

Heart Hunter

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Chapter 1

“Son, there is something you lack in order to become king.”

“What is it, father?”

“Chest hair.”

“But our kind doesn't..you're the only one..”

“There is a way. It is a secret passed down from king to heir since times forgotten, and I will share the secret with you.”

“What do I have to do?”

“You must travel to a place called Earth. It is inhabited by a species much like ours, called humans. You must hunt them, eat their hearts. That will make the hair grow.”

“What? Are you fucking kidding me?”

“Do not worry, my son. They are weak compared to us. Your axe will cut them like hay, smash their weak armour, and cut their blades. Their women will fall to their knees to serve you.”

“How many must I eat?”

“That..that depends on the quality of the hearts.”

“I will kill as many as it takes.”

“You must hurry, my son. I do not have much time.”

“I will, father.”



The bright flash left Verehy temporarily blinded. He blinked to regain his vision. He rubbed his eyes and stared at the ground. The first thing he saw after regaining his vision was the white line painted on the almost black, smooth surface he was standing on.

A high pitched blare made him raise his gaze, only to be blinded by the bright, yellow lights that came towards him with high speed. The lights veered to the side just before hitting him and as it passed by he caught a glimpse of some sort of four wheeled vehicle. He staggered off to the side in surprise until his back hit a stone wall. Beyond it he could see the tops of trees swaying in the gentle

wind.

In front of him he saw tall poles that gave the light that pushed away the darkness. Beyond it, a tall building rose with lights shining through windows. He could even see figures passing by them from time to time.

“What have you gotten me into, you shitty old man?”

The night air felt cool against his naked upper body. The leather loincloth he was wearing was the only thing covering any part of him. He put down the two bladed axe from his shoulder and let out a sigh as he rubbed his shoulder. He had expected the travel to take a bigger toll on him, but if a few strained muscles was the only thing he'd have to suffer for it then it had not been that bad.

He ruffled his black hair and sighed again.

“Aa-ah..I suppose I better get to it then.”

He grabbed his axe and leapt over the stone wall behind him. The ten foot wall posed no problem for him and the trees behind it seemed to promise a better surrounding for some hunting. But it turned out to not be what he had hoped for.

The trees were sparse and the bushes soon gave way to a smaller paved path lined with smaller versions of the light-poles that had lined the striped path he had landed on.

He heard voices in the distance and headed towards them. Perhaps his first prey would be there. As he rounded a corner in the path he saw four men standing by a wooden shack.

“Hey, hey, check that guy out,” one of the men said and they all turned to stare at Verehy. All of them burst out laughing.

“What the hell are you supposed to be? Conan the Barbarian?” demanded one of the men. He had a black leather jacket and his short, combed back black hair glistened in the light.

His three companions laughed again.

“That new Conan movie really sucked,” started one of them as the laughter died down. He wore a purple cap.

“You can't beat Arnold,” agreed a guy with a red scarf wrapped around his neck.

“Have you seen Ronal the Barbarian? Now that movie is funny,” said the

man with long red hair.

“What's that?” asked the man with the scarf.

“It's an animated Danish movie..”

Verehy watched with interest as the frustration and anger grew on the black haired man. He rested his axe casually on his shoulder and walked closer as the three men continued to talk.

“You think that axe is real?”

“Maybe he's one of those crazies that go off into the woods and pretend they're knights and wizards.”

“Haa! You mean like on that 'LIGHTNING BOLT! LIGHTNING BOLT!' video?”

The three men burst out laughing.

“Guys! Shut the fuck up!” the man with the black hair finally yelled and turned to his companions. “You're acting like a bunch of school kids!”

Having shut up his companions he turned around to face the strange man once more. His face met the blade of Verehy's axe with a loud crunch of bone and a red mist that spewed out from the gaping wound caused by it.

His three companions stood there stunned as Verehy ripped his axe out and let the man slump down to the ground.

“Holy shit! You killed him, you bastard! Why did you do that?” shouted the purple capped man and reached behind him. He grabbed a metal pipe leaning against the wooden shack. “We're going to fuck you up good!”

His remaining companions had snapped out of it and managed to find themselves some weapons; a piece of pipe and a metal shovel.

“I need to eat his heart,” replied Verehy and raised his axe. Blood dripped from it. Blood dripped down his chest from the splatter splitting the black haired man's skull had caused. “I need to eat all your hearts.”

“You twisted motherfucker!” the man with the scarf yelled and came in with a raised shovel. His friends followed suit, hoping to overwhelm the muscled man with their numbers.

It wasn't much of a fight. A massacre might have been a better word for it had there been more than three people left. By the end of it there were three more corpses laying on the ground: one with a split stomach and guts hanging out, one

with an arm cut off and skull split and one with a cracked chest.

Verehy leaned against his axe and wiped some of the blood from his face.

“Father was right. They are weak.”

He raised his weapon and cracked open the black haired man's chest. He knelt down and with his bare hand ripped out a rib and reached down to pull out the heart. It was not exactly the most appetising thing he had seen, but the prize would be worth it.

He took a large bite out of the warm knot of muscle. Blood squirted out and dripped down his chin.

To his surprise it tasted almost sweet in his mouth. While the meat was tough and needed a lot of chewing, the blood made it moist. He wolfed down the first heart quickly and started to carve out his next meal from the purple capped man.

By the time he had gotten to ripping out his third heart the taste and texture had grown on him. If everyone was as weak as the four he had just killed, there would be no problem getting enough hearts. What feasts he would have! Though he was a bit concerned that there was no visible change even after eating two of them.

Just as he was about to rip out the ribs out of his way, a gasp and something hitting the ground got his attention. He turned around and saw a woman with long, black hair standing there. Her hands were raised to her mouth and a bag laid on the ground in front of her. Her white blouse revealed a relatively ample amount of cleavage. Verehy noted her breasts looked to be the kind that would bounce and sway around almost hypnotically if you fucked her hard enough.

He grinned and winked at her before ripping out the ribs and reaching down for the heart. She'd be perfect for a little exercise once he was done with his meal.

The woman let out a scream and turned to run away.

Verehy looked after her for a moment as she ran off in her short skirt. She had a nice ass too.

Then he shrugged his shoulders and started to enjoy his third heart. He'd find the woman later. Just as he was finishing his fourth heart he could hear

sirens in the distance and a short moment later there were running footsteps. Lights flashed between the trees and bushes and eventually honed in on him.

“All right! Drop your weapon, lie down, hands on your head and cross your legs!”

Verehy gulped down the last piece of the heart and shaded his eyes with his hand. He grabbed his axe with his other hand and stood up.

“Put the axe down and lay down on the ground or we'll shoot!”

He ignored them and started towards the voice. The lights being shone on him was annoying.

“Stop!”

Onward he went and raised the axe.

“Shit! Shoot!”

He felt a sharp pain in his chest and left leg.

“That shitty old man!” Verehy cursed.

Then everything went black.



“Is this the man you saw, miss?” the detective asked as his colleague pulled away the white sheet and revealed the black haired man. There was a bullet hole in his forehead and dried blood covered most of his body, but still his features made her think he was handsome. Not that it mattered. The deed she had witnessed was enough to make any sane person be disgusted by him.

Kate nodded. “That's him. He was..sticking his hand inside..” She couldn't continue and turned away from the corpse with a gag. Even if they were separated by a window, it was still hard seeing the same man again.

The detective motioned to the man on the other side to put the white cloth back in place and cart the body off.

“Thank you for your help. We have your statement so you're free to go. Do you need a ride home?” the detective had a warm and calming voice. It helped Kate gather herself.

“No, thank you. A friend is waiting for me outside.”

“That's good. Friends are what will help you get over something like this,”

said the detective and started to escort her out of the morgue. Kate gave him an uncertain smile and allowed him to show her the way out.

Seeing the long, black car parked on the side-way, waiting for her, sent shivers down her spine. She pulled her bag tighter on her shoulder and walked to her ride. The back door opened and she stepped inside. The door closed and the car drove away.

She had barely sat down when a hand came and slapped her on the cheek painfully hard.

“You stupid bitch! Going to the cops. What were you thinking? You should have come to me!” a man yelled at her.

The hit had sent her sprawling on the seat and she brought a hand to her cheek. “I’m sorry Carlos,” she sobbed and pulled herself to a seated position. He slapped her again, this time with a bit less strength. Her head throbbed. “I panicked. The cops killed him anyway so what does it matter now?”

“You’re lucky the cops were trigger happy!” the man raged on. “Those were *my boys*! I should have been the one to kill that bastard! You should have called me before anyone else!”

“I’m sorry, Carlos. It won’t happen again.”

“You’re damn right it won’t. If it does, I’ll carve your heart out myself!”

“I’m sorry..” Kate sobbed before breaking down completely. The man sitting opposite to her looked at her with a mix of annoyance and disdain.

“Come here. Let me see that,” the man finally said in a calmer voice and examined Kate’s cheek as she leaned in closer. “Ah, it won’t even leave a mark.” The man gave her cheek a gentle pat and turned his attention to the view passing by them. “I can’t have a trophy be damaged. The boys wouldn’t like that.”

“What do I do now?” Kate dared to ask. “I mean..Ben is..dead..”

It was hard not to think about the man when his name came up. She was certain his opened up chest and split skull would forever be the image that popped into her mind when his name came up.

“Don’t you worry. There are always men in need of reward. You’ll soon have a new owner. You’ll like that, won’t you?”

“Yes..” it was said in a quiet voice with her head turned downwards. It was

only to hide her tears from Carlos.

“For now we're taking you home. I'll call you when I have someone for you to take care of.”

“Thank you,” said Kate and collected herself. She looked up at the man and gave him a smile she hoped would look like one of gratefulness.

“You're such a pretty girl,” said the man and examined her. The skirt she was wearing had hiked high up her thighs, almost high enough to give a glimpse of her underwear. “Almost a shame to use you the way we are. Almost.”

The rest of the journey went on in silence. Once they arrived at their destination, Kate let out a relieved sigh when the black car rolled away, leaving her on the side walk in front of her apartment building. With shaky hands she dug out the key from her bag and let herself into the building. The police had been nice enough to return her bag without stashing it away in evidence for months to come. An elevator ride to the third floor soon had her opening her apartment door.

It was quite spacious for a woman her age with a large living room, a separate walk-in kitchen and dining area and a bedroom and a bathroom with a separate shower and a tub large enough for her to fully lie down.

At twenty she was still seemingly jobless and the building she was in was not exactly the cheapest kind. Carlos took care of most of it, and a portion of the rent she paid with her body so she could have a bit more money for personal use.

She knew her life was a fucked up one, but it was the only one she had, and it was mountains better than starving to death on the street.

