



# Tainted Wings of Failure (Set of White Wings #2)

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**Category:** Suspense Thriller

**Description:** Noah

What if I'm not cut out for the life my Dove longs for—a normal life? One free from violence, from killing, from the thrill that comes from witnessing death. When presented with the perfect opportunity, I can't say no, realizing too late that I've bitten off more than I can chew.

If only I had listened to her doubts. If only I had swallowed my pride and let my demons rest. Maybe then I wouldn't be stuck in this nightmare, fighting for my life...

Evelyn

We could have had it all: the white picket fence, love, normalcy. I was so naive to think he would want that too. He's a killer, a predator, a man with an insatiable thirst for murder.

His promises? Broken.

My trust? Crushed.

My heart? Shattered.

How dare he force me back into the life I fought so hard to escape? Now he's the target, and I'll do whatever it takes to get him back dead or alive.

**Total Pages (Source):** 31

## Page 1

*Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 6:48 am*

Ash Lancaster, son of missing Conrad Lancaster, takes control of Lancaster Corporation amid ongoing investigation, causing widespread concern among authorities.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 6:48 am*

Noah

I am haunted by the intoxicating thrill of power, shattering bones and desperate pleas as a life slips away through my hands.

One.

My finger curls around the trigger of the rifle.

Two.

My eyes remain trained on my target. The deer bathes in the early morning sun, grazing the remains of wilted grass covered in dew. I follow it closely, its chest in the center of my scope's dot.

Three.

I pull the trigger and the explosion of the shot rings through the otherwise quiet and dim forest. The kickback forces the recoil pad to thrust into my shoulder and sends a sharp thunder through my muscles. Crows caw in the distance, their calls bouncing off the trees and echoing through the cool morning air, followed by the rustling of leaves and the flapping of wings as birds in the area take off. The deer takes another couple frantic steps, attempting to run before it collapses into the grass of the open field.

Got it.

A wave of morbid satisfaction courses through my veins as I watch through my scope how the life drains from the animal, its skinny legs thrashing before slumping to the ground. With quick and calculated movements, I push myself off the ground, swing my steaming rifle over my shoulder and jump over the log I was hiding behind. The early autumn leaves crunch under my feet as I make my way through the thinning forest toward the clearing. Stepping onto the grass, it only takes a few wide strides until I reach the now completely motionless animal. Its eyes lost every last flicker of life and its fluffy chest is covered in blood, gushing out through the clean bullet hole, a perfect shot to its heart.

I squat down beside the deer and reach for its neck, caressing the soft fur beneath my fingertips. It remains still, its belly motionless, without the rise and fall of breathing. A smile stretches across my face.

Getting a hunting license was a great idea from my Dove. It may not be the same as torturing and watching the life slowly ease from a human, but I'm able to calm my murderous urges to some degree. Plus, I'm able to provide for us in a way I never knew I would one day. I was content with buying groceries, but there is something animalistic and satisfying about going out to hunt for your food, not only yours but the person you love and want to provide for.

I push myself back to my feet, turn back to where I came from, and then back to the deer. Even though I could, it would be a hassle to carry it all the way to where my truck is parked. I guess I will just bring the car here. Let's see if it is really as durable in terrain as the guy at the dealership claimed.

About thirty minutes later, I pull into the driveway of our home. The exact same moment I turn off the engine and push the driver's door open, the front door flies open and Eve steps outside, dressed in the same fluffy white robe she wore to sleep last night. Her hair is pulled up into a messy ponytail, and she looks like she just crawled out of bed. Flying down the stairs she hurries towards me with quick steps in

her fuzzy slippers.

"Careful, I'm covered in blood," I say as I jump out of the driver's seat and lift my hand to stop her from throwing herself at me.

A smile spreads across her face and she stops right in front of me. "You were successful? That's great!"

"Yeah." I place my hand on the small of her back and guide her around the car toward the back of the truck. As I pull open the ledge, Eve's eyes widen at the sight of the deer.

"It's big."

"That's what she sai—ouch." I wince as she punches my arm.

"Idiot. I really hate that you spend so much time online now, learning all that nonsense." She rolls her eyes, and I can't help the small chuckle rising from my chest.

"Sorry, Dove," I say and pull my pack of cigarettes from my pants pockets, placing one between my lips before lighting the deadly stick with the plastic lighter. Inhaling deeply, the familiar burning sensation fills my lungs.

"Will you take it to the butcher or do it yourself again?" she asks and I turn to face her, holding the cigarette close to my face.

"I'm still thinking about it. I got a very clean shot this time; there's not a lot of damage to the fur and skin, so I'm thinking about taxidermying this one."

"No way in hell!" Eve raises her voice. "I don't want a taxidermied deer in our

house!"

A lopsided smile tugs at the corner of my lips at her reaction, which, honestly, doesn't surprise me. "Thought so. "

"I like the doves, they are small and pretty, but a deer?" She crosses her arms in front of her chest.

"I could sell it or give it to someone else once I'm done. Doesn't the old Mr. Pierce next door collect deer trophies?" I say before taking another deep drag from my cigarette.

"He does, but I don't think his wife would be thrilled to have a whole deer in her home as well." She chuckles and bumps into my side, stepping closer to me.

I throw my cigarette to the ground and stump it out, then shrug my dirty jacket off and throw it onto the back of the truck next to the deer. Now free from blood, I wrap my arm around Eve's shoulder and hold her close to my side.

"He could put it in his office."

"You can also put it in yours," she says with an amused look on her face, her eyebrows shooting up.

"No, I agree with you that it doesn't fit in our home. You did really well decorating the house and making sure the doves fit in, but any other animal would simply be too much." I sigh and lift my free hand to rub my eyes through my lids, trying to ease the pounding sting behind my eyes. The little bit of excitement and adrenaline from watching the deer die wears off, leaving nothing but the slowly growing, throbbing headache I've been struggling with for weeks. I try, I really try to find the same joy in hunting animals as in hunting humans. But it simply isn't the same. It simply doesn't

satisfy me in the same morbid fashion.

"Are you okay, babe?" Eve asks, and when I open my eyes, I find soft lines creasing her forehead and that worried look in her eyes which has become a regular expression ever since these headaches started.

"Yes, just that headache again. I will take a painkiller and drive the deer to the butcher real quick and tell him to save me the skin."

"Are you sure? You seemed to be enjoying yourself the last time you did it yourself." Her lips pucker in a soft pout and I lean down to place a fleeting kiss to her lips.

"Yeah, but I'm not in the right headspace to do it myself."

Yes, I did enjoy butchering the last deer I shot. It was fun to learn something new, about the anatomy of a deer as well as the different parts of meat and the organs. For a moment, even cutting up the animal felt like I was torturing some poor soul who had messed with the wrong people. But the disappointment and the dissatisfaction afterwards, when the thrill faded, was too much, and I'm not in the mood to torture myself any more than necessary today.

I pull back from her and close the back of the truck before heading towards the driver's door. Eve's quiet footsteps trail after me, her eyes boring into the back of my head. I grab the blister of painkillers from the cup holder and my bottle of water, swallowing one pill before turning back to her.

"While I'm in town, do we need anything from the store?" I ask and she narrows her eyes at me, her lips press into a thin line. Something is wrong. She always has this look on her face when something is bothering her, but she doesn't know how to bring it up.

"Can you get some cake for dessert tonight? I want some."

"Of course, any particular flavor?"

She shakes her head and wraps her arms around my stomach, propping her chin against my chest as she looks up at me. "You know what flavors I like. Surprise me."

I lean forward to plant another kiss on her nose. "Anything chocolate or strawberry." Her smile grows and she playfully nudges my stomach before letting go of me. "If we need anything else, call me."



## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 6:48 am*

Evelyn

"Noah?" I call his name once again, pushing the door that connects the garage to the house open and flinch, squeezing my eyes shut when the strong smell of formaldehyde hits my nose and the chemical scent burns my lungs. Stepping onto the landing of the garage, I see the reason why he didn't react the three times I called him before. He stands in front of his desk, headphones on, humming to the music as he meticulously arranges the feathers on the dove he is taxiderming. After coming back home and taking a shower, he excused himself to clean the truck as well as continue working on the bird.

I push the button at the stairs and the door lifts itself, letting a rush of fresh air into the room. His head jerks toward the garage door before turning in my direction as I climb down the steps and walk toward him. A small smile spreads across my face as I notice the pose in which he arranges the dove. It's the one missing in the living room, and then the set on the shelf will be complete .

I place my hand on the small of his back, a few inches above the pistol tucked into the waistband of his suit pants, and caress his skin through the thin fabric of his shirt.

He takes his headphones off. "Yes?" he asks, pushing up his glasses with the back of his hand.

"Dinner is ready. I already called for you three times." I smile and step closer, reaching up to push the damp tangled strands of hair out of his face, revealing his forehead. My smile widens at the sight of his full face. He looks adorable with glasses. It's been two months since he got the pair after months of him refusing to

even look at options, throwing tantrums and sticking to his decision of only using contact lenses. He insisted that glasses would restrict him but when I asked him from what exactly, he didn't have an answer. I eventually tricked him into going to an optician with me and when he noticed how whipped I was for how he looked with glasses, he couldn't get them fast enough.

"Okay, I'm going to wash up and will be there in a minute." He leans down to my level to place a kiss against my lips.

I smile against his lips and raise my hand to his chest, nudging him. "And don't get distracted again."

"I won't. The other day was just an unlucky mistake," he says and already turns towards the sink in the garage. I watch his back as he walks away from me, and I can't help but sigh. It wasn't just the other day; it has been happening a lot as of lately. It's like he is completely absent at times, but he swears nothing is wrong. Maybe he is just bored. Ever since we moved away from the city, he has been trying out countless new hobbies, and to no one's surprise, the only one that seems to stick is hunting. Which I suggested but, in my opinion, also highlights his struggle to adjust to our new life. Although, he would never admit that. But our freezer plus the additional one he had to buy speak a different tale.

Lost in my thoughts, I jump as a large hand lands on the small of my back and a tall frame appears at my side. "Thanks for waiting," he says, gently encouraging me to get back up the stairs.

"Sure." I smile at him and follow his lead, returning to our open living space where the dinner table is set. While I sit down, he heads to the wine cabinet and grabs a bottle and two glasses from the top shelf. I watch him closely as he pulls the cork out of the bottle and pours a glass for each of us, thanking him as he sets it down in front of me before he settles into the chair across from me.

"Thanks for the meal." He nods and picks up his fork and knife and begins to eat as we fall into silence. The clinking of utensils and the occasional creak of the chair are the only sounds that fill the room. It only takes a handful of bites for him to drift off again. His eyes appear unfocused as he loses himself in his thoughts. This has been our routine for weeks now—sitting together in silence, and I'm tired of putting up with these quiet, awkward dinners.

"Noah?" I call to him, but he ignores me. "Noah!" I raise my voice and his head jerks up, looking at me in utter confusion.

"What's wrong?" he asks, blinking while his eyes focus on me.

"You're drifting off again." I raise my eyebrows, and he sighs in response, leaning back in his chair before bringing his glass to his lips to take a sip.

"Yeah, it's that headache again."

"Maybe you shouldn't use those chemicals in a closed room?" I ask, forcing a smile. "But honestly, you should see a doctor about this; it doesn't seem normal anymore."

"No, I'm fine. I'm just a little restless."

"Huh." I purse my lips into a pout. "In that case, have you thought about my idea for a puppy?"

"You know, I'm not a big fan of dogs or cats or anything like that." He raises an eyebrow and rests one hand on the table, drumming his fingers against the surface in a steady rhythm. I steal a glance at his hand, recognizing the familiar gesture he makes whenever he feels uneasy.

"I know you prefer birds." I chuckle and look back at him. "But if you're simply

feeling restless, a dog would give you something else to do, and to be honest, I'd like it if you weren't all alone in the woods when you go hunting early in the morning."

"If the issue is safety, I literally carry a rifle and a handgun with me, and on your request, a GPS tracker."

"It's not just that. The dog could keep you company, make it less lonely."

"I like being alone out there." I roll my eyes and let out another sigh. "Why don't you come with me if you think I'm lonely?" His lips curl into a smirk.

"Because last time we did everything but hunt." My shoulders jerk as I chuckle at the memory. What was supposed to be a moment for me to learn more about hunting turned into an early morning session during which we discovered that outdoor sex can be a lot of fun.

"True." The smirk on his face widens as he nods before taking another sip of his wine. "Don't worry about me. I've been feeling a little off lately. Maybe I'm getting sick." He shrugs.

"Maybe." I lean my elbow on the table and prop my chin in the palm of my hand, looking him up and down, searching for some sign, any sign. "If something was bothering you, would you tell me?"

"Of course." He furrows his eyebrows. "Why do you ask?"

"Out of curiosity," I say with a weak smile.

"I promise." He offers me a smile and reaches for my free hand, his fingers intertwining with mine, the roughness of his skin a familiar comfort as his thumb moves in slow, lazy circles on the back of my hand. The warmth of his palm against

mine travels up my arm, loosening the tight knots of tension in my shoulders. "Now let's eat before it gets cold. You spent so much time preparing this meal, I don't want it to go to waste."

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 6:48 am*

Noah

After dinner, Evelyn decided to take some time to herself. She grabbed two pieces of cake, a glass of her favorite wine and the magazine she is currently reading before retiring to our en-suite bathroom. As much as I want to join her, it's Wednesday, the one night of the week she reserves for herself to take baths and do everything spa-related. It's not like she would mind if I asked her, but I also know she needs that time to herself. She is usually in there for at least two hours doing God knows what. All I know is that her skin is always extra smooth when she crawls into bed with me and I'm looking forward to that.

With my head tilted back into the cushions, I'm sitting on the sofa outside on our back porch. A cigarette in hand, I breathe out the remains of the gray smoke and watch it dance through the air, dissolving into the starry night sky. I raise my cigarette to my lips and inhale deeply, closing my eyes at the comforting sensation of the nicotine filling my lungs .

Tilting my head forward, my eyes land on the ashtray on the table, overflowing with dead ash and remnants of cigarette filters. There is no denying it, I do have to cut down on smoking again. Lately, I've been going through a pack and a half a day, whereas I used to smoke maybe half on bad days. Hell, there was a time when I only smoked on days when I had a job to calm my nerves. But that was when I was eighteen, almost twenty years ago.

I sigh. My Dove would probably be happy too if I smoked less. The way she looks at me, with her nose scrunched up and eyebrows furrowed, whenever I open a new pack, especially if it's the second one for the day, makes it obvious that she hates it.

Unfortunately, cigarettes are one of the few remedies that keep me calm at the moment. That, and sex, but obviously I can't fuck Evelyn twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. I mean, I could indulge in her body for that long, but she would not appreciate it. We have been doing it a lot lately, and there have been a couple of mornings where she has been sore. She also has her period right now, luckily only for another day or two, but it makes her body more prone to soreness. I've been rougher these past few weeks, grasping at every little crumb to keep my hands and mind occupied. Every day I fight that little voice in the back of my head that screams at me that it is bored, that it wants to go back to New York City, find a client and murder someone.

As the images of dead bodies flash before my inner eye, I groan in frustration. Reaching for my beer on the table, I lift the bottle to my lips and take a large gulp.

I would die for Evelyn, right here, right now, I would take a bullet if it meant she could live in peace. Then why is it so damn hard for me to put my old life behind me and give her the new one that she deserves? I want nothing more than to be the perfect man for her, but how am I supposed to be that if I can't let go?

Needing something to ease the growing restlessness inside me, I slam the bottle back down on the table, put out my cigarette, and push myself to my feet. My heart pounds out of rhythm as I jump down the three steps of our back porch and approach the firewood-chopping block with long strides. My mind races and my vision begins to blur from the frustration clouding my senses.

When I reach the block, I grab the axe that is leaning against it, as well as one of the wooden logs that I still have to chop up. I place the wood on the block, right in the middle, and step back. I take a deep breath before swinging the axe with full force and split the wood in half.

Thud.

Repeat.

Thud.

Repeat.

I repeat the same movement like a mantra. Sweat beads on my forehead, my hair clings to my skin, and my now damp shirt sticks to my body.

"Babe." I stop mid-swing as Evelyn's soft voice calls out to me, breaking me out of my daze and I drop the axe to the ground. Gasping for air, my chest heaving, I turn to face the porch where she is standing at the top of the stairs in her white bathrobe, her hair wrapped up in a towel. The warm outdoor light illuminates her soft features from behind, hiding her face in the shadows. With slow movements, she descends the three steps and walks over to me with small strides to avoid losing her slippers.

To calm my raging heartbeat, I take a deep breath, focusing on the sensation of my lungs inflating and deflating. As soon as she reaches me, she cups my cheeks in her hands and forces me to look at her. My eyes meet hers, deep, brown and so comforting that they almost feel like a warm embrace. Her gaze is gentle and soothing, and I allow myself to get lost in it .

She runs her thumbs across my cheeks, scratching the short stubbles of my growing beard. "You need to shave," she says with a quiet chuckle.

"I know, I am going to do it in the morning."

A small smile tugs at the corners of her lips. She lets go of my face and wraps her arms around my stomach, stepping closer, pressing her body flush against mine. I drape my arms over her shoulders and rest my face against the damp towel on her head. Closing my eyes, I take a deep breath and inhale the scent of her cherry vanilla



shampoo. As I focus on her smell and the warmth of her body pressed against mine, the frustration drains from my muscles and my heartbeat begins to slow.

"Babe," she says, breaking the quiet moment.

"Hm?"

"Why don't you and I go hunting tomorrow?" I pull away from her and furrow my eyebrows, while she rests her chin on my chest and looks up at me with a bright smile on her face, soft lines creasing in the corners of her eyes. "What do you think? It might help you feel less fidgety." She takes a single step back and I watch her every move as she removes her hands from my back and places them on my arms resting on her shoulders.

Sucking my lower lip between my teeth, I hesitate. It's a great idea. It's been over a month since our last little hunt. Which turned out messier than either of us had anticipated due to a thunderstorm that caught us by surprise. She was pissed at me for a good week afterwards because she got sick. "That sounds perfect, but are you sure?"

She rolls her eyes at my question. "Of course, I wouldn't suggest it otherwise. I'm in the mood, too." Her smile turns mischievous. She grabs me by the neck of my shirt and pulls me down to crash her lips against mine in a fleeting kiss. "Promise me that you won't hold back."

"I will destroy you." A smirk spreads across my face.

"You'll have to catch me first."

"Nothing easier than that."

"I'm not going to make it easy for you."

"I fucking hope so." My grin grows as she flicks her tongue out of her mouth and licks over my lips.

"Show me what a big and vicious predator you are."

Without warning, I wrap my arms around her middle and lift her off the ground, eliciting a high-pitched squeak from her as I fling her over my shoulder. "Noah!" She slams her fists into my back, but I ignore her and carry her back up the porch. "What the hell are you doing?"

Back in the house, I kick the door shut and turn the key before dropping Eve onto our big sofa, towering over her. My eyes roam over her body. The towel holding her damp hair has come loose and lies on the pillows behind her, her fluffy rope completely disheveled, allowing me a teasing glimpse of her naked body hidden by the single layer of fabric. With every beat of my heart, blood pools between my legs and pumps into my cock, prompting it to harden. "You think I can wait until tomorrow when you flaunt yourself in front of me like a slutty little bird in mating season?" I raise my eyebrows.

She sucks her lower lip between her teeth, nibbling at the soft flesh. "Was I naughty?" The question rolls off her tongue in a cocky voice as she spreads her legs to give me a perfect view of her beautiful pussy, already glistening as her sticky arousal seeps out and coats her folds.

"Very naughty." I step forward, resting one knee on the sofa between her legs. "Perhaps you need to be reminded of the consequences of parading yourself in front of me like a slut."

"You most definitely have to remind me." She flashes me a cheeky grin.

I grab the belt of her robe and pull it loose. The soft fabric slides off her shoulders, revealing her perfect, naked body. My eyes trace the contours of her curves, from her slender shoulders and perfectly shaped tits, down her flat stomach to her rounded hips, until they settle on her pussy. "How strong is your period when you walk around without anything in and risk leaving a trail of blood?" I ask in a hoarse voice as my focus remains on her cunt, watching every pulse of her muscles, waiting for a clot of blood to join her arousal.

"Strong enough for you to taste me," she says, her cheeks flushing with a soft shade of pink. That naughty little slut, she had planned it all along.

"Good." I drop to my knees in front of her, and without hesitation, bury my face between her legs. My tongue slips out of my mouth, flicks over her firm clit. Immediately, her hands fly to my head, clawing at my hair.

I close my eyes and savor the taste of her arousal as it spreads across my tongue. Sliding one of my hands between us, under my chin, two of my fingers slip effortlessly inside her. The muscles of her cunt contract in waves around my fingers, her clit pulsating against the tip of my tongue. Wrapping my lips around her clit, I form a seal and suck on the sensitive nub as I pump my fingers inside her.

Her mouth falls open in a series of high-pitched moans as she rocks her hips back and forth in response to my pursuit. When suddenly, a wave of metallic taste hits my tongue—unmistakably the flavor of blood. It's a raw, primal taste that sends shivers down my spine.

My eyes fly open and I look up at Eve. Her head is thrown back into the pillows, her back arched off the sofa as she continues rocking her hips back and forth. Pulling my fingers out of her, my mouth takes their place, driving my tongue in. I let the taste linger, savoring the way it tingles and spreads across my taste buds.

"Noah." She moans my name in a high-pitched voice as I devour her, curling my tongue inside her. One of my hands comes to rest on her pubic bone, my thumb finding her clit and flicking it before massaging the sensitive nub in circles.

Her legs begin to quiver around me, a clear indication of her impending orgasm. I continue my pursuit, not changing the rhythm or angle, and as expected, her legs clamp around my head, pinning me in place as she screams at the top of her lungs, her hips bucking as she rides the wave of pleasure.

The moment her grip on my head loosens, I pull back and take a deep breath, letting the air fill my lungs. I lift my hand and wipe my face, watching as the remnants of her arousal mix with the faint smears of blood, and a smirk spreads across my face.

Rising to my feet, my eyes land on her, completely naked, sprawled out on the sofa, her arms laying limply by her side as she catches her breath. Her legs are spread wide, her pussy a delicate work of art, her clit swollen, glistening with arousal, and faint strings of blood decorating her folds. Usually, I'm a sucker for the abstract chaos when she's completely drenched in blood, smeared all over her pale skin. But I also appreciate the more peaceful moments. I pull my phone out of the pocket of my pants and snap a quick picture of her, drawing a quiet chuckle from her.

"How many of these pictures do you have now?"

"Not enough." I drop my phone on the coffee table before stepping closer to the sofa until my knees hit the edge. "Sit up, baby," I say, and she does as told, scooting closer to me until her face is right in front of my crotch. She looks up at me with big puppy dog eyes, her lower lip caught between her teeth as I push my pants down and pull out my hard cock with one hand. The other grabs her chin, my thumb pulling her lip from between her teeth before I press it against her lips. "Open up." But she doesn't; instead, she purses her lips into a pout.

"No sex tonight?"

"No, this is just as hard for me as it is for you. You know I love it when you color my cock red, but with what I'm going to do to you tomorrow, you will need the rest. So now be good and open up," I order, and she obeys, her lips parting, her tongue slipping out, creating a perfect path for my cock, offering herself to me .

Releasing her chin, I thread my fingers through the damp strands of her hair, pulling them together and fisting them into a messy ponytail at the back of her head. I wrap the fingers of my other hand around the base of my cock and give myself a few good pumps before lowering myself onto her tongue. Her eyes remain fixed on me as she breathes through her nose.

My cock throbs in anticipation, pulsing against her tongue as I push her head forward, the wet warmth of her mouth wrapping around me. My thigh muscles flex as I have to stop myself from just fucking her throat. With my hand gripping her hair, I guide her head back, only to push her back down, grinding against her slick tongue.

Her eyes fall shut, and with each bob of her head, I can feel her beginning to relax around me, allowing me to go deeper and deeper until the head of my cock hits the back of her throat, drawing an animalistic moan from the depths of my stomach. Her muscles contract around the sensitive tip and my hips jerk at the sensation.

I take a deep breath and place my other hand on her head for additional support. Looking down at her, I find her beautiful brown eyes looking up at me, sparkling through a veil of tears that clouds her vision. God, how I love the sight of her kneeling naked in front of me, about to cry with her lips stretched around my cock as she swallows me so willingly like the good slut she is.

I flash her one last devilish grin before drawing back, only to plunge back in. Throwing my head back, I start a slow, subtle rhythm that only grows more frantic

with each time I slam into her mouth. Her hands land on my hips, her nails digging into my skin as she moans around my cock, sending vibrating shock waves through every muscle of my body.

Snotty sobs echo from underneath me, but I don't care. She's more than capable of handling this; she's proven it to me countless times before. My head lolls forward and my eyes land on my cock as it slides effortlessly in and out of her mouth, her beautiful lips wrapped perfectly around my girth. My eyes meet hers as she stares up at me, a soft shade of red coloring the white of her eyes as tears stream down her cheeks.

Just a little longer, I tell myself and continue my chase, driving myself in and out in a feverish rhythm until my hips begin to stutter. Tightening my grip on her hair, I push her all the way down my length, burying her face in my pubic hair as I empty myself down her throat.

My lips part in a guttural moan as her throat muscles contract around my cock, increasing the pressure around my pulsating length as it squeezes out my cum in waves. "Swallow it all, baby," I demand breathlessly, refusing to let go of her head. "I know you're hungry."

It's only when her shoulders start to tremble that I release her and pull out of her mouth with a wet pop. She immediately throws her head back, gasping for air, her eyes wide open, and I can't help the grin that spreads across my face. I cup her cheeks in my hands and catch sight of a drop of cum running down her chin. Tracing the curve of her lower lip, I scoop up the drop with my thumb before forcing it into her mouth, onto her tongue.

"We are not going to waste a single drop, baby bird." She nods her head and wraps her lips around my thumb, maintaining eye contact as she eagerly swirls her tongue around the finger, then sucks it clean. "That's a good girl," I say, thrusting my finger

deeper into her mouth.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 6:48 am*

Evelyn

"Run, Dove, run!" Noah's voice carries through the night, loud, clear, and haunting, as a series of explosive gunshots follow his call.

Fuck . When he said he would destroy me tonight, he wasn't lying. So far, he has shot directly at me seven times, three of which just barely missed my shoulder. As I recount his shots, another explosion echoes through the cold night air, bouncing off the trees and catching up with me as a nearby tree trunk explodes from the impact of the bullet. My heart leaps in my chest, pumping the adrenaline-fueled blood through my veins.

Caught up in the intensity of the moment, I miss a root sticking out of the ground, hidden by the autumn leaves, where my foot gets caught, knocking me over. I wince at the impact as my body hits the muddy ground.

At the sound of heavy footsteps on nearby leaves, I rise to my knees and check my white dress, now completely covered in dirt. I sigh. He just bought it for our little game and now it's completely ruined. I wanted to keep this one; the corset squeezes my tits together perfectly, making them appear a little bigger than they really are.

My lips purse into a pout, but my disappointment is short-lived and I flinch as another gunshot echoes through the woods. I squeeze my thighs together, my skin already sticky from how dripping wet I am, and my thong has become unbearable to wear. My clit is hard and pulsating; each throb is like an electric shock wave running through my body. This morbid hunting game has become one of our favorite foreplays, and the more unhinged he gets, the more it turns me on.



"Coo, Dove, coo," he calls. "I know you're here!"

