



WALKER

DEPENDENCE

WALKER

DEPENDENCE

The dead lay in far distant sands. How distant, Tom couldn't say. His head ached from the knockout blow, the campfire the only heat in the dark expanse of the Texan wastes. His savior was silent, waiting, offering gristle in a pan to eat. They shared a silent meal, both staring into the fire, avoiding one another's eyes.

He'd been close, Tom had, so close. It'd cost him his brother, his friend, his heart. He thought of Abby Walker, the fires of her hair and the fire in her eyes, the taste of her, the scent of her. He licked his lips in the cold dry dark. His fingers twitched towards a gun that was no longer there.

Abby Walker, his heart.

He thought she'd see him dead and she'd settled on taking his freedom.

A soft chuckle escaped his lips. He'd never had freedom to begin with.

Gravel crunched, moving close. His savior moved, looking into the dark for whomever was coming, but Tom stayed still. Stillness was his ally here. Any stray movement could only bring him pain.

"You get one more chance."

The voice was a growl, a whisper, a promise. Tom had been shot just recently and the words hurt worse than the gunfire, than the hatred of an entire town.

"Good to see you again, Dad," he said. His voice did not shake, and, of this, he was proud.

This was no warm reunion, Tom knew, he and his daddy.

This was the beginning of a reckoning.



The sun rose over a town that had seen its share of blood in days past. Independence, it was called. The name was a slap in the face to an ocean of hostile forces. The townfolk hoped those days were past and they could get on with living on the frontier, making good on the American Dream.

A small posse of folk had ensured that the town might live up to its name. Cailin, leader of a people, walker between two warring worlds. Hoyt Rawlins, waiting for death, dying to live. Augustus, a deputy until he shot the sheriff. Kate Carver, once a Pinkerton and now only herself. Kai, best left to a quiet life.

And, of course, there was Abby Walker.

"Too soon for celebration?" Hoyt asked, drunk early in the morning.

"Word travels fast," Augustus answered, coming to the table and laying his gun on it. He was still walking with a limp from the gutshot what should have killed him. A deep thinker, Augustus, and a tough man.

"Do we know who the Davidsons are?" Abby asked. "They're the ones that put up the money to have Tom freed, right?"

"They did," Kate said, pouring them all drinks from her bar – a promise that had become as-good-as truth now that Tom was gone. "They also had Nathaniel Hagan poisoned, and caused who knows what else. If Tom is still out there and free, that's going to be a problem, mark my words."

"Consider 'em marked," Hoyt drawled. "Abby, how you wanna handle this?"

It was still cause for surprised, the way they all looked to her. She considered them; beautiful people and beautiful souls.

Was she ready for this?

"We keep our ears to the ground and make use of what we know and what contacts we have," Abby said. "No one's moving anything through here with Cailin's people holding their lands. Augustus, Hoyt, we three can hold the town if we have to. Kate, Kai, you two have connections the rest of us don't – what do you know?"

"The Davidson family was east coast," Kate began. "They were moving wealth for some old Confederate money before the traitors did their thing, before Texas was brought in as a slave state."

"Do you think they're still working for old Confederate money, now that the war is done?" Abby asked.

"It's possible," Kate said, sitting down close to Abby. Abby risked a glance at Kate's eyes, the mischief and light in them, and realized she was looking where she shouldn't. Kate noticed because Kate always noticed, and the smile she gave Abby sent shivers through Abby's chest. "All I know is that Allan was so interested he put one of his kids on it, and that kid sent me in to look into things."

"Allan?" Hoyt asked.

"Allan Pinkerton," Augustus said. "Has twin sons, Robert and William. They acted as spies for the Union in the war. Got a detective agency you might have heard of."

"I hear these days they mostly break up unions," Hoyt said. "And didn't they blow up Jesse James' mom?"

"Burned off her arm and killed Jesse's eight-year-old brother, yes," Augustus said. Everyone looked at Kate.

"I quit, remember?" she said.

Kai said nothing and no one pressed him to do otherwise.

"We'll learn what we can," Augustus said. "We'll be ready if Tom returns. Hoyt, Cailan, would the two of you mind taking a look at what happened? I'll deputize you both, if it helps."

They nodded, the menfolk leaving.

Only Abby and Kate remained.

"It's going to be okay," Kate said, touching Abby's hand. Kate's hand felt soft, warm, like silk woven into fire. Abby pulled her hand away; she was certain of so many things, but when it came to Kate Carver...

"How can you be sure?" Abby asked.

"We're still here," Kate shrugged. "I don't believe in much, but I believe in us."

Abby smiled, just a little.

She believed in her friends, too, but Kate always left her confused.



Kate Carver had always confused him. Up was down, left was right, the world made no sense whenever she was around and Nathaniel Hagan wanted her out of his life and needed to warn her about what was coming.

He'd tried to protect her before. He'd been an up-and-comer, hanging on to the coattails of power in the far-off lands of Independence, Texas, hoping to ride the rail lines into wealth and power. A whispered promise to Kate and he'd found himself poisoned, forced to sell everything he'd built for next to nothing, a piece removed from the playing board. He'd managed to sneak back into town once to warn her, but now...

San Francisco was a long way away, but he was here for her – speaking with Mayor Walter Buckley, trying to

find the power players here. He'd been careful, cautious, but the quiet warzone of this city was so much more than he was used to dealing with and

"If there's one thing I cannot abide it is a traitor. But women are most likely to have weak wills, and must be brought to heel. What does that say about you, Mr. Hagan?"

It was a bullet that caught him between the ribs. The man that walked towards him was large, imposing, his father's accent still haunting the voice of this son. He walked without hurry, pushed Nathaniel against the wall, covered his mouth with one hand and pushed the barrel of the gun into Nathaniel's wound with the other.

Nathaniel's screams and the gunshot were both muffled when the bullet tore his insides apart.

