

Chapter 1

#LadiesNightOut

It's Friday. I've got my paycheck. I've paid rent. I've paid the water and sewage. I've paid my phone bill. Everything's good. Well, except I need groceries for the next two weeks, because, you know, food. I check the pile of envelopes by the door.

Oh, also I forgot the fucking electric bill.

Not that remembering would have changed anything; it wouldn't make my check any bigger. And this one isn't a late notice—it's a shutoff notice.

I remember that my friend Elaine does odd jobs on some app. She said I'd be great for it, because I'm basically fit, and more importantly I need the money enough to do anything. She says it pays well, and it pays quick. So I grab my phone, and hope the bill payment went through so I have service. Sometimes it takes 48-72 hours for a payment to post when they shut off service. The phone says I've got a signal, so I call her up.

She tells me to dress in dark clothes. Dark clothes, I have. Light-colored clothes stain, so I have to replace them all the time. She has me meet her in an alley in a shit part of town. The kind of neighborhood you go to get robbed if you're not a drug dealer or, well, a robber. It's the kind of neighborhood where you can get apartments in cash with no background check. I had to live here a while after a particularly bad breakup where my partner fucked my credit score.

"What the fuck is this? I thought this was an app thing? Like you drive people places, or clean their apartment naked, or model for someone's stupid juice machine."

She looks over at me. "Be quiet. We don't want to give away our position. You're gonna want this." She holds out a knife. Not a knife like I might use to serve birthday cake for the kids I'll never be able to afford to have. A knife like I imagine would be between Dolph Lungren's teeth as he creeps through a jungle prowling for otherworldly menaces. Jagged.

Serrated? That's the word, right?

"What do I need this—"

"Shhhhh!" She snaps. She peeks around the trash dumpster. There's a man walking down the alley. Big, in a suit. He's got that feeling about him. Like you know he's guilty of something. Something real fucking bad.

Oh my god we're robbing someone. She dragged me out here to help her mug someone.

"This is him. Just follow my lead. No matter what you do, don't stop, and don't let him look you in the eyes."

"What in the fuck Elaine—"

Before I can think, Elaine jumps out into the alley and jams her knife into his stomach.

"Elaine!" I stand, not entirely sure what's going on right now.

Oh my god she's an assassin. This is a Senator and I'm gonna be on the run from the law for the rest of my life.

The man looks down at his stomach, then to Elaine, then laughs. This is not the laugh of a man who just took eight inches of Big Fucking Knife to the gut.

“Get over here and help!” Elaine snaps, then rips her knife free and swings it wide at his face. The man slaps her hand away, then punches her in the stomach.

Whatever’s happening, if I don’t act, Elaine’s dead. She’s had my back before. Whatever’s going on, she needs me.

Sometimes it’s not about who’s at fault, but who you need. I need Elaine. And right now, Elaine needs me. So I charge up behind the man just as he’s grabbing Elaine by the neck and lifting her off the ground. I wrap both hands around the knife handle, and plunge it into his back. I, like nearly one hundred percent of the population, have never plunged a knife into someone. This doesn’t feel right. Not like “you’ve done something wrong,” but like, “his back didn’t feel like skin.” His back broke away. It was dry, crumbly.

He isn’t bleeding.

“Don’t stop!” Elaine shouts as he drops her.

I don’t have to think twice. I stab. I stab again. I stab again. By the time he’s turned around to face me, Elaine’s gotten her knife and slashes his throat.

He falls to the ground, and his body crumbles to dust. I blink. I stare. I forget the cold night wind. I forget where you am. I’m staring at a pile of dust that I helped to... kill?

I drop the knife. While I’m gawking at the pile, Elaine puts something in my hand. Paper maybe?

“What’s that?” My voice is cracked. I’m not even sure if she could hear me.

“That’s \$700. In the business, it’s what we call ‘your cut.’”

I look down. It’s a wad of cash.

“Huh?”

“I made \$1,500 on this gig. Spent \$100 on those knives. They’re silver-plated. Not cheap. The rest I split with you. Good first gig.”

That pile of paper looks like my electricity this month. It looks like next month’s rent. It looks like groceries. For a brief second, it looks like a pile of ash. It looks like the guy I kind of maybe just murdered. But mostly, it looks like groceries.

Elaine’s walking back toward her car.

“Wait!”

“What?” She glances back but keeps walking.

“Why the fuck didn’t you tell me what we were doing?” I hesitate for a moment, but start after her.

“If I told you, you wouldn’t have gone through with it.”

“You didn’t know that!”

She did.

And she was completely, 100% right. I wouldn’t be standing here with a fist full of grocery money if she told me what I were about to do. But now? I think I could do it again.

I think I will.



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