

Chapter 8: Wonder Woman

"You're not the only one who can pick locks, dearie."-Dinah Selby

Dinah was awakened early the next morning by loud, insistent banging noises on her door. She buried her head in the pillow and threw the covers over her head. "Go away!" she moaned.

"Nope!" the familiar tenor voice called back cheerfully. "Rise and shine!"

Dinah raised her head blearily to look at the clock by the bedside. "It's five o'clock in the fucking morning, Lynley!"

"Quit being so lazy!" he threw back.

Dinah barked a short, irritated laugh. "That's rich coming from you."

"Sure, sure, whatever. Just get up! It's time to be on the move. That is, unless you wanna miss the flight..."

"The what?" Dinah raised her head to look at the door.

"The flight that we've gotta catch to get to our final destination, of course. Now're you getting up or not?" was the answer.

He heard the bed creak and feet move on the floor in reply. Reno-decked out in the same pair of jeans and the same black t-shirt as the day before-allowed himself a triumphant grin as he walked down the corridor and took the elevator downstairs. He stopped in the front lobby and leaned on a door frame in sight of the front desk.

He grinned cheekily at Palmer, who was sitting up high at the front desk, aided by a pile of books on his chair. "Mornin'," he drawled.

Palmer glanced up, eyes wide and expression panicked. "Oh no. What are you going to do to torture me!" The little man looked around like a caged animal.

"Nothing. Leviathan, don't be so paranoid. I've gotta leave. In fact, I'm leaving as soon as she gets her ass down here."

"And 'she' would be the young lady you arrived with?" Palmer asked with curiosity.

Reno nodded.

"Y'know, she looks too good for you," Palmer began.

"You've got it the wrong way around. I'm too good for her," the lanky man answered arrogantly.

"Nice to know you feel that way," Dinah's dry voice broke in. Both men turned to look at her. She was standing just outside of the elevator, looking on amusedly. "Now if I'm not mistaken, we've got to get going if we're gonna catch that flight."

"Yeah," Reno answered.

Dinah detached herself from the wall and moved toward the door.

"Wait; I've gotta get my shit from my room." He made as if he was going to lazily saunter his way toward the elevator, but Dinah held up his black leather jacket.

"This-and the shit in its pockets-is the only thing you had, right?" she asked.

"Yeah. How'd you get that?" Reno asked suspiciously, striding across the room and snatching it from her grasp.

She smiled with no real cheer. "You're not the only one who can pick locks, dearie."

"Y'know, that's one nickname I don't think I like..." he muttered, slinging the jacket over his shoulder.

Dinah tossed Palmer the key to her room, and Reno did the same, with a considerable amount of force behind his throw. One key landed on the edge of the little man's desk and skidded up to halt under his nose, while the other-guess who it belonged to-thwacked him in the forehead.

"Bye Palmer!" Reno said, waving cheerily.

Palmer groaned softly, rubbing at his rapidly reddening forehead. "Just get out of here!"

It was still dark, damp, and cold in Junon Harbor as the two long figures hurried through the empty, dank streets and corridors on their way to the airport.

"Why won't you tell me where we're going?" Dinah snapped for what seemed like the hundredth time that morning.

"Haven't we had this conversation before?" Reno asked, exasperated. "I'm not telling you because if you did you'd just ditch me, though that's starting to seem like a good idea..."

"Why don't you do it, then?" Dinah's gaze and face held a challenge as her eyes burned defiantly. "And come to think of it, why the fuck are you even here, anyway!"

The world will never know what Reno was about to respond, because as he opened his mouth to retort, he caught sight of someone moving out of the corner of his eye. He spun swiftly, feeling sure that he saw a flurry of activity as someone ducked behind a building.

"What was that?" Dinah had apparently seen it too.

"Whatever it was, it couldn't have been good," Reno replied, one long hand casually resting near his hip, where his nightstick hung from his belt.

"What time does that flight leave?" Dinah asked, glancing at her watch.

"Why the fuck are you asking about that when we've got more important things to worry about?" he questioned of her with a trace of bark to his voice, emerald eyes searching the half-gloom for movement. "There's someone following us."

"I noticed, Lynley; I'm not brain-dead. I'm asking because if the flight leaves at six, then we've got about two minutes to get there."

He whirled back to face the woman, messy, fiery tail of hair flipping over his shoulder in the process. "That's the last flight there for days. If we don't make it, we're in deep shit," he told her solemnly.

"Let's go!" She jogged off, throwing a quick glance over her shoulder, obviously watching for their pursuer.

Her companion caught up to her easily and pulled her aside seconds before she would have entered a widely traveled

corridor. "This way," he said, pulling her with him as he sprinted down a darker alleyway.

"What's this!" Dinah asked of the man running directly ahead of her, blinking to get used to the absence of light as the defaced, crumbling sides of a building flashed past on either side.

"A shortcut. Hurry up!"

