

Promise Me Tomorrow  
By Erin Wade

# **Promise Me Tomorrow**

## **By Erin Wade**

**Edited by**  
Julie Versoi  
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Human Authored by  
Erin Wade

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Julie Versoi  
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**DEDICATION**

To the one who has always supported me in  
everything I have ever undertaken. You have encouraged  
me and have always been my  
biggest fan. Life is sweeter with you.  
All My Love,  
Erin

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A special “Thank You” to my wonderful, witty friend and  
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suggestions. She makes me a better storyteller.

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by  
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# Chapter 1

## Meet the Mayor

### Thursday-Day 1

Skylar Tomorrow's shrill whistle was answered by a scream that rocked the ranch as her gelding Alcalde trumpeted, streaking across the pasture to his owner.

Alcalde meant mayor in English, but never one to sound pompous, Sky had shortened it to Ally. She swung her leg over the wooden fence and jumped to the ground as Ally slid to a stop before her.

"I'm thinking you and I need to search the canyons on the Odika tribal lands." Sky talked to the big gelding as she combed her fingers through his mane. "You can take me places a Jeep could never go. Let's take a field trip."

Ally snorted and nuzzled Sky's pocket for the ever-present sugar cube he knew was waiting for him. Grabbing a hand full of thick mane, Sky swung onto the horse's back and let Ally set their pace as they ambled across a slow-moving stream, then entered the forest that covered the back half of the land.

The two-hundred-acre ranch was one of the few in New Mexico that owned the water rights to the stream that flowed across it. It irked Sky that her parents had resorted to turning the land into a dude ranch allowing strangers to vacation there six months of the year. "You should be happy we have six months of freedom with no interference from the outside world," her mother, Juanita, chided her.

Sky had to admit her mother was right. When not on assignment she trained horses and enjoyed the peacefulness of the ranch. It took her away from the evils of the world to a place of contentment.

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She had learned to welcome the tourists who wanted to share a little piece of her heaven. The ranch boasted twelve guest bungalows a mile from the main house that was home to Sky and her mother. The bungalows ranged from two to four bedrooms and were booked solid during the tourist season.

Several corporations held management bonding sessions at the ranch every year, renting several bungalows to house their employees.

The sun was setting as Sky slid from Ally's back. "Get a good night's sleep buddy," she said to the gelding as she filled his feed bucket then brushed him as he ate. "We'll leave before sunup."

##

"Do you have permission to go onto the Indian reservation," Juanita Tomorrow queried her oldest daughter.

"Yes, Mom."

"You know the Indians don't like the law snooping around their lands."

"I know, Mom, but an agent has disappeared and I'm part of the search party. I requested the Odika tribal lands. We've found several women brutally murdered on that reservation. You know sections of it have box canyons. The killers throw their victims into the canyon" and they can't get out. The few that have survived the fall, have starved to death."

"Am I allowed to see the file?" Juanita asked.

"Two reasons I can't say no," Sky quipped. "One, you are my mother, and two you are retired FBI."

"And I have raised a brilliant daughter," Juanita added reaching for the file.

She studied the photo attached to the inside cover of the file. "Karmine Sedona," she hissed. "You are wasting your time. If Sedona hasn't contacted her handlers she is either

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dead or in the deepest, darkest prison imaginable. She is one tough agent.”

“You know her?”

“I had the good fortune to collaborate with her on my last assignment before they put me out to pasture. She is the best.”

Sky nodded. She had read about Karmine’s exploits in the field and the bedroom. “The bureau flew in Reagan and Marta Steel a couple of agents from Peru who have collaborated with her in the past. They are pulling out all the stops to find her. Do you have any advice for me?”

“Just don’t believe everything you hear about her.” Juanita winked.

“Mm-hum,” Sky agreed. “You know me, I don’t judge anyone by gossip only by how they treat me.”

Juanita filled a thermos with coffee and slipped sandwiches into Ziplock baggies. “Toss these into the ice chest we filled with cold drinks last night. There aren’t a lot of restaurants where you’re going.”

Sky nodded. “I have plenty of cans of Vienna Sausages and beef stew and the pickup bed is full of hay for Ally. We’ll be fine, Mom.”

“Keep in contact until you get out of the service areas.” Juanita’s eyes pleaded with her daughter.

“I will. I promise. I’ll call you as soon as I find her.”

Juanita loved Sky’s positive attitude.

## Chapter 2

### Brave Horse

#### Tuesday-Day 6

Sky checked four box canyons in as many days. There were no signs of anyone living. A close search of the canyon floors using her binoculars had yielded two bodies in one canyon but neither of them were Karmine.

Her nightly calls to Juanita didn't lighten her mood. The other searchers had also found nothing.

It was almost dark when she pulled her truck to the plateau above the last canyon in the area and unloaded Ally. "If we don't find her here, I'm afraid . . . I can't even think about it." She talked to her horse as she put out feed and water for him. "We'll camp here tonight and check out the canyon in the morning."

She never tied down Ally. He might wander off, but he always came running when she whistled for him. She watched as the big black nibbled grass and grazed his way away from her. He needed the exercise. She would put his blanket on him before they bedded down for the night. The nighttime temperatures could get brutally cold.

She climbed the ladder that would allow her to stand on top of the horse trailer. Ally was almost out of sight. She turned in a circle squinting her eyes to see as far as possible.

*I must be seeing things*, she thought as a whisp of gray floated above the canyon rim. She pulled her binoculars to her eyes and watched the spot where the low-hanging cloud had appeared. *There it is again. Only it isn't a cloud. It's smoke!*

Her shrill whistle brought Ally running. "Look boy," she talked more to herself than the horse, "Smoke!"

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Ally snorted and blew air through his lips. He was ready to do whatever Sky required of him. He waited patiently as she moved closer to the canyon's edge and searched the floor with her binoculars.

"I'll be damned there is a fire under that overhang. God, please let it be Karmine."

Sky guessed the canyon to be about a hundred feet deep. She started to lower the cable from the winch on the front of her truck then thought Karmine might not be strong enough to pull herself up and Sky couldn't operate the winch from the canyon floor.

"Looks like it's up to you, big fellow," Sky jabbered as she buckled the body harness onto Ally. "Just do what you've been trained to do. Two whistles for stop, one whistle for go, two tugs on the rope for backup, and one for move forward. I have no idea what I'm getting us into."

Leaving the cable threaded through the pulley to provide Ally leverage, she unhooked the end from the winch and hooked it to Ally's body harness.

She backed Ally as far away from the canyon edge as the cable would reach. She secured a boatswain chair to the other end of the cable, buckled herself in, and pulled the steel cord taut. She dangled over the canyon wall and gave the line a quick tug.

Ally began slowly moving forward. Sky proudly thought how smart her boy was. She kept her legs outstretched skimming the wall to keep from banging against the rocks and shrubs she encountered on her way down. It took a long time to reach the canyon floor.

On her way down Sky planned her next moves. She would locate Karmine, get her into the chair and give Ally the signal to pull her up. Once Karmine was out of the canyon, she could drop the boatswain chair down to Sky.

After she reached the canyon floor, she checked the compass on her watch and turned on her spotlight. The campfire had been to her left. She kept the light shining in

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front of her. She didn't know if snakes really crawled at night or if that was just a country song.

After walking for about thirty minutes, she spotted the fire again. Another half hour and she saw Karmine Sedona. The woman was curled in the fetal position for warmth and was either asleep or too weak to care that someone was approaching her.

Sky knew that Karmine had the same training and experience she had and stopped a short distance from her. "Karmine Sedona," she called.

Karmine didn't move. "Karmine, I'm Skylar Tomorrow with the FBI. I'm part of a search party looking for you.

"Karmine, can you sit up?"

Sky moved closer hoping that Karmine wouldn't suddenly kick her feet out from under her and club her with a tree branch. She nudged the woman with the toe of her boot then jumped back. She knew Karmine could be as dangerous as any rattlesnake.

After ascertaining that Karmine wasn't curled around a makeshift weapon, Sky placed her hand on the agent's shoulder and gently shook her. Karmine's eyes twitched and finally opened. "Help me," she whispered.

"Can you stand?"

"I'm not sure."

Sky made certain the fire would burn out safely, then picked up Karmine. "I'm going to carry you to safety," she informed Karmine.

"You and Spiderman." Karmine's laughter at her joke turned into a rattling cough.

"Conserve your energy," Sky advised.

The hour-long walk to reach Karmine turned into a two-hour struggle to carry her back to the lift. Although she was dehydrated and just skin and bones, it had been difficult for Sky to carry her and keep the path lighted ahead of them.

Sky strapped Karmine into the boatswain chair and was about to signal Ally to pull her up when she realized that

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Karmine would not be able to keep herself from banging against the canyon walls and most importantly, she wouldn't be able to get out of the chair and drop it back down to Sky.

"Damn, damn, damn," Sky cursed as she considered her only other option. *Ally is strong, but I'm not certain he can pull up the dead weight of both of us.*

She unbuckled Karmine then sat in the chair with Karmine in her lap. She secured the buckles, said a silent prayer, gave the rope two tugs then whistled loudly.

The chair jerked as Ally began backing away from the pickup. The chair's crawl up the wall was agonizingly slow as the big black braced himself with each step to handle the weight he was pulling upward.

Halfway up the wall, the boatswain chair jerked then dropped a few feet sending Sky's stomach into her mouth. She held her breath wondering what was wrong with Ally then the chair began its interminable movement upward.

A screeching scream sliced through the night as the chair jerked and swayed. Ally trumpeted a sound of terror, but the basket continued its upward journey. The basket began to buck and jerk as the gelding's piercing trill mingled with that of a mountain lion.

*Dear God, help him,* Sky prayed as the chair rose closer to the screaming battle between cat and equine.

As the lift reached the edge of the canyon, Sky held Karmine tightly as she rolled onto her back and let Ally pull them safely to level ground. She unbuckled the straps and pushed Karmine to the ground so she could stand and help her horse.

To Sky's horror, a huge cat was astride Ally's back attempting to sink its teeth into the horse's neck. Blood ran down the gelding's sides. He couldn't get loose from the cable to fight the mountain lion. The line that had saved the lives of Sky and Karmine would be the death of the valiant horse.

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Sky unhooked the cable from the boatswain chair and ran into the battle dragging the wire behind her. She looped the cable around the big cat's neck and held on tight as Ally reared, then flipped onto his back, crushing the mountain lion. He lay still, his breathing labored. "No!" Sky screamed into the black sky. "No, God! Don't take him."

She knelt beside her faithful companion and cradled his head in her lap. She ran her hand down his neck, through the sticky liquid covering him. She found the source of the blood and pulled off her Henley using it as a compress to staunch the flow.

**Wednesday-Day 7**

Ally didn't move but his breathing leveled, and he nickered as Sky continued to hold the shirt in place. As the sun rose, Sky knew she had to make a choice: Karmine Sedona or Ally. She pulled a blanket from the back seat of her truck, reclined the passenger's front seat as far back as it would go, and spread the covering over the seat. Karmine weighed even less than Sky remembered. She carried her to the truck, placed her on the front seat, and wrapped her in the blanket.

Tears rolled down Sky's cheeks as she pulled her rifle from the back of the pickup. Ally's eyes followed her as she approached him. "I can't do this," she cried. "I can't let you die and I damn sure can't shoot you. You must get up. The longer an injured horse is down, the less likely it is to survive."

She got water and a towel from the living quarters of the horse trailer and began washing the blood from Ally. He softly whinnied as she stroked him. There were claw marks down his back and holes in his side where the cat had buried its teeth in an effort to bring down the big gelding, but Ally had never veered from his efforts to pull Sky from the canyon.

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Sky stood and commanded, "Get up, Ally. Please, big fellow. I need you to stand."

Ally struggled trying to pull his legs and feet beneath him. Sky put her hands between his side and the ground and screamed "Up Ally," as she lifted with all her might.

Ally made a valiant effort to stand and stumbled to his feet. Sky let the tears fall freely. She knew he had won the battle. "Now to get you into the trailer and to a vet."

On her way to the nearest pueblo, Sky called her mother, then she called Reagan Steel. "Reagan, I have Karmine, but my horse is hurt and I'm tending to him first. Do you want to send a chopper for your agent?"

"Where are you going?" Reagan asked.

"The first pueblo I come to. You can track my cellphone."

Within an hour a helicopter was flying overhead. Sky stopped long enough to help Reagan transfer Karmine to the medevac then took Ally to the vet. She knew the horse and agent would live to fight another day.

##

"Ally is fine, Mom." Sky reassured her mother. "Agent Sedona is recovering in the hospital."

"When are you coming home?" Juanita inquired.

"As soon as the vet releases Ally to travel, about a week."

"I'll visit Karmine," Juanita volunteered. "Her family is in Peru. Except for Reagan and Marta, she has no one in the states."

"She will welcome you, I'm sure."

"What did you think of her?"

"Honestly, I didn't give her a second thought. She was almost dead. All I cared about was getting her out of that canyon and to a hospital. Then Ally was hurt. I just put Karmine in the truck and drove like hell to the nearest vet."

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Reagan intercepted me in a helicopter and took her to the hospital.”

“You saved her life. You should visit her in the hospital. It is the nice thing to do.”

“I will, Mom. As soon as I can get Ally to the ranch. I’ll visit Karmine.”

Sky hung up thinking about how her mother had always pushed her to do the nice thing. Juanita had been a field officer. Sky knew her mother had often been in positions requiring her to do things that weren’t so nice.”

## Chapter 3

### Karmine Sedona

#### Thursday – Day 15

Sky stood in the doorway scrutinizing Karmine Sedona. Her glorious hair fell around her shoulder like a soft dark cloud, her eyes sunk into their sockets and skin barely stretched over her cheek bones. She looked gaunt and jaundiced. Sky moved to the foot of Karmine's bed. She had a hard time reconciling the haggard woman with the femme fatale stories told about her.

Karmine stirred and opened her eyes. She smiled at the tall blonde standing at the foot of her bed. "An angel, I've finally died and gone to heaven."

Sky looked behind her to make certain she was the only other being in Karmine's room. Then she laughed. "No such luck, Agent Sedona. I'm a mere mortal, bearing chocolates and flowers."

"I'd kill for chocolate," Karmine quipped, pushing the button to raise her bed to a sitting position.

Sky placed the vase of flowers on a shelf and quickly moved to the chair beside Karmine's bed. She unwrapped the chocolates and removed the lid, holding them out for Karmine to select her favorite. She chose the caramel pecan wrapped in a milk chocolate covering.

"I should have brought a box of Millionaires." Sky chuckled as she watched Karmine's eyebrows raise questioningly.

"They said you were intuitive," Karmine muttered reaching for another piece of the candy.

Karmine turned her face up to the agent and Sky was surprised by the depth of dark eyes that smiled along with full lips.

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“I understand I have you to thank for my life,” she said.

“No, you were doing okay. You had a fire and fish. What more did you need?”

“Apparently I needed you,” Karmine’s eyes danced.

*She’s flirting with me, Sky thought. Maybe the stories about her are true.*

“Only if you wanted to leave your canyon,” Sky quipped.

“Please, sit down Agent Tomorrow.” Karmine nodded toward the chair. “You look like your mother—same blonde hair and pale blue eyes. You are taller, though.”

“You can blame my father for the height.”

“The entire package is very appealing,” Karmine complimented.

Sky could feel the blush moving up her chest to her neck and face. *It’s been a long time since someone made me blush,* she thought.

“How is your wonderful horse?” Karmine asked.

“He is doing fine. I just brought him home or I would have checked on you sooner.”

“It’s good to know where I stand in the pecking order.” Karmine’s smile flashed perfect white teeth.

*She’s beautiful when she smiles, Sky thought and has a terrific sense of humor.*

“I understand he sacrificed himself to save us,” Karmine continued. “I’d like to meet such a hero.”

“You should. He will love you and I know Mom would love to see you again. She is a big fan of yours.”

“I’d like that,” Karmine agreed. “As soon as they release me. I’m ready to go after the cowards who did this to me.”

“Special Agent Skylar Tomorrow,” DEA Regional Director Christine Maxwell announced as she entered the room. “I need to talk to you.”

“Here I am,” Sky answered frantically searching her memory for the woman’s name.

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“When I’m through here you can follow me to DEA Headquarters. I need to debrief you.”

Skylar nodded recalling the woman’s name. “It’s good to see you again, Director Maxwell.”

“I’m delighted to see both of you,” Christine said. “Frankly, Skylar I felt like I was sending all of you on the assignment of no return and I had already written off Karmine as dead. Both of you are remarkable agents.”

“I believe we have Ally to thank for our lives,” Karmine commented.

“Ally?” Christine raised a perfectly arched brow. “Who is Ally?”

“My horse.” Sky shrugged.

“Yes, Karmine did mention his role during her debriefing. He is a hero. We will get him a commendation or something.”

“A bale of hay is adequate,” Sky said.

“You don’t understand,” Christine explained. “The public loves hero animals. I’ll have our public relations folks get with you for pictures and information.”

“I don’t think so,” Sky argued. “Ally and I are undercover agents. We don’t want any publicity.”

“We’ll discuss this in my office,” Christine continued. “Karmine, the hospital will release you but only if you have someone at home to take care of you.”

“Director Maxwell, I don’t even have a place to go, much less someone to care for me. My plans were to return to Virginia before I was abducted. I was on my way to Albuquerque when I took a detour to Tent Rocks.”

Christine turned to glare at Sky as if waiting for her to comment. Skylar looked down at her boots. She was looking forward to a few days off with Ally.

“Agent Tomorrow, I believe your folks own a dude ranch with cabins.” Christine scowled.

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“You’re welcome to stay with us until you’ve recuperated,” Skylar reluctantly volunteered. “My mom will love it.”

“Good that’s settled.” Christine charged ahead. “Karmine, check yourself out of the hospital Agent Tomorrow will come back for you as soon as I’m finished with her.” Sky and Karmine nodded.

##

The debriefing took over four hours. “How many ways can you ask the same question?” Sky muttered.

“As many as I need to feel confident, I haven’t let you leave out anything,” Christine said.

“It doesn’t take a Phi Beta Kappa to understand I searched the canyons, pinpointed the locations for you of the ones containing bodies, and found Agent Sedona in the last canyon I searched. She was knocking hard at death’s door. What more can I tell you?”

“I want details of the rescue!” Christine insisted. “I want to know what your horse did that made him such a hero that everyone in the building is talking about him.”

Sky sighed heavily. “In situations like that, a horse normally pulls up a chair with one person at a time. Karmine was too weak to throw the chair back down for me, so Ally had to pull up both of us at the same time. While he was pulling us up, a mountain lion attacked him. So not only did he pull us from the canyon he was fighting for his own life at the same time. He never veered from his task in order to save himself. Only after we were safe did he kill the mountain lion, but he was weak from blood loss. I almost lost him.”

Christine sat silently, staring at Sky. “Can we at least do a human-interest campaign featuring Ally?”

