

Steven E. Domingues II
(805) 264-1263
Steven@stevendomingues.com

The Deckard Job

By

Steven E. Domingues II

15,518 Words

Contents

- I The New Paint Job
- II The Bar
- III The Hunting Party
- IV The Lucky Beaver
- V The Performer
- VI The Standoff
- VII The Chase
- VIII The Biker
- IX The Interrogation
- X The Hotel

I: The New Paint Job

The “Kay-Awes Bonds” building had been open for a just under a year. Daphne Kay was proud of the business she had constructed; taking her knowledge of the undesirable and using it against them had a certain satisfaction to it. Helping people also had its advantages, her karma, she thought, must be through the roof.

Today was a special day. In celebration of being open for a year, she was going to give her car a new paint job. It had sat with its grey primer for too long. She put many long hours into replacing the engine and transmission, days restoring the interior, and months finding, persuading and buying vintage parts to have a factory perfect 1968 Camero. It had been her father’s car, a project that he had to abandon in his old age, his knees too arthritic after years of service in the police department. She had inherited the car on her 21st birthday and it was the only thing she never sold, bartered or pawned for her addiction. She was glad her darkest years were behind her, and her new venture was a success. After all, idle hands are the devil’s tools, right?

Daphne leaned back in her chair, her booted feet twitched on her desk, an iPod sat nearby with its ear buds in her ears.

She held an automotive magazine in her hands and looked at the paint jobs of the cars, looking for the right color. Awes, her mixed breed partner, was asleep in his pile of blankets next to her desk, his feet twitched as he dreamt doggie dreams.

"Cherry red," She thought, "that would look spectacular. But who hasn't seen a red car? A dime a dozen, they're always getting pulled over." Daphne's thoughts were interrupted by her phone beeping.

"Yeah? What?" Daphne leaned towards her phone and pulled the ear buds out.

"Ms. Kay, I've got Mr. Douglas from county on line 2. It seems we've got another no show."

"Who?" Daphne tossed the forgotten magazine on a pile of paperwork on her desk. It caused the pile to lean, and then fall to the ground. Awes lifted his head and looked at her with sleepy eyes.

"Mr. Deckard."

"Ah shit. Okay, put him through." Daphne pressed a button on her phone and leaned back in her chair again. "You've got Daphne, what can I do for you Albert?"

"Hey sweetie, I've got bad news for you." The voice on the phone was a county official whose job it was to inform the bondsman when their client did not show for their court dates. This man was also an old friend of Daphne's father and gave

her the opportunity she needed to start her business. He knew her past and hoped for a better future for his departed partner's daughter.

"Who jumped?"

"Richard Deckard. His appointment was today at 2:30 and was a no show. You know the deal, bring him in and get paid."

"Alright, thanks Albert. Hey, you ever get a chance to talk to this guy?"

"Yeah, a few times, slippery as goose shit. He'd talk the pants off of a nun."

"I don't know Albert, that doesn't sound right." Daphne reached down to Awes and scratched his head. He yawned.

"What, that Deckard could do it, or that nuns wear pants?"

"Either. I'll talk to you soon Albert. Bye." Daphne hung up the phone and stood up. She stretched, arched her back towards the water stained ceiling panels. She grabbed the car magazine, rolled it up and stuck it in her back pocket. Awes' eyes locked on her and he tensed. Daphne grabbed her worn green jacket and paused before putting it on. "Green. Maybe that'd be a good color, a forest green. A strong color, a fuck you to those Go-Green fanatics out there that can't stand an American classic muscle car." Daphne grinned and donned her jacket. "Come Awes, we've got a job to do. Deckard owes us

money."

II: The Bar

"The first part to any successful capture is research. You need to know who you are going after before you step foot outside. I know you'll have paperwork, official mumbo-jumbo, but numbers and address' aren't leads. You need people, you need contacts and you need a bit of luck."

The words her father spoke to her so many years ago echoed in her ears as Daphne shifted her car down into second gear and pressed on the gas to pass a slow motorist. Awes' head had been poking through the window, but dropped at the sudden change in speed. The engine rumbled and the muffler roared as she swerved and dropped down to a semblance of the speed limit.

Her first goal was a bar downtown, a known hangout of Deckard. She had talked to the owner and he'd said Deckard had been there the night before his hearing, talking about how he was innocent; it's an easy case, blah-blah. Daphne had captured many of her clients, and of course, they were all innocent, right? Well, yes and no. She believed that everyone deserved a second chance; she had needed one herself years back. But anyone who was in need of her services was already

in question.

The bar was called the "Rat Hole," its front door set in an arch, leftover from the previous tenant, a reptile feeding supply store. The entryway looked remarkably like a cartoon mouse hole. Daphne parked next to an old Harley Davidson motorcycle, left her windows cracked open for Awes and went inside.

It was 3:30 in the afternoon and there were only two people in the bar, the bartender, and an old biker. The old biker's head was thick with gray hair and he wore a sleeve torn jean jacket with a patch on the back, a large dirty white skull, grinning, surrounded by fire. The words "Flaming" and "Skulls" were above and below the grinning face, respectively. The jacket was a testament to his motorcycle club and his age. He sipped amber liquid from a glass and watched the football game on the dusty TV above the bar.

Daphne strode past the old man and sat at the bar. The bartender flicked his head in her direction, his stringy blonde hair waving in the pale light, asking what she wanted. He wore a dirty white button up shirt and jeans. He didn't look very hygienic.

"Just gimme a water, no lemon, I have some questions." The biker swiveled his head around to look at the new arrival. He glanced at her and turned back to his game. Daphne took off

her jacket and waited for her drink. The barman scooped a glass in a bucket of ice and filled it with a nozzle under the bar. He gave it to her on a coaster and leaned on the aged wood of the bar.

"What?" He looked disinterested and bored. His left hand held onto a dirty rag.

"You know Deckard?" Daphne sipped the water; its condensation soaked the coaster.

"Yeah." The barman's eyes flicked to the TV and back to Daphne.

"I called earlier, you said you'd answer-" The barman's eyes widened, remembering.

"Yeah, that was earlier. Right now is a different story. I think I've changed my mind." The barman smirked at her and raised his right hand, rubbing his thumb and forefinger together.

"Money, huh?" Daphne stared at the man, calculating. She drank more water and set the glass aside. The barman didn't notice.

"Not a bribe or anything, just a contribution. The bar's not been doing so great lately, and, I dunno, a few hundred could go a long way." The barman laughed and the biker joined in, not looking away from the TV. Daphne didn't know if the biker was listening to their conversation or laughing at the

beer commercial.

"Okay. How much?" Daphne tensed her legs on the crossbars of the bar stool.

"Oh I couldn't really say. Two hundred? Three hundred?" The man shrugged at her, smirk still on his lips.

"Well, two or three?" Daphne cracked her knuckles under the bar, the popping mixed and lost with the sounds coming from the TV above the bar.

The man leaned in close to Daphne, "Make it three, honey." Daphne sprang up from the barstool and grabbed the barman's greasy blond hair in her hand and slammed it down once, then twice on the bar and held it there, his forehead squished into the wet coaster. Her right hand reached for the pepper spray clipped to her belt, grabbed it, and pointed in the direction of the biker, who was now watching something much more interesting than a ball game.

The barman's head was pressed hard into the coaster and wood when Daphne leaned in close to his ear and whispered, "Two or three?"

"Hey, come on lady, you're doing it all wrong." The biker hadn't moved but spoke to Daphne, his deep cigarette cracked voice boomed above the sounds coming from the TV. Daphne glared at him, her pepper spray still trained on him.

"And who the fuck are you?"

"I'm nobody, but I know there are easier ways than that to get your information."

"Yeah, what do you suggest?" Daphne kept one hand on the barman's head, but lowered the pepper spray.

"Why don't you point that pepper shit at him. He doesn't answer, you spray him. He still doesn't answer, cut up his arm with a bottle cap and squeeze some of those lemon wedges in there. Maybe some salt. Won't give him a concussion and you'll get your answers. He might scream like a bitch though." The old man turned back to the TV.

"Shut the fuck up man!" The panicked and muffled cry came from under Daphne's arm.

"Oh bullshit, you mix weak ass drinks. Give the lady what she wants; if she's smart she'll listen to me." The old man spoke over his shoulder at them.

"You know what? That sounds like a good idea." Daphne jerked the barman's head up from the bar and pointed the pepper spray at his eyes. The coaster stuck comically onto his forehead. Daphne looked at it and smiled. "Are you going to answer my questions?"

"Yeah, what do you want to know? I don't know how I can help." The barman held his hands up, tried to smile and stared at the pepper spray nozzle.

"Was Deckard in here last night?"

"Yes."

"Did he say where he was staying?"

"No, I was working; I didn't hear anything like that."

"What was he dressed in?"

"I dunno, like a suit I guess."

"Did you see what he was driving?"

"No."

"You got anything else? If you don't give me something I can use, I'm going to spray your eyeballs for wasting my goddamn time."

The barman looked panicked, his voice quavered when he spoke. "Look, okay, yeah, he said something about a girlfriend or wife or something; called her his sweetheart, I think, something like that. He said her name was Sandy or Candy or something. Said they were going on vacation, I didn't hear where to. That's all I got, seriously. Please don't spray me, I think I'm allergic." The coaster, now as full of sweat as water, fell to the ground with a sickly slap.

