

Chapter 13 - The Rest of the Story

I was right though, and when Sandy and I made it to the bed, we just collapsed in each other's arms. We exchanged gentle kisses and whispered sweet nothings to each other. We were both enjoying the feel of naked skin when the sheets moved a bit and the bed shook some.

I looked over my shoulder to find Mel and Hailey had decided to join us, and like the two of us, gently held each other, kissing quietly.

I turned to smile at Sandy, but she was already in the clutches of the sleep fairy, so I just tenderly wrapped my arms around her joining the slumber.

Later in the evening after we had all rested adequately, we once again converged in the kitchen area to decide what we were going to do for dinner.

The evening's activities were more or less predetermined by Janet's condition. It had improved some during the day, but she still wanted a rest so that she'd be ready for the "free for all" tomorrow night.

Mel and Hailey had raided the "storage facilities" earlier and had grabbed a few steaks, which were well thawed and ready to throw on the "Q", and there were always veggies at my place, so it was just a matter of choosing which to steam.

I figured I'd surprise everyone with one of my "specialties", scalloped potatoes.

So with the assignments passed out, I started first since my dish would take the longest. It was actually up to me to choreograph the meal. I was actually pretty good at getting everything done and on the table at the same time so it was hot'n'fresh.

We chatted while performing our various tasks. Mel and Hailey had the veggies. Janet and Sandy were the wizards of the BBQ grille.

So in about 90 minutes we sat down and had a meal that couldn't be beat, sucked down a good bottle of red wine and generally enjoyed life.

Clean up was a breeze and we grabbed another bottle of wine and headed into the living area to do whatever it was we decided to do.

Sandy and I sat together with our arms around each other just enjoying the kind of closeness we had only been able to enjoy in the distant past. It had been quite some time since we were able to be with each other without worrying about looking over our shoulders.

I could see that both Mel and Hailey were enjoying seeing Sandy and I together. Our conversation earlier gave them some level of appreciation for our relationship without creating any concern on either of their parts. They were comfortable in their positions, and to hear them tell the story were happy that they were able to share, especially with Sandy.

If they wanted any deviation in the schedule, it was just a quick word with the other and maybe some spirited negotiations but there was never any contention.

I continually marveled at my fortune. Where I may have had the urge to pinch myself to see if I was in a dream, I didn't even want to know anymore. If it was a dream, just let me sleep!

Even with our nap, we were all still pretty tired, and knew we had a big night planned for Thursday before Janet's departure. Keeping that in mind, we all called it an early crash.

At Mel and Hailey's invitation, Janet bedded down with them so that Sandy and I could spend our night together though we told them we were finished with the "sex" portion for the day.

Re-thinking things Janet decided it would probably work best if she just took one of the other guest rooms so that the "youngsters" didn't keep her up. She was still dead tired and wanted to sleep.

We all kissed and hugged around and migrated to our chosen rooms to hopefully get some semblance of rest.

Yeah, right!

We slowly undressed and showered together; tender caresses, kisses, and hugs being the rule. We both knew that this was not going to be the last time we'd be together for a long time like it has been in the past. With Mel and Hailey in the picture, we'd be able to meet a bit more often, though our requirement to be extremely aware of our surroundings and careful about our meets, we now had a legitimate solid cover that we could use. We were used to covering our tracks, so it wasn't a foreign concept.

We dried each other softly and made our way to the bed where we laid together in each other's arms, giving each other tender pecks on the lips, eyes, nose, neck and other various spots that we could reach.

"Bob, do we have a problem with the conversation we had this morning?"

I could tell there was honest concern in her voice. It was really up to her, by her choice, to maintain the safety of our exile. It's why I had left it with Mel and Hailey that Sandy would control our time. She knew the best opportunities, so she could have our meetings happen without incident, though we were both in the habit of looking over our shoulders whenever we were together. It was just a self-preservation habit.

"I don't think so Lish", actually slipping a bit using her real name. "I think curiosity will overcome their present level of fear, but that gives me some time to decide how to deal with it."

Then with a loving gaze into her eyes, "I think I'm going to need your help though."

Hearing her real name for the first time in quite some time brought some wetness to her eyes. Like me, she missed Alicia.

