

~ The Price ~

by Star Dawn
stardawn19@hotmail.com

Disclaimer- These characters are my own . I own them, I created them. Any resemblance to a certain warrior or bard are purely accidental. (un-huh)

Subtext- what isn't subtext? LOL.

Rating- PG-13 or T for violence and language, and possible heavy suggestion.

Note to readers: This is the first story I have submitted to this site. As for now the story is complete, how ever I am considering sequels. Comments good or bad are always welcome.

The house was dark except for the one room with a roaring fire. Real wood burned instead of gas, filling the air with the husky scent of pine. The few candles scattered about the room reflected light off the three platinum records that hung on the wall. Two dirty plates had been recently placed on the coffee table. The roasted chicken and fresh mixed vegetables had barely been touched. In front of the fire, reclining on the plush carpet and a few scattered pillows lay the homes residents.

"What time is your flight in the morning?"

"9:30. I have to be there by 6:00."

Kasey scrunched her nose as she thought about the early hour. Seeing her partner's reaction, Alex laughed. "You don't have to take me, ya know. I can call a cab."

"No, I want to. If I can't go with you, at least let me take you to the airport."

"Kasey, you could come with me. I don't care what they think."

"Yes you do," Kasey gently scolded. She then sighed and brushed her fingers through her short blonde hair. "Alex, I don't want to make things harder than they have to be. I loved your brother too, but me being there is just going to cause a scene. And besides, who would look after the big guy here?" she added, indicating the Great Dane that slept peacefully using her partner's thigh as a pillow.

Kasey smiled, remembering the day that Alex had brought the beast home. She had agreed to a dog, but only if it had short hair and if Alex promised that she would fully train it. Her mistake was that she hadn't specified the size requirement for the animal. Once she saw him, she had accused Alex of buying a horse rather than a dog. Now fully grown, he out weighed the petite blonde by more then 30 pounds, but Kasey had to admit Hercules was a sweet thing and she had grown to love him dearly.

"Yeah, I suppose you're right. I don't like the idea of having to buy another new sofa," Alex responded with a sad smile. Her thoughts drifted to their last trip together. They visited Egypt where she had done a private concert for the niece of the Prime Minister. They had kenneled Herc, and he had responded by eating the old sofa in protest. But then on the plus side, she did like the new sofa better. She'd always had a thing for leather and "the incident," as they referred to it, gave them the perfect opportunity to upgrade.

"I still can't believe that he's gone," Kasey murmured. She looked up, stealing a glance at her partner, momentarily met Alex's sapphire blue eyes with her own emerald ones. Reaching out, she caught the lone tear that escaped down Alex's cheek and brushed it away with her thumb. "Sweetheart, it's not your fault. You know that right?"

Alex sighed as she stroked her hand over the dog's honey-colored head, absently rubbing behind his ears. The Dane shifted in his sleep to give his mistress a wider area to scratch. "I know. I just feel responsible. He only joined the Army because I did. He always wanted to be just like me. We just never thought that. . . ." Alex shook her head.

Lucas had been stationed in the Middle East. They had only learned of his death two weeks ago. They never found his body. Alex had been told there was nothing left to find. She had pulled every string she had with both the military and her connections in Hollywood, but the only answer she was got was the same one that had officially been given to her parents. He was on a classified mission and killed in the line of duty.

Feeling Alex's distress, Kasey shifted her body and pulled the other half of her soul closer. Kasey's gentle touch was more than Alex could bear. Her grief finally breaking through her shields, she limply accepted the younger woman's embrace, and gave herself permission to let go. Kasey held the taller woman close, gently rocking her, letting the tears run their course.

Kasey felt her own eyes moisten as she shared Alex's pain. She held Alex tighter, glad that for once Alex wasn't fighting the grief. There were just some things that couldn't be controlled, Kasey thought as she stroked the back Alex's hair and laid a gentle kiss on the crown of her head.

It was only when the tears had dried did they finally break the embrace. Stretching her long legs, Alex rose. She doused the fire and snuffed out the flickering candles. Following Alex's lead, Kasey also rose. She gathered the plates and returned them to the kitchen. Dumping them in the sink, she would get to them tomorrow. As they found each other at the base of the stairs their red tear-stained eyes met and they exchanged a weak smile. Kasey placed her hand on the small of Alex's back before guiding her up the wide marble spiral. In the master bedroom they settled under the satin sheets and together drifted off into a dreamless sleep.

@-->-->--

Early the next morning, Alex entered in the airport lounge. She chose a strategic seat, her back to a wall, so that she could survey the area. She had purposely worn an old baseball cap and a pair of fake wide-rimmed glasses to hide her appearance. Her long chestnut brown hair was pulled back in a ponytail, and she had chosen to wear a pair of her favorite 501s and a faded grey sweatshirt that hosted a picture of Mickey Mouse. Kasey had teased her about the outfit, saying

that it made her look much younger than her 34 years, but then that was the point. Today she didn't want to be recognized as the international Rock Star Alexis Drake; today she just wanted to be plain old Alex.

