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Little Hellion,

love tames a wild heart



by

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CHAPTER ONE ...Nine years ago

*A*re you hurt, Honey?" Sabrina Miller asked anxiously. She was carrying an infant in a sling tied across her chest. She shifted the baby to reach inside the car to touch the driver's cheek again. She was glad Jocelyn was regaining consciousness. She worried when she stumbled out of the car and found Jocelyn slumped over the steering wheel. Another car had crashed into them. She was trying to pull the driver's door open.

Her lover, Jocelyn Porter, opened her eyes. She groaned and moved away from the steering wheel, then held on to her head with one hand. She drew a bloody hand back and looked at it, frowning. She looked confused. "What happened?" She stared at the blood on the steering column, but it didn't register that it was her blood. "Are you okay, Rina?" She frowned and struggled to move. "Oh God, the baby! Rina, is the baby all right!"

"Take it easy, Joycie. I'm fine and the baby's fine. See?" Sabrina held the little girl up where her lover could see her and then slipped the baby back into the sling.

The little girl yawned and then gurgled.

"Lean back against the seat, Honey. We tried opening the door, but it wouldn't budge. The bastard who hit us hopped out of his car and ran down the street! I called 911. They oughta be here soon." Sabrina looked around the nearly empty block and shivered. It was a cold night to be outside doing anything. That was why nobody was around. A man walking his dog asked if he could help with the door. They tried pulling the driver's door open, but it wouldn't budge. He said he lived in the next block. He promised to call 911 and bring some blankets for her and the baby. Sabrina didn't have the heart to tell him that she had already made the call on her cell, since he was being so generous with his help. Now, she just wished he'd hurry up with the blankets.

"Who's 'we'?" Jocelyn's voice sounded weak and strained.

"An old man walking his dog. I think that he saw the whole thing." Sabrina Miller studied her lover's face. She didn't look well at all. It was true that she was conscious and talking, but her color was ashen...almost gray. Sabrina didn't think that was from the cut on her head. She was afraid something else was going on where you couldn't see it. Goddamn it! Where was that fucking ambulance! When she called 911, she stressed that the driver was unconscious and her door wouldn't open. An operator told her that EMS and the fire department were on their way.

Jocelyn frowned in pain, then grabbed at the side of her hip as the tears rolled down her cheeks. She moaned. "Jesus, I hurt, Rina! God, it hurts so bad!" She reached out to grasp Sabrina's hand. She squeezed hard enough to leave imprints from her nails in the fleshy part of Sabrina's palm.

“It’s all right, Joycie. They’re coming. Just hold on, Baby.” Sabrina stroked her lover’s hand and found it cool to the touch. “You feel cold, Baby. Are you cold? Talk to me, Joycie, Honey!” She rubbed her lover’s hand vigorously, trying to put some of her warmth into the woman.

Jocelyn sighed loudly and closed her eyes. “I’m tired, Rina, so tired...I can’t keep...” She closed her eyes.

“Talk to me, Baby...Joycie, say something?” Sabrina heard the wail of the ambulance as it rushed down the block. A fire truck moving at a top rate of speed followed the ambulance. A police car entered the block from the opposite end and drove up the street the wrong way. It arrived at their car first.

An officer climbed out and quickly assessed the scene without speaking to Sabrina. He assumed that she was a bystander providing comfort to a seriously injured victim. “You’ll have to move along, Miss. We’ll handle it from here. My people are going to need room to work on the driver.”

Sabrina rubbed Jocelyn’s hand, then turned to face the officer with fire in her eyes. “Look, motherfucker, I’m the one who called you! We’ve been waiting forever, you slow-ass son of a bitch! Don’t give me shit about moving anywhere! Just get her out of the goddamned car and into the fucking ambulance!”

