

CHASING SILVER

Are street smarts
and passion enough
to keep them together —
and alive?

JAMIE CRAIG

SNEAK PREVIEW!
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CHASING SILVER

Jamie Craig



**An Excerpt From
CHASING SILVER**

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Meet Jamie Craig

Jamie Craig is the sum of two wholes: erotica writers Pepper Espinoza and Vivien Dean. Pepper has been writing since she was a child, but began her professional writing career in 2005 and now writes full time as well as attending graduate school and working toward a Masters in British and American Literature. A former resident of Los Angeles, she now lives in Northern Utah. Vivien, the daughter of an author and sportswriter, also began writing at an early age, but eventually explored storytelling through acting and film production before coming back to prose. Vivien, her British husband and two children live in Northern California. You'll find more about Pepper and Vivien at www.jamie-craig.com.

Their creation, Remy Capra, is a tough gal from a rough future, but when she winds up back in the past—our present—she can't help but be nearly as vulnerable as we would be if thrust unprepared into the future. Her co-protagonist, Nathan Pierce, gave up anyone's rules but his own years before meeting Remy. He'd also given up on women. Remy, however, is not like any woman he's ever met.

Among their mutual problems: a great number of people seem to want one or both of them dead.

There are no supernatural beings in *Chasing Silver*, but along with the action and plenty of heat generated by Remy and Nathan, there is a magic coin: the Silver Maiden. We wish money really did talk; we'd like to hear the stories the Maiden could tell! But since it doesn't, we're lucky to have "Jamie Craig" sharing some of the Silver Maiden's secrets.

Chasing Silver will be published this fall by Juno Books and after reading this "sneak peek" we hope you'll want to read all of this exciting adventure. Our Web site at www.juno-books.com will keep you up to date on all our great titles.

Paula Guran
Editor, Juno Books

CHAPTER ONE

Sweat rolled down Nathan's neck as he gripped the gun with slick palms. He walked lightly, but each step against the solid iron grate beneath his feet echoed in the abandoned warehouse. The air didn't move. It clung to his body, heavy and stagnant, layered over a coating of fine dust that covered his exposed skin.

Nathan sensed Tian in the building. Somewhere ahead or above, the other man crept around the stacked boxes. Tightening his grip on the gun, Nathan strained to hear, every bit the predator. In the distance, a siren howled to life. Nearby, a dog barked in response.

Nathan slowed as he approached the end of the narrow corridor. Tian could be waiting behind the sharp corner, gun drawn. After three failed attempts to bring the man in, he had a healthy respect for Tian. But this time, Tian was coming out in cuffs or a black plastic bag; Nathan didn't have a preference.

He moved against the wall, sliding around the corner, his finger on the trigger, but an empty hallway greeted him. Taking a deep breath, he scanned the dark length of the corridor. Tiny, filthy windows lined the top of the wall, but they allowed only the faintest hint of dirty, orange light. He saw a flight of stairs at the edge of the hall, and a door in the middle, but otherwise, the concrete walls stretched on without a break.

Nathan moved quickly to the door, testing the unlocked handle before releasing it. Dark paper blocked the narrow rectangle window, obscuring his view of the room. Holding his breath, he pressed his ear against the door and listened for movement. He heard nothing except the steady pounding of his own heart.

He eased back, raising his gun in a ready position, and prepared to kick the door open. A mere second before he moved, a window shattered

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overhead, sending a cascade of glass to his feet. Nathan looked up in time to see something the size of his fist fly through the hole to land on the floor.

Nathan moved cautiously, forgetting about the door behind him. The object's shape took form as he closed the distance, his narrowed eyes picking out each small detail.

A grenade.

"That cocksucker."

Kicking the grenade down the hall, he ran back to throw the door open. He dived into the room without hesitation, slamming the door shut behind him. The explosion shook the building and, even behind the thick walls and steel door, he felt the fresh wave of heat rolling down the hall.

Staying low, Nathan scurried behind a large desk. He peeked over the edge to scan the layout of the large and cluttered room. Dust billowed around him as he moved, irritating his nose and clogging his throat. He pulled his shirt over his nose, stifling the urge to sneeze. The room reeked of abandonment and sweat. His own and somebody else's.

"Nathan," Tian called in a singsong voice. "Did you like my little present?"

"You can add attempted murder to your list of charges," Nathan responded

"Attempted murder? Did you take that shit personal? I was just playing around some." His words echoed off the walls, mocking Nathan.

Nathan risked looking over the desk again, trying to find the source of Tian's voice, but there were too many places to hide.

"Is Cesar waiting outside?" Nathan asked. "It's going to be a big night for me."

"You think I let you follow me because I wanted to be caught?"

Nathan pulled the knife from his boot and began creeping to the right. "Why did you let me follow you, then? To blow me up with a grenade?"

"Look, I've got shit to do. The cops don't care about me anymore, why are you all over my ass?"

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His voice was closer now, but Nathan couldn't risk taking the shot and exposing himself.

"Your ass is worth a lot of money," Nathan pointed out, thinking of his empty bank account. "Somebody still cares about it."

The slight sound of plastic scraping against concrete caught Nathan's attention. He froze, his eyes scanning the area. Light from a passing helicopter briefly flashed through the dirty windows, giving Nathan a glimpse of Tian's white shirt and black hair. He was only twenty feet away, crouched behind a desk and an overturned table. He was still facing the door.

Nathan smiled grimly. In a single motion, he straightened, flicking his wrist, and released the knife. It buried itself in Tian's right arm, causing him to scream as he whirled around to face Nathan, a gun drawn.

"Put it down," Nathan warned. "I've got this pointed at your head and I'm tired of fucking around."

Tian opened his mouth, but Nathan would never know what the other man intended to say. A series of minor explosions, like shots from an automatic weapon, went off just inches from his ear. Nathan spun around, prepared to shoot Tian's accomplice, but he didn't see anybody. The rapid explosions continued bursting around his head. His skull vibrated from the pressure of the sound and his ears throbbed.

Bombs. Must be bombs, Nathan thought as he moved for cover.

Tian began to run, clutching his stained arm.

"Stop!" Nathan shouted, firing after Tian, but his shots were wild. "Stop!"

A burst of blinding purple light sent Nathan reeling back, stumbling over the debris at his feet. Recovering his balance, he looked up, expecting to see the helicopter again, but the light wasn't coming from the high windows. It pulsed from the ceiling, from the walls, from the floor, matching his pounding heart. He tried to look away, protecting his eyes from the final explosion and cupping his ears.

The air crackled with electricity. With the light flaring to an ice blue, one last reverberation shattered the high windows, sending Nathan diving to safety. The glass showered around him, but as abruptly as it

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had arrived, the sudden brilliance vanished, leaving the warehouse in a blanket of darkness.

The ensuing silence was almost as painful as the explosions had been. Then, a soft groan echoed from the murk, followed by a muffled, “Fuck.”

Nathan stiffened. That wasn't Tian or Cesar. That was a woman.

He blinked several times, chasing the black dots from his eyes, before focusing on the almost shapeless form on the floor. He raised the gun, leveling it at her head as he approached. “Who are you?” he demanded. “A friend of Tian's? Are you armed?”

