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Life After War
Adrian's Eagles

Book 2

by

Angela White

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Chapter One

Hook, Line, and Sinker

April 6th

On 34, near Union Center, South Dakota

1

“Do not kill him.”

Cesar’s guerillas had the lone man surrounded before the gold convertible was fully stopped.

Allowing it, Dean’s harsh countenance dared one of them to make the mistake of touching him. He had come to talk, but like a wounded animal, he would kill right now with little provocation. There was no doubt these men had heard everything over the CB and the waves of energy shooting from the witch would have been impossible to miss. The slaver now had his proof of their words.

Cesar considered these things as he strode toward the black man who’d been sitting in the center of the muddy, abandoned site when they pulled in. It was Safe Haven’s latest area and Cesar didn’t like it that the twin knew him well enough to predict where he would show up.

The guerilla leader had been certain both brothers were dead, and from the look of the

grieving man in the cold center of camp, he guessed only one of them had survived the encounter. It served them right for trying to take her alone.

Why would Dean come? Vengeance for his brother? To try to take over his men and attack recklessly? Cesar did not intend to kill the brother if he could avoid it. After viewing and hearing Safe Haven's protectors, he now wanted every deadly hand he could get. There was no doubt that Dean was that and more. Still, Dean had to know who was in charge.

"You should have called uz. We could have taken her from a group that size."

Dean's face was a mask of hatred that Cesar was careful to ignore for the moment. Business came first. There would be time for lessons later.

"We had an opening and took it. They weren't away from the others long enough for you to get there."

José glared at the disrespect, moving closer to his cousin.

Cesar shrugged, stretching tiredly. "The only thing that matters is what you planned to do once you had her."

Dean glowered up from his seat on the muddy ground, not feeling the sting of the cold wind as it swept over them. "Get our share of the pie."

Cesar frowned, unfamiliar with the saying, and the twin blew out a sigh of disgusted contempt.

“Her first orders would have been to destroy that camp. Yours was next if you came for her.”

José drew his pistol and stepped forward, but Cesar laughed and waved his second in command away.

“Yo hermano was the balls, si?”

“Always.”

“Now, maybe you are both.”

Cesar extended a hand that Dean took warily, letting the slaver help him up.

“Come. Let us share a whore in your brother’s honor and I will tell you about the team I sent to get the tank. They are closing in. We will meet Safe Haven in the middle.”

2

Dawn was still an hour away when Angela sat up with a fast jerk, unaware of the men flinching at the movement. Her nightmare had drawn them and they listened, worried.

“It’s coming.”

Marc was the one they turned to and he understood their hesitation when she peered at him with orbs that held no trace of Angela, only her witch.

“He has to talk to the weather woman. She dreams of it. *Beware.*”

Marc shifted restlessly as the wind gusted, shaking the tent. If Angie said something was coming, then it was.

“It’s the nightmares, right?” Seth asked, mind flashing to the beautiful sorceress who had danced through his. “We all have them now.”

“Not always. Sometimes, it’s something more.” Marc turned to Angela. “Is it the slavers?”

“No,” she answered, haze clearing a bit. “He has to talk to Samantha—today.”

Neil and Kyle exchanged glances, both thinking of the man that had come in with Samantha. Rick was being monitored.

“How long?” Marc asked.

“A week? Maybe less.”

The men around them relaxed a little, some of them lying back down.

“We’ll tell him,” Marc assured her. “You want some hot chocolate?”

“Yes.” Becoming aware that she was the center of attention, Angela flushed. “Who’s my shadow?”

Behind her, Neil said, “That would be me.”

She surveyed his narrow profile. “You had any sleep yet?”

“The same as you.”

Angela put on her boots with cold fingers. “I’ll come back here and lay down in a few.”

“No need to if you’d rather not. I run light.”

“Works for me,” she agreed, grateful.

Kyle and Marc had made a 6’ x 6’ area enclosed by a foot high stack of bedrolls and kits that appeared to be only gear in a neat pile from the outside of the canvas. With Marc at her back, she’d had little trouble falling asleep, but Angela

was definitely done letting the witch dream walk and more than ready to be out of this hormone-filled tent.

She stretched as she rose, unable to stop a small moan of pleasure.

Men's lids flew open at the sound and Marc assumed it was a copy of the one they'd just heard in dreams. He recognized the gut-twisting flare of need in their looks, knew it well.

Angela stiffened at the thoughts, the dreamy images rushing toward her. She quickly strapped on her gun and exited the tent, with Neil and Marc on her heels.

The QZ was layered in thin fog and Eagles. Dog was out roaming, and there were no less than fifteen Eagles in sight. Each confirmed her safety, escorts, and her shadow, before nodding politely as they went by.

