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Burning Bridges As We Go

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It Murder When its Murder

She woke up to cold, empty sheets where he should've been and a feeling of panic. Something she hadn't anticipated. Poking her button nose over the thick covers, looking around, she spied him standing nude in the kitchenette with a small throw blanket wrapped around his waist for modesty. And sighed a sigh of relief.

He's still here, she thought. Good.

The angry red scratch marks crisscrossing his back and shoulders looked deeply uncomfortable but confirmed the passion he had ignited in her last night.

I did that, she realized with a touch of giddiness. He made me do that!

"Good morning," she purred stretching and moaning, feeling luxuriously naked beneath the sheets.

"Morning," he replied without turning around, "Coffee?"

"Yes, please. With cream and sugar if you have it."

"You got it."

Sarah looked past her new lover out the window, catching a glint of the sun, and thought, *What a beautiful place! Lake Tahoe is definitely more beautiful in person than any painting I've ever seen -- Audubon or Cole maybe. Even Monet.* Big red skies streaked orange pushing back against the night shadows with yellow rays of a pale golden sun dancing

across the blue water. *Peaceful*, she thought, *Serene even. You can practically hear the angels singing. Too bad this will be the last view he sees. Though, as far as views go, it could be worse.* She knew.

Her assignment for the weekend had been crystal clear. End Joel's life. Kill him. No equivocation, no mercy, no failures. With finality and prejudice. By Monday. Her orders, however, were non-specific as to what she was allowed to do with him before then. Or how much she could toy with him. Enjoy herself because, let's face it, it had been awhile for her. And he was a very handsome and charming man. Something his wife had, in fact, repeatedly warned her about.

"He has a very magnetic personality. And reads people well. It comes with his job. But don't be taken in," the wife shared, "he's a stone cold narcissist who uses his charm as a manipulative tool to take advantage."

She wasn't opposed to a little challenge. To see if her seduction skills were still at the pro level. But the wife never mentioned the stamina he possessed in spades. Oof. That made things a bit mor interesting.

"I'm loving the view," Sarah cooed.

He barely turned his head to look, putting one hand up to block out the incoming sunlight, "I'm glad. It's one of the reasons I chose this place."

"I wasn't talking about the view outside, Sugar," Sarah purred trying to sound flirty like those sex kittens from the old movies. Betty Grable or Rita Hayworth or, Ohh! Who was the one who always did all those sexual innuendo jokes? Mae West! Yes! Mae West! She loved her!

"Thank you," he mumbled flatly turning back to his task.

Sarah stretched again feeling an aching soreness running up the back of her legs into her loins. An unexpectedly pleasant sensation considering the long hike they took when they first arrived yesterday. And the hungry way they went at each other after they returned, pulling each other's clothes off, kissing passionately, pushing, pulling, and maneuvering each other toward the bed. The attraction strong and intimacy fervent, with only the mildest of awkwardness at being their first time. But very in the moment and satisfying. Especially considering he surprised her greatly when he made her climax at the peak of his efforts - her singing out, ahhhh! while he grunted in unison. Nothing faked there!

Good for you, Mister Jones, she giggled, feeling spent enough to fall back into the sheets. Her thoughts being, maybe one more day. One more day of fun before I kill him so I don't waste this opportunity.

As far as Joel knew, she was Sarah O'Neil from Columbus, Ohio -- the new temp who'd been subbing for his secretary gone a month now on maternity leave. His hot, new, sexy, no strings attached secretary! He should be so lucky! He'd flirted shamelessly with her for the entire month, and she, per her instructions, let it be known she might be available to his advances at the right time. For the right guy. Under the right conditions. Which had finally arrived.

"The coffee will be ready in a moment," Joel said breaking her reverie. "It's French press so it might take a minute. I admit I'm not very good at it yet so you might get a few grounds in there. It could taste bitter."

"I don't mind a little grit," Sarah growled. Very Mae West, but he didn't seem to be catching on.

He finished the coffee, poured two cups, and dropped one off at her bedside table. But before leaving, he took a moment to look down at her reclining in bed and smiled.

“Hmmm,” he murmured, “I wonder if you realize just how alone we are out here all by our lonesome. Doubt anyone could even hear you scream if you cared to.”

What a strange thing to say, she thought before replying, “I had actually. Why do you ask?”

“No reason. Just an existential thought. I’ll be out on the deck, so let me know when you need a refill on the coffee.” He turned and walked outside.

“Thank you,” she called after him.

“You’re welcome,” he replied, flat and monotone.

Well, shit! Sarah thought, What was that?! Had I misread him? He was pretty odd there. What was all that ‘all by my lonesome,’ stuff? Was that supposed to be a warning or intended to scare her? Maybe he’s having morning after regret and, now that he’s gotten what he came for, wanting to leave? Thinking about ending the weekend early? I’m pretty sure he doesn’t suspect my cover but, nor can I let him leave till I’ve completed my mission. Especially if he’s having second thoughts.