Sky stood. “No! Good day, Director.”

##

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Karmine was sitting in a wheelchair at the entrance of the hospital. She looked like a homeless waif staring forlornly through the glass wall watching the curb. *I have no idea what kind of vehicle Sky drives*, she thought but instantly surmised that the sparkling clean red Ford Ranger pulling to the curb was the agent.

Sky jumped out of the pickup and rushed to the lobby to collect the dark-haired ragamuffin. "Have you been waiting long?" She asked unlocking the wheelchair wheels and pushing Karmine toward the truck.

"No. They just discharged me and rolled me down here to wait for you." Karmine eyed the truck. "I'm not certain I can climb into your vehicle."

"Of course, you can," Sky reassured her. "Watch."

When the agent opened the truck door, a hidden platform silently slid down forming an easy step into the pickup.

"My, aren't we fancy?" Karmine laughed. "I like your truck, Agent Tomorrow. I like your name too."

Sky slammed the passenger door and sprinted to the driver's side. "I hope you don't mind; I took the liberty of picking up your luggage from the rental car company at the airport."

Karmine beamed. "Thank goodness. Copies of my identification and extra weapons are inside one of the cases."

Sky nodded as she eased the pickup into the afternoon traffic.

"How did you know which rental car company?" Karmine puzzled.

"I checked your credit card charges. That was the last charge on your card."

"I'm beginning to think the stories about you are true," Karmine chided. "You are freakily intuitive."

"Just a good detective." Sky smiled. "Have you had lunch?"

"No, and I am starving."

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“Karmine Sedona, with a name like that I’m betting you love Italian food.”

“I do.”

“Then buckle up lady. I’m taking you to Farina, the best Italian restaurant in Albuquerque—maybe in the world. Meatballs Calzone that melts in your mouth, pizza like you have never experienced.”

Karmine laughed and Sky caught her breath. It was the freest laugh she had ever heard—throaty and sexy as hell. Sky glanced at Karmine. There was nothing sexy about the woman beside her, except her spirit.

##

They visited over their meal sharing stories from their careers and laughing at each other’s funny anecdotes. Karmine sipped the last of her wine. “You are right. This is the best Italian food I’ve eaten.”

“I’m glad you like it.” Sky beamed wondering why Karmine’s approval pleased her so much.

“Reagan told me you were very shy,” Karmine commented as Sky refilled her wine glass.

“Not really. I usually don’t bother with conversation. I do my job and go home. Honestly, I prefer horses to people. Do you ride?”

“I do. I learned to ride on a mule while working undercover during a drug bust in Colombia. I must admit horses are so much smoother and nicer. Mules can be ornery.”

Sky laughed. “Yes, they can. You will love our horses. They are well trained by yours truly and bred by my mother. As soon as you are up to it, I’ll take you riding and show you the ranch.”

“I’d like that.”

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Sky held Karmine's elbow as they walked to the pickup. "Just to steady you," she assured Karmine.

"How much further?" Karmine asked as Sky unlocked the vehicle with her fob.

"About two more hours. The ranch is on the other side of Santa Fe, a little place called Chupadero. It sort of merges with Tesuque and the two of them together don't make a real town."

"I've never heard of either." Karmine frowned as Sky opened the truck door and the steps descended. "I love this, by the way. It's better than a red carpet."

It was dark when Sky turned off the main highway onto a rutted road sporting spots of pavement in the dirt. The Ranger's headlights flashed across a sign announcing Tesuque, New Mexico— Population 909.

Scrub brush and mesquite trees lined both sides of the dirt road. After a few miles Sky slowed down and made a right-hand turn at a stop sign, then continued on a dirt road.

Karmine could make out a cement wall about four feet tall covered in graffiti. They traveled about a mile along the wall until they reached a gateway arch— "Tomorrow's Ranch." Sky stopped and pushed the gate opener on her rearview mirror.

The only light was from the truck's headlights and the darkness was impenetrable. They traveled along the road until Karmine could see a light ahead. A sudden turn brought a large house flooded with light into view. Juanita was standing on the veranda waiting for her daughter and their guest.

##

**Friday-Day 16**

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Sunlight kissed Karmine's face welcoming a new day. She stretched and flinched as her back muscles reminded her she had been tossed over a hundred-foot cliff.

She closed her eyes and tried to recall what had happened before she plunged into darkness. A woman's scream had drawn her to a mud-splattered van pulled into a copse of trees. Then everything went black. *I must have been hit from behind.* The thought scared her. No one had ever snuck up on her.

Her thoughts moved to Skylar Tomorrow. The unassuming agent was one of the nicest people she had ever met. Beautiful too and I am not sure she knows it. I love her loyalty. The way she took care of her horse after he saved our lives.

A light tapping on her door pulled her from her reverie. She sat up in bed and called, "Come in."

Juanita Tomorrow entered her room carrying a tray filled with coffee, toast, bacon, eggs, and orange juice. "I thought you might like breakfast in bed," she said placing the tray on the table beside the bed.

Karmine's smile lit up the room. "You were always a mind reader. What time is it?"

"Noon. Did you sleep well?"

"This is the softest bed I've ever slept in, and I truly appreciate you taking me in."

"You would do the same for Sky or me," Juanita pointed out.

"Where is Sky?"

"She's in the stable tending to Ally. He must have antibiotic shots. A mountain lion's bite for a horse is like a bite from a cat on a human. It can get infected easily."

"She vets her own horses?" Karmine asked.

"Yes, most things, and shoes them too. Sky is very capable."

"I'm finding that out," Karmine agreed.

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They visited while Karmine devoured breakfast. “That is the best breakfast I’ve ever eaten,” Karmine complimented slipping out of bed. “Would it be okay for me to go to the barn and meet the horse that saved my life?”

“Of course, if you feel strong enough.”

“I feel stronger every day.”

##

Sky talked softly to Ally as she administered his shot. The big gelding flinched but stood perfectly still until she pulled the needle from his muscle. She brushed him, filled his bucket with oats, and gave him fresh water. As Ally basked in her attention, Sky’s thoughts turned to Karmine Sedona. The stories about her feats were both breathtaking and unbelievable. She had won every award for bravery that the DEA offered. Her romantic encounters were fodder for gossip throughout all law enforcement agencies. Almost forty, Karmine was a legend among agents and was the DEA’s go-to agent for undercover work.

*She is one tough cookie, Sky thought, but not much to look at. I really don’t see the attraction.*

“Sky,” Karmine called as she entered the stable.

Ally raised his head and nickered softly. A gentle breeze carried the scent of the dark-haired woman to them. *She does smell good*, Sky thought poking her head out of Ally’s stall.

“In here. Come meet the big fellow that saved our lives.”

Karmine smiled and moved to join them. “Did you walk from the house to here alone?” Sky frowned.

“Yes, and it felt wonderful. A little tiring, but absolutely wonderful. I couldn’t inhale enough of your fresh air.”

“I’m glad you like it.” Sky couldn’t stop the grin that was spreading across her face. “I love it here.”

“Anyone would,” Karmine agreed.

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##

Karmine had washed her hair and soft curls caressed her face. "You look much better today," Sky commented.

"A good night's sleep can work wonders for a girl," Karmine responded. "For the first time in my life I wish I could put on twenty pounds. I look like a skeleton. I'm afraid I don't look like much."

"You look just fine," Sky responded. "You've been through a lot. The doctor said two more days in that canyon, and you would have died from dehydration."

"I thank you for saving my life." Karmine bowed her head. "Director Maxwell told me everyone else searched in a different direction. You were the only one to break from the pack."

Sky laughed out loud. "You make us sound like a pack of hounds. I knew Marta and Reagan had their area covered so I went where we'd found bodies in the past. Thank God Ally and I found you before you became another statistic."

"Is Ally, okay?"

"He is recovering nicely. Another month and I'll start exercising him. Right now, I'm letting him set his own pace. He will let me know when he is ready for me to ride him."

Karmine bowed her head to hide the blush that had moved up her neck and onto her face at the thought of being ridden by Sky. She whirled around and stumbled as a bout of dizziness overtook her.

Sky caught her and held her until the spinning stopped and she regained her balance. "I guess I'm not as strong as I thought," Karmine whispered.

"Let's take it slowly walking back to the house. You have over done it." Sky looped Karmine's arm through hers. "Lean on me."

## Chapter 4

### Tesuque Moonlight

#### Sunday-Day 25

“I’ll take it to her, Mom,” Sky insisted placing a cup on Karmine’s tray. “I need to let her know I’ve been called into action on another missing woman, and we also have a joint-agency raid planned on Monday.”

“Don’t let her go with you. Make her stay here. She is still weak as a kitten.”

“Go where?” Karmine asked entering the kitchen.

“I’ve been summoned by Maxwell and Watson,” Sky explained. “I must report to FBI regional headquarters first thing in the morning. They’ve found more bodies.”

“I’ll go with you,” Karmine insisted.

“No way,” Sky retorted. “I have explicit instructions from your doctors to make certain you get plenty of rest for the next two weeks. That is the only way they would release you to me. You must take it easy and give your body a chance to heal. I gave them my word.”

“And you never go back on your word.” Karmine glared at her.

“Never,” Sky said softly. “Never, Karmine. A woman is only as good as her word.”

“I’ll be here with you,” Juanita added. “For once in your life, Karmine Sedona, think about yourself and what is best for your body and soul.”

Karmine scowled then nodded. “When will you be back?”

“I’m not sure,” Sky said. “I don’t know if we are going to raid a possible production facility or if we are going to concentrate on the missing woman. I think I’m going out with Reagan and Marta to visit some of the pueblos.”

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“Please take me with you?” Karmine moved to stand in front of Sky.

Sky touched Karmine’s gaunt cheek with her fingertips. “I can’t, Karmine. Please don’t ask me again.” For some reason she was having difficulty saying no to the dark-eyed woman.

“Eat your breakfast.” Juanita placed the plates of food on the small kitchen table. “Then you can help Sky feed the horses.”

Karmine’s eyes sparkled, “I’d like that. I need the exercise.”

##

Horses began whining as they approached the barn. “I love the smell of hay and leather.” Karmine commented as they entered the stables.

Sky laughed. “As do I. There is something so . . .,” she paused searching for the right word.

“Earthy.” Karmine’s silky voice caressed the word.

“Yes, earthy.” Sky gulped.

“Oh no,” Karmine gasped as they turned the corner to Ally’s padlock. “Ally is gone!”

“I turned him out at 5:00 a.m. so he could exercise.”

A shrill whistle escaped Sky’s lips as she summoned her steed. Karmine heard the thundering hoofs before she saw the majestic horse. Ally rounded the corner of the barn and slowed to a trot as he approached them.

“He is magnificent,” Karmine enthused as she combed her fingers through Ally’s thick mane.

“His mane is almost as glorious as yours,” Sky spoke without thinking then quickly added, “Are you feeling up to a short ride?”

“I’d love to go riding.” Karmine refrained from jumping up and down.

“We can’t ride Ally yet, but we have a wonderful pair of mares you will love.” Sky led the way to the last paddock

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of the barn and two beautiful buckskin mares scurried to meet them. They took turns taking a sugar cube from Sky. "Mom thinks I'm a horse whisperer." Sky chuckled. "It's really all about the treats. They'll do anything for a sugar cube."

Sky slipped the bridle onto one of them and handed the reins to Karmine. "You can talk to her while I saddle her. She loves attention."

Karmine stroked the mare's neck and scratched behind her ears as Sky slipped the blanket and saddle onto the horse's back. "She is a beauty. What is her name?"

"Candy. She will be yours while you are here," Sky said ducking under the horse's neck to reach her paddock mate. Sky quickly tacked both horses then mounted the one reserved for Karmine. She rode the mare into the round pen and exercised her for about five minutes before turning her over to agent. "I wanted to get the skittishness out of her before you got on," Sky explained.

Karmine nodded then admitted, "Sky, I don't think I have the strength to mount her."

"Let me help you." Sky retrieved a mounting block from the tack room and steadied Karmine as stood on the steps, slipped her foot into the stirrup, grabbed the saddle horn, and swung her leg over the horse's back.

Karmine settled into the saddle and Sky adjusted her stirrups. "This feels incredible," she said. "I've almost forgotten how good it feels to sit in a saddle."

##

"Let's ride to the pasture where the new babies are with their mothers," Sky suggested.

Karmine skillfully kept Candy beside Sky so they could talk as the horses meandered along the path. "How do you leave this place? It is so peaceful. It speaks to one's soul."

"Yes, it does," Sky agreed. "I love it here, but like most horse ranches it doesn't support itself. We have two men

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who do most of the work and training. I help when I'm here and I enjoy it. We sell a dozen or so horses a year, but we need my salary, and I enjoy saving people's lives and putting the bad guys behind bars."

Karmine nodded.

"But you've never had to worry about money," Sky continued. "I've read your bio. You come from one of the wealthiest families in Peru, so you don't do it for the money."

"My father is close friends with the DEA Director in Peru. After I graduated from the University Father and Captain Risso teamed up to make Peru a safer country. I ended up going undercover and loved the work, so I've been doing it ever since. I do the job for the same reasons as you. I love the excitement and the high I get from catching criminals, especially the human traffickers."

"That is very satisfying," Sky agreed glancing sideways at her companion. Karmine sat comfortably in the saddle letting her body go with the horse's movements. She was at home astride a horse.

"Look!" Karmine chirped. "You must have a dozen foals."

"You're a fast counter," Sky noted. "That is exactly how many we have."

They rode to the pipe fence that separated the foals and mares from the rest of the ranch. The mares led their babies to meet them. They expectantly lined up along the fence.

"Don't tell me you give each one of them a sugar cube too." Karmine laughed as Sky produced a Ziplock baggie filled with treats.

"You feed the mamas, and I'll feed the babies; they haven't learned good manners yet."

They dismounted and walked along the fence dispensing the treats. Each mare took her treat, waited for her foal to get its cube then took off for the other side of the pasture, baby in tow. Karmine laughed out loud as she

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watched the foals kick and cavort. “Just watching them makes me want to kick up my heels,” she said.

“They are the epitome of freedom.” Sky noted.

##

“We don’t usually have wine with dinner,” Juanita said as she filled three glasses, “but we’re celebrating.”

“What?” Karmine asked already dreading Sky’s departure in the morning.

“Your recovery. Color is returning to your cheeks, and you are laughing more. You are becoming the firecracker I worked with.”

“You can thank your wonderful horses, the sunshine and your delightful daughter for that.” Karmine raised her glass. “May we always be as happy as we are right now.”

As their glasses clinked Karmine held Sky’s gaze. “That would be wonderful,” Sky agreed.

They ate dinner and drank two bottles of wine. Juanita and Karmine reminisced about their last case together. “Karmine was undercover as a barkeeper in a popular watering hole we suspected of trafficking young Indian women. I didn’t know she was one of us until everything went to hell in a handbasket. Later I found out she was on loan from Peru. She saved my life.”

“Your last job in Montana? When the traffickers kidnapped you, and Karmine extracted the location from one of the thugs?” Sky noted.

“Yes, that’s the one,” Juanita crowed, the wine making her lightheaded.

“Did she torture him?” Sky asked.

Juanita cackled. “Not in the traditional sense. I mean she didn’t pull out his fingernails, although I suspect she tore out his heart. Karmine’s a real femme fatale.”

“That’s what I’ve heard,” Sky scoffed. “I need to check on the horses before I go to bed.”

“I’ll go with you,” Karmine volunteered.

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“Please don’t.”

Juanita and Karmine sat in silence, both upset over Sky’s abrupt departure.

Finally, Karmine broke the silence. “What is wrong with her?”

“I think she likes you,” Juanita said. “She doesn’t want to because she isn’t sure about your morals or your sexuality.”

“Oh,” Karmine squeaked. “You do know I didn’t sleep with that thug in Santa Fe to extract information from him?”

“I never thought you did,” Juanita responded. “How did you get the information?”

“I didn’t pull out his fingernails either. I did cut off his little finger. You know, that’s getting to be a habit with me. I had to do it in Colombia,” smirked Karmine.

“Jesus,” Juanita threw back her head and laughed. “He deserved it.”

“I knew if I didn’t stop the shipment, you and those girls would die a horrible death in some disease infested whorehouse.” Karmine exclaimed. “That wasn’t going to happen on my watch.”

“Go talk to Sky.” Juanita encouraged. “If you care about her, that is.”

Juanita was still talking when Karmine slammed the door behind her.

##

Sky was standing in front of Ally talking to the horse when Karmine approached her. “Are you okay?” Karmine asked.

“I’m fine. Why wouldn’t I be?”

“You left so abruptly. I thought something was wrong.”

“Nope, I’m fine. I just wanted to check on Ally before going to bed.”

“You left before we finished the story,” Karmine stood close to her. “We knew they had your mom and a dozen

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Indian girls in a box car waiting to be picked up, but we didn't know where it was located.

"I had flirted with the leader of the gang trying to get information from him about the location. I was desperate, Sky. I couldn't let Juanita be shipped off to some hell hole, so I cut off his p—"

"You don't owe me any explanation," Sky blurted. "I don't care what you did."

"I cut off his pinky finger with a fence cutter."

"His pinky!" Sky burst into laughter. "You cut off his finger?"

"Yes, what did you think I cut off?"

"Karmine, would you like to go for a moonlight ride with me?"

"Yes, I would Skylar Tomorrow."

## Chapter 5

### Undercover Agents

#### Monday-Day 26

It was 7:00 a.m. when Sky met Reagan and Marta Steel at a coffee shop in Santa Fe's art district. She examined the many pictures displayed on the walls. They were all painted by local artists and ranged from gorgeous sunsets over the canyons and the light of the sunrising on Camel Rock.

"I can never get over how beautiful it is here," Reagan commented as a server placed their coffee in front of them, then walked away.

"The artists from this region are incredibly talented. It amazes me how they capture the sunlight on the many formations."

"You see why I love it here and would never relocate," Sky replied. "I'm lucky this is my home. Which begs the question, why are you two still in the states? I thought you were going to make your home in Peru."

"Director Maxwell requested our help with a problem in your back yard," Marta replied. "Who can say no to Christine?"

"Ah yes, Director Christine Maxwell, it is difficult to tell her no," Sky grinned as they all broke into laughter.

"She pointed out to us that you had risked your life to save one of our own," Reagan noted. "I understand that you and Ally are the officers of the year for your impossible rescue of our top agent."

"How is Karminne doing?" Marta whispered.

"She grows stronger every day." Sky informed them. "Has Christine filled you in on our assignment?"

"Nope," the couple chimed.

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“I was surprised when she suggested we meet here instead of in her office,” Sky declared.

##

Christine slid into the empty chair at the table occupied by the bureau’s three top agents. “Marta, Reagan, Skylar, it is a joy to see you again.”

“We couldn’t say no to your kind invitation.” Reagan grinned as she greeted her boss.

