

Chapter Three

Cathy was waiting with a bottle of sparkling wine and glasses. She decided to take a chance that everything went as planned and they would all come home safe. She watched as they parked the truck and slowly made their way to the warehouse. Everyone was there, but their mood didn't seem well. At the door, she came eye to eye with Wendy who smiled and said, "*you won't believe what we found.*" The others started to laugh. Wendy leaned in and kissed Cathy. The others partied the rest of the night as Cathy and Wendy went to their room and celebrated in their own way. Sally went looking for some more wine when she found Gary and Zoey in the storage room going at it like two high schoolers after prom. Sally said, "*Jesus Christ you two have rooms you could be doing this in, but we have only one pantry.*" She reached over the two and grabbed a bottle of Sky-Blue Vodka.

Cathy and Wendy sat in a large tub filled with water and bubbles. Wendy poured two glasses of a top-shelf tequila called Casamigos Blanco. Cathy asked, "*are you trying to get me drunk so you can have your way with me?*" Wendy smiled and handed her a glass. She then said, "*I would rather have you the way you want to be had.*" Cathy moved over to Wendy after downing the tequila in one go. Wendy said, "*keep drinking like that, and we won't be having anything anyway.*" Cathy turned around and leaned into Wendy's lap, leaned back and brought her arms around her. She said, "*tell me a story.*" Wendy asked, "*what, are you five?*" Cathy stroked Wendy's arms then said, "*I am a little drunk, and I want to hear about Peter.*" Wendy lost her smile and said, "*are you sure? It's not a happy story.*" Cathy said, "*the best ones are rarely happy.*"

Tracy sat in her shop watching the people go back and forth wondering where they are going and why she is just standing still. About a month after she took ownership of the gas station she was robbed at gunpoint. The man had a nickel plated 32 and a shake that had to be from withdrawal. He ended up costing her over four hundred dollars with twenty-seven going to the robber and the rest going to the gun she bought. She didn't know anything about guns so when she bought a Hi-Point 380 semi-automatic, she thought a gun was just a gun. She practiced

with the gun in the large warehouse on her property. After three magazines the gun started to not feed. Then the trigger locked back and wouldn't reset. She took the gun back to the dealer where he said that Hi-Point had the best warranty for a reason. She left the store with a Smith and Wesson model-66 chambered in 357-magnum. It wasn't her first gun, nor would it be her last. As she worked on her draw and aim, she started to wonder about Peter.

She hadn't seen him since he left for California. So much had happened that she didn't see herself as the same girl he knew when they were a thing. He tried to see her when she was on trial, but when she went to prison, her priorities changed. Now she finds herself out in the desert alone and wondering if she made a mistake. One night after a long day of nothing, Tracy found herself watching April James in a television series where she played a Doctor in a crumbling hospital in Hawaii called Island Malpractice. The show was crap, but it hit all the usual clichés that would make it something people would watch. In the credits, she saw Peter's name listed as an extra. After making sure that someone would be there to operate her station, she gassed up her car and left for California.

After some calls to people she knew and to Peter's father Jesse, she found where Peter was living. She pulled into a parking spot near Peter's apartment and watched for him. What she saw was a man that was nothing like the boy she knew. He was impossibly skinny and seemed like he was sick. Tracy sat in her car and wondered if she should stay and talk to him or just go. As she sat not knowing what to do Peter saw her. His face lit up then went dark in a matter of seconds. Then the next shock as Peter turned and kissed a guy standing next to him then he started to walk to her. With every step the words, "*this was a mistake echoed in her ears.*" When he got to the bumper, she got out so he wouldn't get in. With a tee-shirt on that said, "*Drugs Kill*" she could see the track marks on his arms. He leaned in and hugged her. She could feel all his ribs and a smell that was one-part body odor and one-part feces.

They went to a diner near his apartment where he told her about him and his mother. After he returned from trying to go to the court to help Tracy, his mother had him arrested for

grand theft auto then fired him from his job as her assistant. He spent three months in lockup awaiting trial when his mother dropped the charges, and he was released. While in jail he was assaulted by a guy who broke every bone in his hands. It was in jail that he first found addiction to pain medication. His mother hired him back after his hands healed and he was working in an industry that made anything possible. He told Tracy how they even made it possible for people to think of his mother as a doctor while she snorted Heroin. Peter went from being her assistant to her supplier. From there he started to sell on the streets. Peter said, *“they say don’t sell your own poison but with all mom was buying it was just too easy to use and sell.”* Peter had racked up a large debt with a local dealer, and he found himself needing to pay this man back without letting his mother know.