I suck my lower lip between my teeth and chew on the flesh as an idea pops into my head. With hectic movements, I stand up, lift the tulle skirt, and push down my soaked underwear, laying them neatly on a felled tree nearby before I keep on running.

The moment the gunshots and the rustling of the leaves following me die down, I stop. Placing a hand on a tree for support, I attempt to catch my breath, inhaling and exhaling deeply. My lungs are on fire; the cold autumn air stings like a knife piercing through my ribcage.

I lift my head and take a quick look around, scanning my surroundings, and spot him standing among the trees, illuminated by the bright light of the full moon, about thirty feet from me. We hadn't seen each other before because we wanted to surprise each other with our outfits. In contrast to my beautiful puffy white dress that could easily pass for a very summery wedding dress, he is dressed in all black with a tight compression turtleneck covering his mouth and nose, a bulletproof vest on top, and my favorite pair of black suit pants that fits him perfectly. His hair is slicked back, though a few strands have come loose.

The muscles in my core contract, begging for salvation. I want nothing more than for him to rip this dress off my body and fuck me, claim me, destroy me as he promised.

As I take a step toward him, the leaves crunch under my feet, and I coo, just as he asked me to. His head whips in my direction and my breath catches in my throat at the way he looks at me, his gaze is fierce and predatory as he sizes me up from head to toe.

My cunt throbs again as he spins around and stalks toward me. Turning around I scramble to get around the tree behind me to keep on running. But long fingers wrap

around my arm, and I scream out of reflex as, in the blink of an eye, he tackles me face first to the ground. A low moan escapes my throat as my body collides with the cold, muddy forest soil once more. He straddles my hips and sits on top of me, his hard cock pressing against my ass.

My shoulders cramp and a sharp pain shoots up my neck as he pins my hands behind my back, followed by the sharp sound as he ties me up with zip ties. Wiggling my hips, I push against his erection as it bores into my ass, drawing a low moan from him.

"What a needy little thing you are."

"Did you find my little present?"

"You mean this?" His hand shoots in front of me, holding my dripping underwear.

"Yes," I moan out loud.

"You're such a naughty slut." He growls, "Leaving your filthy panties as a trail for me." I shut my eyes as his hand holding my underwear collides with my face, forcing the fabric right up against my nose and mouth. The scent of my own arousal fills my nostrils and I hold my breath. His thumb traces the curve of my lower lip before pressing against it, causing my mouth to fall open and allowing him to force my underwear inside. The taste of myself spreads across my tongue as he shoves it deeper.

With my nose free, fresh air rushes into my lungs and I moan around the fabric stuffed into my mouth. I open my eyes again, but the glimpse of moonlight is short-lived as I am swallowed by complete darkness as a piece of fabric covers my eyes. Every muscle in my body tingles in anticipation, my remaining senses gradually heightening as he blindfolds me.

"Let's see how much of a slut you really are," he says in a low voice. One of his hands slips under the puffy skirt, pushing the fabric up and exposing my damp skin to the chilly night. A cold shiver runs down my spine, goosebumps rising on my skin at the sensation of the brisk air and his rough fingers trailing over my soaking cunt, parting my sticky folds before teasingly flicking over my aching clit. I let out a muffled moan as two of his fingers slide inside me without any resistance, my body eagerly welcoming him.

"So fucking wet for me." His chest vibrates as he growls and forces his fingers deeper. My breathing picks up while my moans turn into high-pitched whimpers as he pumps inside me in a forceful rhythm.

But out of the blue, he stops. I want to scream the moment his fingers slide out of me, but before I can even beg for more, he lifts me off the ground and throws me over his shoulder.

The smell of lavender fills my lungs and a rush of relief drains the tension from my muscles. Instead of taking me to an abandoned hut like last time, he took me home. Which I'm thankful for, because as exciting as the hut is, last time I got a UTI and was miserable.

With a bounce in his step, Noah carries me up the stairs. Not long after, my body lands on the familiar surface of our soft sheets, the fabric soothing against my skin. Unable to see or move freely, I squirm in the sheets, kicking my feet in an attempt to find a more comfortable position with my arms still tied behind my back. His fingers wrap around my ankle, and I gasp as he drags my body to the edge of the bed.

"Stop that irritating moving around," he snarls in a threatening tone and I swallow the lump in my throat and freeze. Letting him push my leg up, and as if on autopilot, I move the other one, exposing myself to him. "That's it, good girl."

At the sound of his pocketknife snapping open, my heart rate quickens, drumming against my ribcage. My breath stutters as the cold blade touches the heated skin of my inner thigh. A soft whimper slip from my lips as the sharp blade scrapes across my skin, trailing down towards my aching cunt. My eyes fly open beneath the blindfold, my lips parting in a silent moan as the sharp edge of the metal flicks against my folds .

"No...ah," I choke out his name, muffled by the fabric stuffed in my mouth but he shushes me before sliding the dull back of the blade between my folds, drawing a moan from me as the cold metal passes over the small slit of my opening. My muscles stiffen, my whole body trembles as he mimics the motion of cutting, repeatedly sliding over my sensitive clit, sending waves of pleasure through my body.

The moment he withdraws the knife, I relax into the sheets. Only to tense again at the sound of the fabric being torn, followed by the sensation of the dull end sliding up my stomach, up between my breasts, slicing the dress off my body, leaving me completely bare in front of him. This is something I will never understand. He buys me the most beautiful dresses, worth thousands of dollars, only to destroy them at the end of our little game.

"Noah..." I call to him again, barely audible.

"Huh?" he hums, his free hand colliding with my face, forcing a finger into my mouth and pulling out my thong. "You want to say something?"

"Cut me loose, please." I wince.

"Not yet," he says with a devilish tone in his voice. "Can you believe how beautiful you look right now? So flawless and perfect..."

Beautiful? Sure, who wouldn't enjoy this view? I'm at his mercy, tied up, blindfolded,

stripped of my dignity and willing, eager for him to devour me. A cold shiver runs down my spine as the sharp tip of the knife brushes the skin of my inner thigh, dangerously close to my cunt. "Maybe I should carve my name into your skin."

"God, yes," I moan out loud at his proposal. I would love for him to mark me, to brand me as his. Countless times I have begged him to do it, but he refuses every time, not wanting to spoil his spotless dove.

He hisses in disapproval, his flat hand colliding with my cunt in a series of punishing slaps, drawing several loud gasps from me, only to choke at the sound as the cold blade returns to my beaten cunt, soothing the burning pain. The sharp tip flicking against my folds, poking my clit before it's twisted around and the dull end slips between my folds. One, two, three, four ...I count each time he slides the knife along my clit, imitating the act of cutting, before he slides it far enough and I feel the rounded end of the handle press against my tight opening.

My breathing picks up, my chest heaving in a frantic rhythm, as he thrusts the handle into me. A long, throaty moan falls from my lips as he drives it deeper into me. My muscles tense at the intrusion of the solid object .

"Good girl, relax." He hums as he continues to push the knife into me, until the cold metal of the rounded edge of the blade that connects to the handle hits my opening. "If you could see how well your sweet pussy swallows the knife."

My whole body quivers as I force myself to relax. With one deep breath after another, my muscles loosen around the intrusion and my mind begins to clear. The reality of the situation is beginning to sink in, and I realize what dimension this little game of ours has taken on. The images of him holding the knife by the blade, his hand covered in blood, dripping onto my cunt and coating me in his blood flash before my inner eye.

A loud, guttural moan rises from the depths of my stomach as he withdraws the knife, only to plunge it back into me with force. It stings, but it's so damn sweet at the same time. This isn't the first time he's done this, knives, guns, or other questionable objects he likes to shove up my pussy; he gets a thrill out of it. We've tried a lot and as long as he cleans everything or uses condoms to protect me from infection, I'm fine with whatever he wants to put inside me because I know I don't have to worry about him choosing objects that would cause me too much harm.

His free hand lands on my pubic bone, his thumb pressing down on my clit, rolling the sensitive and swollen bundle of nerves. He picks up the pace at which he drives the knife into me, and I throw my head back into the sheets. "So beautiful, you were made for this, made to take everything I offer you." My legs are quivering and tears sting in the corners of my eyes at the oncoming orgasm. The perfectly curved handle penetrates that one precious spot inside me while his thumb circles my clit.

"I-I can't," I whimper when my stomach cramps and my muscles tighten.

"Come for me, baby bird...come all over the blade your cunt craves so badly," he croons and with another deep thrust of the knife, I reach my orgasm. A loud moan, similar to a scream, falls from my mouth as my muscles grip the handle tightly, immobilizing the object. I try to squeeze my legs together, but Noah stops me, his free hand slamming into my kneecap to keep me spread. "No, bad girl," he growls. My muscles strain from the intensity of my orgasm and the refusal to do the one thing to help me ease the sensation. Every pulse of my muscles pulls on the knife, trying to draw it deeper. The cold metal of the blade prickles against my aching opening, the sharp edge tickling my folds as Noah holds on to the blade to keep it from entering me and slicing me open from the inside out.

It takes a while for me to relax, allowing him to ease the knife out of me without hurting me. "Good girl," he hums his praise as I lie motionless on the bed, my eyes closed under the blindfold, as I focus on my breathing.

In.

Out.

In.

Out.

In the daze of my orgasm, I barely register the sound of his footsteps walking away from the bed, followed by the rustling of clothes dropping to the floor in the distance.

Once the mattress dips and a set of arms wraps around me, taking me further back onto the bed, I snap out of my haze. He lays me down in the sheets, spreading my legs and kneels between them. His now exposed skin burns against mine.

"Look at you," he says. "Your pussy is dripping in my blood." He places his hand on my pubic bone, running his fingers over my cunt, flicking my swollen folds before drawing a path from my abdomen up to my breasts, leaving a trail of warm blood along the way. His big hands cup my tits entirely, squeezing the soft flesh, pinching my swollen nipples, eliciting a squeal from me. But his attention shifts from my breasts, his hands leaving the mounds and moving upward until he curls his long fingers around my throat. "I'm going to fuck all that blood inside you. Stuff you so good you will feel full for days," he says in a deep, husky voice.

I sob, tears of frustration streaming down my cheek as my breathing quickens again, and I begin to yank at the zip ties, struggling to free myself. I want nothing more than to touch him.

"Do you want me to cut you loose?" he asks, giving my throat a squeeze.

"Yes, please, please cut me loose!" I choke out between sobs. "Please!" I yell, then

squeak as he lets go of my throat, wraps an arm around me and hauls me into a sitting position. The sound of plastic snapping follows and my arms fall free. Without hesitation, I wrap them around his shoulders and press my face up against his, our noses colliding in an awkward attempt to smash my lips against his. He chuckles with amusement, the vibration from his chest resonating throughout me.

"Impatient, are we?" he says before pressing his lips to mine in a feverish kiss and shoving me back into the sheets as he remains on top of me, trapping me between him and the bed.

I run my fingers up his neck to his hair, clutching at the short, sticky, waxed strands as I willingly open my mouth to allow his tongue to devour mine. My heart pounds in my chest as I feel the tip of his hard cock pressing against my beaten opening; my muscles pulsate against him, anticipating his entry. My lips part further in a loud but muffled moan as he thrusts forward, burying himself inside me as far as my body allows. My hips stutter from the stretch, jerking against him while he freezes in place.

"So warm, so good," he mouths against my lips, his hot breath brushing against my skin, the scent of cigarettes and mints tickling my nose. With my eyes covered, I feel every inch, every ridge, every prominent vein on his cock more intimately as it pulsates inside me, pumping blood through its length.

A soft whimper slips out of me as he pushes himself up to kneel between my legs, his body draped over me disappearing, taking all the comforting warmth with him. His hand finds its way back to my throat, his long fingers wrapping around it. My mouth falls open again in a silent moan as he withdraws his hips and glides out of me, only to slam back in. I cry out at the impact of his hips hammering into mine, my hands flying up to clasp at his hands around my throat, clawing at his skin as he drives his hips into me again and again in a violent rhythm, my body bouncing back and forth on the mattress.



Not being able to see heightens my senses of touch and hearing, and all I can focus on is each stroke of his hips, his bleeding hand wrapped around my throat, coating me in a warm liquid, while all I can hear is his loud grunts every time our hips collide with a wet squirting sound as he forces the blood into me.

High-pitched moans, no, screams escape me in the same rhythm as his thrusts. Digging my nails deeper into his arms, he tightens his grip on my throat, squeezing harder as I scratch his skin, not caring if I break it.

From the lack of blood reaching my brain, even in the darkness, the room around me spins in circles as dizziness clouds my senses. Even as I fight consciousness and my body sinks into the sheets, my grip on his arms loosening, he doesn't let go. Instead, he squeezes even harder.

It is only when I nearly lose control that he finally releases my throat. My upper body immediately lifts off the mattress and I gasp for air as the blood rushes back to my brain in a big thunderous wave. My moans fade, replaced by snotty, sobbing cries, tears soaking my blindfold as he continues his assault.

The moment he lowers himself back down onto me, I throw my arms around his shoulders for support, holding on to him as if he is my only lifeline. One of his hands slips under my head and he pulls the blindfold off my face, allowing me to open my eyes. Blinking repeatedly, I fight back the tears and adjust to the newfound light, his face finally appearing in front of me .

I tighten my grip on him and crash my lips against his. The kiss is messy, our tongues tangled in a slobbery dance. I sink my nails into his back, catching on his prominent scars, tearing at the rough edges while holding on tight as another orgasm hits me. My body is trembling and I cling to him while another wave of pleasure rips through me. My muscles tighten around his cock, his thrusts slow.

He grabs a handful of my hair and continues to fuck me with slow and shallow thrusts throughout the pleasure. His hips begin to stutter and with one last deep stroke he pauses, his cock pulsing against my throbbing muscles as he fills me with his hot cum.

Our heavy breathing falls into sync as we remain in the same position, connected by our hips, with him on top of me, savoring our shared orgasm. He lowers his entire body weight onto me, and I welcome him with open arms, burying my face in his hair and inhaling the fruity scent of his hair wax.

After what feels like an eternity, he softens, slips out of me, and rolls onto his back, releasing me. With my new freedom, I take a deep breath before I push myself up into a sitting position and look down at my body. My breath catches in my throat and my heart skips a beat at the sight of the state I'm in. My lower half is covered in dark blood, mixed with my own arousal and the white of his cum dripping out of me. The streaks of blood spread across my stomach to my tits, where perfect handprints mark my skin before the trail continues to my throat. I get on my knees and fling one leg over him, straddling his hips.

"Hey, hey, are you already in the mood for round two?" he teases, still gasping for air.

"No, show me your hand," I demand, and he complies, offering me his hand with the fresh, gaping injury, revealing the underlying tissue.

"You need stitches." I take his hand in mine to inspect the gash.

He rolls his eyes. "Yeah," he says, then sits up and wraps his arms around my waist. "After round two." He grins.

It is my turn to roll my eyes at him and I sling my arms around his neck. "Let's see if

you have enough blood left to get it up."

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 6:48 am*

Evelyn

"I'm done," Noah says, and my head turns in his direction, standing at the island counter where he was cutting the venison.

"Thank you," I say with a smile on my face and take the cutting board with the meat from him.

Upon closer inspection, he managed to follow my instructions this time. I've been trying to get him more involved in the cooking process, hoping that he'll enjoy the activity and that it will become a hobby of his. But I don't know if it's weaponized incompetence or if he really doesn't understand what I want from him sometimes. Just yesterday I asked him to cut the carrots into small sticks but in the end, I got cubes. It's not that he complains when I ask for help, he even offers it, but he doesn't seem to get the hang of it. Sometimes I wonder how on God's green earth he can be so skilled at torturing and mutilating people but fail at the most mundane tasks.

"It's perfect." I smile and push the meat into the piping hot pot. The sound of sizzling meat immediately fills the space.

"Is there anything else I can help you with?"

"Could you go get me a bottle of that red wine for cooking?"

"Of course," he says and disappears through the door that leads to our garage.

Stirring the meat, I wait for it to brown when something catches my attention out of

the corner of my eye. I perk up and look out the window overlooking the front yard of our home. The motion-activated lights leading up our driveway through the woods turn on, illuminating the otherwise dark area. Narrowing my eyes, I spot the pair of bright headlights approaching before parking neatly next to Noah's Q8. Just as I catch a glimpse of the familiar license plate, the owner of the car gets out.

"Hey, Dove, something caught your attention?"

My head jerks in the direction of Noah, who is now standing next to me, setting the bottle of wine down on the counter. "Say, did you forget to tell me Kyle was coming?"

Noah's attention shifts to the kitchen window, furrowing his brows as he watches Kyle walk up to our front porch.

"No, I haven't heard from him in a while. Stay here, I'll get the door."

I nod and watch as he walks out of the kitchen. A few seconds later Kyle's enthusiastic voice booms through the house before the two of them join me in the kitchen.

"Hey, Evelyn, sorry to bother you two this late!" he says with a broad grin on his face. Obviously, he is not sorry at all.

"Hey, Kyle, long time no see." I offer him a faint smile.

"You two don't seem too happy to see me."

"I would have appreciated a call beforehand," Noah says with a sigh while he fetches two glasses from the kitchen cupboard and a bottle of whiskey from the sideboard and pours them both a drink.

"Oh, come on, I wanted to surprise one of my best friends!" Kyle says and sits down at the dining table, thanking Noah for the drink. I raise my eyebrows in doubt; this behavior seems out of character even for Kyle. He knows as well as I do that Noah doesn't like surprises or situations he can't control.

"I'm your only friend," Noah says, and I can't help but snort.

Kyle dramatically clutches his chest and turns to me. "Evelyn, don't you consider me your friend?"

I roll my eyes in annoyance and keep my attention on the stew, pouring the wine into the pot. "Friends might be the wrong term. You're Noah's friend, and we haven't exactly spent a lot of time together yet."

Kyle's lips purse into a pout. "And here I thought we had something special."

"Shut up," Noah snaps, to which Kyle bursts out laughing and waves his hand dismissively.

"Why are you here?" Noah asks. "Did you fail a job again?"

My eyebrows shoot up in curiosity as I glance at the two of them sitting comfortably at the dining table. I don't know much about Kyle's work other than he works with the Mafia most of the time, carrying out hits for them. Occasionally, he asks Noah for advice or information, but other than that, I have no idea what he is up to.

"No, and I didn't screw up the job back then...I got distracted, you should know better than anyone how that feels." Kyle nods in my direction.

"You fucked your client's daughter; that's different."

"But it is okay to fuck your target?"

My heart leaps in my chest as a rush of warmth creeps up my neck and spreads across my face at the memory of our first night together. When I look up, I meet Noah's gaze, staring at me with knitted brows.

"That was..." Noah trails off, clearly thinking about the words he is about to say out loud. "Not the proudest moment in my career, but I have no regrets, because although the way we met was rather unconventional, I found my match this way." My heart swells with affection for him. It's not the worst thing he could have said; it could have been a little sweeter, but Noah just isn't the type for a lot of endearing words.

"See, this is how you found your true love! And maybe she could have been mine!" Kyle argues.

"She's twenty-two, Kyle, you're thirty-five!" Noah groans, deep lines forming on his forehead as he rubs his eyes through his lids.

"Yes, and? You're thirty-five too and Evelyn is twenty-seven, so you two have an age gap too!"

"This is different."

"It's not. Time is ticking and I have to take every chance to find the love of my life. And I mean, the younger she is, the longer she can carry my children," he says with a broad shit-eating grin on his face.

I scrunch my nose in disgust at Kyle's comment and turn to Noah, who has his face buried in the palm of his hand, his shoulders hunched.

"Babe, have a drink," I say, and he lifts his head to look at me before grabbing his

glass of whiskey and downing it in one big gulp.

"I never want to hear those words out of your mouth again." Noah turns back to Kyle and shoots him a threatening glare.

Who chuckles in response and slides his empty glass over to him for a refill. "I'm just kidding, I don't even want a girlfriend, let alone kids."

Noah refills their glasses and slides Kyle's back to him. "Good, because if you ever go after a girl that young again, I'm going to castrate you."

"Yeah, no thanks. I've seen you do it to others and that shit looked painful."

The two then fall into a friendly conversation about everyday subjects, including Noah's search for a new hobby, but also Kyle's own life and, in part, his work.

When I consider the stew ready, I turn to the two men and interrupt their conversation. "Kyle, would you like to join us for dinner?"

"Would love to! What are you having? It smells really good."

"Venison stew. Noah shot a deer a few days ago." I smile and look at Noah, who has already gotten up from his chair to fetch the bowls and cutlery for dinner.

"Look at you. Being a real man, showing off your hunting skills to woo your girl." Kyle turns his attention to Noah, who puts down everything but the coaster for the pot and doesn't hesitate to smack Kyle in the back of the head with it.

After dinner, Noah excused himself to go over his routine with the doves and get them ready for the night. Meanwhile, Kyle helps me clean up and rinses the dishes before loading them into the dishwasher. While I'm busy putting the leftovers in



containers to freeze for later, I keep stealing glances at him. I can't shake the nagging gut feeling that something is wrong with his little surprise visit. While he's generally a fidgety person, he's acting more erratic than usual—unable to sit still and constantly fiddling with his fingers or phone, as if he's nervous.

"Kyle, why are you here?" I break the silence and turn around, leaning against the kitchen counter. He turns to face me and dries his hands on a dish towel.

"I'm here to see Noah and have a little chat, that is all," he says.

I narrow my eyes and glare at him. "Then tell me, why don't I believe that this is the truth?" I cross my arms in front of my chest.

"Because you're being paranoid. I'm not here to take him away from you." He chuckles and walks over to me, placing his hands on my shoulders. "I'm here to talk to him, then I'll leave and you'll have him all to yourself again, okay?"

I groan in annoyance as he lifts his hand and begins to ruffle my hair. Raising my hand, I flick his away from me. "You better not drag him into anything."

Kyle shrugs, dismissing my concerns. "Don't stress yourself too much and stop making things up where there's nothing to worry about." The door to the back porch opens, interrupting our conversation, and Noah walks in. Kyle then takes a step back from me and turns to face him.

"Your birds are okay?" he asks, walking out of the kitchen and over to Noah, who nods.

"Yeah, they're fine," he says and then turns to look at me.

With a handful of steps, he crosses the living room and joins me in the open kitchen,

stopping in front of me and leaning down to plant a kiss on my forehead. "Don't wait for me. I'll join you in bed as soon as we're done."

I glare up at him, grab him by the collar of his shirt and pull him down for a proper kiss. "You better make sure it doesn't take too long," I whisper against his lips before letting him go.

"I'll do my best," he says, then pulls away from me and leads Kyle upstairs to his office.

I let out a heavy exhale and turn to grab the bottle of wine on the kitchen counter and an empty glass from the cupboards. I would love to be a fly on the wall right now and eavesdrop on what they are talking about. But it would just upset Noah, and with how cranky he's been acting lately, I don't want to add to his stress. If it's something serious, I'm sure he'll tell me. Well, I hope he will.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 6:48 am*

Noah

I make sure to lock the door to my office before I walk over to the seating area by the fireplace. I then slump into one of the chairs and watch as Kyle does the same across from me.

"Now tell me why you're actually here, since you couldn't in front of Evelyn," I say, reaching for the pack of cigarettes on the table, lighting one for myself and drawing in a long, deep breath.

"I need your help with something."

I puff out the remains of the gray smoke while keeping my eyes on Kyle, furrowing my eyebrows. Why am I not one bit surprised? In the nearly nineteen years we've been in this business, he's only shown up on my doorstep unannounced when he needed something he couldn't communicate by other means.

"What is it?"

"Remember that guy you took out a few years ago? The one who ran the finance company on the surface, but all the criminal shit in the background?" Kyle asks, and I remember vividly. That whole job was a shit show, causing too much trouble.

"I do. Please don't tell me he came back from the dead. I made sure to cut him into as many pieces as possible." A smile twitches at the corner of my lips at the memory of the night I slaughtered that man. Only on a few occasions, when the pay was high enough, did I take the time to turn my targets into minced meat, and he was one of

those times.

Kyle chuckles. "No, that bastard is still dead, but his son has taken over and is in the middle of rebuilding it all."

"And why exactly is that my problem?"

"The man who hired you back then tried to get in touch with you, but since you're out of business, he couldn't find you, so he came to me."

"Why?"

"He is afraid that the son will also try to take over his company as well."

"And what exactly do you need my help for?" I ask, raising the cigarette to my lips.

"You know, this isn't my usual kind of clientele, and I'm not used to their ways. But you are, so I could use your help."

I throw my head back and let out a sigh of frustration. This is an opportunity being handed to me on a silver platter. This isn't fair. "I can 't help you." I tilt my head back forward to look at him.

"Why?" he asks, leaning forward with his elbows propped on his knees.

"Because I promised Evelyn I would stop working."

Kyles' facial expression morphs from indifferent to irritated. His eyebrows are furrowed, and deep lines crease his forehead.

"Since when do you let others tell you what to do? Let alone a woman ."

"Watch your mouth." My eyes widen and I shoot him a dangerous glare. "I won't let you disrespect her."

"Sorry," he says, bringing his hands up in submission. "But I really need your help, and there's no one else I can ask."

"What about your father?"

"I've already asked him, but he's dealing with some other business right now."

I raise my hand, covering my face as I massage my temples, trying to rub the tension out of my muscles. I would be lying if I said I wasn't intrigued by Kyle's proposal. He offers me the opportunity for a perfect job, an exciting job. If it weren't for Evelyn, I would jump at the opportunity without a second thought and no further questions. But I promised her I wouldn't take any more jobs, and for the first time in my life I'm trying to be a man of my word. However, old habits die hard.

I let out a long exhale, lean forward and stub out the remains of my cigarette. "I'll talk to Evelyn about it. I can't make this decision on my own."

Kyle rolls his eyes. "You've turned into such a pussy since you've been with her."

"Shut up. I don't see what's wrong with wanting to make the woman I love happy."

"Nothing, but you will not make her happy as long as you are not content with your own life. And don't lie to me, I know you. You're sick in the head, I've seen how much you enjoy killing and how much you get your fix from it, and suddenly you're the perfect small-town boy who can do no harm?" Kyle furrows his eyebrows.

I groan in frustration and slump back into my chair, looking up at the ceiling. He's right, I'm like an addict trying to get clean. "I'll figure it out. How much time do you

have?" I ask, but my attention remains on the ceiling.

"I was not given a deadline; the client just begged me to get it done as soon as possible."

"And the payment?"

"Twice as much as you got the last time."

I hum in response. That's a lot of money I don't need, I have more than enough for us to live carefree for the rest of our lives, but I never say no to a little extra cash.

"Give me a couple of days. I will call you as soon as I know her thoughts about the whole situation." I turn my head and look back at him.

"Sure thing." He flashes me a stupid grin.

I hate that he's always right about me, but with a friendship that's lasted more than two decades, it's no surprise. We are like open books to each other; there are no secrets and we know everything about the other, whether we like it or not.

"I think I'll take my leave now; I have to get back home and it's a long drive."

"You can stay the night if you want; the guest room is made."

"No thanks. I also think Evelyn would prefer that I leave." I raise my eyebrows in confusion. "I also don't want to witness what you two are up to in the bedroom again. She tried to hide it, but I saw the bruises around her neck, and the bandage on your hand tells me you two are going at it like animals again," he says with a chuckle.

"Too much, Kyle," I warn him.

After kicking Kyle out and making sure the front door is locked for the night, I lean against it and my gaze lands on the stairs leading back up. I raise my hand, and my smartwatch lights up, showing eleven p.m.. Evelyn is most likely still awake; it's rare for her to fall asleep before midnight. And even though I told her not to wait for me, I have no doubt that she would do it anyway.

