



The Troubles started when the uppity colonials tried to assert their non-existent authority.

American colonials were complaining about unfair taxation or some such nonsense and had the audacity to question the Crown, as if their paltry concerns should have been worth any amount of consideration. But then the fools turned traitor and found other traitors to side with them, including the entire nation of France. It was a frustration.

When the traitors rose up to fight their idiot war and doom themselves to democracy, her family fought back with rifles and explosives. They harried the rebels in Bunker Hill, in Longue-Pointe and Kemp's Landing, burned down Falmouth.

“You could smell the traitors burning on the wind,” her grandparents told her. “Our grandparents told us so that we could tell you. Remember, darling child, that our enemies are cowards.”

Victoria's ancestors fought at the Cedars, at Three Rivers, Long Island and Kip's Bay. Their sappers were considered some of the most dangerous fighters that the British forces could employ, a nightmare for Washington's children. Victoria's ancestors and her people spanked them with fire and with death, but were eventually betrayed when the world turned upside down and they were told to stop, stop, *stop*.

But the legend and the history lived on. Some nobles pretended to set aside their titles so that they could continue to rule the land that had been given them by the King of England.

Victoria grew up hearing about how her family was the old nobility, the aristocracy that was denied their rightful place in what should have been their Barony by revolutionaries. Their family had money and influence in the American South and massaged their power and privilege there until a second war drove them to what would become Wood Oak City.

When Mr. X and his Syndicate started to rise to power Victoria's parents and grandparents recognized the opportunity. No longer would they stand by on one side of a war when they could help fund both sides and claim victory alongside the victor. That's why her parents named her Victoria – she was to learn that worldly and moral concerns were below her.

“The only thing that matters,” her parents told her, “is power.”

They told her to remember that and she did.



She met Commissioner Raymond Bernstein when she was a child. He was a distant cousin, she'd been told, another one of her family come to power in the face of American ignorance.

“My position is appointed,” he told her, sitting her on his knee, “but we make it very clear to every mayor and senator and governor who really holds sway.”

She nodded her understanding – sometimes, the best way to rule was to do so in plain site and from the shadows, to seize the means of granting titles that the rebels had thought they had won and claim those titles in perpetuity.

He ran the police and government intelligence over an entire seaboard and had connections to law enforcement worldwide. If a thin blue line were to exist, he was the one who would draw it, inform it, influence it.

In every way that mattered he was a king.



She met Mr. X back at the height of the Syndicate days.

There was a ball that her parents hosted as she came in to her teens. Her cousins were there, including some from across the pond. They were delighted to meet her and she them. Every power that mattered was there, from politics and celebrity and crime and sport, a shining jewel of the best and brightest. Their estate was electric with the power of the people there, the swaying dances and fine wines.

Mr. X loomed above it all like a mausoleum.

He was twice as tall and broad as everyone there and carried the sort of machine gun one would normally see attached to a helicopter with a terrifying ease. His fine suit was made out of soft leather, his eyes black as pitch. He stalked and people cowered, scrambled out of his way. He looked at her from toe to head, taking in the whole of her body, the whole of everything she was.

Mr. X only looked at her and she felt violated, degraded, helpless.

Her parents could not help her in this.

“**Victoria,**” he rumbled, his voice sending shivers up her spine. She stood in his shadow and so did everyone else. “**What have you learned?**”

Stammering, she told him her lessons. He stared down at her the whole time she spoke and she felt like they were the only two people in the entire world, the only two people that mattered, the only two people that ever really were. At the end of it he nodded, slowly.

“**You are a credit to your ancestry,**” he told her. “**When the time comes we will meet again.**”

He touched her, then. He reached out and he touched her. She didn't want him to. His skin felt rough, sharp, like a shark. He touched her and her skin crawled and screamed and she was shaking and his hand enveloped her entire head and then he was gone and she was trying not to cry.

A house full of some of the most powerful people in the world and he had towered over them all.



Years later, he died and the killing didn't take.

Her parents had helped provide him with a bomb when Mr. X came back from the dead. They died with him and she inherited everything – her family name, her history, her *legacy*.

“The King is dead,” she said, smiling at a number of girls she had drawn around herself. “But you know what we like to say - *Long Live the Queen.*”

They believed in her, her knights. Armed with electric and acidic and fiery explosives, she and her girls

took to the streets. She was one among dozens, among hundreds, the sole calm strategist in a swarming chaos of her own design.



The Gracias and Donovans and Dylans fell into line quickly. How were they supposed to compete with her? They were thugs, nothing but fodder to be brought under her control. They benefited from her leadership.

It was important to be a good Queen.

She took control of the underground and from there conquered downtown, the piers, the art district, the stadium. No one could stand against her; anything that got in her way was destroyed. She controlled the core of Wood Oak City. It was time, she thought, to face the Crones and then have a very specific talk with her cousin at the police precinct about *who* controlled *what*.

But then the Crones vanished.

She looked. She hired people to look. She was thinking of hiring a private investigator, someone that knew the craft. The Commissioner hated a detective named Blaze Fielding who was supposed to be the best the city had to offer. Victoria automatically thought of her and tried to contact her, but her offices had been blown up.

“I never authorized that,” she said to her inner circle. “Who did that?”

“*We did.*”



There were two of them and she didn't know either.

Victoria guessed they were twins or siblings so close that it made no difference. Shocking white hair on each, fine clothing, sitting with a casual cruelty and command at her round table. Somehow, them sitting opposite her made her table feel like there was a head and she was not it.