“That was when it first started. This dealer called Yicki-Tang said I could pay off my debt with a little work on the street. It started by blowing him, and soon I found myself working on my knees,” Peter said this without looking at her. Tracy asked, *“that man back there, the one you kissed, was that him?”* Peter looked down and said, *“no that’s mom’s new dealer. You could say I am how she is paying for her fix now.”* Tracy looked at her purse and the gun she illegally brought with her. She asked Peter, *“would you like to leave this behind?”* Peter took in a breath and said, *“I don’t see how I can. I still owe a lot, and then there is mom and well.”* She stared at the tracks on his arms. Tracy said, *“come with me. I live in the middle of nowhere where they couldn’t possibly find you.”* Peter told her he would think about it. She said, *“change isn’t easy, but anything has to be better than the hell you are in now.”*

At the hotel, Tracy laid out what she had on her. That was when she realized her gun was gone. Peter stole her gun. Tracy called the dealer that sold her the gun. He told her that he sold her the gun illegally because of the robbery and there was nothing that could be traced to her. He also said, *“go back to what you know about him. Trace what he told you and you will find him, but if it was me, I would just leave him to whatever he has planned.”* Tracy broke into Peter’s apartment and found a note his mother wrote about going to Napa for a movie shoot, and he should send her vitamins there. The address was ripped off but using a pencil she was able to bring out the address by shading in the page underneath the one he took. It became clear to her

that Peter meant to kill his mother. She drove from there straight to Napa. With a fifty-dollar door pass, she found her way on the set. April looked bad. In the four years, she aged twenty. Somehow the people around her didn't seem to notice, or they didn't care. Just for a second April and Tracy made eye contact. Then the people parted, and Peter came up to his mother with the gun. He said to her, "*sorry mom but you'll need to pay for your fix yourself.*" Peter put the gun to his head and pulled the trigger. He managed to get three rounds off before he dropped leaving April covered in her son's blood.

Tracy slipped away from the mayhem and found herself in a bar. She ordered a shot of tequila and said, "*just keep them coming.*" The bartender gave her a strange look, but he did as she asked. In the mirror, she could see that she had blood on her. She vaguely remembered going to Peter and seeing the grin on his lifeless face and the look on April's face. Not for the loss of her son but the embarrassment of what happened and the loss of her drug connection. A voice on her left said, "*it looks like you had a hell of a day.*" Tracy looked to her left and saw a man that looked like a lawyer or preacher. Tracy said, "*there has to be a way to kill every dealer on the planet.*" She took a shot and looked at the man expecting him to seem shocked. Instead, he said, "*I hear you just don't look to the police.*" Tracy told this man her story about how she was jailed and what she thought about the law and justice. He put out his hand and said, "*my name is David Warren, and I have a little group I am putting together to deal with this problem. If you are interested, then give me a call.*" He gave her a card. Cathy asked, "*is that the same David?*" Wendy said, "*not tonight, one mistake at a time.*"

Sam stared out his door at the black van that has been parked across the street from his shop for the last two days. He thought that they should just stencil FBI or ATF on the side. He thought how they couldn't tie him to the ranch or any of the militias working the border so now they will just sit on his shop and watch until either he does something illegal or they find a new target. The gun shop in town was the legal side with a separate place for his less than legal activity. Sam once told a man that, "*the second amendment says we have the right to bear arms not we have the right to bare what the government allows us to. Rights with limits are not rights, they are privileges, and they can be taken away. I provide people with freedom and the ability to*

express that freedom with firepower.” That man turned out to be a narcissistic serial killer who used those guns to kill drug dealers then his own people, but in Sam’s view, all he did was provide the hammer not pull the trigger.

David Warren sat just outside in his car near a dive bar in a small town in Nevada. He had twenty-five thousand dollars in a bag. He watched as the ATF raided the bar where he was supposed to buy some guns for a project he was putting together. David was a grief counselor in the Napa area of California where most of his clientele have in some way been afflicted by the drug trade. The one takeaway from all his work was just how much money these dealers were making as well as their ability to kill at will. Something about taking a life just made David hard. He thought that it was the strongest form of power. But to do that he would need firepower that couldn’t be traced to him. A few nights before contacting the people the ATF were arresting, he had a client kill his dealer using a 22-automatic. David acted as his alibi for the shooting for the price of the gun. He sat there thinking about is options when he remembered this woman, he met about a month ago. She had said how she bought a gun illegally and just maybe this Wendy could help him.