The police officer stared at the furious woman glaring at him. She was supporting her baby in the sling with one hand and holding the driver’s hand with her other hand. He noted what looked like a bruise on the right side of her face. Christ, she’d probably been in the car too! He decided that he didn’t want to take on her anger tonight. It was too cold out here and he was getting too old for this shit. He nodded as he faced her. “Yes, Ma’am, I’m sorry about that. How about we start over?” He signaled EMS to come to the woman in the car. “This victim’s unconscious. This here is her friend.” The officer nodded in Sabrina’s direction. “She was a passenger in the car. Right, Ma’am?”

Sabrina nodded.

“She can tell you what happened.” He glanced at Sabrina for confirmation.

Sabrina shrugged.

He gave a commiserating nod and then tried to pull on the driver’s side door. It didn’t budge. “Okay. I’ll go get the fire department.” He examined the door again with his flashlight. “It looks like they’re gonna have to cut the door to get your friend out, Miss.” He turned to leave and then turned back around to face Sabrina. “I’m real sorry we got off on the wrong foot, Miss. Would you and the baby like to sit in my patrol car? It’d be warmer than standing out here.”

Sabrina glanced down at her baby, then at Jocelyn’s ashen face, and sighed. “Thank you, but I have to stay. I wanna make sure that she’s all right...I...” Sabrina could feel the tears welling in the corner of her eyes. “We’ve been together forever. Is she going to be all right, Officer?”

The officer glanced at the EMS technician, who shrugged.

The technician arrived while they were arguing about Jocelyn. He slid into the passenger’s side to open Jocelyn’s blouse and listen for a heartbeat. It was faint and her pulse was thready, but at least she had one for now. The technician shrugged. He didn’t like her vital signs. She could go

sour in a minute. Besides, he needed to find out why her vitals were so poor. If he could get the door open, he could examine her better. “We need to get her to the hospital as quickly as possible.” The technician flashed a light down Jocelyn’s body and cursed quietly when he spotted the blood spurting out of her thigh. “Shit, we got a bleeder! Officer, get my partner over here fast. Tell him to bring pressure bandages and two liters of Ringers lactate, pronto! We gotta stop the bleeding from her thigh before she bleeds out.” He pressed on the area above where the jagged end of a thighbone broke through Jocelyn’s skin.

Jocelyn groaned in pain.

“Hey, you stop that! What the fuck do you think you’re doing? Can’t you see you’re hurting her?” Sabrina moved quickly over to the driver’s side. She leaned inside the car before the cop could turn back to stop her. She brushed the baby girl’s back against the door. The jarring contact woke the baby and she howled loudly.

“Benny, get over here now!” The officer spoke softly into his radio as he watched the woman stick her head into the car. This was what he feared would happen. The woman looked like she was on the verge of a meltdown when she screamed at him a minute ago. Now it was happening. He hoped he wouldn’t have to arrest her and put the baby in the social services system. He watched his partner ease their patrol car closer to the scene. Her move cordoned off the area.

She opened the trunk of the patrol car to dig out several blankets and then strode over to join her partner. “Miss, let me talk to you while the EMS guy does his job.”

Sabrina rubbed her baby’s back to stop her from crying, then leaned down to kiss her forehead. “It’s okay, Ellie, don’t cry. Mama J’s gonna be all right.”

Sabrina bit her lip nervously. She started to cry as she watched the medical technician apply pressure on Jocelyn’s thigh again. It was obvious that Jocelyn was in immense pain from whatever EMS was doing to her. She hugged the baby to her chest, but she couldn’t move from the spot where she stood. She had to see what they were doing to her woman. She wanted to make sure Jocelyn came out of this shit. She looked up when she felt sudden warmth around her shoulders. Strong hands smoothed the blanket down her back and pulled it tightly around her shoulders. A solid-looking female cop in uniform blocked Sabrina’s view of the car’s interior. She realized the cop had somehow eased her several feet away from their car. They were a foot away from the open door of the patrol car before she knew they’d moved.

