

One

The mansion squat on the shore of Indian Creek Island like a well-fed whore, its lights a sparkling diadem in the south Florida night.

A movie executive who'd ruled Hollywood back in the eighties built Casa Torres, more a castle than a house. The mansion was presently owned by one Enrico *Motosierra* Torres, the head of an up-and-coming Mexican drug cartel. He'd received the nickname, *Motosierra*, from his penchant for using a chainsaw to cut body parts off competitors, disobedient workers... anyone and everyone who pissed him off.

Mexican drug lords were notorious for their violence and Moto's goal was to be the most sadistic of them all. "Respect is good," he was fond of saying, "but to be feared... that is best."

Two Bentleys, several Rolls-Royce Phantoms, a few Jaguars, and even a Ferrari was lined up in the long, cobblestone drive waiting for parking attendants to tuck them safely away. King Palm trees, rising like majestic pillars into the tropical night, were carefully scattered over the manicured grounds while a large circular fountain shot a full dozen jets of water into the night air. The liquid torrent was drowned out by high energy dance music spilling out of the mansion. Even here in Miami where excess was the norm, Moto's parties were legendary.

Like pilgrims traveling to Mecca, guests lined the stairs, waiting to enter the mansion. A man and a woman climbed from the black Ferrari and mounted the stairs leading to the entrance, which was impressive with its huge double doors made from exotic jungle woods, leaded glass and wrought iron.

He was a Viking of a man, standing six feet six inches and rigged out in all black. His midnight hair flowed artlessly about his shoulders and a touch of kohl lined his eyes, emphasizing their steel gray color. His lean face, with its trademark three-day beard, was striking. A thin white scar running from temple to jaw gave him an air of danger guaranteeing second and third looks from both women and men.

The man placed a wide palm on the small of his companion's back—a pretty young woman whose athletic figure was perfectly displayed in a royal blue short jumpsuit with six-inch silver knee-length gladiator sandals circling shapely calves.

Together they reached the top of the stairs and played follow-the-leader behind the other guests until they stood at the doorway where a three man security detail waited.

Guard Number One frisked the guests, taking his time with the women to inspect inside their bodices and between their legs while Guard Number Two wielded a hand held metal detector. Guard Number Three stood a short distance away, holding an automatic rifle at the ready.

When it was the couple's turn, Guard Two carefully waved the metal detector over the man while Mr. Grab Happy went to

work on the pretty redhead. The big man growled a protest and moved closer when Guard One slid his hands inside her shorts.

“Stand down, *esse*,” Guard Three commanded, snapping his rifle up and shoving the barrel into the big man’s chest.

“Hands off, *esse*,” the big man countered and in a sudden move, snatched the rifle and pointed it at the trio. “I said hands off.” The men glared at each other for a tense moment.

“It’s okay,” the woman said, tugging on the big man’s arm. “Jesus, I need a drink. Can’t we just go inside? Does everything have to be so difficult?”

The guard who’d held the rifle laughed, said something in Spanish and the other two joined him. Grinning, the big man shrugged and handed him back the weapon.

“You’re clean. Go in,” Guard Three said, waving them on with the rifle.

The woman threaded her fingers through her date’s and tugged him past the entrance onto a floor made of glossy white Italian marble. A giant chandelier, with a thousand glittering crystal pendulogues, dominated the great room.

What part of do not engage don’t you understand, Dark Man? The handler snarled in the hunter’s headset.

“I was just staying in character, base,” DM murmured, his hand at the small of Elle’s back. “Moto’s crew would be suspicious if I didn’t challenge them.” Which was true, but even

if it wasn't, he'd be damned if he'd stand by and watch the son of a bitch hand rape Elle.

“I think he deserves a Golden Globe,” she added, tossing a grateful glance over her shoulder, her heels clicking on the shiny stone. They paused at the balcony and looked out on the massive room beneath them.

Sweeping twin staircases followed the curved walls leading down to a ground level great room a full acre in size. Priceless artwork covered the walls broken up by curtained alcoves scattered throughout the room. A club sized dance floor, teeming with people, was in the center of the room complete with DJ booth and a laser light show shooting sparkles across the walls. The bass heavy electronic music made the balustrade DM's hand rested on throb in time to the beat. Further back, the great room's glass rear walls had been retracted. Opening onto the tropical night, both music and dancers spilled outside to the Olympic sized pool. The rear of the estate ended at the gulf. DM noted several luxury yachts parked at Moto's dock. He also noticed most of the guests milling about the pool were naked.

