
HELLCAT

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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only.
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Prologue

“SHE LIKES TO FUCK, doesn’t she?”

Mateo de los Santos stared at the woman on the screen, her face contorted in pleasure. He didn’t care that she was enjoying the dick that was inside her, which was obvious. It was what she could do for him that mattered.

“Are we going through with this?”

“We are, Carlos,” Mateo said. “If you have doubts, you should have stayed home.”

“I am ready to put the plan in action,” Carlos said.

Mateo turned toward the back seat of the SUV. “Doctor, you stay here. I don’t wish her to see you before tonight.”

“I agree,” the older man said. “And I’m to watch for cops, or anyone else who goes into the bar.”

“Exactly,” Mateo said. He and Carlos exited the vehicle and walked into the bar. The woman he had just watched on the video stood behind the counter. She laughed at something someone said, then waved at them.

“Gentlemen, welcome!” She slapped the bar with her hand. “Have a seat. Can I get you a beer?”

“That would be very refreshing,” Mateo said.

“Domestic? Bottle? Can? Draft?”

“Draft, please,” Mateo said as he slid onto a bar stool. “Whatever flavor you recommend.” He watched as she expertly used the pulls and drew two beers with very little foam.

“It’s a local brand. I think you’ll like it.” She set the beers in front of them, and said, “You look a little familiar.”

Mateo took a long drink of his beer. “Very good.” He glanced at the blonde whose face he’d just seen contorted in pleasure. He wanted to make small talk with her, but they were in a hurry, and he would have more time with her later.

“Perhaps I look like the man you fucked the other evening.” He took another drink. After he’d swallowed, he continued, “His name is Felix Cortez.”

“I don’t know anyone by that name, and I think I’d like you gentlemen to leave.”

She reached for their mugs, and Mateo grabbed her hand and squeezed.

“You’re hurting me,” she whispered.

“And Carlos can hurt you even worse.” He nodded in his friend’s direction.

Carlos opened his jacket to show the gun he’d brought in, and Cara’s soft inhale let Mateo know he’d made his point. They’d argued about the gun, but he had insisted. “*You don’t have to use it, Carlos, just let her know it’s there.*”

“What do you want?” Cara asked. “Money? I don’t have much.”

“Here’s what’s going to happen, Cara.” Mateo traced a figure eight on her wrist “You and I are going to go upstairs. To your office. Carlos is going to stay here and make sure everything stays calm. You are going to open the safe and I am going to take something in it that belongs to me. And then we’ll be done, and Carlos and I will leave.”

“No one gets hurt,” she said. Her face registered that she

was nervous, but she seemed willing to follow his instructions, to make sure no one got hurt.

“No one downstairs gets hurt,” Mateo said.

“Then let’s get it over with.” She made for the stairs and stopped at the bottom. For a moment he thought she would spill the beans to her friends, but instead she said, “Lindsay, will you watch the bar for me for a few minutes?”

“Sure, Cara.” There was a short pause. “Is everything all right?”

“Perfect,” Cara answered. “Give me a few minutes and I’ll be down. In fact, give everyone a round on the house.”

The small group cheered in response, and Cara started up the stairs. Once they were in the office, she wheeled on him. He braced for her to fight him, but instead she said, “My business partner will know the minute I open the safe.”

He laughed and saw her cringe. “I’m counting on it. His name is Gabe, right?”

“Yes.” She looked a little confused. “Gabe Hernandez.” She studied his face, and he could see she was working things out.

“Will he call you?”

“Yes,” she answered. “The safe is his.” She didn’t move, and for a moment he thought once again she would refuse to do as he asked.

“Cara, the safe, please.” When she didn’t move right away, he pointed at his wrist. “We’re on the clock.”

She punched buttons quickly, and he could see her hand shake as she did so. Before she could open the door, he wrapped his arms around her and held her tight. She gasped and started to struggle. But just as she had done when she saw the man with the gun downstairs she stopped as quickly as she’d started.

“Is there a gun in there, Cara?”

“Yes,” she said.

“Naughty, naughty,” he whispered in her ear. “Open it.”

She did as he asked, and he pocketed the gun and waited for the phone to ring. When it didn’t happen, he said, “Is he always this slow?”

“He’s at work,” she said.

“He’d call faster if he thought you wanted an afternoon quickie.”

“You’re disgusting.”

“I’ve wondered, Cara in those videos I’ve seen of the two of you if he’s in your pussy, or your ass.”

“You’re disgusting.”

“You’ve already said that.” Mateo chuckled. “Oh, come now, Cara, satisfy my curiosity. I know Felix well enough to know how he loves to fuck a woman in the ass.” His gaze landed on the box he wanted just as the phone rang. He pocketed the small object and smiled, just as she spoke.

