

Chapter One

Wincing, she blinked slowly, coming back to consciousness.

Ugh, her head ached like someone had hit her with a hammer.

Detective Brynn Norcross tugged on her hands. Her heart lodged in her throat.

She was tied to a chair.

Dammit.

She kept her breathing even, her chin down on her chest. She opened her eyes just to slits.

She saw her jean-clad legs, boots, and a cracked, stained concrete floor. It looked like she was in a warehouse. Light was seeping in from some high, grimy windows, and she had the sense of a cavernous space.

She swallowed. Her throat was so dry. Nearby, she heard the drip of water, and in the distance, the barking of dogs.

Dogs.

That's right. She was currently undercover in a case. A body had washed up two weeks ago in San Francisco Bay with bite marks and a bullet hole between the eyes. Poor Tom Moore had been a well-respected local dog breeder.

It was Brynn's job to solve his murder. She was a homicide detective, and she was good at it.

So she'd gone undercover as a new dog breeder who'd just moved to the Bay area.

Unfortunately, she hadn't just found cute puppies in her investigation. No, she'd uncovered the inklings of something far nastier.

Dog fighting.

Someone was breeding beautiful animals—German Shepherds, Belgian Malinois, Rottweilers, and Pit Bulls—for fighting in a ring. For sick people's bloody entertainment.

Her pulse sped up now. Tom Moore had stumbled onto it and gotten himself killed.

She'd narrowed down the people responsible to three local breeders who all put on family-friendly fronts. She just needed to keep gathering her evidence to uncover which one was the murderer.

Her head throbbed. She'd been supposed to meet one of the breeders—Ed Baker—to check out a dog to breed with one of her fictional dogs. She tested her bindings, but her arms were tied to the wooden arms of the chair tightly.

"Ah, you're awake," a deep voice said.

Brynn opened her eyes. She recognized the voice, but couldn't quite place it.

A man in jeans and a denim work shirt stepped in front of her.

He was just shy of six feet tall, muscular, and with shaggy brown hair sticking out from under his ball cap. He had scars on one cheek that ran down his thick neck. She guessed that a dog had mauled him at some stage.

"Cray, this is a bad idea." A second man stepped into view.

He wrung his hands, his shoulders hunched under his stained T-shirt. He was shorter than Cray, with a slender build. Probably only an inch taller than Brynn.

"This is crazy, man. She's a *cop*."

Oh, shit. She didn't react, instead she frowned like she was confused. "Where am I? What's

going on?”

The big guy stepped forward. His name clicked. Travis Cray was second-in-command for Ed Baker. The breeder she'd been supposed to meet.

She'd turned up at the meeting place, and someone had hit her on the back of the head.

“That’s right.” Cray smiled. “We know you’re a cop.”

Crap. Somehow her cover had been blown.

“That’s crazy,” Brynn said. “I’m Bea North. From San Diego. I breed fucking dogs, you idiot.”

The small guy shifted nervously. Cray’s scarred face twisted. “I’m *not* an idiot.” Then he reached out and touched her brown hair.

Brynn jerked her head to the side.

“Ed said to get rid of her,” the smaller man said.

“She’s too beautiful to get rid of.” Cray’s voice changed, edged with lust. “Shame to waste that.”

Her stomach clenched. “Why the hell do you think I’m a cop?”

“Informant owed Baker a favor. He passed the information along.”

Well, fuck.

“Someone is wrong, buddy. Do I look like a damn cop?”

Cray touched her hair again, running the silky strands through his fingers. “You’re beautiful. I’ve been watching you. I like your laugh.”

Now Brynn felt like concrete pooled in her belly. She heard the echo of obsession in his voice.

From her files, Travis Cray was dangerous. He was violent and did Baker’s dirty work with

no question. He had several charges for assault, and one for stalking an ex-girlfriend.

Now she wondered if Cray had murdered Tom Moore on Baker's orders.

Then an even greater danger popped into her head, and she froze.

Shit.

"You need to let me go."

Cray laughed. "I have you right where I want you, sweetheart."

"But if Baker finds out, he'll be pissed," the other man stuttered.

Cray whirled and glared at the man. "He won't find out, will he, Ronny?"

Ronny wiped his hand across his mouth. "N-no."

"It's not Baker you need to worry about." Brynn tested her bindings again. "It's my husband."

An unhappy look crossed Cray's face. "I didn't know you were married."

Brynn's pulse picked up. "Once he knows someone's taken me, he'll come." She met Cray's brown gaze. "And he'll annihilate you. All of you."

Cray was silent a moment, then he let out a low, grating laugh. "He'll have to find you first." He jerked his head at Ronny. "Come on. We need to prep for tonight." Then the two of them walked off, their steps echoing into the darkness.

Brynn started work trying to loosen the ropes.

She knew that finding her wouldn't take her husband long.

Then he'd come for her. Like a dark, avenging angel.

Or like the loving husband he was...who also happened to be a deadly former Ghost Ops commander.

The most dangerous man in San Francisco.

She had to get free, and save Cray and Ronny's worthless lives, before Vander arrived.

Brynn still hadn't returned his text messages.

