

Beautiful Trouble Publishing

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To all those who've stood the test of time and
worked our REAL jobs with us (and kept us
sane at our other one)...we thank and love y'all!
Peace out! —Jeanie and Jayha

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CAVEAT

This work of erotica contains adult language and sexually explicit scenes, which are smoking hot. This book is intended only for adults, as it is defined by the laws of the country in which the purchase is made. Keep this book out of the hands of under-aged readers.

AUTHORS' NOTE

This story was originally part of the *TAG! You're Writ, Volume 2* anthology. The idea behind these stories is that one author tagged another author. That author would use some concept, character, etc. from the previous author's story and spin their own tale.

Author Shara Azod had the pen first and "tagged" it to author team Dréa Riley and Laura Guevara. Dréa and Laura tagged author Reana Malori. Finally, Reana tagged author team Jeanie Johnson and Jayha Leigh.

Premise:

The tiny but badass country of Kovorkiistan is governed by equally badass rulers. And then, the rulers are set upon by heroines that stir up all sorts of mischief...and hotness

Though connected, these stories are stand-alone tales.

- *The Accidental Princess* by Shara Azod
- *Flippin' the Script* by Laura Guevara and Dréa Riley
- *Need You Tonight* by Reana Malori

tag: (tāg) **noun, verb**

—**noun**

An informal game that involves one or more players pursuing or chasing other players in an effort to “tag” them with their hands or another object, thus making the player “tagged” the new pursuer. Also referred to as Tag, You’re It.

—**verb** (*used with object*)

To touch, as in the game of ‘*Tag, You’re It.*’

Tag! You’re Writ: **noun, verb**

—**noun**

An informal writing challenge that involves at least two authors. The first author writes a short story and “tags” the second author. The next author then writes a story “tagging” off of a character, theme or something else and incorporates it in a story that they pen.

This writing challenge involves six authors. Author Shara Azod has the pen first and is “tagging” author team Dréa Riley and Laura Guevara. Dréa and Laura tag author Reana Malori. Reana tags author team Jeanie Johnson and Jayha Leigh. And thus, the game begins.

Chapter One

“Motherfucker.”

Desron Lorcc ignored the scandalized looks she received from her one-word sentence just like she ignored the blood staining her cargo jeans, the mud covering her steel-toed boots, the fucking frigid air that blanketed them, and the pain thumping through her body like bass thumped in clubs. The blood was a result of her ignoring Exodus 20:13 *You shall not murder*. Normally, she was against murdering, but then she was also against someone trying to murder her. The mud was a result of their unplanned trip out in the middle of the woods. The cold was her own damn fault. She should’ve been chilling on a beach with her fellow college students, being it was spring break and all, but no, she was on a mission trip surrounded by Bible-toting, Scripture-quoting do-gooders who were so old they might have actually taken turns holding the flashlight when God was creating the universe. The pain was due to her not being up-to-date on her hand-to-hand combat. Dammit, it was hard to get in two hours of training a day when she was double-majoring in grad school. Still, when she got back to Nashville she was going to slide in some fuckso meshitup-utsu in between Constitutional Law and Ethics.

Ah, she was so not liking it out here right now. So not liking it, and if she weren't interested in staying out of jail and keeping her rap sheet blank, she would've told her potential probation officer to kiss her ass—and not just some of it but the whole, damn thing. Asshole.

Despite the two pending charges of felony assault back in Rich Peopleville, Virginia, she was a nice person...except when you put your hands on her without first gaining permission, and then only after undergoing a thorough physical and blood test. The Desron Rules of Engagement consisted of one rule: I'm not your bitch, so don't fucking touch me. Anyone who violated that rule was going to be getting an up-close visit to the ICU ward at the nearest hospital, as those drunken frat boys on the prowl for black girl pussy had found out. After removing their grabby hands from her titties and ass, she'd yanked those silver spoons out of their mouths and broken them off so far up their asses they were practically spitting silver mines. To finish it off, she gave them a little size-twelve boot in the face.

The only reason she wasn't tossed up under the jail was due to the quick thinking of one Allison Davis—badass dictator in training. Allison had taped the whole beat down on her camera phone even as she'd whined to her about not leaving her any ass to

beat. Desron couldn't help but like Allison. She had moxie...and lots of it.

The other reason she wasn't up under the jail was because her momma and daddy just weren't going to allow that to happen, despite the ludicrous number of ordinances, laws and the like she'd broken. Major General Vienna B. Lorcc and Rear Admiral Asim Lorcc might be career military, but they were career parents first. Her left ass cheek didn't even get a chance to touch the police cruiser, much less the seat, before her family arrived on the scene.

Though her parents were nearby, being that they clocked in at the Pentagon, she knew they'd broken all kinds of speed limits to get to her so fast. As soon as that black SUV pulled up, her daddy was out the door before the tires stopped spinning, and her momma was right behind him. And right behind them in their chauffeured limousine were her momma's best friends and her play-aunts Baylor Ermenrich (five-time *kumite*—underground no-holds-barred mixed martial arts tournaments— champion) and Dr. Amani McDyess (most sought after attorney in Washington, D.C., and everywhere that surrounded it, including Canada).

Seeing the destruction she'd left, her momma quickly hugged her up and promised, "Baby, if they

even try some bullshit like throwing you in jail, you know I'm coming to bust you out."

Her daddy cosigned on that. Her Aunt Baylor did what she always did—nodded her agreement and busied herself scoping out motherfuckers who were about to have a bad fucking day. Aunt Amani didn't say a thing, but she didn't need to. She simply lifted that perfectly arched eyebrow, patted her short fro and started writing down the names of people about to be on her shit list.

Since her parents said it, she had no choice but to believe it. Between her parents, her Aunt Baylor and their attorney, she had the connections, legalese, and money behind her. Yay her, because despite spending every summer in survival camps and being trained in hand-to-hand combat by her Aunt Baylor, she had no desire whatsoever to spend time in anybody's jail. Along with having strict requirements for cleanliness (the lawgivers in the book of Leviticus would have been like *'don't you think you're going overboard?'*), she had personal space issues. And if that wasn't enough, she had issues with strange coochie in her face. Growing up to be someone's bitch wasn't anywhere on her list.

Obviously, she didn't go to jail. Hell, she didn't even make it downtown. Instead, she was bundled into her play-aunt's limo and taken to the Georgetown

University Hospital, which was ironically where the unsanctioned touchers were transported as well.

Seeing the condition their sons were in had their parents threatening all manner of retribution, from getting her parents fired, to throwing her into some kind of foreign prison, to sending the whole family back to Africa. Aware of the scrutiny, her parents countered their threats and ignorance with silence.

Everything would've been swept under the rug if the public smack down had been between her and some regular moneyed-up frat boys, but because she'd instilled the fear of her into the progeny of the nephews of some dignitaries, the shit had hit the fan and the stink was sticking all over the capitol. It might've all stuck on her if not for Allison, her phone and her 'fight the system' personality. Having stuck around to get her rubberneck on, and not liking what she heard through the grapevine, Allison didn't waste any time kicking off a riot. "No justice; no peace! No justice; no peace!" she ranted, whipping the crowd into a frenzy outside of Georgetown U Hospital. How that chick had the lowdown before the media had the lowdown was a mystery, but since she was on her side, she wasn't asking any questions.

It took a few days for things to get settled. After the authorities confiscated Allison's phone and viewed the video, they came to a decision that no one

particularly liked. All of the serious charges against both her and the frat boys were dismissed and they were all charged with disorderly conduct, since according to the powers that be it was kind of a no harm/no foul situation. However, since she'd used excessive force, she was ordered to pay three-quarters of their hospital bill. She was also given the choice of performing one hundred hours of community service (that the assholes got to choose) and later having the misdemeanor dropped, or she could simply stay out of trouble for six months and perform forty hours of community service. Since Desron had had the privilege of being herself all her life (all twenty-five years of it), she knew there was a good chance she'd whip someone else's ass before six months was up, so she chose option A.

Though she'd stayed out of jail, the people in her camp were still six kinds of pissed off. Her momma was pissed that she couldn't make those boys disappear...right after she served their nuts to them for dinner. Her daddy was pissed that he couldn't lay waste to their countries. Her big brother Socom was pissed that he'd have to wait until the boys were released from the ICU to beat them some more. Allison was pissed that five-o had confiscated her phone for evidence and deleted the video, thus depriving her of multiple hits on YouTube.

Of course her aunts were pissed that anything except apologies were leveled at her. But they were the kind of women who didn't get mad; they got even...and then they got mad...and then even some more...and a little bit more after that. Aunt Baylor hadn't said shit to the gloating parents, but she had plenty to say to her banker, which resulted in her owning a controlling interest in the three banks that held the mortgages to the headquarters of the companies the boys' parents worked for, the notes to their companies' jets, the notes to their yachts and villas in the Mediterranean. Oops for them for not realizing that Baylor Austin Ermenrich wasn't just a pretty face, but the wife of a man who owned half of Europe and a disproportionate percentage of Euros. Beyond that, she was also Texan, and nobody fucked with Texans. And if you didn't know, all you had to do was read the signs the great state posted alongside its highways.

Then there was Aunt Amani. She hadn't said shit...and thus they were all scared. A silent Amani McDyess was a bad enemy to have. Even Aunt Baylor was unnerved by a silent Amani.

