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Burning Bridges As We Go

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## **Tahoe Death Scene**

She woke up to empty sheets where he should've been and felt panic. *Oh shit*, she thought, *if he bailed, I'm fucked*. Poking her button nose over the covers and anxiously looking around, she spied him standing naked in the kitchenette with a small throw blanket wrapped around his waist for modesty. And sighed a sigh of relief. *Pheew, he's still here. Thank God.*

The scratch marks angrily crisscrossing his back looked deeply uncomfortable, but validated the passion he'd ignited in her. *I did that*, she realized with a touch of giddiness. *He made me do that!*

"Good morning," she purred stretching her arms up and moaning, feeling luxurious beneath the sheets.

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

"Yes, please."

"Cream and sugar?"

"No thanks."

"You sure."

"Yes."

“Okay, you got it.”

Sarah looked past her new lover out the window, catching a glint of the rising sun coming up over the snowcapped mountains. *What a beautiful place! Lake Tahoe has to be the most beautiful place I’ve ever seen. Better than any painting at least -- Audubon or Cole. Maybe even Monet. Those 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. Serene even. You can practically hear the angels singing.* Sarah looked back at her lover. *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 was crystal clear. End Joel’s life. Kill him. No equivocation, no mercy, no failures. With finality and prejudice by Monday.

“He will NOT return! You understand,” Joel’s wife pressed. “My alibi will be in place and I don’t want any problems or unexpected returns.”

However, nothing was said about her toying with him beforehand. Enjoy 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 has a very magnetic personality. And reads people well. It comes with his job as a movie star. So be careful and don’t be taken in,” the wife warned. “He’s a stone cold narcissist who uses his charm to manipulate and take advantage.”

*Good,* Sarah thought. *I’m not opposed to a little challenge. See if I can still seduce like a pro.* But the wife never mentioned his prodigious stamina – which Joel possessed in spades. Oof. That made things a lot more interesting.

“I’m loving the view,” Sarah cooed.

He barely turned his head to look, putting one hand up to block the incoming sun. “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!* She loved her!

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

Sarah stretched again feeling the aching soreness running down the back of her legs from her loins. An unexpectedly pleasant sensation considering the long hike they'd taken when first arriving yesterday -- along with the hungry way they went at each other upon return -- pulling each other's clothes off, kissing passionately, pushing, pulling, and maneuvering each other toward the bed. The attraction had been strong, and intimacy fervent, with only the mildest of awkwardness for being their first time. But very in the moment and satisfying. Especially considering he surprised her greatly by 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 Smith,* she giggled, feeling satiated enough to fall asleep. Her last thought being, *Maybe one more day. He's too good to kill the first day. One more day of fun before I end his life. No sense wasting this opportunity.*

As far as Joel knew, she was Sarah Conner from Columbus, Ohio -- his new, temporary personal assistant who'd replaced his previous one -- gone now a month on maternity leave. He'd flirted shamelessly from day one, and she, per her instructions, let it be known she could be open to his advances at the right time. For the right guy. Under the right conditions. Which had finally arrived when a script deadline came due and he suggested they continue working up at his place in Lake Tahoe over the weekend to get it finished.

"The coffee will be ready in a moment," Joel said breaking her reverie. "It's French press so it might take a minute. I'm not used to this thing 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 pouring the coffee and walked two cups over to her -- dropping one off at her bedside table while cupping the other between his two hands. "Hmmm?" he smiled looking down at her reclining in bed, "I wonder if you realize just how alone we are out here. Alone and 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 fairly awkward and not at all smooth like last night.* "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, so 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? What was he suggesting? A warning? Trying to scare me? Or maybe he's having morning after regret now that he's gotten what he came for and looking to leave early? I'm pretty sure he doesn't suspect my cover. And I definitely can't let him leave.*

Sarah's fee was high. Higher than most in her line of work because she specialized in making murder look accidental. And was very effective. Not one of her twenty-seven

kills had ever been questioned. As such, her clientele was select – which Joel's wife, Caitlyn, was now one of. It was Caitlyn who suggested the cover -- to act as Joel's new personal assistant under the pretense she was a young graduate student looking to pay her way through college. Normally she didn't embed with the target or take contracts lasting so long, just got in and did her work. But the wife was willing to compensate with additional fees for her "inconvenience" and Sarah felt she couldn't pass that much money up. Per the wife, she was to work with Joel, watch him, and distract him till the wife decided exactly when she wanted him to die. Which took almost a month.

