**Casey's Rise**

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**Casey's Rise Ch. 12**

Just as he did every morning, Joe Bloccato made himself an espresso after performing his morning ablutions. He was surprised to hear his doorbell ring just as he took his first sip. That was never a good sign at this hour so he grabbed a Glock and hid it in his free hand behind the door as he opened it. Thankfully it was only Cassandra. He left the door open and turned and walked back to the kitchen without greeting her. Cassandra sensed his obvious annoyance but followed him in anyway.  
  
"You have something to say so you best go ahead and say it," he said as he retrieved his espresso and turned to his naked daughter. He noticed Cassandra was looking very dishevelled and likely hadn't slept in two days, let alone showered.  
  
"How could you Pa?" Cassandra began. "How could you let her get her tentacles around you? Do you not see what she is? She's a fuckin' psycho! Not to mention being half your age!"  
  
"Do you think your Pa is stupid?" Joe responded raising his eyebrows. "I know what she is Cassandra."  
  
"Well, if you know, then why would you get involved with her?"  
  
"There are things about your Pa you don't know Cassandra, and there are things you don't know about her," Joe explained. "Let's just say that Jolene and I have an understanding and we have found happiness together."  
  
"Happiness? You know the bitch can't feel love right? Why would you let yourself get involved with that?" Cassandra spat.  
  
"Love?" Joe asked raising his eyebrows again. "Love is many things to many people my girl. For people like Jolene and I, love is a different thing. She can feel it, as can I, but for us it is more about mutual respect and trust. From that we feel a fondness for each other that we know we could not have with other people."  
  
"Are you tryin' to tell me that you're a psycho too and only a psycho can love another psycho?" Cassandra asked with a frown. This was starting to sound really fucked up.  
  
"Pyscho is your word, not mine, but it is true that Jolene and I are different to those around us, even those we love. Do you think I could be where I am today if I was overly troubled by emotions or felt love the same way you do my child? Do you think I could have given you the life you have had some other way?" Joe explained matter-of-factly. "Your Pa is a man who can make the tough decisions without concern for the pain I may cause, but I also know what is right and what is wrong. I believe in justice and punishment when it is due, and I believe in reward when reward is due. I am happy to mete out pain for those who earn it, or to protect those I love, but only as it is necessary. I am not a monster. Yes I feel love, just as I love and protect you Cassandra, and just as I loved your mother. I can also feel loneliness, and I have been lonely for a long time. I have not felt the things I feel with Jolene since your mother passed on, and that is now near on twenty years. I think I have mourned long enough."  
  
Cassandra considered what her father was telling her, and also picked up on an element of sadness in his tone. Had she judged the situation too harshly? She'd made the mistake of thinking him naïve but his eyes seemed to be wide open. Did he know what he was doing after all? She didn't want him to be lonely. He deserved companionship. What about Jolene though? Surely she was manipulating him somehow to her own advantage?  
  
"How do you know she feels the same way about you that you do about her? How do you know she's not just usin' you for her own gain?" Cassandra asked in desperation. "From the time I've known her, the only time she's been nice to anyone is when she has somethin' to gain from it. But it means nuthin to her. She can turn nasty at the drop of a hat if that suits her purposes better."  
  
"I am not an idiot Cassandra," Joe responded. "I have ensured there is no gain for her other than what I happily give. She knows this and she still chooses to be with me. There is your evidence that what she feels or doesn't feel is not so black and white. What can she gain? I am but her landlord. Your business and how you choose to run it is your business. I cannot give her greater authority, nor would I do that even if I could. If anything she has a greater standard to live up to than I expect from you or your other business partners. You must accept this and trust me that I know what I'm doing."  
  
Cassandra looked at her feet realising she had misjudged her father and had treated him cruelly, and perhaps she could say the same of how she had judged Jolene. Jolene was still on a leash after all, and if what her father was telling her now was true, his eyes were wide open about what she was and there was no gain for her in being involved with him other than maybe escaping her own loneliness as well? Ok, maybe these two were equally fucked up, but maybe that meant they were two of a kind and finding each other was a good thing? Maybe this wasn't even her business at all? Her relationship with Jolene was long over and there was no chance it would ever be rekindled, and up until a couple of days ago she'd even thought of Jolene as a friend now. Fucking emotions. She suddenly wished she was more like Jolene, or even Casey who approached everything with such cold pragmatism that she was practically a robot at times.  
  
Cassandra looked back up at her father.  
  
"I-I'm sorry Pa. I guess seeing you two kissin' just shocked me and I've gone off half-cocked without thinkin' it through properly. I should've known there'd be no pullin' the wool over your eyes."  
  
"Is good Cassandra. I would expect nothing less from you," Joe smiled. "It would have been better you found out some other way but now it is out in the open at least. Come, you like an espresso?"  
  
