

# HARD TIME

SAPPHIC B&D IN A WOMEN'S PRISON



**J. T. LANGDON**

**HARD TIME**  
A Novel of Sapphic S&M in a Women's Prison

By  
**J.T. LANGDON**

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For information contact:

Renaissance E Books

Email [comments@renebooks.com](mailto:comments@renebooks.com)

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## CHAPTER ONE

Jessie Greyhorse woke to the delicious sensation of three fingers sliding deep into her pussy from behind. She moaned and arched against the busy hand between her legs out of immediate and almost embarrassing need, so disoriented from intense pleasure and lingering sleepiness that for a moment she completely forgot who was sharing her bed. But then, between the quickening thrusts and her pitiful, answering moans, the night before flashed through her mind like a video being watched on fast-forward and Jessie remembered ... remembered Rachel showing up on her front steps out of the blue, looking incredible – and edible as ever in a tan suede jacket, T-shirt, and tight jeans, with her dusty blonde hair swept back in a ponytail ... remembered the two of them clawing at each other the minute Rachel walked through door ... remembered them finding their way into the bedroom and Rachel gazing at her, hazel eyes filled with longing ... and Jessie remembered drifting off to sleep with Rachel in her arms as the first hint of morning light poured through the window.

It all came back to Jessie now as Rachel fucked her for what seemed like the hundredth time, pumping into her at a wild, frantic pace, like an animal, primal and fierce. Jessie grunted and pushed back on Rachel's fingers, desperate to have them even deeper inside, wanting it so bad she would have promised the moon to her on-again-off-again lover if it would just get Rachel to plunge into her.

"More ... more," Jessie panted breathlessly.

Rachel laughed then whispered in her ear, "You need it so bad, don't you, baby?" Her thick Southern twang managed to tease and excite at the same time.

"Yes," Jessie replied. There was no point in fighting the truth. "Yes, I need it bad. Please."

"I love it when you beg first thing in the morning."

Jessie groaned as her cunt stretched to accept Rachel's fingers and when Rachel was at last completely inside her Jessie thought for sure she would burst. She rocked against Rachel's hand, slowly at first then gaining momentum, until she was riding her lover's fist like a

cowpoke at a rodeo. The bed springs chirped out a staccato rhythm to counter each gasp of desire that crossed her lips. She was close. Rachel was fucking harder and faster than ever and Jessie could feel her climax building, a steady crescendo of pressure against her mound looking for blissful release. Jessie reached between her legs and rubbed her clit, fast and furious, more impatient than ever to get off.

"You're going to come, aren't you?" Rachel rasped into her ear.

Jessie grunted out a strained, "Uh huh."

"Mmmm," purred Rachel. "That's what I love most about having your cunt wrapped around my wrist. I can feel your orgasm almost before you do. Now come for me, baby. Come all over my hand like a good girl."

Jessie whimpered. She loved it when Rachel talked to her like that! It made her crazy! And Rachel knew it, too. Jessie fingered her clit like a mad woman as she humped Rachel's fist, feeling a sharp burning deep in her belly. The fire became more and more intense with each stroke, enveloping her, making her dizzy. She was very close now. Jessie teetered on the edge for what seemed like an eternity then her gut tightened and her muscles clenched and she was coming, coming so hard, heaving forward as a massive surge of energy pulsed through her and left her gulping for air.

The touch of lips on the back of her neck brought Jessie back down to Earth. She could feel her heart thumping against her chest and the blood rushing through her ears sounded like ocean waves crashing against a rocky shore. Soothing ripples of pleasure rolled over her when Rachel at last pulled out but Jessie didn't have the strength to do more than sigh. She sighed again when Rachel spooned against her backside, their naked bodies fitting together perfectly, like pieces of a puzzle.

"Good morning," Rachel said.

Jessie laughed. "Good morning. Was that my wake-up call?"

"Yuh huh. Are you awake?"

"Mmhmm," Jessie murmured. The kisses moved from her neck down her shoulder, stoking embers that by all reason should have burned out hours ago. But she felt invigorated. Then Rachel's hand

came around to cup her breast and Jessie went from invigorated to ravenous. She wanted Rachel now.

Jessie turned in Rachel's arms and kissed her, a heated, passionate kiss that showed her lover just how eager she was to return the favor Rachel had paid her. Their tongues twisted around each other in mutual hunger. Jessie wedged her thigh between Rachel's legs, delighting in the smoothness there. She always loved the feel of a shaved pussy. It was like silk against her skin and when Jessie applied the tiniest bit of pressure to that shaved mound Rachel groaned into the kiss.

"Can you feel how wet I am for you?" Rachel asked.

"Oh yeah," Jessie muttered. She slid her hand over Rachel's soft little tummy then moved upwards to grab a handful of tit. The supple flesh felt so warm and inviting in her grasp and Jessie squeezed it, fondled it, molded it like a sculptor given a fresh lump of clay.

Rachel mewed with each touch, fidgeting anxiously on the bed as Jessie pawed at her breasts. She could feel Rachel's wetness dripping down her thigh in rivulets and pressed into her lover a little harder now, her reward a desperate moan.

Using the flat of her thumb, Jessie turned Rachel's soft nipples into stiff nubs that just cried out to be sucked on. She stole a hurried kiss then lowered her mouth to Rachel's breast, closing her lips around a nipple. Rachel had short, plump nipples, like raspberries, and Jessie loved to suckle them. She flicked her tongue over the very tip of Rachel's nipple then took it into her mouth again, kissing it, sucking it, stroking it with her lips. Fingers combed through her short crop of black hair with growing impatience as she moved from one breast to the other, taking each in turn. Her efforts had Rachel whimpering.

Jessie knew her lover couldn't take much more. She gave Rachel's breast another quick nip then made her way lower with kisses, hot, hungry kisses Jessie didn't stop planting until she had her face between spread legs.

The sight of Rachel's shaved cunt, the lips parted slightly to reveal the moist pink interior, made Jessie whine like a lost little puppy. It was just so beautiful! She took a moment to admire Rachel's hairless

slit, breathing in the thick scent of pussy that drifted to her. The heady musk beckoned her closer like a Sirens call and Jessie finally gave in to desire, hungrily pressing her mouth against Rachel's warm, wet flesh.

Smooth, creamy thighs quivered on either side of her head as Jessie fucked Rachel with her tongue. She licked up and down the length of Rachel's warm furrow then dipped inside, greedily lapping up her lover's sweet nectar. Rachel writhed on the bed in tortured bliss, hips rising to meet her as Jessie probed deeper and deeper until she was practically up to her ears in Rachel's cornpone pussy.

"Mmmmm ... oh, yes," Rachel muttered. "Eat me, sugar. Make Rachel pop."

Jessie smiled into Rachel. She loved how that Carolina accent became even more pronounced in the heat of passion. It was just so hot! Using her fingers to spread open Rachel's meaty cuntlips, Jessie exposed the hard little button within and lightly flicked it with her tongue. Rachel moaned for more. Jessie gave it. She lashed Rachel's clit with her tongue then took the shiny pearl between her lips and sucked it until Rachel was squealing with delight. Sweet cream flowed over her tongue and Jessie slurped it up, wanting it all, licking the stickiness from Rachel's inner thighs to make sure not a single drop was wasted.

With a playful nip at Rachel's cute little paunch, Jessie crawled into waiting arms and eagerly returned the kiss that greeted her. Not for the first time Jessie thought she could get used to waking up like this every morning, but like all those other times she knew it just wasn't in the cards. Rachel would never leave North Carolina, and Jessie couldn't imagine living anywhere else but Phoenix. So that was that. She settled into Rachel's embrace with a resigned sigh.

"Do you really have to go today?"

"Mmhmm," Rachel murmured, kissing her. "I can't blow off this conference."

"How long will you be in San Francisco?"

"Two days," Rachel said. "I'll catch a direct flight back to Raleigh."

Jessie tried not to pout. "Promise me you'll come back for a real visit soon. Not just a layover."

That made Rachel giggle.

"Promise?"

"I promise," Rachel said.

Jessie leaned into another kiss, unable to resist Rachel's pouty lips. When Rachel's tongue found hers Jessie couldn't resist it, either. Both of them were breathing hard when the kiss finally broke. Jessie grinned impishly.

"Do you have time for a quick shower?" she asked.

Rachel pulled her close again. "Oh yes."

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The two of them stood in each other's arms under a spray of hot, pounding water and shared a seemingly endless string of long, deep kisses. Jessie thought Rachel had the most exquisite lips. She could have kissed them all day. But Rachel had a flight to catch and there were other parts of her that were just as exquisite and Jessie wanted to feel them all one last time before Rachel left her again.

Jessie urged Rachel to turn around then reached for the bottle of apricot-scented body wash she loved so much. She squeezed a generous glob into her palm, set the bottle back down then slowly spread the fragrant gel over Rachel's breasts. Her soft touch inspired an equally soft moan.

"You have the nicest hands," Rachel muttered.

"And you," Jessie answered in a whisper, "have the nicest tits."

Jessie worked up a foamy lather as she slid her hands over Rachel's ample mounds, her gentle caresses making the dirty blonde gasp and sigh. She snagged a nipple between her slippery fingers and rolled it firm as she kissed the back of Rachel's neck. Rachel purred and pushed back against her, grinding that tight little butt into her cunt. It took all the self-control she could muster not to start humping Rachel like a bitch in heat. Instead she gave Rachel's nipple a sharp pinch. Rachel groaned.

"I love the way you touch me."

That worked out well, Jessie thought, since she so loved touching Rachel.

Jessie groped Rachel's breast a few moments longer then slowly trailed her hand down Rachel's belly in search of smooth flesh. When she found it Rachel groaned for more, sounding as desperate to have fingers inside her as Jessie had been not that long before. But Jessie wasn't about to give in just yet. Instead she gently caressed Rachel's slit with the tips of her fingers, the small circles she made turning Rachel into a whimpering mass of need in no time.

"Is this what you want?" Jessie asked as she slipped her finger between Rachel's pussylips.

Rachel answered with a sharp intake of air.

"Thought so," Jessie replied. She thrust into Rachel in one fell swoop, filling Rachel's hot little pussy with three fingers. Slick folds of warm, wet woman-flesh tightened around those fingers as Jessie slid in and out of Rachel, each contraction echoed by a deep groan.

The desire Jessie heard in Rachel's tone made her belly ache with hunger. It bordered on reckless to want someone as much as she wanted Rachel.

But Jessie couldn't help it. Rachel was just too damn irresistible. She simply had no willpower where Rachel was concerned. So Jessie gave in to her feelings.

Spooned against Rachel's back, their hips bumping and grinding into each other at frenetic pace, Jessie fucked her lover with singular, focused determination ... she was going to bring Rachel off good and proper. And right now. Jessie reached around with her free hand and diddled Rachel's clit as a counterpoint to her deep, hard thrusts. Her two-pronged attack had Rachel mewling in ecstasy. Jessie kept at it, her fingers moving like pistons in and out of Rachel's cunt while she stroked Rachel's hard nubbin of a clit. She held her breath in anticipation as Rachel neared climax then she felt a clenching around her fingers and Rachel sagged forward with an almost relieved moan.

Jessie kept her fingers inside Rachel until the last aftershocks faded then pulled out. The moan she pulled with her sounded like a tired afterthought. She dropped a kiss on Rachel's shoulder as she pulled



the showerhead from its mount and rinsed the lingering suds off Rachel's breasts and belly. Before directing the spray of water between Rachel's legs Jessie switched the showerhead from a gentle setting to pulse. The throbbing jet of water made Rachel groan.

"Oh. Yes. Right there," Rachel murmured.

"Not here?" Jessie asked, aiming the showerhead at Rachel's firm ass.

Rachel purred. "Mmmmm. That needs washing up, too."

For added emphasis Rachel wiggled her butt playfully. Jessie laughed. She thought Rachel had the most perfect rear end, so tight and round, so thoroughly grabable. Usually she couldn't keep her hands off it. Why should now be an exception? Especially when Rachel was asking for it?

Jessie slid the showerhead back in its mount and gave Rachel's ass a not-so-gentle slap before reaching for the body wash again. She squeezed some onto her fingers and smeared it over Rachel's ass. Rachel sighed in response and leaned forward a little, hands on the wall in front of her, legs spread just a bit, giving Jessie perfect access to Rachel's backside. Jessie let her hands glide over the smooth rounds then deftly slipped between Rachel's cheeks. Her soapy finger slid into Rachel's asshole effortlessly. Rachel breathed a long sigh.

"Yeah, baby," Rachel whispered to her. "Fuck me up the ass."

Jessie did just that. She eased in and out of Rachel's asshole, the slick body wash working better than any lube she had ever used. A very greedy Rachel pushed back to meet each thrust as Jessie pushed in faster ... faster ... using two fingers now, fucking Rachel underhand, feeling almost giddy as she watched Rachel's asshole conform to the shape of her probing fingers. Rachel's hands weren't idle, though. Stiff-arming the white tiled wall in front of her with one hand Rachel let the other drop between her legs so she could play with her clit while Jessie fucked her. Between the two of them, Rachel was on the verge of climax again. Jessie kept sliding her fingers in Rachel's asshole, harder and faster, pounding into her while Rachel feverishly rubbed her clit.

"I'm gonna come," Rachel muttered. "Oh shit, darlin'. I'm gonna fucking come."

The words set off a pang of longing in Jessie's belly so intense it nearly distracted her from watching Rachel. But she managed to reign in her feelings just in time to watch Rachel's ass cheeks quiver under the strain of a surging climax. Rachel's knees buckled and she jerked forward a little, pushing off from the wall to keep from collapsing.

Jessie took the showerhead in hand once more and rinsed the lather from Rachel's butt. It was so beautiful. When the showerhead was back in its mount again Jessie turned Rachel around and pulled her lover into a kiss. Hungry lips met hers and even hungrier hands slid over her wet, naked body. Jessie sighed with a hint of melancholy. She would miss Rachel's touch, as she always did when Rachel disappeared from her life.

But Jessie tried not to think about that. For now she still had Rachel in her arms, and Jessie wanted to enjoy every moment she had with her Southern sweetie.

Jessie was definitely enjoying the feel of Rachel's hands moving across her bare skin. It never ceased to amaze her how Rachel, a cattle rancher who spent so much time outdoors working in rugged conditions, could have such soft hands. But Rachel did. Soft, smooth hands that left no part of her untouched. She had Jessie purring with contentment.

"You have a great body," Rachel said.

That made Jessie blush. Though she never considered herself a vain person, those things were always nice to hear. And she knew it wasn't just idle praise; Rachel meant it. She leaned into Rachel and kissed her again, the touch of those lips igniting a fireball deep in her gut. It just wasn't fair that the woman who could make her feel like this lived on the other side of the country!

When Rachel pulled back to give her a mischievous smile then sank to her knees Jessie banished those thoughts from her mind. She had Rachel's face between her legs. Nothing else mattered. Soft kisses started on her belly then moved lower, so much lower, until Jessie could feel Rachel's breath tickling her slit. Rachel's fingers combed

through her thick tuft of dark hair and tugged a little. Jessie whimpered.

"Are you going to eat me or play with my bush?"

Rachel cackled wickedly. "I'm going to eat you, my pretty."

Jessie tossed her head back with a sharp cry as Rachel's tongue dipped between her cuntlips, swirling inside her like a whirligig. She cupped her hands around Rachel's head almost by instinct, as if to make sure her mouth stayed right where it was. Though from the way Rachel went down on her Jessie doubted her lover had any intention of stopping soon. It was just one more thing she loved about Rachel. The woman made licking pussy into an art. Jessie rolled her hips to Rachel's syncopated beat, the pleasure washing over her like the water spraying from the shower. Now and then Rachel would take a swipe at her clitoris and Jessie would moan each time in response in hopes Rachel would keep her tongue there.

But Rachel teased her, flicking her clit with the promise of sweet release then diving back into her again. The close-but-no-cigar treatment was making Jessie lightheaded. Her legs were turning to rubber. How much of this did Rachel think she could take?

As if to answer the unspoken question Rachel peeled back her netherlips, exposing her clit, then blew on it like it was a morsel of food too hot to eat.

Jessie shuddered. That felt so good. It felt even better when Rachel's lips brushed over her clit in a kiss. Rachel's tongue followed her lips and Jessie mewed pitifully as Rachel lashed her clit, pummeling the little nub until she was coming on Rachel's face.

Even as the last stubborn tremors rumbled through her Jessie pulled Rachel to her feet and kissed her, deeply, passionately, tasting her juices on those soft lips and loving them all the more for it. She used her hands instead of words to beg Rachel not to leave, and for a moment Jessie thought she might actually succeed.

Then Rachel sighed and pulled back from her.

"I should probably get going," Rachel whispered.

Now it was Jessie who sighed. She couldn't bring herself to speak, knowing if she did she would end up saying more than she really should. So she just nodded.

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After dropping Rachel off at the airport Jessie wanted to go home and sulk. But she had to get to work.

The radio cranked out classic rock that Jessie hoped would lift her spirits and take her mind off Rachel as she navigated the streets of downtown Phoenix in her red Volvo. She loved the city. And as an investigative reporter for the top morning paper in town Jessie knew every square inch of Phoenix, from the ritzy facade designed to attract tourists to the seedy underbelly designed to keep people away. Jessie considered both sides her stomping grounds. Posh hotels and cheap diners were equally inviting to her. She appreciated everything about them.

Growing up in a poverty-stricken corner of the Navajo reservation (the Rez, as all the kids called it), Jessie dreamed of only one thing as a little kid ... getting the hell out. She longed to move to a big city, a city filled with people of all shapes and sizes and colors. Phoenix offered that in abundance.

Her ticket out had been a scholarship to the University of Arizona. After that Jessie never looked back. Journalism hadn't been her first love when she started college, but in the end it turned out to be her true love. She found a sense of purpose as a reporter that until then had been missing her life. It came with her start at the campus newspaper and stuck with her even now at the Phoenix Sentinel.

Fifteen years later after leaving the Rez and going off to school, the magic hadn't faded. Jessie still thrived on the news, on the drama of it all. She fed off the energy put out by the city and the cross-section of people who lived there. Nothing else really measured up to it.

A slow, bluesy song came on the radio and Jessie thought of Rachel again. She sighed. It was more than a little unfair of Rachel to breeze in and out of her life like that. Even though the two of them kept things casual by unspoken agreement, it was getting tougher for Jessie to let Rachel go. Did Rachel have the same problem? Jessie wanted

to think so. She wanted to believe Rachel was sitting on the plane at that moment thinking about her, wishing the plane would turn around for some reason ... any reason that would mean she was grounded in Phoenix for a good long while.

But Jessie knew better than that. Rachel was probably flirting with one of the cute young flight attendants right then, and more likely than not was being successful at it. That would be typical Rachel. Wasn't that how they met? Jessie couldn't love Rachel any other way than how she was, which meant it could be another six months before the two of them were together again. It wasn't exactly a stable relationship. The thought of never seeing Rachel again, never touching her or kissing her, was more than Jessie could bear. She would rather have fleeting moments with Rachel than none at all.

So she would just do what she always did after Rachel skipped town – she would bury herself in her work and hopefully find a plaything or two along the way to occupy her time ... and her bed.

The Phoenix Sentinel took up an entire mirrored-glass downtown high-rise. It was both impressive and imposing. When she first went to work there it intimidated the shit out of her. Now Jessie took comfort in the sight of it.

It was her home away from home.

Jessie parked her Volvo in the spot reserved for her in the underground parking garage and took the elevator up to the eleventh floor, where the heart of the Sentinel beat with the steadiness of a metronome. She was promptly greeted outside her office by a young redhead wearing a Wildcats T-shirt, jeans, and a look of annoyance. Jessie thought Nina would have been more attractive without the annoyed look; the T-shirt and jeans could stay, though. Nina was cute and had a nice body. The outfit showed off both traits nicely.

"You're late," Nina said to her.

Jessie shrugged off the good-natured reproach and headed into her office. She really didn't have to explain herself to an intern. Nina Carter was a journalism major at her alma mater who had applied for the summer internship the Sentinel offered every year. The same internship Jessie had worked during the summer between her

freshman and sophomore years. In a lot of ways, Nina reminded Jessie of herself at that age ... determined, ambitious, eager to learn. Jessie wouldn't be surprised to see Nina working at the paper after graduation. She even looked forward to it. But for now Nina was mostly a pain in the ass, albeit an attractive one.

"I could use some coffee." Jessie sat down behind her ever-cluttered desk. No matter how often she tried to organize things, her desk always ended up in disarray. Eventually she resigned herself to the fact that it would never get straightened out.

"Are you feeling okay?"

"Just a little tired," Jessie replied. "I didn't get much sleep."

"Mmmm," Nina murmured. There was a hint of skepticism in it. "You didn't check your voice mail, either. I took down the messages and left them on your desk. If you can find them."

"Thanks," Jessie said.

"Can I get you anything else?"

Jessie shook her head. "Just the coffee, thanks."

"Okay."

Leaning back in her chair, Jessie watched Nina leave. Or more accurately, she ogled Nina's cute little behind as she left the office. It was very nice. Definitely worthy of ogling. And more. Though Jessie didn't have a clue which way Nina leaned, nor was it a good idea for her to be fooling around with the summer interns.

But it was a fun distraction all the same, one that took her mind off Rachel and the empty apartment she would be going home to later.

Jessie shook the depressing thought from her mind and rummaged through the heap on top of her desk for the messages Nina had taken down for her. There were only two. The first was from a man named Hank Birdsong. Jessie had no idea who he was and there was no number so she could return his call, just a cryptic message about needing to see her. It read like an obscene phone call. Wouldn't have been the first time. Phoenix had its share of nutcases and she seemed to piss off a lot of them. Jessie figured if it really was important he'd call back.

The second message was from Clare Taylor. Now that name Jessie knew very well.

Snatching up the phone, Jessie dialed the number Clare left and listened impatiently to each shrill ring. The melodic voice that answered conjured up a slideshow of pleasant memories.

"Yes?"

"Hi, Clare. It's Jessie Greyhorse."

"Jessie," Clare said. Her voice had a smile in it. "I'm so glad you called back. How are you?"

"Good," Jessie said. "You?"

"Overworked," Clare replied, laughing.

Jessie wasn't surprised to hear that. Clare was the district attorney. With the crime rate that came with a big city, the DA's office always had its hands full. Clare was Phoenix's top prosecutors ... and its toughest. She wasn't the kind of woman who sat idle behind her desk and delegated authority to subordinates. Clare got her hands dirty. It was something Jessie admired. The fact that Clare looked scrumptious in a suit had nothing to do with it. Not much, at least.

"It's been a while," Jessie noted. "What's the occasion?"

"Just that," Clare replied easily. "It's been a while. I saw your piece in the Sentinel this morning and it occurred to me we haven't seen each other in the longest time. So I called hoping maybe we could get together soon."

"I'd like that," Jessie said.

"Are you free tonight? We could have dinner."

"That sounds do-able," Jessie said.

Clare made a pleased sound. "Terrific. How about Farinelli's? Around eight?"

"I'll be there," Jessie said.

"See you then."

They hung up.

Jessie smiled. She was never one to count her chickens before they hatched, but with any luck she wouldn't have to spend the night alone. So far things were looking up.

Turning her chair around, Jessie flipped on the police scanner behind her desk. The little device was an absolute must for a reporter covering the city beat. She could monitor police chatter and listen for potential stories. Phoenix was a big city and there was always something going on. It might not always be newsworthy, but there was always something going on.

Jessie listened to reports of routine traffic stops and barroom scuffles. Nothing much piqued her interest. After half an hour and two cups of coffee, courtesy of Nina, she was just about to give up and head to the bathroom to take a pee when a bulletin came over the police radio about a dead body found in an alley downtown.

Jackpot.

Gathering her things, Jessie headed out of her office. God, she loved her job.



## CHAPTER TWO

Jessie had no problem finding the crime scene.

By the time she got there (it was only a few blocks walk from the Sentinel building) police had cordoned off the area with black and yellow tape. Squad cars, their red and blue lights flashing incessantly, were parked up and down the street. People were starting to gather, the curious, the nothing-better-to-do's. Summers in Phoenix were brutal and anything – anything at all that might distract from the heat was welcomed, even if the diversion happened to be a dead body found in an alley downtown.

Heat brought out the macabre in everyone, apparently.

Jessie pushed her way to the front of the crowd where a uniformed police officer stood watch, telling people to move back as needed and doing her best to look intimidating. Jessie knew the woman was actually the sweetest person in the world, though in uniform with a gun holstered at her side she certainly looked the part of the tough beat cop.

She looks damn cute like that, too, Jessie thought. The cut of the uniform hinted at a nice figure underneath. It made her want to strip it off and find out what was hiding in there.

"Officer Hansen," Jessie said in greeting.

The blonde cop smiled lopsidedly. "I should have known you would show up sooner or later."

"You don't have to make it sound so horrible," Jessie shot back.

"It isn't," Hansen said.

Jessie smiled her best smile at the young blonde cop. She wasn't above using a little shameless flirting to her advantage. And if it led to something more down the road that was just fine with her, too. She grabbed the laminated press pass hanging around her neck and waved it.

"Think I could slip in there for a few minutes?"

"All right," Hansen said. She dropped her head slightly. "But you owe me."

As Jessie smiled and dipped under the black and yellow crime scene tape she thought there were far worse things than being indebted to a beautiful blonde police officer.

The crime scene was a narrow strip of alley between a pizza parlor and a drycleaners. There were uniformed cops crawling all over the place. Members of the CSI unit, wearing latex gloves, picked through garbage and debris looking for even the tiniest clue.

It was an all too familiar scene for Jessie.

Watching her step, Jessie weaved her way through the traffic of police officers. Most of them had seen her around enough times at other crime scenes to not question her presence at this one. Jessie learned early on if she were careful and didn't get in anybody's way, the cops would pretty much leave her alone. She headed for the alley where the body was allegedly discovered. There were even more uniformed officers lingering in the alley and with them a plain-clothes detective. Even with his back to her Jessie recognized Pete Ganz.

Peter Ganz was a twenty-year veteran of the Phoenix police department who reminded Jessie of a day old jelly donut ... a little crusty on the outside but still soft and sweet on the inside. He was a big man, with broad shoulders, and a little beer belly he tried very hard to conceal in tailored suits and loose shirts. Pete had dark hair peppered with gray that showed no signs of thinning with matching stubble on his chin that would never be a full beard no matter how long he held off shaving. Detective Ganz turned as Jessie approached and narrowed his deep blue eyes to weary slits when he noticed her.

"Who said you could be here?"

"I think the First Amendment," Jessie said.

Ganz snorted at that. "I think you batted your eyelashes at Hansen."

"I have never batted my eyelashes," Jessie replied defensively. "I leave that to the femmes."

This time Ganz made an impatient grunting noise. "I'm a little busy right now, Greyhorse. Go pester someone else."

Jessie frowned. "Come on, Pete. Don't you have anything for me?"

"Not much," Ganz said. "I only got here a couple of minutes ago."

Stepping aside, Ganz directed her attention to the unmoving lump on the ground. Jessie felt her gut tighten. Even though it wasn't the first time she had seen a dead body, her reaction was still the same ... and Jessie hoped she never became so jaded, so unaffected by the death of another human being, that a time would ever come when the sight of a dead body didn't make her insides clench up.

"The victim," Ganz started to tell her, "appears to be a Native American male late forties to mid fifties. As you can see he suffered a severe blow to the back of the head."

Jessie did see that. The dead man's dark hair was matted in the back with blood.

"Any ID?" Jessie asked.

"No wallet," Ganz said. "And no jewelry."

It was possible he didn't have those things on him, Jessie knew, but it was more likely the man had been robbed. Jessie shook her head. Death was death, and there were never good reasons for it, but the idea that this man face down in a back alley, dead from a blow to the back of the head, was the victim of being in the wrong place at wrong time gnawed at Jessie. It was just senseless.

Jessie asked, "What about witnesses?"

"In this neighborhood?" Ganz snorted at the notion. "People around here suffer from situational myopia. But I have uniforms going door to door asking anyway. We could luck out and get a nibble." He turned to her. "Maybe we should send you out to question people. You might have better luck. Just bat your eyelashes at them."

"Cute," Jessie replied dryly.

Ganz glanced down at the dead man on the ground. "I wish the meat wagon would get here already so this poor bastard didn't have to rot in this heat. I'd better--"

"Detective Ganz?"

Jessie and Ganz both turned. One of the CSI technicians, an Asian man with a short crop of onyx hair, was coming toward them. He held a plastic evidence bag in his latex-gloved hand.

"We found this two blocks over," the technician said. He held up the bag. Inside the bag was a wallet.

Slipping on a pair of gloves, Ganz took the wallet out of the evidence bag and flipped through it. "No cash. Credit cards are still here."

"Driver's license?" Jessie asked hopefully. She thought the dead man on the ground deserved better than being labeled another John Doe. The sooner he could be identified, the better in her opinion.

"Yeah," Ganz said. He studied the picture on the driver's license then looked down at the man on the ground. "Yeah. It's him. Hank Birdsong. Is that a Navajo name?"

Jessie knew Ganz had just asked her something but she couldn't answer. She couldn't move ... she couldn't think. It felt like the ground had opened up under her feet and swallowed her whole. There were chills running up and down her spine. The urge to wretch threatened to take over.

"Greyhorse?"

Taking a deep, calming breath, Jessie looked up at Ganz. "Yeah?"

"Are you all right?"

Jessie nodded. "Fine."

"If you say so," Ganz said. He didn't sound convinced. "Is Birdsong a Navajo name?"

"It could be." Jessie stared down at the dead man on the ground. Hank Birdsong called her that morning. Now he was facedown in alley just a few blocks from the Sentinel building with dried blood caked over the gaping wound on the back of his head.

Phoenix did have its share of random crimes, Jessie readily acknowledged. That was just a sad fact of life. So it was certainly possible that Hank Birdsong's death was nothing but a tragic coincidence, that he could be just another depressing statistic.

But Jessie didn't believe in coincidence. The objective reporter in her had to allow for the possibility, of course; she wouldn't be impartial if she saw conspiracies everywhere she turned. In this case, though, she had a gut feeling something wasn't right.

Jessie was determined to find out what that something was.

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The Office of the Medical Examiner for Maricopa County was located in the very stylish Forensic Science Center on the corner of Jefferson and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue in downtown Phoenix. It was a relatively new, state-of-the-art facility more than equipped to handle the four thousand plus cases it saw each year. The place gave Jessie the creeps.

After getting a Coke and a bag of chips from a vending machine, Jessie found a place to sit in the waiting area outside the main autopsy room and settled in. She was glad to be out of the oppressive heat, though troubled by the reason for it. Waiting for the results of an autopsy was nothing to be thankful for, even if the ME's office did have air conditioning.