Reno led her to the end of the alley, where there was a large wooden fence and a short stack of wooden crates pushed up against it. With a jump, he was onto the stack of crates. He threw a hand down on the top of the fence and used his momentum to vault over the top, landing in a crouch on the runway on the other side.

A half a second later, Dinah sailed over the fence to join him. Looking around, she quickly recognized that they were at the airport. A small cargo plane's engines were starting up.

"Fuck. Is that our ride?"

"'Fraid so," Reno answered grimly.

Suddenly, he heard a clattering noise. He and Dinah spun simultaneously to find that the person that had been following them had followed them over the fence as well.

She was tall, with unbound straight white hair that fell down her back to her waist. She looked to be too young for the hair, even though a viewer could not pinpoint her age exactly. Her body was lithe and muscled and exceedingly pale, and she had creepy silver eyes that looked like dark storm clouds. Her face was delicate and fragile-looking, with inhumanly high cheekbones and small pale pink lips. Long, flowing pristine white robes were anchored at one shoulder, and cascaded from there to her bare feet. She stood with a grace that Dinah had never seen the like of before; she almost swayed while standing still, and was clearly quite a threat.

But her appearance was not the most shocking thing about her. No, the most shocking thing was that Dinah recognized her.

"You are mine, child," the ageless woman purred in a dangerous, husky tone. She slowly drew a long, thin sword from a sheath that had been hidden by her robes and pointed it directly at Dinah. A smile split those demure lips into a demonic tooth-baring grin.

"You! You were the human I could see from my tube when Hojo was experimenting on me!" Dinah exploded vehemently, taking an unconscious step toward the other woman. "Why would you want to take me back to them? You have just as much of a right to hate them as I do!"

"Poor misguided little lamb." Despite the implied kindness of the words, the tone in which they were delivered was venomously angry, and that playful, awful smile dropped from her face. The gigantic blade which, during the encounter so far, had not wavered or moved a millimeter now spun in a terrifyingly quick, graceful, deadly spin; a bit of showing off on the part of the swordswoman who held it.

Dinah came to her senses and took several steps back. No matter how badly this woman had been treated, it was time to bolt. "I think we should run like hell; what about you?" Dinah muttered to Reno out of the side of her mouth.

That was when she first realized that Reno was gone. She spun her head to look about quickly, but all she saw was the plane still powering up and the woman still advancing.

Damn you, Lynley. I should have known. You only watch out for number one, she thought bitterly.

She didn't have time now for lingering on a certain Midgarian scumbag, though, and she quickly turned her attention to her fellow ex-research specimen.

"You really don't want to do this!" Dinah pleaded with the woman.

The only reaction from the white-clothed figure was to begin stepping forward toward the blonde woman, sword held at the ready and the ghost of a smirk hovering about those lips.

Dinah quickly wised up and started to back away, the other woman accordingly adjusting her pace to follow.

Watching the other person advance-and seeing the power and speed evident in her well-formed limbs-Dinah made a snap judgment. "Please, don't hurt me!" she whimpered, and cowered backward, projecting a sense of tears into her voice.

There was a snort from her attacker, and an expression of pure, unadulterated hatred and fury passed across her face as she drew a syringe from her voluminous robes with the hand that was not supporting the blade. "Shivankul, how I wish I might cut your throat!" That voice wasn't a soft purr any longer; no, it was hard, cutting, and choked with rage. Those inhuman silver eyes were glittering with an intense light as she jabbed toward the smaller woman's neck.

Dinah's hand shot up and knocked the syringe flying to splinter into tiny shards of glass on the tarmac. Her foot moved at the same time, catching the woman in the kneecap. Unready for the sudden attack, she staggered back and almost fell. Dinah pressed her advantage, both fists flying out; one to catch her adversary in her right eye, and the other to double the woman over with a punch in the gut. The blonde woman swiftly kicked the sword out of the woman's hand to sail across the pavement and land too far for her to reach.

Then the woman recovered from the gut punch much faster than she should have been able to. She straightened up, and her fist struck Dinah in the side of her head with the force of a mac truck.

Dinah was dimly aware of a roaring in her ears, and a falling sensation. Then nothing.

The white-clad attacker, lips pressed into a thin, angry line, bent over, grabbed the unconscious woman under the armpits, and hoisted her up over her shoulder. That was when she finally became aware of the loud roar in her ears from right behind her, and she sensed a huge presence.

A voice chirped from behind her ear, "Thanks, but I'll take that from here."

Dinah's weight was suddenly wrenched from her and gone, and the white-haired woman spun.

A battered little cargo plane was taxiing along the runway directly beside her, and a redheaded man was crouched in the open hatch of the plane, grinning broadly at her. Directly beside him was Dinah's prone form. The man gave her one last impertinent wave, then slammed the door shut as the little plane lifted off.

The woman gave an animalistic howl of fury and rage, and glared after the plane that was rapidly climbing into the early morning air.