



HOODTOWN

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A.C.L.L. RING ROOKIE COLLECTION: 'X' RUDA AGE:19 HT:5'9" WF:165



1

Name's X. I'm a wrestler, at least I used to be. They used to call me the Ice Queen, on account of my ice-colored eyes and emotionless persona in the ring. I'm a *ruda*, a stone cold bitch and no kinda hero, but I still have a story that needs telling. Oh, right, and in case you couldn't tell by this mask on my head, I'm a Hood.

Now maybe you don't have Hoods in your nice suburban neighborhood, but this ain't Cobalt Street, baby. This is Hoodtown. *Secreto City. La Yasa.*

Bordered by Fire Avenue to the south and 171th Street to the north. Centro and Lastine to the east and west. It's the wrong side of the tracks, the shadow beneath the glitter and flash of downtown Angel City. The place the glossy brochures warn you to avoid. Skins call it a slum and a menace. They love to get on the radio and whine about what a sewer it is, but they can't seem to stop their hapless offspring from showing up every weekend to fuck our hookers and drink our tequila. All their freaks and rejects, criminals and runaways and anyone who needs to disappear, they all wind up in Hoodtown. As for me, I was born here, lived here all my life. Wouldn't live anywhere else.

3

Anyway it was the end of September, summer's heat still reluctant to let go as the sun bled away between the buildings and the city's darker rhythms began their nightly tune up. Gunning engines and wolf whistles as a harried dancer in a beetle-green hood and parrot-feather hat threaded her way through the curvaceous custom rides cruising South Lutteroth Boulevard. That flat *pop-pop-pop* echoing through the alleys, an all too familiar sound that could have been firecrackers but wasn't. The soft clack of polished *Go* stones as the old men outside the *carnicería* gathered up their game and went inside, subtle counterpoint to the harsher clack of high heels on concrete as the Blue Street pimps turned their women out for business. A distant radio struggled to find a song beneath the static, some Japanese mambo number that had been a hit a few years back.

I was on my way to Madrugada's, caught up in my own rhythm, last year's good shoes against the sidewalk and the cranky twang in my bum knee underpinning the gentle tumble of random thoughts brought on by dull routine. I strolled past the scrappy stalls selling chewing gum and mask laces and switchblades. Past heaps of naughty postcards and religious images of El Santo and The Hooded Virgin, Our Lady of Secrets. Past exuberant event posters for the weekend's big A.C.L.L. show, a hooded Who's Who of local ring royalty. Past the forlorn glory of a masked mariachi band sitting on their instrument cases, gaudy hats at their feet, sharing a single cigarette while one of their number dug shirtless into the open maw of their ancient bus'

steaming engine. Past posturing gangsters with their expensive *máscaras*, expensive cars and expensive women. Past street kids in cheap charity hoods practicing awkward *planchas* off the dented hood of an old, primer-dull Tomahawk. Past a belled cart selling sno-cones in flavors like black cherry, *tamarindo* and green tea. Past a thousand things, invisible ordinary things that I describe to you now in spite of the sure fact that then, on that day, they went as unnoticed as the treacherous sidewalk, humped and buckled beneath my feet and the violet air thick with carbon-monoxide and smoke from frying corn and burning trash, burning in my nostrils. On that day, I thought of nothing more than the sweat gathering beneath my hood, making the back of my neck itch. I fantasized idly about swimming, about the sound of ice against the rim of a tall glass.

Madrugada's place was inside a narrow, gargoyle infested relic of a building tucked between a burlesque theater and a Japanese bakery. Out front, eating a red-bean bun and flipping a yo-yo, was the young comic they had hired on at the burlesque house a week or two before, the one whose name never seemed to stick with me. His nose was massive beneath his ugly clown hood, a fact made worse by the spongy red ball sewed to its tip. He wore a baggy plaid suit and a crumpled hat with the brim folded up in front.

"Well hullo, Miz X!" he said, whizzing the yo-yo out and back, out and back, with a sound like the low buzz of lazy insect wings.

"What's shakin', comic?"

He put his hand to his belly and did a little bump and grind.

“Same thing that’s been shakin’ since the dawn of time.”

As if cued, a cluster of leggy dancers thundered past like a herd of spooked gazelle and he turned to follow them with hands hooked like claws, licking his chops.

“Break a leg!” I called after him.

He called back over his shoulder;

“How bout you break one for me?”

I smiled.

“Not for a comic’s salary.”

