

ED BRUBAKER SEAN PHILLIPS

FATALE



Number Nineteen





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Chapter Five

SINCE HE'D STARTED SEEING BEYOND THE ILLUSIONS OF THE WORLD...

...WULF FELT LIKE HE WAS BEING WOVEN INTO THE FABRIC OF SOMETHING VAST, BUT *INEFFABLE*.



HIS DUTIES IN THE FAKE WORLD GALLED HIM EVEN MORE THAN USUAL.



LIKE HAVING TO TAKE A STATEMENT FROM AN *ASSAULT VICTIM* IN THE E.R.



WHO CARES?



AND THE MORON JUST GOES ON AND ON...

...SUPPOSED TO JUST BE A MUSIC VIDEO, Y'KNOW?

LIKE DANCING OR SOMETHING...



HE'S BARELY PAYING ATTENTION AS HE JOTS DOWN THE DETAILS...

...BUT INSTEAD, THERE WAS JUST THIS ONE DANCER...

...ON THIS, LIKE, PEDESTAL...



BUT THEN HE HEARS HIM DESCRIBING THE GIRL...



...AND WULF REMEMBERS THE WEAVE, AND FEELS IT PULLING HIM.

HANG ON, LET'S GO BACK A SEC...

OH, OKAY, SURE...



NOW, WHAT DID YOU SAY THIS BAND WAS CALLED...?



LISTEN TO ME... THAT SHOOT TOTALLY FUCKED US.

WHEN WORD GETS OUT...



...WE COULD HAVE REPORTERS SHOWING UP... OR COPS... WHO KNOWS WHAT...?

WE HAVE TO GET RID OF SKIP'S BODY NOW.

I'M NOT GOING ANYWHERE.



JANE'S BEEN LOST OUT THERE SINCE YESTERDAY...

...AND THIS IS WHERE SHE KNOWS TO COME.



NO, SHE'S NOT LOST.





THERE WERE STILL PIECES MISSING, THINGS SHE DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT THE LAST FEW WEEKS, BUT JOSEPHINE WAS SURE OF ONE THING...

SHE HAD TO GET THE HELL OUT OF SEATTLE.



SHE'D DONE FAR TOO MUCH HARM HERE, AND WORSE, SHE'D EXPOSED HERSELF.



ALL THAT WAS LEFT OF POOR GAVIN WAS A BLOODSTAIN.

SOMEONE HAD COME LOOKING FOR HER...



...BECAUSE SHE'D LEFT A TRAIL.




WANDERING AROUND EMPTY-HEADED... LIKE SOME NEWBORN...






CHRIST, WHAT WAS SHE DOING, RUNNING AROUND WITH THOSE KIDS?


SHE'D WORKED SO HARD TO LEARN CONTROL, AND HARDER STILL TO LEARN TO BE ALONE.




SHE'D ALMOST FORGOTTEN THE EARLY DAYS, AFTER HER FIRST DEATH...



WHEN THE CURSE INSIDE HER RAN WILD.



BEFORE SHE KNEW WHAT SHE WAS.



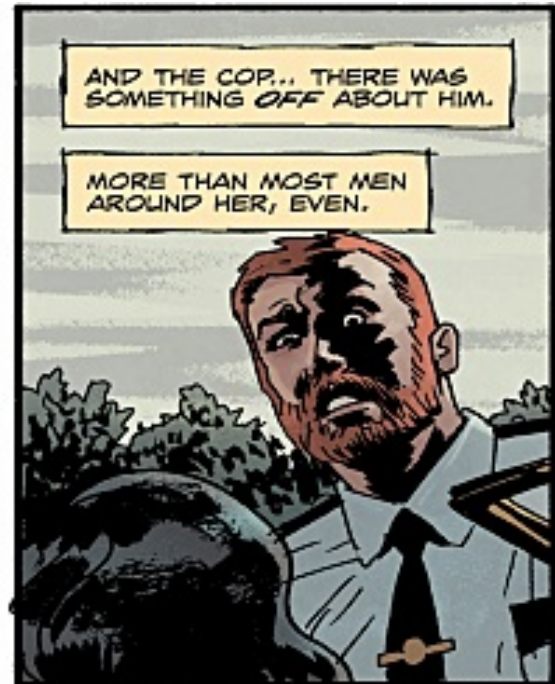
HOW COULD THIS HAVE HAPPENED? HOW COULD SHE LOSE HERSELF?

THE LAST THING SHE REMEMBERED
WAS A COP PULLING HER OVER.



AND THE COP... THERE WAS
SOMETHING OFF ABOUT HIM.

MORE THAN MOST MEN
AROUND HER, EVEN.



AFTER THAT, IT'S
JUST EMPTY SPACE...



