

# Dealing Out Punishment

## Maggie's World

**Feeling herself emerge from her stupor, again, Maggie felt as if she'd been pummeled in the head and stomach. The pounding, twisting, grating pain in both areas of her body made it difficult to focus on the world around her. She needed to determine how much trouble she was in, and begin doing something to get out of it.**

**Maggie opened her eyes, the influx of sunlight causing her to blink rapidly. Scenery moved past her at moderate speed, and she realized she was in the back seat of a car, the light from mid-day filtering through the windows. She raised her body as far as possible and looked toward the front of the vehicle, which appeared to be a larger SUV, and saw heads above every seat. She slid against the leather underneath her, trying to sit. Her hands were tied behind her back, making the task all the more difficult.**

**Her body failed to respond to her commands at first, except to dole out more pain. All her life she'd been blessed with extraordinary recuperative abilities, so pain wasn't something she normally had to deal with. Even so, she didn't consider herself as someone who succumbed easily to discomfort. The fact that all her faculties had deserted her continued to anger Maggie. She wasn't used to it. Luckily, that provided more motivation for her to regain her wits and teach her captors a lesson.**

**One of the men in the seat in front of her looked around, his light eyes focusing on hers. He had a blonde crew cut and black sunglasses. Maggie stilled any attempts to move and simply stared at him.**

**"I think she's coming around," the guy with glasses said.**

**The thug in the seat next to him, who was twice as thick, with a neck as wide as the headrest behind his head, looked back to Maggie. She closed her eyes and let her head loll to the side.**

**"If she starts struggling again, we'll have to tie her up. The Boss said no more drugs," the sunglasses man said.**

**Time slowed to a crawl as she waited in the back seat, girding herself for a burst of energy her foes wouldn't see coming. She could feel muscle control coming back to her arms and legs. Unfortunately, she**

**wouldn't know how much strength she would have until it was too late to turn back.**

**From her prone position, she could see the sides and tops of buildings as the SUV cruised down the streets of New Orleans. The men did not seem to be in any hurry to get where they were taking her. They said little as the car moved along.**

**"Turn right at the next light," one of the men in the front seat said. "The Drake place is up that road about a mile."**

**With her time limited, Maggie prepared to act. As the SUV slowed down for the stoplight, she sat up in her seat. Making a tight fist and tensing every muscle, she busted the rope around her wrists and swung her right elbow, launching her body at the back of the thick man's head. The thud made by the impact sounded like rock against metal. The big man didn't make a sound before slumping in his seat unconscious.**

**The man in sunglasses turned toward Maggie upon hearing the sound. She vaulted over the seat and was on him before he could react. Her lower body landed partly on the unconscious man, while the rest of her began punishing her target. Her first punch shattered the black sunglasses and drove parts of them into the man's eye. Blood gushed from his face as he screamed. One of the subsequent three blows she delivered to his head stopped his cries, however, as he too slipped from the conscious plane.**

**As the driver, an older man with white hair and a scraggly mustache, reached back to try to subdue her, a jolt sent everyone in the car off kilter. Maggie flew into the back of the front passenger seat, then fell back against the two already knocked out men. The passenger slammed forward against the dashboard with a crunch, then landed back in his seat. With an airbag in his face, the driver made out the best.**

**Maggie righted herself quickly and looked out the windshield. They'd run into the back of a patrol car, out of which a police officer was now emerging. He had a cell phone to his ear as he looked toward the SUV, likely contemplating all the tickets he planned to write.**

**The passenger, whose relatively handsome face was marred with a bloody nose as a result of his meeting with the dashboard, opened his door and fled the car. While Maggie didn't like the element of police involvement in the escapade, she also didn't plan to let any of her kidnappers get away unscathed. She scrambled over the sunglasses**

**guy and exited the vehicle at a run. Within ten steps, she caught up to the passenger.**

**Maggie grabbed a handful of black hair and jerked the man to a stop. He was her height, but with the added muscle provided naturally by the testosterone in his veins. Surprise and anger shined through the blood dripping down his chin as he swung around to face Maggie. She greeted his expression by putting her elbow into his face. The passenger stumbled back, keeping his feet by using the brick wall of the building in front of which they stood to balance.**