“I needed a break from the ranch,” Sky added. “What is so important that you called Marta and Reagan back to the states?”

“I need faces no one will recognize.” Christine explained. “There is an enormous gun sale going down in Albuquerque sometime this month. I need one of you to get inside the sellers’ gang and find out when and where the deal will take place.

“We know who they are, but we have never been able to catch them in the act. We believe they have a mole inside our own organization that tips them off whenever we plan a raid. That is why I don’t want your faces around headquarters. The three of you are new faces. Marta and Reagan are unknown in the states and Sky has been an undercover agent forever so I think at least one of you can infiltrate the gang without being recognized. I have prepared dossiers on the gang members.” She handed each of them a fat manilla envelope. Study them and get to know them like your own brother. Then find a way to win their trust.

She gave each of them a smaller packet. “I have new identities for you. New drivers license, passports and voter identifications. Marta and Reagan, I’ve leased a house for you. Sky I’ve leased a nice condo for you. Check them out this afternoon. Give me your service guns. In your new homes, you will find Glocks that have their registration numbers filed off them so no one can trace their owners. You will find everything you need to be comfortable and make it

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look like you have lived in your residence for a long time. They are within five miles of the supper club where the gang hangs out.

“Reagan, I know you and Marta have your luggage with you. Move it into the red Lexus parked out front. I will return your rented car to the airport. The title is in your undercover name and is in the glove compartment. It shows you have owned the car for nine months. The keys to your front door and the vehicle are in your envelope.”

“Sky, I’ve made the same arrangements for you. You need to return home, pack your clothes and have Juanita drive you to this address. You will find a silver Ford pickup parked in the garage of your condo. Your registration shows you have owned the vehicle for two years.

“There is a dresser in your bedrooms that has a false bottom in the center, bottom drawer. Hide the dossiers I’ve given you in it. Put the papers showing your identification and auto ownership in a desk drawer where they can be easily found. You can’t be too careful with this gang. They are smart and ruthless.

“If you have any questions after you study the information I’ve given you, you can reach me directly at this number.” She wrote a number on two napkins. “It is a burner phone and no one else has it. As I said I know we have a mole inside my organization, so I don’t want to take a chance on them learning your identity. Memorize the number and burn the napkins.”

“Any questions?”

“No ma’am,” Sky mumbled. “It looks like you have thought of everything.”

“Then I will leave it to you. Take care and thank you.”

Christine left the restaurant as quickly and silently as she had entered it.

“And that my friends is Hurricane Christine,” Marta said softly and they all laughed.

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As FBI Director Christine Maxwell drove back to the regional office, she congratulated herself for forming the tight team of her three best agents. She hated sending Skylar Tomorrow into the lion's den but knew her agent could handle the assignment. Skylar was tough and driven. Nothing would interfere with her assignment. Reagan and Marta Steel would be on hand to back up any play Skylar was forced to make. She wished she could convince the Steels to move to the U.S. permanently but knew they loved Peru.

At forty-five, Christine was one of the youngest agents to hold a director's position. Like Sky, she was fearless and brilliant. Closing cases and exposing criminals within their own rank she had caught the attention of the top brass and had been assigned the director's position of the regional office. She loved her job and the people she worked with. Most importantly she loved her agents and they trusted her.

## Chapter 6

### Keeping Secrets

The was sun was high in the heavens when Skylar returned home. She drove past her home and stopped at the barn. She was surprised to hear Karmine's voice as she entered the shade of the stables. She stood silently in the shadows and listened as the brunette talked to Ally.

"I know you miss her, big fellow," Karmine said. "I miss her too. She isn't a woman one forgets easily. You are fortunate. You have known her your entire life. She has only been in my life for a short period of time, but I know she will forever change my life."

Sky knew she shouldn't listen to Karmine sharing her thoughts with Ally, but the woman's words mesmerized her. She was glad that Karmine had missed her too. She swallowed then called out, "Ally, I'm home."

The big gelding whinnied and Karmine turned to face the agent. "I was afraid they would keep you," she said.

"I must return in the morning," Sky informed her, "but I had to come home and pick up some clothes."

The light seemed to go out in Karmine's eyes as she responded. "I was hoping you were home to stay at least for a while."

Sky fought the urge to rush to Karmine and hug her. "How are you feeling?" she asked instead.

"I get stronger every day, but you haven't been gone for a day."

Sky laughed. "It felt like a lifetime."

Karmine walked to her and laced her fingers through the blonde's. "You must be hungry. Come to the house. I'm cooking dinner tonight and Juanita will be thrilled that you are home."

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“Let me say hello to Ally, then I’ll join you in the kitchen,” Sky replied.

“I’m in no hurry,” Karmine said. “I just finished feeding and grooming him, all he needs now is his sugar cube reward.”

Karmine stood by patiently while Sky put Ally’s big head over her shoulder and hugged the horse’s neck then gave him a couple of sugar cubes. Ally took the cubes from her hand, swallowed them then nuzzled Sky searching for another cube that was always in his owner’s pocket. Sky laughed and held the cube in the palm of her hand.

Sky washed her hands in the water bucket, dried them on a stable towel, then joined Karmine to walk to her truck.

“Am I allowed to know about your assignment?” Karmine asked.

“You will have to clear that with Christine,” Sky advised. “I’m going undercover. That is all I know.”

“Humph,” Karmine grunted. “Is it dangerous?”

“Undercover is always dangerous,” Sky responded.

“I want to help,” Karmine insisted.

“Nope. You can’t go back to work until the doctor releases you. I’m not taking any chances on losing you.”

“I feel so useless,” Karmine complained. “I go stir-crazy when you aren’t here.”

“Mom will welcome your help. A corporation has leased all our bungalows for the next two weeks for a managerial retreat. Mom will need all the help she can get. A cook and his crew will take over the clubhouse and turn it into a dining hall, so we don’t need to worry about feeding them. The ranch hands will teach them how to saddle their own horses. You and Mom will take them on trail rides and there will be a hayride that ends with singing around the campfire. Typical dude ranch activities.

“The company will spend the day doing training exercises and allowing their management employees to get to know each other in a non-work environment.”

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“Sounds like fun,” Karmine exclaimed. “I’d love to do something to help you and Juanita and repay your kindness.”

“Mom will love having you around,” Sky assured her.

“Will you be coming home occasionally?”

“I don’t think so.” Sky mumbled. “Believe me, I’d much rather be here getting to know you better.”

“That’s sweet,” Karmine replied. “I’d like to know you better too. I already like the Sky Tomorrow I’ve spent time with. I do have one question.”

“What is that?” Sky smiled.

“May I ride Ally while you are gone?”

Sky laughed. “Of course, you can but don’t let anyone else ride him.”

“I promise I won’t. I will take excellent care of him. After all he is the only reason, I am alive today.”

“The *only* reason?” Sky pretended to pout.

“Maybe the two of you together.” Karmine laughed at the blonde.

##

“I hate it when you go undercover,” Juanita groused as they ate dinner. “With your blonde hair you stick out like a Golden Retriever in a pack of Chihuahuas. I can’t believe the bureau is asking you to go undercover in a state where ninety percent of the women are brunettes.”

“You would need to know our end game to understand,” Sky replied.

“Which is?” Juanita raised her brows.

“Information I can’t share with you.” Sky grinned as she picked up their dinner dishes from the table and carried them to the kitchen where Karmine was rinsing them and placing them in the dishwasher.

“The hayride and karaoke around the campfire will be the last function of their stay,” Juanita followed her daughter

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into the kitchen. "Surely you can sneak away from whatever you are doing and come home for that."

"I would love to, Mom, but I don't know where I will be or what I will be doing."

"Can you call me and let me know you are okay?" Juanita insisted.

"Mom! I will be undercover. I will be using a burner phone so no one can learn anything about me from my cellphone. I don't even want a text or phone call between you and me on it so don't ask for the number. You've been undercover. You know how it works."

Juanita nodded. "Please be careful, Sky."

"I am always careful, Mom. Don't worry about me. You and Karmine forget about me and have a good time with your guests. I'm going to check on Ally before I go to bed."

"May I join you?" Karmine asked.

"I'd like that. Let me grab some sugar cubes for both of us to give Ally a treat."

The night was warm and the stars filled the black sky as they walked toward the barn. "It is so dark out here with no city lights," Karmine noted. "Few people know what true darkness is until they go to the middle of nowhere and only the moon and stars light the sky. This place makes me feel so small but closer to my maker."

Sky caught her hand and pulled her closer, so their arms touched as they walked. "I don't want you tripping over anything in the dark," she pointed out.

Karmine pulled her hand from Sky's then slipped her arm through Sky's arm, nestling the blonde's arm between her breasts and letting their bodies meld together.

Neither spoke as they reveled in the closeness of each other.

"I need your help," Sky said as they entered the barn.

"What can I do?"

"I need you to drive me into Albuquerque in the morning before Mom gets up. I will be undercover with a

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new residence and a different vehicle in my name. You know the drill. I need you to drop me off and bring my truck back here.”

“I will be happy to do that. Maybe you can give me detailed instructions on what I need to do to help Juanita.”

## Chapter 7

### Take a Switchblade to a Gunfight

**Tuesday – Day 27**

“Tell me about Karmine Sedona,” Sky suggested as she pulled her truck onto the main highway.

“I thought you already knew all there was to know about me,” Karmine replied.

“I only know the hype. You know, the femme fatale who uses her womanly wiles to extract information from unsuspecting gang bosses. I know you are lethal with a gun and do a pretty good job of surviving in the wilderness. I don’t know much about Karmine Sedona, the woman, except what I have gleaned from you since you’ve been with us. I know Mom has the highest regard for you and that you come from a wealthy family in Peru.”

“I adore your mother. She is an excellent agent. I learned a lot working with her. Yes, my family owns one of the largest gold mines in Peru and my father hopes I will eventually join him in running it. I have a degree in engineering with emphasis on geology.

“I like being an FBI agent. It makes me feel good about myself, that I am fighting evil and making the world a better place. I like knowing that what I do saves lives and keeps people safe. Why do you do this job?”

“For the exact same reasons you do,” Sky admitted. “But I like search and rescue. I’m not wild about going undercover and infiltrating criminal gangs.”

“That’s my specialty,” Karmine admitted. “It is an unpleasant job, but someone has to do it.”

“That’s what Christine said, but I still don’t like it. I didn’t really train for it. I enjoy investigating. You know, tracking down the criminals and arresting them.”

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"I never get to arrest anyone. That is when I disappear and move on to the next assignment. May I ask you a personal question?" Karmine asked.

"Sure. I won't answer it if I don't want to."

Karmine laughed. "I'd expect nothing more from you. I'm curious if you are involved with anyone?"

"You mean do I have a love interest in my life?"

"Do you?"

"No. I'm a bit of a loner. I love the ranch and Ally. Between the agency and the ranch, I don't have much time for dating."

"Do you ever get lonely?"

"Not really. I have Mom to talk to and Ally to take me anywhere I want to go. I stay busy and I enjoy my life."

"Can you share anything about your new assignment?" Karmine asked. "I wish I were working with you."

"Maybe after you recover from your last stint, Christine will let us work as a couple. Marta and Reagan are an amazing team."

"They are married." Karmine noted.

"They worked together before they married. They brought down one of Peru's largest drug producers."

"I know. They are the agency's golden couple." Karmine laughed. "They are perfect undercover. They are so gorgeous and pull off a dim-witted lesbian love birds act perfectly."

"They are good and great to work with," Sky agreed. "Here we are." She pulled her pickup into the drive of a nice condo and clicked a fob to open the garage door. "I'm going to pull my truck inside, so no one sees it."

"At least they gave you a decent ride," Karmine commented as she eyed the truck already parked in the garage.

Sky grabbed her luggage and headed for the door. "I haven't seen the inside either," she noted. "The door from the garage is supposed to be unlocked."

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“Nice,” Karmine said as she walked through the downstairs. “May I go upstairs?”

“Of course.” Sky followed her upstairs with her suitcases.

“Nice view overlooking the swimming pool,” Karmine pointed out. “Big master bedroom and en suite. Do you have a guest room?”

“I think so. I saw another door off the hallway.”

They checked out the second bedroom then walked downstairs to the kitchen. Sky began opening cabinet doors then looking into the refrigerator. “Wow. The agency thought of everything. There is even a bottle of decent wine in here.”

“We should christen your new home,” Karmine suggested.

“Nope, you must drive home by yourself, and you are still taking medications.”

“I could spend the night and leave in the morning.”

Sky bit her bottom lip as she considered Karmine’s offer of company. “No. You need to go. I want you home safely before it gets dark.”

“You’re afraid of me,” Karmine accused. A slow knowing smile played across her lips.

“I just want you to be safe,” Sky argued as she held out her pickup keys to the brunette.

“Okay, but you really do need to learn how to control that blush.”

##

Skylar waived goodbye as Karmine backed her pickup from the driveway. She put down the garage door then walked into the condo. The room that had felt warm and welcoming with Karmine felt cold and sterile without her. Karmine was right, Sky was afraid of her. Afraid of the way her heart pounded when Karmine got too close.

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She pulled a bottle of wine from the fridge and popped the cork. She filled her glass and carried it upstairs to her bedroom. As promised, everything she needed was in the drawer with the false bottom. She studied the papers giving her the details of her assignment. She was thankful Christine had put everything under the name of Skylar Denton. She always hated having a different first name when working undercover.

The arms dealers worked out of one of Albuquerque's most popular restaurants. Sky's assignment was to get a job as a waitress, keep her head down, and learn everything she could about the owners and staff. The agency didn't know if the drug dealers were the owners, employees or customers. She was starting cold turkey.

She pulled out the file about the owners of the Buena Comida Supper Club. She laughed as she translated the name saying it out loud. "Good Food Supper Club isn't very original."

The restaurant was owned by two brothers and their sister, the children of John and Maria Vega. The Vegas were descendants of the Navajo tribe and John served on the Navajo Nation Council. He and Maria made their home in the Navajo Nation where they ran successful cattle and farming operations.

Mateo was their oldest son and Chayton the middle brother. Twenty-five-year-old Sierra was their daughter.

All the Vega children had graduated from the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. Photos of the men presented clean-cut, handsome men and Sierra's showed an attractive, dark-haired woman. *They don't look like gunrunners*, Sky thought.

She hoped she wouldn't have to get involved with the Navajo Nation that was a sovereign tribal government with its own laws and constitution.

The Vega family caught the agency's attention when the Navajo nation ordered a truck load of PKM Machine Guns

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from an American manufacturer. The machine guns were to be mounted in the bed of pickups used by the Navajo Nation to maintain peace. The Navajo Council reported that the guns were hijacked during delivery and they never received them. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) investigated the claim and reported that they believed the Navajo Nation had received the guns and were reselling them. Some of the guns showed up later when the compound of a drug cartel was raided by the ATF. Sky's job was to collect information proving the Navajo Nation was selling the guns to drug cartels.

She finished reading all the information the agency had provided and returned it to its original hiding place. She examined the Redemption switchblade knife that was in a regular envelope. She pressed the button that snapped the four-inch steel blade from its five-inch knife handle. The note accompanying the knife said, "Carry this at all times. You will raise suspicion if you carry a gun."

Sky frowned as she held the knife in her hand. It was a good fit. It would be a suitable weapon if she had to fight her way out of a bad situation.

She placed the knife on her dresser beside her new drivers license, checkbook, and truck fob. She unpacked her clothes, laying out a pair of dark pink, form fitting cargo capris and a lighter pink pullover. There were plenty of pockets to hide the switchblade.

Tomorrow, she planned to dine at the Buena Comida Supper Club for an early dinner. As she showered, her thoughts turned to Karmine, and she had to admit that she missed the brunette.

## Chapter 8

### Sierra Vega – A Woman's Woman

#### Wednesday – Day 28

Skylar slept late, then cooked her breakfast, grabbed her plate and a cup of coffee then settled on the sofa in front of a sixty-five-inch television screen. After fumbling with the controls, she finally located a channel with the local news.

“Local law enforcement officers have surrounded a convenience store where four gang members are holding the owner and two clerks at gunpoint,” a perky newscaster chirped.

“The thugs have taken the money from the cash registers, and the owner has opened the safe to give them all the funds on the premises. The gunmen are demanding that they be allowed to move from the store with their hostages and drive away without being followed,” the newscasters male counterpart joined the reporting. “A special team of negotiators are talking with the criminals in an effort to secure the release of the hostages.”

Sky watched as the team leader motioned to the law enforcement officers to leave the scene of the standoff. News cameras moved in for better shots of the gang as they walked from the store using their hostages as human shields. All cameras were trained on the group as the gang moved toward a white van. No one saw the moment the negotiator gave his snipers the thumbs down signal.

Thunder filled the air as four gang members crumbled to the pavement. The hostages stood frozen afraid to move until policemen ran to them and led them away from the dead men lying on the parking lot.

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“Serves you right,” Sky mumbled as she walked back to the kitchen to refill her coffee cup.

She left the television on for company as she began fixing her hair and applying makeup. She wanted to catch the eye of one of the Vega men today.

Newscasters changed as each hour brought new talking heads and a rehash of the morning’s big story. “We have just learned the gang that terrorized a local convenience store this morning was armed with black market weapons,” the latest newscaster announced. “It is no secret that New Mexico has a problem with illegal guns being sold to violent gangs in our state.”

*Time to go to work,* Sky thought as she slipped on her shoes.

##

Sierra Vega was a woman’s woman. She was highly educated, charming and incredibly beautiful. Her long black hair fell in waves over her shoulders down the front of her blouse coming to rest on her ample breasts as if daring anyone to touch them.

She watched the tall blonde as she stood at the hostess stand waiting for someone to seat her. Sierra grabbed the menu from the hostess, “I’ll take care of her,” she mumbled.

“Welcome to Buena Comida Supper Club,” she greeted Sky. “Do you have any seating preference?”

“Somewhere in a corner out of the center of everything.” Sky smiled. “Have you worked here long?” Sky knew she was talking to Sierra Vega from studying her photo that did not do her justice. Sierra was far more beautiful than her picture.

“Yes. May I get you something to drink?” Sierra placed a menu in front of her as Sky sat down.

“Iced tea,” Sky replied. She looked around the restaurant hoping to see one of the brothers, but Sierra was the only Vega in sight. She perused the menu and watched

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her waitress as the brunette sashayed toward her with her drink order.

“Our special for the evening is the Tomahawk steak seasoned with our own unique garlic herb butter mixture. Your choice of sides, but I highly recommend our twice-baked potato and our famous green beans with bacon.”

Sky looked at the price of the Tomahawk steak on the menu and choked. “That sounds delicious, but a little out of my price range. I’ve been out of work for a couple of weeks and things are getting tight.”

“Are you looking for a job?”

“Yes. I’m getting desperate. I’ll do just about anything that is legal for a paycheck.”

“What is your name?”

“Skylar Denton. My friends call me Sky. What is your name?”