The cop had taken off a glove to stroke Ellie’s little head. “Miss, why don’t you sit inside the car with me?” The cop reached over to turn Sabrina’s face toward the streetlight so that she could see the swollen area on the right side of Sabrina’s cheekbone. “It looks like you’re gonna need to see a doctor too. How about the baby; was she hurt in the accident, Miss?”

Sabrina shook her head no and then cleared her throat.

“We gotta check just to make sure.” The cop smiled gently at the baby. “She’s a pretty little one. How old is she, Miss?”

“She’ll be a year old in two weeks.”

The whirling and grinding sounds drew Sabrina’s attention toward their car. She tried to move around the cop to see what was going on in the car, but the cop turned sideways to block her view

again. She reached out and squeezed Sabrina's shoulder, then blew on her ungloved hand. "Those guys are good at what they do, Miss. Your friend is gonna be fine once they get her out and to the hospital. EMT Wallace is real good. So is his partner Isaac Nelson over there. Your friend should come out of this all right. Why don't you sit right here?" The police officer pointed to the front seat inside her patrol car for emphasis. "Your baby... what's her name?" The cop smiled at Sabrina.

Sabrina looked into kind, dark eyes. "It's Elena. We call her Ellie for short."

The cop chuckled Elena under her chin. "That's a mighty pretty name for a pretty little girl."

Elena gurgled and then smiled at the cop innocently.

"I'm Officer Benjamin. What's your name, Miss?" Yolanda Benjamin figured if she kept the woman talking about her baby, it might help take her mind off what was going on inside the car. Her elevated stress level implied the injured woman was more than a simple acquaintance. She assumed the woman in the car wasn't a relative either. She was certain the two women were lovers. It was too bad the woman in the car was severely injured. She'd seen a few accidents in her time on the job and she was sure the woman wasn't going to make it through the night.

Fred Gates, her partner, radioed her to get the technician's partner to the car immediately. He also asked her to help with the woman and her baby. She sighed quietly. Fred wasn't as sympathetic as he should be in situations like this. She'd bet he started out by bossing the woman around as soon as he reached the car. It was so like him to do that and then ask her to clean up the mess he made.

"Officer... Benjamin, I know you're trying to be nice and I appreciate it, but I need to find out what's going on with Jocelyn." Sabrina sidestepped the cop to peek around her wide back just as they were lifting Jocelyn's limp body onto the gurney. "Oh God, no!" Sabrina's head brushed against the officer's chest. She went still for a moment.

Yolanda Benjamin grabbed her shoulders to hold her upright. "Take it easy, Miss. They're just taking her to the ambulance." She could feel the woman trembling against her. "That's a good sign, Ma'am. Why don't you let me drive you to the hospital?"

Sabrina nodded against the officer's comforting chest and then sighed. "Okay," she muttered softly. "Oh God, what if Jocelyn dies?" She shivered against the warm chest. The officer rubbed her back until little Ellie made her presence known by howling.

The officer chuckled at the angry sound. She shifted her body away from Sabrina. "I think we're squashing little Miss Ellie. Get in the back, Ma'am, and I'll drive you to the hospital." Yolanda turned her head to speak into the shoulder radio. "Fred, I'm giving the passenger a ride to the hospital. 'Kay."

"Copy that, Benny. I'll hang out with New York City's bravest until CSU and the highway patrol guys get here. 'Kay."

"That's a copy, Fred." Yolanda wanted to tell him to secure the scene, but she didn't want her passenger to overhear her instructions. She thought it might upset the woman to know the police were looking at this as a homicide investigation, since her girlfriend hadn't died yet. "I'll stop by to pick you up in about an hour. I'll take the car out of commission. 'Kay."

"That's a copy, Benny."