"Jason. Oh god, how I miss the real 'us'. But do we dare? We have to be Bob and Sandy don't we? I know we can never be a couple again, but I do miss it."

"So do I Hon, and to be honest, I can't believe what's been happening to me over the past months."

"I think we're going to have to tell them some of it," she said wistfully, "But how much is going to be enough?"

"I think we can probably get by with the last mission, and the name changes. They both seem to be accepting of the fact we have secrets, and they say they understand the need but we both know they haven't a clue."

She started to chuckle a bit, "Yeah, tell them about our biggest failure."

"Lish, you know as well as I do it wasn't a failure."

"I know Jas, but look where it got us."

We were both quietly crying on each other's shoulders now, "Jas, I want so much for Alicia and Jason to make love again."

"Me too, Honey. Me too. I just don't ever want to slip with the girls, because you know that will cause more questions."

She nodded, "It's so beautiful Jason. I think Sandy is so ingrained in me, that if you call me Alicia, I'll look at you funny, but only for a nanosecond or two. Do you think we can do it once in a while, or should we just forget?"

"Lish, you know that neither of us can, nor ever will forget. I think the most important thing is that Mel and Hail never use our names, and the best way to make sure that happens is to make sure we never slip with them. As long as we don't make a habit of it, I want desperately for you to be Alicia for me again, and I want to be Jason for you. The hard part for me is not being able to have the relationship we had. You were my world Alicia, but I'm not allowed to live

in that world anymore. It was difficult for a long time and I hate to admit it but having Mel and Hailey now has been an immense help in coping."

"Yeah, I have to admit I was a little jealous at the beginning, but then I realized it was the best thing that has happened to either of us in a long time. The side benefit is that it gives you and I a reason to be together that won't raise any eyebrows anywhere."

I looked at her and smiled. As usual, she was absolutely right.

"Oh Jas, I wish to god we could go back and change things, but I know it's not possible."

As she was saying that, she wrapped her arms around my neck and began to hold me tightly. We both lost ourselves in our own thoughts for a time.

Sandy got up and went to the "ladies room" to change into something to sleep in.

As is my habit, I began to over think everything that had happened today. Well I don't really over think things but because of the training I analyze every little nuance to see if there are any flaws, holes or misconceptions in whatever it is I'm analyzing.

While Sandy was gone, I'm thinking about Mel and Hailey and what I can do to appease their curiosity. Probably tell them the truth would be the best place to start. Well, as little of the truth necessary to quench their thirst.

It was going to be a fine edged sword, or as Col. Kurtz said, "I watched a snail crawl along the edge of a straight razor. That's my dream; that's my nightmare. Crawling, slithering, along the edge of a straight razor... and surviving." I couldn't give too much, but I couldn't hold back either. The devil is in the details.

I knew that at some point, I was going to have to come up with something to satisfy Mel and Hailey's

curiosity surrounding what we didn't tell them. They accepted it for now, but I had no doubt that the analytical curiosity they were both blessed with would get the better of them eventually. I know it would have raised a lot of questions in my mind if it were me.

We had just whetted the curiosity and I knew it would fester until one or the other would come to ask. It was only going to be a matter of time.

How can I tell them that in a "past life", almost literally, that Sandy and I were "married" to each other? There was no ceremony or paperwork, but in our line of work those kinds of "marriages" happened all the time.

We lived together, we slept together, we ate together, and we worked together. We laughed, cried, and had exceptional sex together.

If anyone were to notice the couple in the nondescript red brick house with the double car garage who had just kind of "showed up" in the neighborhood one day, they'd have just assumed that we were a happily married couple that kept to ourselves.

Some would have made the attempt to welcome us to the neighborhood and we would have done whatever we needed to do to appease their welcome, but we wouldn't have "integrated" into the group. We had no idea how long we'd be there, and our work wasn't conducive to conversation. Those discussions needed to be avoided at all cost.

We were friendly but extremely standoffish so though accepted, we weren't sought out which suited us fine.

Our families knew some of what we did for a living so they were aware that we were in danger most of the time when we were gone. They just accepted us as a family and treated us like we were officially married. "Living together" was not an abhorrent concept to either of our families and typically both mothers continually queried when we were going to have our first child.