Alex listened as they called for first class to board. She absently patted the small 9mm in her pocket. It was a small consolation from her military background that she qualified as an air marshal. She had used her connections as a celebrity to gain a license and on the occasions that she flew coach she would often take advantage of the fact by trading her status for a choice seat.

Once on the plane, Alex commandeered her window seat. With a sigh, she settled in and ignoring the flight attendant's safety speech, popped in her iPod's ear buds. The six hour flight from LA to Orlando was going to be a long one. Feeling like a sardine being prepped for canning, she closed her eyes and focused solely on the music pumping through her ear buds.

The plane suddenly lurched, causing Alex's eyes to fly open in alarm. Just a little turbulence, she chided herself. Alex forced her body to relax and then checked her watch. Two hours had passed. She must have fallen asleep. Looking out her window, the landscape was unfamiliar. She figured that she must be somewhere over the Midwest. Bored with the view she glanced in the other direction right into a pair of big brown eyes. Alex signed inwardly. The eyes were staring at her. She knew she'd been recognized.

"What's the matter? Was I snoring? I wasn't drooling again was I?" she joked at the tween with the chocolate brown eyes.

The girl smiled. "No," she replied. "But you're. . . you're Alexis Drake, aren't you?"

Alex sighed inwardly once again. "If I tell you yes, do ya promise not to squeal, shriek, or scream?" One thing she hated more than anything on earth was that high pitched squeal that all young girls seemed to be able to produce. It was like nails being raked over a chalkboard.

The girl nodded enthusiastically and then let out a stream of almost incomprehensible drabble, the only phrase that Alex recognized being "OMG." She had started to tune the girl out when she noticed the girl pulling out her cell phone.

"Is it ok if I take a picture?" the tween asked.

"Actually, I prefer that you didn't," Alex answered. The last thing she needed was the press catching wind of her brother's funeral, turning it into a media circus. Glancing back toward the tween, she grimaced, realizing that she had upset the girl. "I'll tell ya what. If you give me an address I'll send you an autographed copy of my new album."

The glow in the girl's eyes immediately returned. "Really? I heard that *Enduring Roses* was gonna be awesome!"

Alex smiled at the girls comment. She had to agree, it was awesome. She and Kasey had collaborated on each song. Alex's blend of countrified rock and Kasey's lyrics seemed almost like they were destined to be together.

@-->-->--

It had been three days since Alex arrived in Orlando. The first two days had been eaten up by travel and visiting relatives, but now the funeral was over and the relatives had all left. The house was once again quiet. Alex sat cross legged on her parent's sofa. In her lap she held the guitar that she used to play as a teenager. Lost in thought, she softly strummed it while working out the kinks in a new melody she had been playing with.

"That's real pretty honey," Elena Drake commented to her daughter.

"Thanks. Something new I'm working on."

"I wish you didn't have to leave so soon," her mother continued, sitting down next to Alex.

"Mother, we've been over this. I'm just leaving a little earlier in the morning," Alex replied. "It's not like you really want me here anyways," she added sarcastically.

Elena frowned. "Alexis, I really don't appreciate the attitude."

"Really Mom? I heard what you said to Aunt Sally, and to Mrs. Kenzie."

"Really Alexis if you just found the right man, then you could settle down. . ."

"Mom, you just don't get it, do you? For the last time. . ." Alex paused as she put aside the guitar and then turned to face her mother. "I don't want a man, I have Kasey. She didn't corrupt me. She didn't turn me. She's not a phase I'm going through. I love her, Mom. She's the other half of my soul and nothing you or Dad can say or do is gonna change that. Lucas understood. He accepted us. How come you can't?"

"Alexis, please! Leave your brother out of this."

"No! Not this time!" Alex exclaimed, as she stood and turned away from her mother. "By the gods, he's the only reason why I'm here."

Alex's mother leaped from the sofa. She grabbed Alex's shoulder and twisted her back around to face her. "By the gods? By the gods? What in hell does that mean? Have you given up your religion too?"

"Jesus, Mother! It's just a saying. And what I believe is my own business. Why do you care anyways? You're already convinced that I'm going to hell."

"Alexis, you don't really think that. I just can't accept. . ."

"That's right Mom, you don't accept. You don't accept me, my partner, or my lifestyle. The only thing you accept is my money!"

Alex's mother pulled back her arm, intending to slap her daughter, only to be surprised as Alex caught her wrist in mid swing. Their eyes met, and in that moment Elena Drake didn't recognize her daughter. Alex's eyes were cold and distant; they had turned a stormy grey, like a raincloud that covered had the sky. Alex let go of her mother's wrist, pushing it away.

"Don't," was all that Alex could muster. Alex stood for a minute with her hands tightly bound in fists at her side. She allowed the silence to fill the room as she struggled to quell the darkness that had risen within her. Pushing everything down deep inside, she was again able to move. "Goodnight, Mother," was all that she could manage before she once again turned away from the stunned Elena Drake.