The police car was just outside of Wendy’s gas station. David could see one of them holding what looked to be an AK-47. He figured that Wendy was going down, but then they gave it back to her and left. When they were long gone, David went inside to the counter. Tracy was going by Wendy full time, and she recognized him at once. David asked, *“the cops are letting you keep an AK-47 for protection?”* Wendy pulled out the rifle and said, *“well this is actually an AK-74, and yes one of them sold it to me for next to nothing. They took it off a migrant worker crossing the desert. They have been selling me the guns they take from the people they don’t want to be jammed up by a weapons charge.”* David told her about the façade plan he had for dealing justice to dealers and how he needed a style of gun. One that would be easily concealed, as silent as possible and quickly dropped when required. He didn’t tell her that his plan was a way to make money while getting others to kill for him making his clients his weapons. Wendy gave him every 22-automatic she had as well as a couple of 308 rifles.

Wendy had David stay with her that night so that in the morning they could go over and talk to Sam. David told her that he had one client named Allen that had a ranch that would work well for his project. It was going to be a camp for wayward children, but no one wanted to send their kids to a camp run by a tech guy. He also said how this Allen was bankrolling the operation. That night in Wendy's one-bedroom house David slept on a pullout couch. About one in the morning Wendy came out of her room wearing nothing but a nearly see-through robe and climbed on top of David. Wendy was alone for much of her time and David was handsome in his own way. Much of that was in his charisma. Wendy felt this magnetic pull right from the start. She opened her robe as she straddled him. David looked up at her and said, "*I don't want you to feel used.*" Wendy said, "*I don't think you see just who is using who.*" She sat back and started to slide up and down in his lap. She came back down and kissed him. David said, "*I don't think this is a good idea.*" Wendy reached down and pulled his boxers off. She said, "*then just stop thinking.*" She slid down onto him and soon whatever reservations he had were gone, and all that was left was a primal connection between two people.

The next day they met up with Sam at his gun shop. Sam liked to dress in desert khakis that gave him the look of a military man with just a little too much padding. When he first met David, he ran a search to make sure he wasn't with the government. Sam knew a few people with the feds who would tell him if someone was undercover or not even if that was top secret. David told him his plan to deal justice to the dealers and Sam was on board. Sam suggested that they shift their focus to the border and stopping the drugs before they get to the streets. David said, "*one step at a time, first I want to clean our streets.*" Sam said he would track down the guns he wanted as well as the suppressors and ammunition. Finally, he gave David the number of a former marine named Greg who was looking for a cause to fight for. Sam said, "*think soldier of conscience rather than fortune.*" David asked, "*so this ex-marine would help us?*" Sam said, "*first its former marine there are no ex-marines. Remember that when you meet him, or you will get your ass kicked by a sixty-year-old and yes as long as you give him a mission, he will fulfill it.*"

That night David slept in Wendy's bed. They lay entwined with each other staring up at the wide-open skylight in her bedroom. Wendy said, "*I could come with you and help sell this project to the former marine.*" When she said former, she put an emphasis on the word former. David said, "*I think I need to do this on my own, but I have this kid that I watch over named Colin. His parents brutalized him for their business. His scars sell the project.*" David didn't want to tell her that she was older than what he liked and not blonde enough. Wendy didn't like the idea that this man wanted to use this boy as a prop, but she also understood how the world works and that you do what you must to win. She leaned in and kissed him saying, "*well how about one for the road.*" She ran her hand down to him and worked on him until he was ready for another go. They spent the rest of the night with each other on and off until it was time for David to go. As soon as he was gone Wendy realized that what she felt was loneliness rather than any kind of attraction. She decided to find someone to spend her life with or at the very least more than one night.

Time was coming close to the meeting with Wendy and the delivery. Somehow Sam had to ditch the feds and make it to the meeting place, but first, he would have to go and get the merchandise. He had a new 50-caliber armor piercing tracing incendiary round that was built for the desert. He also had some mines and a rocket launcher. Wendy didn't care about the fireworks, but she did like the fancy rounds. A rusted out 1986 Ford Escort pulled up to the shop, and two stereotypical bikers got out and walked in. One of them came up to the counter and said, "*Wendy sent us to distract the pigs outside.*" The biker that spoke was named Jimmy, and he was not a biker, in fact, he was an accountant, and his tattoos were just painted on. The other guy was Henry James, and like Jimmy, he was not a biker just a lawyer for the city. They had a script, and they wanted to follow it.

