

# INTO THE FURY by Kat Martin

## Excerpt

### CHAPTER ONE

#### Seattle, Washington

***SINNERS, SLUTS, and WHORES—BEWARE. Your TIME is at HAND.***

Standing next to the long mahogany table in the conference room, Ethan Brodie re-read the note he'd just been handed. Printed on a plain sheet of white paper, the words were typed in different fonts and sizes, all of them in big bold letters.

*Fairly old-school for the twenty-first century*, Ethan thought. But then, email was a helluva lot easier to trace.

The client, Matthew Carlyle, was Head of Operations for La Belle Lingerie, a retail fashion chain, kind of a knock-off of Victoria's Secret with slightly less expensive garments. In his mid forties, five-ten, lean and fit, Carlyle had silver-threaded dark brown hair, hazel eyes, and a thin scar that ran close to his ear along his jaw.

The other man in the room was Ethan's boss, his cousin Ian, owner of Brodie Operations Security Services, Inc.

"I imagine in the lingerie business you get notes like this all the time," Ethan said to Carlyle.

"We get kooks, all right. Plenty of them." Carlyle accepted the note Ethan returned. "But a letter like this was mailed to each of our ten top models, sent to them at our flagship store here in Seattle, and the company isn't happy about it."

"You talk to the police?"

"Not yet. We'd prefer to handle the problem discreetly, avoid any bad press. That's why I came to BOSS, Inc. Ian and I have worked together before. I trust him to do the job."

Ethan turned to his cousin, conservatively dressed in tan slacks and a yellow button-down shirt. While Ian was blond, Ethan was dark-haired, like most of the Brodie men. Both were tall, Ethan taller at six-foot-three. "You have the notes checked for prints?" he asked.

"I did," Ian said. "Papers were all clean. The letters were mailed out of different post office locations in the area so that led nowhere. Since the models are about to go on tour, Matt's decided to temporarily beef-up La Belle security, just to be on the safe side."

"Probably a good idea." Though Ethan wished someone else was taking the job. The thought of traveling for weeks with a group of air-headed fashion divas was the last thing he wanted. Still, he worked for a living and this was exactly the kind of job he was good at.

Silently communicating his dislike of the assignment, he flicked a hard glance at his cousin, whose blue eyes lit with amusement.

“Ethan’s the best man for the job,” Ian said, not the least repentant. “He’s an ex-cop, worked personal security for some of the top execs in the dot-com business. You can be sure he knows what he’s doing.”

Carlyle nodded. “I read his resume. Looks like he can handle the job.” He returned his attention to Ethan. “Aside from working protection, you’re a private investigator, correct?”

“That’s right. Before I went to work in Seattle, I was a homicide detective on the Dallas police force.”

“Good. I’d really like to find the guy who sent those notes. I’ve got a feeling about this, and I’m not liking it. I’m hoping with your background, you’ll be able to sniff around, talk to the models and the hands backstage. If the guy’s part of the crew, we want him out.”

“I can do that.”

“You’ll need to be discreet. I don’t want people shook-up before we go on tour.”

“Understood.” And he’d rather be busy than standing around waiting for trouble that probably wouldn’t come. With any luck, the most he’d have to worry about was crowd control and a few overzealous fans.

“How many more men do you think you’ll need?” Ian asked Carlyle. Though they’d gone into the conference room, they hadn’t bothered to sit down. The meeting wasn’t going to take that long.

“We’ve hired a couple of guys, but we could use at least one more man with a background in personal protection.”

“That would be Dirk Reynolds,” Ian said. “I’ll talk to him, see if he can take the job.”

Dirk worked freelance for the company, same as Ethan and his brother, Luke, as well as his cousin, Nick. Nick was married. With his little wife pregnant, he preferred to stay close to home.

Luke was on a case. Even if he weren’t, his specialty was bail enforcement, not personal protection. Dirk Reynolds was one of Ethan’s best friends, former Ranger, and a damned good man.

Ethan figured his friend would take the job. The money was extremely good, and since Dirk had just wound up an assignment and was currently looking for something to do, the tour might provide an interesting escape from Seattle.