Jessie hadn't told Detective Ganz that Hank Birdsong called her that morning wanting to see her. She wasn't sure why she was keeping that information to herself. It was always her policy to be honest and up front with the cops, for two reasons. She would never want to do anything that might hinder their investigation, especially when a murder was involved. But she also didn't want there to be any bad blood between in her and the police department.

Sources were invaluable to a reporter, and the more her sources trusted her the more useful the information she could get out of them. She relied on these people to tell her the whole story, the full story, and often times to tell it to her before her rivals at other newspapers got the chance to hear it.

The last thing she needed to do was piss off someone like Ganz, an influential person in the Phoenix police department. Jessie had no illusions; if Ganz put the word out among the cops in town not to cooperate with her, she wouldn't get so much as a scowl from any of them ... not even the cute blonde ones who otherwise were so receptive to her flirting.

So given the risks, why hadn't she told Ganz about the phone call?

Jessie thought about that as she munched on some potato chips and washed them down with soda. Maybe it was because part of her didn't want to believe the two things were related. Back at the crime scene,

the idea that this had been a senseless, random act of violence didn't sit too well with her. But she liked even less the idea that Birdsong calling her then winding up dead were tied together somehow. Jessie couldn't help thinking that if she had just been at work on time, had been there to take his call, that things might have been different ... that he wouldn't have wound up dead. She knew it was pointless and even selfish to assume any blame. It wasn't her fault that someone killed Hank Birdsong. Still, Jessie felt she had a personal stake in all this, more so than with other cases, and she wanted to learn more about the situation before she went to Ganz and told him everything she knew.

But she would tell him. Eventually.

The sound of approaching footsteps intruded on her thoughts.

Jessie looked up to see Ganz walking toward her with a Native American woman. The woman appeared to be in her early thirties, not too thin, with shoulder-length black hair and luminous eyes that darted in her direction for a moment before settling back on Ganz. She wore a muted red blouse with black denim jeans. It would have been easy to mistake her for Birdsong's wife, but Jessie could see a family resemblance. Daughter? Possible. Younger sister seemed the safest bet. It looked like she'd been crying.

The woman and Ganz talked to each other for a moment then she headed for the exit. Ganz waited until the woman was gone then shuffled tiredly over to the waiting area and sat down a few chairs from Jessie.

"Who was that?" Jessie asked.

Ganz let out a tired sigh. "The victim's sister. Amanda Birdsong."

"She identify the body?"

"Yeah."

"How'd she take it?" Jessie asked.

Ganz said, "Better than most. Not as well as some. You know how it goes."

Jessie nodded. She finished the rest of her chips, wadded up the empty bag, then walked over to the nearest garbage can and threw it away. Ganz watched her.

"What?" Jessie asked.

"Just observing," Ganz said. "I'm a detective, you know."

Jessie sat down and drank a swig of soda. "Did you ask Amanda Birdsong about her brother?"

"No, we talked about the Cardinals," Ganz said.

"You are a riot. And?"

"And," Ganz went on, "she is a woman of very few words. I got the feeling the two of them didn't get along very well."

"Is that suspicious?"

"You obviously don't have any brothers or sisters."

"Nope," Jessie said.

Jessie and Ganz both got to their feet when the door to the autopsy room swung open. The Chief Medical Examiner for Maricopa County was a rotund little man with thinning white hair named Jacob Klein. He had on a white lab coat over green scrubs. The stains on his coat looked more like barbecue sauce than blood. Jessie felt ill. The thought of him eating anything – let alone something like Buffalo wings – in the autopsy room made her stomach churn.

"You're here about the Indian fellow, right?" Klein asked.

Jessie bristled at the term but her "yes" overlapped Ganz's.

"Well, I'm about to get started," Klein said. "You're welcome to come watch."

Jessie and Ganz exchanged glances then nodded and followed after Klein.

The main autopsy room was unusually spacious, a reaction – or perhaps overreaction – to the insufficient autopsy room at the previous ME building. There were four autopsy "stations" that including a stainless steel autopsy table and sink. The scales dangling from the ceiling reminded Jessie of the ones in the produce department at the grocery store, though instead of weighing apples or bananas these scales were used to weigh various body parts. (Klein had a bad habit of pointing out to visitors that the average human brain weighed three pounds.)

The lifeless body of Hank Birdsong was on the table at the far side of the room. Jessie fought back a wave of nausea as she approached the table with Ganz, taking some consolation in seeing his obvious

battle with his own discomfort. Birdsong was naked. At first glance he looked like he had been in pretty good shape before he was murdered. The autopsy would either confirm or deny that.

Jessie noticed that Birdsong had a tattoo on his right bicep. She also noticed Ganz noticing it.

"Right," Klein said. He had a scalpel in his hand. "Let's get this show started."

Medical Examiners were nothing if not meticulous, and even though the point of most interest was obviously the gaping head wound that was the most likely cause of death, Klein nevertheless began the autopsy like he began every other autopsy ... with a Y-incision to the chest.

Jessie had no doubt she would regret this later.

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It didn't take much cajoling to get Amanda Birdsong's address from Detective Ganz. He was of the opinion that her reluctance to answer his questions might have something to do with him being a man, white, or both. Either way, Ganz figured Jessie might have better luck getting some of the more routine questions answered.

Amanda Birdsong lived in a modest stucco-walled condo within shouting distance of Grenada Park Ponds. There was a communal kidney-shaped swimming pool in the back and a play area for kids, both of which getting a lot of use given the nice though very warm weather.

Parking her Volvo down the street, Jessie headed up the front walk still feeling a little queasy from observing the autopsy. About the only things she learned from it were that Klein was a morbid son of a bitch and she should never eat potato chips before watching him cut into a dead body. Otherwise, the trip had been a bust.

The official cause of death was blunt trauma to the back of the head that cracked the skull and caused massive blood loss. It didn't take a medical degree to figure that one out. But now it was on the record. It was also on the record that, given the severity of the wound, and the angle of the blow it would have taken to inflict such a wound, the



odds that it was an accident or suicide were ruled out. The death was officially labeled a homicide.

Who killed Hank Birdsong and why were still questions to be answered, though, and those were the toughest questions to answer. Some murders went unsolved forever. Jessie hoped that wouldn't be the case here.

Jessie climbed up the flight of creaking wooden steps that led to Amanda Birdsong's second-floor condo and rang the doorbell. She heard movement inside then the door slightly and Amanda Birdsong peered out at her.

"Yes?"

"Ms. Birdsong? My name is Jessie Greyhorse. I'm a reporter with the Phoenix Sentinel. I was at the Medical Examiner's Office this morning with Detective Ganz."

Amanda looked her up and down then nodded. "Yeah. I remember seeing you there. What do you want?"

"I was hoping I could ask you a few questions about your brother," Jessie said.

"I'm really not up to that."

"I can understand that," Jessie said. "But I promise not to take up too much of your time. Please? Just give me a few minutes."

Amanda thought about that while she gnawed on her lower lip. It took a few moments of thinking and gnawing then she pulled open the door and gestured her in.

"Thank you," Jessie said. She went in.

The condo was just as charming on the inside as it was on the outside. Part of that was by architectural design, though Amanda had to be credited with a lot of the style. The place had a simple elegance Jessie very much admired. She turned at the sound of the door closing behind her and smiled at Amanda.

"This is a nice place," Jessie said.

Amanda nodded. "Thanks. Can I get you something to drink?"

"No. But thanks."

Shrugging, Amanda circled around her and plopped down on the sofa. She had changed clothes since Jessie saw her that morning,

opting to wear a T-shirt and shorts around the house. She looked good either way.

"Have a seat," Amanda said.

Jessie nodded and joined Amanda on the sofa. She took her notebook out of her pocket and flipped to a new page. "I'm very sorry about your brother, Ms. Birdsong."

"Thanks."

"Were the two of you close?"

"Off and on," Amanda said.

"When was the last time you talked to him?"

Amanda took a moment before answering, "Couple of weeks ago."

"Did he mention if anything was wrong?"

"Not really," Amanda said. "He said he was thinking of looking for a new job."

Jessie scribbled that down. "What did he do for a living?"

"He was a guard at the Inferno," Amanda said.

The official name of the place was Eastman Women's Correctional Facility, but just about everyone called it the Inferno ... a literary reference to Dante's Inferno. There were two issues that plagued every state government: prison crowding and budget woes. As a solution to both Eastman Enterprises built Arizona's first privately funded and owned prison, which the state then rented. It had been touted as the wave of the future and an important partnership between the government and the private sector. The project had been successful enough that Eastman Enterprises and others were negotiating to build more prisons in other states like they were a fast-food franchise. Jessie wasn't sure if it was such a good idea or not, but it had a lot of support with state representatives eager to save a few bucks here and there.

"How long had he worked there?" Jessie asked.

"Since it opened," Amanda said.

Jessie nodded. "So, about three years. Did he ever mention wanting to leave before?"

"No," Amanda said. "I thought he liked there. The pay was good, and they offered nice benefits. Actually, I was surprised when he said he wanted to find a new job."

"Did he say why he wanted to leave?"

Amanda shook her head.

"Do you have any idea why your brother might have wanted to talk to me?"

That made Amanda perk up a little. "How do you mean?"

Jessie took a deep breath and released it. "When I got to work this morning I had a message from someone named Hank Birdsong. He didn't leave a number for me to call, and he didn't say what it was about ... just that he wanted to see me. Then he was killed."

"Oh my God," Amanda whispered. She looked up. "What the hell is going on?"

"I don't know," Jessie said. "The two things could be completely unrelated."

Amanda eyed her skeptically. "But you don't think so."

"No," Jessie admitted. "I don't. It's just a hunch and I could be wrong. But I think there is a connection. So I'm going to look into it."

"This can't be happening," Amanda muttered. She looked up. Tears were starting to well in her eyes. "Hank and I weren't always close, but he was still my brother, you know? I did love him very much. He's really gone, isn't he?"

"Yes," Jessie replied softly. "I'm so sorry."

"Oh G-god," Amanda stammered. The tears started to fall, and once they did it was like a dam breaking open. Amanda began to sob. She was practically choking on her grief. Her entire body shook from the pain.

It absolutely broke Jessie's heart to see a person hurt that much. She opened her arms, offering comfort, and without any more urging than that Amanda fell into them. Jessie hugged Amanda tight, murmuring wordlessly, stroking Amanda's soft black hair as she wept for her dead brother.

When the cloudburst of tears finally subsided and Amanda started to snuffle, Jessie gently pulled back and held her at arm's length. The woman looked so vulnerable. Jessie sensed that Amanda needed more from her, much more. The two of them stared at each other for the longest time then Jessie reached up and brushed the tears from Amanda's cheeks. In answer Amanda breathed a little heavier.

Feeling an almost magnetic pull forward, Jessie leaned in and brushed Amanda's lips with hers. The kiss started off a bit awkwardly at first but Jessie was patient, understanding, giving Amanda the time to get comfortable. It wasn't long before Amanda's mouth opened under hers with a sureness that made Jessie whimper.

The kiss came to a slow, delicious end. Jessie pulled back, feeling a twinge of guilt over what just happened. Both of them were breathing hard.

"I'm sorry," Jessie whispered. "I shouldn't have done that."

"Why did you?" Amanda asked.

Jessie brushed an errant strand of jet-black hair away from Amanda's face. "You looked like you needed it."

"I did."

"Have you ever...?"

"No," Amanda said, blushing a little. But she sounded hopeful.

Making a rash decision, but the only one she could, Jessie pulled Amanda to her and kissed her again. There was nothing awkward about it this time. Amanda's lips yielded eagerly under hers. When their tongues met for the first time Amanda purred hungrily. Jessie found that very encouraging. She slid her hand over Amanda's breast and gave it a gentle squeeze, caressing the soft mound through Amanda's skimpy T-shirt. Amanda sighed between kisses.

"That feels so good," Amanda told her.

Jessie was glad to hear that. She wanted nothing more than to make Amanda feel good, to ease her pain ... if only for a few, fleeting moments.

Breaking free of the kiss, Jessie helped Amanda out of her T-shirt, lifting it over her head and tossing it aside. She was delighted to find that Amanda wasn't wearing a bra. The fewer obstacles between her

and Amanda's luscious breasts the better. And Amanda's breasts were indeed mouthwatering, perfect globes of ruddy tan flesh that were begging to be suckled.

Jessie cupped one of Amanda's breasts as she bent forward to kiss her again. The warm, smooth mound felt so good in her hand. She squeezed and fondled Amanda's tit, using the pad of her thumb to coax Amanda's nipple firm. Amanda muttered breathlessly between kisses, arching her back to offer up even more of that soft flesh.

It was an offer Jessie could not refuse.

Bending down, Jessie lowered her mouth to Amanda's breast. It felt even softer under her lips. Impatient fingers twisted her hair into knots as she licked and sucked Amanda's breast, her lips and tongue existing solely to bring Amanda pleasure. Jessie dragged her tongue over Amanda's little pebble of a nipple before taking it into her mouth again and sucking it. She moved from breast to breast, sparing neither of them. In no time Amanda was squirming on the sofa with an obvious itch between her legs.

Jessie shoved her hand down the front of Amanda's shorts. Though she was a little disappointed to learn Amanda had panties on, that disappointment was short lived. She rubbed Amanda's slit through the crotch of her panties. Even through a layer of cotton she could feel how wet Amanda was for her.

With a mouthful of tit Jessie teased Amanda's pussy with the tips of her fingers. Amanda gasped and moaned under her deft touch, hips rising off the sofa to meet her incessant caresses. The want in Amanda's tone was unmistakable.

Jessie kissed Amanda's lips again then slid to the floor, kneeling in the small space between the sofa and the coffee table. She pulled off Amanda's shorts and cast them aside like she had her T-shirt. Amanda lifted her butt up off the sofa just enough for Jessie to yank her panties down then off. Amanda stared down at her, lips parted slightly, tongue poking out, eyes glassy with desire, then spread her thighs. Jessie breathed in deeply. Amanda had a neatly trimmed thatch of dark hair covering thick, meaty folds of woman-flesh. The musky scent of her arousal filled the air like incense.

Pushing forward, Jessie playfully kissed and nibbled along Amanda's inner thighs until she practically had her face in Amanda's cunt. The warm, wet heat radiated against her cheeks. Jessie savored the rich, earthy smell for a moment then closed the gap between her and Amanda's pussy. She lapped at Amanda's folds, gently, delicately, finding those places that made Amanda groan the loudest in approval then ravishing them.

"Yes ... oh ... yes," Amanda rasped.

Jessie tossed Amanda's legs over her shoulders, pulling her down on the sofa a little so she could more easily get at that brimming honey pot. She dipped into Amanda over and over again, pushing her tongue in deep, kissing and even nibbling on Amanda's puffy, pink lips until Amanda was breathing in shallow, ragged gasps.

Thighs quivered on either side of Jessie's head as she probed thick, fleshy folds with her tongue in search of the hard button hidden somewhere within. When Amanda groaned Jessie knew she had hit her mark. She swirled her tongue around the firm little nub then pressed her lips to it, kissing and sucking it. Amanda's fingers tightened in her hair, pulling hard, but it didn't break Jessie's rhythm. She pummeled Amanda's clit, working it over like a speed bag, until Amanda's thighs closed in around her face. Amanda came with a deep moan, butt rising off the sofa.

Jessie kept her mouth pressed against Amanda's cunt until the last spasm faded then lifted her face from between Amanda's legs. She resisted the temptation to wipe off her mouth with the back of her hand and looked up at Amanda. Amanda gave her warm, thankful look.

But then Amanda's lips started to quiver and tears fell once again. Jessie quickly gathered Amanda in her arms and held the naked woman while she cried.

## CHAPTER THREE

The deadline for stories expecting to appear in the paper the next morning was six o'clock. This was firm. There were absolutely no exceptions.

Jessie got back to her office at quarter after five. She started typing almost before she sat down behind her desk, fingers tap-dancing furiously across the keyboard. Though she had her notebook open in front of her, Jessie didn't reference it for it now. Her standard method was to get something – anything – written down then she would go back and make sure the facts she plucked from her memory jibed with the information she had written down in her little black book.

Not that she had many facts to get straight right now.

As far as her story for tomorrow's paper was concerned, all she could report was that a Navajo man had been found dead in an alley downtown and that the ME had ruled the death a homicide. Other than that and the victim's name and occupation, there wasn't very much to tell. Jessie would have to fill out the article with the brief biographical sketch Amanda had given her that afternoon. (After a fresh batch of tears and another round of lovemaking.)

It would have been premature to put anything else in the article. Most of it was just speculation at this point, anyhow. The only other fact Jessie had was that Hank Birdsong called her that morning. But she didn't want to reveal that little tidbit, in print or otherwise, until she investigated further.

What had Hank Birdsong wanted to talk to her about? She never met the man, not that she remembered. Did he only know her through her articles in the newspaper? Amanda said he was looking to change jobs. Had he called looking for a job, thinking because both of them were Navajo she might be able to help him out?

That seemed unlikely.

Jessie did find it interesting that Hank Birdsong was a prison guard at the Inferno. Amanda told her that her brother loved his job in the beginning, but that now he wanted to leave. Why the change of heart? Had something happened there? Was that why he called?

These were the questions Jessie needed to answer. Instinct more than anything else told her there was something more to this story than just a vicious murder. She wanted to know what that something was, not just for curiosity's sake, but for Hank ... and Amanda.

Someone knocked on her door. But it wasn't a normal knock ... it was an obnoxious, shave-and-a-haircut knock. It could only be one person.

"Yeah?" Jessie called out.

The door opened and Nina poked her head inside the office. "Thirty-minute warning."

"Thanks," Jessie said. She went back to typing.

Nina pushed the door all the way open and came in. "What are you working on?"

"Homicide case," Jessie said without looking up.

"Cool."

Jessie stopped typing and looked up. "There is nothing cool about someone being murdered."

"Sorry," Nina said.

Ignoring any sense of boundaries or personal space, Nina circled around the desk and leaned over her shoulder to read her article as she typed it. Jessie grunted her very real annoyance.

"You spelled 'correctional' wrong. It has two r's."

"I didn't spell it wrong," Jessie said heatedly. "It's a typo."

"What's the difference?"

"Saying I spelled it wrong implies I don't know the correct – two r's – spelling. A typo is a mistake. Which I will fix in a minute, by the way."

"Okay, okay. Don't get your panties in a twist."

"I think the phrase is 'get your knickers in a twist'."

Nina leaned closer and whispered in her ear, "I like your panties better. You do wear them, don't you?"

Both the words and the brazenness with which Nina spoke them made Jessie shudder. She couldn't believe it. This college girl was coming on to her! It took a great deal of effort to keep typing like everything was fine.



"Never you mind," Jessie said.

"I don't wear any," Nina whispered. "In case you were wondering."

Jessie hadn't wondered, actually. But now that Nina told her she couldn't help thinking about it. This was insane! "Don't you have anything else to do?"

"Nothing this fun," Nina said. She leaned closer. Jessie thought the little tease might be trying to peek down her blouse, and she was actually disappointed when she realized Nina was instead trying to read something on the computer screen.

"Hank Birdsong," Nina muttered. "Why does that name sound so familiar?" She straightened up. "Holy shit. He's the guy who left you a message this morning!"

"Yeah," Jessie said.

Nina looked at her. "Don't you think it's a little fishy that this guy calls you then winds up dead?"

"I find it more than a little fishy," Jessie admitted. There was no point hiding her suspicions from Nina, since the redhead gave her the message in the first place.

"Wow," Nina said. "That is just too creepy. Are you looking into it?"

Jessie nodded. She gave Nina a quick recap of what she had learned so far. The intern seemed impressed. "That's about it. Tomorrow I'll see what else I can find out."

"Is there anything I can do to help?" Nina asked. She sounded genuinely eager. It was the journalism major in her coming out.

"Yeah," Jessie answered, nodding. "See what you can dig up on the Inferno, if there have been any complaints or whatever. Think you can handle that?"

Nina smiled at her. "I can handle a lot of things."

"Then go handle them," Jessie said, shooing Nina out of her office with a wave of her hand. "And let me finish this article."

"Yes, ma'am," Nina said. She gave her a wink then bounced out of the office, closing the door behind her.

Jessie shook her head and went back to working on her story. Though her mind periodically drifted to thoughts of her unabashed

intern (the one who did not wear panties), Jessie still managed to finish article, proof read it twice, and send it along with a few minutes to spare.

With her story put to bed, and a couple of hours yet before she was supposed to meet Clare, Jessie figured she had more than enough time to go home, take a shower, and a worry about what she was going to wear to dinner.

Then the phone rang.

Jessie snatched up the receiver. "Greyhorse."

"Howdy, darlin'." The playful Southern drawl could only belong to Rachel. Jessie grinned.

"Well hi there," Jessie said. She leaned back in her chair. "How are you?"

"Good," Rachel said. "I tried calling you at home, but you weren't there. So I figured you'd be at the office."

"Mmmm," murmured Jessie. "Well, I had to recoup a little lost time. Someone made me late for work this morning."

"Hope it was worth it."

"Oh it was," Jessie said. "How was your flight?"

Rachel sighed. "Miserable. I couldn't stop thinking about you."

"You're very sweet," Jessie said. She was surprised to hear Rachel admit something like that.

"I miss you."

Jessie swallowed the lump in her throat. "I miss you, too."

"That's why I called," Rachel said. "I needed to hear your voice. And I wanted to apologize for running out on you like I did this morning."

"I understand," Jessie said. Which was true enough. She didn't always like it, but she certainly understood. That was just the kind of relationship she and Rachel had.

"You know I wanted to stay."

"I know," Jessie said.

Rachel purred into the phone. "I would have made you even later for work. You might have missed work altogether."

"You think so?"

"D-definitely," Rachel rasped. The hitch in her voice was unmistakable.

"Are you touching yourself?" Jessie asked.

"Uh huh."

Jessie laughed. "I hope you aren't using a payphone."

"Nope. I'm in my hotel room."

"Thank goodness," Jessie said. The thought of Rachel touching herself made her incredibly wet. She unsnapped her jeans so she could get her hand inside then asked playfully, "So what are you wearing?"

"Nothing," Rachel said. "I just got out of the shower."

Jessie imagined Rachel stretched out on one of those hotel room beds with the ugly flower-print comforters, naked, her legs spread, lazily playing with her bald pussy. "Just got out of the shower, huh? You must be wet."

"You have no idea," Rachel growled into the phone.

"Well I might have some idea," Jessie retorted. She lightly fingered her cuntlips, teasing them, enjoying her own touch. From the shallow breathing on the other end of the phone it was obvious Rachel was doing the same thing. Jessie breathed a long sigh.

"You're playing with your pussy, aren't you?" Rachel asked.

"Uh huh."

"I wish I could see you. I love to watch you masturbate."

Jessie laughed. "I'll make you a tape."

"I would love that," Rachel said. She moaned softly. "Mmmm. But I'd never get anything done. I'd be watching that tape twenty-four hours a day."

Listening to Rachel was really making Jessie crazy. The strain in her voice, the little sighs that punctuated her words. It got to Jessie. She rubbed her slit harder now, faster, the pace getting more and more feverish. Rachel moaned again.

"Oh ... yes," Jessie whispered.

"Feels good, doesn't it, baby?"

"Mmmhmmm."

"I have three fingers inside me," Rachel told her. "And I'm wishing they were yours."

Jessie groaned. She hooked a finger into her cunt, fucking herself, pushing in deep like Rachel might if she were there. "Oh fuck."

"Mmmm," Rachel hummed. "That's it, baby. Finger that hot little pussy of yours. I wanna hear you come."

"Yes ... yes," Jessie panted. Somehow Rachel always knew the right things to say, the things that drove her wild. It was like Rachel could read her mind or something. Jessie turned her attentions to her clit now, stroking it frantically with the tip of her finger. Her lips quivered. She moaned desperately.

"Are you gonna come for me, lover?"

Jessie whimpered. She loved it when Rachel called her that. "Oh yeah."

"Tell me," Rachel demanded.

"I'm going to come," Jessie said. "Oh God. Yes! I'm coming, baby. I'm coming for you! Mmmph!"

With a primal grunt Jessie came, jerking back in her chair so hard for a moment she was afraid she would go tumbling backward. But she didn't fall out of her chair. Instead Jessie slumped back in it, her hand still shoved down the front of her pants. Over the phone Jessie heard Rachel gasp sharply then listened to the heavenly noise of her lover reaching climax.

The line was quiet for a moment as both of them struggled for breath.

"I could do this with you all night," Rachel said.

Jessie giggled. "You have. We've had the phone bills to prove it."

"The cost of long-distance romance."

"I'd pay twice as much," Jessie said.

"Me too," Rachel said. She sighed. "Can I call again soon?"

"Of course," Jessie said. "You never have to ask me that."

Rachel made a soft little sound of contentment. "Thanks. Take care, sweetie."

"Bye," Jessie said. She hung up the phone.

It was a good thing Clare asked her out to dinner, Jessie thought, otherwise she would have ended up alone in her apartment, sulking, and eating way too much chocolate.

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Farinelli's wasn't the kind of place that would win raves for its décor or ambience. It was little more than a hole in the wall with red-and white-checked tablecloths. But it served the best Italian food in Phoenix.

Jessie arrived shortly after eight. Even after her quickie romp on the phone with Rachel she still had time to go home and get cleaned up before meeting Clare. She decided on wearing an ocean blue pullover sweater and black slacks to dinner. The sweater was a little much given the recent heat wave, but Jessie liked how it showed off her bosom and since they would be indoors with air conditioning she figured discomfort wouldn't be a factor.

When she finally spotted Clare, already seated at a table in the corner, a menu open in front of her, sipping a glass of red wine, Jessie was very glad she went with the sweater.

Clare looked fabulous. She had on a navy blue suit jacket over a white dress shirt with a button down collar. Her slender navy blue tie was mind-bogglingly straight. Impeccable was the word that best described Clare's fashion sense.

Even across a crowded restaurant Clare Taylor stood out. She had short brown hair and matching eyes that sparkled with mischief. Jessie liked that about her.

A very determined Jessie cut a meandering swath through the room, dodging waiters and departing customers to reach the table where Clare sat waiting for her. When she got there Clare looked up at her and smiled warmly.

"Sorry I'm late," Jessie said. She slid into the chair across from Clare.

Clare dismissed the apology with an airy wave of her hand. "I was early. But only just. Really. I haven't been waiting long at all."

"Long enough to order wine," Jessie said.

"Yep," Clare said. She grabbed the bottle and filled Jessie's glass. "So you have some catching up to do."

"Mmhmm." Jessie took a sip. As usual, Clare chose something perfect. She drank a bit more then said, "I'm so glad you called."

"I'm sorry it took me so long to do it."

"You're a very busy woman," Jessie pointed out.

Clare had a little wine. "That's no excuse. You have to make time for certain things. And certain people."

"I think you're flirting with me," Jessie said, grinning.

"You look great, by the way."

Jessie laughed. "Now I know you're flirting with me."

"Maybe a little."

"Maybe a lot," Jessie said. She downed what was left in her glass.

"More?"

"Please."

Clare refilled her glass. "Bad day?"

"Just a long one," Jessie said. She was more patient with her second glass of wine, letting it breathe for a while before taking another sip.

The day had been a long one. Looking back on it, she couldn't quite believe everything that happened. Had it really only been that morning she woke to Rachel's fingers? It seemed like months ago now.

But so much had happened since then.

That morning she never even heard of Hank Birdsong. Now he was dead, leaving behind nothing but questions that she desperately wanted to answer.

Jessie sighed. There was no point dwelling on it now. She picked up a menu and looked it over. There were more choices than her brain could handle at the moment. Everything looked good. Including the woman sitting across from her. She was easily the most appetizing thing in the restaurant. Jessie idly wondered if she could get an order of Clare Taylor to go.

Clare caught her staring and arched a querying brow. "What?"

"It's just good to see you."

Clare smiled over the rim of her wineglass. "It's good to see you, too."

Jessie thought back to the first time she met Clare. It was in the middle of a very high profile murder case, which she had been covering for the Sentinel. Clare was the chief prosecutor and watching her in the courtroom day after day had been mesmerizing. Just thinking about it made Jessie shiver. Clare owned the courtroom. There were few things more exciting than seeing Clare in action.

Of course, Jessie had been attracted to her right from the start. She used her press credentials to land an exclusive interview, and while it had been a journalistic coup it had also been a pretext for getting closer to the beautiful district attorney. Clare saw right through her. The two of them did get closer, though.

But it was the kind of closeness she had with Rachel. Only with Clare it wasn't distance that separated them, but their careers. If she and Clare had one thing in common it was their dedication to their work. Clare wasn't just a prosecutor; she lived and breathed the law. She took it personally, as if she alone were responsible for making sure bad people were brought to justice. And while it was that very quality Jessie found so attractive, it was also the reason she and Clare could never have a more stable relationship.

Jessie toyed with the stem of her wineglass. "Do you know anything about the Inferno?"

"Only that I've sent a few women there," Clare said.

"Ever get any complaints?"

"From the women I convicted?" Clare laughed and topped off her glass of wine. "All the time. For some reason they don't like it when I ship them off to prison."

"Ha ha," Jessie shot back. "I meant have you ever received any complaints about the prison?"

Clare eyed her coolly from across the table. "I didn't know our dinner conversation was going to be on the record."

"Sorry," Jessie said. "I didn't mean for it to sound like an interview."

"It's okay. I guess neither of us leave our work at the office."

"Even though we should sometimes," Jessie said.

"Yeah." Clare got wistful look. "This one time I was arguing with my ex and she accused me of cross-examining her. For some reason that little dig hurt more than catching her with another woman." She shrugged and downed a little wine. "Anyway, to answer your question, I don't know of any official complaints against the Inferno. Is this for a story?"

Jessie shook her head. "Just following up on something. Nothing important."

The waiter appeared at their table like an angel of mercy, rescuing them from the awkwardness of the moment. Jessie ordered the chicken parmesan though had second thoughts about her choice when Clare ordered the spinach and mushroom ravioli.

"I'm starving," Jessie lamented after the waiter left the table. "I hope it doesn't take forever."

"Oh it won't," Clare assured her.

"I guess the food here is worth waiting for."

"Mmhmm. And the company is very pleasant."

Jessie felt the side of Clare's foot rubbing up against her leg. Somehow she managed to keep a straight face. But it was tough. And getting a lot tougher the longer Clare kept playing footsie with her under the table.

"Are you trying to kill me?" Jessie asked between clenched teeth.

"Nope. I'm trying to turn you on. Is it working?"

"Yes."

Clare smiled. "Good. I thought after dinner we could go back to my place for dessert."

"Maybe we should get our food to go," Jessie said.

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Their clothes were scattered across the floor in record time.