Inside Madrugada’s building, the lobby was grim and shabby. Carpet the color of rotting leaves, worn bald down the middle. There used to be two chairs, but one had mysteriously vanished, leaving behind a square of greener, cleaner carpet. The dented ashtray held more butts than sand.

The elevator was a cranky iron deathtrap that smelled like the rusted guts of old typewriters. Its operator, a strange little scrap of a Hood whose stained uniform never seemed buttoned right, had this habit of acting like he didn’t see you get in and then slamming the door shut and wrenching the switch so that the poor old machine lurched upward like a kicked dog. I took the stairs.

My client was already there. A Skin, barely more than a kid. Y’know, the usual routine. Some easy shoot holds, just stiff enough to get him hot, but not enough to really hurt him, plus the usual face-sitting and other silly shit that has nothing to do with wrestling and everything to do with hamfisted groping and trying

to sniff my crotch. Far cry from a title match at the Telco Arena, but hey, the money was good and I was already a month behind on my bills.

Mistress Madrugada herself was there too, as usual. She called me into the lounge, a room as dark and indulgently sumptuous as its mistress. Full of rich black velvet and red silk, like a disturbing cross between a funeral parlor and a whorehouse. Appropriate, really. She reclined, candlelit and smoking on a plush divan, all desperate, sexpot cleavage and fang pricked lips, poured into a black silk dressing gown embroidered with dragons. The delicate fabric seemed barely up to the job of containing her milk-white, overfed curves. Her *máscara* was made of deep, glossy red satin, open at the top to let free an unsettlingly Skin-like profusion of perfectly coifed oil-black curls.

I know that’s the style now, but it still rubs me the wrong way. Not that I’m a prude or anything, it’s just... I don’t know. Wrong somehow, like you’re trying to hide your hood and look more like a Skin. Back when she was big, when she used to be a hotshot torchy in the Skin clubs, Madrugada was one of the first Hoods to grow her hair out and wear a tail threaded up through the top of her *máscara*, always milking the shock value and getting the Skin boys all worked up. It was easier back then. Not like now when you got joints all through Hoodtown with Hood girls in *máscaras* that might as well not exist, string bikinis for the head that cover barely more than a Halloween domino. You couldn’t pay me enough to leave the house like that.

“*Equisita!*” Madrugada called, motioning for me to crouch down close to her and rubbing her masked cheek cat-fashion against mine. She had a slave kneeling beside her, a thin, morose boy in one of Madrugada’s submissive hoods, plain black with SLAVE across the forehead in red. His long white throat was marred by ugly, scabbed-over bitemarks.

She spoke in her low, rapid Spanish. “*Your boy is waiting. You better go to him before he dies of desire.*” She tossed her thick hair, smirking. “*Ever since he walked in, all he could talk about was your...*” She made a generous curve in the air, switching to English to say; “Big beautiful ass.”

She smacked my admittedly substantial hindquarters, fangs flashing in a catty smile.

What is it with men and my ass? I shrugged.

“*At least someone appreciates all the quesadillas that had to die to make this ass what it is today.*” I stood and switched to English. “Anyway, how’s tricks?” I could smell her, smoke and roses, blood and spoiled pomegranates, a dangerous smell.

“Oh, you know.” She snapped her fingers, causing the slave to stick out his tongue. She ground her cigarette out against the tender pink muscle and immediately slid another between her lips. The slave blinked back tears and struggled to hold his hand steady enough to spark a slender golden lighter. “*Los mordelónes* were here again last night.” She shrugged, casual irony in her mouth as she inhaled deep and then licked at her carnivore teeth. “They want a higher cut.”

The biter gets bit, I thought. Underworld karma.

“Goddamn cops,” The bastards had been worse than ever since that fat prick Pinkwater had been elected (by Skins of course, for our own good of course) on his “Clean Up Hoodtown” ticket. So far all he and his new goon squad had cleaned out was our wallets. Meanwhile the endless turf wars between the local crime bosses had continued to escalate, becoming hotter, more savage. I shook my head, showing the expected sympathy but thinking more about how this was gonna trickle down to me.

“Business as usual.” Madrugada exhaled through her nostrils, studied indifference as transparent as the bluish smoke in the air between us. I knew how close she was to going under. “*We’ll talk about it more after your session.*”

I knew what that meant too. She had been letting me slide on the house percentage she usually charges independents for use of her ring or any of the other themed playrooms. So much for that.

