

Blood on the Knife—A Love Story

by

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Some people always look for the good in others, the bright side of life, the silver lining I don't. Fuck me, but it's too hard and boring besides. Bad is always more entertaining and, when you get right down to it, more predictable. I suppose that's why I hooked up with Jameson Rose. No one had ever accused him of anything approaching goodness, decency, honor, integrity, benevolence—the list goes on. In fact, mostly he tended to be characterized by friends and enemies both in terms of demons and satan, scum and slime. Suited me fine. I always knew where I stood with him, and while that might not have always been comfortable, I like knowing what's what.

Ours was neither a sexual or romantic relationship—and no, they aren't necessarily the same thing. In my experience they most often aren't. It's true I may be cynical, but then again, I may just be a keen observer of the human condition. I worked for him as a kind of administrative assistant/watchdog bitch. I had my nose in all his dealings (I'm very discreet and don't fold under pressure). Never met a polygraph I couldn't pass neck deep in bullshit. I headed off all intruders—business and personal—and on occasion, I even had cause to arrange his girlfriend's abortion and fold his socks (he doesn't wear underwear)—though not all in the same day. I was pretty essential to him and he paid me well. I will say that I did like the job. I felt needed. I was the best he'd ever had. Or so he said. I wonder if he still thinks so.

I don't know how the hell I let it begin, but I sure know where it ended. I developed a wet spot for him and he had no scruples in using it to manipulate me. He's got radar for that sort of thing and as much as I might deny it to his face, the fact remained that I'd fallen in love with him, or as close as I was ever going to get. There wasn't any underlying necessity behind his manipulation; I did everything he wanted without question. Almost everything. But like I said, he's not a good guy. He's got a lot of bad habits and he'd rather handle people than not.

You might say I got tired of it. Came to head one night when we were at the office. I was packing up for the weekend and he suddenly decided he needed "company." Double visceral reaction: my panties wadded up while the rest of me goose-pimpled with fear. I wasn't going to cross that line. I wouldn't ever be able to get away from him again. Maybe he knew that. Maybe that's why he pushed it. I know that's why I stabbed him.

Which brings me to the here and now.

Of course I ran. Didn't know what else to do. If I killed him, the cops would be after me. If not, well hell and women hath no fury like Jameson Rose. That's right. I ran because I

was piss-my-pants scared, and I was caught between hoping I had killed him and this damned sick feeling which clung to life—his, not mine.

I made it all the way from New York to Wisdom, Montana. Don't ask me where I was going. I just wanted a place to hole up without a lot of people. Which is the definition of Montana, preferred nesting place of wacko militias and bizarro cults, not to mention woman-strangling religions. But I guess I wasn't thinking that clearly. Obviously, or I would've considered getting snowed in: January—Montana—Mountains. It seems pretty obvious in hindsight. But then so many things do.

I decided to wait until spring to move on, and took a place in the mountains along the Big Hole River. A log cabin really. Not like there were any other choices. I had plenty of money. I guess I didn't mention the two mil payoff I stole when I skipped town. Figured Jameson didn't need it as much as I did. Call it disposable income. So I wasn't running on empty. Not that I hadn't saved a big chunk of the substantial salary Jameson had been paying me for the past three years. But I left in the middle of the night and even a newborn knows better than to leave an electronic trail for cops—or other enemies—to follow. So no bank stops, no credit cards, no ATM machines for me.

You'd think log cabins would be warmer, cozy. Not this one. I've had to keep the fire roaring. I've been about smothered by the stink of pine and fresh air. And walls and floors are wallowing in quilts, ragrugs, antlers and animal skins. Obviously the place came pre-decorated.

Lars Henrickson is my landlord. Stoic man, blond, stereotypical Danish lumberjack type. About as opposite to Jameson as you can get. Loaded the mudroom with wood so I wouldn't have to go outside for it. It wasn't generosity. I paid extra. He took the money after giving me the once over. Conclusion? City girl. I can handle his contempt though. So long as I can hole up safe for awhile. Who'd think to look for me in the backwaters of America?

I know, famous last words.