She didn't respond.

He stopped within ten feet of her and pulled back the hammer on the gun. “Put your hands up where I can see them.”

Slowly, the shadows shifted like oil on brackish water, something metallic catching a sliver of light to flash in the darkness. A pale cheek became visible as the woman lifted her head, but her hands remained out of sight. “This has gotta be Hell,” she said. Her voice was a husky alto, sharp with annoyance. “Is this supposed to be my punishment? You torture me for all eternity with bad movie clichés?”

“What the hell?” He circled her without looking away, keeping a safe distance as he approached the open door. A quick glance down the hall showed that Tian had high-tailed it out of there.

“Fuck. *Fuck.*” Nathan turned back to the strange woman, sudden fury overriding any confusion or shock at her mysterious appearance. He marched over to her, grabbed her arm and hauled her to her feet. “Who are you? Did you help him plan this?”

Her eyes widened, as if he'd surprised her by being tangible, but it lasted only a moment before she twisted in his grasp, her back pressing to his chest. A sharp elbow slammed into his diaphragm, followed by her booted heel stomping on his toe. In the fraction of a second Nathan loosened his grip, the woman wrenched free and bolted for the freedom of the open door.

“No, I don't think so,” Nathan muttered, running after her despite the red pain blossoming in his chest. Tian may have escaped, but this woman wasn't going to be so fortunate. He'd be damned before he let

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another one go tonight. He grasped her shoulder, using his momentum and weight to slam her into the wall.

“Who are you?” Nathan grunted. She tried to wrench away from him, but he took her wrist with his free hand and yanked it behind her back.

The only sound she made was a muttered curse of discomfort. He pulled her arm tighter until her rapid breathing was choked off by a pained cry.

“Remy,” she ground out. “You want to know my cup size, too, asshole?”

Nathan relaxed slightly. He didn’t know the name, and he knew all the names that surrounded Tian. “Maybe later,” he muttered, easing the pressure on her arm.

Something warm and sticky coated his stomach. Holstering his gun, he put his hand between their bodies, searching for the source of the blood. *Did something get me? Shrapnel, maybe.* But there weren’t any holes in his stomach.

Nathan stepped back without releasing her and pulled the back of her shirt up. It felt like it was made of tissue paper, like he could rip it right from her body if he wasn’t careful. Curious, he gave it a light tug, but it didn’t tear. He lost all interest in the odd material when he saw the deep cut stretching across the small of her back. The black blood glistened in the murky light. He brushed his fingers across her skin, pulling back quickly as she hissed. “You’re hurt. How did this happen?”

The contact made her squirm, her spine bowing away as if to get as far from him as possible. “Felt like a knife,” she admitted. “I didn’t bother to stop and ask for details. I was a little busy running for my life.”

Nathan examined the wound. It did look like a knife injury. He imagined the assailant, slashing at her . . . as she what? Where had she come from? Who was chasing her? How did she end up in the middle of a third story room of an abandoned warehouse? Maybe she was right and this was hell. Maybe he hadn’t moved fast enough when that grenade came through the window.

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Regardless, she was going to lose too much blood if they stood around talking about it all night.

“If somebody’s chasing you, I think you should get out of here. I know a back way out.”

She snorted. “That’s all well and good, except, you know, when you’ve got your face shoved into a wall and your arm twisted behind you.”

“Well, I hope you’ll forgive my caution around strange women who fall out of thin air and hit like a man three times their size,” Nathan said, annoyed. “I’m going to let go and step back. You don’t run, and I won’t slam you into another wall. Deal?”

Her mouth opened as if to argue, and then snapped shut. Instead, she gave him a curt nod in agreement.

Keeping one hand ready to grab his gun, Nathan let her go and stepped back, waiting to see if she would be true to her word. Remy immediately pulled her arm to the front of her body, stretching the muscles in her back in the opposite direction to loosen the constraint he’d forced upon them.

“Is that what happened?” she asked. When he didn’t answer right away, she glanced back, her face shadowed with unanswered questions. “I fell out of thin air?”

Nathan shrugged. “All I know is that one minute I was here ready to take that fucker down, and the next, he’s flown the coop, and you’re bleeding all over the floor. Might as well been out of thin air.” He narrowed his eyes. “You mean you don’t know what happened? How you got here?”

“I don’t even know where *here* is.” As she swung her gaze around the warehouse, her features passed in and out of the stray light filtering through the shattered windows. He caught sight of her full, sensual mouth and dark eyes glittering with intelligence before the murk swallowed her up again. “I’m going to go out on a limb and say this isn’t DC.”

“No. Los Angeles. Culver City, technically.” He moved to take her elbow, but she stepped back, shifting to a defensive position. Nathan put up his hands, trying to flash a soothing, I’m-just-here-to-help,

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smile. "Sorry. There's a lot of debris in the hallway. There's a flight of stairs to the right. We're going to go up to the next floor, then take the back stairwell out."

Her eyes jumped back and forth between him and the doorway. With a feral grace, Remy edged along the wall toward the exit, only turning her back to him once she stepped into the corridor. Even then, the frequent glances over her shoulder betrayed her anxiety.

"You've got the trump hand," she said as she kicked an empty box out of her way. "I don't even know your name."

"Nathan."

He watched Remy as she walked, noting that she held herself straight, hiding any signs of weakness. But he knew she was in pain. She moved a little too stiffly, a little too hesitantly.

"Here," he said, fishing the pen light out of his jacket pocket and handing it to her.

Their fingers brushed against each other as she took the light from him, her skin surprisingly cool in the swelter of the warehouse. "Thanks," she murmured.

The added illumination sped their steps through the hall and up to the next level. As they began to descend the back stairwell out of the building, though, Nathan saw the whiteness of her knuckles where she gripped the handrail. She was fighting to stay upright, but refusing to ask for help. A flicker of respect began to brew in his gut.

He closed the distance between them, but didn't make any move to touch her. She looked like she was ready to jump out of her skin, and Nathan wasn't interested in catching her fist with his nose. Halfway down the stairs, he detected a slight tremble in her legs, and her foot slipped only two steps later. Nathan reacted without thinking, wrapping his arm around her chest and pulling her back against him.

She tensed, like she wanted to fight him. "Calm down," he said softly. "I'm not going to hurt you."

The beam from the penlight wavered along the far concrete wall. "So says the guy who had the hardware on me a few minutes ago," Remy replied, matching his subdued tone. "Give me one good reason to believe you."

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“Because if I wanted you dead,” Nathan pointed out, his grip on her tightening, “I would have shot you a few minutes ago when I had my gun on you. But I didn’t. Now you’re bleeding, confused, possibly insane, and in a strange place. Do you want my help?”

“No,” came the automatic response. She sighed and sagged against him. When she spoke again, there was a resignation in her voice that made him wonder why she found it so difficult to accept aid. “But I’ll take it anyway.”

“Please,” he muttered, half-carrying her down the remaining stairs. “Stop with the gratitude. You’re making me blush.”

Nathan took a deep breath as they stepped out of the building, relieved for the fresh air that didn’t reek of mildew and dry dust. The back of his throat burned, and at that moment, he would kill for a tall, cold pint of beer.