Alex retreated to her childhood bedroom and flopped down on the small bed. Staring at the ceiling, she blinked her eyes, willing the tears away. She wondered what had just happened. She had almost lost control. She could have so easily hurt her mother. *I'm better than that*, she scolded herself. Her thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the ringing of her cell phone.

"Yeah?" Alex answered roughly, not bothering to check the caller ID.

"Hey sweetheart. . . you ok?"

"Kasey," Alex responded, her mood instantly lifting at the sound of her partner's voice. "Gods it's so good to hear your sweet voice."

"You're the one with the sweet voice, love. I've missed you. How's everything going?" Kasey asked as she peered back at her computer screen. She had checked the flight schedule and discovered that Alex booked an earlier flight.

Alex sighed, "The usual. You think after five years they would have gotten over us by now."

Kasey frowned. "I'm sorry, honey. You want to talk about it?"

"Gods no! I've had enough talking for about my parents for one night. It's just so much, Kasey. Sometimes I wonder if it's worth the price."

"The price?" Kasey asked, as she punched in a few keys on her keyboard, effectively upgrading Alex to first class.

"Yeah, you know because of who we are."

"Ah, I know it's hard sometimes sweetheart. But you know I'm always here for you."

"Yeah, I know...and sorry." Alex responded with sincerity.

"Hmm? Sorry for what?"

"You are worth it, no matter what. There is no price too high."

Kasey smiled, "I love you too, honey."

Alex grinned; those simple words were all that she needed to hear. She decided that a change in topic was in order. She let her voice drop down a register and asked, "So what are you wearing?"

Kasey glanced down at the plaid pajamas, but responded, "You know that little black number you like?"

"The one with the ruffles on the..."

"No the *other* one," Kasey corrected leaving both of their imaginations to get lost in their familiar game.

The Price - Part II

Kasey hummed to herself happily. The conversation the night before with Alex had gone well, extremely well in fact. She was definitely looking forward to Alex being home again. Kasey had been sitting at her keyboard, jumping back and forth between a game of solitaire and a new program she was playing with when she noticed that one of the warning lights from the security system was going off. She switched screens, trying to access the camera off the kitchen that was associated with the tripped signal, and frowned at the black screen she was getting.

"Camera is on the fritz again," she commented out loud "Come on Herc, let's go check it out. It's probably just Mrs. Jensen's cat again."

She exited the door to her office, making sure that the door clicked closed, before she crept quietly down the hall and then the stairs. As she approached the kitchen she heard a noise. The hairs on the back of her neck rose in reaction to the low growl that Hercules was emitting. She latched on to the dog's collar, both for her own support and to restrain him.

"Damn, that doesn't sound like a cat," Kasey whispered as she bent down to catch the dog's attention. "Hercules, scout," she commanded, sending the dog into the kitchen. It only took a fraction of a second before chaos ensued. Hercules's loud bark and menacing growl was immediately followed by shouts and curses. In shock, Kasey backed away from the door.

Suddenly a deafening blast rang out, echoed by an eerie silence. Kasey clasped her hands over her mouth to suppress her scream as she realized that the Dane had been shot. A moment later a second realization hit her. They had a gun and now she was in danger. She turned hastily to flee, but not realizing how far she had backed into the living room, she crashed into an end table, tripping herself, and sending the lamp clattering to the floor.

She froze in horror as she saw the kitchen door burst open and two men rushed through. They instantly spotted her. Fear gripped her heart as one of them gripped her arms. She struggled in

her captor's vice. She felt a sharp pain sear across the back of her head. Her arms and legs went numb. The world dimmed as she slouched forward. Her last conscious thought before her world went black was that Alex was on that earlier flight, due home any minute. "*Gods... just let her be safe.*"

@-->-->--

Despite the strain of the last few days Alex was in good mood as she disembarked the plane. The flight home had been so much better than her previous one. She had managed to avoid seeing her parents, leaving before either of them had gotten up, been complementarily upgraded to first class, and if she was recognized, no one had approached her. The plane had even landed 20 minutes ahead of schedule. Now she was off to surprise Kasey. She had meant to tell her about the change in flights, but had gotten distracted during their conversation the previous night. It was nice to be home again and she was anxious to see the look on Kasey's face when she waltzed in a full five hours ahead of schedule.

Paying off the taxi with a rather generous tip, she collected her bag and noted that Kasey's silver Lexus RX was in the driveway. As Alex opened the front door she called out a greeting. Getting no response, she checked the garage. Her beloved classic Mustang, the BMW and the cherry-red Ferrari were all accounted for. Thinking that Kasey might be in the backyard, she headed toward the kitchen. As she crossed through living room, she raised an eyebrow at the tilted table and lamp and assumed that the dog had gotten a little carried away again. She took a moment to correct the misplaced furniture and then resumed her trek toward the kitchen.

