

Money.

It's always about the money.

Ariana knocked a stack of books off a chair and dragged it to the door, slamming it under the handle and wedging a small chest underneath the raised chair legs, it made a solid brace she was satisfied with. She began to circle the room, checking every window, ensuring the shutters were closed and locked. All the while keeping her gun trained on the figure in the centre.

It was a lower floor room in a half-abandoned inn, decorated with the few material possessions she has chosen to keep over the years, an open floor design with two doors in, one leading to the hallway, and the other to the privy, the room she stood in was a combination of bedroom, kitchen, and everything else, not that she had the furniture for entertaining, her bed was barely anything more than pile of rags in the corner.

With the heavy shutters on the windows now locked in place, Ariana felt safe enough to lower her weapon, the man tied to the chair in the centre of the room relaxed and an edge of cockiness covered his bruised face with a grin.

"Why don't you check again love, I reckon you missed a spot."

She lurched forward and raised her gun at the man, the wide-bore barrel inches away from his face, so close the smell of stale discharged steam and oil burned at his nostril hairs. She stared down the sight into his eyes and gave him a look of pure hate.

"Don't tempt me Dirk."

I could kill him, why don't I kill him?

The man was no longer smiling, instead he tilted his head and spat a glob of bloodied saliva onto the floorboards.

"You're wasting your time girl, they know where we are. They'll break down that door, free me, and then we'll take what we're owed."

The grin came back, but with more malice this time, Dirk's left eye was almost entirely swollen shut and a large cut on his lower lip slowly seeped blood in and around his mouth. The portable gas lamp on the table next to her shone its dull light across his face, a lumped mess by her hand.

There's been so many bodies already, what's one more?

"If you don't have the gold we could always.. work it out."

He began to chuckle but she hit him across the face with the back of her gloved hand, the force was enough to rock the chair side to side, lead scaling inside her glove bit into Dirk's face once again. He coughed and more blood and spit came out, spraying across the floor in an arc. Grunting he locked eyes with her, but kept silent

Holstering the gun in the frame attached to her thigh, Ariana took a step backwards then turned away from the brute, out of Dirk's sight she slipped her hand out of its glove, through the leather and lead plating the sheer dullness of his skull had broken her skin, a split down her finger stung and was beginning to bleed, Ariana winced as she put the glove back on then turned around to face him.

"Why did you come here? You got what you want, our deal was final. I was paid to shoot him, I shot him"

"You was paid to kill 'im."

"The man's dead."

"Aye that he is, but it wasn't your bullet that done it. You broke the contract."

She paced back and forth across the room, trying to get a grasp of the situation, she didn't have the money, nor any means of acquiring that amount.

It was supposed to be one job, just one, quick, simple pull of the trigger

Shadows raced across the bench, people, maybe a dozen, the gaslight in the alley outside giving them away as it cast their figures through the crack of the shutters. She was running out of time. She needed to get out of there, but she still had a debt to take care of.

"I don't have your money Dirk, you knew that already."

She turned to face him.

"What do you want from me?"

"Blood."

That was enough to set her off. She kicked Dirk in the chest, sending both him and the chair he was tied to crashing to the ground, with the wind knocked out of his lungs he hunched forward, but a kick with her leather boot forced him back to the ground. She stood over him, one foot on his neck, with just enough pressure to make the situation painful.

*I can do it, I **should** do it.*

"I could do it, you know I could, they wouldn't find me across the border."

Struggling to breathe, the bloodied and bruised man just smiled up at her, he wheezed out at her.

"They wouldn't find you, but they'd find her."

Beth

Mixed sensations of dread, of fear, washed over her body, followed with an

overpowering primal rage, she reached for her holster, but grabbed Dirk's hand instead, a hand that she held her gun firmly in its grip. In a single motion he ripped the holster from her thigh with one hand and struck a blow into her stomach with the other, the torn leather encasing and the gun scattered across the room, Ariana doubled over in shock and pain, he grabbed her by the hair and pulled her down to the floor, their heads collided and her vision blurred. His large hands grabbing at her shoulders pinning their bodies together, his brutal, wheezing breath was hot against her face as she struggled against him, the smell of tobacco and rancid meat. Pushing against his face to get as far away as possible she could feel his smile as he wrapped a calloused hand around her slender throat. As he tightened his hold on her she managed to lift a leg high enough to bring it down with force onto his groin.

He bellowed in pain and released her enough to get free, she ran to the corner of the room, vision still shaky, to where her gun was. Dirk stood himself up with one hand with his other cradling his crotch, he winced in pain as he rose, and took hold of a shattered chair leg from the ground.

He was too slow.

Ariana aimed the gun at his face, but the room was spinning, she knew she couldn't miss, and only had one chance to save herself, but the thoughts kept running through her head.

Beth... Dirk... Money.. Death..

The door to the room burst open. Several men wearing the same uniforms as Dirk began to pile into the room, in their hands were stun sticks, batons containing immense pressure build up in the shaft generating enough electricity to incapacitate an individual, standard equipment for city's police. She was cornered.

“What have you done with her Dirk!?”

He took a casual step forward.

“She's not a part of this, she's barely a child.”

Another step.

She steadied her aim.

“Curse you Dirk, you bastard.” and pulled the trigger.