



"No beast so fierce but knows some touch of pity.  
But I know none, and therefore am no beast."

William Shakespeare—

THE STREET  
ILLUMINATI

By David Garcia



Visit Chosen Warfare

Copyright © 2021 David Garcia

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher, addressed “Attention: Permissions Coordinator,” at the address below.

Any references to historical events, real people, or real places are used fictitiously. Names, characters, and places are products of the author’s imagination.

ISBN: 979-8-9860236-0-1

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022936086

Chosen Warfare Publishing  
P.O. Box 13047  
Tucson, AZ 85711

# “Genesis of Monsters”

PART ONE  
“THE STREET”

# 1

## *“DJ and Angel”*

### **LAS VEGAS, NEVADA, 2014**

Traffic along Paradise Road was heavier than usual for a Friday night, DJ thought. That was a good thing. It meant police were less likely to fuck with him, choosing instead to focus on actual crime. He lowered the stereo’s volume. “Left on Flamingo?”

“Tropicana,” Raul said as he lounged in the Escalade’s backseat, sipping from a pint of Hennessy. “Then a right on Tamarus.”

“A’ight.”

“I’m starving, ese,” Jason said.

Raul’s older brother, and DJ’s best friend, Jason reclined in the front passenger seat, a Raiders fitted down to his brow. Window open, he flicked ashes from a Marlboro into the

breath of night, watching as the tourists danced about the Vegas Strip like starry-eyed children at Disneyland.

“White boys be have’n all kinds of food,” Raul said.

“If not, I’ll stop somewhere on the way back,” DJ said.

Jason pulled on the Marlboro, blew the smoke out the window. “Simón.”

The three were headed to the house of UNLV film student Robbie Baldwin. Raul had met him at a campus party five months ago. Introduced by a coke sniffing senior, he sold Robbie thirty tabs of ecstasy that night. And like most college kids who wanted to get high—but feared venturing into the barrio to buy their drugs—Robbie happily overpaid. Since then, he had become Raul’s campus middleman, supplying a handful of student dealers everything from ecstasy and molly to coke, weed, and heroin.

DJ rarely transported drugs in his vehicle, but on two occasions the dashboard’s hidden compartment had proven reliable. A seasoned canine unit might have better luck, but DJ knew they never visited the campus area. He attended two business classes during the day, was familiar with the roaming patterns of campus security. Cruisers tended to park in front of the buildings, the male guard posted curbside talking to students. Typically, females. Otherwise, they spent their time roaming campus parking lots and garages.

At night, the same guards occasionally harassed individuals they considered suspicious. DJ heard stories of young black and brown males pulled over and illegally searched. Just in case, he kept his paperwork—clipped to his lawyer’s business card—on the visor. Not only was Jonathan Wright one of the top defense attorneys in Vegas, but his firm’s civil division feasted off a good lawsuit. The sight of his card forced real cops to take three steps back.



“This a house?” Jason asked Raul.

“Bachelor pad for the movie vatos,” Raul said. “A lot of ‘em are from L.A. Be livin off their parent’s fería (money).”

“See them type of niggas every day,” DJ said. “Be taking seven years to get a three-year degree.”

“Any chicás?” Jason asked.

“Simón,” Raul said. “He’s a big deal director. Bitches be there all the time.”

When they arrived, Robbie met them outside with a welcoming grin. “Let’s go ‘round back.”

The group marched along the side walkway, trotting up the rear staircase. Inside the kitchen, Raul asked, “What’chu got to eat, homz? My brother’s hungry.”

Robbie got them Heineken and two slices of meat lover’s pizza from a Pizza Hut box. The four made light conversation before Robbie and Raul stepped into a nearby bedroom to conduct business.

As Jason used the microwave to reheat the pizza, DJ swigged the beer and took a seat at the counter.

\*\*\*\*\*

Angel Dominguez knew she was in trouble. Seated on the couch between Stephen and Jacob, the once friendly conversation had taken an unexpected turn for the worse. They were no longer discussing campus activities, her MBA, or plans after graduation. The two men now used explicit language to compliment her beauty. Compliments she had initially fended off with classy retorts; but as the barrage continued, those classy retorts had slowly morphed into slurred speech. Her thoughts now came in... chopped... fragments... of...