I push myself away from the door, taking a quick detour through the kitchen to grab a box of her favorite chocolates before climbing the stairs, making sure to turn off all the lights on the way. In all honesty, my mind is spinning with thoughts, and I could really use a moment to myself right now to think about Kyle's offer in peace. But there's no way she didn't hear his car engine.

I pause in front of our shut bedroom door. A flickering light shines through the crack and the muffled sound of the TV buzzing from inside. As expected, she is still awake. I wrap my fingers around the doorknob but hesitate. I need to come up with a solid plan how to talk to her about this, and not do it on the fly. But how in the world am I going to convince her to let me go?

I take a deep breath, filling my lungs with air. Not tonight. I'll give it a couple of days, think about it more before I talk to her. By then, I'm sure I'll have a good argument.

I turn the handle, push the door open, and walk into our bedroom, and just as I thought, Evelyn is sitting in bed with her favorite show on. In addition to the TV, the lamp on her nightstand illuminates the otherwise dark room.

Her head whips in my direction and a smile spreads across her face. "There you are."

"Kyle just left," I say, taking four long strides to reach my side of the bed and hand her the box of chocolates. "For you." Her face lights up at the sight of the late night treat, her smile widens as she takes the box from me. Doing that little thing with her

shoulders, swaying in a happy dance, she immediately begins to unwrap it.

"What did he want to talk about?" she asks, and my stomach twists into a tight knot of guilt. Lying comes easily to me; it always has. But I hate lying to her, and I admit I've been doing it a lot lately.

"He needed some information about a target and advice on how to proceed." I look at her and shrug while taking off my watch and placing it on its charging dock on my nightstand.

Her eyebrows shoot up, her forehead creasing with thin lines. "Only that?"

"Yes. "

"But he has asked you for advice several times while I was present."

"Yes, but this is different.""

"How?"

"It's someone with a high profile; it's better if you don't know anything about them."

I grab the back of my shirt by the neckline and pull it off. The moment it is off, I catch her popping a piece of chocolate into her mouth before her lips purse into a pout.

"Why are you sulking?"

"Because you're keeping yet another secret from me."

"I'm not keeping this a secret; I'm telling you as much as I can right now. As soon as I



can, I'll tell you everything."

"Promise?"

"I promise."

With a quick twist of my wrist, the button and fly of my pants come loose and I push them down before climbing into bed beside her. She scoots closer and offers me the box of chocolates.

"Do you want some?"

"No, I'm fine."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, it's all yours," I say and wrap my arm around her shoulders.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 6:48 am*

Evelyn

I'm sitting on the sofa of our back porch, a cozy blanket draped over my legs, basking in the comforting warm light of the morning sun tickling my skin while sipping my first steaming cup of coffee after my daily morning run. My eyes are fixed on Noah as he goes about his morning routine of tending to the doves.

Three couples just hatched their eggs, and while he was thrilled by the late nesting, considering it's already October, the excitement over the little squabs seems to have already worn off. Which surprises me, considering how disappointed he was in the spring and summer when the doves seemed to have trouble adjusting to their new environment and failed to lay fertilized eggs.

I hate to make assumptions, but since he refuses to properly communicate with me about how he is feeling and what is going on in his head, I can only speculate what is bothering him. The one suspicion that keeps popping into my head is that he's having a hard time adjusting. And I have this terrible gut feeling that it is getting worse, when for a while it felt like it was getting better and he was finally breaking out of his slump. Perhaps it's just my imagination, like Kyle said, but it seems like it's gotten so much worse again since his surprise visit.

I perk up at the sound of heavy footsteps climbing the wooden stairs, my head turning to find him walking toward me before dropping onto the sofa next to me. "Everything okay with the birds?" I ask with a smile.

"Yeah, I think so," he says as he sinks into the pillows, drapes his arms over the backrest, and tilts his head back before closing his eyes. I lean into his side, his arm

slipping from the backrest around my shoulders while I pull the blanket up and cover his legs as well.

"Are you okay, babe? You look exhausted," I ask, resting my hand on his thigh, feeling the tension in his muscles as they flex against my fingers. With a gentle squeeze, I begin to massage him in circles, trying to relieve some of the tension.

"I had trouble sleeping last night, that's all," he says, keeping his head tilted back.

"You've been having trouble sleeping a lot lately. Is there something bothering you?" I give his thigh another squeeze, prompting his leg to twitch under my touch.

He sighs and tilts his head to lean against mine. "Maybe. "

"Is there any way I can help?"

"No." He shakes his head. "That's something I have to figure out for myself."

"Okay," I say with a small smile tugging at the corner of my lips and pull away from him. I raise my hand to comb through his soft hair, pushing the loose strands out of his face. This is good, it's not ideal, but it's progress. It's more of an answer than any of the other responses I've gotten from him in the last few days, and we're slowly approaching the subject, step by step; he will open up eventually.

Even after almost a year of being together, it must be challenging for him to openly communicate how he feels and what's on his mind, so I try to be patient. Besides me, he only has Kyle, and the two of them aren't really the affectionate type of friends. Although Kyle seems to know a lot more than he'll admit, I don't see them having many conversations about their feelings. From the bits and pieces Noah told me, I know that Kyle has been with him since middle school, but it wasn't enough information to figure out what Noah went through in his childhood that made him the

man he is today. He is so adamant about keeping this part of his life locked away that I can only imagine how traumatizing it was. And every time I try to ask Kyle about it, he shuts me down and tells me that it is Noah's job to tell me and that he is not going to spill his secrets.

I run my nails over his scalp and smile as he relaxes into the touch, the tension in his shoulders melting away as they slump. Leaning closer, I pepper a series of soft kisses on his cheek. "How about I cook your favorite meal tonight?"

"That would be great, you haven't cooked it in a while." He opens his eyes and turns to face me.

"Yeah, because every time I make it, you refuse to eat anything else for days." I chuckle and flick him on the forehead with my middle finger.

Pushing the blanket off myself, I get up, take his hand in mine, and pull him forward, but he remains seated.

"Come on, you promised to help me clean the house, you have to earn your food," I say with another chuckle to which he responds with a groan and shifts all his weight into my hands holding his. I trip over my own feet and stumble forward as he slumps back into the sofa. "Noah!" A grin spreads across his face as I call his name.

Letting go of his hands, I straighten my posture and cross my arms over my chest. The only chore he truly hates is cleaning, but he was the one who wanted a big house, so he has to help with it, especially when he wants me to cook his favorite food.

The moment we got to work, the day passed like a blur. But now, for preparing dinner, I banned him from the kitchen, not only to make the meal a surprise, but also to keep him from stealing the meatballs right out of the pot. Instead, he sits on the sofa, reading one of his many books. A smile spreads across my face at the sight of

him in a matching set of black sweats, his damp hair messy from the shower, wearing his glasses.

Compared to this morning, he looks calmer and more content. Perhaps keeping him busy helped to distract him from whatever it is that is bothering him.

I prepare two plates of food and carry them into the living room, setting them on the coffee table in front of him. "Dinner's ready. I was thinking we could eat here tonight and watch some TV."

He shuts his book and looks up at me, then down at the food and nods. "That sounds like a plan."

We fall into a comfortable silence as we eat, the TV running with a show that we both like to watch. After devouring one more serving and tending to the dishes as his daily chore, Noah settles down on the sofa next to me and welcomes me with open arms. Leaning into his embrace, I rest my head on his shoulder, my eyes glued to the TV as the familiar sound of the evening news fills the room.

The Lancaster Group, known for its past association with criminal activity, is making a comeback after the mysterious and still unsolved disappearance of its former founder, Conrad Lancaster, five years ago. His son, Ash Lancaster, has now taken the stage in a press conference and announced that he will lead the company back to its former success with the goal of clearing his family's name. This has caused widespread concern and speculation among authorities.

The news cuts to a segment on the Lancaster Group, detailing its involvement in drug smuggling, prostitution and other criminal activities. It also features interviews with former employees who wish to remain anonymous, as well as old recordings of the missing Conrad Lancaster. The moment the story delves into the mysterious disappearance of the former founder, Noah's arm wrapped around me tenses, his

muscles flex, and the comfort of his embrace is no longer there. It's constricting, even suffocating. I try to shift, to break free, but his grip remains firm, leaving me no room to escape.

It is not until the report ends and they cut to the sports news that his grip on me loosens. Shifting in my seat, I look at him, searching for answers, only to be met by his stoic mask. Every muscle in his face is tense while his eyes are glued to the TV as if he is disassociating, masking every spark of emotion.

"Noah?"

Completely ignoring me, he pulls his arm from around me, pushes the blanket off himself and rises to his feet, walking around the coffee table to the cabinet that holds his whiskey collection. Like on autopilot, he grabs the bottle of his favorite brand and two glasses and pours two generous servings.

I watch him lift one of the glasses to his lips and he swallows the whole drink in one big gulp before pouring himself another. He then returns to the sofa with the two drinks and holds one out to me. "Drink," he says in a demanding but strangely pleading tone.

"I'm not in the mood for whiskey," I say with a frown on my face but take the glass from him anyway.

A sigh escapes him, and he raises his own glass to his lips, this time taking only a small sip from it. "Believe me when I say it's going to be easier on you if you drink. Do I have to force it down your throat?"

I look down at the amber liquid in my hand, the frown on my face deepening, my eyebrows knitting together. Without much room for protest, I accept my defeat and raise the glass to my lips. Squeezing my eyes shut, I take a big gulp and the alcohol

spreads through my mouth, burning my tongue and throat. Whiskey has never been one of my favorites. This particular one isn't too bad, it's on the sweeter side, but when given the choice, I'd rather have something else. A glass of wine or some fruit liqueur, such as peach.

"Good," he says.

Opening my eyes again, I set my glass down on the small tray table attached to the armrest of our sofa and scoot closer to where he is standing. "What is going on?" I ask.

His head tilts to the right, where our TV hangs over the fireplace. "You were paying attention during the story about the Lancaster Group, right?"

I blink rapidly and steal a glance at the TV, where a compilation of highlights from a football game is being shown. "Uh, yeah, why?"

"I killed Conrad Lancaster back then," he says, the tone of his voice cold and distant. My eyes widen and a thunderous wave of realization crashes down on me. This is why he's been so on edge these past couple of days. He already knew about the plan to rebuild the Lancaster Group.

Lost for words, not a single one comes out of my gaping lips as I look at him with big eyes. "The ones who hired me back then," he speaks, and my heartbeat quickens at the chilling suspicion of where this is going. "They tried to contact me but couldn't, so they reached out to Kyle instead and he needs my help."

"No," I say and close my eyes. A million thoughts race through my mind, blinding my vision.

"What do you mean, no?"

I take a deep breath in an unsuccessful attempt to calm my racing heart, pounding against my ribcage, trying to escape the brewing rise of my pulse. "You're not helping him." After each syllable, my voice cracks and I open my eyes again.

Setting his drink down on the coffee table, he takes off his glasses with his right hand and rubs his eyes through his lids with his left. "He needs my help," he says in a more heated tone.

"I don't care, you promised me—"

"I know," he cuts me off, the muscles in my face tense up as my left eye twitches. "But—"

"What did you promise me?" I interrupt him in return.

"That I'm done, and that I'll turn down any future offers if someone finds a way to locate me."

"Exactly. I don't care if Kyle needs your help; you gave me a promise. He can find someone else to help him." I get up from the sofa, and with only two steps, I stand right in front of him.

"He has no one but me that he can trust."

"That sounds like a Kyle problem, not a you problem, not an us problem." Raising my hand, I place my index finger on his chest, pressing down and drilling into his sternum. His gaze shifts to where my finger meets his body where his chest rises and falls against my touch, and he lets out a sigh.

"I know what he's dealing with, and he can't do it alone, Evelyn. You have to fucking understand." He raises his voice.



My breath catches in my throat and my heart crumbles. He rarely raises his voice at me and never uses my full given name unless he has to, like in introductions. Even my nickname, Eve, which is what all my friends call me, rarely leaves his lips.

"Then he should not take the job, sounds like the only possible solution," I say between shaky breaths and pull my hand away from him, crossing my arms over my chest to shut him out.

"It's not that simple."

"Sounds pretty simple to me. He can call the client and tell them that both of you are busy." I turn away from him and walk to our dining table, picking up the bottle of whiskey to put it back in the cupboard, hoping that finding something to keep my hands busy will help me stay calm.

"He already accepted. "

I freeze in my movements, my grip on the neck of the bottle tightening. My blood runs cold and I turn back to him, looking at him with wide eyes. "You said yes without talking to me first?" I speak with a quiet voice while my mind shuts down as I process the news, in the calm before the storm.

"No, I haven't. I told Kyle I'd call him after I talked to you."

"Kyle was here a week ago! How long were you going to hide this?" I raise my voice, waving the bottle of whiskey as I lift my arm and point at him.

"Until I figured out a good way to approach the subject in a way that would convince you to let me go," he admits.

My lips part and my jaw drops as I look at him in disbelief. "Convince me?" I ask,

closing my eyes against the sting of tears, fighting them back. "This is not just about Kyle not being able to do this job alone. Please, be honest with me, this is your chance. You miss your job, you miss the killing, the adrenaline and the fix. Am I right?" He remains silent and just looks at me. "You gave me your word!"

"Evelyn, please, it's not..." He circles the sofa and walks over to me.

"Don't even try and lie to me. At least be fucking honest for once that you're bored, that you're not happy with the way we live." I meet him halfway, dropping the whiskey bottle to the floor, which shatters before I crash into him, forcing him to back up until his legs hit the edge of the sofa.

"Evelyn."

"Don't call me that." Clenching my hands into a fist, I slam the underside into his chest, and without a word, he takes the blow.

"Dove."

"Don't call me that either!" I pound my fists into his chest again and again, and he simply takes the beating. The drumming against his chest drowns out the sound of the TV, his body rocking back and forth with each blow.

My movements slow and every muscle in my body stiffens as his long arms wrap around me, pinning me to his chest. "Let me go," I say, squirming in his grip, but instead of letting go, he tightens his hold on me, crushing me against his chest.

"You're right, in a way," he says in a calm and collected tone, burying his face in my hair. "I'm not bored, not with you by my side. But I can't deny that I miss the thrill of killing, the feeling of someone dying at my hands, the look on their face as the life drains from their body. I really try to find the same pleasure in killing animals, but it

is not the same." His arms tighten around me even more, keeping me from falling apart .

While my body is being held together by his embrace, my heart shatters into a million pieces inside of me. Hearing him admit what I have suspected for so long is even worse than I imagined, because even though I had my suspicions, I held on to the small chance that I was wrong, that for the first time my gut feeling was failing. But the worst part of all this is not even that he still misses that lifestyle. No, it's that he kept not only the job but also his struggles a secret, that he didn't feel comfortable enough, didn't trust me enough, to confide in me.

"Why can't we just be normal?" I whisper, barely audible as I force the words out. "Why can't we just have a simple, normal life?"

"If that's what you want," he says, his tone raw, "I'm the wrong man for you. I will never be able to give you the complete normalcy you crave." His words cut through my heart, splitting it in half.

"Why?"

"Because this is part of who I am." One of his hands lands on the back of my head, his fingers combing through my hair as he palms my skull. "You can only really have this life if I'm not in it. Do you want me to let you go?"

I open my mouth to speak, but no words come out. The mere thought of going back to a life without him leaves a gaping void in my chest. Far worse than the heartache of knowing that he will never be able to give it all up, not even for me. I dig my nails into his chest and my silence seems to be enough of an answer.

"Good, because even if you wanted to," his voice drops to a possessive growl, "I would never let you go." His arms tighten around me. "You belong to me. Always

have and always will. No matter where you go, no matter what you do, you'll always be mine."

My heart pounds in my chest, each beat more painful than the last. His possessiveness, usually so comforting, now feels like a double-edged blade, slicing open a scar I didn't even know was there.

"Please, give me some space," I say in a calm voice, not much louder than a whisper, placing my hands flat against his chest. He hesitates, but ultimately lets go, giving me the space to step away from him. "I don't want to talk about it right now; I need time to think about it."

"Of course."

I turn my back to him, cross my arms in front of my chest, and head for the door that leads to the hallway.

"Do you want me to sleep in the guest room tonight?" he asks.

I stop in the doorway and let out a heavy sigh. "No. We had a disagreement, yes, but let's not do that. Sleeping apart won't magically solve the issue. If anything, it'll create distance between us. We should face this, not completely retreat into separate corners." I turn to face him and there is a moment of silence as his gaze meets mine. "Just give me time, okay?"

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 6:48 am*

Evelyn

It's been exactly two days since Noah told me the truth. Two days since I last spoke a word to him. The need for time to think turned from one night, to one day...and then to more. It's not that he hasn't tried to initiate conversation with me, including about the issue at hand or simple everyday stuff. But my head is in the clouds, working on autopilot, stuck in my routine, while I take a step back to pick up the pieces to put the puzzle back together. And I found myself guilty of the one thing I told him not to do. Retreating to my own corner, putting distance between us.

The sound of running water grabs my attention and my head whips in the direction of our en-suite bathroom. His last attempt to talk to me was this morning when he was looking for his glasses, which he has a habit of leaving where he can't find them. After that, complete silence.

With a heavy sigh, the air drains from my lungs and I collapse back into the pile of pillows in our bed. The invisible wall I built between us is crumbling. No matter how angry I am that he kept secrets from me, I can't solely blame him. I should have been more aware, more... something. All those little signs like his headaches and restlessness - I ignored them, didn't I? Or maybe I just didn't want to see them.

I perk up at the sound of the water slowing to a trickle until it stops completely, followed by the rustling of towels, and a few seconds later, the bathroom door swings open and Noah steps out in all his glory. My heart skips a beat at the sight of him, completely nude, walking across the room toward our walk-in closet. The short strands of his hair, still damp, stick out all messy. His skin is a light shade of red from the hot water. My eyes trace the familiar lines of his body, lingering on the countless

scars that stretch across his body.

Keeping my distance from him has meant no cuddling, no kissing, no sex, all of which I'm starting to feel the consequences of. I love him and I crave his affection. I want to be close to him; I want to touch him. Every single cell in my body is screaming to reconnect with him.

Through the open door, I have a perfect view of him grabbing a pair of dark gray boxer briefs and slipping into them. Sucking my lower lip between my teeth, I watch as he adjusts himself until he is completely satisfied and walks back into our room.

I push myself back into a sitting position as he stops at the foot of the bed, his eyes scanning the room until he spots his glasses on the nightstand. After his unsuccessful search this morning, it took me exactly two minutes to find them in his favorite place to lose them: the shower. Almost every time he takes one, he forgets to remove them and only realizes it when he is already shampooing his hair.

"Babe, can we talk?" I break the awkward silence and he turns to me, his eyebrows lifting with surprise.

"Of course." He circles the foot of the bed and sits down on the edge on his side.

"This whole thing, I've read about it, I've watched reports, and I don't like it. Something doesn't seem quite right." I inch closer to him, and he twists to look at me.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I can't put my finger on the exact root cause, it's a gut feeling that something is wrong."

"Dove, nothing is wrong. I checked all the information Kyle was given and I did my

own research. It's a clean and easy job. "

"Clean and easy? You're walking into a lion's den. There is literally no information about Ash Lancaster other than what has been shown in the recent news."

"Everything will be fine. It's all planned down to the smallest detail."

"Planned out? Are you serious?" I ask and my jaw drops in disbelief.

"Yes?" He furrows his eyebrows. "A long distance kill. We monitor him through the night and put a bullet through his skull when the time is right."

"No." I shove the blanket off me and get on my knees, scooting closer until I can grab his face, cupping his cheeks in my hands and forcing him to look at me. His expression is completely unfazed. "You're not going! Do I really have to repeat myself?"

His face hardens, any emotion draining from his features. "Evelyn, I've already set everything up. I'm going."

"You did what? Are you out of your mind?" My heart sinks like a brick was tied to it and thrown into the ocean.

"Dove..."

"You just went ahead and made up your mind. You didn't even give me a chance," I say, my voice shaking with a mix of anger and distress. "You said you would give me time to think!" I raise my voice. "You've already decided you're going, no matter what I say." I pull away from him, climb out of bed and step in front of him. "If you didn't even care if I said yes or no, why did you ask? Why, if you don't care about me ? About us ?"

"Evelyn..." He draws out my name with a growl, his eyes wide, his pupils dilating in a warning, predatory way.

"Don't Evelyn me. You're making your priorities clear right now and I'm not one of them."

"That's not true," he insists, pushing himself off the bed and glaring at me, forcing me to stumble backwards as he invades my personal space.

"You are choosing this job over me, over us. Obviously, I'm not your priority, otherwise you'd be trying to find another way to satisfy your cravings!" I raise my hand, point one of my fingers at his chest and bore it into his sternum.

"You're my priority, but guess what, I can't just fucking turn it off like you can!" He raises his hand and slaps mine away. The impact stings, a sharp jolt that travels up my arm and leaves a tingling sensation in my hand. I freeze, my eyes widening as I stare at him in disbelief. Did he just...?

"I don't care." I break out of my state of shock and push forward, slamming my hands into his chest. "Then find a way. You promised me," I repeat as I look up at him and bring my finger back to his chest. This time, I bore it into his sternum with more force. "You're not going!"

"You can't tell me what to do."

"Oh, I can."

"Is that so?" His eyebrows shoot up. "Last time I checked, I'm the one making most of the decisions, Little Dove."

"Hah," I snort, turning and heading over to his nightstand. I yank open the drawer and



rummage through his belongings. My mind is clouded with anger and frustration, spinning out of control. Intrusive thoughts replace any coherent and rational ones. If he won't listen to what I say, then maybe he'll just have to feel.

"What are you doing?" His voice reaches me from behind and I hear his footsteps approaching.

Buried among his meds, tissues, and other junk, I find what I'm looking for. I spin around to face him and point the pistol at his chest. Immediately, his hands shoot up in surrender, his face morphing into one of surprise, his eyes wide.

"Put that down..." he says in a calm voice, trying to mask the irritating snarl rising from his throat.

"Shut up! I'm tired of hearing you talk!" I snap at him, and he immediately shuts his mouth. He takes a step closer, but I glare at him and he stops. "If you don't listen to me, I'm going to make you feel. I'll make you physically unable to go."

"Don't you fucking dare," he growls in a warning tone, slowly lowering his hands to the level of my shoulders.

"You leave me no other choice!" I yell at him, a small sob rising from the depths of my chest, my shoulders shaking from my struggle to breathe. My finger slips on the trigger, but my grip on the pistol weakens, my hands shaking.

Within the blink of an eye, his long fingers wrap around my wrist, and he forces my hand up, pointing the pistol at the ceiling. "Let me go!" I scream and my finger slips as I pull the trigger. The explosion echoes through our bedroom, the bullet ripping through the wooden ceiling. The kickback shoots through my muscles like a bolt of thunder and heightens my adrenaline level.

"No," he snarls, forcing me to step back, squeezing my wrist so tightly that the blood no longer reaches the tips of my fingers. I raise my other hand to his holding onto me, digging my nails into his arm. "You're not acting like yourself; you're being fucking irrational."

"Let me..." I squeal as my legs hit the edge of the bed and I topple backwards. His weight crashes down on me, trapping me against the mattress as he pins my hand holding the pistol to the bed.

My gaze lands on the new, clean bullet hole in our ceiling before I meet Noah's eyes staring down at me. His pupils are dilated, the beautiful green fading into the background. His heated skin from the shower seeps through the thin fabric of my nightgown and drapes over me like a warm, weighted, comforting blanket. But it doesn't calm the rage that's simmering inside of me.

"Let go of the pistol," he warns, moving his fingers from my wrist to my hand gripping the handle.

"No!" I scream into his face, my heart hammering against my chest. Not thinking clearly, I bring my knee up in one powerful swing and kick him in the crotch. He grunts, his shoulders hunching as his grip on my wrist loosens. Taking my chance, I rip my hand from his hold, place my palms flat on his chest and flip us over, straddling his hips, grabbing his wrists and pinning them to the mattress above his head.

"What the hell are you doing?" he says through gritted teeth, his face twisted in pain, his eyes narrowed and his brows furrowed.

"I'm not letting you go." I squeeze his wrists, pressing the metal of the pistol into his skin. He squints one eye shut as the edges dig into his flesh. My breathing quickens, my chest heaves with every breath, and my heart pounds with a mix of anger and

frustration.

Noah's eyes leave mine as he glances between us. Following his gaze, I find the pervert peeking into my drooping nightgown, under which I'm completely naked. A deep grunt rattles out of his chest, sending a shiver down my spine.

His gaze meets mine again and we stare into each other's eyes. His lips part and his breathing quickens, the sweet cinnamon scent of his toothpaste tickling my nose. His eyes flicker to my lips and I catch the moment he makes up his mind.

It all happens so fast. In a heartbeat, our lips collide, fighting for dominance. His tongue forces its way into my mouth and I moan at the intrusion. The kiss is desperate, a release of all the pent-up emotions.

A familiar heat pools in my core, the adrenaline only making it worse. With every throb of my muscles, my hips buck, my clit firm and begging for attention. My eyes widen and my mouth falls open with a loud gasp as he thrusts his hips up, his hard cock grinding against my aching cunt. He takes advantage of the moment and manhandles me, slamming me back into the sheets and sliding between my legs, pinning my hands back above my head. My mouth is still open as he rolls his hips into mine, the rhythmic pressure against my clit sending electric shock waves through my muscles.

"Look, you're nothing but my slutty Little Dove begging for my cock." He rolls his hips again and I let out another throaty moan. His words send a thrilling shiver down my spine.

"Fuck you!" I collect saliva on my tongue and spit in his face, earning a disapproving growl from him.

"Dove," he says, letting out a heavy breath, his nostrils flaring up with anger. "Do I

need to teach you some manners?"

"You're the one who needs to be taught manners." I tear my hand from his grip and raise the pistol to his head, pressing the still warm barrel against his temple. His eyebrows shoot up at the gesture and his lips curl into a devilish grin that follows a low chuckle.

"Huh?" he huffs as I press harder, then lowers himself on top of me, his forehead resting against mine. "Baby, you can point that pistol at me all you want. I'm not afraid. You know, when you threaten me, it only makes me harder and encourages me to fuck you until you forget your own damn name." I suck my lower lip between my teeth and stare back into his eyes, my core tightening with anticipation. "Come on, say it. Say you want to kill me." But instead I remain silent and drill the barrel harder into his temple. "Damn it, say it." He raises his voice and slams his fist into the mattress next to my head.

Keeping the pistol pressed to his temple, I fling my other arm around his shoulders and drag him down into another kiss driven by desperation. His response is just as eager.

One of his hands slips under my nightgown, pushing the fabric up and exposing my naked body. He cups one of my tits in his hand and pinches one of my hard nipples between his fingers, drawing a muffled, high-pitched moan from me.

Sinking my nails into his skin, I scratch down his back, tracing his spine until I reach his ass and push into his boxers, shoving the fabric down. Our movements become more frantic as we pull away from each other just long enough to yank off my nightgown and his boxers. The moment the few pieces of clothing are gone, we are at each other's throats again. Our limbs intertwine, caught in a ravenous kiss as we roll across the bed, both of us fighting for the pistol. We scratch, bite and punch, each move fueled by a mixture of passion and frustration.