"Ha-ha! Are you looking for 'Dick' Deckard?" The aged biker had turned back to face Daphne and the barman.

"Yeah, you know him?" Daphne kept the pepper spray on the barman, and looked questioningly at the old man.

The barman took this as his opportunity to attempt escape and swung one arm to bat the pepper spray away from his face

and swung his other arm towards Daphne. Daphne, in disgust, easily jumped back from the barstool and sprayed the man. His face contorted in the deep red spray and he shrieked, fell to the floor and writhed, wiping at his face with his dirty rag.

The old man looked at Daphne and smiled with approval. "Nice. Asshole got what he deserved. Yeah, I've known Dick for a few years and have wanted to have some choice words with him for a while now. Why do you want him?"

"He missed his court date." Daphne eyed the old man, guessed he was probably mid to late sixties, had a large beer belly, but strong muscular tattooed arms.

"Ha, and you're huntin' him down, huh?" The old man finished his drink with a gulp and slammed the glass back on the counter. "Well shit little lady, we've got business to discuss. This bitch's crying is bothering me. Follow me." The old man tossed a few dollars on the bar and walked out the front door into the afternoon light.

Daphne watched him leave, and then leaned over the bar at the crying barman. "Keep crying, tears are the best way to wash it off. And the next time you try to hit a girl with pepper spray, don't miss."

The barman didn't say anything, just kept wiping at his eyes with his dirty rag. The rag was steadily turning a deep brown-red with the rubbing. Daphne briefly considered it as a

possible color for her Camero; the deep red was similar to maroon, a dark color that would be easy to hide in at night. She thought about it and declined, the color would probably just remind her of this miserable excuse, hardly something she wanted to remember on a day to day basis.

III: The Hunting Party

When Daphne left the bar, the old man was already on his motorcycle, strapping his helmet on. Daphne walked past him to her car where Awes was watching the old man intently through the glass on the driver's side. It was streaked and wet from his moist nose. Daphne opened the door and nodded to the man, who started his bike and yelled to her.

"Hey, that's a nice car. You rebuild her yourself?"

"Yeah, took a few years, she's almost done." Daphne tried to rub the streaks off of the window with her sleeve.

"If we can come to an arrangement with Deckard, I might know a few people who can help you out." The old man didn't wait for a response; he revved his bike and started down the street, the loud bike easily marking his passage. Daphne started her own car, and drove after the bike.

The old man led her through the commercial district, their loud engines causing people to turn their heads and

watch them pass. Daphne checked her phone; they had been on surface streets for 15 minutes when the old man veered onto a frontage road and then a hard packed gravel one. Daphne hesitated, but followed, calling her office.

"Hey Jean, it's me. I'm somewhere east of town, down a frontage road. Yeah, yeah I think I saw a sign that said 'Montgomery Road'. I'm following a biker, a good lead I think. Okay, yeah, I'll call if I need it."

Daphne followed the bike as it turned onto a dusty side road. There was a series of mailboxes lining the road like broken teeth, their heights jumbled, their posts crooked. Trees also lined the road, thick and untrimmed. They were entering a mild forested area, an out of the way place that Daphne didn't like to go unprepared. She had Awes, and that made her feel a little better, but there was still something creepy about being in the middle of nowhere following a lead she wasn't sure about when it was so close to dusk.

They approached a two story house, its yellow paint cracked and worn. There were a few cars parked out front, and several motorcycles. The old man slowed, then turned back to Daphne, smiled, and waved her forward. The paved driveway wrapped around the house and, in a large gravel clearing, sat a huge blue barn. Its doors were open, and Daphne could see people working on their bikes, a makeshift bar setup with an

old slab of wood and milk crates. There wasn't an animal to be found, except two German Shepherds roped close to the barn. They were lying on patches of dirt, snoozing despite the loud classic rock emanating from the structure.

The old man parked his bike alongside three other bikes and dismounted. Daphne maneuvered her car around so that if she needed to leave in a hurry, she would be pointed towards the exit. She opened the glove box and pulled out a fresh bottle of mace, clipped it to her belt and grabbed Awes' leash. Daphne opened her door, and she and Awes stepped out into the country air. It smelled of pine trees and gasoline. The old man walked up to her, his boots crunching on the compacted gravel.

"Welcome to the Skulls' clubhouse. I hope that the trust I have placed in you does not go unrewarded." Several people in the barn had stopped what they were doing and were watching this exchange. The old man reached out an arm to her, "My name is Jake Gallagher. I'm the President of the Flaming Skulls Motorcycle Club, perhaps you've heard of us, perhaps not. We have a problem with the same man you are looking for, Deckard. You know his profession?"

Daphne grasped the old man's hand, which was tattooed with the same logo as his jacket, and shook strongly. "Yeah, he's a lawyer. Slippery as goose shit, I've heard."

Jake laughed loudly and nearby, a murder of crows took flight. "Yeah that's him. Look, he's wronged my friends here. We're not bad people, a few speeding tickets, sometimes we get in fights, but it's nothing a few days in jail shouldn't remedy, right boys?" A group of four men were sauntering over to them. Awes watched them and sat nervously on Daphne's foot, trying to watch them all.

"Yeah!" A call was returned by the group. They were all young men, aged from 25 to 30 and all wore similar jackets as their leader. Two of them had grease stained hands and forearms, one had a bottle of beer in his hand, sipping, and the last looked remarkably like the old man.

Jake waved his hand at the guys, one at a time. "The greased up assholes here are Eddie and Nardo, the drunken one is Gomez and this here is my boy and VP of the club, James. I didn't catch your name." Jake looked expectantly at Daphne.

"Daphne Kay, this is my partner, Awes." Awes looked at the men, and growled quietly. They were too close for his comfort.

"Cute mutt," James leaned forward to pet Awes. Awes' eyes watched him, and when his hand was too close, lunged at him and snapped his jaws, barking furiously. James snatched his hand back and scowled at the dog.

"Until I know what I'm doing here, he's on duty. I know

Deckard, you know Deckard. That's great, where is this going?" Daphne yanked twice on Awes' leash and he stopped barking, but stayed sitting on her foot.

"We want Deckard because he's an asshole prick that let too many of us get put away for too long. Minor crimes that shoulda got community service or a few weeks in jail were charged as felonies. This prick sucks at his job, and somehow keeps getting assigned to defend our guys. We're not a rich club, we can't afford our own lawyers, we're just a bunch of guys working on our bikes looking for a good time. He owes us, he owes you, I figure we can work together on this." Jake finished this and crossed his burly arms over his chest. James eyed Awes and then crossed his arms too. Gomez continued to drink his beer, and Daphne noticed him swaying slightly. The other two guys just stared at her.

"Alright, what kinda leads do you have?" Daphne continued to look around for trouble. The yellow house was quiet, but she saw eyes behind curtains, looking at her. Daphne figured these were the wives and girlfriends of the bikers, jealousy kept them watching her. The blue barn was a functional garage, nothing important there, unless fixing bikes in an agriculture zone was illegal. She didn't see any weapons, and the grounds seemed well kept.

"That prick in the bar? He said he overheard Deckard

talking about Candy, right?" Jake motioned for Daphne to follow, and he started walking towards the barn.

"Yeah." Daphne followed, Awes stayed at her side.

"Well, we know who that is. Candy is a stripper down at the Lucky Beaver, she's his favorite. We've gone down there before, to meet with him, have a few drinks before court. Anyway, if he's planning on leaving town, I bet he's going to try and take her with him, right?" Jake stopped at an old worn couch and sat down. James sat next to him. The greased up guys returned to their bikes and Gomez disappeared. Someone turned down the music.

"That sounds plausible. What else do you know about him?" Daphne stayed standing in front of the men, Awes sniffed towards the German Shepherds.

"We know where he lives, but I'd guess you know that too?" James fumbled in his pocket for his phone, pressed a button and listened. He spoke a few words and put the phone back.

"Yeah." Daphne continued to look around. The room looked safe and the men here didn't seem to be too suspicious of her. She thought a motorcycle gang hideout would give her a weird vibe, but it didn't. They seemed as legit as a motorcycle gang could be.

"Okay, well, how about the drugs?" Jake grinned, knowing

a secret.

"Drugs?" Daphne was surprised; this was not in Deckard's file, he had been charged with a DUI.

"Yeah, he doesn't use, but he deals, on the side. Designer stuff, not the hood rat shit you find on the south side. I think he deals with other lawyers, business people, whatever. That's another angle, right?"

"Maybe. You know any other names? Anything I can track this drug stuff too?"

"I can make some calls, if you need it."

"Sure, that'd help." Daphne watched Jake elbow James, who pulled his cell phone back out, dialed and walked out of the barn.

"Alright, I think you guys are solid; let's make this official, okay? We help each other, fine. What are the terms?"

Jake got up from the sofa and Daphne followed him back outside. The music turned back up behind them. "Glad you asked little lady. We want him for one night. Beat the shit outta him, there are a few guys here that need the, what do you call it? Closure. Don't worry, we won't kill him, we don't do that. Sound good?"

"Yeah, I think that can be arranged. But I work for the courts, so, if anyone sees this, or if it gets out, I don't know you guys, right?"

"Right."

"Deal?"

"Deal."

IV: The Lucky Beaver

"First things first, I'm going to head to that strip club, see if I can talk to Candy. Figure she'll at least know where Deckard is staying. I'll get my people to check out his house, but I imagine that he won't show up there." Daphne was beside her car, opened the door for Awes, and gave him the command to get in the back seat.