*You're drunk, she thought. Really drunk. But how?*

She had followed her one shot, one cup of beer minimum. The buzz was always just enough to relax and stem her social anxiety. Occasionally, she drank wine instead, but even then, it was manageable.

*Is it a foreign beer?* she wondered hazily. No, when Cindy gave her the cup, she said it was Corona. Came from a keg of Corona. But Corona had never made her feel so mentally sloppy, helpless. And she felt mentally helpless, sloppy. Even now, as she fought to steer the ship, she was telling Jacob about her mother, Gwendolyn. How everyone said she looked like Salma Hayek, and perhaps that was where she obtained her lusciously round ass.

*Why am I discussing my ass? Why am I laughing? Why am I acting as if I'm having the time of my life?*

Stephen said, "I'm gonna stick my cock in that ass."

"Oh, really?" She didn't mean to say that. She meant to scold him because his reply was lewd.

*I'm not being lewd. Where are the other girls that were supposed to be coming?*

At last count, it was still only her and Cindy. They had been early. Max, the guy who rented the house, said others would arrive shortly. But no one yet. Except for a bunch of other guys.

*Where was Cindy, anyway?*

A senior, Cindy had befriended her during one of their weekly finance classes, complimenting her on the outfit she wore, saying how beautiful she was, and the incredible shape of her body. Angel thought her nice, thought it refreshing to meet someone not intimidated by her genius. Not to mention, she had found Cindy incredibly attractive, especially her long

legs. The two eventually got around to discussing the bisexuality that drew them together.

Wednesday, Cindy suggested Angel skip her usual Friday night of study—Foreign Exchange and Trade—and go to dinner. Afterward, they could watch a movie at Cindy’s place.

Tonight, following dinner at *Roy’s* Hawaiian restaurant, Cindy changed their plans. She first wanted to stop by the party of a movie director friend, Max. An aspiring actress, Cindy said she had lots of friends in the industry.

Upon their arrival, Cindy handed her a cup of beer and said she needed to talk to Max in private. Initially, Angel thought to decline the beer, but she didn’t want to seem stuck up, as if the plastic cup were beneath her. That’s when Stephen and Jacob stepped in, offered to keep her company. Angel had not seen Cindy since.

She suddenly wondered if her parents were awake. Wondered how disappointed they would be to see her like this.

The song on the stereo changed for what felt like the millionth time. Rock. Not loud, but not low either. Enough that she needed to raise her sultry voice when speaking... slurring.

Stephen was from Montreal, Canada, and midway through a Master’s in Sociology. The first to approach, he said he was a member of the lacrosse team. Tall, blonde, fit, Angel found him extremely attractive.

Jacob was medium height and average looking. A Los Angeles native, he claimed his father was a well-known Hollywood agent who represented Tom Cruise and Jennifer Lawrence. He’d been super nice, respectful, engaging, but that all changed in the last ten minutes when he tried to kiss her three times.

“Whoa there,” Angel had said, reeling back at his first attempt. “Uh, no thanks.”

She thought her response appropriate, leaving no room for misunderstanding. Jacob apologized; said he had misread the signs. She told him not to worry; it was okay; things happened when people drank.

Minutes later, he tried again. But she had forgotten to reel back. After a brief discussion about her tenseness and need to relax, Stephen offered to give her a massage. Her coltish acceptance came with a warning of no funny business. He had since drawn closer, digging fingers along her shoulders.

Inwardly, Angel panicked. Yet it was not translating. She was smiling, laughing, and appeared to be enjoying herself, her eyes closing, her throat spilling groans of pleasure the deeper he drove his fingers. And those strong fingers betrayed her, carrying her body to a place of desire, her mind disappearing into a dreamlike realm of touch, want, hunger.

Suddenly, she could hear the voice of her beloved tío, Javy. “Never accept a drink from anyone.”

But she had accepted. Now dream and reality twisted through a theatrical rendition of blur.

*Why are you not resisting?*

In a rush of oblivion, her thoughts faded as the ability to talk, to respond, was no longer available.

When Jacob placed a hand on her knee, Angel eyed him lazily and tried to say, “Please, stop.” Needed to say it. Could not say it. As he moved his hand between her thighs, her mind dreamt of screams to, “Stop!”

But it was only a dream.