Alex wasn't prepared for sight she encountered as she entered. Not only were dishes piled in the sink, but drawers had been opened and left like someone had ransacked the place. Papers were littered all over the tiled floor and grey granite counter tops. The kitchen table was crooked and one of the chairs had been knocked on its side. Now concerned, she was about to call out for Kasey again when she heard a whimper. Following the noise she scooted around the kitchen island and discovered the Dane.

"Shit! Herc!" Alex exclaimed as she fell to her knees. She grabbed a dish cloth and held it to the animal's shoulder, sopping up the blood. Recognizing her, the dog beat his tail, thumping it on the tile, but then whined in pain at the movement. Alex quickly assessed the situation, allowing her years of combat experience and instinct take over. Hercules had definitely been shot. Seeing no exit wound, she assumed bullet was still in inside. Her senses alert, she scanned the room. Finding no other blood, besides that which obviously belonged to the dog, she realized if who ever did this had hurt Kasey, it hadn't happened in the kitchen.

Alex kept one hand on the towel and with the other released an access panel below the sink. The panel slid open revealing a black Glock-18. With a trained hand she loaded it and then tucked it into the waistband of her jeans. Keeping continuous pressure on the dog's neck, she pulled out her cell and dialed a familiar number.

"Justin," she began as soon as her manager picked up. "Someone shot Herc. Kasey is missing. I need you here now!"

"By the Gods! Alright, alright. I'm on my way. You call Sam yet?"

"No, not yet. I need to secure the house. See if Kasey is here. . . ." She paused for a second, not wanting to think about the status of her partner, then continued. ". . . then I'll be in my office." Alex didn't wait for the response. She closed the phone and returned her attention back to the dog. Alex replaced the saturated towel with another and then tied an apron around his shoulder to secure the pressure.

"Justin will be here soon, boy. Just hang on. You're gonna be ok." She patted the dog's head in a vain attempt to reassure them both before standing to wipe her hands on another towel.

Alex then gripped the pistol and began the sweep of her home. Going from room to room, her senses keenly aware, she checked off each space, and each time she did she felt a rush of both relief and dread. So easily she slipped back into her military training. It was almost like she was back in the desert again. The tension was the same. Not knowing what was behind every corner. Not wanting to think about what horror she might encounter. She was terrified of the possibility that she'd find Kasey's body.

As Alex entered the last room to be searched, her formal office, Kasey was still nowhere to be found. Besides the end table and the disaster in the kitchen, she had found no other signs of a struggle. Her office appeared untouched. It looked like it always did, plain and unadorned. She never spent much time there. It was really more for show than anything else. Alex quickly strode across the room and pulled the 'X' volume of *Encyclopedia Britannica* from the shelf. She heard the familiar audible click. A panel was revealed and she pressed her palm against the pad. Her identification confirmed, another click was heard and the door to her real office was unveiled.

Alex entered her real office and took a seat on the high-backed leather chair. She tapped her long fingers impatiently on the top of the metal desk as she waited for the large 52-inch screen to come to life. The computer booted and the familiar P.L.U.T.O . logo came up. Instinctively she knew that her involvement with the Performers' League of Underground Trained Operatives was somehow connected to Kasey's disappearance. As she waited she sent out a silent prayer to whatever gods were listening to help protect the other half of her soul.

It only took a moment more for the computer to finish and the connection to headquarters to be established. Alex's fingers flew over the keyboard as she simultaneously brought up the home's security videos and dialed into Sam's office.

"Alexis, we weren't expecting to hear from you until this afternoon," Sam's secretary greeted her through the video phone.

"I caught an earlier flight, Maureen. I need to talk to Sam now," Alex responded. She didn't bother to make eye contact with the secretary. She was too busy scanning the surveillance videos, trying to capture the image of whoever had taken Kasey.

"He's in a meeting. I can't disturb him right now. I'll tell him..."

Alex didn't let the secretary finish. She forcefully hit the pause button on the recordings and met the secretary with a steely gaze. "This is an emergency. I don't care if he's talking to the fucking Queen of England. Get him on the phone now!"

The secretary blanched at Alex's tone and her colorful use of language, but she didn't argue any further. "Alright, Alex, calm down. I'll buzz him. Just a minute."

The screen returned to the PLUTO logo and Alex's eyes returned to scanning the video. Her eyes flashed as she caught the image of two men in her backyard. She then muttered a string of curses as she lost the image and the camera went black. She maliciously backed up the recording and enlarged the brief image she had. She cycled through it, frame by frame, trying to collect as much detail as the grainy image would allow. Noting the time stamp she realized that she had missed them by less than an hour.

The giant screen buzzed to life once more. "Damn Atlas, ever since he became Governor he's always whining, like he's got the whole world on his shoulders," Sam murmured before turning his attention to Alex. "Alexis Drake, this better be good. I just cut off Schwarzenegger for you."

