

The flat-footed idiot who was searching these back corridors wasn't expecting anyone to fight back. He marched into the kitchen with a lackadaisical gait. A revolver was clutched in his right hand but now bared and ready to shoot. He took a sharp turn to the left and walked over to one of the ovens – which had been left on in the panic after the gunfire. He grabbed the ladle from inside and sipped whatever was inside with a pleased hum. That served me just fine. He was totally distracted when I snuck up on him from behind.

He was distracted all the way until I accidentally slipped on a wet part of the floor by the sink. I reached out and grabbed the counter island in the middle of the room to stop myself from falling, but the commotion was enough to catch his ear. He swung around and pointed his gun at me, but I quickly ducked out of the way before he could fire his first shot.

“Hey! What are you doing, girl?”

Who the hell spilt water all over the damn floor? It was an unsafe working environment! I'd need to have a word with Beatrice once I was done taking care of the gunmen. My size was enough to deceive him into thinking that I was not a threat. He approached around the corner of the island and tried to grab my shoulder with his free hand. I made him think again by slashing at him with my stolen knife and cutting his other arm. He gasped and stepped back before I could close the gap and do it again.

“You crazy bitch!” He pointed his gun at me but underestimated how deep the cut I had made was. He couldn't put the same strength into his forearm anymore and his fingers refused to respond. He looked like a deer in the headlights as I closed in with my weapon of choice.

“Give me the gun,” I demanded, “Give me the gun and I won't gut you.”

“Save the bull for someone who cares!”

Switching to his other hand gave me the window I was looking for. I charged in and grabbed the barrel of the gun using one of my hands. Sensing that he was about to lose it and end up on the other end of the issue, he yanked it back and tossed it across

the room. I growled when it landed by the door; I couldn't move as quickly with such a constricting dress around my legs; otherwise, I would have leapt over the central counter to reach it before him.

He wasn't going to have better luck trying to take me on in a fist-fight. He dived onto the counter and grabbed the first knife he could find to try and defend himself from me. I wasn't going to be deterred by that alone. The best he could manage was pointing the right end at me. Several speculative slashes came my way that were nowhere close to touching my skin. I stepped back in and hooked the back of my blade around his, forcing his arm up and throwing it into the air. I followed it up with a punch to the windpipe, sending him staggering back until he hit the counter.

In a display of rage – he grabbed the heated pot and threw it onto the ground in front of him, before making a break for the door. I was already moving around to intercept him before he could reach his discarded weapon. Flipping the knife backwards and catching the blade between my fingers, I threw it at his leg and embedded it into his shin. He skidded to a halt and collapsed down onto one knee. I leapt off of it and struck him in the head with a kick from above.

He rolled away and spat the blood from his mouth, “How in the Goddess’ name are you doing that?”

“What’s wrong, can’t keep up with a little girl?”

He limped towards me and swung out with clumsy fists. I was too nimble, ducking and weaving between each strike and retaliating with shallow cuts and physical blows to his vital areas. In a fight – a small advantage can quickly snowball into complete victory. A position of weakness is not something that is easy to come back from. From one arm and one leg both injured, there was little he could do to fight me off now; but that didn't mean he was going to give up so easily, not while the gun was in play.

Instead of using that gun, he reached out to the rack above and grabbed one of the heavy iron pans that the cooks were using to prepare the food. While it was a comical sight, those things could do serious damage thanks to their weight. It was an effective blunt weapon with longer reach than the knife I'd grabbed earlier. I kept away as he threatened to hit me with it, waving it in my general direction. It looked like he knew

that the fight wasn't going his way, and now his singular priority was to try and ward me off.

"Back off! I'm not messing around!"

"Neither am I."

I couldn't make a break for the gun while he was still aware. He'd leap onto my back and wrestle me to the ground if I gave him the chance. The fight had been paused for the time being, but we were still probing each other for gaps in our respective defences. What he didn't know was that I was backing him up towards a certain spot on the floor. He was so distracted by the spilt soup, that he didn't even consider the water that I'd almost slipped on before the fight started.

He fell for it. As soon as his flat-soled shoe touched the tiles, he lost his balance and was forced to catch himself on the counter. I turned and made a sprint for the gun, diving to the floor and scooping it into my arms. He was hot on my heels to try and stop me from killing him with it, but I had no intention of doing that just yet. I grabbed an upturned cookery pot from the counter next to me and smashed him in the face with it. His already damp shoes made sure that he was knocked flat onto his back for the second time.