A sudden wave of disgust washed over her and she quickly ripped off her clothes and ran to the bathroom. For a long time she gagged with her head down the toilet, but nothing came out. Finally she made it as far as the shower and turned it on. For a long time she sat there, on the floor, while the hot water rained on her.



It was dark and cold when he woke up. His head banged up against the cold metal surrounding him before he realized that he was in a confined space with

barely enough room to move his hands. He ripped away the cloth covering his face and tried to see where he was.

All he could see was blackness.

He knocked around with his hands and feet to try and find the limits of his confinement. It looked like his feet were the key, so he pulled them back towards himself as much as he could and kicked at the wall.

The door was sent flying to the room beyond it.

Verehy pushed with his hand and the slab he was on slid out into the room. His feet touched the cold floor as he flung his feet over the side and sat on the metal slate.

His head still throbbed and as he felt around the sore spots on his body he could tell he had been injured. The holes were mostly healed now, but the one on his forehead must have been the one that had shut him down completely for such a long period.

“That shitty geezer. If he's not already dead I'll rip his throat out myself.”

The white cloth slipped off him as he stood up. He looked around, hoping to find his axe and loincloth, but there was no such luck. All he spotted were some scalpels laying on a tray. He quickly grabbed them while examining the dimly lit room. He pushed open the two doors that led to the better lit hallway and began to explore in the hopes of finding something to wear and something more lethal to wield in his hands. He opened doors along the way and examined the rooms beyond.

It was one such room that was full of lockers that he finally found something useful. He saw clothes in one of the open metal lockers, but none of them fit him. Frustrated, he began ripping open the locked ones. He was not that unusual a size – six feet tall, perhaps a bit more muscular than most – so finding clothes shouldn't have been that difficult.

He saw his image in the mirror on the wall, next to the lockers. He grabbed a shirt from the one most near by and used it to wipe away the dried blood that covered much of his body.

Finally he found a pair of blue jeans that fit him along with a red and black flannel shirt that he could actually button up. In another locker he found a pair

of shoes that fit him.

Satisfied that the clothing problem had been solved, he stashed his scalpels in his pockets and started looking for a way out. When he heard voices coming from a room, he stopped to listen. He had learned his lesson and did not barge in trying to take their hearts. It was clear the humans were not the same his father had had to deal with. They had evolved and advanced their knowledge.

He would not take them lightly again.

“What was that woman's name again?” a male voice asked. “The one that witnessed that thing in the park?”

“You mean the one where someone ate the heart from four people?” asked another.

“Yeah, that one.”

“Kate, I think it was.”

“It says here she lives on the corner of 73rd street and Howard Avenue. That's quite a place for someone her age.”

“You know young people these days. Living off their trust funds.”

“Yeah, I suppose.”

“Why are you so interested in her?”

“Oh, I just forgot to ask her something. No matter. I'll call her or go visit tomorrow.”

“Yeah, it's late. Best let her rest now.”

Verehy sneaked past the door and over to a pair of doors with a green lit figure of a man running out above it. The symbol was clear enough to understand. He found himself in a narrow alley with trash bins and a stray cat hissing at him. He paid the feline no attention and started towards the end of the alley. It opened up to a wider street with cars whizzing by and a few people walking on the sides.

He spent a moment just looking around, trying to comprehend the world he had been put in. The buildings surrounding him were tall and they stretched as far as he could see down the street, both ways. He could not even begin to imagine how many people there were packed into the area.

“That shitty geezer. Didn't bother to mention they were smart enough to

build things like this.”

With no better plan, he closed his eyes and took in a deep breath. The wink he had given her should have been enough. It took a moment, but soon he felt her presence pulsing from north of his position.

“Found you,” Verehy muttered with a grin. He'd have his fun for the evening. He started down the street, all the while sensing how he got closer to his prey. People paid no attention to him. He blended in with his new clothes.

It did not take him long to find himself in front of the apartment building, looking up at the third floor windows.



How long she had sat under the shower, she had no idea. Her fingertips were wrinkly so it had to have been a while. The running water had done very little to make her feel better. At least she had stopped gagging, but still she felt miserable.

Finally she stood up and turned the water off. She grabbed the white, fluffy towel from the rack and dried herself off before wrapping the towel tight around herself.

Kate was shocked to see how pale she was when she wiped the fumes from the mirror. Her stomach growled, reminding her that she had not eaten since morning.

“That must be it. I just need some food. Then I'll feel better,” she said to herself and exited the bathroom. She made her way to the fridge and pulled out a slice of pizza that had been left over from the day before. She dug out a plate and stuck the slice in the microwave. She looked out through the balcony doors while the machine hummed. It wasn't much of a view. All she could really see was the apartment building across the street.

With a sigh she turned back to her food as the microwave let out a bell sound. She didn't bother taking a seat or even wait for the slice of pizza to cool down a bit. The hot cheese and tomato sauce burned her mouth, but still she chewed it down. She was hungry enough to ignore it. As she swallowed down the last mouthful, a cold breeze made her shiver. She turned towards the balcony

door, thinking she had forgot to fully close it in the morning.

She saw the man standing in her living room.

It was the man she had seen laying dead on the morgues metal slab.

Kate screamed and ran towards the door. All she could think of was getting away from the monster. But the man was quick and had an arm on her shoulder before she could even get halfway to the door. She screamed as the man spun her around and slammed her against the wall. The towel fell to the floor.

“No, no, no..you're supposed to be dead!” she screamed and struggled to get free.

Verehy grinned. “Dead? From those tiny holes? Don't make me laugh. You may have advanced from the times of my father, but you've gone backwards when it comes to killing. Had they chopped me to pieces I might have died.” His expression turned grim. “Stop screaming and struggling or I'll have to take your heart!”

Kate shut up as best she could, though there was nothing she could do to control her sobs. The man examined her naked body and nodded approvingly. He reached out and grabbed her left breast and gave it a squeeze.

“Just as I thought,” he said with a smile as he let go of it.

“What do you want with me?” Kate demanded with a shaky voice. Verehy came closer and pressed the woman against the wall with his own body. He sniffed her wet hair. She looked up at him with terror filled eyes.

“I want to fuck you,” the man gently whispered.

There was something about him. Maybe it was the scent of his sweat or the look in his brown eyes, but Kate found it impossible to resist him. The image of him digging out Ben's heart vanished. The image of his blood covered face grinning was replaced by the one smiling down at her.

“All right,” she agreed in a quiet voice. A tiny voice still screamed inside her to run away, to fight back, but the thought of saying no and what that would make the man do was enough to crush any notions of denying him. And it was something she had almost expected to hear from him. It was what she often heard from men and obliging with such suggestions was what had allowed her to remain alive on the street and eventually rise to where she was now.

And then Verehy swept her away.

He was not gentle and he gave her no room to ease into it as he pushed her towards the bedroom while stripping himself. He simply threw her on the bed and started fucking her. He groped her breasts so hard she squealed in a mix of pain and pleasure. Even when he rolled over and pulled her to ride him, he retained control and his hands never left her body. He gripped her waist and made her feel like nothing but a toy being used to satisfy his desires. His hands roamed to squeeze her ass and breasts so hard she was certain there would be bruises in the morning.

By the time the man had finally had enough, Kate was gasping for breath and she felt tender in places she had not known she had. Her throat felt sore from all the noises she had made, some of pain and some of pleasure. She felt like crying, but the shallow breathing of the man next to her made her do something she had not done with any man before then.

She put an arm across his chest and nestled her head against his side and took in a long breath of his scent. She thought herself mad. What had the man done to her? Why was she not disgusted by what had taken place? Why did she feel as if though a welcome lover was sleeping next to her?

Sleep swept over her and dispelled the conflict raging inside of her.

Chapter 2

Kate woke up with the sun shining through the gap between the curtains. She found herself alone and her heart skipped a beat. Had the man gone away during the night? Then she heard the television sounds from the living-room and realized she had no such luck.

She wanted to stay in bed and hope the man got bored and left, but her bladder felt like it would explode if she did. So – reluctantly – she climbed out from under the blanket. She took a good look at herself in the full body mirrors that covered the cabinets opposite to the bed. She frowned at the bruises on her breasts and ass as she ran her hand over them. The man had been too rough, just as she had feared. She could clearly see where his fingers had dug in deep.

“Could have been worse,” she muttered to herself.

There were times when Ben had done worse things. He had enjoyed inflicting pain and it had not been rare for him to tie her up and whip her until her skin was raw. Sometimes he'd use candles and tease her with the hot flames and molten wax. He had not bothered getting the low heat candles usually used for such things either.

Compared to him the strange man had been almost gentle.

Kate grabbed her robe from the chair in the corner and wrapped it around herself. The red fabric felt slick against her skin and let out little rustles as she moved. Then she headed to the living-room and the bathroom.

She found the black haired man sitting naked on the living-room couch. He had pulled the small coffee table closer in and he was busy cutting slices out of a red knot of flesh he had on a plate. It took a moment for Kate to realize what it was.

“Where did you get that?” she asked before thinking it through. She probably didn't want to know.

The man looked up at her. “Some man knocked on the door. He's in the hallway now.” He put in a slice of meat with his fork and started to chew on it as he turned his attention back to the television.

The hallway. She needed to go there anyway if she wanted to get to the bathroom. Gingerly, she made her way there and peeked around the corner to the narrow hallway.

She recognized the fat corpse immediately despite the gruesome wound that had opened his throat and the even more gruesome sight of his ripped open chest. It was the first of the month so her landlord had come for his payment.

Kate couldn't really bring herself to mourn his death. The fat bastard always smelled like he had been sleeping in a trash bin and he'd had a bad habit of drooling on her when ever he got on top, though thankfully that didn't happen too often due to his laziness. Most of the time he let Kate do all the work.

Still, the blood and sight of a dead person got to her and she stumbled into the bathroom and gagged. Her whole body shook and tears ran down her cheeks. It took her a good while to gather herself and get around to taking the pee she had so desperately needed.

When she emerged from the bathroom she took great care not to look at the body. The man was still there, though he had finished his macabre breakfast. His attention was fixed on the television and the history document that was playing.

Kate was uncertain what to do. Clearly the man was dangerous. She pondered about calling Carlos. He'd be very interested in hearing the man was alive and somewhere easy to find. That's what she should have done, but she didn't. Instead she stood there and stared at the man from beyond the kitchen counter.

"Is there something you want?" the man finally asked and glanced at her. He grinned. "Maybe a rerun of last night?"

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why do you kill people? Why do you..eat.."

"In order to become king."

"Of what?" asked Kate, encouraged by the man's relaxed attitude.

"Of my world."

Kate initially dismissed the response as crazy. Then she remembered what he had been like in the park last night. Wielding an axe with nothing but a

loincloth around his waist. He had looked like he was from another time or world. Though as she now looked at him, there was nothing that set him apart from a normal man, at least not on the outside. She knew first hand that there was more strength in his arms than it looked like and he'd healed from several bullet wounds that would have killed anyone else.