So when the knock on the door came, I figured it was Lars with the load of kindling he promised and opened it wide. Do I have to say Jameson Rose stood on my threshold? My gut clenched and it wasn't only because he had me trapped in a tiny cabin on the backside of frigid nowhere.

"Jameson."

I opened the door wide. If you can't win, and you expect to die—painfully—then have the grit to go out with a little class. After all, peeing myself wasn't going to do any good, and I'd pretty much rather have my guts torn out rather than humiliate myself in front of him.

He paused a moment and then padded past with all the fluid elegance of a jungle cat. I'm proud to say I didn't even consider making a run for it. Mostly because I'd have probably taken a header on the ice before Hammond, Jameson's ever-present bodyguard/henchman, could tackle me.

I closed the door and made a beeline for my makeshift bar on the kitchen table.

"Vodka?" I offered.

"You know I drink scotch. So do you."

"Actually I loathe scotch, which accounts for the vodka." I held up my glass for him to view and then took a good swig. Bottled courage never hurts. Besides, didn't they used to use alcohol as an anesthesia? Whatever he was going to do to me was going to hurt. A lot. Better numb up a bit first.

"You look . . . rustic."

I looked down at my jeans and flannel shirt. My hair was in a braid down my back. Yep. Walton's Mountain. I shrugged.

"It's what the natives wear."

I put another log on the already roaring fire and then flopped onto the couch and kicked my feet up onto the coffee table, Jameson eyeing my every move. I felt like his prospective lunch. Anyhow, this was his show and he was going to run it the way he wanted. I might at least get comfortable until he got around to the really painful part.

“Where’s Hammond?” The henchman couldn’t be far. I hoped he was freezing his nuts off. Jameson just gave me one of those enigmatic ‘I know something you don’t know’ smiles and then reached over and took the glass out of my hand and drank. Typical.

“Just passing through?” I queried glibly.

“Here? I don’t think so. I came to collect my property, quickly, and get back to New York.”

“That’s it? Nothing to do with me?”

“Oh now Dru,” (Yes, Dru—as in Drusilla, as in Cinderella’s wicked stepsister. If the shoe fits and all that). Anyhow, Jameson gave one of those smug, condescending looks and ran a finger down my cheek. It felt as cold and hard as a gun barrel.

“You. Are. My. Property.”

Oh.

I could feel my face go flat.

“It seems to me you mistakenly made that same assumption not too long ago.” I looked pointedly at his chest where I’d stuck him with the knife—dagger—whatever. Crime of passion—total panic actually—and of availability. Jameson likes to collect antique edged weapons and display them wantonly in his office. I bet you thought I’d done it with a letter opener. How Desperate Housewives would that be? Give me a little credit.

“About that.” He sat down across from me on the coffee table, capturing my legs between his. “Did you have to twist the knife? Left quite an ugly scar.”

“I wasn’t really thinking you’d live long enough to scar. Besides, you can afford a good plastic surgeon.”

He shook his head. “Ouch. Did no one remember to feed you today?”

I had nothing to say to that and focused instead on quelling that rush of hunger when he touched me. He was playing a game with me, and I had no idea about the rules or the stakes.

“Don’t you want to know how I found you?” Poison green eyes swept the room derisively.

“Does it matter? It’s not like you’re going to let me go so I can learn from my mistakes.”

“No, that’s true.”

So much for veiled threats.

“Don’t sugarcoat it on my account.”

“You did stab me. I think we can dispense with any pretensions of delicate sensibilities.”

The fire crackled and popped with a shower of sparks. I am embarrassed to say that I jumped. My bravado was nothing more than illusion and now he knew it too. I didn’t care much for the expression of smug satisfaction that washed over his face.

“So you plan to take me back to New York. Does that mean you’re going to throw me a grand funeral?”

“Not at all.”

“It would be good PR you know, and help cover your tracks. A gesture of forgiveness for a psychotic employee who came to a sad unfortunate end. Of course you could just walk me off into the wilderness here and drop me into a ravine. Save some effort and expense,” I mused, my stomach churning. I’m not a coward, by any means. But neither am I so cold-blooded as the man sitting across from me. I’ll admit to being scared and revolted to be discussing my own imminent death.

“I’ll take it under advisement.”

