

## Chapter 1

Kanyon was currently face down watching the blood seep from her chest. She watched as it filled the grout patterns of the tile floor like a river filling a dry creek bed. Her eyes were fixed, non-blinking. It was only a matter of time and it would all be over, she thought. She was ready for this life to end. *Come on already!* her brain screamed at the liquid that was taking its own sweet time. She lay perfectly still as moments ticked down to seconds. The blood's path was finally interrupted as it started to pool around the gun she still held in her outstretched hand. Finally!

She blinked once, slow and purposeful. A pained but malevolent grin was rising at the corner of her mouth as finger after finger secured their grip around her weapon. She pushed up, bringing first one knee and then the other underneath her. A wobble. Good. Ragged breath, check, as she sat back on her heels. Her gaze fell to the wounds on her chest and stomach. Painful groan, shaky hand over her blood-soaked shirt, and freeze. Rushing footsteps came in her direction. She glanced around the room at the shattered glass of the thirty-story window she'd just careened through moments earlier. This was her last stand. The end of this little ride was so close now, and her heart pulsed with anticipation.

The door splintered as four men poured in the room in SWAT formation. She had nine bullets. She rolled just as the sound of the first shots came at her. Now down to six, as three of her bullets hit their mark. She sprinted forward,

diving just as a string of bullets sliced the air above her. She rolled, her shoulder coming up under the man's weapon, pushing it toward the ceiling as she used two bullets on the door frame in an effort to keep a second wave of invaders at bay. She forced her gun under the man's chin and fired, stripping his gun as he dropped. Two steps and she was positioned beside the door.

She could hear them regrouping, heard the metallic slide and release of the pin from a tear gas canister. She watched as it was launched past her into the center of the room. She waited until the first man was two steps in, then took a deep breath and attacked. Side kick to the knee, elbow to the gas mask. The second man received a kick to his weapon, which had him shooting into the side wall, then a front kick to his stomach. As he doubled over, she yanked his mask off. The room was filling with smoke while the agents poured in. She took three more to their knees before her breath ran out.

She pictured the shattered window and routed her escape as a fourth man fell. This was it, this was the last chapter ... there was nowhere left to go. She leveled three more before the first shot found her right bicep. She jerked backward, switched the gun to her left hand, and fired blindly into the smoke as she backed her way toward the window. Just a few more steps to freedom, well almost, she thought, all she had to suffer through now was ... Another shot hit her in the left thigh, spinning her around. She limped forward as another shot rang out. The shot to her shoulder punched her forward. She turned back toward her attackers, giving the grenade a little "show and tell" wiggle before tossing it at their feet. Her smile was evident despite the pin

clutched between her teeth. She added a little finger wave before she simply leaned back.

The punch of the large, blue air-filled safety mat didn't wipe the grin off Kanyon's face. "Cut!" Steven yelled, which brought an even wider smile to her lips. *And it was over.* Well, there would most likely be several secondary retakes after they started the editing process, but for the most part the "in at dawn, out after midnight" routine was over. She'd also have to suffer through the promo gigs, interviews, and film premieres—a few scheduled overseas, which dimmed her smile a bit because that would take her away from Daylen and the Guardian gig.

The supernatural job, still surreal, had her and Daylen hunting all over the city for sin-infused articles that could super-juice a person into some pretty nasty ways. They'd had a couple of small recoveries in the last few weeks, since their little reunion, and so far Daylen had kept a pretty good lid on her *push-Kanyon-away-to-protect-her* jar of emotions. She'd also done an excellent job of warming her bed at night.

For five plus years, they'd kept a professional relationship, maybe a surface friendship; and she'd been able to ignore ... *contain* she corrected, the deeper emotions she'd felt for Daylen. Now, though, minus a few rough patches, they were finally acting and not the kind of acting Kanyon was currently getting paid to do, but actually pursuing and exploring their feelings for each other.

Kanyon glanced over at the faux building still erected at the edge of the movie set and remembered the very moment her life had changed. *Again.* She'd just finished

filming a scene when a freak LA rainstorm hit and she'd stood looking out over the set and somehow knew Daylen was somewhere in the darkness. Turned out that Daylen was at the set because consequently, a supernatural, sin-inspired, mad mammy-jammy article had ended up there. Kanyon had her suspicions on how that little convenient circumstance had happened and it started with Aunt and ended with Ruby. However it happened, she was thankful because it had brought Daylen back into her world.