**The officer called to them from somewhere behind. Maggie tried to keep her focus on the man facing her. She'd have to figure out what to do about the cop later.**

**The passenger used her moment of distraction to run again. His speed being no match for hers, though, she was on him within a moment. He tumbled to the ground with her weight upon him, landing face down on sun parched asphalt. An alley wall on either side purged them from view. Maggie rained blows at the man's face as fast as she could. One strike landed, bringing forth new blood from his cheek, then another. The man manage to block the third, throwing Maggie off balance. She slid off of him to the side as he thrust forward in an attempt to stand.**

**"We're going to get arrested," the man panted.**

**Maggie paused a moment. "I don't care," she said.**

**The enraged woman moved forward, her feet barely touching the pavement. She thrust her hand into the passenger's chest, sending him flying the final five feet into the nearest wall. His dark head bounced off the bricks in deceptive silence before he slid to the ground, his eyes fixed and closed. Part of her wanted to move in and finish him off to send a clear message to Jeremiah that the little lesson he wanted to give to the Drake Family was not well received. Killing this man now would cause too many problems, unfortunately. Some other Company member would have to suffer later.**

**"Miss, put you hands up and step away," a stern voice said from behind her.**

**Maggie thought she recognized it, and she hoped she was wrong. When she turned around, she saw that she wasn't. "Hi, Reed," she said, staring down the barrel of his handgun.**

**Detective Reed Hackman pinned her with his deep green eyes, and there was a flash of some unidentifiable emotion across his face.**

**Regardless of whether he knew her or not, the policeman was all business. In his tan slacks, blue shirt, and brown sports coat, he looked a little like he'd stepped out of Miami Vice. The fact that he had the ruggedly handsome features of a movie star didn't dispel that image any.**

**"Are you injured, Miss Drake?" the detective asked, still holding his gun on her.**

**"No, I don't think so. But this man—the men in the SUV—they tried to kidnap me," she said. She supposed that some story close to the truth would be her best way out of this situation with the police.**

**Reed moved his gun toward the unconscious man and walked closer to examine him. The man didn't move, even when Reed used his foot to move the man's arm. "What happened?"**

**"He made me get out of the car and run with him. I tripped him and he ran into that wall," she said. A wave of exhaustion hit her, and Maggie felt herself stagger a little.**

**The officer closed the distance to her and put an arm around her back to steady her. "Are you okay?" Reed asked.**

**Maggie put her hand on his chest, taking a moment to steady herself and clear her head. "I think so," she said. The burst of adrenaline that she'd used to launch her attack must have masked the effect of the drugs in her system.**

**The passenger awoke and Reed cuffed him, then Reed guided her back to the SUV. "Why did these guys kidnap you?" he asked.**

**"Something about my father. I'm not sure," Maggie said.**

**The driver of the car now sat on the curb, rubbing his likely aching forehead. The two men from the backseat sat beside him, both looking as though they'd been crash test dummies. Both had blood dripping from their faces. The uniformed police officer whose car they hit stood beside them, writing on a notepad.**

**As they approached, the driver looked up. A mask of anger transformed his face when he saw Maggie. "There she is," he said, pointing.**

**The officer looked over to her, his brow crinkling. "This is the woman who took all three of you out?"**

**“She made us wreck,” the sunglasses man said weakly. He held a hand over his eye, which no doubt needed medical attention.**

**With approaching sirens in the background, the uniformed officer walked toward Reed. He spoke in a hushed voice. “Something strange is going on here. These guys claim this woman attacked them after they picked her up for sex.”**

**Maggie perked up. “I am not a hooker,” she said.**

**Pushing the fourth man toward the officer, Reed put up a hand to calm her. “Ms. Drake asserts that the men abducted her.”**

**“I see,” the man in uniform said, looking her over.**

**“I don’t think it’s very likely that she could overtake four men,” Reed said.**

**The other policeman agreed. “Not very.”**

**“That would explain why they ran into you,” Reed offered. “Let’s arrest them now and try to get all the answers later.”**

**The uniformed officer took the passenger to his damaged squad car. Maggie stood by Reed, wondering how much trouble this investigation, added to his murder investigation, was going to cause. The Drake Family had managed to avoid too much involvement with the police since she’d known them. Knowing some of the crimes committed by its members, that was really amazing. Seeing the trend change was not a good sign.**