Ethan thought of the weeks ahead and inwardly groaned. For him, babysitting a bunch of hot-bodied women in scanty underwear would be a twenty-four-hour-a-day headache. He’d had more than his share of trouble with the female sex, still did, and he didn’t want more.

“One thing I need to make clear,” Carlyle said as Ian walked out of the room to call Dirk. “These are some of the most beautiful, sexiest women in the world. They’re every man’s fantasy. That’s the reason La Belle has a strict no-fraternization policy. There’s no way you can do your job if you’re thinking about getting laid. We expect you to be pleasant, but steer clear of anything more than that. You with me so far?”

“Oh, I’m with you.”

“I realize you’re only human, but I need to know you understand and accept our policy. Any breach is grounds for automatic dismissal.”

“All right. One thing you need to know. I wouldn’t accept the job if I thought my dick would get in the way. I admire a beautiful woman, same as any other man. But I’m being paid to do a job and that’s exactly what I’ll do.”

Carlyle seemed relieved. “I hope you’re speaking for your friend, Reynolds, as well.”

“Dirk’s a professional. Beyond that, he’ll have to speak for himself.”

“Okay. Sounds like we understand each other. We’ll be doing dress rehearsals for the rest of the week. Our first show is here in Seattle on Saturday night. Tomorrow morning at the theater, I’ll introduce you and Reynolds to the rest of your team and our ten top models. Just keep in mind what I said.”

Ethan made no reply. If Carlyle knew how much he wasn’t looking forward to meeting a gaggle of vain, self-absorbed females, he would probably do handstands. But actions spoke louder than words. It shouldn’t take the man long to figure out Ethan was off women indefinitely.

His ex-girlfriend, Allison Winfield, had done everything in her power to make sure of that.

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“Oh, my God. Would you look at the eye-candy that just walked backstage.”

There was awe in her best friend Megan O’Brien’s voice. As Val bent over to fasten the buckle on her strappy high-heel, she tried for a glimpse, but couldn’t actually see who’d just arrived.

Megan kept staring and just kept talking. “You see the one on the left? The guy with the sexy mustache? He looks like he walked out of a biker fantasy. He can knock on my door any time, day or night.” She rolled her eyes. “Especially at night. And the big one on the right turns the words tall, dark, and handsome into an understatement. I think I’m in love.”

Val finally looked up. Two men stood next to Matt Carlyle. One was about six-two, good-looking, with medium brown hair, and a horseshoe mustache that framed his mouth, curved down to his jaw, and made him look like a real badass. A real sexy badass.

But it was the bigger man who snared her attention, at least six-three, with dark brown hair, dark eyes, and a face any red-blooded female would be hard-pressed not to admire. His hair was trimmed cop-short and fit his hard-jawed, handsome face perfectly. The way he filled out his black T-shirt said he was two hundred plus pounds of solid male muscle.

When those dark eyes moved in her direction, skimmed lightly over her frame, an unexpected zing of electricity shot through her body.

“Who are they?” The little jolt of awareness was new to her. Val was too busy for men. Being a La Belle model was difficult and demanding. At the same time, she was taking on-line college courses, getting ready to start a part-time job at the end of the tour and go back to school in the fall to finish her degree in veterinary medicine.

“They’re extra security,” Megan said. “After we got those threatening notes, Matt hired a few more men. The big guy’s heading up an additional team.” Megan sighed. “Those two look yummy enough to eat.”

“You know the rules. No fraternizing with the staff.”

“I know. I don’t usually care, but in this case...”

Val grinned. “Down, girl. Best not to get your thong in a twist. Far as we’re concerned, they’re untouchable.”

“Yeah, more’s the pity.”

Val laughed. She glanced back at the men, saw the bigger man looking the other way and enjoyed a long, unabashedly thorough appraisal. Sometimes pure masculine beauty deserved to be appreciated.

Hearing the voice of Daniel Clemens, the show’s choreographer, along with the light rustle of feminine laughter, reminded her where she was. Pushing the men into a far corner of her mind, Val went back to work on her shoe so she could take her place in the line-up with the rest of the models.