One of the other pro Mistresses chose that moment to show up in the lounge displaying her crawling client, a huge hairy bear of a man in an enormous diaper and a pale blue baby hood complete with the button-on padded straps that ran down between his legs. For a real baby, those straps kept the unknowing infant from pulling off the hood until they were old enough to understand why it could never be removed, but for this guy they obviously served a more perverse, grown-up function. I’d never seen any baby packing a hard-on like that under his diaper. Disgusted,

I headed for the cramped, curtained section of hallway that passed itself off as a dressing room.

The amazing shrinking income put me into a truly evil mood. As I stripped off my red gabardine summer suit, I noticed that one of the jet buttons was hanging by a thread. Every damn piece of clothing I owned was like that, endlessly propped up by the 100 year old seamstress who lived below me and would let out my slacks for free because she had been a fan back in the day. As I squeezed my “big beautiful ass” into my too-tight ring gear I thought of that soft and often-folded sketch buried somewhere at the bottom of my pocketbook, the design for my new gear. Now I don’t go for that neoJapanese look, all stylized horns and claws and fur. I like a more classic style jazzed up with just a touch of flash. Silvery fishnet tights and ultramodern singlet made from that amazing new fabric that has swirls of oilslick color beneath a frosty surface, black of course and a new hood that matched, trimmed with a matte silver vinyl. Well, money or no money, it wasn’t like I was ever gonna be back in a real ring any time soon after that shit went down with Blue Velvet, so the sketch stayed folded at the bottom of my bag and I made do with my usual black boots, black tights and simple black leotard that crept steadily up into the crack of my ass. At least I still had my good working hood, the hood I took three belts in, the hood I wore in the Telco Arena. It wasn’t real fancy, but beautifully made, tough enough to withstand any punishment. The body was a nice glossy black and the trim a heavy white patent leather. The

same design that I’ve worn every day since my fifteenth birthday, the day I chose the name and image that would define me and be my adult identity for the rest of my life. Well technically a few days after my birthday since I spent that actual day in juvi lock-up, but that’s a whole other story. My hood has always been spartan-simple. Just old-fashioned bad-guy black with hooked teardrop eyeholes and a small X between them. It felt good to trade my thinner dayhood for the workhood’s snug, familiar embrace.

I laced my boots and hood and took a pose before the full length mirror. Never mind the jiggle under my arms or the way the legs of the leotard squeezed my heavier-than-ever thighs so they bulged out around the elastic, I still looked pretty good, like one tough lady you don’t want to mess with. Strong, as much muscle as fat. Hood glove-taut over the solid geometry of my facial bones, cheek and brow and the good, shapely sweep of my skull. Pale sled-dog eyes looking back at me, giving away nothing. Cold eyes that made a lie out of the soft, womanly cleavage and nurturing hips. Not bad, I told myself. Not too bad at all.

The client was young and wide-eyed, almost cute — for a Skin. His hair was close cropped, his skull nicely proportioned with a high forehead and square jaw and he was built like the “before” photo in a body building ad. In spite of his underdog physique, he took the brunt of my bad mood without a whimper, toughing out some nasty submission holds while rhapsodizing

breathlessly about my big ass and legs, about how I was the most beautiful woman on earth and how he would be content to die crushed between my amazing thighs. I tossed him around Madrugada's chinzy play-ring like a ragdoll and he kept on coming back for more. It was really quite endearing. His dick was hard enough to cut glass under his brand new tights as I knelt on his shoulders and sat firmly on his gasping face. His breath was hot in my crotch, fists clenching and opening on the mat. I figured he was inches from a handsfree pop when there was a soft tap on the door.

"Yeah?" I released the skinny little jobber and scowled. Madrugada would never interrupt a session unless it was something serious.

Sure enough it was her, slave close behind with a heavy black phone on a silver tray, careful not to trip over the cord in his high heeled shoes. And sure enough, it was serious. Real serious.

"I'm sorry, X."

There was something in her eyes that made me squint and bite back on my sharp response. Instead I sent my pink-faced client into a corner of the ring and asked her who it was.

"It's your Aunt Flamingo. It's..." She chewed her lip, the left fang drawing a tiny bead of blood. "It's an emergency."

I lifted the receiver with a strange empty chill in my belly.

"Aunt Minnie, I'm in a session. What's wrong?"

Her voice was thick with tears and I could barely understand her.

"Minnie, slow down. A dead girl? What do you mean unmasked? A Skin?"

When she told me, I felt like someone had reached inside me and squeezed my heart. It was hard to breathe.

"Sweet *Santo*! I'll be right over."