



Chapter One

Visiting police headquarters was never his favorite thing to do.

Vander Norcross straightened his suit jacket, then strode across the street. His reason for today's visit to the guys and gals in blue had him in a bad mood.

His long stride ate up the sidewalk. Due to the nice, late-spring weather, and the fact that police headquarters was in Mission Bay, right next door to his own office, he'd decided to walk.

Hopefully, he could shake his sense of impending doom before he got there.

His years in the military—many of those leading a covert Ghost Ops team on dangerous, impossible missions—had taught him to never ignore his instincts.

That got you killed, fast.

He was due to meet with his friend Detective Hunter “Hunt” Morgan in fifteen minutes.

Vander knew he owed his friend several times over. Hunt had helped Norcross Security out loads of times, and had run interference for them more times than Vander could count.

Running a successful private investigations and security firm kept him busy. Unlike Hunt, who was hampered by the rules, Vander could operate quite happily in the gray.

He did whatever the fuck was necessary to keep his people, his family, and friends safe.

What Hunt was asking him to do was screwed. Put a detective—a female one—undercover with the worst biker gang in San Francisco.

No, it did not sit right with Vander at all.

Suddenly, a figure detached itself from the shadows of a nearby alley. South Beach was filled with renovated warehouses and buildings, like the one Vander gutted to create the Norcross Security office. But if you were looking for the shadows, you could still find them.

“Hey!” The young man brandished a pocketknife. “Give me your wallet and watch.”

Vander cocked a brow. The man’s voice had a faint Southern twang, and he clearly wasn’t from around here. His pale skin was flushed, his red hair mussed, and his pupils were dilated. He was also perspiring. He was high on something. Probably Stardust. There’d been an influx of the synthetic drug lately.

“You don’t want to do this,” Vander said.

“I said give me your wallet!” Spittle flew from the man’s mouth. “And that shiny watch, Mr. Fancy Suit.”

Vander was partial to his Omega. Had no plans to hand it over.

He sighed. “You sure you want to do this?”

“I’ll stick you! Shut up, and hand them over.”

Vander moved.

His first hit was to the man’s arm, and his would-be attacker dropped his knife with a sharp cry. Vander spun, and followed up with a quick elbow to the face. The guy cried out again and Vander kicked his legs out from under him. The man fell heavily to the sidewalk and let out a strangled groan.

Vander pressed his boot to the man’s back, and picked up the pocketknife. Then he yanked some zip ties from his jacket pocket and trussed the man’s wrists and ankles together.

“You’re not from around here, so I took it easy on you.”

The man flopped like a fish. “What the fuck? What the fuck!”

Vander crouched. “My name’s Vander Norcross.”

The young man froze, fear seeping into his eyes.

“Oh, so you have heard of me.” Vander leaned closer and lowered his voice. “This is my turf. I don’t like innocent people getting attacked and mugged by junkies.”

“I-I-I—”

“Won’t do it again.” Vander lowered his voice to icy levels. “If I hear you’re approaching anyone, I’ll find out and I’ll make you regret it.” He gave the man an icy half smile. “I’m good at finding people. You get me?”

The man nodded rapidly.

“Good.” Vander rose.

“...ah, you going to untie me?”

“No.” Vander started walking away.

“Hey, what about my knife?”

“I’m keeping it.”

Vander strode away and crossed the bridge over Mission Bay. Soon, he spotted the Public Safety Building complex that housed the San Francisco Police Department headquarters, along with the local fire station and arson team.

He entered the police station and checked in at reception. He also handed in the knife and reported his Southern friend.

The cop behind the glass rolled her eyes. “Is he bleeding, Norcross?”

“Please. I can take down a hopped-up junkie without bloodshed, Officer Cortez. He wasn’t even bruised.”

The woman grinned. “You can take me down anytime you like.”

Vander smiled at her. “That big, ex-footballer husband of yours might not be happy about that.”

Officer Cortez sighed. “True. Go through. You know the way.”

Vander navigated the corridors and headed up to where Hunt and the other detectives had their offices. The building was all concrete and glass, and very modern.

He passed a crying woman with mascara running down her face, who was being consoled by a detective. The background soundtrack was ringing phones and murmured conversations. It was a far cry from being in the military. Hunt had been Delta Force, until an injury had forced him to retire.

Vander had left Ghost Ops before he’d had to. The military would’ve kept him. He’d been good at killing, and good at keeping his men alive in the shittiest of circumstances. His heart thumped hard once. Not all of them, though. Some had never come home.

He’d seen things that the crying woman behind him couldn’t even imagine in her worst nightmares.

He reached Hunt’s office. The detective was standing, talking on the phone.

“Yes, I need it impounded. Yes, I needed it done yesterday.” Hunt spotted Vander and waved him in.

