



Sage (The Breadcrumb Chronicles #2)

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Category: Suspense Thriller

Description: It had been sixteen years since Sage lived outside of the forest.

Now, she is on the run from everything that she once knew, hoping to find her place and a fresh start while being unable to resist toying with the past; and Hans can't seem to stay away.

Will Sage be able to outrun her demons or will the forest devour her for the last time, leaving more than just Hans behind?

Your mental health matters!

Sage contains topics that may be triggering or uncomfortable to some readers. The list can be found in the acknowledgment at the beginning of the book or by visiting the Authors website and/or social media.

Total Pages (Source): 22

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 9:39 am

Escaping the forest

“How could he betray me like this?” Sage whispered as the tears streamed down her face.

Her breaths were staggered and her chest burned, sending her back to the last time she needed to utilize an inhaler, sixteen years ago.

With each step she took, she dodged fiery debris and leaves crunched beneath her feet. Suddenly she was fifteen again.

“Hans!” Greta cried out, the darkness swallowing her whole.

She could barely see three inches in front of her.

“Hans, where are you?” Greta was scared, the only sound she could hear off in the distance was the fire crackling as it continued to destroy the old hag’s cottage.

She was gone. No more torturing the souls of innocent children.

No more- and then a familiar voice broke through the deadly silence.

Hans.

“I’m over here!” Hans yelled out. Greta found the confidence in his voice attractive.

He had taken it upon himself to watch over her since she was twelve years old.

With each passing day their friendship grew, the love and admiration they had for one another continued to blossom into something that neither could explain.

“ I’m going to marry that boy one day.” Gretta smiled and took a deep breath, ready to run and push through the pain that she was feeling due to the tightness in her chest and constricted breathing.

She started running in the direction his voice was echoing from, both of them calling for each other, caught in a desperate game of Marco Polo.

Gretta stopped to catch her breath once more, unable to understand why Hans had wandered so far away from her.

Chills ran down Gretta’s spine, something wasn’t right.

“ Gotcha!” Gretta screamed as the giant ogre of a man wrapped his hands around her arms. He squeezed tighter the more she tried to wriggle free, but it was no use.

She was trapped. The man turned her around, forcing Gretta to look into his eyes which were filled with evil.

With the help of Hans, Gretta knew she would have had a fighting chance to break free from the trauma that their torture had induced, but now, looking at this beast and taking in whiffs of his rotting teeth, Gretta came to accept that there was no way out.

A car horn in the distance brought Sage back to the present, letting her know that she was headed in the direction of the main road.

She had hoped she would be able to find someone to give her a ride far away from this place she once called home.

This was the second time that Sage and Hans had been separated, only this time she was the witch - though with a little less hocus pocus - that he was running from.

Sage stopped and attempted to catch her breath before continuing forward at a snail's pace.

She was unsure of how long she had been running.

Her chest burned with the inhale and exhale of each breath in the cool night air and she found herself wishing she could magically pull an inhaler from out of thin air.

As she edged closer to the dark pavement, Sage glanced up and down the road in hopes that she would see a car coming.

Nothing.

The air was still, Sage could feel herself losing hope when suddenly she could hear the sound of a car getting closer.

Picking up her pace to reach the pavement, she lost sight of where she was placing her feet, her foot getting caught in the tree roots and causing her to fall face first into a pile of dirt.

Caw. Caw. Caw.

Sage caught a glimpse of her raven friend sitting in the tree directly across from her.

Its caws sounded more like laughter, making fun of her for the predicament that she found herself in.

Sage made her way back to her feet, brushing off the leaves and debris that stuck to

her skin as headlights slowly crept up behind her.

The brakes squealed as the car came to a stop. "Is everything okay, miss?" The gentleman driving stuck his head outside the driver's side window.

"Yeah, I'm fine." Sage lied, unsure if this was the ride she wanted to take.

"You shouldn't be out here alone," at least he appeared to be concerned, "Do you need a ride?"

Sage hesitated a moment, but she knew that if she was going to accomplish any of the goals she had, she needed to take him up on his offer.

"Sure, thanks." She walked over to the passenger side, peering in and taking note of the car being unkempt; full of fast food bags, empty beer cans, and empty cigarette packs.

Fuck, what have I gotten myself into? Sage questioned if it would have been better to turn around and run back into the forest.

When she opened the door a cloud of cigarette smoke slapped her harshly across the face, catching her off-guard. She was frustrated, she had already inhaled enough smoke this evening and now this asshole was just adding to it.

The man grabbed a notebook and began fanning it back and forth, apologizing while making an attempt to clear the rest of the smoke from the car. It would have been a kind gesture had the car not fought to hold onto at least ten years worth of smoke within the fabric of its soul.

"Where ya headed, miss?" He smiled big enough that Sage could see he was missing several teeth.

She grasped the sticky seat belt and pulled it across her body, securing herself in while also envisioning herself flying through the windshield if they got into a wreck.

That might actually be a better option. Sage kept her thoughts to herself.

He was an older gentleman looking to be in his late fifties, who reeked of body odor, the aroma telling a story of how he had most likely not showered in weeks.

Sage flung her head backward and stared at the ceiling of the car looking to the universe to give her guidance, there was nothing.

"Anywhere but here." Sage coughed the words out, bringing her attention back down to stare out the windshield, hoping to come up with a destination that would bring her a peace that she hadn't experienced in years.

"Ya hungry? You look like you could use something to eat." The man chuckled.

I guess I missed that joke. Sage attempted a half-assed smile while he continued howling.

As he gathered his composure, she reached into her pocket hoping to find some spare change.

Instead of finding any money, Sage noticed something else had made its way into her pocket that she didn't remember putting there.

The locket . She couldn't believe it, the sign she had been wishing for.

"I'm good, but would you mind stopping at my friend's house so that I can grab a few of my things before we go wherever it is that we are going?"

" Sage was hesitant, part of her hoping he would agree and the other part of her hoping he would say he was on a deadline and needed to get on the road.

With the current conditions of his car she didn't feel like there was anywhere that he needed to be.

"Sure thing, sweetheart." He let out a loud belch as he put his car into gear and started driving down the road. "The name's Troy, what's yours?" Sage quickly went back and forth debating whether or not she was going to give Troy her real name or not, though technically Sage was already an alias.

"Sage." She slipped out reluctantly.

Troy nodded his head back and forth, repeating her name. She assumed he was just trying to make sure he wouldn't forget it, but at the same time it made him appear a little more off kilter and she found herself growing more concerned by the minute.

"So, where's this friend of yours live?"

"The apartments right down the street." Sage wasn't good at answering questions off the top of her head, let alone giving directions.

She couldn't remember the name of the of the streets she needed.

On the bright side, they were the only apartments on this side of Acadia, and only about seven minutes away.

The rest of the drive was silent. Sage spent the last few minutes in the car trying to devise a plan that would help her get out of her current situation, but no matter how hard she thought, there was nothing that made enough sense.

She grasped the locket tighter, changing her mindset to the what if ?

What if Hans had already made it back to his apartment and here she was showing up?

She had to be prepared.

As they pulled into the apartment complex, Sage noticed that the crime scene tape had finally been pulled from around the late Mrs. Jones' patio. "I didn't mean to kill her," she whispered.

"What was that?" a look of concern crossed Troy's face.

"Oh, nothing. " Sage offered up an innocent smile, shocked that he was able to hear her. She looked up towards Hans' apartment and noticed that it was dark inside. Whew, I beat him , she thought, letting out a deep sigh of relief.

Troy parked his car and told her she needed to be quick.

Sage knew that time was precious because Hans would surely return soon.

Deep down her nerves were on fire, much like her home.

She was unsure what was going to happen after she left the apartment.

Sage closed the door of Troy's beater and hoped that she looked confident walking up the stairs, like she was supposed to be there.

Once inside, Sage turned on the living room light, and quickly glanced around, searching for a sign if Hans had been home yet.

Nothing.

She did a quick once over, trying to decide where she was going to leave his gift.

The box on the kitchen counter caught her eye, that was it, she reached in her pocket pulling out the locket.

Sage found a piece of paper and pen in what appeared to be a junk drawer and wrote a quick message to let him know that he hadn't won.

In this moment, Sage hated him, yet, through the hurt she still loved him deeply. "It isn't over. We aren't over." She slammed her fist down onto the countertop.

She kissed the paper, leaving the perfect black lip print on it, placing it on the counter next to the locket.

Before closing the drawer, something caught Sage's eye.

It's perfect . She pulled a pocket knife from the drawer and slipped it into her own pocket hoping she wouldn't have to use it, but it created a sense of security knowing it was there.

"Goodbye, for now, my love." Sage shut off the light and pulled the door closed behind her as she exited the apartment, wishing she could see the look on Hans' face as soon as he got home and realized his plan had failed.

He'd be coming for her, soon enough.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 9:39 am

Just Keep Moving

Walking down the stairs outside of Han's apartment, Sage kept patting her pocket and double-checking that the knife was still there, hoping it wouldn't fall out for Troy to see.

She didn't want him getting any ideas. As she got back into the car he leaned forward looking up through his windshield in the direction she had just come from.

"So, was that like, an ex-boyfriend's apartment or... ?"

"No," Sage quickly interrupted. "Just a friend, or so I thought." She sat back, pulling the sticky seat belt across her once more.

"Alright sugar, let's boogie," Troy announced, pulling out of the parking spot and heading down the road. Sage didn't know where they were going, nor was she sure that Troy knew either, but anywhere far from Acadia was fine with her.

Troy reached into the pocket of his button-up shirt and pulled out a pack of smokes, holding it in Sage's direction, offering one to her. "Gross, no thanks." She waved her hand, pushing them back in his direction. "That's going to kill you one day, you know."

"I don't have a reason to live anyways." Troy shrugged, putting one into his mouth, lighting it up and taking a long drag.

"That's no way to think." Sage couldn't help but see the sadness behind Troy's eyes

while he kept his focus on the road. He exhaled and the smoke took over the car once more, sending Sage into another coughing fit.

"Shit, I'm sorry." Troy quickly rolled the window back down.

"Yeah, thanks. I'm not interested in being hot-boxed by cigarette smoke." Sarcasm escaped through Sage's lips unintentionally. "So... where are we headed?" She made an attempt to change the subject.

Troy shrugged. "Nowhere in particular. I was just going to keep on driving," his tone changed, "you have other plans?"

" Their eyes met and the kind stranger who had offered to give her a ride now looked like the devil himself, ready to devour her with his evil tongue.

Sage broke eye contact, throwing her head back against the seat, staring up towards the universe once more, silently asking for help to get her out of this one.

Unfortunately, unlike the forest, there was no way out this time.

Sage felt a touch on her upper thigh, a bit too close for comfort. She did her best to remain calm but she could feel herself slowly slipping back into her dark place. There was no way of stopping it this time.

"There, there, just relax." Troy's words were quiet. "I'll be gentle." The car came to a stop as he pulled over to the side of the road and Sage felt her heart begin to race.

Sage looked around, searching for something familiar, but there was nothing. No buildings. No cars in sight. Nothing but darkness. She looked over to see Troy wrestling with his belt buckle. Damn, he's just getting right down to business .

"Now, you, since I was so willing to give you a ride without asking you to give me any money, you're going to be a good-" Sage froze as his voice trailed off, her mind wouldn't let her hear him but she knew where he was going with this.

She began to slip back once more, struggling against the present while simultaneously fighting hard against reliving her past. Reliving the day that she met Hans.

Tears began to flow down Sage's cheeks as the memories from her childhood haunted her.

Her chest tightened and her mind raced as she braced herself for what she could tell was about to come.

Troy pulled his crusty dick from his pants and it was all she could do to prevent herself from throwing up.

Troy began edging closer and just like when she was thirteen, Sage felt like she was being backed into a corner, once more.

"Come on Gretta, what's that old man have that I don't?" Charles and his groupies were coming towards her, backing her into a corner. She tried to cry out for help but no one was around. Gretta was only thirteen but the rumors of her sleeping with one of her teachers had already begun to spread like wildfire. When her parents found out, her dad started leaving threatening messages on the teacher's voicemail.

They had debated pressing charges, however, due to his mother's declining health, they held off.

Gretta had overheard them discussing whether having him ejected from the church was satisfactory.

"Come on Gretta." Charles started fumbling with his belt once more and Sage cried out again, hopeful someone heard her this time.

"Stop that right now!" a stern voice resonated behind the crowd.

"What are you going to do about it?" Charles scoffed, zipping up the fly of his pants, and fastening his belt.

Gretta heard rustling around, with grunts and groans, but she wasn't about to open her eyes until the nightmare was over. She sank to the ground covering her head when she heard Charles call out "Have fun with your whore." He sounded like he was running since his words trailed off in the distance.

"Hey, it's okay. You can look now, they're gone." The soft compassionate voice comforted her.

Gretta opened her eyes and saw a hand extended out in front of her, a boy in the class ahead of her offering to help her up. "Thanks, I guess." She accepted his hand and with his help, stood to her feet.

"You're welcome. I'm Hans." He was the sunshine to Gretta's grumpy.

"Gretta," she choked out.

"I know who you are."

"Of course you do." Gretta paused and stared at the floor. "Everyone does."

"Don't let those assholes get to you." Hans' advice was sweet but easier said than done.

The rest of the day was a blur. Gretta and Hans became insta-friends and they spent everyday together moving forward. Except one day a few years later.

Sage snapped back to reality. "Get off of me!"

"Come here, you bitch!" Troy was huffing and his sweat was pouring all over her. Sage had no idea how long this had been going on, but she knew she had to keep fighting.

"Get off me, Troy," Sage called out, wanting desperately to be able to go back and protect her younger self. "Please. Stop," She begged as they continued to struggle.

"Where's Hans now, whore?" Charles was struggling to pin Gretta's arms against the tree but she kept fighting.

He had a vendetta against her since the day that Hans chased him and his goon squad away from her.

When Hans had left school early for an appointment today Gretta had thought it would be safer to take the shortcut home. Charles had other plans.

Gretta spit in Charles's face causing him to lurch backward, swiping at his eye.

"You bitch!" His screams were blood-curdled as he came rushing into the pocket knife that Gretta had pulled from her pocket.

Hans had given it to her for protection in case she ever needed it.

She had told him she wouldn't but he knew better.

Hans always knew better. Gretta looked towards the sky.

"What have I done?" The sky cried with Gretta, releasing droplets of water before losing all control and pouring water down from the sky.

Sage returned to reality once more as she felt something trickling down her skin. She stared down at her hands, now painted in red with the pocketknife resting in the palm of her hand.

Blood .

Sage quickly opened the door and hurled what little was still left in her stomach, wiping the corner of her mouth as soon as she finished.

Her entire body began to shake. She wished it was due to the lack of sustenance, but she knew that when she turned around the sight she would be taking in was one that she least desired.

Taking a deep breath she slowly turned her attention back to Troy, taking note of the blood-stained... everything . In the driver's seat sat Troy's exposed, lifeless body, slumped over. Oddly, it made Sage realize the fate that Charles had escaped that fateful day.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Sage thought to herself, sensing the panic that was starting to take over.

What the hell was she supposed to do now?

She looked up and down the road, still seeing no sign of anyone.

On top of everything, it was a new moon, making the world extra dark.

It was almost too perfect, like it was the plan of the Universe.

Sage exited the car, creeping over to the other side, all while remaining extra cautious and watching her surroundings at all times.

She threw open the door and placed her arms underneath Troy's armpits so that she could pull him from the car and attempt to drag his corpse over to his new grave, the ditch.

Hopefully, he really didn't have anyone who would be looking for him anytime soon.

Once Troy was in the ditch, Sage reached in his pocket, removing his wallet and taking what little bit of cash he had on him.

She took a moment and looked at his license. No fucking way , Sage thought. This piece of shit that had just attempted to have his way with her was the teacher's father. "I wonder if he secretly knew?" Sage stood there staring at the crime scene that had just occurred inside the car.

In the distance, she could hear sirens echoing through the trees. It was time for her to plan her next move. Without thinking too much about it, Sage hopped into Troy's car and began to drive in the opposite direction from where the sirens were coming from.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 9:39 am

Escaping Sage

"How could she betray me like this?" Hans paced back and forth across his living room floor, gripping the note and locket in his hands so tightly that his knuckles started to turn ghostly pale.

He wasn't even sure how Sage had managed to beat him back to his apartment let alone how she got inside.

Who was he kidding? It was Sage he was talking about...

No, not Sage... Gretta .

What had happened to his best friend? This couldn't be the same person he once knew.

Hans continued to ponder what his next move would be. Where would she go?

Despite the fucked up shit that Hans had been through over the past few weeks, that she had caused, he still had a twinge of feelings for her radiating from his core. Hans wanted - no, needed - to help her get through this. To get Gretta back.

My Gretta. Hans smiled at that thought.

Hans remembered the first time that he and Gretta were captured by the witch in Brighton Forest. He had missed school that day because of a dentist appointment, but was going to meet up with Gretta after.

He never imagined that she would have attempted to go through the forest alone.

Not until screams came echoing through the trees.

He had followed the sounds, reaching her right after Charles had run into the same pocket knife Hans had given her.

Gretta's eyes were wide open, the look of innocence was gone, now almost feral.

Her hands shook as the knife fell to the ground, blood splattered across the front of her clothes, and her skin stained with crimson.

"What happened?" Hans inquired as Gretta came running to him, burying her face into his chest while trying to conceal her sobs, tears rolling down her face.

"I messed up, Hans." He pulled away from her and looked her in the eye.

"I need you to tell me what happened." This was probably the moment that Hans should have known he was destined to become a detective.

"Everyone is going to hate me!" Gretta looked away from him, her cheeks flushed bright red as embarrassment began to take over.

Hans desperately wanted to protect Gretta, but between their ages and the fact that Charles was the Mayor's son he knew the reality was that no one would ever believe them. Especially with the past that Gretta had created for herself.

Gretta looked deep in thought and in that moment, Hans knew he was going to marry that girl one day. She was the only person who got him, and he was the only one who understood her fuckery.

Gretta took off.

"Gretta, wait!" Hans had no idea where she was going, but he chased her deeper and deeper into the forest, his gut telling him that he needed to do his best to stay close.

When they finally came to a clearing, there was a beautiful cottage a few hundred feet ahead of them.

From a distance, it looked just like a gingerbread house, the aromas radiating from it luring them in.

"Hello, children." An older woman appeared. Her hair was pulled back into a tight bun and she wore a long, flowing floral dress. "You look exhausted. Would you like to come in?"

"I don't think-" Hans started to say before Gretta interrupted him.

"Yes, I would love a glass of water!"

"I made a fresh apple pie, too!" The old lady seemed innocent enough. Gretta cheered as she ran inside. "Hans, apple pie is your favorite!" Hans couldn't place his finger on why, but despite the stranger's apparent friendliness, something about the entire situation still felt off.