**“Would you like me to take you home, Miss Drake?” Reed asked.**

**Maggie snapped out of a daze. Her mind and body were still not recovered from the drugs The Company’s men had used on her. “No, I need to get back to the store. It’s just a few blocks away. I can walk.”**

**“Are you sure? I could drive you over there.”**

**She shook her head. “I’m sure. I could stand a little more fresh air to clear my head.”**

**“Okay. An officer will be in touch shortly to take a full statement about this. We’ve got your number,” Reed said.**

**Maggie nodded and bid him goodbye. Before she was contacted again by a police officer, she needed to have a really good story to make this all go away.**



**Maggie Drake sat in her office chair at Drake's Carved Wood, letting her head clear. Whatever substance The Company's henchman had used to incapacitate her was running its last course through her system. She willed her body to heal itself to perfection. Her father was on his way to the store and she had to break the news to him about Marco Breaux.**

**Drake had been patient with Marco and considered him a true, unwavering member of the Family. There had been more transgressions than Maggie knew of over the years, but as with all the members of their group, Drake allowed a wide margin of error. It was in their kind's nature not to follow the rules. Marco's latest little move, though, was most likely enough to send Drake over the edge. No matter how many years her father had known the man, Maggie didn't think he'd be very forgiving in this instance.**

**Everyone had a story. Many Family members had long, winding tales. Maggie didn't know Marco's story well. She'd spent quite a bit of time with him on Family business, but he wasn't very forthcoming. Frankly, she didn't think of him as very smart, so they didn't talk much. She knew that he was much older than he looked, and had some connections with Drake from the early days of the Family's existence. Maggie didn't know the details of that link, but she knew it was strong enough that betrayal should have been the last thing Marco would ever do.**

**The over door bell dinged and Maggie left the office to greet her father. He was wearing a black tuxedo with a thin, black tie that shimmered under the showroom floor lighting. His gray hair was slicked back with product and his face shaven clean. Warin Drake did not look happy to be responding to her urgent request that he come to see her. He looked liked he thought he had better places to be.**

**"Where are you going tonight?" Maggie asked. She stopped beside the sales counter and leaned against the side.**

**"It's nice to see you too, Magnolia," he said, a sharp edge to his voice. "I'm on my way to the Robertson Food banquet. Why did you need to see me?"**

**Despite the generally lacking moral compass belonging to her father, he did occasionally give back to the community. A charity dinner let him shine, as well as accomplishing that goal, so it was a win, win.**

**“It’s Marco,” Maggie said. She was unsure of how to go on.**

**Drake raised his eyebrows and held out both hands as if he were waiting to catch a giant ball. “What about him, Maggie?”**

**“He’s working with The Company. He’s betrayed us,” she said. She watched her father’s body tense, and his eyes go steely.**

**Licking his lips, Drake took a deep breath. “How do you know this?”**

**“Some of Jeremiah’s guys picked me up tonight. He wanted to send you a warning. I saw Marco with him.”**

**“What do you mean, they picked you up?” Drake asked.**

**Maggie shrugged her shoulders. “They drugged me with something and took me to his place. His thugs ended up in jail after we had a run in with the police, so I wasn’t able to punish them, unfortunately.”**

**“Are you okay?”**

**“I’m—fine,” Maggie said, surprised he bothered to ask.**

**Drake shook his head and began pacing. “This is unacceptable. Marco knows better.”**

**Maggie didn’t like the look on her father’s face. Drake, except for the occasional raging, angry, temper tantrum, usually hid his feelings as well as a snake about to strike. His caged animal motions now left little to the imagination as to how he was feeling.**

**“Marco’s scared. He doesn’t know where to run,” Maggie said.**

**Drake stopped in front of her, shifting his hands to his hips and standing defiantly. “No member of the family has need to run unless they’ve done something to be afraid of.”**

**“Marco isn’t smart enough to know that. We need to deal with him and quickly,” Maggie said.**

**“I agree with you. Marco must die.”**

**Maggie nodded. She didn't want to deal with having to kill one of her own kind. It wasn't natural. Marco had left them little choice, though. Maggie didn't savor killing. But now, with Marco, she knew Marco had to be eliminated.**