"*Hey Sam, you got what we need*" Jimmy read out loud, so the feds could hear. Sam said, "*yeah these will make a mess out of anyone you go after.*" Henry made a jerking motion with his hand then said, "*are they full auto with a high capacity.*" This went back and forth until they laid enough innuendo to make the agents think they were about to have the bust of a lifetime. The two fake bikers came out with six rifle size cases and duffle bags big enough to carry out world

war three. Just for a second, the driver thought about staying or going after what would be the biggest bust in their careers. On the way down the road, they called in backup saying they were on the chase of a heavily armed biker gang with machine guns. Jimmy looked back at the van that was just a little too close for someone trying to secretly follow them. The Escort pulled in to what looked like a set from a Mad Max movie with some expensive cars parked outside. An hour later and the FBI raided the Southwest Paintball Society arresting a Judge, chief of police and a state senator. They also confiscated fifteen fully automatic paintball guns. All of them fully legal.

Wendy fired a round down range. The 50-caliber was easy to trace as it shot through the armor and set a bale of hay on fire. Wendy said, *“Sam you don’t disappoint.”* Sam smiled and said, *“I’m pleased to aim.”* For a moment Wendy thought about the boy and his mother. She thought about what a round like this would have done in the box of that truck. As if he could read her mind Sam said, *“I wouldn’t use this on a soft target. Maybe something like a truck engine.”* Wendy found her smile again and said, *“I wonder how the FBI took to the arresting of a Federal judge or state senator.”* They packed the truck and Wendy was on her way to a place they kept some of the more illegal items while Sam drove by the big bust. The agent driving the van saw him as he passed, and he just knew that he was up to something.

Wendy went to a storage room in the main building behind the only lock in the complex. Inside was all the stuff she had from the ranch as well as her life as Tracy. She opened a box and found her AK-74 a cop sold her back in the day. She sat down and stripped the rifle down to clean and oil it. The weapon was all kinds of illegal, from the length of the barrel to the fact that it was full-auto she wasn’t supposed to have the gun. But there was a lot of things she wasn’t supposed to have or do. She put the rifle in a hard side case along with four magazines and left the storage room. The rifle was a reminder of past mistakes and new beginnings. She took the case to her office in the warehouse and mounted it on the wall. Underneath it, she put a picture from the ranch of herself, Cathy, Cindy, Scott, Bill, Nancy, April, June, Ruth, Allen, Alice, and Max.

Wendy sat down and called Sam, but he said, “*don’t call right now*” then he hung up. She knew that the ATF was watching him, and they didn’t like the little trick with the paintballs. Sam had said that when the press found out about the raid on a paintball facility, they would force them to stand down and look for a new target out of sight of the press. This should mean that they should step down from operations until the heat is off, but their last raid gave them a lead on a stash house for the drugs being sent through the tunnel. If they wait, it could be cleared out, so there was no option. As George was fond of saying, “*time to drop some bodies.*” Scott was outside with Sally loading a van for a quick assault. The van was padded with Kevlar and equipped with run-flat tires and a reinforced front end to work as a battering ram.

When they first made plans for this type of raid, they investigated armor such as flak jackets or the standard body armor with ballistic plates. In the trials, they found that the more armor they wore, the slower they were. A lightning strike would need speed, and that speed would act as a sort of protection by striking without warning. The first time they used this idea was on a barn being used as a staging ground for distribution of a drug commonly called bath salts. They put the van through the barn from one side to the other, and they followed it. The van managed to strike a table filled with the drug clouding the air and finding the men left on their feet. They were in and out in fifteen minutes with a burning barn in their wake. They found that they needed to have a second chase vehicle for a second team to strike behind and keep the fight going on two fronts. Sally was fond of saying they, “*divided and conquered.*”

Five men stood outside the building with an assortment of weapons from AK-47s to a lever-action Henry. Soldados del Diablo was on the alert after they lost their livelihood with the tunnel. It made them a force in the drug trade and its loss would make them a target. Their leadership was convinced that it was a rival gang with their own plans for a tunnel or worse. One of the guards saw what looked like an old Toyota minivan with a ram of a sort on the front. It was the last thing he ever saw. A round went through his hat into his head and back out. He didn’t see the flash nor did the other four men outside as they got their very own matching head wounds. Sally was behind the wheel with Wendy on the infrared camera trying to read what was

on the other side. Wendy said, “*aim for the side wall.*” The door is reinforced steel, but the walls were a thin wood.