DM plucked a champagne flute from the tray held by a waiter and offered it to Elle.

“I see one, two... make that three of Moto's lieutenants and several representatives of the Columbian growers' conglomerate,” Elle whispered through the link, the glass masking her mouth.

The security detail scattered so obviously around the mansion and grounds weren't the real danger. High powered cameras with the ability to zoom in and count the hairs on a flea's back were. Not to mention the lip-reading software now standard in most high level systems.

Have you located the target?

“He's at the foot of the stairs, greeting guests,” DM said, dropping a kiss on Elle's shoulder.

That was a bit of luck there. With a little more they could get the job done and be away well under the allotted time.

Proceed, the handler said.

DM followed Elle, his eyes sweeping the room, searching out the nooks, looking for enemies and cameras, but the laser lighting and the crushing crowd made it difficult. Instead he focused on the welcoming committee.

Moto had two bodyguards flanking him. One shifted and DM saw the glint of his pistol in the shoulder holster beneath his tuxedo jacket. Both men had the hard countenances and shifting gazes that bespoke serious training. For once, it was nice to see the briefing for this job had been on target, he thought sourly. Bad intelligence made his job harder. Not impossible, just harder. Tonight, he'd like easy.

They continued their downward trek, trailing an older man whose arms were around two teens – a boy and a girl. Descending the wide stairs in fits and starts, the old sod passed

the time running one hand over the girl's breasts and the other fondling the boy's bottom. The girl giggled nervously while the boy tried to step out of the pervert's reach. DM eyed the old goat. It would take two, three seconds to break the man's wrists. While that would offer a welcome diversion besides give new meaning to the axiom: keep your hands to yourself, DM could not. He was on the Department clock. Maybe he'd visit the pervert another night and have a little heart to heart. He looked away, exhaling a long breath. It wasn't a sigh. He did nothing so limp wristed as sigh.

Moto waited to meet his guests at the foot of the stairs like a gracious monarch. Dark hair swept back and gelled into place, coffee colored skin, blue eyes, average height, and stocky build, he was dressed in a white silk shirt unbuttoned to reveal a paunch worthy of a hibernating bear and tan linen pants. Grinning around a cigar clenched between his teeth and the curvy woman hanging on his arm, Moto yucked it up with the old pervert before sending him and his underage sex toys on their way. Change the face and location and Moto could be anyone of a thousand narcissistic killers DM had offed, he thought huffing again. He was so ready to get this job done.

"Remember, he's not stupid so don't you be stupid," Elle hissed as they stepped forward.

"You watch yourself, rookie. I'm not runnin' a daycare," DM growled, giving her a level look. He'd have a talk with the Chief

about pairing him with inexperienced smart asses when he got back to the Department.

“Welcome, welcome, friends to my humble home,” Moto said in Spanish. His unique dialect, a blend of Mayan and Spanish, pegged the Yucatan Peninsula as his home.

“I am honored to have been invited, *jefe*,” DM replied in the same language, if not dialect, gripping Moto’s hand.

Moto nodded at the compliment DM had given him in his choice of title. By calling Moto *boss*, DM was recognizing the man’s status, his power.

“And I am honored by the presence of a representative from my dear Venezuelan friends. Your lovely lady is very welcome as well,” Moto added, reaching for Elle’s hand.

Time seemed to slow as DM focused in hard on the exchange. This was it. Go time.

Smiling, Elle stretched out her hand to grasp his. The ring on her middle finger was large, spanning from knuckle to knuckle. Sparkling in the light, its deadly cache of poison was cleverly hidden in the twists of silver. The poison was fast acting, once delivered to the target’s bloodstream via the hidden needle it would set to work immediately; causing tachycardia, a rise in temperature, confusion, vomiting, unconsciousness, and finally death. From beginning to end, it would take an hour. Tops.

Elle murmured some platitude, her fingers brushing Moto’s as she stepped forward. DM maintained his smile. All that was

needed was a single, firm squeeze. He watched Moto's hand begin to close around his partner's. Almost there.

“Gloria, I can't believe you're here!”

A blond haired bimbo exclaimed, bumping into Elle with enough force to break her contact with the target. The goblet of red wine gripped in the bimbo's fist, splashed Elle full in the face causing her to sputter and stagger under the deluge.

The blond was hot, her four alarm body encased like sausage in a skin-tight spangled red dress that almost covered her round ass. She spun about on strappy platform sandals to face a frowning Moto. The red wine splatters on his white shirt looked like blood. “Ooo, sorry hun. Did I butt in? Gloria and I went to high school together.”

