

HOSTAGE



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Agent Kane Bledsoe watched the woman's breaths pick up. *Three days.* For three days, he waited next to her cot, wondering if she would ever wake. The dried blood on the back of her head proved she'd taken a hard hit. She probably had a concussion.

"If we take care of her shoulder now, it won't hurt as bad," murmured Jon.

One shoulder sat awkwardly lower than the other, proving it was dislocated.

Kane sighed. "If she's here, she has training. You might find yourself with a broken hand for even touching her."

"She still looks out to me." Jon shrugged.

With a grunt, he got on his knees beside her as Jon felt around the joint. The muscles around her mouth twitched.

"She's waking up, Jon," he whispered.

Jon grasped her shoulder, and the woman's hand suddenly flew up, gripping his throat with a grunt. Taking a small sharpened nail Kane had found, he pressed it gently to her neck.

"Let go," he mumbled.

Her eyes darted between them, wide and erratic.

“Jon’s a medic.” Kane sighed and removed the nail. “He’s trying to help you.”

The woman released Jon. He eased her back onto the cot, and she groaned.

“Get her something to bite on now that she’s awake,” Jon whispered.

“No,” her gritty voice murmured.

“You yell out, they’ll come get you.” Kane frowned down at her dirty face.

Her bright blue eyes locked with his for a moment. She nodded, then turned face down in the old, moldy mattress. With the expertise of a trained doctor, Jon pulled and pushed the joint back into place. She let out a low grunt and moan.

“You did good. What’s your name?” Kane’s throat burned, his voice a strained whisper. He glanced around, checking to see if they’d attracted the guards’ attention.

“My, my name?” she mumbled and pushed herself to sit.

He steadied her uninjured shoulder as she looked around.

“Who are you, and where are we?” Her brows furrowed.

He frowned at her questions. “I can try and help you.”

She cleared her throat with a grimace. “Don’t put yourself in harm’s way because of me.” Her bright eyes turned dark. Breaking contact, she gazed at the men behind him. “Who are they?” she whispered.

“None of your concern. You can speak to Jon and me. They’ll stay over there.” Not that he didn’t think she couldn’t handle herself with those men. But her situation was dire enough. He didn’t want her to have to worry about anything but her own survival.

Her gaze shifted to Jon, then back on him. “Okay, Gruff.” She smirked.

He smiled. Strong with a sense of humor. She’d need both to survive this.

“Where are we?”

“Doesn’t really matter. You need to find a way out.”

“I—our intel must’ve been wrong,” She mumbled and shook her head slowly, knitting her brows together again.

“Intel? What intel? Who do you work for?”

“My boss.” She gave him a smug look.

“And your boss is?”

“You think I’m giving up our intel to someone I met ten minutes ago?”

“Intel you’ve already admitted was wrong, by the way.” Kane sighed. “Let’s start over. If you want our help, tell me what you know. We didn’t get locked in here because we’re one of the bad guys.”

She sucked in a deep breath as if considering her options. “Okay, fine.” She released her breath and straightened. “Someone has been sending Senator Marstill threatening letters and calls. We were in Mexico and assumed one of the major drug cartels wanted to make a martyr of him.”

“Why?”

“He’s got a hard line on immigration as well as drugs,” she muttered. Looking up, she narrowed her eyes. “Are we still in Mexico?”

He nodded. “And the senator?”

“He’s safe.” With a wince, she touched the wound on the back of her head. Her eyes widened as a gasp escaped her lips.

“I’m so sorry, they cut it all off,” Jon mumbled.

Cut with scissors, patches of dirty blonde clumps hung around her head. She fingered the remaining tufts of hair.

“It-it’s okay. It’ll grow back.” Her eyes closed as she took a few breaths. She gripped the edge of the mattress, her feet rocked back and forth on the dirt floor. The rough tunic and pants she wore were filthy, stained with dirt and muck.

“Are we ... are we underground?”

He shook his head. Her eyes met his for a moment. Gripping her arm, he stood and helped her up, her body unsteady.

“How long have you been here?”

“Doesn’t matter. You need to focus on getting yourself out.”

She turned to Jon and teetered. Holding her elbow, Kane helped her sit back down on the cot. She held her head.

“Save your energy. You’ll need it,” he whispered.

“But where are—?”

“What’s your name?” He purposely avoided her question. How could he tell her she was in the worst place he could think of on earth for a man or woman?

“I don’t want to say.” She leaned back against the rock wall with a grimace. “Does it sound stupid to think saying my name will just make it more real?”

He smirked. “Nope.”

“Just call me Pack.” She closed her eyes.

With a sigh, Kane scanned Jon’s meager frame. After weeks of being here, they were starved, weak, and on edge. If they didn’t get help soon ...

A clatter echoed through the hallway, and Jon retreated to the back wall. Kane stood, moving in front of Pack.

“No, I told you,” she whispered.

He shook his head slowly, glaring at the men entering the cell. There was no way he’d let them get her easily.