"Alright, we'll follow you; if this sonfabitch is there we'll help you take him down, our pleasure, okay?" Jake shoved his hands deep into his pockets and pulled out a pack of cigarettes and a Zippo lighter.

"Yeah that's fine. Where is this place?" Daphne watched the man light a cigarette and laugh.

"Don't you worry your pretty little head," Jake turned back to the barn and yelled, "Who wants to see some pussy?!" There were several yells and raised beer bottles to the offer. Gomez stumbled out first and threw his empty bottle on the ground. It didn't break, but bounced off of the gravel into a nearby bush. Two other guys came out and walked to their

bikes, saddled up and started their engines. Gomez tried to mount his bike, but fell when he tried to lift his leg over the machine. One of his brothers pulled him off of the ground and waved Jake over.

"Gomez is too toasty. Leave him here to cool off." The biker pushed Gomez towards the barn.

Gomez struggled and turned back. "Nah man, I'm fine. I wanna see the girls." His words were slurred.

Jake leaned in close to Gomez's face. "Can you handle it?"

"Yeah, yeah, just gimme a ride okay?"

"I'll take him; he'll make a good distraction." Daphne had watched the exchange and a plan was starting to form. This Gomez was a drunkard, easy enough to spot. In a strip club, the management and the talent would be watching him, and that would make it easier for her to ask her questions.

"A wha-?" Gomez tried to focus his eyes on Daphne.

"Come with me, you like dogs?" Daphne grabbed his collar and steered him towards her Camero.

"Love um!"

"Get in, let's go."

They drove for a half hour back through the country roads, the frontage roads and the business sector. It was

after 5 o'clock at this point and dusk was setting in. Daphne felt like she was being escorted. Jake and James were ahead of her, and the two other bikers followed her. Gomez relaxed in the seat next to her, his head rolling around whenever they made a sharp turn. She couldn't image what damage he would have done if he had ridden his bike.

"How long have you been a Skull?" Daphne attempted small talk.

"Like, about a year I guess. Maybe two." Gomez was watching the street lights through the car window.

"What do you guys do?"

"Fix our bikes, ride around, hang out, drink." Gomez laughed.

"Do you ever get in trouble?" Daphne turned a corner, missing the red by milliseconds. She looked in her rearview mirror and saw that the other bikers were still there.

"Like, me, or the club?" Gomez turned to look at Daphne, the first time he got a good look at her.

"Whichever." Daphne glanced at him, picking up that he was staring at her. A few silent seconds passed.

"Yeah, fights. There are other clubs out there, they come in to our territory, get in our way. Anyway, it's not like a war or anything, we're not gangs." His voice was noticeably un-slurred. He appeared to be sobering up.

"Do you know Deckard?"

"Who?"

"Richard Deckard, the lawyer. Jake said some of you-"

"Oh, that prick! Yeah I know him. He makes deals with the club, helps us out financially. He also keeps us out of the slammer, know what I mean?" Daphne thought about this. This man hadn't put much emphasis on Deckard being a bad lawyer; he seemed more like a deal maker, a tradesman.

"Yeah, sounds like a real peach. What kind of deals? You guys a real garage or..."

"Just some light trading, you know, between clubs. Gotta keep the cash flow, right?"

"I hear you. I gotta make a call, quiet a sec." Daphne dialed her cell phone and held it to her ear.

"Kay-Awes Bonds, Jean speaking."

"Hey Jean, it's me. I'm headed to the Lucky Beaver. I've got some friends in tow."

"Friends?"

"Yeah, you ever hear of the Flaming Skulls?"

"No."

"Motorcycle ga- er, club. They have some issue with Deckard, so they're helping me out"

"Do you need backup?"

"No, I'm good. Can you check out Deckard's residence? I'm

pretty sure he isn't there, but you never know. Just do a little stake out, yeah? Call me if he, or anyone, shows up."

"Will do. Call me if you need anything."

"Will do Jean, out."

They pulled into the parking lot of the Lucky Beaver, which was in a strip mall, bordered by a used book store and a comic book shop, both of which were closed. The exterior was brick, with a small metal placard; shiny brass that was etched with the words "The Lucky Beaver Est 1992 Must Be 21+." There was a single black door, and Daphne could hear the deep thump of a techno bass beat behind it. There was a man, dressed in a cheap black suit standing outside of the door. He was a large man, more fat than muscle. When the Skulls approached, he smiled and opened the door for them. Daphne followed, once again leaving Awes in the car.

"Hey guys, you're in luck, it's still happy hour. Only \$15 cover until 7:00, you guys want your regular seats?" The bouncer was treating them like royalty, and Daphne guessed they came here more often than they had let on. The guys showed their IDs and paid their cover charges, twenty dollar bills replaced with five ones. When it was Daphne's turn, she tried to pay, but the man refused.

"No mam, every night is ladies night. Go on in." He

winked at her.

"Thanks, do you know if-"

"Come on Daph!" Jake was waving her in "Let's not keep the ladies waiting!" He looked at her with serious eyes. The rest of the guys were pushing past him, eager to see the girls.

Daphne followed his cue, feigned excitement and yelled, "All Right! Yeah!" and strutted into the strip club. She entered into a dimly lit hallway, the black walls plastered with advertisements. There were several pictures of girls, their naughty bits cleverly covered by stars, proclaiming when they'd be stripping and available for lap dances. Daphne watched Jake rip one of them off of the wall and wait for her to catch up.

"This is her, this is Candy." Jake showed her a flier that had a blonde woman on it, scantily dressed as a nurse, a large candy-cane held suggestively next to her chest. The words "The doctor is in!" were along the bottom of the flier, along with dates of her appearances and times. It appeared that despite the run down location of the club, there were many high class clientele that frequented it. Daphne was sure there must be a regular staff, people who were there every day from 8-5, or whatever passed for an 8-5 for a stripper; it seemed that only certain girls got the options to have special

themed shows. Perhaps these drew larger crowds, or more expensive crowds. Either way, one of the dates on the flier was today's date. Daphne grinned.

"Alright, looks like she's here." Daphne had to speak in a loud voice, the music rising as they got closer to the interior of the club. Daphne continued to scan the walls and saw another flier with today's date. Daphne pulled it from the wall, quickly read it, and stuffed it into her pocket.

The main room of the club had two stages in opposite corners; each had a small wall and railing, behind which, a brass pole was mounted, with mirrors on the walls. There were chairs close to the barricade, all filled with men. The main floor of the club had tables and chairs, most occupied with men, a few women sprinkled the crowd. There were dancers soliciting lap dances weaving through the crowd. There was a small bar near the back of the room, with two female bartenders, dressed in vests and bow ties, serving drinks. Next to the bar was the DJ, busily typing on a laptop, listening to his earpiece and announcing acts on a microphone.

"Next up, the Exotic Esmeralda! Give it up for this able-bodied adventurer of the Amazon!" Daphne watched as a woman entered through a door near the DJ, a toy stuffed boa constrictor around her neck. She wore safari clothing, none of which seemed to fit very well. The song changed from the techo

beat to a more world music sound, the bass still vibrating the air. She went through a small opening in the barricade and started her routine. The uncomfortable looking clothes were quickly torn from her body.

The Skulls took seats around the room; Jake and James near the dancer, the other two guys in a dark corner and Gomez wandered to the bar. Daphne followed Gomez and took a seat next to him. He watched the dancer through the mirror behind the bar. The bartender asked them what they wanted.

"Jack and Coke." Gomez put his credit card on the table. The bartender took it and served him his drink. He drank half of it in one gulp. The bartender watched this, rolled her eyes and then looked expectantly at Daphne.

"Just a water, no lemon." The bartender served her and Daphne nodded to her to come closer.

"Hey, have you worked here long?" Daphne's voice was raised above the music, and she thought she sounded like she was yelling. The bartender leaned in close.

"What?"

"How long have you worked here?" Daphne sipped her water and locked eyes with the bartender. She was older than Daphne had first guessed. She was maybe early forties, but had enough makeup on to fool any of the guys in the club. Daphne thought she was probably an ex-dancer, beyond her dancing years.

"Oh, about three years, why?"

"Do you know the regulars?"

"Sure, sure. Those buys you came in with are here all the time." She pointed at Jake and James, who were giving horizontally folded ones to the dancer in front of them.

"Do you know any others?"

"Yeah, sure, you lookin' for someone?" The bartender's gaze wandered through the room, taking inventory.

"Yeah I am, Richard Deckard, you know him?" Daphne put her glass down and reached into her pocket for a picture. She pulled it out and showed the bartender.

"Yeah, everyone knows him. He's in here three or four times a week. Drinks like a fish, tips like one too." She rolled her eyes at the bad joke, and Daphne smiled politely.

"Is he here tonight? Has he been here already?" Daphne put the picture back in her pocket and finished the water.

"No, not yet. But I'd guess he might be here when Candy performs. They make a cute couple, don't they? How do you know Rich?" The bartender smiled warmly at Daphne. Daphne winced.

"I'm with his bonding company. He jumped his court date today. Do you know where he's staying?"