"A shame, of course, you could have been a welcome addition to the agency if not for the charms of Ms. Carver. She could charm the scales off a snake, that one."

A crowd was gathering.

Finely dressed figures stood between Nathaniel and salvation.

"You do know she is an abomination, do you not? She favors members of her own sex for her own gratification. To be certain, such sights may be enjoyed by men like us, but..."

The killer shook his head, let Nathaniel go. He fell down, a slick of blood left in his wake. He tried to speak but simply coughed, mouth full of liquid copper and iron, vision fading as pain washed all sense away.

There were coppers coming to see what was happening.

His killer did not care.

"My name is William Pinkerton. This is Pinkerton business."

Nathaniel hoped the coppers would intervene. William still had his gun pointed at Nathaniel's face, leaking blood and bile, finger tightening on the trigger.

Then: a loud crack, a flash of light, and



At the crack of dawn Abby Walker was beautiful.

Which was, Kate reflected, improper. Abby Walker was beautiful at every time of day, but there was something about those strange golden hours when the sun shone through their windows where she was radiant. Everything about her piqued at Kate in these hours – Abby's moods and grace, the strength of her shoulders and the strength in her eyes. She was achingly, painfully attractive.

I want her lips, Kate thought. Just for a minute. It would be enough. Just her lips on mine...

Abby could have moved out of the bar, could have moved into the house that should have gone to her husband. She could have left the bed she'd shared with Tom, could have left the room where she'd drawn a gun on Kate and where Kate had drawn a gun on her. She could have left Kate alone.

Instead, she was here. Kate could drink her in, the fiery gold hair, thin white clothing that hinted at the smooth lines of waiting skin, the scent of sweet and sweat.

Jesus, she was beautiful.

"What are you looking at?" Abby asked, yawning.

"Nothing," Kate murmured, and Abby smiled like she knew exactly what she was doing. She stretched, a little midriff showing, calves coming up over the bed, her thighs half-covered by bedsheets. Kate swallowed.

"Nothing."

But Abby was looking back at her.

Kate remembered the first time they had met. She remembered making Abby smile, remembered the way Abby had looked at her with wide hungry hurt eyes, lips slightly parted, breath caught in a perfect moment.

The way Abby was looking at her now.

"Are you okay?" Kate asked. Her own breathe felt heavy. Her hips felt heavy and she was leaning on a doorframe to keep from shaking.

"I'm a little hungry," Abby smiled. "And... enjoying the view?"

What?

"What?"

"I don't want to make things queer, Kate, but you're absolutely gorgeous in this light," Abby said, that smile widening, shining, the most beautiful thing that Kate had ever seen. Kate's heart was thumping in her ears, her chest tightening, knees weak.

This, she thought, this is where it should have ended.

But it didn't.



"Mr. Kai...?"

The speaker was an aging woman at the height of her powers, dressed in darkest greens. The severe lines on her face spoke of difficult decisions, the hardness around her eyes speaking of those decisions made with absolute certainty. This was not a woman given to doubt or fear, this was a woman who took action without regrets.

Kai knew her in an instant.

"Yes," he said, keeping his accent clipped and heavy. "I wash clothes?"

"Are you an honest merchant?" she asked.

"Yes."

"And do you know who I am?"

"No," Kai lied.

The woman smiled, looking about for a place to sit. He did not bring her a chair. He did not offer her food. He did not want her in his shop. He did not want anything to do with her.

"Kai, let us speak candidly."

"I not know what candid mean."

"Very well," she said, her smile meant to be pleasant. "如果我用你的□言□□你会更舒服□□?"

"Your accent is terrible," Kai said, in perfect English. He had not moved. He could kill her in seconds from where he was standing and she knew it. Still, she looked so very certain.

"Fair, though I imagine you have had more use for English than I have had for Chinese," she said. She paused, her smile so very polite, her hands where he could see them. "I hope that may change in the days to come, Mr. Kai. And I hope you will be a part of that change."

"What do you want, Mrs. Davidson?"

"You were part of the *union* that challenged my nephew," Teresa sniffed. "We Confederate daughters are hoping to bring rail through this town, and are working with a number of people to make that happen. Some of

them include a detective agency I understand you have some history with."

"The Pinkertons."

"The very same," Teresa nodded. "We will need workers to make that happen, but efforts to unionize are driving costs higher than we would like. I know you dislike the Tongs, and we are willing to pay your people what the Irish are demanding just to shut them up. We can use the Pinkertons to keep the Irish and the Tongs out of our business, but we need someone with knowledge of the latter's dealings to protect our workers."

"I am the only Chinese here."

"Oh, we would want you in San Francisco," she said. Smiled. "We will pay you sixteen hundred American dollars a year to manage this project for us for the next ten years, with a signing bonus - if you sign today - of another twenty-four hundred American dollars. And we will guarantee your family passage to America and set you all up in any manner you choose."

"Why would you do this?" Kai asked.

"You know the answer to that," Teresa said, and Kai did. He understood perfectly. He understood why they wanted him and why they wanted him now, today.

"Kate Carver must not be killed," Kai said. "And all my things here are to be moved so I can continue my... hobby."

"Your hobby," Teresa repeated, glancing around the small store. She paused. Stared. "Is that imported silk?"

"Yes."

"Does anyone here know what it is?"

"No." He offered her a vicious smile.

"That roll of fabric is worth more than this town."

"I have eight of them. An auspicious number."

"I'm told it is difficult to work with," she said, then paused. "You are a complicated man. Yes, the goods in the store undamaged, but only if you design a gown for me with these marvellous silks. In the proper southern style, of course."

"So long as you pay."

"Slavery's gifts left me wealthier than you could possibly believe," Teresa said. Still, the hand that touched the silks shook. "I was under the impression that you and the former detective were strained."