"Thanks Pa," Cassandra replied with a sheepish grin. "Maybe after that I could borrow a shower?"  
  
"Of course. Mi casa su casa, and always will be," Joe replied. "Your room and bathroom is as you left them."  
  
Later Cassandra was feeling greatly refreshed after a shower but also somewhat embarrassed by her behaviour as she drove back to the Crescent to face Greg, Cassandra and Jolene. As she approached the front gate there was a bigger problem though. She was shocked to see the CAMDOS protesters had grown in number and were blocking her way. What the fuck?  
  
Alberto spotted her car and immediately stepped forward and started bulldozing a path for her through the crowd using his massive size and strength. Some turned in indignation to being pushed but quickly moved out of his way once they saw what they were up against. Several had already learnt the hard way that he was not to be trifled with and that he was not open to negotiation.  
  
Cassandra wasn't surprised to see Casey run up to her car as she finally made it into the car park.  
  
"OMG Cass. Are you ok? We've been so worried about you."  
  
"I'm sorry Casey. I feel like such an idiot," Cassandra replied red faced, suddenly realising how much she had missed Casey and Greg. "I had a talk to Pa and I'm cool now. Oh God I've missed you."  
  
The two naked women embraced for a moment.  
  
"So we don't have to sell Jolene's indenture after all?" Casey asked as they stood back and looked at each other.  
  
"You would've done that for me?" Cassandra responded in surprise.  
  
"Well, yeah, if it came to it," Casey admitted. "As much as bygones are bygones, we can't ever forget she's our indent and the reasons that came about."  
  
"It's cool Case," Cassandra responded. "I don't think she'll ever fool anyone again, and she didn't this time either. Pa knows what he's doin' and there doesn't seem to be nuthin more to it than those two actually carin' for each other. More power to 'em I guess. I feel like such a dick."  
  
"Oh I'm so happy to hear that," Casey replied with relief. "I was starting to worry our whole world was crashing down around us."  
  
"I'm so sorry Casey," Cassandra repeated. "Hey, speakin' of dicks. Where's our Gregster?"  
  
"He's in the kitchen as usual," Casey replied. "He'll be so happy to see you."  
  
"Cool, I'll go find him in a while. I probably should go talk to Jolene first, but a bigger problem is what the fuck is goin' on with these assholes outside the gate?"  
  
"They're getting worse," Casey acknowledged as she turned her head worriedly towards the street. "Alberto can only do so much and a heap of guests have checked out. Others have cancelled reservations. The girls are all scared. We think Bernstein took Ellie too."  
  
"Took Ellie? Waddya mean?"  
  
"You won't believe this but a van pulled up and grabbed her yesterday," Casey explained. "Greg saw it all and said that Bernstein was smiling at him straight after so she's definitely behind it. The cops won't do shit because they say it's a property matter rather than a kidnapping."  
  
"What the fuck? We gotta go get her then," Cassandra stated, her face darkening in anger. "Any idea where they've taken her?"  
  
"Not yet. We need to follow Bernstein I guess, but we can't do that while she's surrounded by all of those people. They're guarding her and if she goes anywhere they block us from getting out."  
  
"The fuck?" Cassandra replied in disbelief. "Well we gotta do somethin'. This is ridiculous, blockin' our business and takin' our girls. If the cops won't do nuthin we gotta come up with our own solution."  
  
"What though?" Casey asked. "The law is on their side. We can't even legally Taser them unless they attack us, and there's too many of them for us to fight off physically."  
  
"We gotta have a meetin' then and come up with a plan," Cassandra considered. "But first I gotta go talk to Jolene and catch up with my boyfriend."  
  
Cassandra made her way to the foyer and almost bumped straight into Jolene. Jolene swallowed and wasn't sure what to say for a moment so Cassandra started.  
  
"I spoke to Pa," she began.  
  
"I'm sorry you found out that way," Jolene replied, sensing Cassandra's apologetic tone with more than a little relief.  
  
"Yeah, we're cool girl. I'm sorry I went off like that," Cassandra replied putting her hand on Jolene's shoulder.  
  
"Oh God, I'm so happy to hear that," Jolene responded. "Come here then."  
  
The girls hugged. Cassandra felt a little weird feeling Jolene's skin against her and smelling her scent once again. It brought back memories of when they were once a couple. While there was no sexual desire there now, Cassandra realised there was no real animosity either. It was now in the past and her feelings towards Jolene were now more sisterly than anything else.  
  
"Please come and talk to me if you get upset with me again," Jolene begged.  
  
"I ain't makin' no promises," Cassandra replied with a smile. "You know what I'm like. Nuthin beats goin' off half-cocked and makin' a big mess of things."  
  
"God you're a worry, but we wouldn't have you any other way," Jolene smiled.  
  
Cassandra then went off to find Greg. He beamed as he looked up and saw her entering the kitchen.  
  