“Sierra. I will turn in your order, Sky.”

“I didn’t give it to you.”

A mischievous smile played on Sierra’s full red lips. “You are getting the special. You can wash dishes for it.”

Sky swallowed. Dishwasher wasn’t the job she had in mind, but it would get her foot through the door. From experience, she knew there was no glamour in undercover work.

## Chapter 9

### The Bodyguard

**Wednesday – day 35**

Sky hung her apron on the hook beside the kitchen door, pulled off her rubber gloves and stored them in her cubby hole. The restaurant had been extremely busy and she was tired. She had been at the job for a week and had found out nothing about the Vega's or anyone else that might be connected with the gun smugglers.

She jumped as someone set off fireworks in the street in front of the restaurant. *Albuquerque citizens celebrate at the drop of a hat*, she thought. *I wonder what deity they are honoring tonight.*

"Sky please come into my office," Sierra called to her from across the kitchen.

*I thought she had forgotten I existed*, Sky thought as she followed Sierra into her office. She dusted imaginary specs of flour from her jeans and wished she was dressed better, but then she was a dishwasher.

"Mateo and Chayton had to leave the restaurant early," Sierra explained, "and I must make our nightly deposit. We never leave money in the restaurant overnight. I would like for you to walk with me. The bank is only a block away but there is such a ruckus going on in front of the restaurant, I would welcome your company. You know, safety in numbers."

"I am happy to accompany you," Sky said, "but I must warn you, I'm a lover not a fighter."

Sierra laughed out loud and slowly raked her eyes down Sky's long shapely frame. "That remains to be seen," she teased.

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Sky followed her boss out the back door of the restaurant then down the ally leading to the front of the establishment. Partiers were dancing and chanting in the middle of the street as they walked past.

“Hey, pretty ladies, come celebrate with us,” a tall, husky man began following them.

Sky slipped her hand into her jeans pocket and wrapped her fingers around her switchblade. They began walking faster trying to put distance between them and the drunk behind them.

“Hey, haashch’ée, I’m talking to you.” He grabbed Sierra’s arm and spun her around to face him. He never knew what hit him. Sky slammed the handle of the closed switchblade into the side of his head sending blood flying as he grabbed his face and dropped to the ground. “Keep walking” she commanded grabbing Sierra’s arm and steering her across the street into the crowd.

They reached the bank and dropped the bank bag into the night deposit. “Where is your car?” Sky asked.

“Mateo took it. His wouldn’t start.”

“Mine is behind the restaurant,” Sky said. “I’ll take you home.” She steered Sierra down a side street to put a block between them and the partiers.

As they approached Sky’s pickup on the parking lot behind the restaurant, she stopped and scanned the area to make certain no one was lurking about. “It looks safe,” she said as she held Sierra’s elbow and quickly moved her toward the vehicle.

“Somehow, I knew you’d drive a truck,” Sierra quipped.

Sky opened the door and helped her boss get into the pickup. They drove out of the area without incident.

“I have no idea where you live,” Sky noted as she pulled onto the interstate.

“North Albuquerque Acres,” Sierra replied.

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Sky raised her brows, "I should have known you'd live in the elite part of town. Those are mansions. Do you share a home with a husband and kiddos?"

Sierra huffed. "No, I just happen to love the finer things in life and don't require a husband to provide them for me."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to insinuate that you couldn't take care of yourself. You are very attractive, I just assumed you were married. Are you dating anyone?"

"Are you offering?" Sierra snapped.

Sky laughed. "Lord, no. I know that you are way out of my league. I couldn't offer you anything you don't already have."

Sierra studied the profile of her employee. "You might be surprised."

"You must give me directions from here," Sky blurted. "I've gotten us into the community but need the address."

"Turn right on Anaheim Avenue NE," Sierra instructed. "Drive to the Spanish Mediterranean one with the wrought iron gates at the end of the street."

Sky did as she was told gaping at the size of the homes. "You live in a mansion," she exclaimed. "It must get lonely."

"No, I have a precious dog and a cat that adores me."

Sky laughed. "Who could ask for anything more?" She stopped at the gates while Sierra clicked an opener then pulled into the driveway that circled the house. "Which direction?"

"Left. You can let me out at the back door."

Outside security lights turned on as the pickup moved around the house. By the time they reached the back of the home, the entire place was lit up like a bright day.

"Would you like to come in?" Sierra asked.

"No, I must be at work early in the morning and it is already past midnight. I need my beauty rest."

Sierra nodded and placed her hand on Sky's arm. "Thank you for protecting me tonight. You are a great bodyguard."

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“My pleasure” Sky quipped cursing her stupid heart for beating faster at the woman’s touch.

Sky watched until Sierra was safely inside her home then drove back to the gate that automatically opened as she approached. The scent of Sierra’s perfume lingered in the pickup.

## Chapter 10

### Mateo's Request

#### Thursday – Day 36

“My sister tells me you saved her life last night,” Mateo Vega breathed down the back of Sky’s neck. She stiffened then side stepped to move away from him before turning to face him.

“Just a drunk who was infatuated with her,” Sky replied. “He was harmless.”

“She said he manhandled her,” Mateo insisted.

“He grabbed her arm. I knocked him down. No permanent harm was done to anyone.”

“She wants you to be her bodyguard,” Mateo continued.

“Mr. Vega, I’m not qualified to be a bodyguard,” Sky argued. “If you fear your sister is in danger you should hire a professional not a dishwasher.”

Mateo studied her for several seconds. “You are tall, fit and easy on the eyes,” he complimented. “She wants you as her bodyguard.

“Often Chayton and I must travel out of town. I would feel much better if I knew Sierra was with someone who could help her if she encountered trouble. You seem very capable.”

Mateo pulled a pen from his pocket and wrote on a napkin. “This would be your salary.”

“Whoa,” Sky exclaimed. “What would I be required to do?”

“Carry a gun, protect my sister twenty-four seven. As you already know, she has a large house with plenty of rooms. You would have your own suite.”

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“I don’t have a gun. Honestly, I’ve had a couple of run-ins with the law. I’m not even sure I could get a gun registration.”

“You’re not required to register a pistol in New Mexico,” Mateo explained. “Unless you want to wash dishes for the rest of your life, I suggest you accept the position I am offering you.”

“Why me? Why don’t you hire a male bodyguard for her?”

“She has had two males,” Mateo explained. “Unfortunately, they tend to fall in love with her then things get unpleasant because she only sees them as an employee. Since you are another woman, she won’t have that problem.”

“What if it doesn’t work out and she decides she doesn’t want me around? I don’t want to give up my condo to move into her mansion then find myself out in the street.”

“I will buy your condo and put it in your name,” Mateo promised.

“Does Sierra always get what she wants?” Sky asked.

“Always!” Mateo declared.

“Okay, give me a clear title to my condo and I will do as you ask, but I will also walk away if she is unreasonable or excessively demanding.”

“Understood,” Mateo nodded. “How soon can you move to her home?”

“As soon as you hand me the deed to my condo.”

##

Sky waited until the lunch rush was over to talk to Sierra. She tapped on the door to the brunette’s office then slowly opened it.

“Come in.” Sierra smiled when she realized it was Sky.

“Why didn’t you talk to me instead of sending your brother?”

“Mateo can be more convincing than I.”

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“Do you fear for your safety or is this like rent-a-friend?”

Sierra scowled. “I am charming and gracious and spend all day smiling and making customers feel welcome and valued. While I do value them, I don’t really like interacting with them. Mothers want to fix me up with their sons and fathers want to date me on the side. I often have encounters like the one we had last night. I was impressed with the way you quickly and quietly handled the situation. If you don’t want to be around me, I will tell Mateo that I have changed my mind.”

“I can’t sit around here all day watching for some creep to make a move on you. I would go stir crazy. May I also be a hostess? You have your hands full with the financials. If you let me be hostess, you can take care of the paperwork, and we can go home when the restaurant closes instead of you staying here until after midnight.”

Sierra smiled. “So, you will take the job?”

“Does anyone ever say no to you princess?”

Sierra beamed. “Not that I can recall.”

“I am going to go home and change into something more appropriate for a hostess. I’ll be back in about an hour.”

“Good,” Sierra agreed, “and Sky, thank you.”

##

Alone in her pickup Sky used her burner phone to call Christine. “Boss, I’ve just been promoted to Sierra Vega’s bodyguard,” she reported.

“You have always been a fast worker,” Christine teased. “Give me details.”

Sky explained the encounter with the drunk and the Vega’s offer of the bodyguard job. “Which pays a lot more money than being an FBI agent,” she concluded.

“I was worried about how you would keep tabs on them,” Christine admitted. “Hell, you’re already living with them. Is Sierra of your persuasion?”

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“I don’t know. I do get vibes from her, but I think she may be a shameless flirt. She is much more beautiful than that photo you gave me, and she knows it.

“I haven’t been here long, but I have seen no evidence of the Vega’s involvement with smuggled guns.”

“You are practically one of the family,” Christine pointed out. “If you go everywhere Sierra goes, you will soon find out everything there is to know about them.”

“Mateo is insisting that I carry a handgun to protect his sister. It will be interesting to see where he procures it.”

“Be careful, Sky. I’m going to send in Marta and Reagan so you will see them dining there tonight.”

“I’m on my way to the condo to change into something more appropriate for a hostess. I will keep you informed.”

##

Sky traded her jeans and Henley for a pair of black slacks and an elegant pullover black sleeveless blouse decorated with multicolored beads. Her long blonde hair danced around her shoulders and dangling gold earrings completed her femme-fatal look. She returned to the restaurant as early diners began appearing.

Sierra licked her lips as Sky walked toward her. She swallowed trying to make her vocal cords work. “I may have to fight the men off you,” she muttered in Sky’s ear.

Sky suppressed a grin. There was no doubt in her mind that Sierra was of her persuasion as Christine put it. They led customers to their tables smiling and welcoming them.

“I had them place your desk and chair in my office,” Sierra informed her when they had a lull. “Mateo left a box for you. It is on your desk. You should check it to see what is in it.”

Sky nodded and walked to Sierra’s office. True to her word, the woman had placed a decorative desk at one end of her large office. Sky opened the box sitting in the center of it. A manilla envelope contained a deed to the condo

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showing Sky as the sole owner. Mateo had no idea he had purchased the condo from the FBI. A shoulder holster containing a loaded Glock and a box of bullets were also in the box. *No more sleeveless blouses*, she thought. The last item in the envelope was a keyring with keys to her desk, the office and Sierra's home. A gate opener was included so she could come and go as she pleased from the mansion.

She slipped the condo contract into the lap drawer of the desk then locked the Glock and bullets in the bottom drawer. Things were going even more smoothly than she had expected.

Sierra was seating Marta and Reagan at their table when Sky returned to the dining room. She walked to the hostess stand and welcomed the next couple in line. As she returned to the hostess stand, Reagan hailed her. "Miss, can you help us? We would like to order a bottle of wine."

Sky's smile was genuine as she grabbed a wine list and walked toward her friend's table. "I apologize that you weren't given a wine list when you were seated. I will give you a few minutes to peruse our wines then return to take your order."

Reagan nodded and Sky joined Sierra at the hostess stand.

"With your hair down, you are even more beautiful than I imagined," Sierra murmured.

Sky smiled. "You've been imagining me? Should I be concerned?"

"I, uh, I just meant you look incredible. Accept the compliment."

"Thank you."

They seated several more guests then met at the hostess stand again. "When do you want me to move into your home?" Sky asked.

"Tonight."

"I need to return to my condo and pack a few things."

"When can you move in completely?" Sierra asked.

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“Are you really terrified of being alone? I mean has anyone threatened you. Is there something I should know? Are you in imminent danger?”

“No, I just enjoy your company.” Sierra placed her hand on Sky’s forearm.

Sky had dressed to catch Mateo’s attention, instead she had attracted his sister.

“Ma’am,” Reagan motioned for Sky to return to their table.

“Did you find a wine you like?” She inquired cordially.

“I want to try something new,” Reagan held up the menu forcing Sky to lean down to see what she was pointing to. “How do you pronounce this wine?”

Sky leaned over Reagan’s shoulder pretending to read what her customer was pointing at.

“How are things going?” Reagan whispered.

“I’m moving into Sierra’s house tonight,” Sky muttered.

“You dog,” Reagan snickered.

“Bodyguard. I will go to my condo when I leave here to pack a few things. Meet me there.”

“Oh! That does sound delicious,” Reagan said loudly. “Let’s try that.”

Sky retrieved the wine and served it to the couple. “I am certain you will enjoy it,” she commented.

“At the price, I certainly hope so,” Reagan replied.

As the dining crowd cleared out, Sierra instructed Sky to go get the things she needed from her condo. “I will see you at my home after we close. Don’t forget the gun Mateo purchased for you.”

Sky retrieved the keys and gun from her new office and slipped out the back door to her pickup. Reagan and Marta were at her condo when she arrived.

##

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"I can't wait to hear how you have already managed to move into Sierra Vega's home," Reagan blurted as they relaxed in the living room.

"I knocked out a drunk that tried to grab her," Sky explained. "The next thing I know her brother informed me I've been promoted to Sierra's bodyguard. I explained I was better qualified as a waitress, but he issued me an ultimatum: either protect his sister or I was fired. I will guard her twenty-four seven. If they have meetings to discuss the family businesses, I will be there. I will be part of the inner circle."

"Mateo provided this Glock." Sky pulled the gun from her bag and examined it "Just what I thought, the serial number has been filed from the frame and slide." She locked back the slide and looked through the ejection port. "But they always miss this one. She wrote the serial number on a note pad and gave it to Marta. "Please see if this is part of a stolen shipment. I am anxious to know where Mateo got it."

"We will check this and report your situation to Christine," Marta promised. "Be careful Sky."

"Always," Sky quipped as she said good night to her friends. She locked the door behind them and packed all her clothes in two suitcases. Her toiletries filled her oversized duffel bag. She fought the urge to call Karmin and won the battle. She had only known the other agent for a month but still missed talking with her.

##

Sierra had showered and dressed in silk pajamas by the time Sky returned. She opened the front door when the blonde rang the doorbell. "I was beginning to worry about you," she greeted Sky.

"I picked up all my clothes and toiletries. That is all I will need for now. Since your brother so graciously purchased the condo for me, there is no hurry to move anything else."

"Why did he buy you a condo?" Sierra huffed.

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Sky couldn't resist replying, "I think he likes me."

Sierra's face turned a dark red as she contemplated her bodyguard's answer.

"Do you want to show me where to put my things?" Sky continued.

"Join me in a glass of wine," Sierra offered as she poured the burgundy liquid in a glass sitting beside her own.

Sky accepted the glass held out to her and settled in a chair next to Sierra's. "It feels good to sit down," she commented.

Sierra nodded and sipped her wine. "I appreciate you agreeing to protect me. It will be nice to always have someone with me. I don't go out much because I don't feel safe alone."

"Where do you want to go?" Sky asked.

"The opera. I love music and the Sante Fe Opera House is spectacular. I love the theater and enjoy dancing and dining at establishments other than our own. Do you dance?"

"I do," Sky replied. "I thought you worked twenty-four seven."

"I think we should take off at least one day a week and do interesting and exciting things. Don't you?"

"You're the boss." Sky smiled as she stood, "But right now, I am exhausted. A shower and bed sound like heaven to me."

Sierra placed her glass beside Sky's empty one and stood. "Come, I will give you a quick tour of upstairs. You can see the entire house tomorrow."

Sky finished her wine and stood to follow Sierra. She was surprised when her boss walked past the staircase and opened a common looking door. To Sky's surprise they stepped into an elevator and Sierra pushed button number two. "Where does button number three go?" she asked.

"To the roof. Would you like to see the view or are you too tired?"

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“I think I can drag my poor, overworked body to the rooftop.” Sky grinned.

The elevator door opened onto a charming rooftop patio. “This is beautiful,” Sky noted as she walked from beneath the patio cover to the edge of the roof. A wrought iron parapet bordered the edge of the roof to prevent anyone from falling to the ground.

Sky gazed at the night sky and the distant city lights that glowed like a jewel in the desert. “Breathtaking,” she mumbled.

“Yes,” Sierra whispered in her ear as she hugged her from behind.

Sky fought to keep her body from stiffening in response to the unexpected closeness of her employer. She observed the view trying to ignore the warmth of Sierra’s soft body pressed against her back. After several minutes Sierra released her saying, “I am sorry. I had no right to do that. Come, I will show you to your room.”

Sierra was all business as she led her bodyguard to her apartment, gave her a key to the door and said goodnight. “I’d like to leave for the restaurant at 9:00 a.m. We can eat breakfast there.” She walked gracefully to her own room at the far end of the hallway.

Sky hurried to the en suite and turned on the shower. She was tired and anxious to wash the everything from her body, including Sierra’s sensuous touch. *My job is to prove that Sierra and her family are big-time gunrunners, she thought, not succumb to her many charms.*

# Chapter 11

## A New Home

### Friday – Day 37

Sky dressed and was downstairs before 7:30 a.m. She wanted to get the lay of the land before they left for the restaurant. She followed her nose as the fragrant smell of coffee wafted to her. Sierra was sitting in delightful alcove overlooking a magnificent garden drinking coffee.

“Pour yourself a cup and join me,” she invited.

Sky obeyed and slid onto the bench across the small table from Sierra. The alcove was encased in wainscoting from the floor to halfway up the wall where it intersected with glass allowing one to view the garden from several angles.

“You surround yourself with such beauty,” Sky noted.

“I believe beauty is essential to happiness,” Sierra replied. “I am always happier around a beautiful woman than an ugly one.”

Sky laughed. “That goes without saying.”

They tapped their coffee cups together in a toast.

As they walked to their vehicles Sierra walked behind Sky. “I love the Palazzo pantsuit. It shows off one of your best assets. Why the jacket?”

“Jackets are a must when wearing a gun and shoulder holster,” Sky quipped striking a model’s pose.

Sierra laughed. “You truly are beautiful and you are correct; I can’t tell you are wearing a gun.”

##

Mateo pulled Sky aside as Sierra seated a party of four at a table. “Why aren’t you wearing the gun I provided you?” he asked.

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"I am. I wouldn't be much of a bodyguard if everyone knew I was packing," Sky declared as she pulled back her jacket to expose the gun. "Also, you gave me an illegal gun. It has the serial number filled off it. I certainly don't want some random law enforcement officer checking it."

Mateo scowled. "I didn't know it was filed off. I'll get you a legal one immediately."

"I would appreciate that," Sky agreed. "I assume my employment as bodyguard for your sister is long term."

"If you make certain nothing happens to her, the job is yours as long as you want it."

Sky nodded in agreement. "I need to assume my hostess duties right now. We have diners who need to be seated."

Sierra joined them at the hostess stand. "Is my brother hitting on you?" She inquired.

"No, we were just discussing the legality of the firearm he provided me to protect you."