“I suppose I could drop you off at the hospital,” he said.

“No, no hospitals.” Tensing as if to take flight again, Remy shifted wary eyes to his. “I don’t trust doctors.”

Nathan sighed. Out of the dark and blistering hot warehouse, he had enough light and inclination to study her. He had caught a glimpse of her beauty before, but now he felt like she had sucker-punched him. She had used her looks like a hidden weapon, and it wasn’t fair. Dark, round eyes, full lips, high breasts, and long, black hair, not to mention her nice ass, which had been tight yet soft against his body. Her clothes accentuated each of her curves, the odd material hugging her body. Her collar wasn’t high enough to cover her throat, and the pale skin stood out starkly against the tightly fitted black shirt. Her fingers were long and elegant in what could have been leather gloves, but they didn’t look quite right—they were too thin, like they were painted on. The cut of her pants drew his eyes down her shapely legs to her boots. He didn’t know much about fashion, but these looked like the type of shoes one wore for practical purposes, like they were made for comfort and speed, not to impress anybody, but, like her gloves, they seemed to fit like a second skin.

The sight of her made his brain itch, like there was something he should see, something he should know about her. Like a forgotten

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name, or a song lyric only half-remembered, the feeling danced at the edge of his mind and then was gone.

He absolutely should drop her off at the hospital.

“What do you suggest then?”

It was her turn for a visual assessment, thick lashes dropping as she swept her gaze down his long, lean form. By the time she dragged her eyes back to his again, there was a calculating gleam in the brown depths. “You get me a first aid kit, and I’ll sandbag it myself.”

Nathan frowned, perplexed. *This one is trouble. Forget the hospital, I should take her to the police.* “I can patch you up at my place,” he conceded. “My car’s about a block away.” Nathan hoped it was a block away, and in one piece. “Let’s go.”

CHAPTER TWO

Experience was screaming at her to make a break for it.

Reality had different ideas.

Her back stung from the knife wound, and Remy was pretty sure the fall she'd taken from the second-story window of the Henryk mansion had sprained her wrist. Somewhere on the back of her left thigh she felt the tickle of blood seeping from another injury, while her clothing hid other scrapes and bruises, all courtesy of trying to get the fuck out of Dodge before Kirsten and her brute squad managed to make a blow stick. If this Nathan had any sandbag serum, at least she'd be able to stop the bleeding long enough to start healing. She wouldn't get far if she was leaving a trail of blood crumbs behind her.

Which led to the absolutely cracked idea that she could, in any way, be in Los Angeles. How the hell was it possible to get all the way across the country in seconds? The answer was easy.

It wasn't.

She stole a glance at the man walking at her side. Though hidden by the dark shadow of stubble, his jaw was tense, lips thin from how tightly he held his mouth. A raw power emanated with every movement, from the controlled swing of his arm to the sure stride of his step, and while his anger inside the warehouse had been real, the grim silence surrounding him now was worse. She knew how to deal with dogfights; that was how she'd lived her whole life, after all. Strong and silent left her floundering.

There would be no more fighting for her right now, though. She had felt the taut, lean muscles of his arms when he'd pinned her to the wall. This Nathan might like his guns, but he had helped her down the stairs as if she weighed nothing. If she was forced into hand-to-hand, Remy had no doubt she would end up the loser.

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Her gaze flickered over him again, this time lingering on his long legs and slim hips. The jeans he wore looked heavy, the denim thick and unwieldy compared to what she was familiar with, but the old-fashioned detailing made it work anyway. Sweat and dust from his scuffles at the warehouse molded them to his body, leaving very little to her very active imagination. She licked her lips. Maybe she wasn't up to a fight, but anything else was fair game.

He walked with purpose, leading her down a block and around a corner before stepping off the curb and popping the trunk of a parked car. Remy came to an abrupt halt, eyes going wide at the sight of the classic Mustang. She had never seen one on the streets before. This one even had an exhaust pipe, which meant he'd stuck with the original gas engine. No tags on the retro plate, though. She bit back a smile. Someone obviously didn't care about ridiculous bureaucracy. One more reason to follow her gut and trust this guy.

"This is yours?" she blurted.

Nathan didn't look up as he put his gun in the trunk and reached for a ratty old blanket. "I've got the title to prove it," he said, thrusting the blanket into her arms. "Sit on that. I don't want blood all over my car."

Her eyes were still fixed to the Mustang's sleek lines as she walked to the passenger door. Maybe he'd inherited it or something. A car like this had to cost a fortune, and she had this guy pegged as some kind of PI or cop or something. No way could he pony up for it on his own.

It took staring at the old-fashioned handle for a few seconds to figure out how to open it. By the time she did, Nathan was already behind the wheel, fingers tapping impatiently as he waited for her to get in.

"Not bad, Nate," she said, settling against the blanket. The grin she'd tried to contain on the sidewalk escaped when she saw the vintage radio. Unable to resist, Remy reached to fiddle with the dials, watching the indicator slide back and forth behind the tiny numbers in amused fascination. "Not bad at all."

"Nathan. My name is Nathan," he said as he shifted into first gear.

Remy smiled. His English accent, which was already dead sexy, thickened when he was annoyed.

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She saw him look at the radio as she pushed through static and fuzzy stations playing what sounded like mariachi bands, but he didn't say anything about it. *And you can see Arcade Fire on August 18th as Kay-rock's special guest. Just call 1-800 . . .* The DJ's voice blasted in the car.

"Turn that down," Nathan muttered, reaching for the dial.

Remy let him adjust the volume on the radio, turning it so low that the DJ's voice was barely audible. There was no point in arguing; she'd never been a fan of oldies anyway.

It gave her the perfect opportunity to satisfy her need to know. "So what kind of work do you do that lets you have a car like this?"

Pulling onto the deserted street, he glanced at her with what appeared to be confusion mingled with curiosity. "What do you mean, a car like this?"

His question made her pause. Nathan had struck her as intelligent, but if he didn't know what his car was worth, maybe she needed to re-evaluate that assessment. "It's a classic," she said. "And it looks like aces. You'd never see anything like this on the streets back in DC."

"I'd hardly call this a classic, Remy. I picked this one up for a few grand and slapped a new coat of paint on it. She doesn't look too bad though, does she?" The question was asked with just a hint of a smile.

Her fingers stroked the smooth surface of the dash. "She looks amazing." No reason to wonder about his street smarts. If he negotiated a car like this for just a few thousand, there was nothing wrong with his brain.

"So where's your place?" she asked once the car was moving again.

Nathan didn't answer until he eased onto the abandoned freeway. "Glendale. It's only a few more miles. This time of night, it won't be more than ten minutes." He looked at her out of the corner of his eye. "How is your back? Are you still bleeding?"

Gingerly, Remy peeled off her gloves before leaning forward to slip a hand beneath her shirt. Her fingers came away sticky, but the blood felt too cool to be fresh. "Looks like it's slowing down."

She looked around for some kind of wipe-ee or tissue to use to clean her fingers off. Nothing was obvious, but just as she was about to swipe them across her already-ruined pants, Nathan spoke up.