“Get her up.”

Kane stepped forward and took a blow to the gut. Gripping his middle, he doubled over, unable to breathe.

“Get back.” The low, accent-laden voice of the head guard prickled his skin.

“I’m fine. It’s fine.”

He felt her hand grip his arm. She grunted and stood, shaking her head at him.

“Can you walk?”

“Of course.” Her light-hearted tone made him hurt worse.

He knew what she might be facing.

As they took hold of her arms, he glared at the men who pulled her from his cell. The door slammed shut. Its echo caused bile to rise in his throat.

“She’s tough,” Jon whispered from behind.

“She doesn’t know any better.” He shook his head. “But she will by the time she gets back.”

Jon clutched his arm to steady him.

Kane groaned and pulled his arm from Jon’s grip. “I don’t need help.”

“We all need help. Especially in here.”

He shook his head and collapsed onto the cot. Closing his eyes, he swallowed hard. He couldn’t save himself or Jon, and now, he couldn’t save her. She needed help— much more than he could give.

“What do I do now?” he whispered to the void. Ignoring the silence, he slipped into sleep.

A HAND PUSHED HER FORWARD. The man wearing khaki turned and dragged her out of the cell and into the corridor. Macy struggled to keep from falling, her feet not willing to work as she followed.

The man giving the orders apparently noticed her slow gait. “Help her.”

Hands gripped her again and pulled her arms. She could barely lift her feet as they scraped and burned against the cement floor. Macy noticed the cells lining the walls. At least twenty men were imprisoned here, counting the two men from her cell. The stench from their bodies hung in the air. Her captors led her up a wooden staircase to a landing, and then down a hallway.

A guard dragged her down a carpeted passageway. She caught a glimpse of another wooden corridor to the left before the man forced her into an office on her right.

“Sit.”

The khaki man shoved her into a hardback chair. She grimaced and tried to catch her breath. He sat on the edge of the desk facing her, grinning through missing teeth and a scruffy

chin.

“Your name?”

“What’s yours?”

He answered her question with a hard slap across her face. Shooting pain pulsed from her jaw and down the back of her neck. She leaned to her right and spat blood across the carpet.

“Jay, no more blood.” A Spanish-laden accent graced the words.

She struggled to swallow the rest of the blood. Her gaze lifted. The chair at the other side of the desk spun around, revealing an older, distinguished man. He clasped his hands clasped in front of him. His face bore a stern look.

The man’s white hair and matching mustache contrasted against jet-black eyebrows.

Jay moved to her left side. He wore a wide grin that made her want to reach out and smack him. But she held her hands in front of her. They weren’t tied, and she didn’t want to give them a reason to do so.

“My dear, I have some questions, your name being the first of many.”

“How about you give me your name first?” She saw Jay’s hand come at her again. This time, she grabbed his wrist with both hands before he could make contact. “Now, Jay, he said to go easy.” She glowered at the guard, who glared as if he’d kill her the first chance he got.

Laughter came from the other side of the desk, and she released the man’s wrist.

“Let her be and wait by the door, Jay.”

Jay stepped away, and her focus returned to the man at the desk.

“My name is Señor Luis DeLuca. I am in the information business.”

“How did I get here? I have no information for anyone.”

“I doubt that.” DeLuca stood and moved to her side of the desk. “When we bring someone here, it is because they know

something, and I am tasked with getting that information from them. But, you see, we do not keep women here. So, I would like to find out what you know sooner rather than later. The men have orders to keep to themselves. No one will abuse you without consequence.”

“How gracious of you.” She did her best to smile, but the pain in her face kept her muscles from working.

“Now, what is your name, and what is it you know? Who do you work for?”

“I work for a senator who’s probably resigning at the moment. There’s nothing I can tell you that would help anyone. Once the senator escaped, he received a new protection detail, one that I have no information on whatsoever.” She ignored the first question, not willing to give the man the pleasure of knowing her name.

DeLuca frowned.

Macy looked around the office, orienting herself. She had no clue where she’d ended up, and without that knowledge, escape could do little to help her.

“Take her back down. I have a call to make.”

Jay’s hand pulled her head back by the tufts of her hair and ripped her from the chair.

“Remember, I need her talking.”

Jay’s grunt proved he felt differently.

“Yeah, Jay, might want to rein in that temper.” If she could push his buttons, maybe she could stall the interrogations.

The door closed, and another slap knocked her against the wall.

“Now, Jay, is that how you treat women?” She mumbled as her mouth filled with blood.

His fist in her stomach crumpled her to her knees. She wrapped her arm around her middle and gasped for breath. A sharp pain jabbed her leg. When she turned to see what caused the pain, a kick sent her back to the ground, face first. Her fingers moved beneath her body until she found a jagged nail.

She pulled it from the floor and pushed into her top, keeping it for later.

“Jay!” DeLuca’s voice sounded.

Another blow came down on her head, slamming her into the ground. Her vision dimmed, and darkness washed over her.