They'd been cautious at first. But the caution quickly turned into laughs, shared looks, and more intimate moments. Their connection had always been so natural, so fluid. And now, after some heart-to-heart conversations, some of the naked variety, it appeared they were maneuvering around their previous roadblocks and making a go at a real-life relationship and at their fated Guardian and Seeker bond. Kanyon recognized she was smiling at being Daylen's Guardian. It was crazy, surreal, things of movies and make-believe, but after pretending to be so many people, playing so many roles, she'd finally found what she was meant to do—who she was meant to be.

"Miss McKane, you okay?" A stunt assistant rushed up to her.

"Perfectly." She sat up. "How did we do?"

"Freakin' awesome! I still can't believe you did that shot yourself. I mean, you're like a female Jackie Chan, but even he gets rigged up when he films over here."

"Yeah, well, I wanted to test my abilities." She slid to the edge of the mat. "Acting abilities," she clarified quickly.

He reached out a hand. "I'd say your abilities passed, like A++."

Kanyon gave him a shoulder pat. "Thanks."

"Kanyon, I swear to God," Steven rushed forward, "you're amazing. There was absolutely no way we could have met these deadlines without you. That shot would've taken thirty takes, and forty, hell, eighty hours with anyone else." He looked down at his watch. "It's not even noon yet."

"I had something to prove." She took off her shirt, which was stained with the remnants of the exploded dye packs and handed it to a wardrobe assistant who was already holding out a clean replacement. She offered a quick thank you and stepped up alongside Steven.

"There might be a couple days of reshoots, but I think those will be minimal. I know they already have you set up for some appearances and press stuff, so we'll work around those. Hopefully, this will all be wrapped up by the end of the month."

"Sounds good," Kanyon answered.

"Great. Well, I think we're good for today, so you can go ahead and clear out if you want."

"Want," Kanyon replied. "But let me know if you need anything."

"Will do. Otherwise, I assume I'll see you Sunday?"

"Sunday?"

He laughed. "That pesky little award show?"

Kanyon morphed the groan that nearly escaped to a barely audible "oh right." There was little she liked less than an award ceremony. She appreciated the awards she'd received over the years. She just didn't appreciate all the dress and makeup hoopla, fake smiles and congrats, the egos,

the attitudes, and well, all the rest of it. It was all too much of ... well, of everything she didn't like about Hollywood and the industry.

“Great! Again excellent, excellent work!” Steven patted her on the back and headed off to wrap up for the day.

Kanyon made her way to her trailer. It took her longer than normal as everyone wanted to congratulate her on the movie and the latest scene. She entered her trailer, her smile muscles exhausted. “Move over.” She swatted Ralph's butt. When the only movement the dog offered up was a lip raise to release his signature scoff, she squeezed between him and the end of the couch. “I'm comfy, how about you?”

Ralph flicked her an annoyed look with his multicolored eyes, then stubbornly moved an inch. “Gee, thanks.” She wiggled deeper into the cushions before dropping her head back and laying an arm across the dog to absently run her fingers through his long hair.

“We're done here. Well, almost. There'll be a day or two of retakes, but yeah, pretty much done.” There was a quick pounding on the door before it was flung open and heavy boots hit the floor next to her. She didn't have to look. “No please, come on in, Blue.”

“I want you to light this,” Blue demanded.

Kanyon rolled her head to the side to see the “this” in Blue's statement. “No.” She resumed staring at the ceiling.

Blue stomped a heavy boot. “Come on.”

“You. A stink bomb. Been there, lost my favorite jacket. I'm going with a big fat no.”

“It's not a stink bomb. It's a mega-make-you-totally-gag-up-your-socks bomb. I made it myself.”

Kanyon looked at the five foot nothing, overly pierced and tattooed evil genius. “I find that disturbing on several different levels.”

“I find you disturbing on several levels, but you don’t see me judging.” Kanyon snorted. “What? I completely accept that you are obnoxiously long-legged with stupid naturally silky black hair, weird dark blue eyes, ridiculously rich, and some would say hot, though that’s a matter of opinion. And I never say anything about the annoying fact that you also have freakin’ superpowers.”

“Yes, I see just how non-judgy you are.”

