

## Chapter 13

### A Burning Retreat

Forgive me if my recollection of this section of the story does not follow a straight line, but my condition was far from clear at the time. I do remember my biker friends turning and moving towards the door. I remember seeing Emersome in the middle of their eager circle, searching for me over their shoulders.

“Hey, baby,” the Chief called out in a low growl, “how about flashing them for us... a little demo.”

I was sprawled out on the floor feeling like a deboned fish. I got on my knees hugging the bar stool to peek over the tables. Emersome was standing in the middle of the huddle, chest heaving as she took a sharp breath as Rat-tail drew a step closer.

“Afterwards maybe,” he said, licking his chops, “you can give me a little chocolate massage.”

I wished against hope that the moron had not really said that. I was so busted. If I stayed, the bikers would get me, and if I left, Emersome would eat me alive. I just slid back on the floor.

“Get lost!” I heard Emersome’s determined shriek, “you pigs.”

From my position under the table, I could tell that the patrons were determined to get payback for all the drinks they had bought for me. I could see their legs edging closer around Emersome. A pair of boots had stepped behind her to block her exit. Even in my haze I could reason that it was me who got her into this mess, and so it should be me who got her out. The only problem was the current condition of my head, which was resting on a pool of my own drool. Not much hope for poor Emersome, but I had to try anyhow.

I slowly crept on my hands and knees and bravely headed for the space between the counter and the kitchen. As soon as I was out of their view I ambled back on my shaky legs. My stomach gave a bolting leap as I steadied my hands on the kitchen stainless steel counter. Another stomach contraction. I could feel cold sweat beads trailing down my forehead on both sides of my nose. In an abominable grizzly explosion, the beer, Jack Daniels and bile in my stomach spumed forth across the sink and into the deep fryer, causing the hot oil to froth up in a hideous bubbling brew. The oil overflowed

and spilled onto the cook top and immediately ignited in yellow flames that shot right back up my head. The smoke alarm went off in a deafening din as I ducked down back on the floor and crawled out of the flaming kitchen and hid by the bar. The attention of the crowd was momentarily drawn to the burning kitchen and I knew that this was my chance. Just then I felt a powerful force tugging at the scruff of my shirt until I had been pulled right back on my feet.

“Get your ass up off the floor, you jerk-off,” Emersome barked, “you got some explaining to do.”

I marched meekly behind her through the door and out into the tepid night air. It smelled of gas fumes and burnt grease. Rat-tail staggered out behind us and tried to catch his breath.

“Hey sunshine,” The Chief said, grabbing his crotch, “you’re not leaving before we have us a wiener roast.”

Emersome slapped him out of the way and turned around with fire in her eyes.

“Listen here jackass,” she said loud enough for the other bikers to hear, “you don’t know who you’re messing with. This little pyro here has a big problem with matches. If I don’t get him out you’ll wake up in a pile of your own ashes, so why you don’t get the hell out of here before he torches your precious bikes.”

Rat-tail turned to me with a newfound regard. I didn’t know it at the time but my hair and face was black with soot, my polyester green outfit was partially melted, and vomit was streaming down the front of my outfit, plus I still smelled like shit from my encounter with the rattlesnake. Even rat-tail didn’t feel like messing with the likes of me at that moment. I looked at Emersome in awe. We were a team. Once in the car and safely on the road again, I felt my life start to return.

“Sister, you owe me big time,” I said.

“Owe you?” Emersome spat out, “what the hell are you talking about? You were the one who got us in this situation. Did I hear one of those jerks talk about a Chocolate Massage? I wonder how the hell did he learn about that? A little bird told them?”

An icy silence followed.

“That was your fault,” I said, after a few minutes, “you wouldn’t give me any money. I had to keep those guys interested to buy me drinks.”

“Why am I bothering with you?” she said to herself.

“I’ll tell you why,” I said, “because I saved your skin. So you owe you’re your Karma is skewed. You must return the favor.”

“Don’t play the Karma card,” Emersome said, shooting a ferocious look to me, “you don’t know the first thing about Karma.”

“Whatever you want to call it,” I protested, “Karma, Force, Spirituality, but I do know that you must bring it back in balance.”

“So how about saying we’re even?” she said, “since I picked your ass out of the desert.”

“No, I’ve already paid you back for that,” I said, in my professor’s voice, “remember, I warned you in time before you ran over those dogs.”

“And you compare that with saving your life?” she said.

“For one thing,” I said, “we don’t know that you saved my life. Technically, I might have survived in the dessert on my own resourcefulness...”

“Phhh, sure!” Emersome interrupted, “as if you had a chance in hell...”

“and...” I continued, “if you had ran over those dogs, the deaths would have haunted you for years. I saved you from that misery. So in my mind, we were even at that point. Now that I saved you from those thugs, you need to make the balance right.”

We could hear sirens coming from the opposing lanes and Emersome pressed her foot on the accelerator to put as much distance as possible between the crime scene and our car as we bolted south on the empty two-lane highway.