In the end, it was the first of many laughs for Desron. Allison just so happened to find another recording of the smack down and, yeah, that didn't go bad. Their fraternity ended up disbanded. Their

friends, who didn't want any part of the scandal, dropped them, and of course the boys were too fucked up to worry about anything outside of how long they'd be peeing blood. And the cherry on top? Their parents, their uncle, and the companies they worked for were all relegated to being Baylor's personal bitches.

That was gravy, but it still didn't get her out of going along on a mission trip. There were mission trips to all kinds of places, but of course, she'd gotten hitched with the mission trip to Eastern Europe...in late winter. Dammit. She was sure there were people in much warmer places who needed some New Testament. Places like Hawaii, the Cayman Islands...hell, at this point she'd take West Bum Fuck, Georgia. At least there she could get some decent sweet tea with her Jesus. It wasn't that she had a personal vendetta against missionaries (although she did have one against tyrants); she just didn't like the ones who hawked their religion like used car salesman. *'Want some rice? Take my God, then...or keep being hungry.'* What kind of shit was that? For that matter, what kind of shit was allowing people—any people—to be hungry in the first place?

Feeling a stab of pain go through her, she checked her stitches to make sure they were still shut and felt her head to make sure she didn't have a fever.

Yes to the first, no to the second. And since she was in the checking mode, she checked her stolen guns once more for ammo, her pockets for the stolen machetes she'd stuffed there and the horizon for danger. Turning, she checked on her flock. For better or worse, the missionaries were her flock, and she was their shepherd. Being that it was getting colder, darker and their situation more desperate by the moment, she made sure they kept together, as she had no desire to reenact Luke 15:4 or Matthew 18:12. Ironic, especially as she'd spent the last two days praying as hard as she could that her own shepherds (her momma and daddy) would leave their flock to come looking for her.

Chapter Two

If she'd hated the pussy-ass frat boys before, finding herself asshole deep in people who wanted to kill her and her newfound homies made her hate them more. She warmed herself with the thought that the boys weren't enjoying shit anymore within the confines of the U.S. It was nice to have friends who had juice like that. Oh, they hadn't been *made* to leave, but by the time her momma, Aunt Baylor, and Aunt Amani had gotten through with them, they'd *wanted* to leave. Still, their misery really didn't help her right now. Matter of fact, when she got out of this (she couldn't think of the alternative), she was going to pay a visit to their country and fuck some shit up on GP.

Oh, she was going to have a story to tell her homies when she got back to Nashville. *What'd you do for spring break? I got lectured all week by missionaries, and then we all got kidnapped by one of the most ruthless gangs in Eastern Europe. Of course, not having planned on being killed, sold into sexual slavery, or held hostage while they bled my family dry, I had to go on a killing spree. In the midst of the spree, I got shanked three times and had to stitch myself up without anesthesia. What about you? Oh, you got freaked by a troupe of hot, blue-chip*

athletes, ate like there was no such thing as calories, then worked off those savory meals by going voguing with some cross-dressers at the clubs. Damn.

Gritting her teeth, she tried to stop feeling sorry for herself. She didn't want to be out here in the middle of nowhere, but it wasn't like the rest of her group did either. Instead of bitching and moaning about it, those cats had a skip in their step as they thanked the Lord for leading them to a new place where they could spread the Good News. Despite the way she personally felt about most organized religion, she admired her Bible-toting group. They took Luke 4: 17-19 real seriously. They'd even tried to tell their kidnappers the Good News, hurling Scripture at them even as Desron hurled machetes. In the midst of the storm in the middle of nowhere, they were guided by their faith. Faith was a good thing, but so was being alive.

Having spent the last day hiding and walking, they weren't technically in the middle of nowhere. They were somewhere along the coast of the Baltic Sea. Considering how long they'd traveled with their temporary kidnappers and the many hours they'd been hiking the rugged area (who knew missionaries were in such good shape?), she estimated they were either in the very northwestern or very southwestern part of Lithuania. For their sakes, she hoped it was

the southwest, not because she was in love with the region, but because southwest Lithuania bordered the kingdom of Kovorkiistan. And while she wasn't thrilled about trekking to Kovorkiistan—not that it wasn't a lovely place—when she really wanted to be enjoying the hotness that paraded up and down South Beach, Miami, she was thrilled that the kingdom was ruled by the Shah family.

While she wouldn't count herself among the Shah's close circle of friends, she'd had the privilege of meeting Alexei Raijin Brijesh Shah, the Crown Prince, as her godfather had done business with the family. The fact that her godfather did business with him meant two things. One, he was ridiculously rich, and two, the Crown Prince knew how to keep his eyeballs off of Aunt Baylor. Her godfather was funny about Baylor—like anyone was crazy enough to fuck with the short-tempered, multiple sword-wielding Texan. Of course even if Alexei had been that crazy, he would've curbed all of that crazy after meeting her aunt. Aunt Baylor was fucking nuts, and she wasn't afraid to show it to anybody. *'The dumber people think you are, baby, the more surprised they are when you drop an ass whipping on them.'*

It was a crazy quip, but it was true, which their kidnappers had soon found out. Right now they needed some good people. The missionaries might

not like her cussing, her don't-give-a-shitness, or the trail of bodies she'd left in their wake, but they didn't deserve to die like this. No one did. And that was why she respected her parents so much. Vienna and Asim were military to the core—not because they enjoyed destroying things, but because they believed in liberating people. So did she, but she much preferred doing it from the comforts of her home, where the thermostat was set on a reasonable seventy degrees Fahrenheit in winter and sixty-four in summer.

While she didn't have the stomach for the military (she had a thing about people telling her what to do), she'd lived a privileged life because of her parent's drive. She'd traveled all over the world, and the few times she and Socom couldn't go with their parents, they'd holed up in Aunt Baylor's palatial Luxembourg estate or Aunt Amani's massive D.C. brownstone that was a hop, skip and jump away from the Supreme Court. She'd had a kickass education, which had resulted in her being fluent in kicking ass, taking names, German, French, Russian, Greek, Luxembourghish, and liberation theology.

She believed in justice and righteousness not because it was politically correct, but because she'd grown up with a family that stressed those virtues. Despite the blood covering her jeans, the machetes in her hand, the semi-automatics strapped to her neck,

and the trail of bodies she'd left in her wake, she was a nice person. She was a nice person who was hungry and cold. "Fuck," she mumbled just to blow off steam.

"You shouldn't cuss so much. Or kill people so much," Head Bible-Toter said.

"I like to cuss. I also like being alive," she said.

"What about 'turn the other cheek'?"

"I do. I turned my left butt cheek to them right before showing them the right one," she said just to rile her.

All she got for her efforts was a strong 'hummmph.' Normally, she wouldn't mess with older people, but she couldn't resist teasing the woman. Besides, the missionaries knew her well enough now not to be too offended by her cussing. And she knew them well enough not to be offended by their proselytizing. She and the missionaries were at an impasse. It was like a Mexican standoff, except it wasn't warm like Mexico, and there weren't any plates of delicious *tortas*, and there wasn't any siesta in sight.

"You know what cheek I meant, youngin'," Head Bible-Toter said.

"Yes ma'am, I do. I'm quite familiar with Matthew 5:39. I've read it many times, most recently in the original Greek. I'm also well-acquainted with the Beatitudes, the Preamble to the Declaration of Independence, and the Declaration of Human Rights.

It's a fact that don't nobody do you like Jesus. While He raised Lazarus from the dead in John 11:44; the widow's son in Luke 7:14; and, Jairus' daughter in Mark 5:41, Matthew 9:25, and Luke 8:54-55, I don't really want to be dead more than one time and I want that to be a long time from now. And despite y'all working my last nerve, I don't want y'all to die anytime soon either...but don't take that aforementioned statement to mean that I like y'all. I'm just letting you know it's going to be hard for y'all to spread the Good News if you're dead, so step it up. I want to get to Kovorkiistan ASAP. The sooner we get there, the less people I have to kill."

After her mini-lecture, they hushed up. She wasn't naïve enough to think their silence was because they agreed with her. They were probably quiet because they could feel the growing desperation of their situation and because they really didn't want her to kill any more people. Truth be told, she didn't want to kill any more people either. She could've gladly gone the whole of her life never having done so, but she also could've gladly gone the whole of her life never having been kidnapped, threatened, or stabbed. She'd have to live with that...but at least she'd live, and when she got home, she was going to have an angry Socom all up in her face telling her 'I told you so,' even as he hugged her almost to death.

She'd told him there wasn't any need for him to interrupt his residency to come babysit her on her community service. *'What could go wrong on a mission trip?'* she'd asked flippantly. Famous last words, she thought as they navigated the slippery terrain that was the result of a freak snowstorm. As if the kidnapping and killing spree weren't enough, the weather just served to add to her level of pissed off. Majestic mountains, green valleys sprinkled with jewel-colored flowers her ass. The Baltic area in late winter was better left on the front side of a postcard. It was foreboding, snow-covered, gray and frigid...nothing at all like Miami in March. Sigh. Damn. Fuck. She hated being out here, but more than that, she hated being scared.

Her sighs got the attention of Head Bible-Toter. "Are you scared, Desron?" she asked in a gentle, momma-like voice.