"Oh, um, no, no I don't. Sorry. Excuse me, it's, um, time for my break." The woman smiled at Daphne and motioned for the other bartender to take her place. Daphne watched her walk to

an 'Employees Only' door and disappear. Daphne figured that the bartender would tell Candy someone was looking for her sweetheart, and that meant Candy would call Deckard and let him know someone was looking for him. This worked into Daphne's forming plan; if he wasn't already packed, he would head home, and Jean would let her know. If he was ready to leave, then Candy would attempt to meet up with him, and try to give Daphne the slip. It was time for some distraction.

"Hey Gomez, how 'bout a round of shots for you and the boys?" Daphne reached into her pockets for her company credit card.

"Hell yeah! Jameson all around! Hey Jake! JAKE! Come'ere! We got shots!" Gomez shouted into the crowd and amazingly, they heard him. Daphne watched the guys wander from their seats over to the bar. The new bartender poured the shots and took Daphne's card. Daphne nodded at the bottle, indicating another round. The bartender obliged and spoke into the nearby phone. A bouncer that had been wandering through the crowd came to the bar and smiled, watching the men.

The Skulls downed both shots and started talking loudly and wildly with each other. They ignored the dancers and Jake kept them entertained, telling wild stories of his youth. At the conclusion of one of these tales, Daphne leaned in close to Jake and said, "Be ready, I'm going to try something

stupid." Jake nodded and kept talking, keeping his men entertained.

Daphne paid for another round of shots, listened to the cheers of the bikers and went to the DJ, who was introducing a new act. She pulled out the crumpled paper she had torn from the wall earlier and pointed at it. He nodded, pulled a clipboard out from below his table and had her fill out some paperwork. Tonight was ladies night, as the doorman had said. What he left out was that every night was also amateur night.

V: The Performer

Daphne was escorted through the 'Employees Only' door, and passed the bartender on the way down the hall. The bartender's eyes widened but she stayed silent, and Daphne smiled at her as she sauntered by. Daphne was being led by a woman who had introduced herself as Sarah; she had an earpiece in, and a clipboard with a chart that had times hand written in. She was in charge of organizing the girls, and the amateurs that would slot into the night as required. Sarah was rattling off rules for her and the guests of the club as they wound their way around dressing rooms. Daphne saw one door that had a piece of paper with "CANDY" hand written on it taped to the front. Daphne saw that Sarah was checking her

clipboard and talking into her earpiece, not paying attention to who was following her. Daphne stopped at the door, turned the handle and quickly ducked into Candy's room.

"Who the fuck are you? You're not supposed to be in here!" Daphne saw the woman from the flier, naked from the waist up, sitting in front of a cracked mirror, doing her makeup. She looked flustered, but not concerned she was mostly exposed.

"Oh my god, I'm your biggest fan! You have to teach me that move you do, you know, that one everybody loves!" Daphne put on her excited school girl act that most security guards or store managers fell for. Daphne hoped it would work here was well.

"Sweetheart, what are you doing in here? This is my private room, I need to get ready." Candy wrapped a towel around her chest and walked over to Daphne. Daphne could see that Candy wasn't suspicious of her at all; she looked flattered at Daphne's gushing.

"Oh no, no I'm so sorry, I'm just, you know, a fan, and I wanted to know if you had any tips for me, anything that could help my performance." Daphne managed to get a quick look around the room. There were no weapons, which was good, there was also no other people, which was better.

"Well hon, just relax and dance your little heart out,

nothing to be afraid of." Candy reached for Daphne's face, and brushed her cheek. Daphne thought maybe she was playing naive a little too well.

"But, what if I can't remember anything, I've never danced with a pole before, I'm a little scared." Daphne decided to run with it a little, really get Candy to drop her guard.

"Have you every danced with a man?" Candy's tone got serious.

"Yeah, of course."

"Did he dance back?"

"Well, not really."

"There you go, you just dance around that pole like it was your main squeeze, hug it, wrap your legs around it, grind on it, it's all good girl." Candy smiled at Daphne and returned to her chair, dropping her towel and her modesty. She leaned towards the glass and continued her makeup.

"Oh, thank you so much! I just had one more question." Daphne used her best school girl voice and walked up behind Candy.

"What's that hon?"

"Where's Deckard?" Daphne abruptly dropped the voice and returned to her normal harsh interrogating demeanor.

"How do you know-" The stripper turned around and faced

Daphne, her makeup forgotten.

"Oh, I'm sorry, I thought you'd been informed. Didn't the barmaid tell you? He jumped bail, he's a wanted man. Tell me where he is." Daphne crossed her arms over her chest and stared at Candy.

"You? You're the bounty hunter? I thought it was one of those biker creeps. Yeah, Shelly told me to watch out, but she didn't think it was you." Candy's face worked itself into a snarl.

"Well, tough titties. Where is he?" Daphne took a step forward in the small dressing room, her face inches from Candy's.

"I'm not telling you, bitch. Get out of here before I call security. You know what, no, I'm going to call them anyway." Candy reached for the phone on the counter. Daphne watched this and tried to get to her one last time.

"Look, he's in trouble and running is only going to get him in more trouble, it's really for the best that he just turn himself in to me."

"Fuck you bitch." Candy started to dial.

"That's not very nice." Daphne grabbed Candy, and flipped her around into a head lock, pulling her away from the phone.

"Where is he?"

The door to the dressing room opened and Sarah stepped

in.

"Ms. Boucher, have you seen – oh my god!" She dropped her clipboard and raised a hand to her mouth. Daphne thought it was a tad dramatic, until she saw the headset that was in her ear, the microphone near her mouth; she was talking quietly into it.

"Help me!" Candy's muffled cry sounded desperate to Daphne, even though the hold she was in was perfectly comfortable, as far as restraining holds go.

"No, no, it's not what it looks like." Daphne knew the situation was looked bad, but tried her best to explain. "See, this is the girlfriend of a man I'm looking for, he's in trouble and, and she's just going to tell me where he is, right?"

"Oh sure, husband trouble, right?" Sarah rolled her eyes and spoke into her microphone, "Security to backstage, I've got another angry wife here."

"Hey, no I'm not anyone's wife, I'm looking for Richard Deckard, do you know him?" Daphne relaxed her grip on Candy, realizing that her interrogation was falling apart and didn't want any assault charges brought against her.

"Ms. Boucher, what is she saying?" Sarah watched them and then leaned into the hallway, waiting for security.

"Dumb bitch is trying to put Richie in jail!" Candy was

starting to cry, her fresh makeup at risk. She wiped her eyes with careful fingers.

"What? I don't get it - I thought he was free or whatever, isn't that why you guys are going to Hawaii?" Sarah looked from Daphne to Candy to the hallway, still waiting.

"Yes, yes! See, he's innocent!" Candy sniffled at this, finally losing out to the stressful situation.

"No, he's not, he hasn't even been to trial yet! That's the point: he needs to go to trial. He skipped his court date, and I need to bring him in before things get worse." Daphne was tired of people not understanding the legal system, and it pissed her off that this lawyer was abusing it, and this poor girl.

"That's not, no. No, you're wrong; he's innocent unless proven guilty! He's a damn lawyer, he would know! He's innocent, and you're just trying to put him in jail, and what the fuck are you doing back here!? I just need to do this last performance and go! I need to be at the airport in an hour, just let me finish this!" Candy sat back down in her makeup chair and openly sobbed into her hands, her fresh makeup finally succumbing to her fears and running. Sarah grabbed a nearby robe and covered her shoulders, attempting to sooth her.

"Okay, you," Sarah picked up and looked at her clipboard,

"Mona Lotta, jeez that's a bad name, you get out of here. I don't know what's taking the damn security so long, but get the hell out and don't come back, okay?"

"Yeah, yeah, that's fine. Look, uh, Candy, I'm sorry, alright?" Daphne felt bad. This is the reason, she thought to herself, this is the reason why I do my job, to help people, and to keep people where they belong.

VI: The Standoff

Daphne exited the room and walked briskly down the hallway, knowing her purpose and knowing where to go next. A girl walked quickly past her, not saying anything, a scared look on her face. A few seconds later, another girl came through the door at the end of the hall, this one running. Daphne let these girls pass and noticed the hallway was too quiet; the only constant in the strip club had been the reverberating thump of bass, the music that paid the bills of so many single mothers and future nurses. She reached the door to the main room and listened. She heard muffled voices and commotion. She pressed on the panic bar and peeked through the crack in the door.

To her surprise, the room was brightly lit; the dark walls reflected the phosphorous overhead lights and Daphne was

momentarily blinded. She reached for her pepper spray, and waited for her eyes to adjust to the new brightness.

The Skulls were all gathered around the bar, Jake, James and the other two that had escorted Daphne were all holding weapons. Jake had a switch blade, the two others Daphne didn't know the names of had broken beer bottles and James held a security guard in his left arm by the throat, and pointed a small gun at the group of security guards who had Gomez in a similar hold. The Security guards were armed with pistol gripped tasers and aluminum baseball bats.

Daphne watched this Mexican standoff and listened. Both sides were shouting to let the others go; there was a small band of patrons, one holding his cell phone at the altercation capturing video, watching the scene. The DJ had left his post, and there was nobody at the bar. Daphne heard a scuffling run from behind her. A security guard was running down the hallway towards Daphne, holding a pump-shotgun and shouting for her to move. Reflexively, Daphne dropped her mace, kicked the man in the stomach, grabbed the shotgun, twisted and hit him in the head with it. The man crumpled to the ground, and Daphne spun around back to the door, kicked it open, stepped through, pumped the shotgun and screamed.

