

## Chapter Eight

Darrel pulled out into the yard in the 1969 Mustang Fastback Boss 429 in metallic copper with black metallic flake rally stripes. The flake shined in the sun. Wendy walked over to the car and leaned in asking, *“and you think this is subtle?”* Darrel ran his hand over the wood steering wheel and said, *“subtle is overrated. Painting this car in anything else would have made it stand out even more like a hot pink Ferrari or a neon green Jaguar.”* Darrel got out of the car and held the door open for Wendy. When she was behind the wheel, he said, *“we have many cars for the job. A car like this is something you enjoy. Something more than just a car.”* Wendy ran her hand along the steering wheel and down to the clutch. She said, *“you do know that the next car is going to be hot pink or neon green.”* Darrel smiled and said, *“yeah I kind of regret saying those colors.”* Sally was standing in the doorway. Darrel looked over at her then he asked, *“does she know?”* Wendy smiled saying, *“not yet but I think it’s time.”*

Sally found a long open stretch of road with the car running hot near ninety-five miles an hour. Wendy held on tight trying not to scream. She asked, *“didn’t Darrel say to not do this?”* Sally said, *“yeah you are supposed to break the motor in but..... I mean how can I take it slow? There’s nothing slow about this car.”* Wendy smiled saying, *“this car could be worth somewhere around one-hundred thousand dollars but not if you kill the original motor..... but ‘it’s your car so whatever.”* Sally slowed the car down to a stop and looked over at Wendy saying, *“don’t play with me.”* Wendy said, *“you are well worth this and so much more.”* Sally spun the tail around and laid some rubber on the blacktop. Sally asked, *“so that’s why all the questions about color?”* Wendy said while trying not to scream, *“no, I told him to do a basic paint, not this show job..... what you chose this color?”*

*“Luis, I know you are having trouble understanding who you are and your father and I aren’t helping, but I hope that one day you can understand and maybe forgive us.”* Luis played the recording again. The recording was the last words of his mother just days before her and his father’s death at the hands of the cartel that took over their small border town so they could build a tunnel to smuggle drugs into the states. Jorge slipped behind the wheel of the truck and started

the motor. Luis played the recording again. Jorge gently put his hand on Luis's hand and pulled it away from the play button saying, "*we are making this right.*" Luis turned the phone off and put it away. He said, "*I want to do something to remember their anniversary tonight.*" Jorge replied, "*I think we need to find a source of information.*" He pulled out onto the highway heading to the small town of Dent, New Mexico. After about an hour of driving, Jorge asked, "*do you think we'll find someone.*" Luis smiled as he replied, "*the one thing you can always count on is finding an addict in America.*"

Dent, New Mexico had a population of fourteen hundred people most of which are either trying to hide or just lost. The town was once a stopping point for the trains to add water or sand, but that was long ago, now the town is a stopping point for illegals to find water and racists to track the illegals. Much like any town, you can find what you want in Dent. Alicia Gram knew what she wanted and how to get it. She spent her nights at the large truck stop just outside of town working on her knees servicing truckers and her days smoking pot laced with Phencyclidine also known as angel dust. That night her shift was coming to an end with more than enough to buy her fix and just maybe some food. A tall, handsome Hispanic man approached Alicia. He showed her two hundred-dollar bills but didn't say a word. Alicia thought how she would almost do this guy for free, well almost. She followed him around a corner where she found another man holding something yellow in a gun-like shape. A flash of light and an intense sting across her chest was the last thing she remembered.

## Part two

Alicia awoke to find herself stripped down to her bra and panties and duct taped to a chair. She was in a dark room with one bare lightbulb overhead nearly blinding her. A dark form came into her view with something in its hands. It was a plastic bottle with a wand sprayer. The form sprayed her down with what seemed like saline. The salt water hit her eyes and into her mouth. She started to panic asking, "*what's going on? Who are you? Why are you doing this? Who the fuck are you?*" Luis said, "*so many questions. You ask and demand as if you were in a place to demand anything.*" Jorge replied, "*we have a few questions, and I think we are in that*

*right place for a few answers.*” Alicia tried to shift in the seat but with her forearms fully taped down all she could do is wiggle. Luis came into the light. She could see it was the man from the alley and a sort of relief came over her as she thought this was just some sort of twisted roll play. She said, *“no, I normally don’t do this bondage thing but as long as you pay.”* Luis slapped her across the face hard enough to draw blood. The saline went into the open wound in her mouth, and the pain doubled. Then there was an underlining feeling like there was something else in the water. A drug of some kind. Luis grabbed her by her face just below her chin and said, *“no, this isn’t about sex or even about you. We want answers, and we will do whatever we need to do to get them.”* A metallic taste filled her mouth as she spat out a glob of blood. Alicia asked, *“I’ll tell you whatever as long as you let me go.”* She hesitated then asked, *“what do you want to know?”*