No, she wasn't scared. Scared was a temporary state that was sometimes followed by exhilaration. That was why people watched scary movies, did dangerous things, visited haunted houses. There wasn't anything temporary about this experience. She'd carry it with her always. No, she wasn't scared; she was frightened. More than that, she was fearful...but she wasn't going to admit that to them. It was tough enough to admit it to herself.

Resorting to humor, she teased them. “Step it up, people. I haven’t killed or maimed anyone in a few hours, so my belligerence levels are getting low.”

Just as she’d expected, they answered her taunt by hastening their gait and by hurling prayers at her. They were good prayers, though. Stopping, she turned to them, and for a brief moment she went all Isaiah and was fully exposed even though she wasn’t prophesying. “I could use some Psalms right about now.”

And just like that, they gave it to her. They started with Psalm 23:4. *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.* Then they rolled right into Psalm 27:1-3. *¹ The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid? ² When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. ³ Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.*

She’d read Psalms countless times, but never had they sounded so good. Just when she’d gotten used to the tender-sounding Scripture, Head Bible-Toter pulled the okeydoke.

Putting her hand under Desron's chin, Head Bible-Toter looked her right in the face. "Your lips may say you need some Psalms, but the look in your eyes says you need some hard-hitting Scripture. How about some Isaiah?"

And before she could answer, Head Bible-Toter started reciting...without a Bible. That chick was good. "Isaiah 35:4. *Say to those with fearful hearts, 'Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, He will come with vengeance; with divine retribution He will come to save you.'*"

Even though she wondered why her God had to be male, Desron had to admit that right now she didn't care which God (male or female) brought the water, as long as one of them came.

"Isaiah 41:10. *Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.*"

Ah, a gender-neutral God. She could get down with that. And she could use some strength and some upholding, and the world could use some righteousness.

"Isaiah 41:13. *For I hold you by your right hand—I, the LORD your God.*

And I say to you, 'Don't be afraid. I am here to help you.'"

Yes, help me, Lord. Help us, Lord. Help us soon. She was tired...so tired. "Can you hit me one more time with some of that Isaiah 35?"

And they all hit her with it...and she joined in. *"Say to those with fearful hearts, 'Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, He will come with vengeance; with divine retribution He will come to save you.'"* Reciting Scripture out loud when you were supposed to be sneaking probably wasn't the brightest idea she'd ever have, but right now it felt good. It took away the numbing cold, it took away the burning pain, it took away the fear. And it took away her alertness, for when she looked up, she saw the shadows. Turning to her group, tears streaming down her face, she confessed. "I'm sorry."

"Are you ready to die?" Head Bible-Toter asked.

She wanted to be flip, she really did, but she just didn't have it in her. "No, but are you?"

"Yes," they all said.

Knowing they wouldn't accept the guns or the machetes or the knives, she offered them anyway. Just as she thought, they refused them...just as they refused to leave her. They held onto her with their hands, and when she pulled away they held onto her with their words, with their song, with their faith.

Using the last of her strength, she released the safety on each gun and ran towards the shadows.

Having seen *Scarface* plenty of times, and having been moved by the senseless tragedy each time she'd watched it, she didn't assume. And having grown tired of the pandemic of gun violence in her America, she laid down her guns and picked up her knives. Shooting was so impersonal. If you were going to kill a person, the least you could do was look them in the face when you did so.

"Face me and try and kill me," she taunted.

She wasn't ready to die, but she wasn't ever going willingly into bondage either. Bondage was not an option. There were only two choices: she would die fighting, or she would fight to die.

Chapter Three

Ras Vytautas was not a people person. In fact, he was hardly a person. While he had official records, they were buried so deep that there were times he almost forgot who he was. Almost, but then something would happen, and he'd remember. Those in his inner sanctum described him as a son-of-a-bitch or an asshole. To his enemies he was the things they were too afraid to voice; the terror that filled their minds when they closed their eyes. He was that, but he was also the vengeance they feared would haunt their every waking moment. They were right to fear him because he didn't know how to quit, never relented, didn't know the word surrender. And yet, for all that he was simply known as *Priest*, which was ironic being that he was considered the meanest motherfucker on the team.

That was the other ironic thing: most of the time he was the entire team. He went into the places even tenured mercenaries avoided. Slipping in under the radar, he slipped out the same way. The only evidence he'd been there was the fact that the target had been eliminated...without a sign there'd even been a target. While others left a trail of destruction, he didn't even leave a trail. His targets simply went missing.

He didn't feel bad for what he did; he felt bad that despite doing all he could, it was never enough for those living under siege, living in fear, existing on the edges of society. Not known for being much of a talker, he was a superb listener. He heard the cries of the helpless, the moans of the survivors, the travails of the suffering...and he hated those sounds. Yet, as much as he hated those noises, he abhorred the sound of silence even more, because it meant he'd been too late to make a difference.

Priest spent most of his time hating people. Only humans treated each other with such cruelty, such dispassion, such apathy. There weren't a whole lot of people he respected, but Rear Admiral Asim Lorcc and Major General Vienna Lorcc were two people he did. It'd been Rear Admiral Lorcc who'd dragged him out of hell, and it'd been Major General Lorcc who'd been driving the getaway tank. They'd broken laws across continents, but they'd rescued him, and the women he'd been attempting to save. His mother was among them. They'd asked only one question—'who do we need to kill?'—and when he'd told them, they'd finished the job with all due haste. There was no reason for them to put their careers, their lives and their reputations at stake, yet they had, and because of it his mother lived, as did the other women with her.

They'd never asked for anything in return, even though he'd gladly give his life for them. Even if they'd wanted something, he knew them well enough to know they wouldn't ask. He'd offered once and had gotten cussed out for his efforts. *'Just like I wouldn't put my other children in harm's way, I wouldn't do that to you, Ras,'* the Major General had said, all point blank...and he knew she'd meant it.

They might not ask him for anything, but he'd made it a habit to keep an ear to the ground where it concerned them. What hurt the Lorccs hurt him. When he'd heard through his connections that their daughter's missionary group had gone missing, he was already en route. He'd bring Desron Lorcc back, or he'd raze Eastern Europe to the ground looking for her and for those stupid enough to take her away from her family. Having an idea who'd taken them and for what reason, he contacted the six men he trusted, and six hours later, they were well on their way to tearing the Baltic a new asshole.

Once they'd narrowed down the players, it took his team less than three hours to locate the place where the kidnapping had gone down. It took less time than that to find the first body. Though each

member of the elite team had seen their fair share of carnage, they couldn't help but cringe at the trail of fucked-upness. There was nothing finesse about the kills; there was simply a clinicalness to it.

Though he'd seen plenty of Rear Admiral and Major General over the last few years, he'd only seen their children in pictures and from afar. Desron and Socom were always on the move. Bouncing between Luxembourg, D.C. and wherever their parents were stationed, they racked up more frequent flyer miles than many CEOs. And then they'd gone off to college, and while Socom had decided on medicine and settled down, Desron, who'd decided on law and divinity, had soaked up more of the world. There wasn't a study abroad that she turned down, much to her father's dismay. From her file, he'd learned she didn't go to any of the glamorous places; instead, she trekked to the places where people needed justice the most. He admired that about her.

Depending upon which parent one spoke with, the Lorcc children were either one step away from sainthood or one step away from being swallowed by the earth. The Rear Admiral waxed poetic about his delicate, gentle daughter and his strong, honorable son while the Major General muttered about how both the kids had spent the bulk of their teenage years racking up more rebukes than all of the people in the

Hebrew Bible. He could only shake his head. The truth probably lay somewhere in the middle, but one should surely expect a little hell-raising from children who bore such...interesting names? Desron being a naval abbreviation for **D**estroyer **S**quad**r**on and Socom being an army term for **S**pecial **O**perations **C**ommand.

Maybe when he became less of a bastard, he'd introduce himself and tell the Lorcc children how amazing their parents were. Or maybe he'd say nothing at all, sure that they knew. Before he could decide, he had to find Desron and return her to her parents.

His musings were interrupted by one of his teammates signaling for his attention. Trotting over, he was briefed on the situation. From their tracks, of which there were few, it looked like they'd headed south, and that was a good thing, because to the south lay the tiny country of Kovorkiistan. While the country was populated with some strange people, they didn't start any shit, so he had no beef with them...unless they were holding Desron against her will. In that case, he'd have beef with them, but it'd be brief because they'd stop existing.

Finding the group of missionaries and hearing Desron among them, Priest breathed his first full breath. Not knowing who was friend and who was foe

and not having cleared the area yet, he maintained silence. Signaling his team, they surrounded them. Anyone who wanted the missionaries would have to go through them...or come in from above. And if anyone dared such a thing, his team had a shoulder rocket that would bring them down. A fiery crash wasn't his usual way of doing things, but nothing about this mission was usual.

While waiting for the all-clear, he watched the group...and he knew immediately who'd left the trail of bodies. And he knew immediately that the Rear Admiral was full of shit. Desron Lorcc might be female, but the Rear Admiral's description of her as gentle and almost nun-like didn't fit her. While he knew these weren't normal circumstances, and while he freely admitted he didn't know her, he couldn't imagine a circumstance where the description 'nun-like' would ever fit such a fiery warrior. She might be studying religion and law, but somewhere along the way she'd studied a whole lot from the book of Lorcc, and the book of Lorcc was jam-packed with ways to fuck shit up.

