

"I already promised not to kill someone today," Decker said. "Don't make me go back on my it," the man said.

He kept his hands on the polished, black marble bar top and looked straight ahead to the mirrored wall behind the bar. The glass shelves were lit from above by small, powerful halogen lights. In between his spread hands was a tall, narrow glass of iced water. Beneath all the ice was a small wedge of lime and Decker's cigarette.

"You don't want to be smoking in here," the other man said, his biceps straining the fabric of the short sleeved western style shirt he wore. "Specially around my woman."

Decker looked to the bartender, who managed to retreat to the far end of the bar, away from the bright lights, and begin arranging glasses. He stared and waited for the bartender to take notice.

"Who is this fuckin guy?" the man with the biceps said. He looked over his shoulder to his friends, laughing with his mouth wide open, showing his bright, white teeth, pointing at the man who had been smoking. The tightness of the man's shirt made it so when he pointed at the man who had been smoking, the sleeve pulled up to show off the lower half of a tribal style tattoo that wrapped around his arm, just above his elbow.

The bartender looked up when the man with the biceps laughed and smiled a little, to share with whatever was going on, and then he accidentally made eye contact with the man who had been smoking.

"Jimmy?" The man who had been smoking said.

"It is against the law, Decker," Jimmy the bartender said.

"Pardon me?" Decker said.

Jimmy repeated himself, only louder so that Decker could hear from where he was standing.

"Like the man said," the tattooed guy, went on. "It's against the fuckin law."

He laughed again and looked to his friends for support, including his girlfriend. Decker checked at what the man was looking at. The men all looked the same, more or less. They all wore faded denim that had either been purchased to look that way or had been purchased by someone else who marketed them as being vintage. They all possessed the same style of shirt, though Decker suspected there might have been a short conference call

before meeting at the bar to ensure that no two of them wore a shirt with the same pattern. They all wore pointy toed shoes, though some of them, Decker noted, could almost be considered cowboy boots. He noted that only because of the heels and did not want to consider the fact that high heeled shoes could possibly be in fashion for both men and women.

The girlfriend, though, was another matter. A blue eyed girl wearing dark eye makeup, long fake eyelashes, and lips so sweet they looked like a cut fig. She wore a cutoff denim skirt and a tee shirt two sizes too small that was cut just below her breasts. Despite her deep tan, He could still make out the coloured ink of a tattoo that curled around her hip and almost touched the side of her belly. It looked like a wing, he thought.

She watched the whole exchange while suckling the straw of her tall, slim highball glass, which contained some neon pink concoction that Decker thought looked like liquid bubble gum. Her cowboy boots were tanned leather with pink accents, their high heels hooked on the bottom rung of her barstool. She watched everything not wondering if her boyfriend would win or not, but to see what would come next.

"I fuckin well could make a citizen's arrest of you," the tattooed kid said, drawing Decker's attention away from the girlfriend.

The owner of the bar had recognized that staff needed to come first so he paid big money to have the area behind the bar tiled with ergonomic tile made from recycled car tires. This was all done to save the wear and tear on the bartender's feet. The owner even paid for new running shoes, up to eighty dollars, every six months, for all his employees. But, because of the soft, rubberized floor, when Jimmy dropped the glass he was handling, all it did was bounce a couple of times before rolling and coming to a rest at the gap between the rubber tiles and the bar.

Decker went back to checking out the man's girlfriend. She only glanced over when her boyfriend spoke. He didn't provide her any amusement, so she went back to chatting with his friends. He smiled and went back to sipping his drink.

The tattooed guy poked Decker. Decker's drink slipped through his hand and shattered on the bar, sending clear liquid

everywhere. The lime wedge fell to the ground with a tiny, thin slap. Jimmy the bartender gasped. Decker threw his stool back and got to his feet in one motion. He looked to Jimmy, who had a look on his face like he just farted in church.

"Yeah, like I'm the fuckin sherrif and my boys here are the deputies. Ain't that right, boys?"

Jimmy ran the length of the bar in the same time took Decker to take one.

"Now, Decker, come on now..." Jimmy began.

Decker held up his hands in surrender. "It's cool, Jimmy. It's cool. You trust me, Jimmy. It's cool."

The tattooed man laughed.

"What's your name, sir?" Decker asked.

"Call me Brimley," he said. "Why you want to know my name?"

"Always good to do business with a man whose name I know," Decker said. "So. Tell me. How much?"

"What the fuck are you talking about, old man?" Brimley looked again to his friends and his girlfriend. No one seemed to want to move from that side of the bar. Brimley took a quick scan around the rest of the place. No one else was around except them. He turned back to Decker. "You're scarin away good people, man."