Jessie tumbled back into bed and pulled Clare with her, the two of them finding time to laugh between kisses. Clare's delicate hands moved over her naked flesh with hungry determination, as if to claim her, possess her. Jessie didn't mind at all. In fact the ferocity in Clare's touch made her ache to feel those hands everywhere. She



arched her back to offer more of her body to Clare, leaving no doubt she was there for the taking. In answer to that offer Clare slipped a hand between her legs and stroked her damp flesh. Jessie groaned.

"You are so wet," Clare growled into her ear. "I forgot how fucking wet your pussy can get."

"It's all for you," Jessie replied, breathless.

"Lucky me, then."

Jessie cried out as Clare's fingers slid into her. She moved her hips in time to Clare's manic thrusts, tangling her fingers in silky brown hair as she held on for the ride of her life. Her cunt tightened greedily around Clare's fingers, pulling them in deeper, wanting more.

"Oh! Yes! Fuck me, baby! Fuck me!"

"Well, if you're going to insist," Clare answered with a laugh.

"I am ... aaaah!" Jessie's words were lost in a scream of pleasure as Clare plowed into her. The woman was an animal, an untamed beast for whom Jessie was just a piece of raw meat to be used.

And that's just how Jessie wanted it. She wanted to be fucked hard, ravaged, taken completely. At that moment she existed only to be Clare's plaything.

Jessie tightened her grip in Clare's soft tresses as she rode those fingers like a woman possessed. And wasn't she? Jessie was possessed with desire for Clare. It turned her into a snarling, foaming-at-the-mouth, cursing wretch. The crudest words dripped from her lips in answer to Clare's long, deep thrusts. Her body trembled uncontrollably. She had been taken over, consumed with lust. What else was that if no possession?

Soon Jessie could feel the first rumblings of climax stirring deep in her belly, like the first faint echoes of thunder signaling an approaching storm. Her pussy twitched in pre-orgasmic fits. Jessie bit down on her bottom lip and braced herself for the imminent rush of pleasure.

But it never came. And neither did she.

Clare slowed her pace to a crawl then stopped completely, gently withdrawing her fingers.

Flabbergasted, Jessie pulled back to look at her lover. "You have got to be kidding me."

"You know what I hard-ass prosecutor I am," Clare said, her smile turning truly wicked. "I never let anyone get off that easy."

"Ooh, you are so going to get it!" Jessie pushed Clare onto her back and pinned her down with a deep kiss. She paid no attention to the demands of the frisky hands sliding up and down her back, even when those hands grabbed the rounds of her ass and squeezed in submissive apology. She would not be hurried into action. It was payback time.

Jessie kissed a zigzagging line down Clare's throat, feeling her lover's pulse throbbing just under the skin. She followed that pulsating rhythm to Clare's breast and gingerly took a nipple into her mouth, sucking it like a precious stone that might crumble to dust if she handled it too roughly. Clare breathed a long sigh, raking fingers through her hair as she kissed and licked at her nipples. She took the same care with each plump nub, lightly flicking them with her tongue before sucking them, her lips barely making contact.

"Mmm ... oh ... baby, what are you doing to me?" Clare asked softly.

Jessie ignored her. She gave Clare's breast one more lingering kiss then inched lower, dragging her tongue across Clare's remarkably flat tummy. The path she blazed took her around Clare's navel for a quick detour then continued south, past her hips, to the unruly bush of thick hair between Clare's legs.

The sweet smell of needy pussy filled the air and Jessie breathed it in, savoring how desperately Clare wanted her. Clare proved that even further by spreading for her, thighs parting like the gates of heaven to let her inside. But Jessie wanted to raise a little hell first.

As a little teaser, Jessie flicked her tongue over Clare's slit. But it was more for her benefit than Clare's; she needed a taste of that yummy treat. And having gotten it, Jessie continued lower, dropping feather-light kisses from Clare's inner thigh down to her ankle. She was practically hanging off the edge of the bed when she reached the bottom of Clare's foot.

Jessie glanced up. The pitiful look on Clare's face more than made up for being taken to the edge of climax and yanked back before she could come. But she wasn't finished.

Holding Clare's gaze, Jessie took one of Clare's toes into her mouth and sucked it. She knew from experience this drove Clare absolutely bonkers and when Clare groaned Jessie knew it was working like gangbusters now. Her game of "this little piggy" soon had Clare writhing on the bed. The poor thing sounded so desperate.

Jessie crawled back between Clare's legs for more than a taste this time. She spread Clare's netherlips with her fingers then pushed her tongue in deep, hungrily lapping up the juices pooling inside. Clare grunted.

"That's it baby," Clare muttered. "Right there."

It occurred to Jessie that Clare's mouth could be put to much better use. She maneuvered into a sixty-nine and Clare wasted no time taking advantage of the situation. Even though Clare's tongue didn't end up where Jessie expected it, she was hardly about to complain. Instead she groaned into the hot, wet pussy in front of her as Clare's tongue flicked over her asshole.

Clare circled the tight little ring then pushed inside. Jessie answered by lashing Clare's nub of a clit. The two of them traded licks like dueling guitarists. Jessie purred in approval when Clare's tongue slid from her asshole to her slit. She showed her gratitude by pressing her lips to Clare's rock hard clit and sucking it. Clare moaned behind her.

The sudden need to bring Clare off took hold of Jessie. She dragged her tongue over Clare's glistening little pearl, flicking it serpent-like until she could feel the sugary walls of Clare's pussy trembling around her face. Even then she didn't stop.

It didn't stop Clare, either. Even as she came the woman never missed a beat, fucking her relentlessly with her tongue. Jessie felt the familiar twinge in her gut and idly wondered if Clare would let her climax this time. She got her answer when Clare slipped a finger in her ass. The combination of Clare's tongue up her cunt and a finger in her asshole pushed Jessie over the edge.

Jessie rolled off of Clare then crawled next to her. Their lips dripping with each other's come, the two of them kissed deeply, hungrily, sharing the kind of kisses that made it clear this was start of the evening not the end.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Jessie was convinced time stood still when she was on the treadmill. It was the slowest, most tedious half an hour of her life. There had to be some kind of disruption in the space-time continuum localized around the health club, some bubble where the rules of quantum physics didn't apply to those trapped inside. What else could it be?

Maybe it was just that she hated it so much.

Keeping up her brisk walk was getting tougher the more she thought about how much she didn't want to be doing it. Jessie sighed. She would much rather have spent the morning doing some vigorous calisthenics between the sheets with Clare. But the DA had an early court appearance.

It wasn't like the two of them hadn't worn each other out the night before, of course. But who could get enough of Clare Taylor? Jessie sure couldn't. She was insatiable where the brown-eyed district attorney was concerned. Fortunately for her Clare had an equally voracious appetite.

Jessie sighed. She had hoped memories of the night before would distract her from the monotony of her morning workout, but they only reminded her that she wasn't doing what she really wanted.

There was, however, one benefit to being at the club. The women. Lots of them. In tight spandex and sport bras. For ogling purposes, Jessie had a buffet of tasty dishes to choose from. She kept her eye on a Black woman a couple of treadmills down. Gorgeous. Skin the color of milk chocolate. The woman had on a lavender running suit that reminded Jessie of Easter candy. She wouldn't mind unwrapping her and finding out if she melted in her mouth instead of her hands.

Even as Jessie imagined that an Asian woman walked passed her and smiled. Jessie felt her pulse quicken. Though it had nothing to do with her workout. The woman was stunning! Her athletic figure was nicely on display in a tank top and tight bicycling shorts. Jessie couldn't remember ever seeing an ass so tight and round and perfect.

The timer on her treadmill chimed. Was she finished already?

Jessie hopped off the treadmill and headed into the locker room. She had to wind her way through the maze of metal lockers recently painted fire engine red to get to hers on the far side of the room. When she got there, she heard the distinctive ring of her cell phone.

"Shit!" Jessie fumbled with the combination to her locker, got the door open, then rummaged through her gym bag for her cell phone. She managed to get to it before it stopped ringing.

"Hello?"

"Where are you?"

It was Nina. Jessie sat down on the bench between the lockers and breathed a tired sigh.

"At the gym," Jessie said.

"Are you coming in today?"

Jessie used her shoulder to hold the cell phone to her ear and started to wiggle out of her T-shirt. "I wasn't planning on it."

"But I wanted to see you," Nina said.

The puppy-dog whine in Nina's voice made Jessie smile. It was kind of cute. "I'm sorry. I have an appointment with Elliot Eastman this afternoon."

"Speaking of him," Nina said, "I got some stuff for you on the Inferno."

Switching the phone to her other ear, Jessie shrugged off her T-shirt and tossed it into her gym bag. "Tell me."

"It's much more interesting when I tell it in person."

Jessie laughed. She imagined Nina back at the paper making a pouty face at the phone. "I'm sure. But tell me anyway."

"Yeah, okay," Nina said. It sounded like she was shuffling papers around, most likely organizing her notes. "Well, for starters there have been no official complaints against the Eastman Women's Correctional Facility."

Jessie kicked off her Reeboks. "Well that's a good thing."

"You'd think," Nina said. "But most state prisons receive hundreds of complaints a year, mostly from disgruntled inmates with nothing better to do. The complaints are usually dismissed, but they are a

matter of record. So either the inmates at the Inferno are treated unbelievably well or—"

"Or they're reluctant to complain," Jessie finished. She noticed the Black woman she had seen on the treadmill open a locker at the end of the row. Without being too obvious about it, Jessie watched the woman strip off her lavender running suit.

"And then there is this," Nina said, pausing dramatically. "About a month ago there was a prison riot. Somehow all the electrical systems and the backups failed. The prisoners were able to leave their cells. Fighting broke out. One of the inmates was killed. It was kept quiet."

It had to have been. This was the first time Jessie had even heard about it. She asked Nina, "Where did you get that?"

"You have your sources, I have mine," Nina said.

Jessie grunted. When she looked over at the Black woman again she had her top off and was starting to peel off her underwear. God, she had a great body!

"Anything else?" Jessie asked.

"Just one more thing," Nina replied. "Roz Mitchell. She was released from the Inferno two months ago. Her parole officer wouldn't give me a home address, but I did manage to find out she works as a mechanic at an auto shop on 17<sup>th</sup> and Grange."

Jessie nodded. She was more than impressed. "Not bad. We just might make a journalist out of you yet."

"Very funny," Nina said. "We can discuss how you're going to repay me later."

"Repay you?"

"Uh huh."

Jessie said, "I thought this was just part of your normal intern responsibilities."

"Well you thought wrong. This was way above and beyond the call of duty. So you owe me."

"I see," Jessie said. The Black woman tossed a glance in her direction then headed for the showers. "Tell you what. I'll call you when I get home tonight. We can discuss it then."

"What time?"

"I should be home around five."

"Talk to you then," Nina said.

Jessie switched off her cell phone and stuck it back in her gym bag. She finished getting undressed, stuffed everything into her locker, and followed after the Black woman with the gorgeous body in case she needed a little help washing certain places or something.

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The service station on the corner of 17<sup>th</sup> and Grange had once been part of a national chain, but a sign pasted over the faded outline of a corporate logo made it clear it was now Mitchell's Auto Repair.

Jessie parked her Volvo in the lot and went inside. There was no one at the front desk. In one corner a TV was tuned to the local news but the sound was turned down. There were a couple of chairs, a coffee maker, and some magazines but no customers to read them.

On the front desk was a shiny chrome tap bell with a sign written in magic marker that said, "Ring for service." Jessie rang it.

The man who appeared from the back office looked to be in his late twenties. He had on a navy blue pocket T-shirt and faded jeans. His scraggly brown hair was a little too long to look good and he was in desperate need of a shave. The nametag over his pocket named him Russell.

"Help you?" Russell asked.

"I'm looking for Roz Mitchell."

"She in trouble?"

"Not from me."

"Then why are you looking for her?"

Jessie took a deep breath and released it slowly. She doubted the conversation could get more frustrating, but she didn't want to risk it by letting her emotions get the better of her. "I'm having some problems with my car and a friend recommended I talk to Roz. So, is she here?"

"Yeah. Hang on," Russell said. He went through the door that connected the main office to the garage area.

After a couple of minutes Jessie began to wonder if Russell was somewhere telling Roz a woman was looking for her and that she



should beat it. But just when Jessie was about to give up a woman walked in from the garage.

"I'm Roz. Russell said you were looking for me?"

Jessie stared at her. For a moment she actually thought Russell had gone into the bathroom, shaved, pulled his hair into a ponytail, then slipped into a pair of grease-stained overalls. The resemblance was that uncanny. And if Russell hadn't appeared over Roz's shoulder Jessie might have thought it a lot longer.

"Um, yeah," Jessie said, collecting herself. "My car has been acting kind of funny. I heard you were the woman to see." She put added emphasis on woman. Roz caught on.

"Your car in the lot?"

"Yeah."

"Let's have a look, then."

Jessie followed Roz out the door and into the parking lot. Even with oil smeared over her cheeks and gunk under her fingernails, Roz Mitchell was a very attractive woman. She had Jessie wondering what she would look like all cleaned up.

"So Russell is your brother," Jessie said, hoping to jumpstart the conversation.

Roz laughed. "Noticed that, huh? Yeah. We're twins. Our parents named us Rosalind and Russell. Twisted people, my folks."

"I think it's cute," Jessie said.

Roz shot her a look. "I take it you don't like men. For mechanics, I mean."

"I'm more comfortable with women," Jessie said. "When she knows what she's doing."

"Don't worry," Roz said, "I know my way around an engine."

"I'm sure of that," Jessie said.

They reached her parked Volvo. Roz gave an impressed whistle.

"Nice car," Roz said.

Jessie smiled. "Thanks."

"So what exactly has she been doing?"

"Actually," Jessie said, "the car is running fine. That was just my excuse to talk to you about your time at the Inferno."

Roz turned to her. The flirtatious glimmer was gone from her eyes. "I think you better get the hell out of here now."

"I liked it better when we were using fixing cars as a euphemism for sex," Jessie said.

"Fuck this," Roz said. She started off.

Jessie grabbed Roz's arm to stop her. "I only want to ask you a few questions."

"Let go of me," Roz told her coldly, "or I'll knock you on your ass."

"I take it that's not a euphemism," Jessie said. She dropped Roz's arm. "I'm not here to hassle you, I promise. I'm a reporter with the Phoenix Sentinel and I'd like to talk to you about your time at the Inferno."

"No comment," Roz said. She started off.

Jessie gave it one more last-ditch effort. "Did you know a guard named Hank Birdsong?"

That got Roz's attention. She stopped, grunted in frustration, then said, without turning around, "Yeah. He was there. So what?"

"He's dead," Jessie said.

Roz turned around. The look of shock on her face seemed genuine. "Hank is dead?"

"Yes."

"Jesus," Roz muttered. She came back and leaned against the passenger door of the Volvo. "What happened?"

"He was murdered," Jessie said. "Hit in the back of the head. The police are investigating the possibility that he was mugged. I think there's more to it than that, which is why I'm here."

Roz shook her head. "I don't believe this."

"You did know him?"

"Sure," Roz said. She balled up her fist and pounded it against her thigh. "He was one of the few decent people I met in that hellhole. Hank actually treated you like a human being. And not because he wanted something in return, you know? Most times a guard treats you that well you know you're gonna end up on your knees. Hank wasn't like that."

Jessie nodded. "Did that kind of thing happen a lot at the Inferno?"

"It happened enough," Roz said. She glanced at Jessie. "You don't have to hide that look of disapproval you're trying so hard not to let me see. I don't expect you to understand. When you're inside, when the guards have your life in their hands, you do what you have to do to survive."

"And no one ever blew the whistle on them?"

Roz laughed. But it was a laugh without humor, a cold, bitter laugh that sent a chill down Jessie's spine. "You really do live in a different world, don't you? With your expensive car and designer jeans. Even if you do look good in them." She peered at Jessie's backside before continuing. "Prison life isn't real. It's like an alternate universe. The normal rules don't apply. Someone whines about it, that makes them weak. An easy target. And the guards? They don't forget. You can bet your cute little ass there'll be payback for anyone who squeals. So you learn to keep your mouth shut, do what you're told, and if you believe in God you pray you last long enough to get yourself out of there so you can start your life over." She took a deep breath and released it through pursed lips. "Any other questions?"

"I don't think so," Jessie said.

"Good," Roz said, nodding. She looked Jessie up and down then smacked her lips. "I better get back to work. Listen, uh, if you ever have any real problems with your car, or with anything else, call me. I'm pretty good with my hands."

"I'll keep that in mind," Jessie said. She returned Roz's crooked smile and watched her head back into the garage. For the first time since getting her new Volvo, Jesse sincerely hoped she had car trouble soon. Very soon.

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The Eastman Building was considered the crown jewel of downtown Phoenix. It was a hundred stories of metal and glass that towered over its neighbors, a gaudy, monolithic testament to corporate excess. The number of people who worked their was in the thousands.

But Jessie was only interested in one of them.

Jessie sat in the posh reception area outside Elliot Eastman's office thumbing through the latest issue of Newsweek pretending to be interested while she listened to Eastman's adorable young receptionist take (and mostly deflect) calls. Elliot Eastman was the chairman and CEO of the aptly named Eastman Enterprises, a multi-billion dollar conglomerate that had its hooks in a number of business ventures. Like building prisons. He was the kind of man people were desperate to talk to, if only for a minute or two. Jessie hadn't been promised much more.

From everything Jessie heard, Elliot Eastman was a man born too late. He had all the makings of an old-fashioned mogul, the kind that wielded unimaginable power before there had been antitrust laws to stop them.

But he was a Citizen Kane in an Enron world.

Though even with the restrictions placed on business Eastman had a lot of influence. After all, he had convinced the governor to go along with his plan to build a privately funded and operated women's prison.

Jessie knew Eastman didn't want to build it out of some altruistic notion of civic responsibility. The Inferno was built to snag state-subsidized profit. He built it, assumed all the construction and maintenance costs, then bilked the state for a hefty sum in users fees. Nice arrangement. Not all state lawmakers had been so keen on the idea as their governor, of course, but politicians always needed money, particularly near election time, and Eastman had plenty to spread around.

Ultimately, Eastman got the approval he needed. It seemed to be paying off for him, too.

"Ms. Greyhorse?"

Jessie looked up from her magazine. The receptionist was smiling at her. "Yes?"

"Mr. Eastman will see you now."

"Thanks," Jessie said. She tossed the Newsweek aside, smoothed out her appearance, then headed through the door the receptionist pointed out to her.

The office Jessie stepped into was bigger and better than her first apartment. Thick blue-gray carpet stretched from wall to wall. There was a black leather sofa on one wall. Bookcases, real wood, stained the color of honey, lined the opposite wall. The artwork was simple, elegant, and – no doubt – all original. No prints.

Eastman was behind an antique oak desk and stood to greet Jessie when she walked in. He wasn't nearly as impressive-looking as his office. Jessie knew from articles she had read on Eastman that he was in his late forties, though he looked older. His wispy salt and pepper hair was more salt than pepper. He had good taste in clothes, but the designer sweater and relaxed-fit cotton pants just made Eastman look like an average guy in an expensive outfit.

"Good afternoon, Ms. Greyhorse," Eastman said.

Jessie took his outstretched hand and shook it. "Thank you for seeing me, Mr. Eastman."

"Not a problem," Eastman said. He waved her into one of the chairs in front of his desk. "Please. Sit down."

"Thanks," Jessie said. She slid into one of the chairs and took out her notebook.

Eastman took his seat. He leaned forward, resting folded hands on the top of his desk. "Now. I understand you're writing an article on the success of our correctional facility.

"Yes," Jessie replied, nodding. She knew Eastman would never have agreed to an interview if she told him up front that she had serious questions about the way the Inferno was run. But Jessie was sure Eastman would gladly cooperate if he thought she was writing a puff piece that would be more like free advertising than journalism.

"We're very proud of this project," Eastman said, launching into his spiel. "The facility has vastly exceeded expectations. We've redefined what the average person normally thinks of as a prison, while maintaining a dedication to both the incarceration of serious offenders and the rehabilitation of those most capable of rejoining society."

"So time at the Inferno isn't just punishment for the guilty?" Jessie asked.

Eastman smiled. "We prefer to call it the Eastman Women's Correctional Facility."

"Sorry," Jessie said. "Most state facilities housing the kind of criminals that are sent to the Infer ... excuse me, to the Eastman Women's Correctional Facility, are inundated with complaints about the treatment of prisoners. You've managed to avoid that. How?"

Eastman thought about that one for a long moment before answering. "Our staff undergoes a rigorous training process to ensure that the abuses too common in state-run facilities are avoided. And of course, we are subject to the standards and regulations as defined by the Department of Corrections. Much of the credit for the success of the facility goes to our warden."

"And who would that be?"

"Alexa Tobler," Eastman said. "We interviewed a number of people for the job, but Alexa was by far the best choice. Her experience in law enforcement and management were unrivaled by the other candidates. This project simply would not have worked like it has without her."

Jessie made a note to check out her background. "Have there been any outbreaks of violence?"

"None."

"Really?" Jessie sat up a little straighter. "I heard a rumor that a riot broke out last month. Are you saying, for the record, that isn't true?"

For a moment Jessie thought Eastman was going to pop a gasket. The color of his cheeks went from white to red. When he spoke he measured his words out very carefully. "There was an unfortunate incident last month, yes. Main and backup power systems at the prison failed temporarily. The general prison population did get free of their cells for a brief period. In the confusion, one prisoner was, sadly, injured. She died two days later. We accepted full responsibility for the tragedy and her family was compensated. However, I take issue with your characterizing this event a riot. In spite of the power outage, our guards quickly restored order. This was an isolated incident."

"Noted," Jessie said. "Were you aware, Mr. Eastman, that one of your prison guards, Hank Birdsong, was found dead yesterday?"

Eastman nodded. "Yes. I was informed about that this morning. So very sad."

It was hard to tell if Eastman meant that or not. Jessie folded up her notebook. "Well. I think that's all. Thank you again for taking time out of your hectic schedule to answer my questions."

"Glad to," Eastman said. "I look forward to reading your article."

Jessie smiled. "I'll be sure to send you a copy."

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When Jessie got home it was well after five. She had no idea that spending the day driving around the city could be so tiring, but after her trips to the health club, Mitchell's Auto Repair, and finally the Eastman Building she was just about ready for bed. And she still had to call Nina at the office.

Jessie went through her standard just-got-home routine with much less enthusiasm than usual. After she kicked off her shoes at the front door she checked her answering machine. There was a particularly ribald message from Rachel and a reminder from her dentist that she had an appointment to have her teeth cleaned next week. What fun.

As she rummaged through the kitchen, Jessie tried to decide what running around the city all day had gotten her, other than a tempting invitation from a hot auto mechanic. As she suspected, there were abuses going on at the Inferno. If Hank Birdsong had been the nice guy Roz suggested he had been, it was certainly possible he was going to blow the whistle. But why now? Did it have something to do with the prisoner who died? She enjoyed seeing Eastman's little tap dance around that. But was she any closer to knowing why Hank Birdsong had been murdered?

The answer, unfortunately, was still no.

Jessie sighed. She hated feeling like she was chasing her tail. There had to be more she could do, better questions she could ask. The information was out there. Jessie just had to find it. At the moment, though, her brain was little more than a clump of mush.

Maybe she'd call Rachel later. After a long, hot bubble bath and some dinner a little naughtiness over the phone might be just what she needed.

Finding nothing in the fridge that interested her, Jessie decided on having Chinese food delivered. Perfect. She'd call Nina, order her dinner, then slip into the tub. Sounded like a good plan to her.

But that plan changed in a heartbeat when she got to her bedroom.

Nina was reclined on the bed, naked, with her legs spread open wide, working a blue-green dildo in and out of her cunt. She was really into it, too, pumping hard, breathing harder, her look intense, her pussy glistening.

Standing in the doorway, Jessie was first shocked then mesmerized by the sight before her. The young intern had an incredible body, slender and curvy, with a thick bush like red shag carpet and firm breasts that jiggled from the effort she put into riding the dildo. The fake cock looked awfully familiar, but Jessie was so entranced by watching Nina that it took her a minute to realize why it looked so familiar ... that was her dildo!

Conflicting emotions coursed through her. In the end, Jessie was torn between the two most powerful ones ... arousal and anger. It was hard to know which one would ultimately win out.

Nina finally noticed her standing there and smiled sweetly, as if she were playing with dolls and not sliding a dildo into her cunt. "It's about time you got home. I started without you."

"How did you get in here?" Jessie asked.

"I remembered you mentioning once how you locked yourself out of the house, and ever since kept a spare set of keys in your desk."

Nina told her all that without once stopping the activity between her legs. Jessie didn't know whether to be impressed or further outraged.

"And that thing?" Jessie asked, quirking an eyebrow.

"Oh, I found this in your nightstand," Nina said. "It's nice. Did you get it at that sex shop on Pearson Avenue? They have a really nice selection. I got my vibrator there."



Jessie shook her head, incredulous. "Just so we're clear. You went into my desk, took the keys to my house, came over, let yourself in, and went through my drawers?"

"Well, I took a pee somewhere in there," Nina said. "But otherwise, yeah. You should really think about an alarm system. Expensive, yeah, but you can afford it. So are you going to come over here and join me or just watch?"

The surrealism of the moment made Jessie want to laugh. Was this really happening? Were the two of them actually having this conversation, and doing so while Nina got off with one of her dildos? She couldn't believe it.

"What I should do," Jessie said, "is throw you out on your ass."

"Well that's no fun," Nina said. She plunged the dildo in deeper. "Why don't you fuck me instead?"

"You seem to be doing just fine without me," Jessie pointed out.

Nina curled her lips into the cutest little pout. "Come on. Take off your clothes. I want to see you naked."

Something in the way Nina said that made Jessie shudder excitedly. No one ever told her they wanted to see her naked. Plenty of women had been eager to get her naked, but that had always just been a means to an end. But Nina actually wanted to see her in the buff, to look at her. Jessie never felt so sexy, so desired. She couldn't say no.

Under Nina's intense gaze, Jessie started to get undressed. She very slowly and deliberately undid the buttons of her blouse then shrugged it off. Her jeans were next. Jessie popped the snaps open then unzipped her fly before wiggling out of them. Nina hummed with approval.

Jessie now stood there in just her bra and panties. She saw the anticipation in Nina's eyes, noticed that she was working the dildo in and out a little faster now, and waited a moment before unhooking her bra and taking it off. Nina whimpered softly at the sight of her now bare breasts, the redhead's tongue poking out slightly between her lips. Jessie made Nina wait a little longer before she pushed her panties down over her hips to at last stand there naked.

"Well?" Jessie asked.

Nina sighed dreamily. "You are so beautiful."

Blushing a little, Jessie crossed the room and got into bed with Nina. She propped herself up on side and smiled at the redhead. "Mind if I take over?"

"Please," Nina whispered.

Jessie wrapped her fingers around the base of the blue-green dildo and thrust the fake cock deep into Nina's cunt. The redhead groaned. Jessie stared into Nina's eyes as she fucked her, sliding the dildo in and out to a hard, pounding beat. With each penetrating thrust the pretty young intern moaned. Her face glistened with a fine patina of sweat. Jessie kept at it, pumping the faux cock into Nina harder and faster, never taking her eyes off that beautiful face. She wanted to see Nina come.

"Rub your clit for me," Jessie told her.

With an eager nod, Nina did what she asked, fingering her clit at a frantic pace. Jessie's cunt twitched with need as she watched the redhead approach climax. She worked the dildo into Nina's pussy, almost daring her to get off. Nina answered each thrust with a moan, rubbing her clit faster and faster while Jessie fucked the intern harder and harder. She saw a spark in Nina's eyes and knew the redhead was about to come. Then Nina groaned and her hips bucked.

Jessie felt the most pleasant warmth move through her as she watched the blissful look that spread over Nina's face. She slipped the dildo out of the redhead's cunt and brought it to her lips, greedily licking off Nina's juices. The panting intern smiled.

"Taste good?"

"Mmhmm," Jessie purred.

"I know where you can get more."

Jessie laughed. She set the dildo on the nightstand for now and pulled Nina into a kiss. The redhead proved to be a great kisser. It made Jessie wonder what other skills Nina had that she didn't know about.

Pulling back, her breathing coming in short, ragged gasps, Jessie looked at Nina and said, in a hungry growl, "I want your mouth on me first."

Nina agreed with a nod.

Pushing Nina flat on the bed, Jessie straddled the redhead's face. She heard Nina moan underneath her then impatient hands grabbed the rounds of her ass and pulled her cunt down to a starved, ravenous mouth.

Jessie groaned as Nina's tongue slithered up her cunt. The redhead was definitely more than just a good kisser! Jessie bounced up and down on the talented intern's face, humping her, riding her, reaching down to diddle her clit while Nina licked her from below. She couldn't remember ever being this aggressive with a lover before, but something about Nina brought out the lusty animal in her.

"That's it baby," Jessie muttered. "Lick my pussy. Make me come all over your pretty face."

The groan from between her legs made it clear Nina wanted that almost as much as she did.

Jessie rocked her hips like a bitch in rut, fingering her clit as Nina's tongue probed even deeper into her pussy. She could feel the burn down inside her belly and steeled herself for the surge of joy she knew would soon arrive. But even though she knew it was coming Jessie wasn't prepared for the power and force of the orgasm that ripped through her loins. It tore through her like a knife. She screamed in pleasure, thrusting her cunt hard against Nina's mouth.

When the last shudder of climax faded, Jessie slid off Nina's face and fell onto the bed with a satisfied sigh. The redhead quickly snuggled up next to her and started to play with her breast.

"Do you always come like that?"

Jessie laughed. "You inspired me."

"I'd like to inspire you again," Nina said.

"Mmmm," Jessie murmured. She really liked the way Nina teased her nipple. "I think that can be arranged. But how about dinner first?"

"As long as we order in," Nina said, bending down to suckle at Jessie's breast. "I don't want to get dressed."

Jessie moaned softly. She couldn't have agreed more.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Jessie stared down at the naked woman sleeping next to her and smiled fondly. In the morning light, face pressed into a pillow, the bedcovers not quite covering her freckled shoulders, Nina looked even more beautiful than Jessie remembered. She seemed almost angelic. It was hard to believe this same woman had whispered the nastiest suggestions into her ear the night before. Even harder for Jessie to believe was that she had done them. Repeatedly.

Lying there, Nina also looked a lot younger than Jessie remembered. She really had no business going to bed with college students, especially ones that were interning with the paper over the summer! Not that Nina had given her much of a chance to say no. The redhead was irresistible. Jessie wouldn't have been able to say no, even if she wanted to ... which she certainly hadn't.