UNTIL SHE'S
WRAPPED IN
LANCE'S ARMS...




IT HAD BEEN SO
LONG SINCE SHE'D
ALLOWED HERSELF
TO BE TOUCHED.




SHE CAN STILL FEEL HIS
HANDS ON HER, AND
THE LONELINESS SHE'D
GOTTEN USED TO IS
NEARLY CRUSHING NOW.






BUT IT WASN'T JUST HIS HANDS, WAS IT? THAT'S THE PROBLEM...




IT WAS HIS BANDMATE, TOO. AND WHO KNOWS WHO ELSE?



AFTER WHAT SHE'D SEEN WHEN SHE AWOKE ON THAT STAGE, ANYTHING WAS POSSIBLE.




UNTETHERED, HER INFLUENCE HAD JUST RIPPLED OUT.



THOSE KIDS HAD NO IDEA WHO THEY'D TAKEN IN.

SHIT.



THEN ANOTHER PIECE OF THE PUZZLE SLIDES INTO PLACE...

MA'AM, PLEASE RETURN TO YOUR --

I NEED TO GET OFF THIS TRAIN. NOW.



...AND SHE REMEMBERS TOM'S SONG.














JOSEPHINE TOOK AN HOUR TO GET HERE FROM THE TRAIN STATION, TAKING CARE THAT NO ONE COULD FOLLOW HER...



BUT SHE KNOWS IMMEDIATELY THAT IT WAS WASTED EFFORT.



SHE CAN *SENSE* DEATH...



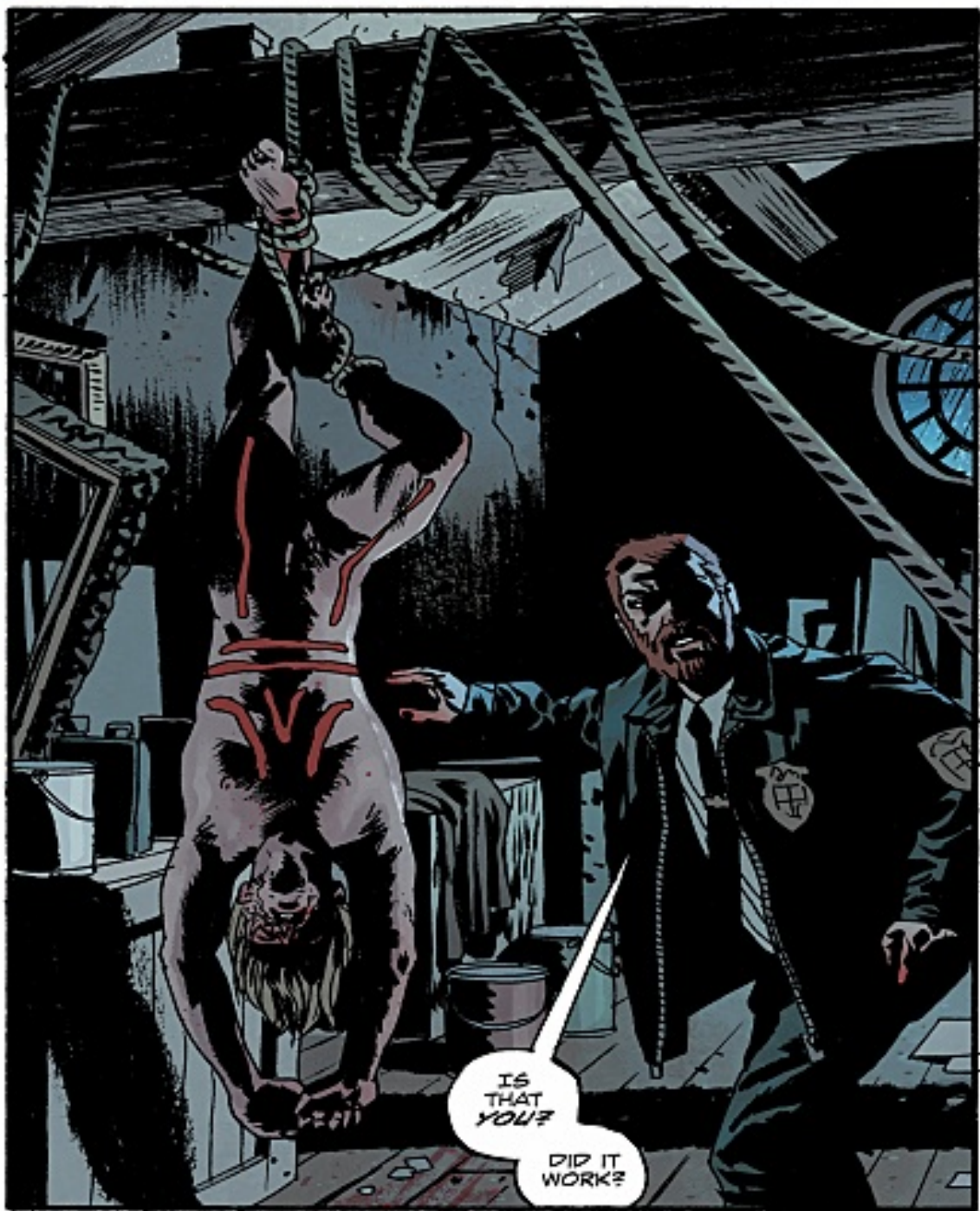
...BEFORE SHE EVEN SEES THE BODIES.