We finally had to tell them that in our line of work a child wouldn't fit very well because we'd rarely be around and couldn't drag a child around with us while working. It just didn't fit the lifestyle. We did let them know that as soon as we retired we would give it some serious consideration.

How can I tell Mel, Hailey and even Jessi eventually, the details surrounding our final mission, a mission that cost us not only our careers but also our very lives. No, we didn't die but our lives were over nonetheless.

Alicia and I were an elite team, clandestine operatives working on a complex mission to break up a bevy of opposing radical political factions, which were a hindrance to peace initiatives in the region.

Every time that peace was deemed possible, one of the groups would do something to fuck it up. We were tasked with causing the divergent groups to focus on killing each other rather than the peace process.

It was thought that once the leaders of the factions were in the ground a majority of their followers would go back to being farmers or whatever it was they did before.

There were numerous groups of tribal factions that wanted everything their own way. Problem being that having it their way was detrimental to everyone else in the area. Being tribal in nature, there were no conciliatory possibilities. It was the 'my way or the highway' syndrome.

Groups that would stab their own mothers in the back if it would give them an advantage over another. These were ruthless barbaric people that used ruthless methods in an attempt to ensure they got their way. The interesting part was that they all kissed each other's asses, and made nice-nice while maneuvering to get an advantage over the other. Even more interesting, is that they all knew what was going on and chose to play anyway.

It was our job to bring them all together in such a way that the groups would fight with each other.

The objective of all of this was killing off as many of them as possible. We were aiming at the leadership and those who would destabilize the whole situation, the goal being that they would no longer have the capacity to elicit the friction they had been creating.

Since we were not native to the region, everything we said and did was questioned, but we had forged some good relationships with the intention of causing problems so that the said killing would seem to be "self induced".

"The secretary will disavow any knowledge of your existence...blah, blah, blah..."

How do I tell the girls that on our last mission together, which turned out to be the final mission for each of us, we had worked for over 19 months in that little red brick house to set up a masterful "sting" that didn't exactly come off as planned, they never seemed to, but in the end, didn't totally backfire.

As sometimes happens with FUBAR realities, it actually turned out better in the end. We achieved about 99% of our goals in an operation that didn't happen the way we had lined it out. Even fuck ups can turn to gold.

In clandestine operations one needs to be very flexible as to plans. In the nine years that I was involved there was never once a plan came off as it was originally drawn up. Everything seems to end up being improvisation, based on circumstances with a whole fleet of alternative solutions.

One major objective is to insulate yourself from the actual operation as it goes down. We had been extremely successful at being elsewhere when the shit hit the fan, at least up to this point, and things were actually going rather well this time. We were actually nearing the end of the planning and about to pull the trigger, but it turns out there was sand in the Vaseline!

The real big problem we encountered was that we both inadvertently ended up in a crossfire between two of the opposing factions who had prematurely

discovered the other was there trying to do an end around on the other. An error of timing, but an error that was totally out of our control if we were to remain anonymous. Without that anonymity we'd have both been dead in an instant.

Fortunately, they wouldn't figure out that "we" made sure they were both there in the hopes they would end up killing each other off. It looked like I was there accidentally and that Alicia showed up looking for me and wondering what the gunfire was all about. The fact that we were both armed to the teeth may have raised some questions, but those that would have raised them were soon going to be dead.

The timing got fucked up when one of the "big cheese" leaders couldn't keep his dick in his pants and went out to find some "local female companionship". Hey, he's a guy! He only had 8 wives, but was away from home so he was on the prowl looking for some strange.

While doing so, he discovered that his main rival was in town attempting the same type of backstabbing that he himself was trying to pull, and it was only by the chance of choosing different "watering holes" they hadn't run into each other sooner. That would have worked out a bit better for us because had they discovered each other earlier, the shit would have been on the fan before I got there thus saving me and unfortunately Alicia some extremely heavy wounds.

Having discovered his rival, instead of continuing his pursuit of some local pussy, he decided to round up his "boys" and attempt a preemptive strike.

That's actually what the original plan... remember the plan? ... Had called for, but he and his henchmen went off totally unorganized and half-cocked - like most of those types of idiots do. It didn't help that most were also hopelessly drunk.