“Who is Felix?”

“The man you’ve been fucking.” Mateo watched as she clicked the answer button on her phone. “Put it on speaker.”

She did as he asked.

“Hey, babe, what did you need out of the safe? Is everything okay?”

Mateo held up his finger to his mouth, and Cara nodded.

“Hey, babe,” he said.

There was a moment of silence before the caller said, “Who is this? Where’s Cara?”

“Tell him you’re fine, Cara.”

“I’m okay,” she said, softly.

“That’s far from fine, Cara,” Mateo said.

“Who is this?” Gabe said.

“Cousin, you wound me. All those years we spent together. All those women we fucked together.”

There was a short pause and then Gabe said, “Mateo?”

“Tell me, cousin, why haven’t you told your lover and

your business partner about Barbara Runnels? January 1, 2006. That's the date you murdered her. He strangled her while they were having sex, Cara."

The horrified look on Cara's face told Mateo everything. Felix had tried it on Cara, too.

"Cara, Cara, listen to me! He is lying to you. Cara!" Felix's voice rang out over the phone, and Mateo hit the end button and handed Cara the phone.

"It has been a pleasure," he said. Then he left the room and started down the stairs.

"Who are you?" she yelled after him.

"My name is Mateo de los Santos." He paused at the bottom of the stairs. "And unlike Felix, I am telling you the truth."

Chapter 1

BY THE TIME the bar closed, and she'd counted money and restocked beer for the next day, Cara was exhausted. She was running behind because she'd had to do quarterly reports that afternoon. But she had taken the time to sit in the parking lot and look up Barbara Runnels on the internet. The woman had been twenty-two when she was murdered on Jan 1, 2006, in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

The main suspect in the slaying had been Mateo de los Santos, because his fingerprints had been found on the woman's neck. But he had later been cleared, and police had been searching for Felix Cortez, de los Santos' cousin, since then. The story Cara read said the two cousins had picked up two women that night and gone to the apartment the ladies shared where Cortez and Runnels had gone to her bedroom and de los Santos had gone with the other woman, Misty Boxer.

Cara read through the first story and called up the second one. There were two mugshots with this one. They were grainy and had obviously been scanned before digital was used. One was a younger version of the man who had

appeared in her bar that afternoon. The other was a young Gabe.

Cara opened the door of her truck and retched. The little bit of food she'd eaten for dinner fell to the ground. De los Santos had been telling her the truth about the murder. But was he the guilty party, or was Gabe?

Gabe had come into the bar as soon as he'd gotten off work, but she had ignored him. He'd finally told her he'd meet her at her house when she got off. Her house was fifteen miles out in the country. She loved the open space except for now, when she might be meeting a murderer.

"Get a grip, Cara," she said to the empty truck. After all, she had known Gabe for nine years. He had loaned her money to buy her bar. They had become lovers six months after they'd met, and except for the one incident, he had never hurt her. The only problem was the one incident was him trying to choke her during sex, which was how Barbara Runnels had died. It had scared the hell out of her, and he had sworn it would never happen again... and it hadn't.

But now, as she drove to her home, she thought about the man waiting for her, she considered who was telling her the truth, Gabe, or de los Santos. She knew nothing about the man she'd met today. But then again, she knew very little about Gabe. He was very secretive about his younger years. When they were first together, he'd told her he'd been in a great deal of trouble, with drugs and alcohol. Now, as he neared forty, he drank very little, and did no drugs that she knew of. Now he liked to spend time on trips... and to fuck.

They had been lovers for years and except for that one time he had never put his hands on her neck. There was no reason for her to believe de los Santos.

She drove the twenty minutes to her house, and as she turned into the driveway the open gate told her Gabe was there. She wasn't sure she wanted to see him tonight, but she

didn't have a choice. She drove the half mile to the house and parked her truck. Gabe sat on the deck; at the table he'd bent her over so many times.

He jumped up the minute she parked and ran toward the truck. "Cara, you have to believe me, please."

Cara pulled out her phone and unlocked it. She flipped to the story she'd called up earlier, and turned the phone so Gabe could see. "Is this you?" After he looked at it, she turned it back to look at it again. It looked even more like Gabe than it had before.

"Cara. Cara, baby, listen to me." He took her face between his hands and gently kissed her. "People can put anything on the internet. You know I've been arrested before. Somehow, he got hold of my mug shot and put it on a fake webpage."

What Gabe said had merit, but the webpage had looked legitimate to her.