Even so, Jessie did feel a little embarrassed about what happened the night before. She brushed an errant strand of red hair from Nina's face. This gorgeous woman was fifteen years her junior. But did that really matter? Jessie supposed not. It wasn't like she had taken advantage of Nina. If anything, Nina had the upper hand in all this. The gap in their ages was considerable, though.

Still, Jessie didn't regret what happened. Not even a little bit.

Jessie noticed Nina twitch in her sleep. She smiled. The woman was so beautiful! Dropping a kiss on the redhead's exposed shoulder, Jessie carefully slipped out of bed, padded quietly across the bedroom floor, grabbed her robe from its hangar on the back of the door, then headed down to the kitchen.

It was after eight.

Jessie got the coffee maker started then spent a good five minutes staring at the inside of fridge looking for something to have for breakfast other than leftover fried rice. There wasn't much, though. She decided on a bagel.

That was a much easier decision to make than what she wanted to do next with her story.

While she got out a bread knife and sliced her bagel, Jessie considered her options. She could talk to the family of the inmate who died last month in the so-called riot. But Eastman said the family had been compensated for their loss, so even if they had any useful information – which wasn't even a given – chances were the financial settlement from Eastman Enterprises came with a strict nondisclosure agreement attached to it. So Jessie doubted she would learn much from talking to them. It would give her something to do, but it wouldn't advance her story much.

The other choice she had, of course, was to check in with Ganz and see how the official investigation was coming along. It might even be time to let him know that Birdsong wanted to talk with her the same morning he was found dead. But again, Jessie didn't think it would prove very useful. Until she got any other ideas, though, it was the best she could do.

Jessie heard the shuffle of approaching footsteps and turned around. Nina appeared in the doorway to the kitchen. She looked adorable though a little sleepy. The cute redhead had obviously been through her drawers again looking for something to put on. But the T-shirt she picked was barely long enough to cover her pussy.

Not that Jessie minded looking at it.

"Is there coffee?" Nina asked.

"There will be in a minute."

Nina closed the distance between them and slid her hands over Jessie's waist. "Good morning," she said, leaning to kiss her.

The touch of Nina's lips sparked pangs of longing in Jessie. Her mind flashed on where those lips had kissed her, the pleasure those lips had brought her. She put her arms around Nina and hugged her close as the kiss deepened. When the need to breathe finally drove a wedge between them Nina sighed and crushed her face into Jessie's chest.

"Good morning," Jessie said. She slid her hands up and down Nina's back. "Are you hungry?"

"Starved," Nina said, nuzzling her. "What have you got to eat?"

"Well, I'm having a bagel. Feel free to see what you can find."

Nina gave her a quick kiss then opened the fridge and bent down to see what she could find. The T-shirt she had on, already not long enough to cover her, rode up when she leaned forward, giving Jessie a lovely view of the redhead's ass and the soft, pink netherlips that peeked out slightly between her legs.

"You so have to go food shopping," Nina told her.

"It's on the to-do list," Jessie said. She really wanted to put Nina on that list. "What about you? Got any plans for today?"

Nina looked her way and smiled. "I'd like to recap some of the many highlights from last night. But the people who sponsor the internship at the paper tend to get a little cranky when the interns blow off work." She closed the fridge and leaned back against the door. "You decide what to do with your story?"

"Not really," Jessie said, venting her frustration with a sigh. "I'm getting close to the grasping of straws part of journalism."

"You could interview other prison guards," Nina suggested enthusiastically. "I could get a list of names for you."

Jessie thought about that. "It might be kind of fun to put them in the hot seat and watch them squirm. But I doubt any of them will be forthcoming, and if I badger them with accusations they'll just deny everything and I'll be right back where I started." She blew out a long, deep breath. "There has to be another angle to this. Something that will break this story wide open, something that will expose the truth about what's going on at the Inferno."

"You are so unbelievably sexy when you get in that whole reporter groove," Nina said in a low, husky voice that made it clear she was seriously turned on. "In the end, the problem is always the same. You're on the outside looking in. It's kind of hard to know the truth about what goes on in that place unless you're actually in that place."

Jessie froze suddenly. That was it! That was the idea she had been looking for. Why hadn't she thought of it sooner? God! It was perfect! She let out an excited laugh and grabbed Nina's wrist, pulling the redhead to her.

"You are brilliant!"

"Me?" Nina asked, confused. "What did I do?"

"Everything," Jessie said. She put her arms around Nina and smiled. "Out of the mouths of babes. Oooh. I could just kiss you right now, you know?"

"I wouldn't object to that," Nina replied softly.

Jessie smiled and bent forward to capture Nina's lips with her own. The kiss was deep and burned with the same intense desire that kept the two of them up so late. Their tongues took swipes at each other, playful and teasing. Jessie moaned when Nina slid a hand inside her robe and cupped a breast. She wanted this woman so much! How was it that she could need her this bad, and so soon?

But she did.

Spinning them both around, Jessie pushed Nina back against the counter with a grunt. She slipped her hand between Nina's legs and fondled the pink cuntlips she spied earlier. The redhead groaned.

"Inside," Nina pleaded between kisses, trying desperately to hump her hand. "Go inside."

Since Jessie apparently couldn't say no to the young intern she didn't even try to now, instead obediently thrusting two fingers into the redhead's sopping wet cunt. She slid her fingers in and out, hard, fast, using her thumb to tease Nina's swollen bud of a clit. Nina moaned.

"Jessie, yes, fuck me," Nina muttered. She grabbed two fistfuls of bathrobe and held on for the ride. "Fuck me!"

There was nothing Jessie wanted to do more. She drove even deeper into Nina, thumbing her clit, keeping at it until she felt the redhead's slick flesh tighten around her fingers. Nina cried out and jerked forward, leaning against her for support. And maybe for other reasons, too.

Jessie put her arms around Nina and held the intern close, breathing in the smell of her hair, enjoying the feel of that slender young body pressed to hers. She never wanted to let go, though Jessie knew she would have to.

Eventually, anyway.

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Jessie was bubbling over with excitement as she wandered through the county courthouse downtown. She was definitely in the reporter groove, as Nina referred to it. What she had in mind, if she could actually pull it off, was the best idea she'd had since her idea to keep a set of spare house keys in her desk drawer.

But she couldn't do what she had in mind alone.

After Nina left, Jessie called Clare at the office. The snooty receptionist who answered the phone informed her District Attorney Taylor had a case to prosecute that morning. So now Jessie moved through the busy corridors of the county courthouse, looking for the particular courtroom where Clare's trial was taking place.

The courthouse was buzzing with the usual activity. But then there was rarely a dull moment around the place. Cops, lawyers, and the hard-to-figure-out courtroom groupies shuffled back and forth through the marbled halls. Jessie had spent her fair share of time at the courthouse covering trials, and while she had a general sense of where things were she still had to ask security for directions. She might have seemed suspicious if not for the press pass around her neck.

After much frantic searching (and lots of help from security), Jessie finally found the courtroom she was looking for. She quietly slipped inside and found a place to sit toward the back, getting settled as witness took the stand and was sworn in.

Then Clare stood up.

The DA looked incredible in a black jacket over a turquoise blouse, the modest skirt she wore showing off a pair of great legs. Jessie squirmed a little in her seat. But watching Clare at work always had that effect on her. The woman was amazing in a courtroom. This was her turf. She ruled there. And Clare proved it with each question she tossed at the man in the witness chair. Jessie sighed. Damn, Clare was good.

When the witness was finally excused the judge declared court adjourned for lunch. People started to file out of the courtroom. Jessie waited until the crowd thinned out a little then made her way up the aisle.



Clare was stuffing papers into her briefcase when Jessie reached her.

"You were great out there," Jessie said.

Clare looked up, a smile tugging at the corners of her mouth when she saw her standing there. "Well, this is a pleasant surprise. Are you here covering a trial?"

"Actually," Jessie said, "I came down here to see you."

"Oh," Clare chirped, grinning broadly. "Well, I sure hope my good luck continues through the rest of this trial."

Jessie shook her head and laughed. "You can save the lines for someone else. Watching you grill a witness more than does the trick for me."

"Good to know," Clare said, gathering her things off the prosecutor's table. "Why don't we go somewhere and talk?"

Jessie nodded.

The two of them left the courtroom together. Clare led Jessie to a small conference room, one of several in the courthouse where lawyers could consult with their clients or prepare witnesses to testify. It was nothing fancy, just a table and a few chairs. Very bare bones.

When the door was closed behind them, Clare set her briefcase on the table and pulled Jessie into a kiss. Jessie quickly got over her surprise and returned the kiss, hungrily, running her hand up Clare's thigh. She loved the feel of Clare's smooth pantyhose under her fingertips.

"This isn't why I came down here," Jessie whispered between kisses.

Clare laughed. "I didn't think so. But I couldn't help myself."

"Hey, I'm not complaining," Jessie replied. She slipped her hand under Clare's skirt, giving her tight ass a squeeze. Clare whimpered.

"I better stop while I still can," Clare said, pushing away. She straightened out her disheveled clothes and took a deep breath. "Okay. Now. What did you want to see me about?"

Jessie sat down at the conference table and gestured for Clare to do the same. When the DA was sitting across from her Jessie leaned

forward a little and said, "I want to go inside the Inferno, undercover, so I can write a story on prison abuse."

"Excuse me?" Clare stared at her like she'd just announced she used to be a man.

"Hear me out," Jessie said. She took a moment to collect her thoughts. "Two days ago I got a message from a man named Hank Birdsong. He said he wanted to talk to me, but he didn't say why. That same morning he turned up dead." A look of concern registered on Clare's face. Jessie continued. "It turns out he was a prison guard at the Inferno, though apparently he didn't want to keep working there. I did some legwork and from what I hear not everything at that place is on the up and up. Last month an inmate died. So here's what I think. Hank Birdsong called me because he wanted to blow the whistle on what was happening out at the Inferno. But someone killed him before he could talk to me." She let out a long breath. "Well?"

"Do you have any idea what you're suggesting?" Clare asked.

Jessie nodded. "I have to go in there, Clare. I need to see for myself what is going on."

"Absolutely not," Clare said. "It's too dangerous. You think you're tough, Jess. And maybe you are. But we're talking a maximum-security state prison. I've put women in that place. I know the kind of people that get sent there."

"I'm willing to accept the risks," Jessie said.

"But I'm not," Clare snapped back. "Not as your friend, and not as an officer of the court. If anything happened to you while you were in there, me and my office would be responsible. No. I can't sanction that."

"Damn it, Clare," Jessie huffed, slamming her fist down on the conference table. "A man was killed to stop the truth about that place from coming out. I'm sure of that. And by trying to get in touch with me he put me right in the middle of it. I can't let it go now. And I won't."

Clare thought about that. "All right. Let's suppose I agreed with you. What exactly do you want me to do?"

"You're the District Attorney," Jessie reminded her. "I'm sure you can figure out some pretext to get me in there."

"I think you're overestimating the influence of my office," Clare said.

"Maybe," Jessie said. "But I'm not overestimating the influence of the person currently holding that office."

Clare smiled. "You can save the lines for someone else. Seeing you all worked up over a story more than does the trick for me."

"Good to know," Jessie answered, laughing. "Well?"

"Let me think about this," Clare said. "Okay?"

Jessie agreed with a nod. "Fair enough."

"I'm due back in court, soon," Clare said. She looked across the conference table and sighed. "Damn. I sure would like to throw you down on this table and fuck you silly. Oh, well. I'll touch base with you later."

"Thanks," Jessie said.

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Even though Jessie had gotten her keys back from Nina, when she got home later that night she half-expected to find the hot little redhead in her bed again, naked, getting off with another one of her sex toys. Instead she found an apologetic message from Nina on her answering machine saying that she had to have dinner with her parents, but she was looking forward to a "repeat performance" of the night before as soon as possible. Nina left a phone number and asked her, in what Jessie considered a very seductive voice, to please call.

Jessie knew she had to be careful with Nina. She could easily see herself falling for the young intern, and while that wasn't exactly a bad thing it was a complicated thing. But she would definitely give Nina a call. The cute redhead wasn't the only one looking forward to a repeat performance of the night before.

There was still no word from Clare.

Getting a bottle of beer out of the fridge, Jessie went into the living room and plopped down on the sofa. While she still thought her idea to go inside the Inferno undercover was a damn good one, her enthusiasm was waning. Clare was right; there were risks involved.

But Jessie meant what she told Clare that morning. She was willing to accept those risks in order to expose the truth about life at the Inferno. And there was something going on there to expose. Every instinct she had as a journalist told her so. That might not mean very much to some people, but over the years Jessie had learned to trust that instinct, that inner voice speaking in whispers.

Convincing Clare to act on that instinct was another matter. Jessie took a swig of beer. She knew she was asking a lot from her friend. But she never would have done so if the cause weren't important to her, if she didn't feel strongly about getting to the bottom of this case. She always considered herself a dedicated reporter, but Jessie couldn't remember ever feeling as though she had such a personal stake in a story. In the past she had been able to maintain her professional detachment. It was necessary, not only for her to remain neutral but also for her own survival. Reporting the kinds of stories she did, on the beat she covered, Jessie knew if she let the heartbreak and suffering get to her she would be useless inside a week.

But this story had gotten to her when others hadn't. Hank Birdsong made it personal when he chose to get in touch with her, and she couldn't undo it. She was in this for the long haul. No matter what happened.

The doorbell rang.

Jessie set her bottle of beer on the coffee table and got up to answer it. She wanted it to be Nina outside but when she opened the door and saw that it was Clare she was hardly disappointed. The DA was still wearing her black jacket and turquoise blouse, and her skirt still showed off a very nice pair of legs. She had her briefcase with her.

"Clare, hi," Jessie said.

The DA smiled sheepishly. "Sorry I didn't call first."

"That's all right," Jessie assured her, motioning her inside. She closed the door behind them and shooed Clare into the living room. "Can I get you anything?"

Clare spotted her bottle of beer on the coffee table and pointed. "One of those would be great."

"You bet. Have a seat."

"Thanks."

Jessie went into the kitchen and got another bottle of beer. When she returned to the living room Clare was getting comfortable on the sofa. She handed her the bottle then grabbed her beer off the coffee table and sat down next to her.

"So how was your day?" Jessie asked.

"Frustrating," Clare said, taking a sip of beer. "This new case wasn't mine to start out with. The ADA who was supposed to be prosecuting it came down with the flu, so I took over at the last minute. He did a piss-poor job preparing, and I'm playing catch-up on top of it. And then, as if that wasn't bad enough, this gorgeous woman showed up at court today and teased me. She gets me all cranked up then leaves me hanging. I couldn't stop thinking about her all day."

"Sounds like a real bitch," Jessie said.

"Nah," Clare said. "She's pretty sexy."

Jessie smiled. "I'm sure she thinks you are, too."

"I hope so," Clare said. She had a little more beer. "Now I suppose you want to pick up on that interesting conversation we had this afternoon."

"Uh huh."

"Figured as much," Clare said. "Well, I thought about. And even though it goes against my better judgment, I'm in."

"Thank you," Jessie said, releasing the breath she'd been holding.

Clare wagged a finger at her. "Don't thank me just yet. There are conditions. For starters, I'm only giving you three days. And that's nonnegotiable. So don't even think of making those puppy-dog eyes at me. It won't work. You have three days, and then I come to get you. If you don't have what you need for your story by then? Too bad. You're leaving with me. Got it?"

"Got it," Jessie said. "So how is this going to work?"

Clare drank some more beer. "I created a file on you. It only exists in the computer. Nothing on paper. As far as the system is concerned, you are a repeat offender who, as part of a plea bargain with the DA's office, has agreed to a five-year sentence at the Inferno

for felony assault. If anyone asks, you shot a guy in the leg while holding up a convenience story."

"I'm such a bad ass," Jessie said.

That prompted a snort from Clare. "Your bad ass alter ego is scheduled to be picked up at the courthouse tomorrow. It'll look like, as part of your plea agreement, you're cooperating with me on another case. With me so far?"

"Yeah," Jessie said. "So what do I have to do?"

"Meet me at the courthouse tomorrow morning," Clare said. "Eight o'clock. You don't need to bring anything with you. I'll make sure you have what you need."

Jessie nodded. "Thanks, Clare. You have no idea how much this means to me."

"You can thank me by getting out of there in once piece," Clare said. She leaned closer. "Inmates are allowed phone calls. They're monitored, and you have to keep them short, but you are allowed them. If anything goes wrong, and I mean anything, or you start to feel uneasy about the whole thing then you call me. Okay? Don't stick it out just to prove how tough you are. Just call me. If you can't get a hold me, leave a message. All I need to see is your name and I'll know what it's about. Do you have any questions?"

"I don't think so," Jessie said. She probably did have questions, a million of them, but she was too jazzed at the moment to think straight.

Clare took a long sip of beer. "I wasn't kidding, you know. What I said before? I really did think about you all day today. That was no fair getting me so worked up."

"Who kissed who?" Jessie asked.

"Who had whose hands under whose skirt?"

"Okay," Jessie said, "that was me."

Clare smiled. She reached over and slid her free hand along Jessie's leg. "You can make it up to me. One for the road, maybe? You'll have to do without for the next three days. That might be a record for you."

"You don't think I'll get any on the inside?" Jessie teased.

"You've been watching too many women-in-prison movies on cable," Clare said. "There's no hanky-panky allowed where you're going."

Jessie sighed as Clare's hand moved further up her thigh. "Then I guess I better get some while I can."

"Smart thinking," Clare said.

Setting their beers aside, Jessie pulled Clare into a kiss. Though it wasn't a kiss so much as a mauling. Clare's lips were ferocious against hers, hot, hungry, demanding. Jessie grunted under the strain, barely able to keep up with Clare. She really must have worked Clare into a lather that afternoon! The DA pawed at her, tugging at her shirt to get it off her. Jessie returned the favor, dipping her hand under Clare's skirt like she had in the conference room at the courthouse. She eased her hand along Clare's inner thigh, the silkiness of her stockings making her ache with desire. Clare moaned in answer.

But her touch inspired more than just a soft moan from Clare. The DA lifted her shirt up over her head, tossed it aside, then went to work on her bra. Jessie helped out. Between the two of them it was quickly gone, too, and her bare breasts were out in the open for Clare to play with. And she did. Clare groped and fondled her breasts, squeezing a moan out of her. How could hands so soft give her breasts such rough treatment? Jessie didn't know ... and didn't care. Just so long as Clare kept touching her.

Clare did better than that. She snatched a bottle off the coffee table and drizzled a little beer over her breasts. The ice-cold beer turned her nipples to stone on contact. Jessie tossed her head back with a deep moan. Clare kissed her again then bent down and latched onto one of her beer-soaked nipples, sucking it. Dizzy with pleasure, Jessie combed her fingers through Clare's brown tresses as the DA suckled at her breast, kissing it, tongue fluttering lightly over her rock-hard nipple. Clare gave her other breast equal attention, dragging another pitiful moan out of her before moving to nibble on her earlobe.

"You taste good dipped in beer," Clare told her. "Maybe I should do that again ... somewhere else."

Jessie whimpered. She would have begged Clare to do it if she could manage to form words. But that skill was beyond her. All she could was grunt and moan, as if she had regressed to the Neanderthal stage of human evolution. Jessie. Want. Fuck. Clare didn't need a translation.

Pushing her flat on the sofa, Clare started to undo her jeans. The determined district attorney made short work of it, pulling them down then slipping off Jessie's panties. Jessie hooked one leg over the sofa and planted her other foot on the floor, spreading for Clare like a cheap slut. Clare didn't seem to mind, though. She grabbed the bottle of beer again and poured a stream of amber liquid into Jessie's gaping cunt.

The cold beer splashing against her hot cuntlips made Jessie groan. Then Clare leaned into her and began slurping the beer from her pussy and her groans became a constant, pitiful wail. She wriggled on the sofa, head rolling from side to side as Clare drank from her cunt. When the beer disappeared Clare refilled, topping her off again and again. Jessie thrust her hips at Clare, wordlessly begging for more.

But the beer only lasted so long.

Still holding the bottle, Clare slowly dragged the ridged head over her slit. Jessie sucked in a long, deep breath and released it slowly. She knew what Clare had in mind and wanted her to do it, wanted it more than she ever wanted anything in her life. When their eyes met Jessie made that clear, not with words, but with the intense look on her face. Clare nodded.

Jessie slammed her head back against the sofa as Clare shoved the neck of the beer bottle into her cunt. She was overpowered by the various stimuli assaulting her senses. The cool, smooth glass sliding into her, the ribbed end rubbing against her soft folds, the always-delightful feeling of having something deep inside her. It all merged into one mind-numbing sensation. Jessie was delirious with pleasure as Clare fucked her with the beer bottle, thrusting deeper into her burning pussy. She pounded her fists on the sofa, hissing and growling like a rabid dog. Her insides were twisted in painful knots but Clare leaned closer to ease that tension, playfully flicking her clit.



In a sharp, jabbing surge Jessie came, heaving forward, her toes curling so far back she thought she could feel the top of her foot. Her cunt throbbed long after the lingering ripples of orgasm faded, leaving her breathless.

When Jessie opened her eyes Clare was hovering over her on all fours, grinning. Had she blacked out for a moment? Or had she just been so lost in her own pleasure that she didn't even notice Clare straddling her?

Jessie cupped the back of Clare's head and pulled that lush mouth down to hers. The kiss was deep, passionate, and when the two of them at last came up for air Jessie giggled and said, "Oh yeah. I can go three days without this. No problem."

## CHAPTER SIX

Jessie got to the courthouse a little before eight. She paced back and forth in the foyer, impatiently waiting for Clare to get there. Where the hell was the DA, anyway? Taking a much-needed breath, Jessie tried hard to relax. Her pulse was racing a mile a minute and it felt like a swarm of bees decided to use her belly as their new hive.

This was really happening. In a few hours she would be an inmate at the Eastman Women's Correction Facility ... the Inferno. Was she crazy for doing this?

Jessie had been asking herself that ever since Clare left the night before. She wasn't jetting off to Club Med for a few days; she was going to prison. Hardly a vacation. And the Inferno got its nickname for a reason. It was Hell. If her suspicions were correct, if there were abuses going on there, and if Hank Birdsong had been murdered to keep him from spilling the beans about those abuses, that made the Inferno even more dangerous.

And she was going there? Voluntarily? She must have lost her mind!

Sitting down on a bench, Jessie patted her growling tummy. She knew she really should have had a little something for breakfast, a piece of fruit or some crackers, but she was just too damn nervous. It was doubtful she would have been able to keep anything down anyway, so why bother?

Jessie reminded herself she would only be at the Inferno for three days. She wasn't sure that was enough time to gather all the information she needed, but Clare was adamant about the time limit and Jessie wasn't in a position to argue. It might even work to her advantage. Deadlines always brought out the best in her. That was true back in college, and even more so now she was a reporter. For whatever reason, when the clock was ticking and the heat was turned up, Jessie rose to the occasion. Some people cracked under pressure; she thrived on it.

So with only three days, Jessie would have to make the most of her time.

Jessie finally spotted Clare amid the throngs of people hurrying through the courthouse doors. She stood up, a little too quickly, and wiped her clammy palms on the legs of her khakis. Clare wore a variation of her usual court-appearance outfit. She had a gym bag slung over her shoulder. The DA saw her and waved, dodging through pedestrian traffic to reach her. Jessie forced a smile.

"Good morning," Jessie said.

Clare returned the smile. "Good morning. You look like hell, Jess. Did you get any sleep?"

"A little," Jessie replied sheepishly. It wasn't a total fib. She had dozed off between the tosses and turns. But she hadn't gotten much rest. Her nervous excitement wouldn't allow it.

"Well come on," Clare said.

The two of them skipped idle conversation while Jessie followed Clare down the crowded halls and into the same little conference room she and Clare used the day before. The DA closed the door behind them and made sure all the blinds were closed before turning to her, the weary expression on her face making Jessie swallow hard.

"What's wrong?"

"Just having second thoughts," Clare said. "Aren't you?"

"No," Jessie said.

"You really want to go through with this?"

"Uh huh."

"All right," Clare said. She set the gym bag down on the table with a resigned sigh. "Take of your clothes."

Jessie arched an eyebrow. "Do you really think we have time for that?"

"Don't I wish," Clare said. She snorted. "You need to change into prison fatigues. Now strip. We don't have a lot of time here."

Jessie didn't argue. She kicked off her shoes then started to unbutton her blouse. There was nothing seductive or playful about it. Clare wasn't even paying attention. Jessie might as well have been in her doctor's office about to get a physical. She slipped off her blouse then unsnapped her khakis, slowly pushing them over her hips and stepping out of them. Though Jessie felt a little silly standing there in

her underwear and white cotton ankle socks, when Clare looked over at her and breathed in sharply it more than made up for it.

"What I wouldn't give for an extra twenty minutes," Clare muttered. She pulled a bright orange jumpsuit out of her gym bag and tossed it to her. "Here. Put this on."

Jessie nodded. She slipped into the jumpsuit while Clare stashed her clothes into the bag. "How do I look?"

"Like an Oompa-loompa on steroids," Clare said, handing her a simple pair of white canvas slip-on sneakers. "These go with the outfit."

Jessie took the sneakers from Clare and put them on. To her surprise, the shoes and the jumpsuit were actually very comfortable. Not that she expected to feel like a criminal the minute she put them on. But she thought there would be some small change in her. She watched Clare stash the rest of her stuff in the gym bag then the DA turned around and looked her up and down.

"Are you wearing any jewelry?"

Jessie shook her head. "Left it all at home."

"Makeup?"

"Nope."

"You look better without it," Clare mused.

There was a knock at the door. Jessie felt her gut tighten a little, though it was hard to tell if that was hunger or nerves. Or both.

"This is it," Clare said. "Last chance. You sure you still want to go through with this?"

Jessie bit down on her lower lip. Of course she still wanted to go through with it. That didn't mean she wasn't a little scared at the thought of what she was getting into. But she had to do it. Scared or not, she had to do it.

"I'm sure," Jessie said.

"Remember," Clare said. "Any problems, you call me."

Jessie nodded. "Got it."

Holding her gaze a moment longer, Clare nodded back at her then opened the door. There were two uniformed guards standing in the

hall. Both were armed. The one who stepped forward had a clipboard with him.

"We're here for the prisoner," the guard said.

Clare nodded. "I'm finished. You can take her."

Listening to them talk about her like that made Jessie shudder. It was like she was a thing, a piece of furniture the Salvation Army had come to take to a new home.

The second guard stepped into the conference room. "Put out your hands," he ordered.

Jessie did as she was told, holding her arms out in front of her. The guard slipped a pair of metal shackles to her wrists. Even though the restraints weren't that tight Jessie still felt anxious about having them on.

"Legs apart," the guard said.

It took Jessie a second to figure out what the guard wanted from her. But it finally dawned on her. She spread her legs a little and the guard slipped a second pair of shackles onto her ankles. Then he connected the shackles at her wrists to the ones at her ankles with a thick chain. Jessie wondered if that much restraint was really necessary, but she supposed since the alias Clare had created for her in the computer was an armed bank robber the guards were taking sensible precautions.

"Let's go," the guard with the clipboard said.

Giving Clare one final, lingering look, Jessie headed out the door with her armed escorts.

It was almost impossible to walk with the shackles around her wrists and ankles. But after a few steps down the hall Jessie figured out that if she sort of shuffled along it made for easier going. It also made her look like Igor out of the Frankenstein movies, but she could move at an almost normal pace, which the two guards apparently insisted on.

People stopped and stared at her as the guards led her down the hall. Some just seemed curious, while others looked at her with disgust and contempt. Jessie understood why all the prisoners she had ever seen kept their heads down and their eyes on the floor. It wasn't

to watch their step, but to avoid the stares of the people they passed. Jessie never felt so on-display before. It made her extremely uncomfortable.

The guards escorted her through the courthouse then to a door that led outside. There was a dingy gray prison bus with metal grates over the windows parked next to the building. A prison guard stood by the door leading onto the bus. He had on a black uniform, much different than what the courthouse guards had on. Jessie figured it was the uniform all the guards wore at the Inferno.

With a prod in the back from one of the courthouse guards behind her, Jessie walk/shuffled down a concrete ramp to the door of the bus. The prison guard standing watch there looked her over. He snorted at her then looked over her shoulder at the guards behind her.

After some bureaucratic conferring Jessie was ordered to get on the bus. If walking proved a challenge, getting up the stairs leading onto the bus was practically a Herculean task. But somehow she managed.

There was no one on the bus except for the driver. Jessie was apparently the only prisoner being sent to the Inferno that day. She didn't know if that was a good thing or not. The bus looked pretty much like every school bus she had ever ridden on, except for the metal cage-like grate that separated the driver from the rest of the bus. Jessie looked at the rows and rows of empty seats, feeling a trickle of sweat slide down her back.

"Move," a stern voice told her.

Jessie shuffled into the nearest seat and plopped down. Just under the seat, at her feet, anchored securely to the floor, was a thick metal ring about four inches in diameter. Its purpose became clear when the guard in the black uniform bent down and connected the shackles around her ankles to the metal ring with a sturdy security lock.

As the guard took a seat outside the metal grate, leaving her alone in the back of the bus, Jessie, for the first time since putting on the orange jumpsuit, actually felt like she was a convicted criminal being sent off to prison.

It was the worst feeling she had ever known.

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The Eastman Women's Correctional Facility was built smack in the middle of the desert, to the chagrin of some in Arizona who protested such a gross violation of what was a truly picturesque region of the state. It was home to glorious rock formations, varieties of cacti, and assorted forms of wildlife. To some the land was sacred, something to be protected not desecrated and defiled. It was the landscape most associated with Arizona, the images that made the state famous on postcards and in magazines.

Jessie would have enjoyed the casual drive down the scenic highway if she weren't shackled and chained to the floor of a prison bus without air conditioning, and if there weren't a metal grate over the window obscuring her view of the countryside.

After an hour on the bus, Jessie was getting fatigued. Her butt hurt. She was sweating so much that the shackles were starting to chafe. And for some inexplicable reason she had to pee, a biological paradox since she hadn't downed her usual two cups of coffee that morning.

The guard hadn't said a word to her since leaving the courthouse, and she didn't try to initiate a conversation. She could tell just by looking at him he wasn't the chitchat type and wouldn't have talked to her even if she weren't a prisoner on her way to the Inferno.

With no one to talk to, Jessie found her thoughts wandering aimlessly. She questioned her sanity a number of times and wondered what Nina was up to. It depressed her that she didn't talk to the redhead before she left.

But she didn't want to tell Nina what she had planned.

If she had, the stubborn intern might have tried to talk her out of it. Jessie also wanted to give Nina that ever-popular plausible deniability in case something went wrong. She didn't want Nina getting into trouble over her stupid ideas. But she couldn't lie to Nina, either, and she knew the redhead would see through any story she made up to explain why she would be gone for a few days.