The overhead light went out sending Alicia back into darkness. She started to scream catching herself turning it into a silent plea. A bank of fluorescent lights came on revealing the room. It was windowless with the scent of decay like an abandoned building. Jorge stuck a probe to Alicia’s upper chest then another a little lower. A monitor started to beep as it showed her heart levels going past a safe amount. The tears in her eyes from the hit across her face made it difficult to see what was happening. Luis prepared a needle with what would be some of the stolen heroin they used as cover to gain access to the country. The amount was more than enough to kill her. He showed her the needle and said, *“tell us where we can find your dealer, or you go flying.”* The monitor sounded an alarm. Luis turned the sound down. Over the next twenty minutes, Alicia cried, spat blood and told the two men everything she knew about the drugs going in and out of the truck stop. The more she spoke, the lighter she felt. Whatever they had laced the saline with was starting to take her pain away. Luis turned to Jorge and nodded. Jorge said, *“you were a good little doggie, and now it’s time for your reward.”* It would be a few days before Alicia’s body would be found in an alley. In her quick autopsy, the coroner noted the small caliber wound to her forehead as he thought about the strange smile on her face. The coroner was busy that night after the events at the truck stop.

Finding what they needed was easy on a road laden with trucks going back and forth from the US and Mexico. Diesel, an ammonia-based fertilizer and other supplies turning the

hijacked truck into a weapon. The truck belonged to a company in Dallas driven by Grant Hester a part-time trucker and part-time dealer. He was Alicia's dealer as well as a dealer to many other women along his route. He would be blamed for what happened. A disgruntled overworked driver turned suicide bomber. His death would force his suppliers to find another driver slowing down their operations. Jorge followed in a van they stole from a house near the highway while Luis drove the truck into the truck stop and up to a pump near the middle of the complex. The Middle of Nowhere Truck Stop was in the middle of nowhere along a busy highway going to and from Mexico. A place for cheap diesel and rest for the long-haul truckers. It also served as a place for cheap sex and drugs. Luis got out and ran Hester's fleet card for the fuel. Next to him was a truck with hazardous waste signs and next to that was a truck showing possible radiological warnings. In the back of his mind, he saw this place being closed off for many years with contamination spreading across the desert.

Wendy got out of bed and did her usual five am yoga stretches as the coffee brewed. She loved these early mornings where she could have a few minutes to herself to do nothing but meditate on the past while preparing for the future. She slipped on a long jersey over her sports bra and yoga pants and went into the common room to watch the news. A fire truck raced by the compound than another along with several police cars and what looked like national guard vehicles. She turned on the news to see a smoking crater that once was one of the largest fuel stations in the state. The small town of Dent, New Mexico was calling out for help from every city nearby for what had to be the worst disaster in the history of the region. By eight the news was calling it a terrorist attack with footage of the truck exploding taking the station with the blast. The news then talked about possible radiation until a spokesperson for the National Transportation Agency dispelled the rumor saying how there was a truck in the stop but it was empty with little chance of contamination. By Noon the news had Hester's name and tied it to the truck at the center of the explosion. By twelve-thirty they were harassing his wife and children about his motivations for his terrorism. None of them knew the truth.

Luis and Jorge drove for about an hour before they found a motel room. They had paid for a room near the truck stop only to find the explosion shattered all the windows in the building

forcing the place to close. In their room, Luis turned on Fox News, and the two made love as they listened to the pundit nearly break down over a terrorist attack on American soil. When they were finished, they channel surfed between CNN, MSNBC and Fox News as the networks fought to be the first to come to the wrong conclusions. The motel filled with cars and people trying to get rooms. Luis watched as people argued over parking spots. They had ditched the van in an alley and parked their truck in a nearby lot. Their guns were in a storage locker away from the truck just in case they were stopped. Luis found a man who could supply them with papers that would make them appear legal including real New Mexico driver's licenses from a well-paid state employee. They would hide out and wait for the documents, and now they would have to wait among the people searching for answers.