“Cool. Now ... Lighter up, buttercup.” Blue held out her bomb again.

“If I light that, will you go away?”

“Duh. I only have maybe fifteen seconds to deploy it.”

Kanyon flicked her fingertips to flames, started to reach out but pulled back, letting the flames die. “Wait, why can’t you light this yourself?”

“You banned me from all things flammable after I *accidentally* lit your Rose of Sharon bushes on fire.”

“Right,” Kanyon agreed. “Second question, why are you actually obeying my order?”

“Because you still haven’t accepted my application for sidekick and I’m trying to show you my best behavior.”

“Last night in the middle of my laps, you dropped a man-eating penguin-hyena and an ice cube in the pool and told me to swim for the iceberg.”

Blue huffed. “I think we need to focus on the *trying* part of my prior statement.”

Kanyon rolled her eyes. “Where is this gag-me bomb going exactly?”

“Men’s locker room,” Blue confessed.

“Theo in there?”

“I cannot confirm or deny whether my rival sidekick candidate is or is not in said premises.”

“You do realize this little rivalry between you two is getting out of hand, right?”

“Name me official sidekick and it will all be over.”

“Go bomb him.” Kanyon brought flames to her fingertips and held them out to Blue.

Blue held the wick in the flame until it started to sputter and spark. “This is going to be so freaking awesome!”

Kanyon waited until Blue was out the door before turning to Ralph. “Shall we go watch the show?”

Ralph replied with a grunt and slid his large frame off the couch, doing a quick downward dog stretch, before trotting out the still open door.

They’d barely reached the end of the row of trailers before a chorus of gagging noises hit them. Kanyon stopped. “Maybe we should hit the catering table instead?”

Two double-deckers for Ralph and one for Kanyon. She was only two bites in before Ralph whined for hers as well. They headed back to her trailer to pack up the few personal things she had there. Duffel bag full, she glanced around for nostalgia’s sake while calling Daylen. Her heart did its now familiar somersault at Daylen’s hello. “I’m all done here.”



“Last shots went well, I take it?”

“Yeah, there’ll probably be some retakes this week and next, but for now I’m all packed up and ready to head out. Do we have anything—” Kanyon stopped as the door to her trailer slammed open.

“Where is she?” Theo growled.

“Ahhh,” Was all Kanyon could offer as she took in the disheveled, semi-crazed geek in her doorway.

“Kanyon? What’s going on? You—”

“I’m fine,” Kanyon inserted. “Theo, on the other hand, not so much. Jesus!” She threw an arm over her mouth and nose.

“Where is she?” he repeated, then coughed, which caused the spit dripping from his lower lip to dance once and stick to his chin.

“Not in here!” she answered, then gagged and replaced the arm over her mouth and nose. “And you are so not riding in my car,” she yelled from behind her elbow.

“Ha! The next ride I’ll be taking is in a prison van, ’cause I’m going to kill her.”

“Cool. I’ll send you your first carton of cigs if you get out of here.”

Theo slowly assessed the trailer, ensuring that his nemesis was not in residence. “Fine! But make my cigs the candy ones,” he demanded, before turning and stomping out.

“Do I even want to know what that was all about?” Daylen asked from the other end of the line.

“Blue *may or may not have* used a super-gag-me-stink bomb in the men’s locker room,” Kanyon offered as she released the breath she’d been holding.

“My vote is *may*,” Daylen offered. “What’s on your agenda now?”

“Thought I’d grab the little bomb-maker and the woolly mammoth and swing by there?”

“How about Theo?”

“Um yeah, he’ll have to take a bus,” Kanyon answered.

“Because Theo may or may not have been in said locker room?”

“Exactly.”

“You know we’re going to have to put an end to this rivalry soon, right?”

“I know. I know. But Blue has been so focused on making Theo’s life miserable that I haven’t had to pay off the postman or call a contractor to fix something in over a week.”

Daylen let out a little laugh. “Fine.”

“I’ll see ya soon.”

“See you soon.”

“Daylen,” Kanyon said quickly.

“Yeah?”

“I miss your mouth. I miss the rest of you too, but especially your mouth.”

“You’ve only been away from it for five hours,” Daylen said playfully.

“Exactly,” Kanyon agreed. “Way too long.”

Daylen’s voice dropped to a soft tease, “Then you better hurry up and get over here so we can remedy that.”