"I don't usually ask," Sarah asked the wife before taking the contract, "but most clients also want the job done immediately. So I'm curious, why do you want your husband dead?"

"It's very cliché. Almost to the point I'm embarrassed to say. But in my line of work, it can be terminal to be seen as weak or without control. A movie producer whose husband has just impregnated his personal assistant, though common, is not considered being in control. The feeling being why would anyone invest millions in her movie if she can't successfully handle her own family affairs. You understand?"

"I suppose."

According to Caitlyn, Joel knocked up his previous personal assistant, an aspiring actress herself, who threatened to expose their affair. Requiring Caitlyn to step in.

"He's a philanderer, I know. But until recently, he'd always been discreet. And safe. But a pregnant assistant?! DMZ would be all over that before she even received her first epidural. And I'd be a laughingstock to the point my company would take a hit. I love Joel, but we're talking millions here. If not billions over the next five years. I can't allow that to be put in jeopardy." So Caitlan sent the personal assistant away with an all-expenses paid leave to the Cayman Islands to keep the situation amenable. And

ordered her lawyers to start working on the payout package and NDT's. "But then Joel comes to me and says he loves her. Can you believe that! Bastard said he loved her and wanted to leave me so he could marry her and raise a family. Something I've apparently denied him. What a joke! So here I am with you making the tough decision."

The quarter million dollar fee Sarah received, in addition to the fifty thousand paid to watch him first, arrived via private courier before the end of the month. The enveloped included a handwritten message confirming the wife's decision, "Kill the bastard by Monday. Make it look like an accident so I can still collect on his life insurance policy."

Sarah planned to make Joel's death look like a bear attack, which paid out three times the insurance premium for "a naturally occurring, violent death," rather than have Joel just slip and fall off a cliff – which only paid out "accidental termination." Something the wife might appreciate and be willing to grant Sarah a little extra 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 maybe give me one more go round before I execute the bastard.*

*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 a little. Push the assignment off a day so we can get our nut off again.*

*Hey! Her conscious shot 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. And nearly destroyed our perfect record. So, everything by the numbers this time. 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 robbery angle and screw the bonus.*

*If you think that's best, Sarah 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 studs 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 done.*

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 slipped out from under the covers to the other side of the bed. Then went for her day bag -- removing her favorite piece, a Berretta Cougar .380 semi-automatic, with seven plus one in the chamber and a reduction silencer to reduce the noise. All solid metal and top shelf -- unlike most of those new hybrid guns out there with their molded polymer plastic handles and aluminum slides that wore out quickly. *That crap may be all the rage with American assassins, she thought, thanks to being cheap and disposable. But it doesn't always 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.

*Careful, 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 too harsh bitter grounds condensed at the bottom of the cup.

“Okay,” she whispered, “let’s talk tactics. If we call him in 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, Mae West style, over to the sliding glass doors and gently knocked. When he looked up, she smiled as sweetly as she knew how and mouthed coquettishly, “More coffee?”

Joel smiled and stood to come back in. Sarah stepped back and waited till he had, keeping her back to the sun. Then facing him, she purred, “Hey there, sugar.”

When he turned to look, the sun struck him full in the face – temporarily blinding him and making him 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?”*

When he was able to re-focus, he smiled. Looking her up and down like a cat who was about to eat the proverbial canary. "Oh, you're gorgeous! You really are! And I love what you're doing here. I do. 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!"

"I did. I'm a little surprised it worked too. I thought for sure you would taste the bitterness and throw 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 Beretta and leveled it straight at his heart. "Say goodbye, sweetheart, you've been a real peach," she drawled, all Mae West.

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

"Sure is, sweetheart," Sarah replied cocking back the hammer, "Of course it is. And I'll stop, but only 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....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 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 has blanks and all. But it feels real and it’s heavy. Did you say you poisoned me? What did you use for poison?”

“Just a little turmeric and sugar mixture Jimmy assured me would taste bitter, but was completely safe. He suggested putting it in your coffee so the taste would be better hidden. I was going to lace it in your margarita last night, but the coffee worked better. Hell, Jimmy’s probably laughing his head off right now picturing the two of us.”

“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 if we put his ideas into 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 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 he’s also an assassin. 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 obviously not a skilled assassin. She probably would know better. Plus, now they both die, which doesn't leave much room for a sequel. Still, that might 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 does he want 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 us to the third act. 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. 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 day tomorrow to finish the script. We can crank it out, fly back to L.A. tomorrow night and have the draft on hand first thing Monday morning for a read through with Marty. Which satisfies his deadline. Whaddya say?”

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

The End