So Jessie weaseled out. She left a message for Nina saying she would be out of town for the next couple of days and would explain everything when she got back. Hopefully the cute little redhead wouldn't be too pissed off at her. She didn't want to damage their

relationship before it had a chance to really bloom, which it had the potential of doing.

When the bus exited from the main highway onto a much narrower paved road, Jessie knew they had to be getting close to the prison. She sat up a little straighter in her seat, straining to see where the bus was headed through the mesh of metal covering the window.

The desert stretched on around them. Jessie had to admit, in spite of all the protests and complaints this was an ideal location for a prison. Isolated, far removed from the main highway. On the off chance someone did manage to escape from the prison, the escapee would then face brutal terrain for miles in every direction. And where there wasn't wide-open space with no place to hide, there were jagged rock formations ... beautiful, but dangerous. Prison, no matter how terrible, was preferable to the rugged conditions of the Arizona desert.

It wasn't until half an hour after leaving the highway that Jessie got her first glimpse of the Inferno. At first it was just a dark little speck on the horizon, but as the bus got closer the little speck grew into a looming monolith in the middle of nowhere.

Jessie shivered in spite of the heat. If the prison was meant to intimidate at first glance, then mission accomplished. The Inferno was definitely an intimidating sight, its cold blue-gray exterior ominous and gothic. There was a barbed wire fence, at least twenty feet high, that extended from the end of the main building out at least a hundred yards before wrapping around to the back. Jessie assumed it was the prison yard. She noticed a guard tower in the corner, and even from the bus the armed guards were a chilling presence.

The bus circled around to the back of the prison then lurched to a stop. Jessie was tossed around in her seat. She looked out her window and saw two armed guards emerge from a gray steel door. Both had the same black uniform as the guard at the front of the bus. The bus guard got up and unlocked the metal screen door that separated the front of the bus from the back then strolled down the aisle and detached her from the metal ring on the floor.

"Welcome to your new home," he said.



Jessie smiled sweetly. She liked him better when he didn't say anything.

The guard stood idly by and watched while Jessie struggled to get out of her seat, no easy task with shackles around her wrists and ankles. When she was on her feet the guard prodded her down the aisle and off the bus. Even though the little shuffle/walk-thing was hard on her it felt good to be moving again after sitting for so long.

A nudge in the back told her to keep moving. Jessie shuffled through the open doorway without making eye contact with the armed guards standing on either side of it. Walking like that, her ankle shackles dragging on the ground, made her feel like Jacob Marley sneaking up on an unsuspecting Scrooge on Christmas Eve.

Ask me who I was, Jessie thought with a touch of gallows humor. She was a free woman once, bedding lovers with bright red hair and Southern accents. But now she was about to be an inmate at the Eastman Women's Correctional Facility. Feelings of dread swept over her like a cold, harsh wind. This was the real deal. Prison.

The guards ushered her into a processing area that reminded Jessie of the admitting desk at a hospital. Furniture was limited to a couple of chairs and the decor consisted of gray walls and a tiled floor.

In an odd way, though, Jessie was impressed. Everything seemed to be designed with the intent to demoralize arriving prisoners. The first look at the prison sent chills down the spine, and now the barren processing center with its drab walls and dingy tile disheartened. There wasn't so much as a potted plant to give a little splash of color. She was sure the reception area for visitors was colorful and carpeted, with plants and works of art.

But the arrival area for prisoners was deliberately dreary. Being hip to that fact didn't lessen the psychological impact, either. Although the air conditioning did feel good after the long ride on a hot bus.

The guard interrupted her thoughts by removing her shackles. Jessie rubbed her tender wrists, grateful to be free of the restraints.

Sitting behind the front desk was an older guard with frosty white hair. Jessie figured he was nearing retirement and got stuck with the less-demanding desk job for the remainder of his time there.

"Paperwork?" the older man asked in a bored, listless tone. Jessie recognized the voice of a person who no longer had a passion for their work. She felt bad for him.

The guard from the bus handed the white-haired administrator a folder. He took it, gave it a cursory look, then nodded them along.

As the guard steered Jessie toward a pair of gray swinging doors she heard the tappity-tap-tap of a keyboard. Either the old man was going back to work on the great American novel he was writing in his spare time or her arrival at the Inferno was being entered into the computer for the record.

Jessie passed through the swinging doors and into a long, brightly lit corridor that ended in a T-junction. There were doors on either side of the hall. Her guard chaperone motioned Jessie into the first door on the left. She went inside. The guard didn't follow.

The room looked like an examination room and had a very antiseptic feel to it. Metal cabinets were bolted to the wall. In the middle of the room was a stainless steel table that reminded her of the ones in the morgue back in Phoenix. About two feet in front of the table, painted on the floor, was a blue line.

"Get undressed," a woman's voice told her.

Jessie looked over her shoulder. The first female guard she had seen so far came into the room and head straight for one of the metal cabinets. She looked to be in her mid forties, plain but not unattractive. The black prison guard uniform gave no clues about her physique.

"Come on, honey," the woman said, glancing over her shoulder. "Off with it. Everything. Now."

Hurrying to do what she was told, Jessie slipped off her canvas sneakers then peeled off her orange prison jumpsuit. While the guard rummaged through the metal cabinets Jessie pulled off her socks, unhooked her bra, then wiggled out of her panties. By the time the guard turned around, she was completely naked. She finally saw what

the guard had been looking for in the cabinets ... latex gloves and a tube of lubricant.

"Stand on the blue line and put your hands on the table," the woman ordered.

Jessie swallowed the lump in her throat and followed the guard's instructions. As she stepped up to the blue line and bent forward to put her hands on the cold metal surface of the table, Jessie heard the sound of a latex glove snapping into place. She knew exactly what was coming next. Her breathing came in short, ragged gasps as she waited for it then she felt the touch of slippery latex sliding between her buttocks. The guard pushed into her asshole, feeling around inside her, and Jessie felt embarrassed and ashamed that part of her was actually enjoying a body cavity search. But she couldn't help it. The fingers sliding into her felt nice, and she was disappointed that the guard didn't keep them in their longer.

But the search wasn't over, yet, either. Jessie heard the guard peel off then glove then heard the snap of another being put on. This time the guard's fingers slid into her cunt and Jessie had to resist the urge to push back against them.

"Congratulations, you're clean," the woman said, taking her fingers out.

Jessie straightened up. She watched the guard toss the pair of latex gloves into the trash then put the tube of lube back in the cabinet. When she turned around the woman looked Jessie up and down without so much as a glimmer of emotion.

"You can go," the woman said.

But when Jessie started to gather her clothes off the floor the woman stopped her and smiled.

"Nuh uh, sweetie. You go. The clothes stay."

Jessie couldn't believe it. She was supposed to walk around naked? No way! But the hard look on the woman's face made it clear she wasn't kidding. If this was standard procedure at the Inferno, there was definitely something wrong there. How degrading! Jessie didn't believe for one second that such things were permitted by the Department of Corrections.

Incredulous, Jessie headed back into the corridor. Naked. The guard waiting for her outside took a moment to leer at her then motioned her down the hall.

The next stop was just a few doors down. Jessie headed into the room without any prompting from the guard. It was clearly the prison barbershop. There were two barber's chairs in front of a long mirror. On the counter just under the mirror was a stainless steel sink, stacks of towels, scissors, brushes, combs, hairdryers, and various other hair care products.

Standing next to one of the chairs was the barber, another woman, younger than the last one and much prettier. She had a white smock over her prison guard uniform.

"Have a seat," the barber said.

Jessie still found it a disconcerting to have things like that barked at her. She was used to her barber smiling and politely asking her to hop into a chair, just as she was used to her doctor's soothing voice before a breast examine or something equally intrusive. The treatment was a little different at the Inferno.

But that was the point of this scheme, wasn't it? Jessie wanted to see what life was like on the inside.

Keeping that in mind, Jessie settled into the barber's chair. The barber tilted the chair back and grabbed a cordless hair trimmer. Jessie wondered if all prisoners at the Inferno had their heads shaved, and what purpose it served. Then the barber circled around to the foot of the chair and Jessie realized it wasn't her head that was going to be shaved.

The barber ran the hair trimmer through the thick tuft of hair between her legs, reducing it to peach fuzz with just a few swipes. Then, setting the trimmer aside, the barber grabbed a can of shaving cream, squeezed a generous dollop into her palm, and spread it over Jessie' mound. Jessie couldn't believe what was happening. Even though she loved Rachel's shaved pussy she had never shaved her own, rarely even trimming it, preferring a naturally thick bush of hair. But now that was gone. The barber set the can of shaving cream back on the counter and grabbed a disposable razor. Jessie tensed.

"Relax," the barber told her. "It won't hurt. But you have to keep still. Can you do that?"

Jessie managed to nod in answer. She gripped the arms of the chair as the barber dragged the razor over her mound scraping off swatch after swatch of foam. The razor actually felt good, tickling her skin, and Jessie relaxed a little under the barber's expert care. She watched more and more of the shaving cream disappearing until her cunt was at last completely hairless. It looked good.

The barber tossed the razor in the trash then got a washcloth and moistened it. When the barber placed the dampened washcloth on her newly shaved mound Jessie sighed. The feel of the warm, wet cloth against her smooth flesh felt good, and the barber cleaning her off felt even better. This time she couldn't help herself. Jessie arched off the chair, urgently pushing against the barber's hand. In answer the barber pressed down a little harder, grinding the damp washcloth into her cunt. Jessie moaned. That made the barber laugh. She cleaned off the last remnants of shaving cream from Jessie's mound with the washcloth then brushed it with her fingers.

"I do good work," the barber said. She looked at Jessie and smiled. "I think you're ready to see the warden."

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Jessie waited outside the warden's office, naked, cold, and wanting desperately to feel her shaved pussy. She'd been sitting in the outer office for at least ten minutes now with her legs pressed tight together and her arms folded across her chest to keep at least some parts of her body concealed from ogling prison guards. It helped. But only a little.

Strange as the notion seemed, Jessie felt even more naked and vulnerable after leaving the barber's office. She was acutely aware of the smoothness between her legs, more sensitive now to the cool air, the chair she was sitting on, even the feel of her own thighs clamped firmly shut. Gone was the scratchy tickle she had been used to since puberty. It made her hyperconscious that she was naked.

And it made her want to slip a hand down there.

Since she had been sitting there so long, the guards in the office really weren't paying any attention to her. Even the guard who escorted her there from the barbershop was distracted at the moment. Would anyone even notice if she touched herself? Jessie doubted it. She parted her thighs just a bit, then, pretending like she brushing something off her lap, reached down and dragged her finger over her mound. It was smooth to the touch, like silk. Jessie thought of how much she enjoyed touching Rachel's shaved cunt and realized she liked touching her own just as much. She might have to keep it like that after she left.

"Never been shaved down there, huh?"

Heat spread through Jessie's cheeks. She jerked her hand away, pushed her legs back together, and looked up. The woman standing over her was another inmate, around her age, with an unruly mop of brown hair. The jumpsuit she had on was not unlike the one Jessie arrived in, but where hers had been bright orange the one the woman standing in front of her wore was a dull gray. It hadn't been designed to be flattering, and it wasn't. Though this particular inmate managed to look pretty good in it.

The woman smiled. "It's okay. I couldn't help touching myself, either. Feels weird."

"A little," Jessie said. She breathed more normally. The woman managed to put her at ease. She appreciated that.

"They'll tell you it's for hygiene. But I think they do it to make us feel like little kids again, before we got hair down there. You know?"

"Yeah," Jessie said. That actually made sense to her.

The woman flicked a glance at her crotch then said, "Some people look good that way, though." She blushed a little and brought her gaze back up to eye level. "I'm Paige."

"Jessie."

"Hi," Paige said. "So you're new, huh?"

"Yep."

The guards in the office started to glance in their direction. Paige noticed them staring and suddenly looked uncomfortable.

"Well, I'd better go," Paige said. "I'm sure I'll see you around eventually."

Jessie nodded and watched Paige leave. The woman was cute and might prove a good source of information. She made a mental note to look for Paige later.

After another ten minutes of waiting, Jessie was told she could go in. As she got up from her chair with as much modesty as she could under the circumstances, Jessie wondered if the warden had actually been too busy to see her or if keeping her waiting like that was all part of the head games played at the Inferno.

Taking a deep breath, Jessie squared her shoulders and headed into the warden's office. It wasn't as bland as the other parts of the prison Jessie had seen so far, but it wasn't luxurious either. There were a few personal touches here and there mixed in with the file cabinets and bookcases and other standard office wares, but not much. The one thing that did stand out was the view of the desert from the large window. It was breathtaking.

The warden sat behind her desk, leaning back in her chair, fingers threaded together in thoughtful repose. Alexa Tobler might have been a well-preserved fifty, though she looked about ten years younger. She had a haughty, almost aristocratic air about her and her smile was both charming and chilling. Short-cropped silvery-blonde hair gave her a harsh, authoritarian look that was offset by the soft colors of her business suit.

"Please close the door," Tobler said. Even her voice was a study in contrasts. Polite in word, firm in tone.

Jessie obeyed without thinking, closing the door then approaching the warden's desk. There was no place to sit. Even if there had been something told Jessie she wouldn't have been allowed to do so.

The warden stared at her, that steely gaze locked with hers like she wasn't standing there naked, the cold air having long since made her nipples hard, her cunt bare and exposed.

"Jessica Lynn Greyhorse," Tobler recited as if reading a cue card over Jessie's shoulder. "Thirty four years old. In and out of prison since you were eighteen. Shot a man while trying to rob a

convenience store. Welcome to the Eastman Women's Correctional Facility." She leaned forward. "I'm Warden Tobler. You will learn in time that I do not tolerate troublemakers. Behave yourself and we will get along just fine. Step out of line? You'll be disciplined. Understand?"

"Yes."

Tobler's face darkened with a scowl. "You will address me as warden. Do I need to repeat that for you?"

"No, Warden," Jessie quickly answered.

"Mmmm," Tobler purred. "You are a fast learner. I like that." Her gaze dipped for the first time, slowly moving down Jessie's naked body and back up again. "I think I'm going to like a lot of things about you."

Jessie shuddered visibly. The tone in Warden Tobler's voice made her skin break out in goose bumps, and the look the woman gave her was the same kind of look a cheetah got before it pounced on an unsuspecting gazelle and made a quick meal out of it. She didn't think she would fare much better against Alexa Tobler.

"You're going to find that the Inferno – and yes, I am aware of that particular moniker – is a bit different than the other prisons you've been in. There is a period of adjustment. But don't assume that means we'll make allowances for you just because you are new. Got it?"

"Yes, Warden," Jessie replied, nodding.

The warden seemed pleased. "Being such a quick learner, I'm sure you'll pick up on the rules in no time. If not, well ... undesirable behavior can be corrected with the right approach."

Jessie gulped. As a reporter there to do a story on prison abuse, she was curious what Alexa Tobler considered the right approach to dealing with inmates that broke the rules. And yet part of her never wanted to find out.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

The walk from Warden Tobler's office to her cell seemed to take forever. Jessie was paraded through the prison naked like a prize-winning heifer at a state fair. It was humiliating. Faces peered out open doors and around corners to look at the new arrival. Jessie could feel the stares of a hundred inmates crawling over her bare skin, like bugs, making her twitch uncomfortably.

It did give her a chance to learn more about the prison, how it was laid out. She saw signs pointing the way to the infirmary and library, the cafeteria and the visitor's center. The place was a maze of long corridors. Jessie also noticed the security cameras mounted in the corners, getting every angle. She knew there wasn't a part of the prison that didn't appear on a monitor somewhere. Right at that very moment, Jessie realized, her naked body was on a TV screen being watched by a guard (or several) in a control room. The thought was not comforting.

The long corridor branched into two directions. Stenciled signs indicated the hall on her left would take her to the showers while the corridor on the right led to the main cellblock. The guard escorting her through the prison steered her to the right.

There was a guard station at the end of the corridor and a small security cage leading into an adjoining hall. When Jessie reached the cage there was a buzzing sound, the indicator light on the electronic lock securing the cage door went from red to green, then the door unlatched with a soft pop. Jessie was gestured forward and once she was inside the confined space her guard chaperone closed the door behind her, locking her in. If she hadn't felt like an animal before, standing there naked in a cramped metal cage would have done the trick. She watched the guards in the station congregate with her escort. Sometimes the guards would look over at her, and Jessie wasn't sure if they were just checking on her or checking her out.

The guards kept her caged for a good five minutes before her chaperone continued on through the guard station and appeared on the other side of the metal security cage. Jessie waited for the guards to

buzz her out and breathed a sigh of relief when she heard the soft click of the lock. She pushed the door open and headed forward, down a short corridor that opened onto the cellblock.

It wasn't quite what Jessie expected. The prison cells surrounded an open rectangular space with a white strip painted down the center, which, Jessie assumed, she was meant to follow straight forward. Metal stairs and catwalks led from the ground floor to the cells above and circled around each floor of the cellblock. Jessie counted three levels of prison cells.

As Jessie walked down the white line inmates started to emerge from their cells, the ones on the upper levels leaning over the guardrail to ogle her from above.

"Fresh meat," someone above shouted.

Another voice chimed in, "She don't look so fresh."

"I'd do her!"

"You'd do anything with a twat!"

"Except you!"

Laughter joined the chorus of voices taunting her. Someone tossed a tampon at her. It whizzed past her head. Jessie took small comfort in the fact that it wasn't used. The cellblock guards turned out. Their mere appearance out in the open silenced the cacophony that filled the cellblock. Jessie wasn't sure whether she preferred the eerie silence that followed to the jeers from the other inmates or not.

The guard directed Jessie to a cell in the middle of the row on her left.

"Home sweet home," he chided her.

Ignoring the barb, Jessie walked into her prison cell. It reminded her more of her dorm room back in college than the prison cells she had seen on TV. There were no bars. The cell door was just that ... a door, with a glass panel in the center and the same electronic lock as the security cage. Although the cell wasn't spacious, there was room for two small beds, two dressers, and a writing desk.

The left half of the cell had a very lived in look. There were some personal items on the dresser ... framed pictures, a hairbrush, a stick of deodorant. On the bed on the right side of the room, which Jessie

assumed was hers, there was a pile of clothes and a pair of canvas sneakers.

Jessie was never so glad for anything as she was for that pile of clothes, even if it did include an unattractive prison-issue gray jumpsuit. She slipped on the pair of white cotton panties provided her then wiggled into a bra. Both fit well enough. She put on her socks then started into the jumpsuit.

"Looks like I get to bunk with the newbie."

Jessie turned around, half out of her jumpsuit. Standing in the doorway of the cell was a tall brunette in the same prison garb she was in the process of putting on. The woman had a hard, rugged face and her lips were pressed together tightly as if to prevent even the suggestion of a smile. She was tall, lean, and while the jumpsuit didn't show off much, there were hints of a curvy body under it.

"What's your name, newbie?" the woman asked.

"Jessie Greyhorse."

The woman looked her over then introduced herself. "Kara Jacobi. I guess we're cellmates. Lucky me." Sarcasm dripped from her lips like venom.

"Should I apologize?" Jessie asked.

Kara snorted. "Don't bother. Since we're bunkies I get the honor of showing you the ropes. Finish getting dressed. I have to get back to work."

"Work?" Jessie asked, pulling on her jumpsuit.

"That's right," Kara said. She leaned against the doorframe. "We don't get to just sit around in our cells all day. We're expected to contribute. You've been assigned to work in the prison laundry with me. So I guess we'll be seeing a lot of each other."

"Lucky me," Jessie retorted. She zipped up her jumpsuit then sat down on the edge of her bed and pulled on her sneakers. "How long have you been here?"

"Long enough," Kara said.

"What are you in for?"

Kara narrowed her eyes to menacing slits. "You ask a lot of questions, newbie."

"Just making conversation."

"I can do without conversation," Kara informed her. "Are you ready yet?"

Jessie checked herself out. In the gray jumpsuit and white canvas shoes she looked just like every other inmate at the Inferno, anonymous, a nobody, another serial number in the computer.

"Yeah," Jessie replied sullenly. "I'm ready."

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At first Jessie was surprised by how much freedom the inmates had to move around inside the Inferno. But with armed guards roaming the prison, checkpoints along the way, and video cameras in every corner, there really weren't any opportunities for inmates to cause trouble. Even if a prisoner tried, she would never get away with it. The guards would be swarming around her in minutes like a plague of locusts.

Jessie followed Kara out of the cellblock, passing through the cage at the guard station one at time before continuing down the corridor Jessie had been led down, naked, not that long before. In less than an hour at the Inferno the place was already looking familiar to her.

"Your shift is nine to eleven," Kara told her as the two of them walked down the corridor. It was the first thing her cellmate had said to her since leaving the cell. "When your shift is over you get an hour of free time. Lunch is at noon. Can you remember all of this?"

"Yeah," Jessie replied. "So what exactly is my job in the laundry?"

"Since I'm the supervisor on first shift," Kara said, "your job is to do what I tell you."

Jessie was afraid of that. She didn't know why Kara had taken an instant dislike to her. It might have been a defense mechanism. In a place like the Inferno it was probably a good idea to keep people at a distance. On the other hand, maybe Kara was just a bitch. Or even both. Jessie supposed, with them poised to spend a lot of time together, she would figure out which one applied.

Unlike the cellblock (and so many other places Jessie had been so far) the laundry was one place at the Inferno that looked exactly like she imagined it would. There were several rows of industrial washing

machines and dryers, just like at the Laundromat. Inmates pushed large rolling canvas hampers around the room, transporting dirty laundry to the washers, transferring wet clothes to the dryers, then ultimately taking the clean clothes to a table where other inmates stood around neatly folding jumpsuits, underwear, and socks.

Jessie noticed one guard standing watching over them from the corner. Well, not standing so much as sitting in a wooden chair. The inmates looked up from their work when Kara brought her into the room. Jessie had no doubt that a new arrival was the topic of much discussion among the other prisoners. What else was there to do in prison? Gossip was worth its weight in gold. Jessie was counting on that fact to gather information for her story, though if Kara's standoffishness was more common than Paige's openness she might not get as much information as she wanted from the other inmates.

"Every morning," Kara said as if she were a tour guide leading Jessie around, "inmates put their dirty clothes and bed linens into a laundry bag which is then dropped down the chute." She pointed to a mountain of canvas bags in the corner. "The bags are marked to make sure the right laundry goes to the right cell. Wouldn't want the wrong woman getting their hands on your little white panties, now would we?"

Jessie ignored her last remark. "So what do you want me to do first?"

"Looks like we're almost out of detergent," Kara said. She pointed to the corner opposite Mt. Dirty Laundry. "There's a supply room right over there. Go get a couple bottles of detergent. And a bottle of bleach, while you're there."

Jessie nodded. She crossed the room, taking in as much of the activity going on around her as she could without seeming too obvious about it. Since she was new she could explain away some of her curiosity. But because she was new everyone was also watching her. It was hard to not draw attention to herself when she was the center of attention just by virtue of that fact that she had arrived that morning.

When Jessie opened the door to the supply room she found a very different activity going on. A Latina inmate was standing in the middle of the room surrounded by shelves of laundry supplies. Her jumpsuit was bunched around her ankles and her panties were pulled down. Kneeling in front the Latina was a scrawny blonde inmate. The blonde had her face in the other woman's pussy and was hungrily eating her out. From the look on the Latina's face, the blonde was very good. The Latina twined her fingers in the blonde's hair and moaned softly, arching her hips, thrusting her cunt into the blonde's face.

Caught off guard, Jessie gasped in surprise.

The Latina turned to look at her, snorted with obvious contempt, then tightened her grip in the blonde's hair and pulled the woman's eager mouth hard against her pussy. There was something almost territorial about the Latina's gesture, as if to make it clear the blonde was hers.

Jessie quietly closed the door. So much for what Clare said about there being no hanky-panky at the Inferno! Where there was a will, there clearly was a way. She headed back to the long row of large washing machines. Kara was taking a load of wet clothes out of a washer and putting them in a canvas bin. When Kara saw her returning empty handed her expression hardened.

"Where's the fucking detergent?" Kara asked.

"Um, the supply room is sort of ... occupied."

Kara nodded in understanding. "Ah. Sanchez and her bimbo are at it again. Figures."

"So it happens a lot?"

"Again with the questions," Kara said. She shook her head and put more wet clothes in the bin. "Here's a little advice, newbie. People who don't mind their own business aren't going to make a lot of friends here."

"So far I'm not making friends anyway," Jessie said defiantly.

Kara shrugged. "Whatever. You've been warned. Now take these clothes over to the dryer. You can do that, at least, right?"

"Yeah," Jessie said.

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When Jessie first saw the prison yard that morning from the bus, she couldn't imagine why anyone would want to be outside in the brutal heat of summer. But that was a lifetime ago, it seemed. After just a few hours inside the Inferno Jessie keenly understood the appeal of being outdoors, breathing fresh air, if only for a little while, even if it did mean braving the scorching temperatures common to the Arizona desert.

Jessie followed the fence around the perimeter of the yard, using the opportunity to take in her new surroundings. There was a basketball court on one side of the yard, near the building, where a group of inmates played while another group gathered around and watched the players run up and down the court. Next to that was an area for weightlifting. Jessie thought that kind of thing only existed in movies about prison, but there it was to the contrary. Butted up against the building was a set of aluminum bleachers. Inmates occupied various tiers, some alone, others in groups, perched on them like birds.

But it was more than just a place from which to sit and watch the goings-on in the prison yard. Since she had been out there Jessie had noticed several woman pair off and disappear under the bleachers. She didn't have to guess what the couples went under there to do.

The only guards in the yard were in the tower that loomed over them like a castle turret. But Jessie had no illusions about the security; if needed, the yard could be overrun with armed guards in a matter of minutes.

Jessie stopped at the far end of the yard and turned to look out at the vast expanse of desert on the other side of the fence. The life she had in Phoenix seemed so far away now, and she had only been in prison for a few hours. She couldn't imagine what it felt like to be stuck in there for years ... didn't want to imagine it.

The place was designed to break spirits. From the moment an inmate arrived she was conditioned to feel helpless, vulnerable, at the mercy of her captors, stripped of clothes and dignity then led around naked to the amusement of others.

Jessie didn't kid herself about the kind of women in the Inferno. This was where the worst of criminal offenders ended up. Thieves and murderers surrounded her. She had always been one of those get-tough-on-crime types who bitched that prison inmates had it too good.

But not even convicted criminals deserved the treatment she had received in her short time there. Jessie doubted it took Hank Birdsong three years to reach that conclusion, which means what she had experienced so far was tame compared to whatever prompted him to try and get in touch with her.

Would she see evidence of such things in the three days she had there? Jessie didn't know. There was a good chance she wouldn't, and an even better chance that no one there would open up about what they had seen. But Jessie made a promise to herself to make sure that people read all about the things she saw for herself. It might not be the worst the Inferno was guilty of, but it would at least be something.

Shouting voices drew her attention from the desert.

Jessie turned around. There was some kind of commotion on the basketball court. Inmates were huddled together. Even more were running over to join them. Including her. She jogged over to the growing mob.

"What's going on?" Jessie asked no one in particular. When she didn't get an answer Jessie elbowed her way through the crowd, ignoring the annoyed grunts and grumbles that followed after her. She was breathing heavily when she finally made it to the front of the pack.

Three guards with their clubs drawn were trying to grab an inmate who was rolling around on the ground to avoid their grasp. She kicked and scratched at the guards, spitting and hissing at them like a cat.

When the woman flopped over Jessie saw that it was Paige. She acted without even thinking.

"Leave her alone!" Jessie screamed.

One of the guards whirled around to face her. His eyes were cold steel and without emotion. "Stay out of this."



The other two guards got a hold of Paige and dragged her to her feet. She still fought them, but the heat and the inevitability of the situation had taken its toll on her. The guards started to haul her off.

"Wait!" Jessie cried. "What did she do?"

Instead of an answer the guard who warned her to stay out of it jabbed his club into her gut. Jessie doubled over, a sudden wave of nausea driving her down to one knee. She choked and coughed, her eyes bleary with sweat and tears.

When she managed to look up again the crowd of inmates had dispersed. Except for one. Kara. Her cellmate stared at her down on the ground like that, shook her head sadly, then walked off without a word ... and without bothering to help her to her feet.

It was like another jab in the belly.

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If her prison cell reminded Jessie of her old dorm back in college, then the cafeteria definitely reminded her of high school. There were rows and rows of rectangular tables lined up across the room. She noticed there were guards standing in every corner, and two guards who walked up and down the aisles. With so many prisoners gathered in such a confined space, the chance of trouble breaking out was much higher.

Jessie was surprised how quickly she had started to think of everything she saw in a prison context. Would she ever be able to look at the outside world the same way again?

In her eagerness to do her story, Jessie never considered the effect being in prison would have on her. She figured since it was only for three days it wouldn't be that bad, something she could shrug off like a disappointing vacation. But she was quickly learning that even three days in Hell was still time spent in Hell.

The incident in the yard made that clear enough.

Jessie still didn't know what Paige had done to incur the wrath of the prison guards, if anything, or where Paige was now. Wherever she had been taken, Jessie sure hoped Paige was okay.

Having stupidly skipped breakfast that morning, Jessie was starved when she got into the lunch line with the other inmates. The smell

wafting from the kitchen wasn't very promising, but Jessie would have eaten just about anything put in front of her.

The line moved forward. Jessie shuffled along like just another head of cattle. That's how it made her feel. Inmates in hairnets and rubber gloves prepared trays and handed them out to the hungry crowd. The lunch menu consisted of chicken-fried steak covered in a thick brown gravy that was starting to congeal, a chunk of cornbread, TexMex corn (corn with bits of red pepper in it, Jessie learned), a brownie, and her choice of milk or apple juice. Jessie opted for the juice.

Emerging from the food-serving line, Jessie next trotted over to a nearby counter to pick up her silverware. A guard stood watch and made sure that each inmate took exactly one knife, one fork, and one spoon. After lunch Jessie knew the guard would also make sure every inmate returned each one.

Prisoners were clustered together at tables just like the different cliques in her old high school. Jessie didn't feel welcome at any of the tables, and no one waved her over or invited her to sit down. She noticed an empty space in the back and headed that way, sitting by herself at the end of one of the long, narrow tables.

The food wasn't that bad. Or maybe she was just that hungry. Either way, Jessie devoured her lunch in record time. She didn't leave so much as a morsel on her tray. The grumpy rumble in her belly quieted a little and she sank back into her chair with a sigh, patting her stomach, unable to remember the last time a simple meal had been that satisfying.

"Well, I guess the newbie was hungry."

Jessie looked up. Sanchez, the Latina woman she walked in on that morning in the supply room, was approaching her table with an inmate on either side of her, like bookends. The trio didn't seem like the welcoming committee type.