\*\*\*\*\*

DJ continued to watch the scene unfold. It went against everything he learned about Angel during the last year. In the two classes they shared, she had always presented herself as a classy, young, professional Latina. But there she was, sitting in the corner with two white boys. Not just sitting but giggling as one of them felt her up.

Insanely beautiful, she was extremely overdressed—as usual—wearing a red business suit and skirt, black nylons, and designer heels. The same type of outfit from class. Outfits that had even Professor Franklin drooling like a pervert. The other students, tired from partying all night, came to class in T-shirts, flip-flops, and tennis shoes. Not Angel. She always strolled in looking like a corporate CEO.

The finest chick DJ had ever laid eyes on, she was maybe five-one—the heels made it hard to gauge—with round, above average breasts, and a bubble ass that murdered any dress or skirt she wore. The story he'd heard in and around class was that she was a business prodigy who graduated high school early, fifteen or sixteen, and had gone straight to college. By the time they crossed paths, she'd been there a few years.

During weekly critiques sessions, in which students picked apart each other's work, it became routine to watch her destroy the entrepreneurial dreams of Shark Tank wannabes. Her analyses were so brutal, Professor Franklin nicknamed her Ms. Wonderful. Although DJ barely knew her, except for the fact he'd been one of her class kills, he respected Angel.

As she and the white boys laughed it up, DJ thought, *What a waste*. Only a matter of time before one or both had a dick in her.

“She’s in my class,” DJ said.

Seated next to him, Jason gulped the beer. “Bad motherfucker.” He nodded toward the four guys standing off to the side. “Vatos about to run a train.”

DJ didn’t like the image of her being pounded out like a common whore. But Jason was right. From this angle, the entire scene appeared normal. Normal because, based on what they were looking at, Jason was right. College bitches fucked all the time. Sometimes one on one. Sometimes drugs and alcohol turned it into a gangbang.

*Maybe she drank too much? Maybe she ain’t trying to go out like that?*

It didn’t matter. DJ wasn’t going to play the hero. There was a process to life. Even if she was sloppy drunk, it was a choice. And like the choice’s niggas made, good or bad, bitches had to live with the consequences. Nature had run its course—predator and prey.

But the shit wasn’t adding up. Not once had Angel presented herself with heat, as though a freak lay beneath her corporate persona. Not the kind who’d bang a house full of guys. She was a nerd. A fine ass nerd, but still a nerd.

He wondered if he was hating on them. Like every guy in class, DJ had wanted to fuck Angel since the first day he laid eyes on her. Most had asked her out. Word was she’d shot them down cold. Told them she needed to focus on her studies. That she was all about her studies.

*So much for her studies.*

DJ turned his attention to Raul and Robbie. The two had finished their transaction and stood in the hallway, talking. Raul motioned for them to come over. DJ got up, eyed the living room once more. Angel laughed, her head swaying side to side. Just then, one guy placed her hand on his junk. She didn’t remove it.

*Predator and prey.*

When he and Jason stepped into the hallway, DJ noticed three different guys posted outside another door. Slightly open, it set across the hall from the room Raul and Robbie had exited. Different music boomed from inside: Heavy metal. Most of the frat houses were constructed the same way. Rooms originally built as dens, offices, and storage areas, became bedrooms, allowing the owners to charge ridiculous amounts for rent.

“What’s up?” Jason asked.

Raul presented a condom. “Gonna fuck this white bitch real quick.”

“She ain’t white,” DJ said, a tinge of anger in his voice. “She’s one of us.”

“Uh, I hate to disagree with you, big guy,” Robbie said, “but she’s white.”

“How the fuck you gonna tell me, nigga.” DJ pointed toward the living room. “Her name’s, Angel Dominguez.”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa.” Robbie raised his hands in a calming manner. “I’m not talking about her. I’m talking about Cindy.”

He pushed the other door open. Atop the room’s only bed, two guys fucked a white girl from front to back. Robbie grinned. “You guys can go next.”

Not wanting any problems, the guys in the hallway nodded in agreement.

“Fuck that bitch.” DJ again turned his attention to the living room. “She fucking like that?”

“Ain’t never seen her before.” Robbie motioned to the girl in the bedroom. “Came with Cindy. She wants to be in my next film. Auditioned a month ago—in the living room. Afterward, she hung out with me and my producer, Stan. We did lines of coke, got to talking movies, acting, shit like that. Next thing

you know she's on her knees. We ended up fucking the shit out of her." Robbie chuckled nervously. "Anyway, she shows up a week later with a chick from school. Had like four of my buddies here. Her friend was cool, drank, got high, but sorta let it be known she wasn't fucking. That's when Cindy gave her a special drink."