“I’m not going to cooperate with you.” I couldn’t bring myself to say, ‘you’ll not take me back alive’ but that was the gist of it. As if someone had pulled a plug on me, all the fight had drained out, leaving behind only rabid stubborn defiance. I had always had plenty of that.

“Do you think you have a choice?” He set the glass down and cupped my cheek with his hand. The tender touch of a lover. Only this was revenge. I pushed him away and he caught my hand in his.

“You’ll have to kill me, or drug me into oblivion,” I advised, trying to tug free. He tangled his fingers in mine and rubbed my palm with his thumb.

“I can feel your pulse race. You want this.”

“Like I did six weeks ago?” I glanced toward the kitchen, thinking longingly about the knives in the drawer by the sink. Jameson followed my look, reading my mind.

“No weapons today, Dru. You’re at my mercy.”

“Try me.” I

“Why resist? I know you love me.”

I sputtered. Seriously. “Love? Lust maybe. But you aren’t remotely loveable, Jameson. And I’m not the kind to get suicidal over a man. And getting mixed up with you is definitely suicidal.”

“No? But I think you have.” He sat back and let go of my hand. “Otherwise why react so strongly?” He rubbed his chest and I closed my eyes, remembering the feel of the knife driving into his breast, the sticky resistance of living flesh. I hadn’t been sleeping real well these past weeks.

“What? Nothing to say?”

I opened my eyes and shook my head.

“Well now, we’re getting somewhere.”

“Where are we getting Jameson? Seems to me you’ve led yourself back to the beginning. I’ve seen you in action and I won’t let myself be tortured by you. I’d rather die.” And I actually meant it.

“I don’t think any of the women I’ve been to bed with ever called it torture,” he mused, his eyelids heavy with satisfaction. He’d won a major point.

“Oh no, the sex was good. Stupendous, amazing. I got to hear all about it. Sometimes I did hear it when you and the bimbo-du jour were rolling around on your office desk. But then after you tore their guts out, didn’t you? For the fun of it.”

He bent, holding my head in his hands, his breath warm on my lips.

“I wouldn’t do that to you.”

I couldn’t move. Deer in the headlights. But luckily my brain and mouth were still connected and on autopilot.

“Sure you wouldn’t. And of course, I’ll believe you because you’re so trustworthy and forgiving.”

“What about you? You tried to kill me. I’d be setting a rattlesnake loose in my home. Call it a relationship of mutual distrust. Come home with me.”

“Why? Why me? Why should I believe you? And please not the boring ‘you’re so beautiful’ crap, or better, ‘you’re the only girl who’s ever made me feel this way’.” My lip curled in a sneer. But he didn’t even crack a smile.

“Because you know me. Because you’re mine—you’ve been my right hand for three years running and I want you.”

Treacherous charming lies.

“It’s a game. You’re always playing games.” I was shaking my head and trying to push free. His hands clamped hard and he pulled me forward until my forehead and nose rested hard against his.

“It’s not a game Dru. But even if you think it might be, don’t you have to take a chance? You can always kill yourself—or me—later.”

“You could hurt me a lot, in the meantime.”

“Coward.”

“Maybe I’m just smart enough to know better.”

“Take a chance, Dru. It might be everything you hoped for. Beyond your dreams.”

“My, aren’t you full of yourself.” I could feel myself beginning to smile in spite of myself. He could hear it in my voice.”

“Come on, come on, come on . . . Trust me this much. Trust me like I trust you.”

Now I felt him pull one hand away and fumble in his breast pocket. Then something cold and hard was shoved into my hand. A knife. Unfolded it would be a serious weapon. My fingers clenched around it. A peace offering of sorts. I wasn’t fooled. This trust he talked about was the same kind invoked by a standoff between nuclear powers; it was full of threat. But like I said, I’m not a coward. And more, he was right. Whether I liked it or not, I wanted him, more than self-preservation.

I closed the last few centimeters between us and brushed his lips with mine. Surrender. Jameson held me closer, slanting his mouth across mine. Our tongues wove together, hot and thrusting. I had to open my eyes. He was watching me. My stomach curled. Fear. His eyes glinted wickedly as he pulled me to my feet, never breaking the kiss until I stood resting against his chest.

