

CHAPTER EIGHT

Geoffrey Aitkens stood back as the solemn faced guard opened the door. He had been summoned for a visit fifteen minutes ago but nobody had told him who. Aitkens prided himself on his ability to win someone's confidence; it was what had enabled him to carry out his crimes. But no one had been forthcoming as to whom his visitors were and as the door swung open and the warder jerked his head towards the interior of the room, Aitkens was frightened for the first time in his life.

Lynda pushed herself away from the wall as the man walked into the room, the warder gave her a curt nod and slammed the door, leaving him alone with the dark haired woman and her burly male companion, he knew with the instinct of the seasoned criminal that they were cops.

"Sit down, Aitkens," she pulled the metal chair out and nodded at it.

"You're cops, aren't you?"

"You must have ESP," Danny smiled tightly, "just sit the fuck down."

"Okay, you're the boss."

Aitkens sat down and looked up with wide innocent eyes.

"What can I help you with now?"

"You knew an Ali Bin Omar," she opened a manilla folder and shoved it across to him. He leaned forward as she yanked another chair around and turned the back to face him. Danny watched in mild amusement as she arranged the leg so as it was hovering over his sandshoe encased foot. Aitkens shook his head in mild amusement.

"I'm sorry I don't..." his words ended in a yelp of pain as she sat down on the chair, hooking her arms over the back and slamming the leg down on his toes.

"Wrong answer, shithead!"

"Guard!"

"He won't help you," she hissed, adjusting the chair so as her weight was crushing his little toe. "So tell me, Aitkens, what were you doing in Manilla with Omar? Were you buying slaves again or just checking out the night-life?"

"Fuck you," he hissed in pain.

"No, fuck you," she rocked back and slammed the chair down on his foot and this time he screamed in agony as the toe broke.

"You fucking whore, I'll bend you over and fuck you up the arse, you fucking bitch, cunt, whore."

"My, my," she smiled, "that's quite a tongue you've got there," she shifted the chair slightly to bring the leg to bear on his next toe. "I'll let you into a little secret, Aitkens. I know who you're covering for," she stared into his eyes as he turned to face her.

"I know about the fatherhood, I know it all. I chased you and your stinking crew all over the fucking world. You fuckers thought you had closed operation Tiny Tots down, didn't you?"

And when he didn't reply she rocked back again ever so slightly, Aitkens' eyes widened with fear but he couldn't move his foot because she had managed to trap his foot beneath the leg.

"Okay."

"Were you aware that Tiny Tots was never officially closed down?" she glared at him. "We just went to ground, we figured that in order to catch a slug we had to go underground, you get my point?"

"What do you want from me?" he turned to stare at her, his eyes narrowing evilly.

Lynda stared into the face of evil, taking her time as she carefully sorted through the information in her mind and Aitkens realised with a start that she hadn't blinked. It was he who blinked first, licking his lips as he tried to pull his gaze away from the dark haired woman. The pain from his already broken toe was surging through his body, but he wasn't about to give her, the satisfaction of knowing she had gotten to him.

"I want you to pass on a message to the Company, the brotherhood, the fatherhood or whatever name you sick bastards are operating under right now," she adjusted her weight slightly and he winced.

“You tell them that Operation Tiny Tots is still alive and kicking. You tell them that we have them in our sights and they had better start running, because we’re coming after the big fish now, the untouchables.”

“You’re bluffing,” he smiled nervously.

Lynda leaned forward and even Danny winced as they heard an ominous crack. This time Aitkens screamed in agony, Lynda’s hand reached out to grab his throat and cut off the scream.

“I have the names of six people I’m going to visit right now, shithead. Thanks to that stunt your people pulled on a certain tv reporter,” she smiled tightly, “you know who I’m talking about don’t you?”

“Okay, okay.”

Lynda got off the chair and moved around behind him.

“Your plan failed, she’s still alive and now we have the database,” her hands slid slowly down his chest as she locked eyes with Danny.

“It’s all coming to an end, Aitkens. We searched for years for this database and now, thanks to you, we have it,” she reached his belly and smiled at Danny.

“We’re going to be passing on your name to your friends when we visit them today, I think they’re going to be very interested in what we have to tell them.”

Her hand suddenly grabbed his testicles, while her other hand grabbed his throat, cutting off his scream as she twisted them violently, her fingernails digging into soft yielding flesh. Her final act was to stand back, yanking the chair away from him and depositing him in a crumpled heap on the cold concrete floor.

“Let’s go, I can smell a killing,” she stared at Danny.

Danny said nothing as they made their way out of the remand centre but once they were outside he whirled on her, his face livid with rage.

“What the fuck was that all about?”

“A little warning that’s all.”

