

SOUL OF IRON by January Bain

EXCERPT

Mira

After throwing the fresh meat into the fenced compound, I plunked the bucket down on the cement. Though my job as the newest hire as a zoologist at the Vegas Zoo called for more administration duties than feeding ones, I liked to get out and stay in touch with the animals at least once a week To see if their habitat needed improving the old-fashioned way by observing them.

It was important to stay in touch with all aspects of running a zoo, not just fund raising, budgeting and public relations. My cell phone rang as the big cats began to prowl across the ground, headed for the chunks of food I'd tossed. They looked magnificent in the dying light, all sinew and tawny fur, casting long shadows. Animals I understood and respected, their nature controlled by instinct. No crime in that. But people—don't even get me started.

I didn't recognize the number when I tugged my phone out of my shorts and hoped it wasn't another one of those calls, demanding repayment of my brother Evan's drug debts. I didn't have any more spare cash this month than last. And no way to contact him since he'd done a vanishing act a month ago, just like our father did before he was born.

My mother, who'd died last year and Deadbeat, the name I'd given to the guy I unfortunately shared DNA with, hadn't even bothered to make it legal. I missed my mom terribly, but it was my brother I worried about, angry as I was at him for drop-kicking me under the bus...notwithstanding his note to say he would be back when the heat died down.

Funny, but drug dealers, much like loan sharks and other nefarious characters, don't take no for an answer. The thought of more taint being added to our family name made me even more determined to make a name for myself. The dream of being listed in the hallowed halls of scientific discovery loomed large in my mind, pulled a little closer due to recent developments. No, make those incredible recent developments.