Desron was a natural leader...and a damn good warrior. He watched how she kept her group together. From the way she moved, it was clear she wasn't just walking randomly, but leading the group somewhere specific. He smiled, knowing she was heading to the

very place he was going to take them: 55.5°N, 21.2°E to the nation of Kovorkiistan.

His smile was short-lived. Something wasn't right. Zeroing in on Desron, he realized she was hurt. She didn't favor any particular body part, but his gut told him she was hurt. His heart urged him to announce himself and scoop her up, but he couldn't. He needed to know it was safe first. Hurt was better than dead. And she might be hurt, but she still had that wicked sense of humor the Rear Admiral talked about. Hearing snippets of the conversation, he couldn't help but nod his head at the respect she showed the missionaries. Her parents had raised her right.

As the evening wore on, it became clear the group was near the end of their rope. Though they kept walking at Desron's request, their steps had slowed considerably, as had Desron's. They all looked haggard, but his eyes remained glued to Desron. Right now she looked desperate. She knew every moment that passed decreased their chances of survival. He hated that look on anyone, and that included his enemies, because his enemies never got a chance to feel it—they never knew he was there until right before he killed them. For the next thirty minutes, he watched that look settle on her even as he listened to them sing Scripture. For Desron to lower her guard

meant only one thing, and that was the one thing he wasn't about to accept. She thought she was going to die. Dammit, why the hell was it taking so long to receive the all clear?

The signal didn't even get a chance to fully develop before he was on the move. Receiving the all clear from his team member, he was moments away from announcing himself when she confronted him. He knew she couldn't see him, but she was aware of his presence. That'd never happened before. The Rear Admiral and Major General had taught her well. When she threw down her guns and faced him with her machetes, he cursed the scruples that wouldn't allow her to simply blindly shoot at an enemy. That was why most of the bodies had no bullet wounds. Desron preferred to face her enemy. He respected that even though he wanted to shake her for it. While the rest of his team concentrated on the missionaries, he concentrated on Desron.

Emerging from the woods, she was on him in an instant. His superior training, superior physical stature, and superior speed allowed him to disarm her, but he still took some shots. In moments, he had her under him, but she fought him with everything she had—and probably some things she didn't know she had too.

“Desron, your father sent me.”

His admission didn't even slow her down. It wasn't that she didn't believe him; it was simply that she didn't hear him. She was so deep into survival mode, he feared she wouldn't come out. He had to reach her, but before he could, he was knocked upside the head by a Bible and almost deafened with a good old-fashioned telling off.

"Get off of her! And I mean right now. I won't kill you, but I will switch your hind parts all over the Baltic."

Pushing him off of Desron, she squeezed herself between them and called her name.

"Desron, come on now. We got some people to proselytize now, so get up off the ground so we can get there."

Just like that, Desron was back. Smiling, she looked at the older woman. "You always have to go and do something to stop me from killing someone."

"Didn't look like you were winning, Little Bit."

"That's what you call subterfuge," Desron said right before she was pulled into the woman's arms and hugged tight.

Priest stepped back as the rest of the group gathered around her, giving her hugs and Scripture. He would let them have a few moments, but no more. Night was upon them, and if they didn't get a move on, so was hypothermia. Clearing his throat, he barked

out instructions and herded the group towards the jeeps he'd commandeered.

Priest didn't like a lot of places, but Kovorkiistan was one of the few he did. He didn't like a lot of people, but the Crown Prince Alexei and his cousin Gavriil were in that group. They'd worked together before, and that was why he called them instead of any number of heads of states or high-powered agencies.

While there wasn't a neon sign welcoming visitors to Kovorkiistan, Desron didn't need one. While most of what went on in the country was like the motto of Las Vegas, one fact she did know about it was that no one fucked with the tiny nation. There was a reason for that...the Shah family and their homies. Alexei Raijin Brijesh Shah and the men who rolled with him were as dangerous as they were fine. Having seen Alexei and his entourage up close and personal, she could verify the fine and compose an opera about it.

Even if someone was stupid enough to fuck with them, she couldn't imagine any men who'd be stupid enough to fuck with the man at her side and the dudes he was rolling with. They might be fine, but one would have to get past the danger to verify that. And the

most dangerous guy rolling with them was the man standing next to her. She'd grown up hearing about Ras Vytutas. Her momma liked him; her daddy liked him and, well, you didn't get a better recommendation than that. Still, she'd been kind of busy the last eight years with college, so she hadn't exactly sat around thinking about him. Of course, that was because she'd never met the man in person. Now that she had, well, damn. He now had the monopoly in 'hot-ass men she masturbated to.'

Her musings were interrupted by the gasps of two of the missionaries.

"Now that is truly beautiful."

Without pulling her eyeballs off of Ras, she commented, "Yes, beautiful."

She was sure the estate was beautiful, but she'd seen plenty of beautiful estates; she'd never seen a man like Ras Vytutas, and that was saying something. Especially considering the fact it was night and she really couldn't see that much of him, being his hat was pulled low and he was covered from head to toe. Of course it was late winter. Dammit, yet another reason she needed to be somewhere warm enough to require Ras to wear nothing but, um, her. She wasn't one who made rash decisions, but Ras Vytutas was hers.

"Desron, are you going to act civilized?" Head Bible-Thumper asked.

“Depends on whether the fineness beside me wants me to,” she winked.

“Young man, do you need me to sit between you and Desron in order to keep your virtue safe?”

“No ma’am, that won’t be necessary. Ms. Lorcc’s father has told me about her sense of humor. I’m sure she’s just teasing me.”

“I’m sure she’s not, but if you change your mind, don’t be ashamed to come talk to me.”

Sidling up closer to Ras, Desron whispered in his ear, “My daddy might’ve told you about my sense of humor, but did my momma tell you about my sense of adventure and my boldness?”

Ras was hers, and he’d better accept that.

Priest was glad he had all of those years of training under his belt—otherwise he would’ve crashed through the castle gates. Though he wasn’t looking at her, he’d been sure she was looking at him, not the castle, when she’d commented on beauty. And if he’d thought he was misreading her, her whispered statement certainly cleared that up. Desron Lorcc was coming onto him...and his body was responding.

Luckily, his attention was required elsewhere, else he might've dragged her into his lap and showed her that it was dangerous to play with him.

Stepping out of the jeep, he approached his friends. "Thank you for receiving us, Alexei. Good to see you again, Gavriil."

"Not a problem; come inside. The staff is preparing a meal. Meanwhile, the east wing has been readied for your group," Alexei said. Turning to the missionaries, he welcomed them to his country and to his home. "Welcome to Kovorkiistan," he drawled in perfect English. Turning to Desron, he welcomed her. "Nice to see you again, Desron. I wish it was under different circumstances."

"Me too. Congratulations on your recent wedding. You too, Mr. Vasily. Y'all are so lucky because the sisters you married are hoooooooooooooooooot. And being that they're sisters, I'm hoping they have some stuff for my hair because after I take a couple of showers and a bath or two, I'm going to use my wiles on Ras."

Only Ras's professionalism stopped him from showing any emotion. Though the rest of his teammates were professional, they didn't keep their emotions in check. Smiles stretched their lips and mirth lit their eyes. Later, he was going to beat them

all soundly. Later—after he pleased himself to the sound of Desron’s voice.

Chapter Four

In his fifty-one years of living, Rear Admiral Lorcc had faced a lot of challenges. His wife Vienna had been the biggest. They had a mixed marriage—she'd graduated from West Point, and he'd graduated from Annapolis. He'd met her during the second semester of their third (junior) year and known two things immediately: one, she was going to be his wife, and two, she was a star. Keeping his hands off of her for that last year and a half had been pure hell, but he'd done it because while he'd risk his scholarship and future military career, there was nothing that would make him bring risk or shame to Vienna.

There weren't many blacks in the service academies, and there were even fewer women. Vienna was in the first class at West Point that admitted women. They couldn't have picked a better candidate than Vienna Brookings. Vienna Brookings was the most amazing person he'd ever encountered. She had a commanding presence, confidence in spades, and a ready smile...or ready right cross when it was needed.

She was amazing. She didn't let any kind of perceived limitation (gender, pregnancy, marital status) restrict her. Vienna did the damn thing every day. She was a scholar of the rules not because she liked them but so she could find the loopholes. She

was an expert at social mores not because she agreed with them but because she wanted to challenge them.

With an MS in psychology from George Washington, a JD from Georgetown, an ear for languages, a knack for knowing when people were bullshitting her, and an IQ in the ninety-ninth percentile, her skills were highly coveted by the private sector and foreign governments. With coffee-colored skin, a salsa dancer's gait and a Wild West mentality, her beauty was highly coveted by men everywhere. But just like she'd turned down the big money to blaze trails in the U.S. Army, she'd turned down richer, handsomer, smarter men for him. He'd like to say she accepted his proposal because he was so amazing, but the truth was that he'd never gotten a chance to propose. She'd simply informed him that he should clear his calendar because the day after graduation, she was marrying him. And she did. He hadn't had his diploma in his hands for more than two seconds before she'd dragged him over to the nearest chapel and married him. He'd worn his dress whites, she'd worn her dress grays, and he couldn't have been happier.

Not a day went by that he forgot to be humbled and amazed by her love, her confidence in him, her belief in him, her respect of him. Not one day. Not one minute. Not one second.