“I call it torture.”

“Yeah, it could be,” she smirked, “all depends on your point of view,” she ran her eyes over him.

“Don’t stand there and lecture me, Danny. I know what I’m dealing with, you have no idea at all and if you wanna go ahead and report then that’s your business but you’ll be no closer to solving this case and Daina will die.”

“Well she’s in more danger now, thanks to you,” he opened the car door.

“Oh,” she slammed her door and marched around the car to face him down. “Is that right, asshole? Would it please you to know that your girlfriend in all her naivety stirred up a fucking hornet’s nest when she exposed Aitkens. Daina was doomed from then on in, and she has no idea of what she’s up against. I’ve chased these fuckers all over the fucking world, we hunted them like dogs and they hunted us!”

She swept her hair over her ear, her eyes blazing.

“These people have no morals, no principles and a shit load of money. They will do anything to protect the big fish, the politicians, actors, and other celebrities from exposure. They will kill, maim, destroy and yet you, you seem to think they have the right to spit in your face. Aitkens was laughing at us in there, but he ain’t laughing now, I can assure you of that, he’s shitting through the eye of a needle. He knows his days are numbered because they don’t fuck around.”

She hesitated.

“I’m sorry I’m screaming at you, Danny, you’re a good cop but you really have no idea of what you’re up against. Now, we’re gonna go back to Daina’s and go through whatever files she’s got and if she’s got any database hidden away, I want it asap. I’m taking these fuckers down with or without you, now let’s hope Daina has six names or we’re fucked.”

She whirled and stalked around to the other side of the car leaving a stunned Danny staring at her back, his mind racing.

It seemed he had gravely underestimated Lynda Hudson.

Daina rose as they stepped into the living room, her face was still pale and Danny noticed a small cut on her lip, the result of having bitten herself at the time of the explosion. She glanced at the female detective by her side and nodded at the kitchen.

“We can talk in there.”

They followed her into the tiny kitchen of the safe house. She had been moved here shortly after being released from hospital. In the interim, her house had been sealed off and a team of detectives, and uniformed police were currently scouring the neighbourhood for clues.

“How’s Renée?” Danny asked.

“She’s resting,” Daina replied. “I gave her a sedative.”

“We found the bomber,” Lynda spoke up. “His body was in a burned out car near Blackburn Lake, the car was stolen a few hours earlier.”

“I see,” she sat down and stared at the kettle, “do you want some coffee?”

“No thanks,” she smiled and propped herself against the bench. “We’re still making inquiries but based on my experience with these people, I can tell you that it’s going to be pretty scary from here on in, you’ve opened a hornet’s nest when you helped bring Aitkens down.”

“I had no idea,” she breathed.

“Now you do,” Lynda nodded, “but luckily for you, I do have an idea,” she tucked her pale blue shirt further into her slacks and pursed her lips.

“I was wondering, Daina.”

“Yes.”

Their eyes met for a moment and Lynda smiled slightly, aware that Danny was staring at her oddly.

“I was wondering if you have some names, more information, anything that can help us solve this case. We can bring them down but we need your help.”

“And you think I can help you?”

“They wouldn’t go to these lengths unless they were frightened,” Lynda shook her head. “You probably aren’t even aware of what you’ve got right now, it could be a name, a photograph, a mailing list, anything, but they know you’ve got something.”

“They wanted me to admit I’d framed Aitkens,” she replied slowly.

“So, maybe Aitkens has something,” Danny suggested quietly.

“Maybe,” Lynda nodded, “but I’d still like to check your files anyway.”

“That’s personal,” Daina stared at Danny who simply shrugged.

“I admit that, Daina but so is trying to blow up you and your daughter, this is serious shit and it’s going to keep on happening until we bring them down.”

“All I want is copies of your files, Daina. You can keep the originals and if you want to run a story on it that’s okay, but I need the same information you have otherwise I’m wandering around in the dark.”

“Can we have a moment alone, please,” she stared at Danny.

“Sure take all the time you need,” Lynda walked from the kitchen, leaving Daina alone with her.

He watched as she made the coffee. She didn’t say a word as she waited for the kettle to boil, poured out two coffees and placed his cup on the table next to him.

“What do you think?”

“I think she’s right,” he replied, “she has some strange methods but you came very close to being killed today. You owe your life and Renée’s life to her quick thinking.”

“I don’t know what I can do to help you,” she sat down and wrapped her hands around the cup, her eyes studying the plastic chequered tablecloth. “I had information that Aitkens had contacted someone who turned up dead yesterday, I’ve got a few names of other people he’s contacted over the last few years. He was in London last year about this time talking to an MP, he then went across to Hanover, and then took a flight to Algiers via Marseilles. From there he dropped out of sight and reappeared in Harare, from there he flew home and stopped off in Perth where he saw another friend and came back to Melbourne.”