"Good to see you too Sam," Alex replied, raising an eyebrow at her boss's rambling. "Someone broke into my house. They shot my dog, and. . ." Alex paused again, taking a breath, "they took Kasey."

"Zeus's Teeth Alex! We'll get a team on it right away."

"Damn it, Sam! Leave your Grandfather outta this. And forget the team. I'm going after her." Zeus's Teeth, it was such a stupid curse, Alex thought, but one of Sam's favorites. It was a direct reference to the founder of PLUTO, George Washington. He'd adopted the code name Zeus and started the tradition of the agent's using mythological references for their code names. Sam, who was known officially as Uncle Sam, was his direct descendant and took great pleasure in reminding his agents of his heritage.

"You can't," argued Sam. "You know the rules; if it's personal you have to hand it off."

"Fuck the rules."

"Alex..."

"Sam, you know I can't just sit here. And you know I'm the most qualified to handle this. If it was anyone else, you'd be calling me. Damn it! I need to do this and I need to do this my way. Please Sam... if anything happens to her...." Alex lowered her head, resting her forehead on the palms of her hands.

Sam frowned. "Damn it, Alex! I don't like this, but you are right. You would be the first one I'd call."

Relief washed over her as Sam agreed. Alex raised her head, meeting his eyes once again. "Thank you," she replied. She then paused for a moment, wrapping her head back around to the business at hand, "I need a clean up crew here. I have images, and it doesn't look like they were wearing gloves. There are probably prints."

"You have images? Can you send them to me?" No sooner had the words left his mouth than he heard the familiar ding announcing he had mail.

"Yes," Alex smirked, as she correctly anticipated Sam's request. "Two men, Hispanic or possibly Arabic. The images are a little grainy. We'll have to have someone in Visual clean them up."

Sam opened his e-mail and studied the images. "Egyptian," he mumbled.

"What?" Alex asked confused, wondering what Egypt had to do with Kasey's disappearance.

"Egyptian. I'm betting they are from Egypt."

"Egypt? Wait a minute, we were in Egypt two months ago, when I did that private concert for the niece of the Prime Minister, but it was just a concert, I wasn't on a mission."

"No, *you* weren't."

Alex's eyes suddenly went wide, springing out of her chair she yelled, "Kasey! You sent Kasey in? I can't believe you used *me* as a distraction to send her in! Damn it, Sam!"

"Hades, Alex! Do you think you were the only one who went on missions? You know how PLUTO works."

She knew, too well. PLUTO was an undercover organization made up primarily of performers, athletes, and executives. PLUTO also encompassed a select group of other professionals who held special skills that would aid agents and the organization as a whole. The agents used their star power, political power, unusual connections, and incredible finances to gain access and trust in places that a traditional spy couldn't go. It was almost a perfect system. As celebrities, they could gain access to anything. People would inherently trust them and overlooked irrational or unusual behavior because, as celebrities they were expected to act eccentrically.

"Of course not," Alex snapped. "I just never thought that Kasey... It's just, I know that PLUTO is secretive, but I never thought that she could be involved with out me knowing."

"I'm sorry Alex, but for both your own protection, it was deemed best that you didn't know. After all can you imagine what Kasey would say if she knew about Bin Laden, or about Peru? Just because Kasey isn't a celebrity like you doesn't mean she doesn't have skills to contribute."

"I know. We aren't all celebrities. So what is she, some sort of support staff?"

Sam grimaced. He knew that she wasn't going to like his answer. "Alex, Kasey is Athena."

"What!? Ares Balls, Sam! You mean to tell me that my partner... my Kasey... is the world most prominent computer hacker?"

"Yes," Sam confirmed. "Think about it Alex. For Zeus's sake, you two have even collaborated on missions before; you think that was easy to do with out you figuring each other out? There is a reason why you were never allowed to meet or talk in person."

Alex shook her head in disbelief. She quickly scanned her memory about the reports that she'd read regarding Athena. Kasey was so good at manipulating computers and doing the math, she realized that the age range was right. Strangely it all fit. Athena was a computer hacker who had joined the organization at the tender age of 17. Rather than going to prison for hacking into the Department of Defense she had cut a deal, and went to work with the organization. She'd been with them for the past 12 years and her record was perfect, until now. She'd never fouled up a mission before. Alex couldn't help but wonder what had happened in Egypt.

Alex eyed Sam. "We will talk about this later," she threatened. "I can't believe that you kept this from me. Damn it, I don't have time for this now. What can you tell me about her mission?"

Sam squirmed under Alex's gaze, but kept his voice even when answering. "Alright Alex, I'll level with you. Usually Athena does her missions remotely. As you already know, she's just about the best in the world at hacking into high security systems. This time it was a closed system that she needed to get into, so she had to access it directly. I don't know how they figured her out, they must have caught her image on a camera somewhere, but I know she is in trouble. She needs you."