Until he has me on my knees, my hands tied above my head by one of his belts, ass up in the air while one of his hands holds a fistful of my hair as he forces my head into the mattress and the other holding the gun to my skull. He kneels behind me, his cock between my thighs, rubbing against my dripping cunt with every subtle thrust. My hips buck every time he presses against my clit, the little bundle of nerves pulsing with need. "Will you give up?" His grip on my hair tightens, the pull stinging against my scalp, but I shake my head.

"No!" I scream, muffled by the pillow pressed up to my face.

A heavy sigh escapes his lips, and my eyes widen as he lowers the gun from my head. The cold metal of the barrel traces the curve of my back, glides between my cheeks, and brushes against my anus, until his cock slips from between my thighs. The warmth leaves me, replaced by the hard metal pressing against my cunt. "Still a no?" he asks, pushing the barrel between my soaked folds, up against my opening. My muscles flex, preventing him from easily pushing in.

"No—" Squeezing my eyes shut, my lips part in a loud, throaty moan as he forces it inside me. My cunt clenches around the cold, hard surface. My thighs quiver as my stomach tightens, every single muscle in my body throbbing as it tries to adjust to the pressure.

"Say that again," he dares, pushing the barrel deeper into me. I shove my face into the pillow, pulling at my restraints, trying to break his belt to fight back, but I'm at his mercy.

"No!" I scream nonetheless.

"Oh, my Dove." He chuckles, pulling back the barrel only to pump it back inside me. "Your cunt swallows the pistol so beautifully, sucking in the deadly threat so willingly." He continues, increasing the speed at which he drives it into me with a wet

sloppy sound. "If I pulled the trigger, you would explode so beautifully. Paint our bedroom crimson and create a masterpiece." The cold metal adapts to the temperature of my own body heat, making it less tormenting, but the hard surface scrapes against the soft flesh of my cunt, threatening to tear me apart every time he thrusts the barrel in.

"Noah," I moan out his name as I arch my back.

"Yes, just like that." He grunts and drives the gun deeper until the handle of the trigger hits my folds. "God, you're so beautiful, your cunt was made for this," he slurs as his hands begin to tremble, the pistol vibrating inside me, drumming against that one sweet spot inside me, pushing me closer to the edge.

"Fuck, I can't wait any longer," he says, then pulls the pistol out of me. The moment the hard object leaves me, a whimper escapes my throat at the loss of pleasure, but my muscles relax and my legs go limp as I slump into the mattress at the removal of the threat. But I have no time to relax as he lifts my hips back up and pushes a thick pillow underneath me before positioning himself behind me .

My mouth falls open as the tip of his cock pushes between my folds, locking onto my entrance, only to be followed by a deep, violent thrust as he forces himself into me. My body jerks forward and bounces back to meet him as he begins his violent assault on me. A series of high-pitched moans slips out of my throat, tears stinging the corners of my eyes as his hips slam into mine. The wet sound of our skin slapping against each other drowns out my screams and his animalistic grunts.

"Noah..." I call out his name between snotty moans, tears rolling down my cheeks. My body quivers and I cling to the sheets above my head, crying through the pleasure that drapes over me like a weighted blanket, crushing me. His cock slams into me violently, hammering repeatedly against my cervix, causing the muscles in my abdomen to cramp. I usually love pain, it takes me to heights I never want to miss

again, but it does not mix well with the high emotions of our current predicament. The intensity builds beyond what I can handle and makes this feel like a real assault as he forces himself on me with pure brutality.

"Pink," I gasp, my voice barely more than a whisper. "Noah, pink!" I repeat, crying out louder this time, the words echoing through the room, drowning out our animalistic cries. Pink —our safe word that doesn't mean a full stop, but a plea to change things up, to ease the overwhelming sensations that are becoming too much for me to bear.

His movements immediately come to a halt, and he slips out of me. His hand lets go of my hair; he loosens the belt around my wrists and sets me free. My heart leaps in my chest that even in such a moment he listens to my needs and comforts and does not just take from me.

I push myself up and put my hands to my face, wiping away the snot and tears. Through blurred vision, I see his eyebrows furrowed in concern, his Adam's apple bobbing as he swallows nervously. Unable to hold back the tears, I lunge at him, throwing my arms around his neck and slamming him back into the mattress. I land on top of him, straddling his hips and grinding along his cock as it rests against his abdomen.

His arms immediately fly around me, his big hands cupping my ass and squeezing it. I smash my lips against his, forcing my tongue into his mouth and the salty taste of my tears mixes on our tongues. Maintaining the feverish kiss, I lift my hips and slip a hand between us, holding him in place as the head of his cock presses against my opening and slides back into me with ease. Breaking the kiss, my mouth hangs open in a silent moan, our hot breaths mingling as I settle down on him .

"Please don't go," I gasp, rolling my hips. His cock fills me entirely as I take him all the way in, my muscles pulsing around him in waves.

He shakes his head, his lips brushing against mine. "It'll be okay."

I lift my hips slightly and let him slip out of me before I settle back down and push him back in. Shaking my head, I bump my forehead against his as my movements become bolder and I bounce on top of him. "No, you already failed once. What if you fail again?"

"What?" he grunts as my hips slam back down on him, forcing his cock inside me. His well-groomed pubic hair tickles my overly sensitive clit.

"You failed to kill me. I'm living proof that you're getting rusty," I say through high-pitched moans. "I'm your biggest failure."

His eyes widen and his fingers dig into the soft flesh of my ass, threatening to bruise my skin, before he suddenly flips me onto my back and takes his rightful place between my legs, but he doesn't continue his violent chase; he just stays buried inside me, filling me to the brim. He raises a hand to my head, his thumb brushing across my damp cheek. "You are not my biggest failure," he says in a threatening tone. The venom in his voice sends a nervous chill down my spine and makes the hair on the back of my neck stand up. "You are my biggest achievement." My heart leaps in my chest as tears stream down my face, heavier than before.

His lips connect with mine and I throw my arms around his shoulders, clutching at the short strands of his hair as he rolls his hips, pulling out only to drive back in. He's not as violent as before but still not gentle. Muffled by his tongue invading my mouth, moans vibrate within my throat. One of his hands creeps between us and rests on my pubic bone, his thumb finding my clit and flicking it, setting off fireworks in my abdomen.

My eyes fall shut as my orgasm builds, my whole body beginning to tremble. It washes over me like a flood, my muscles tightening and clutching him as he remains



buried inside me. I dig my nails into his scalp, holding on tightly.

He breaks the kiss and his lips brush against mine. "Good girl," he purrs and rolls his hips in a steady rhythm, penetrating me through my orgasm. "Never, and I mean never, again call yourself my biggest failure." He pushes in deeper, stuffing me with all he's got. His hips begin to stutter, and soon his muscles tense and his body goes rigid with a loud, deep moan. His cock pulsates inside me and the hot, soothing sensation of his cum filling me warms me from the inside out .

He lies down on top of me, crushing me under his weight and I wrap my legs around him, clinging to him as if he will disappear the moment I let go. I let my emotions free, my heart hammering against my ribcage as I cry into his shoulder while we hold each other, our limbs intertwined.

Only when my muscles relax do I loosen my grip, allowing him to pull away. Kneeling between my legs, he cups my face in his hands and runs his thumb over my cheekbones, wiping away my tears.

"I'm gonna run a bath, how does that sound?" I simply nod and he bends forward, placing a fleeting kiss on the tip of my nose before he climbs out of bed, covers me with my fluffy blanket before he disappears into the bathroom, and shortly after, the sound of running water fills the silence of our bedroom. I grab one of the pillows and hug it to my chest as my eyes land on the bullet hole in the ceiling again and I let out a heavy sigh.

A few minutes later, we're in the bathtub together. The soothing warmth of the hot water eases the tension from my muscles, and the foam of the lavender bubble bath surrounding us adds to the relaxing atmosphere. Noah is sitting behind me, with his head tilted back, resting on the soft cushion of the big tub. I sit between his spread legs, leaning against his broad chest as I sip the mixture of water and cranberry juice he made for me. One of his arms rests on the edge of the tub while the other is

wrapped around me with his palm resting on my belly.

With the tip of my finger, I trace the rough edges of one of the many raised, long scars on his arm. There are so many all over his body. I counted them once and came up with twenty-nine cuts or stab wounds, eight bullet holes and one large burn scar on his chest. They are reminders of his past. Of the countless hits he has carried out over the course of nearly nineteen long years. I was foolish to think that I could compete with that side of him, let alone completely tame it, no matter how hard I might try.

I push myself off his chest, place my cup on the edge of the tub, get on my knees and turn around to face him, splashing water on the bathroom floor. He lifts his head off the cushion and looks at me through hazy green eyes, fighting sleep. "Hm?" he hums.

"You can go," I say, and his eyebrows shoot up in confusion, forming deep lines on his forehead. "You will go, no matter what, we can fight and make it so much worse, or I will give you this opportunity. I fell in love with a killer. It was fucking naive of me to think I could change you so easily."

"Dove..."

"I love you for who you are. This is a part of you and if you need this, I can't stop you. "

A small smile plays on his lips. "Thank you," he says, pushing himself forward, his hands coming to rest on my thighs.

"Don't." I sigh and scoot closer, draping my legs over his thighs and wrap my arms around his shoulders.

"I promise you, this is the last. A clean cut. One that I have completely decided for myself."

I close my eyes and lean my forehead against his. "How long will you be gone?"

"A week at most, no more than that."

"Okay," I say quietly, suppressing the raging mixture of sadness and frustration simmering inside me. "Promise me that you will come home as soon as possible."

"The moment the body drops dead to the ground, I'm back in my car heading home."

Noah

The hinges creak as the heavy front door of my old house falls shut behind me. I take a deep breath, the cool late autumn air filling my lungs, the warmth of the setting sun tickling my face. Turning back, I look at the house—its dull brick facade, the windows dark and empty like soulless eyes staring back at me. I should have sold it the moment Evelyn and I moved away. The thought crosses my mind for what feels like the hundredth time since I got here three days ago.

Every time we come back to the city, we stay at Evelyn's old apartment. It's more convenient, closer to her friends and their usual hangout spots. Yet I still can't part with this old house and the memories it holds within its walls. I thought about keeping it for us, a place to stay during our regular trips to New York City, but that plan never materialized. Maybe it's about time to move on, to let it go for good.

The sound of a car's blaring horn startles me and drags me out of my thoughts. I whip around, turning my attention to the driveway, where I'm greeted by the familiar sight of Kyle getting out of our rental car. I take the two steps down and walk toward him, looking him up and down as he walks around the car.

"I never thought I'd see you actually wear a suit one day." I snatch the keys from his hand and walk around the car to the driver's side.

"First and last time. How do you wear those tight pants all day? They're fucking uncomfortable," he complains as he pulls open the passenger door.

"Mine are not too tight. Simple as that." Once in the driver's seat, I push the start

button and maneuver the car out of the driveway before stepping on the gas, keeping my eyes on the road.

"Jeans are much more comfortable and also more durable."

He is right about the durability part. In hand-to-hand combat, jeans are better. The chances of scarring your legs in a fall are slim. But I disagree on the comfort part; I don't like the rigid fabric against my skin. It feels rough, unyielding, and every time they shift, it's like sandpaper scraping against my skin. It's not just uncomfortable, it's irritating.

"Well, let's hope we don't have to fight anyone tonight. I wouldn't want your pretty knees to get scratched." I flash him a shit-eating grin.

"Fuck you." Kyle snorts and hits my shoulder.

The drive doesn't take too long and half an hour later I pull into the underground parking lot of the venue and park in the back of the dimly lit concrete halls. We still have some time before our contact arrives to take us to the event and introduce us to the inner circle. I unbuckle my seat belt and sink back into the leather, pulling my phone from the inner pocket of my suit jacket. With a tap on the screen, it flickers to life and shows a bunch of missed messages from Evelyn. Our chat pops up and shows all her messages as soon as I unlock it. She has a habit of not writing everything in one text, but breaking up whatever she has to say into multiple small texts. Most people find this irritating, I find it endearing.

Dove: Good Morning

Dove: Today is the day!

Dove: I miss you

Dove: Good luck and take care

Dove: Can't wait to have you back home!

Dove: I love you!

A series of pictures follows and a small smile creeps across my face as I flip through the images. They are of casual things like her breakfast, the morning sun in our backyard, my doves, and...

"She's got a great ass, you're lucky," Kyle says, leaning over the middle console, staring at my phone. I immediately press the button on the side and the screen turns off before I shoot a glare in his direction.

"Don't push your luck."

"It's not my fault that you're looking at her lewd pictures when I'm sitting right next to you." He props his arm on the center console, resting his chin in the palm of his hand.

"I hate you."

"No, you don't, brother ."

"I should have refused your parents' offer to adopt me back then."

"Oh, come on. You love Mom and Dad, and without them you would have become an erratic serial killer who would have ended up on death row."

"There are times when I wonder if this would have been a better choice."

"No, it wouldn't. You love your fucked up life, especially since you found Evelyn."

You have never been happier, or whatever emotion you feel in the name of happiness." He chuckles before his eyes dart back to my phone. "Question about her, what are you going to do as your grand gesture for allowing you to do the job?"

I sigh and lean back in my seat, rubbing my eyes through my closed lids. "I've been thinking about taking our relationship to the next level."

"And what would that be?"

"Ask her to marry me." I open my eyes again and look at Kyle.

"Marriage? You?" Kyle's jaw drops and his eyebrows shoot up as he looks at me in utter disbelief.

"Yes. Me taking this job has made her question my commitment to our relationship, and I want to show her that I want to spend the rest of my life with her."

"That's very noble. But marriage? Really?"

"Why are you so surprised?"

"Because you are... you ." A lopsided smile finds its way to his lips. "You never really cared about serious relationships. Hell, the thought of love, affection and anything genuine with women gave you the ick."

"Yeah, but it just feels right. And she deserves a happy ending. "

" She sure does," Kyle says before turning his attention to the rearview mirror. I do the same, watching as someone pushes through the heavy doors that lead to a fire escape.

"Is that our guy?" I ask.

"Yeah, that's him." Kyle reaches for the door handle, but I grab his arm and stop him.

"How did you meet him again?" I furrow my brows as I watch the man nervously check the watch on his wrist, his eyes darting around the parking lot.

"Our client set him up, had him infiltrate them a few months ago for information."

"And are you sure we can trust him? Because he seems nervous."

Kyle sighs and pushes my hand off of him. "Yes, we can. I did my job. Background check, everything, trust me."

"Good, then let's go."

As Kyle gets out of the car, I type a quick message to Evelyn and drop my personal phone in the car's glove compartment before getting out and trailing after him. I tug at the hem of my suit jacket to straighten the wrinkled fabric as we approach the man waiting for us. Kyle greets him enthusiastically, as if they were friends, even though he only knows one of his alternate identities. They exchange a few pleasantries until the guy's attention shifts to me and the nervousness returns to his face, his brows furrowed, as his eyes dart back and forth between us.

"And who are you?" he asks.

"The infamous White Dove Killer, as requested by Mr. Bloom," Kyle responds on my behalf, throwing one of his arms around my shoulders.

"Does he have a name?"



"Names are not important to the job," I say, keeping my face stern and emotionless.

"Names are important for good collaboration and trust," the guy pushes, and I shoot a glare at Kyle, who gives me his customary shrug.

"I don't trust you yet."

"I guess I can't blame you." The guy shrugs and turns away from us, heading for the door he came from. "We should probably get going before someone sees us and gets suspicious."

While Kyle walks beside him, engaging in small talk, I back off, staying a few feet behind to watch for any suspicious behavior. I don't like working with others. The only one I tolerate is Kyle. I trust him. He is good at his job and usually, with a few exceptions, he gets his shit done properly.

After three flights of stairs, the man pushes through another door into a humid, stuffy hallway. Kyle follows without a care in the world. But something smells fishy. "Hey, Kyle." I raise my hand and place it on his shoulder. He stops, but before he can turn and look at me, a small tranquilizer hits the back of his neck just inches from my hand.

"Fuck," he hisses, reaching for the pin and ripping it out of his skin, but it's too late and he slumps to the floor. I catch him in the middle of his fall and put him on the ground before I quickly draw my two pistols, aiming one at our contact and the other in the direction from which the tranquillizer came.

"You fucking traitor," I hiss at the man, pushing myself to my feet, ready to pounce when the door to the staircase behind me flies open and two men rush in. Acting quickly, I spin on my heel and charge in their direction. I collide headfirst with one of them, ramming my shoulder into his chest, wrapping my arms around his stomach

and hurling him over my shoulder.

As I spin around, ready to pounce on the next guy, he is already in the middle of his jump, lunging at me and knocking me off my feet. My body collides with the concrete floor as the man drives a punch straight into my face. I groan in pain, squeezing my eyes shut. But instead of giving up, I thrust my hips up, knocking the man to the ground and tumbling on top of him. I wrap my fingers around his throat and begin to squeeze. My heart hammers against my chest, pumping adrenaline through my veins as I squeeze harder and harder. The man's eyes bulge, the veins in his temple throb and his face turns crimson. A sinister satisfaction rushes through me as life slips from the man's eyes.

A pair of hands lands on my shoulders, yanking me off him and slamming me to the ground. Followed by three more men throwing themselves at me. I groan, trying to push myself to my feet, trying to break free, but I'm shoved back down and the last thing I see is a man's foot coming at my face.

I let out a long, painful moan as consciousness creeps back to me. My brain is clouded with dizziness as the room spins around me while my limbs feel heavy but weightless at the same time. I raise my hand to my face, tracing the outlines of the pulsing pain, inspecting my cheeks and nose, feeling the bone out of place under my fingertips. Great, my nose is broken.

I take a deep breath but choke on the moist air. The lingering stench of mold on concrete burns my lungs. Resting my hands on the floor, I push myself up into a sitting position. The room is dark, the only source of light being the crack in the door, filtering in a narrow strip of bluish moonlight .

Looking around, I spot the silhouette of someone else lying on the ground. It takes a while for my eyes to adjust to the darkness, but eventually I make out Kyle's features. I scoot over to him, grab his shoulder and give him a shake. "Hey idiot, wake up."

Thankfully, he does, groaning as he squirms and pushes himself up to his knees.

"What happened?" he asks in a hoarse voice.

"We walked right into a trap. Good job." I pat him on the back before getting up and taking another look around the room. There is nothing to give away where we are. The only useful information is the light filtering through the door, indicating that it's night.

"Like you would have done it better."

"Of course. Because I would not have trusted an outsider."

A pair of strong hands land on my shoulder, tossing me around and shoving me back until Kyle has me pinned against the wall. My muscles flex and I reach for my chest, ready to aim my pistol at him for the sudden confrontation. But my holster is gone.

"Our fucking client is the one who set up the contact. You really think my first instinct is that someone we have a history with would betray us? "

"Don't touch me," I force out through gritted teeth, glaring at him. "But you're right. Also arguing won't help us now, we have to get out of here." I shove him away and step out of his reach. I pat myself down, looking for anything, but they took everything that could be used as a weapon. "They even took my fucking belt," I point out with a sigh.

Kyle does the same. "Those bastards," he grunts. "What are we going to do now, Mr. I Know Better?"

I approach the door, grab the handle, push and pull, but to no one's surprise, the door is locked. Obviously. "I guess we have to wait for someone to come back for now," I

say, turning back to face Kyle. There's not much we can do now. We're trapped and as annoying as it is, we have to stay calm. Going for each other's throats is what they would like to see. Maybe one of us will kill the other and then they will only have one left to deal with.

At the sound of vents opening, we both tilt our heads up to find a faint mist raining from the sprinklers. I lower my head and meet Kyle's gaze. We both raise our eyebrows and let out yet another heavy sigh. I guess we're not done with our beauty sleep yet.

*Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 6:48 am*

Noah

"Look who we have here." A man's voice snaps me out of my haze. The room spins all around me as my eyes burn, my vision blurred by the dried contact lenses still stuck in my eyes. I lift my head to look at the source of the voice entering the dim room, stepping out of a bright, fuzzy light.

I let out a low moan as another punch slams into my stomach; the man in charge of watching me has been using me as a punching bag for hours now. The chair I'm tied to rocks back and forth, just barely staying up. Once I'm free, this bastard will wish he'd never laid a hand on me. I will make his death one of the worst on my record.

"It's a pleasure to finally meet you, the famous Dove Killer, tied up and suffering after all these years." Long fingers wrap around my chin, jerking my head back. After blinking a few times, I manage to focus on the man through my lenses, and slowly but surely his face clears.

Fuck, that's our target. Ash Lancaster .

"What do you want?" I ask, my voice hoarse.

"Good question." He releases my face and I observe him pacing up and down in front of me. "Perhaps revenge?" he asks sarcastically.

"For your sorry excuse of a father?" I spat, an amused chuckle breaking out of my chest.

"He was indeed a sorry excuse of a man. But powerful, influential. Building an empire no one would be able to destroy," he explains as he approaches me, cupping my face in his palms and forcing me to look at him up close.

"He went crazy, became reckless and was a danger to all of New York's criminals," I say through gritted teeth.

"He was a monster," he spits into my face, and I squeeze my eyes shut as the clot of saliva hits my cheek. "But he was still my father, and you took everything from us. Our family, our livelihood...everything." His fingers dig into my skin.

"I couldn't care less," I snort, raising my eyebrows.

I never cared who I killed or what their background was. It's the targets' own fault for dragging their families, often innocent people, into their mess and throwing away their loved ones because of their own idiotic decisions .

"Then you don't care that we're going to kill you and your friend because you're a monster just like my father?" He quirks an eyebrow and pushes my head back.

"Where is he?"

"Worried? He will be taken care of, just like you."

"I'm going to fucking kill you," I snarl and glare at him, but he just bursts out laughing.

"They say you are a friend of torture, am I right?" He flashes me a vicious smile.

I can't help it and my lips curl into a grin. "Sure, show me what you got," I dare them. I can take a lot; I have learned to endure more pain than the average man and have

pushed myself to limits that most would find unbearable. A little torture won't break me that easily. "Let's have some fun."

My lungs flutter violently, fighting for air. The room is rotating around me from the lack of oxygen reaching my lungs and brain. Adrenaline is pumping through my veins, the heat of it fighting the freezing cold that is swallowing me. The chair I'm strapped to is on the floor, collapsed backwards. A thick piece of fabric is draped over my face as they continue to hose me down. My whole body is shaking, my muscles tense, twitching as I fight to stay conscious. Finally, the water stops and the man responsible for my torture pulls the wet cloth from my face. My mouth falls open and I gasp for air, my lungs inflating, oxygen rushing back into my body, through my blood and into my brain.

The taste of bile creeps up my throat, flooding my mouth, and I rock violently from side to side until I'm far enough and can let go of what's left of the contents of my stomach with a loud retching gasp.

Fighting for air, my eyes land on Ash Lancaster, who has been watching the whole show, sitting in a chair a few feet away, enjoying my torture, but growing increasingly frustrated. The image of him is shaky, flickering as it mixes with memories bubbling to the surface, hidden in the depths of my mind.

He occasionally snaps at his men, yells at them, and his constant frown reveals his annoyance. He certainly did not expect me to be able to handle so much. But I'm not a pussy who can only dish it out; I can also take it very well.

My focus shifts back to the ceiling where I had found a small spot of mold, a point to focus on through the agony, my anchor to keep me from going insane .

"That's enough for today," Mr. Lancaster's voice echoes through the room as he snaps. "I don't want him to die just yet." Die? Me? Well, they can try.

"What are we going to do with him?" one of the men responsible for my torture speaks, and my attention shifts to him.

"Leave him tied to the chair, just put him back up, I don't want him to choke on his vomit," is the last thing he says before he walks away. Next, my body is lifted off the floor before the men surrounding me exit the room, leaving me to fend for myself.

They all just signed their death certificates.



## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 6:48 am*

Evelyn

Forty-eight hours.

"Thanks, I'll let you know if I hear anything," I say with a shaky voice, desperately holding myself together not to burst into tears again. I lower the phone from my ear and press the red button that ends the call. Kyle's mom and I have been in contact for the last twenty-four hours as they haven't heard from him either and are worried. Looking down, I find that the screen has jumped back to my chat with Noah, displaying his last text message to me.

Noah : I love you too. Will be home at around six. Sleep well.

I had set my alarm for five a.m., got up, prepared his favorite breakfast, got all dressed up, and waited and waited and waited. But he never came. At ten a.m., I tried to call him for the first time, thinking he was stuck in traffic, but he didn't pick up. I tried texting and the messages went through, but he never read them. Around seven p.m. his phone shut off and since then my calls have gone straight to voicemail and my messages don't get delivered. It's the same with Kyle; calls and messages went through until last night, but now they're stuck in a loop.

He's never been gone this long without a word. During all the hits he had to complete before we moved, he always made sure to stay in touch with me.

Tears sting in the corners of my eyes as I curl into myself, clutching my phone. Shortly after his last message, I had a strange feeling. I blamed it on my nerves or the excitement of him coming home soon. But what if my gut was trying to tell me that

something was wrong?

My chest burns with every erratic beat of my heart. My body shakes with each sob as I let go of my emotions and let them roll off my shoulders. "You fucking idiot!" I scream, high-pitched and full of distress, as I throw my phone across the sofa.

I was right all along, and yet these two idiots fooled me into thinking that everything would be fine. I let them talk over me, blinded by the fact that they hadn't really failed any jobs over the years. Except for me. I'm the first job he has ever truly failed. The thought keeps replaying in my mind. His perfect record— clean, efficient, flawless— shattered the moment he decided he chose me over his reputation. My mind spirals, each thought darker than the last. What if I set his downfall in motion?

At the sound of nervous wing flapping, my head jerks up, and with the sleeve of my sweater, I wipe away the tears and snot before looking over to the big birdcage in the corner of our living room. Inside is one of Noah's oldest doves, Penelope. He had brought her in days before he left because she was egg bound. He took care of her and asked me to keep an eye on her in case she starts acting differently.

"Sorry, little one." I push myself off the sofa and walk over to the cage, open the small door and let her out. She immediately begins to flap her wings and flies aimlessly around the living room, looking for a place to settle down. Until she finally lands on the back of the sofa where Noah usually sits when we watch movies.

My eyes move from Penelope to my phone on top of the decorative pillows. At the sight of the Polaroid picture of us in my clear phone case, a sharp pain shoots through my chest, like a knife stabbing right through my heart. There must be something I can do. Think, Evelyn, think.

Circling the coffee table, I pick up my phone, swipe my finger across the screen to unlock it, go to my call log, and press Noah's contact again, holding my phone to my

ear, but like all the times before, it never rings. Instead, it goes straight to voicemail stating that the number I'm trying to reach is not available.

With a sigh, I lower my phone and scroll through the contacts I've called in the last twenty-four hours. Including Noah, Kyle, Kyle's mom and dad. My fingers stop over one particular contact from a few months back. Riley. I haven't spoken to her in forever. The last time we talked, I just told her that I was able to get rid of the White Dove Killer and that I was safe, but I never told her how and why.

Closing my eyes, I take a deep breath before pressing her contact and the screen switches to call. I lift the phone to my ear, sit down and wait for her to pick up. As always, after about five rings, she answers.

"Evelyn!" she yells from the other end, and I lift the phone from my ear for a second.

"Hi to you too, Riley," I say, my eyes focusing on my lap where I nervously pick at the fabric of my leggings.

"How have you been?" she asks excitedly.

"Good, how are you? How is work?" I try to sound as normal as I can .

"The last few months have been fantastic," she blurts out. "Since you said you got rid of the Dove Killer, no one has heard from him. Are you sure you didn't kill him by accident?"