DJ snatched him by the throat, pinning him to the wall. "You saying she spiked her drink?"

When his three friends took a step forward, Raul pulled up his shirt, revealing the nine-millimeter. "Kickback, fools."

Robbie struggled to breathe, his pink face quickly becoming beet red. "I... I didn't make her do it."

DJ threw him to the ground and bolted into the living room.

The wolf pack surrounded the couch, blocking his view.

"Pull 'em down and push her knees forward," a voice said. "You'll be able to slide right in."

DJ stepped between them.

Out cold, Angel lay on the couch. One guy had mounted her thighs but appeared unsure of what to do next. The other knelt near her head, his junk inches from her face as he tried to open her mouth.

DJ snatched him by the hair and threw him to the ground. He then spun around and kicked the other guy in the face. Blood gushed from his broken nose as his body stiffened, falling backward off the couch. Unconscious, his calves lay against the armrest like a stuffed doll.

"What the fuck, man," the guy said whose hair he pulled. He had jumped to his feet and taken a jittery fighting stance.

DJ closed the distance between them and backhanded him to sleep.

"That's my frat brother!" Another guy barked.



Tall and muscular, like most inexperienced fighters, he stepped forward with his hands down, as if talking tough was the same as being tough. DJ crushed the bridge of his nose with a jab. He followed it with a straight left, knocking him out. The sight of their giant friend hitting the ground caused the others to step back.

DJ scooped Angel into his arms. “Where’s her shit!?”

One guy, his left leg shaking, pointed to a black bag on the coffee table. “Uh, she came in the black Mercedes—SUV.”

“If any of her shit is missing, I’m gonna come back here and kill you motherfuckers.”

All shook their heads, confirming they had stolen nothing from the bag.

“You and my brother are cool, ese,” Jason told Robbie. “Business as usual. But you betta let your homies know what it is. Cops come looking for mí hermano...” he motioned to DJ. “And mí familia gonna come looking for them.”

Jason didn’t say another word. He didn’t have to. Robbie would take it from there. He’d tell his friends about the infamous Abregon family and the local gangs, all while explaining how lucky they were to still be alive.

Outside, DJ gently set Angel in the back of the Escalade as Jason fished car keys from her bag and handed them to Raul.

Twenty minutes later, both vehicles eased into the darkened carport of DJ’s house. He carried Angel inside, placed her onto his bed, took off her shoes, and covered her with a blanket.

He stepped into the living room, lit a Newport, and took a long drag. “Couldn’t let them do her like that. Real talk, I feel like going back and smoke’n that bitch.”

“Relax, homz,” Jason said. “Need to figga out what’chu gonna do with la chicá?”

“Gonna let her sleep it off.”

“Hopefully, she don’t wake up crazy.”

“Hopefully.” DJ sat on the couch and took another drag.  
“Take my truck. We’ll hook up in the morning.”

After they left, DJ kicked off his Jordan’s and lay on the couch. He didn’t know why, but he felt relieved knowing they drugged her, that his perfect image of her was still intact.

\*\*\*\*\*

Awakened by the sudden squeak of the bedroom door, DJ opened his eyes and sat up. Shirtless, he clicked the table lamp on, glimpsed the clock above the TV. 4:05 a.m.

He eyed the hallway. Even with frayed hair and a crinkled skirt, Angel looked flawless.

She stared at him for a long moment before stepping closer. “Jack? Jack Johnson?”

The sound of her voice sent a wave of electricity shooting through his body. “Yeah,” DJ said, standing up.

She took a step back.

He raised hands to calm her. “It’s okay, you’re safe.”

“How did I get here?”

“What do you remember?”

“Cindy and I... we stopped by a friend’s house. Her friend’s house. A movie guy.” Angel eyed the carpeted floor. “She’s an actress. I was waiting for her, and....”

DJ saw it in her eyes. The memory was slowly returning.

“Started talking to some guys...” she continued, looking up at DJ. “Now I’m here.”

“She spiked your drink for them.”

Angel wrapped arms around her body, dropped her gaze, expecting the worse.