Vienna was everything to him...everything, and then she'd given him children, and she'd become more. He was there for the birth of their children, and each time he was frightened by the intensity of childbirth and humbled by the fact that she willingly bore it for him. Childbearing didn't just affect her body, it affected her career...just like marriage. If she'd been single and childless, Vienna could've been Commander-in-Chief, or at the very least she'd have two more stars. She knew that, yet she sacrificed those things, and she did it without sacrificing herself.

Career military, their jobs had taken them all over the globe, sometimes to different places, but they'd made it work with the help of a strong faith, good friends, and understanding superiors. And now one of their kids was in danger, and that wasn't acceptable. He didn't want to hear any kind of no, which was why he didn't ask. Grabbing his wife's hand, he marched out to his truck. No one stopped them. There wasn't a lot anyone could say in response to *'your daughter is missing.'* The deliverers of her and Asim's devastation didn't say anything more, but they hadn't needed to.

They drove home in silence. Cutting the engine, he walked around to Vienna's side and opened the door.

“I’ll get her back. No matter what I have to give or give up, I’ll get her back, Vienna,” he said, knowing he was about to do all manner of illegal things.

While he didn’t care what kind of trouble it brought to him or what kind of hell he had to dish out, he wasn’t about to drag his wife into it. She needed to be home to receive their baby. She, of course, had different ideas.

“*We’ll* get her back, Asim,” she said as she pulled her door shut again, refusing to budge out of the passenger seat.

Regardless of what they’d gone through, it’d always been a ‘we’ effort with Vienna. Damn, he loved that woman. And he loved the children they made...more than anything, and that included his career.

“Vienna, I might be going into hell to get her.”

“And I got your back.”

With the exception of having to sit through her children’s idea of music and the north’s version of iced tea, not much scared Vienna Lorcc. Her fearlessness wasn’t because she thought she was so big and bad, although she was pretty badass. Her fearlessness was due to having the love, friendship and respect of Asim

Lorcc. In her line of work, it was par for the course to be in the company of strong, cunning, quick-thinking, wealthy and titled people...and then there was Asim Lorcc. He was everything dreams were made of...if you had the capacity to dream that big, that fearlessly, that relentlessly.

He wasn't a perfect man, but he was a good man, and it'd only taken her a hot second to realize that...and then another second to know she was going to marry him. She'd claimed him in front of everybody and dared anyone to try and take him from her. She wasn't normally that bold when it came to men, but there was just something about Asim Lorcc. Actually, it wasn't just something; it was a whole lot of something. Over time, she'd discovered so much about Asim, and just as she treasured the man, she treasured her discoveries.

Asim was the strongest person she knew. His strength wasn't derived from how well he could whip ass or how much weight he could lift. His strength was evident in the way he responded to being ignored, overlooked, and called racial epithets or "boy." His strength was evident in the way he used his size and intelligence to lift people up. His strength was evident when he picked up someone else's burdens and carried them along with his own, not out of obligation but out of solidarity.

Asim was also the most beautiful person she'd ever encountered. His beauty wasn't due to his large stature, his wide chest, tree-trunk like thighs or his espresso-colored skin. His beauty was derived from his integrity. There wasn't any in-between with him when it came to doing right by people. To him the ends didn't justify the means. If something wasn't just, it wasn't right.

While his strength and beauty called to her, so did his directness. Asim Lorcc didn't know how to pussyfoot around, how to hedge, or how to play games. She liked the way his no always meant no and his yes always meant yes...and how he could say either without ever saying a word.

She loved this man. She still recalled their wedding vows. While she'd straight out told the preacher the only way she'd obey Asim was if he was her commanding officer (and being that he was Navy and she was Army, she was pretty sure that wasn't going to happen), she'd thought she'd meant it when she said she'd love him till death do us part. The passing of time had proved to her that'd been a lie. She wouldn't love him till death did them part; she'd love him even after then.

While other men would be threatened by her boldness, her position, and her refusal to back down from something she believed in, Asim was her biggest

fan club. Sometimes he was the only one in it, but that didn't matter, because she discovered he was the only person she needed. He had her back...and her front and her sides and the area above and beneath her and a thousand-mile radius all around her. He didn't care if she could take care of herself; he still took care of her.

He'd always cared for her. She'd gotten chills hearing him vow to cherish her when they'd wed. Asim had proclaimed his intent to cherish her loudly and clearly...and not just with his mouth, but with his eyes. There'd been times when they'd been stationed in different states and countries, yet he'd always sent someone to watch over her and their children. When they were close enough to drive to see each other, instead of getting a place halfway between their bases, he'd insisted that their home be no more than an hour from where she worked.

She treasured the way he treasured her and could only love him more in return. He wasn't always able to be with her, but he was always there when she needed him. He was present at the births of their children; he'd held her hand when the doctor had told her she couldn't have any more babies; he'd shouted himself hoarse when she'd walked across the stage to receive her MS and her JD. And he was present when they'd watched their babies walk across the stage to

receive their diplomas. He'd hugged Socom so tight when he'd graduated from medical school and announced that he was going into the Navy. He'd held Desron even tighter when she'd announced that she was going to law school and wasn't going into any of the armed forces.

Asim loved and cherished his family. How could she not love him back? How could she do anything less than give everything she had to this man? How could she do anything but hate that which caused him pain? And she did—and right now, she was hating the ones who'd taken their baby girl. She hated thinking of what her baby was suffering, and she hated the look in Asim's eyes when they'd been told Desron had been taken.

She'd only seen her husband get that look in his eyes on two other occasions, and yeah, she didn't want to talk about them because Interpol and a whole bunch of other acronyms were still investigating that...not that they'd find anything. They were thorough—real thorough, and they had the kind of connections that went beyond human.

Vienna was already frightened for her child, and Asim had gone and lost his whole damn mind talking crazy telling her to stay home. There was no way in hell she was going to allow him to walk into that kind of danger without her at his back. Fuck that. She was

going, and not even the entire U.S. Army and Navy combined were going to stop her.

A lot of people, organizations, and entities owed her favors, and today she was prepared to call all of them in. And then she walked up the stairs to her house...and sank to her knees in gratitude. Beside the front door was a vase of flowers. It wasn't the flowers that had her sinking to her knees; it was the arrangement. A medley of blue and purple flowers greeted her. That was the personal signature of the second-most badass man she knew: Ras. If Ras had sent flowers, that meant Ras was already on the hunt. And when Ras went on the hunt, people went missing. Grabbing her husband's hand, she ran inside to change and call Baylor. She needed a jet...in the next twenty minutes, and one thing Baylor had plenty of was jets. She was going to get her baby, and someone was getting their ass handed to them for daring to take her.

Alexei waited patiently while the missionaries called their loved ones. And while he waited, he couldn't help but watch Desron...not because she was beautiful, but because it pissed Ras off. Being *upir*, he was normally able to pick up on the emotions of humans. Some were harder than others, and then

there was Ras Vytautas. Ras was unreadable...except for now. Now he was pulsing red hot, and all of that energy was directed at Desron Lorcc. Desron herself contained a medley of emotions; even so, she made no attempt to hide her interest in Ras. Perhaps “interest” wasn’t the right word. Desron looked at Ras like Vienna Lorcc looked at Asim Lorcc, like Hludowig Ermenrich looked at Baylor Ermenrich and like Baylor looked at weapons. Ras Vytautas might be a warrior with few equals, but he’d never had a Lorcc female as an opponent. This was going to be so good.

Having talked to damn near everyone in her family, Desron had dragged herself to the bedroom, glad to get a chance to bathe. If she hadn’t been so hungry and she’d been alone, she would’ve dropped to the floor and gone to sleep right there on the cool marble, but she wasn’t alone. Ras was there. Coming up behind her, he loaned her his strength. Peeling off her outerwear, he tossed it to the floor.

“The doctor will be up in a few minutes,” he said without preamble.

Ah, so Ras was bossy. Later, when she’d bathed and eaten, he’d learn that she too was bossy.

Her two showers had felt good, but they paled in comparison to her bath. Oh, she loved that tub. As long as it was filled to the brim with soapy, hot water, she could spend the rest of the night in there, and if her stomach would've stood for it, she just might've.

After dressing in the sweats that had been deposited on her bed, she left the sumptuous bedroom. As soon as she stepped out of the room, she felt Ras's presence.

"Hi Ras," she said, even though she didn't see him.

"Everyone else calls me 'Priest,'" he said from behind her.

"Yeah, well, I'm not everyone else," she said as she tucked her arm in his and made her way downstairs.

Indulging in a bowl of hearty stew and a sandwich that should've come with a warning label, she bantered with the others.

"Ras, sweetheart," Head Bible-Toter called.

"Yes, ma'am?"

"You sure you don't need me to sleep in front of your door tonight to protect your virtue, being that Desron's over there eating you up with her eyes?"

"That won't be necessary, ma'am."

"Hmmpf."

“You don’t have to worry about me having my wicked way with Ras tonight, being that I’m fresh out of condoms,” she said.

“I’m going to bed before I end up having to wash your mouth out with soap, Desron,” Head Bible-Toter said.

Saying her goodnights, she waited while a member of Ras’s team escorted the older woman to her room before scooting her chair so close to Ras’s she was practically in his lap.

“Looks like you’re staking your claim on Ras,” the pretty doctor said. “So does this mean I cannot admire his handsomeness?”

“Pretty much,” she said as she leaned further into Ras.

“But what if I want other women to ogle me?” Ras spoke up.