"I guess I was," Jessie said.

"How come you're sitting all alone?" Sanchez asked. "Don't you like us?"

The inmates at the tables around them were turning in their seats to watch the confrontation Jessie would have rather avoided. But Sanchez clearly wanted it.

"Sure I do."

"Maybe you just miss your little friend."

Jessie fought back a surge of anger. The Latina was obviously referring to Paige. She couldn't let herself be goaded into doing something stupid. "Yeah. Maybe I do."

That made Sanchez and her gang of two laugh derisively. "So did you get a good look this morning?" Sanchez asked. "You sure seemed to like what you saw."

"Not really."

Sanchez snorted. "Yeah you did. Bet you wished it was you instead, didn't you, newbie?"

"Yeah," Jessie said, glaring that Latina. Her next words popped out of her mouth before she could stop them. "Your little friend looks like she is really good at eating pussy. It's just too bad she doesn't have a good pussy to eat."

That was a big mistake.

In a fit of rage Sanchez flew across the table and took her down to the floor, chair and all. Jessie heard the shouts from the inmates around her but it was just background noise. She was much too preoccupied with the crazed Latina pummeling her. Balled-up fists slammed into her kidney.

Sanchez was both strong and determined, but Jessie somehow managed to flip them both over and put Sanchez on her back. The Latina growled and tried to scratch out her eyes. Jessie stiff-armed Sanchez and managed to keep her face just out of the woman's reach.

The next thing Jessie knew she was being pulled off Sanchez and dragged to her feet. Two guards grabbed Sanchez and pulled her off the floor as well.

Jessie stood there, chest rising and falling with each labored breath, staring daggers at Sanchez, two guards holding her back. Hate coursed through her veins, scathing and irrational hate for Sanchez.

As the guards led them off in opposite directions, Sanchez spat, "This isn't over, newbie."

Jessie didn't think so, either.

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For the second time that day Jessie found herself waiting outside Warden Tobler's office. But at least she had clothes on this time. It was a small consolation. Sitting there did give her time to cool off, though, and Jessie realized how stupid she had been. If she had just kept her mouth shut and ignored Sanchez the Latina probably would have left her alone. But she had to go and take the bait. Why did she let Sanchez get to her like that?

The Latina wasn't worth the trouble Jessie knew she had gotten herself into.

It was more than just the taunts of one woman, though, that made Jessie pop her cork. She knew she had been venting the frustration from the entire morning ... the humiliation of her arrival, the cold shoulder she got from her cellmate, the violence she had seen in the prison yard. Sanchez was just the proverbial straw, someone to take out her frustration on. And the woman made it so easy for her!

And while it felt good to release some of that pent up aggression, Jessie knew it would come with a hefty price. That's why she was sitting outside Tobler's office like a naughty student summoned by the principal.

Jessie knew she was in trouble. Big trouble.

The guard behind the reception desk told her to go in. Jessie stood up and took a deep breath to calm her nerves. This was it. Time to face the music. She headed into the warden's office.

Tobler was sitting behind her desk just like before, leaning back slightly in her chair, hands clasped together. Her thin smile, which at first seemed to Jessie both charming and chilling, now leaned to the chilling side. Jessie swallowed the lump quickly forming in her throat. This was so not good.

"Ms. Greyhorse," Tobler began icily. "I honestly didn't expect to see you in here so soon. You must be trying to set a new record."

"Warden, I just want to—"

"Do not speak," Tobler cut in sharply, "unless I ask you a direct question. Is that understood, Ms. Greyhorse?"

"Yes, Warden."

Tobler eyed her for a long moment then nodded. "This morning I informed you that rule-breaking would not be tolerated under any circumstances. I also made it clear that you wouldn't catch a break just because you happened to be new here. And yet here you are, Ms. Greyhorse, in my office for fighting with another inmate. Did you think I was just kidding about the rules?"

"No, Warden," Jessie quickly replied.

"So, then, you thought you would just defy me the first chance you got?"

Jessie shook her head. "No, Warden."

"Or maybe," Tobler said, getting to her feet, "you think the rules simply don't apply to you. That you deserve special treatment."

Cold sweat trickled down Jessie's back as the warden circled around her desk and moved behind her. She could feel Tobler standing just over her shoulder, could hear her uneven breathing. What was Tobler going to do to her now? Jessie got her answer when the warden reached around, unzipped her jumpsuit, and yanked it down just over her hips.

"Pull down your underwear," Tobler demanded softly.

Jessie wasn't eager to do that. But she also didn't want to get in even more trouble. She pulled her panties down, baring her ass to the woman behind her.

"Now," Tobler said, "put your hands on the desk."

Barely able to breathe normally, Jessie somehow managed to do what the warden ordered. She bent forward slightly, put her hands on the desk, and braced herself. Even though she sensed what was coming next, when Tobler's hand came down on her ass Jessie still cried out in a mixture of surprise and pain. It stung like hell. More than that, it was further humiliation and degradation.

It could have been worse, Jessie supposed. The warden could have done this to her in front of the other inmates instead of in the privacy of her office.

The warden brought her hand down again. Then again. The sound of flesh smacking flesh echoed through the office like rumbles of thunder. Jessie whimpered each time the flat of Tobler's hand made contact. Her ass cheeks were getting warm from the punishment the warden was administering and Jessie imagined her butt was starting to redden by now.

That didn't stop Tobler, though. The woman slapped her ass again and again, slowly, rhythmically, each blow measured and even. Jessie lost count of how many times the warden smacked her. Fifty? A hundred?

When it was finally over Jessie was panting heavily. Tears rolled down her cheeks, tears of pain and shame and relief. Her ass was throbbing. She wouldn't be able to sit down for the rest of the day!

Tobler was still behind her. Jessie started to wonder if that last spanking wasn't just the first round and prepared for a potential second wave. But instead of Tobler's hand coming down on her ass again Jessie felt the touch of soft lips on her tender backside this time. She couldn't believe it! The warden kissed her ass cheeks all over, as thorough with her lips as she had been with her hand. Jessie couldn't stop the sigh that escaped her lips. Tobler's soft, gentle kisses soothed her aching rump and so much more. She thrust her ass back out of reflex and for a panic-filled moment her heart seemed to stop beating as she waited for the warden to react.

Answering her bold gesture, Tobler pried open her buttocks. Jessie moaned softly as the warden's tongue flicked over her asshole, teasingly at first, then more fervently. Tobler's warm, wet tongue swirled around the rim of her asshole then slipped inside. Jessie's knees buckled under her. She pushed against the desk for support as the warden tongue-fucked her ass. Beads of desire dribbled down her inner thigh and Jessie was desperate for the warden to lick them off, but Tobler denied her that. She was in more agony now than when the warden had been spanking her! Jessie was crushed when Tobler pulled away from her.

For a few moments the only sound in the room was their labored breathing then Tobler returned to her desk and sat down. Looking at

her, no one would have guessed she just had her tongue up an inmate's ass.

"I hope you've learned your lesson," Tobler said.

Jessie nodded. "Yes, Warden."

"Good," Tobler said. "Then you can go."

Straightening up, Jessie pulled her panties back into place and zipped up her jumper. She left the warden's office unsure of what just happened there, but also wondering – maybe even hoping? – if it would happen again.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Jessie stood under the spray of the shower, letting the pounding water soothe her tired muscles. If she learned nothing else in her time at the Inferno, she would walk away with a much better appreciation for the simple things in life. Like a good meal, or a long, hot shower. She used to take those things for granted; but never again.

Sleep took its sweet time coming for her the night before. She laid in her bunk staring into the darkness, listening to Kara snoring from the other side of the room. After the day she had, Jessie thought she would fall asleep before her head hit the pillow. But no such luck.

The events of her first day at the Inferno flickered through her mind like a bad movie playing over and over. She worried about Paige and thought about what happened in the warden's office. Her butt was sore all night from that encounter. Even now it ached a little when the hot water hit it just right. She wondered how often the warden fooled around with the inmates there. In her position Tobler could take advantage of any woman in the prison. Who could refuse her? Only someone wanting more trouble, Jessie realized. The warden had the power to demand sexual favors from every inmate there, and for all Jessie knew Tobler did.

Jessie grabbed a bar of soap and lathered up her hands. When she did finally manage to fall asleep, she was tormented by bizarre and confusing dreams. She dreamed Rachel came to visit her, naked, a sheet of bulletproof glass separating them. Their conversation took place over phones in a little visitor cubicle, and while Rachel wanted to have phone sex with her all Jessie wanted to talk about was life in prison. It did not make for a night of restful sleep and Jessie was feeling it now, her muscles aching in protest to the abuse she was heaping on them.

As a peace offering to her strained muscles, Jessie slid her soapy hands over her shoulders and down her arms. It felt nice. Her muscles started to relax a little. Encouraged, Jessie circled her breasts then slowly moved down her tummy. Much better. The tension was ebbing now. She reached between her legs and teased the smooth



flesh down there, delighted with it, caressing her silken folds until a soft moan escaped her.

Jessie thought about her dream, Rachel sitting across from her, naked, and imagined all the wonderfully naughty things Rachel might have told her over the phone. Her lover had quite the potty mouth and Jessie stroked her cuntlips more vigorously while recalling the last conversation she and Rachel had.

Abruptly her thoughts suddenly turned to the warden. Jessie replayed what happened in Tobler's office in her mind, surprising herself by not skipping over the spanking part. She remembered each smack of her ass like Tobler was punishing her all over again, then sighed when she thought of the warden's lips on her ... of the warden's tongue inside her. As she remembered that last part Jessie massaged her clit, gently at first then harder as the need to get off became overpowering.

But the sound of approaching footsteps interrupted her before she could finish.

Jessie looked up and her spirits fell when she saw Sanchez and her two trained seals heading in her direction. She didn't even get the marginal benefit of seeing them naked; all three women were in their prison jumpsuits. Sanchez stopped just a few feet away. The two women with her obediently took up positions on either side. She could tell Sanchez wasn't there to make nice.

"I had to spend the night in solitary because of you," Sanchez said.

"Sorry?" Jessie intoned. She didn't know what to say. Pointing out to Sanchez that she was actually the one who started that little fracas in the cafeteria, that she was the one who went lunging over the table and tackled her, wasn't going to make the situation any better.

"Sorry isn't good enough," Sanchez said.

Jessie shrugged. "Well that's all I have to give you."

"Nuh uh," Sanchez grunted. The Latina inmate looked her up and down and smiled. "You have plenty to give me."

"Thought you were spoken for," Jessie said with more chutzpah than she actually felt.

The women standing on either side of Sanchez snickered. She silenced them with a hard look that she then turned on Jessie. "Well, who's gonna know? It's just the four of us in here."

"No, it isn't," a voice echoed in the shower.

Jessie breathed a little sigh of relief when Kara walked toward them. Her cellmate had an incredible body, lean and athletic, with a pair of mouth-watering breasts that hardly even bounced when she moved. Kara circled around Sanchez and her two personal cheerleaders and stood behind Jessie, so close behind her that Jessie could feel the heat radiating from Kara's body. She resisted the urge to lean back into her.

"This is none of your business, Kara," Sanchez said.

"Yeah. It is."

"How you figure?"

Kara answered Sanchez's question by reaching around and cupping Jessie's breast. Jessie choked back a sigh as Kara began to massage her tit. The woman had nice hands. Soft, delicate. Nimble fingers tweaked her nipple.

"I didn't know," Sanchez said. She actually sounded apologetic.

"Well, now you do," Kara said. "You touch my thing, you have to deal with me. So unless you want to start something here, I suggest you just go ahead to breakfast and let us have a little privacy."

Sanchez sneered at that. She stared at Kara for a long, tense moment then slapped one of the women next to her on the shoulder. "Let's go. The honeymooners want to be alone."

The three of them turned around and headed out of the shower. Jessie watched them leave. Kara's hand stayed at her breast until Sanchez and her posse were gone then she let go. Jessie turned around and smiled at her cellmate.

"Thanks," Jessie said.

"Forget about it."

"How can I?" Jessie asked. "Who knows what would have happened if you hadn't shown up."

Kara snorted. "You know exactly what would have happened."

"Yeah," Jessie said. And she did know. Sanchez and her cohorts would have taken turns with her and left her in a spent heap on the floor of the shower. "So thanks for being here. I owe you one."

"Whatever."

"I could make it up to you," Jessie told her suggestively. She leaned into kiss her cellmate but Kara put a hand on her chest to stop her. "What's wrong? I thought—"

"I know what you thought," Kara said, stepping back. "Just because I saved your ass doesn't mean I want a piece of it. Sanchez will get the word out. Don't worry. And as long as people think we're together, no one is going to fuck with you. Including me."

Jessie stood there, incredulous, when Kara moved a couple showerheads down and started to scrub herself as if touching her breast made her dirty. She rinsed herself off and left before Kara could see the hurt in her eyes.

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The corridor echoed with the sound of squeaking wheels as Jessie pushed a laundry bin across the tiled floor. After an hour of working together in the laundry Kara got tired of her being around and sent her off to deliver clean linens to the infirmary. She didn't know why Kara had such a problem with her, and even though she owed her cellmate big time for intervening in the shower she was quickly getting tired of her attitude.

It wasn't like Jessie had done anything to her. When did she have time to piss her off? Kara started disliking her the moment she arrived. She tried not to take it personally, told herself Kara would have treated any newbie the same way. But that didn't make it any less painful.

Besides, why should she care what Kara thought of her anyway? The brunette was just another inmate at the Inferno she would never see after tomorrow. It shouldn't have mattered that Kara didn't like her.

But it did matter. For some reason Jessie couldn't explain, she cared what her cellmate thought.

There was something about Kara that fascinated her. She really liked the way her cellmate handled Sanchez. Whatever reputation Kara had, it was enough to keep the Latina at bay. Jessie was haunted by Kara's words back in the shower, when she told Sanchez not to touch her thing. It gave her an unexpected thrill to be called that, even if it was just a charade.

And Kara's body! God! The woman was so damn beautiful! She had the most perfect breasts. Perfect everything.

Jessie sighed as she rounded a corner with the awkward laundry bin. Why was she even thinking about Kara's body when she knew she would never have it? Kara despised her. But then why did her cellmate come to her rescue before? Jessie didn't understand her. But she definitely wanted to solve the riddle that was Kara Jacobi.

Under the watchful eye of the security cameras, Jessie made her way through the maze of corridors that led to the infirmary. Signs at different junctions pointed her in the right direction, and when she rounded the next corner she saw a pair of swinging metal doors with a sign above them indicating that she had, in fact, reached the hospital ward. Jessie pushed through the swinging doors using the rolling laundry bin like a battering ram.

The infirmary was a long, wide room, with neatly made beds lined up on either side. Most of the beds were empty, but Jessie spotted one patient in a bed at the far end of the room. As she got closer the woman in the bed seemed familiar and when Jessie finally reached the bed she stopped and gasped.

It was Paige.

Jessie's heart almost broke seeing Paige lying there in a hospital bed. She looked so small and helpless. Paige's face was one giant bruise, shades of black and blue and purple blending into each other like some horrific patchwork quilt. There was a cut on her lip starting to heal, though her lip was still swollen. Paige had a blanket pulled up to her chest but Jessie could see white gauze bandages peeking out from under the covers. It took all the effort she could muster not to keep from crying.

Blinking back tears, Jessie noticed that Paige was awake. When Paige saw her first recognition then happiness flared in her eyes. Jessie circled around and carefully sat down on the edge of the small bed.

"Hi," Paige said. She sounded so weak.

Jessie smiled. "Hi there."

"You probably can't tell," Paige said, "but I am happy to see you."

"That's sweet."

"I've looked better, huh?" Paige laughed. "Guess it's a good thing we met already."

Jessie wanted to just fold Paige in her arms and never let go. "How are you?"

"Okay, I guess," Paige whispered. "I should be out of here soon. My ribs are still a little tender. Nothing broken, though."

"Are they treating you okay?"

"Yeah. It's not so bad, really. I get to lounge in bed all day. And I get out of janitorial detail."

Jessie smiled. "Always a bonus."

Paige looked up, her eyes expressing an unbelievably deep sadness. "I heard you tried to stop the guards yesterday. You shouldn't have done that. You'll only get in trouble."

"I couldn't just stand there and watch."

"Most people would."

"And did," Jessie pointed out. "But I'm not most people."

"You'll feel different after a while," Paige said. She managed to laugh. "Or end up like me."

Jessie brushed Paige's bangs away from her face. "You just rest. And get better. Okay?"

"Okay," Paige said. She sighed as it released the weight of the world. "I really shouldn't have talked to you yesterday. But it was almost worth it."

At first Jessie thought Paige was comparing to her to some bad luck omen, like a broken mirror or a black cat. But the look in Paige's eyes told a different story. Jessie remembered how the guards in the office had taken an interest in the fact that Paige was talking to her. Is that

why Paige was now all bruised? Had she been punished for talking to her? The thought sickened Jessie.

"I'm sorry," Jessie whispered.

"It's not your fault."

"Or yours," Jessie said. She stared down at Paige with a hard look, making it clear she was serious.

Paige turned away. "I don't know how you can even stand to look at me right now."

"Because you are beautiful," Jessie said, meaning it. She gingerly turned Paige's head to her so the two of them were facing again then bent down and gently kissed Paige on the lips. The kiss was soft, sweet, and ended too soon. Paige sighed.

"Thank you," Paige whispered. She found Jessie's hand and covered it with hers, lacing their fingers together and squeezing gently. Jessie returned the simple gesture of affection.

The two of them stared at each other for a long moment then Jessie reluctantly disentangled their hands. "I'd better get going. But I'll try to come visit again."

"I'd like that," Paige said.

Jessie smiled. She bent down and kissed Paige's forehead then got up, pushing her laundry bin into the adjoining room. Now that Paige couldn't see her, she let the tears fall.

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When Jessie finished her laundering duties she returned to her cell to relax a little before lunch. Unfortunately, Kara had the same idea. The brunette was on her side of the room, stretched out on her bed, lying on her side, with a hardcover book open in front of her. She didn't look up when Jessie came in, or even acknowledge her presence with so much as a disgusted grunt.

"Whatcha reading?" Jessie asked.

Kara answered without even looking up. "None of your business."

"You know," Jessie said huffily, planting her hands firmly on her hips, "if we're going to act like a couple you could at least pretend that you like me."

"There are a lot of women here who don't like each other and still fuck each other," Kara said. "I don't think Sanchez has ever let her little bimbo kiss her."

Jessie harrumphed. "So I get shafted on both counts. And now that the entire prison thinks we're a couple no one else will even offer."

"Your hand isn't broken," Kara said, shrugging.

Jessie snorted at that then stomped over to her bunk like a petulant child and plopped down. She glowered at the woman across the room. But Kara paid no attention to her. "Here's an idea. Maybe if you told me what you find so annoying about me, I could stop doing it. It could save us both a lot of aggravation."

Kara looked up. "Well, for starters you keep talking to me even though you can see that I'm reading. Reading is usually a non-talking activity."

"So you want to be quiet."

"Well, I was thinking more along the lines of you shutting the fuck up," Kara said. "But yeah. You get the general idea."

Jessie made a face at her cellmate. When she was a little kid her mother used to call her Running Mouth because she was always babbling incessantly. She had grown more reserved later in life, but still jabbered endlessly when she was nervous or anxious. So why did Kara make her feel like that? Jessie took a deep breath and released it slowly. It didn't help at all.

"Paige is in the infirmary," Jessie said.

That got Kara to look up from her reading. And for once out of genuine curiosity not irritation. "Who?"

"The woman who was dragged kicking and screaming out of the yard yesterday?"

"Oh her," Kara said. She turned a page and continued reading.

"Since you ask," Jessie said, folding her arms in front of her, "she's doing okay, under the circumstances. The guards roughed her up pretty good, though."

"Be thankful it wasn't you."

"Now that's a nice attitude," Jessie snapped back. "Ever hear of a little something we humans call compassion?"

"Ever hear of something we humans call survival instinct?"

Jessie gritted her teeth. This woman was so damn infuriating! It was obvious Kara did not want to be her friend, so why did she keep reaching out to her cellmate? It would have been easier and less painful to bang her head into the wall! Besides, she was only going to be there one more day! What did it matter if she and Kara became friends? Jessie reclined on the bed, propping her head up on one elbow so she could watch Kara from across the room. Her cellmate had an intense look on her face, as if she were cramming for a final exam.

"Paige thinks the guards were punishing her for talking to me in the warden's office yesterday morning," Jessie said. "Do you think that's possible?"

"Maybe," Kara said. "Or maybe they just beat her for the fun of it."

Jessie shuddered. The idea of the guards doing that to Paige's face for kicks turned her stomach. Not that there could ever be a reason to justify what happened to her. Three guards armed with clubs against one inmate weren't exactly fair odds. And it was hard to argue self-defense. What kind of person could do that to another human being? But then inmates weren't supposed to be human. Right from the start the guards treated prisoners like animals.

"I heard a woman died here last month," Jessie said. She was curious to see how Kara would react to her mentioning something like that. But Kara didn't react. Jessie might as well have been commenting on the weather. "Is that true?"

"Yeah."

"Did you know her?"

Kara said, "No."

"It isn't right," Jessie said. She shook her head sadly. "The way the guards treat people here? It just isn't right."

"No shit."

"Doesn't it bother you even a little?"

Kara slammed her book shut with a frustrated sigh. "You have to ask that? Of course it bothers me. But what do you expect me to do about it? I have to get through this place. In one piece, if at all



possible. What happened to Paige is barbaric. That woman never should have died. But eventually you have to quit worrying about everyone else and start looking out for yourself. There's nothing more you can do."

"You can be outraged," Jessie replied meekly. She knew Kara was right. If she really were an inmate at the Inferno, there was nothing she can do. Not from the inside. Even the story she planned to write might not make any difference. She wouldn't be the first reporter to expose prison corruption, yet it still went on.

"Oh like that does you any good," Kara said. "Righteous indignation might make you feel morally superior but in the end it just reminds you how helpless you are in here. And if you dwell on that you'll never survive this hell. It's defeatist."

Jessie managed to smile. "I didn't know I was sharing a cell with a philosopher."

"Oh yeah," Kara scoffed. "I'm the Plato of A-block."

"You wanna go to lunch, Plato?" Jessie asked. "I'm getting hungry."

Kara eyed her dubiously. "Will you let me eat in peace?"

"Yeah," Jessie said.

"Then let's go. You can even sit with me."

Jessie laughed. "What a generous woman."

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The Rec Room was a confined but much more comfortable alternative to the yard for prisoners to spend their free time. It was a little smaller than the cafeteria, longer than it was wide, with tall windows covered with metal grilles providing a filtered look at the desert that surrounded the prison. Several inmates were crowded around a large screen TV to watch a racy movie on cable, sitting on the sofa, in chairs, even on the floor. On one side of the room was a pool table. Couples huddled in the corners for kiss and grope sessions.

Jessie sat with Kara at a card table near the windows working on a jigsaw puzzle. It was the one activity the two of them could compromise on. Sitting together in front of the TV was too much

closeness for Kara, so of course going into one of the corners was completely out of the question. From time to time, to keep up the appearance of a new couple, Kara's hand would brush against hers in what was intended to be an affectionate if not possessive gesture. Jessie felt a thrilling jolt of electricity every time Kara touched her. Kara gave no indication that she felt anything other than annoyance by her mere existence. But at least Kara wasn't ignoring her completely.

"We're missing the right hand corner piece," Kara informed her.

As Jessie picked through the puzzle pieces scattered over the table looking for the fourth corner a chilling hush fell over the Rec Room. She looked up.

Two guards were standing in the arched entryway, their eyes scanning the room while every inmate squirmed uncomfortable and hoped they weren't the one the guards were looking for. Jessie got an uneasy feeling deep in her belly, a feeling that only got worse when the guards looked in hers and Kara's direction, nodded to each other, then crossed the room.

Jessie willed away the knot in her gut as the guards moved closer. Every inmate in the Rec Room was watching to see what happened next.

What happened next made it hard for Jessie to breathe. The two guards stopped in front of the card table and looked down at her and Kara. Which one of them were the guards there for? Jessie was impressed that her cellmate could look so calm and collected.

"Greyhorse," the guard on the left said. "The warden wants to see you."

Jessie heard the guard as if from a great distance, as if he were speaking to her from the opposite end of a long tunnel. Her pulse quickened. But Jessie didn't know if it was out of fear or something else. She remembered all too well what happened the last time she had been sent to the warden's office. Would it happen this time?

Glancing across the table, Jessie caught Kara's gaze and held it for a long moment before getting to her feet. She could feel the eyes of

every inmate watching her as the guards escorted her out of the Rec Room.

The guards said nothing to her as they led Jessie to Warden Tobler's office. Each step down the corridor, each step that took her closer to the warden's office, made her heart beat a little faster. Was she in trouble again? Jessie tried to think of what she might have done to incur the warden's wrath. Had someone spotted her talking to Paige in the infirmary?

By the time Jessie reached Warden Tobler's office her chest was heavy with panic. Her panic level increased when the guards told she could go right in. No waiting. Swallowing the bitter taste of apprehension, Jessie nervously headed into the warden's office.

Tobler was sitting behind her desk, just like she had been for Jessie's last two visits. The warden had on glossy black top today, unbuttoned part way to reveal a tantalizing bit of cleavage. Heat flushed Jessie's cheeks when she stopped in front of the warden's desk. It took a lot of effort to stop from peering down the other woman's blouse.

The whirr of the air conditioner was the only sound in the room. Jessie grew more and more uncomfortable the longer she stood there while Warden Tobler said nothing. She didn't dare speak before she was spoken to, but the tension was starting to get to her. Tobler finally cracked a thin smile.

"You are very beautiful," the warden told her.

Jessie blushed a little. Did the warden summon her just to tell her that? "Thank you, Warden."

"Mmm. Yes. Very beautiful." Tobler fiddled with the buttons on her blouse, as if deciding whether or not to unbutton the rest of them. The thought of her doing so was not without its appeal. "You're wondering why I sent for you, aren't you?"

"Yes, Warden," Jessie admitted.

In lieu of an answer – or perhaps for an answer- Tobler slowly undid the buttons of her blouse, shrugging it off to reveal the black lace bra she had be wearing underneath. The warden's pale breasts were practically spilling out of it, her cup running over, and Jessie

imagined burying her face in the valley between those two mounds. She was starting to pant like one of Pavlov's dogs and Tobler seemed to really like that. The warden smiled.

When Tobler stood up Jessie noticed two things simultaneously ... the warden wasn't wearing pants, and she had a thick pink cock strapped between her legs. Leather straps encircled stark white thighs, keeping the rig secure. Knee-high leather boots crept up Tobler's legs as if she had been dipped in a pool of ink.

Jessie stood there, transfixed, as Tobler circled around the desk to stand in front of her. She had to look up to meet the warden's eyes and when she did Jessie found them filled with an intense burning that made her tremble with excitement.

"Show me why I sent for you," Tobler whispered.

Jessie whimpered softly then sank to her knees in front of the warden. She had every intention of taking the warden's thick pink cock into her mouth, but when she got down on the floor Jessie got an idea. Bending even lower, Jessie pressed her lips to the toe of the warden's leather boot. Tobler hummed with pleasure.

"Such a good girl," Tobler muttered.

Emboldened by the warden's approval, Jessie eagerly continued. She licked from toe to heel and back again, polishing Tobler's boots with her tongue, doing one then the other until she made the black leather on both boots shiny with her spittle.

Jessie made her way up Tobler's boots with kisses until she again had the warden's pink cock right in front of her face. She leaned forward, flicking her tongue over the tip, and Tobler moaned. Fingers tangled in her hair as Jessie licked up and down the length of the pink shaft then kissed the head, closing her lips around it. Tobler sighed.

"That's it," Tobler whispered. "Suck my cock."

More than eager to comply, Jessie hungrily took the warden's faux cock into her mouth. She stroked it off with her lips, sliding further and further down the shaft until she was swallowing the length of it. Tobler murmured wordless approval and pulled her hair, encouraging her. Like she needed it! Jessie's head bobbed with the effort she put

into sucking Tobler off. The warden rocked her hips back and forth, fucking Jessie's face, ramming the pink cock down into her mouth.

"You are such a good little cocksucker," Tobler rasped. "Almost makes me wish I had a real cock so I could shoot a load of jism down your throat."

Jessie looked up at Tobler and moaned around the dildo in her mouth. She held the warden's gaze as she sucked on the pink shaft, deep-throating the length of soft plastic as if it really were a part of Alexa Tobler, as if she could milk the warden to orgasm. Tobler breathed a little harder then groaned softly, hips jerking as if she really were coming in her mouth.

The fingers in Jessie's hair tightened then Tobler pulled her mouth from the pink cock with a loud slurp. Jessie found herself being hauled her to her feet and grunted in both surprise and pain from having her hair pulled so violently. The warden quickly silenced her with a kiss, hot and hungry, demanding lips prying her mouth open so Tobler's soft tongue could tease hers. Jessie groaned. The warden unzipped her jumpsuit and slipped a hand inside, grabbing her breast and squeezing it.

Pushing the jumpsuit from Jessie's shoulders, Tobler roughly spun her around and bent her in half. For the second day in a row Jessie was leaning over the warden's desk with her jumpsuit and panties pulled down over her hips, just far enough to give the warden access to her. She felt the head of Tobler's cock bump her slit and pushed back against it, desperate to have that thing inside her. The warden gave her butt a sharp smack.

"Patience," Tobler admonished her.

Jessie whimpered pitifully as the warden dragged the head of the pink cock up and down her slit, teasing her dripping wet folds until she wanted to scream. Then Tobler thrust into her in one hard motion and Jessie did scream, but in pleasure not frustration, dropping her head a little as the warden fucked her from behind. Hands slid over her hips for purchase as Tobler thrust the dildo deep into her cunt, burying the entire length of it inside her.

"Oh ... fuck! Yes!" Jessie cried out.

The rhythmic smacking of the warden's thighs slapping against her ass cheeks were a drumbeat under Jessie's deep moans of pleasure. In that moment she wanted nothing else but for Tobler to fuck her forever, even if it meant spending the rest of her life at the Inferno. Just so long as the warden never took that cock out of her pussy.

"Ah! Ah! Please don't stop! Please don't stop!"

Jessie felt her gut tighten. Her pussy clenched around Tobler's cock, pulling it into her, gripping it tight, not wanting to let go. Tobler kept driving the soft pink cock into her, over and over again, slamming into her until her head was spinning. Jessie slumped forward onto the desk with a groan, the warden's cock deep inside her, the slickness of her pleasure trickling down her inner thighs.

The two of them stayed like that for a while, Jessie bent over the desk, the warden hunched over her back. Tobler finally pulled out of her, though, and Jessie whimpered like a puppy that just had its favorite chew toy taken away.

