

Chapter 10:

Cabo San Lucas

DECEMBER 2, 1987

“God, my back’s bothering me so much,” Art said in the morning. “I wonder if a heating pad would help.”

That day I picked up a heating pad. When Art showed up at my apartment that evening, he was extremely upset, and a little incoherent. He got on the phone and said, “Is Vince there? Well, who’s around? Paulie? Tell Jim I want ten thousand dollars in a bag or I’ll Molotov cocktail the lobby. I want the money—I’m getting out!”

I wondered what the hell was happening. Plus he was almost crying, which I had never seen before. I didn’t know what to do. Sitting on my bed he picked up an alarm clock and hurled it against the footboard. Broke the clock completely up. “Nobody wants to listen to me anymore. I’m getting out. I’ve told Jim that I want out—just sell the business, divide it. Sell the house.”

I took out the heating pad so he could lie on it. “Oh, you’ve got a heating pad,” he said. “You had one.”

“No, I got it today.”

He began to cry. “Oh, you got that for me. You don’t know how much that means to me.” Then he said, “We’re going to leave in the morning, go ahead and pack three bags, you’re going with me, we’re going to Mexico.”

Even though I wanted to be with Art, going away when he was so upset was a bit scary.

When Jim got on the phone Art said, “I want ten thousand dollars in a paper bag, I’m sending Simone down to get it.” After he hung up

Art told me Jim said, “How about five thousand now, five thousand later?”

I threw a leather jacket over the sweater and jeans I was wearing, and drove down to the O’Farrell. It was 7:00 p.m. and dark. I ran into Jim near the deserted parking lot. “I don’t know what’s going on,” I tried to sound moderate.

“Well, same old stuff. I’m sick of Art. He’s a cocaine addict. He’s twisted; you’ve seen it. He’s a coke addict. I’m sick of it,” Jim looked angry and severe.

“I’m sorry.”

“If you go somewhere call, and we’ll send more money,” Jim added.

In the lobby Paulie put his arm around me, “Oh, boy. Is he out there?”

“No.”

He handed me a brown paper bag of money. “There’s plenty of love for the both of you,” Paulie said.

I took the bag back to the apartment. Art was still very upset. He counted the cash and I brought him dinner, but he took only a couple of bites. His back was killing him, and he lay on top of the heating pad and had me turn out the lights. He said, “Call your father and tell him you’re getting married and you’re going to Mexico—lie!”

That didn’t make me feel too good, either. Hoping Art would relax and drift to sleep, I packed quietly. I was afraid the pad would burn him but I couldn’t move him off it. I halfway wondered if he would change his mind overnight and decide not to go.



In the morning, he went to Moraga to pack, picked me up in the van, and we stopped by Nick’s clinic. Nick wanted to take an X-ray, had told him, “It would be good to know if your lung is punctured, Art.”

He sent me up the street to get him some rolling papers and a couple of pipes to smoke coke out of, while he went in to see Nick. When I came back he was emerging with a bottle of painkillers, and we took off over the bridge. In the East Bay Art stopped in front of a house, hoping to buy some cocaine. Fortunately, no one was home. Feeling desperate, anxious to get out of town, he got back on the highway and hit it.

“I was fighting with Jim yesterday. He’s been on my case for weeks. I told him, ‘Your wife had her foot way up your ass to her knee the whole time you were with her!’ Jim swung at me. We got into a fistfight. And he actually hurt me; he knocked me over the TV. He shouldn’t have done that—he knew I already had a cracked rib. My brother shouldn’t have hit me when I was injured. Then I picked up a great big heavy tape dispenser, and held it as Jim walked towards the bathroom. Paulie saw it and thought, ‘What do I do?’ He backed away, afraid I was going to hurt Jim. I just held it over Jim’s head like ‘I could kill you, fucker, if I wanted—but I love you, so I won’t.’ Then I put it down.

“I have a lot of ideas I want to use for the video store. Jeff won’t listen to me. Nobody around the O’Farrell takes me seriously and I’m fed up with it. They’ll miss my spirit!

“I called up Karen this morning and yelled some stuff and said I’m not going to be picking the kids up this weekend. I’ll pick them up the eighteenth or I may never be coming back!

“When I walked into the poolroom this morning Jim said, ‘Hi, Art, here’s some pills from the Doc.’ just like nothing happened. I snatched them, then I went over to the safe, opened it up and took out two or three guns, and stuffed them in my pants. I chewed out Lisa. She’s just another slut. Lynx can get anything she wants on the schedule. At least Vince was fair.

“Then I stormed out, just like the song ‘Walking down the road with a pistol in your waist, Johnny, you’re just too bad . . .’”

He turned the radio on. Some old rock song was playing a line about eating your pride. “You’ve had to do that, darlin’,” he said, and I smiled, knowing how true that was. I was so happy to be with him. Where we were going didn’t matter.

Just south of Salinas, we stopped for a quick hamburger. I would have liked dinner, but Art had to keep moving, kept calling, “Soute! Soute!”

In Pismo Beach, we got a quiet room near the sea. “I came down to Pismo twice this year—one time I came down by myself and did two or three grs of coke, and just stayed in the room. I went out and flirted with some older woman in a bar, even though I couldn’t have handled fucking her. Another time I brought the kids and we dug for clams.” We found a country western bar and danced a little; Art relaxed and talked warmly to the band. Adorable big red paper bells hung from the ceiling for Christmas, some of them a little bent.

