

Excerpt/An Outlaw Returns

“Wynona Johnson, you got ‘til I count to two! Then you better get your butt out here!”

“Sabrina, I don’t have a quarrel with you! I-”

“One!”

Damn it. She was going to play it hard to save face. Shoot another woman down in the street because her own man whistled at another woman. Or was she planning to simply humiliate her with a stomping of her boots? Veronica recalled the stories she’d heard about Sabrina Wilson. A big woman known to punch a man in the face and knocked him out. Well, if she thought it was going to be easy, Veronica decided she’d have to prove her wrong. On the count of two, she stepped out of the beauty parlor, wearing a thin short cape tied at the back of her neck. The top portion of her hair was curled and pinned. Under the cape, she wore her six-shooter.

“Wynona, I’ll give you one chance to come out of this in one piece.”

“I’m not looking for a chance, Sabrina. I didn’t wrong you or allow that fool you call your man to touch me.”

“Oh, I know he ain’t touched you.”

“Then why are you doing this?”

“You. Since you rode in here on that white stallion. A woman like you, acting like you got superior class. Maybe that’s what the menfolk like, but that don’t matter. You don’t disrespect me by strutting in front of my man in those tight britches.”

“You mean, you can’t stand that he was looking and liking what he was looking at.”

“Girl, I’m going to tear you apart.”

“Naw, you ain’t.” Veronica produced her shooter and aimed it at the big woman’s chest. “If you want to fight, we’ll do it with guns. I’m not about to brawl over a man I don’t consider one bit attractive by any means.”

“If we gonna use weapons, I choose knives.”

“Guns,” Veronica said. “Guns in a fair duel or you shut your mouth and let me finish my press and curl.”

“You bitch,” Sabrina pulled her knife handle from the sheath concealed down her back and threw it at Veronica’s face. “Damn you!” she screamed at the blade protruding

from the wood post to the right of Veronica's head. Veronica cocked her pistol and fired deliberately missing her opponent. Sabrina trembled in fury watching her as she placed her pistol back in her holster. "Wynona!" She screeched as Veronica turned to enter the parlor as if she was finished. "Girl, don't you turn your back on me!"

"It's over, Sabrina. Your knife missed my face and my bullet missed your heart," Veronica said. Now, don't be so foolish as to make me turn around, she thought and took another step toward the salon entrance. In the window, beyond her own reflection, she saw the other woman's hand move down her hip. As she spun around, a bullet whizzed past her ear, so close she felt the heat in the air. Her own bullet hit Sabrina in the chest before she squeezed off another shot.

"Oh, Jesus!" Sabrina cried bending her knees easing herself down to the muddy street. "You got me! A crook like you!"

"That's right! I'm a crook and I don't shy away from anybody." She held her pistol in the air addressing everyone in the street. "Y'all better remember that and get that big ox to the sawbones!"

"Don't you dare walk away and leave me like this. Finish it."

"I didn't mean to kill you, Sabrina. But if you call me again, I will put a bullet in your crazy head. Get her out of here," Veronica told the man and woman lifting her off the ground.

"It's true ain't it? Everything they say about you is true."

"Yeah," she gritted and placed her pistol back in its holster.

Inside the salon, all eyes were upon her, watching her as if she were something strange. She met the gaze of the light complexioned woman who had been curling her hair. "You gonna finish me up or gawk at me all day?"

"Gal, I think you ought to be on your way," the woman said and looked at the others for support. "That's my cousin you shot!"

"Oh?" Veronica's hand went to her gun holster. "She called me. What did you think I was going to do about it?" Veronica watched her until she dropped her eyes. She wasn't worried too much about her own cousin who'd just been shot. "You knew when I came in, she was going to holler for me. That's why you talked me into your chair. It's wasn't because you wanted to curl long hair," Veronica deduced on the spot.

"No, that ain't-" Veronica pulled and cocked her pistol. "What- what are you doing?"

“You set me up. What kind of women are you?”

“The kind that don’t brook no outsider taking our men.”

“Simon Garvey is worth killing another woman?”

“She wasn’t going to kill you, just teach you a lesson.”

“By throwing a knife in my face!” Veronica pulled the trigger; the cousin shrieked and ran to cower behind another patron who sat frozen in a chair. “Everybody get out but this fool.”

“Now, wait a minute!” The owner came forward with his hands up. “The girls made a mistake.”

“I’ll say they did.”

“Look, I’ll finish your hair. Let Pauline go see about Sabrina.”

“Right. So, she can come back and shoot me while you press my hair? Do I look so stupid to you folks?”

“I’m- I’m leaving!” Pauline decided to break and run from the salon. A bullet to her shoulder stopped her at the open doorway screaming and grabbing her arm.

“Jesus Christ! What are you doing?” the owner demanded and stepped in front of Pauline. “She ain’t armed or nothing!”

“And she ain’t leaving until you finish my hair,” Veronica told him. “Nobody is leaving. I suggest you get busy and be quick about it.” She reclaimed her seat in the chair and kept her gun pointed at Pauline.

“You are that girl those riders came looking for a few days ago,” the owner speculated and placed the irons back in the stove. “It has to be you.”

“I have no idea what you are yammering about,” she said. So, they were looking for her and going in the wrong direction. The knowledge was worth dodging a knife to the face. It was doubtful they’d double back.

“As long as you are wearing that gun and shooting folks you ain’t gonna hide from them much longer. The law or that mad dog gang.”

“I’m not hiding from anybody.”

“Girl, you just been lucky so far,” the owner shared parting a section of her hair then combed through it. “Course, I suppose you might be smart too, but in the end, it ain’t gonna matter because luck only lasts so long.”

“I suppose you know what you are talking about,” Veronica scoffed then smirked at the man in the mirror behind her own reflection. He had thick hair he wore pressed and curled then combed back. And wasn’t that perfume she detected every move he made over her?

“You crooks think you can do anything,” Pauline accused grimacing as she examined the wound on her shoulder. “One day, you are going to regret this.”

“Yeah,” Veronica agreed with a sigh. “One day, not today.”