“Nothing happened,” he said. “Got there right when you blacked out. Recognized you.” He motioned to the recliner beside her. “Have a seat.”

She did.

He went into the kitchen, returned with a glass and a can of Red Bull. He filled the glass, handed it to her.

Angel drank and set the glass on her lap. “Why?”

“Why what?”

“Why save me? We don’t really know one another.”

“Truth is, I thought you were partying and got wasted. Almost stayed out of it.”

“But you didn’t.”

He eyed the Newport box, decided against lighting up. “You’ve always been polished. The guy we went to see told us what she did.” He shrugged. “All I needed was a reason.”

“I should call the police.”

“Was hoping you wouldn’t say that.”

“Why? They nearly raped me,” she said.

“Yeah, but I knocked three of them out.” He looked away. “I sorta have a history of knocking niggas out.”

“I can testify. Tell them what happened.”

“Can’t stop you, but I don’t need the heat.”

DJ wanted to tell her he did three years in prison for putting a guy in a coma. Was on parole for the incident. Calling the police constituted *police contact*. The only thing his parole officer would focus on was the three guys he put to sleep. In parole terms, it was an act of violence. He could hear the asshole now. *Why didn’t you simply call the police? What were you doing there in the first place? Who were you with?* DJ knew he’d be violated.

Angel sipped the glass and huffed. It wasn’t an angry huff. More like a *‘we need to find a solution to the rapist problem,’* huff.

She stood, took a contemplative posture, like the one used during her critique sessions. “Well, how do you suppose we keep it from happening to someone else? I couldn’t live with myself if they harmed another girl because I did nothing.”

“Take three of my niggas. See who you need to see. Threaten who you need to threaten.”

“And what makes you think they’ll heed my warning?”

“Because they will.”

She took another drink, eyed him curiously. “Very well. The least I can do is avoid causing you any problems. I’ll take your friends to confront the loser whose house it was. Perhaps that will suffice.”

DJ grinned inside. That was the Angel he knew: poised, determined, a fucking badass.

“My tío told me never to accept a drink from anyone,” she said.

“Smart dude.”

“Smartest person I’ve ever known. He passed away.”

“Sorry to hear that. Pretty sure he’d want you to pick better friends.”

“I agree.” Angel straightened her posture, walked up to him. “I can assure you, Jack, it will never happen again.”

DJ towered above her. “My friends call me DJ.”

“I prefer Jack if that’s alright with you.”

*You can call me whatever you want.*

“Jack’s cool.”

Angel stepped in, wrapped arms around his waist, hugged him tightly. “Thank you so much.”

It was then she wept.

## 2

### *“Butterflies”*

DJ stood beside his truck and watched as Angel walked briskly along the university parking lot. A perfect young tigress, her heels clacked lightly against the asphalt like the pendulum of a grandfather clock.

In the eight classes since the incident, she had twice smiled at him before quickly dropping her gaze. That was it. No, “Hi Jack, thanks again for saving me.” No request for his brothers to meet up and go with her to Robbie’s, as they had planned. Nothing.

By the second week of silence, DJ figured she’d put the entire event behind her, and that included him. He wasn’t mad, though. He had observed her class demeanor and she seemed okay. Better than okay. Stronger, more decisive with her words, Angel no longer took prisoners. Like today, when on two separate critique sessions she had stayed true to the

nickname, Ms. Wonderful, making quick work of Xavier Smith's *Java Juice* proposal, and Cynthia Wilkes *Centered Life Yoga* studio. In both instances, Angel had cut off their entrepreneurial heads like a fucking Samurai, tossed them in the middle of the classroom. Did so with the sexiest smile on earth.

"Good afternoon, Jack."

"What's going on, girl?"

"Will not be needing your friends after all."

"A'ight."

"Aren't you curious why?"

"I don't do curious, mamá." He shrugged. "If you're good, I'm good."

She stepped closer, placed a hand on his arm. "I finally dared to go to Max's last night. That's the loser's name whose home it was. Jacob was there. Remembered him from that night."

"Handled your business?"

"I certainly did. And let me tell you, mister, your impact on them was amazing. Geez Louise, I've never seen two men so afraid. I thought they were going to pass out. At any rate, they assured me their friends were equally afraid, deeply sorry, and wanted nothing more to do with you or your friends. Another guy, Robert, went into his room and returned with five thousand dollars in cash. Strange he would keep so much money on his person."