"Cass! You're back! Thank God!"  
  
Moments later she felt his strong arms around her and they hugged for some time. They may have stayed there longer but both of their phones suddenly dinged. It was Casey calling them up to the top floor.  
  
As they entered the foyer they could hear drums being beaten and trumpets blaring discordantly. The protesters were obviously increasing their efforts to disrupt the resort's business as much as possible. Jolene also joined them as they made their way to the top floor.  
  
"Look at this shit," Casey announced distraughtly, gesturing towards the window as the team joined her.  
  
They looked down at the chaos in the street outside. The protesters had ramped up their game and were now virtually an angry mob. There were now at least one hundred of them holding signs, singing hymns, shouting into megaphones, banging drums and blowing trumpets. A smaller group had once again linked arms across the gateway. Of more concern though were some brandishing baseball bats.  
  
"Motherfuckers! What are we gonna do?" Cassandra asked. "Do I get Pa to send more muscle or what?"  
  
"We should get the cops to start with," Greg responded. "They're not allowed to block our gate like that."  
  
"Let's do both," Jolene decided. "In the meantime we need to go down and back Alberto up. As big as he is, he's massively outnumbered. Those baseball bats are a worry too. It's Tasering time if any of those come close to me."  
  
"Wait a second. Who's that?" Casey asked as she pointed down the street.  
  
They all looked and saw what appeared to be a lone naked man walking towards the protesters. When he got close he suddenly stopped and just stood there in front of all of the protesters with his hands on his hips. As they watched, another naked man appeared and walked up to stand beside the first one. Then two more. Then some women. Then suddenly a group of around thirty naked people turned into the street. Then a whole parade appeared! Within minutes the street had at least a thousand naked people of both sexes and all shapes and sizes marching up to the protesters! Then just as suddenly they all came to a stop and just stood silently facing them down.  
  
The drums and trumpets stopped and the protesters stared back, obviously not knowing how to respond.  
  
Satisfied he had their attention, the first man then slowly raised his left arm while clenching his fist and showing his crescent tattoo. Then a wave washed over the crowd of nudists as the others copied his move. There was a sea of raised crescent tattoos and naked flesh filling the street.  
  
"Holy crap!" Cassandra said, finally breaking the silence as they stared down at the scene unfolding before their eyes. "Well, they seem to be on our side at least."  
  
"Where did they come from?" Casey wondered.  
  
"We should probably go down and back them up anyway," Jolene added.  
  
"I'm not sure that's going to be needed," Greg observed. "Look, the wowsers are all leaving."  
  
"Holy fuck! Is that it then?" Cassandra laughed. "The gutless motherfuckers ain't even gonna try to fight? They're just gonna run?"  
  
"Looks like it," Greg responded.  
  
"Dammit," Jolene scowled. "I was itching to try out our new Tasers."  
  
"They're not really a weapon you could use against a crowd anyway Jolene," Greg commented. "You'd do better with the batons and your hands and feet in that sort of situation."  
  
"I was thinking they'd be a good deterrent though," Jolene added. "Once I dropped one of the fuckers, the others might be less likely to come at me. If they did, that's when the baton would come into play."  
  
"We have to go down to meet them," Casey suggested, rolling her eyes slightly at Jolene's eagerness to fight. "They're obviously here for us. Oh God, how do we thank them? We don't even have enough supplies to feed that many people lunch."  
  
Casey was surprised when a cheer went up from the crowd as she approached them through the driveway. Alberto looked stunned as he surveyed the sea of bare-skinned people all around him.  
  
"Casey, I'm Andrew," the man who had first appeared in front of the protesters said as he stepped forward to greet her. "We saw on the news what was going on and thought you could use a hand."  
  
"Oh my God, there's so many of you," Casey replied as she shook his hand. "Where did you all come from?"  
  
"Mostly online. We call ourselves the United Nudist Organisation but we don't often come out together like this. That's part of why we did though. What you've been doing here with making public nudity more accepted and normal has meant a lot to so many of us."  
  
"Really? We thought we were kind of on our own and any other nudists were more down south?" Casey replied.  
  
"Oh not at all. We're everywhere, but usually we try to stay out of the public eye," Andrew replied. "Most of us know you from your forums and we love your message of body positivity and freedom. When we saw the news and how much trouble you were having, we had to come and help out. People have come from all over the State to be here today, but most of us live here in town or have come over from Megaville."  
  
"Really? You all did that for me?" Casey asked in shock. It still amazed her to learn that anyone outside of her immediate friends or family knew her or gave a damn about her if they did.  
  
"Definitely. You're changing the world Casey," Andrew assured her with a smile. "Public nudity, while legal now, still comes with a lot of shame. Now we're able to do our own shopping, go to the beach or to a restaurant without fear of ridicule or discrimination. That means more than you could possibly imagine, and that's all thanks to you Casey. That's why we had to be here today. People like CAMDOS need to be stopped, and that's happening right here right now."  
  