I can't help but chuckle. "I'm one hundred percent sure I didn't kill him."

"Well, then maybe you bruised his fragile ego." She snickers.

"No, I definitely didn't." I sigh and Riley falls silent for a moment on the other end.

"Evelyn, are you sure everything is alright?" Her voice is soft, laced with a hint of concern.

"No, there's something I have to tell you."

"What is it? Please don't tell me he's back."

"No. It's something else, but it has to do with him."

"What?" The tone of her voice changes from soft and concerned to confusion and irritation.

I close my eyes and take a deep breath, letting the air out of my lungs with a deep sigh before I speak again. "The reason no one has heard from him in the last few months is because we are dating and he stopped working because of me."

"What?!" Riley yells at me and I lift the phone from my ear, still able to hear her perfectly. "And you didn't tell me this the last time we talked?"

"No, because it's not that easy."

"Well, you 're not wrong about that." She sighs. "You know I have to tell the boss about this, right?"

"No!" I jump to my feet, clutching my phone.

"There is no way I can keep this a secret; you know what he will do if he finds out, let alone that I know about it and keep it from him."

"Riley, please, I will tell him...eventually."

"Oh, really?" The drop in her voice makes her sound like she doesn't believe me.

"Yes?"

"Huh," she hums. "You're not calling just for that reason. What else is going on, Evelyn?"

"Nothing. It was just that," I mutter. Yes, my main goal with this call was to see her reaction when she finds out the truth. Although it could have been worse, I'm not sure if I should tell her what's going on. I can ask her to keep my relationship a secret for a while, but not that he has vanished from the face of the earth. This is vital information, important to many people in the business, and the boss would need to know.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I wanted to be honest with you because this has been bothering me for a while."  
"

"Okay," she says. The usual spark in her voice is back but laced with suspicion. "But if there is anything I can do for you, anything, call me. We will find a way."

I nod and a small smile spreads across my face. "I know, thanks for that."

"Of course, you're one of my best friends."

## Page 13

*Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 6:48 am*

Noah

Pain.

Excruciating pain shoots through every single fiber of my body with every movement of the man forcing himself on me. His hand on the back of my skull keeps my face buried in the cushion, silencing my desperate pleas, my cries for someone, anyone, to come and save me.

My shoulders strain from my hands being tied behind my back. The ropes holding my wrists together cut into my skin, preventing me from fighting back. Even though I gave up fighting a long time ago, it only makes things worse. It drags it out and excites the men to hurt me even more.

"You're doing great, Noah," my foster mother's supposedly friendly voice interrupts the man's grunts, which ripple through my body in wild, terrifying waves, drowning me in the depths of darkness. My stomach churns, nausea creeping up my throat, as the clear image of her sitting in her chair across the room, watching over me to make sure I don't upset the man, flashes before my mind's eye.

The man is here once a week when his wife and daughter, who happens to be my classmate, are out of the house. He pays my foster mother a ton of money to act out his fantasies on a young boy.

But there is a problem: I'm growing out of it. I'm sixteen now, puberty is taking its toll and I'm turning into a man faster than they'd like and he's losing interest. That means my salvation is within reach, but my freedom means someone else's nightmare

is creeping up on them, ready to drag them into the same hell I've been in for years.

Tears sting in the corners of my eyes, soaking into the soft surface of the pillow pressed against my face. My mouth is stuffed with the fabric, muffling the painful groans every time the man forces himself on me.

Even after all these years it still hurts. No matter how much I try to prepare, it's never enough and every time I'm left bruised and bleeding for days.

My eyes widen and my heartbeat quickens, panic surging through every cell of my body as the man's movements become frantic, knowing exactly what horror will follow as he pins me to the mattress...

I can't take this any longer.

My eyes flutter open and my heart races, pounding against my chest in a violent rhythm. My breaths come in ragged gasps, the taste of bile creeping up my throat, filling my mouth. Cold sweat trickles down the back of my neck and my eyes dart around the dimly lit room. Oh God, thank you... I'm not a child anymore. I'm not with them anymore.

I take a deep, shaky breath and toss my head back. It's been years since I had my last nightmare about that time in my life. Years since I thought about it in a detailed way. This situation is messing with my head.

I've lost track of how many unconscious and conscious sessions, plagued by nightmares, I've gone through at this point, and even if I had been able to keep track, I have no idea how long I've been out. If it was enough for a full break or just a few short minutes. The room I'm in has no windows, which means I have no idea what time of the day it is outside my prison. My only source of keeping track of time is when the men responsible for my torture arrive and they seem to come at regular

intervals. They bring food and water three times a day, but it's always the same meal, so there's no way to guess when I'm having breakfast, lunch, or dinner.

Sitting on the concrete floor with my back against the cold, damp wall and my shoulders slumped, I tip my head forward and look around the room. The floor is smeared with a thick mixture of my bodily fluids, including vomit and blood. With a heavy sigh, I throw my head back and hit the wall again. My focus lands on the spot of mold on the ceiling that has become my anchor point through torture sessions and all the countless sleepless hours.

Kyle—no, I fucked up. I should have been more involved with our client. I should have been more involved with our contact. I have always been wary of strangers in my business; that is why I killed everyone who dared to cross my path. But of course, the one time I trust someone because of a shared history, it ends up like this.

When I close my eyes again, images of Evelyn flash before my inner eye. My beautiful Dove. You were right. As always, you were right. How could I have been so blind? How could I have missed that something was fishy while she, without knowing anything about the job, had a bad feeling about the whole ordeal from the get go?

I raise my hand and run my fingers through the greasy strands of my hair. I miss her. I want to go home, make it up to her, show her that she was right and that I am an idiot. She must be going crazy worrying about me, or perhaps she is celebrating that she was right. No, I doubt it. I know her, my precious and soft Dove, so full of love. She is worried, probably angry too, fuming. When I get home, I will surely walk straight into a new nightmare. But this one will be without physical pain, this one will leave no scars.

The sound of dull footsteps hitting the concrete floor snaps me out of my thoughts and my attention shifts to the locked door. Someone is coming. From the sound of the



footsteps and the absence of the usual chatter, it is only one person, which means it is time to eat. I've been waiting for this exact moment.

I rise to my feet and in about two long strides, reach the door, slipping into the shadows where it will swing open. I glance down at my left hand, which is blue and swollen. It throbs with a dull, persistent pain with every pulse of my heart. Besides that, I've lost all other feeling in it, but I'll make it work. The rope burn around my wrists is raw, with deep lines carved into the flesh and still slick with a faint sheen of blood—the result of frantic pulling against the restraints when I broke free.

Once the door swings open, I remain in my position, hidden in the darkness, waiting for the guy to walk by. He drops the bag of bread and the water bottle as soon as he doesn't spot me. Before he has a chance to call for help, I burst out of hiding, sling my left arm around his throat, and bring my right up to his face, digging my fingers into his eyes so hard they pop .

With a painful groan, the man pushes back, knocking me into the wall. I flinch, let go, put my hands on his shoulders and push him forward, tackling him to the ground. He struggles, but I have the upper hand. The adrenaline dulls the pain radiating from my left hand, and I wrap my fingers around his throat and squeeze, crushing his Adam's apple under my palms. His hands snap to my arms, but I don't let go, squeezing harder and harder, his eyes bulging, the vein in his temple popping. The pulse under my fingertips slows until it fully stops, his limbs dropping to the floor.

It is only when I am sure that he is dead that I let go of him and settle down on his stomach with a heavy sigh. Step one is done.

I pat him down, looking for his gun, and find it in the waistband of his jeans. Idiots, they all are idiots and only strong because they are in a group. Glancing down at the pistol in my right hand, I wrap my fingers around the handle and put one on the trigger, ready to shoot. I'd prefer to use my left hand, my dominant one, but this will

have to do for now.

I approach the door with slow steps, lean against the frame and peer out to see if anyone is there, but the hallway is completely empty. Pushing forward, I tiptoe to the next corner and back up against the wall before taking a peek. I have to find the exit. Quickly.

Just before the next turn, loud voices echo through the building, booming through the concrete building. I press my back against the wall, hiding out of sight. A quick glance around the corner reveals two men standing by a door leading to the outside. Looking past them, my eyes fall on the starry night sky. I pause for a moment as the breeze of fresh air wraps around me, allowing my lungs a break from the stench I've been breathing for days.

I close my eyes and take another deep breath. It's now or never. With a big step, I jump out of hiding, raise the pistol, and with perfect aim, shoot. The explosion thunders through the night as the first bullet pierces one of the men's skulls. Blood and brains splatter all over the other one standing next to him.

"Hey!" he yells and whirls around, launching himself in my direction. Pulling the trigger two more times, I fire at him, the bullets hitting his shoulder, and he stops in his tracks, staggering back. "You son of a bitch," he hisses through gritted teeth.

Fuck.

My eyes land on the door where two more men are now blocking my exit. I guess this is going to be more of a fight than I thought. I raise my left hand to the handle and wrap my fingers around my right hand for support, gripping the pistol tight.

Dove, I'm coming home.

Evelyn

I inhale deeply and take a drag on the cigarette, the burning yet surprisingly soothing nicotine filling my lungs and easing the emotional pain. Personally, I don't like smoking, I've never understood the appeal. But I don't mind it on others, especially Noah, because it's part of him, it's part of his unique smell.

I pull my legs closer to my chest and twirl the cigarette between my fingers, careful not to drop any ash on our sheets. Ever since we moved here, I refused to let him smoke in the bedroom. I would yell at him if he even just hurried across the room to the balcony with one on. But now I miss him being the source of it. I miss him spreading it around the house, leaving his mark.

Resting my chin on my knees, I take one last deep drag on the cigarette before stubbing it out in the ashtray in front of me. I watch closely as the gray smoke rises from the tip of the cigarette and the tiny embers fizzle out. Then I turn to my nightstand, reach for the glass of whiskey next to the nearly empty bottle, and take a sip. I've been trying to imitate his smell, mixing cigarettes, whiskey, his cologne, but no matter how much I use, it doesn't work; his own unique touch is missing.

Tears well up in the corners of my eyes and I fall back onto the pillows, burying my face in the soft collar of his button-up shirt. The one he wore the day before he left. It doesn't smell much like him anymore, not after I've been wearing it since the day he left for New York, but just the thought of him having worn it me brings me a sense of peace while I'm spiraling further.

I should get up. I should do something, anything. But where do I start? My mind is a

maze of panic and confusion, with every thought leading to a dead end down a dark tunnel. The only things helping me calm the raging storm are the familiar taste of whiskey and cigarettes.

The walls of our room close in on me, suffocating in their familiarity. I roll onto my side, grab one of his pillows and wrap my arms and legs around the fluffy cushion. His side of the bed remains untouched, a haunting reminder of his absence. The sheets desperately need to be washed as well, but the thought of washing away the remains of him makes me sick. Closing my eyes, I take a deep breath and the faint remnants of his scent fill my lungs. My heart flutters, pumping a familiar warmth through my body .

Rubbing my thighs together, the seam of the pillow rubs against my cunt and I let out a soft whine. His intoxicating smell wraps around me like a soft warm blanket and my mind fills with images of him. My breathing quickens, and before I realize what I'm doing, I roll my hips, grinding into the pillow, relishing in the friction of the seam against my clit. My lips part in a quiet moan as I hump the pillow, chasing his scent, chasing the thrill, chasing him.

One of my hands slips between my legs, gripping the pillow and providing more resistance. Loud moans escape my lips as I find the perfect angle pushing against my clit. My other hand slips under my shirt, cupping one of my tits, squeezing the soft bump and pinching my swollen nipple.

My mouth falls open in another loud moan. I flatten three of my fingers to create a firm base for friction and continue my chase. Rocking my hips back and forth into the pillow, I grind into my fingers. I alternate between squeezing my tit and rolling my nipple between my fingers. A series of erratic whines slips from my throat as I hump the pillow in a feverish, uneven and desperate rhythm. Images of Noah flash before my inner eye, of him watching me as I pleasure myself just for him, of him losing his cool and lunging at me, unable to resist his primal instincts and taking me .

After another roll of my hips, a weak orgasm surges through me. My muscles tighten, my whole body trembles, and I clench my thighs around the pillow. The relief of the sensation calms the violent storm in my mind. The thunder dies down to a soft trickle of rain. My muscles loosen and I sink into the sheets, ready to let sleep take over, at least for a little while.

But just as I'm about to drift off, my phone beeps with the familiar notification sound from our surveillance system. I push myself into a sitting position and reach for my phone. The moment the screen flickers to life, I see the time. It's two a.m., it's probably just an animal sneaking around the house, maybe trying its luck with the doves. I still open the app, just in case something really tries to break into the aviary.

The screen jumps to the camera that sent the alert. Seeing what—no, who—it is, my heartbeat quickens and I hurl my phone to the side, leap out of bed, and charge downstairs, tripping over my own feet from the panic boiling inside of me. I slam into the front door, before I reach for the handle and yank it open.

And there he is.

Kyle.

I look him up and down through tear-fogged eyes. His face is battered, a black eye, a broken nose. His arm is resting in a slip. Without saying a word, I push past him, jump down the porch and run down our driveway to where his car is parked, but he is nowhere to be seen. I spin back around and find Kyle who has followed me down the driveway. His face betrays him; deep lines of guilt, pain and remorse crease his forehead, his eyes dull, having lost all their spark.

"Where is he?" I barely manage to utter the few words through the tears rolling down my cheeks. Kyle tilts his head forward, avoiding my eyes as he remains silent. I lunge at him, slamming my hands into his chest, shoving him back. "Where is he?!" I raise

my voice and yell at him, the word echoing through the cold night air.

"I don't know..." His voice is so quiet I can barely hear him over my own loud sobs.

My bottom lip quivers as I take one last look around the driveway, hoping this is just a sick joke, that he is hiding somewhere, that he is behind a tree to surprise me, but there is no one beside us. I raise my hand and wipe my face with the sleeves of the button-up. "Get inside. Now!" I urge and Kyle follows my request.

Once in our living room, I go to Noah's whiskey cabinet, fling open the door, grab one of the expensive bottles, unscrew the cap, and take a shot straight from the bottle. I close my eyes, feeling the alcohol sting in my throat, and take a deep breath before turning to face Kyle. He stands awkwardly in the middle of the living room, shifting his weight from one leg to the other as he watches me.

"Are you drunk?" He asks with genuine concern in his voice.

"It's none of your fucking business." I snap before I can stop myself, the words coming out louder than I intended. My outburst rings in my ears, setting the room around me in motion, or maybe it's just my head. "What happened?" I manage to ask, my voice a little shaky.

Kyle gestures to the sofa. "Sit down."

"I'm fine," I lie, stumbling over the words as I raise my free hand and rub my eyes, hoping to ease the dizziness.

"Evelyn, please."

Sighing in defeat, I follow his request and sit down on the edge of the sofa, my grip on the neck of the bottle remaining firm. Watching him through still slightly blurry,

tear-filled eyes, I listen to the story. With each sentence that describes what has happened to him over the past few days, another piece of my heart breaks, sending a wave of grief through me, and I realize that Noah is likely going through the same thing right now.

"How did you get away?" I ask as soon as Kyle is done.

"Thanks to a drunk idiot who forgot to lock my cell one night, I was able to slip away."

"And Noah?"

"I have no idea. I tried to look for him, but he wasn't in the same place as me."

I set the bottle down on the coffee table and curl into myself, burying my face in the palms of my hands. When a strong hand lands on my shoulder and gives it a reassuring squeeze, I flinch. "Is he dead?" I ask, muffled by the hands pressed to my face.

"Possibly..."

My breath hitches in my throat while my body collapses. My chest burns, seething with pain as my heart feels like it will burst at any second. The image of his dead, lifeless face, his green eyes losing all their brightness, flashes before my mind's eye. Kyle squats down in front of me, wraps his arm around my shoulders and pulls me into a hug.

My pain morphs into anger and I snap. I pull myself up, put my hands on his shoulders and shove him away from me. "Don't you even dare trying to comfort me!" I yell at him through heavy sobs, tears rolling down my cheeks. "You're the one who took him away from me!" I push myself off the sofa and hurl one of the pillows at

him. "If he is dead, it's your fault!" He doesn't dodge the pillow and just accepts the blow .

"Evelyn." He stands up again and takes a step toward me, but I fling another pillow at him.

" You took him from me. You are the one who will bring him back," I scream, my voice hoarse from the countless shed tears of the past few days.

"What if he's dead?"

"I don't care, you will bring him back to me, dead or alive ," I warn him. "But for your own sake, I hope he is still alive."

"What if not?"

"You are going to wish they had killed you too, because you are going to join him in hell sooner than you wished, and I am going to make your death as painful for you as it is for me to lose him."

Kyles sighs and then nods. "I will bring him back, I promise." He offers me a weak smile. As glad as I am that Kyle is alive and well, that his parents have him back, I don't want him; I don't need him. I only need Noah.

My body trembles as I can't hold in the emotions anymore and I let go. The tension rolls off my shoulders with each wave of tears. His hand lands on my shoulder and he pulls me closer, wrapping his arm around me and holding me close to his chest. This time I let him and wrap my arms around his middle, sinking my fingers into the thick fabric of his sweatshirt.

He smells so much like Noah, a hint of cigarettes mixed with the familiar cologne



they both use. I tighten my arms around him, embracing the warmth that radiates off his body and the comforting scent that drapes over me like a cozy blanket. If I close my eyes, if I try hard enough, I can fool myself into believing that this is Noah holding me. That he is back home with me.

Evelyn

The living room is a mess. Kyle and I turned Noah's entire office upside down, dug through every cabinet and drawer, searched through all of his belongings until we found all of his electronics. If Noah knew what we had done, he would be furious. His office is his private sanctuary, where he can retreat when he needs time to himself. Unless he's in there making calls or arrangements, I don't often go in there.

My head is still throbbing with the remnants of a hangover, but I push the discomfort aside. Even though I told Kyle it was his responsibility to bring Noah home, seeing him gave me the push I needed to crawl out of my hole, and I'm not going to let him do it alone. With him here, I have a starting point, and if I want this done right, I need to be involved.

Now we're sitting on the sofa, surrounded by his paperwork, his two laptops, tablets and additional phones, in the process of booting up all of his devices. In front of me is the notepad where he wrote down all his passwords for me and what they belong to. While Kyle goes through the phones, checking for recent calls, I browse through the laptops until I find the folder with all the information on Mr. Lancaster and a link providing live access to the man's private calendar.

"Kyle, I found something," I say, and he immediately scoots closer, pressing into my side as he leans over me to steal a glance at the screen. I click on the entry for this coming Friday and for that night he has a memo for a private gala event along with details about it all.

"We need tickets for that," Kyle says, pointing at the screen where the notes mention

the tickets.

"We have to get into this event somehow." I sigh and click on the comment Noah made in his notes about the calendar. The window pops up with a list of people's names, including how many tickets there are for each person. I mindlessly scroll through the names as if I might find something useful, and then, as if my prayers have been answered, two particular names catch my attention. My heart leaps in my chest and I immediately start digging through the chaos on the sofa, looking for my own phone.

"What are you doing?" Kyle asks but I ignore him, find my phone and immediately search for a specific number. Her words echo through my mind. If there is anything I can do for you, anything, call me. We will find a way. If anyone can help us, it's her. "Who are you calling?" He furrows his eyebrows, but I raise my index finger to my mouth, telling him to be quiet as my phone begins to ring with a video call and I prop the device against the laptop screen in front of me.

After the usual five torturous long beeps, the person on the other line picks up and a smile spreads across my face as her familiar freckled face, framed by shiny copper hair, pops up on the screen.

"Eevee," she sings, dragging out my nick name as her voice blasts from the speaker. "How have you been?"

"Hey Riley, please don't ask..." I chuckle nervously. "I'm sorry for calling again, but—"

"You need my help?" she cuts me off with a grin on her face.

"How can you tell?" I furrow my brows.

"You look exhausted, the circles under your eyes don't do you any favors, and," she draws out the last word, "that handsome gentleman peering over your shoulder is most likely not the psycho you call your boyfriend. He is not your type at all." She laughs and I turn to see Kyle looming over me, curiously looking at my phone.

I shove him aside. "No, that's actually his best friend. He's..." I turn to look at Kyle. "Do you have a nickname?"

"Hell no, Noah's the weirdo who does that shit with the doves for fun. I'm not really known for anything."

"So the Dove Killer's sidekick, got it," Riley says bluntly, and I can't help but chuckle as Kyle's face changes to one of annoyance, furrowing his eyebrows as he glares at her. If looks could kill, Riley would for sure drop dead right now.

"Something like that," I say and Kyle grunts next to me as he slumps back into the sofa.

"Now to the matter at hand, what do you need help with?" Riley asks, her voice becoming more serious, and I quickly explain the situation to her, sending her the information Noah had gathered about the event and, most importantly, the two familiar names of my former colleagues who would be attending.

"I need their tickets, please," I plead with Riley, who is staring at her own laptop in front of her.

"I can't just give them to you; the guys have a job to do at the event," she explains.

"Are they hired to kill someone?"

"Yes. How do you know that?" She raises her eyebrows in confusion.

"They're walking into a trap," Kyle speaks up, interrupting our conversation, and I just nod in acknowledgment.

"What?"

"Let me guess, the client who hired these killers hired them a few years ago to get rid of someone associated with the Lancaster Group?" Kyle asks, lifting his eyebrows.

"Yeah..."

"Looks like they are not very creative. That's exactly what they did to Noah and me. They seem to lure in anyone who has harmed the company in any way over the years."

"That means the clients are most likely involved in the whole ordeal?"

"It's the only possible explanation."

Riley falls silent on the other line, narrowing her eyes at Kyle through the camera. "But you got away," she points out.

"Yeah, Noah was the one originally hired back then. I just went along for the ride because I was bored. I don't think I was ever a priority for them. They probably just used me to get to him, since I was the only way to contact him"

I turn and look at Riley. "You need to take the killers off the job; you can give the boss all the information I sent you. Even that they caught Noah. It will show him that this is serious."

"Wait, you will finally let me tell the boss that you know and are with the man he hates the most?"

"Yes...if that means I get a chance to go look for him. "

"I'll see what I can do," Riley says with a long, heavy sigh.

"Thank you." Tears sting in the corners of my eyes, but my lips curl into a smile.

"You know there is a chance the boss will want to talk to you directly on the matter? After all, he's the one who ultimately makes all the final decisions."

"I know." I sigh. "I'm ready to talk to him..."

I pace up and down the living room, dragging my feet protected by my fluffy socks across the polished wooden floor. The warmth from the floor heating fights the tickling cold in my toes from the nervous chills that run through my body. I clutch my phone in my sweaty palm and wait for the call from my former boss. Riley texted me thirty minutes ago that she had talked to him and that he would call soon.

At the sound of a spoon clinking against a bowl, I look up at Kyle sitting on the sofa, digging into a bowl of cereal. With each crunch and slurp, my irritation grows, grating on my nerves like nails on a chalkboard.

I'm about to snap when my phone suddenly vibrates in my hand and I jump up, almost dropping it. Quickly, I swipe my finger across the screen, answer the call, and lift the phone to my ear.

"Boss," I say with a nervous tone in my voice.

"Evelyn, sweetheart," his deep, raspy voice sounds from the other end. "It's been a while, how are you?"

"I'm fine," I lie, squeezing my phone harder.

"Is that so? Riley told me something different."

"Everything was fine...until recently."

"She gave me a short run down but left out some information. Tell me what is going on. Even though you don't work for me anymore, you're still a part of our family."

"I need the tickets for the gala this Friday."

"That seems rather unexpected. Why?"

"Because I need them..."

"Evelyn, details please. You know how much I hate having to squeeze every last bit of information out of you guys. I know my men are walking into a trap, but I don't understand how you know that," he urges.

"Because they have my boyfriend..."

The boss on the other end remains silent for a couple torturous seconds before speaking again. "Your boyfriend?"

"Yes..."

He sighs. "How on God's green earth is your boyfriend involved with them?"

"He was hired to kill the new boss."

"Evelyn. Are you telling me you left this line of work behind just to date someone who's in it?" He groans. "I lost one of my favorite girls, which was devastating enough, and now you tell me you didn't leave it all behind like you said? I let you go

on the condition that you get as far away from all of this as possible, and here you are breaking that agreement."

"I... He was retired too. He only took this one job because it was important."

Another sigh escapes him. "Who's your boyfriend?" he asks but I stay silent. "Evelyn?"

"The White Dove Killer."

"For fuck's sake, are you kidding me?" He raises his voice at me, and I flinch, squeezing my eyes shut. "Are you trying to tell me that you're dating the bastard who kills anyone who even dares to look at him? How do you know him?"

"That's a long story." I offer him a quiet, nervous chuckle.

"If you want those tickets, you're going to tell me how of all people you got with him."

In a brief summary, I fill him in on the events of last year. How Noah was hired to kill me, how he failed not once but twice, and how our cat and mouse game led to what we have today.

"So that's why no one has reported any kills involving him in the last seven months," the boss says. "Let me be honest, Evelyn. I don't care about him." My heart throbs, frantically beating out of rhythm. "He has single-handedly caused a lot of trouble for me, for our organization. Not only did I lose a lot of money because of him, but I also lost some good people. I would be delighted if he was dead." Tears sting in the corners of my eyes. It was naive of me to think the boss would help. "But," he pauses and sighs, "you really love him, don't you?"



"Yes. I want to spend the rest of my life with him, grow old together, maybe have kids and a family of our own...if that's what it takes to live a normal life," I say through quiet sniffles.

"You can have the tickets," he says after a moment of silence.

"Really?" My heart leaps in my chest with excitement.

"Yes, but on one condition."

"Everything!"

"If he is still alive, I want to meet him. There are some things I need to discuss with him."

"Of course, I will find a way to arrange that."

"Good. I will grant you access to our pick-up spot for the twenty-four hours before the gala. "

"Thank you so much," I mutter between sobs as my emotions roll over me in waves.

After bidding farewell to my former boss, I turn to Kyle with tears in my eyes, who looks at me with raised eyebrows and a mocking grin on his face.

"Kids? Really? With Noah?"

"Shut up." I throw my phone at him. "He'd make a great dad."

"I have no doubt."

*Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 6:48 am*

Evelyn

The lipstick glides smoothly over my lower lip, tugging at the pink skin as it turns it a deep shade of red. Rubbing my lips together, I smooth out the soft layer before popping my lips and stepping back from the bathroom mirror of our hotel room to make sure I look just right. I've done my hair and makeup the way Noah loves it, with soft curls and nude makeup, but with bold red lips. To top it off, I'm wearing the new dress he bought me just last month. A stunning white corset shapes my torso, squeezing my small boobs, and a long tulle skirt with a slit that allows my right leg to show.

He was so excited to see me wearing it for the first time and kept talking about wanting to chase me with it on, to be his precious dove that he would hunt just to catch and claim. I don't think he wanted the roles reversed. But now he's the prey and I'm the huntress chasing him.

I slip into my white leather heels, the movement causing my leg to poke out of the slit of my dress, revealing my lace garter holding an auto-injector with a dose of my signature poison as well as one of Noah's pocketknives. Placing my hand over the knife pressed against my thigh, I take a deep breath and straighten my posture. It takes every ounce of self-control to remain calm; my heart is pounding inside my chest with nervous anxiety. I really thought killing Mr. Williams would be the end of it, but here I am again. This time to bring my man home. I'm starting to wonder if this will ever end. No matter how hard I try to be someone else, a good person, there is no escaping my past. I can keep running and running, but this part of our life will always loom over us. I take another deep breath and look at myself in the mirror before putting on my mask that I had sworn to put to rest almost two years ago.