He turned onto his stomach and tried to crawl away, but I was already pushing my knee down into his spine before he could get anywhere. I cocked the hammer of the gun and pressed it against the back of his head.

"Those are the jaws of a viper you're feeling. I don't care about your name, or why you're here – I have one question for you. Is this gun single-action, or double-action?"

"What?"

I repeated it with venom and put more tension onto his captive arm, "Single, or double?"

"D-Double!"

"Thank you kindly."

I came down on the back of his head with the grip, slamming his jaw into the floor and knocking him out cold. I dismounted his unconscious body and sighed, that was much harder than I was expecting. Kitchens were terrible places to try and assassinate someone in. The floors were just as treacherous as the weapons we were using. Regardless, I'd successfully subdued one of their men and taken his weapon. It would serve me much better than the novelty hidden gun that the other one was carrying.

I needed to get the rest of his gang out of the hall. I could realistically handle them, but not if they had access to hostages. The chances of success would decrease drastically if they were able to use them as human shields. I avoided using strategies like that, but I wasn't going to be naïve and think that they'd do the same. The fact that they were willingly revealing themselves to the people in the building meant that they didn't care for the art of subtlety. I could easily see them gunning down an innocent bystander just to prove a point.

In my old life that would be a death sentence. There was a fine line to walk between doing the job and attracting too much heat. Every move you made had to be calculated and considered, weighed against the risk that is presented in return. I was a killer, but I also wanted to keep on doing what I did. How would I draw them out of the hall, you ask? Felipe was one piece of the puzzle. They needed to send someone to find him, and he wasn't in there thanks to our bathroom break.

Given that only two of them had come through this way, they must have missed him leaving. They'd need to keep someone in the hall to make sure that they didn't get any funny ideas about escaping or fighting back. I counted seven different guards during my scouting mission, but there could have been more waiting in the wings for when the party really started. This all told me that the person in charge was impulsive and aggressive; that they were someone who I could manipulate and unsettle with a few basic tricks.

And thus, we return to the time-tested practice of intimidation. I wouldn't be intimidating anyone using my body language. While the kids at the academy were easy enough to scare with a strong glare, a fully-grown man would discount me as a posh girl with more confidence than common sense. In order to present the narrative

that I wanted – I needed to keep my own face and name out of the equation. I retrieved my knife from the floor and headed over to my new best friend.

A single cut in the right place could leave a very intimidating wound that was less deadly than most others. Have you ever seen a professional wrestler slice their own forehead open? It was the same principle here. I carefully ran the tip of the knife across the skin and split it open. A veritable waterfall of blood started to leak down his features. He sputtered back to life and spat some of the iron-tinged gore from his mouth. It would stop bleeding fairly quickly and close itself up, but it made sure that he looked like he'd been through a warzone and barely got out alive.

My bloodied friend soon discovered that I'd tied his wrists together using one of the washcloths from the sink. I pulled him back up on his unsteady feet and kept the gun trained on his back as we walked into the main corridor. The guy could barely even see through the crimson mask I'd given him, but a helpful shove got him moving in the right direction.

"I'm going to let you go."

"Seriously?"

"Seriously. All you need to do is walk through those doors before you pass out again. Or not, it's up to you really."

He shook his head in disbelief and hesitated. He was waiting for me to deliver the punchline, that being a bullet shot through his back and through his chest cavity. I was actually being honest. I wanted him to stumble into that hall looking like he'd just run through a butcher's freezer blindfolded. I wanted some of his friends to come crashing through looking for the person responsible. The first step was tentative, but they soon increased in pace. I could see what he was thinking at that moment, he couldn't believe that I wasn't lying to him.

Once he reached the door I dropped the gun to my side and turned to leave. I needed to set up my next ambush before they came running. It was a good thing that I had gotten a lay of the house before entering the hall earlier. I already had some good places in mind to launch my next attack. As long as they kept me between them and

the office that Felipe was now hiding in. I opened the cylinder of the revolver and checked how many rounds I had to play with; six, and he wasn't carrying any more.

I needed to make them count.