"Cara, you know I love you. I would never lie to you. You have to know that."

She nodded, unable to agree with him verbally. Maybe it was time to change the subject.

"He took something out of the safe."

"And you let him!" Gabe's mood changed instantly. He drew his arm back and for a moment she thought he was going to backhand her. He caught himself at the last minute and put his arm down. "Let's stay calm," he said, and she got the feeling he was talking more to himself than to her.

"What did he take?" he asked, his voice strangely even.

"The old box, the one that looks like it's a hundred years old." His accusatory stare sent a chill through her. "His friend had a gun! What was I supposed to do?"

"Pull the one you have behind the bar and shoot the bastard!"

"Over a box?"

“It’s more than a box!”

“How would I know that!” she yelled. “You never let me see what was inside.”

Gabe held up his hands. “It’s not important. Did he tell you where I could find him?”

“No,” she answered.

“If he comes back in the bar, call me immediately.”

“Okay,” she responded. Although she didn’t want him to come back.

“Now, let’s kiss and make up.” He kissed her, first on the lips, then on her forehead. She felt warm and needed when she was next to him. “But you know it means I have to take off my belt, right?”

“No. Gabe, no.”

“Cara, you know it has to be.” He stroked her hair, and for a moment she felt he was right. But she hated it when he spanked her.

“I don’t want it,” she said.

“You need it,” he said. “You let de los Santos walk in there like he owned the place and take what was mine.”

“His friend had a gun!”

“So did you!” Gabe started to undo his belt. “Take down your pants, and your panties. I want your bare ass.”

“No.” The word didn’t hold much conviction to her ears.

Gabe narrowed his eyes at her, and she swallowed hard. He cocked his head, and she shook hers.

“No. It’s been a long day, and I’m not playing games tonight.”

“This isn’t a game.”

For the second time that evening, she thought he might hit her. He’d never done it before, except for the spankings. The look on his face frightened her, and she took a step toward the front door.

“I want you to leave now,” she said. “We’ll talk more tomorrow.”

“Don’t make me force you, Cara.”

His words shocked her so much that she thought the world lit up, even though it was not yet dawn.

Turns out what she saw was the lights from a cop car, and the whoop of a siren.

“Fuck!” Gabe exclaimed.

“Calm down,” Cara said.

The door opened and the sheriff’s voice filled the air. “Cara, Gabe. What’s going on?”

“Jay, what are you doing out this time of night?” Cara asked.

“You mean morning,” the sheriff said. “It was all hands on deck for a bog wreck on the Amarillo highway. Mr. Hughes called about your fight. He said something about hearing the word murder.” He paused and then said, “Does this have anything to do with what happened at the bar today?”

“Nothing happened at the bar,” Gabe yelled. “And Hughes is ten miles down the road. He doesn’t know what he heard.”

“Sound travels in the country,” the sheriff said. “And I heard there was an incident today. I’m asking Cara, not you, Gabe.”

Gabe turned his back on the sheriff. “I’m the victim here, Cara. Remember that. What was taken belonged to me. Don’t say a word.”

His words were so low and cold, and so full of venom that Cara shivered.

“What was that, Hernandez?” the sheriff asked.

“Nothing, Sheriff,” Gabe replied.

“Jay, I’m really tired.” Cara took a deep, fortifying breath. “I’d like both of you to leave, please.”

“Cara, that hurts,” Gabe said. “I thought we were going to... you know—”

“I’m just so tired, Gabe.” She hoped her voice didn’t shake, but by the wicked grin that appeared on Gabe’s face, she knew it did.

“Well, Sheriff, it looks like she’s kicking us out.”

“You first, Hernandez.”

“Why, Sheriff, are you trying to take my place in Cara’s bed? Y’all got something going on I need to know about?” He chuckled and then walked toward his bike. “Cara, I’ll talk to you tomorrow, bright and early.”

He roared off, and Cara felt a deep sense of relief. She watched as the sheriff reached for his phone. He hit a few buttons then said, “Parker, you done at the accident site?”

She couldn’t hear the answer, but she heard Jay say, “You live near Gabe Hernandez, right? I just broke up a fight between him and Cara Anderson. I want to make sure he makes it home. Give it about fifteen minutes and let me know.”

Jay disconnected the call and smiled at her.

“I’ll just wait here.”

“Jay, he would never hurt me.”

“You sure about that? I heard the word victim when he turned his back to me. What was he talking about? What happened at the bar?”

“Jay, it’s late, and I’m really tired. Please, can we talk about this tomorrow?”

He didn’t look happy about it, but he nodded. “What time do you get to the bar?”

