

Eric Seiley

Burning Bridges As We Go

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## **Tahoe Death Scene**

She woke to empty sheets where he should've been and sat up in a panic. *Oh shit! If he bailed, I'm screwed.* But there he was -- standing naked in the kitchenette with a small blanket around his waist for modesty. The scratch marks crisscrossing his back looking deeply uncomfortable. *I did that,* she realized with a touch of giddiness. *He made me do that!*

"Good morning," she purred, stretching and moaning and enjoying the luxurious feeling of being naked beneath the sheets.

"Morning," he replied, "Coffee?"

"Yes, please."

"Cream and sugar?"

"No thanks."

"You sure?"

"Yes."

"Okay, you got it."

Sarah looked past her new lover, staring out the window, watching the sun peek over the snowcapped mountains. *Lake Tahoe is such a beautiful place!* she thought. *More*

*beautiful than any painting for sure -- Audubon or Cole. Even Monet. Look at that big red sky streaked orange, pushing back against the night shadows. And all those rays of a pale golden sun dancing across the blue water. Impossible to capture something so peaceful and serene on canvas. I know, I've tried. And failed. Shoot, you can practically hear the angels singing. Sarah looked back at her lover and squinted hard. Too bad it'll 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 clear. End Tom's life. Kill him. No equivocation, no mercy, no failures. With finality and prejudice before Monday.

"He will NOT return to Los Angeles, you understand?!" Tom's wife, Margo, insisted. "You will make this happen, yes? I can trust you, yes? My alibi will be in place and I don't want any unexpected surprises. Nor any excuses or mistakes. He dies this weekend! You can do this, yes?"

"Yes," was all Sarah had to say. She was a professional. However, nothing was said about toying with the mark beforehand. Enjoying herself because, let's face it, it'd been awhile -- and she was in the presence of a very handsome and charming man. Something his wife had, in fact, repeatedly warned her about.

"He is a very magnetic man. Extremely charming. And he reads people well. So be careful and don't be taken in," the wife warned. "In truth, he's a stone cold narcissist who manipulates others to gain advantage."

*Good, Sarah thought. I'm not opposed to a little challenge. See if I can still seduce with the best.* But the wife never mentioned his stamina – which Tom possessed in spades. Or his ample genetic gift. Oof. That made things a lot more interesting.

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

Tom barely turned to look, but put up one hand to block the incoming sun when he did. "I'm glad," he replied. "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 with all those sexual innuendo jokes? Mae West! Yes! Mae West! I love her!*

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

Sarah stretched again feeling the aching soreness running up her legs into her loins. An unexpectedly pleasant sensation considering the long hike they'd taken when they first arrived yesterday -- along with the hungry way they went at each other upon return -- pulling each other's clothes off, kissing passionately, pushing and pulling till they maneuvered each other onto the bed. The attraction was 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 by finding her button and making her climax at the peak of his efforts - her singing out, *ahhhhh! Aaahhh! AHHH!* while he grunted in unison. Nothing faked there!

*Good for you, Mister Cross,* she giggled, feeling satiated enough to fall asleep. Her last thought being, *Maybe one more day. He's too good to kill on the first day. One more day of fun before I end his life. No sense wasting this opportunity.*

As far as Tom knew, she was Sarah Beechum from Columbus, Ohio -- his new personal assistant sent by the agency to replace the previous one -- gone now a month on maternity leave. He'd flirted shamelessly with her from day one, and she, per her instructions, let it be known she might be open to his advances. Under the right conditions. At the right time. Which finally arrived when a script deadline came due and he suggested they continue working up at his place up in Lake Tahoe over the weekend to finish the job.

"The coffee will be ready in a moment," Tom spoke, breaking her reverie. "It's French press. Which, honestly, I haven't made before so you might find 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.

Tom finished the coffee and walked two cups over -- dropping one off at her bedside table. "Hmmm?" he smiled looking down at her reclining in bed, "I wonder if you realize just how alone we are up here. All alone. All by our lonesome. In fact, I doubt anyone could hear you scream."

*What a strange thing to say, she thought. Is that his way of flirting? Cause if it is, it's pretty awkward and not at all smooth.* "Well, you did have me screaming last night and no neighbors complained. Was that the point you were making?"

"No, not really." He seemed disappointed. "Just an existential thought. Well, I'll be out on the deck. Let me know when you need a refill on that 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 with that 'all by your lonesome,' stuff? Was he giving me a warning? Or trying to scare me? Or maybe he's having morning after regret now that he got what he came for. So was he looking to leave early? No, I definitely can't let him leave.*

Sarah's fee was high. Higher than most in her line of work thanks to her ability to make murder look accidental. Which was very effective with clients looking for insurance

payouts. Not one of her twenty-seven kills had ever been successfully questioned or challenged. As such, her clientele were select too – which Margo was now one of.