The moment I step out of the bathroom, Kyle's head snaps in my direction; he purses his lips and whistles as he looks me up and down. "Damn, Evelyn, you look fucking gorgeous." He gets up from the bed to walk over to me. "If you weren't my best friend's—"

"Save your breath." I look him up and down, taking in how poorly his suit fits his broad frame, the fabric stretching around his muscular shoulders. It really does make a big difference when they are tailored to your exact measurements. "We're here to get Noah, not for you to be an asshole and flirt with your best friend's girlfriend." I grab my purse with the gun in it.

"Sorry," Kyle says and clears his throat, already heading for the door and holding it open for me. "After you." He holds out his arm, gesturing for me to go first.

The event takes place in the luxurious ballroom of the five-star hotel where we are staying. Clinging to Kyle's arm, I act as his escort through the ticket control until we finally enter the spacious, luminous event. Large groups of people mingle and chitchat, all dressed to the nines to fit in with high society. Waiters shuffle through the crowd, effortlessly maneuvering through the masses to serve appetizers and a variety of drinks. As we push on through the crowd, my eyes scan the room, searching the hundreds of familiar and unfamiliar faces for the one person I am interested in.

"He's over there," Kyle says in a hushed tone, pointing at a man across the room. My grip on his bicep tightens as I catch a glimpse of the person responsible for Noah's disappearance and for what happened to Kyle. I reach for two glasses of champagne from one of the trays a waiter is balancing, handing one to Kyle as I look up at him. "Does he know what you look like? "

Kyle shrugs and takes a sip of champagne. "Pretty sure. I never saw him directly, but it's not like I look like every other guy; my tattoos give me away."

I nod. "Then this is all on me." I empty my glass in one quick gulp. "The trackers are working; you keep an eye on me. Once I get him out of here, you follow us, get rid of his security and get to me as fast as possible."

"Yes, boss." Kyle salutes and I chuckle as I punch him in the shoulder.

"Let's get my man back," I say before leaving Kyle's side and walking down the hall towards the man. By no surprise, his bodyguards don't stop me, while they have stopped several men who have tried to approach him. He is surrounded by women, swooning over him, engaging him in conversation. Without a care in the world, I make my way through the group of women, pushing past them, and the moment I break through the ones at the front, the man's gaze immediately lands on me and a spark ignites in his brown eyes. I put on my sweetest smile. "Mr. Lancaster, it's a pleasure to finally meet you." I speak in a slightly higher voice than usual. He steps forward and reaches for my hand with a grin on his face, bringing it up to plant a kiss on the back of my knuckles.

"The pleasure is all mine; may I know your name?"

My smile widens as I take a cautious step closer to him. "Evelyn King." His eyes light up the moment the last name rolls off my tongue. Using the name of a powerful but somewhat anonymous family, whose countless children's faces no one will get to see until they are useful to their father, has its advantages, and so far, it has worked every time. Mr. King knows I do it, I've done it dozens of times when he's hired me in the past. At this point, you could say that I am actually one of his daughters.

"Miss King, what a pleasure. That your father would allow one of his precious daughters to show her face at such an event?" He raises his eyebrows with suspicion, probably anticipating a business opportunity. "May I interest you in a glass of champagne and a little chat?"

I tilt my head and briefly observe the reaction of the women around us, gasping in shock and envy. "I would absolutely love to." I flash him another smile.

It took a while, but as the night went on, Mr. Lancaster became more and more comfortable around me. The more alcohol we consumed, and the more flirtatious and suggestive I became, the touchier he got, and now we're on our way to his suite. His arm is around my waist, his hand on my hip, fumbling with the fabric of my dress, tugging at it. I lean into him, stealing a glance at his bodyguards who are riding the elevator with us. Resting my head on his arm, I look up at him and purse my lips in a small pout. "These two aren't going to be watching us all night, are they?" I speak in a slurred voice, pretending to be drunk as I nod in the direction of his guards.

He turns to look at the two men and thinks for a moment. "No. You're all mine tonight." A broad smile spreads across his face. The familiar ping echoes through the small room before the sliding door of the elevator flies open and Mr. Lancaster escorts me down the hallway to a set of large doors. He unlocks the room with his key card and lets me in first. "Wait for me darling, I just need to talk to my men for a second." I nod and he closes the door behind me while he stays outside.

With hasty but calculated steps, I hurry across the room, spotting an ice bucket of champagne on the coffee table with two glasses already filled. With a few quick steps, I reach the table, take the auto-injector from my garter, and shoot it into one of the glasses. Then lift it up, place my lips on the rim, leaving behind a stain of lipstick as if I already took a sip of the drink .

The click of the lock announces his entrance, footsteps echo through the room and seconds later, a pair of long arms wrap around me from behind, one hand cupping one of my tits, squeezing the soft flesh while the other reaches for the glass of champagne and without hesitation the man empties it in one gulp.

Parting my lips, I let out a throaty moan and lean into the man's embrace. Turning

around I slide my arms over his shoulders while his hands move to my ass, cupping my cheeks and pressing me flush against him, his already rock-hard cock digging into my stomach, and I have to bite the inside of my cheek not to flinch. As he leans in to kiss me, I tilt my head, exposing my neck, and he accepts the alternative invitation, running his tongue up the side of my throat. His grip on my ass tightens and he pushes me closer, guiding my hips as he grinds into me.

He drags me with him and slumps down on the bed, until I am lying on top of him, straddling his hips. The taste of bile crawls up my throat as his erection presses into my core. But the moment his hands cupping my ass start to tremble and I catch sight of his eyes start to dart from side to side, a wave of relief washes over me.

"Are you okay?" I ask in a breathy voice, running my hands over his chest, my fingers busy with the buttons of his shirt .

"I'm dizzy." He clears his throat.

"Maybe you had a little too much to drink." I let out a playful chuckle. "But don't worry, I'll take care of you." I continue the act, pushing the fabric of his shirt aside.

"Nonsense," he snaps.

Suddenly, a series of gunshots rip through the heavy door and both of our heads snap in the direction of the hallway leading into the room.

"What was that?" I ask, my voice pitched high as I pretend to be scared. Meanwhile, I'm fuming inside. I knew Kyle was not the subtle, elegant type like Noah, but did he have to be so blatant?

The moment the door to the room flies open and Kyle bursts in, my eyes widen. Mr. Lancaster shoves me off his lap and jumps to his feet, swaying from side to side.

Kyle's eyes land on me, looking me up and down. "You okay?"

"What the hell is going on?" Mr. Lancaster asks, looking back at me. I rise to my feet, but he stumbles towards me, threatening to tackle me back into the bed but I don't give him the chance. Clenching my hand into a fist, I deliver a solid punch to his Adam's apple, sending him staggering backward into Kyle's waiting arms. He overpowers him, knocking him to the ground .

"I'm fine," I say, taking a deep breath and shaking my hand to ease the sting of the punch as I approach the two men. I reach for the knife in my garter before dropping to my knees in front of the two. Cupping his cheek in my hand, I flip the knife open with the other.

"What the hell do you want?" he yells. I raise my hand and smack him across the face with the handle of the knife, drawing a painful groan from him.

"That's what you get for talking like that to a lady." Kyle chuckles as he sits on top of him, holding him down.

"I think you can get off him, the poison should have immobilized him by now," I say.

"Sure, boss." Kyle nods and rises to his feet, flipping the limp man onto his back.

"What did you do?" Mr. Lancaster asks, his voice filled with panic and his eyes bloodshot. I step over the man, taking Kyle's place, and squat down, straddling his stomach.

"I've given you something really sweet; you will sleep well soon." I smile. "But first you have to answer a few questions."

"I'm not going to answer anything." He puckers his lips and then spits at me with

what energy he has left.

At the sight of his saliva staining the fabric of my dress, I purse my lips into a pout. "You got my dress dirty, that's not nice." I pick up the knife and position the sharp edge over his ribs, pushing down slowly, slicing through his clothes before piercing his skin. "You're going to tell me where my man is, and maybe if you're really nice, I'll give you the antidote."

"Your man? I don't have your man!" he yells at me and I push harder, the knife sinking into his body. The poison acts like a narcotic, numbing the pain, but that doesn't matter; it will keep him quiet and that is important.

"You do. Think hard. What color am I wearing?" I ask, and soon the realization creeps onto his face as his eyes widen.

"You're the Dove Killer's bitch." Blood spurts from the man's mouth as he chokes from the knife piercing his lungs.

"Ding, ding, ding, we have a winner," I announce, twisting the knife. "I'm here to pick him up from your little playdate. Where is he?" I lean closer to the man's face. He looks at me through clouded eyes and a small gurgling chuckle escapes his throat.

"Probably dead by now." My eyes widen and my heartbeat quickens, my hands shaking from the anxiety bubbling up inside me.

"Don't you dare lie to me," I say through gritted teeth.

"I'm not... He was barely hanging on this morning when my men checked on him. He might have a few hours left." My gaze shifts to Kyle before returning to the man.

Tears sting in the the corners of my eyes; my jaw twitches as my breathing picks up



and soft sobs rise from the depths of my stomach. "Where is he?!" I yell, but he just bursts out in a howling laugh. My anxiety mixes with anger and irritation. In all my fury, I rip the knife from the man's chest, gripping the handle tightly with both hands before slamming the blade into his body. I repeat the motion over and over, throwing my entire weight into each swing, and with each impact of my body crashing into him, blood splatters all over me.

It's only when his laughter dies down and he lies motionless beneath me that I stop. Blood covers me completely. My once white dress is now crimson, and droplets of blood trickle down my exposed skin.

"I think I know where he is." Kyle's voice snaps me out of my trance, and I look up at him standing next to me, holding Mr. Lancaster's phone out to me. The screen shows live footage from a surveillance camera pointing at a man who resembles Noah, tied to a chair in a dark room. My eyes land on the corner of the video feed that shows GPS data .

I swallow the lump in my throat and look up from the screen at Kyle, who offers me his other hand to get back up. I take it and he easily pulls me to my feet. A smile spreads across his face as he looks me up and down. "Evelyn, you really are a wolf in sheep's clothing. You're just as crazy as he is, just better at hiding it. You're really made for each other." He chuckles, and I can't help the smile pulling at the corners of my lips.

"Let's go."

*Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 6:48 am*

Noah

The large hand covering my face, blocking my mouth and nose, prevents me from vomiting yet again. My lungs flutter, fighting for oxygen while simultaneously preventing the taste of bile from flooding my throat. When the man finally lets go of me, my muscles slacken and my body collapses forward against the restraints, my mouth wide open as my shoulders heave and I throw up on the floor at my feet. They've been doing this for hours, forcing me to eat and drink, only to make me throw it all up again. Since they caught me trying to escape and killed three of them, their torture has become more cruel. However, they do not seem to have permission to kill me. Otherwise, they would have done it by now, that is for sure.

"You're surprisingly resilient," one of the men in front of me says before grabbing my chin and forcing me to look up at him. My vision is blurry, the men and the room around me nothing but a mass of fuzzy colors. I haven't recognized a single face since... I don't know how long it's been.

With a loud slap, a hand connects with my head, landing against the open injury on the side of my head where my ear used to be. With a groan, the air pushes out of my lungs and my body pulls on the restraints.

"You're supposed to answer when we talk to you," the man says, followed by the slurping sound of saliva collecting in his mouth and seconds later a wet sensation slaps my face.

My lips curl into a grin. Every fiber of my body is on fire and I'm sure I have a fever. My time awake is getting shorter and shorter; my body and brain are fighting to stay

alive, but it's only a matter of time before they finally give up. One thing I'm sure of, though, is that I'm not going to give up just yet.

With what little strength I have left, I collect a good amount of sour saliva on my tongue, tilt my head back, and spit at him just like the man did to me. "I'm far from dying, you idiot," I say with a grin, my voice hoarse from my damaged vocal cords.

I groan as a foot connects with my chest, sending the chair I'm tied to flying backwards and collapsing to the floor. "You son of a bitch," the man hisses, his footsteps echoing through the cold concrete room as he stalks toward me.

"Maybe we should go a step further," another man across the room says, and my head snaps in the direction of the blurry figure. As he approaches, I notice a shiny object in his hands, reflecting the soft shimmer of the light bulb hanging from the ceiling. Will they finally put me out of my misery? Are they done with me? They must be getting tired just like me.

But instead, the group bursts into laughter and my stomach drops. Why are they laughing? They wouldn't be laughing if they were finally putting an end to all of this. My eyes widen as one of the men steps over me and crouches down, resting his weight on my chest. Up close, with the light reflecting off the object, I finally see what he is holding. A knife. I have a pretty good idea what he is going to do. I've done this a dozen times before. The grin on my face grows even wider. What a day to experience it firsthand.

"You won't be grinning much longer, you sick fucker," the man says.

"We'll see about that, show me what you got," I challenge him.

The moment the sharp tip of the knife sinks into my eye, piercing my eyeball and darkening my vision, I burst out in a fit of hysterical laughter, masking the painful

screams that follow each twist of the blade. My heart pounds against my chest in an erratic rhythm, fueled by the adrenaline that mutes the pain.

When all of a sudden, a series of gunshots from outside the room draws everyone's attention. The blade slips from my eye socket and the weight of the man sitting on my chest disappears as he rises and drops the knife beside me.

"What was that?" one of them asks.

Screams follow the gunfire and the men around me begin to move frantically around the room.

"What do we do with him?"

"Sit him up, I don't want him to die. We will kill him later," the voice of the man who tortured me says, and within a second of his answer, a pair of large hands land on my shoulder and pull my chair back up. Hurried footsteps echo through the room, followed by the metal door slamming shut with a loud crash, leaving me alone in the gloomy room.

The repeated gunshots and screams from outside fade into a buzzing hum until a dangerous silence falls over me. With no strength left in my limbs, my head lolls forward and out of the corner of my eye, I spot the shiny drop of blood pooling at the tip of my nose.

My thoughts slip, memories blur, my mind struggles to hold onto anything familiar. But I see her, my sweet Dove. Images of her flicker before my eyes—her bright smile, her laughter—jittery and unstable, interrupted by the nightmarish scenes of my childhood, slowly but surely merging into a black mess .

The searing pain coursing through my body morphs from steady waves of misery to a

constant dull, pulling me deeper. In the darkness, I hold on to the small fragment of her image, like a flicker of light at the end of the tunnel.

"Dove," I whisper to myself, allowing my eyes to fall shut.

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*Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 6:48 am*

Evelyn

The warehouse from the video feed location wasn't far from the hotel, both located in the city's harbor area.

I grip my pistol tight and aim at the man charging around the corner in the direction of Kyle and me. He's already covered in blood, most likely that of his comrades, but a small voice in the back of my head tells me that the dried blood and the foamy yellowish liquid coating his pants are not theirs. They are Noah's.

Pressure builds in my chest as my heart beats violently, my pulse thumps in my ears as rage brews inside me. The room around me blurs as I concentrate on the man. Anyone who dares to lay a hand on what is mine and damage it will face a death far worse than their darkest nightmares.

With only a few feet left between us, I pull the trigger and the thunderous explosion echoes through the warehouse. The kick back forces my shoulders back and sends a jolt through my muscles. The bullet strikes the man's neck, a clean shot ripping through his carotid artery. Blood sprays everywhere, and in an instant, his body drops to the ground. His hands fly to the gushing wound as he struggles to cover it, eyes wide with fear as he fights for his life as blood begins to pool beneath his body, surrounded by his dead comrades.

"Damn, Evelyn, you're evil," Kyle coos as nothing but the gurgling, desperate plea of the man on the floor fills the hallway.

"What?" I snap, irritation bubbling up inside me as I turn to look at Kyle, my eyes

narrowing as I aim my pistol at him.

"A clean shot through the head would have been nicer." He chuckles.

"I'm not here to be nice. I'm here to take back what's mine." I slam my hands into his shoulders and push him forward. "Let's move."

As we reach the next corner, slow, heavy footsteps echo through the corridor and Kyle backs up against the wall, one arm flying across my body, pinning me back and preventing me from pushing forward. Peering around a corner, he raises his pistol, leans forward and fires five more times, the explosion followed by another painful groan and the thud of a body falling to the ground.

The warehouse falls into an eerie silence, no more gunshots, no more screams, no more hurried footsteps trying to escape. Kyle drops the arm that's covering me and takes a cautious step around the corner, firearm still raised. "I think this is all of them for now," he says. I nod and follow him into the corridor where three dead men are lying in pools of their own blood.

"Why did you hold me back? I want to kill them." I follow Kyle down the hallway, stepping over the bodies, ignoring the pools of blood underneath our feet.

He remains in front of me. "I know. I just witnessed your thirst for murder. You killed Lancaster in cold blood and have no problem shooting anyone who gets in your way. But what if you had turned the corner and something had happened to you? Then, if we find Noah alive and he learns that you were hurt when I could have prevented it, I'd be a dead man."

"Not if. When we find him alive." I correct him and take a deep breath, letting the air out of my lungs with a frustrated sigh. "But you're right..."

After another turn, the rancid smell of vomit hits my nostrils, paired with the metallic odor of blood and the stench of urine. "Kyle," I call to him and stop dead in my tracks in front of a metal door.

"What?" Kyle asks, turning from where he is peering around the next corner. My eyes meet his and I turn my head to the door next to me .

"Here," I say, pointing at the door. My fingers tremble as I curl them around the handle, but I hesitate. Terrified of what we might find in the room. My heartbeat quickens, and tears prickle in the corner of my eyes. Tattooed long fingers wrap around mine, forcing my hand onto the handle. My head jerks to look up at Kyle who looks at me with a determined expression on his face.

"Together."

I nod and we push the handle down. As the door swings open, the stench that lingers in the hallway intensifies. The taste of bile crawls from my stomach to my throat. Swallowing the urge to throw up, I raise my head to look inside the room. The moment my eyes land on the figure tied to a chair in the middle of the room, my heart shatters into a million pieces. My blood runs cold, and tears spill over.

He is still dressed in the remains of his suit from the day they were ambushed, his entire body coated in filth, fresh and old dried blood, vomit, and other questionable fluids. His head is tipped forward, blood dripping from the tip of his nose.

"Noah!" A scream tears from my throat, raw and guttural. I rip my hand from Kyle's grasp and sprint across the room, falling to my knees in front of him in the pile of fluids. Blinking away my tears, I catch a glimpse of his chest rising and falling with each shallow breath. Carefully, I cup his cheeks in my hands and tip his head up. My heart pounds in my chest, each beat a deafening drum in my ears. I swallow the lump in my throat at the sight of his state. Pushing his greasy hair away from his forehead,



I have a perfect view of the devastating image of his face. One of his eyes and ears are missing and his nose is broken, the purple bruise stretching all across his face.

"Noah, baby, I'm here, it's okay," I say, trying to sound calm and reassuring, but my voice is shaking with fear when he doesn't respond to my attempt to get his attention. Meanwhile, Kyle remains at the door, looking out with his gun raised.

Removing one hand from his face, I fish for my phone in my purse, pull it out and turn on the flashlight. I coax his remaining eye open and shine the light into it to test his reactions, but the pupil doesn't dilate and when I wave it from left to right, he fails to follow. However, the moment I let go of his lid, it doesn't fall shut. Instead with a gurgling breath he raises his head as if he is trying to look at me.

"Dove?" My pet name rolls off his tongue in a voice I don't recognize, hoarse and weak.

"Yes, it's me, I'm here, we're going home," I say through silent sobs, cupping his cheeks in my hands and resting my forehead against his.

His lips twitch in a slim smile, followed by a mocking chuckle, his head bumping against mine. "It's not fair..."

"What's not fair baby?"

"You're not here." He coughs and drops of his blood and bile splash into my face, but I ignore it.

"But I am, I'm real." I offer him a smile.

"No, you're not..." Another chuckle vibrates from his chest. He must think I'm nothing more than a hallucination. A shaky breath escapes my lips as tears run down

my cheeks, but before I can utter a word, he speaks again. "I'm sorry, Dove," he continues. "I should have listened to you. I broke my promise again, and now I'm dying."

"No—"

"I wanted to marry you," he cuts me off with a smile on his face. "Give you the life you deserve but I was too stubborn." His breathing begins to come in uneven, ragged gasps as he spirals into a state of panic, the veins in his throat pulsating, his Adam's apple bobbing as his jaw trembles.

"Marry me?" I ask, my voice so soft that only the two of us can hear it. He nods, his forehead bumping into mine.

"I want this normal life, with you, even if it is only for one last minute." He chokes on his words as his nodding becomes more violent, his head slamming into mine again and again. "I love you." He repeats the three words like a mantra.

Pulling away from him, I grab the knife from the garter on my thigh and cut him loose, his body collapsing forward, falling onto me as he can't hold himself up. I wrap my arms around him and hold him tight, cradling him in my arms with one hand on the back of his head, stopping him from continuing to slam his head into me. "Baby, Noah, steady breaths. Follow my lead." I take a deep, shaky breath and he does the same, holding the air in our lungs until I guide him through the exhale. We repeat the same slow rhythm, our chests rising against each other, our breathing falling in sync. I brush my fingers through his greasy, tangled hair, trying to loosen some of the knots. "You're doing good, baby," I say through sobs. "We're going home."

"I'm cold..." he whispers against my shoulder, his voice fading as his body goes completely limp in my arms.

"Kyle," I scream, my voice, hoarse and broken, tearing through air as my head whips in his direction.

Evelyn

Wrapped in a thin fleece blanket, clutching the ends and hugging it close to my chest, my eyes remain fixed on my once spotless white leather heels, now stained with dried blood. In a nervous rhythm, I tap the sole of one of the heels against the shiny marble floor of the medical ward that I have walked through many times in the past.

The first thing I did when we left the warehouse was call Riley, who immediately transferred me to the boss who gave us access to their medical resources. When we arrived, a number of doctors were already waiting for us. They rushed Noah into surgery, while Kyle provided any medical information about him, such as blood type and any other issues that might arise. In the year we had been together, we had never discussed any medical issues or details. It wasn't high on our priority list, but now, as I sit here, the harsh reality of the importance of this type of information is right in front of me .

Speaking of Kyle. I look up from my shoes to find him standing in a corner with his phone pressed to his ear, still wearing the clothes that are soaked in not only Noah's blood, but also the vomit that spilled out of his stomach when Kyle carried him to the car. He has been talking to his mom and dad ever since the nurse who had been collecting Noah's medical information left, updating them on the situation.

My attention then drifts back to the door in front of me, where the doctors and Noah disappeared long ago. The space between me and the door stretches out like an endless corridor of uncertainty, while its walls close in on me, suffocating me.

"How are you holding up?" Riley's voice cuts through and snaps me out of my trance

as she sits down on the cushioned bench next to me and holds out a hot chocolate. My eyes focus on the spider tattoo on the back of her freckled hand. With trembling fingers, I take the paper cup from her. Its warmth seeps into my chilled fingers and I raise the hot beverage to my lips, taking a sip. The rich, velvety liquid coats my throat with its sweet, familiar taste. As the warmth spreads through me, the tension in my muscles begins to ease, my shoulders relax, no longer hunched, and I let out a slow, steady breath. "Thank you." I offer her a quick smile. "I'm scared. "

"The doctors will do their best to help him, don't worry. I'm sure he'll be fine."

"That's so easy to say, but you don't know what he looked like," I say through dry sobs, having already shed all my tears.

"You know we have some of the best doctors. Trust them." Her hand lands on my thigh and gives it a reassuring squeeze.

At the familiar sound of the elevator doors opening, both of our heads snap in the direction of the source. My gaze lands on the tall man walking in, dressed in a navy-blue suit. His short brown hair has a silver sheen to it, and the scruff on his face emphasizes his strong jawline.

Both Riley and I jump to our feet as the man approaches us. "Riley, Evelyn," he greets us with a stern expression as he comes to a halt in front of us.

"Boss." I lower my head, my eyes landing on his perfectly polished brown leather shoes. Picking at my cuticles, I try to suppress my anxiety. While I used to feel comfortable around the man who treats everyone who works for him like part of his family, I cannot deny the unease that comes with the changed circumstances. Not only am I no longer officially part of his workforce, but I also broke the promise I made to him.

"Call me Hunt. I'm not your boss anymore, Evelyn."

"I'm sorry." I swallow the lump in my throat.

"It's okay, and who is that?" My head jerks up to see Mr. Hunt looking past me, and when I spin around, I find Kyle walking back toward us.

"I'm Kyle Bennett," he says and extends his hand to my former boss, who accepts it.

"Bennett." Mr. Hunt draws out his last name. "Your father wouldn't happen to be Matthew Bennett?"

"Yeah, that's my old man." Kyle raises his eyebrows. "How do you know him?"

"Hm, interesting." Mr. Hunt looks him up and down with knitted brows before turning his attention back to me, completely ignoring Kyle's question. "Any news?"

"No, nothing yet," I say, and my eyes drift back to the door leading into the room where they are operating on Noah.

"They're doing what they can. Be patient." The boss's large hand lands on my shoulder and I nod. Out of the corner of my eye I see Riley leading Kyle a couple of steps away and engaging him in a quiet conversation. His face is twisted in annoyance, probably because the boss ignored his question, and if I know one thing about Kyle, it's that he hates being ignored.

Then I turn to look up at Mr. Hunt, who still has his eyes on me. "Thank you for everything." A small smile spreads across his face, and he gives my shoulder a reassuring squeeze.

"You're welcome, sweetheart. But don't forget, I'm not just doing this out of the

kindness of my heart."

"I know." I let out an exhausted sigh.

"Good." The boss lets go of my shoulder when suddenly the door to the operating room swings open and a doctor as well as a nurse walk out, covered in blood. Their faces still covered by masks that hide their expressions, they look back and forth between everyone present as we gather around them before their eyes settle on me and Mr.Hunt.

Evelyn

Careful to avoid the bandage covering his eye and the sticky cast on his nose, I run the damp washcloth over his forehead, wiping the sheen of sweat from his skin. His fever is finally gone, a small victory at last.

My eyes follow the outlines of his face, pale and still against the pillow. He looks so vulnerable, so different from the man I'm used to.

We were lucky, without a doubt. When the doctors stepped out of the surgery, they informed us that if we had come in just a few hours later, he would have died. Although I would have preferred for Noah to stay in the organization's hospital, my former colleagues got wind of what was going on and began to question who he is and why he was there. After five days, the boss told us to go home because he couldn't guarantee for his safety in case someone found out the truth.

So now we're back home with Noah knocked out in our bed. The silence of our bedroom broken by the occasional beep from the machines that the medical staff provided. A nurse comes by every day to check on him and manage his medications, which keep him sedated and the pain in check. The few times he is somewhat awake, but never really present, are hardly long enough to get him to eat and take care of his needs.

I sigh and remove the washcloth from his forehead before leaning down and planting a soft kiss on the top of his head. "Please wake up soon," I whisper against his skin before pulling away and pushing myself to my feet, dropping the washcloth into the bowl of water. Pressing the button on the small screen on his nightstand, I activate the



baby monitor I bought to keep an eye on him when I can't be in the room with him.

I then head back downstairs to the living room, where I find Kyle sitting on the sofa, shoveling spoon after spoon of cereal into his mouth while he is watching a soccer game. At the sound of my footsteps, his head snaps in my direction. "Is Sleeping Beauty...still asleep?"

"Yes, he is," I say with a sigh, slumping down on the sofa next to him, grabbing my glass of wine and making myself comfortable under my fluffy blanket. "But his fever has finally dropped."