The office was small and neat. Hunt wasn’t one for many trinkets, and he wasn’t married, so no photos of a pretty wife and kids. There was a framed picture of him with his two brothers. Ryder, a paramedic, who patched up the Norcross guys on occasion. He also donated his time at a free clinic in the Tenderloin. Camden was also Ghost Ops, and about to get out. Vander had offered him a job at Norcross.

Hunt hung up the phone. “Hi, Vander.”

“Hunt.”

The detective kept in shape. Leaving Delta Force hadn’t softened him. His light-brown hair was cut short, and his eyes were a deep green. He circled the desk and leaned against it. “You’re still unhappy about this.”

Vander cocked a brow. “About you railroading me into putting an unknown woman in a dangerous position with a motorcycle club? Yes.”

“She’s not a woman, she’s a detective. A good one. And she’s on her way, so she won’t be unknown for long.”

Vander grunted. He wandered over to one of the shelves. Hunt had a glass paperweight made to look like a police badge. Cute. Vander lifted it. “If she’s experienced, Trucker might know who she is.”

Trucker Patterson was the head of the Iron Wanderers MC. He was an all-around asshole, but Vander kept lines of communication open with the man. It let Trucker know that Vander was watching him.

The Wanderers kept a pretty public-friendly face, with a clubhouse and garage out in Oakland. Not all the members were assholes. Some just liked the lifestyle—bikes, riding, parties, living free. But behind the scenes, there were some who were involved in illegal shit—usually drugs and weapons. There were plenty of law-abiding motorcycle clubs around; the Iron Wanderers wasn’t one of them.

“Sullivan hasn’t been a detective long,” Hunt said.

Vander groaned. “A newbie? You’re fucking kidding me, Hunt. How many undercover assignments has she done?”

Hunt held up a hand. “Hear me out, she’s new but good. This is her third undercover assignment.”

Vander bit out a curse.

“As the *lead*,” Hunt continued. “She’s been on other undercover assignments as part of the team. She’s solid, Vander.”

“Hunt, this is a fucking bad idea. Sending a female, an inexperienced one, at that, into the Wanderers’ clubhouse is like sending a lamb to the slaughter.”

“*Baaaa*,” an amused voice said from the doorway. “The difference is this lamb is trained and armed.”

Vander snapped his head around. He didn’t drop the paperweight, but damned if his pulse didn’t spike.

He didn’t like it. He’d learned years ago to control his emotions. When you were standing in the back of a Blackhawk, waiting to fast rope into hell, you learned to keep all your reactions and emotions under control.

Control was something Vander practiced in all aspects of his life.

“Vander Norcross,” Hunt said, “Detective Brynn Sullivan.”

She smiled. She had thick, brown hair, but brown was totally the wrong word to describe it. There were many different shades in it, from caramel to chocolate, and it was pulled back in a sleek ponytail. She wore black, fitted pants, and a pale blue shirt tucked into them. On her belt was a holstered SIG Sauer and her badge.

She was medium height, with a fit body, and sharp eyes the color of her shirt. She studied him steadily, meeting his gaze straight on.

Vander realized then how few people did that.

She held out her hand. “I’d say it’s a pleasure, but we both know I’d be lying. You think I’m, what was it? Female and inexperienced, and I’ve heard *all* about you.”

Vander shook her hand. Her grip was firm, her fingernails natural and cut short. This close to her, he saw she had an intriguing sprinkle of freckles across her nose.

“Really?” he said.

Brynn Sullivan stepped back. “Dangerous, with a blatant disregard for the law.”

Hunt made a choked sound.

Vander didn’t take his gaze off her. He raised a brow. “I think blatant is a bit much. I respect the law.”

“Except when it gets in your way?” she challenged.

“Detective, I don’t let *anything* get in my way.”

Vander Norcross was so much more than she’d expected.

Brynn Sullivan kept her face carefully neutral. With two nosy sisters and one overprotective brother, she’d had lots of practice.

Norcross had a big, muscular body that looked far too good in a suit. His military background was clear in the way he held himself. A predator ready to explode into action when required. She knew his history. He’d been a Ghost Ops commander—in charge of a team of the toughest, hardest, most skilled soldiers in the military. She knew the reputation of Norcross Security, as well.

But no one had warned her about the handsome, rugged face, the bronze skin, or the black eyes.

Or the dangerous vibe that emanated off him.

Dangerous in a “I can and I will take you down” kind of way, and dangerous to any woman brave enough to tangle with him.

She realized suddenly that his eyes weren’t black—they were deep, dark blue.

Brynn refused to be intimidated. Her detective badge wasn’t very old, but she was damn good at her job. “So, how about we discuss the Iron Wanderers MC? And when you’ll make my introduction with Trucker Patterson?”

Norcross just continued to stare at her and she stared back. If a few knots formed in her belly, she refused to let them show.