"Oh my God, I don't know how to thank you," Casey replied tearfully. "I can't even feed you all."  
  
"That's ok. We came here today for ourselves as much as we did for you and we don't expect any reward for it. Most of us will go home again in a little while but a few of us will stay on for the rest of the day to make sure CAMDOS don't come back. I'll leave my contact details with you as well. If they ever do come back, we're just a phone call away."  
  
"Oh thank you so much," Casey replied giving Andrew a hug much to his surprise. "You have no idea how much this means to me. Well, to all of us here really. We were so worried everything we worked so hard for was going to collapse around us."  
  
Greg stepped forward to shake Andrew's hand as well. Then Cassandra and Jolene followed suit.  
  
"Look, I hate to break up the party," Greg interrupted, "but I think we need to go and get Ellie straight away. There's a good chance she's at Bernstein's house right now but they might move her if we wait too long. Right now they're on the back foot. Now is the time to stake out Bernstein's home and see who's coming and going."  
  
"Ok, what's the plan Greg?" Jolene asked.  
  
"I think Casey and I will take my car and watch Bernstein's house. You and Cassandra take another car. If Bernstein goes anywhere, you guys follow her and we'll go in for a closer look. We keep in touch with our mobile phones and meet up if we catch a glimpse of Ellie."  
  
"Should we take the Tasers?" Jolene asked hopefully.  
  
"Definitely," Greg laughed. "Well try to do this without any physical conflict but if we have to defend ourselves, so be it."  
  
It wasn't long before Greg and Casey in the Trans Am carefully parked down the street from Bernstein's home while Jolene and Cassandra parked at the other end in Casey's Mustang. There were about a dozen people outside the house but it wasn't clear what they were doing. There was no sign of Ellie. The team watched as the people slowly dispersed, shaking hands and bidding their farewells as they made their way to their vehicles. Bernstein too was seen getting into a car. Now was their chance.  
  
"Ok, you guys follow that car Bernstein got into. The place looks empty so we'll go in for a closer look," Greg texted Cassandra.  
  
The Mustang carefully pulled out of the parking spot and started tailing Bernstein's car. In the meantime Casey and Greg set off on foot to check out the house. They walked around the outside but it was impossible to see anything inside because all of the curtains were drawn.  
  
"It's very quiet," Greg finally announced. "I think we should take a look inside."  
  
"Are you sure?" Casey asked. "That's breaking and entering if we get caught."  
  
"I don't think we have a choice if we want to find Ellie," Greg replied solemnly. "She may not be here but we might find something that will give us a clue to where they've taken her."  
  
"Ok, you're the boss," Casey said worriedly.  
  
Greg looked over at her and smiled briefly at her. He never ceased to be stunned by how beautiful she was and how she carried herself so gracefully in her nakedness.  
  
"Ok, this window is our entry point," Greg decided after looking around. "It's just a stupid latch that I can pop easy enough, and it's out of sight of any neighbours who might be watching."

A minute later they were both looking around inside the gloomily lit house, and to their great surprise they found Ellie sitting in the main dining area all alone. She was wearing a dress! They quickly rushed to her to find she was duct-taped to the chair and was wearing a gag.  
  
As they set about trying to undo her bonds, Ellie was making muffled noises through her gag which suddenly got louder and had an urgency about them. Casey looked up at her face and noticed her eyes were huge and she was gesturing behind them. Just as she was about to turn to look, a rifle butt smacked into the back of Greg's head and he crumpled to the floor unconscious. Casey screamed and scrambled to the side to look up at the man standing behind her.  
  
"Well, well, well. What do we have here?" the man said as he looked Casey up and down hungrily as he rested the rifle up against a wall and took a step towards her.  
  
"Please don't hurt me," Casey begged as she backed away. "I just came to rescue my friend. I don't want any trouble."  
  
"What a tasty little treat you are. This seems like divine providence to me. Come closer girl and maybe we can come to an arrangement."  
  
Casey eyed the rifle against the wall behind him but it was too far away for her to get to easily. One advantage she had was that this man only saw a helpless naked girl, so Casey played along by holding her hands up and feigning terror and weakness. Little did he know she wasn't exactly weak or defenceless though. As he stepped within range, she suddenly brought her foot up in a front kick, catching him squarely under the chin and knocking him out cold. She then quickly checked on Greg to make sure he was still breathing before grabbing a knife from the kitchen and cutting Ellie free.  
  
"Oh my God. Thank you Casey! I thought my life was over. Oh God is Greg ok?" Ellie exclaimed when at last the gag was off.  
  
"I think he's just out cold," Casey replied. "I'm hoping that's all anyway. He got hit pretty hard."  
  