"It's fine, you can wait out here if you'd like." The old lady winked at Hans while turning around to head back inside her cottage after Gretta.

"No, I'm coming, too" Hans caught up to Gretta, and he wrapped his arm around her as the door slammed shut behind them.

A knock at the door pulled Hans out of his daydream. Except, it wasn't really a

daydream, it was real life. The beginning of the end of Hans' relationship with Gretta; when she was still Gretta .

Hans peered out the peephole, there stood Officer Billings, cocky as usual.

Regardless of how Hans was feeling, there was no doubt in his mind that he needed to make the call to file a report.

Too much had happened. Normally, he would have been able to make a report over the phone, but considering the circumstances, the police department insisted on sending an officer out to make sure that it really was him, which was fine.

"Is anything missing?" Officer Billings inquired.

"I don't think so, but I also haven't taken the time to do much investigating myself.

" Hans made his way around the apartment to see if he could find anything that notably stood out.

He walked over to where the note and locket had been found and noticed that the drawer hadn't been closed all the way.

He opened the drawer, instantly realizing that the pocket knife he had kept in there for opening packages was missing.

"Well, my pocketknife is missing and I know I never take it from the drawer, so I can only assume that it is in her possession."

The officer was taking notes when Hans realized he had written the words armed and dangerous.

"You really think Sage is armed and dangerous with a little pocket knife?" Hans tried to stick up for her before he remembered who he was talking to.

Officer Billings was Officer Charles Billings. The same skumbag Gretta had stabbed back in the day and he had a vendetta against her ever since.

"She tried to kill me when we were kids, why would she have changed? Hell, look what she did to you!" Charles justified his report with ease.

"Maybe if you weren't trying to rape her in the forest, she wouldn't have felt it necessary to try and protect herself.

"Hans loathed this guy. Why, out of the entire precinct, was he the one who had been dispatched to Hans' apartment to handle this call?

They had both been searching for Sage, err, Gretta for all these years with two separate missions in mind.

Charles let out a guttural sigh, "You know damn well that isn't what happened.

She wanted it and didn't want to have to feel guilty for betraying you.

I don't know why you are still so far up her ass after all these years.

Especially after all she put you and Marco through. You're just as sick as she is."

Hans refrained from punching Charles between the eyes. Barely. "Maybe." He shrugged. "The best of us are." Hans winked at Charles watching him to see how far in the back of his head he could roll his eyes.

"This isn't fucking Wonderland, freak." Charles' aggressiveness was starting to show.

"I think you have all the information you need for tonight, why don't I call you if there's anything else?" They were walking toward the door when Charles paused with an inquisitive look on his face.

This is gonna be good , Hans thought.

"What about Marco?" Charles hesitated.

Hans let out a sigh, "He didn't make it man," he paused, watching the look on Officer Billings' face go from annoyed to amused.

"So she killed him, huh?"

"You'd like that to be the case, I'm sure." Hans couldn't understand why he continued to defend Sage, for all he knew she had killed him and then lied to him about it. All Hans could think about was sleeping in his comfy bed.

"Then what happened?" Charles reached up, pulling his glasses from the top of his head, and placed them on his face. Hans found it interesting that Charles hadn't used his glasses for any of the other notes which told him that he really wanted to make sure he didn't miss a single detail this time.

"Marco had a medical emergency. Sage rushed him to a hospital but he passed away before he was able to be seen." Hans paused to read Charles' reaction.

Charles squinted at Hans while stroking his chin. "What kind of medical emergency?"

Hans couldn't help himself. "Erectile dysfunction." Charles let Hans' stupid remark go right over his head.

"Okay, so," Charles paused, "he went into a diabetic coma and you two idiots couldn't call anyone because you didn't have your...phones? Is that what actually happened?"

"If you knew he was a diabetic, then why did you-"

"Cut the crap Hans, I don't believe for one minute that is how or why he died."

"You can look, but I don't think you're going to find anything." Hans was exhausted over the back and forth and just wanted to relax a bit before going to bed. "It's getting late, I think you've gotten everything you came for?"

"Fine, whatever." Charles sauntered back toward the door.

"I'm going to find out the truth about what happened and that little slut of yours is going to pay."

"He slammed the door behind him. Hans looked out the window and watched Charles rushing down the stairs in a hurry to get into his car and drive off."

Hans bellowed a loud growl. "Why the fuck do I care so much?"

She wasn't Gretta.

It was all starting to click and Hans was finally getting closer to being able to mourn the loss of his best friend.

Gretta was gone and her body had been sacrificed to the devil herself.

She needed to be stopped.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 9:39 am

Honey, I'm Home

Sage had no idea where she was going, but the darkness continued to treat her like a dessert; devouring her whole.

She knew she wouldn't be able to stop anywhere without raising suspicion until she found somewhere to shower.

In her current state - covered in Troy's blood - she was bound to raise questions.

Sage lost herself in thought, brainstorming ideas just to convince herself why each of them in turn would fail her.

It wasn't until she started drifting toward the ditch that she was able to regain control of her mind. Jerking the steering wheel she overcorrected, sending the car into the other lane. Sage was thankful that there were no other cars on the road or her story could have been cut short.

Shaking herself up like that had done a mental reset and Sage suddenly remembered that there was one place she could go.

Marco's.

At this point, no one except Hans knew that he was dead.

To her knowledge anyway. Most of the precinct should have expected him to take time off after the death of Alana.

It's perfect! Sage couldn't think of any reason that her plan wouldn't work out well in her favor.

Even better, the area was becoming familiar to her, so she was able to figure out that the turn off to get to his house was just up ahead.

Sage hated herself for knowing this information, but had to give her intuition major credit for getting her going in the right direction.

Otherwise, she would have been forced to continue driving until she ran out of gas and she doubted that would land her at a shower instead of in the middle of nowhere.

Tough chance.

Marco lived in a semi-secluded area, his closest neighbor was about a mile away.

It was like living in the cottage, only this was much nicer.

Sage had spent plenty of time stalking around outside his home, learning his strengths and weaknesses, to prepare herself for when he finally made his way to Brighton Forest.

Sage parked Troy's car in the ditch down the street and made sure to eliminate any trace of her existence inside.

She considered setting it on fire for a hot minute, but then reconsidered as she realized that would only bring more eyes watching the area.

If she needed to get away, it only made sense that she would be able to use one of Marco's newer, less trashy cars.

She continued perusing her thoughts, trying to decide on her next move while she slowly trudged up the hill to get to the front steps of Marco's home. "I really need a shower, a snack, and hopefully I'll be able to find some cash lying around," Sage told herself.

When she finally reached the front door, Sage reached up and grasped the knob. Locked, damnit .

Of course that was to be expected. Why would an officer of the law leave his home vulnerable to villains, such as Sage, to squat in?

Sage started to dig around the rocks in the planters that lined the sidewalk, her gut instinct telling her that he was the type to have one of those rocks with the secret compartment to hide a spare key.

Found it.

The holy grail fell out easily onto her hand.

Perhaps she had given him more credit than what he deserved because that was too easy.

Sage hurried to the front door, unlocking it and then securing it tightly behind her, making sure to keep the key in her possession so that no one else would have easy access to enter the home.

Once inside, Sage started giving herself the grand tour.

She had never been inside, she had only watched him from the exterior.

The home was modern; simple black and white with colorful accents in a subtle touch

that had clearly been provided by Alana.

As Sage walked past the fireplace, she ran a finger over the mantle.

Spotless. Not a single speck of dust to be found, but the dried blood that encrusted her fingertip reminded her of the original mission.

???

While taking a shower, Sage continued having flashbacks of moments shared between her and Hans.

His hands running up and down her thigh.

The hand necklace he would give her when she was being more of a brat than what he wanted to endure at the time.

His soft lips.

She raised her now clean fingers up to her lips as she imagined Hans pulling her in close to steal a kiss. The more she thought about him, the greater her desire for a release took over.

She had been caught off guard and unable to think about anything else.

Sage stuck her head out of the shower, glancing around the room to see if there was anything that she could use to assist her, when she realized that the showerhead was detachable from the wall.

She messed around with the various settings until she found the perfect one for getting the job done.

She had just removed the showerhead from the rack when-

Ring. Ring. Ring.

The phone from the other room startled Sage, causing her to drop the showerhead as water sprayed everywhere. "Oh my God, stop!" She was unsure if she was lecturing the shower or the phone, but she managed to shut the water off right at the same moment that the phone stopped ringing.

Who the hell still has a landline? The voicemail had triggered and once it beeped, a man's voice began to speak.

"Marco, it's Charles, the craziest thing just happened and I really wish you would pick up.

The weird guy, Hans, filed a report about all this wild stuff that had happened.

It involved that girl, Gretta, who I guess goes by Sage, now.

You know, the one he had been looking for all these years?

Anyways, can you believe he tried to convince me that you're dead?

Come on, man, don't make me believe that to be true. Call me back as soon as you get this."

Charles.

Sage squinted her eyes, glaring at the image of him in her head and the things he had tried to do to her when they were young. She of all people would be the first to admit that people can change, but not this bastard. She couldn't believe they gave him a

uniform and a badge.

And then it clicked: Hans called the police. "They are going to be looking for me," she whispered. Damnit, Hans. Why?

Why did he call them?

"Oh perhaps because you kidnapped him, tortured him, killed his friend, you know... The usual reasons that people tend to involve the cops," the angel on Sage's shoulder had to pipe in.

"Shut up," the devil took a moment to stand up for Sage. "He wouldn't have paid her any attention had she not done those things."

Sage quickly tuned her friends out and searched for a towel. "I guess I'm not going to find a release tonight." Sage shook her head, annoyed at the entire situation. She checked the cabinets and drawers for a towel, but there was nothing in the bathroom and no luck in the hall closet, either.

Where the hell are your towels Marco?

Across the hall appeared to be the master bedroom.

Sage wandered in and looked in the closet to see if she could find anything.

Tucked away in the back of the closet was a gorgeous ruby-red robe.

She decided that it would have to do for now, but she made a promise to herself to find the towels before taking another shower.

Sage continued digging through the closet, finding a box tucked away in the back.

She struggled to pull it out, but after a couple of attempts she succeeded, squatting down to open it up.

The box was packed full of women's clothes that she could only assume had belonged to Alana.

Sage sat back on her heels and began to dig through it.

Damn Alana had great taste when she wasn't trapped in her uniform.

Sage was pleased to see when she checked the tags that they wore the same size and celebrated the fact that she wasn't doomed to only have her almost burial outfit to be the only thing she had to wear.

As she dug deeper into the box, Sage found a cute little black dress.

It reminded her a lot of the one that Alana had worn the night that she found her lost in the woods.

Sage had never owned a dress like this, besides lingerie, the majority of her clothes were long dresses that covered most of her skin to help protect her from the elements.

She also believed that it helped provide an extra layer of protection between her and the drugged-up perverts that stumbled into her neck of the woods.

But this... This felt nice. Maybe it was time for a change.

Sage twirled around like a giddy school girl and then stooped back down to continue siphoning through the clothes hoping that she might come across some shoes that would go with it.

When she reached the bottom of the tub she was disappointed that there were no shoes but when she went to put the box of clothes back in the closet, she realized that it was her lucky day.

An entire box of shoes stared back at her.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 9:39 am

The Locket

Charles didn't waste any time putting out a BOLO for Sage.

Hans couldn't blame him. It was what an officer should do after all.

Unlike himself, sitting back and waiting for the circus to begin.

It made sense. With Marco gone, Charles was essentially standing in his place.

He probably felt that if he did a decent job then he deserved to be Marco's replacement.

Ugh.

Hans couldn't shake Marco's face from his brain, how small and pathetic he had looked as Hans sat him down in the car. He wasn't the strong, cocky son of a bitch that he portrayed himself as at the precinct, but an actual human being.

Bastard .

Marco had won Hans over and he knew that he was going to miss him more than he wanted to, but that is life now, Hans supposed. Missing a man and having a psycho stalker killing people for him.

Yet, deep down his feelings for Sage still burned bright. Hans continued thinking while he fiddled with the locket between his fingers.

"Hans, I want you to have this." Gretta handed him a velvet satchel that contained a beautiful locket. "Why me?" Hans asked. They hadn't been friends for long and he didn't think that he was deserving of a best friend's necklace, just yet.

"So you'll never forget who I am at this very moment."

It's like she knew that one day she would no longer be herself.

Hans licked his dry lips, noticing the metallic taste. He really needed to make a store run to get some lip balm.

"Shit, my car!" At the reminder that his car had been destroyed, he sunk back into the couch a little deeper this time, hoping he would just be absorbed into it.

Hans couldn't even bring himself to be okay with the idea of having his car towed from the hold the forest had on it.

There were too many memories there and he didn't dare show his face back in those woods.

Brighton Forest was on his do not enter list, indefinitely.

What about work? Hans' mind started running a million miles per second, unsure of if and when he would be able to return.

He had become a detective with the intent of solving the mystery of what had happened to Gretta.

Now that he had his answers, he didn't technically have to be a detective anymore. Right?

Wrong .

That was the only life Hans knew, and his desire to help others solve their own mysteries was what kept him going. He just didn't have to continue that life in Acadia.

Hans reached into his pocket to grab his phone and call a buddy of his to see about any available cars when he stopped, remembering that his phone had also been destroyed.

Once Sage was finished texting Marco, pretending to be Hans, she had used a sledgehammer to ensure that no one else would be able to track his location.

Fuck!

Hans was starting to feel extra vulnerable in his own home.

Sage had taken everything from him and he was left unsure of what his next move was going to be.

He had been a resident of Acadia since the day he was born, but now he found himself beginning to question if he was going to be able to stay here.

Perhaps a new start was exactly what he needed. ..

Glancing at the time, Hans determined it was too late to be shopping around for cars anyway. It wasn't too late to get his laptop fired up and start applying for other precincts far away from Acadia though.

He freed himself from the grasp that the couch had on him, rising to his feet.

Shuffling to his room to grab his laptop he then made his way to the kitchen, flipping on the coffee pot.

It's never too late for coffee . Hans smirked as he thought about all the times he had given Alana hell for her late-night coffee binges.

Before the coffee had finished brewing, he poured a cup and made his way back to the couch to start his research, double-checking that his resume was up to date just to be safe.

The concept of relocating was becoming more tempting by the minute.

California? Too many bros.

Kansas? Gross, too many cows and corn fields.

Maybe, another country? He shook his head.

Hans continued scrolling through the listings, coming up with excuses for each one until he came across a posting that caused him to pause.

How did that... Hans squinted at the screen.

Marco's position had been listed in the national database.

It's too soon.

Hans continued staring at the screen. He had just admitted to Charles that Marco had passed. With no body and no investigation to confirm whether Hans was even telling the truth, there is no way that Marco's supervisors would have enough evidence to justify the position listing.

Did Marco resign after losing Alana, before risking his life entering Brighton Forest? Nothing made sense anymore, but this made it seem like Marco went into that forest not expecting to come out alive.

Interesting. It looks like Charles isn't getting that position . He smiled. Charles had a history of being a hothead which had gotten him in trouble a few times. It was a surprise that Charles hadn't been fired since he was such a liability.

Regardless of the knowledge he had just come upon, it still didn't make Hans feel any differently about relocating.

Hopefully, he would be able to stay on the East Coast, close enough he could still come back and visit friends, but far enough away that Sage wouldn't be able to follow him unless she learned to ride a broom.

A position listed in New York seemed promising.

It would also come with a pay raise, though most likely due to the increased cost of living there.

But he liked the idea that he would only have to be in the field for high-priority cases; they were the ones that most were too chicken-shit to get involved with, and in New York they would probably be even more dangerous than what he dealt with when it came to Sage.

Hans quickly uploaded his resume and filled out the application, hoping that it would get him out of there sooner than later.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 9:39 am

Remembering the Past

Sage dug through the box of shoes from the back of Marco's closet, searching for the perfect pair. Alana had an impeccable taste with brands like McQueen and Gucci. Sage couldn't believe her eyes and was almost afraid to touch them.

Almost.

Finally, at the bottom of the box there was a gorgeous pair of ruby-red pumps.

"I bet if I click my heels together three times these won't get me home.

" Sage giggled as she stared at them intently.

She stood back up, grabbed a hanger to place the dress on, and walked over to the full-length mirror.

Holding up the little black dress and the shoes, Sage was able to see that she had created the perfect outfit for a night out.

Perhaps she would have to invite a certain detective out for a couple of drinks.

If only my face wasn't plastered all over the news.

Sage sighed at the realization and then began to search the apartment for scissors, shears, or anything else that she could use to change the length of her hair.

She could use some of the money that she had taken from Troy to purchase some lightener and hair color.

While part of Sage felt sad about losing something that she had known for years, she looked forward to the change.

After an unsuccessful search, Sage finally settled on using a sharp butcher knife. Guess this will have to do. Walking back to the bathroom, she put her hair into a ponytail. She took a deep breath and began sawing through the thickness of her hair.

Sage removed the hair tie and examined the damage she had done while murdering her hair, which is exactly what it looked like she had done. She sighed, wishing a pair of shears would magically appear in her hands so that she could fix this disaster.

Glancing around the room, her eyes fell on a baseball cap. It was perfect. All she needed to do was tuck her hair up into it while grabbing everything she needed. Sage went back to the box and dug through everything hoping to find something a bit more casual.

Nothing .

"Was the princess too scared to wear comfy clothes around her prince?

" The snide remark slipped from her mouth.

Sage had a vendetta against Alana the moment she realized that Alana had the man of her dreams at her fingertips.

All she had to do was stick her ass out on the hood of the car, whereas Sage couldn't get his attention without committing murder.

Bastard.

It wasn't completely Hans' fault. It had taken Sage a few years to accept, but had she not wandered off from where she was supposed to be, they could have lived happily ever after a long time ago.

Hans had never been the type to tell her to stay put and then change his mind, wanting her to come find him instead. I should have known better.

Sage moved away from the closet and began going through drawers, looking for a pair of sweats and a shirt that wasn't two sizes too big.

After what felt like hours she found a pair of light gray sweatpants and a gamer-boy tee.

"Well," she giggled at the shirt. "I guess I'll have to make do with this.

" She continued searching through the drawers just in case she could find another gem tucked away.

Instead, she found an envelope at the bottom of one of the drawers.

"What could this be?" Sage pulled it out, slowly opened it, and peered inside. "Holy shit!" she exclaimed, dumping the cash out over the bed, diving into the bills just like she had seen people do in the movies. "There's so much here! I could go on the run and survive perfectly fine."

Sage was making snow angels in the mound of cash sending them flying in various directions.

In a single instance, Sage realized that a majority of her problems had just been

solved while causing just as many issues at the same time.

She lay there in silence, enjoying for the first time in years what felt like true peace.

At least her brain was not running a million miles per minute, which made things even better.

Sage rolled over and before she could muster up her next thought, she had drifted off to sleep.

???