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“There are some napkins in the glove box. A few of them probably aren’t covered in ketchup.”

Glove box. It took her a moment to realize what he was referring to, and she leaned forward to examine the round knob. Taking a risk, she twisted it and was pleased when it popped open, revealing a dark compartment crammed full of papers and junk. Something small and rectangular tumbled to the floor, but she was too absorbed by the other contents to pay much attention to it. There were napkins right on top, while underneath was what looked like the original owner’s manual for the Mustang and a small square piece of stiff paper with facts about Nathan and the car typed across it. But he didn’t actually have any gloves in it.

Thoughtfully, she grabbed a napkin and closed the compartment. Maybe Nathan was a historian of some sort, or one of those people who did re-enactments for a price. It would explain the obsessive detail.

“Who got you?” he asked softly.

Wiping the blood off her fingers, she settled back into her seat, looking out her window to watch the lights of the city streak past in candied-colored stripes. He sounded concerned; that knocked her for a loop. The last time anybody had asked about her health and meant it was before Kirsten’s strike at the safe house. Remy didn’t want—or need—to be reminded that she was all on her own. Not right now. There were too many other problems to consider first.

Like how in hell she was going to tell a guy she didn’t know from jack that the woman who had sliced her back open was a cop.

The silence stretched. “There was a fight,” she finally said. “I tried to run, and this bitch who’s been after me didn’t like that idea.”

Nathan didn’t reply for several seconds. She risked a glance at him, but he was staring straight ahead. The car slowed and drifted to the right, the next exit looming. They rolled down the ramp, and he pulled into the parking area of a brightly lit shop. Its illuminated sign showed a red numeral “7” with the word “eleven”, in green, superimposed across it.

“And then you fell through a hole in the time-space continuum and ended up on the other side of the country?” he asked dryly, pulling the keys from the ignition. “I’m going to get some food. Are you hungry?”

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The shift in attitude left her gawping at him. Where the hell was the sarcasm coming from? But his face was unreadable, eyes dark pools shadowed from the brilliance of the nearby storefront.

Nathan repeated the question, enunciating clearly as if he was speaking to a child.

Something inside her snapped. "I'm not bleeding out my ears," she said. "I heard you the first time."

Nathan sighed, looking at her before saying, "Fine, I'll just grab you some chips or something." He opened the door and made it two steps away before pausing and circling back. Opening the passenger door, he announced, "You're coming in, too. I don't know you well enough to trust you with my car."

Finally, a response that made sense. Climbing out, Remy followed him into the store, her stomach rumbling at the scent of the warming hot dogs.

When he glanced at her with a raised brow, his mouth curving into an amused smile, she flushed in embarrassment. "Maybe I'm a little hungry."

Nathan went to a drink dispenser and filled a huge plastic cup with "Big Gulp" emblazoned on it with liquid. He didn't seem interested in what she was doing, but she knew he was listening to every step she took, keeping track of her as she moved through the small store. Once he had his drink, he grabbed some packaged sandwiches from the nearby cooler, as well as a few flat boxes marked with an Italian name and "pizza" and two cylindrical containers that said "Ben and Jerry's."

"Grab something if you want it," he threw over his shoulder as he headed for the counter. When she didn't react, he paused and added, "What are you gawking at?"

Remy barely heard his question. Her attention had been riveted by a newspaper stand next to the cooler, bypassing headlines about strife in the Middle East to stare at the way the overhead vents made the edges of the papers flutter in the minute breeze.

Who in the world still printed the news?

As if hypnotized, she skimmed a fingertip across the bold type, glancing down afterward to see a faint black smudge on her skin where

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she'd touched it. Nobody used paper any more; it had been outdated for decades. So why was there rack after rack of them? Supposedly, California was one of the most eco-conscious states in the country.

That was when she noticed the tiny date emblazoned along the upper corners.

That can't be right.

Followed almost instantly by . . .

What the fuck did I fall into this time?

Nathan dumped his food on the counter and turned back to her. "What? What are you looking at?" he asked, annoyed.

When she didn't look up, he walked over to her and took her elbow. The door chimed as a new customer arrived, and Nathan pulled on her arm, but she didn't move. He tried again, but she smacked his hand away, her attention never shifting from the newspapers.

Nathan grabbed her, his grip tighter this time, and pulled her against him. "Look," he said under his breath, "you're going to start attracting attention. Your back is covered in blood and you look like you're on something. I don't want to deal with the police and I'm sure you don't. So get your ass in gear."

Her heart was already hammering inside her chest, but the hot stream of his words along her neck made her skin stipple in goose bumps. Letting him drag her back to the front of the store, Remy noticed for the first time the costs of the items he had picked up, how he pulled cash from his worn leather wallet to pay for everything instead of offering a debit card. A small box of rolled horoscopes near the register proclaimed the same year that had been on the papers, and the stereo perched on a shelf behind the aging cashier had a cassette deck in the middle of its display. A cassette deck. She had only ever seen one of those in the movies.

She still hadn't said a word by the time they stepped back out into the cool night air, but when Nathan tried to lead her to the car, Remy yanked herself away from his grasp to go fumbling into her back pocket.

The tiny piece of plastic she extracted was wet with blood that had seeped from her wound. Wiping away a smudge in the corner, she felt

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the air rush from her lungs as she stared at the date, achingly familiar, decades away from what the papers and rags inside had declared. It was the year she had been born.

2057.

If she believed the headlines, she wouldn't even exist for almost fifty years.

How was that possible?

The sound of the slamming door startled Remy into lifting her head. Nathan stuck his hand out the window and waved. "I'm leaving now."

As if to emphasize his words, the Mustang's powerful engine flared to life. She took a stumbling step forward, but that wasn't fast enough for Nathan. The car rolled beside her, and he leaned over the passenger seat to push the door open. "What the fuck is wrong with you? Get in the car."

As soon as she was seated, Remy thrust her ID into his face. "Tell me what that says," she demanded. There was a note of panic creeping into her voice, but she couldn't hold it back any longer. "Tell me I'm not losing my fucking mind."

Nathan plucked the ID from her fingers and held it up to the light. "Remy Capra. Classification: C. Date of birth . . ." He looked at her with narrowed eyes. "What is this? A fake ID?" He snorted. "You should get your money back."

She snatched it back. Her fingers were trembling. "It's not fake. It's . . ."

But she didn't know what it was. The situation, that is. It wasn't possible for her to be sitting in front of a Eleven-Seven store with a guy fifty years before she had even been born.

On the other side of the country.

Fuck. What the hell did I grab?

Her hand plunged back into her pockets, pulling out the coins she had stolen from the Henryk collection. Under the orange lights of the convenience store, they gleamed back at her, silver and gold reminders of the life she'd ran away from. She had no idea what any of them were; all Remy knew was that they were valuable and Kirsten Henryk protected them as fiercely as she fought. That had been the only reason

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Remy needed to take them. Even now, though, they offered no clue as to their purpose, not even a date to prove that she wasn't crazy.

But they were real. As real as the newspapers inside. And somehow, some way, they had helped her escape.

She glanced over at Nathan. He was still regarding her with the same intense gaze he'd leveled at her earlier, waiting for some kind of explanation. What was she supposed to say? He was going to think she was crazy, no matter how she painted it.