“Then you obviously don’t care about their safety. In case you hadn’t heard, Lorcc women don’t share their males,” a familiar voice rang out.

Looking up and spotting her momma, she ran across the room.

Chapter Five

Despite the facts she was twenty-five years old, was two months away from receiving her JD and MDiv degrees, had her own apartment and changed the oil in her truck herself, Desron didn't even attempt to pretend she wasn't thrilled to see her parents.

"Mommy! Daddy!" she screamed as she ran to them.

"BABY!!!" her father's deep voice boomed off the stone walls of the castle.

Even though he felt like an intruder, Ras was unable to look away from the tender scene. The Rear Admiral and Major General checked Desron over with loving hands, holding her and taking turns kissing her cheeks and forehead. After a few frantic moments, the Admiral gathered both his wife and daughter in his arms and simply held them close. From the expression on his face, he wasn't going to be letting go anytime soon.

"Baby...oh, baby...you had me so worried," he whispered into his daughter's hair.

Desron snuggled deeper into her father's embrace. That one small gesture told him more than

her words ever would. She was deeply affected by her wilderness experience.

“Thank you for coming, and thank you for sending Ras,” she said.

Ras couldn’t help but be humbled by Desron’s words, just as he couldn’t help but be moved by her courage. He watched as the Major General pulled back and smoothed the hair away from her face.

“You’re tired, baby,” Vienna whispered to her daughter.

“Yes, but I wanted to wait up until you got here,” she said.

As soon as the admission fell from her mouth, her parents ordered her to bed.

Deciding that he was no longer needed, Ras started towards the nearest exit. He’d catch up with the Rear Admiral and the Major General at a later, less emotional date. He’d barely taken three steps when a hand on his arm stopped him in his tracks. Turning, he found Vienna smiling at him. Seeing her arch her eyebrow, he inched forward and allowed himself to be embraced in a crushing hug.

“I don’t know why you keep that pretty hair covered up with hats,” she said.

Smiling at her usual way of greeting him, he responded. "Because the Rear Admiral caught you admiring it and gave me a warning to keep my hat on my head if I wanted to keep my head on my neck."

"You know he's all talk," she said.

"Not when it comes to you, Major General."

"Well, I am an intelligent, beautiful, remarkable woman, so I can understand that." Stopping her flow of words, she held onto his hands as she gathered herself.

"Thank you, Ras. Thank you so much," Vienna said hoarsely, her voice heavy with emotion.

"You never have to thank me," he said.

Did Ras just say that crazy mess? Something was obviously wrong with the males in her circle.

"You're not too big to get a spanking, so just hush that crazy talk," she said.

He looked at her all crazy, but he didn't say anything else, which was good for him. Since he was being so amenable, she did something she'd been wanting to do for years: snatched that hat off of his head. Throwing it across the room, she looked up into those Persian indigo eyes and let him see the love she had for him. In return, she was able to see the

emotion in his eyes. She loved this boy like her own. She snatched him to her again, indebted to him for what he'd done.

"I know you're not leaving, especially when I need you to do one more favor for me," she said.

One of Ras's eyebrows lifted, but he didn't raise an objection. *Good boy.*

"Asim and I are needed to ensure that no one involved escapes justice...and not the court kind. Also the families of the other missionaries are arriving tonight, so we need to coordinate them. After recent events, Asim's nervous about leaving Desron without protection."

"She's in the heavily fortified primary palace on the estate of the ruling family," he argued.

Ah, so cute. Why was he arguing? Oh yes, because he was male.

"Yes, but they have their own wives to see to, and after that there's the business of ruling the country. Plus, Desron's been through a lot, and I know she'll be safe with you. I know you've got things to get to, but if you could do this one favor for me. Please, stay with my daughter tonight and keep her safe."

“You ought to stop smiling at the prospect of some boy in our baby girl’s bed.”

“I would if it was someone other than Ras, who, by the way, hasn’t been a boy in a long time.”

“I don’t like the thought of a boy in my daughter’s bed,” he said, completely ignoring her words about Ras not being a boy.

“You like the thought of her kidnapped and sold into...” she started.

“Okay, stop. You’ve made your point. I was so scared, Vienna.”

“So was I, and now that I know Desron’s safe, I’m mad. And being that Ras’s team is already in attendance and Alexei has been kind enough to loan us part of his army, I’m going to get even-er. We got some motherfuckers to hunt down.”

“You know how hot you get me when you talk all righteous?”

“Yep.” She winked. “Now let’s go.”

Desron didn’t want to close her eyes. Though it wasn’t rational, she was scared she’d wake up and be back in the forest. Despite her fears, she did close her eyes...and woke up two minutes and forty-five seconds later...with someone in her room.

“Momma?” she called.

“No, it’s Priest,” Ras said as he approached the bed.

“What are you doing here?” she asked, watching as he stripped off his shirt and shook out his hair. Despite being sleepy, she couldn’t help but emit a couple of “oohs” over the sight of him. He was beautiful.

“Being that you’ve spent all night tempting me, I thought it best to allow you to see I’m a lot more man than you’re accustomed to.”

“You are so cute and so mine, so while I don’t mind seeing all that skin, I’m going to need you to keep my stuff covered outside of the bedroom.”

“And if I don’t?”

“Why, I’ll have to spank you, and considering what a tight ass you have, I can’t help but hope that you do.”

“I don’t believe I’ve ever had a woman come on so strong to me.”

“Then you’ve only met lesbians, happily married women, or nuns, because you’re six feet seven and one quarter inches of absolute hotness,” she said.

“Thank you,” he said as he slid into bed with her and pulled her into his arms.

Though she knew what he was thanking her for, she needed to thank him for what he’d done.

“Thank you, Ras. I was fearful out there. I don’t like that feeling.”

“You’re not supposed to like it.”

“I don’t know how y’all do it every day,” she admitted.

“One second at a time.”

“Thank you for doing it, and after you become Mr. Desron Lorcc, you’re going to have to find something else to do when you’re not barefoot and pregnant.”

She would’ve said more, but then Ras touched her.

Ras knew that the Major General was playing him, but there was nothing he could do to stop it, and even if there was, it wasn’t like she’d allow such a thing. The Major General was accustomed to having her way regardless of who her opponent was—not that he was her opponent. She was one of the few people he had a soft spot for. He’d do anything for her...and she knew it. If he’d needed proof of her knowing it, all he had to do to find it was look in her eyes. Her eyes sparkled with that *‘ha ha motherfucker, I win’* look she got when walking off the battlefield with a victory firmly secured. Hell, she didn’t walk off after a

victory; she strutted off and sometimes executed a little shimmy.

Most of the time her battlefield was the halls of Congress, the offices of bigwigs, or the maze of the Pentagon, but she stormed those places like they were the beaches of Normandy. And while she'd stormed many an office, there were the handful of times she'd stormed actual battlefields. Officially, females didn't fight, and officially, she didn't...she fucking kicked straight ass and took no prisoners while doing so. You threw a rock at the Major General, and she threw hell back at you—and she kept throwing until there wasn't anything left to throw at.

There were plenty of males with more brass than her, but not so many who had bigger balls than her. She didn't just rest on her many degrees and past accomplishments —she forged new paths, not afraid to mix it up. While she knew the rules, she also knew the loopholes, and she wasn't afraid to use them. No one fought the enemy the way the Major General did. She didn't leave a soldier behind...no matter what, no matter who said, no matter the ramifications. That wasn't her style, and that was why soldiers would follow her into any kind of fucked up. She never sent people places she wasn't willing to go to herself, just as she never led people places she wasn't confident she could lead them out of. He knew because she'd sent

the order to go in and get his team, and the Rear Admiral had been the one to fetch him...and she'd been right there in the thick of gunfire, knee-deep in bodies and bullshit, but she'd stood her ground and didn't leave until she'd had all of them.

Her actions, while honorable, had cost the Rear Admiral his promotion to Vice Admiral and cost the Major General a star and all future promotions, but neither one of them had given a flying fuck. She'd been busted down from Lieutenant General, but she wore her discipline with so much pride that the higher-ups were shamed every time they spoke her name...and the grunts, they simply loved her. Truth be told, he loved her too...but not too much, because the Rear Admiral was crazy about that woman. And he was crazy about their daughter.

Desron Lorcc was everything parents could hope for. She was smart (how could she be anything else with parents like hers?). She was honorable (like her parents would give her any other choice). She was so many things...and she was the only woman who'd ever moved him. While he'd been the recipient of many a blatant come-on, he'd never had a woman outright claim him and say it with such conviction. She didn't hint at it; she stated it in much the same way one would say 'in liquid form, water is wet.' While her proclamations had amused his teammates and left

them baffled, they'd moved him...and left him baffled. What did he have that she needed? She routinely hob-knobbed with the jet-set crowd; she was two months away from graduating with not one, but two, big time degrees from the prestigious Vanderbilt University; she had the kind of hips and ass that made men look two or three times; and she had the kind of future that people dreamed of. And yet, she'd decided that he was hers...and her momma was backing her up.

He'd told himself she was just glad to be rescued, but even as he thought it, he knew it was a damn lie. She might've thought she was at the end of her endurance, but he'd never seen anyone fight harder. While she might have faltered, he knew she wouldn't have quit. It just wasn't in her.