"Now don't pout," the warden said from behind her. "We'll play again soon. But go now."

"Yes, Warden," Jessie whispered. She pulled her panties back on and zipped up her jumpsuit, feeling used, like a cheap whore, ashamed that part of liked that feeling.

## CHAPTER NINE

For the second day in a row Kara had her delivering laundry rather than spend two hours in the same room with her. Jessie wheeled an uncooperative laundry bin down the middle of the main cellblock, dropping off canvas bags filled with bundles of clean laundry to their appropriate cells. Initially she had planned on using laundry delivery as an excuse to visit Paige again, but her route wouldn't take her anywhere near the infirmary and she didn't have time to make a detour. She hoped she would get a chance to see Paige again before she left, though, both to see how the woman was doing and also to say good-bye.

It was hard to believe she was into her third (and last) day at the Inferno. In some ways, it seemed like she had been there a lot longer. So much had happened to her in such a short period of time. It was like measuring her life in dog years instead of human years. A day in the Inferno was the equivalent of a month in the outside world. When she left she wouldn't be any older, but on the inside she had aged considerably. And she had grown a little wiser.

The brief experience had definitely made a profound impact on her. She would never be able to look at life the same way again. How could she? There were so many things Jessie used to take for granted that she would appreciate now, from little things like being able to pee in private to the really important things like the people in her life.

But in other ways her time at the Inferno seemed to just fly by. It was all a blur in her mind, one incident blending into the next until she couldn't tell where one ended and another started. She would have to spend the next couple of weeks sorting everything out before she could really make sense of it all.

As she pushed the laundry bin down the middle of the cellblock Jessie wondered when Clare would come for her. She missed her friend so much ... missed having a friend period. She couldn't really consider Kara a friend yet, even if her cellmate had been a little more amiable toward her. Paige could have been a friend if the two of them

had a chance to get to know each other. But that was as close as Jessie got in there.

And maybe it was for the best.

If she made friends it would have made it a lot more difficult to leave. That was something Jessie hadn't counted on when she came up with this scheme. What on Earth made her think she could just go to prison for a few days and come out again without any consequences, to herself or the people she would inevitably meet inside?

Jessie knew the answer and berated herself for it. Like the guards she had learned to despise, Jessie had thought of the inmates at the Inferno as less than human. What difference did it make to her what impact her brief stint there had on a bunch of hardened criminals? In the beginning all that mattered to her was gathering facts for her story. The feelings of the inmates at the Inferno didn't count because she never stopped to consider that inmates even had feelings.

But that was before a bruised and battered woman stared up at her from a hospital bed with eyes longing to know even a moment of compassion.

That would haunt her for a long, long time after she left the Inferno.

Jessie sighed as she dropped off another load of clean laundry. While she was certainly looking forward to getting out of there and back to her normal life again, part of her would miss this place, or, at least, the people she had met there. She wanted to know how Paige and even Kara fared after she left. Perhaps she could do a follow-up piece to the story she already had planned. It would make for an interesting story and be a good excuse to revisit the women she had met there. Would they come out of prison changed women as well? Jessie was curious. And given her newfound perspective she would have to interview Roz Mitchell again. The two of them would have something to talk about now.

When Jessie reached the next cell she recognized the woman inside as one of Sanchez's posse. She thought her name was Hannah, but wouldn't have bet her freedom on it. Hannah was stuffing her large breasts into a bra that seemed a cup size two small. She noticed Jessie



standing there and snorted with contempt, pulling on her jumper but only zipping it up part way before she sauntered over to the door.

"What do you want?" Hannah asked.

Jessie dropped a laundry bag at Hannah's feet. "Just dropping this off. Sorry about the screw up. Next time I'll make sure you get a bra that will actually fit those things."

"Funny," Hannah said. She leaned against the doorjamb. "So you're still pulling laundry detail, huh?"

"Why wouldn't I be?" Jessie asked.

Hannah grunted at her. "Thought you'd be under the warden's desk."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Jessie demanded angrily even though she knew exactly what Hannah meant.

"If you don't know then you're the only one around here without a clue," Hannah said, punctuating her snide comments with a cruel laugh. "Sure ain't worth being the warden's bitch if you still gotta deliver laundry."

"Fuck off," Jessie snapped back.

Hannah just laughed at her again. "Enjoy it while you can. Sooner or later another pretty young newbie will come along and you'll be tossed in the garbage like a used condom."

"Speaking from experience?"

Ignoring that, Hannah grabbed the bag of laundry at her feet. "Giving up all that pussy and still gotta deliver laundry. Huh. You must not be all that."

"You'll never find out."

Hannah grunted. "Like I'd ever want Tobler's sloppy seconds."

Walking off in a huff, mocking laughter following after her, Jessie thought there were some people at the Inferno she would definitely not miss when she left.

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Inmates were encouraged – meaning required – to make the most of their free time, those precious couple of hours that weren't already set aside for work detail, meals, showers, or structured recreational periods.

Jessie retreated to the library when her time came. Now that she was hip to the fact that her sessions with the warden were the topic of prison gossip, Jessie took quicker notice of the snickers and spiteful looks from the other inmates as she passed by them. It was as if a scarlet letter had been stitched onto her gray jumpsuit when she wasn't looking. But Jessie knew every single one of them would have done the same thing if their positions were reversed, though she doubted any of them would admit it.

So Jessie didn't let their scornful looks faze her. Besides, she wouldn't have to put up with them too much longer anyway. That night she would sleep in her own bed. With any luck, Clare would be in it with her. So to hell with what the other inmates thought.

The library was an impressive maze of bookracks lined up like dominoes on one side of the room with several cafeteria-style tables and chairs filling up the other side of the room. Jessie snatched a copy of *People* from the magazine rack and found a place to sit away from the other inmates. She flipped through ads for teeth whiteners and feminine hygiene products without interest, her thoughts instead dwelling on what she wanted to do that night.

After much careful consideration, Jessie decided she wanted to change into some nicer clothes, go some place fancy and have a really big dinner, and fuck Clare silly. Though perhaps not in that order. Jessie was still deciding what she wanted to do first when a guard appeared beside the table.

"Greyhorse," the guard said. "The warden wants to see you."

Jessie could hear every inmate in the library sniggering. It amused them no end to see the warden's bitch being summoned to service her mistress. She let them have their laughs at her expense, as a parting gift, leaving with the guard without returning the looks thrown at her.

Five minutes later she was standing outside Tobler's office with permission to go right in. She stared at the door for a moment, wondering what games the warden wanted to play with her this time, then went inside feeling like she was ready for anything.

There wouldn't be any games this afternoon, she realized quickly. But Jessie wasn't disappointed. More like relieved.

"Ms. Greyhorse," Tobler said. "Please come in. You have a visitor."

Clare was sitting in a chair in front of Tobler's desk and stood up when Jessie entered. She had on a lemon colored peasant blouse and a pair of loose-fitting jeans, a nice change from the no-nonsense business suits Jesse was used to seeing her in.

The two of them shared a look.

"It's good to see you," Jessie said.

Clare smiled. "It's good to see you, too."

"So we're all pleased to see each other," Tobler said. "Now. Perhaps Ms. Greyhorse would like to explain why the Maricopa County District Attorney is in my office asking to see her?"

Jessie looked at the tall blonde woman sitting behind the desk, with her over-confident smile and snazzy clothes. "You're damn right I would. The District Attorney is a friend of mine. I asked her to arrange it so I could come here, undercover, to do a story about prison abuse. And in the short time I have been here, Warden Tobler, I have seen more than my fair share of abuse." She took a deep breath before continuing. "The inmates here are subjected to cruel and unusual treatment from the moment they arrive. Prisoners are harassed and beaten by the guards, for dubious reasons or no reason at all. Trading sexual favors is commonplace. Not only are you aware of the abuses, Warden Tobler, but you encourage and participate in them. You can be sure that I will document everything I have seen here, not only for the story which will appear in print, but for the authorities as well. When the dust finally settles, I promise you, there will be a new warden at the Eastman Women's Correctional Facility and you will be doing time at the Inferno."

The warden stared at her. Jessie doubted anyone had ever dared to speak to her like that while wearing the gray jumpsuit of an inmate. It felt so good to tell her off. Jessie felt like she was speaking for every woman at the Inferno.

But then Tobler smiled. The woman actually sat there and smiled that smug little smile of hers as if Jessie hadn't just dropped a bombshell in her lap. What an arrogant bitch!

"You were right, Clare," the warden said. "She is feisty."

"Mmhmm," Clare murmured. "But she's a hellcat in the sack."

Jessie felt as if a fissure had opened up under her feet and gobbled her up. Had she misheard them? She must have. Because what she thought she heard was impossible. Dear God no. It just couldn't be real. Her insides churned. She thought back to the day Hank Birdsong was murdered. There were two messages waiting for her when she got to the paper that morning, the message from Birdsong and a message from Clare. How interesting that Clare would call her out of the blue the very morning Hank Birdsong tried to get in touch with her. Jessie always said she didn't believe in coincidences. So why hadn't she found it odd that Clare called her that morning?

Because she had been thinking with her cunt, not her head. She was depressed that Rachel left so when she got a message from Clare Taylor she didn't think to question it, to be even a little suspicious. All she saw was an opportunity to get laid. How stupid she had been!

"I think she's starting to understand," Tobler said.

"Yeah," Clare chimed in, laughing. "And not a moment too late."

Jessie looked at Clare but saw a complete stranger. She didn't know this woman. It looked like someone she had cared about once, someone she had taken to her bed and made love with all night. The resemblance was uncanny, really.

But this wasn't her friend and lover. Jessie didn't know who the hell she was.

"You murdered Hank Birdsong," Jessie said flatly.

The stranger with Clare's face smiled sweetly at her. "Me, personally? Goodness, no. I had it done. It's amazing what some criminals will agree to in a plea bargain."

Jessie grunted in disgust. "You cold-hearted fuck."

The insult rolled off Clare like beads of water on a waxed surface. "Well, we couldn't have him blabbing to you, now could we? See, we knew Birdsong called you," she continued, her smile never waning, "but we didn't know what, if anything, he told you. After I called I and got your voicemail, I couldn't even be sure you talked to him."

"So you asked me to dinner to find out," Jessie said. "How did you know I'd ask about Birdsong?"

"I didn't," Clare said. "I would have put out some feelers, eventually, but then you mentioned the Inferno and I knew that you were at least looking into things you shouldn't. Alexa wanted to take you out of the picture right there, but I wanted to keep an eye on you for a while, see where you went, who you talked to. Then you came to me with the most brilliant idea. Send you to prison. It couldn't have been more perfect. You are so helpful when you want to be. Especially with the whole not telling anyone where you were going. That was very thoughtful of you."

Jessie felt an icy chill race up her back. "You can't be sure I didn't tell anyone."

"No?" Clare intoned. "I stopped by your office, claiming you and I had an appointment. That hot little redhead who spent the night at your place said you were out of town but didn't know where. She's a little young for you, isn't she? Not that I can blame you. I'd fuck her in a heartbeat. Come to think of it, she might know more than she's telling. I could always pay her a visit."

"Don't you go near her," Jessie growled.

"Mmmm. Do I detect a note of jealousy? You must really like her. It's too bad you won't get to see her again. She'll miss you, I'm sure. But I can help her get over it."

Jessie lunged at Clare. It was pointless, futile, but she had an overpowering urge to wrap her hands around the woman's throat. The DA was faster than she expected, though. Clare sidestepped just in time and caught her in a bear hug. Jessie struggled in Clare's grip but it didn't help. She gave up with a frustrated grunt. Clare still held her. The two of them were nose to nose, their lips almost touching. Clare slid a hand over her breast and squeezed. Jessie pushed back.

"Don't touch me," Jessie said.

Clare laughed. "You can't fool me, Jess. I know you too well. Even though you hate my guts right now, you know you still want me."

"You think way too much of yourself," Jessie said angrily. "And too little of me." But part of her anger she directed at herself. Because on some level, Clare was right. She did want her. The hand at her breast felt nice, much nicer than it should have. But she couldn't let Clare know it.

The DA groped her breast through the thick fabric of her prison jumpsuit. "Alexa told me how beautiful you looked with your lips around her cock. I wish I had been here for that."

"There's plenty of time for an encore performance."

It was the first thing Jessie heard the warden say in the last ten minutes. She'd almost forgotten Tobler was in the room with them. As Clare pawed at her breast with more and more enthusiasm Tobler slowly came up behind them. Jessie found herself sandwiched between the two women she hated most at the moment. She felt Tobler's hands on her ass. Was this a dream? Or a nightmare?

Jessie tried to squirm free. But she was in the grip of both women now. There was nothing she could do to stop them. She could make it harder for them, though.

"You should be a little more cooperative," Clare said.

"Why?" Jessie spat at her. "It's a little too late for threats, Clare."

The warden laughed into her ear. "For you, perhaps. But what about your friend in the infirmary? I could make life very difficult for her."

Jessie tasted the bitterness of defeat in her mouth. She couldn't bear the thought of anything happening to Paige. It didn't matter what happened to her; her fate was sealed the moment Clare's treachery had been revealed. Paige shouldn't be made to suffer, too. With a resigned shrug Jessie stopped resisting.

"Now that's a good girl," Clare whispered, leaning in to kiss her. But not with the soft lips Jessie remembered. These were cruel, harsh lips brushing over hers.

Now that Jessie wasn't struggling, the two pairs of hands that had been feeling her up made short work out of getting her clothes off. In no time she was standing between Clare and the warden naked, their hands all over her, unable to tell which of them was touching her

where. Those eager hands slid over her breasts, her backside, finding their way between her legs where the flesh was damp in spite of her reluctance. Damn her lack of self-control! Jessie hated herself for it. But these same hands caressing her now had wrung moans of pleasure out of her before, and knew how to do so again whether she wanted it or not.

Tobler spun Jessie around and kissed her while Clare fondled her from behind. The warden's tongue slithered over hers, as impatient and demanding as the hands on her butt. Jessie moaned into the kiss. She was such a lost cause. Tobler clearly approved, though, roughly grabbing her breast and massaging it until she moaned even louder. Laughter echoed in her ears.

It was bad enough that she had so easily surrendered. But Clare and the warden not only knew it, both women took great delight in it.

Tobler backed up until she bumped her desk, pulling Jessie with her, their kisses growing more and more urgent. With a little hop the warden was sitting on the desktop, legs dangling over the edge, her knees on either side of Jessie's hips. She unbuttoned her top and Jessie slipped it off her shoulders. Tobler wasn't wearing a bra this time. The milky breasts that looked so appetizing in black lace the day before looked even more inviting bared to her. Jessie couldn't help but whimper.

"You want to suckle at mommy's breast, don't you?" Tobler asked, combing fingers through her hair.

Jessie nodded.

The warden took her breast in hand and lifted it up, offering it to her. Jessie bent down and took the warden's nipple into her mouth, sucking on it just like an infant. Tobler murmured softly and stroked her hair as Jessie suckled hungrily, as if actually seeking nourishment. While she did that Clare came up behind her. The DA had gotten undressed while Tobler kept her occupied. Jessie knew that because she felt Clare's bush tickle the crack of her ass. She moaned around the tit in her mouth as Clare rubbed against her, the wetness of the other woman's cunt stirring more of her own. The warden's nipple

stiffened in her mouth and Jessie flicked it with her tongue, making Tobler moan.

Hands gripped Jessie's shoulders from behind and pushed her to her knees. No one had to tell her what to do now that she was down there. She helped the warden out of what was left of her clothes then stared hungrily into her pussy. Unlike the inmates Tobler lorded over, the warden had a neatly trimmed tuft of blonde hair over her mound. The musky scent of arousal was thick from where Jessie was and she just had time to breathe it in before Clare pushed her face between Tobler's legs.

Tobler gave a soft moan as Jessie lapped at silken folds, her tongue darting up and down the warden's slit, dipping inside for a moment then slithering over her cuntlips again.

"Mmmm," Tobler purred. "You were right, Clarissa. She's good at this."

Jessie was surprised to hear Tobler refer to Clare like that. It gave her some idea how close the warden and the district attorney were. But it was a fleeting thought. For now, at least, having given in to lust, she was much more interested in the tasty dish right in front of her. Tobler leaned back on the heels of her palms and thrust her hips up at Jessie as she drove her tongue between the warden's puffy red folds, fucking her, with Clare's fingers moving through her hair to encourage her.

"You look so good on your knees, with your face in her pussy," Clare told her. "That's where you belong."

That made Jessie whimper. Why did she get off being treated like a slut? But, God help her, she did. Jessie nuzzled her face into the warden's pussy, eliciting a moan. She searched for Tobler's clit with her tongue and when she found Jessie lashed it, flicking the hard nub. Tobler hissed at her.

"Yes," Tobler muttered. "You're going to eat my fucking come."

Jessie groaned into damp flesh then pressed her lips to the warden's hard pearl of a clit and sucked it like she had suckled at her breast, as if she needed to in order to stay alive. The warden's hips jerked suddenly off the desk. Jessie felt the first spasm around her face then



Tobler cried out, thrusting against her as she came. Sweet juices dribbled from her slit and Jessie eagerly slurped them up. She could have gotten even more but Clare's grip in her hair tightened then Clare pulled her from between the warden's legs and turned her around.

"Since you're already down there," Clare said, grinning at her.

With Tobler's juices still dripping from her lips like wine, Jessie leaned forward and buried her face in Clare's pussy. The familiar smell and taste of her old lover was the only about the DA that was still the Clare Taylor she remembered. Jessie licked up and down her cleft then, using her fingers to spread Clare's netherlips, slipped her tongue deep inside. She knew how much Clare liked that and the moan above her confirmed that.

"Look at you," Tobler said, laughing. It sounded like she hadn't moved from her desk. "Your face is all flushed. You're going to come already, aren't you? You must have been touching yourself while you watched us."

Clare hiccupped with pleasure. "Can you blame me?"

"Uh uh."

From the hitch in Tobler's voice, Jessie knew the warden was playing with her pussy while she watched her licking Clare. The thought made her wild with desire, as did knowing that Clare was nearing climax. Jessie turned her attentions to the other woman's clit, stroking it with her tongue.

"That's it, bitch," Clare growled. "Fuck yeah. Get me off."

Jessie had every intention of doing just that. She slipped two fingers into Clare's pussy, underhand, using the pads of her fingers to massage the underbelly of Clare's hard pebble while she flicked the exposed nub with her tongue. The combination had Clare mewling in ecstasy. Hands gripped her shoulders, squeezing almost hard enough to shatter bone as Jessie spurred Clare closer to orgasm. Woman-flesh tightened around her fingers and tongue then Clare howled like a wolf at a full moon. Jessie was a little startled when a stream of opaque juice squirted out at her, splashing across her face, but she kept her mouth on Clare's pussy. The slick liquid was sweeter than honey and Jessie hungrily lapped it up while Clare hyperventilated above her.

Just as abruptly as she demanded to be serviced Clare pushed her away. Jessie lost her balance and went tumbling backward, sprawling on the floor. She looked up at Clare, at her red cheeks and trembling lips, feeling a mixture of arousal and hurt. On the floor like that, naked, the juices of two women sticky on her face, Jessie felt cheap and dirty. As she lay there, trembling, Tobler pulled Clare to her and kissed her long and deep, the kiss of a longtime lover. The warden's hands moved up and down Clare's back. Clare's hands were in Tobler's hair.

Jessie stayed on the floor and watched them, ever the obedient slut, waiting for her owners to whistle for her.

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It was well after lights out when Jessie got back to her cell. Kara was asleep in her bunk, snoring away like a chainsaw running out of gas. Even though Jessie doubted her cellmate would hear her over that din, she still slipped off her shoes so she would make as little noise as possible and tiptoed mouse-like across the room in her socks.

Jessie sank down on her small bed with a tired sigh. She ached all over from spending the entire evening on the floor of the warden's office. Clare and Tobler took their turns with her then made her sit there and watch them with each other. It was torture. She was desperate to get off. But her needs were an afterthought, and when they finally saw fit to address them the only relief Jessie was allowed was to finger her pussy while the two of them watched. There was an added thrill to masturbating in front of them, but it wasn't enough to satisfy her burning need. And now she was just too tired to do it again.

In the darkness of her cell, Jessie felt guilty about what happened. Those women were murderers. Clare had arranged to have Hank Birdsong killed, and would have had her killed too. Yet Jessie had wanted her, both of them. And even though she had been coerced Jessie still shouldn't have enjoyed it like she did. The raw energy of Clare and the warden just overpowered her, like a narcotic, clouding her judgment and making her crazy.

But now that high was starting to wear off and Jessie was crashing back down to Earth, landing with a dull thud against the cold, hard surface of reality.

Jessie sat on her bunk in disbelief. Was this really happening? She was in prison. And not just for three days. She couldn't imagine they would ever let her out of there, not given what she knew. Could she prove it? Not really. But her allegations would be enough to start a process in motion. The proper authorities would get involved and that would be the beginning of the end. So letting her out of there was just not in the cards. Jessie didn't know how to get a message to Nina or someone else who could help her. Under normal circumstances her mail and phone calls would be monitored, though Jessie doubted she would be allowed either of those now. She might be able to get another inmate to make the call for her, but Jessie was sure from now on the guards would take note of every woman she talked to. Assuming any of the women at the Inferno ever talked to her again.

The prison cell seemed a lot smaller to Jessie now. She felt cold. Drawing her knees up to her chest she hugged them tightly and rocked back and forth to comfort herself. Part of her kept expecting to wake up from this awful dream, to find herself back in her own bed with Clare sleeping beside her.

But it wasn't a dream. Clare had betrayed her. And now she was stuck in the Inferno forever. She would never see Nina or Rachel again. She would never tell Amanda who murdered her brother and why, and she would never have a chance to let Roz look under her hood.

It was all gone. Her life had been stolen from her. She would have preferred death to this barren existence. Better to end up a dead body face down in an alley than to live with the loss of everything she cared about.

Jessie didn't want to cry. She wanted to tough it out, stiff-upper-lip-it, be strong and not let this turn of events get to her. But the tears welled in her eyes and her bottom lip began to quiver, then the floodgates opened and with a choking gasp she was crying like a baby.

Movement on the other side of the room got her attention. Through the blurry sting of tears Jessie watched a half-naked Kara roll out of bed, cross the room, and sit down next to her.

"What's wrong?" Kara asked softly.

Jessie tried to answer. But all that came out was a pathetic gurgling sound. Kara opened her arms and Jessie crawled into them, crushing her face into the other woman's shoulder. Fingers moved through hair, comforting her.

"Sorry I woke you up," Jessie murmured.

"It's okay," Kara said. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Jessie pulled back to look at her cellmate. "You'd never believe me."

"Tell me anyway."

So Jessie told her. Everything. She told Kara about being a reporter for the Phoenix Sentinel, about the message from a prison guard named Hank Birdsong. Still wrapped in comforting arms Jessie told her cellmate about how excited she was over her idea to go undercover in the Inferno, and how Clare turned out to be part of the problem not the solution. It felt good to tell Kara, to get it off her chest. Even if it did sound like a fish story.

When she was done the two of them sat for a moment in silence. Kara was still holding her. Jessie liked it. She snuggled in closer. "I knew you wouldn't believe me."

"I didn't say anything," Kara said.

"But you thought it."

"Oh, so you can read my mind now?"

"Wish I could," Jessie said, looking into Kara's eyes. That was the truth. She wanted to know what went on inside there, what mysteries were behind those warm, inviting eyes.

The two of them gazed at each other for the longest time then Jessie leaned closer and their lips were touching. It was a gentle kiss at first, soft and sweet, almost nervous, like the first kiss of two teenagers. Then Kara's mouth opened under hers and the kiss deepened, became hot, passionate. She and Kara kissed like parched desert travelers finding an oasis after weeks in the hot sun, slaking their thirst on each

other's lips. Jessie started to lean back on the bed and tried to pull Kara with her. But her cellmate resisted.

"I can't do this," Kara whispered.

Jessie nodded sullenly. "I understand."

"No, you don't," Kara said. She cupped Jessie's face in her hands. "If this were just a convenient fuck to pass the time, I would have no problem whatsoever. But it wouldn't be that. I've been resisting you from the get-go because the last thing I want to do in this shit-hole is fall for someone. And God, could I ever fall for you."

Tears welled in Jessie's eyes again, but not for the same reason as before. She ran her fingers through Kara's hair. The woman was so beautiful. If things were different, in another world, back in her real life, maybe ... just maybe. But that was gone. This was all she had now. Kara was right. This wasn't the place to fall for someone. "Will you at least hold me?"

"Yes," Kara whispered.

Without another word the two of them snuggled up together on the small bed. Jessie drifted off to sleep in Kara's arms, scared, unsure, yet feeling safer and more content than she had in a long, long time.

## CHAPTER TEN

In the dream, Nina was making love to her. Jessie squirmed on the bed – was it her bed? – as Nina's tongue flicked over her nipples, teasing them to hardness, making her gasp and moan with each touch. The redhead took each of her breasts in turn, moving from one to the other, kissing them, sucking them, in general just making her crazy. Jessie raked her fingers through Nina's red hair, silently demanding more. Nina answered her pleas by slipping a hand between her legs and rubbing her cuntlips. Jessie moaned.

"Mmmm ... ahh ... oh yeah," Jessie panted hotly. The intern had such nimble fingers, the fingers of a concert pianist, and her body was the instrument of choice for this recital. She moved against Nina's hand in search of a firmer touch, but Nina would not be rushed.

The redhead's fingers traced the length of her slit, so lightly it barely even qualified as touching. And all the while that hungry mouth was latched onto her breast so tightly Jessie wondered if she would be able to pry it off even if she wanted! Not that she did. As far as she was concerned Nina's mouth could stay at her breast until it shriveled up into something resembling a prune.

But Nina didn't wait for that to happen. The redhead moved down her body with kisses, soft, tender kisses that still managed to burn wherever they went, as if Nina's lips were a branding iron searing their mark into her flesh. Jessie groaned under the heat of Nina's mouth as the redhead inched lower and lower until, at last, those burning kisses reached the inferno between her legs.

Drawing her knees up, Jessie spread for her lover. Nina wasted no time accepting the offer, hungrily pressing her mouth to Jessie's slit. Jessie groaned and arched of the bed, clutching desperately at the bedcovers as the redhead went down on her.

"Oh! Oh God! Yes, baby. Yes!"

Even to her own ears Jessie sounded pitiful. But she couldn't help it. Nina's tongue flittered over her pussylips like the wings of a hummingbird, pushing her to the breaking point. Her insides felt like

a balloon inflated to its limit. She was going to pop and Nina's tongue was the sharp pinprick that would make her explode.

Then suddenly Nina stopped licking her. How cruel! Jessie looked down and saw Clare and Warden Tobler pulling Nina off of her. Both of them were naked. She tried to stop them but found that her wrists were secured to the bed with iron shackles. When had that happened?

"Leave her alone!" Jessie cried.

Clare smiled at her. "Don't worry. We'll take good care of her."

"No!"

Jessie woke with a start, heart pounding in her chest. She was confused for a moment, disoriented, unsure of where she was, then the room around her started to take form and it all came back to her. Clare. The warden. Prison. Kara.

Where was Kara?

Sitting up, Jessie was disappointed that Kara wasn't still in bed with her. Kara wasn't even the cell with her. She was probably down at breakfast. Had her cellmate returned to her own bunk after she was asleep? Or had Kara spent the night with her and slipped off before she woke up? It didn't matter. The last memory she had of the night before was Kara holding her and the warm feelings it stirred within her. Jessie couldn't think of better way to end the day, especially that particular day.

Waking up in her cell reminded Jessie all over again that it hadn't been a dream. But a little sleep in her cellmate's comforting arms left her feeling a more optimistic this morning than she had been the night before. There had to be a way out of this mess. She would find it. Somehow she would get a message to the outside world, let her friends know where she was. Jessie wasn't about to let Clare and Warden Tobler win. The two of them had broken her spirit the night before, but she was through being their submissive.

Jessie got up and stretched her back. She was still a sore from last night, but a hot shower and some breakfast would definitely go a long way in taking care of that. Not to mention seeing Kara again. Finding her shoes, Jessie slipped them on and was about to head out when

something caught her attention. Or rather, something that once caught her attention was now gone.

When she first arrived, Jessie noticed some pictures and other personal effects on Kara's dresser. Those were gone. Jessie opened the top dresser drawer. Empty. So were all the other drawers. No spare jumpsuits. No underwear. Nothing. Just empty drawers.

Panic seeped into Jessie's chest, making it heavy. Where was Kara? Had the warden done something to her? Jessie dashed out of her cell, frantic, looking for someone, anyone, guard or inmate, that she could ask.

The cellblock seemed deserted. Jessie ran down to the guard station. The guards inside paid no attention to her. She pounded on the window with her fists until one of the guards came rushing out, club in hand.

"What the hell are you doing?" the guard asked.

"Where is Kara?" Jessie asked.

The guard looked at her, puzzled. "Who?"

"Kara Jacobi!" Jessie cried, exasperation raising the pitch of her voice. "We shared a cell. But now her stuff is gone." She didn't know why she was telling the guard this. It wasn't like he cared. His expression said as much.

But the guard apparently wanted a quiet morning instead of a confrontation. "Wait here."

Jessie nodded. She watched the guard go back inside. The two guards conferred with each other for a moment then the guard came back out again.

"Jacobi was transferred out of here this morning," the guard said.

Jessie's gut twisted into a knot. "But ... why?"

"Don't know, don't care," the guard said. "I just get the paperwork, and the paperwork says she was transferred. Now get moving. I'm sure you have someplace to be."

Walking off before she pushed the guard too far, Jessie fought back the tears threatening to spill again. The warden was behind this. What other explanation was there? That bitch had taken away her last thread of hope. Now she was completely alone.



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The heat outside in the prison yard was almost unbearable, a choking kind of heat like a noose of fire around her neck. Jessie stood at the fence line staring out into the desert. Sweat gathered at the small of her back, making her jumpsuit one with her skin. It didn't matter. The heat, the sweat. Who cared? Kara was gone.

Jessie had been going through the motions all morning. She showered, had breakfast, and reported to the laundry for work but didn't really remember much about it except that Kara wasn't there to tell her to shut up and go away. Of all the things she missed, Kara's annoyance with her topped the list. Maybe it was because she finally knew why Kara was so annoyed with her. Or maybe she just missed any acknowledgement of her presence, even an annoyed one.

No one had spoken to her except the guard from the guard station. Since she wasn't in the mood to talk it didn't bother her so much, but Jessie still noticed how the other inmates were avoiding her. Her reputation as the warden's bitch made her a pariah. Were they afraid of catching Tobler cooties? She just didn't get it.