Then it dawned on her. She was free. This was her chance to get away from her old existence and start over. There would be no cops coming after her, no psycho bitches who only saw black or white. There wouldn't be family, but hell, Kirsten had slaughtered that possibility when she attacked the safe house. For Remy, this was the break of a lifetime.

She smoothed her composure, shedding the anxiety that had crippled her inside for the swagger she was more accustomed to wearing. "Are we just going to sit here all night?" She sounded normal again. Thank god.

"No, my ice cream is melting," he said under his breath as he eased off the brake and rolled out of the parking lot.

At the next red light, he spared a glance at her. "Fake ID. Precious coins. Maybe I was right about your desire to avoid the cops, huh?"

Remy refused to back down. "I seem to remember hearing somebody tell me to get my ass in gear because he didn't want to deal with the cops, either." As she slipped the coins back into her pocket, it occurred to her that she couldn't afford to lose the lone ally she had just yet. Nathan could still tow her off to the funny farm if he wanted. "So . . . are we good?" she asked carefully.

"I didn't want to deal with the cops because I am armed and you are injured, and they'd draw certain conclusions." The streets darkened as they made their way further from the freeway and deeper into the city, winding down side streets and rolling through empty intersections without stopping. "Yeah, we're good. Your ID is almost cartoonish, which makes me think you're no criminal mastermind. And what do I care about a handful of coins?"

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He turned into a gated driveway, except the gate was broken and all the lights were dark.

He led her up a sidewalk path to a narrow set of concrete stairs. Walking honed her attention back on her injuries, but while it took every ounce of her strength, Remy made it to the second floor without stumbling. She even refrained from leaning against the wall when he paused to unlock a door. It wouldn't last long, though. Her back was starting to spasm and her wrist to ache. Remy hoped that he wouldn't waste any time in getting her fixed up.

Nathan turned on the small apartment's single overhead lamp and gestured towards the vintage couch—the only piece of furniture in the room. There was a small clunky monitor on a stand in the corner, but she didn't see a keyboard near it; maybe it was rolled up out of sight. A bookshelf dominated the wall, stretching from the floor to the ceiling. Antique books, the sort she used to read in the detention center's library, lined the top three shelves. Glossy-covered magazines were stacked haphazardly on the next shelf, and her fingers itched to touch them, to see if they were as smooth as they looked. Beneath that were rows of thin, multi-colored boxes. They were too small to be more books. She supposed they could have been computer software of some sort, but they were larger than most computers, even the cheap ones. The other walls were bare, the floor uncluttered, and the kitchen counter was empty of everything except what could have been a microwave, except it was enormous. A short hallway led to what must be the bathroom and bedroom, and he disappeared into the dark corridor after telling her to make herself comfortable.

When he returned, he carried a small plastic box, white with a red cross on the top, a large T-shirt, and a bottle of hydrogen peroxide. Noticing she still stood in the middle of the room, Nathan nodded towards the couch again. "Lay down and take off your shirt."

Remy gave him her best smirk. "Kind of hard to get the shirt off once I'm already down," she said. Grabbing the hem, she whipped it over her head, ignoring the twinges in her back from stretching. It left her in cargoes and a tiny black bra that barely covered her nipples. By the time she tossed the shirt aside, Nathan's eyes were no longer on her face.

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She took her time crossing to the couch, enjoying the heavy weight of his gaze on her body. This was better. A known situation. Remy had had to spend too much of her life using her looks as a weapon not to know when a man found her attractive.

As she stretched out on her stomach, Nathan detoured into the kitchen for a bowl of hot water. Kneeling beside the couch when he returned, he set to work, gently wiping the blood from her skin. His fingers were light and skilled, as though he regularly cleaned and bandaged injured damsels in distress. But occasionally, his hands strayed, brushing against skin she knew couldn't be injured or stained with blood.

"This might sting a little," he said as he drenched a cotton ball with the hydrogen peroxide. He touched the edge of the injury lightly, then rubbed it across the length of the cut without further warning.

A little was an understatement. With a sharp hiss of breath, Remy buried her face in the pillow she'd grabbed, steeling herself against the deliberate swabs across the wound. To his credit, Nathan worked quickly, so that by the time she was starting to relax again, he was done.

She lifted her head and met his concerned gaze. The brilliance of his blue eyes made her mouth go dry, and for a second, she forgot what she was going to say. All that seemed to compute was, God, he's gorgeous.

Nathan nodded before leaning over to blow across her burning skin. Goose bumps erupted across her back, and the base of her spine tingled. If Nathan noticed her reaction, he didn't give any indication as he placed folded pieces of gauze over the cut.

"I think you're going to survive," he informed her as he tore a piece of the white tape from the roll. "But it was touch and go there for awhile."

Again, he worked efficiently to bandage her, but she felt his fingers drifting, his skin rough against her smooth back.

"Do you have any clotters to stop the bleeding?"

"I've got some painkillers," He said slowly.

His careful tone and the slight draw of his brows told Remy that what might be street common in her time wasn't quite as universal

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now. She made a mental note. No blood clotters. That meant being a little more cautious than she would normally.

“Painkillers are great.”

“Where else are you hurt?” He asked.

“My leg’s been bleeding since the warehouse,” she said automatically. “But since that means taking off my pants . . .”

She stopped, rolling onto her side to face him. Truth be told, she was ready to strip out of the rest of her clothes right then. His fingertips had scalded everywhere they’d touched, and her pussy was slick and ready, clenching every few seconds in anticipation of being fucked. But Remy Capra had never had to ask a man for sex and she sure as hell wasn’t going to start now, even when that man looked like Nathan. If he ignored her innuendo, she’d have her answer. Maybe it was even better that way. But if he didn’t . . .

She swallowed, wetting her dry throat, and waited for his response.

Hesitating for only a moment, Nathan looked at her with unwavering dark eyes before nodding. His gaze was drawn to her hands as she unzipped her cargo pants to reveal the black outline of her briefs on her smooth, white thighs. He hooked his fingers around the waistband, pulling the stiff cloth down to her knees, his knuckles skimming over her skin. His impassive mask had slipped a bit, and now unmistakable hunger marked his face.

“Turn on your stomach,” he instructed hoarsely. Once she was facing the ugly green of the couch again, he began washing the blood away from the scrape. “It’s not that bad,” he added, his words even. “You’re missing a bit of skin, but it’ll be fine.”

His fingertips danced across her thigh, first one side, then the other. Every fiery contact went straight to her pussy, but not once did he stray from attending her wounds. Remy had to bite the inside of her cheek to keep from clenching muscles he would be able to see. If he could play it cool, so could she.

“So . . .” She glanced back over her shoulder to look at him, her hair slipping away to expose bare skin. “. . . You never told me what it is you do.”

“I’m a bounty hunter.”

In spite of the heat pouring off his fingers, everything inside Remy froze.

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A bounty hunter. Someone who didn't give a shit one way or another about anybody but himself. Someone who took money to go after people like her.

Someone Kirsten could buy without blinking an eye.