Only a few hours had passed when the visions disturbed Sage's sleep. So loud. So real. She got up quickly and rushed around, throwing on the clothes that she had found earlier. "I have to do this."

Was she trying to convince herself otherwise?

Yes .

Sage blazed through the kitchen, searching high and low for the keys to one of the cars that Marco kept hidden in his garage. She finally came across a set of keys in one of the drawers in the living room.

"Got it!" she yelled, grabbing one last thing before she exited the main house into the garage.

She had no idea who she was yelling to or sharing her joy with, but the excitement was there for the ghosts of Christmas past to endure.

She hopped in the Cadillac XLR and started searching for a place to insert the key

with no luck.

The start button stared back at her. Sage had never seen a car like this but she pushed the button.

A message on the dash alerted her to push the brake before hitting the start button.

Vroom . This baby purred like a kitten.

Living in the forest for half of her life, Sage didn't know a whole lot about cars, but she did know that this one would have all eyes on her.

She needed to be extra careful on this mission to ensure that no one saw her.

Sage pressed her foot to the gas pedal but it accelerated much faster than she had anticipated.

In a panic, she applied more pressure than necessary to the brake, causing the car to buck.

Sage drove back and forth on the dark winding road a few times until she felt comfortable enough to move on to the main road.

Overall the car was easier to drive than most she had driven, once she got a handle on the road, it was nothing but smooth sailing.

Beep.

Sage quickly glanced all over the dash to see if there was something wrong.

"Welcome to Satellite Radio, would you like to listen to your most listened-to

Females of Metal station today?"

"Yes?" She hesitated. "What the hell is this?" The words escaped her mouth quietly and she hoped that the infiltrator was unable to hear her.

A message on the dash flashed: Starting Females of Metal Radio before the music began to play and a beautiful voice came over the speakers.

"Okay, Marco, you had good taste in music at least." Sage started bobbing her head back and forth to the beat of the music. Her foot pressed down on the gas a little bit harder and soon she was zooming down the road, rolling down the windows so that she could enjoy the crisp night air.

Soon, Sage started to come up on street lights, letting her know that she was getting closer to her destination.

Don't worry, just a couple more minutes, she told herself, trying to gather her composure.

Pulling over to the side of the road, she gathered her hair and tucked it under the baseball cap that she had found before pulling back onto the road as soon as she was ready.

Sage's destination was creeping up, and she was back in familiar territory. Shutting off the headlights, she pulled into the parking lot at Hans' apartment complex. She looked up to his window to see that the bedroom light was still on.

"Fuck!" She slapped the steering wheel. "I can't believe that bastard is still awake." Sage sat back in the seat crossing her arms, letting out a little pout.

"It's going to be okay, Gretta." Hans looked at her, a pain in his eyes she had never

seen before, while he still attempted to protect her from the cage he had been locked up in across the room.

“Shush you.” Gretta’s attention was turned back toward the fireplace. “You’re such a pretty girl.” The old woman ran her fingers through Gretta’s hair. “If you continue behaving and doing what I say, then you can keep yourself from ending up like your little friend over there.”

“Let her go!” Hans grasped the side of the cage so tightly that his knuckles turned ghostly white.

“Ah ah!” The woman wagged her bent-up finger at him. “She doesn’t need you, ya know? I could just have you killed.”

Gretta turned slightly to look back at Hans, reminding herself to try to be strong. She didn’t want him to see the tears that were forming at the corners of her eyes... She didn’t want him to worry.

Turning back around to face the fire before her, she allowed only her eyes to dart around the room to appear less suspicious. She was trying to find where the key to that cage might be. It didn’t take long before something on top of the mantel caught her eye. “There it is,” she whispered.

“There what is?” The old hag looked down at her with her iced over sky blue eyes.

“The crackle of the fire. It’s one of my most favorite sounds.”

“Ah. It is nice, isn’t it?” For a brief second this woman showed a shred of humanity and Gretta had almost forgotten that this was someone holding them captive in the forest.

"It's gonna be okay." she heard Hans' voice fading out.

Sage exhaled slowly as she came back to her current reality.

"Fuck it. I am going to be okay."

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 9:39 am

A Date with Death

As she placed one foot after the other, stepping out of the car, Sage took a deep breath.

Making her way slowly over to the stairs, she hoped that the creaking while she climbed them wouldn't give her away.

Each step she took told a story; she remembered the times that she had visited with Mrs. Jones, watching Hans come and go from his apartment.

Why did I take things so far? Most days were full of hatred toward herself and regret.

Once on the third floor, Sage tiptoed over to the door of Hans' apartment.

Do I knock? She debated back and forth with herself, fighting the urge to see Hans' face sooner than later.

She smiled at the thought of him as she stared at the 'Unwelcome' sign hanging on the door that challenged her right back while she reached up and straightened it out.

Just like she had watched Hans do time after time.

Reaching into her pocket, Sage pulled out a piece of paper. Placing her lips lightly against it, she knelt before tucking it beneath the doormat enough that it wouldn't blow away, but would still be visible enough to get the attention of the handsome detective that resided inside.

Letters seemed to have become the latest method of communication for her. It reminded her of middle school where she would pass notes back and forth with her friends. It was harmless.

A much better route to take rather than murder.

She scurried back down the stairs and to the car, slamming the door shut a little harder than she had anticipated. Sage paused for a moment to see if it had alarmed anyone.

Nothing.

You would have thought that with all of the crimes that had been committed - that she had committed - people would have been more alert or concerned about random noises in the parking lot.

Sage felt disappointment mixed with relief.

What if Hans wasn't alone? What if there was an officer still hanging out with him?

I wouldn't want to go down this way.

Sage started the car and drove off into the darkness and a tear dropped down her face.

What if he doesn't come?

???

The sound of a car door slamming shut made Hans jump, and he looked away from his laptop screen toward the clock.

It was late.

Late enough that no one that lived here would be caught dead leaving at this time of night.

The energy of the apartment changed and Hans got up from the couch quietly trudging towards the door.

He slowly unlocked the deadbolt and cautiously opened the door, peeking out in time to see tail lights glowing in the distance.

Weird.

Hans closed the door, quickly flipping the lock on the deadbolt, securing it long enough for him to grab his handgun from the shelf in his bedroom closet.

After obtaining the firearm, he swiftly walked back toward the door and repositioned himself to the side like he had learned in his training.

He kept one hand on the grip as he flipped the lock and opened the door once more, giving it a second before stepping into the doorway and turning on the porch light to illuminate the walkway in front of the apartment.

No one was there.

A piece of paper on the ground was waving back and forth as the breeze blew over it. Hans bent down and picked it up, looking around to see that the coast was clear before returning inside, securing the door once more behind him.

Raising the note to his face Hans caught a whiff of a familiar scent. He felt his body tense up and walked stiffly back over to the couch, carefully unfolding the note so as

not to rip it accidentally.

Meet me at the Sunset Lounge on Saturday at eight o'clock p.m. -S

Sage.

The breath that Hans had kept in finally released. He knew that he should call Charles and add to the report, but he also knew his curiosity was going to get the best of him. He still had so many questions that he desired to be answered.

Hans reached up to his chest and began to play with the locket.

Just a few short hours prior, Charles had insisted on taking the locket into custody with the rest of the evidence but Hans refused to lose the last bit of Gretta that he could physically hold on to.

He sat back and let his mind continue wandering.

Why did she want to meet? Was she going to attempt to kill him?

So many questions and the only person that could answer them was the one that he had attempted to kill himself.

A yawn finally crept up on Hans. He had reached the end of his productivity for the night and decided it was time to go to bed, though he was unsure if he would be able to actually fall asleep.

Especially with the development of Sage showing up at his apartment twice in the same night, leaving notes for him.

He decided he would need to take his sleep meds if he was going to get any rest

tonight.

Tonight of all nights is probably the one that I shouldn't be taking these pills.

He laughed to himself and shook his head before throwing the pills down his throat and washing them down with the last few drops of his cold coffee.

Hans sauntered to his room, falling into his bed, the pillowtop absorbing him in, filling out around his body.

It had been too long since he had slept in his own bed.

Perhaps he really wouldn't have any issues falling asleep, he mused as his eyes grew heavy as he began to struggle keeping them open.

???

The next morning when Hans woke up, he felt like a new man.

His blackout curtains were finally put to good use as he hadn't been awoken by the sun's rays peeping in through the blinds.

It was ten forty-five in the morning, the latest Hans had slept in...

in who knows how long. He hopped up out of bed and immediately went to the kitchen to get a pot of coffee brewing before heading back towards the bedroom to take a shower.

His stride was interrupted by a knock at the door.

"Who the hell?" He was a bit put off as he looked out the peephole to see Charles

standing there. Hans opened the door and invited Charles in.

"What do you need?" Hans asked in an annoyed tone.

"I brought you this." Charles handed him a box and as Hans opened it, he discovered Charles had brought him a new phone.

"What's the catch?" Hans was hesitant, unsure if he was willing to risk the fact that it could possibly be tapped. "Is this a gift to show your undying love?"

Charles scoffed at Hans's attempt at cracking a joke. "Seriously, no catch. I just figured that this would be one less thing you needed to be worried about," Charles assured him. "Besides, if Sage shows up how would you be able to notify me?"

Had Charles been watching the apartment last night? Hans still felt skeptical, but for now this would have to do. Once he had a way to transport himself around, he would add getting a new phone to his list of things to do. But first, the only thing on his mind was her.

"You're right man, thanks so much." Hans faked his way through the interaction before Charles announced he needed to leave. The two men shook hands before Charles went about his business.

Hans took the opportunity to finally take a shower and call his buddy about a car. He had to get prepared for his date with death at the Sunset Lounge.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 9:39 am

The Sunset Lounge

The breeze ran through Hans' hair as he drove to the Sunset Lounge in the new car he had purchased from his friend Ross earlier in the day.

Ross had once been a colleague of Hans', and after his partner had gotten shot he left law enforcement completely to chase his new dream of becoming a mechanic.

The car wasn't anything fancy, but it was going to get him from point A to point B without too much attention which is all he really cared about.

Pulling into a parking spot, he looked at the car parked next to him.

"Shit, but something like this would definitely grab a bunch of attention.

" He stood outside the lounge entrance and stared at the neons on the arrow that flashed toward the door.

Hans took a deep breath and slowly released it out; the cooler air of the evening emitting like a cloud of smoke from between his lips.

It's now or never.

Hans pulled the door toward him and entered.

The lounge was dimly lit, set up more like a speakeasy with comfy sofas and chairs for seating.

A few booths lined one wall and there were chairs that rested at the bar.

It was a romantic atmosphere regardless of the smell of cigars that wafted through the air, tickling his nose.

The Sunset Lounge was the last in the area that still allowed smoking inside because of where it sat on the county line.

It had been years since Hans had been in this bar. The last time was when he and Alana had originally been together. He had never noticed the intricacies of the black and gold detailing against the red wallpapered walls which could be seen peeling in different spots.

Over the whispers of the night's crowd, a haunting tune danced its way to Hans' ear.

Hypnotized, he turned and looked in the direction of where the sound was coming from.

In the corner sat a baby grand piano. Some nights the lounge booked entertainment - a jazz band or pianist - and others they arranged for comedians to grace the presence of Acadia.

Tonight, a gorgeous woman sat at the piano bench. Her fingers danced across the ivory keys in an almost seductive manner.

Her hair was short and a deep shade of red.

She was edgier than what normally caught his eye: her makeup was dark and she wore a bright shade of red lipstick that complimented her complexion.

He wanted to turn away and search for the woman he had attempted to kill just a day

earlier, but there was something about this woman that kept him hypnotized.

As he allowed the music to guide him closer, his eyes searching the crowd for Sage, who was surely lurking in the shadows watching his every move.

Halfway between the entrance and the pianist, she looked up and their eyes met. When a familiar feeling came over him, a part of Hans was relieved that his plan had failed.

" Sage ," he whispered as he continued walking towards her. The rest of the crowd disappeared and at that moment they were the only two in the room.

"Hey, stranger." Sage winked as her fingers continued to glide over the piano's keys. "It took you long enough."

"I didn't know you could play the piano." Hans quickly changed the subject, unwilling to explain the back and forth battle he had going on in his mind up until the moment he had arrived.

"There's a lot about me that you don't know." Sage stuck out her tongue, taunting him.

"Fair enough." Hans ran his fingers through his hair as he took in the essence of the woman before him. He started taking note of the changes she had made in case he determined that he needed to update the report that Charles had filed. "You changed your hair."

Sage scoffed. "Well, you didn't exactly leave me a choice." The tone in her voice changed from sweet to serious.

Hans shook his head, realizing that Sage was already two steps ahead of him and the

report that he had filed. "Well, you look great."

"Would you have still thought the same thing if I was dead?"

Fighting for the right words Hans was glad that their conversation was cut short.

"Good evening, sir. My name is James and I'll be the waiter taking care of you tonight. Can I get you anything to drink?" he inquired.

Hans took no time to respond. "I'll take a jack and coke, short." he had been craving a drink since he escaped the forest for a second time.

"I'll have another Witches Brew." Sage winked, smiling sweetly at the waiter.

He nodded at them and headed back to the bar to input the order into the system.

Sage gestured to the table next to the piano. "Would you like to move over to a table so we can talk?" She stood up and took a couple of steps before Hans cut her off and pulled her chair out for her, pushing it in as she went to sit down. "How gentlemanly of you."

"I know it might be hard to believe, but..." Hans paused and stared at the beautiful woman sitting across from him, her eyes putting him under hypnosis. "I've always been a gentleman." He shook his head coming back into the present moment.

"Yes, because a true gentleman attempts to burn a woman's house down while she's sleeping."

"You left me no choice!" He raised his voice and the room fell silent around them, eyes shifting toward their table.

Sage giggled nervously and raised her hand to wave them off and assure any concerned bystander that she was safe.

"It's not like you were just going to let me go. " Hans finished more quietly.

The two sat there, the deafening silence roaring louder than anything Hans had ever experienced in his life.

James brought over their drinks, laying coasters down before placing the drinks on top of them.

"Can I get you two anything else?" he asked as Hans reached into his pocket and started to pull out his wallet.

"Just keep 'em coming, and place them on my tab," Sage interjected.

"As you wish." James sauntered off and began mingling with what appeared to be some of the regulars at the lounge.

Sage swirled her glittery drink that tasted of passionfruit. It had a purple base and was topped off with a green liquor that gave it the essence of a cauldron, and it was garnished with a slice of pineapple and a cherry.

"That is one helluva drink," Hans laughed, "but it makes sense for you."

Sage looked offended. "And that is one boring drink you've got there. Also fitting." She smirked through the glass as she took a sip.

The two continued to talk like old friends, the essence of betrayal barely lingering in the air the more time passed and the drinks kept coming.

Eventually, the bartender announced last call and they decided it was time to call it a night.

Sage staggered her way over to the bar to close her tab and the bartender informed her that he had already called a cab for her and Hans.

"C- can you b- believe it?" she slurred her words. "That bastard won't let us go home." She began to laugh hysterically over the thought of being trapped at the Lounge until she sobered up.

"N- no." Hans' sarcasm still lit up a room no matter how much he had to drink. "He said we had to take a cab home."

"Home?" Sage taunted. "Together?"

"I guess so." Hans shrugged. They stumbled toward the door and he held it open while Sage stepped out onto the pavement, stopping and turning toward Hans.

"But then you'd know where I was staying." The thought seemed to have sobered her up.

"I said I'm sorry, okay?" It was Hans' turn to seem annoyed. "What more do you want from me?"

He wrapped his arms around Sage's waist and pulled her in closer to him.

The cab pulled up to the curb and flashed its lights at them, notifying it was time to go.

"Look, I'm sure the driver would take us to our separate places. Maybe he'll take you home first?" Sage offered up a suggestion that Hans was willing to take. They got

into the back of the cab, leaving their cars behind with plans to pick them back up at separate times in the morning.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 9:39 am

Mistakes were Made

“ Ladies first, where to?” the driver inquired. Sage sat there, zoned out, deciding on her next move.

I could have him drop me off in the general area . Her thoughts were interrupted by him clearing his throat. “Miss?”

“Sorry, uh, you can drop him off first,” she insisted.

“ I’m not letting you ride alone,” Hans whispered in her ear, sending a shiver down her spine. Sage was frustrated but proceeded to give the driver Marco’s address.

Hans started to chuckle. “See, it wasn’t that hard was it?”

Hans took notice of the panic that had washed over Sage's face as he took her by the hand.

"It's going to be okay." He assured her, and for the first time in the past forty-eight hours, they both let out a nervous chuckle and decided to call a truce.

Giving in to the fact that they were all that each of them had left.

"Have you forgotten that you tried to kill me two nights ago?" Sage glared at him as he smiled and shook his head at her. "I'm being serious, Hans." She let out a sigh.

"Again, you left me no choice." Hans shrugged.

"I left you no choice?" Sage was in shock. Regardless of their damaged relationship, and the fact that she had stalked him and held him hostage, Sage had never intended to follow through with killing him.

"You weren't going to just let me go and be like, 'yeah go back to your apartment and resume your life'." Hans mocked her voice and mannerisms until Sage cut him off.

"And you didn't exactly offer to save me from the forest and move in together."

Hans leaned in, his mouth just centimeters from Sage's ear. "You killed Alana."

Sage waved him off. "Yeah, yeah, minor details."

"It wasn't minor to me ." Hans felt his anger building up in a sexual rage. "You also lied about who you were."

"Uhm, excuse me?" The cab driver interrupted them. "Can you two continue this lovers quarrel outside of the cab? I've got other customers to get to."

"Yeah, sorry," Hans and Sage apologized in unison. Sage looked back as she got out of the cab to see Hans following right behind her.

"What are you doing?" Sage stopped him once he set one foot on the ground.

"I'm getting out so he can get to his other customers," Hans started to explain.

"You are his other customer." Sage insisted. "You need to go." She started to walk away when she felt Hans' hand wrap around her wrist and spin her around in his arms to face him.

"Let me stay." Hans pleaded. "We can get a cab in the morning to get our cars."

Sage bit her lip and looked off into the distance, the ride home had been a sobering experience and she couldn't believe that after everything she had experienced, her plan hadn't been a bit more thought out. "Hans I-"

He interrupted her. "You what? You can't have a boy over?" Hans rolled his eyes.

She let out a deep sigh. "It's okay. He'll stay here."

"Great!" The driver's sarcasm struck a nerve with Sage. Hans handed him the money to cover the fare along with a generous tip. The driver tipped his hat and quickly sped off.

The two continued to stand there awkwardly looking at each other and down to the ground when their eyes met. Sage began to fumble around, searching her clutch for the house key as they slowly made their way to the front door. She unlocked the door and invited Hans to come inside.

"Whoa. This is Marco's place?" Hans couldn't believe his eyes while he looked around, taking in the sight of everything laid out before him.