"This world of yours. Is an axe the preferred weapon?" The man looked to have an unusual knack for figuring out stuff for him to be form a society that was still on that level.

"Are you asking if my world is some backwards place where we live in stick huts and throw stone spears at each other?" A small smile lingered on the man's lips.

Kate took an involuntary step back, fearing she had angered the man by implying him to be primitive.

"Of course we're not," the man said. "It's just that chopping someone to pieces is the best way to kill them and facing someone over a long range is dishonourable unless you're at war with them. So we use axes and swords when we fight over personal matters." He turned his attention back to the television.

Kate stood there in silence for a while. Her throat felt dry so she got herself a glass of water. The cool water felt refreshing as it rushed down her throat. Finally, she gathered enough courage to ask the question that had been on her mind the most.

"Why haven't you killed me?"

"Because I have continued use for you," the man said without even looking at her. "Fucking a dead woman isn't much fun, I can tell you that."

"So you intend to keep me?"

"Yes."

"What if I try to run away?"

"I'll just find you again."

Carlos wouldn't like that, of that Kate was certain. He'd be foaming at the mouth at the thought of getting his hands on the man sitting on her couch. If he found out that Kate had hidden him and even slept with him, there would not be a place for her to hide from his wrath.

“What do you plan to do here?” asked Kate. “You can't just go around killing people on your own. You'll get so many people after you that there's nothing anyone could do to stop them.”

“I'm not the first one of my kind to come here,” the man replied and pointed to the television. “That's why I'm researching what they've done.”

Only then did Kate turn his attention to the program that was on. It was a history document about the Aztec culture of human sacrifices. Just then there was a historian on the screen estimating that every year tens of thousands of people were sacrificed in the various rituals and that extracting the heart was a common trait in many of them. Kate stopped listening when the man went into details about beheading and young women being skinned so a young man could wear it.

“That must have been started by one of my ancestors,” mused Verehy with a wide grin. “Impressive.”

Kate had to lean back against the counter as the strength escaped her legs. Hearing the man commend such atrocious actions and grin approvingly was just too much. Was he planning to start something like that himself? Kate shook her head. There was no way something like that could be done in today's world. There were too many people, too much information got around, and people had been brought up to abhor such things.

“Woman, what do they call you?”

Kate looked up at the man. For the first time he looked interested in her as something other than a fuck toy.

“Kate.”

“I am Verehy,” the man replied. “Tell me, how do people gain power in your world?”

“What?”

The man stood up and started towards the kitchen. “How do you get power here? Do you kill someone in a duel or..?”

It took a moment for Kate wrap her mind around the question. “No. We don't kill people. We have elections to choose our leaders.”

Verehy snorted. “So you have the best liars and cheats as your leaders.” Kate

withdrew as far away from him as possible when the man walked past her to the fridge. "Is there any other way?" The man rummaged through the contents of the fridge and finally grabbed a can of beer from it. He examined it for a moment before popping it open and giving it a taste. He seemed to approve of it as he took a second, longer gulp immediately after the first one.

Kate found herself watching him in a sort of daze. He was not bad to look at with his flat stomach and muscled arms. The side profile of his face could have been out of a Greek statue.

She shook her head and took a step away. Every time the man got to a few feet of her her mind seemed to lose its own will. "Money can get you a lot of things," she finally said.

"Money.." the man gulped down the last of the beer and crushed the can. He threw it on the kitchen counter and went for another one from the fridge. "Can I buy slaves with it? People who will do what I want them to?"

"We don't have slaves," said Kate, even though she knew that in practice she was not that far from being one. Her freedoms only extended as far as Carlos allowed them to and her body was not entirely hers to control. At a moments notice Carlos could give her to some man to use as he pleased.

If she tried to escape they'd find her body cut into small pieces, neatly packed into plastic bags, in some trash bin in an alley. She had lost friends that way.

"There are always slaves." The man popped open the can of beer and took a sip. This time it looked like he'd enjoy it for a bit longer. "The difference is whether the slaves know it or not and whether they get beaten or enjoy the illusion that they're safe."

"You're sounding like Carlos," accused Kate, though as soon as she had said that she wished the words had stayed inside.

"He sounds sensible. Tell me more."

"The men you killed in the park. They worked for Carlos. He'll want you dead for it."

"Hmm..what does this Carlos do?"

Kate looked away from the man. "All sorts of things. Extortion, drug

trafficking, human trafficking, murders..”

“Is he a powerful man?”

Kate nodded.

In the underground of the city, there probably wasn't a more feared man and few if any who could rival his organization. Part of it was because he was so directly involved in all of it. The man was a twisted sort of genius at keeping under the police radar and hiding his activities.

“He your master?”

She nodded again.

Verehy gulped down some more beer and set the can down on the counter. “He sounds like the kind of man I need to be. ”

“He'll kill you if you try,” said Kate.

“He can try,” the man replied with such confidence that the faith Kate had in the strength of her master received a few cracks. Given that he had survived getting shot in the head, she had to give him some chance, though given how Carlos liked to cut his victims to tiny pieces, it was hard to imagine even him surviving that.

The moment was interrupted by the doorbell ringing.

Kate's heart stopped. Who would be coming to see her at this time? The landlord already laid dead in the hallway. As she realized there was a mutilated body laying on the floor just in front of the door her heart skipped a few more beats. How could she hide something like that?

The doorbell rang again. This time it was followed by a few knocks on the door and a muffled shout.

“Ms. Hodges! It's detective Gatsby. If you're there, please open the door. There is something I must talk with you urgently.”

It felt like her life force drained out of her then and there. The police. If they found the body it would all be over. They'd think she harboured the man and was an accessory to the landlords death. Especially after they'd dig around some and find out how he had been abusing her. They'd think she'd instigated the entire thing.

“Who's detective Gatsby?” asked Verehy.

Kate looked up at the man. He looked ready to kill.

"He's a police officer," she replied. "He's investigating what you did in the park." She then realized that the detective probably wanted to talk to her about his body going missing.

"I should kill him then," said the man and reached out for a knife from the knife-block. He had already used the sturdiest blade there, but he grabbed a thin blade meant for cutting fish. It was sharp and long and would do the job just as well.

Kate quickly pulled herself up and grabbed the man's hand as he started to head towards the door. "You mustn't! He's a police officer. If you kill him they'll start a manhunt that will see you dead. Even you can't win against hundreds of people coming after you."

She knew the cops in the city. They were like a gang of their own if one of theirs got hurt. She'd seen it happen time and time again. The police would raid some pimps place and there'd be shooting. Somehow, most of the time, the pimp would get killed along with the girls in the building. No one ever cared much about it. No one from high on up investigated. The corruption was complete from top to bottom.

Once you made an enemy of the cops, you were as good as dead. Perhaps even more so than with any of the gangs or mobs that roamed the city.

Verehy glared at her, making her let go of his hand and scramble back a few steps. "What do you suggest we do about him then?"

What could they do? There was only one thing Kate could come up with. "We hide the body from the hall and we hide you as well. Then I let the detective in and get rid of him." She saw the look on the man's face and quickly added, "Without killing him!"

The man let out a disappointed grunt and headed towards the hall. Kate followed close behind and soon the both of them were pulling the rug and wrapping it around the dead man.

"Ms. Hodges! I can hear you in there. Open the door!" the detective banged the door.

"Just a minute!" shouted Kate in response as they hoisted the carpet

wrapped body and stuffed it in the bathroom. Verehy further hoisted the man in the bathtub and pulled the curtain to cover it.

Kate quickly fetched a few damp pieces of cloth from the kitchen and wiped the few splatters of blood from the floor and walls. She thanked herself for buying carpets that did not let liquid through very quickly, but rather soaked it up. While the wiping did not completely remove all the stains, at least it made them less obvious and she'd be able to explain them as spilled coffee or wine.

"What about me?" asked Verehy as he emerged from the bathroom. He spoke in a hushed tone so as to avoid giving himself away to the detective outside.

"Hide in the bedroom. Close the door," said Kate without even realizing how commanding she sounded. To her luck the man simply smiled and went as ordered, though not before grabbing his plate from the coffee table with him.

Kate gave the apartment one last look around before going to open the door.

"Detective, how may I help you?" she asked with a smile.

"Are you all right?" the man asked and eyed her.

It was then that Kate realized how she looked. Her hair was a mess and all she had on was a robe and even that was not on properly as it had slipped from one shoulder as they had moved the body.

"Just a rough night," she replied and pulled the robe up and fastened it properly. "After what happened in the park..sleep just wasn't eager to come to me."

"Ah. That's is understandable." The detective looked around the hallway, slightly uncomfortable. "Can I come in?"

Kate glanced back into the apartment to give it a one last look over. "Sure."

She gave way for the detective to come in. The man walked in and looked around like only someone who got paid to observe things could. Kate feared the stains would catch his attention – no matter how faded they were now – but the man walked past them without saying anything.

"Quite an apartment you have here," he noted when he entered the living room and admired the view the glass balcony offered.

"I have been fortunate," said Kate as she made her way behind the kitchen counter. She was relieved to see the bedroom door was closed and that everything

seemed to be in order.

“Yes, I can see that,” the detective gave her a knowing look that passed the point of decency. It made Kate pull the robe tighter around herself.

“You said you needed to talk with me?”

“Ah, yes,” the detective paced around for a moment before taking a seat on the couch armrest. “I’m afraid I have some unpleasant news. Last night the body of the man you saw in the park disappeared from the morgue.”

“Who would want to steal a body?” Kate wondered in the sort of disgusted voice that was to be expected upon hearing such news.

“We’re not all together certain it was stolen.”

“You can’t be suggesting he walked away himself?” The disbelief was feigned as masterfully as the disgust had been. Faking emotions was her survival tool and there were few who could tell when she did that. The skill had been honed over the years and failure had meant getting a black eye or worse. No acting school offered as much incentive to become a master.

“Funny you should say that,” said Gatsby and eyed the woman. There was something very off about her that he couldn’t quite put his finger on. He had seen a glimpse of it the previous day as he had interviewed her, but now it was even more evident. “We found no evidence of a break in. The security cameras showed nothing suspicious either.”

“But..you shot him. He was shot several times. If you’re saying he walked away from that..would he come after me?” Kate played through the stages as if she were performing at a theatre. The emotions bubbled through as true as anyone would expect them to be.

The detective chuckled. “I wouldn’t worry. He’s dead for sure. Someone just outwitted our security. Wouldn’t be the first time.”

“I still don’t see why you had to come all the way here to tell me this,” said Kate.

“Ah, yes. There were some questions that I did not get to ask yesterday.” He dug out a notepad from inside his jacket pocket. He flipped through a few pages. “Now, you said you knew none of the men being attacked?”