She almost fell off the couch as she scrambled for her clothes, her pants slipping through her suddenly clumsy fingers as she tried to put as much distance between her and Nathan as possible. "I can't believe I fucking fell for it," she muttered, trying to find the bottom of her shirt in order to get it back on.

Nathan grabbed her wrist before she could get far, but he didn't pull himself to his feet. His firm grip didn't give her a lot of options, but she still struggled to pull away. "Fell for what? Is this about those coins? I already told you I don't really care."

It was on the tip of her tongue to make a retort about how she was sure a wad of cash might change his mind about that, but Remy stopped herself in time. The less he knew about her, the safer she was from getting turned in. And the truth of the matter was, he already knew she was on the run. If he wanted to use that to his advantage, he'd had plenty of chances long before bringing her to his apartment.

Plus, Kirsten wasn't here. If Remy really had traveled back in time like she thought, there was nobody alive who cared one way or another about her.

Her gaze flickered to the strong fingers wrapped her wrist. Maybe Nathan didn't care, but he wasn't indifferent to her either. He was tending to her injuries. He'd insisted on taking care of them.

And he was still holding her.

"If you don't care," she asked, her voice calmer than she expected, "then why are you helping me?"

Nathan tilted his head, regarding her with clear eyes for a long beat before he finally answered. "Because you needed my help."

His direct response took her by surprise, and her mouth twitched in amusement. "Your Mustang's not exactly white."

Nathan shrugged. "Neither's my hat. But I couldn't have left you alone in that district. Tian might not have been interested, but Cesar would have started circling like any predator that smells blood. Speaking of blood." He looked pointedly at her thigh. "Are you going to let me finish?"

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Remy glanced down at the cut only half-cleaned off and tossed her clothes aside. Stretching back onto the couch, she propped her upper body up on her elbows as soon as Nathan let her go in order to watch him work. “You’ve got good hands,” she commented.

He glanced at her briefly, something like a smile in his eyes, before diverting his attention back to her leg. “Thanks. I’ve had years of practice.”

The antiseptic stung just as much on her leg as it had on her back, but Remy refused to look away this time, too absorbed in the strong sculpture of his face and the almost caressing dance of his fingers to break the spell. “Guess that means I’m holding aces then. I don’t suppose you take personal requests?”

The corner of his mouth lifted as he tossed the cotton ball aside. “It depends,” he said, digging through the white box for more bandages and a small, yellow tube. “There is a basic standard of service I aspire to, but I do aim to please.”

“Maybe you should tell me what to expect then,” Remy dared. “Cause the rate you’re going, a girl could think she could spend the night if she wanted.”

“Do you want to spend the night?”

She decided to be honest. “I don’t have anyplace else to go.”

Nathan spread a clear gel over the cut and reached for a bandage. “You know, that’s actually not the worst excuse a girl has used to stay at my place.”

“Should’ve known a guy like you would have ’em lined up around the block. Which means I’m even luckier for falling into your lap like this.” It was impossible to resist a quick glance at his crotch, and her mouth went dry at the clear outline of his cock. “A very nice lap.”

Nathan snorted. “I wouldn’t say lining up around the block. In fact . . .” He stopped, offered her a quick smile, and refocused on his task. “But you are welcome to stay tonight. Maybe after some sleep, we’ll be able to figure out what the hell is going on.”

“Thanks.” It was a relief to have one less thing to worry about. And maybe the light of day would reveal everything to be either a figment of her imagination or give her new perspective on this whole time travel

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business. She waited until he'd reverted his attention back to the last of the bandages before adding, "Something tells me I'm either not going to sleep much, or I'm going to have the dreams of the century. One of the two."

"For what it's worth, I doubt I'll be getting much sleep myself," Nathan muttered.

He pressed the last piece of tape down along the edge of the bandage, his fingers straying to the bordering skin. Remy suppressed the shiver his touch elicited, but hiding her soft gasp was unavoidable.

"Is it tender?" He asked, not pulling his fingers away.

She swallowed. "That's one word for it."

Nathan lingered for another moment before breaking the contact. "They weren't too deep. You should feel better in the morning." The words sounded forced, like it was taking some great effort for him to speak.

Without the excuse of first aid, she felt more than a little exposed lying on the couch in front of him. Normally, she had no problem with her sexuality, but he'd done nothing more than remain friendly with her, maybe flirt a little back when she'd deliberately baited him. He was being a gentleman, and no matter how attracted she was to Nathan, she wasn't entirely sure what she was supposed to do with that.

"What about you?" she asked. Swinging her legs over, she sat up on the edge of the couch, reaching out at the same time to swipe her thumb across a cut on his temple. "You're not the only one with a bedside manner, you know."

Nathan touched his forehead and pushed himself to his feet. "I'm fine," he said softly, "thank you." After a moment of hesitation, he leaned forward and cupped her cheek. He brushed his thumb across her mouth before dropping his head and touching her lips with his.

Her face had been flamed ever since Nathan's first touch, but now, the mere contact of his fingers left her scorched, all the air sucked from her lungs as he surprised her with the kiss. It wasn't hungry, and it wasn't aggressive, and he didn't even part his lips to pursue deepening the caress. But it still charged through her like a jolt of electricity, his hot breath washing over her cheek as his mouth worked along hers.

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It still left rampant images of how his sweaty body would feel against hers, how long and hard he would be and how pliant she could mold around him. It still brought a whimper to the back of her throat.

The moment she reached to satisfy even one of her racing wants, though, Nathan pulled away. His breathing was ragged, his pupils blown with desire, and Remy was transfixed by the sight of his tongue finally darting out to lick across his lower lip, as if chasing the taste of her.

“You win,” she murmured. “Your bedside manner is definitely better than mine.”

Nathan backed away from the couch and gestured towards the plastic bag. “You can help yourself, if you’re hungry. Get some rest.” Each word carried him further away, until he was nearly out of the room entirely.

Her mouth slanted into a soft smile before she leaned over to retrieve the T-shirt he’d left for her to sleep in. “I think that might actually happen now. Thanks. Again.” By the time she’d pulled the shirt over her head, he was gone.

CHAPTER THREE

Nathan awkwardly stripped off his clothes, desperate to get out of the tight, sweat-soaked pants. His mind was a mess of incoherent thoughts and vivid images of Remy's nearly naked, ready, willing, body, and he could still taste her soft lips, still smell her sweat, her hair.

Nathan stepped into the shower, welcoming the hot frenzy of water against his skin. He basked under the spray for a moment before reaching for the soap with shaking hands, working up a desperate lather before allowing the bar to slip from his fingers to the floor. Nathan ran his hands over his chest, the back of his neck, his arms, and his thighs before finally wrapping his slick fingers around his erection, with a sigh of mingled relief and regret.

What was he doing jacking off in the shower? What the fuck was he doing? She wanted him. She wanted him, and he wanted to do a hell of a lot more than just kiss her. Nathan moaned. What was keeping him in the bathroom when every cell in his body was calling for hers?

From the first good look he had of her, Nathan had been attracted to Remy. No, before that. He wanted her as soon as he pushed her against the wall and pressed his body against hers. In his defense, he imagined a dead, blind, gay man would be physically attracted to her. Even when she had her episode in the gas station and insisted her fake identification was real. So, she was a little weird. Maybe a little insane. Nathan didn't know. All he knew was that the heat of her skin had made his head spin, and when he kissed her . . . he just wanted to taste her again.