### Part Three

Sally loaded her car with supplies including the portable ultrasound while Jill and Gina packed for what could be a stay. Sally was once a trauma certified nurse in an emergency room, and the city of Dent was asking for any kind of medical assistance. With Jill and Gina in tow, she would drive over and help as much as she could while trying to find out who did this act of terror. Scott and Darrel were staying behind to work on a new van and Wendy, and Cathy would stay and watch Gina's children. Gina had left taking her children with her only to come back the night before the truck stop bombing asking if they could move back. Gary and Zoey were in Flagstaff, Arizona seeing his family. Sally found a place to park her car after dropping Jill and Gina off with the Red Cross where they were put to work right away. It was hard not to notice all the guys staring at her car. She got out, grabbed her bags and made her way into what looked like a war zone. Seven hours later, the scene was finished, and anyone that could be helped was helped. Sally found Jill and Gina sitting on the ground back to back. They both saw her then the blood on her shirt. The three walked back to her car to find it surrounded by firefighters and the police. They past them and got in. Starting the car the radio came on, and in some sort of irony the song Mustang Sally started. Jill leaned over and asked, "*you planned that didn't you?*"

Luis watched a copper, and black Mustang sounded by men driven by a black woman drive away. He thought about taking the car but soon realized it would stand out too much for a stolen car. Jorge walked over to Luis and looked out the window at all the activity. He asked, “*I wonder what they would do if they knew it was us?*” Luis smiled and said, “*up in America they call it lynching. The land of the free and the home of the angry racist mob.*” Luis walked away from the window and sat on the bed grabbing and putting on his boxers then pants. He asked, “*I wonder what the cartels are thinking back home?*” Jorge said, “*giving what the news up here are saying they most likely are thinking terrorists and if we are lucky then they are thinking about how an attack will increase security on the border.*” Luis replied, “*as long as it shifts the cartels away from the border then I don’t care.*”

Wendy sat back in her chair and said, “*I hate to say it but whoever did the bombing did us a favor.*” Cathy looked over at her saying, “*you don’t really mean that. A lot of innocent people died including several children.*” Wendy turned the television off. Cathy asked, “*I want an answer, do you really agree with operating like that? Just how far would you go?*” Wendy looked at her hands saying, “*I don’t know how far I would go but..... I don’t think I could ever intentionally harm innocent people..... not intentionally.*” Zoey rolled over from Gary nearly falling off the couch. Wendy asked, “*should we wake them?*” Cathy looked over at the two naked on the couch and said, “*maybe we should cover them before the kids wake?*” Wendy went to the sink and ran some water into a glass. She took the glass over to the couch and before Cathy could say anything, Wendy dumped the water over Gary and Zoey. Gary jumped up then covered himself with a pillow while Zoey acted as if nothing was out of the ordinary. Wendy said, “*there are children here so keep your private parts private, or the next time it will be hot wax.*” Zoey replied, “*promises, promises.*”

A few hours later and the daily commotion was in full swing with people eating breakfast while Gina got her children ready for school. Three televisions were on covering the three cable news networks of MSNBC, CNN and Fox News. All three were putting on a spin from tragedy to terror. Fox News was talking about the President’s latest attempts to get funding for a border wall. None of them were talking about the drug and prostitution problem at the truck stop.

Within a few hours, most of them were off on their daily tasks from the management of the gas station to work on the new truck. Wendy sat at her desk working on the books while listening to the chatter in the station as well as the television and the police scanner. The drastic difference between what the police were saying and what the news was saying made her rethink their plans of ramping up their attacks. They planned to get together that night and lay out a strategy. Pick targets and layout a roadmap to closing as many dealers as they can. Wendy started to think about what an end would be. They never talked about how all this would end, but after George killed himself, she found herself questioning why they were doing any of this.

#### Part Four

Cathy walked over to Wendy and sat beside her on the couch as the cable news cacophony blared on over the explosion. She put her arm around Wendy and said, *“I can tell what you are thinking, and I have just one answer.”* Wendy looked over at her with a, *“OK and that answer is”* gesture. Cathy smiled and said, *“this is bigger than you and me. What we are doing is for all of us and those we help. I think we spend too much time killing and not enough time helping but even with all the death we do good.”* Wendy turned to the others as they sat and talked. She said, *“yes, I think we should do more to help. I think about all those that died..... All the people I killed, and I can’t help but think how many of them could have been innocent or deserved a second chance like the one I had.”* Cathy leaned over and said, *“babe I hate to say this, but you had more than one second chance. I think I lost count on your second chances and none of that matters. What matters is who are you are right now and what you are doing right now.”* Wendy leaned over and kissed Cathy.

