

SERPENT'S DOOM by Connie Di Marco

EXCERPT

I took a deep breath, trying to piece everything together. The proximity of the docks could indicate smuggling, but just what was being smuggled, I had no idea. I crept back to the small, blacked-out window, hoping to catch a glimpse of what was happening inside. There was movement but I wasn't able to make out any individuals or any activity. I sighed. The only thing that made sense was to return to my car and wait. Maybe I'd learn more from following this group after their visit.

Suddenly, a rush of air came from behind me and I was blinded as a cloth hood was pulled over my head. A strong hand muffled my cry as I tried to scream. Someone was holding me tightly. My arms were yanked behind me and I felt plastic ties cutting into my wrists. My heart was pounding. Panicked, I struggled against the force but was dragged backwards in spite of my efforts. I tried to kick my attacker to no avail. I was helpless and blind as I was half-dragged, half-carried to the rear of the building. I tried to scream again and again through the gloved hand that was clamped firmly against my mouth.

"Stop screaming if you want to stay alive," a deep voice growled.

An icy fear coursed through my veins. I struggled against the strong arms. My screaming was involuntary. I couldn't stop. The atavistic urge to fight was overwhelming. Then...the click of a lock. Another person. Hands grasped my ankles and I was lifted from the ground. I twisted and turned but my assailants were too strong. I felt hard metal under me as I was shoved into what I was certain was the back of a van. Someone climbed in after me and a heavy door slammed shut.

The engine came to life and the vehicle began to move, slowly at first, then picking up speed over the bumpy concrete. I couldn't see a thing. I struggled to breathe. I rolled on my side and tried to sit up but a strong hand pushed me back. "Stay still," the same deep voice commanded. I screamed for help again, even though I was sure no one outside the van could possibly hear me.

"Shut her up," a man's voice from the front called out. The driver? A passenger?

The cloth covering my head was lifted a few inches and a strip of heavy-duty tape was pressed against my mouth. The hood was pulled down again. I continued to scream but the sounds were muffled. No one would ever hear me. There were two of them. Maybe a third. My muscles were in spasm. I focused on catching my breath. I mumbled, trying to talk or ask questions. Who were these people and what did they want with me? I began to sob in panic. Where were they taking me? What about my car? Would someone notice a strange vehicle and call the police?

I fell silent as I heard whispers come from the front of the van. I tried to make out the words but couldn't. My heart was racing and I had broken out in a cold sweat. I was sure one person was a woman. Two men and a woman. I felt movement onto a smoother surface. Then the vehicle turned. I tried to concentrate on the moves the driver made. If I could escape, maybe I'd have an idea where I was. If we had exited by the same road, then the driver had turned left, heading south. I estimated we had travelled for about ten minutes.

Then the van slowed and made a sharp turn to the right – west. Traffic sounds. An occasional horn and other cars near us. I guessed we had moved into the eastern part of the Mission District. The van slowed, its engine running, and then it came to a stop. Someone exited from the front of the van. The sound of a garage door rising. The vehicle moved forward again and came to a complete stop. Doors opened and shut, a heavy garage door slammed down. Then the rear doors of the vehicle opened. Someone took hold of my arms and brought me to a sitting position, sliding me out of the van. My feet hit concrete. A bright light shone through the cloth covering my eyes. I tried to talk but couldn't make myself heard. I forced myself not to scream and panic. I took deep breaths. Whisperings, then a woman's voice, "Get her inside."