"SHUT THE FUCK UP MOTHERFUCKERS!" Everyone went silent. Daphne noticed that James relaxed his grip on the captive

guard, seeing her as an armed ally. She pointed the gun at the Skulls, winked at Jake, and slowly walked towards the security guards.

"Talk."

"We were having a good time! Until these dickless bastards came over and started harassing us; they grabbed Gomez, we grabbed one of them, that's it." Jake spoke for his club, squinting in the bright light at Daphne, his eyes trying to convey a message to her. James kept his eyes on the guard holding Gomez, his gun wavered in the light, his blood alcohol level too high to hold the gun steady.

"Look, these pricks come in here almost every night, bother the girls and get too drunk. They were gettin' too rowdy, so we decided to kick him out." This was the guard holding Gomez.

"Alright, everyone calm down. You guys give up Gomez, we let your man go, we all walk out of here friends, okay?" Daphne waved the shotgun from side to side, motioning to the groups.

"Not going to happen sweetheart. These guys were fighting, that's assault and the police are on their way. It's my job to make sure it's not going to happen again." The guard talking to her had a bored expression on his face, but his eyes were trained on the gun pointed at him from the Skulls.

"We protect the girls and the patrons here, that's our job, so put down the big nasty gun, little girl, and let us do our job."

Daphne thought about the situation; the news of this standoff must have reached the dressing rooms by this time and Daphne would wager that Candy was on her way to see Deckard. She needed to follow, and she only had an hour before they were at the airport, and safe behind airport security. The Skulls had gotten her this far, but did she really need to keep her end of the bargain? The police were on their way, and she was holding a shotgun, a stolen shotgun, and she needed a way out. She needed a way to follow Candy and avoid the police.

"Jake, I can't be here when the cops show." Daphne spoke to Jake, ignoring the security guards. Jake spoke back.

"You think we want to be here?" Jake's faith in Daphne was wavering, his gravel voice sounded strained.

"Just wait a second here, you guys aren't going anywhere." The head guard looked from Daphne to Jake, realizing that Daphne wasn't who she appeared to be.

Gomez took this as his chance, buckled his knees and leaned forward hard, causing the man holding him to lose his grip. Instead of going down with his captive, the security guard let go of Gomez and flung himself backwards in an

attempt to keep his balance. He overcorrected and fell into the other guards; his grip on the taser pistol faltered and he shot it towards the ceiling. The electrodes struck one of the bright lights, causing it to pop; sparks rained down on both groups, the electricity surged and all the lights went out. Five seconds later the red emergency light flickered on to a flurry of activity.

Daphne flipped the shotgun around and used it as a bat to disarm one of the guards, and she watched James use the butt of his gun to knock out the guard that he had been holding captive. The remaining Skulls and security guards had launched themselves at each other and were brawling. The few patrons of the strip club that had been watching the standoff ran towards the door, getting in the way of the fight. The man who had been taking video with his phone bumped into Daphne, who grabbed the phone out of his hands and shoved him towards the door.

"Come on boys, scatter!" Jake yelled at his club and they all dropped who they were hitting and ran towards the door. Daphne followed, but tripped over Gomez. His escape attempt had caused him to be the first one on the ground and he had been kicked mercilessly in the face and torso. Daphne reached down for Gomez and dragged him to his feet, wincing at his black and bloodied face. She heard a muffled "Thanks" and felt

Gomez wrap his arm around her shoulders, limping towards the door.

Daphne exited the club at a jogging pace, dragging Gomez with her, to be met with the sounds of a motorcycle and sirens. Flashing lights could be seen several blocks away, Daphne hurried over to her car, and shoved Gomez into the passenger seat. Awes' eyes were darting around the chaotic scene, watching patrons run to their respective cars, the strange smelling man in the passenger seat, and his master, whom he was most worried about.

The first Skull that made it outside was Jake, and Daphne was sure his club had pushed him out first; he was already on his bike, waving at Daphne to hurry up. One of the other bikers was starting his bike, but James and the other one were nowhere to be seen. Two guards burst out of the front door; Daphne watched them quickly converse and point at her car and Jake's bike. Daphne started her car and peeled out of the parking lot; Jake and the other Skull were quickly on her tail, their uneven headlights in her rearview mirror making her dizzy in the cool night air.

"The fuck happened?" Daphne drove her Camero through the commercial district, first breaking the speed limit, then slowing down to a more lawful pace. She made turns at random, the bikers keeping pace, understanding what she was doing.

Getting lost was not high on her agenda, but keeping out of prison was.

"Too much fun? Ow!" Gomez laughed at himself and felt a lightning bolt of pain shoot through his ribs. "You needed a distraction, right?"

"Yeah, but I didn't expect a Mexican standoff."

"What was your plan anyway?" Gomez no longer had a drunken slur; his top lip was quickly swelling, and he now had a slight lisp.

"Pose as an "amateur night" girl, get in the back and question Candy"

"Did it work?"

"Yeah, found out that Candy is meeting Deckard at a hotel, and then they're getting on a plane. She said she had to be at the airport in an hour, which was," Daphne pulled her phone out of her pocket, flipped it open and said, "about 13 minutes ago."

"Cutting it kinda short, don't you think?"

"That's the way things go. Can you call Jake, or is he just going to keep following me?"

"Nah, can't answer his cell on his bike. He'll just keep following us."

"Alright well, I know where we need to go, kinda. Have you ever met Deckard, you know, before a trial, at a hotel?"

Some place other than the Beaver?"

"Yeah, there's a fancy place downtown that we've been to. Got a little rowdy in the lobby bar once and were asked by the hotel staff to leave. I don't think we ever went back. I heard that's where he takes his muckity-muck clients, you know?"

"Yeah, I know. How's your head?"

"Fine, I think. My eyes feel all swollen. I think I have a cracked rib, hurts when I laugh." Gomez rubbed his head with one hand and his ribs with the other.

"Alright, we'll head there and see if we can't find our man."

They drove on in silence, Gomez reclining in the seat. Daphne wasn't worried about his wounds, and they seemed to have shaken off any potential pursuers. They were headed towards the Crate Plaza Hotel, a place where the rooms started at five hundred dollars a night, and had a presidential suite that was reportedly over twenty grand a night. Lucky for them, the twenty-five story hotel was also a block from the airport. Daphne hoped that they'd be able to beat Candy to the hotel and use her to talk Deckard down. Daphne's phone beeped at her, Jean was calling. Daphne checked the time, it had been 23 minutes since they left the strip club, enough time for Candy to dash home?

"Ms Kay, she just left. She pulled into the driveway,

left the car running and went inside; came out with a duffel bag and a pink suitcase. Threw them in the trunk and sped away. I'm trying to follow her now, but she's driving fast and erratically."

"Thanks Jean, does it look like she's heading towards the airport?"

"Could be, that's the direction we're heading."

"Try to stay on her, call if she changes directions."

"Okay, bye."

VII: The Chase

Daphne kept a close eye on her phone. She was expecting Jean to call her with an update, and she needed to keep an eye on the time. Luckily, having to be at an airport "in an hour" usually meant that the flight wasn't going to take off for two hours after that. The meeting at the hotel made it seem that maybe, just maybe, she didn't need to be at the airport until even later. Daphne's eyes twitched to the phone again. It had now been forty minutes since they had left the Lucky Beaver, if Jean called and Candy had reached the hotel, they'd be too far away to do anything, and Jean couldn't take Candy or Deckard down herself. As Daphne looked, the time blinked away and the words "Jean Calling" appeared moments before her phone

beeped.

"Yeah, what's up?"

"We're stuck on the freeway. I can see Candy a few cars up, and it looks like she is going to try surface streets. She's getting off at Lost Oak Boulevard."

Without saying a word, Daphne dropped her phone into her lap, down shifted from third gear to second gear and cranked the wheel to the right. The intersection that she had been beginning to cross had been Lost Oak, and she took drastic measures. Her car screeched to the right and Gomez almost fell into her lap. Awes, whose head had been sticking out of the window next to Daphne, yelped and dropped down, hitting his head on the window frame. The Camero's tires screamed at her, and the rear ones began to slip when she cranked the wheel back and tapped the brakes. Her car snapped back under her control and she continued on Lost Oaks. She glanced in her rear view, saw the bikers still following her, and picked up her phone.

"I'm on Lost Oaks now. The freeway is up ahead, what color is her car?"

"White. A sedan. There are pink heart stickers in the rear window."

"Can you follow?"

"Changing lanes now, I'm still several cars back, but I

have my eye on her."

"Call me if something changes." Daphne clicked her phone off and drove. Gomez stared at her and Awes put his head back out of the window.

"You always drive like that?" Gomez smiled at her, unsure if this woman was completely insane, or in control of the situation.

"When I need to - hold on." Daphne accelerated around a slow car in her lane; she had to swerve into oncoming traffic to do so. She watched Gomez's right foot pound into the floorboards, trying to brake, and raise his hands towards the dash. Daphne smirked and dashed back into her lane. "Don't worry Gomez, I've got this under control. Nighttime driving is easy, you can keep your eyes out for headlights, that lane was empty."

Gomez's breathing was hard and strained. He took in large painful gasps of air and looked behind them. The bikes had not taken the same risks as Daphne had. "You're a crazy bitch."

"Right, just hope that I never have to come after you."