"I have to get this fucking dress off," Ellie replied as she slipped it over her head. "They've been keeping me dressed and tied up while they all pray around me and sing hymns. It's been a nightmare."  
  
"Bastards! Ok, we need to get you out of here but first we need to wake Greg up. I'll get some water. We probably should take care of that asshole too," Casey responded as she pointed towards the unconscious man. "Where's the duct-tape?"  
  
"Right here," Ellie replied as she picked up a roll from a nearby shelf. "I'll take care of him if you wanna get some water for Greg?"  
  
"WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN MY HOUSE?"  
  
Casey and Ellie turned to see Bernstein standing in the doorway holding a handgun!  
  
"This is just too perfect," Bernstein gloated. "The little whore who ruined my life standing here before me trespassing in my home. A dirty little thief as well as a slut, and I'm well within my rights to defend my property."  
  
Bernstein carefully aimed the gun just as Greg started to rouse. The first thing he became aware of was the pain in the back of his head and he reached around to rub it and saw blood on his hand. The next thing was the sound of a gunshot and then Casey falling at his side, followed by the sound of Cassandra's voice screaming "CASEY!"  
  
He groggily looked up and saw Cassandra standing in the doorway across the room and Bernstein holding a gun turning towards her. A gun? Cassandra? Casey had been shot?? As if in slow motion he glanced at Casey. There was blood. He looked back up at Bernstein turning to aim the gun at Cassandra. Without thinking, he was on his feet and diving across the room in full quarterback style. His arms wrapped around the former college Dean, crash-tackling her just as another shot rang out. Cassandra screamed and cowered as the bullet hit the door frame inches from her head. Greg quickly had Bernstein's wrist and used his elbow to pin her chest as he wrested the gun from her grip and slid it across the floor towards Cassandra. His next thought was Casey and he quickly rushed back to her.  
  
Oh my God! There was blood all over the right side of her face and he couldn't even see her eye through the mess. At first he thought she was dead but then a low moan escaped her lips and her hand raised up as he felt for her carotid. She was alive but this didn't look good. He quickly ripped his shirt off and wrapped it around her head.  
  
"Is she ok?" Ellie asked shakily, beginning to sob.  
  
"CASEY!" Cassandra screamed again as she rushed over to her girlfriend's side, holding Bernstein's pistol awkwardly in her hand while pointing it at the floor.  
  
"We need to get her to hospital straight away," Greg announced as he scooped Casey up and cradled her in his arms. "You guys call the cops and don't let these two out of your sight."  
  
"This is an outrage!" Bernstein screamed. "You invaded my home so she got what was coming to her! I insist that you call the police!"  
  
"Shut the fuck up bitch!" Jolene announced as she entered the scene and saw what was happening around her. Then in the same motion she drew her Taser and shot Bernstein squarely in the chest, smirking as the older woman writhed in response to the voltage coursing through her body.  
  
"Can you take this please Jolene?" Cassandra tearfully asked as she held the pistol between her thumb and forefinger and tried to pass it to Jolene.  
  
"Umm... I don't think it's a good idea for me to have a gun in my hands right now," Jolene admitted. "Just make sure neither of these assholes can get it if you can't handle holding it. C'mon Cass, Casey needs us to be strong now. Remember you're a trained badass."  
  
"You're right," Cassandra agreed and took the gun in both hands, training it on Bernstein and the unconscious man.  
  
"I have to get her to hospital," Greg repeated for Jolene's sake. "You girls get the cops here and tell them and the hospital I'm coming."  
  
"Oh God, is she ok?" Jolene asked in shock at seeing the state her sister was in.  
  
"I don't know Jolene, but it's bad," Greg replied.  
  
"Where was she hit? Is she breathing?"  
  
"She's alive but now is not the time for talking. I need you to get out of my way so I can get her to a doctor."  
  
Jolene face was white as she looked at Casey being carried past her. Moments later Greg gently laid Casey's unconscious body into the passenger seat of the Trans Am and the engine roared into life. With tyres screeching and the supercharger howling, the car rounded the corner barely keeping traction before Greg floored it. He slowed briefly on approach to an intersection and then carefully pushed through the red light, forcing people to stop and make way for him, and then floored it again out the other side.  
  
It wasn't long before a police car with lights flashing and siren blaring slid sideways in front of him out of a side street. Greg was infuriated in his desperation to get his girlfriend to help and wasn't going to stop now for some traffic violation, but then to his surprise the driver's arm motioned out the window for him to follow. The girls must have got through to the police and they knew what was going on. He floored it again, easily maintaining the police car's pace. Traffic lights were now no longer a problem.  
  
At last they arrived at the hospital and the police car led him to the ambulance bay where a group of hospital personnel in scrubs were waiting with a gurney. Greg followed them in as they rushed inside but then was asked to wait outside as they took Casey into a theatre.  
  