Sarah had been paid a great deal of money by Joel’s wife to keep an eye on Joel. To act as his new temp secretary and work directly for him at his privately owned advertising firm under the pretense of being a young graduate student looking to pay her way through college. And she was to continue watching him and distracting him till the wife decided exactly what she wanted to do about him. Seems like Joel knocked up his previous secretary and sent her away on an all-expenses paid leave to keep the situation amenable till he could figure out what he wanted to do about her and the baby. Which the wife believed meant Joel would end up leaving her for that damn pregnant trollop if the baby turned out to be his. Something the wife, she mentioned to Sarah in an ice cold manner, had sadly not been able to do during their marriage.

"I'm having paternity tests run secretly," the wife told Sarah. "He doesn't know I know. Or that I know where he's keeping that little hussy! Or who her OB-GYN is. It's a small state, for heaven's sake. But I tell you this, when I get the results, you'll know what I want you to do next. Till then, just watch him and keep him interested. It shouldn't be difficult with his roving eye and you looking the way you do."

The twenty thousand dollar fee Sarah received, in addition to the ten thousand she'd already been paid to watch him, arrived via private courier at the end of the month. The enveloped included a handwritten message confirming not only the results but the wife's intent, "Kill the bastard by Monday. Make it look like a violent robbery or some such fiasco so I can still collect on his life insurance policy."

Sarah planned to make it look like a bear attack, which paid out three times what the robbery angle did to the beneficiary. Something the wife might be willing to grant a little bonus for. Bear attacks were rare, sure, but not uncommon up on the north shore where people liked to hike the Tahoe Rim Trail off season between Brockway Summit and Mount Rose, as Sarah's research indicated. *But if he's looking to end the weekend early, Sarah thought, that means I'll have to move up the timeline. Shoot! I was just starting to have fun. How can I extend things and convince him to go on one more hike later? Maybe if I promise to throw in a little open air loving in some forest glen or pasture up there? That should interest him, give me one more go round, and still fit my plan.*

You know the score, her conscious interrupted to reason back, NO forcing things for your last minute passions. You have your assignment.

Sure, but when was the last time we had sex that good? Or a guy strong enough to make us orgasm on his first try? It won't hurt to extend things. Push the assignment off a little so we could get our nut off again.

Hey! Her conscious admonished back, *That's* the kind of thinking that nearly cost us the Cross contract last year. Remember? We went over deadline and it cost us time, money, and reputation to set that right! Just so you could get laid. So, everything by the numbers this time. The cabin is definitely the place to do it and earlier is better than late if he's having second thoughts. You'll just have to use the robbery angle and screw the bonus.

If you think that's best, she sighed. But look at him! Pity to end such talent so early in the weekend.

I know. I know. Sorry, babe, but we have a deadline to think about and our career to keep in the black. You'll have all the fellas you want when we retire to some tropical climate in a few years so suck it up, girl! I hear Brazilian men can be quite passionate. Save it for them. You'll be able to afford a dozen when we're through.

Looking at Joel sitting outside on the deck drinking his coffee, his back still to her as he watched the sunrise, Sarah was unsure whether to join him outside or wait till he returned back inside. Instead, she opted for the more prudent tactical course of action. Slowly she eased out from under the covers on the other side of the bed. Then she went for her day bag. Inside she removed her favorite piece, a Berretta Cougar .380 semi-automatic, seven plus one in the chamber with a reduction silencer to reduce the kick. All metal and top shelf – unlike most of the new hybrid guns out there with their molded polymer plastic handles and aluminum slides and springs that wore out quickly. That crap may be all the rage with the young assassins, she thought, thanks to being cheap and disposable, but it didn't help the reality of most situations – that when you needed a solid piece of *dick* to shoot with, and never miss, you went with steel. What were a few extra ounces compared to that kind of dependability?

Sarah quietly slid back the slide, making sure a round was chambered, before creeping back to bed -- inching up and under the comforter with her finger indexed outside the trigger guard.

No accidents needed here, her conscious warned.

With her free hand, Sarah picked up the coffee cup and drank the last, grimacing at the too sweet sugar and harsh bitter grounds condensed at the bottom of the cup.

"Okay," she whispered, "let's talk tactics. If we call to him for more coffee, when he walks in, we do our thing. He won't expect it. Clean and simple."

Wait, her conscious considered, if he's at the kitchenette, the window will be just past him with the sun shining directly into our face. It could blind us. Not a good position to shoot from.

"Well then, we need to move him to a more advantageous position. Make the sun shine in his eyes and not ours, right?"

How do we do that without it being obvious?

"Oh, I know! I've got it. Leave it to me. But be ready."

Sarah stood up and wrapped the comforter around her naked body so he wouldn't see the Berretta held underneath. Then she sashayed, Rita Hayworth style, over to the sliding glass doors and gently knocked. When he looked back, she smiled as sweetly as Marilyn Monroe and mouthed coquettishly, "More coffee?" at him.

Joel smiled, stood and walked back in looking her up and down as he did. Sarah waited till he passed, faced him, and purred, "Hey there, sugar."

When he turned to face her, he was struck full in the face by the shining sun. Not yet strong enough to blind him completely, but enough to delay his pupil adjustment response and make him again raise a hand to shield his eyes.