“And where did all this information come from?”

Daina looked up.

“Flight schedules, the station also hired a private detective to keep tabs on him, we stopped the surveillance when he disappeared in Algiers.”

“If we have that information, we can do something about the people who tried to kill you and Renée,” he leaned on the palm of his hand, “but we need your help. Lynda has the contacts, perhaps if she had your information she could pass it onto the relevant authorities overseas.”

“And then what?”

“No one’s cutting you out, we give you the information first and tell you when it’s okay to release it. We need your abilities in front of the camera to keep these cunts on the run.”

“Abilities,” she smiled, “that’s the first time you’ve ever commented on my abilities in front of the camera.”

“I’m sorry,” he blushed slightly.

“Don’t be,” she shook her head, “I can’t believe we argued over a fucking pergola.”

“It’s still there too,” he sipped at his coffee.

Her eyes met his.

“Why not pull it down?”

“Don’t know,” he sighed, “it just sat there and I kept on making plans to pull it down but then I’d look at it and think that maybe it could be repaired, maybe a new roof and a fresh coat of paint.”

Daina burst out laughing.

“God, it’s a pergola, you’re not waiting for my approval before you do something are you?”

“No,” he replied defensively, “I don’t know why, it’s just sat there ever since. I’ve made a few changes around the house since you’ve been gone, but the pergola was just one of those things that I’ll get around to one of these days.”

“It’s all right,” she smiled nervously, “I wasn’t making fun of you, it’s just weird that you haven’t done anything about it.”

Danny regarded her for a moment. The blonde hair had grown to well past her shoulders, the soft waves framing her delicately framed face. Her blue eyes had always been a part of her he loved the most, expressive, and inquisitive and when she was in the mood, seductive. He felt a slight weakness in his belly at the thought of what could have happened today. As much as he had been shocked by Lynda’s treatment of a prisoner today, he was glad she was at his side, the thought of the Company bringing harm to Daina was more than he could stand.

“What’re you doing tonight?”

“Huh?” her question took him by surprise. She tugged at the collar of her white shirt and pushed a lock of hair over her ear.

“Probably trying to find the people who did this to you, why?”

“Oh,” her eyes fell to the tablecloth, “I was just thinking that maybe we could come over for dinner, that’s if you don’t mind a five-year-old asking you a million questions.”

“What’ve they said about the safe house?” he asked.

“The studio arranged it for me, but it’s only temporary. It’s not like I’m a celebrity,” she smiled sarcastically, “I’m just a reporter, pretty faces are a dime a dozen in this business.”

“So, why not stay a few days at...” he pulled up short.

“At your place?” she looked away.

“Well, it was an offer.”

“I’d feel guilty, Danny,” she sighed, “you were good to me and I still feel bad about it all, I know it sounds weird but that’s the way it is.”

“I understand that,” he nodded, “but the place is there, at least until the investigation is over, then I’m kicking you out,” he smiled.

Daina stood up and walking to the door, opened it and glanced down at Lynda who was casually chatting with the detective. Their eyes met and sensing her inner turmoil, Lynda excused herself and re-entered the kitchen.

“It sounds feasible to me,” she replied after Daina had repeated Danny’s offer to her, “I know you two were involved but we need to hide you somewhere they can’t find you. I would even suggest you stay a few nights at my place, they’ll know where you are of course, but if you modify your schedule, keep them on their toes I’d say you stand a good chance of surviving this thing in one piece.”

“They’re that dangerous, are they?” Daina stared at her and Lynda nodded.

“I’m not bullshitting you, they are that dangerous. I can’t even tell you the details of operation Tiny Tots because of the methods we used, it’s unacceptable to the western media organisations and very covert, they call it black ops in military circles.”

Daina shuddered.

“I’m glad you’re on my side.”

“And you’re willing to do as I say?”

“Yes,” she replied after a moment, “whatever it takes, this isn’t just a case of journalistic ethics,” she smiled, “if there is such a thing. It’s about my daughter and I, there’s no way I’m going to let you run roughshod over me but I’m not gonna try and tell you how to do your job either.”

“So, we have a deal then,” Lynda folded her arms resolutely.

Daina nodded at Danny.

“Can you drop me at your place now? I have to pick up some stuff from my place first.”

“Sure,” he checked his watch, “I’ll drop you off at the station first, Lynda.”

“Okay,” she glanced at Daina, “I can look at your files while Danny’s getting you settled in, okay?”

“Okay.”

The feeling of relief was palpable.

The Company was about to suffer its first setback...