Unfortunately, working diligently to make the original plan happen, I ended up in the wrong place at the wrong time, when the shooting started. Remember, timing is everything.

I was not a happy camper, but as I say, improvising is one of those things at which I had proven to be very adept.

Unfortunately, when the shit hit the fan this trip, I was totally exposed to both groups, allowing each group leader to figure out, more or less, who I was and what I was doing, which lead to the why I was doing it.

Neither of the group leaders was particularly happy with me at that given moment, but they were very inebriated and more concentrating on their rival, figuring they'd take care of me later.

I do have to say, that in the confusion, and their lack of rational thought processes, I was able to take out both of the factional leaders and their upper echelon lackeys. That eliminated the recognition factor temporarily, but in the meantime each of the groups, sans leadership, had drunkenly hunkered down to blast each other with me still stuck, more or less, in the middle.

Having a gun, but not having much cover to hide behind, I was able to at least shoot back. Each group duly noted my continuous firing at both sides, so then I was now a target of convenience for both sides. They didn't recognize what I had to do with anything, but they saw I had a weapon and that I was using it in both directions. I wasn't supposed to choose sides.

I had been hit at least five or six times before Alicia, hearing the gunfire before the plan called for it, made the scene, found me in the crossfire, and bleeding quite profusely.

Without hesitation, she carefully moved towards me, her gun blazing in a very careful, wide, sweeping pattern, to cover each side. It actually turned out to be a pretty good move, because while she still had rounds in the magazine it kept their heads down and for the most part, "enemy" guns went fairly silent.

But alas, there are only so many bullets in a gun, and even with the trigger being feathered they tend to run out eventually.

Now, Alicia was no virgin with an AK-47, so she was feathering the trigger only popping off 2 to 3 rounds at a time, but the bottom line is the magazine finally went empty. She had more, lots more, but before she could get re-loaded, she moved in to grab me and drag me off to a spot where I couldn't be hit anymore.

Adrenalin is a wonderful drug. Under normal circumstances Sandy, uh... Alicia would not have been able to move me at all as dead weight. Pumped with adrenalin, she grabbed the collar of my shirt and dragged me, like a rag doll, very quickly out of the line of fire.

Unfortunately for Alicia, it wasn't quite quick enough.

I sat against the wall where she propped me up, and noticed that she was bleeding as well.

In the mayhem she had been hit three or four times herself, and as we both sat in the small room she'd found, panting heavily, and in a lot of pain. Thankfully I wasn't bleeding nearly as badly as I had been -- I was probably running low -- she made some desperate calls to "our friends" for some assistance.

While we were waiting for help to arrive, between the two of us we greased 8 or 9, of the opposing "combatants", maybe more... we weren't counting at that point...

They had noted our little hiding place and I suppose figured we'd caused them enough grief for one evening and mounted what I guess a drunk would call an assault.

As they came to the door either she or I just raked them with one of the AK's and fortunately neither Alicia nor I took any more hits, or so I thought.

We had plenty of ammunition, already packed into magazines, so there was no running out at this point as long as our friends showed up fairly soon. We both feathered our triggers; neither of us ever fired holding the trigger down full auto. It's the training.

Full auto only sprays bullets and gets uncontrollable at some point because of recoil, besides it only takes a few seconds to blow through a whole magazine at full auto.

After what seemed like hours, but was probably only 5 minutes or less, the SEAL squad we were "operating with" came in to finish the battle and get us the hell out of Dodge.

By the time they dragged me out and assessed the situation Lish was all over me, putting down enough tears that I was in danger of drowning had I not had experts in waterborne combat surrounding me.

Unbeknownst to either Alicia, or me, one of the SEAL team members was shot up as well. Not nearly as badly as me but a little worse than Alicia, but he was the lead man in and took concentrated fire on himself taking it off of the two of us. The rest of the team took care of the remaining drunks.

One of the members of the SEAL team was a corpsman so began working on me in earnest. I had lost a lot of blood, but he managed to halt the remaining flow in very short order. I think he just shoved gauze pads in the holes with his fingers. Sandy had been pushing on the wounds to stop the flow and was literally covered with blood, both hers and mine.