"Well, that's a step in the right direction, isn't it?"

"Sure is." I offer him a weak smile before taking a sip of my wine, then grab the remote and start surfing through the TV channels, looking for something other than his soccer game to distract me until I decide on a channel running cartoons. "How much longer are you planning on staying here?" I ask and turn to face him.

"As long as he is knocked out and you need help."

"I can manage on my own."

"I don't doubt that, but I can't let you take care of him all by yourself. Imagine he falls out of bed, he weighs almost twice as much as you, how are you going to pick him up? And it's the least I can do."

"You're right..." I say in a hushed tone, admitting defeat as I lean back into the pillows and take another sip of my wine.

"Evelyn, I know you want everything to go back to normal, and I'm really sorry that this happened," he says, looking in my direction. "Noah is like a brother to me, and I

never wanted him to get hurt that bad."

"I know." I sigh and look down at my wine, swirling the burgundy liquid. "How do you think he'll react when he wakes up?"

Kyle chuckles. "He'll be mad. Not at you, but at me. And he has every right to be." He sets his empty bowl on the coffee table and leans into the pillows next to me. "He'll threaten me and maybe try to kill me, but he will calm down eventually. Wouldn't be the first time."

"What do you mean?" I turn to look at him, resting one arm on the back of the sofa.

"We've been through so much shit over the years. Do you really think this is the first rodeo we almost died in?" he asks, tilting his head to look at me. "We've been on a lot of jobs together, and we fucked up a few of them. Some my fault, some his. He likes to think he is invincible, but he is only human. He has bad days when he's not as meticulous as on his good days."

I purse my lips into a pout. "So you two have been in a similar situation before?"

"Yeah," Kyle nods. "Even though it wasn't as bad as this...but we'll make up and be back to normal in no time."

"Are you sure?" I furrow my eyebrows.

"Yes," he says. "Don't worry about it. You've got so much on your plate right now, don't worry about the what ifs for when he wakes up." I nod and turn my attention back to the TV.

Kyle is right. The state of their relationship is not something I should worry about. None of that matters to me. What matters is Noah and his well-being, and if anything,

what happens to our relationship in the future.

Noah

Where am I?

My head is throbbing in agony with every beat of my heart as it pumps the blood through my veins. A groggy haze clouds my brain, my thoughts are scattered, like pieces of a puzzle spread throughout a dark room. Slowly, sensations start to trickle in, like a dull throbbing in my limbs. I curl my fingers into a loose fist, feeling the strain of unused muscles protesting the movement. When I try to move, a sharp, suffocating pain shoots through my entire body from head to toe, like a thousand needles piercing my flesh. Every muscle screams in agony, every bone feels shattered. Slowly but surely, the buzzing mixture of pain and dizziness begins to calm. The dark fog clouding my brain dissolves, clearing the way for a coherent thought.

I'm not dead.

My chest tightens, my heartbeat quickens, and my adrenaline rises. I still have a chance. I try to move again, gritting my teeth and stifling a groan as I prop my elbows against the soft surface beneath me that gives in to my weight. Stretching my fingers, I feel the cool, soft sheets beneath my fingertips. Wait. I'm no longer lying on a concrete floor. I'm no longer tied to a chair. I'm in a bed .

I open my eyes, but all that's there is darkness. As I concentrate on my surroundings, I notice the smell for the first time. It's not the wet, moldy concrete mixed with the stench of my fluids. No, the soothing aroma of lavender and a hint of extinguished firewood fills my lungs. It smells just like our bedroom on a cozy autumn night when

we light a fire and watch one of her sappy movies. Is my brain playing tricks on me?

I have to go home.

I have to see Evelyn.

With another groan, I fight through the pain, place my hands flat on the mattress and push myself up. Once I'm in a sitting position, I feel for the edge of the bed and when I find it, I shift over. But before I can get up, a light flickers on behind me, illuminating the dark room. "Noah!" I freeze at the soft but muffled voice of my Dove.

I turn my attention to the light behind me and a blurry figure moves in my direction, reaching for me. A warm hand lands on my forehead, pushing my hair out of my face.

"Dove?" I hardly manage to say her name before the dryness in my throat triggers a cough.

"Yes, it's me, you're home," she says and cups my cheeks in her hands, gently running her thumb over and scratching the stubbles of my beard. Raising my own hands, I cup her face with my palms and trace her smooth skin, following the contours of her face, and like muscle memory, I recognize the way my finger moves over the curve of her cheek to her eyes and forehead. It's really my Dove. Forcing myself to focus, my vision clears; it's not perfect, but I can make out some details of her facial features, like her beautiful brown eyes and full lips.

She tilts her head into my touch and a second later, warm little droplets run down my fingers, followed by her soft snuffle. "I'm sorry Dove..." I manage to say with a trembling voice.

"You fucking idiot!" she yells between sobs. Throwing her arms around my shoulders, her body slams into mine, knocking me off balance and forcing me back into the soft padding of our bed. A painful groan pushes the air out of my lungs as she lands on top of me.

I wrap my arms around her, placing one hand on her back and the other on the back of her head as she cries into my chest.

"I told you it wasn't safe!" she chokes out, her tears soaking into the fabric of my shirt .

"I know. I fucked up," I admit, holding her close. My chest tightens as another dry cough forces its way out of my throat.

"Yes, you did!" Her fist slams into my chest, drawing a gasp from me that sends me into yet another coughing fit. Immediately, she pulls back, propping herself up on her hands and watches me through teary eyes as I struggle to regain my composure.

"How are you feeling?" She kneels down beside me, dabbing at her tears with the sleeve of her robe.

"Like shit...everything hurts, especially my head." I close my eyes as she puts her hand on my forehead. Her touch, soothing against my heated skin.

"Do you want me to give you more pain meds?"

I open my eyes again, look at her and nod slowly. Immediately she turns away from me and scoots over to her side of the bed to grab something from her nightstand. A rush of panic swells in my chest, my pulse quickening, and instinctively I reach for her nightgown, clutching at the smooth fabric. "Please don't leave me," I whisper.

"I'm not going anywhere," she says, turning around and crawling over to me. Then she sits down and takes the small auto-injector out of its plastic wrapper .

"What's that?" I ask, watching as she takes off the cap and pushes my shirt up high enough to expose my stomach.

"Premeasured doses of morphine." She places the injector against my skin. "It may pinch a little," she says and presses the back of the small stick, and while I hear the click of the needle popping, I don't feel it piercing my skin as the pain dominates every single nerve in my system.

After wiping my stomach and putting a small Band-Aid over the puncture hole, Evelyn settles back into bed next to me and lays her hand on my chest. I sigh and close my eyes, taking deep breaths as I wait for the morphine to work its way into my system and ease the searing pain.

"What happened to me?" I ask, opening my eyes and tilting my head toward her beside me, where she lies with her head resting on her arm, watching me.

"You don't remember?" she asks and I shake my head.

"No, just that we had been ambushed and a few blurry bits and pieces."

Her hand travels from my chest to my face, cupping my chin in her hands, running her thumb over the soft stubbles of my beard.

"They tortured you." She lets go of my chin and runs her hand up my face, gently touching the bandage that covers half of it. "They took your eye and your ear." Her hand leaves my face, down to my shoulder, tracing my arm to my left hand, her small fingers wrapping around my wrist and lifting it up. "They smashed some of your fingers, but the doctor was able to save them." My sight lands on my hand, where my

pinky and ring fingers are secured in a splint. Letting her words sink in, I turn my attention to the ceiling lamp above our bed. "That's all they visibly did to you, but from the state you were in when we found you, they must have done worse," she says, releasing my hand.

I remain silent as my mind goes into overdrive, trying to access my memories, but all I find is darkness, haunted by horrific screams and unspeakable pain. There are only blurry images flashing back and forth, but never a clear scene. I tilt my head in her direction as she shifts and scoots back a little. "Is there anything I can do for you right now?"

"I'd do anything for a cup of coffee and a cigarette," I say and her eyebrows shoot up. "I know, no smoking in the bedroom." A quiet chuckle rises from my chest.

"No." She sighs and pushes herself up. "I think under the given circumstances I can make an exception," she says with a smile. "Will you be okay without me for a few minutes while I fetch you a coffee?"

"I have to. "

She climbs out of bed, tightening the belt of her robe around her waist. "I'll leave the bedroom door open. Call for me if anything's wrong."

"Sure thing." I nod.

The moment she leaves the bedroom, an eerie silence falls over me. My pulse quickens, the drumming in my chest growing louder, buzzing in my ears as panic wells up inside. I close my eye and focus on my breathing, trying to stay calm as I listen to the whistle of each shaky breath, struggling to pull air into my lungs.

It only takes a few minutes, which still felt like an eternity to me, for Evelyn to walk



back in with a cup of coffee and a plate of various little snacks. With her help I push myself up into a sitting position, lean against the headboard and take the coffee from her. She fishes for a new pack of cigarettes and a plastic lighter in the pocket of her robe before climbing back into bed with me.

The first sip of coffee is like salvation. It moistens my dry throat. The warm liquid sending a soothing rush through my limbs, relaxing my tense muscles, while the caffeine enters my system, heightening my senses. Sitting next to me, Evelyn is already pulling a cigarette out of the pack and offers it to me.

"Thank you." I set my cup down on my nightstand and bring the cigarette to my lips while she holds the lighter for me and I inhale deeply, lighting the tiny stick. My lungs expand as the rush of nicotine fills my chest, and the soothing sensation I haven't felt in weeks drapes over me like a comforting blanket.

Evelyn holds the ashtray for me and we both remain silent while I smoke my cigarette and drink my coffee. Every now and then, her free hand moves up to my head, brushing through my hair or running her thumb across my stubbled cheek. "Do you like the beard?" I raise my eyebrows to which she responds with a chuckle and a shake of her head.

"I prefer you clean-shaven, but this is new, this is different."

"Would you still kiss me with a beard?"

"Of course, you idiot." She rolls her eyes in amusement. "I even kiss you with morning breath." She leans over to plant a soft kiss on my lips.

"Thank you for bringing me home," I whisper against her lips.

"Always."

The early rays of the rising warm winter sun filter through the lattice windows, illuminating the bedroom in a soft, warm and soothing glow. We've been awake since I woke up around four a.m., unable to go back to sleep. Every time I close my eyes and try to sleep, a wave of darkness swallows me, pulls me back into the depths of hell, and makes it seem that this is all just a dream, an illusion, and that I will wake up back in that concrete hole.

I finished the plate of snacks Evelyn got me and had two more cups of coffee, which my stomach isn't very thrilled about, but it's worth every painful cramp. Now I'm lying between her legs, hugging one of her thighs while she sits up against the headboard, combing through my hair at a comforting pace. The TV is on, running in the background, playing some sitcom that neither of us cares about. It's only on to create a constant noise to keep the silence from swallowing me alive.

A knock on our bedroom door startles me and I lift my head from her lap. "Come in," Evelyn calls and I watch as the door swings open and Kyle walks in.

"Good mor—you're awake!" Kyle exclaims, rushing over to the bedside.

"What are you doing here, you bastard?" I groan as I brace my hands against the mattress and push myself up .

"I've been helping your dear Evelyn take care of you. You should be grateful," he teases.

"How are you alive?" I glare up at him.

"I managed to escape," he says in a cocky voice.

I growl in annoyance. "Good, that means I can kill you." Evelyn's hands land on my shoulders as I try to push myself further.

"I want to see you try in this condition." Kyle's lips curl into a grin, knowing he has hit the nerve he was aiming for.

"I'll show you." I grit my teeth, pushing through the pain until I'm on my knees and start to climb out of bed.

The atmosphere in the room shifts immediately, the teasing gone and replaced by panic as both Evelyn and Kyle's hands land on my arms and shoulders. "Wait, wait, I was just kidding," Kyle says.

I tilt my head and shoot him a glare. "You better watch your mouth."

*Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 6:48 am*

Evelyn

"Get the fuck away from me," Noah's voice carries through the house from upstairs in a loud, angry scream. Dropping the spatula, I turn off the stove with one quick flip. "Don't touch me!" he shouts again and I dash upstairs, taking two steps at a time before bursting into our bedroom.

"What's going on?" I ask, out of breath as I process the sight in front of me. Kyle is standing at the side of our bed, his arms hooked under Noah's armpits, hoisting him off the mattress.

"You mentioned it is shower day, so I wanted to help and wash him," Kyle says offhandedly and shrugs.

"Over my dead body," Noah spits out.

"We can make that happen."

"Kyle," Noah says, his voice low. "I'm going to fucking kill you." He shoves Kyle off of him and attempts to stand on his own, swaying from side to side. With hurried steps, I run to Noah's side and wrap my arms around his stomach, glaring up at Kyle.

"Can you please go downstairs and cook the pasta?" I ask him.

"What?"

"You cook, I shower him. You only have to boil the water and cook the pasta; the

sauce is ready and just needs to be heated up." Noah remains silent throughout the exchange, leaning against me while trying to keep his balance.

Kyle sighs and turns around to leave. "Sure can." He waves before closing the door behind himself.

I look up at Noah, furrowing my eyebrows in worry. "Babe, are you okay?"

"Do I look okay?" he asks, his voice laced with irritation and anger, but not as snippy as with Kyle.

"Let's get you into the shower."

"I don't want to."

"You have to. We've already compromised that you'll only shower every other day. Since it's winter, you don't sweat that much, so it's doable, but you have to shower eventually."

He groans and rolls his eye. But without any further protest, he lets me help him into the bathroom, get him undressed and ready for the shower before I take off my clothes as well and help him into the stall.

"When are you going to let me do this by myself again? "

"Once you get used to your new vision and hearing, and your sense of balance is back to normal. I can't have you falling in the shower and hitting your head."

He rolls his eye again but sits down on the built-in shower bench without further complaint. As ridiculous as I thought this feature was when we bought the house, I'm glad we have it now. "Tell me if anything feels uncomfortable."

"Everything's uncomfortable," he snaps.

"Noah," I say with a sigh and turn on the water, waiting for it to heat up before I step closer and begin to rinse his body.

"This is humiliating," he mutters, his eye glued to my chest.

"Is there any way I can make you more comfortable?" I nudge his chin and urge him to tilt his head back so I can start shampooing his freshly trimmed hair.

"No. I hate all this," he admits through gritted teeth. "It's fucking frustrating."

After rinsing his hair, I proceed to scrub his body, being careful not to use too much pressure on the huge fading bruises that mark his skin. His eye is fixed on me as I kneel in front of him, washing his legs. In the corner of my eye, I catch a movement followed by a low grunt escaping him and he tilts his head back to look at the ceiling. "Fuck," he mutters, and I turn my attention to the movement. His cock is slowly but steadily hardening, rising a little higher with each pulse that sends blood through his length.

I look back at him, his head still leaning against the shower wall. Sex has been and will be off the table for a while. Not that he hasn't tried to initiate it; he tries every day, in the morning, afternoon or at night. But in this state, his body is simply not ready. Although it's clear that the lack of intimacy is adding to the already pent up frustration. I turn my attention back to his now fully erect cock in front of me. There is a slight chance he will feel better after an orgasm. Maybe he will be less hostile and more cooperative.

I suck my lower lip between my teeth, shoot him one last glance and without a second thought, I turn off the water before I wrap my fingers around the base of his cock, feeling his pulse against my fingertips. His head immediately jerks forward,

looking down at me as I give him a few pumps with the roll of my wrist. "Dove..."

"Shut up and enjoy yourself," I say, leaning closer, holding his cock up and placing my tongue flat against his shaft, working my way up until I reach the top. Circling the swollen head with the tip of my tongue, the familiar taste of salty pre-cum floods my taste buds. A low moan escapes his throat, and his hips buck forward, thrusting against my lips. Instead of complaining as I usually would, I place a soft kiss on the tip before parting my lips and easing him into my mouth. One of my hand's lands on his thigh, just in case, while I wrap the fingers of the other hand around the base of his cock.

With my tongue pressed flat against his shaft, I begin to bob my head, making sure my tongue brushes over the sensitive head with each stroke. He throws his head back against the tiled wall with a bump as one of his hand's lands on the top of my head, grabbing a handful of my hair.

His hips jerk every time I lower him a little deeper into my mouth, and with each bob of my head, my throat muscles relax to meet the anticipated goal. "Eve," he moans, pushing my head down and hitting the back of my throat without any further resistance. My muscles contract around the tip of his cock as he holds my head down. Tears sting in the corners of my eyes and I look up to meet his hazy green eye staring back at me. His jaw drops, and he struggles for air, his chest heaving with every breath.

His hand holding my head down begins to tremble and loses its tight grip, allowing me to lift my head before lowering him back down into my throat. With every bob of my head, heat pools between my legs, the stickiness of my own arousal coating my thighs. It's not that I don't miss sex. No matter which toy, no matter how satisfying the orgasm, it doesn't compare to the heat of him inside me, keeping me warm from the inside out. The comfort of his body draped over me like a cozy blanket, enveloping me.

Blinking away the tears that trickle down my cheeks, I close my eyes and pick up the pace. With each swallow, he hits the back of my throat, drawing low moans from him. Through my hand on his thigh, I feel his muscles loosen as he melts into the bench and finally lets go.

Rubbing my thighs together, I suppress the aching emptiness that desperately begs to replace my mouth with my cunt, to have his cock where my body has craved it for weeks. But instead, I continue until I feel Noah's muscles flex under my hand and his cock throbs in my mouth. His grip on my hair tightens and he forces my head down, eliciting a wrenching grunt from me as my throat muscles clench around his cock, pumping his cum into my mouth. The sheer amount is too much to swallow all at once, some squirting out of my lips wrapped tightly around him.

The moment his grip on my hair finally loosens, I pull away, gasping for air. My chest heaves as I lean against his leg before turning to look up at him and find him gazing down at me with a hazy, satisfied smile on his lips as he fights for air himself. My heart flutters at the sight of the first genuine smile in days.

Raising his hand, he wipes my lips, which stretch into a smile at the gentle gesture. "I love you," he says through heavy panting. My smile widens and I rise to my feet, pressing my lips to his. But he breaks the kiss, his hand slipping between my legs, caressing my inner thighs, spreading my sticky arousal. "Do you—"

"No, it's okay," I say softly.

"But..."

"No. Let's clean up and go downstairs for dinner. We shouldn't keep Kyle waiting for too long." I place another fleeting kiss on his lips before grabbing the showerhead. His hand falls back to his side. The light in his eye that flickered with his orgasm fades and his shoulders hunch.



*Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 6:48 am*

Noah

I focus on the clock on my office desk, illuminated by the warm glow of the lamp next to it. The second-hand jumps in circles as it counts down the last seconds to midnight. I raise the glass of whiskey to my lips and take a small sip, the liquor burning on the tip of my tongue. Closing my eye, I lean back in my leather chair, savoring the tingling sensation.

If Evelyn saw me drinking, all hell would break loose. I'm not allowed to have any alcohol while I'm on these mighty painkillers, but since I'm fighting another sleepless night, I'm hoping it will knock me out and allow me to catch up on at least a few hours of sleep, hopefully without nightmares. It's been four weeks since they rescued me, two weeks since I fully woke up. And still, every time I close my eyes and try to sleep, I'm haunted by the paralyzing fear of waking up in that concrete hole again and realizing it was all just a fever dream.

Evelyn is already out cold, sound asleep, enjoying the company of a stuffed animal I slipped into her arms as a replacement for me. She didn't even stir when I snuck out of bed, and I don't blame her. Usually it takes her forever to fall asleep, tossing and turning until she finds the perfect position, either in my arms or touching me in some way. But over the course of the last few weeks, in which she has spent every waking minute taking care of me, it seems to have become the norm for her to pass out the moment her head hits the pillow.

Like a weighted blanket, guilt drapes itself over me, suffocating me. My throat tightens and it becomes harder to breathe. She shouldn't have to deal with this, shouldn't have to take care of me like this, when it's all my...

My mind drifts to Kyle resting peacefully in our guest room. What happened was my fault. I knew Evelyn was against it, had her doubts about the whole ordeal, but I took the chance anyway. However, it is not solely my fault. He was the one who came asking for help, he was the one in charge, in contact with our client and contact person; he should have seen something was off.

With each beat of my heart, my guilt transforms into frustration and slowly but surely into anger. As if on autopilot, I push myself off the chair, kicking it back, raise my glass to my lips, and swallow my drink in one big chug. Then I pull open my desk drawer and grab one of my trusty Butterfly knives before stepping around my desk and leaving my office, heading down the hall to the guest bedroom where Kyle is sleeping.

Instead of knocking, I twist the handle and the door swings open without a sound thanks to the perfectly oiled hinges. Inside the room, illuminated by the dimly lit hallway behind me, my sight lands on Kyle's heavily tattooed back, lying on the bed. His shoulders rise and fall in a steady, calm rhythm.

I clutch the handle of the knife as I take four long steps toward the bed. It's cowardly to kill someone in their sleep, but right now I'm at a disadvantage and if he was awake, he would overpower me in no time. So, my only option is something as dishonorable as this.

The moment I raise my arm, gripping the knife tightly as I get ready to swing, Kyle jerks, shoots up to his knees, and his hand jumps up to grab my wrist. "Ah, not so fast!" He grins at me.

"Let me go." I glare at him.

"So you can stab me in my sleep? I was expecting more creativity from you."

I curl my tongue, collect a good amount of saliva, and spit in his face. "Shut up." He just grins at the impact of my spit striking his face.

"Come on, you're stronger than that, even if you're injured and have to use your weak hand," Kyle barks, squeezing the wrist of my right hand. My arm in his grip begins to shake as he squeezes harder and harder, preventing my blood from reaching my fingers. My left hand tingles, my fingers twitching nervously with the need to punch him. "Come on, Noah, show me your old self, I know you're in there." Gritting my teeth and ignoring the fact that my fingers have just healed enough to bend again, I push through the pain, which is nothing more than a faint sensation, swallowed up by the raw intensity of my rage brewing inside. I clench my left hand into a fist, my short nails digging into my palms, and I strike, aiming for Kyle's jaw and hitting him with every ounce of strength I can muster. His head whips to the side; his lip bursts and blood splatters on the beige sheets. A sickening crack runs through my bones, followed by a sharp, searing pain that shoots up my arm like a bolt of lightning.

"That's all you got?" he grunts, turning to look at me. "Come on, pussy, you're mad at me, let it out." My breath quickens, and with each sharp gasp, it fuels the fire that is raging inside me. The pain is relentless, a throbbing, stabbing sensation that doesn't let up for a second, but I push through it. Raising my fist again, I aim for Kyle's jaw once more. His head whips around yet again. "Yes!" he groans. "That was much better!"

Still holding my right hand, Kyle yanks the knife from my grasp, shoves me away, and flings it across the room before getting off the bed and stalking toward me. "More! Come on!" Kyle yells. We meet halfway and for the first time, Kyle attacks as well, ramming his shoulder into my stomach and slamming me into the wall, knocking the air out of my lungs with a low groan.

I slip a leg between his and wrap mine around his, pushing into the back of his knee and his body gives in. Throwing my weight on him, I tackle him to the ground,

straddling his chest and wrapping my fingers around his throat, feeling his pulse under my fingers as I squeeze shut.

"Good," Kyle chokes out. "That's the Noah I know, the one Evelyn knows." His face reddens, the veins in his temple throb. "If you're not strong enough, your Little Dove will leave your sorry, disfigured ass." His comment only feeds the anger that rages inside me.

"Leave her out of this!" Squeezing harder, I let out a low growl, the sound echoing in my throat. It feels good—so good—to let the storm inside me take over.

Lost in the daze, Kyle throws his arms around me, his hands landing on the back of my head and slamming it forward, meeting me halfway. I squeeze my eye shut and groan in pain as our heads collide in a brutal blast.

"Stop!" A shrill scream, followed by the thunderous explosion of a gunshot and the shattering glass of the lamp on the nightstand, echoes through the room, stopping us. Our hands slip from each other as we break apart and turn toward the source of the scream, only to find Evelyn standing in the doorway with a steaming gun pointed at both of us. "Whatever you two are doing, stop this bullshit and go back to bed."

Kyle and I sit next to each other on the floor, our hands raised in surrender as she alternates between aiming at both of us. God, she looks so damn beautiful standing there in her short, white satin nightgown that highlights the curves of her body. The gun in her hand adds a dangerous flavor to her otherwise soft appearance that leaves me completely spellbound.

"Noah Philip Holman, get up and go back to our room." Her words snap me out of my trance, and I shake my head to clear my mind. "Kyle Bennett, get back in bed," she orders and we both move without saying a word. We rise to our feet and I turn to face Kyle, who looks at me with a grin. I offer him a quick apologetic smile before I

follow Evelyn's orders and walk past her, out of the room and back to our bedroom.

Close behind me, Evelyn slams the door shut with a loud thunderous thud. "What the hell was that?"

"I tried to kill Kyle," I say, sitting down on the edge of my side of the bed. Something warm trickles down my nose, followed by the unmistakable taste of blood seeping into my mouth. I tilt my head forward and raise my hand to wipe it off. The back of it turns bright red and I grimace at the sight.

"Are you out of your mind?" she asks, throwing the pistol on the bed before walking to me, cupping my cheeks in her hands and examining my face.

"Did you just notice this now?" I quirk my eyebrows at her.

"You're not funny." I wince as her hand lands on my cheek in the form of a light slap before grabbing some tissues from my nightstand and starts to wipe my nose. I sniff and flinch as the motion triggers a dull pain deep in my nostrils. "Hold still," she says, her voice soft but firm. The pain in my nose intensifies for a moment as she wipes away the dried blood, and I clench my jaw to keep from flinching again. "Your face looks okay, no blood is seeping through the band-aid covering your stitches, so your eye socket should be all right. You may end up with a bruise tomorrow, but nothing seems to be broken again." She sighs and lets go of me, tossing the blood-stained tissues into the small trash can beside my nightstand.

Then she takes my left hand in hers and examines my fingers. Her brows are furrowed in concentration, her lips pressed into a thin line as she tests each finger individually, carefully curling and then stretching them. A dull pain shoots up my arm, but it's bearable, not as bad as the initial punch. "Your hand is fine too," she says. "You should sleep, rest and recover. Kyle told me you would try, but for God's sake, give yourself time." She lets go of my hand and crosses her arms in front of her

chest, her eyes narrowed as she looks at me.

I lower my head, feeling the weight of guilt pressing down on me. "I know," I mutter, not meeting her gaze. "Let's just go back to sleep," I say, then scoot back onto the bed.

She remains silent for a moment, standing there with her eyes boring into me. She tries to hide her anger, but the deep lines on her forehead give her away. "Alright." She lets out another sigh and climbs back into bed. The mattress dips under her weight as she puts the pistol back in the drawer of her nightstand before slipping under the covers with me and wrapping her arms around me.

"Just...please take it easy, no more fighting tonight, promise?"

"Yeah," I nod, offering her a weak smile.

And then, just a few minutes after her head hits the pillow, her breathing evens out and she drifts back to sleep.

*Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 6:48 am*

Noah

My eye is glued to the screen of the TV in our bedroom, which hangs above our fireplace. It is still on, playing one of my many bird documentaries. The melodic songs of birds are one of the few things that keep me calm and prevent my brain from spiraling into a state of panic. They are on all the time, buzzing in the background, sometimes interrupted by the occasional movie or TV show to provide a constant noise throughout the house.

I take my attention off the screen and tilt my head to my left, where Evelyn is lying on her side, facing me, asleep, hugging her fluffy pink blanket that peeps out from under the covers close to her chest.