“That’s right.”

“Would you be surprised to hear they worked for a man called Carlos Remerez?”

“Is he someone I should know of?” asked Kate. Despite her innocent voice, she was starting to feel worried inside. How much had the detective dug up? Did he know she worked for Carlos?

“No, I suppose not. He's one of the powerful figures of the underground. Runs drugs, prostitutes, protection money..you know, the usual mob stuff.”

“It sounds like the world is a better place with those men dead,” muttered Kate. She turned to get herself a glass of water just to hide the expression she felt creeping on her face. It gave her enough time to get herself under control without raising the detectives suspicions.

“Perhaps, but murder is still murder,” replied Gatsby. He flipped through a few more pages of his little notebook. “I forgot to ask, what is it that you do for a living?”

“Why does it matter?” The questions were taking a direction Kate was not comfortable with. Explaining her lifestyle to the detective was not something she wanted to do.

“Oh, just wondering. A girl your age in an apartment like this.” The man looked around meaningfully.

“I'm not here to satisfy your personal curiosity,” snapped Kate before she could think things through. Answering such a simple question shouldn't have been a problem and the raised eyebrow from the detective was enough to tell her she had raised suspicions.

“I'm sorry,” she added quickly and gave the man a tired smile. There was no faking in it as she really was suddenly feeling very tired. “It's just..bad night of sleep and your questions are something I'd expect you to ask from a suspect, not a witness.”

“It's quite all right. I understand,” assured Gatsby, though he could not completely pass off her reaction to the question. Clearly, there was something she did not want to discuss about how she made her living.

“Part of this is my parents, part of it is my party planning business,” explained Kate. She knew it was something the detective would expect. Rich

parents supporting their children with lofty apartments wasn't that unusual and party planning was such a large business you could easily claim to be in it without raising too much suspicions.

"I see." Gatsby knew the woman was lying, but that wasn't really that relevant to what he was there for. He decided he had spent enough time pestering her already. "The real question I came here for was regarding the incident you witnessed. Did you see it start or did you just stumble on it?"

"I just..he had already killed them all when I got there," replied Kate. She knew the man was listening in from her bedroom. Just thinking about the previous night made her question whether what she was doing was sane. For a moment she contemplated telling the detective that the body had, indeed, walked out of the morgue and had come to her apartment.

She then realized they'd both be dead if she said that.

"Did you see anyone else around? Possible accomplices?"

"What? No..do you think someone was helping him?"

"His body did disappear so we can't completely rule that out," replied the detective. He saw the anxiety on Kate and mistook it for being worried about her own safety. "You shouldn't worry. There's no reason for them to come after you."

Inside, Kate laughed. No reason to come after her? No logical one perhaps. "That's reassuring."

"Well, that's really all I came here for. Thank you for your time." The detective stood up and stashed the notebook back in his pocket.

"Any time," said Kate with a smile and started showing the man out. The way he looked around made her feel nervous again. But he walked all the way to the door without saying anything more.

"You take care of yourself," said Gatsby as he opened the door. "Don't go walking around the parks during those hours. That's just asking for trouble no matter who you are, but especially for a woman like you."

"Thank you for your concern. I'll keep it in mind," said Kate and slammed shut the door as soon as the detective had entered the hallway beyond it. She let out a long breath and took a moment to collect herself. If only the detective knew what had happened in her life during the past twenty-four hours, he would not

have offered such half assed advice to her.

She heard the fridge door open and went back to the kitchen. As she had expected, there was Verehy, downing another can of beer. He glanced over at her and smiled.

“You are quite the liar,” the man noted and took another swig of beer.

“You learn or you die,” Kate replied and leaned her back against the kitchen counter.

“Ah. The best way to learn something,” the man noted and finished his beer. He crushed the can and threw it in with the rest. “I knew there was a reason to keep you. You'll be useful in many ways.”

“What do you mean?” Kate asked and tried to take some distance to the man, but he closed the gap and with her back against the kitchen counter she found herself trapped. She felt it once more when he got close, that feeling of being drawn to him and her mind getting cloudy, unable to say no.

“You have talents I'm going to need.” The man parted her robe and gently caressed her sides.

“Why do you think I'll help you?” asked Kate. She surprised even herself with the question.

“You have no choice,” came the emotionless reply. He slipped the robe off from her and turned her around. “Now how about we have round two from last night?”

The man took her from behind.

He was gentler than before.

But not by much.

Chapter 3

Disposing of a dead body. It was something Kate had never thought she'd search for on the internet, but there she was, perusing through forums and all sorts of shady websites with feasible suggestions and some less so. Burying it was the most common answer, but that would involve driving through the city with a dead body in the trunk.

Not to mention they didn't have a car.

She had to throw away the suggestions of dissolving the body in a barrel of acid outright. Where were they going to get a barrel of acid?

"Can't we just leave him there?" asked Verehy. He had managed to put on his clothes after having his way with her. He sat on the couch and looked as relaxed as a cat in a spot of sun.

"He'll start to stink up the place and that will get the neighbours attention," replied Kate as she clicked through to another website. She did not notice how easily she had fallen into not being bothered by the fact there was a mutilated body in her bathroom. Well, at least being bothered only in the sense of how to get rid of it.

The man looked around. "True. Would be a shame not to be able to use this place."

"Why am I the one researching this? Shouldn't you know how to do this?" asked Kate. The man had made it clear he liked her – as much as it was possible for him to like a human – and that he had a use for her. With a little bit of distance between them, Kate had found the courage to ask questions.

"I haven't had to dispose of that many bodies. Not discreetly anyway. Usually I just leave them where they fall." The man shrugged and reached for the remote. He began to change channels.

Kate gave him a glare and brushed aside a lock of hair. She was sitting on the floor with her laptop on the coffee table. She had her robe back on and a plate with a half eaten sandwich on it laid next to her computer.

"So back home you just left them laying around?"

“Back home I'm a prince. Princes don't carry dead bodies.”

Kate couldn't argue with that. She was certain there was an army of servants following, ready to take on the dirty task. She wished the man had taken some with him. Though as she thought about it a bit more, she changed her mind. It was hard enough to have one of his kind in her life.

A moment of silence passed as both focused on what they were doing: Kate to find a solution to their body problem, Verehy on the television.

She grabbed the sandwich and took a large bite. She had to chew it down before talking. “So, it looks our best bet is to cut the body up into tiny pieces, burn off any fingerprints, grind any teeth into a fine dust, and distribute the bits in various places around the city. Preferably in trash bins and the like.”

The man frowned. “Sounds like a lot of work.”

“You're the one who killed him,” reminded Kate. She wasn't about to get her hands *too* dirty with the matter. Not that she wasn't already neck deep in the same shit as the man was.

For a moment it looked like he would start arguing, but finally he sighed and stood up. “I'll get started then.” He went to the kitchen and grabbed the sturdiest knife left and headed for the bathroom. Soon there were noises of bones breaking and moist smacks as pieces of meat were thrown on the floor.

Kate expected the noises would make her feel sick once more, but to her surprise the waves of nausea did not hit her. Was it really that easy to harden your heart and accept killing? No, she couldn't accept that. The man had to have some sort of effect on her. She was certain there was something about him that made her unable to resist him when he got close. Why couldn't there be something that changed her more to his liking?

There was a loud thud from the bathroom and a curse.

She stood up and went to her bedroom. It was time to get out of the robe and into some decent clothes. She really wanted to take a shower, but in the current situation it wasn't possible. Not unless she wanted to be ankle deep in blood and guts.

She grabbed a black tank top and blue jeans from one of the mirror doored closets and a bra and panties from another. She stuffed herself in the clothes

with haste and then directed her attention to the mess that was her hair. She had just gotten the brush out and made a few strokes when the noise of her cellphone going off got her attention.

It was right there on her night stand and the vibrating of it was the only sound coming from it. Kate picked it up. It was Carlos. She wondered how many calls had gone unanswered. Feeling a bit nervous, she answered.

“Hey, Carlos.”

“Don't hey me you stupid bitch! Do you know how many times I've called? Do you think I have all day to try and get a hold of you?”

“I'm sorry, Carlos. I forgot I muted my phone for the night.”

“Hah! Muted my ass. You're lucky you silly cow. If you hadn't answered I'd have come over and shoved that phone up your pretty ass.”

Normally Kate would have been worried, but given all that had happened she found herself only being annoyed at the man. “What do you want, Carlos?”

The man burst out laughing. It wasn't a happy kind of laugh. It was the sort that promised pain. “What do I want? Can you believe the nerve of this woman?” Kate heard some voices replying to him. “Look here Kate. You're a trophy. When I call, you answer. If you don't you'll get some real lessons from my boys here. You've seen what they can do to a woman, haven't you?”

She had. It wasn't a pretty sight afterwards nor was it something you wanted to see happen. If you did, it would come to haunt you in your nightmares for the rest of your life.

“What the fuck do you want Carlos?” Why she used the tone she did, Kate couldn't quite understand. Maybe something had gone broken during the events of the past day and a half, but she just couldn't bring herself to fear the man on the other end of the conversation.

There was a moment of silence. “All right, if that's how you want to play. Come to the warehouse at seven tonight. We'll see what's up then.”

The coldness in the man's voice was enough to send shiver down Kate's spine. Had she gone too far?

“Oh, and if you don't show up, I'll send the boys after you. They'll find you. They'll give you your lesson and then the cops will find your mangled body

floating in the river.”

Carlos ended the call right there.

Kate put the phone down on the night stand. She could now see the ten missed calls. She had no doubt they were all from Carlos.

“Who was that?”

Kate turned to the door. Verehy stood there, naked and covered in blood with a knife in his hand. At least he had had the sense to remove his clothes, thought Kate. “It was Carlos.”

“The man who claims to own you?”

Kate nodded. “He wants to meet me tonight.”

Verehy grinned. “Well, that's great. I want to meet him too.”

“What? No. They'll kill you if you come with me.” Kate was certain of it. She'd be lucky if they didn't kill her for the way she had talked to Carlos. If she went alone there was still a chance they'd let her live, but if she brought some stranger with her there would be blood spilled.

The man gave Kate a long, scoffing look, though at the same time he noted her demeanour. He knew that look well enough. He'd seen it enough times. “You think they'll kill you, don't you?”

“Probably,” Kate admitted and looked away from him. Her hands twitched nervously and sought to grab something, only to fall back in place and start again.

“All the more reason why I should come with you. They need to understand that you're mine now.”

Kate didn't know how to feel about that. So far the strange man had been better to her than Carlos. She knew full well that her life was hanging by as thin a thread as it did with Carlos, but at least Verehy had not taken her just to pass her around to others nor had he done anything too offensive to her – if you left out dragging her into being an accomplice in murder. His threats were less colourful than those of Carlos, but somehow that made them easier to take at face value and understand that there was real intent behind them.