An hour later Wendy parked next to Sam’s gun shop. The closed sign was still on the door, but the lights were on. The ATF and FBI vans were gone as well as any visible signs of governmental surveillance. The door opened, and a hand waved her inside. She knew she would have to explain why she left his nephew Owen in Mexico and that this might not end well. Sam let her in and hugged her. His wild over the top combover was gone, replaced with a near bald top with just a little hair on the sides and a deep tan. He looked like he lost twenty years with his

time away from the shop. Sam said, *“it’s good to see you my dear, and I hope you and everyone else are doing well.”* As he said this, he had his hand up to his mouth in a shushing manner while pointing to a sign saying, *“infested by the Feds.”* Wendy nodded and said, *“everything’s great Sam. I was wondering if that ball ammo came today for my black powder rifle?”* Sam replied, *“yes I have them in the back.”* He led her into the back room. Inside he asked, *“I took the bugs out of this room and placed them in the bathroom. How are things really going?”* Wendy replied, *“quiet. We stopped all activities and now with this thing down in Dent I think our active operations will be on hold for a while.”* Sam cocked his head in that dog with a question posed and asked, *“that wasn’t you?”* Wendy just shook her head saying, *“no.”* Something felt off about how Sam was acting. She said, *“that’s something we would never do.”* Sam smiled and said, *“I wanted to hear that from you in person…… I think there’s another crew doing what you and your or our family is doing but in a scorched earth sort of way.”*

Wendy left with a fifty-caliber St. Louis Hawken rifle, a kit for another rifle, rounds, black powder, and primers. Hidden in the stock was a micro flash card with all the information Sam could find on the new people working in the area including video of two men abducting an addict and the same men breaking into a gun shop near Albuquerque NM. They stole ammo and survival gear but nothing easily traceable like a gun. Both men moved with precision taking as little time as they could take what they needed going to those items as if they knew where everything was. Sam said how he watched the day footage but hadn’t seen anyone that matched their body types in the video. They wore gloves and used hand signals instead of speaking, but their signals seemed unusual. Sam couldn’t pin it down, but he felt the men weren’t from the States. Possibly military but not American.

A teenage girl walked down the aisle of the Prepper’s Paradise military surplus and gun shop dedicated to people that like to be prepared for the end of the world. Gia was sixteen and dressed in a mix of black camouflage and leather with a spiked dog collar and near thigh high black boots. She was in the new age goth that shopped in this store every day. The owner of the store watched her while smiling about all the money such people spent in his store. Up until the show bearing his name came around most people had called Dexter Diego by the name Dex but

after he was known as Mister Dexter and he liked the change. He went from his usual green camouflage to a white lab coat with dots of red paint acting as blood. He liked playing the part. He also liked it when the pretty little girls dressed in his gear. He didn't see the camera hiding in her jet-black teased hair. Jorge watched the live footage and grew angry watching the fifty-something old man watch the ass of the teenage girl. Luis made notes on the store marking where the supplies they needed were as well as any problems. They paid Gia three thousand dollars to shop in the store as well as a small bag of cocaine. She passed on the cocaine meaning she would live when she was done. The ones that took the drugs died that night when the job was done.

That night both men went down the isles with the map and plans in their heads taking what they needed. Both men in black from their boots to the balaclavas over their faces. Jorge had a battle flag of Virginia also known as the Confederate flag while Luis had an American flag in shades of gray with a blue band in the middle. Their goal was to make people think they were white supremacists sending the authorities in the wrong direction. They took what they needed leaving traceable items. Their time in the Mexican military came in handy with timing and execution. The next morning, they met with an expat from their hometown who would supply them with a new truck and a place to operate from. To protect their operation, they killed the man and buried the body in the desert. According to contacts back in Mexico, the explosion had shifted the operations but not away from their part of the border. Another large attack might just force the smuggling further west or east away from what was left of the small village of Jaluco on the border. The village was little more than a drug warehouse built over a mass grave.

Wendy turned the video screen off after showing the footage of the break-in to the others. Sally asked, *“what do we know about them? Where they from....? You know?”* Cathy replied, *“No. we don't know much if anything about them but what we see on the video and their actions at the gas station.”* Darrel said, *“I have known more than a few military people, and they carry themselves as military.”* Sally replied, *“military training can be faked.”* Wendy asked the room, *“does any of it matter?”* Jill looked over and asked, *“so now what do we do?”* Wendy said, *“I want to find a way to cover what we are doing with another project. A place away from the operation where we can help people with problems not just kill them.”* Zoey asked, *“some sort of*