Back at the Sea Crest, for one long moment I watched him walk into the bedroom. He was so sexy, so good looking, successful, tough, and infinitely complex. The sheets never felt softer. I was with a man I deeply desired. The sound of the waves and the high wind over the December sea lulled us asleep. Countless miles away from complications, and from the O’Farrell.



“You deserve this vacation,” Art told me at breakfast. “I want us to have a good time for all the bad times and uncertain times we’ve had.”

A fortuneteller’s sign beckoned near the highway. I had gone there once, years ago. What if we got some weird fortune? I thought. When we were safely past I told him the gypsy’s old prediction—I would have more than four children. “Yeah, lady, you’re going to have

more than five children," he said, as if his children would also be mine. I kissed him.

Artie and I drove south, into a storm. I wondered if we were really going to drive all the way through Mexico, down to the jungles of South America, in the van. In the back, buried under sleeping bags and fishing poles, for protection, were the guns.

It took forever to get to L.A. in the rain. Art decided we would drive to San Diego and get a plane to Cabo San Lucas from there. "I'm tired of living in the cold north," he mused. "I could live anywhere. Karen could move south with the children. It would be sunny. We could live close by and go to the beach all the time. Why not?"

"You know, I'm ready to retire. I want Jim to divide the business," he said. They must have had many serious disagreements over the years for him to say that, I thought. How uprooting it would have been for Art to take off and move somewhere far from the business he'd been in and loved for close to twenty years, and start all over again. I didn't think he wanted to go through that type of change.

As I drove he saw a cute teenager wearing a backpack and called out the window, "Hey, we're going to Mexico, want to come along?" She smiled.

Art pissed in a Heineken bottle as we moved through L.A., tossed it out the window. Soon we slowed to a crawl behind an endless stream of cars. He fidgeted in his seat and hurriedly rolled up a joint. L.A. seemed foreign and surreal. "We're both outcasts, Simone," Art said. "You're an Okie, just like I am."

"Yes," I smiled. "And we're both part Cherokee Indian."

"My mother knows don't get Art started on the Indians," he said. Not knowing better, I had. He believed that Ten Claw, a terrible warrior who killed many people, hung many white scalps from his belt, was his spirit guide—his spirit—who came into Art at times. "Go

back, Ten Claw. Go back, Ten Claw!” he said. “If you come through me, who knows what can happen!”

For half an hour, Ten Claw, fierce, remote and thirsty for vengeance, rode next to me in the van. Horrified by the massacres inflicted on the Indians, eyes wet for the Trail of Tears, he wailed in an unearthly tone, “Too many died! Too many have died!” The history was mine, too, but Ten Claw saw it before his eyes, felt every wound, pictured each drop of blood, was filled with heartfelt sorrow. Near crying, I kept silent. “No, Ten Claw, Great Warrior, don’t come through me!” He kept repeating. Ten Claw burned with a passionate hatred for the hypocritical ways of the whites, and the desire to take revenge on their oppressive power structure, the government of the United States. “Pornography is my gift to them!” he cried. Ten Claw and Artie were one.

As we approached the many off-ramps of San Diego, Ten Claw withdrew. At the airport, they said the next flight to Cabo San Lucas left in the morning. Artie Mitchell bought the tickets.



I waited in the terminal the next morning, while he parked. Art came walking up to me, with a bouquet. “Oh, you didn’t have to do that,” I said. It hit my heart. We looked like newlyweds, which he partly wanted so they would tend less to search our stuff. At the airport in Mexico we rented a car and drove through the desert, on a two-lane highway, stopping for a Pacifico for him and Agua Minerale for me in a sleepy little town. In Cabo San Lucas, he chose the Marina Sol, a high-rise hotel with a still green courtyard and a pool in the center. “I brought you to a nice place, didn’t I?” he asked.

I loved the ceiling fan in the bedroom. The afternoons were so hot, we had to take siestas every day. Every siesta I would pamper Art with a warm wet towel. Then we would make love and fall asleep in each other’s arms. It was paradise.

The first evening he took me down to an open-air restaurant by the water. Art had the strolling musicians play a song at our table, dedicating it to me, his wife, “por mi esposa.”

“When Aaron was five he was playing with some Mexican kids on the beach with firecrackers, and he accidentally set a palapa on fire. I felt so bad. I gave the owner some money and she thanked me profusely, even though Aaron had temporarily destroyed their business.

“That trip I just took Aaron. The night we got here, we were so tired we fell asleep. When we woke up it was too late to get anything to eat. I showed Aaron how to make an air sandwich, that was our first meal in Mexico.

“After the trip, Karen was real upset. She said I’d taken my little boy all the way to Mexico and didn’t even feed him properly. Aaron loves being with his dad. He loves me. He told all his friends the story.”

“How do you make an air sandwich?” I asked.

“Well, first you take some bread, and open up your jar of mayonnaise,” Art pantomimed. “Then you put in whatever you want, turkey, lettuce, whatever . . .” air sandwich stacked high, he took a funny, realistic bite. I wondered about this story. It sounded like dustbowl humor, born from hard times.

“Eat the salsa, Simone. It kills the parasites . . . Aaron loves whole fish. Mostly that’s what he orders, in Cabo.”

After dinner we stopped at a beautiful little bar, and sat looking down at the lights on the water.

“They have this great ride here,” he said. “You put on water-skis, they strap you into a parachute and pull you way up in the air over the water. It’s a gas, you’ll have to do it!”

“Oh, I couldn’t do that. I really don’t like heights.”

“You’re questioning me. You can’t question *me* . . .”