"We are, yes," Kai nodded. "But those are my sole conditions."

"Acceptable."

"Very well," Kai said. He did not look at the place he was about to abandon. He had many good memories from his time here, from what he did here. Honest work done with clever hands. "When do we leave?"



"Kai is gone."

"What?"

"Kai is gone," Augustus repeated. "His store is empty. There was a note written in that strange language of his."

"There are Chinese philosophers, you know," Kate said, snatching the note from Augustus' hand.

"Anyone interesting, or haven't you read them?" Augustus asked. Kate glowered at him, stalking away while

reading the small note.

"What's it say?" Abby asked.

"He's left," Kate muttered. "He's gone off to San Francisco for some ungodly reason. He says-" She scrunched up the note, tossed it into the fire place and stared at it, blinking back tears. "Everyone leaves."

"Has there been any word from Hoyt or Cailin?" Abby asked.

"No," Augustus shook his head, lighting a cigarillo. He sat heavy in his chair, looking thoughtful. "Do either of you know anything about the Dawes Act?"

Abby spared a glance at Kate. The former Pinkerton shook her head, no.

"I think it'll be a while before we hear anything from Cailin," Augustus said, sighing. "President Cleveland just swept one of our strongest allies off the board. Kai is gone, Hoyt is missing. And..." he trailed off, staring at nothing.

"What?" Kate demanded.

"What?" Abby echoed.

"I know Kate was close with a man named Hagan," Augustus said, inhaling deeply. "There's people that Tom used to talk to, and I know all of them. They like me more than they liked him, and I've kept up with them. I. Kate?"

"What?"

"Please sit down."

Kate stared at him, then strode to a chair while staring, sat. "What?"

"Hagan was killed."

"What." Kate stopped, paused. Her mouth opened but no sound came out. "Where? Hagan? What?"

"Chicago," Augustus said, pouring Kate a strong drink and offering her the glass. "William did it. William Pinkerton."

Kate drained the glass. Then another.

Then she threw the glass against the wall and wept.

"Sun Tzu," Kate said, her eyes meeting Augustus. She stood up, cleared a table for the three of them. "You wanted a Chinese philosopher. Let me tell you about Sun Tzu."



"Are you ready?" Teresa asked. Tom's wounds were healed. He was clean, shaven, his suit immaculate. He put on his jacket and felt the familiar weight of the gun at his hip.

"I reckon so."

Teresa smiled.



Kate did not reach for her gun when William Pinkerton walked into her bar.

Her hands twitched, her fingers clenching and unclenching, but she did not go for her gun and that is why she

survived the first few seconds.

William Pinkerton walked up to her with a powerful stride as his men followed him in and took control of her home. As soon as he reached her his hand pushed against her throat and pushed her back against a wall, holding her in place. His index finger from the other hand was in her face, his eyes full of hatred.

"There are three things I love whole in all the world. I love dogs, I love horses, and I love whores. Do you know what those three creatures, among all of God's creations, share?"

"A need for a strong hand," Kate whispered. He was choking her and she kept her hands at her side. He smiled, finger dropping, letting her go.

"Good that you remember, whore."

He didn't spit the last word. Kate knew him; he could admire a skilled whore the same way another man might admire a purebred horse or a well-trained dog. He truly did think of her as an animal. He pointed at the center of the bar space, where his men had cleared a space.

"Sit."

She did, kneeling on the floor.

The bar had been emptied except for William and his men.

"Tell me everything."

She did.

He wanted her to look up at him, to look into his eyes. It was hard to meet his gaze but she did what he had told her to do, what he had trained her to do, what he demanded that she do. Hand at her sides, on her knees, looking up at him, telling him everything. He wanted her to think of him as her god, and from where she knelt it was hard not to.

He mulled over her words, sitting too close to her with his legs spread, sipping at her finest brandy.

"You seduced the sister?"

"I did."

"You probably believe your feelings for her are real."

"They are real," Kate whispered. His eyes dug into her soul, left her shivering when he shrugged. She knew that his smiles were never ever kind.

"We gave you too long a leash. Not your fault you nearly choked yourself with it."

"Thank you, sir," she said. He reached out and cupped her cheek and she looked up at him, couldn't help adoring him.

"You've made a fine mess, Carver, and we're gonna have to take it out of your ass. You have one chance to make this easier on yourself."

She nodded, leaned forward and unbuckled his pants, fished his growing erection out of his pants and beat herself in the face with it. He grinned down at her, knowing she hated this – the feel of it, the smell, the taste. He wanted to see her disgust as she opened her mouth and ran her tongue down the length, as she kissed the tip, as she swallowed it down.

He knew that none of this came naturally to her. He'd spent weeks training her on all kinds of men. She'd thought she'd put that part of her life behind her but it all came back to her: how long to suck, how long to lick, how to swallow, how to cradle. He smiled, running a hand through her hair.

"Good girl."

She hated his praise. She hated how much she craved his praise. She hated how much and how easily he still ruled her.

Minutes trickled by, the sounds of her suckling filling her bar. He exploded in her mouth and she kept her eyes locked on his as she swallowed every drop, whipping her tongue around his cock and swirling his cum around her teeth and gums just the way he liked, opening her mouth to show him what she'd done and that she'd swallowed. Then, she licked him clean, fastened him back up, and stood.

She trembled, hands clenching into fists. She forced them to relax.

"Is there something you'd like to say, Kate?"

"Would you like something to eat, sir?"

"Maybe later."

William stood, hands on her shoulders. She stood, submissive as his hands travelled down her chest to the buttons on her jacket. He undid them so carefully and she wondered if she would ever see it again, the black-flowers-on-purple that Kai had made for her.

"This is lovely."

He took it off of her, pulling it free of her shoulders and arms. He folded it and set it aside, returned and started on the sleeveless gown underneath.