Sandy refused any treatment until I'd been taken care of. Having set up an adequate perimeter in the middle of "enemy territory" the team leader called for a Medevac of three wounded, one very critical and two less so, but with multiple GSW (gun shot wounds). The helo bounced in and picked up the SEAL, Sandy and I, and in less than 15 minutes we were all on board a hospital ship located in the area.

I guess I was in surgery for a couple days total so the doctors could patch up a lot of holes. After stabilizing me on the ship, they flew us both to a "real hospital" for ultimate recovery.

Those shipboard docs are the best! Hands down, they are the very best trauma docs on the planet!

Alicia had refused to leave my side, during the entire ordeal. They tried, but Alicia's one stubborn woman when she wants to be.

I had tubes, hoses, needles and all kinds of things running to my body and Alicia was there to guard against any malfunction. As you might imagine, there were tubes, hoses and needles sticking out of her as well. She was awake; I was not.

Usually in a "military hospital" there is separation between men and women in rooms, but while Alicia recouped from her wounds, she made them push her bed over next to mine so she could hold my hand. It was probably that hand holding that gave me the will power to pull through.

The powers that be, not used to being told "no", had a chat with our "command" trying to tell them how uncooperative we were being in their rules and regulations. They were essentially told that by instructions from the highest authority they were to provide us anything we wanted in any way we wanted it. I guess if Alicia had wanted gold forks and knives with dinner they'd have somehow come up with them. They weren't used to being so authoritatively shut down, but they understood whom the "highest authority" was.

The overall success or whatever of our mission was being studied but everything they told Alicia was positive. There was no hint of what was to come.

I guess I spent about 4 months in the hospital recovering from my wounds. Fortunately, Alicia's weren't as extensive, so after her recoup she didn't need her bed any longer, but she still spent just about every minute of every day holding my hand, sometimes yelling at me through tears, "that we were not going to be doing 'this kind of shit anymore'." I was in no position to argue.

Little did she know.

But our covers had been blown, big time. It was all over the worldwide media with 27 8x10 color glossy photographs with a paragraph on the back explaining what each picture was. I guess "they" had ID photos of the both of us; they somehow got photos

of the SEAL team extracting us. Fortunately, like everything else in our operations, the photos were not actually accurate. They had photos of the inside of the room we had defended showing the huge puddle of blood and god knows how many empty shell casings.

We had been operating with so many sides at the highest levels, pulling chains, pointing at doorways to nowhere, leading multiple foreign intelligence agencies on wild goose chases using some of the most magnificent disinformation I'd ever seen in my career. The only bunch that wasn't out to eliminate us was our own and I wouldn't be all so sure about that in some circles.

We had actually been too successful for our own good. When you're that good at doing what you do, you'll invariably step on toes, and as it turns out, we'd stepped on a lot of them; some pretty big ones.

We were damned good at what we did, Alicia and me. The best.

We made one hell of a fantastic team. We could read each other's minds in most situations so even when things diverged from the "plan", we were always still on the same page.

It may sound like an inflated ego, but we were the best, which is why we got assigned the missions we did.

Once I was released from medical care we were called into the "head office" where we were told of our impending fate.

We were too hot and would be unable to operate ever again. They gave us medals, and citations attesting to our prowess, but we couldn't take them out of the room. We couldn't even share our triumphs with our families. Ever.

The future was totally voluntary on our part, but we were essentially assured that we'd both be dead in less than a week if we went out the door. Essentially our "faces" were pretty much as well known as the president. Fortunately, the faces that "everyone" was

familiar with were not our real faces, so there was some level of anonymity in that, but not enough to make anyone comfortable. "The world" was looking to eliminate the thorns that had been sticking in their ribs.

So we had decisions to make.

They put us up in rooms, but we only shared one of them. We had long conversations. We made love a lot, and we fucked a little, but eventually we both came to the same depressing conclusion.

We needed to disappear. We both cried on each other's shoulders because we both understood what the other would be giving up.

All the worldwide media had reported that "we" had been very seriously wounded, so the fact that we had died was a plausible cover.

To disappear we could never have any contact with our families again. That was the hardest.

They would be told that we'd been "Killed in Action". The families would be given a couple flag draped boxes to put in the ground, they'd be given our insurance money as though we were dead and then Jason Croft and Alicia Barrett would no longer exist.