SHE'S ALWAYS TOO LATE.

THEN SHE FEELS
A PULL INSIDE...

...AND SHE KNOWS
THIS ISN'T OVER.






STEP OUT
WHERE I CAN
SEE YOU... OR
THE BOY DIES
NOW.




NO. HE
DOESN'T.

GOD, I AM SO
SICK OF THIS
SHIT... PEOPLE
LIKE YOU...




WAIT -
WHAT ARE
YOU -- ?

SHE'S DONE SOMETHING.
HE CAN'T FOCUS ON HER.




ALL HE SEES IS A
BRIGHT BLUR...




HE JUST WANTED
TO SEE HER ONE
MORE TIME...

NO... NO...
IT'S NOT
FAIR...



THAT'S ALL HE'D
EVER WANTED...

IT'S
NOT --




SHNNK

OH






MR SOMMERSET
HAD BOUGHT OUT A
LOT OF BUSINESSES
OVER THE PAST
DECADE. PLACES
LIKE *SUB-TRACK
RECORDS*.



POP CULTURE
INFILTRATION WAS A
KEY TO HIS POWER.


AND WHO
ELSE HAS
SEEN THESE
RECORDINGS,
BRUCE?

JUST, UH...
THE ASSISTANT
DIRECTOR...
THE GUYS IN
EDITING...



YOUNG MINDS AND
BODIES WERE EAGER
TO BE EXPLOITED, IF
YOU COULD REACH
THEM.

MY BUDDY
PETE. I JUST...
I HAD TO SHOW
SOMEONE ELSE,
Y'KNOW?



NO... I'M
BLIND, SO I
WOULDN'T
KNOW.

OH, MAN...
YEAH, I KNOW
THAT. SHIT. I'M
SORRY.



MY MIND IS
JUST A BIT...
OFF... SINCE
I SAW THAT
GIRL.




YES... WELL, I WANT A
LIST OF *EVERYONE*
WHO'S SEEN THIS...
PERFORMANCE...

YES, OF
COURSE, SIR...
RIGHT AWAY...



AND THERE'D
BETTER *NOT*
BE ANY OTHER
COPIES.




THEY'LL ALL HAVE TO BE CONSUMED, HE THINKS, AFTER THEY LEAVE HIM.

PROBABLY EVEN *BRUCE*, WHICH IS A SHAME, HE HAS A REAL EAR FOR TALENT...




BUT NO ONE BUT HIM CAN BE ALLOWED TO KNOW HER LIKE THIS...




HE CAN'T SEE, HER SERVANT TOOK THAT FROM HIM A LONG TIME AGO...

BUT HE PLAYS THE TAPE OVER AND OVER AGAIN, AND HE CAN FEEL HER...



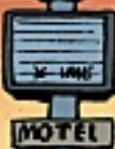
SHE'S SO PURE, THE STARS SWAY ALONG WITH HER...

AND HIS BLIND EYES CRY TEARS OF JOY...



BECAUSE HE KNOWS NOW, FOR SURE, THAT HE WILL SEE HIS MASTERS AGAIN.

Two Weeks Later -
Somewhere in Montana



JO STAYED WITH HIM
FOR FOUR DAYS AFTER
THEY FLED SEATTLE.



THEY STILL HAD A
LOT OF CASH LEFT
OVER FROM THE
BANK ROBBERIES...



... AND SHE DID WHAT SHE
COULD TO TRY TO TEACH HIM
HOW TO LIVE ON THE RUN.



BUT HE WAS SO
FUCKED UP.




SOMETIMES SHE
COULDN'T EVEN TELL
IF HE WAS LISTENING...




LANCE,
PLEASE...
THIS IS
IMPORTANT...


YOU'RE ALL
OVER THE
PAPERS...




AND HE WASN'T LISTENING... HE WAS TRAPPED IN A MEMORY LOOP...




WATCHING THAT COP BEAT JON TO DEATH... OVER AND OVER AGAIN...



WHILE LANCE JUST DID NOTHING. JUST STOOD THERE.