Sierra's bright eyes darkened as she glared at Mateo. "Please tell me you have done nothing stupid like buy her a street gun!"

"It was a good deal," Mateo defended. "I had not idea it wasn't legal."

"That's why it was a good deal," Sierra hissed. "You handle the hostess stand. Sky and I are going to a legal gun shop to get her a gun." She grabbed her bodyguard's hand and pulled her out the front door.

"Sometimes I worry about my brother's intelligence," she groused as they got into her car. "Do you have a drivers license?"

"Yes, but I don't have a license to carry a gun."

"You don't need a license to open carry a pistol," Sierra informed her. "You must have a license to conceal carry a firearm. Let's get you concealed carry license."

"What must I do to get a CCL license?"

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“Pass a background check and complete a fifteen-hour training course. Let’s get a gun then sign you up for the training course.”

“This bodyguard business is more involved than I expected,” Sky pretended reluctance to continue. “I’m not certain I am what you need. You should hire someone with more experience.”

Sierra took Sky’s hand. “I want you,” she said softly. “I trust you.”

“Mateo told me that you have had problems with male bodyguards falling in love with you and I can understand that. You are incredibly beautiful and charming, but I promise I won’t fall in love with you.”

“May I wouldn’t mind if you did.” Sierra hung her head.

“I’m not uh, I mean I’m not a...” Sky stammered.

“You’re not a lesbian,” Sierra finished her sentence.

“I mean I’m okay if you are, but you don’t need to worry about me. That’s all I’m saying.” Sky clarified. “I will never do anything inappropriate.”

“Pity,” Sierra huffed as she started the car.

##

Sierra parked in front of a store named Right to Bear Arms. “They can provide everything you need,” she said. “Your gun and your Concealed Carry Course.”

Sky followed her inside the store that handled every kind of gun imaginable. She pretended to be confused about what type of gun she preferred.

“Give her a Glock 19 Gen 6,” Sierra instructed the clerk.

Sky handled the gun pretending to get the feel of it. “You can teach me how to use this?” she asked the clerk.

“Yes ma’am. We have a firing range and everything you need to get your CCL.”

“This feels good,” she looked down the sight of the pistol. “I do like this gun.”

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Sierra purchased the gun and arranged for Sky to begin class the next morning so she could get her concealed carry license.

“I will handle the Saturday,” Sierra noted as they discussed the 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. class schedule. You will be at the restaurant by the time customers begin arriving for dinner.”

“Works for me,” Sky agreed.

## Chapter 12

### A Piece of Heaven

#### Saturday – Day 38

The New Mexico Concealed Carry Course was a piece of cake for the FBI agent as she easily passed the written course and qualified on the shooting range. She thanked the men running the operation for their instructions and assistance.

In her pickup Sky called Christine and explained her situation. “Can you mail me a CCL in the Sky Denver name you gave me just in case I get carded?”

“Consider it done,” Christine replied. “What address should I send it to?”

“Mail it to my condo. I had the one I just qualified for mailed there. I’ll use it when it arrives, but I want to be covered until then.”

“Be careful, Sky,” Christine warned. “If the Vegas are who we think they are, you will be in constant danger. Don’t let down your guard.”

“Trust me, I won’t. Thanks Christine.”

##

Sky hurried to the Buena Comida Supper Club. She was pleased to see the restaurant was filled with diners. She joined Sierra at the hostess stand.

“How did you do?” Sierra asked.

“I passed with flying colors,” Sky bragged. “I am now firing range tested and approved. Let’s hope I never have to put my knowledge to the test.”

Sierra laughed. “I certainly hope you never have to. I want your experiences as my bodyguard to be enjoyable not scary as hell.”

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A stream of diners entered the restaurant. Sky asked their names, verified their reservations, grabbed menus and led them to their table.

The following two hours were hectic as they seated customers and assisted the wait staff. They emerged from the kitchen as a new group of diners began arriving.

“Don’t look now, but a beautiful piece of heaven just walked through our door.” Sierra caught her breath.

Sky followed her gaze and inhaled sharply as she watched Karmine and Juanita approach the hostess stand.

“I’ve got this,” Sierra insisted as she scurried to welcome the two women.

Sky was amazed at the improvement in Karmine. She looked healthy and strong. Unlike the skinny woman she had rescued from the box canyon.

*God, she is beautiful,* Sky thought. *Now I understand why they called her a femme fatale.*

She watched Sierra fawn over the two women, paying close attention to Karmine.

“Raymond James,” a male voice interrupted her thoughts. “Reservations for four.”

“Welcome Mr. James. Thank you so much for dining with us tonight.” She gave the man her most beautiful smile as she grabbed four menus and led his party to the table next to her mother and Karmine.

Like true undercover agents neither Karmine nor Juanita gave any indication that they knew Sky.

After the hourly rush settled down, Sierra joined Sky at the hostess stand. “She is really something,” the brunette nodded toward Karmine. “I wonder why she is hanging around with an older woman.”

“Maybe that is her mother.” Sky commented.

“I bet you are right.”

“Do you often develop instant crushes on your customers?” Sky chided her.

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“No, but then I’ve never had a customer that looks like her.” Sierra mumbled. “I will be right back.”

Sierra disappeared before Sky could respond. She returned with a bottle of expensive wine and took it to Karmine’s table. “I don’t believe you have dined with us before,” she said to the two women.

Karmine’s smile lit up the room. “This is our first time. Friends told us how wonderful your food is. We are looking forward to trying it.”

Sky found herself smiling as Karmine’s dimples appeared and her eyes flashed. She didn’t blame Sierra for being smitten with the gorgeous FBI agent.

“Please try our finest wine. Compliments of the house,” Sierra said as she uncorked the wine and poured a bit in Karmine’s glass. The agent sipped the offering and nodded.

“Oh, it is indeed a fine wine,” Karmine informed Juanita. “Thank you umm...”

“Sierra. Sierra Vega. My brothers and I own this restaurant,” Sierra said as she filled the two wine glasses. “If you need anything at all, please don’t hesitate to summon me.”

“Thank you, Sierra,” Juanita responded. “You are very gracious.”

“My sister at her best,” Mateo muttered in Sky’s ear.

The blonde jumped. “No wonder you have so much repeat business.” Sky pretended to misunderstand Mateo’s comment. “Is she always so effusive?”

“Only with extremely beautiful women,” Mateo snickered.

“Oh! You mean...”

“My sister loves beautiful women.” Mateo confirmed. “I must admit that woman is exquisite.”

“I suppose she is, if you are into women.” Sky shrugged as she greeted a party of six. “Mr. and Mrs. Hughes, right this way. We have your table ready for you.”

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She seated the diners at their table and placed their menus in front of them before returning to stand by Mateo.

“Our customers like the way you greet them as if they are old friends,” Mateo noted. “You make them feel important.”

Sky watched Sierra flirt with Karmine and felt a twinge of jealousy when Karmine flirted back.

“Mr. Vega, we need you in the kitchen,” one of the waitresses said.

Mateo smiled as he let his hand slide down Sky’s arm. “Duty calls,” he said. “Just for the record, I think you are the prettiest woman in the room.”

The top of the hour rush began as the next wave of diners lined up to be seated. Sierra returned to the hostess stand to help seat the customers.

Juanita signaled for their check. After signing the receipt, they waited until Sierra was busy with other customers then walked to the hostess stand.

“The food is excellent,” her mother said as Karmine slipped a napkin into Sky’s blazer pocket.

“You’re carrying,” the brunette gasped as she brushed against the holstered Glock.

“We appreciate you dining with us tonight,” Sky beamed. “Please come back soon.”

The two women nodded and walked out into the cool night air. Sky wished she were walking with them.

##

“Why don’t you leave your pickup and ride home with me?” Sierra suggested when they left the restaurant.

“I’m afraid it will be vandalized,” Sky replied. “I would rather follow you home.”

“Are you mad at me?” Sierra cocked her head and smiled.

“Why would I be mad at you?” Sky asked.

“No reason. I’ll see you at the mansion.”

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##

Sierra was already inside when Sky pulled her pickup into the garage and closed the door. She pulled Karmine's napkin from her pocket and read, "Please call me. I miss you."

Sierra was in the kitchen talking on her cellphone when Sky entered the house and ran up the stairs to her room, locking the door behind her. She read Karmine's note one more time then flushed it down the commode. She couldn't take a chance on her cover being blown.

She walked into the en suite, traded her clothes for a robe, and turned on the shower. Just to be safe, she locked the en suit door. Perched on the dressing table chair, she called Karmine on her burner phone.

"Sky!" A breathless voice whispered her name. "I was afraid you couldn't call me. When I saw you tonight, I realized how much I miss you."

"I miss you too. I was shocked to see you and Mom in the restaurant tonight."

"Neither of us knew you were working there," Karmine explained. "I hope we didn't create any problems for you."

"No. No problems, but I think you may have wrecked Sierra Vega. She couldn't stop drooling over you."

"She's a lesbian?" Karmine gasped.

"If you couldn't tell that, you must have no gaydar at all," Sky teased. "I couldn't believe she comped you that bottle of wine. It is the most expensive vino in their wine cellar. Did she ask for your phone number?"

After a long silence, Karmine answered. "Yes."

"Did you give it to her?"

"No."

"Good. I don't want her around you. It isn't safe." Sky warned.

"Have you found any connection between the Vega family and the gun runners?" Karmine asked.

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“Not yet.” Sky admitted.

“Maybe I can visit you in your condo,” Karmine suggested.

“I’m not staying there now,” Sky admitted.

“What do you mean? Where are you staying?”

“I am officially Sierra’s bodyguard, and I am with her twenty-four seven.”

“Then you live with her?”

“Something like that.”

“Why does that not surprise me?” Karmine huffed before she ended their call.

Sky was in the middle of redialing Karmine’s number when Sierra knocked on her bedroom door. She turned off her phone, shoved it into a drawer, then stuck her head under the shower. She dried her hair and wrapped the towel around her head.

“Coming,” she called out when Serria knocked again.

Sierra looked her up and down as the door opened. “I am sorry. I didn’t know you were in the shower.”

Sky thoroughly dried her hair. “It is okay. I’m finished. Did you need something?”

“No, I brought you a glass of wine. I thought we could share a nightcap together.” She held out the glass to Sky.

Sky opened her door wider so Sierra could enter and accepted the glass. “Make yourself at home. *Mi casa es tu casa*, literally.”

Sierra laughed, sat down on the loveseat and patted the cushion for Sky to sit beside her. “I spoke to Mateo about touching you tonight. It won’t happen again.”

“I thought *I* was supposed to be *your* bodyguard,” Sky responded. She sipped the wine. “Um, this is delicious.”

“Nothing but the best for my bodyguard,” Serria flashed her a sweet smile that Sky couldn’t keep from responding to.

She finished her wine then said, “I am tired and we have a big day ahead of us tomorrow, so I am going to bed.” She

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stood and walked to the door where she stood waiting for Sierra to follow her.

"I'll see you in the morning," Sierra said as she took Sky's glass on her way out the door. Sleep tight."

Sky closed the door and locked it then took her shower. As she slipped naked into bed, she fought the urge to call Karmine and explain her situation with Sierra. After several restless minutes she returned to the en suite and retrieved her burner phone. She returned to her bed, propped her pillows against the headboard and dialed the agent.

"I was hoping you'd call me back," Karmine answered. "I'm sorry I hung up on you."

"May I explain my situation," Sky asked.

"Please do."

Sky described how she had saved Sierra from a drunk that was manhandling her and Mateo offered her the job of bodyguard for his sister. "I must be with her twenty-four hours a day. I have moved into my own suite in her mansion. It seems male bodyguards don't work for her because they fall in love with her."

"That is understandable," Karmine admitted. "She is beautiful."

"Not as gorgeous as you," Sky said. "You looked wonderful tonight."

"So did you," Karmine complimented. "Do you ever get a day off from your bodyguard duties?"

"No. Even on our days off from the restaurant, I must stay at her side."

"Ally is doing wonderfully," Karmin changed the subject. "He has fully recovered. I exercise with him daily and let him set his own pace. He is powerful. It is empowering and intimidating at the same time to have that much power between your legs."

*As long as he is the only one she is straddling,* I'm fine, Sky's thought came out of nowhere and she mentally slapped herself.

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“Are you still on the line?” Karmine asked after a long silence.

“Yes, I just, um, my mind wondered.”

“Dare I ask where?” Karmine quipped.

“I’m tired. I should hang up. I just wanted to hear your voice before I went to sleep.” Sky admitted.

“Sky, I am happy you called me back. Can you call tomorrow night?”

“I will try. Goodnight.”

Sky lay on her back as visions of Karmine straddling her and leaning down to kiss her as the softness of the brunette melted into her own. She tried to refrain from touching herself but failed miserably. She wondered if Karmine had similar thoughts about her. “I hope so,” she gasped into her pillow as her body convulsed.

## Chapter 13

### You Saved My Life

#### Wednesday - Day 42

“I talked with Mateo and he agrees we should have one day a week off from the restaurant,” Sierra informed Sky as they ate before the Buena Comida Supper Club opened. “I selected Thursday so we will have tomorrow to do anything we wish.”

“What do you have planned?” Sky asked

“I thought we might go to the Santa Fe Opera House to see the musical touring company that is performing there this week.”

“What is the musical?”

“*& Juliet*. It is a story based on Shakespeare’s play, only Juliet doesn’t die. She lives.” Sierra explained.

“It has some awesome music,” Sky remarked. I love the songs, *Show Me Love* and *Show Me the Meaning of Being Lonely*.”

A slow smile curved Sierra’s lovely lips as she placed her hand on Sky’s. “If you are lonely, I could solve that problem for you.”

“As much as I’d love to take you up on that invitation,” Sky replied, “I would never mix business with pleasure.”

“I could fire you tomorrow and rehire you on Friday,” Sierra grinned impishly. “We could have one hell of a night.”

Sky burst out in laughter. “You are incorrigible, and as enticing as it would be, I don’t want to be another notch on your headboard.”

Sierra became serious. “Is that how you think of me—a one-night stand?”

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“No! No! I think you would break my heart. When that brunette was at the restaurant last night, you didn’t even remember my name.”

“You’re jealous!” Sierra accused. “You are jealous of me and other women.”

“I promise you, I am not,” Sky defended. “I’m just not willing to put my heart out there to be broken; not by you or anyone else.” *And I don’t want to visit you in prison*, she thought.

“I’ve already arranged for us to attend the musical. As my bodyguard, you are committed to going wherever I go.”

“I am okay with that,” Sky said truthfully.

##

The dinner rush was over, and Sky led a party of four to a private table in the corner. She handed them a wine menu and waited patiently as they discussed their favorite wines. A flurry of activity at the hostess stand drew her attention to Sierra as she greeted Juanita and Karmine. *Why are they here?* She seethed as she watched her mother and friend laugh and talk to Seirra.

Sky motioned for a server to take over the table she had just seated. “This is Linda, one of our best servers,” she informed her customers. “She will take care of you. Thank you for dining with us.” She returned to the hostess stand as Sierra seated her mother and Karmine.

“That would be lovely,” Karmine gushed as Sierra beamed like the cheshire cat. “I have been dying to see that musical. Thank you for thinking of us.”

Sierra sashayed gracefully back to the hostess stand. “I have a date for the musical tomorrow night,” she gloated. “Actually, I have two attractive women joining us for the show.”

“The two women from the other night,” Sky noted as she nodded toward Karmine and Juanita.

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Sierra cut her eyes toward the blonde to gage her reaction. "You are jealous," she accused.

"Maybe a little," Sky admitted, "but you deserve to have some fun. I would never deny you the pleasure of anyone's company."

Sierra called her friend at the Opera House and arranged for four tickets for the next evening. "Front row, center," she requested. "That is perfect. Thank you so much."

"All set," she said as she disconnected the call.

Mateo joined them at the hostess stand as the servers closed out their checks and bid diners goodnight. "Sierra you should close out the register and do the deposit so you and Sky can drop the bag in the night deposit on your way home."

Sierra nodded and walked to the area that housed the restaurant's point of sales machines and cash registers. Sky walked Juanita and Karmine to the front door of the restaurant and thanked them for their business. "Please call me," Karmine whispered.

Sky nodded and walked back into the restaurant.

"I'm going to pull the car to the door," Sky informed her boss. "I will be right back."

"Wait for me in the car," Sierra instructed. "You've been on your feet all day. There's no reason for you to come back inside."

"Yes ma'am," Sky grinned as she saluted the brunette.

Sky took her time walking to the back of the parking lot and driving the vehicle close to the door. She knew the siblings would have their usual discussion about the day's business.

She killed the engine and pulled out her cellphone to play a game of 42 Dominoes. After waiting fifteen minutes, she decided to check on her bosses to make certain everything was okay. As she eased open the front door, a gravely male voice commanded the brothers to get on their

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knees. Silently she unholstered her Glock. It was already racked and ready to fire.

To her horror a big man had his arm around Sierra's throat and a gun pointed toward her head. "Hang on to the deposit bag, pretty lady," he commanded as he backed from the kitchen.

"You've got all of our money, please release our sister," Mateo pleaded.

"I'll release her down the road. If you try to follow me, she may have an accident."

Sky silently slipped up behind the thief and placed the muzzle of her Glock against the soft spot in his neck below the back of his head. "Unless you want us to scrape your brains off the ceiling, you should drop your gun and release her."

The man stiffened but continued to grip Sierra.

"Don't think you have time to make a move," Sky warned. "My Glock is already set to fire when I squeeze the trigger."

The man tightened his arm around Sierra's neck and pressed his pistol against her temple. "Drop your gun, or I'll kill her," he threatened.

"Don't say I didn't warn you," Sky said before she squeezed the trigger sending the thief to meet his maker and she yanked his gun arm away from Sierra causing his weapon to clatter to the floor.

Sierra threw herself into Sky's arms and began to wail. "I was certain I was going to die," she cried. "You've saved my life again. How can I ever repay you?"

Sky held her as she shivered and sobbed. She wrapped her arms around Sierra and held her close. "Shush," she whispered. "You are okay. I'll never let anyone hurt you."

She moved the brunette to a sofa in her office and sat down, keeping a protective arm around her boss' shoulders. Police sirens wailed as two cars pulled to a screeching stop in front of the building.

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Officers entered with guns drawn and quickly assessed the situation. Mateo told them what happened and they took statements from him and Chayton.

“May my sister and her bodyguard go home?” Mateo asked. “She is badly shaken.”

The police officers agreed. “Could both of you come by the station in the morning and give your statements to Sergeant Patton?”

“Of course,” Sky agreed. “Thank you for your quick response.”

##

It was after 3:00 a.m. when Sierra and Sky dropped the money bag in the bank’s night deposit box. “I can’t wait to take a hot shower,” Sierra said. “I want to wash away the feel of his touch and I’m pretty sure I have his blood in my hair.”