Yolanda caught up with the ambulance at the light and honked. She announced over the patrol car's public-address system that she'd escort the ambulance to the hospital thirty blocks to the hospital. "How are we doing in the back seat, Miss?" She adjusted the rearview mirror so she could see the woman's face in it. She looked frightened and nervous. Yolanda felt she should say something to reassure her when the ambulance stopped suddenly and pulled off to park on the left side of the street. Shit, that wasn't good sign. It usually meant the medical technicians were trying to stabilize the patient. She prayed the woman's heart didn't stop.

"What's going on, Officer?" Sabrina asked with rising anxiety in her voice. "Why are we stopping? The light's green...." She turned around in time to see the ambulance had pulled over and stopped. "Oh God, Officer Benjamin! Please tell me she's not dead, is she?" She reached for the door handle.

"Take it easy, Miss, and stay in the car." Yolanda stared at the woman in her rearview mirror. She looked like she was barely holding her wits together. "They're probably adjusting the gurney to make your friend more comfortable. It's either that or they're adjusting her pain medication. Why don't I call them to make sure?" She prayed Nelson wouldn't say the woman had died as she punched in the numbers. "What's up, Nelson? Why did we stop? Her friend wants to know how she's doing."

Nelson sighed. "Her heart stopped, Benny. Wallace is trying to get it started again. I think she's lost too much blood, but you know how he is. He's not gonna let her die out here in the street. Besides, we can't call the time of death anyway. We have to take her to the hospital. The attending physician has to do it." Nelson peered through a small window in the stainless steel partition that separated him from the rear of the ambulance.

Wallace gave him a thumbs-up signal.

"Shit! I'll be a son of a bitch. It looks like Wallace got it started, Benny, but I don't think she's gonna make it." Nelson cleared his throat. "Don't tell her friend. Gates said she was acting a little crazy. I don't want two dead women on my hands tonight, Benny."

Officer Benjamin nodded. "I gotcha." She snapped the cell shut and looked into the mirror. "Your friend is gonna be all right. It's what I was saying before, Miss. They had to stop to make her comfortable. They gave her another shot to kill the pain in her leg. She's doing fine."

Sabrina nodded her approval and then hugged the baby against her chest. She kissed Ellie's forehead.

"How's the kid doing, Ma'am?"

"She's sleeping, thank you."

"And how's her mama doing?"

Sabrina sighed and then closed her eyes.

"Miss, talk to me." Yolanda adjusted the mirror at an angle so she could see Sabrina's face.

"I'm tired and cold." Sabrina neglected to add how worried she was about Jocelyn.

"Yeah, you've been through a lot tonight, Miss. It'll be over soon." The patrol car turned into the emergency entrance and parked at the end of the bay docking. Yolanda sighed as she opened the rear door and offered her hand. "Let's get you and little Ellie checked out by the triage nurses."

She guided the woman and her baby into the entrance to the triage unit just as they rushed Jocelyn into a cubicle.

Several doctors and nurses raced into the cubicle with a red serving cart on wheels, only the cart had medical supplies rather than lunchtime snacks. A nurse efficiently cut off the remains of Jocelyn's clothes. Another nurse slapped on a blood pressure cuff. She called the pressure readings to the doctors. Someone, Sabrina couldn't tell who, attached some electrodes to Jocelyn's chest while somebody else attached a new IV bag to a stand near her arm. She watched a nurse push a tube through a hole in the groin of her good leg. Jocelyn didn't move or even groan. Instead, she just lay still. A doctor leaned over her head, held her eyelids open, and flashed a light in her eyes. He said something to one of the nurses, but Sabrina was too far away to hear.

Sabrina couldn't tell if Jocelyn was breathing; she just knew she'd never seen her looking so pale...ashen. She wanted to rush over to her and say how sorry she was that they'd fought earlier. Suddenly, an alarm went off inside the cubicle. A nurse quickly pulled the curtains closed around Jocelyn's gurney and shut off visibility. Sabrina moved quickly over to the cubicle, or at least she tried to rush over, but the solid-looking cop reached out to stop her. The cop moved in quickly to stop her.