Moto's body guards moved in front of their employer putting a wall of brawn and firearms between him and DM, Elle, and the blond intruder.

What's happening, team one? The handler's voice drilled in DM's ear.

“Geez, I'm such a clumsy ass. Sorry!” The woman shrugged, her blond curls bouncing on bare shoulders. She glanced up at DM, her up-tilted amber eyes gleaming in the light. Familiar up-tilted amber eyes. The muscles in his jaw flexed.

Elle stood like a deer caught in headlights, her inexperience flying high and wide while the wine dripped down her chin soaking her clothes.

Report... Team one... copy?

Moto shouldered a guard aside and tilted his head. “I apologize for this insult,” he said to DM then turned to his arm candy and said, “Maria, *querida*, escort the young lady to the powder room and help her get cleaned up.”

Dammit, Morace! What the hell's going on?

Elle balked, staring at DM who dropped a chin in agreement. Reluctantly, she followed the woman, gazing back over her shoulder until they disappeared through a door.

“Pablo, take this *puta*. Find out who she is and what she’s doing here. No, find out who she is with. That’s the idiot I want to speak to.”

DM gripped the woman’s arm so hard she cried out in pain. “If you’ll allow me, I’d like to handle this clumsy *puta*.”

Moto looked from DM to the struggling woman and chuckled. “*Bueno*, I’ll let you... how you say... *take care* of her.” He waved the guard off, turning back to the line of guests.

With a short bow to the Mexican drug lord, he gripped the blonde’s upper arm and dragged her away. It was impossible for the smaller woman to match his long stride so she stumbled after him.

“You’re hurting me,” Angel remarked, her tone disinterested.

“Good,” he snarled. What was it with this woman following him, fouling up his missions?

DM threw her into a private alcove and drew the curtains, their filmy fabric making privacy a figment of the imagination.

Morace! his handler shrilled. DM ignored the idiot and reached up to press the ear piece twice, switching from team channel to private channel.

“Gamer, you there?”

Go ahead, Dark Man.

“I have your shadow.” She scowled at him, sticking out her tongue.

Son of a ...

“I’m going to get a few answers before the Medic gets his hooks into her.” She rolled her eyes.

What d’you need?

“Elle’s been cock blocked—your shadow again. Can you implement plan B?”

“Ooo... plan B...” she mocked, wagging her fingers.

Not a problem, Gamer replied with a laugh. Although, I gotta say, I never thought I’d live to see the day Dark Man needed my help to complete a contract.

DM scowled down at the woman watching him with narrowed eyes. “Yeah. Whatever. Just get it done, okay?”

Got it, Gamer said. And Dark Man? When you find out just what the hell is going on you’ll tell me, right?

“Yeah, sure,” he said, wondering just how the hell he could do that, and heard Gamer’s unit click off.

Finally, he gave his full attention to the woman who took turns driving him insane and haunting his nights. Her ass cheeks peeped from beneath her “dress.” Dress, right. More like a child’s tee shirt. Still, with her eyes snapping amber fire, she was magnificent. He felt his cock stir with interest. Dammit all, what was it about this woman that made him grow wood every fucking time he got near her?

Angel studied him, serenely rubbing her bruised wrist. “So what are you going to do? Beat me? Or maybe you could borrow one of Moto’s chainsaws and cut me apart. It’s what he’s expecting.”

DM grunted. She knew better. “Why do you keep showing up—No. Wrong question. Why sabotage Department hits? You say you need my help. For what? Try being precise for once.”

“The Department is working to bring down the Guild...”

He huffed out a breath. “Yeah. I know.” There was nothing wrong with his arithmetic. He could add and subtract. When it came to the attacks and the glitches, the foul ups and bad intel it all added up to the fact that the Department was colluding with another outfit to take out the Guild.

She paused, her deadpan expression flipping to surprise for a beat before closing up.

“But... you’re Guild-born.”

“And so are you.”

She stilled, her mouth thinning into a straight line. “So. You know, and you’re still working with them,” she said.

He lifted a shoulder, ignoring the implied accusation, his eyelids at half-mast as he studied her. He knew nothing about her alliances, her motivations, or her goals. Was he really going to trust her with his? Not fucking likely. Finally, he asked, “Why aren’t you?”

“Dear God, Morace! You were born into the Guild, were *Prințul*, the crown prince, in line to be king. *Why* would you turn your back on our people?”

Suddenly he wasn’t thinking so clearly. Fury raced like wild fire up his synapses. What made her think she was an expert on him and his life experiences? In two strides he had her shoulders in his fists, her back pressed against the wall, his face inches from hers.