Oh God Casey! Please be alive!  
  
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Barely a day later Eunice Bernstein sat in the back of a van with her hands in her lap bound together with a cable tie. She'd been sentenced to twenty years indenture for grand larceny and for the use undue force! It was an outrage. The judge barely considered her side of the argument. Ellie was family and obviously had been brainwashed by that cult of disgusting nudists who were going to exploit her for their own gain, but he would hear none of it. What was his name? Sturt? He was obviously corrupt. She would make a complaint against him in her appeal. She still had friends in CAMDOS who would surely come to her aid and get her out of this mess. An even greater outrage came after the so-called trial. To stand and hear people bidding for her was so humiliating! And now to be led off to a life of drudgery. She was a master educator, the former Dean of one of the State's leading technical institutions! She was so much more than a janitor or maid, but that was surely the life set before her now.  
  
She didn't know who had purchased her indenture or where she was being taken. The van driver had been less than forthcoming with any details, or any conversation at all really, but she guessed she would find out soon enough at the end of this journey. There were no side windows for her to even get a decent view of where she was being taken. It was terrifying, humiliating and confusing.  
  
At last the van came to a halt and the side door slid open. Outside she caught a glimpse of a circular driveway in front of a lavish home. At least she would be surrounded by a level of luxury here she thought briefly. The driver helped her to her feet and she stood at the foot of the steps. The cable tie was hurting her wrists and cutting off circulation to her hands. She hoped they would soon remove it, but worse was not knowing what was happening. Why wouldn't someone tell her what was going on?  
  
At last the front door opened and a large man in an expensive suit made his way down the steps towards her. So this was her new owner?  
  
"Hello buttana," greeted Joe Bloccato.  
  
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Casey blinked and peered around the semi-gloom of the room. It smelled strangely antiseptic. Where was she? What had happened? How did she get here?  
  
"Casey? Casey? You're in the hospital. You've been in an accident but you're ok."  
  
Casey looked towards the voice and tried to focus. She finally was able to make out a nurse smiling gently at her.  
  
"W-what happened?" she asked.  
  
"You came in with a gunshot wound," the nurse explained. "There was some swelling to your brain so we've been keeping you in a coma, but we hope there's no permanent damage."  
  
"Oh... uh... how long have I been out?"  
  
"About a week. Unfortunately we weren't able to save your eye but there are some wonderful prosthetics we can look at when you're feeling better."  
  
"My eye? Oh no! Seriously?" Casey asked as her hand went up to feel the bandages covering the right side of her face and head. There was a dull pain underneath.  
  
"I'm afraid so, but you're alive Casey. Not many get to go through what you did and live to talk about it. You're one very lucky girl."  
  
"Did you get the bullet out?" Casey asked.  
  
"It was a through and through," The nurse explained. "The bullet exited near your temple. There was some damage to your eye socket and some scarring but it should all be coverable with makeup once it heals. You can talk to a plastic surgeon if you're not happy with it but from what the surgeons told me it should heal up nicely. I know it doesn't sound great at the moment, but if the bullet had've struck you just a few more degrees straight on, you wouldn't be here with us today to talk about it. You really are a walking miracle."  
  
"Oh my God! Thank you so much for saving me! I can't believe this has happened."  
  
"Thank you. It was our pleasure," the nurse smiled. "Now, when you're feeling up to it I can take you to a private ward. There's a few people waiting there who are going to be very happy to see you."  
  
The nurse carefully helped Casey into a wheelchair and pushed her out of the Intensive Care Ward and into a busy hall. While Casey was still naked and her breasts clearly visible, a blanket was draped over her body to help keep her warm. White bandages covered a pad over her right eye and concealed most of her hair. She felt groggy and surreal, still not fully grasping what had happened to her.  
  
The nurse pushed her into an elevator and at last she was led into a room.  
  
"Casey!" Cassandra squealed, rushing over to hug her.  
  
Casey looked around the room. Greg, Jolene and Cassandra were present, and also her parents and even Ellie. She still felt confused and out of place as everyone clamoured to hug her.  
  
"Oh God, I'm so happy to see you. You had us so worried."  
  
"Your poor eye."  
  
"You're alive! That's all that matters."  
  
"The last thing I remember was talking to that guy Andrew with all of the nudists who came to help us," Casey at last announced. "I don't remember how I got here or who even shot me. Can someone fill me in?"  
  
"We went to rescue Ellie and broke into Bernstein's home," Greg explained. "Then she came home and shot you, quite on purpose. She was going to shoot Cassandra too."  
  
"You should have seen him Case," Cassandra added. "Our bloke shot across the room without a thought to his own safety and crash-tackled the bitch. She's in jail now I'm sure."  
  
"Oh really? Is that the end of those protesters then?" Casey asked.  
  