"The name is Decker, and you haven't answered my question. How much?"

"What. The fuck. Are you. Talking about. I already asked that question, too."

Decker smiled.

"I have a horse," he explained. "that I paid very good money for. Except she doesn't have any brand on her because I won't allow it, and she shits out in the field where she is supposed to, and not in my house or not in hers. Not that she has a house, really. But I make sure to keep her barn good and neat. Your woman over there, who certainly presents herself like she is for sale, already has a brand on her and likely spends hours in your bathroom, stinking it up. I bet I can get her for a much better price than what I paid for my horse."

Jimmy launched himself over the bar to get in between Decker and Brimley before the first fist flew.

"Decker is sorry for lighting up a smoke and he won't do it again and Brimley, you are sorry for being so rude to Decker

here."

"Me? Sorry for being fuckin rude? He called my woman a horse."

"I never once said she was a horse," Decker explained. "I asked how much you wanted for her. I compared her to a horse I own."

Jimmy held off Brimley from attacking Decker while Brimley's friends and girlfriend only leaned a little closer to the action.

"Decker is sorry," Jimmy said to Brimley, "and I would like to pay for drinks for you and your friends for the rest of the night. Decker? You want to smoke, I can let you out the back door by the kitchen. I'll pour you another glass of soda water, just please, go away."

"Who is this fuckin guy, anyways?"

"No one you want to be fucking with," Jimmy whispered. "Count your blessings and walk back to your friends, okay?"

"This ain't over, cocksucker," Brimley called out over Jimmy's shoulder.

Decker stopped and turned around to walk back to Jimmy and Brimley. He closed his eyes, pursed his lips, and nodded his head to Jimmy.

"One more chance, Jimmy, is all I'm givin him."

Jimmy nodded once and stepped out of the way. Brimley took a step back as Decker approached him.

"This ain't a spaghetti western, kid," Decker said. "And you ain't Clint Eastwood. You don't like me to smoke, ask me not to smoke. Don't go putting it out in my drink to show off to your woman."

Decker stepped back and crossed his palms like he was wiping his hands.

"Sorry for the trouble. Have a nice night. Jimmy? You need me, I'll be having a smoke out by the back door. Can you bring me my drink, please, once you've taken care of Brimley and his fine friends?"

Brimley watched and did not move back to the table with his friends and girlfriend until he was sure Decker made it to the kitchen. Good to his word, Jimmy brought over a big tray of fresh drinks and handed them out. Everyone except for Brimley cheered and whooped it up. Brimley's girlfriend leaned over,

putting one hand close to his crotch, if only for balance and whispered a soft, gentle thankyou into his ear, her warm breath drifting over his earlobe. He kissed her cheek and said it was nothing, but he grabbed ahold of Jimmy before he could get back behind the bar.

"What kind of ride does Decker have?" Brimley asked.

"Aw, man, what are you doing? He gave you a pass, man. What more do you want, man?"

"Fucking respect. I want a fucking apology. He owes me fucking respect."

"He gave you your fucking life, my friend. Take it and go."

"What kind of ride does Decker have?" Brimley repeated.

"Figure it out for yourself, smart guy. I'm done." Jimmy repeated Decker's handwashing gesture.

"Fine, fuck you, I'll figure it out." He leaned over and kissed his girlfriend again. "Baby, I'm going to go out to the car for a second, okay? I forgot something."

"Is it surprise? For me?" She asked.

"Yeah, Baby, just for you. I'll be back in a bit, okay? Love you, Baby."

"Love you too." She reached out to touch him again, and kissed him ever so slightly on the cheek.

She watched Brimley go to the kitchen before getting up to walk past the staring eyes of his friends. Her eyes were lowered, her long lashes almost touching her cheeks, her lips in a half smile as she moved a long lock of hair away from her face. She stood by the host's station and counted to ten before starting to make her way through the front doors.

"Where you goin?"

A large, soft hand grabbed at her elbow.

"Eric?" She said.

"Bobby," he corrected.

She wanted to say that they were all too similar to tell any of them apart, but she suspected that even their indignant response, no doubt that insisting that they were the best looking one, would be the same.

"Where you goin?" He repeated. "Didn't Brimley tell you to stay here?"

"What's it to you?"

"Brimley wants us to make sure you're okay. If you goin

anywheres, one of us guys gotta go with."

"You wanna wipe while I squat?" She asked.

"Hunh?"

"I was on my way to the ladies room," she explained.

"Oh," Bobby said. "Isn't it the other way?"

"You know how Marilyn Monroe walked across a room? She walked past everyone in the room to do it. Understand?"