"You can't go inside the cubicle, Ma'am." Yolanda grabbed the shorter woman's arm and restrained her. "I don't want to hurt you, Lady, but I will," she whispered, holding Sabrina's arms stiffly at her sides. "Think of your little one, Miss. She's almost lost one mommy tonight." Yolanda sighed. "She'd lose you too, if I had to arrest you for interfering with the doctors. Why don't we sit here and wait for the doctors to tell us what's happening?"

Yolanda felt Sabrina relax. She loosened her grip to guide Sabrina to a chair in the triage unit. "I'll be back in a minute." She strode to the triage window. "Hi. I need somebody to look at the woman and her child sitting in the chair over there." Yolanda nodded in Sabrina's direction. "She was in the car accident with her friend."

The nurse frowned. "Which one, Officer? We've had two so far tonight."

"The woman with the busted thigh...we just brought her into ER."

"The one whose heart stopped in the field?"

Yolanda nodded. "Yeah, that's her. I didn't tell her friend about that. She looks ready to collapse as it is, Nurse."

The nurse nodded in Sabrina's direction. "What about the baby, Officer?"

"She seems fine, but I didn't examine her thoroughly."

"Are you going to stay around for a few minutes?"

Yolanda glanced at her watch and frowned. "I promised my partner that I'd..."

The nurse stared hard at Yolanda, then studied the woman staring steadily at the cubicle containing her lover. "Officer Benjamin, she formed a rapport with you. I'd appreciate it if you'd stay until we get her checked out." The nurse shoved a clipboard at Yolanda. "Get her to fill this out or you do it for her."

"But I have to..."

"Just do it, Officer! A badge and a gun don't give you special privileges around here unless

you're wounded, which you aren't. I expect you to bring my pen back too, Officer. It's getting too damn expensive for me to be replacing my pens all day long!"

Yolanda rolled her eyes and then shrugged. "Yes, Ma'am. I'll be sure to do that. Could you let me know about her friend's condition?"

The nurse nodded and smiled at Yolanda. "No problem, Officer."

Yolanda walked to Sabrina. She noticed one of the doctors squeezing Sabrina's shoulder as she sat looking stunned. She'd taken the baby out of the sling and sat the child in her lap.

The baby was a chubby little girl dressed in pink overalls, a white hooded sweatshirt, tiny high-top sneakers, and white socks. She was awake and watching everything that moved near her. She studied Yolanda as she drew closer. She held her hands out, then gurgled a greeting and smiled at her.

Yolanda's first instinct was to return little Ellie's engaging grin. She wanted to play with the baby until the doctor speaking with her mother glanced at her. He signaled with his eyes and a slight shake of his head indicated to her that the woman had just died.

"I'm so sorry for your loss, Ms. Miller. We did all we could for your...companion. She'd just lost too much blood from the wound in her thigh." The doctor cleared his throat. "Is there anybody that we should notify, Ms. Miller?"

Sabrina picked up Ellie, held her tightly against her chest, and then leaned her head into the baby. She closed her eyes. When she opened them, Yolanda could see the tears streaming down her face. "Can I see her, Doctor? I wanna say good-bye...I need to say..."

The doctor squeezed her shoulder again. "You should let us clean her up first, Ms. Miller."

"No...I need to do this right now, Doctor. Everybody's been keeping me away from her! I wanna see her ...please."

The doctor looked over her head at Yolanda. "Officer, could you escort her into the cubicle. It's the first..."

Yolanda sighed and held up a hand to stop his explanation. "Yeah, Doc, I know which one it is." She squatted down in front of Sabrina and stared into sad, empty, light-brown eyes. "Ms. Miller, let me carry Ellie for you." Yolanda noted how the little girl resembled her mother.

Sabrina handed the baby to the cop and sighed when she stood up.

Yolanda shifted the baby in her arms to a sturdy shoulder and then grasped Sabrina's elbow to guide her to the cubicle. "Take your time, Ms. Miller."