“Besides, I can't very well take his place if I haven't met him.”

“What are you planning?” Kate asked, fearing that the man had something in

mind that would drag her deeper into blood soaked madness.

Verehy grinned. Given his bloody appearance it would have been enough to make small children wet themselves. "I'm going to kill Carlos and take over his organization. I'll build my own empire and I'll soak the city in blood to accomplish my goal if need be."

Kate couldn't come up with anything to say to that. Not like the man would listen to her if she told him the plan wouldn't work or that it was foolish. She decided a change in subject was the best she could do.

"How's the body?"

"Oh, it's coming along. I've got the head off and most of the limbs. Tougher than I thought. Makes me wish I still had my axe." The enthusiasm with which the man spoke about it was comparable to two ice-hockey fans reliving the victory of their favourite team.

"Get the teeth and fingers separated and bring them to the kitchen. I'll figure out something for them."

The man grinned. "Will do."

Kate watched him turn around and head back to work.

"God damn it," she cursed to herself and grabbed the phone from the nightstand. She turned the sounds on and threw it on the bed before venturing into the kitchen. There she went through drawers and cabinets trying to find something with which to get rid of the body parts.

She found some large garbage bags that could be used to wrap the body pieces for transports. Not thinking it through, she headed towards the bathroom. Opening the door revealed a room of red to her along with the bloody man in the middle of it all, grinning as he chopped off fingers from a severed hand.

Kate had to suppress a gag and turn away. No matter the changes her mind had gone through during the last day, the sight was still too much for her. "Here, you can put the body pieces in these," she said and threw in the roll of garbage bags.

"Oh, thanks," said Verehy and grunted. There was a sound of bones breaking. "I think I've got all the teeth and fingers. I figured you'd want the toes too. I'll put them in a bag for you."

“Great. Thanks.” Kate's voice was weak and she was less than happy with what was happening. She started asking herself how things ended up like they were and why she was helping the man. Then she felt a bag placed in her hands and she found herself grabbing it.

“Have fun with those,” said Verehy and returned to his work.

Kate didn't bother replying to the man. She walked into the kitchen and placed the bag in the sink and renewed her search for something to use for disposal. Finally her eyes set on the blender sitting next to the toaster. It was a good quality blender with real metal parts and all around sturdy build.

“Eh, it's worth a try,” she said to herself and pulled the appliance from its place and plugged it in. With slight disgust she opened the bag, though she was pleased to note the man had had enough sense to put all the bits in separate bags. She grabbed the one with the teeth and poured them into the blender. Putting the lid on, she turned it on.

The bloody teeth rattled on against the metal blades and the hard plastic container they were in. It was an unsettling noise, but ever so slowly a white powder started to appear. After several minutes all that was left was a powder with a slight hint of red in it.

Getting the fingers and toes in was a far more disgusting task, but she was pleased to note they blended as well. With the introduction of actual skin and flesh the left over product turned from a powder into what looked like a red, chunky milkshake.

Kate had a hard time keeping herself together as she worked in the pieces. She wanted to stop, run to the police or even Carlos, but she couldn't. Something had gotten a grip of her that kept her from making the decisions that seemed the most rational. By the time she put in the last toe she didn't even flinch. She worried some part of her was slowly dying as Verehy sunk his teeth deeper and deeper in her, some part of her humanity that should have been screaming bloody murder.

She turned off the blender and removed the plastic top. She was about to pour it down the sink, but she realized flushing the mush down the toilet would be safer, so she made her way to the bathroom.

Verehy was there, standing in the middle of the room, looking at the plastic wrapped pieces of the body with a certain amount of pride. He turned to Kate as she opened the door. "Oh good, I was getting thirsty."

Before she could say anything, the man had grabbed the plastic container, removed the lid and taken a gulp of the red mush.

"No! Don't! That's the teeth and fingers!" She looked at the man, horrified. He'd kill her for certain for failing to tell that sooner.

The man gave the container a closer look. He shrugged and drank some more of it. "It's a bit chunky. Not as good as a heart." He took another gulp and shuddered. He pulled what looked to be a big toenail piece from between his teeth. "Definitely not as good as a heart."

"Just flush it down the toilet!" screamed Kate with a pale face. How were you supposed to deal with someone like him? The weak voice of sanity from within her said to call the police, but it was mercilessly silenced by the other voice telling her to just do what the man wanted her to do.

Verehy did as she wanted and flushed the rest of the mixture. It wasn't too much to ask and keeping a woman happy with small gestures was always better than having to threaten them into silence and submission. He handed back the container to Kate.

"So what do we do now? I've chopped up the body and it's all wrapped up?"

Wild eyed, Kate surveyed the room. There was blood everywhere and cleaning it all up would take a lot of bleach and scrubbing. Even then she doubted everything could be cleaned away. A voice inside her said it just meant they would need to dispose of the body as neatly as possible. The small voice sounded out inside her again, telling her they could not do it. Something would be left behind. They'd eventually be discovered.

"We'll have to carry the pieces to various trash bins in different locations," she finally said, having silenced the small voice once more. A part of her feared the voice would disappear all together if she continued ignoring and shutting it up.

"That'll be a lot of work," said Verehy and looked at the pile of bags. He wouldn't be able to carry many of those in one go without raising suspicion.

“I have a duffel-bag we can fit most of the pieces in,” said Kate. “We'll have to walk to the warehouse anyway. We can dump the pieces on our way there.”

She went out to the corridor and pulled open a closet door. A black duffel-bag was there so she grabbed it and handed it to the man. She didn't say anything before heading back to the kitchen to clean the blender. She scrubbed the thing three times before being satisfied that it was clean enough and no spot had been missed. Whether she'd ever use it was questionable still.

She heard the shower go on. Not even thinking about it she went to the bedroom and got a fresh towel from one of the wardrobes and took it to the bathroom. She was surprised to see the entire body had fit in the single bag. It looked like something an ice-hockey player would carry with them to practice. She looked at Verehy in the shower and thought he'd pass for one without problems.

“I brought you a fresh towel,” said Kate and placed it on the toilet seat. It was one of the few places that wasn't all bloody.

“Why don't you join me?” asked the man and gave her the look. She had gotten to know it already. It felt absurd to be even thinking about it in the middle of the blood covered room, but she couldn't deny that she felt dirty. There was the influence of the man once more.

“All right,” she agreed and stripped down.

It was two hours later that both of them were dressed and ready to head out. After the shower and the quick sex it had involved Kate had cleaned the worst of the blood from the bathroom. There were places where she had to leave some bleach to really soak out the stains. The meeting at the warehouse gave plenty of time for it to work its magic.

Verehy had on the same jeans and t-shirt as he had the previous day. He lugged the heavy looking duffel-bag on his shoulder with ease and looked like he was simply headed for practice.

Kate had put on a new pair of jeans and a tank-top. Normally she would have been wearing a mini skirt or something more sexy when meeting Carlos, but this time it seemed like there'd be very little attention paid to her. It would be a showdown between Carlos and Verehy, though she suspected it would not be

going as smoothly as the strange man expected. Carlos had plenty of men working for him and all Verehy had was a kitchen knife and a dozen steak knives he had modified into throwing knives.

Kate locked the door behind her and lifted the rolled up bloody carpet under one arm. On the outside it looked like she was just carrying an old rug to be disposed. She hoped no one would investigate further. Once on the street the pair headed towards the warehouse.

The route would take them through several blocks of apartment buildings and dozens of thrash bins in which to spread the body pieces. Kate disposed of the carpet in the first large bin that came their way, though she made certain that it was a fair way away from her own apartment. Verehy started to spread the body pieces as soon as they were a few blocks away. It went surprisingly smoothly. No one paid them any attention as they ducked into alleys and emerged with a lighter bag every time.

In a large city, even in crowded streets, no one paid attention to you. Eyes were averted, there was real effort put in *not* seeing you. You'd had to have been wielding a knife and screaming like a mad man to garner any attention.

It took them an hour to reach the warehouse. It was in a run-down section of the city with abandoned factories and industrial complexes. Kate had read in the papers there were plans to reconstruct the area, refurbish the buildings as apartments. As she looked at the broken windows, roofs that had crumbled down, she thought who ever came up with the idea must have been mad.

The area was popular with gangs and all sorts of criminals. The cops rarely ventured there which gave peace for the shady figures to conduct their business. It was not unusual for a body to crop up every week, if not every day. How anyone thought they'd get control of the area was beyond her. They'd need an army for it to flush out all the crooks.

Verehy paid close attention to everything around them. He noted every building, every shady figure that pulled back further into the dark alleys as they passed. He peered inside cars that stood on bricks – tyres stolen, insides stripped to bare metal, rust eating away at it.

It had gotten dark during their walk over and without even realizing it Kate

had drawn closer to the man, as if seeking protection and comfort from him. She had made the walk many times before, alone, and it was never an easy thing to do. Now she had the added worry of not knowing whether she'd be walking back. Carlos had sounded angry enough to just do away with her. She glanced at the man next to her. He looked confident, not worried at all. Maybe he'd be able to pull off something.

They turned to a wall enclosed yard. A sign that read "Smith's Canned Goods" still hung on the wall above the warehouse doors. There were men on the paved yard, smoking joints, talking. Some had weapons clearly in view while others looked to be on a leisurely evening walk. It was not until they reached the warehouse door that two men stepped to block their path.

"Well, well, if it isn't Katie," said a man wearing a green beret.

"Just let me pass, Luis," said Kate and glared at the man. "Carlos is expecting me."

The other man chuckled. "He sure is Katie and I doubt you'll like what he has planned for you." He licked his lips.

"I doubt I've ever liked what he has had planned for me, Ricardo," Kate replied bluntly.

"That why you brought the muscle with you?" asked Luis and eyed Verehy cautiously. He was an imposing figure no matter how you looked at him.

"She's mine now. I've come to explain that to Carlos," said Verehy in a calm voice.

The two men frowned at hearing it. Both went for their guns. Neither had the chance to do more before sharp blades cut into their throats. The steak knives were sharp albeit difficult to throw with any sort of accuracy. Somehow Verehy had pulled it off.

The man wasted no time before grabbing the weapons from the fallen men. He turned and fired several shots, felling several men in the yard before pushing the stunned Kate inside the warehouse. It was all too quick for her to fully realize what had happened. Once the man slammed shut the door, she started to realize.

"What have you done?" she demanded. "You've killed us! Killed us both!"

Verehy glanced at her and then examined the warehouse. There were

wooden crates and shelves that created narrow passages. Lamps hung from the ceiling, providing barely enough light to see where you were going. Dust floated in the air creating cones of mist in the light.

“We were going to die anyway. I just started the killing first. Now, where's Carlos?”