Alex nodded once, thinking about her own past. Unlike most of her fellow Plutonians she had been specially recruited for her skills as a warrior. It was right after 9-11 and after spending 8 years in the military. Alex was set to sign up for another tour of duty, but instead of returning to her special ops forces, she was recruited by the organization.

Originally she was stationed as a body guard to one of the other agents. During one of Madonna's after parties she was challenged to a karaoke contest. Never one to back down from a challenge she accepted and won. Madonna, who she came to know as Aphrodite, had been rather impressed with her skills and suggested to the organization that she had more to offer. They had set her up with Justin, and helped her secure her first album.

The deal was ideal for Alex. Music had always been a secret passion and being involved with the organization allowed her to pursue the music while keeping in touch with her warrior side. She accepted, not only becoming an agent, but one of the best. She was the one that they called when ever someone needed to be rescued, or on occasion discreetly taken care of.

"Alright, then...I don't suppose that she's tagged?" Alex asked, unconsciously rubbing her own arm, feeling the aspirin sized GPS-transmitter right under the skin.

"You kidding? We've been trying for years, but she'd always argued that she never goes anywhere and you know how she feels about needles. Plus she always threatened to deactivate it, so until now it was a mute point."

"Hopefully she is wearing one of my bugs then. I have to get to work."

"You have her bugged? Ha! Good job, Eris."

Alex gave Sam weak smile as he used her code name. Eris, goddess of strife, she was surely earning that title lately. "Well I hope I do, I've added the mini-GPS'ers to some of her jewelry, and a few pairs of her shoes."

"Good, good. I'll let you get to work then and I'll get that clean up crew for you. Keep in contact and let me know what support you need." Getting a nod from Alex, Sam continued, "and Alex, be careful, ok? And don't worry. We'll get her back."

The Price - Part III

Kasey groaned and tried to open her eyes, only to shut them tight again. The pounding in her head was reminiscent of a hangover, but she didn't recall having even a single glass of wine. Moving her head gently, she felt the lump at the base of her skull. Suddenly the memories came flooding back; the darkness, the pain, the men, it had all been real.

Kasey slowly opened her eyes again. She discovered that she was lying on a pile of musty blankets in the back of a van. The van was moving, and she could hear the distinct sounds of two men arguing in another language. She was careful not to make any noise or move too fast, as she did not want to alert the men arguing in the front seat that she had regained consciousness. Shifting slightly, she found that her hands were secured behind her back with a plastic zip tie.

Gradually, as her head started to clear, she took in her surroundings. The van was some sort of utility vehicle, the type the phone or cable company would use. The back had an open conduit, in which she was lying, and the sides were lined with metal shelves secured to the walls. On the shelves were baskets full of what looked to be small computer parts. Lifting her head so she could see the contents of the bottom row of baskets, Kasey examined them, hoping to find something sharp enough to break her bonds. She groaned inwardly at the irony. This was the one time in her life that random computer parts didn't come in handy. Looking over the shelves again, she realized that the bolts holding the shelves together had a rough end that just might be enough. Meticulously she scooted backwards so that her back was pressed against the shelf and began searching for one of the bolts with her restrained hands.

Tearing a gash along her wrist Kasey bit her lip, guarding herself from making any noise. She had managed to locate a bolt, and had learned exactly how sharp it was. Angling herself the best she could, she began the process of sawing through the restraint. It took several minutes and a couple more scrapes and cuts to her arms, but she finally was able to break free. Kasey was so relieved that she had momentarily let her attention waiver from her captors. Suddenly she realized that the men had stopped arguing. They had noticed that she was awake.

Wasting no time, Kasey sprung into action. She grabbed the closest basket and hurled it at the front of the vehicle. The noise and flying debris caused the driver to swerve. The passenger, who had half stood in his chair, went flying, crashing into the opposite wall of shelves. Grabbing two more baskets, Kasey flung one at the passenger and another towards the driver. She struggled with her balance as the van swerved once more, smashing her into one of the metal shelves.

The driver slammed on the brakes, causing all three occupants to lunge forward. Kasey regained her footing and backed up, hastily reaching for the handle on the back door. The man from the passenger seat grabbed her left shoe, pulling her back onto the ground. She responded by rewarding him with a kick from her right foot, which hit him solidly in the nose. The man immediately let go, bringing both his hands to his face. Kasey scrambled back to her feet and managed to get the rear door open. She jumped down, spinning around, only to see the driver coming toward her.

Rough hands grabbed her. Once again she found herself bound by the vice-like grip of her captor, but this time she wasn't going to go down without a fight. Bringing up her knee, she slammed it into the driver's groin. His grip loosened as he doubled over in pain. Kasey was able to break free. She then turned and fled down the road, her heart beating rapidly in her chest as her feet echoed on pavement. She had hoped to be able to flag down another car, or perhaps find a house in which to seek sanctuary, but the further down the road she went the more her hopes were crushed. The only things she saw around her were trees, trees and more trees.