Vander Norcross rose from his desk chair and moved to the window. But he didn't look at the view. No, his gaze stayed locked on his sleek, black cellphone.

She should have replied by now.

She was undercover as a puppy breeder. He'd teased her about it. He knew that his beautiful, tough detective could look after herself.

Still, she was *his*.

His to love. His to hold.

His to protect.

He stabbed at the phone and called her.

"This is Brynn. Leave a message."

He felt a cold sensation crawl over the back of his neck.

Vander had been in the Army, then joined Delta Force. He'd been damn good at special forces. So good, the government had recruited him into the covert Ghost Ops program.

Ghost Ops had been made up of the best of the best of the special forces from all branches of the military. He'd led his team on the toughest missions with the worst odds.

In hellholes across the world, he'd tracked the enemy through the darkness. It was what he did best.

He took a deep breath and slid his hands into the pockets of his pants.

He wasn't in combat anymore. Now he ran Norcross Security and protected his family and friends, and did his bit to keep the streets of San Francisco safe.

For a long time, he'd avoided relationships. The darkness had left its scars.

For years, it had been easy to avoid anything deep with women.

Until Brynn.

Until a confident, tough detective had marched into his world.

He'd tried to fight what he'd felt for her, but Brynn was stubborn as hell.

His lips tilted. Thank God. He loved her so damn much.

And he'd tear the city apart and burn it to the ground to keep her safe.

His office door flew open and his best friend and second-in-command, Saxon Buchanan, strode in.

Saxon had followed Vander into the military. With his good looks and gold-brown hair, he still looked like that young, rich kid Vander had met at school. But despite coming from money, Vander knew his friend was deadly in a fight. And he had Vander's back. Always.

He'd also married Vander's sister Gia, so they were brothers in more ways than one now.

One look at his friend's face and Vander knew. "Tell me."

"Vander—"

"Brynn's not answering my texts or calls. Tell me."

"Detective Soto called me."

The young, green detective Brynn was mentoring. Vander had met him a few times, and he was a decent guy. Vander had thoroughly investigated everyone Brynn worked with.

"And why didn't he call me?" Vander asked silkily.

Saxon raised a brow. "He didn't want you to go off half-cocked."

Vander tilted his head. "You ever known me to go off half-cocked?"

"No, but this is Brynn. You'll go off full-cocked and leave a trail of dead bodies in your path."

Vander arched a brow. “No one would find the bodies.”

“I’m pretty sure Soto is scared of you, so he called me instead.”

“Where is my wife?”

Saxon blew out a breath. “No one knows.”

A chill crept over him, and his mind turned ice cold. “Explain.”

“She was going to meet someone. A breeder. She missed her check-in.”

“Have Ace track her phone.” Ace was Norcross Security’s top tech man.

“I already did,” Saxon said. “It’s off.”

Or destroyed. The coldness continued to spread, stirring something inside him.

Something he worked hard to keep chained up. Something that only Brynn kept controlled.

Vander turned and strode out of his office.

“*Vander.*” Saxon jogged after him.

He moved down the hall. When he’d purchased the old warehouse, it had been dilapidated.

He’d completely renovated it to house Norcross Security. The central level was mostly open plan and held glass-walled offices. Wooden beams and metal duct work added to the industrial feel.

The upper level had once been where Vander slept. Now it was a home, one he and Brynn had made together.

Brynn.

He gritted his teeth and fought for control. He shoved open a door and entered Ace’s domain.

Ace Oliveira sat in the computer room with his feet up on the desk, the screens on the wall filled with data. There was a sleeping baby girl tucked into the corner of his arm.

“Hey,” Ace said.

It wasn’t uncommon to see Ace’s little girl Isabel in the office. His wife Maggie was a

helicopter and drone pilot, and if their nanny wasn't available, Ace sometimes brought Isabel into work.

"Activate the tracker in Brynn's wedding ring," Vander ordered.

He knew she wouldn't be wearing the ring since she was undercover, but she'd wear it on a chain around her neck. She never took it off.

Ace's smile evaporated and he set his feet down. Then he rose and settled Isabel in her pram.

"What's happened?"

"Brynn's missing."

Realization widened in Ace's eyes. "Saxon asked me to trace her phone earlier, but it's off. She's in trouble?"

"We don't know that yet," Saxon said.

"Yes. She's in trouble." Vander felt it in his bones. He'd been good at Ghost Ops because of his instincts, his hunches. It had saved his life, and the lives of his team, too many times to count.

He'd learned to trust his gut.

Ace whirled and tapped the keyboard, his fingers flying.

Saxon stepped forward. "If we get her location, we need to contact SFPD."

Vander shook his head. "I'll go in and get her."

Saxon put his hands on his hips and made a sound.

"Alone," Vander added.

"Got her," Ace said. "A warehouse in the Bayview Industrial Park."

Vander studied the map on the screen. It was south of the city. An industrial area near Hunter's Point, not far from the Bay.

"It says the warehouse houses a Muay Thai gym," Ace said.

Vander's guess was that the gym was a front, and that there was more going on than just guys working out. He spun and strode out.

"Fuck," Saxon said. "Don't kill anyone, Vander."

Brynn was in danger, so that was a promise he couldn't make.