Kate leaned against the door frame. There were bangs against the door. A few had survived the sporadic fire Verehy had laid down on the yard. There were some shouts coming from further ahead in the warehouse. She couldn't bring herself to answer. How had the man even known how to use a weapon?

“Kate. Where is Carlos?” demanded Verehy again. He grabbed her arm and squeezed hard.

“Ow! You're hurting me!”

“Where is he?” the man demanded again and didn't release the grip. “You better start talking or we will die.”

“Up ahead. In the office, up the stairs,” said Kate and rubbed her arm as the grip was released. It made her remember what sort of a man she was involved with. She didn't have much time to ease the pain before Verehy grabbed her hand again and started dragging her through the corridors towards the office.

Men started to pour out of the office at the back of the warehouse. Some were brandishing guns, others had long knives in hand. How they were going to get past all of them was beyond Kate.

Verehy kicked in one of the sides of a crate and shoved her inside.

“You stay here until I come and get you,” he said and then disappeared.

“Wha..” Kate started but didn't have the time to finish. On some level she was happy to be tucked away in the relative safety of the crate. Then the shooting and shouting started. Screams of pain echoed from the direction Verehy had gone. She hoped none of them were his for if they were she knew her own would soon join them. Carlos would not let the killing of his men slip by.

Still the silence that followed was worse. She did not know who had won, who would be coming for her. In her mind she could see Carlos peeking in from the hole, grinning while motioning for his men to come over and exact revenge on her.

She was startled when Verehy peeked in. He was covered in blood and chewing on something with a satisfied expression on his face. He swallowed. "Come on. It's safe now. Carlos is holed up in his office all alone."

Kate stared at the man. As far as she could tell there wasn't a scratch on him. She let him pull her out from the crate. The scene that unfolded in front of her was one that could have been from a horror movie. There were bodies strewn all across, one lying mere feet away from her with its chest opened wide. As she turned to look in the direction of the office there were more bodies, some with weapons in hand, some unarmed, but all dead and chests cracked open. How had he had time for all of it?

"Come on. Let's go talk with Carlos," said Verehy and grabbed her hand again. He dragged her through the warehouse to the staircase leading up to the office. A body rested on the railing, nearly bent in two.

Kate wanted to look away, but there would just have been another body waiting for her. She wanted to close her eyes, but then she'd have tripped on the stairs Verehy dragged her up. They walked the small walkway to get to the office door. There weren't any windows in the box that made up the office.

"Carlos, we know you're in there. We just want to talk," shouted Verehy loud enough to be heard inside. A couple of bullets shot through the wooden door.

"Stay away!" shouted a man from inside. The panic in his voice gave Kate a small measure of satisfaction. "I saw what you did! What are you man? You're not human."

Verehy frowned and turned to Kate. "I don't think he'll let us in."

"You think?" said Kate and looked at the bullet holes in the door.

"Can't you talk some sense into him?" the man asked. "I don't necessarily want to kill him."

Kate glanced around the warehouse behind her. The red stains and dead bodies all around told of the work Verehy had done. She turned back to look at him and raised an eyebrow.

"What?" he asked.

Kate sighed. "I'll try, but I doubt he'll listen to me."

Verehy gave her some room to get closer to the door. She hoped the walls

were thick enough to stop any bullets from coming through. After all, she wasn't built like Verehy.

"Carlos, it's me. Kate. We just want to talk." Kate hoped she sounded calm. Despite everything Verehy had done so far the utter massacre he had perpetrated all on his own had shaken her.

"Kate? You're the one who brought that man here? You stupid bitch. Everything's ruined! And why? Because some whore got her panties in a knot."

Kate frowned. "Talking like that isn't going to help you, Carlos. In fact, it's talk like that that got you into this mess."

A bullet shot through the door again.

"I've got plenty more where that came from! You'll never get in!" Carlos shouted from inside. He sounded frightened and panicked.

"I don't think this is going to go anywhere," said Kate as she turned to look at Verehy.

The big man frowned, but nodded. "Then I'll just have to go in."

"But he'll shoot you!" protested Kate as the man pushed past her.

"Wouldn't be the first time, nor the last," replied Verehy right before kicking in the door with one powerful thrust of his leg. He rushed into the office just as the first shots sounded, followed by several more. Kate heard Carlos scream and the sounds of struggle. Then it was silent.

"It's safe to come in now," came the voice of Verehy.

Hesitantly, Kate peered in through the shattered doorway. The room was a mess with tossed chairs and papers scattered on the floor. Carlos laid on a desk at the far side of the room. Verehy was busily cutting open his chest with a knife to get at his heart. As gruesome as the sight was Kate could not turn away from it. There was a man who had been controlling her life for years finally getting what he deserved, but at the same time she had a feeling she had only traded one master for another. She could only hope the change would be for the better. Aside from the violence and heart eating Verehy had not forced her to do as humiliating things as Carlos had.

The big man looked happy as he pulled out the heart and took a first bite. Blood dripped down his chin and squirted all around from the severed arteries.

Kate finally had to turn around. It had been a bloodbath with just Verehy against what had always seemed like an undefeated army to her. He had completely decimated them and done so apparently without getting hurt himself.

“Oh, look!” demanded Verehy.

Kate turned around to find the man standing there without his shirt. “What?” she asked, baffled at what she was supposed to look at. His bare chest was nothing she had not seen before or even touched.

“Here!” said the man excitedly and pointed just to the right of his left nipple. Kate squinted as it was hard to see from under the blood, but there it was. A single dark hair had appeared.

“A hair?” she asked, not sure what to think of it.

“Yes! My first one!” said Verehy with a smile. He looked more proud of it than the father of a newborn baby. “It took less hearts than I thought.”

“What?” demanded Kate. “You're eating hearts just to get chest hair?” It seemed too unbelievable to be true. Absurd. Why would anyone do such a thing?

“Of course,” replied Verehy and admired the single hair. He wiped off some of the blood to get a better look at it. “It's the only way we grow them and it's the sign of a ruler. My father has ample chest hair and he's the king. If I am to succeed him I too must have chest hair.”

“And for that you're going to kill tens of people?” asked Kate in disbelief.

“Well, considering how many it took just to get this single hair I think it'll be more in the thousands,” replied the man and looked at her. The thought did not seem to bother him at all. For a moment Kate was starting to miss Carlos.

“But I can't do it just by going around killing people like this. I need help and an organization to back me up,” the man continued and shoved the cut open corpse of Carlos off the table. “So I'm going to take over his operation. Who's his second in command?”

Kate fought a wave of nausea. The man was too callous. He did not care about anything but himself. What had she been dragged into?

“Kate?”

She pulled herself together. “That would be the man hanging out on the railing.”

Verehy frowned. "Who's after that, then?"

"That would be Luis, the man whose throat you cut open outside."

Verehy frowned as he pulled up a fallen chair and threw himself on it, resting his legs on the table in front. "Is there anyone I haven't killed that could be considered a leader?"

"I don't know," admitted Kate. "I haven't seen everyone you killed." Nor did she have any desire to. She'd seen enough death for one day. Somehow it felt like it was all she had seen since the man came into her life. Would it continue to be like that? She hoped not.

"I guess we'll just have to go through them all so I know who to talk to," said Verehy and stood up.

Kate did not want to, but saying no to him seemed like an impossible task. So she did it and finally a man was found who could talk business. He offered little resistance to Verehy taking over and before she knew it, she was the woman of a crime-lord.

Chapter 4

The sunlight woke Kate up. Its warmth made her turn to her other side and pull the blanket to cover her bare back. She cracked open her eyes enough to see Verehy was not there. He rarely was these days. Two weeks had passed since he had taken control of Carlos' operation. He had duties now that kept him away and for that Kate was grateful. When he was gone she could do what ever she wanted. No longer was she tied to the chains of being a trophy woman.

Whether the chains that had replaced those were a good thing she was still uncertain.

Verehy did not mistreat her, far from it, though the sex could get rough at times and he wanted plenty of that. In the morning, in the evening, sometimes several times during the day. He was insatiable. It was enough to make her wish he'd find another woman to share the load, but at the same time she did not want him giving up on her. What would she do if that happened? Go back to the streets to sell herself? To be picked up by a pimp that would beat her and take all her earnings? No. She'd rather deal with a few bodies now and then and the daily sex.

With a yawn and a long stretch she got up from bed and threw on a morning robe. She padded her way out the bedroom, through the kitchen and down the corridor into the bathroom. With a sigh she sat down on the toilet and ran her fingers through her hair. She almost felt hungover despite not having anything to drink the previous night. Then again, the days felt like she was drunk all the time.

Verehy had solidified his control of the organization very quickly and it was running as if nothing had happened now. The drugs were moving, girls bringing in the clients and the competitors had been assured that moving in was a bad idea. The strings of dead bodies had made the news. Their hearts missing had proven a juicy titbit that the news milked for all its worth. Verehy had been clever and instituted a rule that if anyone was killed his heart had to be brought to him. It earned the new group a ruthless reputation and a few examples was enough to

make the competitors find easier prey, but it also gave him an effortless supply of hearts to eat. He was making much quicker progress with his seemingly insane goal.

The doorbell rang.

Kate cursed and hurried to finish her business. A quick wipe and a flush of the toilet and she was in the corridor, peering through the fish-eye on the door. She frowned and cracked open the door.

“Can I help you?” asked Kate.

The woman standing in front of her eyed her much the same way Verehy had initially. She felt a bit like a horse on sale. She had thick black hair, deep brown eyes and a well shaped nose and face. Her clothes hugged her figure, bringing attention to her slim waist. What she lost in the chest department she more than made up for below her waist. She was about the same height as Kate.

“Is Verehy here?” the woman asked and continued examining Kate. It forced her to pull her robe tighter around her.

“Who are you?” asked Kate and readied herself to slam the door shut. Few if anyone was supposed to know about the place, much less that Verehy lived there.

“I'm his sister,” came the reply.

Sister? Verehy had never mentioned her, but then again there were lots of things he did not talk about. It was possible for him to have a sister, but how could she have gotten here? Wasn't it supposed to be a secret?

“There's no Verehy here,” said Kate and began to pull the door shut. She figured it best to try and keep the woman outside the apartment. Before she could close the door, the woman took a step forward and grabbed the door with one hand. With the other she took a hold of Kate's wrist. Despite her best effort she could not pull the door shut. The woman leaned in closer and sniffed the air a few times as if a bloodhound.

“Don't lie to me. I can smell him all over you. If he's not here right now then let me in to wait for him,” she tightened her grip on Kate's wrist to the point where she started to fear bones would be broken. It was convincing enough. Such strength was not human and her arms were not those of a muscle builder that

she'd have to be to exert so much strength. The only thing keeping the door from completely opening was the chain that anchored it to the door frame.

