like some pathetic, lame ass fool who thought if I did...that you would love me. But no...you only wanted to fuck me. And boy did you do that well." She paused, eyeing Erin, sizing her up. "But that was ok because I had all but convinced myself that you couldn't love." She looked back to Adams. "That maybe you just weren't capable. But then this little bitch came along and proved my theory wrong. And now, I'm so fucking fed up with you and your new found love that I'm ready to kill you both. Her first of course, so you have to watch her die."

"No, Jay...you can't." Adams said, looking to her sister, pleading with her.

"Oh you're right. She can't. She's weak. Crazy and weak. But she has been good for most things. Setting that fire, helping me kill those bastards..."

"Jay, don't listen to her. Why did you ever listen to her."

"She told me those people were bad." Jay looked back forth between Kristen and her sister. "That they were hurting you."

Kristen laughed wickedly and walked over to stand next to Jay. "You see. My perfect little puppet. She'll do anything I ask and all for you little sis." She stroked Jay's face, looking back to Adams. "And now it's time to end this little game. It's time for me to say farewell to all this. To kill both of you, to pin all of it on you Liz, and then I'm off to retire in the tropics." She grinned at the two women.

"You'll never get away with it." Erin declared with disgust.

"Oh, but I will. You see, no one knows the truth other than our little circle here." She looked to Adams. "Your little private eye found me though."

Adams shook her head. "No." She whispered as she realized she hadn't heard from Shea in days. Too long.

"Oh yes. She was so easily seduced. All I had to do was let her fuck me and she told me all I needed to know about you two."

"Where is she?" Adams asked, already fearing the worst.

"She's fine. In fact, I left her sitting in your grandfather's old chair. All nice and comfy." Her wickedness escaped her again in shrill laughter.

"You bitch!" Adams shouted at her with rage as she took hurried steps towards the evil woman with Erin tugging on her, trying to hold her back.

"Yes, I suppose I am." Kristen said with another evil grin. She raised her hand up and fired a shot at Adams as the dark woman rushed at her, tearing a hole through her arm as the bullet passed through to imbed into the fridge.

"Fuck!" Adams screamed out, immediately staggering back, gripping her arm.

Erin clamored to her in a rushed panic, shielding her lover from further bullets as they both sank to the floor. It was all too much. The nightly ambush, the gunfire, the shrill laughter. All of it so reminiscent of the other horrible night that she had lived through not so long ago.

"Did that hurt? Oh I'm sorry. I must've missed. But this one won't." She raised her arm again to fire. Erin tugged on her lover and they both crawled quickly further into the kitchen, trying to hurry before more shots were fired.

"No!" Jay shouted as she tackled Kristen's arm just as the shot was fired. She had heard everything the woman had said and she now knew that Kristen wasn't trying to help Lizzie. She was trying to hurt her. And she would be damned before she would let anyone hurt her sister.

Kristen wrestled with Jay, unable to get a shot off. She freed the hand with the gun and cold cocked the shorter dark woman with the butt of the gun.

Jay fell to the floor in a painful daze, trying to gain the strength to stand back up and fight the evil woman.

"Shit." Kristen said, eyeing the fallen woman before her. "God damn little hillbilly!" She yelled as she kicked the crawling woman in the gut and then watched with pleasure as she doubled over.

Jay coughed and wheezed as her lungs screamed. She scurried away from the evil woman as best she could, unable to handle another assault.

Erin sat shielding her lover in the corner of the kitchen, trying to stop the rapid loss of blood. Adams was trembling, her face ashen. Erin had managed to grab a large knife from the kitchen counter while Kristen was busy with Jay. She stood now, rising up from her lover, to face off with Kristen Reece. She squared her shoulders and waited, careful to place her body between the evil woman and her lover. She wasn't about to leave Adams to save herself. She was going to try to fight for them both, or die trying.

"Now I'm going to have to kill all of you." Anger shook Kristen's voice as she watched Jay scamper away from her. She cocked her head in thought and then continued in a lighter tone of voice, looking towards Adams. "Actually, that works out better for me. Detective Sinclair knows I'm alive and this way I can wipe my hands clean of it all. Blame it all on you and your crazy sister. Make it look like Jay killed you and then herself." She finished her thought with a smile.

She laughed again as she saw Erin approach her with the knife. "I suppose you're going to tell me to drop the gun and fight you fairly?"

"You don't have the guts to do so." Erin responded through clenched teeth. She heard Liz groan from behind, heard her moving, but she wasn't about to peel her eyes away from the evil woman.