Fuck. When had a girl affected him like this? Ever? He had barely touched her; yet, the arousal was something bone deep and excruciating and sweet and very heady. The sort of agony that both needed to end and be pleasantly prolonged. Remy would be good. He knew it.

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But she was probably crazy. Delusional. And that insanity was contagious because he was not the sort to pick up strange girls, bring them home, and kiss them like a nervous teen on his prom date. And he wasn't the type to leave the girl and jack off in the shower.

Nathan pushed those thoughts out of his mind. They were important thoughts that he should consider very carefully. In the morning. Right now, the only thing he wanted to consider was the soft friction of her body moving against his, her soft, soft lips against his mouth, against his skin.

Why am I in here? Why aren't I out there? Why aren't I inside her right now?

Fair questions, all. The answer was not simple. So, she was crazy? So what. Weird? Not a problem. Violent tendencies? He'd ignore them. But she was confused, and for a moment, she had been frightened of him. If he left the shower right now and went to her still wet, still hard, she wouldn't turn him down. But he didn't know if she wanted him, or if she wanted to thank him, or if she wanted to placate him, or bribe him. Or rob and kill him, which he was obliged to accept as a possibility.

Still, Nathan knew how she'd fit around him, how she'd wrap her body around his. He sensed something primal about her, something a little feral. He imagined her shouting his name, imagined her tight muscles clenching around him, her pulse pounding against his lips as he pressed his mouth to her neck.

Nathan even felt her come against his body, pulsating heat around his shaft. It was that image; so vivid he couldn't help but wonder if it had already happened, that pushed him over the edge. The orgasm rushed through him, something bittersweet. It was enough to take the edge off, but she was still mostly naked on his couch, and he was still hard for her.

Sighing, he rested his head against the cool tile and let the water pound against his back. At least he could think now. Did she have any idea how much, possibly misplaced, self-control it took for him to walk away from her? Did she even care?

Even if she wasn't injured, she could still be crazy.

What the hell am I going to do?

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He'd start by finishing his shower. Nathan soaped his body and hair, his mind far from his task. First, he would need to figure out just who this girl was. That should be easy enough if she wasn't giving him a fake name. Next, he would have to find out where she belonged and who was chasing her. Letting her crash on his couch indefinitely was not an option. Finally, he might have to drag her to the hospital against her wishes, because if he couldn't figure out who she was, where she belonged, or who she was running from, then she could be somebody else's responsibility.

Nathan rinsed the soap from his body, watching the suds as they fell from his skin and swirled down the drain.

Remy wasn't even his biggest problem.

Tian had escaped again, but not unscathed. The knife had done serious damage to his shoulder, and he would want a bit of revenge. An eye for an eye, that's how it always worked. And Tian wasn't some punk off the streets. He had fifty grand on his head, and with this most recent failure, that price would almost certainly go up in an effort to attract every bounty hunter on the west coast.

Nathan resisted putting his fist into the wall as a new, sharp anger sparked. He almost didn't care about the money—though he needed it very much. He just wanted to bring that fucker in.

He turned off the water and stepped out of the shower, feeling refreshed. The air was momentarily cool against his wet skin, and the grit had been washed from his eyes. Slinging a towel around his hips, he stepped out of the bathroom and listened in the darkness for Remy. Her breathing sounded deep and even.

Nathan knew he shouldn't see her right then, but if she was asleep, how much damage could it do? He crept over to the couch, not making even a whisper of sound. Light from the neighbor's back porch filtered through the blinds and fell across her sleeping face. She was stretched out in his T-shirt, a blanket draped over her breasts, and another pillowing her head.

Nathan swallowed hard. She looked so soft, so inviting, but he suspected she knew how to be hard, unbendable. Despite her confusion and injuries, she didn't seem vulnerable. She had the look of a hunted animal—but one that was clever enough to outwit its predator.

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Who are you?

He watched her for another moment before bending to scoop up her discarded pants. Once again, he was struck by the oddness of the material, but he didn't linger on that. He rifled through the pockets, ignoring the coins in favor of her fake card. He thought the card might tell him more about the creator than the girl sleeping on his couch, but it could still be useful for Isaac. If anybody could figure out who this girl was, it would be him. And it was Nathan's good luck that Isaac never slept. He padded back to the bathroom and fished his cell from his pocket. Isaac's number was at the top of his address book.

It picked up on the first ring. In the background, a slamming door cut off the low hum of the police station, and then there was only quiet until a baritone came over the line. "McGuire."

"Isaac, it's me. I've got bad news and a favor to ask. Which do you want first?"

A stream of low curses whispered under Isaac's breath. Nathan pictured him running his hand over his closely shorn hair. "The day I've been having, make it the bad first. Unless your favor means I have to do some ass kissing, in which case, the order doesn't fucking matter."

Nathan sighed inwardly. Of course, he'd caught Isaac at a bad time. But then, maybe the possible wild-goose chase would raise his spirits. "Bad it is. Tian got away. But," he said before Isaac interrupted him, "That's not the bad part. Apparently, he's armed with grenades now. And he's not shy about using them."

"Where the hell did he get grenades? I thought we cut Cesar off at the knees when we locked up the Vasquez brothers."

"How should I know? You're the detective, you tell me. But if you check out that warehouse on Center and 10th in Culver City, you'll see the evidence for yourself." Nathan slapped his palm against his knee. "I almost had him, Isaac. He was mine."

"Well, I'm sure you'll get him next time," he said. "You're not the best for nothing." Though the words were meant to be reassuring, the tone was not. The creaking leather of Isaac's chair came over the line as he got more comfortable. "What happened? Did you lose him because of the grenade?"

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“No.” How to explain the next part without sounding like the crazy one in the story? “There was a girl. She, well, she came out of nowhere. At first, I thought she was an accomplice, but I didn’t recognize her name. In fact, that’s the favor.”

“You want me to tell you who she is?”

“And if she has a history of violence or psychotic behavior.” He held the card up to the light, narrowing his eyes thoughtfully. “The name on her identification, which was probably fake, is Remy Capra. Date of birth is March 15.” He paused, staring at the unexpected numbers. “I don’t know the year.”

He heard Isaac scribbling down the information. “Anything else you can give me? Age, stats, that kind of thing?”

Nathan searched his memory for any details he could recover from the strange night. “She claims she’s from DC. Mid-twenties, perhaps. Brown hair, dark eyes, maybe 5’5 or 5’6. She’s the sort of girl you’d remember seeing.”

“Pretty, huh?” He was tapping away at his computer; Isaac was one of the few cops Nathan knew who didn’t have to hunt and peck. “Just give me a sec. If she’s with Tian, she’ll come through here pretty quick.”

“I don’t think she is. I hope she’s not.” He trusted his gut on this one. Despite the initial suspicion, it seemed that her arrival was a remarkable coincidence, not a conspiracy. “I think somebody is after her, but she wouldn’t give me any details, or let me take her to the hospital.”