"Pretty much I'd say," Jolene responded. "Andrew said to call him if they come back, but without Bernstein around I doubt we'll see them again anyway."  
  
"Who's looking after the resort?" Casey asked, suddenly realising the whole team was in the room with her.  
  
"Don't worry about that," Jolene smiled. "All under control. We've been taking turns watching over you but we all came in just now when they told us they were going to wake you up. The Crescent is doing fine. The phone's even started ringing again and the bookings are coming back."  
  
"Oh thank God for that," Casey responded with some relief.  
  
Casey looked down at her mother's hand holding her own.  
  
"I'm so sorry Mum," she said, looking into her mother's tearful eyes. "I would never in a million years thought something like this would happen. I'm sorry if I made you worry."  
  
"You gave us a fright but we're so relieved you're ok now. That's all that matters," her mother replied, stroking Casey's hand.  
  
"We've been here the whole time," her father added. "You made the news too. I guess that's why your phone started ringing again. You've got a lot of fans out there my girl, and a lot of people have been rooting for you."  
  
"There's even a 'savecasey' hashtag," Cassandra added with a smile.  
  
"Are you ok Ellie?" Casey asked, suddenly noticing her.  
  
"I saw everything," Ellie explained. "I've been so worried. I haven't been able to concentrate on anything else so I had to be here to see that you're ok."  
  
"Oh wow," Casey responded as she looked around the room at all the people who so obviously loved her and had worried so much about her. "I feel a little overwhelmed right now. I guess I have a lot to deal with, but you know what? With all of you behind me I know I'm going to be fine."  
  
They all clamoured around and hugged her again.  
  
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Some years later Casey exited the elevator at the Crescent and strode out confidently into the lobby and then down to the pool area. She was undeniably sexy with her perky tits, hairless pussy with its protruding labia, jiggling clit piercing and the impossibly tall stilettos, but there was also something else about her, like there was a whole lot more to this girl than just her body. The black eye patch was the first thing most people noticed after her nudity. It was something she insisted on wearing rather than accept a prosthetic, and fine pink scars radiated out from it towards her temple. It was obvious she had seen some shit.  
  
The next thing people noticed was how she carried herself. Visible abs and a wasp-like waist gave way to long and muscular legs. She moved with cat-like grace and yet there was also kind of an athletic bounce in her step as she walked, like there was too much energy in her legs and gravity was struggling to keep her earth-bound. Well-defined arms and shoulders, and a V-shaped back completed the picture. Then there was the way she looked into people's eyes. Her remaining eye had a steeliness that seemed to see straight through people, like she was looking straight into their souls. It was kind of disconcerting at first and it often caused people to tell her more than they thought they should have. There was a wariness about her too. She was almost constantly scanning, looking the person in front of her up and down and occasionally checking over her shoulder as she spoke, and yet when she smiled it was like the whole world lit up and you couldn't help but smile back.  
  
As she walked around she seemed to know everyone by name which was no small feat. There were now around one hundred and fifty Crescent Girls on staff with at least fifty current students, fifty post graduates and about the same again on the full time staff. Alumni would visit regularly, and all were permanently naked and wore their piercings and butt-plugs with pride. Crescent girls were world famous, highly sought after and commanded huge salaries. That wasn't to say there wasn't a lot of nervousness for a new recruit when shed her clothes for the first time, but they were never alone and never regretted the decision. Being permanently nude was a special kind of freedom. Nothing to hide. No more secrets. I am woman, I am sexy and I am proud of it.  
  
Amelia had Casey's cappuccino ready for her as she rounded the corner and sat at her usual stool with her back to the bar as she watched guests and staff around the pool.  
  
"Thanks Amelia. You're a godsend. How are things with Bernard and the baby?" Casey asked, turning to her friend.  
  
"He's sick of changing nappies but he loves being a Dad," Amelia smiled.  
  
"You could have taken longer off if you wanted," Casey suggested.  
  
"Nah, it's fine," Amelia replied. "I missed being here, and Bernard can manage for a few hours without me now. I use the breast pump so he has enough milk to keep her fed."  
  
"As long as you're sure?" Casey responded. "If you need more time off just say so."  
  
"Thanks Casey. I'll be fine," Amelia assured her.  
  
"You haven't seen Greg around have you?" Casey asked.  
  
"Um... he finished the school run this morning but I saw him drive off in the bus again with three girls about an hour ago. I guess they have photoshoots?"  
  
"Oh that's right," Casey replied. "That'd be Stef, Jessie and Sarah. They all have shoots with Mark this morning. Dammit. I was hoping to see him before he left."  
  
"I'm sure he'll be back soon."  
  
"Yeah, I know he will. We're all so busy these days I hardly seem to see him. We might need to employ a full time bus driver."  
  
"He might give you a hard time about that. He seems to like being the bus driver."  
  