“You got it wrong, Angel,” he snarled. “They turned their backs on me.”

She gazed at him for a beat then whispered, “You’re a fucking traitor.”

DM saw red. Literally. “Traitor? You know nothing about what’s between the Guild and me. You know nothing about what’s between *him* and me...”

“Him?” she prompted. “Damien?”

His fury flared higher. *Dammit, Morace. Keep your goddam mouth shut, can't you?* The last thing he needed to do was explain his actions to a representative of the group that had set him up. Open up to her? Fuck, no.

He growled his rage, his big hands circling her delicate neck. She gazed up at him, her arms dangling loose at her sides. “Go ahead. I was wrong to think I could trust you.”

His hands tightened a fraction and she lifted her chin in defiance. Daring him. Frustrated and furious, he ground his teeth. She was dangerous, an unknown commodity. He knew he should drag her back to the Department. But wait. Was that moisture on her cheeks? The strobe lights flashed, exposing the tears trailing down her face. He loosened his grip.

Muttering a curse, DM spun her around to face the wall. “Witch,” he growled low, lifting the dress’ hem and exposing her bare bottom. If he couldn’t kill her then goddammit, he’d fuck her. He kicked her feet apart and slid a hand down to cup her naked sex.

“No! Not like this!” she whispered, beginning to struggle as she realized his intent.

Pressing her shoulders against the wall, he squeezed her fragile wrists in one hand and leaned into her, pinning her. “You torment me day and night and now use the Guild to hunt me down. I think it’s time for you to feel what I feel. To see how it feels to get fucked from behind.”

“Please...”

He hardened himself against the fear, the desperation he heard in her voice. Ignoring her frenzied squirms, he palmed her slick pussy, parting the lips and running a thick finger over the small bud until her pleas became something altogether different. He felt her grow moist and thrust his middle finger deep inside her, heard her moan, and felt himself grow harder. He'd intended to teach her a lesson, to show her, to punish her. Now he wanted to pleasure her, because, dammit to hell, pleasing her increased his own pleasure.

“Oh my God, Morace! That feels...”

“Fucking incredible,” he whispered hoarsely. “You're so goddam tight... Jesus... so wet.”

She backed into him, her sweet, round ass open to his inspection, damp and ready for his cock. He unzipped, his slacks pooling around his ankles, and slipped on a condom with shaking hands. Then in one smooth motion, he was buried balls deep inside her. He groaned, her muscles gripping his length. Releasing her wrists, he wrapped an arm around her hips supporting her weight and holding her right where he needed her.

He thrust into her, withdrew, plunged again, shifting to lift one slim leg, positioning her, angling her hips for deeper penetration. God, she felt so good, so right. His Angel was tight, her muscles milking him. He felt himself edge nearer to release.

“That’s good. There. Right there...don’t stop,” she gasped as he varied his thrusts from short and fast to deep and slow. Sweat dripped from his forehead, spattering her back as her pussy squeezed him rhythmically with her climax.

A shadow stopped outside the alcove peering in through the sheer curtain, watching them. DM knew he should stop. Had to. But couldn’t. Her tight sheath suddenly contracted, gripping him so tightly he thrust once, twice, then exploded inside her. Panting, he held her close for a slow four count then pulled out, straightened, and zipped up.

“C’mon, Angel. Time to go,” he whispered, caressing her bare bottom before he tugged her dress down and turned her to face him. She seemed dazed, languid from her release.

“DM? Is that you? What the hell are you doing?” Elle asked just beyond the curtain.

Just what he didn’t need— a curious rookie. Worse, a curious rookie with a big mouth.

“Who is that?” Angel hissed, sweeping the wig’s blond curls from her face.

“I got this,” he replied. “Go.”

She cast a speculative glance at the figure beyond the curtain then rose up on her toes and pulled him down to meet her lips for a scorching kiss. He felt his cock stir. Damn, the woman was a sorceress.

She pulled back, and giving his cheek a pat said, “I’ll see you later.” Turning, she sashayed past Elle, her firm ass cheeks playing peekaboo with the hem of her dress as she disappeared into the crowd.

“Who the hell was that?” Elle asked, her brows meeting in a straight line. “Wait, wasn’t that the bitch that fouled the hit?” She spun around but Angel had vanished. “Were you *fucking* her?”

DM said nothing, his jaw flexing. What could he say? Just then gunfire sounded followed by screams.

“Time to go,” he said for the second time.

Grabbing Elle’s elbow, he ran out the back doors and into the night.