The van plowed through the wall striking then tossing two people across the room. The side doors opened, and they struck at the men taking them in just a few seconds. The team checked for information and anything useful. As they checked the floor shifted. Wendy said, “*clear the building and evac to the staging area.*” Wendy got behind the wheel of the van and put it into gear. The floor shifted again, and the van slipped halfway into what must be a basement. Wendy saw she had no chance to retrieve the van, so she pulled the pin on the long shot. An explosive package made just for such an occasion. The bomb was laced with thermite to make the fire as hot as possible. She walked through the newly made hole to see her crew left without her. Part of their protocols was that their cell phones are kept in the chase car so no one can lose one on the job. Off to one side, Wendy saw a motorcycle. One of the head-shot guards was next to it. She took his keys, a colt-1911 and his customized hog.

About two miles away from the hit Wendy saw a blinking light on the motorcycle. She quickly stopped and ran from the bike just before it exploded. She figured that the bike must have some sort of proximity sensor that if he ever got two miles away without deactivating it, the bike would explode killing the rider. Wendy said out loud, “*what a shame, that was a nice bike.*” She looked to the rising sun knowing that it would be very hot very soon and she had a long walk without any water. She made it about five miles down the road when she recognized where she was and that they had a stash nearby. On the side of a road that no one drives anymore was an old gas station. Inside it was a bunker with armaments and other supplies including a beacon and air conditioning assuming the solar cells kept the batteries charged. Inside the service station, she went for the car lift. Raising it opened the door to the bunker. Inside she found water, MREs, and enough ammo to restart a good war. She also found a bottle of Tequila. The bottle made her think about Maria.

Wendy ordered another shot of Tequila from the bar. It had been about a month since David left with Sam and their plans to buy guns. She had been going from bar to bar looking for love in all the wrong places. She decided that this would be her last bar for a while. Her search for a hole filler was turning up lots of guys but no men. She wanted a real man, not a dude. This bar seemed like every other bar in the area with a mix of Texas and Mexico that didn't seem to jive. Most of the patrons were militia fresh from the border with a few locals who seemed to be hoping they could just get their poison and go. Behind the bar was a raven-haired beauty with an olive complexion. Her looks were upsetting the militiamen, so they spent their social time taunting her. None of this was new for Maria, she had to deal with this crap ever since she and her parents came from Warez Mexico when she was five. They came legally and became citizens the legal way, but to these guys, none of that mattered.

As if something was released in the air the locals all left leaving just the militia and Wendy in the bar. One of the men, a particularly loud one came over to Maria. She had stepped away from the bar to clean a table when he cornered her up against a wall. He whispered into her ear, *"so you think you can come to my country and just take. I think I should be able to take from you."* He then bashed her head against the wall as he pulled her shirt open revealing her chest. The bartender was her father. He went for a gun but was stopped by two men who started to beat him. The man said, *"first me then my crew. Welcome to America."* From his left side, he heard a racking slide of a gun. He turned to see Wendy with a Glock 19 in her hand. He turned back to Maria and said, *"you don't have the balls to shoot me, bitch."* Wendy said, *"I don't have balls at all asshole."* She let off a round that just kissed the bridge of his nose and struck the wall near the guys beating on Maria's father. He let go of her and went for his face as his eyes started to water from the injury. The man turned to his buddies and started to say get her when he realized he was all alone with his friends running away. Maria kneed him in the crotch as her father brought down a bat on the back of his head.

The next morning, Wendy was in this woman's bed. She wanted to tell her she wasn't gay it was just all that happened that made that night what it was. She wanted to tell her that, but she somehow felt at peace with this woman. She still liked men, and she didn't think that would

ever change, but now she found she liked whatever that was last night. Maria stirred in bed. There was something Wendy liked in just how unguarded this woman was. She was nearly gang-raped by people who hated her for her looks, but it didn't seem to faze her. Maria rolled over and kissed her. She was somehow even more beautiful in the morning than that night. Wendy got up and told Maria she had to go. Maria asked, "*so was that your first time with a woman?*" Wendy didn't answer, but her silence screamed "*yes.*" Maria said, "*you know where I work and if this is something you would like to explore then come back.*"

Wendy put the bottle of tequila down. Her thoughts of Maria opened an old wound that had somehow healed with time. She knew that some wounds didn't really heal they just closed and waited for the right time to burst. It was too early to start drinking, and she wasn't hungry enough to eat an MRE. About noon the beacon turned from red to green signaling that someone was waiting for her. Wendy looked out and saw one of their jeeps with Cathy behind the wheel. She had her Sara Conner look from the last scene of the first Terminator with the aviator sunglasses and bandana around her head. All that was missing was the dog and bun in the oven. Wendy shut the bunker down and went for the Jeep. Inside Cathy said, "*we need to work that exit better.*" Wendy said, "*no, that worked. Next time, I just need to let the van go.*"