THAT HAD BROKEN HIM AS BADLY AS WHAT CAME NEXT HAD LIT HIS BRAIN ON FIRE.




HE WANTS TO ASK HER ABOUT WHAT THE COP WAS CHANTING, BUT HIS LIPS CAN'T FORM THE WORDS...



AND SHE JUST LOOKS AT HIM LIKE HE'S A KID WHO'S TRYING TOO HARD.



SHE MAKES LOVE TO HIM ONE LAST TIME, AND HE KNOWS IT'S OUT OF PITY...



BUT HE DOESN'T CARE, THIS IS ALL HE HAS LEFT.

AND THEN HE DOESN'T HAVE HER ANYMORE, EITHER.



You'll never get better around me. I'm sorry
- J



SHE'S NOT COMING BACK, HE KNOWS THAT BY THE SECOND NIGHT.



BUT HE CAN'T MOVE ON, ANYWAY. SOME PART OF HIM WON'T LET GO.



HE STAYS UP LATE WATCHING THE NEWS...

-- CAUGHT IN A SATANIC SEX MURDER, THEIR BIG HIT *FLOW MY TEARS* IS BACK ON TOP OF THE CHARTS...



AND EVERY DAY HE WATCHES THE ROAD, FOR HER RETURN...

HEY... HEY, MISTER...



...UNTIL HE CAN'T ANYMORE.

...AREN'T YOU THAT GUY, THAT SINGER?



FROM THAT BAND?



Epilogue

I'd given up trying to break out of the handcuffs after a few hours...

Instead, I just listened to the story *Nelson* was mumbling his way through...

He skips around and loses his place a lot, like some kind of William Burroughs cut-up...

But he keeps saying "the band" this and "the band" that... and that's when it hits me...

HOLY SHIT...

...AN' THEN SKIP HAD TO BE GOTTEN RIP OF... AN' THEN...

...YOU'RE LANCE HICKOK, FROM AMSTERDAM.

DON'T SAY THAT NAME.

And suddenly a dozen *other* thoughts are flying through my head...

Amsterdam, the grunge band who worshipped the *devil*...

And the *lead singer* who'd murdered his friends and disappeared...



...Last seen at some roadside motel in the mid-90s, where he'd killed a family and stolen their camper-van.

...OH MY GOD...

This was a story I'd known *half my life*...

...IT WAS HER?

THINK YOU'RE THE *FIRST GUY* WHOSE LIFE SHE WRECKED? F*CK THAT...

...YOU'RE JUST THE LATEST IN A STRING...


Y'KNOW, I REALLY *LOVED* AMSTERDAM. THAT ONE SONG.

THAT WAS AS GOOD AS ANYTHING NIRVANA OR PEARL JAM EVER -

F*CK PEARL JAM!

AND STOP TRYING TO MAKE FRIENDS WITH ME.





NOW C'MON...
DON'T MAKE ME
CARRY YOU...

JUST...
TELL ME
WHAT YOU
WANT,
MAN...

MAYBE WE'RE
AFTER THE
SAME
THING...?



YOU CUT SOME
PARTS *OUT* OF
MY UNCLE'S BOOK
WHEN YOU
PRINTED IT...
WHY?

CHRIST, YOU'RE
ALWAYS
SUCH IDIOTS...
WAS I THIS
STUPID?



I TOOK OUT THE
PARTS THAT
WERE LIKE
TOM'S
SONG...



BECAUSE YOU
DON'T EVEN
KNOW HOW TO
PROTECT
HER.

WAIT -- I
DON'T KNOW
WHAT YOU'RE
TALKING
ABOUT...




YOU NEVER DO,
YOU NEVER
LISTEN...

HERE,
THIS
WAY...



SEE, SHE'S SO
HARD TO FIND,
THAT'S THE
THING...

JANE'S TOO
GOOD AT BEING
INVISIBLE...



BUT THE
BROKEN THINGS
SHE LEAVES
BEHIND, LIKE
YOU... I CAN
FIND...



AND YOU'RE GONNA LEAD ME TO HER...

WHAT - HEY!



I GOT IT WRONG BEFORE, BUT I BEEN GETTIN' BETTER...

I BEEN REMEMBERING HARD, AND FIGURING THINGS...



...AND I'M PRETTY SURE I KNOW THE RIGHT WORDS TO SAY NOW...



It takes a few seconds to understand what I'm hearing...

NO...



...NO!



And as we struggle, Nelson's eyes are full of sympathy...

STOP - JUST DON'T!



But his smile is the smile of a lunatic...



...and I have no escape.

END OF BOOK FOUR



FATALE Number Nineteen Ed Brubaker Sean Phillips

Rated M / Mature