She ran her hand through her long hair. “What the hell?” She squealed as she pulled something from her hair and slung it into the floorboard of the car. “A nose. It’s his nose! Jesus, I can’t...I can’t...”

Sky pulled her car to the side of the road and pulled tissues from the glove compartment. She began wiping Sierra’s hair. She wrapped the tip of the criminal’s nose in a napkin and placed it in the back of her car. “We should turn this over to the forensics folks.

“A shower will do a lot to calm your nerves,” Sky soothed. “I’ll get a bottle of your favorite wine from the cellar, and we can sit back and relax.”

“I’d rather you shower with me,” Sierra said softly. “I don’t want to be alone, and I’ll be forever grateful if you will wash my hair.”

“I will help you any way I can,” Sky assured her. “I know this entire night has been traumatic for you.”

##

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Sierra's shower was the size of a small room. It had an octogen-shaped bench, the height of a chair built in the center giving a person showering the option of sitting on it or lying on it. A large cushion made of soft, waterproof material covered it. Shower heads on all four walls sprayed toward the bench. It was opulence Sky had never dreamed of.

Sierra wasn't shy about stripping off all her clothes and stepping into the shower. She adjusted the water temperature, sat down on the island and held out a bottle of shampoo to Sky.

The blonde removed her clothes keeping on her bra and panties then joined Sierra in the shower. She poured shampoo into the palm of her hand then began massaging it into Sierra's thick, dark hair.

"That feels like heaven," Sierra moaned as Sky's fingers worked up the lather in her hair. She leaned forward placing her forehead against Sky's stomach. "Please don't stop."

Sky finished her boss' hair then pulled the sprayer from the wall and rinsed it. She noticed a bottle of her favorite conditioner on the shower shelf. She combed the conditioner through Sierra's hair then rinsed it again.

She stepped back from the brunette. "You can take it from here," she muttered as she pushed open the shower door.

"Don't go," Sierra pleaded. "I don't want to be alone tonight."

Sky shrugged. "Finish showering. I'll do the same in my room then come back to check on you." She was gone before Sierra could react.

##

After showering, Sky dried her hair, slipped into her pajamas and returned to Sierra's room. The brunette was in the bed propped against the headboard. She held out her hand to Sky. "Please stay with me tonight."

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“Okay,” Sky began removing the overstuffed pillows from the sofa.

“What are you doing?” Sierra asked.

“Making the sofa comfortable for sleeping.”

Sierra held up the duvet. “I want you to sleep here next to me.” She glowered.

“I don’t think that is a good idea,” Sky argued.

“Please, don’t think. Just do as I ask,” Sierra pouted.

“Please? I just want you to hold me. That is all. I promise.”

Sky slipped into the bed.

Sierra quickly snuggled against her. “Now I feel safe,” she said as she drifted into an exhausted sleep. Sky did the same.

## Chapter 14

### Date Night at the Theater

#### Thursday - Day 43

Sky lay motionless, trying to decide if she could leap from the bed before Sierra touched her. She half opened one eye and was surprised to find she was in bed alone. She jumped up and looked around. Sierra was nowhere to be seen. She scurried back to her own room and quickly dressed for the day then walked downstairs wondering where her boss was. The smell of coffee pulled her to the kitchen.

“About time you awoke, sleepy head,” Sierra quipped as she entered the room. “Join me. I have fresh blueberry muffins and coffee.”

Sky refilled Sierra’s cup then poured her own. “This is just what the doctor ordered.” She smiled, pleased that nothing had happened to change their roles.

“I want to thank you for saving my life,” Sierra murmured. “And for babysitting me last night. I trust you more each day. You didn’t take advantage of me while I was in a vulnerable state. I’m glad you are here.”

“So am I. You make the best coffee I’ve ever tasted.”

“Just one of my many talents,” Sierra replied raising her eyebrows. “To change the subject, do you have a nice dress to wear to the musical tonight?”

“I should go shopping,” Sky admitted. “Will you be okay here alone?”

“Probably, but I am planning to go with you. I want to help you select a dress that is fit for the Opera House. I’m thinking something forming fitting with a slit up the leg that will show off your beautiful body and make everyone’s mouth water.”

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Sky laughed. "I'm thinking something with room to hide a shoulder holster or my ankle holster."

"I'm thinking a sexy thigh holster." A mischievous gleam lit Sierra's eyes. "You are so sexy."

"As much as I hate to disappoint you, I don't have a sexy thigh holster," Sky joined into her teasing.

"We can remedy that before we purchase the dress. I want everything to be perfect, but safe."

"You know my Glock is too heavy to put into a thigh holster. I'll need something deadly but light like a Walther PDP-F."

"I love it when you talk dirty," Sierra beamed.

Sky laughed. "You are incorrigible."

##

They stopped by the police station and gave their statement about the early morning shooting.

"Do you know the name of the man that tried to rob us?" Sierra asked.

"Yes. His name is Carlos Lerma, and he has a rap sheet a mile long," Sergeant Patton replied. "We've arrested him for burglary, smuggling firearms, auto theft, rape and beating his girlfriend so badly we charged him with attempted murder. The district attorney released him without bail pending his trial. Thanks to you we won't have to squander the citizens' money on a trial."

Sierra thanked Patton for helping them and gave him her business card. "Please visit our restaurant. Bring a date and your dinner will be complements of the Vega family. We appreciate all you do."

"You are very kind," Sergeant Patton responded. "I will take you up on your generous offer. I am also going to post a police car on your parking lot for the next two weeks to make certain none of his gang bothers you."

They were separated for their interviews. Sky related the details of the shooting and signed her statement. Sierra was

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waiting in Sergeant Patton's office. Sky could tell that Patton was infatuated with the beautiful brunette and Sierra was shamelessly flirting with him.

"Have you given your statement?" Sky addressed Sierra as she entered Patton's office.

"Yes, Sergeant Patton and I were just visiting while you finished. We know a lot of the same people."

"We should go. We have a lot to do today." Sky said.

Sierra thanked Patton for his attention to the case and encouraged him to visit Buena Comida Supper Club. "I will take care of you myself," she promised.

"How can I turn down an offer like that?" Patton flirted back.

"You are a shameless flirt," Sky said, as she pulled her pickup from the police station parking lot.

"Why do you care?" Sierra replied.

"I don't, but it makes my job more difficult when you flirt with every Tom, Dick and Harry that comes along."

"Don't forget Susan, Amanda and Carla," Sierra chided her.

Sky laughed.

##

They found the perfect pistol and thigh holster for their evening out. "Give me directions to the dress shop you want to go to," Sky said as she pulled her pickup onto the highway.

After trying on half a dozen dresses, Sky found the perfect one to accommodate her handgun and showcase her figure. She admired her image in the mirror. She looked sexy as hell. She knew she would turn heads and hoped she could keep Sierra at bay.

"This dress is perfect," Sky announced as she walked from the dressing room. The shimmering gold ankle-length dress made a soft rustling sound as the slit slightly opened

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when she walked, providing a breathtaking look at her long shapely legs.

“My God, you are gorgeous,” Sierra breathed.

“I hope I look harmless,” Sky replied.

“If you discount stopping your admirer’s heart from beating or their breathing to stop, you might be considered harmless.”

“Good, I’ve accomplished my goal.” Sky smiled and returned to the dressing room. “I’ll take this dress and the heels that match it,” she informed the saleslady as she handed her Sierra’s credit card.

When she completed her transaction, she joined Sierra as the brunette was talking on the on the phone. “The musical begins at 7:00 p.m.” Sierra said into the cellphone. “We will meet you in the lobby at 6:30 p.m. if that is okay for you. Good. See you then.”

Sierra’s eyes sparkled as she disconnected the call. “Karmine and Juanita will meet us at the Opera House,” she informed Sky. “We need to go straight home and get ready.”

##

The elegance of the Santa Fe Opera House made Sky stand still and absorb the beauty of the theater. The shimmering lights of the open-air performance hall melted into the desert sky giving the structure’s attendees a breathtaking view of the sunset bathing the Tesuque Valley below.

Although she had attended many musical functions in the edifice, Sky was always fascinated by the beauty of the surroundings of the music cathedral that stood out like a rare jewel in the desert.

“Earth to Sky,” Sierra quipped “I asked if you are ready to go inside or are we just going to stare at the theater all night?”

“I am sorry,” Sky replied. “I never get tired of looking at this building in this setting.”

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"I know," Sierra agreed. "The beauty of the opera house is only matched by it's incredible acoustics."

Sky opened her door and walked to the driver's side to assist Sierra. "I'm glad you insisted that we drive your vehicle. It is much more impressive than my pickup."

Sierra looked around at the pickups on the parking lot. "I think your truck would have fit right in," she replied. "There is everything from monster one-ton trucks to the Ford King Ranch."

"I liked being chauffeured by you," Sky teased.

Sierra gave her an admiring look. "No one would ever think you were a bodyguard," she commented.

"Goal accomplished," Sky chirped as she linked her arm with her client's. "We are a little early. Would you like a glass of wine while we wait for them."

"I am a member of the Wyncote Opera Club Lounge," Sierra informed her. "If you will pick up our tickets at will call, I'll get us a table in the club. I told Karmine and Juanita to meet us there."

Sky was on her way back to the club with the tickets when a soft hand caught hers. She didn't have to look. The fragrance she loved told her Karmine was beside her. She turned to face the dark-haired beauty and sucked in her breath. "Lord, you are gorgeous," she whispered as Karmine smiled exposing beautiful white teeth framed by plumb red lips. "You look wonderful."

"I feel wonderful. I have been exercising Ally every day and helping Juanita get ready for a company retreat that has booked all your cabins for a month." Karmine looked around. "Where is Sierra?"

"In the lounge. Where is Mom?" Sky asked.

"Lady's room. Why haven't you called me?" Karmine asked.

"I haven't had the opportunity. I can't take a chance on blowing my cover," Sky explained.

"Are you sleeping with her?" Karmine asked.

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Sky's emphatic "No!" made the brunette release her hand. "By the time we close the restaurant, make the night's deposit and drive home, it is after 1:00 a.m. I hesitate to call you that late."

"I am happy to hear your voice no matter the time." Karmine said.

"Sky," Junita joined them. "I hope your boss has a club membership. I could use a drink."

Sky smiled at her mother. "Follow me ladies."

A sommelier was placing an ice bucket with a bottle of wine on their table when the three women entered the room. "May I have your name," the hostess asked.

"We are guests of Ms. Vega," Sky replied.

She led them to Sierra who greeted them enthusiastically. Sky noticed how her boss ogled Karmine like a delicacy on a luxury buffet.

"I ordered a bottle of wine," Sierra said as she waved her hand for the wine steward to fill their glasses. "It is good to see you both. Thank you for coming."

"Thank you for inviting us," Karmine replied. "It is good to dress up and go out for the evening."

"Both of you look incredible," Sierra complimented. A bell dinged and people began to stand.

"Please, finish your wine," Sierra insisted. "They will ring two more bells before we must be in our theater seats."

Karmine kept Sierra talking, not giving her an opportunity to question them. "I saw on the internet that you were almost kidnapped last week," she noted. "That must have been terrifying."

"It was a little unsettling, but Sky saved me." Sierra smiled at her protector as she held her gaze. "I feel safe when she is around. She is my bodyguard."

"Ah," Karmine breathed. "You are lucky to have her."

"Yes, I am." Sierra agreed.

A second bell rang. "We should go to our seats," Sierra said as the group rose to follow her.

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Sierra led the way to their seats, entering first and motioning for Karmine to sit next to her. Sky sat next to Karmine and Juanita took the end seat. "These are excellent seats," Juanita commented.

"Are you okay?" Juanita asked Sky.

"I am. Karmine said you are getting ready for a group that took the entire camp next month."

"Yes. Hopefully, you will be able to join us by then," her mother whispered.

The lights dimmed in the theater and the musical began. Sky rested her arm on the armrest between her and Karmine. The brunette rested her arm on Sky's snuggling into her side.

*God give me strength*, Sky thought as she inhaled the fragrance of the woman who haunted her dreams. Karmine shifted slightly and pressed her arm lightly into Sky's breast. Sky closed her eyes trying to tamp down the heat that was rising in her body.

Sierra leaned toward Karmine and whispered in her ear. Karmine laughed softly and Sky fought to keep from touching the agent's arm. *Why can't I get Karmine out of my mind?* She thought.

##

"That was delightful," Juanita commented as they waited for the valet to deliver their car.

"I'm glad you enjoyed it," Sierra replied. "Would anyone like a nightcap?"

"We should go," Juanita said. "We have a few miles to drive before we reach home, and it is late."

Sierra nodded and handed Karmine her business card. "Please call me when you are safely home. We will worry about you until you call."

The valet pulled their car to the curb and Karmine slipped into the driver's seat. "We will," she promised.

Sky closed Juanita's door and stepped back from the vehicle.

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##

“I am glad you didn’t valet park,” Sky said as she and Sierra walked to their car in reserved parking. “It feels good to walk and the night air is invigorating.”

Sierra nodded but said nothing, Sky knew her mind was somewhere else. “The musical was amazing,” she tried again to engage her boss in conversation.

“It was.” Sierra agreed.

“Is everything okay?” Sky asked. “You seem preoccupied.”

“I have a lot on my mind,” Sierra responded. “The robbery, and that man trying to kidnap me. I owe you my life.”

“And you can’t get Karmin off your mind,” Sky blurted.

“Yeah, that too,” the brunette admitted. “See what you can find out about her and Juanita.”

“Will do, boss.”

Sky noticed the black SUV as it pulled in behind them. She hoped it wasn’t following them but soon confirmed her suspicions were correct as the vehicle made every turn they made.

“Someone is following us,” she informed Sierra. “Drive to the police station in Albuquerque. That should send them on their way.”

“Can you get their license plate?” Sierra asked.

“No, it is covered in mud.”

As they navigated the dark twisting highway, the SUV rammed the rear of their car. “What the hell?” Sierra screamed as Sky crawled into the back seat.

“When you can, pull into the oncoming lane,” Sky instructed, “so I can get a clear shot at their passenger-side tire.”

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Sierra straddled the white line in the center of the road and Sky rolled down the back car window. "Move to your left about two feet," she yelled.

Sierra did as instructed and Sky fired two shots into the front tire, sending the vehicle careening wildly into the desert sand before it skidded sideways over an embankment and turned over.

"Damn, you are good with a pistol," Sierra declared. "What are you? Some kind of soldier of fortune?"

Sky raised the window and climbed back into the front seat. "I'm your bodyguard," she smirked. "A job I take seriously. I am glad you insisted on this thigh holster."

Sierra glanced at her as she pulled open the slit in her dress and strapped the firearm back into its holster. "Jesus, you are sexy as hell," she breathed.

"Sexier than your friend Karmine?" Sky taunted her trying to redirect the look of lust in her eyes. "Who were those guys and why were they trying to kill you?"

"I have no idea," Sierra lied. "They probably saw two beautiful women and decided to attack us. You should call 911 and report an accident."

"No, that would give the authorities my phone number. All calls to 911 automatically trace back to the caller. It is a federal law. There is no such thing as an anonymous 911 call."

##

Sky faked a big yawn as their car drove through the gates of the mansion. "I am exhausted," she said.

Sierra glanced at her. "So am I."

When they entered the house, Sky made a thorough search of every room. "All clear," she reported. "I'm going to my room. Goodnight."

"Would you unzip my dress?" Sierra asked sensuously.

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Sky studied her for several seconds. “No. I’m not that strong.” She whirled on her heel and left the room closing the door behind her.

After a warm shower Sky doubled checked the lock on her bedroom door. She pulled her burner phone from its hiding place and called Karmine. The call went to voice mail. *She’s probably talking to Sierra*, Sky thought. She started to return the phone to its hiding place, but dialed Karmine’s number one more time.

“Thank you for calling,” the brunette answered. “I was afraid you wouldn’t.”

“I almost didn’t. I called once and your line was busy.”

“As I promised, I called Sierra when we reached home. I couldn’t get her off the phone. She told me you encountered trouble on your way home.”

“I don’t know who is after her, but she definitely has a target on her back,” Sky said. “Can you call Christine tomorrow and find out anything you can about a black SUV that ran off I-25 North and turned over at 10:00 p.m. tonight?”

“I will be happy to,” Karmine replied. “I’m just glad you are okay. You are lucky they ran off the road.”

“Lucky, yes.” Sky agreed, choosing not to tell her that she had shot the tire.

“I enjoyed sitting next to you tonight,” Karmine said.

“It was nice to spend time with you,” Sky agreed. “I’ll be glad when this assignment is over. I want to get back to the ranch...and you.”

“Good,” Karmine agreed. “I do want to get to know you better.”

“That conjures up all kinds of images in my mind,” Sky teased. “All of them breathtaking.”

“I am glad,” Karmine flirted. “I suspect our minds are on the same wavelength.”

A loud knock on her door made Sky jump. “Sky, please let me in,” Sierra wailed.

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"I gotta go," Sky mumbled to Karmine. "Talk tomorrow."

She leaped from her bed, hid her burner phone and opened the door. Sierra rushed into her arms. "I had a nightmare," she cried. "May I sleep in your bed tonight?"

Sky hesitated then said, "Yes."

Sierra slipped under the duvet as Sky sat down on the side of the bed. "Are you okay?"

Sierra nodded. "Just a little unsettled and totally exhausted."

Sky turned out the night light and slid under the duvet. Sierra snuggled against her. Sky turned on her side, wrapped her body around the brunette and held Sierra tightly. *I could get used to this*; Sky chastised herself as they fell asleep.

##

"Wake up. We need to get to the office," Sierra shook Sky.

"What time is it. The sun isn't even up," Sky stammered as her feet hit the floor.

"The burglar alarm is going off at the restaurant," Sierra yelled as she threw a blouse and clean pair of slacks on the bed.

Sky quickly grabbed clean underwear and dressed slipping on her ankle holster. Sierra shoved her socks and shoes into her hands and grabbed Sky's Glock and shoulder holster. "Put these on in the car," she insisted as she dashed out the door.

Barefoot, Sky ran after her. Sierra was already starting her car when her bodyguard jumped into the passenger's side.

Sky buckled her shoulder holster and put on her socks and shoes. "Who called you?"

"The alarm company. My brothers and the police are already on their way. Pray the intruders haven't vandalized the place."

## Chapter 15

### The Hostage

#### Friday – Day 44

Police cars blocked the front and rear entrance of the restaurant, and an officer was trying to talk three men from the building.

“I am the restaurant owner. What’s going on?” Sierra demanded as she approached the Sergeant with a megaphone.

“I’m Sergeant Winters. Three men are inside your establishment,” the officer replied. “They are armed and have your female security guard. They are holding her as a hostage and are trying to negotiate their way out of this mess.”

“Do you know who they are?” Sky asked.

“The vehicle they arrived in is registered to Daho Nakai,” Sergeant Winter replied. “He has been charged with rape and attempted murder but is out on bail pending his trial.”