*halfway house or I don't know a camp?"* Sally smirked and shook her head, but Wendy replied, *"yes. I want us to do more good than evil. Help not just kill."* Zoey mouthed the words, *"more good."* Gina said, *"there is the old Adobe Motel on the other side of town."* Everyone turned to Gina who went on saying, *"we own the property and it just sits there falling apart. We could turn that into a sort of halfway house for people looking to get clean and sober."* The room went silent until Scott asked, *"we own that crap hole out in the middle of nowhere?"*

## Part Five

Luis parked the truck behind the building so it wouldn't draw any unwanted attention. The old motel was long abandoned and just far enough away from the road to give them some privacy so they can plan and work. Most of all the old Adobe Motel and Spa offered them a place to sleep. Jorge wanted to knock a wall down in the back so they could pull the truck inside away from view. Luis could see running a place like this back home then he remembered their home was gone and everyone that mattered was dead. They planned on staying in this place for as long as they could or until they were finished. Jorge had two MRE meals ready to eat opened and ready to eat. The American combat rations were made to eat without any kind of cooking source with special packs that heat when water is added. They took as much of this food as they could so they could stay in the field without any unnecessary human contact. Luis pulled Jorge's head back and kissed him while he slipped the pizza MRE away from Jorge leaving him the chicken and rice. Jorge said, *"ass hole."*

They finished eating and sat near a radio listening to a local station while drinking from a bottle of cheap tequila and making love. Luis wondered how much longer they could keep doing this. How long until they were caught or killed. Jorge thought about what they would do or are going to do when the cartel left the border. They talked about going home and dealing with what was left of their town and maybe find their families remains. He could see a future that was nothing but an unrealistic dream to Luis. Jorge's family never knew about how he felt or anything about his life after he left to join the army. When he was discharged, he and Luis were friends but not much more. It would be over two years before the two became more than just

friends and it was a first for the both. Neither of them planned on ever going home until there was no longer a home to go back to. They fell asleep and, in the morning, they packed the truck and moved on.

The motel felt wrong. They wanted fewer walls and more ways to escape. If they were caught squatting in the old motel, their fake papers could be questioned while two men camping would draw less attention. Jorge went to set a fire to destroy any evidence of their stay, but Luis stopped him saying, *“that will draw just as much attention.”* Jorge lit the bottle of diesel and tossed it into the open doorway. The two drove away and went for about an hour before Jorge said, *“fuck them all. If they could keep their problems on their side of the border, then none of it would have happened. If I could, I would burn this country down to the ground.”*

*“Yes, I do..... what? I don’t know..... No, it’s empty,”* Wendy hung up the phone. She turned to Cathy and said, *“the Adobe is burning.”* Cathy put her cup of coffee down and asked, *“what?”* Wendy grabbed her coat and said, *“that was the fire department on the phone, the motel is on fire.”* She grabbed the keys to one of the trucks and said, *“I’m going over to see what the fuck is going on. I’ll call you from there let everyone know what’s going on.”* Wendy didn’t wait for a response she just went out the door as Cathy watched. There was no local television news, but the radio news was talking about the loss of a landmark with the fire. By the time the call-in show was speculating on arson, everyone was awake and listening. Wendy called the show saying how she didn’t have the insurance the other callers were claiming, and the police and fire departments said there were signs of squatters and arson. The callers turned from blaming Wendy without saying her name to blaming illegals and the war on the border. About the time someone asked if they found a Quran in the motel Cathy turned the radio off saying, *“what a bunch of fucking idiots.”*

Darrel got behind the wheel of the 1986 Chevy cargo van he and Scott were rebuilding and drove to the shop that does all their paint jobs. Hector Estrus know in the painting community as Steady E for his flawless freehand pinstriping met Darrel at the door to his shop.

He said, *“it’s gonna be hard to beat that last job Big D.”* Darrel smiled and said, *“you are going to hate this one. I mean gouge out your eyes, offer to pay me to hide it kind of hate.”* Hector looked the van over and said, *“this needs something like a penguin riding a unicorn across a rainbow or some sort of shit.”* Darrel said, *“hot pink with lots of bright neon green pinstriping.”* Hector smiled then started to laugh. Darren smiled and said, *“no really that’s the paint.”* Hector said, *“let me do what I do, and just maybe we can do something.”* Over the next four weeks, Hector painted the body of the van the hot pink with the roof a pearl white. Along the top and the skirt, he added neon green pinstripes. Along the sides of the van, he added a two-foot strip bordered by a pearl pinstripe with an elaborate series of vines and roses all in the pearl. He painted the rims white with neon green pinstriping, and a pearl rose on the hood surrounded by the neon green pinstripe. He left it unsigned hoping no one would know the work was his even as his efforts made him smile with just a little pride.