“Sit down, Vander,” Hunt said.

Vander didn’t move for a beat, then he dropped into a chair.

Brynn took the one beside him. She got a faint whisper of his aftershave—fresh and crisp with a darker undertone. It made her think of dark ocean waters.

“Again, I urge you away from this course of action,” Norcross said.

“No.” Brynn leaned forward. “We’ve tracked an increase in Stardust—aka bath salts aka synthetic cathinones—on the streets to the Wanderers.”

Norcross scowled. “Trucker wouldn’t do that. He knows to stick to his turf.”

“Or you’ll make him regret it?” she asked.

He caught her gaze. “Yes.”

Brynn didn’t completely disagree with how Norcross operated. She knew Hunt felt the same, which was why he worked with Norcross, and often smoothed things over with the chief and the rest of the brass.

But Brynn knew that when you bent the rules too often, eventually you were tempted to break them. If you dipped your toe in the muck too many times, eventually it clung. She’d seen it

happen.

Because of that, her father was dead.

Her stomach hardened. Norcross was her way into the Iron Wanderers. That was all Brynn cared about.

This was her first big case, and she had plenty to prove.

She wasn't going to screw it up.

"Trucker is probably sticking to the agreement in principle," Hunt said. "An out-of-towner has muscled in. They have something over Trucker, don't know what. Trucker is turning a blind eye, and letting the new player ply his trade in San Francisco."

Norcross frowned. "How do you know this?"

"We have an informant in the Wanderers," Brynn said. "They get me intel when they can, but they're low level. I need more, so I need in there myself."

"These are not nice guys," Vander said. "Women are second-class citizens to most of them."

She lifted her chin. "I can take care of myself. I'm not planning to sign up for life."

"We heard Trucker needs a new supplier of parts for the bike business," Hunt said.

Vander nodded. "He's been bitching about it for ages."

"You'll introduce Brynn as a reliable supplier."

Norcross' dark brows rose. "You'll be undercover as—"

"A mechanic with a sideline in excellent parts, from shady parts unknown," she said.

"Trucker will never buy that." Norcross' gaze skated down her body. "You look and smell like a cop."

His perusal ignited tingles that annoyed her. "Yes, he will buy it. Your job is the introduction, Norcross. Dealing with Trucker is mine." She crossed her arms over her chest.

His jaw tightened. It was a hell of a jaw—strong, covered in dark stubble. Then his gaze narrowed on her face for a second before it flicked to Hunt.

“You two are related. She has your nose, and the same stubborn look you get when you’re pissed.”

“Cousin,” Hunt said.

Brynn smiled. “Although he sometimes likes to treat me like a little sister.”

“I only have brothers, so...” Hunt shrugged one broad shoulder.

“You really want to send your cousin into Trucker’s lair?” Norcross asked.

“No, I want to send a competent detective in to do her job.”

“And save lives,” Brynn added. “We need to identify and stop this new supplier. Stop kids from overdosing on Stardust.”

Brynn thought back to the crime scene from the night before. She’d spent hours there, and even now, she could still see the cold, dead bodies of the two boys who’d ODeD.

No more dead kids. She’d vowed it.

Vander released a breath and stood in one lithe move.

And dammit if she didn’t notice how he moved. She straightened. She wasn’t here to notice anything about Vander Norcross. She needed his connection to Trucker, that was it.

“Fine,” Vander said. “I’ll set things in motion with Trucker. Meet me at my office tonight so we can go over the plan. I’ll assume you’ll want to come after hours so no one spots you.”

She nodded. “No one will see me if I don’t want them to.”

He gave her one more piercing look. “Detective Sullivan.” He sent a chin lift in Hunt’s direction and then strode out.

Brynn barely suppressed the need to release a breath. “Well, your friend is rather intense.”

“Yes, but he knows his stuff. We can trust him.”

She wrinkled her nose. “You sure? He strikes me as a man who will do whatever he needs to in order to achieve his own goals.”

“He’s a good man, Brynn. I trust him with my life. I’m trusting him with yours.”

Brynn rose and elbowed her cousin in the side. “Well, I’m heading out to meet an informant.”
And later, she needed to prep her cover.

Hunt grabbed her arm. “You be careful. If you need backup, or you get a bad vibe, or you get a sniff of things going bad, you call for help.”

Brynn kissed his cheek. “Thanks, Hunt.”

“Go. Tell that brother of yours he owes me a beer.”

“Will do.”

“I still haven’t forgiven him for bucking the family trend to become a smoke eater.”

Brynn rolled her eyes. It was a familiar complaint. Both her father and Hunt’s father had been cops and best friends. Her father had married Hunt’s father’s sister. Her brother, Bard, had been copping the brunt of family teasing ever since he’d joined the fire department.