"What did you expect? He was a bachelor. Alana only stayed over what appeared to be some nights and-"

"And the position he was in, did not warrant being able to afford this lifestyle." Hans started giving himself the home tour.

"Maybe it belonged to his parents?" Sage shrugged.

"Who knows? It doesn't really matter much now, I suppose.

" She wandered over to the fireplace that rested between the living room and

bedroom, turning the dial to light it.

As the fire started to blaze, she stood there, admiring the beauty as it crackled.

Sage turned back towards Hans who had already kicked off his shoes and made himself at home on the couch with a beer from the fridge.

"Hey, haven't you had enough for one night?" She skipped over to him and plopped down next to him, snagging the beer out of his hand and taking a swig. "Me?" Hans acted shocked. "What about you missy?" The two started playfully wrestling over the beer. "Hey, get your own."

Then, in a moment that felt like it was moving in slow motion, their lips met, pressing together vigorously like they hadn't seen each other for years.

Damn, I knew I should have gotten some lip balm, crossed Hans' mind as Sage had begun to unbutton his shirt, refusing to let him pull away from their lip lock.

"Sage, I don't think we should." Hans pressed his forehead against hers once he was finally able to catch his breath.

"Why not?" A look of disappointment fell over her face once more. "You almost told me you loved-"

"You lied to me." Hans cut her off trying to forget the activities of the previous night. "You had ample opportunity to tell me, and yet, you didn't," He continued his lecture.

"So, you thought you loved me as Sage but stopped loving me the moment you found out I was Gretta?" Sage pulled away.

"Of course I loved you as Gretta." It was the first time he had acknowledged her by

her birth name . "I wouldn't have dedicated my life to trying to find you after you disappeared if I didn't."

"Then what happened?" Sage snapped him out of his thoughts.

"I- I don't know." He stumbled over his words hoping an answer would magically appear. "I can't explain it other than... shock."

"I'm still the same person." She leaned back into him.

"But you're not." His breaths became staggered and Sage took this as her opportunity to swing her leg over him, straddling his lap.

"I think by now I've proved I can be whoever you want me to be." She wrapped her arms around the back of his neck, leaning into his ear and whispering as she pulled herself down against him, feeling Hans starting to grow hard, his cock pulsating beneath her.

Sage ran her tongue up the side of Hans' neck, lightly nibbling his ear lobe as she dug her nails into his back. Hans let out a quiet moan as he sunk into the couch, his hands caressing Sage's ass through her dress, taking the opportunity to grind her back and forth over him.

"We shou-" He tried to choke out.

"Shh." Sage pressed her finger up to Hans' lips. "Don't you want me?"

"Listen here, you little minx." A serious tone took over. "I'll always want you, but I need you like my lungs need oxygen and I'm not ready to accept that, yet. At the end of all of this, you'll be mine once again."

A tear rolled down Sage's cheek and Hans brought his finger to her face, wiping it away.

"I'm scared." It was the first time she had expressed any hesitation in what she was doing.

"One day at a time." Hans pulled her back in for another kiss, this time the passion behind it was stopping neither of them.

Sage finished unbuttoning Hans' shirt, exposing his chest and stomach while she ran her nails up and down him lightly.

Hans had moved on to kissing her neck and the surprise of her nails on his skin sent a chill through his body.

He gasped against her ear, pulling her back into him as he began to grow hard once more.

The more excited Hans grew, the tighter his pants became.

He flipped Sage over onto her back, resting her head on the arm of the couch.

She let out an unexpected giggle, surprised he had flawlessly accomplished the move.

Hans slowly unbuckled his belt before moving on to the button.

The zipper slid right down, exposing his cock, lightly glossed in precum.

Sage looked down at him, biting her lip before her eyes drifted back to his.

"Commando, nice. Now... fuck me." Her plea sounded more like a demand.

"Excuse me?"

"Fuck me, please ." Sage still didn't seem like she was begging much, however, Hans had reached the point of not caring.

Hans sat back, sliding up Sage's dress slightly, exposing her, taking notice that she also wasn't wearing panties.

"Commando, nice," he taunted her with her own words.

He grabbed her by her thighs, flipping her back onto the couch while bringing her on top of him once more, slightly impressing himself with his own moves.

Sage positioned herself over him, slowly sliding back onto his cock, their eyes never breaking contact.

She slowly started grinding back and forth on him.

Hans leaned his head back, enamored by the pleasure of their connection.

Sage had managed to hypnotize him once more, making him her slave to get her way.

Perhaps it was a combination of the alcohol and the rest of the chaos that caused him to finish quickly, before he even had a chance to realize what had happened, he exploded into Sage.

She reached between her legs and began rubbing her clit, he had finished before she had a chance to get started. It only took a few moments before she let out a satisfying moan.

This is not how I pictured the night ending. Sage thought as she awkwardly hopped

off of Hans feeling slightly disappointed.

"I'm going to take a shower and try to get some sleep," she announced leaving the room quickly. She returned with a pillow and blankets for Hans to set up his bed on the couch.

"I couldn't find a damn towel in this place, but the man had a million blankets." Sage laughed while rolling her eyes. "I had to buy towels just to make sure I had some."

"For some reason, that almost makes sense for him." Hans shook his head, confused about getting left on the couch after they had just had sex.

"Yeah." Sage sauntered over to the doorway, twisting the knob on the fireplace, shutting it down before they went to bed. "Wouldn't want to accidentally set the place on fire now would we?"

Hans laughed nervously. "Yeah, well... Good night!"

"Night, Hans." Sage shut the door, locking it behind her, keeping a safety net between them.

Page 10

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 9:39 am

The Morning After

The next morning, Sage was awoken by the sound of a phone ringing.

Yawning, she stretched, her body popping and reminding her about her life before the forest. She would sit and wait around for packages to be delivered, hoping that whatever whimsical item her parents had purchased that day would be donning a layer or two of bubble wrap.

If she was lucky, her father would split the wrap in half and together the two of them would sit on the stairs and take turns popping the bubbles.

It was one of the only positive memories she had with him.

The sadness that had started taking over Sage's memory was quickly erased by the aroma of coffee.

Getting up, she grabbed a robe that she had previously discovered tucked away in the closet, wrapping it around herself and securing the belt tightly, the fuzziness of it tickling away at her skin.

She started to open it when she heard Hans talking on the phone.

?? “ No, I understand completely...I just...time got away from me and I didn't think it was safe to drive.

” She could hear Hans explaining to the mystery person on the other line.

“I know she’s still out there, but I don’t have anything else to share with you.

I told you I would update you as soon as anything new came up. ”

Sage felt her heart sink deeper into her chest. Had she been so blind to believe that this wasn’t going to end badly for her?

On one hand, she wanted to believe that last night wasn’t a one time thing, and that what he was saying over the phone was to distract this mystery person.

But what if he had already exposed her whereabouts and this was just a cover story because he had noticed her movement in the bedroom?

Regardless of the truth, she knew she needed to continue to watch her own back since no one else seemed to be.

“Alright, we’ll talk soon. Bye Charles.” Hans hung up just as Sage stepped out of the room, clearing her throat to make him aware that she was standing there.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to wake you.” Hans turned to look at her. His smile attempted to wash the worry away from her mind.

“No, you didn’t wake me.” She tried to assure him. “Is that… coffee?” Sage changed the subject.

“Yeah, I guess you can call it that.” Hans shuffled into the kitchen, searching through the cabinets to find a coffee cup. He then poured what seemed to be the lightest blend of coffee Sage had ever seen in her life.

Hans glanced up at her, and chuckled, sliding the cup across the counter passing it to Sage. “So, it’s extremely weak. I had hoped there was enough there to muster up a

single cup but..." he held the coffee pot up to the light, "as you can see, this is indeed, not really coffee."

"It's brown water." Sage looked disgusted.

Hans put his hands in the air, claiming defeat. "I tried."

"Thank you." Sage raised her cup like she had just shouted 'cheers' after a speech, and then poured the cup down the drain of the sink in front of her. She started getting lost in thought once more about the person Hans had been speaking to prior to her coming out of the bedroom.

Taking note that Sage had something on her mind, Hans waved his hand in front of her face, hoping to snap her back to reality and discover what adventure she had just returned from. "Earth to Sage?"

"Sorry." She shook her head and then rubbed the tears that had formed in her eyes. "The man you were on the phone with... was that the same Charles we went to school with?"

"The one and only." Hans grabbed two glasses from the cabinet. Filling them with ice and water he handed one to Sage with a couple of pills before he returned to the couch and collapsed into the cushions. "I don't know about you, but last night kicked my ass. I haven't drank like that in years."

Sage shrugged her shoulder and shook her head. "I'm fine, actually." She placed the pills back down on the counter.

"You're not hungover?" Hans was shocked. "How?"

"Nope." Sage smirked. "I guess I just got lucky."

Hans continued to sip on his water as Sage stood in the kitchen, her mind wandering once more to the last interaction she and Charles had. That bastard.

“So, what were you two talking about?” Sage asked, waiting to see if Hans’ story was going to be believable or if she needed to start planning her next move.

Hans let out another sigh, something he found himself doing more often than not lately.

“You.” He took another sip of water before licking his lips, giving him time to gather his thoughts.

“I know you know that I filed the report, but Charles is the one who is in charge of the case.” He looked at her with seriousness in his eyes. “He’s the one looking for you.”

Sage gasped, hearing the actual words form terrified her. “To finish what he started, I’m sure.”

“It’s been so long, I doubt he even rememb-”

Sage cut in, interrupting him. “Oh, he remembers alright.” Her anger grew as soon as the words left his mouth. She couldn’t believe that Hans was being dismissive of the situation, a situation she had found herself in because he wasn’t there.

“You weren’t there, Hans. You didn’t see the look in his eyes.

” Hans laid his head back, resting it on the cushion of the couch while he listened to Sage go on.

His head was still throbbing, but not as much as when he had first woken up.

“Who’s the person who kept yelling at me about consent back in the cabin?”

” The question snapped him out of his stupor, chasing away the hangover faster than any cure had ever done.

“ You’re right.” He gave up. “I should have been there.”

“ I didn’t mean...” Sage tried to interject.

“I was sixteen, Sage. I had an appointment. I would have been there if I could and none of that would have ever happened to you. I am sorry!” Hans started to get emotional, “But I wasn’t there and there’s nothing I can do about it now, and I have hated every single minute of that.

But I tried.” He stood up and started walking to her.

“I got there as fast as I could once I realized something wasn’t right, and had that never happened then we wouldn’t be here in this situation right now.

We would have never stumbled into the cottage in the woods.

We would have never been apart. Who knows where life could have taken us, where we would be now?

We can’t change the past, but we can guide our future.

” He took her by the hands. “I’m not going to let him get you. ”

“How do I know?” Sage was hesitant. “How do I know I can trust you?”

“I went into the woods alone for you. I didn’t report it to Marco,” he started. “In a

way, Charles is Marco right now. It's the same situation as before, only this time we are in a house, and not in the woods. And neither of us are trapped in a cage."

The mention of the cage sparked Sage's creative mind and all thoughts were suddenly away from Charles, and on to something a bit more salacious.

"Hans?" A devilish smirk crossed her face.

"Sage?" He wasn't sure what was going on with her, but he could tell by the shift of energy in the room that he was in for the long haul.

Hello Old Friend

The week had passed slowly, but once Saturday evening arrived, Hans kept a steady watch on the clock. It took forever, but finally he was buttoning his shirt, rolling his sleeves up, and pushing them back to his elbows.

When he and Sage had returned to the Sunset Lounge to pick up their keys before going their separate ways, Sage had stopped him dead in his tracks.

“Why don’t we meet up again next Saturday night?” Sage had inquired.

“Where do you want to go?” Hans should have said no but there was something about her that had him addicted. He was still riding the high from the night before.

“It will be a surprise, but dress nice,” she said with mystery in her voice. Before Hans could respond, she was blowing him a kiss and ducking into Marco’s car.

Hans tucked half his shirt into his pants and stared at himself in the mirror. I can’t believe I’m doing this. Staring at himself, he couldn’t decide if he looked better with his shirt tucked or untucked.

Untucked .

He swiftly went to his closet to select a tie from the rack. Red, blue, or black? Hans shifted his body to look into the mirror attached to his closet door, holding each one up trying to make a decision as to which one looked better.

Black.

Flipping his collar up, he put on the tie and cinched it up as tight as it would go without cutting off his oxygen.

Looking at the floor of his closet, Hans also selected a pair of black dress shoes to complete his ensemble.

Unsure of whether or not he was about to have the time of his life or wish he was dead.

A few moments later there was a knock at his door.

She's here.

Hans looked back into the mirror, and roughed up his hair, giving it a bit of an edgier look. Damn, I need a haircut.

He made his way toward the door, grabbing everything he might possibly need for the night ahead of him. As he opened the door, taking a hit off his vape, he realized that the person standing there wasn't who he had expected.

"Hey stranger." A woman from Hans' past stood there, a goddess in all black.

Her dress sat low revealing the perfect amount of cleavage while there were slits up both sides of the skirt, exposing her tattooed legs beneath her fishnets.

The woman's hair was long, wavy, and the color of blood.

She looked like a woman of the night, a vampire.

“ Marcy. ” He choked on the vapor he had just inhaled.

Hans had first met Marcy a few years back on a case that he had been working on.

During that case she went from being in one of the happiest relationships he had ever seen, to going through a messy breakup.

He and Alana had broken up around the same time, so he and Marcy had come to confide in each other.

Even though Marcy seemed numb to the overall situation, it ended up being too much for her to stay in town.

The last he had heard, Marcy had opened up her own little funeral home somewhere in New York and had found success living her dream.

Marcy was the first person who Hans had felt comfortable opening up to about Gretta aside from Alana or anyone who had known both of them personally.

She always remained positive that he would one day find the answers he was searching for. She had no idea what he had discovered.

“What are you doing here?” It had been years since they had previously spoken.

“You didn’t think Sage was going to show up here and risk being seen did you?” Marcy’s sapphire eyes pierced his soul.

“Oh, you know Sage, too?.” Hans rolled his eyes at the realization Sage had clearly been following him around a lot longer than he originally thought.

“We’re old friends.” Marcy winked at him. “Of course, I had no idea the two of you

knew each other, let alone the fact that she was the one you had been searching for all these years. I do feel like had that tiny detail been shared we could have avoided this entire disaster.”

Everything clicked with Hans. “Sunshine, the girl who had left you... That was Sage?”

Marcy pressed her lips together, nodding her head while awkwardly swaying back and forth.

“I’ll admit when she contacted me yesterday and said she needed to come clean, I thought she was going to tell me she ended things because she had cheated, not because of the extracurriculars that she didn’t want to get me involved in, or the fact that her initial interest in me was... you.”

Curiosity piqued his interest. “How did that make you feel?” A sudden cool breeze stirred the air inside the apartment and Hans, keeping his gaze steady, and invited Marcy to come inside.

Marcy had never been inside Hans’ apartment, he watched as she looked around, seemingly assessing her surroundings while using it as an opportunity to gather her thoughts.

“I’m here, aren’t I?” The look that Marcy gave Hans when she said those words made him realize that he might not be the only one trying to decipher any lingering feelings for Sage.

“I’ve missed her. I haven’t dated anyone since because I was left with so many questions.

I couldn’t help but feel like I wasn’t good enough for anyone, that I was the one who

had fucked up. ”

Hans agreed. “She definitely has a way of doing that.”

They fell silent. Both unsure of what to do or say next, until Marcy cleared her throat and gestured at the door. “Are you ready or are we just going to stand here all evening?” she asked, attempting to change the subject.

Hans stumbled over his words. “Let’s get this over with.” Hans opened the door and the two stepped out of the apartment into the night. He pulled the door closed behind him, twisting the knob to ensure that it was securely locked before locking the deadbolt, pushing on the door one last time.

“I don’t think anyone is going to budge that.” Marcy laughed at Hans’ overly prepared door-locking skills.

“One can never be too cautious... Sage proved that to me time and time again.”

Marcy smiled. “Lucky for you she’s going to be at the same place as us for the entire evening,” she reminded him.

“True.” He nodded in agreement. “What an interesting night this shall be.” The two made their way to Marcy’s car, Hans tried letting go of his nerves still unsure of where he was being escorted.

Page 12

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 9:39 am

Club Red

Club Red was in Greenville, a couple towns over from Acadia, tucked back in the warehouse district away from the normal Saturday night hustle and bustle.

During the week it was one of the hottest, members-only nightclubs that everyone in the area dreamt of being accepted into.

On the weekends it was transformed into something darker.

Non-members even spread rumors that it was a hip Vamp club, convinced that the owners would go so far as to allow human sacrifices on the full moon to induct their new members.

The rumors got so outrageous that the local police got involved.

In reality though, that did nothing but add an extra layer of protection to the club which was actually a place for kinksters to unleash their inner desires.

“The place hasn’t changed much.” Hans was unphased by their arrival.

“Surprise,” Marcy said sarcastically as she pushed the button that opened the gate.

“Do you have a code?” A voice came over the intercom.

“Charlie, Romeo, four, two, seven,” Marcy responded and the gate started to open.

“Alright Marcy, have fun tonight.” A click soon followed and the voice was gone.

Hans hadn't been to Club Red since he and Alana were together the first time.

Part of him wondered if he would see any old friends still hanging around or if he was going to be able to fly under the radar.

He didn't exactly look forward to trying to explain that not only had he and Alana broken up, but she had recently passed.

Once they had been directed where to park by the parking lot attendant, they made their way up the sidewalk where security greeted them and opened the door.

The place was dimly lit, string lights and LED candles lined the long hallways that led toward various rooms and into the main dungeon.

During the week these rooms were closed off, but tonight they were open for business.

Hans took the opportunity to look in each room they passed in their search for the woman both he and Marcy craved.

Loud thuds could be heard from the first room where a woman was strapped to the St. Andrews Cross.

She moaned, an orgasm clearly begging to be released with each thud she received.

Even in the poor lighting, Hans could see the bruising starting to take shape across her body.

The implements of the person servicing her were lined out on the table next to the

door perfectly.

“Beautiful,” Hans whispered as they kept moving forward. Marcy took note of the passion and fire returning to him.

In the next room there was a woman suspended from the ceiling, her rigger creating a piece of art with intricate knots.

A second woman stood off to the side waiting for her turn.

Shibari was something that Hans had always been interested in.

He and Alana had discussed taking classes together, but they had been unsuccessful in obtaining any information.

“She should be here somewhere.” Marcy was starting to seem nervous.

??“You know Sage, she is probably in the main area,” Hans reassured her.

Their whispers caught the attention of the rope bunny that wasn’t currently tied up.

Her eyes met with Hans and they exchanged a smile before he decided it was time to move on.

“Why don’t you go on ahead? I’ll be there soon.

” His voice lowered and words flowed from his mouth slowly.

At first, Marcy seemed confused but when she realized what room they were approaching next.

She took the hint and left Hans standing there.