"Lol, yes I think you're right. He gets to be all protective, like he's everyone's personal bodyguard."  
  
Casey's phone dinged a message, interrupting the old friends' customary morning chat.  
  
"Everything ok?" asked Amelia.  
  
"It's just Cass sending a love heart emoji," Casey smiled. "But I guess I should get moving anyway. There's no rest for the wicked."  
  
Casey checked in on the security team at the front gate. The uniform hadn't changed much over the years. The girls were still naked apart from their caps, boots and utility belts, and of course the thigh holsters holding Tasers. She smiled as she remembered the chaos of their opening days when wack-jobs had barred the gates. Then her smile wanned as her thoughts went to the events leading to the loss of her eye. Still, if it wasn't for that they might still be dealing with protesters even to this day. Maybe the resort wouldn't have taken off at all if it wasn't for all of that and the publicity it had generated? The worst they had to deal with these days was the odd bit of graffiti sprayed on the wall outside, or maybe a peeping tom from time to time, but the security girls soon put a stop to any of that nonsense.  
  
The guards thankfully had nothing to report so she made her way back to the reception desk.

"Hey girlfriend. How are we doin'?" Cassandra asked on seeing her.  
  
"Great," Casey replied as she stepped forward to give Cassandra a kiss. "How are things going here?"  
  
"Casey, this here is Nancy," Cassandra replied, gesturing to the somewhat nervous girl standing naked beside her behind the desk. "She's only new so still getting' used to this shit. I'm just showin' her the ropes up front here. She'll be mostly concierge and bellhop, but she's lookin' forward to getting' her girl-thing happenin' on the web cam and maybe some live action in the private members' lounge too, ain't you Nance?"  
  
"Uh... yeah," Nancy replied as she stepped forward to shake Casey's hand. "Oh my God. You're such a legend! I can't believe I get to meet you in person let alone work for you!"  
  
Casey laughed.  
  
"So how are you finding being naked Nancy? Has the piercing healed up ok? Cassandra's not being too hard on you is she?"  
  
"I'm shitting my pants a bit. Well, that's if I still had pants to shit," Nancy admitted with a laugh. "The piercing's fine. It stung a bit at first but it seems to be better now. Cassandra's been wonderful. This would be so much harder without her and all of the wonderful girls around here. There's so much love and support. I feel like I'm part of a family here."  
  
"You are part of a family," Casey responded. "Once a Crescent girl, always a Crescent girl. You have a home here for life now and we will always be your sisters."  
  
"I know Casey. I'm so proud to be a part of all this and I'm sure I'll get used to being nude in no time," Nancy replied.  
  
Jolene suddenly emerged from her office, interrupting the conversation. She looked somewhat different these days too. The piercings in her nipples remained, but many hours in the gym had given way to a more slender and somewhat muscular figure. The biggest change though was her pitch-black hair, heavy eye-liner and the black BDSM triskelion tattoo covering most of her left shoulder. Black knee-length boots complete her look. Altogether she looked like a goth dominatrix, a look she no doubt went to great pains to maintain.  
  
"Casey I've got some quotes on the new building," Jolene began. "The bank has approved the mortgage on our boarding house so we can start construction straight away."  
  
"That boarding house was quite the find," Casey replied. "It's within walking distance and big enough to accommodate all of the girls which freed up more rooms for guests. I don't want to lose it."  
  
"It's safe," Jolene responded. "We're booked out more than a year from now so money isn't a problem, but we need this new building with a second kitchen and restaurant ASAP."  
  
"Indeed," Casey agreed. "When can we get the ball rolling?"  
  
"Right away," Jolene replied. "I just need you to sign some forms. Joe, Greg and Cassandra have signed already."  
  
Casey followed Jolene back into her office and sat down in one of the luxurious chairs as she poured over the paperwork.  
  
"You know, I was just thinking this morning about the first time you made me take my clothes off and walk out in public nude through the courthouse," Jolene commented as she watched her sister signing the forms after carefully reading each one. It was so typical of Casey to read through all of the legal jargon.  
  
"Yes?" Casey responded.  
  
"I hated you for that and I was going to get you back," Jolene admitted.  
  
"I suspected as much," Casey replied as she looked up at Jolene's face to see what she might be alluding to.  
  
"You changed my life sis," Jolene continued as tears formed in her eyes. "I look around and I see what we've done here. Well, what you've done here. I could never have done this. You've created an empire that extends well beyond these walls. You've changed the world Casey. Somehow you got everyone to not just accept female nudity but to respect it, and so many people are better off for having met you. I'm living a life now that I never could have dreamed. I'm in love with a man and he loves me, and I love you Casey. You've given me happiness and a purpose. I don't know how I can thank you for all of that. I'm so very proud of you."  
  
"I know," Casey smiled, and the sisters hugged.  
  
The end