“Fair warning Dru. I won’t let you go. You’re mine, now and forever.”

It could have been a threat. It could have been a promise. But I couldn't resist the challenge nor the lure of his touch. That's why I stabbed him in the first place. Would this be a road to Jameson's own special neighborhood in hell? Or the beginning of a spectacular romance? I tucked the knife in my pocket and gave him a small, self-derisive smile.

"Don't make threats you can't keep, Jameson."

"Oh no, Dru. That's a promise, and I intend to keep it."

I didn't bother telling him the road to hell is paved with the best intentions. I was pretty sure his intentions weren't that good.

"I've got a plane waiting in Butte. Let's get out of this wretched place and go home."

"Not some sultry beach in the South Pacific?" I asked, remembering one of his recent ventures. She'd lasted three weeks before his palate got bored and he began to crave new meat.

He yanked me close, his fingers digging into my arms.

"We're going home. To my bed. Our bed. I've already had your things moved." I barely had a chance to say 'oh' before he shoved me to the door. I scooped up my coat and the satchel of money and stepped out into the cold. Hammond waited there, behind the wheel of an SUV, the truck purring warmly in the snow. I sneaked a look at Jameson's thunderous expression and felt a wiggle of newborn hope flutter in my chest. What if this was real? What if he really cared? What if I really mattered to him? Men like him don't fall in love, especially with women like you, a nasty voice whispered in my head, but what if . . . ?

Jameson opened the door and then pulled me close before I could get in.

"I'd like to think I could let you go now if you wanted free of me. But we both know I won't—can't. If you want to be rid of me, you'll have to carve me up with that new knife of yours. Fair warning."

"Careful Jameson, you might give a girl the mistaken impression that you care."

When he spoke, his lips were against my ear, his voice a low, raspy whisper.

“Make no mistake, Dru. I care. I didn’t even know how much until you stuck me and disappeared. The doctors couldn’t keep me in the hospital. And then running you to ground—it’s been a hellish six weeks. You may not believe me now, but I’ll do whatever it takes—whatever it takes—to keep you with me, fair or foul. Now get in the car and let’s go home.”

He gave me a little shove and I climbed in, only to have him settle in beside me and pull me against his chest. I can’t say it was particularly comfortable, but then I was in too much of a daze to really notice. Jameson barked orders at Hammond. I could see the muscles in his jaw clenching. He looked more furious than not.

He caught my look and frowned.

“Did I grow a second head?”

“Pretty much, yes.”

Jameson gave a sharp, bitter laugh, clearly despite himself.

“You’ll have to get used to it quickly, because I don’t think I can stand much of this.”

“You know what they say about leopards and spots.”

He grasped my jaw in his fingers, those poison green eyes boring into mine.

“Have done, woman. Isn’t it enough that you poked holes in me? Can you not shut your mouth? No, better yet, let me . . .” And he began to kiss me again and I lost all capability for coherent thought.

And that’s where the story ends, or begins, I’m not sure. I still have a knife in my pocket, and I don’t know if I can believe Jameson; and if he is telling me the truth, I don’t know where that takes us. Maybe he’s lulling me into a false sense of security. Maybe this is all a scam for revenge. Either way, the sex will be good. I suppose there are worse risks with lousier payoffs.

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The SUV rolled slowly down the mountain road, flakes of snow beginning to drift like falling stars through the thin, clear air. Behind, the lights of the cabin continued to glow merrily in the gathering gloom. Around back, in a narrow cleft made by spring runoff, the blond, flannel-clad body of Lars Henrickson lay wedged, his eyes sprung wide with surprise, a pile of kindling scattered about his feet. Blood had ceased to seep from the six stab wounds in his chest, made by a knife which, when unfolded, would, and had, made a serious weapon. The falling snow thickened and soon the corpse of the landlord faded into the natural landscape, not to be discovered until spring. Had some madman murdered Lars and kidnapped the young female tenant who had disappeared at the same time, leaving behind all her clothing and a meal cooking in the oven? Or had she committed the murder herself and fled? The search focused on recovering the murder weapon, the possession of which would be a clear indication of guilt. So far, there were no leads as to its whereabouts, nor those of the woman. So far.