He slowly crept up towards the door, touching the doorframe and allowing all the memories that he and Alana had shared in this room come back to him.

“I miss you, Alana.” Hans whispered before stepping back into the middle of the hallway.

His mind was set on figuring out where Sage and Marcy had run off to, and he started to make his way to the main dungeon area.

Loud moans could be heard down another corridor that was typically reserved for private parties.

Hans couldn't help but stand at the end listening to try and figure out what type of party could be happening down the long secluded hallway.

Once the sounds became scarce, he turned, running into another member of the club.

“Shit, I am so-” Hans started to apologize when the light caught the man's face. “Dax? Is that really you?”

Dax was the cousin of Michael, Hans' best friend in high school, and he was always hanging out with them regardless of being a few years younger.

After graduation Michael and Hans had drifted apart but, much like tonight, he and Dax had reconnected after running into each other at Club Red.

The two were almost inseparable until Dax took a job that sent him across the country.

“Hans! I haven’t seen you here in quite some time!” Both men were in shock to have run into each other after so many years.

“I thought you were living over on the West Coast?” Hans started to feel bad for not staying in touch with him. “I had no idea you were back.”

“Turns out that if you work hard enough, get involved with some crazies and make it out alive, your job will let you work anywhere in the world as long as you can fly out to the office every few months.” Dax chuckled awkwardly.

“You too, huh?” Hans shook his head, curious about what Dax was referring to. “I’ve gotta meet up with a couple of people, but we need to get together for lunch or something and catch up.”

“Sounds good to me.” Dax shook Hans’ hand. “I need to figure out where Emily ran off to.”???? “Emily, huh?” Hans smirked. “You never struck me as the type of guy who’d want to settle down.” ??

“A lot has happened. See ya around.” The men went their separate ways.

As Hans drew closer to the main room, he could hear fits of giggling, a sound he knew all too well.

He stepped inside the massive room that housed the main dungeon.

Chains hung from the ceilings with plenty of stools and benches for impact sessions on top of seating for the voyeurs to get their fill.

Other rooms branched off from this area designated for more intricate types of play: a shower room for watersports, a medical room for blood play, and another room designed for an escape when you just needed a break from the overwhelming action

that was going on.

Off in the corner, Hans could see Sage and Marcy engaged in a tickling session with a random man.

He was tied up, his arms above his head were connected to one of the chains and he had stripped down to nothing.

On the table next to him were various implements that the girls would ogle over as they decided what to tickle him with next.

Hans stood there, watching Sage in her element, releasing all hesitation and just allowing herself to be her.

If only this never had to end. Hans slowly walked toward the area where Sage and Marcy were.

He sat down on a random stool once he was closer, observing their interactions.

Marcy's hand caressed down the small of Sage's back as she looked in her direction longingly, but she must have felt someone watching as her eyes began to drift across the room.

Her gaze met up with Hans' as he gestured with a tilt of his head as if to send a message that everything was fine.

Marcy leaned in closer and whispered something into Sage's ear, causing her to look over to where Hans sat as she continued to lightly drag a feather across the random man's chest. By now, a crowd had gathered and she passed the feather on to the next person for them to have their fun.

“You’re abandoning your new friend already?” Hans asked coyly.

Sage shrugged, “We found him that way, as long as he’s being tickled by someone he will be fine.”

“Besides,” Marcy chimed in, “that’s not the reason we’re here.”

Page 13

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 9:39 am

Three's Company... Again

Sage slowly made her way toward Hans, swaying her hips back and forth like a pendulum in an attempt to put him in a trance. She grabbed his tie and pulled him closer to her. “Do you like what you see, my little poppet?” Her voice was sultry and smooth.

“I think you’ve forgotten who you’re speaking to,” his voice was gravelly.

Hans ran his hand over Sage’s waist and across her lower back, pulling her flush against him.

“And I have no issues with reminding you.” His hand met her throat with a roughness that he hadn’t shown in what felt like forever.

The hoarseness in his voice left Sage speechless, causing her to bite her lip in hopes of distracting him from the fact that, for once, she had nothing to say.

“Everything is set up,” Marcy chimed in, unaware of what type of situation she had just become a distraction for. Sage hadn’t even noticed that Marcy had slipped out of the main area on a mission to claim a space for them to call their own.

Oh thank God . Sage was relieved, and right on cue she turned back and looked at Hans.

“You won’t do anything.” She giggled, their eyes locked on one another for a few seconds longer before she smiled brightly and then took off following Marcy, who

was going to show her where they were set up for the evening.

Before exiting the room, Sage stopped and looked back in Hans' direction just before Marcy grabbed her hand and they disappeared like ghosts into the dark hall.

???

By the time Hans had gathered his composure, he was back on the hunt for the two women he was trying to keep up with. I didn't know I signed up for a game of hide and go fucking seek. He was peeking into the various rooms that he had already examined on the way to find them the first time.

Nothing . They were nowhere in sight.

He continued his search. "Alright, where the hell did you two run off to now?" His voice was louder than he had anticipated. It echoed through the hall and he could only whisper "sorry" as he continued his search.

Giggles poured out of the room at the end of the hall; the one room he had neglected to check because he had been so sure it was nothing more than a storage closet.

He crept upon the room and quietly peered through the split in between the curtains to see Sage sitting across Marcy's lap and their lips connected.

Passion and lust exploded within the room, their pheromones mingling together causing an eruption of desire from deep within his body.

He froze.

Hans couldn't help but stand there and continue to observe the deeply rooted connection that Marcy and Sage had. He was unsure exactly what his involvement

was supposed to be, unless their plan the entire time had been that he would simply provide the dick to ride.

No, that can't be what this is. Hans knew the way Sage had looked at him so intently just moments ago. Her playful banter wasn't all for nothing, or just a way to convince him not to turn her in.

Sage clearly couldn't help what came out of her mouth. "Are you going to get in here, or just stand there gawking like you've never seen two women kissing before?"

Hans spread the curtains apart and entered the room. "I didn't want to interrupt anything." He shrugged, examining the implements that Marcy had laid out. He picked up one of the thuddier toys and studied it, running his fingers along the rod and testing it out against his hand.

Marcy smiled. "That's one of my favorites."

"I can guess why." Hans glanced over to see that Sage was now standing over Marcy, sticking her ass out and wiggling it back and forth a bit trying to get Hans to test it on her.

With the flick of his wrist, the edge of the implement struck Sage's still-clothed ass, but he could tell that even with the added barrier, it was going to leave beautiful marks.

"So, what's on the menu for tonight?" Hans inquired while Marcy and Sage both started giggling like school girls over his corny choice of words.

Sage removed herself from where Marcy was seated, sitting down next to her and looking back at Hans, her eyes full of innocence.

“Don’t give me that look, Sage.” Hans waved the toy at her.

“You girls are the ones who brought me here with not so much as a hint as to what you’re after. ”

Sage smirked, “Well, it’s been a while, and I figured you’d be happy to play in a controlled environment. Plus, Marcy wanted to see if you still had it in you.”

Hans didn’t believe for a second that this was the real reason. Regardless he had been graced by being allowed to be in the presence of two goddesses, and at this moment, he wasn’t sure that he even cared about the truth.

Hans instructed Marcy to take off Sage’s dress, while the women looked at each other mischievously.

Marcy obliged, sitting up on her knees and pulling Sage’s dress up over her head.

Sage’s breasts bouncing in celebration of their freedom.

Hans glanced over at Marcy who seemed to have been taken back at the sight, reminding himself that she and Sage had a past that he had only recently discovered.

He smiled, taking note of the innocence that Marcy portrayed.

Sage taunted. “What now?”

“Bend over.” A knife laying on the table caught Hans’ eye.

It was a reminder that just a couple of weeks prior, a knife on the table represented the potential of life versus death.

He picked up the blade, examining it before placing the flat edge at the top of Sage's spine, slowly dragging it down her body until it met the top of her fishnets.

Sage seethed in anticipation, as Hans just stood there, in awe of the beauty that was before him.

He leaned in, pressing his body up against her back. "What was it you told me earlier?"

Sage looked back at him out of the corner of her eye, a sinister grin came across her lips as she seemed to be debating on what direction she wanted to take this.

Hans ran his free hand across her body and grasped her by her hair, pulling her head back so that she had to look him directly in the eye.

"You must be getting old if you've already forgotten.

" She paused and he pulled her back a little further.

"I said, 'you won't do anything'." She enunciated each word clearly.

"So this is how it's going to go tonight, huh?

" Hans released her. Applying pressure he forced Sage back into her bent over position as he ran the blade up under her fishnets slicing through them.

He glanced over at Marcy who had the biggest smile on her face, enjoying the show that had just gotten started.

" She has quite the mouth on her." Marcy beamed.

“If she keeps it up, she’s going to have to put that pretty little thing to work,” he snapped back without even thinking, Marcy bit her lip, her eyes not leaving Sage’s body.

Hans knew that regardless of what the rest of the night was going to bring, nothing was ever going to happen between him and Marcy.

Between their friendship and the fact that as far as he knew, she was only into women.

That didn’t mean he didn’t enjoy the idea of sharing Sage with her, though.

“Is that all you got?” Sage broke through his train of thought. “Because if you think that you’re ‘showing me’ just by ripping up my cheap ass fishnets with a knife, you’re very misinformed. I may have to trade places with you and show you how it’s done.”

Marcy took that as her cue to get up and move back to a chair that she had placed in the corner of the room when she was setting things up. It was in the perfect location for her to get one helluva show.

Hans cut through Sage’s panties with the knife and proceeded to cram them into her mouth.

“Hush,” he whispered, grabbing the restraints from the table of instruments and wrapping them around her wrists.

Then he secured them to the spot on the back of the bench.

“If you can be a good girl, I’ll take the panties out of your mouth here in a few minutes.

” He grabbed a heart-shaped flogger and began lightly tapping each of Sage’s now exposed cheeks, applying different variations of pressure with each swat.

He could hear Sage’s moans of enjoyment being soaked up by the panties that had taken up residence in her mouth.

He walked in front of her, placing the crotch of his pants at eye level.

Hans reached down and placed his finger beneath Sage’s chin and lifted her head up to look in his eyes.

Even with just a little bit of play, her doe-eyed expression had already taken over.

With his other hand, he reached to her mouth and pulled the panties out slowly, dropping them on the floor in front of where he stood, moving his hand to caress her cheek.

“Are you enjoying yourself already?” His voice was low and steady.

“ Yes, sir.” Sage nodded into his hand.

“See, it wasn’t so hard was it?” He waited for her to retort and brat back at him, but there was nothing but a euphoric look splattered across her face.

This was a side of Sage that he hadn’t had the opportunity to witness before, and he was quite enjoying it.

He glanced up over at Marcy, getting more of a sense that it was her who was responsible for the taming of this animal.

Hans stood up and moved back behind Sage, getting into a rhythm while switching

back and forth between implements, adjusting his speed and amount of force behind each swing. Listening to the little noises that escaped her lips upon each forceful contact.

In between heavy strokes, Hans would set down the implement that he was using and gently brush his hand across her skin. Bending down and placing gentle kisses upon her, visibly sending chills up her body before continuing on.

Marcy cleared her throat, which caught Hans' attention.

He glanced down at his watch and saw that it was getting late and Club Red would be closing soon.

He didn't want to take away from any aftercare that Sage might need immediately following their time together.

He decided it was time to finish up with a more gentle impact from the flogger.

Music played in the background and Hans synced up his timing with the beat as he finished creating his piece of art with each stroke. Each cheek displayed shades of crimson and violet, with a couple of areas where the skin had broken and blood was creeping down like paint splatter across a canvas.

He grabbed a first aid kit and began to tend to Sage's wounds when Marcy stepped in and offered to care for Sage while he worked on cleaning up the space.

Hans made sure to sanitize the toys before putting them back in their bag and wiped everything down so that the room would be ready for the next group to use.

Once he had finished, Hans looked back to see that Sage had already curled up against Marcy wrapped in a blanket and drinking water. Two things that she had

learned in their previous relationship that Sage needed after a session.

“We make a good team.” Hans held up a water bottle to cheers Marcy for stepping in.

It had been a good while since he had endured a session like that.

Apartment living wasn't exactly the ideal situation for those who enjoyed the kinkier things in life.

It made him grateful for places like Club Red to exist.

“She's worth it.” Marcy pushed Sage's hair out of her face and tucked it behind her ear. Hans could see Sage trying to hide her face as she blushed overhearing the conversation between him and Marcy.

“You about ready to go?” Hans asked the room.

“Only if we can stop and grab tacos on the way.” Sage giggled as Hans grabbed their things and they all made their way to Marcy's car.

When Friends Become Lovers

Once back at Marco's, bellies full of taco fries, crunchy tacos, and burritos, there was no denying the sexual tension as the three of them snuggled up on the couch.

Sage was happily squished between Marcy and Hans with feelings drifting around inside her head and filling her heart.

Feelings that she had never experienced in her life before tonight.

"I could get used to this." Sage broke the silence.

"Driving forty-five minutes to hit up The Taco Stand?" Hans poked fun at her.

With a playful glare being shot in his direction, Sage snuggled deeper towards Marcy. "No. Okay well... Yes, but, no." She stumbled over her words. "Like all three of us being together." Sage glanced back and forth between Hans and Marcy to gauge their reactions, expecting someone to object.

Instead they both sat there in a euphoric state and just enjoyed the moment. Tensions may have been high, but the only thing anyone wanted to do was just remain like this, forever, as they drifted off to sleep holding one another.

"You're so fucking worthless." The voice behind Sage was sinister and unfamiliar. "No one could ever love you." The degrading words kept spewing through his mouth as the old hag stood before her.

“I-” Sage tried to plead before the door slammed shut and the woman was gone, leaving Sage alone with the voices that surrounded her, knowing they were lying in wait for when she least expected it.

She curled up in a ball in the middle of the floor, tears streaming down her face, praying that someone would just put her out of her misery.

The night that Sage had been captured after she and Hans had escaped.

The woman threatened that one day Sage was going to regret ever trying to escape.

Time went by and Sage found herself wondering when these threats were going to show themselves.

It wasn't long after she had turned eighteen that she started to endure many nights where she was verbally and physically assaulted over and over by various men.

She couldn't remember what a full night of rest was like, and she spent most of the time with at least one eye wide open.

“You're so much prettier when you wear makeup. You're no good to me like this. I'll have to put a bag over your head in order to fuck you without getting sick.”

Their words repeated over and over in her mind.

So much so that Sage found times when she couldn't tell what was real and what was made up.

Then one of the slimebags that had just got done talking so much shit, would slither up to her, touching her regardless of how many times she begged them not to.

“I paid good money for this,” the men would periodically remark when she was struggling against them. “And I will get what I paid for.”

The nightmares took over Sage’s sleep, causing her to whimper and beg the mysterious man to just leave her alone. Startled, Hans and Marcy woke up, afraid that someone was in the house, only to find Sage in a panic, trapped in her mind.

“Hey,” Marcy hushed Sage, trying to calmly wake her without causing any more trauma than she had already been through.

Hans sat back and observed, unsure of how he could help.

He knew that Sage had some experiences that had affected her deeply, but that was one thing that they had never sat down and hashed out.

Sage always tried to blow things off and pretend that everything was okay when they were at her cottage.

This made it quite clear that they weren’t.

“Did this happen often when you two were living together?” he inquired, hoping that it was okay to ask and that he wasn’t causing deeper stress.

“She suffers from PTSD,” Marcy explained. “She had been seeing a therapist weekly when we were together. Towards the end she decided that it wasn’t helping and that’s when she turned to immersing herself deep into her book collection and getting more involved in the kink community.”

“Is that safe?” Hans had growing concerns.

“She went through a lot. It was way worse before, but the longer she spends away

from the situation she was in, the more she heals.”

“I’m not sure her going around and murdering people to get my attention really showed any signs of healing.” Hans chuckled. Marcy glanced at Hans, unamused as Sage finally started to come out of her nightmare, yet remained asleep.

“I believe that some of the things she has done are definitely unexplainable and concerning.” Marcy got up to grab Sage a glass of water for when she woke up.

“But I don’t believe that she is a bad person.

” As Marcy sat back down on the couch, placing the water on the table, a sadness came over her.

“ What’s wrong?” Hans questioned.

“At first, I was jealous. Sage had begun spending all of her time doing everything else. It was like she had forgotten that we were even in a relationship. When we broke up, I was already numb to the idea of losing her because in my mind she was already gone,” Marcy started to explain.

“I worried that I was incapable of love because it didn’t hurt, but now, seeing her like this...

” She paused and smiled as Sage started to wake up.

“I think the past twenty-four hours has shown me that maybe I wasn’t ready back then, but I’m definitely ready now. ”

“Aw, Marce,” Sage placed her hand on Marcy’s cheek, catching the tear that still lingered there. “I love you, too.” She leaned in and gently kissed Marcy.

Hans sat back, watching their interaction, taking note that the jealousy Marcy had towards Sage's books was all too familiar. He wished he had more time with Sage to learn all of these intimate details of what she had endured.

Like a psychic, she read his mind. Sage reached over and took him by the hand.

"Don't worry, there's plenty of time for us to reconnect, and for you to learn all of this about me as well.

" She giggled. "But I need you to promise me that you won't try to kill me again.

Otherwise the potential this could have," Sage gestured to all three of them, "will be over."

"Alright, fine," Hans agreed to her stipulations. "And you," he pointed at Marcy, "are you fine with this?"

Marcy took a minute to think, placing her index finger against her lips and looking back and forth between the two. "Oh, what the hell, of course I am," she went on playfully. "I wouldn't be here if I didn't know what I was getting involved with."

Knock. Knock. Knock.

The loud thudding on the front door startled them out of their comfort and conversation, but they remained quiet knowing that they couldn't risk being found out.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

Whoever it was, seemed persistent. Sage shooed at Hans while he quietly crept toward the front door, hoping that he wouldn't misstep and cause the floor to creak

beneath his feet.

The universe was on his side and Hans made it to the door undetected.

When he peeked through the peephole there was a familiar face standing on the other side.

Sage watched carefully as Hans leaned back and stared at the ceiling in frustration. After a moment he turned to her and Marcy and putting his finger to his lips, encouraging them to keep quiet until the coast was clear.

Charles

Charles.

Why is he here? What does he want? Fuck, Marcy's car is out there, he's going to know someone is here.

Hans stood there, quietly, continuing to stare through the peephole, praying to the Gods that Charles would decide to give up and leave.

He made a mental note that he should also plan to call the person in control of his case to have a bullshit conversation and potentially snag some information on what the plan could possibly be.

After about five minutes of waiting, Charles looked down at his watch and wandered off.

That was weird.

Hans watched until he saw him drive off down the road and made sure that there was no one else poking around Marco's property. He quickly backed away from the door and hurried over to the girls, taking his place next to Sage once more.

"It was Charles." Sage's eyes grew wide and a fear crossed her face that Hans hadn't seen in awhile. "Are you okay?" Hans' concern grew.