It was Margo who suggested her cover – that she act as Tom's new personal assistant under the pretense she was a young graduate student looking to break into the movie business. Normally she didn't embed with the target, or take contracts lasting so long. Usually she just got in and did her work. But the wife was willing to compensate with additional fees for her "inconvenience" -- and Sarah couldn't pass up that much money. High six figures were no joke. So, per the wife, she was to work for Tom, watch him, and distract him till Margo decided exactly when she wanted him to die. Which took almost a month.

"I don't usually ask," Sarah told Margo before taking the contract, "but most clients want the job done immediately. So I'm curious, if you want your husband dead, then why the pretense? I can be quite efficient and effective, you know. No one will question his death. So time won't matter."

"No, no, no. It's not that I don't trust your skill – you came highly recommended by a very reliable friend. It's just...well, this may sound cliché. Almost to the point I'm embarrassed to say -- but in my line of work, a female executive producer cannot be seen as weak or without control at any time. Especially when said female executive producer's movie star husband has just impregnated his previous personal assistant -- a girl barely past the age of consent -- right under her very nose. The scandal won't hurt him. But I'll be a laughing stock and my production company will lose investors to the tune of millions. No one wants to invest in an independent movie studio is if they think I can't manage my own family affairs, no pun intended. So I need to get my ducks in a row first before I have you kill him. You understand?"

"Sure, I suppose."

Sarah didn't mind waiting after Margo paid her a hundred thousand dollar retainer, plus one-fifty free and clear just to act as Tom's personal assistant for the month. With the expectation of another half million dollars plus contingencies, via private electronic courier, once the job was complete.

So, when the Tahoe weekend popped up, Sarah mentioned it to Margo and Margo green lighted the getaway. "Perfect. I'm ready. Kill the bastard! But make sure it looks like an accident so I can collect on his life insurance policy. And make sure it's done by Monday. Then all business will be concluded between us."

Sarah planned Tom's death to look like a bear attack, which paid out three times the insurance proceeds for "any natural act of God resulting in violent demise" and was not unheard of in Tahoe. She could also have Tom slip and fall off a cliff – which only paid out standard rates for "user-error resulting in accidental termination" -- but the bear angle was something the wife might better appreciate and be willing to grant Sarah a bonus over.

*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? Maybe if I promise to throw in a little open air loving in some forest glen or pasture? That should interest him and give me one more go round before I execute the bastard.*

*You know the score, her conscious reasoned 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 a little. Push the assignment off a day so we can get our nut off again.*

*Hey! Her conscious shot back, That was the kind of thinking that nearly cost us the Benelli contract. Remember? We went over deadline on that one and it cost us time, money, and*

*reputation to set it right. And nearly destroyed our perfect record. So, everything by the numbers this time, okay. The cabin is definitely the place to do it and earlier better than late -- especially if he's having second thoughts. You'll just have to use the heart attack angle and screw the bonus.*

*He's in phenomenal shape. You think they're going to buy a heart attack?* Sarah sighed. *I mean, 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 can go after all the studs you want when we retire to some tropical climate in a few years. I hear Brazilian men can be quite passionate. Save it for them. But for now, suck it up, buttercup!*

Looking at Tom sitting outside on the deck drinking his coffee, his back to her as he watched the sunrise, Sarah felt unsure. *Should I join him outside or wait till he returns back inside.* Instead, she opted for the more prudent tactical course of action.

Slowly, Sarah slipped out from under the covers, then went for her day bag -- removing her Peneus .380 semi-automatic dart gun with seven, 90-grain tranqo-darts, plus one in the chamber, and a full Fulco guiding silencer. All solid metal and top shelf -- unlike most of those new hybrid guns coming out of Europe with their molded polymer plastic handles and aluminum slides that wore out quickly. *That crap may be all the rage with young assassins, she thought, thanks to being cheap and disposable. But it doesn'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 into the 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 harsh bitter grounds condensed at the bottom of the cup.

“Okay,” she whispered, “let’s talk tactics. We call him in for more coffee and when he walks in, we do our thing. He won’t expect it. Clean and simple. Then we move him to the bed and say he had a heart attack during our morning...umm...conjugal visit.”

*Margo won’t appreciate the story angle, but no one will question the heart attack – especially if we drop a bottle of extra strength Viagra in his bag. But wait, her conscious considered, if he walks in from outside, won’t the sun be shining directly in 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 first. Turn him so the sun shines in his eyes and not ours, right?*

*How do we do that without it being obvious?*

“Oh, I know!” Sarah laughed. “I’ve got it! Leave it to me. But be ready.”