“Bye.” Brynn stopped by her desk and shrugged her jacket on, then grabbed her bag.

As she headed out, she saw two female cops chatting.

“You missed seeing that prime hunk of lickable hotness.”

“Damn. Vander Norcross might scare the bejesus out of me, but that man’s ass... Mmm-hmm.”

“I know, right. If he crooked his finger my way, I’d run as fast as I could and shed my clothes on the way.”

Brynn’s jaw tightened.

“Girl, I think that Vander Norcross is more the kind of man to tear a woman’s clothes off.”

Both women sighed.

Brynn kept walking.

Objectively, she knew that the man was hot. His Italian-American, dark good looks, his body, the dangerous vibe. It was a hell of a combination.

Shame he could also be dangerous and reckless. She shook her head and headed out.

Her phone rang and she yanked it out, then pulled a face. It was her older, bossy sister, Naomi. Nay was sure she’d been born to rule the world. She employed her enviable skills on five-year-olds as a teacher.

Her sister’s face popped up on the screen.

“Hi, Nay,” Brynn said.

“Hey, Sis.” Naomi looked like a younger version of their mom, and had dark brown hair cut in a neat bob that was always blow-dried with precision. “You look like a woman on a mission.”

“Always,” Brynn replied.

Naomi took a breath. “Sooooo...”

Nothing good ever happened when her sister started off with a drawn-out so. “No.”

Naomi pulled a face. “Let me ask first. There’s this great guy at work I want to set you up with.”

“No.”

“At least give it—”

“No.”

Naomi huffed. “Jack is nice.”

“Then definitely no.”

“Argh, you are so stubborn and single-minded, Brynn.”

“I have no time for men or dating.” A dark, rugged face flashed in her head, and she quickly snuffed it out. “But I still love you for trying to set me up at least once a month.” Even when it drove Brynn crazy.

Naomi took her role as oldest sister seriously, and since she’d gotten engaged to her teacher fiancé, Brian, she was determined to see her siblings married as well.

Another huff from her sister. “I love you too, even when you aggravate me, and I worry you’ll die alone, clutching your gun.”

Brynn smiled. “I like my gun. Now, I have to go. I’ve got a big case, and lots of prep work to do.”

Naomi shook her head. “It’s always work with you.”

“Always. See you at Mom’s place for dinner next week.”

Brynn had barely gone two steps when her phone signaled another video call. She rolled her eyes. It was her younger sister, Carrin. “God, Naomi was fast.”

Carrin grinned. “She knew you’d say no and had me lined up.” The much blonder, short-haired Carrin—who worked as an attorney—schooled her face into a serious look. “Brynn, go out with Naomi’s nice, boring friend.”

“No, you go out with him.”

“I’m banging that assistant DA, so she’s not hassling me.”

Brynn thought for a second. “That one with the square jaw and the nice ass?”

“That’s him. We’re friends with benefits and it works for me.”

“Don’t rub it in,” Brynn said. “You’ve done your duty. Go.”

Carrin waved and winked off.

A second later, Brynn's phone rang. She growled and considered throwing it at the wall, until she saw it was her mom.

She pressed it to her ear. "Hi, Mom. And no, I'm not going on a date with Naomi's friend, Jack."

"Hi, darling girl. He sounds very nice."

"I'm not interested, and I'm busy. I have a big case."

"Stubborn and dedicated. Just like your father." That familiar tone held a blend of both old grief and love.

Brynn's belly locked. God, she really missed her dad. She wished she could sit with him, have a beer, ask him advice. "I take that as a compliment."

"I know. All right, sweetie, I'll let you go. See you later."

"Bye, Mom." Brynn was tight with her family, and loved them all to pieces, even when sometimes she wished they lived a little farther away.

Her phone vibrated. It was a text from Bard.

Naomi keeps texting me about some guy named Jack.

She wants me to have sex with him.

Not going anywhere near that! Why don't you agree to dinner with this guy?

I don't have time. You go out with him then.

Is he gay?

I don't think so.

Not my type then.

Bard was currently single. His last boyfriend had been a hunky ER nurse. Like Brynn, he didn't have much time for dating or relationships.

I have a work thing later, but I'll see you tonight.

I'm cooking, so don't worry about dinner.

Finally, some good news. Firefighters all had to cook when they were at the station, so Bard was pretty decent in the kitchen. Brynn finally shoved her phone into her pocket and strode down the corridor.

Naomi meant well, but right now, Brynn didn't have time for men. Maybe one day, in the distant future. If she found the right one—someone strong, tough, loyal, trustworthy. Oh, and a nice jaw and ass wouldn't go astray.

No, first, she had a plan to prove herself as a new detective.

To herself.

To the memory of her dad.

That's the one thing she and Vander Norcross had in common: not letting anything get in their way.