Jessie sighed as a light breeze drifted through the prison yard, bringing a short-lived moment of relief from the dreadful heat. Is this what her life would be like from now on? Filled with brief moments of pleasure between long stretches of suffering? She supposed after a while those brief moments of pleasure were all that kept some inmates going. Without them, there was only constant suffering. What was the point of living, then?

Dark, ugly thoughts filled her head then. Jessie forced them back into their dungeon. She could not give in to despair. That just wasn't an option. She had to survive. Even if it was only to spite the warden. Jessie would not give up, no matter how much misery the Inferno heaped on her.

The crunch of gravel alerted Jessie that someone was coming up behind her. She turned around, relief flooding through her at seeing a familiar face. It was Paige. She looked much better than when Jessie had last seen her. The purple bruises on her face were starting to yellow now, giving her a jaundiced look. But it was an improvement.

The cut on her lip looked healed and the swelling had gone down. Paige shuffled to a stop and smiled shyly.

"Hi," Paige said.

Jessie smiled. "You look great. Are you feeling better?"

"A lot," Paige said.

"I'm glad."

The two of them regarded each other awkwardly for a moment then Paige abruptly moved closer, much closer, until their lips were almost touching. The suddenness of it caught Jessie off guard. Hands slid over her hips.

"Grab my butt," Paige said.

It wasn't a demand. More an urgent request.

"Huh?"

"Put your hands on my ass," Paige said. "If the other inmates see me talking to you they'll beat the shit out of me later. But if they think I'm just trying to get you under the bleachers they'll leave me alone. So play along."

Jessie nodded even though she didn't really understand what was going on. But it was hardly the worst thing she had ever been asked to do. She slid her hands over Paige's tight, round butt, squeezing the hard globes. "Is this better?"

"Uh huh," Paige grunted. She took a deep breath and released it in a sigh. Because the two of them were standing so close together Jessie felt Paige's warm breath on her lips. "I wanted to warn you."

"Warn me about what?"

Paige's right hand slid from her hip to her breast. "The word is out on you. That's why no one will talk to you."

"Yeah, I know," Jessie said. "I'm the warden's flavor of the month."

"She doesn't deserve you," Paige said, grunting, though whether it was out of disgust or because Jessie kept fondling her firm ass was hard to tell. Maybe it was a combination of both. "I'm not talking about that. Something else."

"Wh-what, then?" Jessie managed to ask. The hand at her breast made it awfully difficult to speak.

"You've been marked," Paige said.

"What does that mean?"

"Someone is gunning for you," Paige said. She brushed her thumb over the hard nub straining against Jessie's gray jumpsuit. "I don't know who. But you need to watch your back."

Jessie tried to digest the information. Someone was out to get her? She knew the warden was behind this, too. But Tobler wouldn't do the job herself. Who would it be? Guard or inmate? Jessie could never be certain, and she couldn't trust anybody. Except maybe the woman with a hand around her tit.

"Thanks," Jessie said.

"I owed you," Paige replied. "Besides ... well, I don't wanna see anything happen to you."

The distance between their lips was almost nonexistent now. Jessie closed what little gap remained, kissing Paige under the scorching sun in the middle of the prison yard. Now that Paige was on the mend Jessie didn't have to be so gentle with her. The kiss was hot, hungry, the kiss Jessie would have given Paige the first time if she could have. She moved her hands over the other woman's backside. Paige's hand never left her breast. Between the kisses and caresses and the head both of them were soon gasping for breath. Paige pulled back, panting.

"Push me away hard," Paige murmured against her lips, "and everyone will know you turned me down."

"I could do that," Jessie said. She kissed Paige again then added, "Or we could go under the bleachers."

Desire flared in Paige's eyes. "You really want to?"

"I really do," Jessie said, nodding.

Paige smiled bashfully. "Me too."

Knowing every inmate in the yard was watching them, Jessie took Paige's hand and led her under the bleachers. The umbrella of shade the bleachers provided was a welcome respite from the heat, but that wasn't why inmates went under them. Nothing made that clearer than the other couples already under there, hands inside jumpsuits, women

on their knees. The couples were too wrapped up in each other to notice Jessie and Paige joining their ranks.

Jessie found a private little corner and took Paige there, pushing her back against the wall and pinning her there with another kiss. The lips she kissed were fiercely eager against hers. Impatient hands moved up and down her back in long strokes, from her shoulder blades to her ass. Paige's hands seemed to linger down there. Jessie approved.

Unzipping Paige's jumpsuit, Jessie slipped her hand inside and cupped a breast. Paige moaned into the kiss and arched against her, offering up her tits. Jessie accepted. She used the heel of her palm to knead Paige's supple flesh through her prison-issue bra, groping and fondling the ample mound while Paige gasped and grunted under her.

Pulling down the cup of Paige's bra just enough to let the nipple slip out, Jessie flicked the plump nub with her tongue. She teased it hard then took Paige's nipple between her lips, sucking it, gently stroking it with her lips. Paige answered with a soft moan.

With her mouth around Paige's breast, Jessie slipped her hand down the front of the other woman's gray jumpsuit. Her fingers immediately went for the crotch of Paige's panties. She rubbed Paige there, delighted with the wetness she felt underneath. Paige's hips jerked hard against her. Under different circumstance Jessie might have teased her new lover first, letting the tension slowly build, but time was precious and she couldn't afford to squander it. Kissing Paige on the lips again, Jessie pulled aside the crotch of Paige's underwear and plunged two fingers into her cunt. Paige responded with a deep groan.

Jessie pumped her fingers in and out of Paige's sopping wet pussy, fucking her harder and faster than she really wanted to, but loving it all the same. Slick flesh clenched around her fingers as Jessie pushed in deep. She used her thumb on Paige's clit, pummeling the hard little nub while she slid her fingers in, out, in, out, goading Paige closer to climax. Their kisses became more and more urgent with each thrust then Paige groaned against her lips and Jessie felt the sharp contraction of orgasm. Paige slumped against her with a sigh, Jessie's fingers still deep in her pussy.

Slipping her fingers out, Jessie brought them to her lips and had a taste. Delicious. When Paige saw what she was doing she smiled and took one of Jessie's fingers into her mouth, cleaning her juices off them. Jessie held Paige's intense gaze as she sucked on each of her fingers. The touch of those soft, warm lips made Jessie want to feel them other places.

Paige must have read her mind.

Turning them around so Jessie had her back to the wall of the prison now, Paige unzipped her jumpsuit down to the crotch and pushed it over her shoulders. It fell away, bunching around her legs. Then, smiling sweetly at her, Paige sank to her knees. Jessie sighed as Paige rolled her panties down over her hips. That sigh became a deep moan of pleasure when Paige's tongue flicked over her cuntlips. Jessie cradled Paige's head in her hands as Paige ate her pussy, licking up and down the length of her cleft before pushing her tongue inside. The world around her seemed to melt away in the heat. Jessie gasped and moaned under Paige's care, the tongue darting around inside her pushing Jessie to the brink of release. When Paige's tongue swirled around her clit that nudged her over the edge.

Even as the last tremors of orgasm rippled through her loins Jessie hauled Paige to her feet and kissed her, tasting the sweetness of her juices on the other woman's lips. She was surprised how well her tangy nectar and Paige's sweet lips went together. It was something she could get used to.

The two of them were standing there, breathing hard, both their jumpsuits hanging open, when the lunch bell echoed through the yard. Jessie pulled back so she and Paige could zip up and join the rest of the inmates in the cafeteria. As she tugged her jumpsuit into place, Paige gave her an embarrassed look.

"I can't sit with you," Paige said. "At lunch? I'm sorry."

Jessie nodded. She could hear the regret in Paige's voice, and that meant a lot to her. "I understand. Why don't you go first? I'll hang back."

"Okay," Paige said. She reached up and caressed Jessie's cheek with the back of her hand. "Remember what I said. Watch your back."

"I will," Jessie said.

The two of them shared a meaningful glance then Paige sighed and headed off. Jessie watched her go. Maybe she'd just skip lunch and go back to her cell where no one would be able to see how lonely she looked.

\*\*\*

Jessie pulled a handful of damp laundry out of a washing machine and put it in the large canvas hopper next to her. Even though her work shift was over she couldn't face the emptiness of her prison cell, and since she wasn't up to dealing with more scornful looks and snide remarks from the other inmates she didn't bother with the Rec Room or the library.

Not after suffering through lunch.

In spite of her misgivings, Jessie went to the cafeteria. She wouldn't last very long in prison if she started skipping meals. So she joined the other inmates in the chow line. It turned out to be a mistake. She felt like a leper. Faces melted into scowls of distaste when she walked by, and when she passed snickers and taunts followed after her. She sat alone at one end of a long empty table, feeling the cold stares of the other inmates.

Heeding Paige's warning, Jessie sat with her back to the wall so she would be able to see when someone approached her table. She needn't have been concerned. Nobody approached her. No one wanted to be near her. Jessie tried to find Paige in the sea of unfriendly faces. Even if Paige wouldn't look at her for fear of incurring the wrath of other inmates, just seeing her would have made Jessie feel a little less alone.

But she didn't see Paige.

After that horrid experience she decided to come down here. She had nowhere else to go.

It was between shifts, so Jessie had the laundry room to herself for now. She could handle it as long as she had something to keep her

occupied, something to keep her mind off the fact that someone was out to get her.

Jessie still wasn't quite sure how to feel about that. She supposed she should have been scared, and maybe the safest place for her to be was in her cell with the door shut. But she wasn't going to spend the rest of her life cowering in the corner like a frightened child. She simply refused. Paige's warning had been very cryptic, but that didn't mean she wouldn't take it seriously. She just wouldn't let it get the best of her, wouldn't let the warden ... the inmates ... the Inferno get the best of her. Jessie had give all three too much of herself already. She wasn't about to give them any more.

Pulling the last of the damp clothes out of the washer, Jessie pushed the rolling canvas bin across the laundry room to the line of dryers. The high-pitched squeak of the wheels echoed through the room. It made her cringe. The sound was worse than fingernails on a chalkboard.

Jessie loaded a dryer with damp clothes, added a static cling sheet, and started the dryer. Damp clothes tumbled around for a couple rotations then abruptly stopped.

The room went dark.

Jessie felt a prickle of apprehension at the base of her spine. The only light in the room was a red glow from the battery-powered emergency exit signs. What the hell was going? Had the power gone out?

It wouldn't have been the first time.

The thought made Jessie's heart stop. It was just last month that a woman had been killed during a prison riot following a failure of the main and backup power systems. Jessie just assumed that failure had been a tragic accident. But what if the power had failed on purpose?

There was no better cover story for a murder than a prison riot. Power out. Lots of confusion. No way to know who was responsible. It was perfect. Who would think to dig any deeper than that?

Not a family that had gotten a big fat cash settlement from the corporation that owned the prison. Not the District Attorney's Office since the DA was in on things. That was it. Case closed. So if what

Paige said was true, and someone was coming after, and if, as she believed the warden was behind it, when would be the best time to make a move?

Jessie tried not to panic. It was a hard sell to the butterflies in her stomach. The emergency exit signs didn't provide much light, but it did give her a point of reference. Would it be better to try and make it to her cell, or was she safer hunkering down there? In her few days at the Inferno Jessie had learned her way around, but she wasn't sure she could find the cellblock in the dark. That still didn't answer the question of whether or not she'd be safer there. The biggest congregation of inmates would be in the Rec Room and in the prison yard. The cellblock wouldn't be entirely deserted, but it wouldn't be full up either. Why hadn't she just gone to her cell? Damn!

The darkness seemed to be closing in all around her, like a fist slowly squeezing tight. Jessie forced herself to breath slowly, evenly. What the hell was she going to do? She thought back to that first day at the Inferno, when Kara told her to get detergent out of the supply room. The room didn't have a lock, but it was small and if it was a good place to sneak off to for a quick romp then it would also make a good place to hide. But did she want to corner herself like that? One way out meant only one way in, and as long as the lights were out she could take a full bottle of detergent and use it like a club on the first person who opened the door.

Of all her options, that sounded like the best one. She wouldn't have to watch her back once she was in the supply room and could focus all her attention on the door. It also gave her something to do. Standing in there in the middle of the wide-open laundry room made her uneasy.

Feeling good about her decision, Jessie headed in what she thought was the direction of the supply room.

Someone grabbed her arm.

Jessie yelped in surprise. She squinted in the darkness and just barely made out the hard lines of a familiar Latina face. "Sanchez?"

The answer came in the form of a fist slamming into her face. Jessie stumbled back a few steps. She felt something warm that



smelled of copper drip down her lip. Blood. Her nose was bleeding. Great.

"That was from me," Sanchez said. Her voice filled the darkness like the cry of a phantom. "And when I find you, you're going to get something from the warden. I'm gonna bury it in your gut."

Jessie dropped to the floor. It seemed like a good idea. She couldn't move as fast as she could on her feet, but in the darkness speed and mobility were less of an issue. Avoiding Sanchez's fist (or whatever else she had with her) was her top priority, and since the woman had all the sense of a baked potato Jessie was hoping she wouldn't think to look (or feel around) for her on the floor.

"Where are you, cunt?" Sanchez called out.

It sounded like Sanchez was walking away from her. Jessie crawled on her hands and knees, hoping she was heading toward the table where the laundry was folded. She'd be safer under there than out in the open where Sanchez could trip on her. It was a better plan than sitting there hoping Sanchez gave up and went away.

The hard floor was murder on her knees, though.

You should be used to it, Greyhorse, she told herself mockingly as she crawled through the darkness. You spend half your time on your knees.

Jessie felt like a cockroach. A really slow cockroach. It was taking forever to reach the table. Had she gone the wrong way? Her sense of direction wasn't the greatest, but she should have been that far off. Even as she thought about it her shoulder bumped into something. At first she thought it was Sanchez, but to her relief it was the leg of the table and not a person. Score one for the Greyhorse internal compass.

But she patted herself on the back a little too soon. The power came back on, and with it, the lights. Score one for bad timing.

Sanchez was on the other side of the room, just like Jessie thought. But when the lights came on Sanchez immediately started looking for her. Their eyes met. Jessie saw pure hatred in those eyes. It wasn't difficult to understand why Sanchez was in prison. That was definitely the look of a murderer.

Time seemed frozen. Like God had just hit the big pause button in the sky. Jessie got up off her hands and knees like a sprinter hearing the shot of the starter's pistol. She bolted for the exit. But Sanchez angled toward her, cutting her off, knocking her into the row of dryers. She hit them with a grunt.

Sanchez pulled something small out of her jumpsuit pocket. The just-turned-on lights reflected off the metal blade of a crude, hand-fashioned weapon. It sure wasn't pretty, nothing elegant about it. But the tip looked very sharp. Jessie didn't want to find out for sure.

The line of dryers severely limited her escape options. Jessie made a move to the left but Sanchez darted out in front of her, waving the homemade knife at her menacingly. Was there any other way to wave a knife? Unable to answer that, Jessie backed up. Sanchez marched toward.

"I'm going to cut you, chica," Sanchez said.

Jessie glared at her. "Like you cut that woman last month?" Anger flickered over Sanchez's face. Was it smart to taunt the woman with the knife? Probably not. Not that it mattered at this point.

"She had a big mouth, too," Sanchez said.

Still backing her way along the line of dryers, Jessie bumped into something. She risked a glance over her shoulder. It was the bin she had used to transport the wet laundry over to the dryer.

Empty, the canvas bin wasn't that heavy. In one fluid motion Jessie grabbed it and hurled it at Sanchez. The laundry bin slammed into the Latina woman. She cried out. Jessie made a break for the door, running as fast as she could.

But she just wasn't fast enough, even with the distraction she created.

Sanchez cut her off and stabbed at her blindly with the knife. Reflexively Jessie put her arms out to protect her face. The blade jammed into her arm. Jessie howled in pain. When Sanchez pulled the knife out of her arm it was dripping with blood. Jessie felt sick. She told herself she wasn't going to die, that this wasn't the end for her. Sanchez had other plans. She lunged at her. Jessie sidestepped

and punched the Latina in the jaw. It hurt like hell but still felt good. The woman needed a punch in the jaw.

Too bad it just pissed the Latina off even more. With a bear-like growl Sanchez came at her, tackling her, taking her down to the floor like she had in the cafeteria. The two of them rolled around, wrestling like a couple of dogs. Did Sanchez still have the knife or did Jessie hear it go clattering to the floor? Jessie kicked and flailed her arms, hitting mostly air, but managing to drive a few satisfying punches into Sanchez's ribs.

Sanchez rolled them both over and straddled Jessie's hips. Jessie struggled underneath the weight of the Latina but all she got for her troubles was a punch in the mouth. Sanchez backhanded her again then grabbed the knife off the floor and put it to her throat. Jessie felt the blade digging – but not yet cutting – her skin. She stopped struggling.

"You are going to die soon, chica." Sanchez unzipped Jessie's jumpsuit and peeled it open. She used the makeshift knife to cut open her bra, baring her breasts, then took one in her free hand and groped it roughly.

Jessie grimaced. It was one of those moments where she expected her life to flash before her eyes. But it didn't. Her thoughts were of rage, hatred, and the sickening prospect that she would die with Sanchez's musk all over her. Sanchez still had the knife at her throat. The wrong move and it would puncture an artery. She'd bleed to death right there on the floor. For a passing moment she thought of turning her head, sharp, fast. Better to get it over with than have Sanchez mauling her.

Then a gunshot rang out in the laundry.

It didn't sound like the shots fired in police shows on television. On TV, gunshots sounds like a car backfiring. But this was quieter, like a balloon popping. A swatch of red began to form on the shoulder of Sanchez's jumper, like she had a pen hidden in there somewhere and it just started to leak. Sanchez jerked forward a little then slumped to the side.

Jessie quickly rolled away from Sanchez and scrambled to her feet. She looked up.

Blinked.

Looked again.

Still didn't believe it.

Kara was standing about ten feet away, in a firing stance, holding a gun in both hands. She was wearing a white T-shirt over khakis. The flak jacket had Department Of Corrections printed on it in big letters to avoid any confusion.

"Are you okay?" Kara asked.

Jessie stood there, motionless, her brain unable to process even basic questions. She noticed several men in flak jackets like Kara's coming in, guns drawn. Some of them went for Sanchez. Kara moved toward her.

"Jessie? Are you okay?"

"Yeah," Jessie managed to blurt out.

Kara was standing next to her now, taking her hand, lifting her arm up slightly. "You're hurt."

"It's just a small cut," Jessie lied. She had no idea if it was or not. Had Kara just saved her life?

"We'll get you checked out, anyway," Kara said. She started to lead Jessie off.

Jessie pulled away from Kara. Her mind was starting to clear now. The reporter in her was back. And she had questions. "What the hell is going on?"

"I'm with the Department of Corrections," Kara said. She pulled back her jacket and slipped her gun into a brown leather shoulder holster. "Internal Affairs Division. I was sent in undercover to investigate the death of an inmate last month."

Jessie nodded at the Latina woman the other DOC officers were taking out of the room. "It was her. On the warden's orders, but it was her."

"We'll deal with her," Kara said. "And Tobler."

"Clare?" Jessie asked. "She's—"

"In custody," Kara finished. "We'll sort this out, Jessie. And I will fill you in on everything, I promise. But first you should really get checked out by EMS. For me? Please?"

Jessie nodded. She had more questions, and she would ask them, but not now. There would be time later. Now, though, she mostly wanted to get the hell out of there. "Okay."

"You, uh, might wanna zip up first," Kara said.

Looking down, Jessie saw that her bra was flapping open and her breasts were hanging out. She pulled off her bra, tossed it aside, and zipped up her jumper. "Better?"

"Depends on how you look at it," Kara said.

Jessie laughed for what seemed the first time in years. "Let's go."

## EPILOGUE

It was strange being home.

Jessie plunked down on the sofa with a listless sigh, tucking her legs underneath her. She had been home for almost a week now and didn't know what to do with herself. Not for lack of options. There was mail to go through, phone calls to return. While she was gone Rachel left five messages on her machine. Nina was eager to come over.

But Jesse wasn't up to facing anyone yet. She still needed time to adjust, to sort things out.

The case was working itself out rather nicely. Clare and Tobler both plead no contest in exchange for lighter sentences. Apparently, they could keep women in prison but weren't so keen on being there any longer than they had to. Jessie didn't blame them. An ex-DA and a former warden would not make friends on the inside. She had mixed feelings about the plea bargain.

As far as she was concerned Clare and Tobler should be in prison until their withered, decaying bodies were discovered in their cells. But the plea agreement meant that she wouldn't have to testify, and while Jessie was willing to do whatever it took to put Clare and Tobler away she preferred to not relive her experience at the Inferno. She got enough of that in her dreams. When she slept.

Sanchez was in a prison hospital recovering from the gunshot wound to her left shoulder. She would live, though. The world wasn't perfect. But twenty-five years had been added to her sentence for the attack on her and the murder she committed in prison. It didn't seem like justice had been served, but the twenty-five years tacked on to her current sentence meant she would only see the light of day from a prison yard.

The same was true for a twenty-year old Tucson man named Brian Granger. He was the convict Clare had "hired" to murder Hank Birdsong. The dupe had been up on assault charges, a crime that carried a sentence of only a couple years. But to cut that down he

agreed to murder Birdsong. Now he was charged with murder and would spend the rest of his life in prison. Stupid bastard.

The Inferno, at least for now, was still in operation with a new warden in place. There was no evidence that Elliot Eastman had been aware of the abuses taking place at his prison and he was cooperating with investigators fully. Jessie didn't think it was out of the kindness of his heart, though.

The Inferno was getting a lot of bad press, national press, the story appearing on all the cable news channels and even the networks. State legislatures that once had been considering granting contracts to Eastman Enterprises to build new prisons were now having second thoughts. Eastman had to stop the hemorrhaging somehow. Maybe he would be successful, maybe not. It didn't matter to her.

Jessie was just glad things were working out. She hoped her life would take that same route.

The editors at the paper were furious with her, not only for going undercover at the Inferno but for not telling them first. She tried to argue that by not telling them what she was planning the paper wouldn't be liable. But that didn't quite appease them. Of course, in spite of their angry protestations, they did print her story ... front page, above the fold, banner headline with color photos. All the stops had been pulled. She was on vacation now. It wasn't punitive, or so she was told, just some time off so she could recover from her harrowing experience.

Much to her relief, Nina wasn't as miffed as Jessie was afraid she might be. The redhead was more concerned for her than angry with her. She called several times to check up on her, offering to come over and help in any way she could, even if it was to bring her food or do chores around the house. No strings attached. Jessie appreciated the offer. And while she did want to see Nina again, even for an innocent dinner together, she still wasn't ready yet.

Would she ever be ready?

The doorbell rang before she could answer.

Jessie uncoiled from the sofa and padded to the front door in her bare feet. She wasn't expecting anyone and didn't feel like

entertaining visitors. Whoever was out there would be sent on their way post haste.

When she opened the door Jessie rethought her position on visitors. Kara was standing outside.

"Hi," Kara said. She had on a sky blue polo shirt over a pair of Dockers and looked great.

Jessie managed a timid smile. "Hi."

"I wanted to check in and see how you were doing," Kara said.

"I'm doing okay."

"Good."

"Yeah."

The two of them regarded each other for an awkward moment. Jessie hadn't spoken to Kara since things went down at the prison. It was just as well. She didn't know what to say to her. But damn, she looked good. Jessie wished she hadn't been standing there in a T-shirt and sweatpants.

"Can I come in?" Kara asked.

Jessie wanted to kick herself. "Ugh. Yes. Of course. Just call me thoughtless. Come on in." She motioned Kara inside and closed the door behind them.

"I know I should have called first," Kara said. "But if I had, you might have said you didn't want to see me. This way you have no choice." Her smile lit up the room.

Jessie laughed. "That's very, um, what's the word? Oh yeah. Devious."

"You aren't mad, are you?"

"No," Jessie said. "It's good to see you."

Kara dipped her head a little. "It's good to see, too."

The two of them were staring at each other again. It wasn't as awkward this time, but there was still just the staring and the silence that went with it.

"Can I get you anything?" Jessie asked.

"I'm fine. Thanks."

"Okay."



More staring. More silence. Jessie felt like a teenager on her first date.

"I read your story," Kara said. "It was good. I clipped it out and pinned it to the bulletin board in my office."

Kara had an office. She had a life. There was so much about her Jessie didn't know. It might as well have been a stranger standing in her living room. She didn't know where Kara was from what music she listened to, what she liked for dinner. So why did Jessie feel like she had known this woman all her life?

"I never had a chance to thank you," Jessie said. "You know, for saving my life. That's what, twice now?"

"I lost count," Kara said.

Jessie laughed. "Well, anyway. Thank you."

"You don't have to thank me," Kara said. "Just doing my job."

"Of course," Jessie replied, trying not to sound crestfallen. Just doing her job. Right. Why would she think it was anything else?

"Not the answer you wanted, huh?" Kara gnawed on her bottom lip for a moment. "It just sounds tougher than admitting I ran frantically through the prison looking for you, hoping I wasn't too late, praying I wouldn't find your dead body in a corner somewhere."

Jessie reached out and brushed her fingers over Kara's cheek. "You don't have to be tough now."

Capturing her hand, Kara turned it and pressed her lips into the palm. Jessie shuddered. She moved in closer. Kara leaned into her and then they were kissing, hotly, hungrily, desperate for each other, like two lovers who hadn't seen each other in weeks. Jessie slid her hands up the back of Kara's shirt. Kara's hands made a beeline for her ass. Breathless gasps escaped between kisses.

"Where's your bedroom?" Kara asked, her voice husky with arousal.

"Not close enough," Jessie panted. "Upstairs."

"We have to go there. Now."

"Yes, yes."

The kiss resumed in the bedroom. Hotter, hungrier. Impossible as that seemed. When they came up for air Jessie lifted Kara's shirt up

over her head. Kara tugged at the waistband of her sweats. Between kisses and caresses the two of them managed to undress each other.

Jessie pulled Kara into bed. The kisses never stopped. It was as if their lives depended on those kisses, as if the world would stop rotating on its axis if their lips weren't pressed together. Jessie slid her hands over Kara's naked body, wanting to know every curve, every rippling muscle. The brunette answered her in kind, touching her in places that with any other person wouldn't even be considered erogenous. But when Kara touched her in those places Jessie felt her pussy get wetter. Their legs were a tangle of flesh as the two of them explored each other, kissing deeply, lost in each other. Jessie moaned when Kara's hands slid over the rounds of her ass.

Pushing her lover flat on the bed, Jessie moved down Kara with kisses. She started with Kara's lips, then her chin, sliding down Kara's throat then inching lower until she had her mouth around the other woman's breast. Taking a nipple into her mouth, Jessie sucked it, teased it with her tongue. The plump nub grew stiff in her mouth and Kara moaned, raking demanding fingers through her hair as Jessie moved from one breast to the other, kissing them, licking them, sucking Kara's rock-hard nipples until both were glowing pink from her attention.

Her mouth stuffed full of breast, Jessie slipped a hand between Kara's legs and fondled the sopping wet cuntlips she found there. The fingers in her hair moved down her back now, clawing at her as she lovingly teased Kara's pussy.

"Jessie ... Jessie..."

Hearing her name roll off Kara's lips like that made Jessie groan around the breast in her mouth. She plunged her fingers into Kara's wetness, fucking her, pumping in and out of her at a blinding pace. Kara groaned. Their bodies moved together, the rhythm building, faster and faster, their desire out of control.

Keeping her fingers wrenched up Kara's hot, wet cunt, Jessie dragged her mouth from Kara's breast and down her flat tummy, kissing a zigzagging path lower unto her lips caught up with her fingers. She dipped her tongue into Kara's depths and Jessie hummed

with approval, savoring the spicy-sweet taste she discovered there. Kara arched off the bed with a moan.

"Please, baby, please!"

Jessie replaced her fingers with her wagging tongue, lapping at Kara's pussy like a kitten with a bowl of cream. She licked up and down Kara's slit then slipped inside again, unable to get enough of that silky smooth honey in her mouth. It was ambrosia, rich and delicious. Kara scratched at the sheets in desperation, her cunt pulsing.

The desire to bring Kara off filled Jessie's entire being, consumed her, became her obsession. She wanted her lover to come ... needed her to come. Thrusting her fingers into Kara again, Jessie flicked her tongue over the other woman's clit, lashing it until the hard nub was straining from its protective hood. Then she pressed her lips to the exposed nubbin and sucked it, hard, using her tongue and teeth and lips until her face was awash in Kara's juices and howls of pleasure filled her bedroom.

Jessie licked the sticky-sweet mess from Kara's inner thighs then crawled up next to her. Kara welcomed her with a kiss filled with a passion that rocked Jessie to her very center. She whimpered into the kiss and arched into Kara, desperate for contact, needing to feel the other woman's body pressed tight against hers. Kara answered by sliding a hand between her thighs.

"Inside," Jessie muttered. "I need you inside me."

Kissing her again, Kara thrust her fingers into Jessie's cunt. Jessie groaned and humped against Kara's hand, riding her fingers, hips moving to a tremulous beat. Her insides were in upheaval as Kara pounded into her. Jessie wanted to laugh and cry and scream out in pleasure. She straddled Kara's hand, rocking against it, their kisses becoming more and more urgent as Jessie approached climax. The tight ball of tension in her gut was like a lead weight yet Jessie felt lighter than air with Kara's fingers deep in her pussy. She was getting closer ... closer ... the room spinning around her, making her dizzy. Then the room disappeared completely and there was just her and Kara ... Kara's fingers inside her ... Kara ... Kara ... Kara. Blinding

white light filled her vision. Jessie began to tremble. Her muscles tightened. Then in a whooshing surge she came, hard, her pussy strangling Kara's fingers. She slumped forward with an anguished sigh, falling into Kara's waiting arms.

The two of them snuggled up together, their naked, sweaty bodies in a breathless heap in the middle of the bed. Jessie draped her leg over Kara's thighs and rested her head on the other woman's shoulder, teasing Kara's breast with the tip of her finger while Kara gently stroked her hair. This felt right to her. Comfortable. For the first time since returning from the Inferno Jessie felt whole, complete. She felt like she was really home.

"I'm glad you stopped resisting me," Jessie said.

Kara laughed. "Well, I'm only human. How long could I hold out?"

"So true," Jessie said, grinning. She drew lazy figure-eights around Kara's nipple. "You told me you didn't want to fall for anyone in prison. Remember?"

"Uh huh."

"Well, we're not in prison anymore."

"Nope."

Jessie looked up at Kara, saw the playful smile on her lips, the glimmer in her eyes. "So do you think you could fall for me now?"

"I think I already have," Kara said.

Sighing contentedly, Jessie rested her head on Kara's shoulder again. She'd fallen, too. Hard.

**The End**

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