She - Reunion Battle

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Robert paused outside the door to his office as the distinctive sound of tearing paper broke the silence. He carefully set the steaming coffee mug he was carrying down on his receptionist's desk, before reaching up to remove his elegant, rimless glasses. He firmly massaged the bridge of his nose, hoping to delay the onset of the migraine triggered by his instant identification of the midnight intruder. The magazine let out another snarling hiss of protest as one more page was torn from its spine.

Replacing his glasses, then smoothing and adjusting his suit coat and tie, Robert wondered what had prompted the girl's visit. Retrieving his coffee and taking a firm grip on his walking stick, he strode into his office. As he made his way to the desk, he watched his former ward thumbing through the pages of the most current edition of Time magazine. Her long red hair tumbled over her shoulders and down the back of an oversized down overcoat.

As he settled into the chair behind his desk, she glanced up from the gutted publication and met his eyes. There was no reason to ask what she was doing in his office when she opened her mouth and announced without preamble, "I just want you to know that I feel really bad about this."

Robert casually slid open the top drawer of his desk and glanced into it. Apart from the twenty-dollar bill, weighted down by one of three unopened packets of paper-clips, it was empty. Picking up one of the other packets and breaking the seal with a manicured thumb nail, he replied, calmly, "You shouldn't have run away, Morgan. I could have protected you if you had stayed in San Francisco."

"Your protection ceased to have value the moment you proved I'm not invulnerable," she declared, refusing to divert her gaze.

"A difficult lesson to teach," Robert acknowledged with a nod. "That is why it is usually the last one." He tapped the box of paper-clips on his desk. "I did not expect to see you again. Louisiana is even worse than San Francisco."

"The people there are more awake, and there are enough of us who are fully awake to watch each other's backs," she countered his unspoken argument. With a shrug, she added, "Besides, the people you said would come after me are much more interested in getting their hands on you."

"I assume that leading them to me gets you some kind of free pass?" he challenged, opening the tiny cardboard box and tipping the metal clips into the palm of his free hand.

"Yep," she nodded, hopping to her feet and stuffing the stack of magazine ads into a pocket, after removing a stale doughnut to make room. Dropping the remains of her breakfast on the coffee table and brushing the crumbs off her hands, she cocked her head, "Unfortunately, they had no intentions of actually honoring their agreement."

Robert studied her as he transferred the two remaining packets of paperclips and the rogue twenty to his pockets. "I see," he said after a moment. Then, turning to look out the windows to take in the Phoenix skyline, he asked, "Does this mean I am forgiven?"

"That depends on how well you fight," she responded, as an elevator arrived on their floor with a cheerful ding. The faint rumble of a tactical assault team making its entrance followed.