Sarah stood up and wrapped the comforter around her naked body so Tom wouldn’t see the tranq-gun held underneath. Then she sashayed, Mae West style, over to the sliding glass doors and knocked gently on the glass. When he looked up, she smiled sweetly and mouthed, “More coffee?”

Tom smiled back and stood to come back in. Sarah stepped away from the sliding door and waited till he passed, then stepped between him and the sun -- facing Tom so the sun was at her back. “Hey there, sugar,” she purred. Tom turned. And when the sun struck him full in the face, raised his hand to shield his eyes.

*Perfect, Sarah thought, dropping the comforter to expose her naked body. Which she hoped looked seductive and not as ridiculous as it felt. Sun behind her, legs slightly*

apart, hip thrown out to the side, one hand resting on her hip with the other hidden behind her back holding the Peneus. Very Mae West. "Hey there, big boy. Interested in a little action?"

Tom smiled. "Oh look at you!" He was the cat about to eat the proverbial canary. "Oh, you're gorgeous! You really are! And I love what you're doing here. All silhouette and X-rated. But as much as I would love to lay you down again, 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 within seconds. And dead the minute after."

"Poison? Poison! You son of a bitch, you poisoned my coffee?! Shit!"

"I did. I'm a little surprised it worked too. I thought for sure you would've tasted the bitterness and thrown it away."

*Poison*, she thought. *Shit! Why didn't I think of that?!* "That was clever of you, but I still have time to do this."

Sarah raised the Peneus tranqo-gun and leveled it straight at Tom's chest. "Say goodbye, sweetheart, you've been a real peach," she drawled, all Mae West.

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

"Sure is, sweetheart," Sarah replied cocking the hammer back, "Of course it is. And I'll stop when you say the safe word we agreed upon."

"Oh, crap," he stammered. "Darn, darn, DARN! What was that word? It was from that assassin movie....with that chick....Angie something that we produced. Angie Julie?"

She was the assassin in....what was that frickin' movie? Umm, not the spy one, but the assassin one. Bleach?! Black? Blond? That's it! Blond! The safe word is ATOMIC BLOND!"

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

Tom coughed and wheezed, putting his hands on his knees to catch his breath. "Where did you get that gun!? Is it real? You about gave me a heart attack. And you're naked too! Damn. I'm afraid to 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's from that zoo picture we did six months ago. But it feels real and it's heavy. Did you say you poisoned me? What did you use for poison?"

"Just a little mixture Jimmy cooked up with a bunch of herbs and spices and such. He said it would taste bitter, but was completely safe. He was the one suggested putting it in your coffee to mask the taste. I was going to lace your margarita last night, but we never made it to dinner. Hell, Jimmy's probably laughing his head off right now picturing the two of us up here trying to kill each other with a fake gun and fake poison."

"Good ol' Jimmy," Sarah laughed, "I had the drop on you for sure if not for that little putz. Now he'll be wanting a co-writer screen credit for his contributions to the script."

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

"It was odd and I don't think it worked. But nor did I think of poison, which was clever. 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 from act one your character is some badass female assassin who likes to toy with her prey. But we never reveal the guy being targeted is also an assassin till the last act. I thought it might work better to build suspense by letting a few secrets out.”

“Maybe. But this is a star vehicle for a female lead. Of course, poisoning the coffee could work if she fell for it. I’m not sure she would though if she were an experienced assassin.”

“Well, you fell for it.”

“True, but I’m obviously not an assassin. Plus, look at it this way, if you use poison to kill me and I shoot you, both lead characters die. Which doesn’t leave much room for a sequel. Though it may make the ending more interesting - two assassins who outsmart each and end up being the cause of each other’s demise.”

“Could work. Or maybe she misses?”

“Not likely. She has him dead to rights. The only way she could miss is if the sun blinds her. Which wouldn’t happen because her back is to the window with the sun behind her.”

“I wondered if you did that on purpose. I liked that move. Especially with the lovely nude silhouette distracting me. I imagine that scene will curl Marty’s toes – he’ll salivate trying to frame and choreograph that little shot and still keep the movie’s R-rating! Who do we have lined up for the female assassin lead anyway? Scarlett? Jennifer? Florence?”

“Charlize.”

“Perfect. I’m pretty sure Charlize will do that 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 finish the revised version and add a few extra scenes. Let me pull out my laptop.”

“Well, as much as I’d like to, I’ll be honest. I was really enjoying the role play...up till the gun part, that is. You definitely got me revved up.”

“Umm, I’m glad?”

“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 day tomorrow to finish the script. We can crank it out, fly back to L.A. and have the first draft on hand Monday morning for a read through with Marty. Which satisfies his deadline request. Whaddya say?”

“Sweetheart,” Sarah drawled, sounding like Mae West, “You just read my mind.”

The End