Cara checked her phone. It was almost four in the morning. “At this rate, probably one.”

“But you don’t open until two?” His phone rang and he answered. She heard him say, *yeah, yeah, good*, and then he thanked the caller and hung up.

“He’s home. Go inside and lock your door.”

Cara laughed. “He has a key, Sheriff.

“You should take it back.” He tipped an imaginary hat in her direction, then got in his truck and left.

Cara went into the house. For the first time she wished she had a dog, or cat... someone to talk to even if they could not talk back. She thought about taking a shower, but decided to wait until morning. She would need the hot water hitting her in the face to wake her up. She lay down on the bed, and before she closed her eyes, she remembered that she hadn’t locked the front door. She thought about Gabe coming back, and thought she should get up and lock it, even if he did have a key.

It wouldn’t keep him out, but it would slow him down. She thought about how angry he’d been, and his words about being a victim because de los Santos had stolen from him, not her. She’d never seen him like that before, and it made her wonder if he could kill a person. She’d heard that anyone could take a life, but she wasn’t sure that was true. Still, remembering the look on Gabe’s face scared her.

There was a part of her that wanted to call Jay and tell him everything. She reached for the phone and was about to dial when she heard the front door open.

She’d gone to bed in an old t-shirt that she’d cut the neckline out of. One of the reasons she’d done it is because she knew Gabe hated it. He’d expect her to be naked and waiting on him. Well, not tonight. She turned on the lamp near her bed and called out his name.

“Did Jay not ask you to leave? Please, Gabe, not tonight.”

She didn’t get an answer, so she got up and went to the living room.

Cara flipped on the living room light and her heart caught in her throat.

Near the doorway stood Mateo de los Santos.

“You’ve had a busy night, Cara,” he said. “Or rather a busy morning. First, a visit from Gabe, in which he threatened to spank your bottom. And then the sheriff. You know, I think the sheriff has a crush on you. So protective he was. He was your savior tonight, wasn’t he? But we are behind schedule and need to hurry.”

Her legs felt rooted to the ground, until he said, “Cat got your tongue, Cara?”

She whirled around and ran for the bedroom.

His voice rang out as she opened the nightstand drawer.

“Cara, if you’re looking for your gun, I must tell you I already have it. And your taser. And the shotgun you keep behind your door. I have them all. And your phone is being jammed. For now, it’s just you and me.”

He now stood in the doorway to the bedroom.

“What do you want?” she asked. “I have nothing of value here, nothing of Gabe’s.”

“That’s not true, Cara. You’re here, and Gabe, as you call him, thinks you belong to him.”

Despite his earlier words, she dialed 911 on her phone, and got nothing.

“Are you going to kill me?”

“What purpose would that serve?”

“Are you going to rape me?”

“I am not a rapist.” He held up a finger. “Having said that, I am not an entirely nice man, Cara. I am here to relocate you.”

“What?” His words confused her. At the same time, she thought of something she could use against him. She dove across the bed to Gabe’s side and opened the nightstand drawer. Her heart sunk as she saw the empty space where he kept his Bowie knife.

“Oh, I forgot to mention, I took the knife, too.”

Cara bent down and picked up the wooden baseball bat

Gabe kept under the bed. She came up in a batter's stance only to be greeted with Mateo's laughter.

"Are you going to try and hit me with that?"

To show him she was serious, Cara took a swing, and connected with the shelf behind her. She heard breaking glass. She turned to look and saw the remains of the crystal fairies she collected lying on the ground. She'd been buying them for years, and a few had been presents from Gabe.

She swung the bat again and heard an oomph of pain and knew she'd connected with him. When she swung again, she aimed lower. She'd hoped to hit his crotch but got his thigh instead.

"I do believe you were aiming for my dick."

"Your balls, if you have any."

"I assure you; I do. And I don't appreciate you threatening them."

"Like you're threatening me?"

For a few minutes she felt like she had the upper hand. She kept swinging the bat, but all she really heard was the sound of breaking glass and cracking wood. She took another swing, and it threw her off balance. He grabbed her around the waist and threw her on the bed. Cara flung the bat in his direction. He caught it as if it were a piece of lint and tossed it to the ground. She lashed out with her arms and was rewarded with another oomph of pain.

Then suddenly, a voice she'd never heard before sounded out, "We need to hurry. He's on his way back."

De los Santos knelt over her, trapping her arms to her sides. Then he placed a cloth that stunk to high heaven over her mouth. She tried to turn her head, but he held it in a tight grip.

The room started to spin. "That's it, hellcat, go to sleep."

Before Cara lost consciousness, the new voice said, "I'm so sorry. I'm so very sorry."