"H-he was h-here?" Sage started to stutter. "That means he saw Marcy's car and

knows that something is going on. He'll be back." Hans sat there, trying to develop a plan in his head while the two women went into a state of panic.

"We're going to have to figure something out," Marcy spoke up. "Otherwise you'll get caught and end up going to jail."

"Or worse," Sage interjected. "It's Charles, there's no way that he wouldn't try and get into my head first."

"I'll kill hi-" Marcy started to respond but Hans interrupted her.

"First off, no, you won't." Hans looked over at her and raised his eyebrow. "Second of all, between the two of us, we aren't going to let anything happen to you, Sage. You just need to stop being so fucking stubborn and let us take the lead on this."

Sage rolled her eyes and Hans knew that she was struggling with the idea of relinquishing control over the situation.

"You can trust us." Hans placed his hand on her leg. "I'm going to give Charles a call here in a bit and see if I can casually get information from him so we at least have a timeline to develop a game plan."

"That's good." Marcy nodded in agreement. "For now, I suppose I can find a hotel somewhere and we can hide out there."

"Good plan." Hans stared off into oblivion while he thought of the best-case scenario for Sage.

"I know it feels risky, but I think you should stay here. Gather up the things you might need and then we can all meet back this afternoon." He looked between the two waiting for one of them to either agree or disagree.

“I’m fine with that,” Sage chimed in, glancing over at Marcy who appeared anxious. “Hey, everything is going to be okay,” she assured her. “Remember, I’m a pro at killing people if I need to.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of, Sage.” Marcy’s voice was stern. “I don’t want us to leave and come back to an absolute massacre.”

“Don’t worry,” Hans cut in. “The plan is solid, no one will be dying today.” The energy in the room shifted and became so quiet that you could almost hear a pin drop and know its exact location.

Did Hans actually believe the words that were flowing from his mouth or was he just trying to remain positive to keep the spirits of Sage and Marcy lifted?

“Let’s make a plan to all meet up for dinner.

I will stop and pick you up, Sage.” Marcy broke the silence.

Hans stood up, wrapping his arms around Sage and he placed a soft kiss against her forehead.

He was surprised when Marcy continued, “Mister Cop-With-a-Vendetta interrupted a very important conversation we were having earlier. It would be nice if we could all have a chance to revisit it.”

Hans and Sage looked at each other and shrugged, as far as they knew the conversation had been completed with everyone agreeing that this was what they wanted.

Hans found it odd that she was hinting at the fact that it had not concluded, but agreed that at least a few things needed to be solidified.

“Yeah, of course, Marcy.” Hans sauntered over to the kitchen so he could grab his wallet and keys off the counter. “Ready?”

Marcy stood up and kissed Sage on the forehead, almost mimicking the way that Hans had and squeezed her tightly. “Please be safe. I could never forgive myself if anything came between us again.”

“The only thing coming between you-” Glares from both Sage and Marcy stopped Hans dead in his tracks from finishing his less than corny joke, though it did cause Marcy to lighten up her mood a bit as she chuckled and shook her head at him.

“Boys will be boys.” She grasped Sage by the hand before letting go and heading to the front door. Hans watched as Marcy dug through her purse to find her car keys before she removed her purse from the coat rack next to the front door.

“I’ll go out first.” Hans had already devised a plan to make sure that they were able to sneak out without being caught. “That way, if someone is out there, it will be easier for me to talk my way out of it.”

“Will it though?” Marcy challenged him.

“Your girlish figure won’t do anything for you in this case,” Hans verbally pushed back at her.

Their friendship was clearly picking up where it had left off and with a new relationship in sight, it was a good thing that the other person involved was someone he knew he could trust with his life.

Someone who understood what it was like to love a woman as chaotic as Sage.

Love . That was a concept Hans didn’t know he was capable of ever feeling again.

At least not since Alana. Was that what this was ?

Did he love Sage? So many questions were racing through his head.

He was beginning to feel overwhelmed with his emotions and it left him silent as Marcy began to back out of the driveway.

“Hans?” Marcy’s concern and refusal to let him be a prisoner of his own mind broke through the thoughts. “Is everything okay?”

“I’m not sure.” Hans was monotonous and his gaze traveled to the trees and tall grass passing by in a blur. “Eventually things will be fine, though.”

The silence remained intense for a few more minutes before Marcy broke it once more by releasing a stressful sigh.

“What’s wrong, Marce?” Hans was grateful for the pressure to be taken off of him.

“I don’t want to see her get hurt,” Marcy started to explain. Without listening Hans had his response locked and loaded.

“I don’t want to see her get hurt eith-”

Marcy cut Hans off. “By you.”

The pressure was back on.

Hans raised a brow and looked down toward his lap, searching for the right words - any words at this point - that would help reassure her that Sage was in good hands between the two of them.

“I’ve made a lot of mistakes. I’ll be the first to admit it.

I know I should have been stronger in my previous relationships.

” He knew that if anyone would understand that, it was her.

“I’ve been through enough loss in my life that I know that I can’t lose her again.

Even if it means sharing her with someone who can provide in the areas I lack, and vice versa. ”

“Yeah, well, she’s a handful, it will probably take both of us to tame the feral gremlin.” Marcy laughed.

“Ah, but that’s the side that makes her who she is.” Hans reminded her. “We just need to make sure she remains less... stabby.”

Deep down, Hans knew that Marcy had a valid point. If this relationship was to remain successful, he was going to have to grow up a little and stop living in the past.

Marcy dropped Hans off, confirming the plans for the evening before she continued down the road on her mission to find a hotel room for her and Sage. Hans made his way up the stairs and glanced down at the vacant apartment that Mrs. Jones once resided in.

“Have a slice of apple pie dear, unless you’re allergic.

” Mrs. Jones handed Hans a plate with a slice of her warm apple pie.

Hans had always heard of the Jones’ Farm and knew they were famous for her apple pies, but he had never had the opportunity to taste one for himself.

He sat the box he was carrying down next to him and graciously accepted her 'welcome to the apartments' gift.

"Thank you, I'm Hans." He didn't want to be rude.

"Oh, I know who you are." Mrs. Jones smiled. "You're that hot new detective all the girls at the salon keep going on about."

Hans' cheeks flushed, he couldn't believe that people were talking about him, let alone the new position he had accepted. Of course, with Acadia being a smaller town, he already knew who the ladies were who were suddenly infatuated with him.

"Well, that's good, because I already know who you are, too," Hans shot back at Mrs. Jones, feeling like he was finally meeting the town celebrity.

He took a bite of the apple pie and it melted in his mouth, hints of cinnamon and nutmeg causing his mouth to water.

"This is the best pie I've ever had." He couldn't get over it and was feeling sad that he had never prioritized it sooner.

"If you're still selling them, I'd gladly sign up for a pie a week. "

Mrs. Jones chuckled and a sadness came over her face. "I'm glad you like it, but these are nothing like they used to be since I don't have the farm anymore, and I don't have the space for a pie business."

Hans patted her on the shoulder. "Oh, that's okay. I do appreciate you for making me feel welcome!"

Mrs. Jones smiled, a twinkle flickered in her eye. "You're welcome, dear." She

started to turn and head back to her apartment. “I’ll let you get back to your unpacking, but if you would like to come down about five o’clock and I will have a lasagna ready so you don’t have to worry about dinner.”

“ Thank you, I’ll see you then.”

???

Once Hans was comfortably back in his apartment, he started to pace back and forth in front of his bedroom mirror, letting his emotions spiral for the first time. The loss of Alana. Discovering his best friend was still alive. Guilt for what he thought of as betraying Alana.

You idiot, you started falling for Sage before you tried to remove her from this world which was only a couple of weeks after Alana’s passing. You didn’t even allow yourself to mourn Alana’s death before taking on the next piece of ass.

He stopped, unsure of who the person was that was looking back at him from within the glass of the mirror.

Did I ever love Alana?

The reflection in the mirror took on a new shape and without even thinking, Hans’ fist met the glass, shattering it into the tiniest of shards all over the bedroom floor.

He shook his hand as he returned to his current reality, carefully removing the shards of glass that were sticking out of his knuckles.

Fuck.

Blood slowly trickled down his hand and started to drip onto the floor. He wandered

into the bathroom so he could wash his hand and find some gauze to wrap it with.

Get it together man, now isn't the time to need a grippy sock vacation. He took a deep breath and stared at himself in the mirror, his reflection returning to normal as he wound the gauze around his hand to stop the bleeding.

Bzz. Bzz.

Hans reached into his pocket with his uninjured hand and pulled out his phone.

Bzz.

Hans bit his lip as soon as he saw the name on the caller ID.

Charles.

“Hello?” Hans’ voice came out hoarse.

“Hans, it’s Charles. We need to talk.” Charles was being mysterious. Was he about to share his experience over at Marco’s with Hans? “Meet me at The Shake Shack in twenty minutes,” Charles demanded aggressively.

The Shake Shack

As Hans pulled up to The Shake Shack, Charles was already there, waiting for him outside with a smug look drawn over his face.

Hans took a moment to gather his composure as he parked and asked his guardian angel, or whoever had been looking out for him, to help him not flip his shit if Charles was to say the wrong thing.

“Hey man,” Charles greeted Hans. The men shook hands before going inside and taking their seats.

Hans sat across from Charles, quietly examining his energy and analyzing the overall situation that he had suddenly found himself in.

“Hans!” Delilah stopped what she was doing and hurried over to the table once she realized he was there. “Whatever you want, it’s on the house today, doll. Your friend, too.”

Charles started to thank her when Hans cut in, “You know that isn’t necessary.” He could feel the heat radiating off of his skin from Charles’ glare, that man will accept any handouts without even stopping to think about it.

“Well, too bad.” Delilah smiled again. “Order anything you want.”

She left them with a couple of menus and scurried off to the back.

“Geesh, man.” Charles picked at his teeth with his nail. “You can get literally any woman regardless of age, huh?”

Hans rolled his eyes. “Delilah and I go way back. She’s known both of us since we were boys-” Charles cut him off.

“And yet, you’re the one she acknowledged...not me.” He was the same Charles that Hans had grown up with, the Charles that would get jealous any time someone would give anyone else attention.

“Let’s get to why we are here.” Hans didn’t want to play games today, he wasn’t in the mood.

Charles leaned back in his seat and rubbed his hand over his mouth and mustache.

“I got a tip from one of Marco’s neighbors that there were people at his house.

So this morning, on my little Sunday drive, I decided that I should stop by.

You know what it’s like to get a gut feeling and follow it when you’re off duty. ”

Hans squinted to look at him, unable to contain himself for where this story Charles had cooked up was going.

“ There was a car,” Charles lowered his voice, “in the driveway.”

Hans leaned in closer. “Do you know who the car belonged to? Maybe family?”

Charles shook his head. “Nope. I’m having the license plate run, it was a bitch getting anyone to do it for me.” Hans chuckled, knowing that he wouldn’t have had any issue getting anyone to do any work for him. “The bastards are probably going to take their

sweet time and make me wait all day.”

Hans relished the moment, realizing that once again he had the upper hand over Charles. He just needed to ensure that he had some time before there would be a concern that Charles would get to Sage; before he and Marcy had the opportunity to get her out of Marco’s house.

“I’m gonna get to the point, since you seem to be a man of few words.” Charles poked his pointer finger into the table. “I think Sage is hiding out at Marco’s.” He paused for dramatic effect. “And I think you’re helping her.”

If given some time to think, Hans knew that he would be able to concoct the perfect response to Charles’ accusation.

However, on the spot, he could feel himself start to panic.

It was like Delilah could tell things weren’t going right with their conversation because she magically appeared beside their table, ready to take their orders.

Her distraction was the perfect amount of time for Hans to think. “Don’t you feel like if I was helping her, I wouldn’t have shown up here and I would have been taking the time to find her a new place?”

“That could be true. And while you can be an idiot sometimes, I refuse to believe that you wouldn’t have devised some sort of scheme or brought someone else in to help out with your little sinister ‘fuck Charles over’ plan.”

“What are you even talking about?” Hans was lost in the gibberish that was spouting from Charles’ mouth. The moment he had mentioned Sage, Hans had to fight himself from punching the life from Charles, but he knew he had to remain calm. “What plan is this, exactly?”

“You already know that I’m not going to be able to take over Marco’s old position,” Charles seethed, “and it’s because of that bitch that you’re trying to protect.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Hans started to lecture Charles like a child over the list of reasons why he wasn’t eligible to take over Marco’s position.

“While I’m not sure who or what the precinct is looking for,” Hans reassured Charles. “I can tell you a big part of why they didn’t offer the position to you is because of your attitude which has nothing to do with Sage.”

Once again, like clockwork, Delilah walked over to the table, placing a smorgasbord of food in front of the men. Things they had ordered, but also, things that they hadn’t, nor did Hans even know were options on the menu.

I really should branch out and look at the menu more often.

“What is this feast? I didn’t know it was Thanksgiving,” Charles chimed in.

Delilah rolled her eyes at his lackadaisical attempt at cracking a joke. “It just seemed like you boys needed something to break the stress from whatever conversation you’re having over here.” She patted Hans on the back and started picking up dirty dishes from the other now vacant tables.

“Look, I’m gonna know who that car belongs to soon, and once I do I can either say, yes you’re involved, or no, you’re not involved. Unless you want to make my life easier and just admit you are working with her.”

Hans could feel his blood starting to boil. Charles wasn’t going to let this go and it was frustrating him that he had to remain calm under the circumstances. He knew that he was going to need to get to Sage and Marcy and get them out of Charles’ line of sight sooner rather than later.

“I’m not sure what you’re talking about.” Hans hoped that his poker face was better than the one time that he had attempted to gamble his life away.

Bzz. Bzz.

Charles looked down at his phone. “Looks like we’re about to have our answers.” He glanced up with a smirk. Hans returned the smile, feeling nervous about what was about to be revealed.

“Okay, uh huh. Alright, thanks. Bye.” Charles hung up and sat back, his eyes like an x-ray examining Hans’ soul. “Well, that was an interesting conversation.” He twisted his neck to the side, the popping sound loud enough to reach Hans’ ear.

“Was it?” Hans braced himself, mentally preparing for the variety of hoops he was about to have to jump through in order to create a believable excuse.

“It turns out that the car that was in the driveway was registered to a Marcy Murphy, a mortician who lives in New York.” He paused. “Now, why do you think a mortician from New York would be at Marco’s house?”

Hans took a moment, sipping his coffee to buy him enough time to choose his words carefully.

“It seems really strange. Was she a relative of his?” It was the perfect question to get a better look into where Charles’ mind was wandering off to.

“No, but I’m going to look a bit deeper into this.” Charles took a gulp of his orange juice and stood up. “I need to get back to the office.” He adjusted his pants, pulling them up and smoothing his shirt out. “Delilah, it was amazing as always. Thank you.” He waved to her as he left the diner.

Hans sat and watched Charles get in his car and drive off until his tail-lights disappeared.

He finished his coffee and then reached into the pocket of his pants, pulling out his wallet; glancing around to see if Delilah was paying attention before tossing a couple of bills down on the table to cover the cost of the meal and a tip.

As he stepped out of The Shake Shack, he dialed Marcy's number to let her know that Charles was hot on her trail and that he was unsure how long they would have before he would show back up at Marco's.

Something's Not Right

Hans made it back to his apartment, concerned that he had yet to hear back from Marcy. Where is she? He tried to convince himself that everything was fine, but his gut was telling him that something was off. What was it though?

Bzz. Bzz.

Hans looked at his phone, feeling relief as soon as he saw Marcy's name come up on the screen.

"Marcy, is everything alright?" Hans felt panicked.

"Yeah, everything's fine." Marcy's response was quick. "Did you get any info from Charles?"

Hans was quiet. Apparently she hadn't listened to his voicemail yet, so he explained everything to her in detail, making sure not to miss a single detail.

"S... Great, he knows I'm here. He's going to figure it all out."

"I think we need to add a step to our plan." Hans encouraged Marcy to rent a car from the next town over so that she could dodge Charles' attempts at staying hot on her trail.

A few hours later, Marcy picked Hans up from his apartment in her rental and they stopped to pick up a couple of pizzas for their evening together with Sage. Even

though Hans still had a feeling deep in his gut that something was still awry.

As they started to pull up to Marco's, Hans and Marcy took note of a car that was sitting in the driveway.

Charles.

Panic set in.

Where was he?

Marcy slowly drove towards the driveway, if nothing else but to just drive past to get a handle on the situation. As they crept up on the house, Hans realized that no one was in Charles' car. The front door, however, was wide open.

"Shit, Marcy. We need to go," Hans demanded.

Marcy stopped the car in front of the house and they quickly game-planned how they were going to handle things, promising each other that no matter what happened they were going to stick together.

Hans went first, slowly pacing himself as they made their way up the drive with the intent on listening to see if they could hear any movement or struggles.

As he got closer to the door, he could hear Sage sobbing.

"I'm so sorry," she was crying. "I didn't mean to." Hans' heart sank, hearing how scared she sounded, afraid of the scene that was playing beyond the frame of the front door. Sage just kept crying and repeating how sorry she was.

That was it though. There was no response. No sounds of anyone threatening her, or

any noises coming from a second party that should be in the house with her.

Hans put his finger up to his lips, encouraging Marcy to remain quiet and calm, before he waved at her to follow him inside. Cautiously they entered the house, unsure of what they were about to bear witness to.

Inside, Hans could see feet sticking out from around the corner and a feeling of relief came over him. He didn't know the extent of what had happened, but he did know that there was no movement coming from Charles.

Hans and Marcy quickly walked inside and as they came around into the kitchen, Charles' body was lying there, lifeless in a pool of blood. Sage knelt next to his body, appearing to have bathed in the blood like she had just performed a ritual sacrifice.

"Oh!" Sage shouted. "You scared me!" Tears had left streaks down her blood-covered face. "I didn't mean-"

Marcy ran back to shut the front door, wanting to place a barricade between them and anyone else who may show up. Hans took his place to the left of Sage while Marcy returned to her right side, both of them hushing her cries.

"Sage. Sage, it's okay," Hans assured her. He pulled her in close, not caring that soon he was also going to be covered in the blood of his enemy. "We've got you."

Sage nuzzled into Hans' chest, her breaths slowing as she began to calm down. Marcy reached over and ran her fingers through Sage's blood-soaked hair. Hans and Marcy looked at each other then to the scene in front of them, noticing that Charles had endured multiple stab wounds to his face and body.

"Wow, you sure do go all out, don't you?" Hans attempted to break the silence and provide some comedic relief.

Sage glared up at him, just as Marcy smacked him on the back of his head. “Really? You choose now to crack jokes?” Sage rolled her eyes and looked back down to the scene in front of her. “What are we going to do now?”

“Don’t worry,” Marcy assured her. “We’ve got this part covered.”

???