"This is very well made indeed. The fabric nearly matches your fleshtone – it looks like you're presenting your whore body. Did you enjoy that?"

"I did," Kate said, only a partial lie.

His fingers brushed her bare skin as he let it slip down her shoulders, down her ribs and hips. He let it fall and pool at her feet and she stepped out of it, dressed in only her collar, glove, shoes, and underthings before the leering eyes of hungry men.

"You're thinking of fighting, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir." Lying would only earn her a beating.

"Did you know the agency is bigger than this country's army right now?"

He laughed, let the threat linger. She already knew that there was nowhere she could run, not from the Pinkertons.

"Have you seduced the pretty redhead yet?"

She said nothing, let her eyes drop. She could hear the low chuckles, the whispered comments. They were looking at her ass. They were bragging to one another about how fun it would be to ride her. They were speaking about her the way they would talk about breaking in a horse and she was wet, heavy, trained to respond to those threats with lust.

Kate Carver hated William Pinkerton for all the things he had done to her.

She adored him because he had trained her to adore him.

"You left me, Kate. You must be punished. You know that."

"I do."

"Kneel."

She did.

The laughing men came round to decorate her pretty face.



The last time Tom had walked into town he'd been a shadow alone facing a militia.

He'd held his own back then. He'd fought and lost only because the town stood united against him.

Hoyt was gone and vanished.. Cailin swallowed by vicious political ambition. Kai had left town for somewhere else. Augustus had simply vanished. Kate was nowhere to be found.

Abby stood alone, shotgun in hand, as Tom Davidson walked towards her.

"Do you know what time it is?" he called, not drawing a gun. There was a band of men behind him and they all had their guns drawn, all walking with purpose. Five of them, ten of them, twenty of them. They marched like an army, covering the town, covering her.

Tom reached out, touched her shotgun with his hand.

She could pull the trigger and he would die.

"It's noon," she said. He pushed the gun down, aiming it at the space between her feet. "High noon."

"Abby Walker," he said, stepping closer, closer, too close, the scent of him filling her. His hand crept up her arm, bending her. "Mary Abigail Collins nee Mackenzie. As the duly appointed sheriff of this town, I am arresting you cor sedition, attempted murder, conspiracy to commit murder, and a half dozen other crimes besides."

"Duly appointed by who?" she asked. His army stopped. The town surrendered. He took her gun from her but she kept his gaze and her dignity. "I have the right to know my accusers."

She saw it, then. All the men, all these shadows, all of them with the same circular tattoo.

Abby Walker remembered an all too common threat, an all too common warning:

The South Will Rise Again.



The manacles looked huge and heavy on Abby's slim wrists. Tom kept a hand on her neck and pushed her forward, toward the town jail.

"What are you going to do to me?" she asked. He tried not to answer, creeping heat running along his ribs, tightening his cock. Her hips were right there. He could bend her over and

Abby stumbled on the stairs up into the prison and he stopped, holding her steady, letting her find her feet. He was careful not to touch her where he shouldn't. He helped her find her balance. She didn't thank him.

She never did.

It didn't matter.

He knew what was waiting and he was terrified.



Kate could barely see through the sticky strings of dried cum on her pretty face, She was still dressed in her underthings, wrists bound above her, a rope thrown over a beam and tied to a pillar to keep her upright. She struggled, feet barely touching the floor, all her weight resting on her delicate wrists.

She heard stumbling outside. The door opened and Tom stepped in, looked at her, paused. She was a master at reading the things people wanted hidden and, in the moment she considered him, she thought he looked regretful, scared. She spared him only a moment of passing interest and then turned her attention to the only

person who mattered:

Abby Walker.

She had been left alone and she had lost. Her chin was tilted up even if her hands were bound, she carrying herself with dignity, without fear. Her eyes, so fierce. Those cheekbones...

"And this must be Abby Walker."

Even the sound of his voice made her tremble. He let go of Kate's breast, slapped her ass.

"I don't believe I've had the pleasure," Abby managed, pulling away from Tom, standing her ground.

"You will. Son, you told me this cunt sang a whole song mocking you and you let her walk away."

Kate paled, staring at Tom.

"S-son?" sputtered Kate. "I didn't know, I-"

He slapped her into silence.

"You are better seen and not heard, whore. You remember your lessons."

She mumbled yes, nodded, sniffled.

"Illegitimate."

William left Kate to cup Tom's face with his rough hands.

"Still mine."

"Dad, we've taken the town," Tom said, and Kate could hear the sliver of fear, quickly hidden. "There's no need to-" William slapped him.

"Your sense of mercy and fair play is what cost you this town, boy. These women are weak because of their nature, but you can bear no such weakness. You understand?"

Tom swallowed, nodded, as William handed his son a whip.

Kate shivered.

The whip lashed out, kissing her skin. She screamed. He put his arm, his back into it. The whip

cracked

and she screamed

cracked

again and she cried, whimpered, begged.

"There's nothing you have that I want, Kate Carver. Nothing you are I can't just take."

Kate was left dangling, swinging, whipped until her clothing was torn, ripped, whipped until her skin was bruised and covered in angry red lines. Only her face, her cum-soaked and tear-stained face, was left pure.

She dangled, breath rough, vision blurry, when the whip

cracked

and she whimpered, dangling.

"This is as much for his benefit as it is for you, Ms. Abby Walker."

"I am a married woman."

"Your husband is months dead. Time to move on."

Abby's voice sounded strained.. blinking through the mess covering her eyes, the sweat and tears and seed, she managed to see Abby. Her friend was still strong, still defiant, a goddess surrounded by a fading high noon halo.

But the light faded and the whip

cracked

"Took care of the paperwork of your divorce myself. You're welcome."

Abby was silent, but Kate understood her well enough to know that William Pinkerton had just marked himself for death in her eyes. She knew how useless working on that would be and wanted to tell her that, but the only things that would pass her lips were blood, drool, and whimpers.