"You're right, she doesn't." Adams whispered as she staggered to stand beside her lover, a knife of her own hidden behind her back.

"Such harsh words." Kristen let out and then laughed as she clenched her chest. "You're breaking my heart."

"I'm sure we are." Erin replied, her green eyes fierce and boring daggers into Reece. "Because she doesn't want you. She doesn't love you."

"Shut up you little bitch!"

Erin had stricken a nerve and she kept on, taking a step closer as she spoke.

"She loves me not you."

"Fucking whore." Kristen seethed.

"How could she love you, Kristen? You're evil. You killed all those people and then tried to frame Liz. How could she love you?"

Kristen glared at her. "That's right I did. And I'm going to get away with to."

Adams raised her good arm back over her shoulder just as Kristen finished the words. She then flung the knife quickly, and yelled out for Erin to get down.

Erin flung herself to the floor as Adams yelled, unsure as to what was going on, but seeing the knife turn end over end as it flew through the air with rocket like speed. She then covered her head, not looking to see if the knife hit its mark.

A shot rang out. One then two. Erin flinched, waiting to feel the pain, but none came. She opened her clenched eyes slowly and looked around. Kristen lay in a twisted heap on the floor. The knife wavered from it's penetration in her chest as blood ran out from two other holes by its side. Erin looked back to her lover, unsure where the other two holes had come from. Adams stood bracing herself against the kitchen counter, holding her arm. She looked to Erin and nodded that she was ok. Erin pushed herself up as someone moved beyond Kristen. The blonde stood still in a crouch, ready to react if she needed to. She watched the kitchen floor intently as someone stepped into view.

"You two ok?"

Erin looked up and nearly collapsed with relief as her eyes settled in on Henderson's face. The writer nudged a lifeless Kristen with her boot and then lowered her gun.

Erin went to her lover to make sure she was alright. Adams stood trembling, but ok. Erin then turned to Henderson.

"We need an ambulance."

Henderson nodded and flipped open her phone to dial 911.

"I need to go check on Jay." Adams said softly, moving past her lover. Erin nodded and watched her wounded lover walk unsteadily over to her sister.



"Jay?" Adams whispered, reaching out to touch her arm. Jay stood suddenly, almost as if she were afraid. She looked around wildly and touched her head. A large knot had already formed where Kristen had hit her.

"Jay?" Adams said again, needing her to focus.

Jay looked at her sister and saw the blood oozing down her arm.

"I'm sorry Lizzie, I'm so sorry." She let out, nearly weeping with guilt and defeat.

"Shh. Nevermind." Adams said quickly. She looked back to Erin and Henderson and then dug in her pocket. "Here." She said, shoving a large folded stack of bills in her sister's hand. She then took her sister by the hand and led her into the bedroom where she snatched up her satellite phone from the night table. "Take it." She said handing it to her sister. "Take it and go." She whispered hurriedly.

"What?" Jay said, shaking her head in confusion.

"Go Jay. Get out of here now."

"But..."

"No!" Adams said a little louder. "Get out of here. Go to Mexico. I'll call you on the satellite phone to make sure you have what you need."

"But after what I done..."

"It doesn't matter. You did what you thought was right." She looked back towards the kitchen and saw Henderson and Erin bent over Kristen. "The police won't understand that, Jay." She met and held her eyes. "They'll lock you away forever."

Jay looked at her sister in silence.

"Just promise me you won't hurt anyone else."

Jay looked down and nodded.

"I'm going to get you some help, but not here. You'll never get it here. Now go."

She motioned for Jay to go out the patio door from the master bedroom. Jay took a step, then hesitated.

"I love you, Lizzie." She choked out.

"I love you too, Jay." Adams whispered as she watched her sister slip out the door and into the night.

Erin removed her hand from Kristen neck. She had been checking for a pulse, needing to know for sure that the woman was dead.

"No pulse." She confirmed as she and Henderson then stood. She looked to the writer who looked as visibly shaken as she herself felt. "Please tell me you heard." She said, needing for the whole thing to finally be over.

Henderson looked up at her and nodded. "I heard enough."

Erin sighed and nearly sobbed with relief. "What were you doing here?" She asked, grateful beyond words that she had been.

"I needed to talk to you about Jay. But your phone was off the hook and I got worried."

Erin started to voice her profound thanks but she stopped short when she saw Adams stagger back in from the bedroom.