Not to DJ. Robbie and Raul had continued doing business.

"Gave it to me for my troubles," she said. "Though I think it was less about my troubles and more about keeping you and your friends at bay."

"Hope you took it."

“Sure did. Then I slapped his face.” Her eyes beamed. “Slapped all three of their faces. And they let me. Didn’t budge one bit. It was like some sort of hazing ritual. Told them their lives would be in grave danger if I ever heard of an incident involving another girl.” She placed a hand on her heart, laughed the sweetest laugh. “Slapped their faces, Jack. Can you believe it?”

“Definitely. You’re strong as hell. And you got a nice chunk of cash out of the deal.”

“Oh, I don’t need the money. Dropped it off at the Ronald McDonald House. Watching them nearly poop their pants was the only satisfaction necessary.” She paused, contemplatively. “Hope my threatening them doesn’t cause you any problems.”

“It won’t. And you weren’t lying.”

“About what?”

“About their lives being in danger.”

She smirked. “I was wondering... can I buy you lunch?”

“You don’t have to thank me anymore.”

“I beg to differ. I’m forever in your debt. But I’m over what happened. I mean, I was going to give Cindy a piece of my mind when I saw her, but she never returned to class. Rumor is she has dropped out. Perhaps fearing legal repercussion. Aside from that, I’ve moved on.” Angel folded her arms at the chest. “My request is more about courage. Before that night, I wanted to ask you to have a cup of coffee with me, but I was too much of a scaredy cat.”

“And now you’re not?”

“And now I’m not.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Inside the crowded student cafeteria, DJ and Angel sat at a table nearest the fire exit. During the last hour, he learned she lived in Henderson and was an only child, like him. Her parents were middle-class conservatives who raised her around mostly whites. Education wise, Angel had attended the best private schools' money could buy, meaning the handful of minorities they had exposed her to, walked and talked just like her. Regardless of her upbringing, Angel was proud of her Mexican, Columbian heritage.

DJ loved the flow of her speech. It carried an air of sophistication that made her sexier, as if that were at all possible. A byproduct of the conservative upbringing, DJ knew, historically, his people (black and brown) usually associated proper speech with a desire to be white. He also knew that was bullshit. An educated flow wasn't a white thing. Barak and Michelle were educated. Dolores Huerta was educated. Pedro Albizu Campos was educated.

Her upper-class background wasn't a big deal either. His brother, Carlos—not by blood—held a revolutionary mindset and didn't ascribe to *us* (minorities) versus *them* (all whites) mentality. Carlos had schooled him on the Young Patriots, white Appalachian revolutionaries that ran with the Black Panthers.

“History books don't be talk'n 'bout them,” Carlos said, one night after too many shots of Cuervo. “But them niggas was riders. And guess what their logo was?”

“What?”

“A Confederate flag with a white and black hand embracing in the middle.”

“Get the fuck outta here.”

“Real talk, nigga. It was like this.” Carlos reached out and took DJ's hand, holding it up as if the two were about to arm



wrestle. “Google that shit. Young Patriots knew the motherfuckas up top with all the money is our real enemies.”

Angel told DJ she loved his street swag. That he differed from similar males she and her friends had encountered in the past, many of whom were extremely vulgar when she did not respond to the catcalls. DJ knew the type. Soft niggas who got in their feelings when a female saw through the game. She told DJ that although he carried a dangerous demeanor; he was sweet, kind, and confident in who he was. He clearly had nothing to prove, a characteristic she found extremely attractive.

They talked for two hours—which felt like thirty minutes—before going into the class dynamic.

DJ teased Angel on her ability to pick apart proposals, joking that her intensity bordered on cruelty. He pointed out one student, Amos Whitehall, who she’d brought to tears.

“You’re crazy,” Angel said. “Everyone knows how sensitive he is. I took it easy on him.”

“Easy on him!? You started walking ‘round class in them high heels, talking ‘bout...” DJ raised his massive arms, “are you not entertained! Are you not entertained!”

Several people in the cafeteria turned their heads, his deep voice drawing their attention. DJ wasn’t sure if what he saw in Angel’s eyes was embarrassment or pleasure in their social discomfort.

“Whatever.” She punched his arm softly.