"What's being done to her is for your benefit, Ms. Walker."

"How so?" Abby asked.

"The answer is twofold: to show you what is to come, and that you might stop it the moment you agree to marry my son."

"Dad-?" Tom began, then fell silent as the whip

cracked

and Kate screamed. She managed to look at her friend, gave a small shake of her head. Abby swallowed as the whip

cracked

but, fast as vipers, Abby reached out and grabbed it.

"Stop hurting her," Abby said.

"you know my conditions."

"... fine," Abby spat the word, spat at Tom's feet.

"A wise decision. Son, you know what must happen now."

Kate closed her eyes.

She could hear heavy boots walk across the small room, Abby yelling for them to get off her, the heavy impact of a slim woman hitting a large desk. She could hear her friend kick and fight, but everything hurt and she just wanted to fade from consciousness when she felt nails digging across her scalp.

Her eyes shot open.

"You have to watch, Kate."

William's hands in her hair, holding her head up.

"This is as much for her benefit as it is for yours."



"Son, you need to go find the Judge. I brought one with me. Go"

Tom scurried out, leaving Kate dangling from the rafters and Abby staring, trembling at this monster of a man and the thugs that would follow him to the ends of the earth. She tilted her chin up, regarding him with cool disdain, holding on to her dignity.

"Strip."

"What?"

"I am going to see what my son is marrying. You can either do it yourself or I can have my men pull those rags off you. Choose."

Kate moaned, softly, and Abby looked in her friend's direction. Blood, cum, and sweat littered the wooden planks around Kate's toes, dangling listless over the wood. Kate was the strongest person Abby knew but she would have crumbled without the line holding her up.

Would William do that to her?

Would anyone stop him if he ordered it?

Shaking fingers found and worked one of the buttons holding the her jacket closed, worked down the line from top to bottom. William stood, watching her as she struggled out of the tight top. She hung it off a nearby chair, hands lingering on the lost fabric. She bowed her head, closed her eyes – she was not going to let him or his orders dehumanize her.

“Get on with it.”

There were clasps above her hips that held her skirt up. She undid them, thumbs hooking into the skirt and lowering it down to mid-thigh, letting her step out of it, one leg after the other, careful not to get her boots tangled in the fine fabrics. She held the skirt away from her body, folded it and placed it over the jacket as one man whistled.

“She's got a fine arse,” the man said.

William stalked up to the man and backhanded him, kicked his knee out from under him and shot him in the face. He stared at the other men and stood over the corpse.

“That is my son's wife. You will speak of her with respect.”

The men shook, nodded as William turned his attention to her.

“He was right. You do have a fine ass. Let's see the rest of you.”

He walked around her as she sat, trying to cross her legs as she struggled to get her boots and socks off, setting them aside. He motioned her to stand and she did, bare save for her pantlets and a soft white camisole.

The barrel of his gun was still hot from firing when he pushed it between her pantlets and her hips, pulling it off her waist and looking down her flat belly.

“Good to see you're not worried about lice down there.”

His free hand moved down between her legs, a rude probing that brushed her out lips but did not enter her. The gun moved, held underneath her chin, his eyes boring into hers as he ran his fingers around her outer lips and inner thighs, calloused hands teasing her. She squirmed despite herself, felt heat in her cheeks and chest.

“You got grit, I'll give you that.”

The hand moved upwards, mauling one of her tits, then pulled the camisole up over her chest, off her shoulders, over her head. The gun moved away from her throat.

She thought about trying to take it from him.

He noticed the urge.

“Definitely got grit.”

He smiled, the expression twisting his face. He moved back.

“Get naked.”

She would not let them see her cry.

Blinking back tears, she pushed the pantlets down her long legs, covering her shame with her hands, letting the pantlets linger on the ground underneath her. She stared at them, the slight hint of unwanted wetness.

He let her stand like that, circling around her, moving close and letting the heat of the gun trace a long line around her exposed flesh. His hand grabbed her ass, moved up the small of her back and shoulders, up her

neck, was in her hair. He tightened his grip, pulled her over to a chair and pushed her over the back of it, her ass up and exposed, her hands catching herself on the seat. She struggled to stand and he held her there, easy.



The sound of his hand hitting her ass echoed in the small chamber.
And then it echoed again.

She was kicking out, cursing him, trying to escape, but he held her in place and kept spanking her. She spit and fought, pushed and screamed, but he held her in place and kept spanking her. She sobbed and hung her head, just trying to breathe, but he kept spanking her.

"There are three things I love in this world, Abby Walker. I love dogs, I love horses, and I love whores. Kate knows that. We all know that she's a whore already."

The men laughed as Abby sobbed, limp over the chair.

"Dad--"

"Hush, boy."

Tom was seeing this. She didn't even know when he'd re-entered the bar. She looked around with bleary eyes; there were more people now, but she couldn't focus on them, couldn't focus on any of them.

"Kate, I'm letting you name your punishment. Do you know why?"

Kate's rasp was desperate.

"Someone get her some water."

It was Tom, tilting her head back and working the cup to her lips. She swallowed. She visibly struggled with the urge to spit it in his face.

"... because you are a just man..." managed Kate, her voice raw.

William had not stopped spanking Abby.

Abby had not stopped whimpering.

"What will you do to save her, whore? Dog or horse?"

"... if I do one or... or the other..." whispered Kate, then swallowed. She needed more water and Tom helped. Abby could see him being careful, taking care not to hurt her, not to take advantage of her further. "... safe... Abby safe?"

"You're going to do both, whore. This is a punishment. Which one do you want to do first?"

"... dog..."

"Tack and rein her up, boys. Horse it is."



Teresa was waiting when they shoved the naked Abby Walker into the room.