Hearing the screech of the tires and the screaming motor of the van rapidly approaching, she made a quick decision and left the road. The only chance she could see was if she could lose them in the dense camouflage of the forest. She twisted her way through the trees and bushes, pulling herself deeper away from any signs of civilization.

After what seemed like an eternity she stopped and took a minute to catch her breath. She carefully listened for her pursuers. Concentrating, she could just hear enough man-made clatter to know that they were still on her trail and not far away. Too exhausted to run any further she made another decision. Remembering a lesson from her survival training, Kasey took a swift survey of her immediate area and finding the tallest and most dense tree, she climbed up. The old Amazon warrior that taught the class was certain of one thing, "if you must hide, remember 'no one ever remembers to look up.'"

@-->-->--

Alex sat at her computer, her fingers flying over the keys as she punched in one code after another. She was trying to discern if Kasey had been wearing any of her special jewelry. Alex had already been through half her codes and she was starting to get frustrated. Not taking her eyes off the screen she heard the door to her office click open.

"How's he doing Justin?"

"I think he'll be ok," the manager replied. "Doc Jameson is loading him in the car as we speak."

"Good," Alex replied. Leave it to Hollywood to have a vet that not only makes house calls but utilized a pet ambulance as well.

Justin moved closer to Alex, peering over her shoulder at the screen. "Any luck with Kasey?"

"No...wait...Yes!" One of the codes hit. She had a signal. Switching screens, Alex transferred the coordinates. "She's about 45 miles away, somewhere in the Angeles National Forest," she concluded with a frown. "Not a good sign, but at least I won't have to deal with a lot of witnesses there."

Alex then stood, indicating that her manager should take her seat. "Watch that, while I change," she commanded.

Alex slipped into the small bathroom that adjoined the secret office. She took a moment to thoroughly scrub her blood tinted hands before slipping off her similarly stained shirt. Opening up a linen closet, which doubled as a locker, she quickly secured her bullet proof vest and then slipped on a dark green polo. She added a shoulder holster and the twin to the Glock-18 that she had picked up earlier in the kitchen before she tucked the original back into the waistband to her jeans. She then threw on a grey jacket to help hide the weapons, stocking its pockets with extra ammunition, a small med kit, and a handful of plastic restraints.

"Ok, I'm leaving. Contact Sam and let him know the status. I'll have my phone with me."

The manager who had dutifully kept his eyes on the screen responded, "Alright, and Alex? Be careful ok?"

"Always am." Alex responded, as she headed out the door.

It was true Alex was always careful, but she could remember more than once that she had to delay a trip home or make up a story to explain away one injury or another. Not that she'd ever been seriously wounded, but occasionally she'd gain a new badge of honor in the form of a scar. Kasey must think that she was the world's biggest klutz.

Alex shook off the memories as she left her office and headed for the garage. Looking over her choices, she briefly debated on which car to take, but deciding that speed was her best option, she chose the Ferrari. Once inside the car she programmed her GPS unit and like one of Zeus's lightning bolts was gone in a flash.

Initially, Alex wove in and out of traffic at an alarming speed, but once she hit the mountains, because of the twisting and turning roads, she was forced to slow down. The closer she got to the coordinates, the more her stomach filled with knots. Justin had called her to inform her that the signal had stopped moving and now she was fearful for Kasey's life. There was only one reason why someone would bring a captive up in these secluded mountains, and the fact that they stopped moving did not bode well.

As Alex zipped along the mountain road she passed a white van. Kasey's signal was telling her that Kasey was still about two miles east, but the hap hazard way that the van was parked and the fact that it looked to be abandoned just didn't feel right. Alex parked next to the van. She then grabbed the GPS unit, clipping it to her belt, before exiting her vehicle.

She found the van unlocked, and quickly surveyed its contents. She discovered a bit of blood in the back and the plastic tie that Kasey had sawed off her wrists. The blood made her worry, but the tie gave her hope. If Kasey was able to break free, then there was a chance that she was still alive. Climbing back out of the van, Alex carefully studied the dirt around it. She could only see two sets of prints and both of them were too big to belong to Kasey. Noticing that they both headed out into the woods she quickly followed.

The trail was easy to pursue and it took her little time to catch up with the first captor. Coming up from behind she tapped him on the shoulder. Surprised, he turned only to be met with a right hook which rendered him unconscious. Alex took a moment to study her victim, confirming that he was one of the men that she'd seen on the security tape. She swiftly patted him down. Finding a pistol she tucked it away in her pocket. She then used two of the plastic restraints from her pocket, like a pair of handcuffs, and secured the man to a nearby branch.

Moving on, she found the second man. As she approached she could see the early afternoon's sunlight reflecting off the gun he held in his hand. Alex bent and picked up a handful of small rocks. She then took shelter behind a large tree and tossed a pebble in his direction. Hearing the noise, he turned to investigate. His back now facing her, she threw another rock, this time hitting him squarely in the back of his head. He turned toward her. She leaned back against the tree, knowing that it was large enough to hide her as long as he stayed on his current path.