While Hans and Marcy were out disposing of the body, Sage gathered enough strength to take a shower, rinsing the memories of Charles off her body and down the drain.

“Did you really think you could hide from me?” a loud, angry voice called out as the front door to Marco’s home burst open. Within seconds the intruder was on top of her.

“Charles! What are you doing?” Sage struggled beneath him, in shock and trying to determine what the hell had just happened. Where were Marcy and Hans?

Tears continued to drip down her face as all of the flashbacks started coming to her at once. Memories that she wished she could forget...

The victims of all of her murders, their faces burned into her mind as they had passed. It didn’t matter if their deaths were justified or not, she had still committed one crime of passion after another, and even some that she had premeditated.

“You don’t have to do this,” Charles cried out, placing his arms over his face as if that was the only place he wanted to try to preserve. It was the first time that Sage had ever seen him in this light... this man was nothing more than a coward.

Sage took a heavy breath, slowly releasing it into the air.

I'm the one who created him to be that way.

She twisted the knobs of the shower, adjusting the temperature, causing the water to get hotter as she squatted down to the bottom.

She screamed, releasing the tension and the stress and everything that had been weighing her down.

Outside the bathroom door, she could hear the front door burst open and Marcy's voice calling out to let her know they had returned.

Marcy's footsteps got closer to the bathroom and as she opened the door she was bombarded with steam.

She flailed her arms to clear the air and was finally able to see Sage, naked, peeking through the curtain as the hot water continued streaming down.

"Sage?" Marcy's voice sounded concerned. Sage wiped her cheeks, forgetting for a brief moment that what she was wiping away was nothing more than water drops from the shower. She stood up and twisted the shower knobs once more into the off position and stepped out.

"You never cease to amaze me." Marcy smiled, reminding herself that not too long before this, Sage had been covered in the blood of the man who had been out for revenge.

The moment between them was interrupted when Hans called out requesting help in cleaning up the mess that he had been abandoned to take on alone.

Sage walked out of the room, smiling, pulling Hans away from his current project where he was on his knees scrubbing the tile with a hydrogen peroxide solution.

“I could get used to this.” Sage sat down on the couch sideways, propping her feet up on the arm.

“Of me cleaning up your messes?” Hans shook his head while rolling his eyes, questioning the sanity of the relationship he was getting into.

Sage laughed. “Hopefully that is the last mess that will need to be cleaned.”

“Well, at least you didn’t kill Charles on the carpet.” Hans paused. “Though I do need to ask... What happened?”

Sage took a deep breath as she replayed the incident in her head, explaining that Charles had come crashing in, how it was clear that his intentions had been on trying to finish what he had started when they were teens.

“He didn’t even attempt to check and see if anyone else was here.

It was just the front door, then bam, I was trapped beneath him.

” Sage continued to explain how he had attempted to force her to perform oral, smacking her when she bit him.

Hard. The thought made Hans cringe. Not just the thought of Charles sexually assaulting her, but also the thought of having his own cock bit that hard.

“After that, he smacked me across the face and called me all the names in the book. While he was fumbling around I managed to get free. Knocking him off to the side and I was able to run to the knife block in the kitchen.” Sage’s eyes started to well up.

“I didn’t want to kill him, but I wanted him to stop hurting me...

The flashbacks from the assholes in the forest came pouring in causing me to see red.
”

“It’s okay, Sage,” Marcy comforted her.

“Then I was like, no, he is exactly like the assholes from the forest, and I continued plunging the knife in and out of him. He cried out asking me to stop but his words became garbled and it was too late. He was gone.”

“You did what you had to do.” Hans stood up, grabbing his cleaning supplies and headed into the kitchen to dispose of the sponge and cloth and wash his hands.

“It’s not like Charles was any form of innocent.

” Hans scoffed, wishing he was the one who would have had the opportunity to kill Charles himself.

He returned to the couch where Sage was, her head on Marcy’s lap. The light hit the perfect spot to where he could see the mark that Charles had left on Sage when he smacked her.

A rumble escaped Sage’s stomach breaking the silence they had created for two seconds. “Well, sounds like someone is still hungry.” Hans poked her.

“I thought you two were supposed to get pizza?” Sage retorted quickly, poking Hans back in the arm.

“Had someone not decided she needed to be out for blood today...” Marcy pet Sage’s hair. “We could have already enjoyed fresh pizza, but instead, it’s now way past cold.”

Sage sat up and looked back and forth between the two of them. “Let’s get some fresh pizza on the way to the hotel.” Sage stood up and walked to the bedroom to grab some clothes to put on. “I’ll pay!” she called out from the other room.

Hans and Marcy looked at each other, giving their shrugs and nods of approval. As quickly as Sage had disappeared, she reappeared, presentable to the world wearing a black flowy v-neck t-shirt dress that she had cinched at the waist with a belt.

“ Ready?” Sage asked.

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 9:39 am

Pineapple Still Doesn't Go On Pizza

After they hopped into the rental car, Hans pulled out his phone to place their order from Pizza Palace, which was conveniently located about less than a mile from the hotel.

Since he was in control of the ordering, he made sure that on the canadian bacon and red onion pizza that Sage had requested, he added pineapple to half of the pizza.

It was a debate that he and Marcy shared with the first round of pizza orders because, according to Marcy, pineapple doesn't go on pizza.

It didn't take long to arrive at the hotel after picking up the pizza.

Once they had Marcy and Sage's suitcases unloaded and up to the room, they all crashed on the overly firm mattresses and turned on the television.

Sage reached over and grabbed the remote so that she could scroll through the TV guide while Marcy opened the pizza box.

"Gross, Hans," Marcy scoffed. "I told you pineapple doesn't go on pizza!"

"So, don't eat it," Hans bratted back at her, sticking his tongue out and giving her a cheesy grin.

"God, you're such a pain in my ass." Marcy grabbed a couple of slices and put them on a napkin for Sage. "What if she wanted the whole pizza?"

Hans shrugged. “Then she could pick it off.”

“But the pineapple juice would still be there!” Sage chimed in, adding her two cents to the conversation.

“Alright, look you two, I didn’t come here to get ganged up on.” Hans reached over and grabbed a slice of his prized possession.

“Well, no one is keeping you here.” Marcy squinted and smirked at him.

“Hey look, Hocus Pocus is on!” Sage quickly changed the subject and switched the TV to the correct channel. “Oh my God, it’s my favorite part!” She was pleased at the timing.

Hans remembered when Hocus Pocus had originally come out, it was all she had ever wanted to watch, instantly winning her over and becoming a favorite.

They had even gone to see it in the theater several times.

When they had initially been kidnapped by the old lady in the forest, he remembered feeling like he was almost living the movie, only in real life.

“It’s been awhile since you’ve seen this, huh?” Hans asked.

Sage nodded her head, but she could still quote the movie almost verbatim. “I guess some things never die.” Hans placed his hand on Sage’s leg, she looked over at him and smiled.

Marcy laughed, looking over at Hans and Sage, but there was something about all of this that still left her feeling uncomfortable. “Does it bother you? That you were out there for so long being held captive?” Marcy inquired.

Sage replied with a shrug. “Technically, these last few years were my decision.”

Marcy couldn't help but wonder why anyone would choose to continue living off-grid. “But why? You know you had people out here who had never given up their search for you.”

Sage lowered the volume on the T.V. and turned toward Marcy.

“It isn't like I had a job so that I could have a place to live.

In the forest I had a home and I had all these skills that I had acquired over the years in order to survive.

The old woman may have been evil, but she also gave me tools I needed to be able to thrive. ”

Marcy's eyes began to well up. “You had a place with me, Sage.”

Sage stared down into her lap. “I was scared, Marcy.”

“Alright, but you're both here now.” It was Hans' turn to be the voice of reason. “Together we can all live, grow, and support each other regardless of what it is that we all need support with.”

Marcy chimed in. “True. We're all a little broken in one way or another. That's why I believe that this relationship is going to be built to last. As long as we all communicate and are open with our feelings.”

“Speaking of communication...” Hans was still curious about the conversation that Marcy had hinted around at them needing to have. “What were you wanting to discuss earlier?”

Marcy paused, he could tell that she was struggling to find the right words to express what she was needing to say.

After a moment of hesitation, Marcy explained that while she was fine with the relationship being the three of them, she wanted to ensure that it was clear that she and Hans were not to have any involvement with each other than just being friends.

“Marcy, I’ve known from the beginning that there wouldn’t be anything more between us other than taking care of Sage in all the ways she needs taken care of and us just being friends,” Hans assured her. Worry drained from Marcy’s face and a look of relief and content replaced it.

This could actually work . Hans leaned back against the pillows and rested against the headboard. “So, that leads us to the next question: where do we go from here?” He had been considering all sides of the relationship, including the fact that Marcy had a life built for her in New York.

Marcy cleared her throat. “Actually, I have to head back home tomorrow afternoon.” The news hit Sage hard and she looked upset.

“Why didn’t you say something sooner?” Sage whined, not wanting their time together to come to an end.

“For this exact reason.” Hans could tell that Marcy was upset over her decision to wait, but it also gave Sage less time to wallow, counting down the hours before the three of them were separated once more.

Sage stuck her tongue out at Marcy. “Wait, I have an idea!” She sat quietly for a moment while Hans and Marcy waited for her to finish her train of thought. “I could come with you!” ??

Marcy glanced over at Hans, at this point the two of them were at a point where they could read the other person's mind. ??“That’s actually not a bad idea, you know,” Marcy agreed. “What do you think, Hans?”

Hans sat there, unsure of how he wanted to respond. Part of him knew that it was the perfect opportunity for Sage to escape her self-created hell. The other part was a mix of uncertainty, not wanting her to leave when he was just getting used to her being around again after so many years.

He looked up and both Marcy and Sage were staring up at him awaiting his input. “I mean yeah, that makes sense, if Marcy has the space.”

“I do,” Marcy agreed. “And hey, you were wanting to get out of here too. Maybe you can get a job in New York...” Neither of them were aware that he had already submitted an application for a position there.

“Maybe.” Hans looked toward the window. “Wherever the wind blows me, or maybe it’s time to hang up the badge and move on to something new and exciting.”

They spent the rest of the evening discussing and making plans. Marcy had chosen to return home by train and was able to secure a second ticket. With luck on their side, the seat was even next to hers. She would have her car delivered within the next week.

“I can’t wait!” Sage was excited to go on her new adventure.

“Could these beds be any more dense?” Hans interrupted the moment with his annoyance and for a brief moment, he regretted agreeing to have an overnight with the girls when he had a comfy bed back home.

“With Charles out of the picture, why didn’t we just go ahead and crash at your place,

Hans?" Sage questioned.

"Uh, that would be on me." Marcy saved Hans from being put through the wringer.

"I had already booked the room and it was too late to cancel." The same look of worry returned to Marcy's face, catching Hans' attention.

He picked off a piece of pineapple and threw it at Marcy, hitting her in the cheek.

He watched it fall off leaving a speck of pizza sauce on her. "What the fuck, Hans?"

Sage got up and rushed over, tackling Marcy onto the bed and pinning her down so she could lick the sauce off of her cheek before leaning in and kissing her.

"He was secretly working for me so I could come over and do this..." Sage pressed herself into Marcy and went in to kiss her again, lightly placing her lips against Marcy's, before she nipped at her lower lip.

Marcy's eyes got wide. "And what do you think you are doing?"

"What I've been wanting to do since we woke up this morning and were rudely interrupted," Sage said confidently.

"Secretly that's why she actually killed him," Hans poked fun. "He cock-blocked her."

Marcy chuckled, she couldn't believe Hans was picking this moment to start cracking jokes. "If you're not careful, mister, you'll be next."

Hans got up and started to head to the door of the hotel room.

“Wait.” Sage sat back and Marcy pushed up to her elbows. “You don’t have to leave.”

Hans reached into his pocket, pulling out his vape and waved it at the women. “Non-smoking room.”

“Pssh, no one would even know.” Marcy scoffed at his ridiculous timing for deciding to leave.

“They probably have sensors installed in here, Marcy.” Hans was just searching for any excuse at this point to give Marcy and Sage a few moments to themselves.

“Yeah okay, because you’re really worried about that,” Sage knew him all too well.

Hans shrugged. “I don’t want to risk Marcy getting charged any extra, be back soon.” He slipped out the door before either of them could interject with another comment that wouldn’t let him escape.

There Are No Rules

After a few hits of his vape, Hans had gotten his fix and returned to the room.

Walking down the quiet and dimly lit hallway he could hear moans echoing through the hall coming from the room that he was casually strolling toward.

He stuck his hands in his pockets and smiled as he got closer to the room, before awkwardly pacing back and forth debating whether he should just walk in or knock to give them a heads-up.

Hans paused, facing the door and started nervously bouncing up and down on the balls of his feet before finally deciding to knock.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

Hans could hear Sage and Marcy scrambling around, giggling like they had just been caught doing something they shouldn't be. The pitter-patter of footsteps came to the door and he could tell that Sage was eyeing him through the lens of the peephole.

The door opened slowly.

"Hans? Did you forget your key?" Sage pouted at him, seeming disappointed that he had interrupted the fun that she and Marcy were having.

"I did not," he stated matter-of-factly. "I simply didn't want to intrude."

“So... you interrupted and cock-blocked us basically.” Marcy couldn’t keep quiet any longer.

“Hey,” he put his hands up, “don’t kill me, too. I just wasn’t thinking clearly.”

“Did you go out there and hit on something that wasn’t your vape?” They laughed.

Hans kicked off his shoes and crawled into the bed opposite of where Sage and Marcy had been enjoying each other.

“Please, continue,” he offered. “Don’t let me ruin your fun.

” He grabbed his phone, scrolling his social media, while taking note that across the room Sage and Marcy were sharing secrets and seemingly plotting against him.

He pretended to ignore them but after a couple of minutes he realized it was going to be harder now that they had joined him in his bed.

“What’s going on here?” He acted clueless.

The reality was that after the conversation he had with Marcy earlier, and then the conversation they had while eating pizza, he hadn’t expected that the three of them together was going to be an option regardless of how the previous night had gone with them together at Club Red.

Sage smiled seductively, crawling towards him before sitting back on her heels and unbuttoning his shirt; pulling it down off of his body.

She leaned forward on her hands and knees once more steadying her balance before placing one hand on his chest and kissing Hans.

An electric shock shot through his body.

“ Fuck ,” Hans whispered, his breath staggering at her long-awaited touch.

Sage’s hand started lightly exploring his body, slowly letting it fall from his chest to his stomach, then to his belt.

While Sage undid Hans’ belt with her free hand, she began to fill with pleasure as Marcy lifted up her dress and buried her face into the warmth between Sage’s legs. He watched as Sage got distracted, pausing all of her focus on him to enjoy her moment with Marcy before realizing what she had done.

“Shh.” Hans lifted his finger to her lips. “Don’t worry about me right now.” He sat forward, grasping her dress from the skirt and lifting it over her head, tossing the garment on the floor.

Sage rolled over onto her back, sprawling across the bed. She nestled into the pillows while Marcy repositioned herself, applying pressure on Sage’s inner thighs keeping her legs spread apart.

Hans leaned in, kissing Sage to help muffle her moans.

Marcy gently ran her tongue back and forth over the slit of Sage’s pussy, picking up the pace as Sage reacted to her touch.

Hans pried his tongue into Sage’s mouth as his fingers roamed across her hardened nipples, gently circling them with the lightest touch which made her absolutely feral.

Sage reached over, finishing what she had started with removing Hans’ clothes by unbuckling the clasp of his belt. It took her a moment of messing with the button before the hole released its hold. As the zipper slid down, his cock was begging to be

freed.

Hans stopped what he was doing and stood up, stepping away from the bed.

Sage watched his pants fall to the floor and once he had kicked them away, she invited him back to her.

Hans returned to the mattress balancing on his knees, grasping the headboard with one hand, and angling toward Sage as she leaned up on her arm.

Marcy grasped Sage by the thighs as Sage pulled Hans' erection free from the confines of his boxer briefs.

As Sage guided his cock into her mouth she found herself fighting through the distractions of Marcy humming into her body, catching her occasionally peeking at Hans and Sage's interactions.

Hans ran his fingers through Sage's hair, grasping it tighter at the nape of her neck.

He guided her back and forth over the shaft of his cock, listening to the sound of her choking when he would go past what appeared to be her breaking point.

He removed his cock from her mouth and placed his finger beneath her chin, lifting her face up to look toward him. "Good girl," he said in a hushed manner. A single tear smeared down her face. "Are you okay?"

"I'm the best I've been in years." she smiled and batted her lashes.

"For the first time in... I don't know how long, I'm finally hap-" Her sentence was cut off by Marcy's handiwork as Sage bucked her hips, grinding over Marcy's tongue as she started to come.

Hans enjoyed watching them deepen their intimate relationship as he continued lightly stroking his cock.

By the time Sage had caught her breath, Marcy had already slipped next to her, and Sage was ready to dive in and devour every last drop of her. As Sage leaned into Marcy, she arched, pressing her body against Hans and whispered in his ear that she wanted him to fuck her.

She grasped Marcy by the thighs and pulled her down toward the end of the bed.

Sage slid off the end so that she could position herself between Marcy's legs and remain bent over for Hans to access her.

She released her breath slowly over Marcy, causing her to curl her toes and beg for actual contact.

Sage slowly ran her tongue along Marcy's slit, focusing on taking her time, driving Marcy wild.

"Oh my God, Sage," Marcy begged for her to stop fucking around.

"Patience." Sage smirked. "I like it when you beg."

A whimper escaped from Marcy, her eyes pleading for Sage to take pity on her, to give her what she wanted.

Sage's gaze was intently focused on the other woman's face, paying attention to every move and reaction as her tongue gently grazed Marcy's clit.

A moan of satisfaction finally releasing from her depths as Sage gave her exactly what she was wanting.

Hans positioned himself behind Sage, digging his nails into her back before he took her hips into his grasp and slipped his cock inside her. He thrust into her at varying speeds, allowing her to spend most of her focus on taking care of Marcy's pleasure.

It didn't take long for Hans to finish, releasing himself inside Sage.

Marcy released her final moans close behind.

Hans removed himself from Sage's body and went to clean himself off in the bathroom while Marcy and Sage crashed in the bed.

The girls cuddled up next to each other, leaving Hans a spot on the edge of the bed next to Sage.

When he returned, Hans could see Marcy sitting there, a confused look plastered across her face. "Is everything okay?" he inquired. Sage sat up to look back at Marcy.

"Did that go the way it should?" Marcy's confusion was about how a threesome is supposed to operate.

"Well, there's no specific rules," Sage cut in before Hans could respond. While it appeared to be a little awkward, that didn't mean that's how it would always be.

A look of relief came across Marcy's face as Sage continued to explain.

Hans sat down on the end of the bed listening, in awe of how knowledgeable Marcy was in varying areas of the kink world, and yet also so naive when it came to something as simple as a threesome.