They drove on, Daphne still watching her phone and the clock. They passed under the freeway, and Daphne kept up her break-neck pace, feeling the adrenaline course through her veins. The cold night air whipped her short hair around her face and eyes. Headlights and streetlights illuminated the

cars in front of her in a kaleidoscope of white, red and yellow lights. The thrum of the engine, the vibrations from the stick shift knob into her arm felt like home. She was in her element; this was the reason why she did what she did. It was a hunt, a chase, and she was close, she could smell it on the cool exhaust fumed night air.

Ahead of her, politely obeying the speed limit was Jean's car. It was a small purple hatchback, non-descript except for the color. Momentarily, Daphne thought of that color for her car, laughed out loud and perished the thought.

"What are you laughing at?"

"Nothing. What's your favorite color?"

"What the fuck?"

"Come on Gomez, oblige me." Daphne looked sideways at Gomez and smiled.

"I don't know, black? Blue? Something dark, I guess." Gomez saw nothing but pure insanity in her eyes.

"Figures." Daphne shook her head.

"Figures? The fuck does that mean?"

"Bruises man, you like bruises."

"You're fucking crazy."

"Oh come on, tight-ass, isn't this fun?" Daphne swerved her car around Jean, and looked out over the street. The road had turned into a six lane boulevard, a center divider filled

with trees and bushes kept the oncoming traffic separated. Daphne drove her car through traffic like a salmon fighting its way upstream. Never braking, just downshifting and accelerating around what looked like parked cars to Gomez.

Daphne saw another car changing lanes like she was; a white car. Daphne's eyes locked onto the car and kept driving, her vision focusing on nothing but that car, all other cars around her melted into obscurity. She maneuvered her Camero into the sedan's blind spot. Daphne looked over and saw the pink heart stickers in the rear window.

"Here," Daphne tossed her phone to Gomez, "text the license number to Jean." Gomez complied. A few seconds later Jean texted back, "Call it in?" After Gomez relayed this to Daphne, Daphne said "No, tell her to keep it for the file." Gomez texted again and handed the phone back to Daphne.

Daphne edged her car up towards the driver side window of the sedan and looked in. It was Candy. There was fear in her eyes, and she kept looking down into her lap. She also appeared to be talking to someone, but the car was empty.

Daphne told Gomez to roll down his window. Gomez complied, and Daphne leaned towards Candy's car and yelled.

"Hey! HEY CANDY!" Daphne's eyes flicked from the road in front of her to the white sedan next to her. "HEY BITCH! LOOK AT ME!"

Candy, in confusion, looked over towards Daphne. Her wide eyes told more of a story than Daphne could have expected. Candy kept talking, but pointed at Daphne. Daphne smiled back, but noticed something in the corner of her eye. She looked at her own driver side window into the barrel of a gun.

VIII: The Biker

Daphne took her foot off of the gas and let her car slow. Candy's car accelerated away but Daphne could only see the barrel of a gun and the man holding it. It was James, Jake's son and second in command of the Flaming Skulls. His bike easily kept pace with Daphne's car. He nodded at Daphne, indicating he wanted her to stop.

"What the fu-" Gomez stared at James, and tried to communicate, pointing at the white sedan that was getting away, and looking confused at the gun. "-ck! I don't get it, what the hell man, she's getting away!"

"I'm not sure what this prick is playing at, but you better have your seatbelt on." Daphne held her hands up from the wheel, showing the renegade Skull that she was submitting.

"What?" Gomez looked down at the unbuckled belt on his lap.

"Hold on." Daphne grabbed her wheel and turned it towards

the biker. She heard the barrel of the gun click against the glass of her window moments before the car nudged the bike. James was good, he swerved his bike away and kept the gun pointed at Daphne's car, with only the smallest wobble in his machine. He grimaced at her and shouted something. The noise of the bike and her car was too much for the obscenities to reach Daphne's ears.

"Come on you mother fucker!" Daphne accelerated and swerved her car again. A deafening crash exploded her window. Shards of 40 year old non safety glass rained down on her lap and into Gomez's seat.

"Oh fuck! Did you get shot?" Gomez, ducked in his seat as much as possible, shook his head at Daphne and looked in the rear of the car. Awes was on the floorboard, a scared look in his eyes but otherwise unharmed. Daphne accelerated her car and attempted to change lanes, but the biker wouldn't leave her side. His aim steady, he shot at her again; and again. He missed her three times, but struck her car's hood and door. Daphne was keeping a mental note of his bullet count. This was not the same gun that James had pulled at the Lucky Beaver. This looked more like a Desert Eagle, maximum of 7 to 9 rounds, unless it was modified.

Daphne drove onward, seeing a yellow light ahead. She had a choice; if she stopped, she'd be dead. The biker would shoot

her, and probably Gomez. She didn't have a gun of her own, so her most deadly weapon was currently her car. He was obviously an experienced cyclist, so she couldn't out maneuver him, and he weighed less, so she couldn't out-run him either.

The second option, as dangerous as it was, was not sitting around waiting to die. It was a gamble, and one she had little time to debate. The yellow light turned red. Running a red light was their only chance, and Daphne hoped that either a cop saw the biker's gun, or he'd chicken out and let her go.

Daphne kept her foot on the accelerator, keeping her speed constant; she wanted James to follow her. A blue car was coming into Daphne's view on her right side. Daphne glanced at James again; he was next to her, not looking at the light, aiming. Daphne glanced at Gomez, who was scrambling with his seatbelt, trying to get it to click in his glass strewn lap. Daphne braced herself; the blue car was going to hit her Camero on the front right fender. The speed she was traveling at, plus the speed of the blue car would either flip her car, or cause it to spin violently. Either way, she'd be a 3 ton brick of out-of-control metal that would end James. There was no other way out.

Daphne screamed to Gomez to hold on again, reached into the back seat and gripped Awe's collar as the impact of the

blue car obliterated her fender and hood. Daphne saw the lights of stopped cars and streetlamps spin dizzily around her. She felt the impact through her body, felt a stabbing pain in her stomach, but only looked at Awes, who cowered behind Gomez's seat. Her car's tires screeched and she was shoved violently in the opposite direction as she impacted the biker. She saw a flash of metal (a gun?) fly towards her head and then...

And then...

Then...

Black.

IX: The Interrogation

Daphne woke slowly. As her senses came into focus, she could hear barking. She was glad for that. Awes, her constant companion was chasing squirrels in the park, it was a warm day, and she was laying in the grass, watching him. Her skin felt the tingle of sunlight, and she smelled something familiar. Gasoline. Her car was nearby, and that familiar scent of grease, lubricant, and gasoline was never far behind. Her father was there, in the garage. He was bent under the hood of the car and talking to her. She stood from the grass, left Awes and walked towards him. Oddly, he seemed to shrink

away. He looked up at her and smiled, a smudge of grease on his chin. Daphne laughed and called out to him. His expression changed from happy to worried to frightened. Daphne started to run towards him, but he continued to shrink away. The sunshine brightened, it burned at her skin. Awes continued his barking, but it was no longer playful, it was as if an intruder was breaking into their apartment. It was a frantic bark. Her stomach exploded in pain, and she woke up.

Daphne was laying in her car, between the front seats, her body twisted. Her legs dangled under the steering wheel, but her upper body lay with her arms around Awes, who was sitting in the foot well behind the passenger seat, barking at her. Her car was on fire. The hood was bent up at an odd angle, and there was black smoke billowing out. She looked at her stomach and saw blood; a lot of blood. Too much blood. A shard of glass stuck out from her shirt. It was wedged between her stomach and the passenger seat.

Daphne let go of Awes, and tried to pull the glass out. Her fingers slipped on the blood, cutting her hand. She shouted in pain. Her door was ripped open and she saw a familiar face. Jake, leader of the Skulls, reached in and grabbed her by the waist. She tried to tell him that she was wedged, but her voice cracked in her dry throat. Her mumbles

turned to a surprised scream as Jake yanked her out of the car, causing the glass shard to slice its way around her stomach and side to her back. Jake's grip faltered and she hit the asphalt hard. Awes jumped out of the car after her, and viscously barked and snarled at Jake.

"Whoa, whoa, easy boy, easy. Hey, little lady, you want to call off the hound? We have a bitch of an emergency here."

Daphne grimaced in pain as she sat herself up. She looked around at the scene she had caused. Her car and the blue car were smashed together; the blue car was mostly wrapped around her engine block. Its plastic was torn and melting, as the fire under her hood continued to smoke. She looked beyond Jake's upturned hands and Awes' barking to the third part of her plan. A twisted motorcycle was laying on the ground, but was deserted. About twenty feet beyond it, a group of men were surrounding another man who was twisting and screaming on the ground.

"Awes," Daphne croaked, "shaddup. Comere' an sit." Awes stopped barking, sat between Daphne and Jake and growled softly. Daphne coughed and looked around again. Her head was dizzy and she couldn't remember all of the details of the crash. Jake came forward and offered her a leather wrapped flask. Its cap was already twisted off. Daphne took a gulp, coughed violently, and then took another gulp. She then poured

a little of the amber liquid into her palm and splashed it on the wound on her stomach and side. It burned, and it cleaned.

"Alright, sure, use thirty year ol' whisky to clean yourself. Jeez lady, come on, we don't have much time before the cops get here, and I'd rather be somewhere else." Jake edged his way around Awes and helped Daphne to a standing position. She wobbled a little but steadied enough to be able to walk on her own. The cut on her stomach continued to bleed, but she saw that it was mostly cut skin, and nothing life threatening. She pulled off her jacket, and took some bandages out of a pocket. She pulled up her shirt and placed a square bandage over the worst part of the wound, and then yanked her shirt back down.