Perfect, Sarah thought, dropping the comforter to completely expose her naked body while striking her very best Mae West pose. Which she hoped was seductive and not as ridiculous as it felt. Sun behind her, legs slightly apart, her hip thrown out to one side, hand resting on her hip with the other hidden behind her back holding the Berretta, Sarah purred, "Hey there, big boy. Interested in a little action?"

He looked her up and down with a big cat who ate the canary grin. "Oh, you're gorgeous! You really are! And I love what you're doing here. But as much as I would love to, unfortunately, I don't think you have that much time left."

"How so?" Sarah replied slightly confused.

"Well, it's been nearly twenty minutes. If I timed the poison in your coffee correctly, then you should be passing out in less than thirty seconds and dead within a minute."

"Poison? Poison! You son of a bitch, you poisoned my coffee?! Shit! Why didn't I think of that?! Well, no matter. That was clever of you, but I still have time to do this."

Sarah revealed the Beretta, raised it and leveled it straight at his heart. "Say goodbye, sweetheart, you've been a real peach," she drawled like Mae West.

"Wait, wait, WAIT!" Joel yelped, "HOLY HELL! Time out! TIME OUT! Put the gun down! We need to stop the role playing! Is that a real gun?!"

"Sure, sweetheart," Sarah replied cocking back the hammer, "I'll stop. But only if you say the safe word like we agreed upon first."

"Oh, crap. Darn, darn, DARN! What was that word? It was from that assassin movie....with that chick....Angie....no, Angelina. Angelina Jolie. Yes! She was an

assassin in....what was that frickin' movie? Umm, Silk? Satin? Salt? Salt! That's it! The safe word is SALT!"

"Okay, salt. I concur," Sarah laughed lowering the gun.

"Where did you get that gun!? Is it real?" Joel wheezed trying to catch his breath. "You about gave me a heart attack. And you're naked too! Damn. I'm afraid to even ask where you were hiding that thing. Please tell me you weren't pointing a real gun at me."

"No, it's fake. Jimmy from Props mocked it up for me before we left. It even has blanks and all. But it's heavy and feels real. You said you poisoned me? What did you use for poison?"

"Just a little turmeric and sugar mixture Jimmy came up with. He suggested putting it in your coffee so the taste would be better hidden. I was going to lace it in your margarita tonight like I originally planned, but the coffee worked better. Hell, Jimmy's probably laughing his head off right now picturing us two."

"Good ol' Jimmy," Sarah laughed, "I'da had the drop on you for sure if not for that little putz. Now he'll be wanting a co-writer credit, I'm sure, if we put his ideas in the script."

"Probably. How was your backstory motivation just then? Did you suspect me? Did I convince you how creepy I was with the 'alone here in the wilderness' reference?"

"It was odd. And I didn't think of the poison, which was clever. But no, your character didn't seem strange or creepy. He just seemed ambivalent about being here. Were you trying to tip your hand?"

"Not like that. I wanted to give the audience a few markers to follow so they knew my character wasn't the nice guy he was pretending to be. They already know your character is some badass female assassin who likes to toy with her prey from the set up

in act one, but we haven't revealed at the turn that he's also an assassin which is why his wife keeps suspecting he's having affairs. I thought it might build better suspense."

"A little, maybe. But what about that last part. Poisoning the coffee could work if she fell for it. I'm not sure she would if she were an experienced assassin."

"Well, you fell for it."

"Yeah, but I'm not her. She probably would know better. Plus, now they both die. That leaves little room for a sequel. Then again that might also make the ending more interesting - two assassins who outsmart each other only to end up being the cause of each other's demise."

"Oh, I don't know. I liked it. Plus, maybe she misses?"

"Not likely. She's an assassin and has him dead to rights. But then, if she doesn't turn him into the sun, maybe the sun blinds her instead of him and she does miss?"

"I wondered if you did that on purpose. I liked that move. Especially with the lovely distraction technique you used. That will definitely curl Marty's toes when he thinks about choreographing that shot! Who's he have set for the female assassin lead?

Scarlett? Jennifer? Florence?"

"Charlize."

"Perfect. I'm pretty sure Charlize will do the shot without a body double. As long as she believes its part of her character arc."

"Do you want to start the writing session now? I think we have enough to get the third act started. Let me pull out my laptop."

“Well, as much as I would like to finish the script right now, I’ll be honest. I was really enjoying the role play up till the gun part. And you definitely got me revved up with that thing. I nearly passed out.”

“Umm, I’m glad you enjoyed it?”

“And, frankly, seeing you standing there naked has given me a tremendous hard on.”

“So I can see.”

“Maybe we finish the day out in character? Till tonight even? That still leaves us all tomorrow to finish writing the script. We can crank it out all day, fly back to L.A. tomorrow night and have the draft on hand first thing in the morning for a read through with Marty. Which satisfies his Monday deadline. Whaddya say?”

“Sweetheart,” Sarah drawled like Mae West, walking toward him, “You just read my mind.”

The End