Sage was right, however. She and Marcy were just relearning each other's bodies and building their intimate relationship.

Adding him into the middle of that meant that they were working overtime and Sage's focus kept shifting back and forth between her partners instead of keeping with just one.

It's what they wanted though. They continued talking through the night, relearning more and more about each other. At some point they drifted to sleep, holding one another as they prepared to separate in just a few short hours.

I Love Her

“Take care of our girl, Marcy.” Hans smirked as he made eye contact with her.

“I have a feeling we’ll be seeing each other again soon, but don’t you worry,” Marcy nodded and assured him.

They embraced each other in a hug before Marcy stepped up onto the platform at the entrance of the passenger car.

Sage followed close behind Marcy as she hopped up the steps.

Marcy kissed Sage on the cheek and waved to Hans once more as she headed in to claim their seats.

Sage’s breath was staggered in the cold, the condensation creating the illusion that she was smoking.

Her eyes glossed over the crowd of people rushing around.

Some were reuniting with their loved ones, while others were saying farewell.

When she finally got the courage, she looked back to where Hans was standing.

“Sage,” Hans whispered.

“We’ve all got secrets, ya know?” A single tear rolled down her cheek. “You’ve got

‘em. Lord knows I do, but it’s going to be okay.’

“What are you gonna do now?” Hans shouted.

Sage took a deep breath and smiled a smile that Hans hadn’t seen since they were kids. “I’m going to start over and find Gretta.”

“Why can’t you do that here, with me? Both you and Marcy?” Hans pleaded.

“Don’t you get it?” Sage stepped off the train and walked over to Hans. “You’re the reason I got into this mess. You know damn well I can’t hide forever.”

“And I’m the reason you got out of this mess, too,” he reminded her.

Sage grasped the collar on Hans’ shirt and pulled herself up to him, their lips meeting once more as she placed one last passionate kiss that sent an electric shock through his body.

“It’s always been you.” She looked into his eyes and smiled, releasing his collar.

“Besides, we’ll all be together again one day.

We’ve just gotta be patient.” Sage handed him a satchel of her favorite tea blend before she turned around and hurried onto the train as the conductor yelled, “All aboard!” for the last time.

Hans could see Sage through the windows, making her way towards her seat next to Marcy.

He followed her, hoping she would be able to see him waving her off.

As Sage found her seat, Marcy got up so that Sage could sit next to the window.

Sage sat down, placed her hand on the window and looked out at Hans.

“I love you, Sage,” he shouted, desperation lacing his voice like he had never experienced before. For a brief moment he hoped she could hear him.

“I love you, too,” she mouthed the words right back, and warmth broke through the frigid air, warming up his once cold heart. It was no surprise that she loved him, but for the words to slip out without a single thought was shocking to him.

Choo. Choo.

The train started to move slowly. Hans stepped back, waving to Sage and Marcy until he knew they could no longer see him.

At that moment, the sky let loose and rain started pouring down over Hans, but he didn't have a care in the world.

He reached into the pocket of his hoodie and pulled out his vape, taking a hit and slowly releasing it into the air before turning around and walking towards the exit.

Strolling through the parking lot, Hans was met with feelings that he had never experienced before. “I love her.”

“Does she love you?” a stranger nearby asked.

Hans laughed, he hadn't realized that his thoughts had exited his mouth. “You know what? She does.”

“You're a lucky man, and I can tell that she is lucky, too.” The stranger nodded at

him and kept walking toward the station.

“Thank you.” Hans waved, a cheesy smile splattered across his face as he continued to his car, staring up at the sky as it continued to rain.

I love her.

After all the time that had passed, the secrets and everything else that they had overcome in just a short period of time, he knew without a doubt that he was doing exactly what he was supposed to be doing.

Now all he needed was to get home and start applying for other jobs that didn't necessarily put him in harm's way.

He got into his car, connected his phone to the Bluetooth and then went to his music app.

It was there he noticed a notification letting him know that he had been added to a group playlist with both Sage and Marcy.

He instantly knew he was doomed to the boy bands and girly pop that he didn't normally listen to.

Regardless, Hans hit play and started listening.

Marcy's taste was interesting, a combination of goth rock and industrial.

If he was going to stereotype, this was exactly what he would expect, however, he still found himself surprised.

The songs that Sage had added to the list were girly and romantic, and he could tell

they were all songs that reminded her of their relationship.

Hans couldn't help but notice how different Marcy and Sage were, while also taking note of all the reasons they were so similar.

About a mile from his apartment, an unknown number rang through the music. For a moment his heart sank, was it in regards to Charles?

"Hello? This is Hans," he answered the phone with confidence hoping to appease the caller on the other end of the call regardless of what they wanted.

"Hi Hans, how are you this afternoon?" He could tell the woman on the other end was older, but she had a pleasant voice that made him feel at ease.

"I'm doing great, how are you?" he responded.

"Great, thank you. My name is Sylvia and I'm calling from the New York City police department. We were going through paperwork and noticed your application had been tucked away at the bottom of it. I do apologize for the mix-up."

He was unsure how his electronically filed application was filed in paperwork, but he decided that it wasn't worth wasting either of their time with a silly question like that.

"It's okay."

"Were you still interested in interviewing?"

Hans pulled into his parking spot and sat silent, why couldn't he just immediately respond with yes I can be there tomorrow.

"Hello? Sir?"

“I’m sorry, I hit a bad service spot,” Hans lied.

“Oh. I was wondering if you were still interested in interviewing for the detective position we have open here. We can schedule an over-the-phone interview if you would be interested since it’s such short notice. I see you live in Maine.”

“That would be perfect,” Hans managed to squeak out.

“Great, how does tomorrow at eleven o’clock in the morning sound? You’ll be interviewing with Marshall.”

“I can’t wait to talk with him.”

“So, go ahead and put you down for that time?” Sylvia seemed frustrated with him while still remaining cordial.

“Yes, that works for me. Thank you so much.” Hans hurried and responded before she told him to take the job and shove it. “Have a great day.”

“You too.” She hung up the phone.

Hans sat in his car staring at the steering wheel as he processed how quickly everything was lining up for him.

It seems like someone is looking out for me.

The following day came and went, the interview Hans had with Marshall had gone so well that he ended up being hired on the spot. They would be sending him an offer letter to his email within the next few days.

Hans felt immense relief, knowing that if all went well, he would be reunited with

Sage sooner rather than later. He was ready to start his next chapter and close the one that he was currently living, forced to play both the good and the bad cop.

On Tuesday morning, Hans woke up to the proposal that he didn't expect to receive so quickly, all he had to do was accept the offer and let them know when he would be available to start.

New York, New York

When moving to New York, Hans' intention was to find his own home. However, to help get him there sooner, Marcy offered to let him stay in her spare bedroom until he was able to find a place of his own. An offer he accepted faster than a speeding bullet.

The apartment complex normally penalized residents for breaking their contracts early, but due to recent events, they understood Hans' desire to leave.

Ultimately they agreed that if he was willing to forfeit his security deposit, they would allow him to break the rental agreement without penalty.

Everything was going according to plan, and almost felt like they were happening too easily.

Hans kept an open mind, remaining positive and reminding himself that if anything didn't go the way he wanted, it would work itself out.

When he went to the precinct to pack up his office, Hans was greeted with a going away party.

His soon-to-be former coworkers celebrated that not only did he make it out alive, he was moving onto bigger and better things outside of the small town of Acadia.

Everything was going smoothly, but there was one last thing that he needed to do. ..

Ding-dong.

Hans stepped foot one last time inside The Shake Shack to say goodbye to the one person he could always count on: Delilah.

“Hey, you upgraded from the bell?” Hans sat down in the booth that he had once shared with Frank, the original detective who took an interest in Gretta’s disappearance.

“Yeah, it was time for a change.” Delilah patted him on the shoulder. “And the word on the street is that you agree.”

“Oh, so you’ve heard.” Hans tried to act surprised, but even he knew that Acadia was a small enough town that word got around like a town whore. “Yep, I’m leaving in the morning.”

“What about your things? How are you going to pack up your apartment in time?”

“I’ve hired movers to do the packing and delivery for me. They’ll be bringing my things within the next couple of weeks. I’ll either have a new place for them to take it to, or get a storage unit to hold it all temporarily,” he explained.

“Do you really think you’re going to have your own place?” Delilah winked at Hans.

“It’s too soon,” Hans reasoned. “Sage needs space to figure out who she is and I need space too...” He paused.

“To live out your bachelor lifestyle?”

Hans blushed.

He hadn't lived with anyone as an adult.

He had lived with his parents until he moved into an apartment just outside the college campus.

Alana was the closest to having someone live with him.

Much like with Marco, she had weekends that she had planned to stay the night and had left her own toiletries for her more extended stays.

"Is that too much to ask?" Hans inquired.

"Of course not, dear." Delilah smiled and went to grab him a menu and a cup of coffee.

When she came back to the table, Hans skimmed over the menu and then proceeded to order his usual meal. "I know I'd miss your burgers too much if I didn't order them one last time."

"I'm sure you'll find plenty of new favorite burger joints once you get to the big city."

It was a slow night, which Hans was grateful for as it meant he got to talk with Delilah for longer than just a couple of sentences back and forth. They discussed his move and her plans for what would happen to the diner when she was ready to close it down.

"Honestly Hans, maybe it's time for me to sell this place and move on myself," she shared with him.

The thought of it almost broke his heart.

At the same time, she had been pouring her own blood, sweat and tears into the place since she was a teen, so much so that she didn't have anyone to pass it on to.

Hans finished eating and paid his tab, Delilah grabbed him and gave him the tightest hug he had ever felt. Her eyes started to tear up and Delilah turned her head to hide it from Hans. "Promise me you'll call and let me know how you're doing?"

"Of course," Hans wiped the tears from her waterline. "I'll call so much you'll want to retire from me, too."

Delilah walked Hans to the door and waved him off as he pulled out of the parking lot. Hans kept his eyes on the rearview until he could no longer see her.

After Hans got home, he finished making sure he had packed everything he would need.

It was really just the basics that would get him by, he had made a list of stuff he needed to get after he arrived at Marcy's.

I can't believe that in a few hours I'll be starting my new life.

He crawled into bed, and pulled the covers up over himself, falling asleep to the vision of Sage in his mind.

A few hours later, he was startled when his alarm went off. Five o'clock in the morning . He groaned. It had been a while since he had been up before the sun.

He got up and walked into the kitchen, electing to make a thermos of the hot tea that Sage had given him before they parted ways instead of his usual morning coffee.

He looked in the cabinets until he was able to find his tea pot, filling it up to the brim

with water, and twisting the burner dial onto medium heat.

While he waited, he gathered his bags and took them all down to the car, struggling and wrestling with them so he wouldn't have to make more than one trip.

Once he made it to the bottom of the stairs, he turned around and looked up to his apartment.

And that's exactly why I'm hiring movers.

Hans played a game of luggage Tetris to get his stuff to fit in his car which proved to be the easiest task of the entire morning so far.

He could hear his teapot screaming from the parking lot, so Hans hurried back to his apartment before someone thought a bomb was about to go off.

He separated some of the water into his travel mug before pouring the rest into the thermos that would become his best friend on his somewhat long adventure.

Making one last lap around the apartment, Hans assured himself that everything was ready and that he, especially, was ready to take these next steps.

He took a sip of the tea that he had made.

Wow, Sage sure knows how to create a tea blend.

Hans took a mental note to suggest that she consider opening a tea shop when she was ready.

He went back to the kitchen to see if she had left any information about what the tea had in it aside from light hints of chocolate and cherry. The Halloween-themed label

simply read mors per socolatam .

Well, whatever it is, it's good.

Hans grabbed the rest of his things for the trip, balancing them in his arms as he shut off the light and locked the door behind him.

Caw. Caw.

He looked to the right to see his raven friend seeing him off. The bird was soon accompanied by several of its friends, all watching him as he made it back down to his car and started to drive off.

As Hans was driving through Acadia, he glanced back through his rearview mirror, watching all the things he once knew and loved trail far behind him.

When he passed the sign that led to Brighton Forest, an ominous feeling came over him. Hans shivered, hoping the feeling would soon pass. Leaving Acadia meant that he would escape the grasp that the forest still had on him, and it was time for the forest to relinquish its control for the last time.

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It had been two weeks since Marcy or Sage had heard from Hans.

“Maybe he changed his mind,” Sage said in a slightly worried tone.

Something still felt off .

Sage never expressed her concerns with enough emotion that led Marcy to believe that Sage was truly worried.

“Something feels off,” Marcy suggested but Sage continued to brush it off.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

A loud pounding came from the door of Marcy’s apartment, startling both women.

“Maybe that’s him!” Sage seemed a little too positive as she filled her teapot with water and set it on the stove to heat up. When Marcy opened the front door, two police officers stood before her.

“Good afternoon ma’am. I’m Officer Stewart and this is Officer Dawn. Is there someone living here by the name Gretta, or perhaps you know her best as Sage?”

Marcy invited the officers in, offering them each a bottle of water.

“Sage,” Marcy called, unsure why she had suddenly chosen to perform a disappearing act at that moment. Finding herself momentarily hoping Sage hasn't escaped out the bedroom window.

“Yeah?” She came out of the bedroom, with a curious look on her face.

“Sage, these officers are here to speak with you. Do you have any idea why?”

“I’m not sure.” Sage tilted her head, confused as she stared knowingly at Marcy. “But I am sure you do.”

“Ma’am, I’m going to need you to stop right there,” Officer Dawn placed her hand on her gun, which was still resting in the holster, as Sage started walking towards them.

Sage reluctantly obliged and Marcy felt a tinge of relief that she wasn’t about to witness her girlfriend’s murder in the confines of her own home.

“Sage, you are under arrest for the suspected murder of-”

Marcy zoned out, listening to the overwhelming list of names as the officers read each of the names off.

“-the murder of Alana Garrison, Marco Salvatore, Charles Billings, and finally-”

Marcy braced herself against the back of the chair, preparing for what they were about to say.

“The murder of Detective Hans McGee.”

Marcy cried out as the officer read off Hans’ name, she had suspected he was dead but hearing the reality still hit her hard.

“You have the right to remain silent,” Officer Dawn began reading Sage her Miranda rights as she put her in handcuffs and escorted Sage out the door.

Officer Stewart handed Marcy an envelope containing money. “It’s all there, just like

we agreed.”

Marcy had worked with the police department previously, so when they had reached out to her about the murders to help with autopsies she agreed to assist. Once she began to suspect the deeper details of the case, she didn’t hesitate to offer Officer Stewart the details, especially not after being left with a broken heart.

The last few weeks didn’t erase the past...

“Thanks.” Marcy paused. “But did Hans have to die for this to work?” Marcy was suspicious.

“We had nothing to do with that,” Officer Stewart responded quickly.

“What happened? Hans was fine when we left.” Marcy and Officer Stewart had become close friends since they had first run into each other at a bookstore in town.

“I shouldn’t say anything,” Officer Stewart leaned in closer.

“Hans was in a car accident, just outside Brighton Forest. His toxicology report showed vast amounts of poison and the detectives found a satchel of loose tea leaves in his trash can that read ‘mors per socolatam’ which was roughly translated to mean death by chocolate. Her prints were all over it and it was almost identical to Alana’s accident. ”

Marcy let out a gasp.

“You’re lucky, Marcy,” Officer Stewart gently placed her hand on Marcy’s shoulder. “You could have been next.”

Marcy gulped, the reality sinking in. “Will she get the death penalty?”

“The death penalty hasn’t been a thing here for a long time. However she will definitely rot in prison, if found guilty.”

The scream of the teapot interrupted their conversation and Marcy rushed over to pull it off the burner.

“ If found guilty?” Marcy inquired. “So, there’s a chance she may be found innocent?”

“Unfortunately, I’ve already said too much. I really can’t discuss this with you any further..”

“I understand. Can I get you some tea to go?” Marcy offered as she reached up into the cabinet and pulled down a basket that held a variety of flavored tea bags before pausing.

“Was it a satchel like this?” Marcy held up one of the tea bags that Sage had made, it contained the same label that created Hans’ demise.

Officer Stewart walked over, put on a pair of gloves and took the satchel from Marcy, placing it in an evidence bag. “I’ll have it tested. If it is positive for the same poison that was in Hans' system, it will further strengthen the case against her.”

“You can take them all.” Marcy found herself having trouble standing, feeling as if she had almost come close to meeting death herself. “It’s hard knowing who you can trust these days. You showing up today may have saved my life.”

“I’m so sorry about all of this, Marcy. I know it’s going to hurt like hell, but we truly appreciate your help in closing this case.”

Officer Stewart walked across the room, exiting Marcy’s apartment and closing the door behind her. Marcy walked toward the window and separated the blinds watching

the officer enter her vehicle where Sage and Officer Dawn were waiting.

“I always did enjoy playing with fire.” Marcy closed the blinds and went back into the kitchen digging through the cabinet hoping for an untainted teabag but instead she found a pouch of hot cocoa. “I just wish Sage wouldn't have been the fuel needed to make everything burn.”

She reminisced on the good times they had had as she poured the hot water into a cup and mixed in the powder.

???

“Do you want to tell me what happened?” Officer Grey began the interrogation while Detective Harris stood behind the one-way glass.

“I will, but I'm feeling parched. Could I get some hot water for my tea?”

Officer Grey looked back in the direction of the Detective, as if looking for guidance if that was okay.

“Go ahead,” Harris sighed into the microphone. “Then maybe she will actually speak.”

Officer Grey got up, returning a few minutes later with a Styrofoam cup full of piping hot water.

“Can you please get the teabag from my jacket pocket?” Sage smiled sweetly as she gestured to where it was hanging. The officer obliged, getting the tea and setting it on the table so she could open it.

Grey looked annoyed as Sage dunked the tea bag a few times before letting it steep. “Now, I held up my end of the deal, your turn.”

“You're right. What would you like to know?” She smiled sweetly.

“Why don't you start at the beginning?” The officer stated. “I'll take notes and ask the questions from there.”

Sage held the cup in her hand and took a sip. “But what about my attorney?” She continued to drink. Annoyed, the officer got up and exited to room to go speak with the Detective.

“Of course she wants an attorney,” Grey bitched at Harris.

“She does have a right to one,” Harris responded, holding his hand up to prevent Grey from speaking. “Is she behaving strangely to you?” Both officers stared through the glass observing Sage.

“Don't worry Hans, we will be together again soon.” They heard her say through the speaker as she laid her head down on the table.

Just then, Officer Stewart came in. “All of her tea came back positive for the poison.”

Both Officer Grey and Detective Harris looked at each other and back where Sage had laid her head.

“Fuck.”

Sage always had ways of making sure she didn't get caught, down to the last moments of her very existence in that room.

They rushed into the interrogation room but Sage had already slipped away, only a note remained.

The phoenix is weighed down by the rubble, unable to rise. While the crow finds only

ashes, its treasure lost.