Abby was a strong woman, defiant and willful, but her time among the Pinkertons had softened her up some. She fell into a heap and wept, perhaps thinking that she was alone. It pleased Teresa to let her continue thinking that for a few moments, she enjoying watching this private moment of despair as reality crashed down on this yankee sow.

"I don't know why you're weeping," Teresa said. She stepped into the window frame, letting the light frame her like the god she wanted Abby to think of her as. "This is the happiest day of your life."

Abby glared up from the floor, her eyes narrowing over her tears, brushing her hair out of her face. The men had groped her on the way in and her ass was a bright painful red, the same red as her cheeks, her lips, her stiff little nipples. Teresa clapped her hands, leering down.

"You're getting married to my nephew," Teresa reminded her. "I'm here to get you dressed."

"You're the one who poisoned Hagan," mumbled Abby. Teresa smiled.

"He was a good boy and survived because he did what I wanted him to," she said, then paused and looked down at her, pointed. "And then he died a little shit, chasing the wrong tail. Are you going to be a good girl, Abby, or are you going to follow him into an early grave?"

Abby howled and rose, hands like claws reaching for her face.

Abby was younger than her, probably stronger and tougher, but she'd just been physically abused and beaten. Her legs were stiff, her muscles shaking, her mind weak. Teresa stepped to one side and grabbed Abby's shoulders and drove her knee into Abby's gut, knocking the wind out of her, and threw her to the ground.

Kicking her idiot slapping hands out of the way, Teresa straddled Abby and sat down on her belly. She slapped her until Abby was crying again, then leaned down and licked the tears from her face.

"I'm going to be kind because we're going to be family," Teresa whispered in Abby's ear, then nibbled the ear and left soft kisses along Abby's cheek all the way to her nose. "But we're not family yet."

She lifted her skirts and shimmied up Abby's torso, sitting down on Abby's face, revealing her lack of pantlets. She felt Abby realize what was happening, felt her buck and fight, but she was too weak and shattered to be anything other than Teresa's tongue-pet.

"Pleasure me with your tongue, Ms. Walker, or you'll never breathe again," Teresa promised.

She could imagine Abby's face, the fierce battle and feelings she must be experiencing. She might want to die, but she was a survivor – she would do anything to live.

Abby's shoulders were tense, then relaxed. She stopped fighting, started licking.

The sense of absolute mastery over this beautiful creature was intoxicating.

Teresa quickly stole her pleasure and crawled off the mewling whelp underneath her, straightening her dress and leaning against a table to steady her shaking legs. She smiled down at the coughing crying woman, tapping Abby's cheek with her fine shoe as she struggled to breathe.

"I am satisfied that you will please my nephew," Teresa told her. She reached down, wrapping a wound camisole around Abby's slender neck and yanking it up, bringing them face to face. She licked the mixture of tears and her own juices off Abby's cheeks. "Now, let us get you dressed."



Abby's arm was linked with Teresa's, the older woman leading her down the stairs of the bar and out the door into the sun. The older woman had cleaned her up, made her look tasteful in her own clothing.

"White is for virgins, dear, and we know you are not that," Teresa told her, smiling. Abby felt the heat in her cheeks and the hate in her heart but she said nothing – nothing as Teresa poked her, prodded her, prepared her for a ceremony she did not want.

She blinked in the sun, wilted in the heat. There was a small wagon waiting for her, Tom waiting inside. He looked as uncomfortable as she felt, but William Pinkerton was there, walking around her again.

"You look lovely, dear."

There was a kindness to his voice, the lie even touching his eyes as he spun her around, then handed her up to Tom.

It was only when she was seated that she noticed their horse.

Tack and rein her up, boys. Horse it is.

Kate was naked save for a pair of boots. A bit had been fit in her mouth, her hands bound to the shaft connecting her to their small wagon. A strap ran between her breasts, down her belly, settled between her lower lips and the crack of her ass, the line of it another point of connection to the wagon. A bit had been fitted between her

lips, the reins connecting to the collar around her throat and then all the way to Tom's hands. A pair of small bells had been clipped to her breasts, another dangling between her legs.

There were no blinders – she had to see everyone watch her suffer this humiliation.

As Abby settled into her seat, she saw that someone had cut the length off a whip and shoved the handle up Kate's ass. It dangled like a tail.

“Hyah,” Tom said, flicking the reins, flicking a small whip. Kate yelped as red lines appeared fresh on her creamy white ass. She struggled to push the wagon – she was strong for her build, it was still an agonizing process, the thing in her ass swaying along with her behind, the sweat on her back and legs glistening in the sun.

The merry bells ringing called forth a large crowd, the whole population bearing witness to what the Pinkertons had done. William welcomed them all to take a feel of Kate and then join the procession.

“There is food enough for everyone at tonight's celebration!”



Everyone came.

It didn't even take them a day, Abby thought, watching as the whip washed against Kate's back, her ass, her thighs. Kate grunted and struggled and whined, a slow procession following their slow progress to the church. Kate was practically leaning fully forward to try and move the wagon by the time they got there, and finally collapsed down in the dust.

William poured a bottle of whiskey on the back of her head.

“Get her up and inside. I want her to see this.”

He held out his hand to Abby, like a gentleman offering to assist a lady. She knew better than to refuse him. He let her lead her into the church, let everyone else walk past her and settle into the pews. The organ player began

to play, judge and priest there to officiate, Teresa leading Tom to the front.

"I want you to know she said nothing until we threatened you."

It was a whisper, an aside. Pinkertons were dragging Kate's barely conscious body to the front, finding a space for her, letting her sprawl in a lewd display. William was holding her but looking at Kate with a sickening proud smile.

"It's not surprising. I've done worse to her for training than I did to her today. But the minute you were put in peril, she broke."

He looked at her and smiled, patted her hand with his own, and led her down the aisle.

No one objected to the wedding.

The kiss that sealed it felt like the prelude to rape.