“What do they want?” Sierra asked. “Why did they break into my restaurant?”

“We aren’t certain. We trying to communicate with them, but they won’t talk to me.”

“May I call them on the phone at the hostess stand?” Sierra asked.

“If you will put the call on the speakerphone,” Winter replied.

Sierra nodded, dialed the number and placed her phone on the hood of the patrol car. The phone rang four times before a man answered it. “Hello.”

“This is Sierra Vega. I own the restaurant. What do you want?”

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“Guns, money and safe passage out of town,” came the reply.

“I have no guns,” Sierra informed them, but I can get you money.”

“Come inside and talk to us,” the man insisted.

“Do I know you?” Sierra asked.

“No, but we have heard about you. You can set us guns.”

“Whatever you have heard is not true. I can give you money and get you out of town if you release your captive, but I have no guns.”

“Come inside and talk to us,” the man demanded, “or we will have a little fun with the woman and kill her if you try to rush the building.”

“I will come in if you let the woman go in exchange for me,” Sierra replied.

“Are you crazy,” Sky growled grabbing her arm. “I’m not going to let you go in there with those thugs.”

“We have to do something to get the woman out,” Sierra insisted.

“We will shove the woman out when you reach the door,” Daho yelled.

“I’ll go,” Sky mumbled as she raised her hands and began walking toward the restaurant.

“No,” Sierra hissed as she joined her bodyguard.

When they reached the entrance of the restaurant, the door opened, the woman was shoved out onto the porch as Sky and Sierra were yanked inside.

“Why are you here?” Sierra demanded.

“We know about the guns,” Daho insisted.

“I have no idea what you are talking about,” the brunette cried. “Which guns?”

“The truck you are sending to Mexico.”

“Do I look like I have a truck load of guns?” Sierra yelled. “You really are crazy.”

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Daho pointed his pistol at Sierra as the other two men grabbed her arms. One shot was fired. Daho staggered backwards then crashed to the floor.

“I have over a dozen bullets left,” Sky yelled. “Do you two want to die today?”

The two men shook their heads, no and raised their hands over their heads. Sierra scooped up Daho’s gun and pointed it at the pair. “I should kill both of you,” she snarled.

“Sierra,” Sky’s voice was cold, “they aren’t worth it.” She pulled open the door and the police rushed in taking the kidnappers into custody.

“Who killed him,” Sergeant Winter asked as he rolled over Daho and looked at the hole in his forehead.

“I did,” Sky admitted.

“I must take your firearm,” the officer informed her.

Sky dropped the clip from her gun and cleared the chamber then handed it to the man. “I am her bodyguard. I will need to pick up my gun first thing in the morning.”

“I will make that happen,” the sergeant agreed. “Is there some place where I can take your statements then you can leave. It’s just regular protocol, but I do need to close your restaurant until CSI finishes their investigation.”

Sky and Sierra were taken into separate rooms of the restaurant where they gave their statements. Mateo and Chayten arrived on the scene and insisted on talking to their sister. They were placed in police cars to wait for Sierra and Sky.

After giving her statement Sierra walked into her office and locked the door behind her. She opened her computer and copied the information from the restaurant’s indoor security cameras. “We are going home,” she informed the sergeant as she handed him a thumb drive. “This is the video from our security cameras. I believe you will find everything you need to justify what happened here today and to put away the two you arrested. You have my number if you need me.”

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“Yes ma’am. Thank you for your cooperation.” Winter replied.

Mateo and Chayten rushed to the two women as they walked toward their car. “Sierra, Sky, are you okay?” they chorused.

“A little rattled,” Sierra replied. “Sky, please join us for coffee. My nerves are shot.”

Sky nodded and followed her boss.

Sierra pulled from the restaurant parking lot and took Sky’s hand pulling it into her lap. “You have saved my life three times in one week,” she said softly. “If not for you I would be in a coffin right now.”

“Which begs the question, why are so many thugs after you?” Sky queried. “And why the sudden interest in you?”

Sierra dug her fingernails into the palm of Sky’s hand. “I don’t know.”

“Don’t treat me like an idiot,” Sky said. “If I am going to keep you alive, I need to know the cause of the constant threats to your life.”

“We will discuss this tonight in private.” Sierra promised.

Sierra pulled her vehicle into the parking lot of a small bistro and her brothers parked beside her. Mateo was at the driver’s side door and pulled it open before his sister could.

“Are you okay? Should I cancel tonight’s meeting?”

“No!” Sierra sprang from the car and slammed the door before sternly speaking to her older brother. Sky couldn’t hear what she was saying.

Mateo slipped his arm around Sierra’s shoulders and steered her toward the bistro door. He spoke softly into her ear as they walked. Sky hurried to catch up with them.

“We must meet tonight,” Sierra hissed.

“My favorite customers,” an attractive redhead welcomed the Vega family, “and their beautiful friend.” She gave Sky an inviting smile and a wink. “What in the world is going on at your place today?” She made a sweeping

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gesture toward the large-screen TV hanging on the establishment's wall. The four stood motionless as they watched their life and death experience play out on national news.

The redhead led the group to a corner booth away from the other diners. "Thank you Corina," Mateo said. "Coffee for everyone."

"I'd expect you to want something stronger," Corina quipped.

Sierra replied, "No we need our wits about us."

Her cellphone rang and Sierra quickly answered it. "Hello ánt'é. Yes sir, we are okay. Tonight? I will inform my brothers. Goodbye."

Sierra bowed her head, collected her thoughts, then made her announcement. "Ánt'é wants to see us tonight."

Worry twisted the beautiful features of the siblings as they nodded in unison.

Sky spoke enough Navajo to know that ánt'é was the term for revered father. She sat silently as Corina placed coffee in front of them along with an insulated carafe of coffee. "Do you want your usual?" she asked.

The Vegas nodded and Corina turned to Sky raising a questioning brow. Sky replied without thinking, "Bacon, scrambled eggs and toast."

"Where does he want to meet?" Mateo asked.

Sierra furrowed her brow in deep thought then leaned toward her brothers and softly said, "He will come to us. He and mother will arrive at the private airport at 5:00 p.m. We can pick them up and go to my home. He wants the three of us there. Sky, I need you to take care of the restaurant and make sure everything goes smoothly while we are away. Then you need to sleep in your condo. My parents will stay at my home until tomorrow morning when Mateo takes them to the airport."

"I don't want to let you out of my sight," Sky argued. "Your safety is my main concern."

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“I will be safe. My parents always travel with bodyguards, and my brothers will be there,” Sierra reassured her.

“But...”

“Please do as I ask.” Sierra insisted.

Sky scowled. “Of course, *boss*.”

A faint smile twisted Sierra’s lips.

They dined and talked as if the morning had been without all its drama. Corina placed the server’s folder beside Mateo. He slipped his bankcard into it as Sierra stood and announced, “I will take Sky back to my place so she can pickup her truck and check on the restaurant.

“Mateo, Chayton take care of your business and pick me up from my home at 4:00 p.m. so the three of us can greet our parents at the airport.”

“I don’t feel good about leaving you unprotected,” Sky reiterated as Sierra pulled from the parking lot.

“I will be fine,” Sierra reassured her. “Father’s security team is excellent.”

##

Sky showered and took extra care styling her hair. She would be the hostess tonight and wanted to look her best. She dressed then strapped on both her thigh and shoulder holsters.

“I’m going to Buena Comida,” Sky informed Sierra as she walked onto the patio. “Please be careful. I have a bad feeling about whatever is going on. I would be more at ease if I were going with you.”

“I’ll be fine.” Sierra stood to face her. “Enjoy your night in your own place. It will be peaceful.”

Sierra touched Sky’s face with the tips of her fingers. “You are so beautiful,” she murmured as she gently kissed the blonde’s lips.

Sky backed away. “We would never work,” she declared. “We are both toppers.”

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“Oh Sky, you have no idea how incredible I am on the bottom. I do love an aggressive woman who takes control.”

“I will take your word for that,” Sky said as she hurried to the door. “Call me if you need me.”

## Chapter 16

### The Meeting

#### Saturday – Day 45

Sky entered the Buena Comida Super Club and hurried to the kitchen to make certain everything was running smoothly after the chaos of the morning. Everyone clamored around her with questions.

“Everyone is safe and everything is okay,” she assured the employees. Sierra and her brothers will be out for the evening, so it is up to us to make this place run as smoothly as always. They are counting on us.”

Everyone nodded in agreement. The place was bustling with activity as the staff put pristine white table clothes and black napkins on the tables. Fresh-cut flowers were placed in vases and candles graced each eating area. Customers were lined up outside the doors awaiting entry.

Lights were dimmed, candles lit and the band began playing a waltz. Sky unlocked the door and welcomed the eager diners. Servers assisted her in taking customers to their tables and the restaurant came alive.

Sky seated a party of four and returned to the hostess stand where Karmine smiled as she approached. “I’d like a table for one, please,” the brunette said.

“Mom’s not with you?”

“No, she has a date with the fellow that purchased the ranch adjoining yours, and I wanted to make certain you are okay. I saw you on television earlier.”

“A date! Good for her,” Sky smiled. “I’m going to seat you close to me so I can visit with you when I’m not busy.”

Karmine looked around. “Where is Sierra?”

“She has the night off,” Sky replied.

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Karmine moved closer to her, ran her finger down the menu then whispered. "Christine heard a rumor that something is going down tonight."

"Not tonight, but Sierra and her family are gathering at her home, so I am in charge of the restaurant, and I've been instructed to sleep at my condo tonight."

"Would you like some company?" Karmine murmured.

"I would love that." Sky said softly as she seated the brunette. "Wine?"

"Yes, please." Karmine replied.

Reagan and Marta Steel arrived at the supper club half an hour later. "This must be my lucky night," Sky greeted them. "What brings you two out?"

"Your delicious food," Reagan answered then lowered her voice. "Christine has been informed that the gun runners are moving a shipment to Mexico."

"I know there is a meeting with the Navajo's tonight, but I haven't seen any evidence of guns," Sky whispered.

"Keep your eyes open," Marta cautioned. "The gun runners are part of the drug cartel and they are ruthless."

Sky nodded and wondered if Sierra was safe.

The restaurant was filled to capacity by customers who had seen the attempted abduction of Sky and Sierra on the news.

"It looks like you are a local celebrity," Karmine commented after several diners had complimented Sky for her bravery.

"Just what I need, exposure on national television." Sky frowned. "Christine may need to pull me from this assignment."

"I hope she does. It gets more dangerous by the day, and I truly don't want to ride Ally searching the box canyons for you," Karmine declared.

Sky rolled her eyes and greeted a couple as they entered the restaurant.

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Customers crowded into the restaurant, and the staff hustled to keep the tables turning. "I believe we have broken all our records tonight," the Lenardo, the head chef informed Sky as she locked the door at midnight and surveyed the few diners finishing their meals.

"I am going to prepare the night's deposit," she replied. "It will be nice if we broke all records without the owners looking over our shoulders."

"We have shut down the kitchen and are cleaning everything," Lenardo said. "You can leave whenever you wish. I can lock up after everyone leaves. You have had a very long day."

"I may take you up on that offer," Sky said as she began totaling the registers.

After the chef returned to the kitchen, she slipped Karmine the key to her condo. "You should go to the condo. I will be there in about an hour."

Karmine squeezed her hand and handed her a credit card. "I don't want Sierra to think you give away food when she is gone," she said.

Sky rang up the charge then walked the woman of her dreams to the door. "Be careful."

Sky finished the night's deposits as Lenardo entered her office. "We are finished," he informed her.

"Good, so am I," Sky replied as she filled the money bag with the cash they had received. "We can all walk out together. You were right Lenardo, tonight broke all our previous records."

## Chapter 17

### Unexpected Phone Call

#### Sunday, Day 46

Karmine showered and slipped into her pajamas. She wandered around the condo wondering what time Sky would be home. Her phone rang in answer to her thoughts.

“I’m headed your way pretty lady,” Sky said. “I just dropped off the deposit so I should be there in fifteen minutes.”

“I am looking forward to spending some time with you,” Karmine replied. She disconnected the call and opened a bottle of wine giving it time to breathe before Sky arrived.

As she projected, Sky entered the condo fifteen minutes later at 2:20 a.m. “Let me take a quick shower,” she said. “I smell like something to eat.”

Karmine grinned mischievously. “That’s not all bad,” she teased.

Sky couldn’t stop the tremor that ran down her body or the blush that ran up her neck to her cheeks. She had often dreamed about being alone with Karmine Sedona. “Hold that thought.” She grinned as she hurried into the en suite.

##

“I’ve often thought of moments like this,” Sky admitted as she leaned back against the sofa and propped her feet on the coffee table. She tapped her wine glass against Karmine’s.

“This is nice,” Karmine cooed as she snuggled into Sky’s side. “I’ve never had you all to myself and you smell so good.”

Both jumped when Sky’s cellphone blared, “Sierra calling.”

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“What the...” Karmine squealed. “It’s 3:00 a.m.

“I must answer it,” Sky said. “She may be in trouble.

“Hello, Sierra. Are you okay?”

“I am fine,” Sierra replied. “I just wanted to hear your voice. I miss you.”

“It’s after 3:00 a.m.” Sky pointed out.

“I know. I’m sorry. Did I wake you?”

“No, I made the night’s deposit and just finished showering. Lenardo said we broke all our previous records tonight.”

There was silence on the other end of the phone. “Are you still there?” Sky asked.

“Yes. I’m coming to you.” Sierra replied.

“No, you can’t,” Sky insisted. “I’m exhausted and am going to bed.”

“I can go to bed with you,” Sierra cooed.

“No! Not tonight.” Sky exclaimed.

“Is someone with you?” Sierra accused. “You do have someone with you!”

“I...Yes, I do.”

“I can’t believe you,” Sierra screamed. “How could you?”

“Sierra, I’m not a fricken nun. I’ve never given you any reason to think I’m celibate. You date other people. I am just your bodyguard. That is all.”

“Goodnight, Sky.”

“I should go,” Karmine strode from the room with Sky following her. She dressed and tossed her pajamas into her overnight bag.

“Karmine, I...”

“This is dangerous,” the brunette declared. “She is crazy enough to show up on your doorstep. We have too much invested in this operation to let it blow up in our faces and Christine would station us in Greenland for the rest of our lives.”

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Sky nodded then pulled Karmine into her arms. She tentatively touched her lips to the brunette's then hugged her tighter, fitting her soft curves against her own. Karmine moved her full lips against Sky's making their hearts hammer inside their chests. Sky slipped the tip of her tongue between Karmine's lips and was met with a kiss she would never forget. She was still trying to breathe as the brunette closed the door behind her. "Damn you, Sierra Vega!" she cursed her boss.

Sky locked the door behind Karmine, overcoming the urge to run after her and begging her to stay. Instead, she carried her half-full wine glass into the bedroom and finished it after she instructed Alexa to set an alarm for 9:00 a.m. She knew that six hours of sleep would do little to dispel the tiredness she felt from the previous day and she had a feeling the coming day would be worse as she tried to second guess the gun traffickers.

##

The wail of the alarm pulled Sky from a fretful sleep. "Alexa, alarm off," she commanded silencing the howling wake-up reminder. Coffee and two slices of raisin bread toast chased away the grogginess, and the agent was ready to face the day.

Cooks and servers were already at the restaurant when Sky parked her pickup behind the building. There was no sign of the Vega family.

The phone on the hostess desk was ringing when Sky entered the restaurant. She wondered who would call the establishment that didn't open until noon. "Buena Comida Supper Club," she answered.

"Good! You are there," Sierra greeted her.

"Where did you think I'd be?" Sky grumped.

"Still in bed with your one-night stand," Sierra growled.

"Sierra, I didn't sleep with anyone last night. I told you I was tired and I didn't have the energy to argue with you."

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Sierra was silent.

“Are you okay?” Sky asked.

“Yes. We are headed your way. Mother and Father want to eat at the restaurant and meet you. They want to thank you for saving my life on more than one occasion.”

“That isn’t necessary. I was just doing the job I signed on for.”

“Still, they want to meet you.”

“I look forward to meeting them,” Sky admitted.

“Sky, I want to apologize for the things I said last night. It is none of my business what you do on your time off. I, um, I missed you that is all.”

“Forget about it. It is no big deal. Yesterday was a bad experience for everyone,” Sky responded. “I will be delighted to meet your parents.”

##

Sky was seating a table of four when the Vega family accompanied by six bodyguards entered the restaurant and went to Sierra’s office. Sierra motioned for her to join them. Sky informed the other hostess that she had been summoned to the boss’ office and joined the Vegas.

“Mother, Father, this is Sky Denton, my bodyguard. Sky, this is Maria and John, our parents,” Sierra introduced her parents and their bodyguards.

“My daughter tells me you have saved her life on several occasions,” John said as he shook her hand firmly. “Maria and I are indebted to you.”

“Sierra gave me a job when I was down and out,” Sky replied. “I am grateful and dedicated to keeping her safe.”

“You can return to the hostess stand now,” Sierra said. “We are having a board meeting. I’m sure you would be bored.”

“It was nice to meet you,” Maria said. “Perhaps you can join us for dinner.”

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Sky nodded and left the room, closing the door behind her. *I would love to be a fly on the wall in that meeting*, she thought as she resumed her duties at the hostess stand.

##

Two hours later the Vega family and their bodyguards moved to a private dining room reserved for customers' birthday parties and private functions. Sierra slowly approached Sky with an engaging smile. She moved closer, each step was more seductive than the last.

Sky gulped as her traitorous body responded to the brunette's obvious effort to elicit a reaction from her. She couldn't stop the slow smile that curved her lips or the way her nipples stood at attention. Sierra Vega was an extremely desirable woman Sky prayed she could resist.

"It is good to see you smile," Sierra noted. "My family request you join us for dinner."

Sky found herself holding her breath and nodding her head in agreement. She felt like Sierra had cast a spell on her. She fought to keep from reaching out and touching her.

Sierra tilted her head and held Sky's gaze as she smiled and raised her eyebrows. She was completely aware of the affect she was having on the blonde. It was good to know she could evoke the reaction from her beautiful bodyguard.

Sky silently followed her boss into the private dining room.

"Sit by me, dear," Maria patted the seat of the chair beside her. Sierra sat down beside her sandwiching the blonde between the two Vega women.

John welcomed her then asked everyone to join hands as he said the blessing.

Sky didn't hear a word he said after Sierra clasped her hand and held it tightly. She continued to hold Sky's hand after her father said, "Amen."

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Sky gently pulled her hand from the soft, warmth of Sierra's and cursed herself for being so attracted to the other woman.

The evening was delightful as the family reminisced telling stories about Sierra and her brothers growing up on the Indian reservation. "They were always getting into things, racing horses and swimming in the San Juan River," Maria said, "I always worried about them, but they took care of each other."

"We have always had each other's back," Mateo pointed out. "We always will."

"That is as it should be," John added.

