

BLAME THE DOGS

ADVANCED READING COPY

by Laura Martin

PART 1 :

COME OUT AND PLAY

The French words "les chiennes" translates to "the female dogs" in English.

They can also refer to the meaning "the bitches", a translation that applies to the proper term for female dogs as well as vulgar slang for 'the bitches', the objectionable women.

Chapter One:

When Elvis met Janey

Have you ever met someone and instantly knew you were going to be friends? This happened to Janey and me.

She walked in at Restaurant Breathe on that early winter's day in 1984, her dark hair tied in a bun, her white blouse ironed in a rush, and I was struck by a sense of familiarity that I hardly ever experience.

Her smile was a little shy; obviously she was petrified for her first day at Breathe—working there is a big deal for even the experienced waiter.

As the night progressed, and I comfortably looked after my usual corner, I saw her walking towards table 9 with a tray full of cocktails. The women at table 9 all wore matching pink boas and top hats for what must have been a hen's night. All eight gals hardly looked up when she reached the table. Somehow in that moment, I anticipated what was about to happen. I started walking towards her, could hear her soft voice ask: "The Moon

Dance cocktail?"

One of the women, a gal with a very short bob over dark smoky eyes, dangled her salon claws above the table.

"Eight cocktails, eight women...mmmh, let's see if she can work this out."

Janey blushed and leaned forward to place the first glass on the table.

And that is when it happened—just as I had expected.

Nobody takes a tray full of cocktails on their first day. The glasses are darn wobbly and even I hold the stems as I make my way to a table. The bar should never have sent her out there. But it was too late. As if a conductor demanded a ritardando, the glasses seemed to slide off the tray so lethargically slow that for a moment, I thought I could get to her on time; save her. Janey gasped; the women looked up as eight large glasses tumbled down towards them. Shrieks and squeals followed as the liquid poured over the top hats, creating brief waterfalls over the women's faces. Ice cubes clinked on the table. Glass shattered. The cacophony inevitably drew the attention of all other guests. My hand was already resting on Janey's tense shoulder.

"Apologies ladies, we will cover all your drycleaning expenses. I will fetch some towels, right away. Your drinks are on the house for the rest of the evening."

The hats had been the saviors, funnily enough. The women were mad, but free drinks are hard to resist. I folded my widest apologetic smile at them as I gently led a flustered Janey to the kitchen.

"You saved me," she said. I didn't think it was such a big deal. Any decent human being would (or should) do the same. But she folded her arms around my neck and gave me the tightest hug. Nobody had ever given me a hug like that.

And that's how we became friends.

Janey and Elvis.

Through thick and thin.

I may have rescued her that night, but I didn't know that she would turn out to become *my* savior in life.

I owe her so much.

And yet her downfall is entirely my fault.

Chapter Two:

Vic rules

"Help me move these sweets," Vic says as she lifts the first box off the table. Their headquarters are nestled inside the storage space of a tiny Turkish sweets store, where the store front is no more than a door. It has a back entrance too, straight onto the alley behind; the main reason why she had chosen the location. Once they have piled the boxes on the floor, the table reveals the many names scratched into its wood. Katarina. Brenda. Mandy. Alyssa. Fay. The names cover two thirds of the table. Every time when they learn of a serious assault or rape, they scratch the name of the victim into the wood.

Vic checks her watch. They should have been here by now.

She prays this girl will have some balls and will boost the group's energy. They will need it.

Vic looks across to Pam, who sits quietly on the corner of a chair. *If it's another one like her, I'll hang myself.*

Lizzy, her frizzy blond hair in a bouncy ponytail, calls them from the desk.

"Hey, hey, listen here!" Lizzy rolls the chair closer to the screen. "The number of sexual assault cases in Vallerton, Arrowbrooke and Old Mill show a careful but clear drop of 2% relative to the previous year. Some suggest there may be a connection between this drop and the activities of Les Chiennes, the female activist group, or rebel group, that has been active for the last 1.5 years. Despite their methods being frowned upon by many, and despite the fact that they are under investigation, the majority of the public—in particular the women—seem to root for them. Their fanbase on social media is rapidly growing, with their Instagram account alone showing over 500,000 followers from across the globe."

The girls clap and howl like wild dogs and the backdoor opens with a clank. Maya and Samira walk in, with a blindfolded girl in between them. She is small and has a nose like a button.

They push her down onto one of the metal chairs and she lands with an "Oomph."

"Welcome," Vic says. "I am glad you found your way here."

"Yes, you gave excellent directions," Nicky replies to the darkness around her.

<CHAPTER TWO HAS BEEN CUT SHORT HERE FOR THIS EXCERPT>