"But the shitter is over there," Bobby said.

"And I'll be there in a minute. You go on now. I'll tell Lee that you took good care of me."

"Bobby," he said. "Make sure to tell him that Bobby took good care of you."

Baby nodded and smiled. "Yes. Sure. Run along now."

She watched and waited and once she saw that everyone was on their ways and not paying attention to her. Before popping out the front door she did a double take to ensure that there was no one sitting at the bar.

Brimley drove a 2008 Nissan 300Z and parked it as far away from the front doors as possible. When she asked him why he explained that they made him stop putting out neon orange pylons all around his car when he came to the club. Baby sprinted across the parking lot on the toes of her boots, making tiny splashes in the puddles that riddled the black pavement of the parking lot. She tapped the buttons on the extra key fob that Brimley had given her and the amber turn signal indicators flashed in acknowledgement.

"I'll keep my promise," Decker said when he stood up from behind the car. "But he's not making it easy. I think I might actually enjoy it."

She walked to him slowly. "Do you have an extra cigarette for me?"

"Players Filter," he said. "Strong."

He held the pack out to her and pushed the package from the inside with one finger, to expose the opened left deck. She reached out and with the long, manicured nails of one hand she took out the one cigarette that had been turned the opposite way, white against tan and spotted filters. She put the cigarette between her teeth and stood there, cocking one hip out and putting her hand on it.

He reached into his front pocket and took out a metal

cannister that he twisted and flipped open and slid out a single match. They looked at one another for a while, standing like that, neither one saying anything. The silence broke when Decker chuckled and struck the match on his thumbnail and held it out, his other hand cupping the flame against the wind.

She leaned forward and touched the tip of the cigarette to the flame, then leaned back and exhaled a plume of smoke. He looked at it, luxuriant against the clear sky and bright, full moon.

"I think they taste better when they are lit with a match," she said. "What do you think?"

"I thought that smoke bothered you?"

"Lee said that. Not me."

"Thought his name was Brimley."

She shrugged. "I call him Lee."

Smoke filled the spaces between the silence and time went on while Decker watched Baby smoke, not bothering to light one of his own.

"Do you know where Brimley went?"

"Said he had a surprise for me. I thought if he went back her to get it, he might bump into you by accident."

"How did you know I'd be out here?"

"I saw you were gone. I thought that you weren't going to honour your end of the deal."

"I'll keep my promise."

Baby nodded three times, her eyes closed, her lips pursed, while she held out the hand that held the cigarette and crossed her other arm under her breasts. On the third nod she kept her chin down. She watched the ground as she kicked around a small pebble with the toe of her boot.

"My mom had a hell of a time when I was a kid. She couldn't get away with anything. I knew how many cookies she had bought and what kind they were just by the sound they made when she tried to put them quietly into the cookie jar. Christmas was the worst, because I could hear her scrambling around the living room, trying to make it all just perfect, but I could still tell by the wrapping paper and how she carried things, every single thing that she had bought me. When morning came, I knew what each of my gifts were, what few were there, but I pretended to be surprised and she went along with it."

She nodded again and took a drag off her smoke. She leaned back and put her ass against the hood of Brimley's car, looking in profile like a three quarter open jack-knife.

"Yup. Just me and her and I caused her all kinds of trouble. She said that I could hear a mouse fart from across the street.

"When she was dying, I ignored the monitors and the doctors and the nurses. I sat on her bed and put my head on her chest and listened to the sound of her heart beating, her lungs pump air, and I told myself that I could even hear the blood flowing through her veins. It sloshed about, like not enough water in an oversized cup.

"I heard the last beat of her heart and her last breath before the monitors went off and I got up and out of the way as everyone rushed in to try and resuscitate her. I had listened to enough of her to know just what her last would sound like and I knew I would never hear it again."

She threw down the cigarette, the spark from it's heater leaped like a tiny nova on the pavement, having missed all the puddles. She walked over and crushed it with her heel.

"So," she said. "What do you think of that?"

"I'm not sorry about what I did," Decker replied. He waited two heartbeats for her to say something before he continued.

"If you aren't for sale, then they are you with him?"

"To be with someone like you?"

Decker didn't answer. He reached for his smokes and his matches to light one up but Baby's voice stopped him.

"Aw, fuck," she said. "Lee is over by your bike."

"What?" Decker dropped his cigarretes and his match carrier, the shiny metal cylinder rolling under the front wheel of the car.

"I think he has either a bag of sand or a bag of sugar," She said. "It sounds like something really fine, anyway. I think it would be sugar. I saw him going into the kitchen when he said he was going to get me my surprise."