"Doesn't he think this is a bit much?" she asked sharply. It wouldn't help these men accept her as one of them if she needed to be babysat.

Marc didn't tell her that he and Neil were responsible. Until the extra protections were in place, she would have help within reach at all times. It was how he'd handled witnesses he had been sent into foreign lands to recover, and it was a plan that he intended to use here. Besides the slavers, there was a grieving twin out there and that one may not come in force. Dean might sneak in and slit her throat while she slept or firebomb her tent if he knew which one it was.

“You can’t stop it, Marc. They’ll come and I have to be ready,” she stated, spotting specks of crimson in his goatee that he’d missed when he washed up.

Marc didn’t say anything because he was positive their idea of ready was drastically different. Angie grew a reckless streak when she was upset, always had. More than once, he’d had to refuse a dangerous request when they were kids, and then she’d waited for him to leave and done it. *Alone*, he remembered, trying not to flinch. He would have to be careful not to push her into anything.

Neil hung back as they ducked under the awning of the little mess, fog curling around their boots. They were the only ones at the small eating area and Angela chose a dim corner while Marc got their mugs.

The larger camp was still silent, only quiet Eagles moving, and she rubbed at her face, yawning. She wasn’t used to a first shift schedule.

“This’ll help.”

She let him set the mug down and pull his hand away before reaching for it.

“Chocolate caffeine.” She sipped it carefully, forcing herself to not wake too fast, but enjoy the time with Marc instead. “How do you feel?”

Marc’s lips grinned, but he didn’t. He sat down, adjusting his matching Colts. “Sore, like after a mission.”

“Sounds like another promotion is in order.”

“That’s your honor.” He couldn’t hide his anger or his awe. “What you did! Thank you.”

“Anything for you.”

Magic sparked between them and Neil distracted a pair of Kyle’s Eagles who were coming in for coffee.

“Neil’s a good friend to have here, I’ve heard,” she commented.

“Sure could have been a lot worse without him,” Marc admitted.

Angela wanted to say more, like how grateful and how mad she was about what he’d done for her, but didn’t. He already knew.

“Did you calm down and get some sleep?”

“Yes,” she snorted wryly, loving his musky scent. “Thanks.”

They shared a grin and it held for a long moment where Marc fought to keep from sliding his hand over hers. He settled for letting his eyes say all the things his mouth wasn’t allowed to.

“We’ve been through a lot, *Wolfman*,” she teased, the caffeine slowly bringing awareness.

“Hasn’t changed much since we’ve gotten here, has it, *that New Woman*?”

Angela chuckled, loving the way he always kept up with her, kept her laughing. “Nope. We’ll still avoid bridges.”

It wasn’t much. Five minutes without Kenn and the camp scrutinizing their every expression, but it was a flash to the trip here for them, sharp and sweet. Their slow starts and finishes to the day

were something they'd grown to love and both of them missed it.

“You did pretty good last night. How does it feel to be the first female here officially allowed to carry a gun?”

Angela felt a sharp prick pierce her good mood, sensing the searching caution in his words. Why couldn't he leave it alone?

“Going through it like an Eagle was great,” she answered tensely. “Wow, Alex is fast!”

Aware of her tension, Marc didn't change his plans or censor his words.

“You'll be that good someday.”

There was a sense of being patronized and Angela cast out a line, hoping not to snag anything, but needing to know. “Adrian will be opening Eagle tryouts for rookie levels soon...for women.”

Marc's attention snapped up from her delicate wrists. “Tryouts?”

When she nodded, showing the V in her chin, his heart thumped painfully. “You're thinking about it?”

She nodded again, and he was aware of those shrewd baby-blues evaluating his reaction. Swallowing his first three responses, Marc sipped his chocolate and thought. When he finally spoke, it was carefully.

“It's rough, the way they do things here. You might want to try a few private lessons with Doug or Kyle first, to be sure.”

It was a perfectly reasonable answer and then his mouth opened again.

“And I honestly don’t know if you can do what they do, honey. You’re awfully small compared to them.”

Listening, Neil groaned at the thoughtless words.

Angela’s demeanor frosted over and that cute chin became a set line.

Damn it! Marc thought. *Why couldn’t I stop there?*

It was an identical wish for both of them.

“It’s been a long time since you’ve said that to me, Brady.”

“And I wouldn’t now, if I wasn’t worried about you getting hurt,” he defended.

Angela pushed away her anger as best she could. “I’m not afraid to get hurt if it means earning something that I want. I never have been.”

“I know that, better than most people,” Marc relented. “It’s your choice, Angie, as always.”