Essentially it was the same kind of deal as the criminal "Witness Protection Program", but taken about 3 or 4 levels higher. If you really wanted to and had the right access or connections you could find someone in the criminal system. Once in the program we were entering, there were only four people on the planet that knew anything, and we were two of them.

All other paths led to a cemetery.

Theoretically, the only way we'd be found is if we somehow blew it or some agent somehow got extremely lucky.

There were very few people anywhere that even knew what we actually looked like. There were no surgeries or the like to change our appearances but when we were on operations we were always disguised so our

disguises would be easily recognized but probably not us.

Family was the only variable. If family spotted us we'd have to plead look-alike and hope for the best. If they didn't buy it, we'd have to deal with it as best we could and yes termination was considered a legitimate option.

Sorry. I could not terminate one of my sisters if I was somehow found out. I'd rather die myself than harm one of them. Sandy's the same way about her brother and sister, so that "method" was off the table in our minds. Not a serious option.

They gave each of us a cover story, a plausible past, a very large eight figure chunk of change, a house, car and all the other things a person would have in life including the "sincere thanks from a government well served". What a fucking crock.

Because our families were more east than west they sent us to the west coast. I chose north, she chose south, and Jason Croft became Robert Lane and Alicia Barrett became Sandra Thomas.

We changed our appearance a little, Sandy dyed her hair and I grew mine long, but since no one really knew us, it was pretty safe to assume the overseas contingent wouldn't recognize us. They could find the names of the agents that caused their problems, but they'd find that those agents were dead and buried. I suppose we could only hope they wouldn't go so far as to dig up the boxes.

So I decided to return to being the Hippie I was before I left, and Sandy decided to become a chauffeur. Neither of us had to work based on the monies we were given, but neither of us were the type that could just sit around. I invested a little in the Mini-Condo, mutual funds, and started doing craft shows with my "wares."

It is actually a pretty good cover. Neither of my sisters had ever been more than 50 miles from our hometown. I guess Sandy's weren't much on travel either. What's with that? I'd go fucking crazy if I was still in my hometown! I couldn't wait to get out of that place!

Sandy and I got together a few times a year for some down and dirty sex, and some days of commiseration and mutual mental relaxation, but Sandy was in control of the timing as well as the locations. She was far better than I at keeping track of external forces.

Things hadn't really happened until I hooked up with Mel. We had talked about it and decided that she was going to be my "driver" every chance we got.

I worked that out with her management. Didn't matter what they wanted, when I needed her she was made available. I was also considering setting her up as an independent contract driver with her own company and that was what turned her boss around. He was being a real prick because as Sandy had always played it, she really needed this job, which is why she was always available any time...blah, blah, blah.

One quick mention of her leaving got his attention real quick.

Gee, I think we had some practice at setting up that kind of operation. If we were going to attempt it, the company would probably be in Mel and Hailey's name just for show. But that was just in the thought process. It hadn't even gelled in my mind yet. I had no doubt we'd make it happen someday.

Now the plan could work out well because I had Mel and Hailey, which would "cover me," and she was just "driving" for the "rich dude". He made "room" for her to stay with the group when it was needed. Though they were all bi-sexual women she continued to maintain her own space.

She was also a known bi-sexual and so were the two other women at the house, so she was visiting Mel or Hailey and not necessarily the "rich dude".

She had done very well with her investments as well, so a couple thousand a month to maintain appearances was smaller than pocket change.

Sooooo, tonight was to be Sandy's first night with me at the mini-condo. I don't think Mel or Hailey understood how much the two of us were going to enjoy and take advantage of this night.

They had seen us in the hot tub and knew that our sex was very explosive. It wasn't supposed to really explode until we were in LA. I don't want to get ahead of myself, it's really nice that this trip worked out the way it did.

I think we were both very much looking forward to some tender, sensual, caring sex like we had in the old days. I know she hadn't had any of that in a long time because she didn't sleep around.

She is bi, quite obviously, but as far as I know, I am still only one of two guys that she'd ever slept with, and since the first one was "before service" she hadn't had intercourse with a man in quite a while. It was all part of her being careful.

She's back from the powder room. I suppose it's time to get on with it.

Hurt me hurt me!