She held her breath and counted. She could hear his steps crunch across the forest carpet. As he got closer she tensed, gripping her pistol tightly. She could feel him now, just to the left and behind her. He had stopped just short of her tree. She silently cursed to herself. Taking the last rock in her hand she tossed it to her right. As the man turned his head at the noise she made her move.

Alex jumped out from behind the tree taking the man by surprise. He yelped as she caught him and pinned his back against the tree. With one hand she held her gun, pressing it into his chest; with the other she pressed her forearm into his neck, putting enough pressure on his windpipe to make breathing difficult but not impossible.

"Where is she?" Alex demanded.

"Who?" the man answered.

"Don't fuck with me!" Alex retorted, putting more pressure on the man's neck causing him to rise up on his toes.

"I... I don't know. She ran..." the man gasped.

Her patience running thin, she reared back and struck her pistol across his temple. She let him go as he crumpled unconscious onto the forest floor. She replaced her Glock in its holster and then disposed of the kidnapper's pistol, tucking it into another pocket. Like she had done with the first man, she secured him to a nearby branch with the plastic ties. Now that the man was no longer a threat, she took a moment to survey him, and noticed that his nose was broken. That could explain the blood in the van. She smiled. "Good girl, Kasey," she whispered. The man had confirmed that Kasey was still alive. Now she just needed to find her. She checked the GPS unit on her belt, and could see that Kasey had to be close.

Taking a deep breath, Alex yelled out, "KASEY!" She then stood stock still and listened carefully for a response. Alex turned, hearing a rattle of branches. "Kasey?" she called out again as her hand instinctively went to her gun.

Relief washed over Alex as she saw Kasey drop down out of a nearby tree. It only took seconds for the two to reunite and exchange an embrace.

"Alex, thank the gods you are alright." Kasey mumbled into Alex's shoulder.

"No, thank the gods *you* are alright," Alex answered. She glanced over her partner, and spotted the scrapes on her arms. "You're hurt."

Kasey shook her head, "I'm fine, just a little banged up, but Alex... I don't understand. How did you find me?" Kasey encircled her arms around Alex once more. Feeling a lump, she pulled back the edge of Alex's jacket. "Um... Alex? Is that a gun?"

"Ah, yes...it's a little complicated," Alex responded, fingering the gold locket around Kasey's neck. "Maybe I can explain."

Alex then stepped back from Kasey. Taking a deep breath she then thrust out her hand, inviting Kasey to grasp it in a handshake. Kasey raised an eyebrow at her partner's odd behavior, but went along with the game and took Alex's hand.

"It's nice to meet you, Athena," Alex started. "They call me Eris. Perhaps you've heard of me?"

"You are kidding right?" Kasey responded, pulling her hand back from Alex's shake.

"Afraid not, apparently we both have some secrets," Alex responded.

"Sam! I'm gonna kill him."

Alex chuckled. "That was my response. I already put him on notice. Don't think he's looking forward to seeing me again."

"Eris, huh? Goddess of strife? I'd have pinned you for Artemis maybe, or even Nike." Kasey responded casually.

"Artemis, that wimp? Please! But, you knew, how?"

"You forget what I do. I can track anyone anywhere; I've seen some of the odd places you've gone. Some of the little injuries you've acquired. You forget I know every inch of you... intimately," Kasey teased, running a finger down the center of Alex's chest. "But I didn't know who you were. It's surprising though. It is true what they say? Peru? The Ivory Coast?"

"Yes." Alex responded, looking down at her hands, her voice barely above a whisper. "It's true. Peru, the Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Bin Laden... I have a lot of blood on my hands."

"I know, love, I'm not blameless either. We've both done things that we regret or would like to forget." Kasey responded as she took Alex's hands in her own. She brought them up to her lips, kissing each one gently. "It doesn't change how I feel about you. Hopefully knowing what I'm capable of doesn't change how you think of me either. Hopefully I'm still worth it."

"Worth it? Gods Kasey, I told you before there was no price too high for you. You are my life. If anything, this will only bring us closer, now I feel like I can truly be myself with you. There will be no more secrets."

"Definitely ... definitely no more secrets." Kasey agreed, nodding her head. "So there is just one thing left to do."

"What's that?"

"Well after, these guys are taken care of," Kasey responded, motioning to the unconscious man tied to the tree. "We have to decide what nasty things we are going to do to Sam and Justin."

"Justin?"

"You forget who introduced us?"

"Oh, Hades." Alex groaned. "And I liked Justin too, I'm gonna miss him."

"Ha, ha, very funny Alex."

"You think I'm kidding? I know how to discreetly dispose of a body."

"As do I," Kasey responded, rising up an eyebrow.

"Damn!" Alex's mouth went dry, as she was strangely turned on by Kasey's nonchalant attitude. "You, my dear, are definitely worth the price."

Star Dawn's Scrolls
Index Page