"Oh my God." Erin let out, running to her. "Lay down." She insisted as she helped her weak lover ease down to the floor. "Just relax. They're almost here." She encouraged softly.

Adams looked up into the face of the woman she loved. She felt cold and weak and she couldn't quite focus on Erin. "I love you." She whispered just before her vision tunneled into blackness.

## Chapter 11

*Two Months Later*

*Utopia, Az.*

Henderson stood against the red wood railing out on her deck. It was a cool, crisp November morning up in the pines. She snuggled her thick terrycloth robe closer to her body as her lungs filled up with the fresh mountain morning air. She looked down next to her at her deck chair. A notebook sat staring back at her, her favorite pen clipped to it. It held the last chapter of the manuscript she had been writing. A manuscript based on the events of the serial killings and the people involved. Only unlike the real events, the book itself was fiction, something that people could read for entertainment.

She sipped her coffee as the events of late summer ran through her mind. She had almost wished that the horror she had lived through had been fiction. Fiction was a whole lot easier to deal with. But then, she supposed, that's why she wrote. To help her deal with life and all the curve balls it threw her way. She looked down into the ravine which ran below her cabin. A deer stood perfectly still as if it sensed her presence. Then, as it gained confidence it began to move once more. As she watched the young fawn continue to walk through the ravine, silently searching for its breakfast, she thought about Jay Adams.

It had been two months now and the police still had no idea as to the woman's whereabouts. She was convinced that Elizabeth Adams knew exactly where her sister was but she also knew the night club owner would never tell. While she didn't agree with it, she could almost understand it.

After the shootout with Kristen Reece, the police had managed to get the whole story from Mac and Adams. It seemed that Jay had most likely been manipulated by Kristen, but it still didn't excuse her of the wrong doings. Jay had a lot of questions to answer and the department would continue to search for her for a long time to come.

Erin Mackenzie had been immediately cleared of any charges, gaining only a slap on the wrist for withholding the information about Jay. She suspected the department didn't want any bad press and that was why they hadn't pressed charges against her. With the exception of her job, Mac it seemed, had been released relatively unscathed.

It took the department awhile, however, to let Elizabeth Adams free of their clutches. They, along with herself, were convinced that Adams not only knew that Jay had been the one committing the serial murders and refused to report it, but that the woman also knew the whereabouts of her missing sister. But without any proof regarding these matters, they had had no choice but to let her go.

She drained the last of her coffee and thought of Mac. She hadn't heard from the blonde in a few weeks and she hoped she was doing well.

"Morning." A raspy, sleepy voice welcomed from behind.

"Morning sleepy head." She said with a smile as she felt the tall detective wrap her arms around her from behind. It was always nice when the weekends arrived. It meant that Sinclair would drive up from Valle Luna to spend the weekend with her. Time she always valued. Especially now that her book was finished, she would be able to spend more time with the handsome detective.

"You didn't come to bed last night." Sinclair whispered in her ear with a kiss. "Did you finish the last chapter?"

Henderson rubbed her hand across Sinclair's forearm. "I did."

"The next New York Times Bestseller?" She asked, gently squeezing her.

"I don't know about that." Henderson said with a laugh.

"I do. I'm sure of it." Sinclair nuzzled the writer's neck. "Now, let's go inside. It's freezing out here."

Henderson groaned from the sensation of Sinclair's hot mouth on her neck. She turned to face her lover and laughed.

"You're naked!" She said, unable to resist ogling the tall blonde's beautiful body. The woman was all sinewy muscle which tensed as the detective jerked from the cold.

Sinclair grinned at her through clenched teeth. "Come here." She said, tugging on Henderson's belt. "Warm me up, gorgeous." She pulled open the robe and stepped into her lover's arms, thoroughly enjoying the feel of the warm nude body beneath the robe.

Henderson's body instantly caught fire as Sinclair rubbed up against her. "Let's go inside and make a fire." She breathed huskily.

Sinclair nibbled her ear. "Ok." She said as she turned to look at the stack of logs located next to the door.

Henderson pulled her back into her. "We won't..." She said touching the taller woman's lips. "Be needing any wood."

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## *The Aegean Sea*

### *Just off the Isle of Lesbos, Greece*

Erin stood staring out the incredible teal green sea. It was late afternoon and the breeze was blowing cooler against her. She hugged herself and focused on one of Greece's larger islands, the Island of Lesbos. Liz had friends that lived on the island and they were due to port there that very evening. They had been on the private yacht for days now and while she found comfort in it's secluded safety, she was looking forward to setting foot on solid ground.