“Ouch.” He leaned back and feigned injury. He then eyed her beige suit jacket, skirt, nylons, and matching shoes. “You always dress like this?”

“Like what?”

“Like a smoking hot CEO. Goddamn, girl.” He raised a hand. “No offense.”

“Oh, it would take a great deal for you to offend me. And yes, I love the attire of corporate professionalism.”

He bent an agreeable lip. “You’re definitely killing it. Anyway, word on the street is you’re some kind of genius. Started college at like six or seven.”

She laughed. “Sixteen. Studying for my MBA. Plan to open a marketing firm in Vegas. Expand internationally.”

“No doubt you’ll kill that too.”

“What makes you so sure?”

“Cause you’re definitely a genius at the business shit. Even Professor Franklin knows that. And because I’m psychic.” He looked up, closed his eyes, pretended to see a vision. “Yup. There you are. The sexy, badass, marketing firm-owner-lady.”

DJ opened his eyes. Her smile was brighter than ever, the episode at Robbie’s place truly behind her.

“Tell you what, if that happens your first campaign is on the house.”

“Deal.”

“Okay, mister, tell me something about yourself. Something nobody in class knows.”

“I like going to the Spring Mountains... by myself.”

“Alone? Why not with friends?”

He pouted, playfully. “I don’t have any friends.”

“Aw, I’ll be your friend.”

“Cool. But all jokes aside, my niggas ain’t on the whole nature vibe.”

“Why not? Nature’s awesome.”

“We’ll have to hit the mountains sometime.”

“What about now?”

He looked around at the cluster of students. Her gentle nature was messing with his ability to keep the world at arm’s length.

His hesitation forced her to add, "I'm sorry. If you don't..."

"Let's do it."

\*\*\*\*\*

DJ parked at the far end of the narrow overlook and shut off the engine. He shuffled out of the vehicle, watched as Angel pulled alongside his truck.

A minute later, she still hadn't exited. DJ considered the possibility she might be a little wary since the dense woods were better suited for the disposal of bodies than an afternoon of sightseeing. When she finally stepped out, he saw the reason for the delay. She had exchanged the designer heels for a tiny pair of pink Nikes.

*Adorable.*

"I like your truck," he said.

"Thanks. Drives awesome, don't you think?"

"My nigga Raul drove it that night. Took you in my truck. What kind is it?"

"Mercedes Brabus AMG. It's super comfortable."

"And super expensive."

"The tío I told you about left me some money."

"My bad. Didn't mean to be all up in your business."

"It's okay."

A short time later, DJ had taken her to his favorite location, an isolated fifteen-foot walkway along the mountain's apex.

Angel took in the view. "God, Jack, it's breathtaking."

"Makes you feel small enough to appreciate life."

"Couldn't have said it better myself."

He examined her Nikes. "Cute."

“My non-CEO attire.” She extended a foot. “For my spin class.”

“Bike riding? You’re turning out to be one sexy little mami.”

“Why thank you, sir,” she said, her voice silky. “And you’re incredibly hot if I say so myself.” She surveyed the entire landscape. “I see why you come here, it’s so peaceful.”

“My fortress of solitude.”

“You’re certainly built like Superman.” She turned her body to face him. “Enough about me. How long have you lived in Nevada?”

“Why you say that?”

“You have an east coast accent and a different flair than most guys. Especially the ones from... how should I say this... urban backgrounds.”

DJ laughed. “I’m originally from New York. Brooklyn. Pops died when I was born. Mom died two years later. Cancer.”

Angel placed a hand on her heart. “God, I’m so sorry.”

“Got no memory of them. After she died, I had no relatives in New York, so I went to live with Carlos. He’s not biological, but I call him my older brother. Him and my pops were partners in crime. He’s Dominican, like my pops. Mom was from Haiti. We stayed in New York ‘til I was twelve.”

“I don’t mean to pry.”

“It’s all good, we’re kicking it. Enough with the sadness. How did you get so dope with the business?”

“Tío Javy was a shrewd capitalist. I took an interest at a young age—used to ask him all kinds of questions. Once he saw my interest, he nurtured it; taught me everything he knew. I became a sponge and fell in love with making money, which he made super simple to understand.”

“Simple to you because you got a gift. But trust me, it ain’t simple. If it were, everybody would do it. And the way you be cracking skulls, he must’ve been a genius too.”