"All right, all right, I'll let you in," Kate relented as the woman gave her wrist a painful squeeze. With her free hand she felt around to let loose the chain. As soon as she did that the woman let her go and opened the door and sauntered in like she lived there. Kate rubbed her wrist before pulling the door shut and following the strange woman into the living-room.

"What's your name?" asked Kate and headed towards the open kitchen. The woman was admiring the view from the large windows.

"Serena," she replied and turned towards Kate. "And yours?"

"Kate."

"Hmm," Serena made her way across the room to where Kate was. There was a cat like sway to her hips that was certain to draw the looks from any man. Before she could even react her morning robe had been pulled open and the soft hands of Serena were feeling around her body.

"What are you doing?" demanded Kate and took a step back and pulled her robe tight around herself.

Serena grinned playfully. "I just wanted to see why my brother has taken a liking to you. I can see why. He has always liked breasts like yours."

Kate blushed and turned around to the fridge to hide it. She dug out a soda and popped it open. "Do you want one?" she asked after a moment of consideration.

"Sure," said Serena and popped open the can Kate handed her. She took a long gulp from it and nodded approvingly. "The drinks you have in this world. There are so many of them." She wandered around the room for a bit before settling down on the couch.

"Why are you here?" asked Kate and hesitantly made her way to sit on the opposite end of the couch.

"To see my brother. I already told you that."

"No, I mean, why are you here, in this world? Are you here to eat hearts as well?"

Serena laughed. "I don't know about this world, but in my world chest hair

is not considered attractive on a woman.”

“What then? You've come to eat some other body parts? Hoping something will make your breasts grow?” Kate immediately wished she had not asked the last question, but what had been done could not be taken back. She glanced at Serena nervously. Given the strength she had shown at the door there was little she'd be able to do if she decided she'd make a good meal.

“I'm quite happy with my breasts,” said Serena and gave Kate a stare before shuffling her way slowly to her. Kate found herself trapped against the couch arm as the woman pressed close against her. “Maybe you'd like to try them? I tried yours, after all.”

Serena grabbed hold of Kate's hand and brought it up to her left breast. Even through the clothes Kate could feel a hard nipple press against the palm of her hand. It wasn't her first time touching another woman in such a way. Carlos and his boys had had many women in similar position as she was and sometimes more than a few would get together and expect the women to put on a show while they drank and snorted drugs. It wasn't the sort of thing that got her excited, but it wasn't all together unpleasant either.

A hand slipped under her robe again and groped her breast.

Serena leaned in closer, her lips almost touching Kate's. “Don't just sit there. Squeeze, feel around..” She leaned in the last few inches and their lips met in a kiss that was full of passion from the side of Serena, but hesitant on Kate's side. It surprised her enough that her hand gave Serena's breast a firm squeeze.

“What have I said about playing with my things without permission?” came the voice of Verehy, surprising both women. Kate jumped up from the couch and pulled the robe to hide her nakedness.

“Verehy!” Serena exclaimed excitedly and jumped up from the couch. She trotted over to the man and gave him a big hug. The man did not look as pleased to see her, but he did not push her away either.

“What are you doing here?” asked Verehy as she pulled away.

“I came to see you,” replied Serena with a smile.

Verehy sighed. He had on a pair of black jeans and black high collar shirt. “What did you do to father for him to tell you how to get here?”

Serena shrugged her shoulders. "I overheard him telling you."

"So why are you here only now?" asked Verehy.

Serena looked hesitant. She took some distance to her brother and settled back onto the couch. "I ran. Father would have me marry a man old enough to be my grandfather. I'm not going to do it."

Verehy cursed. "Do you have any idea what you've done? What sort of position you've put father in? That man you were supposed to marry is powerful and now you have insulted him!"

Kate looked on, frozen in place as the two continued to squabble over the matter. She had not seen Verehy as angry as he was now and it frightened her. He'd seen what he could do. Still, Serena did not seem concerned at all. Then she was his sister. Maybe she relied on that to keep her safe from the brunt of his wrath.

It was a long argument, but finally it looked like Serena emerged victorious.

"Fine. You can stay here for as long as I am here," said Verehy, though he did not sound pleased with the decision.

It was obvious to Kate now he had a soft spot for his sister. The fact he did not bother asking Kate whether she could stay was just a sign of how things were.

"Thank you, brother," said Serena and smiled at him, though she had her mood still in fighting mode. It was obvious from her body language.

Verehy turned to Kate. "Can you keep an eye on her while I'm gone? Keep her out of trouble, show her around?"

Kate nodded, though she doubted there was anything she could do if Serena wanted to do something. She was much stronger than her and words were unlikely to be enough to keep her in check.

"I don't need a babysitter," said Serena.

"That's the condition I'm setting," said Verehy in a firm voice and gave his sister a stern look. "What Kate says, you do. If I find out you haven't, I'll send you right back home to father. He will not be as understanding as I have."

Serena looked sullen. "Fine."

"It won't be that bad," said Kate, hoping to ease the foul mood her newest

problem was in. "There's plenty for us to do and I won't force you into anything you don't want to do."

Maybe she'd turn out to be reasonable. Maybe they'd get to have some fun together.

"Now since my lunch has already been ruined, I might as well get back to work," said Verehy. He gave Kate a look that told come evening, there would be a bit more than usual coming her way.

"Can I come with you?" asked Serena and looked hopeful. It was clear she was not putting much faith in Kate being able to entertain her.

"No," said Verehy and turned to leave. His tone left little room to argue against and both women watched as he disappeared out the door.

There was an awkward silence as the two were left alone.

"What is he up to anyway?" asked Serena after a moment.

Kate wrapped the robe tighter around herself and went to the kitchen. It was time for some food. Maybe Serena would calm down with a full stomach. "He's running a criminal organization. I think they're going to remove one of their competitors tonight."

Verehy was merciless in expanding his domain. Every bloodbath meant hearts for him to eat. The reputation of his organization was enough to make most fold over by now. The stories of dozens of bodies with their hearts ripped out meant there was respect on the streets for the brutality with which he conducted business.

Kate feared the cops would soon have their sights on him on reputation alone.

"There's going to be a fight?" asked Serena, her eyes sparkling. She stood up from the couch and made her way to the kitchen counter to see what Kate was up to. She watched her take out vegetables and meat from the fridge and start preparations.

"Most likely," Kate replied as she cut the meat into thin strips.

"He should have let me go with him. I love fighting." Serena leaned against the counter and watched Kate work the knife. The way she looked at it made it look like she wanted to grab it and go stab people.

Kate tried to put most of her focus on the food and let the conversation happen without much thinking. "You're a princess in your homeland, aren't you? Do they let you fight?"

Serena laughed. "Of course. Everyone fights back home. If you haven't cut off someone's head by the time you turn ten, you're considered a failure. I cut my first one when I was seven. I still remember how proud my father looked that day."

It shouldn't have come as a surprise how coldly she talked about it. But it still had Kate fumbling with the knife.

"What's the matter?" asked Serena. "You look shocked."

Kate shook her head. "I'm sorry. We're not used to such things here."

"What do you do then? To prove that you are growing to be an adult?"

"We don't have to prove that," said Kate. "We just go by years. Once you turn a certain age there are some celebrations, usually tied to your particular religion."

"Then how do you weed out those unfit to be adults?" asked Serena.

"The stupid take care of it themselves," said Kate. "The rest, well, they live."

Serena pursed her lips. "Doesn't sound very efficient. You let the weak live and spread their seeds. That must be why you are so weak compared to us."

"Perhaps," Kate admitted. For the moment she was happy her society did not work like theirs. She would likely have been dead herself had it done so.

Serena reached over the counter and grabbed a strip of beef from the pile Kate had made. She sniffed the red piece of meat before dangling it down to her mouth and chewing on it with a delighted expression. Just a few weeks ago it would have been enough to make Kate shudder with disgust, but the things Verehy had put her through made eating raw cow meat a minor thing.

"Do you like it?" asked Kate.

"It's tasty," said Serena and reached for another strip. She tore off a small piece from it and took her time chewing each bit.

"Just don't eat it all before I have a chance to cook it. It'll be much better then," said Kate and finished with the meat. She started chopping up some onion and carrots along with other vegetables that would go into the stir-fry.

Serena gave her a doubtful look, but did not grab any more of the meat.

Instead she was content to sample each of the vegetables being sliced. None of them seemed to offend her tastes. As Kate started cooking the food and the aromas filled the room she started to agree with her that cooking would make all of it taste better.

“What do you say about going out after we're done eating?” asked Kate as she tossed the meat around in the pan. It had gotten a nice brown crust already so she set it aside in another bowl and started working on the vegetables.

It was only lunch time so there was plenty of time left to explore the city. Staying cooked up in the apartment with Serena for the entire day did not sound like something that would end well.

“I'd love that,” said Serena. “I didn't have much time to get to know things as I walked alone. I was more focused on finding Verehy.”

“Where did you get those clothes then?” asked Kate. They were not something that looked to be from her world.

Serena shrugged her shoulders. “I took them from some woman. She looked my size. She was very weak. Couldn't even get up after a single punch.”

“You didn't kill her, did you?” asked Kate and stopped stirring the vegetables to look at her. Of course she'd killed her. That seemed to be what they did.

“I didn't bother to check. She might be alive.” Serena did not seem at all concerned about it. At least she had had enough sense to realize she needed different clothes to fit in.

Kate returned to the vegetables. She couldn't quite shake the coldness with which Serena had explained the situation, but what could she do about it? Nothing. Just like with Verehy, if she said the wrong thing it would be her who would end up paying for it. Even if he had ordered her to follow Kate's commands, it did not seem enough to ensure she didn't use violence on her.

It took her a moment more to add the meat back into the mix and pour in some soy sauce and other ingredients to coat everything with a tasty sauce. When it was all done, she had two plates filled with a tasty dish. She handed Serena her portion along with a fork and settled on a stool to eat her own share.

“This is good,” said Serena after the first few mouthfuls. She savoured every bite much more than she had with the raw meat. The expression on her was one

of happiness and enjoyment, which made it harder for Kate to see her for what she was. When she was like that she looked just like any other young woman.

Kate had seen many like her. Carlos had gotten his claws on every one of them and locked them in an invisible cage like they were canaries. She'd seen his men strip them of their innocence, turn them into drug addicts so they could cope with the constant use and abuse.

In that sense she was happy Verehy had come along.

He might have eaten peoples hearts and killed anyone he wanted to, but at least she treated the women better. Of course, he still rewarded his men with them, but he expected them to be treated properly. They were his after all. Kate knew of at least one man who had given a trophy woman a black eye. Verehy had not hesitated in taking his heart.

He had no tolerance for poor treatment, which seemed a bit odd considering how he acted otherwise.

"In your world, how are the women treated?" asked Kate and took another mouthful of food. There was a nice crunch left in the carrots.

"What do you mean?" asked Serena.