It was obvious that John and Maria were proud of their offspring. The revelry broke up around 11:00 p.m. when John reminded them that tomorrow would be a big day and everyone needed to be at the top of their game."

"I'll make tonight's deposit," Mateo declared as he pushed his chair back from the table. "Sierra our parents will go home with you, and we will meet at the airport in the morning."

Maria turned to Sky, "It was a joy to spend the evening with you dear. Thank you again for watching over Sierra."

"It is my pleasure to keep your daughter safe," Sky assured her. "I will be delighted to escort you to the airport tomorrow. It is a shame you are leaving so soon." She didn't miss the glances exchanged by the Vega family.

"I would like for Sky to accompany us," Sierra exclaimed. "I will feel safer with her there."

The Vega men exchanged glances, then John nodded. "She has saved her life on multiple occasions. Your brothers also assure me we can trust her. What about you, Sky do you want to be involved in our family business or serve as hostess in the restaurant tomorrow?"

"My priorities have always been to protect Sierra," Sky declared.

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“Be at Sierra’s home at 8:00 a.m. tomorrow,” John instructed. “We will leave from there.”

“Father, Sky lives at my home. We asked her to stay somewhere else because we weren’t certain how you would feel about an outsider being involved in the business we will conduct tomorrow. I assure you that she is as loyal as any of your bodyguards.”

John nodded. “I believe she is. Let’s all go get some sleep. We have an early day tomorrow.”

“I will ride with you,” Sierra informed Sky.

##

“I assume your family has more than just the restaurant business,” Sky noted as she pulled from the parking lot.

“It’s something we handle for the Navajo Nation,” Sierra admitted. “You’ll see tomorrow. It could be dangerous, so be on your toes.”

“Why would it be dangerous?” Sky asked.

“That’s not important, just cover my back.”

Sierra placed her hand on Sky’s thigh and gently caressed her.

“Please don’t do that,” Sky whimpered. “It’s very distracting.”

“I could come to your room tonight,” Sierra suggested.

“Like your father said, we should get a good night’s sleep to be ready for whatever your family is doing tomorrow.”

“You know you want me,” Sierra insisted. “I saw it in your eyes. The way you looked at me as I walked toward you.”

“You are an extremely desirable woman,” Sky admitted. “But I don’t want to do anything that will distract from your plans for tomorrow.”

Sierra stopped caressing Sky’s leg. “You are right. I want to be at my best tomorrow. After we complete our family business, you and I will discuss our future.”

## Chapter 18

### Identifying the Players

#### Monday, Day 47

Sky had a bad feeling about the day. She slipped into a pair of bootcut black jeans and a red pullover top. A black blazer covered her shoulder holster and Glock. Unsure of who or what she might encounter, she secured a pistol under the inside top of the western boots she wore. The Redemption switchblade was strapped above her wrist out of sight. No doubt about it, she was a walking war machine. She pulled her long blonde hair into a high ponytail. She didn't want it getting in her face if she needed to fight her way out of a bad situation. She had a sinking feeling she might not make it home tonight.

Putting on her devil-may-care face Sky bounded down the stairs toward the woman looking up at her. "Someone is chipper this morning," Sierra smiled.

"I'm looking forward to our outing with your family," Sky replied.

"You do know we aren't going on a picnic," Sierra informed her. "We are sometimes forced to deal with unscrupulous people who can be dangerous."

Sky grinned. "That's why I'm wearing steel-toed boots. I might have to kick our way out of whatever unpleasant situation you take me into."

"I hope your boots won't be necessary," Sierra said. "Let's join my family for breakfast then we will head to the airport."

Sky followed the brunette to the kitchen. For the first time she noticed that Sierra wore a shoulder holster under her jacket. *This might be more dangerous than I anticipated*, she thought.

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##

Sky scrutinized the private airport as she followed the limo carrying the Vega family. Their bodyguards followed her. She was surprised when the entourage passed the airplane hangars and stopped behind a large building that resembled a warehouse. She quickly parked and rushed to Sierra's side as the bodyguards circled the limo. For the first time they were carrying AR-15 rifles. The heavy fire power surprised Sky.

Two handsome men dressed in expensive suites walked from the warehouse to meet the Vega family. They talked quietly then shook their heads no, and returned to the warehouse. The Vegas returned to their limo and instructed Sky to return to her pickup. She did as she was told and followed the entourage back to the restaurant where the limo stopped just long enough to let the three siblings out then drove away.

Sky parked her pickup and rushed into the building. "What just happened?" she demanded.

"The deal didn't go down," Mateo answered.

"But why not?" Sky insisted.

"It was cancelled. That's all you need to know," Chayton huffed.

Sky shrugged and walked away wondering what had spooked them so much that they cancelled the transaction. She wondered if they knew the FBI was watching them, if they knew she was an undercover agent. She knew that Christine suspected one of her agents was reporting to the cartel.

##

Sky picked up two menus and greeted a couple as they entered the restaurant. "Welcome to Buena Comida Supper Club." She smiled.

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Sierra was at the hostess stand when Sky returned to the front of the restaurant. "Are you okay?" Sky greeted her boss.

"I've had better days," Sierra mumbled. "I'm tired. That's all."

"Go home. Mondays are always slow. I can handle the hostess duties," Sky encouraged.

Sierra's eyes opened wide as the two handsome men from the airport warehouse entered. One of them beamed at her. "I hope you can sit down with us," he said as he held out his hand to Sierra.

"I would love to join you," Sierra exclaimed. "I hate it when our plans go awry."

"Those things happen," he smiled.

"Perhaps you can introduce us to your new employee," his friend suggested as he looked Sky up and down as if appraising her value. His lascivious scrutiny made her skin crawl.

"Skylar Denton meet my dearest friends Antonio Juarez and Carlos Ramos. Gentlemen, meet Sky Denton my personal bodyguard."

Both men chuckled at the thought of the beautiful blonde woman being a bodyguard.

"It is a pleasure to meet you," Sky smiled.

"The pleasure is all ours." In an over exaggerated gesture, Carlos caught her hand and kissed the back of it. "After dinner you must join us for a nightcap."

Sierra frowned and grabbed three menus. "Come, we will sit at a table where we can discuss things without anyone listening." She failed to add it was the table that had a security camera trained on it. She led them to the table she and Sky often shared. Sky avoided the table but closely watched its occupants. Judging from the scowl on Sierra's lovely face, her boss wasn't enjoying their conversation.

##

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The men ordered dessert and a five-hundred-dollar bottle of dessert wine. Sierra stood and threw her napkin onto the table. "This meeting is over," she declared then stomped into her office.

The two men seemed unconcerned about her abrupt exit and continued dining until they had consumed the bottle of wine and their dessert. Carlos motioned for Sky to join them, but she ignored them, choosing to join Sierra in her office instead.

"Are you okay, Sierra?" she asked as she locked the door behind her.

"No! I am not okay." Sierra hissed. "Nothing about today has been okay."

"What is wrong? What can I do to help?" Sky asked sincerely. "Have I done something to upset you?"

"You have been the only thing good about this day," Sierra's face softened and the scowl disappeared. "You make me feel safe."

"Good, that is my purpose in life," Sky reassured her. "Can your brothers close tonight so you can leave now?"

"No. I must pull my own weight. I never want them to think that I can't be an equal partner. The entire day has been a disappointment, and I have a raging headache."

Sky did something she rarely did. She moved behind the brunette beauty and began massaging her shoulders. She smiled as Sierra's shoulders dropped and the woman relaxed leaning into Sky's touch.

After manipulating Sierra's tight shoulder muscles and working her way up the woman's neck, Sky felt the taunt muscles go from strands of steel to the soft pliable tissue she was used to finding in her boss' neck. "How's the headache?" she asked.

Sierra moved her head from side to side then bowed it. "Gone," she murmured. "Have the two clowns gone?"

"You mean Antonio and Carlos?" Sky clarified. "I will see."

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Sky opened the office door and surveyed the dining room. The men were gone. She walked to the kitchen and picked up two glasses and a bottle of the restaurant's finest wine. "I'll put this to good use," she informed Mateo.

"Is she upset?" he inquired.

"Very."

"I knew she would be. She has worked hard on this. Please tell her we will salvage this business venture. She must be patient."

Sky nodded in agreement not certain what they were talking about. She returned to Sierra's office and locked the door.

##

Sierra had stretched out on the sofa in her office, kicked off her heels and was more at ease. Sky held up the wine bottle. "I bring the ambrosia of the Gods," she laughed as she held the stems of the two wine glasses between her fingers and poured the burgundy liquid into them. She handed a glass to Sierra then sat down on the sofa pulling the brunette's feet into her lap.

"A toast," Sky held her glass toward Sierra, "to a better day."

Sierra laughed. "If only a toast could make tomorrow a better day."

Sky absent mindedly began massaging Sierra's foot. "Can I do anything to help?"

"You just did," Sierra grinned. "I had no idea you were a bodyguard and a masseuse."

Sky couldn't stop herself from flirting with the beauty beside her. "I have many talents you know nothing about."

Sierra held her gaze. "I'm very willing to explore all of your talents," she cooed.

Sky took a long sip of her wine and paid attention to her conscience as it reminded her, "no sleeping with the enemy."

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After a long silence Sky noted, "I thought Antonio and Carlos were your best friends. You don't seem happy with them."

"I'm not. They have let me down and I'm angry at them. They made me look weak in the eyes of my father."

"How?" Sky asked hoping that Sierra would open up to her.

"It doesn't matter." Sierra flipped her hand as if brushing away something unpleasant.

"If it helps any, Mateo said to tell you that the three of you will salvage the business deal." Sky relayed the message.

"I do love my brothers. The three of you are my rocks," Sierra said. "Don't trust Antonio and Carlos."

"What do you mean?"

"Just don't trust anything they say or do. That's all you need to know."

Sky bowed her head then said, "I will be happy when you fully trust me."

"I do," Sierra vowed as she moved to straddle the blonde. "I do trust you, Sky." Her lips caressed Sky's as she settled onto the agent's lap. "And I want you."

*Oh, crap*, Sky thought frantically trying to find an excuse to stand up.

A loud knock on the door made them jump and Sky stood up letting Sierra slide to her feet.

"Sierra, open the door," Mateo called out.

Sky walked to the door as Sierra ran into her bathroom. "She is indisposed right now," she informed Mateo. "She has asked me to close out the registers and prepare the night's deposit. Is that okay with you?"

"Of course. That will give me an opportunity to visit with my sister. Thank you, Sky."

Alone with the registers and the security computer, Sky copied the video from the table showing Carlos and Antonio. *I need to know who you are*, she thought.

## Chapter 19

### The Wrong Road Home

**Tuesday, Day 48**

Sky glanced at her watch as she finished the deposit. It was 1:15 a.m. She checked all the doors to make certain they were locked.

“I will make the arrangements,” Sierra said to her brother as they walked from her office. “

Mateo hugged his sister. “Get a good night’s sleep. I’ve asked two other hostesses to open tomorrow. “You and Sky sleep late and have a leisurely morning. You deserve it, and sis, don’t worry. We’ve got this.”

Sierra gave her brother one last hug then motioned for Sky to follow her from the restaurant.

“I will drop off the deposit then meet you at your home,” Sky volunteered.

“No, I want to ride with you,” Sierra declared. “Leave your pickup and we will take my car, but you drive.

Sky nodded in agreement and opened the door for Sierra. She searched for something to talk about as she slid into the driver’s seat. “It is amazing that we don’t have to fish out keys to operate the functions on our vehicles,” she mumbled.

“What?” Sierra snapped.

“You know. Your keys are in your purse, but we can still unlock the door and start the car without searching for the keys.”

“Sometimes, I worry about you,” Sierra huffed. “My brother interrupted us just as we were about to make love and all you can talk about is the wonder of modern-day car keys.”

“Sierra, I don’t think it is a good idea for us to...”

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“A car is following us!” Sierra exclaimed.

Sky glanced at her rear-view mirror then made a sharp right-hand turn. The vehicle followed them. “I can lose them,” she informed Sierra, “but I’d rather catch them.”

“Just lose them,” Sierra instructed. “I’m in no mood to deal with idiots tonight.”

“We have a large deposit,” Sky reminded her. “Do you think they are thieves or some of your faux friends?”

“I have no idea,” Sierra snapped. “Just lose them.”

“The usually crowded streets are almost empty. I doubt I can outrun them,” Sky thought out loud. “If it is your friends, they probably know where you live anyway. Hold on tight. I have an idea.”

Sky pushed the car to its top speed as their pursuers began shooting at them. She made a sharp skidding turn onto Copper Avenue heading to Second Street reaching her top speed as street repair signs and barricades loomed in her headlights.

“Jesus, you are going to kill us,” Sierra shrieked when Sky slung the rearend of the car around and skidded into an ally as the car following them crashed through the barricade and disappeared from sight.

Sierra gasped as the headlights disappeared from behind them. “Where did they go,” she exclaimed.

“They plunged into a sink hole,” Sky replied. “I saw it on the news.”

“You are the best damn bodyguard I have ever had,” Sierra,” declared.

“And the prettiest,” Sky joked.

“Definitely the prettiest,” Sierra laughingly agreed, “even if you did take the wrong road home.”

##

Thirty minutes later, Sky pulled the car into the garage of her condo. “I think we will be safer here tonight. If they were willing to participate in a high-speed race through

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downtown Albuquerque, they won't hesitate to show up at your home."

"I don't care where you take me," Sierra admitted. "I am exhausted and just want to sleep."

*Mission accomplished*, Sky thought then said. "We didn't make the deposit."

"It's not going anywhere," Sierra stated the obvious. "It is as safe with you as it would be in a bank."

##

Sky made certain that Sierra was sleeping soundly then locked the door to her own bedroom, turned on her computer, and called Karmine. "I was hoping you would call," Karmine answered the phone. "Why are you up so late?"

"We are at my condo. Sierra is asleep. Someone tried to kill us tonight. I am going to email you a security video from the restaurant. See if Christine can identify the two men in it. I think they are somehow involved in the gun deal."

"Please be careful," Karmine said. "You are getting in deep and you have no backup."

"I'm fine. Believe me I will return home safely. I can't wait to see you. How are things going at the ranch?"

"Busy. I think your mom misses you when the drugstore cowboys start arriving. This is a mixed group. Some of them are nice and join into the activities but some of them don't want to be here."

"Yeah, most corporate building conferences are like that." Sky couldn't stop the yawn that escaped her mouth.

"Go to sleep," hon. I've forwarded your video to Christine, and I will talk to you tomorrow as soon as she gets back to me. I may come into town for lunch."

"I would love to see you, but please be careful."

"Always," Karmine replied. "Sweet dreams, honey."

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Sky hung up the phone then unlocked her bedroom door. She didn't want Sierra to think that she was hiding something.

## Chapter 20

### Make it Happen

#### Tuesday Evening Day 48

The scent of fresh coffee filled Sky's nostrils as she turned over in bed. "Wake up sleepy head," Sierra shook her arm. Sky immediately sat up and put her feet on the floor.

"You have no idea how much I need this," she declared taking the coffee from Sierra's hand and moving to the chair in her room. "Did you get a good night's sleep?"

Sierra scrutinized her bodyguard. "Why are you acting so funny?"

"I'm not acting funny."

"Yes, you are," Sierra insisted. You go out of your way to avoid intimate contact with me. I know you like me so why do you keep me at arm's length?"

"Honestly, I'm not certain I know you. I've been in your life a little over a month, and I have lost track of the times your life has been endangered. Why are you on everyone's hit list?"

"Some of it is just bad luck and some of it is political. As you know, my father is on the Navajo Council, and he has his own enemies who would stoop to hurting me just to hurt him."

"There's something else," Sky insisted. "When I accepted the job as your bodyguard, I began following your father's political career and his influence in the Navajo Nation. He is very popular and highly regarded so are you and your brothers. Your family is considered strong supporters of law and order on the reservation."

"You seem to know all there is to know about me and my family." Sierra shrugged. "You should shower. We need

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to make the deposit on our way into the office. It is already past noon.”

Sky sipped her coffee noting that Sierra was dressed and ready to go. “I’ll hurry,” she promised.

Sky showered, put her hair up in a messy bun and dressed in thirty minutes. Sierra’s bedroom door was open and the lights were out so she knew her boss was downstairs. She put on her best smile and skipped down the stairs to her kitchen. “I’m ready,” she announced as she walked to the island where a note was propped against the napkin holder. She huffed as she read it.

*Sky, I’ve gone into the office. Call an Uber.*

“Aren’t you thoughtful,” Sky seethed as she crumbled the note and tossed it into the wastepaper basket.

“It seems I have time to pay special attention to my appearance.” She walked back upstairs and stripped off her clothes. She paid extra attention to her hair and applied makeup as perfectly as any Hollywood actress.

A red dress that showed off her shapely figure and a pair of dangling earrings and red heels completed the look she was going for. “Eat your heart out, Sierra Vega.” She yelled into the empty room as she pulled up the Uber app on her phone.

##

It was late afternoon when Sky walked into the Buena Comida Supper Club. Sierra inhaled deeply and held her breath. Sky was always beautiful but tonight she was enchanting. “Gorgeous,” Sierra moaned as the blonde beauty glided toward her.

“Harper. I have a reservation for six,” a distinguished man in a very expensive suit repeated louder trying to get Sierra’s attention.

“Harper, um uh yes sir. Please follow me,” she stammered as she picked up six menus and led the party to their table.

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Sky picked up menus and seated the next customers in line. The restaurant was incredibly busy, and the two hostesses seemed to pass like ships in the night.

At 8:00 p.m. Karmine strolled in looking as lovely as Sky. Sierra moaned under her breath. *I think I'm going to die*, she thought.

Sky picked up a menu and led Karmine to a table that was in a small alcove close to the hostess stand. "Oh my God," Karmine whispered under her breath. "Who are you trying to seduce tonight?" She asked Sky.

"You said you would dine with us tonight." Sky smiled very aware of the affect she was having on those around her.

"Can I go home with you?" Karmine teased.

"I wish. You look ravishing." Sky complimented

"I have information for you," Karmine said softly.

Sierra appeared at Karmine's table holding out a bottle of their most expensive wine. "Compliments of the house," she rasped, then cleared her throat. "Sky, you need to seat our other guests."

Sky returned to her hostess duties as Sierra half-heartedly flirted with Karmine unable to suppress her desire for her bodyguard.

When everyone was seated, Sierra returned to the hostess stand and reached out to touch Sky's arm. "Please step into my office with me."

"Nope," Sky quipped.

"I'm so sorry," Sierra murmured.

"For what?" Sky shrugged.

"Leaving you and making you take an Uber."

"No biggie," Sky muttered. "It gave me a chance to put myself together better and I enjoyed the nice quiet ride."

"And you are not going to forgive me are you?" Sierra asked.

"Never!" Sky sneered. "You put me in my place princess, and I intend to stay there."