Kate was barely conscious.

She tried to object to the wedding but she was too tired, her throat parched, her every part aching and dull. She was dirty, whipped, fucked. Her ass was a throbbing pain, the whip ripped out of her when her time as a horse was complete.

They dragged her up unfamiliar stairs to a fine room and for a moment she hoped they would throw her on the bed, rape her, and leave. Instead, they forced her onto a chair, tying her hands to the sides, her calves to the front legs, her throat to the back.

One of them slapped her cheek.

"If there's one thing William can't stand," the man said, "it's a traitor. He wants you to watch. This is as close as you're ever going to get again, bitch."

They left.

Kate swam in and out of a dazed emptiness, jolted awake whenever the pain grew too intense.

The pain was always too intense.

"What is she doing here?"

Kate tried to move her head so she could see the speaker, but her neck hurt too much. She whimpered, managing to focus her gaze on Abby being pulled into the room by Tom.

Abby repeated the question, but Tom shushed her. Even now, Kate could see the fear in his eyes, the set of his shoulders – but he still pushed Abby onto the bed. She tried to scurry away but Tom grabbed her ankle and pulled her back, hiking her dress up over her legs, standing on one knee and forcing it down on the floor. He spanked her already red ass, spanked her again and again until Abby was sobbing from pain new and old.

Only when Abby had gone limp – her resistance exhausted – did Tom unbuckle his pants, kneel behind her, and fuck her.

He pulled out before he came, spreading his seed all over Abby's ass, her back, her dress. He pulled it off her, stripping her naked, looking down on his wife. The site of her, legs spread and she broken, excited him enough that he fucked her again. And a third time. And then he pulled her close, holding her like he actually loved her, like he hadn't just violated her very soul.

"Mine," he whispered, kissing her forehead. "All mine."

There was a knock on the door. He pushed her off his chest, leaned over and kissed her on the lips. Kate saw Abby kiss him back, too ragged and fucked silly to understand what was happening. He pulled away and she

reached for him. He put his pants back on and she finally fell back, limp on the blankets as her husband went to answer the door.

Abby shuddered, looked at Kate, reached for her.

Kate bowed her head and cried.



"Young Jun?"

"I am that man." The well dressed Chinese gangster smiled, offered a hand. "William Pinkerton?"

"The same. An honor to meet you. How is San Francisco?"

"Complicated." Young Jun said, smiling, laughing. There was a casual cockiness to him, the fire of youth mingled with casual violence. Abby, thinking of Hoyt, knew the sort. "This your girl?"

"My daughter-in-law," William said. "My son is going to meet us after the show. Let me escort you to your home-away-from-home."

William led the Chinese man and his accomplices through the town, discussing things Abby struggled to understand. She was still in shock, the whirlwind of the last few days leaving her in stunned silence.

The Pinkertons had come in and transformed everything. Every position of power was now held by someone there to support Tom, from former Confederate soldiers to Pinkerton operatives. There wasn't a single thing that Tom now didn't control, and William through Tom.

Abby was terrified of him.

She dreamed of killing him.

"The people you represent need a work force," Young Jun said. "You pay us to stay away?"

"And infiltrate unions or kill union leaders."

"Yeah, we can do that," Young Jun laughed. "Easy money, neh?"

They moved into the bar, where burlesque had happened in the past but now the girls on stage were there selling themselves, doing tricks to attract the attention of any patron that might want to fuck them.

Any girl that failed ended up being used by the Pinkertons.

They were all motivated sellers.

"Look at all this sticky," Young Jun smirked, looking to the stage, the girls on display. "You know how to put on a good show."

"We've got something special going on tonight. Something that I think you will enjoy."

He led them to the best seat in the house, got them the best food and drink Independence could offer. Abby was seated next to William, the three men that had come with Young Jun sitting at the table and settling in to enjoy the show.

Her husband came on stage to rabid applause.

He smiled, drinking it all in as they chanted his name.

The Pinkertons had infused the town with money, transforming it in a week to a place that was thriving with promise. Big things were in store for Independence, the name now a lie as everyone became more and more dependent on Pinkerton influence and Confederate money.

"Independence!" Tom said, raising his hands, the town cheering. "It's a been a hell of a week, and tonight - on

this very stage – we've got something special for you. A special sort of beast, only recently tamed and brought to heel, here to perform for your enjoyment.”

He pulled a whip from his belt, cracked it against the stage.

“Piano!”

A tune familiar to Abby's ears began to play.

The curtains behind Tom pulled back.

The woman behind the curtains had her back to them, showing her ass. She was mostly naked, the barest of pantlets clinging to her hips, invading the crack of her ass, barely covering her lower lips. The corset hugging her tits didn't cover the tops, only held them up as an offering. She had a collar around her neck, collared like a dog, her hair a tangled mess, her eyes tired.

Her lips parted and she began to sing:

“Since my boots hit the ground, I tried to rule this town, but I'm just a silly little whore that needs to be bound.”

She turned around, exposing herself, tight belly, bald from the neck down like a child.

“Right now... right here... tell me, am I an object of lust?”

Cat calls and hollering from the crowd told her that she was.

“Do you want to feel me, take me, break me, leave me down in the dust?”

She sashayed forward, running her hands up her naked sides, cupping her breasts, her hands suddenly in her hair as she stepped off the stage.

“Does anyone here want to know me? In the Biblical sense, a repast?”

She let men fondle her ass and smiled at them, the expression forced, pained.

“Your intentions shouldn't be vague, you can take my ass, I sure hope my tight holes will last.”

She cupped her lips, pulling the pantlet tight between her legs, exposing herself as she spun and gave everyone a good look.

Some girls, unseen, crept up on stage.

“Get inside her, cock divide her, don't be careful, you can ride her! She's an animal brought to heel!”

Kate spun back up on the stage, standing in front of girls who wore little but still more than Kate Carver.