"Verehy seems very protective of us. Not just me or you, but others that come under his influence," replied Kate and gave the other woman a look.

Serena laughed. "He's always been like that. It's not exactly normal. Father has scolded him for it more than once." She gave Kate a look. "Where we come from women don't need special protection. They take care of themselves just as the men do. Most of them would take it as an offence to have a man meddling in their affairs on account of their gender."

"But aren't the men still stronger?" asked Kate.

"Sure, but any man knows if they try anything they'll get hurt," said Serena. "You forget what our society is built on. Death can come just as easily from the hands of a man as a woman. Or a child."

"But don't you have powerful men. Men who have followers who can use numbers to enslave those alone?" It seemed like an unbelievable scenario that such cliques would not form. When individuals were too strong it was an obvious outcome that some would gang up to make up for it.

“There are laws and then there is the king. On top of that there is the code of honour,” said Serena. “What sort of a victory is it, if you need five men to beat a single opponent? There's no honour in it for the victors. Only shame for their weakness.”

She finished up the last of her food and looked ready to lick the plate clean, but instead she placed her fork on it and pushed it towards Kate.

“So there are no women that get shoved around as trophies for men to use?” asked Kate. She emptied her own plate and reached for Serena's. She started rinse them before putting them in the dishwasher.

Serena looked at her like she was mad. “Of course not. Well, not any against their will anyway. You can never discount the ambitious types that latch onto who ever seems the most powerful.”

Kate shook her head in disbelief. Despite the backwards nature of their society it seemed some thing were better there. Maybe violence and the right of the strong did work better when allowed to run its course.

“And there is the king to keep things in check,” said Serena and started to wander the apartment. She stopped to admire a painting on the wall. “He's the only one you can follow. He has the chest hair. He ensures the laws are followed and everyone is treated as they should be.”

Kate said nothing as she put away the dirty dishes. What was there to say? Her words were not going to change how ridiculous their entire society seemed to be. But somehow it looked to be working.

The doorbell rang.

Serena gave her a questioning look.

“Just stay here. I'll go see who it is,” said Kate and made her way to the hallway and the door. She peered through the small spyhole and cursed as she saw who it was.

It was detective Gatsby. What was he doing here?

He rang the bell again.

Kate glanced back into the apartment. How would Serena react to him if she had to let him in? What would the detective think of her? It was a risky combination, but she couldn't just not open the door.

Kate turned the handle and cracked open the door as much as the chain linking it to the door frame allowed. She put on a smile. "Detective. What brings you here?"

"We have some new information about the case. I would like to talk with you about it," replied the man and looked her up and down. Kate knew the look. She saw his gaze stop at her cleavage for a moment. The detective could likely have called just as easily, but that would not have allowed him to see her. Instinctively, she grabbed her robe and pulled it tighter around herself to hide the cleavage.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I believe it would be best if we talked inside," replied Gatsby.

Kate hesitated. She could say no. There was nothing forcing her to talk to the man, but what sort of suspicions would refusing raise? How much unwanted scrutiny would it bring on her and by extension to Verehu?

"All right," she finally replied and undid the chain, letting the detective in. She made certain to lock the door just as it had been. She led the detective into the living-room, dreading what reaction he would have on Serena and she on him.

To her surprise the woman was nowhere to be seen. She looked around for any signs of her and noticed the bedroom door move a little. The relief in tension was immediate. Serena had been smart enough to hide.

"Can I get you something to drink?" Kate asked.

"No, thank you," replied Gatsby and surveyed the apartment. He leaned against the back of the sofa and turned his attention to Kate. "We've had some reports that concern us."

"What kind of reports?" asked Kate. She had her arms crossed under her bosom, making her look apprehensive.

"That the man you encountered at the park is active in the underground world. He has racked up quite a reputation for himself. People I thought could not be frightened are terrified of him and his gang."

"Do you think I'm in danger?" asked Kate and did her best to sound worried and scared. She should have been had things been as the detective thought they were.

Gatsby shook his head. "Seems like he has moved on. Still, I have to ask. Have you had any contact with him?" It was hard to remain calm under his inquisitive look.

Kate shook her head. "Thankfully no. If I had I doubt I'd be standing here talking to you. He did not seem like the kind to let people live."

"I ran across one of your neighbours," said Gatsby and kept his eyes on her, looking for any unusual reaction. "They told me a man has been coming and going from your apartment on a regular basis. The description could have fit our man."

Kate felt a panic swell up inside her. It took all her effort to keep her composure. What could she say to it? Which of her neighbours had let something like that slip?

She was saved by the bedroom door swinging open.

Both of them turned towards it. Serena walked out, stretching and yawning as if she had just woken up. The scene was made more believable by her complete nakedness. She had the body of someone who worked out. You could see firm muscles on her arms, but not enough to make her look any less feminine. She did have nice breasts, just as she had claimed and her body continued down to a flat stomach and a curvy hip.

Her clothes had managed to hide most of it.

Serena rubbed her eyes, as if still half asleep and made her way to Kate. "Good morning," she mumbled and wrapped her arms around Kate. She leaned in to give her a kiss on the lips.

For a brief moment Kate wanted to push her away, but realized it would blow away everything she was trying to do. So she replied to the kiss. The softness of her lips made her feel a bit sorry as they parted. She didn't mind Serena had slipped a hand under her robe and fondled her body as they kissed.

Gatsby looked like he was about ready to have a heart attack at the sight of the pair. There was even a slight red that had risen to his cheeks.

"Oh, we have a guest," said Serena and turned to the detective, as if noticing him for the first time. Her hand didn't leave Kate's waist. Nor did she make any effort to acknowledge her nakedness.

"This is detective Gatsby," said Kate after a moment of gathering herself. It was a brilliant plan to distract the man. She only hoped they'd be able to pull it off. "Detective, Gatsby, this is Serena."

"A pleasure," said the detective, still flustered and looking for a safe location to set his eyes on. He found a spot, but every time his eyes wandered back to Serena.

"How can we help you?" asked Serena in a voice peppered with curiosity.

"I was just asking Kate here about a man one of the neighbours has reported seeing leaving this apartment," said the detective, getting back on point when reminded why he was there.

"A man?" asked Serena with a raised eyebrow. She turned to look at Kate and put her hands on her hips. "I thought we agreed there would be no men without telling first?"

Kate took on a hurt expression. "I was just about to tell the detective there is some sort of mistake. There hasn't been any man coming and going from this apartment. I wouldn't lie to you."

Serena pursed her lips for a moment. Kate kept her eyes on the detective and saw him ease up considerably. He still had his eyes on Serena and it was clear she was giving credibility to her response with her moment of consideration.

A smile appeared on Serena and she leaned in to give Kate a kiss. "I know. You wouldn't lie to me," she said as they parted lips.

Kate gave her a smile and turned back to the detective with a questioning look.

"Ah. Well, it could be the neighbour was mistaken," said Gatsby and rubbed his chin as if trying to remember what else he was supposed to ask.

"I have had some issues with some of them," Kate confessed. "Not all of them approve of my lifestyle." She glanced at Serena.

"I see," said Gatsby. "That can be an issue sometimes."

"We don't let it bother us," said Serena and grabbed hold of Kate's hand. She gave her a look that could only be described as love filled.

Kate was uncertain how to respond to it so she just looked down, hoping it would be taken as a sign of coyness.

“Well, I won't take up any more of your time,” said Gatsby and pushed himself from the couch. “If you see that man, give me a call.” He handed Kate his card once more.

“I will,” Kate assured and started to guide the man to the door.

“Are you sure you have to go?” asked Serena. “We could offer you something to drink.”

Kate gave the woman a stern glance. What was she doing, trying to make the man stay just as he was about to leave? The longer he stayed the greater the risk he'd see something was not right.

Gatsby turned to give her a look. It was longer than it needed to be as he once more took in her nakedness. “Thank you for the offer, but I have to be going. You two ladies have a nice rest of the day.”

There was a hint of disappointment in his voice. No doubt he would have loved to stick around and see if Kate would get naked as well.

“Thank you for stopping by,” said Kate as she had managed to escort the detective out the door. “I know you could have just called.”

Gatsby nodded. “Some things are better talked about in person. You keep your eyes open and remember to call me.”

“I will,” Kate assured, though she was certain there would be no call made.

“All right. Bye.” Gatsby turned to walk down the corridor to the elevator.

Kate closed the door with a relieved sigh.

She hoped there would be no more similar encounters with the detective. Eventually she would slip and then the police would really be after her and Verehu.

And Serena.

Kate made her way back to the living room. Serena still stood there, naked. She had a smile on her that told of how pleased she was with herself.

“That was a good distraction,” said Kate. There was no reason not to acknowledge that she had saved her from answering tougher questions. “How did you come up with it?”

Serena shrugged her shoulders. “In my experience a naked woman distracts any man. I figured it would be the same here.”

Kate couldn't argue against that.

"I did think about killing him," said Serena as she plopped herself onto the couch. She laid down as if it were the most natural thing to do at such a moment.

For Kate it was a chilling reminder that while her lips had been soft and the kiss not all together unpleasant, she was from an entirely different world whose values were not the same as hers. "I'm glad you didn't. That would have been trouble for both of us. And Verehy."

"What's so special about that man? Why would his death have brought us trouble?" asked Serena.

Kate stared at her for a moment before taking a seat opposite to her, leaving the coffee table between them. "He's a cop. They uphold the laws and if one of them gets killed the rest will swarm over the incident like hungry wolves."

"So they're like the city watch or guards working for my father," said Serena and turned her head to see Kate. Her hair was scattered around her head like a puddle of blood.

"A bit like that, yes," said Kate. She wasn't sure it would do any good to explain them in any more detail. Serena did not seem like she'd care nor would it make much of a difference.

"So if I say someone is a cop, don't kill them," said Kate, hoping it would be enough to keep her from causing too much damage.

"What if they're really causing trouble?" asked Serena. It was clear she was looking for fringe cases that would justify her killing them anyway.

"No killing unless I say so," said Kate in a firm voice. "That goes for anyone we come across."

Serena gave her a sour look. "That's no fun."

"But it's for the best. This world isn't like yours. People getting killed draws a lot of attention. The kind of attention we don't want. Verehy made the mistake and he ended up dead. Well, unconscious for several hours."

"He did?" asked Serena and sat up. Suddenly she seemed very interested. "Tell me all about it."

And Kate did.

Serena listened to her intently. Hearing how her brother had been

embarrassed seemed to do wonders to her mood. Hearing about the gruesome deaths made her ask for every detail.

By the time Kate was done an hour more had passed.

“Come on, let's put some clothes on,” said Kate after having answered the last question from Serena. “We still have time for some shopping.”

“All right,” Serena agreed. She seemed a lot more willing to listen to her now. Kate hoped it would be enough to keep her in check in public.