



RAPID READS



WHEN I KILL YOU

MICHELLE WAN

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To Frances Hanna

CHAPTER ONE

I was jogging lightly in place at ring-side while Al, the owner of Al's Roadhouse & Pit, worked up the crowd.

"Our own luscious Lady Lava," he yelled, pointing at me. "A homegrown talent, five feet seven, one hundred and thirty pounds of dynamite. And does this lady love mud!"

I pumped my arms. The crowd, mostly men, whistled and cheered. Jimmy came out from the bar to give me a high five. He was the bartender at Al's and my main supporter.

“Good luck, kid,” he shouted over the noise.

“And weighing in at a hundred and forty-five, five feet eight of sheer swamp instinct, from Sarnia, Ontario...Wild... Woman...Wanda!”

More cheers. Wanda muscled forward and performed a little jig.

There was a big crowd out, a hundred at least. Most of the spectators were locals from the town and surrounding area. There wasn't a lot to do in Franks, Ontario, on a hot Sunday night in August. But they came from all over. Windsor, London, Hamilton, Toronto, some from as far away as Sudbury. Most of the guys had never seen female mud wrestling. Most of them were there for the skin. They wanted to ogle two semi-nude girls scrambling around getting dirty. They wanted a bit of titillation and a lot of laughs. A few, like me, took it seriously. I wore a one-piece suit, not a bikini. I'd been district

girls' wrestling champ in high school, and I knew the moves. So did Wanda. That was what made her such a tough opponent. That and the fact that she'd do anything to win.

While Al gabbed on about the future of mud wrestling in Canada, which was happening *here*, thanks to him, we climbed into the ring. The ring was outside behind the roadhouse. It was six feet square and the bottom was covered in mud. It should have been good quality bentonite, the kind of stuff they used in spas, but Al was cheap. It was the coarse stuff mixed with other junk to cut the cost. On the other hand, give the devil his due, Al's was one of the few places, other than one-off events, where you could see real mud wrestling. The sport had never taken off here the way it did south of the border. Too cold most of the year.

I was now kneeling in my corner, glaring across at Wanda, who was kneeling in hers and glaring back. I wanted to show her

I wasn't afraid of her, even though I knew she was big, mean and popular. I'd only met her once before. She beat me more by acclaim than on points, because the rules of wrestling are pretty loosely applied. Who wins is often who the crowd cheers loudest for. Or throws the most money at. That's something Al does his best to encourage.

We both went through the routine of the mud bath. The first few seconds can be critical in mud wrestling. Smearing yourself with mud straight off makes you slippery and harder to grab.

"Okay, ladies," Al mouthed into the mike. "This is a three-round match. You know the rules. No biting, scratching or hairpulling. You must remain in the mud at all times. You may not rise beyond a kneeling position. And no pulling off each other's clothing." Boos from the crowd.

"Are you ready?" He did the countdown. "Mud wrestle!"

Wanda came out of her corner fast, but I was faster. In mud wrestling it's speed, not size, that matters. I was on her and we grappled for a few seconds, shoving and sliding. I broke and came back to grapple again. This time I made a neat pass behind her and locked one arm around her neck. I tried to slide the other under her knee in a quick cradle that would tie her up like a package, but she bucked and managed to break my hold. This is where mud really adds another dimension to wrestling. It's slippery and unpredictable.

Now we were shoulder to shoulder, pushing and scrambling on our knees. Her weight gave her an advantage. I found myself giving ground bit by bit as she bulldozed me back. One of her well-known ploys was to throw her opponent right out of the mud. It was a real crowd pleaser and usually ended the match. She had me jammed up against the foam wall of the ring now, and the crowd was chanting, "Go! Go! Go!"

I sensed her tensing for the big push. I let her think she had me. Just as she drove in for the final ram, I managed to twist aside. It was enough to skew her balance. I followed up like lightning, using her momentum to pitch her on her back. Mud flew. The crowd loved it. Then I was all over her in a full body press. She flailed around to shake me, bridging and bucking. I stuck to her like wet clay, trying to force the pin. But she was strong and her shoulders wouldn't cooperate. The crowd was going nuts. Then the bell clanged to end the round.

"You're crap, Lava," Wanda sneered as we separated.

When the whistle went for Round Two, I launched myself at her, but Wanda was prepared for me. We slapped skin, shoved head-to-head. Suddenly she ducked and grabbed me around the middle. We rolled. I slithered loose. We came at each other again, locking arms. This time I got her in

a leg clamp and held her for a few seconds before she wriggled free. Now it was her turn to toss me around. I tried to stabilize, but my knee slid out from under me. Next thing I knew I was facedown in the mud. She really ground me in it.

“Eat dirt,” she rasped in my left ear. I hooked my leg around hers, lost the hold, hooked again. Over the shouting I heard Jimmy yelling something at me. I gave a tremendous buck, managed to get my arms and knees under me. She stayed on top of me, but at least I was up for air. My eyes were so caked with mud I could barely see. I was thankful when the bell rang.

We were both breathing hard as we went into Round Three. We slammed together, sort of falling onto each other. More grappling, shoving, circling. Wanda got me in a wristlock, did a quick shift, got behind me and threw a half nelson. She had me for a moment before I wriggled free. We separated

and came together again. But I was running out of gas. She sensed it and used it to her advantage to throw me sideways and slam me on my back. Along the way she drove her knee into my stomach—hard. It knocked the wind out of me, and suddenly she was straddling me, heavy as a landslide, going for the pin. I struggled to bridge.

She growled, this time in my right ear, “You’re dead meat, Lava,” and gave me a quick, sharp head butt that had me blinking stars. Al, who was refereeing, pretended not to see. But I could hear Jimmy in my corner yelling, “Foul!”

The butt stunned me, and that was all Wild Woman Wanda needed. She threw her full weight on me in a press. Al was with us in the ring, bent double, hand out, waiting to signal the pin. I tried to kick free but was too exhausted. My shoulders sagged. Al’s hand lowered for the count. One! Two! Three! I was down for the fall.