She smiled as she thought about her dark haired lover. Although the last couple of months had been trying, the two had still managed to emerge hand in hand and ready to start their new life together. The police were finally leaving them alone, finally accepting the fact that they had no case against either one of them. She had lost her job, but after all that had happened, she knew she would never choose to go back even if she could. She was scarred now and resentful. The department will never look the same in her eyes. She looked down and ran a finger over her left hand, rubbing where her wedding ring once rested. Her divorce from Mark still wasn't final, but they were no longer fighting over the settlement, which meant it was only a matter of time before the state finalized.

"Hey, beautiful." Liz said as she walked up behind her blonde lover. "Cold?" She asked as she slid out of her white blouse and placed it on her lover's shoulders.

Erin hugged the shirt to her which held the wonderful scent of the dark woman. A scent that always sent shockwaves of lust right through her no matter how many times she smelled it.

"Thank you." She said, slipping the shirt on, while turning to give her lover a warm kiss. "You look beautiful." Erin said, looking the dark beauty up and down, taking in her white linen outfit. She noted the angry scar on her bare arm and reached out to lightly touch it. A tear started to form in her eyes as she thought of that awful night. The night she had witnessed her lover drift into unconsciousness.

"Hey...it's ok." Liz said softly, stroking her cheek. She could read the blonde so well and she knew Erin was thinking back to that night. She pulled the shorter woman against her for a hug. Taking Erin away from Valle Luna had been the easiest decision of her life. They had both needed to get away and she knew that the only way to make Erin feel safe for the time being was to take her around by yacht. On the yacht, they were surrounded by water, not people. Eventually, she knew, the nightmares would stop. Eventually, Erin would feel safe again. She would see to that. No matter how long it took.

"I know." Erin said pulling away from her and offering her a smile. "It's just...I love you so much. I never thought I could be this happy." She stood watching her lover with intense green eyes. She watched the way the wind blew her midnight hair, the way the sun reflected off her blue eyes. She smiled at the color on her high cheeks bones. Color brought by days on end of the sun and wind. The woman was so beautiful and she knew she would never tire of looking at her.

"I'm glad." Adams said, kissing her again. "Because I wanted to talk to you about something."

"Sure." Erin said, suddenly unable to stop thinking about the things her lover had done to her just that morning. She blushed as she looked at Liz, realizing the dark woman was wanting her attention on the here and now.

"I want you to have something." She said as she reached into the pocket of her white linen pants. With her hand nearly trembling, the dark woman pulled out a deep red velvet box.

Erin immediately placed her hand over her mouth as she realized what her lover was about to do. She watched helplessly as Liz opened the box to retrieve the diamond ring inside.

"I love you Erin Mackenzie." The dark woman said, her voice strained with emotion. "I want to be with you always. I will protect you and love you for the rest of my life." She gently took Erin's hand and slipped on the ring. "If you'll have me..."

Erin threw herself into her lover's arms, holding her dark head and kissing her long and deep. Adams groaned against her and lifted the blonde's smaller frame up against her.

When Erin finally pulled away, Adams reached up and fingered her lips which tingled after the hungry kiss of her lover.

"I take it that's a yes, then?" She asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Absolutely." Erin said, tugging on Liz's white tank top, pulling her in closer.

"You know..." Adams said, leaning down to bite the blonde's neck. "We still have another hour before we make port at Lesbos. What do you say you and I go inside and celebrate our honeymoon a little early?"

Erin shuddered under her lover's warm mouth. "Mmm. Only tonight..." She said, reaching up to rub her thumbs across her lover's nipples. "It's my turn."

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### *Baja Peninsula, Mexico*

Jay sat in the white thick sand, staring out at the sea. As the waves crashed hungrily into shore, she thought about her sister and all the wrong that had been done in her name. She reached down and ran her hand through the soft grains of sand. She still felt guilty about letting Kristen manipulate her to do things to hurt Lizzie. And she knew now that there was nothing she could do about it.

She stood and wiped the sand from the backs of her legs. Her sister was safe now and off cruising the world. Lizzie had helped her escape yet again. And as long as she promised not to hurt anyone else she would remain free. As she walked back up the beach, she made another silent vow to her sister. If anyone ever tried to hurt Lizzie again, like those men did, or like Kristen...she would be there. She would be there to protect her. Always.

**The End**