“Yes, it is.” She stood as Neil came toward them and Kyle’s team filled the small area.

Smothering disappointment, (she’d hoped Marc might actually support her idea) she let only traces of it lace her tone. “Looks like there’s hours yet before the camp will be ready to travel. Let’s do our normal drill.”

Marc started to tell her it wasn’t safe for her to be out in the open, but Neil beat him to it.

“I’ll have it set up in 5 minutes. All of us hate missing sets while we’re in the QZ.”

Satisfied she’d be safe; Marc did a fast sweep of the molding trees and bold ants that littered their view. “What’s with the ‘all of us’? It’s your first time in quarantine, right?”

Neil smiled sheepishly, relenting. “So I’ve heard.”

All three of them were laughing as they came from the little mess.

From the edge of the tattered caution tape, Adrian saw them and thought they seemed out of place with the apocalyptic landscape to backdrop their happiness. The brackish sky was a dim, depressing canopy that dripped indifferently over everything.

“Hey, Boss.” Kyle had come to meet him, an extra mug in hand. “All quiet now.”

“Now?”

The mobster took a quick glance around to verify there was no one else in hearing distance. “She had a nightmare. Said you need to talk to the new woman, Samantha.”

“She say anything else?”

“Something’s coming within the week.” Kyle’s voice dropped. “You think Samantha’s special too?”

“The odds just went up on that bet.” Adrian turned toward the larger camp, taking the hot

coffee. “Bring her by while I’m breaking down my canvas and we’ll find out.”

3

“Ready?”

“Yes.” Angela blew out an annoyed sigh. “And stop warning me. It’s like training with someone’s nervous grandmother.”

The Eagles laughed, their eager noises carrying on the wind.

Flushing a bit, Seth lunged with a leg sweep that she jumped and returned, sending him to the ground in surprise.

“Never underestimate your opponent!” Doug growled, huge form moving between them. “Who’s next?”

They’d been at it for half an hour despite her passing the self-defense part in the first few minutes. She’d insisted on more.

“Me.”

Marc stepped forward. His tone was hard to read, but his thoughts said he hated witnessing her wrestle with these men.

“You guys are too easy on her.”

There were scoffs from the four disheveled men she’d cleared and the senior Eagles monitored closely, evaluating. It was obvious that she was better than some of Adrian’s rookies and this would tell them where to place her in training when Adrian openly declared her an Eagle. That he would, his top men had little doubt, though it

had only been a few days. When Adrian wanted something, he got it, and female members of the guard were high on his list. He'd just been waiting to put his faith in the right one.

“Don't hurt yourself, now.”

Marc's challenge came from their mornings spent this way and Angela's face stretched into a grin. Lower level men exchanged disapproving looks at her lack of seriousness, but again the top Eagles wondered. The determination behind that smile said she was anything but distracted.

From the beginning, it was fierce. Marc did what none of them had been willing (in this situation) to do. He tackled her.

Prepared and glad to be on his training terms, Angela locked her ankles and used the momentum from their fall to roll him over and off.

Marc pushed to his feet, hair messed sexily as he stalked her. Contentment melted his angry face back into her best friend and Angela crouched low. “Say it. Say it!”

“I've missed this.”

Her grin widened. “Even the pain, grunt?”

He barked a laugh. “Especially that!”

“Then, let's get to it.”

Before he could rush her again, Angela lunged upward to deliver a harsh hit to his shoulder that he absorbed, wrapping his arms around her upper body to trap her in a tight hug.

Angela immediately dropped to her knees and twisted her elbow into his side. Able to slip free, she ducked his swipe for her braid and kicked out, shoving him away from her.

Angela flashed to her feet, eagerness spilling out. “More, Brady, more!”

It was a blast from their past and it lit up his heart. “Whatever you want, baby cakes.”

In her happiness, Angela didn’t get set for his lunge and the shock of being on the ground under a man sent fear rushing into her mind, freezing her.

“Lock those ankles!”

Angela steeled her panic, calming, and then Marc had his hands full keeping her on the ground as she punched, twisted, elbowed.

As they struggled, there was the sound of their harsh breathing and the mutters of the Eagles, who all wore deep scowls at a woman being on the ground under a man they didn’t trust.

As they rolled over again, Marc still coming out on top, Seth stepped forward to break it up.

“Leave them.” Adrian had come from the caution tape with quiet steps, and it eased his men to have him present, even as their frowns grew.

“Still want more?”

Angela had freed herself and was staying low as Marc circled her, rapidly closing the space.

She didn’t answer his taunt and he eased closer. “Very good. You remember the next lesson?”

“Trade-off.”

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