He'd told himself that touching her would be dishonorable. Her parents trusted him. She was their baby girl—their only daughter. But his body reminded him that she was all woman. His mind reminded him that she was a helluva woman. His heart screamed at him that she was *his* woman.

Taking his time with his shower, he'd mulled over the enigma that was Desron Lorcc. Should he or shouldn't he? And then his heart said her name: *Desron Lorcc...Vytautas* and the decision was made. Drying himself and his hair, he'd slipped into some sweats and made the walk next door. Hearing the

trace of fear in her voice, he knew he'd made the right decision to come. Hurrying his steps and stripping off his shirt, he slid into bed with her and simply held her close to his heart. It was the most erotic thing he'd ever indulged in and the best sleep he'd ever had, which was why he did the exact same thing the next night and the night after. Lying in a luxurious bed with Desron in his arms was a treat, and he savored every moment.

Though she hadn't consummated their relationship, she'd enjoyed spending the last three nights sleeping in Ras's arms. When she'd admitted as much to her momma, her momma had simply smiled. "You've only been sleeping?"

"Momma," she said. "I just met him."

Smiling, her momma rubbed her back. "Ras is a good man."

In hindsight, she probably shouldn't have told her momma that she hadn't freaked Ras, because at dinner that night her momma made a point, and in the process left half the dining room grunting and the other half laughing. Desron was among the ones in the grunting camp.

In between passing the salt, her momma announced, "Alexei, how good is your soundproofing?"

Because Desron's concerned that if she sexes up Ras like she wants to, his roars will wake everyone in the castle."

"Momma," she'd exclaimed, and of course, she'd simply ignored her.

If her daddy hadn't already been there, she would've so told on her momma to him. But he was there, glaring a hole into Ras, who was busy assuring him that he hadn't touched her. That'd been the last straw for her momma.

"First off, Ras, my baby is smoking hot so unless your stuff's not working, there really shouldn't be any reason why you haven't touched her."

Turning to her, her momma continued. "I want Ras as a son-in-law. Now for some reason I don't think Socom's going to be willing to sleep with him, so that leaves you, Desron. I expect to hear some screaming in that room tonight. Pass the butter, Asim."

Her daddy passed her momma the butter. Ras choked on his water. Socom just got up and left the room.

Deciding there wasn't any use in being put out with her momma, being that her momma couldn't give two fucks if she was, she turned to her and asked. "Momma, since you spend every night screaming out

Daddy's and God's names, how are you going to hear anything?"

"My throat might be a little sore from telling your father, 'faster, harder, more,' but ain't nothing wrong with my hearing. Hurry up with those peas, baby. I need to get my eat on because I've got business with your daddy tonight."

"From what all of the castle and half of Kovorkiistan heard, you already had business with daddy this morning, and again right before you came down to dinner," she said.

"Damn straight." Her daddy smiled, all proud.

It was a good thing the royal family had healthy senses of humor. Then again, Alexei and Gavriil were too busy feeling their mates up under the table to care what was going on on their end. Turning to Ras, she'd winked at him and whispered in his ear.

"Tonight will be the first night you scream out my name."

And it would've been. She'd gone up to her room and planned her siege. Being that the crown princess was the shiznit, her room was well-stocked with any and every thing she might need. After enjoying a long soak, she spritzed on perfume and donned some sheer, burgundy panties before nabbing one of Ras's t-shirts and pulling it over her head. Dressed, she opened her door and walked next door to

Ras's room. Not even bothering to knock, she opened the door and caught a picture of Ras's hot, naked self.

"Damn," was all she could say...before she got it together and instructed him to turn around.

Raising one brow, he did just that. His loose hair brushed the top of the most perfect ass she'd ever glimpsed, and being a connoisseur of football, she'd seen some good asses. Walking up to him, she tunneled her hands through his decadent hair and looked into his indigo eyes. "Mine," she said right before she kissed them both breathless. "Say it with me," she demanded as she rubbed herself against him. "Mine," she reiterated as she raked her nails over his nipples and brought them both to the brink.

"Yours," he said as he lifted her in his arms, crushed her to him, took over the kiss and pushed them both over.

She'd never come so hard in her life. She was so glad the wall was behind her and Ras was in front of her, because she sure as shit couldn't hold herself up. Perhaps if she'd been thinking of something other than the fastest way to impale herself on Ras's cock she would've heard the footsteps, and the chorus of clearing throats. Perhaps, maybe, possibly, but she doubted it, because a naked Ras was a pregnancy just waiting to happen. A strange noise made her open her eyes. Wrapping her legs tighter around Ras, she

leaned over and looked into the eyes of her momma, her daddy, and the Head of State, who, from the looks of things, had been all up in his wife and was about a half step to the left to being all up in her again. No, they weren't making out with each other like a couple of horny teenagers. And no, her momma wasn't leering at Ras's ass.

"Momma, are you looking at my man's goods?"

"Yep," she said, all unrepentant.

"Daddy, are you going to do something about that?"

"Yep, I'm going to call Ras out just as soon as the king speaks."

"Why is the king here?" she asked.

"To marry you and Ras," he said. Turning to the king, her daddy politely cleared his throat.

Dragging his mouth off of his wife's throat, the king turned to them and spoke. "You're married," and without so much as a by your leave, he quit the room.

"Um, I didn't say anything," she said.

"Don't need to, baby. The king has the power to marry couples. The marriage is legally binding in Kovorkiistan, so feel free to freak Ras all you want. Of course, when we get back home y'all are getting married again. And since we'll be home next week, I'd get together a list of people you want to attend."

Well, damn. She might've been mad at everyone's interference if she hadn't already planned on marrying Ras. But being that she'd already made up her mind, she shrugged and pulled Ras back down to her. Noting the intense look in his eyes, she asked, "Are you upset?"

"No," he rasped.

"So you're good with this?"

"Yes."

"Then kiss the bride and get on your back. I need to get you pregnant," she commanded.

For all intents and purposes, for better or worse, Desron was now his wife...at least in Kovorkiistan. As soon as he touched foot stateside, he was going to make sure that her being Mrs. Him was a permanent condition. He wasn't going to let her go. Being that her father had practically dragged the king from his bed and convinced him to join him and Desron in marriage, Ras was going to take full advantage of what was now his honeymoon night.

Being caught in a compromising position with the only daughter of not one general but two, wasn't the smartest move, but luckily the generals in question knew he was a decent man despite having zero personality. While other men might be annoyed at

being forced into marriage, he was honored and humbled by their acceptance of him. Knowing the Rear Admiral and the Major General, he knew that forcing them to marry was their way of giving their blessing. Despite Desron all but hiring a town crier to shout her dibs, if he hadn't passed muster, they would've brought a coroner to his room to pronounce him dead instead of the king to say the words to pronounce him married. It also helped that the Major General had pursued the Rear Admiral in much the same fashion—relentlessly.

He was also humbled by Desron's confidence and faith. She was so confident that he was a good man. She had faith in him to be a worthy mate. Sometimes he was hardly a man, but despite being all kinds of bastards, he promised to never become the type of man he hunted and brought to justice. It'd been enough for him before, but now that he'd been gifted with Desron, he vowed to be more because she deserved it. Despite being so close that their bodies were practically melded together, he held her tighter, needing to feel the thumps of her heart and the slight tremors that coursed through her. In truth, he needed to just feel. Hefting her in one arm, he yanked her shirt over her head, pleased that she'd chosen to wear something that belonged to him.

Walking her to their bed, he gently laid her down. Before he could pull back, she dragged him to her by his hair and ravished his mouth. Caught up in her passion, he let her have her way with his mouth even as he poured all of himself into that kiss...and unlike any other woman he'd encountered, Desron demanded more.

"Give me everything, Ras," she whispered as she massaged his scalp with her nails, his chest with her breasts, and his ego with her fervor. She didn't just want his cock, she wanted all of him, and it turned him on so damn good.

He'd always been the chaser in the pursuit, the aggressor in lovemaking, the maestro in the symphony of moans, mewls and screams of pleasure. Ah, but he'd never played tag with Desron or had her as his orchestra.

"Desron," he rasped her name as he pulled back and drank in her beauty.

"Ras," she responded as she opened herself to his perusal.

"So beautiful," he said as he bent and latched onto one of her full breasts.

"Thank you," she answered even as she yanked his head to her other breast. "Yes," she purred as she arched up into his mouth. "Yessssss," she screamed as he reached between them and stroked her sex.

She wasn't content to let him set the pace—she rocked her hips back and forth and fucked his fingers. Using his shoulders as her anchor, she pulled him into her song. A slow buildup to her pleasure wasn't her style; she went straight in for the crescendo. Pushing at his chest, she attempted to push him onto his back and take the dominant position. As much as he'd give her, he couldn't give her the dominant position. While he would do all within his power to ensure her happiness, and while he had the utmost respect for her intellect and agency, he was the man in this relationship. As such, it was his job to ensure her safety; his privilege to bring her to pleasure.

Rolling to his side, he pulled her with him and smacked her ass. Just as he thought, a moan spilled from her lips and her eyes flashed fire. Searing him with a look that was full of challenge, she bit her full bottom lip and threw out a demand. “Again, but harder.”

He could do nothing less than oblige. Not content to feel anything separating them, he deftly removed her pitiful excuse for panties. While he could've ripped them off, he had every intention of keeping this pair. Cupping her ass, he kneaded the globes before delivering a secession of quick but hard smacks. Her moans spurred him on. Flipping her onto her back, he spread her muscular thighs. Not

giving her a chance to protest, he thrust two fingers inside of her silky sheath.