They approached the group of men, and Daphne realized that these were more Skulls, all watching their second in command writhe on the group, yelling for help and holding his arm, which was bent at a very odd angle. Gomez stood closest to him, a Desert Eagle in his hand. He was scraped and bloody, but held the gun steady. He looked up at Daphne and grimaced, his attempt at a grin. "Sorry, I couldn't pull you out, ribs."

"No problem, but I'll remember that." Daphne lifted her blood soaked shirt to show Gomez and the other Skulls her side.

"Look, sorry about that," Jake took his place next to

Gomez and pulled a sawed off shotgun from his own leather jacket, "but we have some business to discuss, don't we son?"

"I just, ow, it's broken I think, and, argh, I need help, a hospital." James' feet kicked in pain and frustration, casting shadows around the broken intersection. Several cars were stopped, and people looked on at the scene, but nobody intervened.

"Shut the fuck up, you get nothing until you explain what the fuck you were doing shooting at Daphne; who the fuck told you to do that?" James held his gun at his son's head, his voice monotone and full of gravel.

"It's just, you know, business pops."

"Business?" Jake kicked James in the stomach and yelled, "The fuck are you talking about you bastard fuck?! Business?! I conduct business around here, not you. Tell me what you mean, and do it now, so help me god, before I blow your useless fucking head clean off."

"Deckard, it's Deckard, okay? He's getting me a shipment-"

"Of what?" Jake interrupted, his arms and back tensing.

"A shipment of heroine."

"You mother fucker. The Skulls don't deal, you little shit."

"Yeah, well, fuck you and fuck the Skulls." James spit a

bloody wad at his father. "This is a bullshit club, nothing but a bunch of drunk pussies that don't do shit!"

"Yeah, and what are we supposed to do, shithead? You want to be a hotshot, tough shit? What do you think happens when a club turns dealer?" As if on cue, sirens could be heard in the distance. "You hear that James, that's the future you've made for yourself. Strip him."

The other Skulls grabbed James and tore his leather jacket off of his body. He screamed as his broken arm was unceremoniously yanked through the sleeve.

"Are you okay Daphne, can you go on?"

"I've still got a job to do, don't I?"

"Fuck yeah you do, and I've got a little more to discuss with Deckard now."

"Ah shit," Daphne turned back to the wreckage of her car, "who was the other driver, he okay?"

"Yeah, saw you coming and braked, air bags and seatbelt did a number, but he's fine. Called 911 for us, so we gotta hurry. Had one of my boys talk to him, the green will keep his mouth shut." Jake rubbed his fingers together, indicating a large amount of cash.

Daphne nodded at him and then asked, "What happened to Gomez? He doesn't look too injured." She watched him keep a steady aim at James.

"Kid is tough, that's why I keep him around. He acts a little more boozed up then necessary, keeps people off balance," Jakes grinned at Daphne, "He's fine, can take a beating and keep on ticking." Jake hid the shotgun in his jacket and took James' old jacket from the Skull who was holding it out to him. James walked over to Daphne's smoldering car and tossed the leather into the flames. "Alright boys, we're going to the Crate Plaza. Keep an eye out for a white car, pink hearts on the back. We're looking for the stripper girlfriend." A few of the guys shouted obscenities. "Yeah, yeah, and Dick Deckard too, you all remember that prick, I'm sure. We're still working with Daphne here, and we need the asshole alive, so no shooting, alright? Alright, let's roll!"

X: The Hotel

"How'd you get your club out here so fast?" Daphne was on the back of Jake's bike, an extra helmet wobbled around her head, too big for her. They were leading the group of eight bikes, a few of which held more than one man, towards the Crate Plaza Hotel.

"After the brawl at the Beaver, the whole club was put on alert and headed out; and after your lane changing stunt, I

pulled over and made a call, they all got here in time to see the aftermath of you crazying yourself through a red light." The shoot out and subsequent crash had put a serious time strain on her plans of catching Candy and Deckard.

Daphne leaned forward and shouted near Jake's ear, "You okay about James?"

"Fucker tried to kill you for no good reason, he gets what he deserves." Jake twisted his head and shouted back in response.

"You sure about that?"

"Look, he's not the first prick to try and take this club out from under me. I'll survive, and he'll survive too. He'll fall for that accident, spend some time in jail, then he'll come crying back home. We'll take him in, and he'll be put back in line. Don't know if he'll ever wear leather again, but we'll see."

They rode in silence for a while. Daphne needed to break the tension. "So, you say you know Gomez pretty well?"

"Yeah, he's loyal as hell, a bit of a drunk, and I dunno, he might be into other stuff, but he's reliable as hell. Why, worried you left your mutt with him?"

"Yeah, it's just, you know, that dog is the world to me."

"I know what you mean, had a dog myself as a kid, we went everywhere together. Car got 'em. Crying shame, loved that

dog."

"I know what you mean. Had another dog, named Groove, he got out one night, never found him." They made a sharp turn and Daphne flinched at the sharp pain in her side.

"What's with the names?"

"What do you mean?"

"Awes, Groove; those aren't dog names. Spike or Fido, Butch; those are dog names, what gives?"

"They're short for slang. Groove for Groovy, and Awes for Awesome. My dad used those words a lot when I was a kid. No, he wasn't a hippie or anything, just liked to make up words or whatever."

"Those words weren't made up by him. My old lady and I were using words like that at Altamont before you were a twinkle."

"Generational gap I guess."

"Fuckin' kids think you invented it all."

"How 'bout you go fuck yourself Jake?"

"That's the spirit little lady. Let's get ourselves a fucknut and show him who's boss."

The group pulled into the Crate Plaza and parked their bikes in the loading and unloading zone in front of the main doors. Jake helped Daphne off of his bike, and the whole crew

walked into the lobby.

Jean was sitting on a posh looking chair and got up as soon as she saw Daphne. She walked over and abruptly stopped when she saw the blood on Daphne's shirt.

"Ms. Kay? Are you all right? What happened?" Jean looked suspiciously at the bikers surrounding Daphne.

"I'm fine, you didn't see?"

"See what? After you passed me I decided to take a different route here, figured you'd cause a crash or something."

Daphne and some of the bikers laughed. "Yeah Jean, that's what happened."

"Are you serious?"

"Yeah, but we're okay. Is Deckard still here? Things got ratcheted up a notch in the past half hour." Daphne scanned the sparsely populated lobby. The bikers spread out on Jake's command.

"He's still here. I watched Candy go up in the elevator, and I had a bead on her car. I don't know what Deckard was driving, and I couldn't watch all of the elevators, so I guess they could have left, but they didn't know I was watching, so--"

"Yeah, okay. Everyone wait here." Daphne walked up to the main desk. There was a snotty looking lady attending a

computer, her eyes twitching to the rough looking group that had wandered into her realm.

"Can I help you?"

"Yeah, my name is Daphne Kay, of Kay-Awes Bonds. You're currently harboring a fugitive. I need to know the room number of Richard Deckard."

"Well, I'm sorry mam, but that is privileged information."

"Bullshit. Look, this guy almost killed a kid running a stop sign while drunk. H jumped his court date, and I gotta bring him in. You can help us, or," Daphne waved to the Skulls, "my friends and I can start knocking on doors. Your call."

"I'm so sorry mam, but you can't come on here and start making accusations." The lady turned around as id to leave.

"Look, you stupid cunt," Daphne lifted her shirt and ripped the bandage off of her stomach, "you see this? This is the shit he's already put me through." The snotty looking lady turned a shade of pale green and nodded, holding up her hands in a soothing gesture.

"No need for name calling. Please, keep those gentlemen down here and away from our clients. I'll give you the room number, but," The lady waved her finger in front of Daphne's nose, "you mustn't tell anyone what I've done."

Daphne smiled at the woman, resisting the urge to grab her finger and snap it in two. "Thank you very much."

The woman typed for a minute and then stated, "He's in room 8015. That's the eighth floor, mind you."

"Thank you so very much." Daphne sneered at the woman and walked back over to Jake.

"Alright, Deckard is in room 8015. Get a man to guard every exit here, and post one near the elevators. We'll go up together and bring him down. Jean, get your car ready, be close to the main doors, I need to be able to follow him in case he runs, okay?"

"Yes Ms. Kay." Jean turned and left.

"You heard the little lady, move your asses." Jake's voice boomed in the quiet lobby. The bikers moved to their positions and Daphne started towards the elevator. Jake followed closely behind, ignoring the looks from the snotty lady behind the desk.

On the elevator ride to the top floor, Daphne took the time to better clean her wounds. She had pulled her bag from the trunk of the Camero and, lucky for her, it held a more elaborate first aid kit and a change of clothes. Daphne took off her jacket and shirt, and washed the cut on her side with rubbing alcohol.

"What, no thirty year whisky in that bag of tricks?"

"Can it Jake. And quit looking at my tits."

"Yes mam." Jake chuckled and did as she requested.

Daphne finished taping her side and put on a fresh shirt. She then donned her green jacket again and pulled out a can of mace and hand cuffs.

"No gun?"

"No gun."

"Want mine?"

"No sir."

"Care if I shoot the prick?"

"As long as I can still take him in, I don't care if you get him liquored up and put him in a dress."