“He was. Lived in Miami at the time of his passing. We spent summers abroad, traveling all over the world, which sorta became my classroom.”

“Any place cool?”

“Italy. Spain. China. Even Russia.”

“He must’ve been really successful ‘cause I’m pretty sure that’s hella money.” DJ shook his head. “Sorry, I keep getting all up in your business.”

“It’s okay, Jack. And he was remarkably successful. If a company had an ounce of profitability, he bought it. That’s why I’m so thorough. He taught me how to read below the bottom line, which varies from company to company. And yes, now that I’m older, and know the cost of his lifestyle, I realize how wealthy he was.”

“Need to keep that to yourself.”

“Always do.” She walked up and motioned for him to lean over, as if she wanted to whisper something in his ear. When he did, Angel kissed his cheek. “But I’m sharing it with my friend, Jack, who I trust.”

DJ fought back a blush. “Growing up, Carlos had a little money. Nigga wasn’t rich, but I never wanted for anything. Once we got here, he started making business moves.”

“Is he the reason you’re taking classes?”

DJ nodded. “Owns two businesses. A small restaurant, and an auto repair shop. Wants me to expand the portfolio. Treats it like some Northside empire I’m gonna inherit.” He stepped closer. “I’d go into business with you any day.”

“I’ll hold you to that.” She placed a soft hand on his arm. “I’m sorry, Jack. Don’t mean to ask so many questions. I just find you interesting.”

“You’re good. And I’m having a blast.”

“Me too. Never hung out with someone like you.”

“Damn girl, *someone like me?*”

“I didn’t mean it like that. You’re sweet... extremely buff... and god, super hot. Super, super hot. But the same streets that told you I was a genius, said you were a fighter, and... that you were in prison. I’m not into bad boys, but the fact you’re so humble fascinates me.”

“Them streets love to talk.”

“They sure do.”

“Use’ta kickbox. Was undefeated as a pro. Problem was, I fought more in the streets than I did in the ring. One night, I got into it with this one nigga. Before I knew what happened, he was in a coma. Cost me three years.” DJ moved to the edge of the overlook. “Prison was good for me. Taught me how to slow down life... reflect... be careful about every step I take.”

\*\*\*\*\*

DJ walked side by side with Angel, stopping next to her truck. He extended a softball sized fist for her to bump. “Okay, my super smart and sexy friend, I’m gonna need you to drive safely. That way we’ll get to kick it again someday.”

“Soon, I hope.” She bumped her tiny fist, leaned against the truck’s door. “FYI, I totally enjoyed your company.”

“Not as much as I enjoyed yours.”

“Don’t be so sure.” She grabbed his collar, pulled him down to her lips, kissed him.

DJ wrapped hands around her waist. “Shouldn’t I have done that?”

“Of course. But I get it. With all that happened, you probably felt awkward.”

“Smart...” He kissed her back. “And perceptive.”

Angel set hands into his. “Have a confession. Ever since our first day in class, I’ve had a giant crush on you. Wanted to get to know you better, but I was super intimidated by the fighter, prison stuff.”

“Since you’re spilling your guts, I would’ve been holla’d at you, but I heard a few niggas in class had asked you out. That you shot ‘em down cold.” He shrugged. “Guess you weren’t the only one intimidated.”

\*\*\*\*\*

As DJ turned east onto I-19, he struggled with the unnatural feelings running through his mind. Unnatural in the sense he’d never felt them before. He didn’t want to even consider the origins, but it was hard not to admit the obvious. There wasn’t another woman in Vegas who could touch her. It wasn’t even close, not to his taste. A goddess, she was the perfect woman: beautiful, readymade rich, and sweet as honey. And she was feeling him, kept his heartbeat twenty beats above normal, all as he fought the wellspring of hunger rising in his soul.

The phone’s beep snapped him back to the present.

A missed text. Picking up the phone, he read: **The butterflies in my tummy are killing me. I already miss the taste of your lips**

*Butterflies? That’s exactly what this feels like. And they’re fucking killing me, too.* All he wanted to do was spend every second with her.

DJ texted: **Don't trip, I feel 'em, too. And I could spend the entire night kissing you**

She texted: **Where?**

He texted: **Anyplace you want**

She texted: **Purrrrr**

*Goddamn, she's killing me.*

Purchase right now...