“Victoria and the Troubles,” the brother smirked, leaning back and exposing his throat. “You sound like an emo band So late nineties.”

“No DJ K-Washi,” the sister snarled. The brother shrugged.

“We can't all be glorious.” He flung himself to his feet, rocked back and forth on his heels, sized them all up. “You work for us, right here and now, no questions asked, and we'll let you keep your little kingdom.”

“And if I say no?” Victoria asked, also standing. Her hands were slipped into her pockets, the grenades waiting. Her court looked her, nodded, ready to scatter. He laughed.

“That was a question,” he laughed. “I'm going to beat you, but first I'll beat your little Troubles and then I'm going to beat you and make you beg to serve me in front of everyone here.”

“And me,” the sister added, standing. She draw a rapier from somewhere, metal gleaming from overhead electric lights. “I would like to do this.”

“Would you?”

“One Queen to another.”

“Well, don't let me stop you.”

They were ignoring her, so Victoria threw the grenade at them both.

The brother jumped out of the way, a superhuman leap that was like nothing she had ever seen. The girl simply batted the grenade out of the air and danced around the shrapnel, the force of the explosion rustling her hair. Victoria's eyes went wide at the impossibility of it.

“What are you?” whispered Victoria.

“More than you could possibly understand,” the sister answered, saluting with her sword.



She was so quick.

She was so quick.

She simply jumped through the explosions like they were nothing, danced around the electricity and the fire and the acid. She slipped behind Victoria's knights and took them out at the knees, leaped over their heads and stabbed them through the back, hurt them and hurt them *and hurt them*.

Through it all Victoria remained untouched, alone among all her knights and soldiers. Fire rained from her hands and the sister simply smiled, dancing through fire and lightening and acid, untouched by any of it. Her shirt was too long and descended to the top of her thighs, revealing long strong legs that were just starting to sweat as the last of the Troubles fell.

“Well,” the sister said, smiling, saluting, mocking, “shall we finish this?”

She had eyes like ice. Like a tiger. Cruel and uncaring, certain of her own power.

Victoria screamed and fought, she really did. She used every bit of strategy, every last explosive on her. The sister wanted her to use everything up, Victoria knew, and there was nothing Victoria could do, no weapon at her disposal that could keep the sister from controlling the land around her.

“I'm coming for you,” the sister said.

Victoria tried to run but the sister was fast so inhumanly fast.

The rapier lashed out, cut off her jacket, her kneepads.

“What are you doing?” asked Victoria, back up against a wall. The sister leered, licked her lips.

“Owning you,” she said. The point of her sword caught Victoria's shirt and tore down, hacked it off.

“Please,” Victoria begged.

“Not yet,” the sister said.

Victoria ran and the sister danced around her, laughing, cutting off her clothing until she was naked and

then shoved her down, cutting the backs of her knees. Victoria crawled naked on her belly, crying as it began to rain, as cold droplets exploded along her back. Wood Oak City was doused, all the fire and fury she'd brought to her kingdom smothered to smoke. The sister stalked her, stripping her panties off between one footfall and the next.

Behind them, in the distance, she could hear her knights screaming in unwanted pleasure and she shivered, cried. The sister cut at her shoulders, two shallow cuts, and suddenly her arms would not obey her commands. The brother was back there with her knights and there wasn't anything she could do to help them. There wasn't anything she could do to help herself. There wasn't anything she could
“Hey,” the sister said, kicking her over onto her back, looming over her like a mausoleum. “Remember your pride. Stiff upper lip.”



The sister sat down, smothering her.

Victoria learned that it wasn't sweat glistening on the sister's thighs.

She had to breathe and the only way to breathe was to use her lips, her tongue. She wasn't fighting to defeat the enemy on top of her – she was fighting not to die, to please her. Begging without words. Their eyes locked, the sister's eyes implacable ice, cold and cruel and utterly beyond comprehension.

The sister grabbed her hair, held her, pulling her head and hurting her, making her gasp and scream and lick lick *lick*. She was straining, convulsing as the girl above her enjoyed her, rode her, terrified her, owned her.

“I'm cumming on you,” the sister said, a sparkle in her eye, a crooked smile on her face. “What have you learned?”

Victoria saw it, then.

She knew who they were, the sister and the brother.

The brother emerged naked from the shadows, covered in the juices of her knights. He smiled as he kicked her legs open, took his place between them, and thrust into her.

She screamed, bucked, begged.

“What have you learned?” the sister said, lifting herself up just enough that Victoria could choose to beg with her words or her tongue.

She knew what that wanted, what she had to give them.

Straining neck and spine, she buried her face in the sister's cunt, squeezed down on the brother's cock.

Pleasing them was her only hope of salvation.



When Edmond "Skate" Hunter had been a teenager, he'd faced down a god of crime and won. He'd saved America from a nuclear attack. After that, everything felt dull. He'd gone through high school, college. He'd gotten into international law enforcement like his big brother, Adam.

He worked as a field agent, but even that lacked a certain something.

During a routine psychological evaluation, he was tagged.

"You've got a form of C-PTSD," a doctor informed him. "We can help, but it might take a while."

He talked with Adam about it.

"You've been caught in a bit of a malaise since that whole thing with Mr. X," Adam told him. "Therapy did wonders for me. No shame in it, bro."

He checked himself in and was recommended to a care facility in Wood Oak City. He smiled, liking the idea of going home. A dusky-skinned woman named Dr. Bernstein was assigned to his care.

"You're going to be fine, Edmond," she told him, soothed him. "Forget about the outside world for a time, and let's figure out what you want to do going forward."



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