Silence filled the line. Nathan patiently waited for the question he knew was coming.

“So . . . where is she now, Nathan?” Isaac asked.

He hesitated a moment before answering. “On my couch.”

“Are you out of your mind?” The sudden switch in his friend’s tone had Nathan rubbing at his eyes, wishing he had avoided this entire line of questioning. “You’re not even sure if she’s not psychotic, and you’re putting her up on your couch? Since when did you start thinking with your dick instead of your brain?”

“If I were thinking with my dick, she wouldn’t be on my couch, now would she?” Nathan considered explaining his heroic and noble sacrifice, but decided that wouldn’t make Isaac feel better about the

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situation. “What was I supposed to do? Leave her bleeding in the warehouse?”

“Well, no,” Isaac conceded. He sighed. “Look, I’m sorry. It’s just been a hell of a day. I know you wouldn’t do anything so stupid if she was a real threat.” He chuckled. “I mean, it’s not like you fucked her, right?”

“Right,” Nathan agreed. “Anything come up yet?”

“No, not yet. There are Capras in DC but none that match your girl’s description. Hang on. If she’s running, there might be something in missing persons.” More beeping from the computer. “Nope. That comes up clean, too. Huh. You sure on the name? If her ID’s fake, the name might be, too.”

“I can’t be sure about the name. Do me a favor and keep an eye out for anything matching her description.” Nathan paused for a moment before explaining, “Her ID looks all wrong, of course, but the year of birth was 2057. Shoddy work.”

“Probably some new game cooked up by the college kids. See how bad they can make their ID’s before someone notices and they get busted. You wouldn’t believe some of the shit they’ve been trying to pull.” Isaac’s chair groaned under his weight again. “The only thing I can tell you for sure is that she’s not part of Tian’s gang. Unless it’s a dye job and she’s not a brunette. He was banging this blonde named Josie a few months back. Think it could be her?”

Nathan snorted. “No, Josie is sucking cock for money in TJ.” Frustrated, he ran his fingers through his damp hair. “I’ll let you go. But I’ll be sure to keep you posted on any new developments with my mystery girl.”

“Thanks, but . . . your mystery girl? Just how pretty are we talking here?”

“She’s an eleven.”

Isaac whistled. “She would have to be. I don’t think I’ve seen you notice anybody with breasts since before we broke up Parker’s gang.”

Nathan winced. The mention, or thought, of Parker was enough to make bile rise in his throat. Shuffling over to the bathroom, he pulled the chalky antacid tablets from the medicine cabinet. “Yeah,” he agreed, “it’s been awhile. Hopefully this one doesn’t plan to kill me.”

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“Crazy never strikes twice in the same place,” Isaac assured. When he next spoke, his voice had grown contemplative. He was shifting out of cop mode and into his friend shoes. “You want me to come over and check her out? I’m going off-duty anyway, and if there’s one person’s judgment I trust more than yours, it’s mine. I could even get her set up someplace else if you want. Get her off your couch.”

He knew, based on the still present ache in his groin, that he should accept Isaac’s offer. But he also knew that Remy would react poorly to the presence of a cop, even if he assured her that Isaac wasn’t a threat to her. Nathan didn’t know why, but the thought of her panicking and fleeing was not an appealing one. “I appreciate it, but not tonight. Maybe if she’s still around tomorrow.”

“Well, offer’s there. And if something comes up on my end, I’ll let you know.” He paused. “Just be careful. Brains, not dick, OK?”

“Right. Thanks.” Nathan disconnected the phone, placing it on the charger. “Brains, not dick,” he muttered, stretching out on the bed. “Easy as that. No problem.” He stared at the ceiling, considering the wisdom of the simple statement. It was the best advice he had ever heard.

He pushed the towel away, running his palm over his shaft before gripping it lightly. Brains, not dick. Right.

It felt like she’d been dragged tits first through an electric socket. Kirsten decided then and there that the first thing she would do when she got back home was give her father a piece of her mind. Easy, my ass.

The coin had, however, worked as he had said it would. Pushing up from the rough concrete, Kirsten stretched the kinks out of her still humming muscles, scanning her surroundings at the same time. The smell of rotting garbage coated the air, making her nose wrinkle in disgust. A green-and-red sign glowed against a night sky lightened with the orangey illumination of lamps on tall poles. Heavy dumpsters overflowed in wait of garbage day. It was some type of uninviting store. Kirsten wondered why in hell Remy would want to go to it.

Her hard-heeled boots clicked against the concrete as she rounded the corner of the building. The darkness sucked away the red taillights

JAMIE CRAIG

of a vintage Mustang as it pulled from the lot, but other than that, the place was deserted except for another old-fashioned car. Her head swiveled toward the brightly-lit store. Through the windows, she spotted an older woman behind the cash register and some customers milling around, but none of them looked like Remy Capra. That didn't matter. Kirsten knew the coin wouldn't have brought her here without a reason.

Inside the door, the bright lights made her hesitate, her eyes adjusting to the difference in illumination. The mirror over the counter showed a tall, willowy woman, eyes a pale blue, skin like porcelain. Kirsten grimaced, self-consciously lifting a hand to smooth down her short blonde hair. She looked like hell. That was something else to complain about once she got home again.

When Kirsten didn't move from the entrance, the cashier offered a tight smile. "Can I help you with something?" she asked, her voice high and wavering with age.

"Actually, yeah." Adopting her friendliest smile, Kirsten walked up to the counter and leaned against it, bringing her down to the shorter woman's level. "I'm looking for a friend of mine. She said to meet her here, but . . ." She glanced back, making sure Remy wasn't lurking in a corner she hadn't seen from outside. ". . . I think I might have missed her."

"What does she look like?"

"My age. Ish. Long dark hair, brown eyes. About five-five and a hun—" She stopped. Friends didn't give weights out when looking for each other; that was a cop thing. "Curvy," she said instead. "But still in shape. She likes to wear clothes that show off her . . . assets."

The cashier frowned. "Well, there was a girl in here like that a couple minutes ago," she said. "But I don't think it's your friend."

Kirsten tried to hold back her excitement. Maybe she could end this once and for all right now. "Why not?"

"She was with some British guy. They took off in an old Mustang." The cashier patted her hand, as if consoling her. "But, honey, if that's your friend, get her into a program and away from that boyfriend of hers. I'd bet my youngest grandkid she's strung out on something,

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and I'm pretty sure he's beating her up, too. She had blood all over her clothes."

Though she made noises of disappointment, inwardly, Kirsten was rejoicing. It was Remy, no doubt about it. Just before the bitch had crashed out the gallery's window, Kirsten had sliced her with her best blade. It had been the ultimate in satisfaction until Remy vanished right before her eyes.

Somehow, she'd found an ally already, though it was hardly surprising that it was male. Remy knew what her strengths were; she would exploit them to get what she wanted. Chumping a guy into helping was the sort of stunt she would pull.

Thanking the cashier, Kirsten left the store, then stood in the cool night air, debating what to do next. British guy in an old Mustang.

Even out of her element, she knew that one was easy.

Even better, it would lead her straight to Remy Capra.

What happens next?

Chasing Silver

Jamie Craig

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