"Huh, you got a mouth on you don't ya?"

"I've had a rough day."

The elevator dinged when it reached the eighth floor, and Daphne and Jake stepped out slowly. They followed the signs to room 8015. The room was down the brightly lit corridor, around the corner from an ice machine. There was a cleaning woman a few doors down, knocking on doors. Daphne pointed to her and Jake nodded. They hung near room 8015, until the cleaning woman passed by.

"Psst. Hey." Daphne grabbed the woman's arm. She whirled

around, scared. "Hey, we need to get into this room."

"I no speak ingles."

"Ah shit. Okay, um," Daphne thought for a minute. "No es un hombre malo allí. Tenemos que llevarlo a la policía. ¿Puede abrir la puerta?"

"The fuck did you say?" Jake asked Daphne, after trying to decipher the language himself and failing.

"Said there's a bad man in there and we're going to take him away."

"Está bien, pero no pueden quedar atrapados por ello." The cleaning lady looked from Jake to Daphne, and shrugged.

"Toma este dinero y salir de aquí, gracias." The cleaning lady took out her keycards and handed one of them to Daphne. Daphne held out a twenty dollar bill and took the card. The cleaning lady took the money and hurried around the corner.

"That was easy." Jake looked around the hallway and pulled out his sawed off shotgun.

"Money makes the world go round."

"I'm ready when you are."

"Okay, sliding now." Daphne listened to the door and then shoved the card into the slot and pulled it out. A little light turned green and the door clicked. Daphne twisted the handle, and swung the door wide, leading with her can of mace.

The scene she walked into was incredible.

Deckard hung from the ceiling. His limbs were tangled in a series of black leather straps and chains. He was nude, save for a small g-string, and metal clamps around his nipples. A red ball gag was in his mouth. He stared wide eyed at Daphne and Jake, who stared back in astonishment and disgust.

Candy walked towards Deckard, oblivious to their new guests. She was dressed in black as well, her sweet sexy nurse costume exchanged for a tight fitting leather and latex suit. Her hair was pulled back tight in a ponytail, and chains tangled from her chest and sleeves. Deckard tried to tell her they were not alone, but all that came from him were muffling screams behind the gag. Candy selected a tool from the bed, a whip of sorts and flogged Deckard on the bare ass.

"No, no, bad Dick! I told you to shut up!"

"MMmmfghh, mmmffgghh!"

"I said," Candy reached forward and ripped one of the clamps from his nipples, "shut up!"

His muffled scream made Daphne laugh. She tried to hold it in, but the sheer madness of the situation caused her guard to drop. Candy jumped and whirled around, instinctively covering the parts of her that were not covered by her suit.

"What the fuck! Get out of here! Hey! I know you-"

"Hey Candy, can you teach me that too?"

"You're that bitch from the club! You're not getting my

honey, you skank!" Candy ran towards the bed and picked up another instrument, a bat like club that had tiny metal spikes on it. Holding her chest with one arm, Candy rushed forward and swung at Daphne with the other. Daphne sidestepped her, and jutted her foot out, catching Candy's 5 inch heel and causing the off balanced Candy to fall on her face. The club clattered to the floor, and Daphne kicked it away.

"Keep an eye on her, will you?" Daphne stepped over Candy towards Deckard.

"With pleasure." Jake nudged Candy over onto her back and pointed the gun at her. "Don't try anything sweetheart."

"Perve!"

"Yeah? What'll you call me if I give you folded dollars?" Candy, arms crossed over her chest, inched her way into a sitting position and pouted.

Daphne walked towards Deckard, who was turning red. His eyes were scared, but his manhood stood out.

"Ah fuck man, put that away, would you?" Daphne gave Deckard a quick spray in the crotch with her mace. His gagged screams made Daphne and Jake laugh. "That's for my car, you asshole." After a few minutes had passed, as well as the bulge, Daphne unbuckled the gag from Deckard's mouth.

"The fuck is the matter with you?! That burned like a mother fucker!"

"Yeah well, after the shit I've gone through today, you deserved it."

"What did I do to you? And what's this shit about your car?"

"Jake? Care to respond to any of that."

"Sure Daph. Hey Dick, why did you think it was a good idea to sell heroine to my son? Did you not think it was going to get back to you?"

"Well, if the little shit had done his job," Deckard nodded towards Daphne, causing his body to swing in the leather device, "we wouldn't be having this conversation, would we?"

"You really think we're that stupid? That I'm that stupid?" Jake's body tensed. Daphne saw this and intervened.

"Deckard, your client tried to kill me tonight, causing me to crash a car that is very near and dear to my heart," Daphne reached up with her hands and shoved the ball gag into Deckard's mouth while ripping the clamp off of his other nipple. The gag did its job, and after a few seconds, Daphne took the gag out again. "That really pisses me off. You endangered my life, the life of my partner over there, and, most importantly to you, the life of his club. Now, you have some things to repay. You have to repay your debt to me, you have to repay your debt to society, and you have to repay your

debt to this man," Daphne shook her thumb at Jake, "and he's none to happy about the coup you were trying to fund against him."

"Okay, fine. Yeah, you caught me. I'll go willingly to the police station."

"Well, that sounds dandy, thank you Richard. Jake, when should I pick him up? Tomorrow morning?" Daphne turned and held her hands up to Deckard, motioning to him as a model would a prize package on an afternoon game show.

"Make it the afternoon." Jake smiled a sick smile at Deckard.

"No, no! You can't do that! It'll be assault, and, extortion. I'll get you on so many counts of violence and torture, and-"

"Torture? Nah, we're not going to torture you, Dick. We're just going to, I dunno, tie you up and whip you a bit. You'll like that, won't you?" Jake sneered at Deckard and took a menacing step toward him.

"Honey, what did you do? Did you try to kill these people?" Candy stared wide eyed at Deckard, missing pieces of her life coming into focus.

"No baby, it's not like that, they're just making a mistake-" In one smooth motion, Daphne grabbed another whip from the bed and swung it at Deckard, smacking him on the

chest and striking his already sore nipples. His teeth gritted and he stifled a yell.

"Don't listen to him Candy. He's a goddamn liar-" Daphne threw the whip down in disgust.

"-a fucking bad one-" added Jake.

"-and you deserve better. Look, you haven't done anything wrong have you?" Daphne knelt down beside Candy.

"Well, no, I'm just," Her eyes welled up in tears, "I was just looking forward to getting away for a while. I needed this vacation, and, and-"

"Yeah, about that," Daphne looked around the room at the suitcases that were packed, "why aren't you on the plane already?"

"I don't know, plane was delayed until tomorrow morning; bomb scare or threat or something." Candy wiped at her eyes with her latex sleeve, her considerable makeup smeared on the side of her face.

"Just go." Daphne stood and grabbed a robe that was on the bed and tossed it at Candy. "I know you don't deserve this, this guy is an asshole, and I'm pretty sure he's not going to be around for a long time." Candy donned the robe, took off her heels and stood up.

"Thank you, but, I don't have much money, Richard-"

"Just take his stuff."

"What?" Candy sniffed.

"What?!" Deckard's exclamation caused himself to spin slightly in his harness.

"Just take his car, go home, grab some stuff, I'm sure he's got valuables all over his fucking house. Grab watches, candle sticks, expensive looking audio video equipment; pawn that crap and then go to Hawaii for a while."

"Can I, I mean, is that legal?"

"No it's not fucking legal! You touch anyth-MMmmggffhhh!" Daphne shoved the ball gag back into Deckard's mouth and buckled it.

"We're not the cops, get what you need and get out of here. As far as I'm concerned, we found Deckard alone." Deckard continued to try and scream around the gag. "Just go and enjoy life for a while, forget about Deckard, he's a scumbag and he's going to pay."

"Yeah," Jake chimed in, "in a big way." Jake pulled out his cell phone and dialed. He spoke for a few seconds and then clicked it off and smiled, "Company is coming."

Daphne waited until Candy was dressed and on her way out before she spoke to Jake. Deckard swung slowly in the corner, watching his life disintegrate around him, and waiting for the unpleasant pain to begin.

"Just keep him intact, okay?" Daphne said to Jake.

"Yeah, like I promised, just a little friendly payback. He won't say anything, will you Dickie?" Deckard just looked at them, fear in his eyes. "And when it comes time, I know a guy who can fix up your car. Just take this," Jake fished a wallet out of a pair of nearby slacks and pulled out a credit card, "over to the clubhouse and my old lady will give you the number of a guy I know. He'll run the card before it's canceled, and we'll take care of the rest."

"Thanks Jake, I appreciate it."

"No, the pleasure is all mine." Jake walked with Daphne out to the elevator, which dinged. The doors opened and several bikers sauntered out. "Believe me, he won't do wrong again. Oh, one more thing."

"What's that?"

"What color?"

"Huh?"

"Your car, what color, can't keep it primed forever."

Daphne watched the bikers pass her on the way to the hotel room and looked at their jackets. The skull emblem on the back was surrounded by bright orange flames. "Orange, fire orange."

"You got it little lady." Jake smiled at her, and turned back into the room.

Daphne entered the elevator and rode it down to the lobby. She walked out the sliding doors, past several parked motorcycles, and into Jean's waiting car. She dialed Gomez's cell number and talked with him briefly.

"Second and Walnut Jean, my side hurts, my head hurts and I've got paperwork to do; let's go get my dog."

The End

February 22, 2010