

Countdown America by M.C. Fox / Chapter Excerpt

Isabella's eyes were heavy, and the pillow was so soft beneath her head that when sleep started to come to her, she was helpless to stop it. All the fear, all the turmoil that had ricocheted throughout her brain all day was giving over to this sweet oblivion, and she welcomed the respite. Even as she was about to lose consciousness, she knew she would only sleep for a few hours, but that would help restore her, and she looked forward to it.

But then she heard a soft clicking sound, and she was instantly awake, her eyes wide open. The suite was laid out so that her bedroom led into the spacious living area, which was where the door to the hallway was located, and it was from there that the sound originated.

Someone was entering her suite.

All it took was a second for her to go through the rolodex of explanations as to why someone would be entering her room at night to know that it couldn't be anything good.

Someone was coming to kill her.

Again.

Silently, she slid out of bed—grateful she had decided to sleep in a tank top and yoga pants and not anything less—and pressed her back against the wall opposite her bed, right next to the french style doors that separated the rooms. She kept her breathing even and silent as she listened to the softest of footsteps approaching her room.

Head on ice, she repeated to herself, recalling the mantra she had learned in basic training when dealing with attacks. Keep your cool, and remember your training. Don't let any thoughts cloud your mind besides defending yourself.

One of the glass doors was open. She had left the other shut. Next to the doors, flat against the wall, she watched, listening as the almost-silent footsteps got closer.

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And then he was inside.

In the dark of the room, the man didn't see her. He kept his eyes on the bed, where she knew he must think she was still sleeping. He didn't turn to the side—he had no reason to—and so he didn't see Isabella waiting there. She waited for an agonizing few seconds for him to step all the way into the room.

Then she struck.

She curled her fingers into a tight fist and threw the hardest punch of her life, which connected full on with the back of his skull, directly on target.

Immediately she felt the *crack* in her knuckles and knew it was likely she'd broken a finger or two. The human skull is incredibly hard, and punching it is the equivalent of punching a brick wall, but Isabella knew it was worth it if it knocked her opponent out.

Unfortunately, it didn't do the trick. The man fell to his hands and knees, but he wasn't out for the count. He groaned and grasped the back of his head, but already he was staggering to his feet. Isabella grabbed his hair and started to drive her knee into his head, but he turned and threw his hands up, blocking her strike. She grasped one of his wrists and attempted to knee him again, but with his one free hand he blocked her again and grabbed her leg. She lost the grip of his wrist. He planted his feet beneath him and drove his shoulder into her abdomen. They crashed into the wall, Isabella taking all the impact in her back.