“You know, it's true, I agree! So come know me, come and take me, pin me down and fuck me.”

And Kate pranced, danced in front of the girls that had once been hers, dressed in nothing, an object selling herself, shaking her pretty tits, shaking her tight ass, holding herself open, pulling the pantlets down to mid-thigh in a perverse display.

“Get inside her, cock divide her, don't be careful, you can ride her! She's an animal brought to heel!”

She looked somehow more naked with the pantlets down to mid-thigh, her tits falling out of the corset, someone tearing that scant protection away and leaving her totally exposed.

“You know, it's true, I agree! So come know me, come and take me, pin me down and fuck me.”

Kate turned around, shook her ass, bent low and spread her legs to expose her charms, rose back up and half turned so that the whole audience could see her boobs and butt at once.

“I'm just an object of lust, to let me just be generous, aren't you just curious?”

She turned, the girls falling into step with her, all of them shaking their tits, their asses, exposing themselves.

“So get inside her, cock divide her, don't be careful, you can ride her! She's an animal brought to heel!”

Kate stepped forward, feigning modesty as she made to cup her tits, her cunt, and instead framed her shame



with her hands.

"You know, it's true, I agree! So come know me, come and take me, pin me down and fuck me."

It ended with Kate on her knees, playing with herself, begging people to fuck her until Tom cracked the whip.

"Well, that was a familiar little ditty," her husband said, and Abby managed to hold back a snuffle as Kate placed her hands to her sides, hands up shoulder height and held loose, her tongue lolling out past her lips.

Kate paled.

"I want that one," Young Jun said, pointing at Kate. William's smile was terrifying.

"I have good news."

Tom tied a leash to Kate's collar, led her through the pawing crowd, led them feel her, grope her, molest her. Tom was smiling when he handed the leash to Young Jun.

"She's your signing bonus."



Tom Davidson loved his life.

He was the mayor of a town that would vote him in for life. His father and mother kept money flowing into the town, trusting him to run things in their names. He felt like a local god, well-dressed and well-paid, wealthy beyond all reckoning, keeping cash flowing into the pockets of everyone that mattered and forcing jobs on everyone that didn't. It was a new kind of slavery, one where people were loyal to jobs that underpaid and overworked, going into debt to keep working, he and his friends encouraging them to dream big.

Tom Davidson loved his wife.

Abby Davidson was quiet, demure. She had to be watched at first and even tried to leave town a few times, but he and his boys had gone out into the desert to chase her, hogtying her and punishing her among the sand, dragging her back home and showing her that the only place she would ever be safe was under his roof. A half year into their marriage and she no longer had to be watched. She made herself pretty, not just as a pretext for failed escape attempts, but for him. He admired his wife. He loved her, but not in the way he loved his house, his suits, his power.

Tom Davidson loved his wife the way he loved the sun or oxygen. An unthinking automatic reflex.

Not having to hide it anymore made his life so much better.

A year into their marriage and she was singing for him, stripping for him, cuddling him in the long cold nights, clinging to him for warmth. It no longer felt like rape when he fucked her, like she had come to accept her life. She smiled at him, smiled at him with her eyes, told small jokes.

He found himself laughing with her, living for her. She made his life better, made the blood and screams his father sometimes forced him into bearable. He told her about it, sometimes.

Who was she going to tell? She never left the house.

Their food was delivered. Anything she wanted was brought to her.

He would give her everything but freedom.

She was so beautiful.

Abby Davidson, standing before him in her white camisole and blue-purple skirts, stripping down for him, offering herself to him. Making him hard with her lips, sitting on his lap, letting him feel her, grope her, fondle her as she straddled him, rode him, as he thrust into her, pushed her down. He gasped and she moaned, begging him for more, always more, insatiable as he always dreamed she would be.

She cooked. She cleaned. She ran the house and he ran her, the punishments fewer as she fell into the happiness he had always wanted for her, as she accepted the life he offered her.

Whatever dreams she might have had before him were dead.

He was now her everything.



Tom tried. Abby could see that.

In other circumstances he might have been a good man, but his monster of a father and the monstrousness of his mother's family robbed him of whatever good might have flourished in him.

Use that, Kate had said. He's so desperate to be loved.

And she did.

She really did try to escape, that preferable to where she was now, but she had learned to make the most of a bad situation. Tom's family sent all their paperwork through Independence and Tom kept his office in their home. When he was out whoring and fighting and being a big tough man, Abby copied those notes, all that paperwork.

No one noticed that the deliveryman looked like Hoyt.

No one noticed that the deliveryman was Hoyt.

Augustus was out there.

Kai.

Kate.

The five of them were waging a very different war, fighting insurmountable odds and wealth from the shadows, stealing what wealth and information they could and placing it where they could do the most good.

They exposed the Pinkertons, stymied the efforts of the Confederacy.

Augustus, the philosopher, the historian, got in touch with the underground railroad and turned them anti-American aristocrat, turned them into a group that would fight back against sundown towns.

Kai spread his people all over the United States, keeping the Tongs focused on the west coast as his people fled further east, finding homes along the coast, quietly strengthening labour unions.

Kate was pulled from an opium den, was Kai's personal whore in public and his assassin in private. She had good days and bad days, much like Abby herself.

Sometimes, whenever the two could, they got together and held one another, thought of the world that might have been – the world that still might be.

"We need to fix the law," Kate whispered to her, cuddling at her side in Tom's bed while Tom was out and about. "Augustus and Cailan have been talking about infiltrating the rangers."

"A Walker is going to stand among them," Abby whispered, holding Kate tight. "Someone we can trust to make this world better."

Kate left because she had to, but she would be back and back and back again, back until it was time to go.

One day, Abby knew, she would put a bullet in Tom's head while he slept.

One day soon, she would be Abby Walker again.

Until then