Desron threw her head back and climaxed all over his hand. He was honored to witness her release. When she sang out his name at the height of it, it was all he could do not to jump up and thump his own chest. He didn't jump up, however. Instead, he went lower. Bending his head, he lapped up the rest of her orgasm, relishing every drop that touched his tongue.

"Ras," she gasped. "Ras," she sighed. "Ras," she moaned. "Ras," she screamed.

Lapping up the rest of her nectar, he kissed his way up. Pausing at her stomach, he rested his head there briefly and prayed over the first home their children would know.

"Ras," she sang again.

Loving the way his name sounded on her lips, he slowly made his way up, stopping to suckle at her breasts briefly before reaching her mouth in time to catch his name in his mouth.

"Mine, Desron," he answered. "Mine," he reiterated.

"Yes," she breathed.

Of course that was the only answer he'd accept...the only answer he'd recognize. "Damn right," he said matter-of-factly. Like 'God is good,' it was an indisputable fact.

“You’re mine too,” she said the same way. He didn’t need to see the passion shining in her eyes to know that she meant each word.

“Always,” he said as he settled her thigh on his shoulder and joined them.

The feel of Ras’s body pressed against hers turned her on in so many ways. His strength sheltered her, his goodness surrounded her, and above all that, his masculinity called to her. Her femininity responded to his call. Stretching out before him, she arched her back, tempting him to look at her, trusting him with her nakedness. It wasn’t just her body she was baring; it was also her soul.

‘Look at me, Ras,’ her eyes invited. *‘Look at me and want me,’* her sex enticed. *‘Look at me and need me,’* her heart said. *‘Look at me and love me despite my imperfections,’* her soul pleaded.

And he looked at her, and his indigo eyes glowed their pleasure. His hands caressed her like she was a treasure. His body responded to her like it was seeking its other half. Without having to think about it, she knew she was loved. Without having to seek counsel, she knew she was treasured. Sure that Ras would never hurt her or demean her and that he was

man enough not to be threatened by her, she challenged him. Pushing at his chest, she attempted to take the dominant position not because she wanted it, but simply to see what he'd do. All she got for her efforts was the most delicious spanking and stroking she'd ever experienced.

Ras touched her so good, looked at her so lovingly, and cherished her so honestly. When he dipped his head and drank from her, all she could do was lay back and feel and call out his name. Then when he kissed his way back up her body and paused at her stomach, she couldn't fail to be humbled. By the time he took her lips, she was more than ready to be claimed by him. When he thrust into her body, she gave herself over to the pleasure just like she'd given herself over to his keeping. This good man loved her...and she loved him back.

Lifting her hips, she met each of his thrusts. Digging her nails into his tight ass, she staked her claim on his body. Wrapping herself tighter around him, she held him to her. Seeking his lips, she breathed forever into his mouth and treasured the 'I love you's' he conveyed with his body.

And then he voiced it. "I love you, Desron," he said in a clear, loud voice.

"I love you, Ras," she said back just as clear, loud and certain. And then she couldn't think because she

was too busy feeling. Moments later, she plummeted over the edge and met her destiny head on.

Chapter Six

She didn't march down the aisle to the Wedding March. Nope, she marched down the aisle to her favorite superhero's theme song. And why wouldn't she? She had everything including the boots, the jewelry and the badass gear.

That was why she'd insisted on that song. It was a cool song and she deserved to shimmy down the aisle to it...especially when she had Ras waiting for her at the end. Go her! Go her! And go her daddy for being bold enough to harass the king into marrying her and Ras. And go her mommy for throwing together the American ceremony. Her family was the best. Her daddy helped her with her wedding outfit. Aunt Amani took care of all the legal things. Aunt Baylor flew all of her classmates to DC in her jet. Her big brother hid her Ducati from Ras. And her maternal grandfather, who just happened to be a conductor, and her maternal grandmother, who was like first chair everything in the orchestra, played the music. Her paternal grandmother took care of the cake, and her paternal grandfather made sure she was properly spoiled.

She was properly spoiled, and she was allowed. And she was happy. Her time in the wilderness had brought her Ras and taught her the value of life, the

power of faith, and the sanctity of love. Turning, she looked at her family and mouthed that she loved them, and they mouthed it right back. Then she hip-checked Ras and pulled his hair. Of course the preacher cleared her throat...loudly. Desron had expected that, just like she'd expected Ras's quick slap on her ass. But then the preacher winked. She hadn't expected that...at least not from Head Bible-Toter. Rev. Head Bible-Toter wasn't so bad. If she and Ras were blessed with children, she hoped Head Bible-Toter would baptize them. That woman swung a mean Bible and sang some awesome Scripture...but she wouldn't be going on anymore mission trips with her.

Epilogue

Four women sat at a table, looking at each other in disbelief.

“I blame you all for this,” Vienna said, finally breaking the silence.

“Don’t look at me,” Baylor said, brushing an imaginary piece of lint off of her cowboy boots.

“Don’t look at me either,” Amani said, looking as dapper as ever in her tailored suit.

“How are you blaming me?” Svajoné said. “I just met her three days ago.”

Looking over the newest member of their group, Vienna shook her head. “It’s your fault for making such a good-looking son and raising him to be so badass. Desron’s always liked edgy, handsome men.”

“This is true, but how exactly does this make me responsible for Desron’s outfit?”

Looking over at her one and only daughter, she sighed. There was nothing at all wrong with the red, strapless chiffon gown with the gold beading decorating the ruched bodice and asymmetrical hem—even though it showed too much thigh according to her daddy. Hell, if she had thighs like that, every skirt she had would be a mini. Okay, she did have thighs like that, but Asim was crazy so she kept them covered everywhere except the bedroom. Nope, there wasn’t

anything wrong with her baby's dress, despite the gold trip decorating the top. There wasn't even anything wrong with the two-inch, knee-length red boots she wore with the dress. What was wrong were Desron's accessories. Desron wore two-inch gold cuffs on her wrists, a gold headband that held back her micro-braids, and the cherry on top was the "magic lasso" attached to her waist that her daddy had painstakingly spray-painted gold.

"I had to put my foot down at the star-decorated blue panties," she said.

Laughing, Baylor chimed in. "I like her boots though."

"And when has a Texan ever seen a pair of boots they didn't like?" she asked.

"Probably the last time you southerners found a food you wouldn't consider frying," Svajoné said even as she bit into her fried Oreos.

Pausing from her consumption of her fried candy bar, Amani oohed before fist-knocking Svajoné. "I wonder how Ras got out of wearing the cape Desron picked up for him?"

"I'm betting he didn't get out of it...he just got out of wearing it in public," she said.

"I see you passed your fast ways onto your daughter," Baylor said.

“If your baby is going to corrupt my son, I hope it results in some babies,” Svajoné said.

“You’re not sick to your stomach thinking of your son having a sex life?” Baylor asked.

“Please, my son is hot—which he got from me, so I expect women to flock to him.”

“Well, if they saw that wedding cake and the message Desron had the baker put on it, they’d better stop flocking,” Amani said.

At the mention of the cake, Vienna simply shook her head. The massive, multi-tiered cake was the stuff dreams were made of. A pure work of art, it had cascades of indigo-colored frosting flowers and intricate designs made with butter cream frosting. Vienna had dubbed it the ‘ooh cake’ because everyone was drawn to it. It wasn’t every day you got to see a cake that big up close and personal...and it wasn’t every day you saw a wedding topper that featured a mixed-race couple with the groom holding the bride so passionately and the bride holding an Uzi. And then there was the flag planted beside her that read: ‘Ras is mine, bitches.’ She needed to have a word or ten with her mother-in-law, but of course her own mother was too busy fawning over her excellent taste.

She sensed a headache coming on, but before she could go in search of some aspirin, she felt her

husband embrace her from behind. Looking over at the cake, he chuckled.

“Desron gets that from you.” He laughed.

She was about to get him told and good, but before the first word could fall from her lips, he leaned down and kissed a trail from her temple to the space between her shoulder and neck...and then he kissed his way back up. Asim’s erotic kisses and the feel of his erection in her back had her forgetting all about her headache. Pressing back into him, she couldn’t hold back her moan...nor did she want to. After all, Desron *did* get it from her.

JJ and JL

Thank you for trusting us to deliver your prose. We appreciate the investment of your trust and time. We hope that you enjoyed the adventures of Ras and Desron.

To read stories with connections to these characters please check out the following:

- *Ride or Why Chick* (Ažoulas Vytautas & Rada Constantine)

For more information on the Jeanie and Jayha universe, please visit our Web site: www.jeanieandjayha.com.

Jeanie and Jayha

A kickass tag-team bound together by the pen, Jeanie (the shagalicious wordslinger) and Jayha (the ninja master of h*ll no's) are forces of nature that will either leave you begging for mercy or begging for more.

We are women who have brains we aren't afraid to use; feelings we aren't afraid to express; and, middle fingers that we aren't afraid to extend. We pen stories that push all kinds of boundaries and we don't apologize for it. Our heroines are feisty; our heroes are hot, and our stories are one-of-a-kind adventures. Come visit us at www.jeanieandjayha.com and remember: if you don't enjoy your stay, f*ck it, you didn't have to come.

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