My heart skips a painful beat at the sight of her beautiful face, so pure, so soft, not a single imperfection in sight. Her features are relaxed, her mouth slightly open, and a quiet whistle escapes her lips with each breath. I lift my hand and brush one of the loose brown strands of her curtain bangs out of her face before running my thumb across her rosy cheek, her skin soft against my rough fingertips. A small smile curls on her lips, and she squirms in her sleep but doesn't wake up.

She is so beautiful and I—I have turned into a monster. In the calm after the raging storm of my attempt to kill Kyle, his words echo through my mind: If you're not strong enough, your Little Dove will leave your sorry, disfigured ass.

Pulling my hand back, I take a deep, shaky breath and roll over to the edge of the bed. I push away the blanket and get up, making my way to our bathroom. I stop in front of the large mirror, planting my hands on the counter to balance my weight as I stare

at my own reflection looking back at me. My stomach twists into a tight knot at the sight of my face and the band-aids covering my eye and ear. Without hesitation, I reach up and pick at the sticky edges and peel off the protective cover, revealing my sutured eye socket and missing ear.

My remaining eye stings at the sight, and I swallow the lump crawling up my throat, suppressing the raging emotions that well up inside me. I shouldn't be here. I should be dead. I should be in hell, where all the souls I killed are waiting for me, waiting for their revenge.

My mind has been clouded by the same depressing thoughts that have been haunting me since the first time I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. I'd like to believe that I never cared about my looks that much. Sure, I made sure I shaved, went to the barber on a regular basis, and wore good clothes to look well put together. Yes, I hid my scars, but not because I'm ashamed of them, more because society isn't used to seeing all those marks on a single human and I prefer to blend in. But this new addition is too much even for me. I won't be able to fit in; instead, I will stand out.

My heartbeat quickens and I clutch the edge of the counter as the room spins in circles all around me. Breathing becomes increasingly difficult as I gasp for air and spiral into a state of hyperventilation. Nausea creeps from my stomach up my throat, the taste of bile fills my mouth, and I hunch over as the contents of my stomach force their way out and splash into the sink.

My head jerks up as a pair of slim arms wrap around my stomach from behind, hands coming to rest flat on my chest. "Everything's okay." Evelyn's voice fills the room, speaking over my heavy gasps.

"Nothing is okay," I snap, but she tightens her arms around me. "Leave me the fuck alone." I raise my voice, my arms trembling as I hunch down again and another spurt of bile hits the sink.



"No," she protests. "I'm not going anywhere, I'm right here and we'll get through this together." I remain silent, gripping the marble counter, my knuckles turning white.

"Why couldn't you just let me die?" I choke out, my voice raw, slamming my fists onto the marble as a violent impulse runs through my mind. I push myself off the counter, forcing myself back into her embrace, causing Evelyn to stagger back with me, almost tripping backwards as her arms remain wrapped around me.

"Because I love you." Her arms tighten around me, her face pressing between my shoulder blades as she clings to my shirt.

"Bullshit, stop fucking pitying me, you don't love me."

"I do," she insists, her voice quavering.

"Stop lying and leave me already." I raise my voice. "You pity me. That's what this is. Pity." The words taste bitter on my tongue, but I can't stop myself. "I don't need this. Especially not your pathetic blowjobs, pretending you're not disgusted by me. I can see it. You're repulsed."

"Noah, please stop, that's not true, focus on me, not your thoughts, breathe with me, please. I'm not disgusted by you. I love you more than anything," she begs, her arms tightening around me, her nails digging into my chest.

Closing my eye, I suppress the resentment toward her and follow her desperate plea, focusing on the sensation of her chest rising against my back, slowly copying her breathing pattern until we are in perfect sync. When my limbs stop shaking and my breathing slows, Evelyn pulls her arms away from me and steps up beside me.

"Better?" she asks and I nod in response. "Good." Out of the corner of my eye, I catch her reaching for my toothbrush and toothpaste, wetting the bristles and letting the

water run, washing away my vomit before squirting a good amount of the paste on my toothbrush. "You'll feel even better when you freshen up." She smiles through the delicate drops of tears that frame her eyes. All I do is open my mouth for her to brush my teeth, which she does without hesitation. When done, I bend forward and rinse while she cleans the toothbrush before putting it back in its cup.

"Come, let me get you back into bed," she says, wrapping her hands around my biceps and leading me back into our room, where I sit down on the edge of the bed. She steps between my legs, cupping my cheeks in her hands and tilts my head back to look at me. "You need to keep your stitches covered." She leaves me and fetches the first aid kit from the bathroom. During the entire process of cleaning and covering my eye socket and ear again, I remain silent and let Evelyn take care of me without further complaint.

"I'm sorry," I mumble, looking down at my feet once she is done and busy putting everything back into the kit.

Her face comes into view as she crouches between my legs, placing her hands on my thighs. "You don't have to apologize for how you feel."

"I know, but..."

"What is it?" she asks with a small smile on her lips.

"I don't feel like myself."

"Then how do you feel?"

"Not like adult me...more like the child me."

"Is that a bad thing?"

"Yes. Because that means I'm vulnerable, I can't protect myself, and most importantly, I can't protect you."

"You don't have to protect me, you, us all alone. I can do it just fine. You can let go."

"I can't."

"Why?" She scoots closer and kneels in front of me, wrapping her arms around my stomach.

"Because I can't let him down."

"Who? "

"Me."

"Do you mean your inner child by any chance?" she asks and my head jerks up, my eye wide. "I can protect you and him, I promise."

"Evelyn..."

"Can you tell me about him?" she asks.

"I don't know. I've never told anyone about this part of my life." I close my eye, drape my arms over her shoulders, and bury my face in her hair, inhaling the soothing scent of her shampoo.

"Why don't I show you?"

"What do you mean by that?" I pull back and look down at her.

"I'll tell you about my childhood, how I got into killing, how I left, simply show you that it's not so scary to be honest and vulnerable with the person you supposedly love." She looks up at me with a reassuring smile on her lips.

"We can try that," I say with a sigh.

"Good," she says and dives right in. "You know my birth parents abuse substances, right?"

"Yes, they have binders full of police reports." I nod and she chuckles in response. The information about her parents were some of the first details I found when I looked her up for the job a year ago .

"Well, as you can imagine, they always put their addiction before me. The older I got, the worse it got... They neglected me for most of my life, but eventually it turned into abuse if I wasn't useful to them and provided money for their drugs. As soon as I turned eighteen, I moved out, wanted to break the cycle of bad decisions and started working in this bar, which obviously led to the polar opposite." She pushes herself to her feet and sits down next to me on the bed. "I was young and naive, fresh meat. It was easy for my first client to seduce me with the promise of a shitload of money that I desperately needed."

"How did you feel the first time you killed someone?" The question rolls off my tongue without a second thought. It's more than just curiosity—I want to hear that at least some part of us is the same, that maybe we're not so different after all.

"I was terrified, but it was also exciting; the power was intoxicating. After so many years of feeling helpless, I was in control, so much so that it became a form of drug for me." She reaches for my hands. "One day the organization I was a part of approached me because I was doing these kinds of jobs in their territory. They offered me to join them, I agreed, and they trained me. From then on, everything was

perfect. I made a lot more money and felt powerful. I was more skilled, and I didn't have to prostitute myself and sleep with my targets to get them to let their guard down." Her palms turn sweaty as her hands begin to tremble in mine at the revelation that she had to sleep with her targets.

"If you felt so good, why did you want to give it up?" I furrow my eyebrows.

"The thrill wore off and what I had always wanted for my life caught up with me. I was lucky that the boss had a soft spot for me and was kind enough to let me go, under certain conditions." She leans against me and rests her head on my shoulder.

"These conditions are?"

"That I get away from this lifestyle as far as possible."

"Well, you failed at that..." She chuckles at my comment and bumps into me.

"It's your fault," she says with a smile. "I hope you still think of me as your Little Dove."

"You are..." I lean my head against hers. "Despite everything, you're still a kind and caring person."

"Thanks to my friends. They couldn't save me, but they taught me what it could look like, what it could feel like. I lived two completely different lives side by side for years, experiencing the best and the worst of humanity."

"And you're teaching me now, huh?"

"I try." She tilts her head to plant a kiss to my cheek. "Do you want to give it a shot? We can take it step by step and stop anytime you feel uncomfortable."

Suddenly the room feels smaller, the air thicker. I glance down at my hands, fingers rubbing together nervously, before I look back up at her. I remain silent, trying to find the right words, the right way to start, since I've never actively talked about it. "How much do you know about my time in foster care?"

"Not much. All I know is from the official records Riley found last year, including that you were abandoned outside a hospital, the foster families you lived with, some school records, and of course the fact that you were emancipated at sixteen."

"Okay, that means the basics." I pull away from her, putting some distance between us, and take a deep breath before continuing. "I'm going to start by clearing something up. The first time I killed wasn't for money like I told you in the past. I killed my foster mother and one of my abusers."

Her eyes widen in shock. "You killed your foster mother? Why?"

"She had it coming after all she put me through," I say, my gaze drifting to her neck, her muscles pulsing as she swallows.

"Do you feel comfortable telling me what she did?"

"Let's just say she allowed grown men to do whatever they wanted to me. Any form of abuse, torture, or rape—they could act out their darkest fantasies as long as they paid." As the words roll off my lips, memories stored deep in my mind push to the surface and the taste of bile follows, itching my vocal cords, but I swallow the urge to vomit. Instead, I focus on Evelyn as she sits in front of me, her eyes bloodshot, bulging as a veil of tears settles over them and her jaw slack.

"Is that why you castrate all the men before you kill them?" she asks, and I raise my eyebrows at her question.

"Of all the reactions you could have had, your brain went there first?" I can't help but smirk.

"I...I'm sorry." She trips over her words. "My brain is short-circuiting and I don't know how to react." She blinks away the small tears that are gathering in the corners of her eyes and scoots closer to me. "And I guess that's something I've always been curious about, because as a man, don't you sympathize with pain when you see it?" She chuckles nervously.

I can't help a breathy chuckle rising from my stomach. "Don't be sorry. A response like that is better than someone just feeling sorry for me. Sympathy doesn't change anything or erase what happened." I sigh and look down as she takes my hands back in hers and moves even closer, her fingers nervously beginning to pick at my skin, pulling at one of the prominent scars on my hand.

"How did you kill her?"

"One day something inside me snapped. I couldn't take it anymore. I tampered with a gas pipe in the basement, and while they were in there, I locked the room from the outside. As soon as one of them lit a cigarette, they went up in flames." I close my eye and allow the images of the day to flash before my mind's eye. The blazing flames swallowing the small suburban home where I grew up outside New York City, the desperate cries for help, the sirens of fire trucks in the distance and the screams of neighbors outside. "I stayed in the house long enough for their cries for help to quiet down, then burned myself to make it look believable." My hand automatically moves to the burn scar on my chest, covered by my shirt. Evelyn's hand follows, landing on top of mine.

I open my eye again and find her staring at me, with tears rolling down her cheeks. "What happened to you after all this? You were emancipated; that seems strange in that situation."

"I was in the hospital for months. My foster dad and siblings vanished into thin air. Instead, Kyle and his parents took care of me during that time."

"So you really went to school with Kyle ?

"Yeah, that wasn't a lie."

"Then how did you two get into professional killing?"

"Kyle's dad worked for the Mob and he was always supposed to follow in his father's footsteps. I was just a bonus. His parents knew immediately what I had done and made it their priority to get a hold of me by any means necessary. They were afraid that if they didn't teach me I would end up as a serial killer."

"So they turned you into a hitman instead? That's just a different kind of serial killer."

"Yes, but like that, who I killed was mostly controlled. I only killed people who were not targets when they actively got in my way."

"Right," she says, scooting closer, wrapping her arms around my shoulders, climbing onto my lap, and I put my hands on her hips. "Did it feel good to kill your foster mother?"

"Yes," I admit with a smile. Evelyn just nods and inches closer until her body is pressed against mine.

"Does it feel good when you kill altogether?"

"Yes." I say, my tone flat and detached, with no emotion behind my answer. We both fall silent, her eyes meeting mine as she nods.



"Thank you for telling me all this." She breaks the silence and guides my face into the crook of her neck while the fingers of her other hand trace soothing patterns on my back. "I promise no one will ever hurt you again. I will protect you, us."

I close my eye and wrap my arms around her waist, breathing in her sweet and inviting scent, a mix of cherry, vanilla and her own unique smell. The warmth of her body seeps into mine, melting the barriers I've built around myself and calming the storm within. I can feel her steady heartbeat against my chest, matching the rhythm of her gentle breathing.

For the first time I don't feel the need to hide, to put up a front, to keep my guard up. I feel truly safe and understood and I allow myself to be vulnerable in a way I never thought possible. I tighten my arms around her, holding on to her as if letting go would mean losing this newfound sense of security.

*Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 6:48 am*

Evelyn

I lift my head from the pot in front of me, where dinner is cooking, and my eyes land on Noah, sitting on the sofa with his glasses on and a book in his hand, lost in the world of words, while Penelope sits on his lap. The little white bird occasionally coos happily when he runs a finger over her smooth feathers.

Ever since he opened up to me, his mental state has improved, as if a barrier has been lifted, and his recovery has progressed drastically in just two weeks. He's still not back to a hundred percent, physically and mentally. It will take months and I don't think we're going to get back to where we were, but this is our second chance and we're making the most of it.

With a soft smile on my face, I turn my attention to Kyle, who is sitting in front of me at the island counter, snacking on some pretzels while scrolling on his phone. He takes his eyes off the screen and offers me a small smile. The two are slowly rebuilding their relationship after their ridiculous antics, still threatening each other, but moving in the right direction. I'm still a little shocked by the fact that they 're legally brothers. It makes sense that Kyle's parents adopted Noah when he turned eighteen, but it is such a random piece of information that I didn't see it coming, though it does explain their somewhat bizarre bond.

"I think it's time for you to go back to New York, Kyle," I say and the smile falls from his face as he glances behind himself at Noah before turning his attention back to me.

"Are you sure?" He raises his eyebrows.

"Yes, I can handle it from here. He is doing well, and I think it is time for you to take a break as well."

Kyle nods. "If you say so. I'm just worried he might have another outburst. He's fine now, but..."

I sigh. "Even if he does, I can handle it. Besides, I think some time apart would be good for both of you."

"You're right about that." He grins and turns in his chair to steal another glance at Noah, who is out of earshot. "What about our little plan?" he asks, lowering his voice anyway to make sure he can't hear him, his eyebrows raised, forming deep lines on his forehead.

"I think we need to put that off for at least a little while longer."

"Sure."

"I will let you know when he is well enough for that."

"Okay. Sounds great."

"You promise to keep an eye on it and not let it get away?" A smirk spreads across Kyles face.

"Oh, sweetheart, everything is already set and ready to go."

"What do you mean?" I furrow my eyebrows.

"The little rat walked right into a trap." My upper lip curls up in confusion. Kyle was here the whole time? How? He lets out a quiet laugh. "Let me do my part. You don't

have to worry, everything will be perfect, just the way you want it."

"Okay?" I tilt my head to the side.

"You don't mind if I stay until after dinner?"

I shake my head and offer him a smile. "Not at all. I wouldn't have let you leave before anyway."

"Perfect." Kyle grins and jumps up from the barstool he was sitting on.

"Oh, and Kyle." He turns to look at me. "Thanks for helping me bring him home."

"Of course, it's the least I could have done. I'm the one who took him from you after all." Kyle leaves the kitchen, walks across the living room, and throws himself on the sofa next to Noah. He flings one arm over his shoulders, rips the book from his hands, and skims through the pages. At the impact Penelope takes off, flapping her wings as she flies through the room before settling on top of one of the bookshelves lining the walls.

Standing on my toes, I peek into a nest where a couple of doves are huddled in a big ball of feathers, keeping each other warm. Temperatures have dropped drastically over the past couple of days and the weather forecast is predicting a good amount of snow, which is not uncommon for early January.

Loud cooing and hectic flapping behind me draws my attention and I turn to find Noah standing among his doves. They are gathered around his feet, excitedly picking up the dried berry treats. Penelope and another bird sit on his shoulders and are busy preening his face and hair.

It's the first time since he woke up that we're out here. The birds were skittish at first,

not having seen him for almost two months. However, as soon as the older ones recognized him, they swarmed around him, excited to have him back. Never in my life did I think that birds, especially doves, could be so emotional, but since meeting him I have learned so much about them and what resilient and wonderful creatures they are.

"Are you happy to be out here with them?" I ask .

He lifts his head, our eyes meet, and he nods. A smile spreads across my face. Careful not to step on any of the birds shuffling at our feet, I walk up to him, wrap my arms around his biceps, press my body close to his to stay warm, and watch the birds.

When I lean my head against his shoulder, Penelope takes it as an invitation and waddles from his shoulder onto my head, her tiny claws tickling my skull before she starts picking at my hair. He hasn't been very communicative since we stepped into the aviary, but I can see he's focused on his beloved birds and I want him to enjoy the moment. I want to enjoy the moment.

After dropping the last batch of treats, Noah pulls his arm out of my grasp and wraps it around my shoulders. I jump at the opportunity and loop my arms around his stomach, burying my frosty fingers in the soft fabric of his fleece jacket and pressing my body close to his.

"Dove, I'm sorry." Noah says, breaking through the sounds of the birds and the soft whistling of the cold evening breeze.

"Hm?" I hum, tilting my head up, which causes Penelope to take off. I look at him and find his new, more vulnerable side, while his focus remains on the birds.

"I realize I never gave you a proper apology." He continues, "You told me something was up, but I was stubborn and wouldn't listen. And now... I don't know how to make

it up to you after all you've done for me."

"You would have done the same for me," I say and tighten my grip on him.

"Yes." He tips his head forward, looking down at me. "I would burn the world and everyone on it for you."

My eyes almost hit the back of my skull from how hard I roll them at his dramatic response. It's endearing how he says this stuff with such confidence, like he's ready to tear down anything that dares come between us, yet he's struggling to tear down the walls he's built himself. "While I appreciate the violent approach, I don't need that," I chuckle, reaching up to cup his cheek in my hand and trace the outline of his jaw. "If you want to make it up to me, the only thing I want from you is for you to choose us." The corners of my mouth lift, but it's as if they're weighed down by doubt.

He nods, leaning into my touch. "I'm ready for a new life, no matter how hard it may be," he says with a sigh and his hand falls from my shoulder to my waist, pulling me closer to him. "You know, before I lost consciousness, when I thought I was dying, I saw your face— smiling, laughing." My chest tightens with every beat of my heart as he reveals that he saw me on the brink of death. Tears sting in the corners of my eyes and his face begins to blur as my emotions rise to the surface. "I want to be the cause of your happiness, not the source of your sadness, which has been more common than I'd like to admit over the past year. If you give me the chance..."

"Of course." I blurt out, cutting him off and offering him a smile, hiding the tears as my lower lip quivers.

"It may take a little while."

"It's okay."

"No more lies, no more secrets. I promise," he says. My heart leaps, wanting to believe him, accept it, and move on. But he has proven to me in the past that his promises don't carry a lot of weight. My mind—my mind needs more.

"No more solo efforts as well," I say. His eyebrows furrow as he takes in my words. He tilts his head in a nod, his lips parting about to say something, but I move my hand from his cheek and place a finger over his lips. "We're in this together, okay? You and me. We've taken the first steps in the right direction, so no more shutting me out. If we're going to make this work, you have to let me in. Completely." He remains quiet, his eye darting over my face, and I can tell he's thinking about my words. "I need to know you trust me enough to let me help you. No more of this 'I have to deal with this on my own' bullshit. If you're going through something, if you're facing something—whatever it is—we face it together."

He swallows hard, his Adam's apple bobbing, then nods with a sigh. "Together," he agrees. "I promise."

"Good." My lips curve into a sincere smile. I raise my other hand to his face, cup his cheeks in both of my hands, and pull him down in a kiss. "I love you, you idiot." I whisper against his lips.

"I love you too." He says, a low chuckle rattling from his chest as he slides both his arms around me and pulls me into another kiss. I allow myself to get lost in the moment, letting everything else fade away, the worries, the past, the future. It's just us, right here, surrounded by the birds he loves, and me, his favorite.

*Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 6:48 am*

Evelyn

Hugging my bathrobe close, I step out of our bedroom into the dark hallway. After spending nearly an hour out in the freezing cold with the birds, I excused myself to take a nice hot shower to warm up and get changed for the night.

Looking up and down the hallway, my eyes land on the thin strip of warm light creeping through the bottom of Noah's office door. Instead of going to bed, he has disappeared into his office to take care of some business. This man better not be planning anything. Yes, he is well enough to take care of his daily needs by himself again, but if he tries anything stupid, I will not hesitate to lock him in the basement.

In a couple of steps I reach the door and knock. "Come in." He calls and I wrap my fingers around the handle, turn it and push in. The moment the door swings open, my eyes land on Noah. The room is dark except for the flickering light from the fireplace, which illuminates him as he sits in one of the armchairs by the fireplace, still dressed in his button-up and suit pants. A week ago, he started to dress up again, getting back into his routine step by step. He is sitting comfortably leaning back in the cushions holding a glass of whiskey.

My focus remains on his hand for a little while longer. He's still on a number of different medications, and he shouldn't be drinking while he's dealing with the aftermath. But I've come to accept that a glass every other night won't kill him. In fact, he seems even more relaxed since I caved and stopped scolding him for drinking.

Wrapping my arms around myself, I cross the room and come to a halt in front of



him. "How are you feeling?" I ask, twirling the ends of my robes belt between my fingers.

"I'm fine. I didn't think I'd say this, but I'm enjoying the peace and quiet." My eyes widen the moment the words leave his lips, and I realize that, except for the soft crackling of the fire, there is no other noise—no birds chirping, no music, no TV show, nothing.

"That's fantastic!" A broad smile spreads across my face as my heart swells with pride. I step around the small coffee table and lean in to plant a kiss on his cheek.

His lips curve into a lazy smile as he looks me up and down, his eyebrows raised. He lifts a hand and twirls a strand of my hair around his fingers. "Your hair is down, aren't you going to bed?"

"No." My smile turns into a smirk. "I had something else in mind."

"And what would that be?"

I take a step back, straighten my posture, and in one smooth motion I pull at the ends of my robe, the fabric loosening around my shoulders as I let it sink to the floor around me. Noah's eye widens, his Adams apple bobbing as he swallows, his gaze roaming over my body as he takes in the sight of me dressed in white, see-through lace lingerie.

Not waiting for his reaction, I nudge my leg into his kneecap and like on autopilot he spreads his legs, allowing me to step in between. My heart drums against my ribcage, nervous, excited as his eye follows my every move. I reach for his whiskey, snatch the glass from his hand, raise it to my lips and empty it. But instead of swallowing, I drape my arms around his shoulders, lean down and press my lips to his, forcing the liquor into his mouth.

A low grunt rattles through his throat as he accepts the drink from me, swallowing it with ease. I'm about to pull away when his hands land on my hips and he yanks me onto his lap, shoving his tongue into my mouth and pulling a whimper out of me .

I tighten my arms around his shoulders, bringing my hands to rest on the back of his head, my fingers weaving through his hair as I respond to the kiss with equal passion. His hands slide from my hips to my ass, guiding me as I roll my hips in a fluid motion into his growing erection.

My breathing picks up as I grind against his bulge, the covered zipper of his pants catching my aching clit and drawing a quiet moan from me. My arousal seeps through the sheer fabric of my thong and stains his pants in no time. I've been craving him for so long, my body betraying me with its desperation.

A loud groan escapes his throat as I roll my hips into his once more but I break away from the kiss. I trail soft kisses from the corner of his mouth across his cheek to the scar where his right eye used to be, brushing my lips against the rigid skin. "I love you," I whisper, moving on until I reach the scar where his ear once was. "I love every scar on your body." I pull back just enough to look at him, his bright green eye staring back at me. Sliding my hands from his hair to his face, I cup his cheeks in my palms. "You will always be the most attractive man for me."

"Dove..." His lips part, but I press a finger against them to silence him.

"I mean it," I insist, my gaze locked on his eye. "They show that you went through hell and came out the other side. They show how dangerous, how unhinged you are. And that... that drives me crazy." My heart races as I speak, the words tumbling out with a mixture of awe and lust.

He chuckles, a deep, throaty sound that ripples through his chest. His remaining eye darkens with lust and something deeper, something that has always drawn us

together, our primal need for each other. His hand slides to my neck, his fingers curling around my throat as his thumb brushes over my pulse and draws a gasp from me. "Show me," he demands, his voice rough and raw.

Following his command, I smash my lips against his, urgent and hungry, pouring every emotion into it as I lose myself in the familiar rhythm. Sheer desperation runs through our veins, his hands busy exploring every exposed inch of my skin, his fingers dipping beneath the sheer fabric of my lingerie. His need, his desperation to be reassured, to know that I still want him, still crave him, is evident as his rough fingertips tremble against my skin.

Without wasting another second, I slip my fingers through the narrow openings of his button tape and rip his shirt open, completely ignoring the flying buttons. I place my hands flat against his exposed chest, the touch of his skin sending a jolt between my legs, my clit throbbing with need. Tracing the curves of his muscles, my fingers brush against the many scars that mark his skin as I travel lower. With a quick, skillful twist of my wrists, I unbuckle his belt, undo the button on his pants, and push the zipper down. We break from the kiss and our eyes meet. Our ragged breathing mixes between us, tickling my skin.

No words are necessary and he lifts his hips off the cushions, allowing me, despite the awkward position, to push the fabric of his pants and boxers far enough to free his raging hard erection. "Let me make you feel good," I say, wrapping my fingers around his shaft, earning a low moan from him. My lips curl into a smile as I pump my hand up and down his length, his pulse drumming beneath my fingertips.

"Hang on a second," Noah says between ragged breaths, his fingers wrapping around my wrist and stopping me.

"What is it?" I suck my lower lip between my teeth, chewing the soft flesh to calm the burning impatience inside me, wanting nothing more than to feel him again after

weeks of abstinence.

"My desk, top left drawer."

I raise my eyebrows in confusion. "What's there?"

"Just go get it. Please." I sigh and climb off his lap, circle the coffee table and walk to his desk located in the middle of the room. Pulling open said drawer, my eyes widen at the sight of the object at the top of the papers. A pocket knife .

"No." I lift my head to look at him with a stern expression on my face.

"Please."

"No. I'm not going to hurt you."

"I need this, Dove, please."

"Need? Are you insane?"

He sighs and rises to his feet, stripping off his pants and walking across the room until he is standing behind me, his right hand sliding around me, resting on the table, while his left reaches into the drawer and pulls out the knife, snapping it open. "I want to control who hurts me." He says and grabs my hand, forcing the knife into my palm. "You just said that when I go through something, we face it together. And I need your help to get that control back." He leans down and whispers in my ear, his hips pressing into my back, his cock thrusting between my thighs and I let out a soft moan at the sensation of it rubbing against my cunt. My heart rate quickens as it drums against my chest. "I'll beg for it if that's what it takes." His lips brush against my ear, sending a cold shiver down my spine.

“No, that’s not what I mea—” A shriek rips from my throat as Noah's hands land on my hips and he yanks me around, lifting me up onto the table and stepping between my legs so close that his hard cock presses against my soaking wet cunt. Only the sheer fabric of my lingerie keeps him from thrusting in.

"Do you want me to beg?" He asks in a hoarse voice.

I glance down at the knife in my hand, my palm sweaty around the handle. Part of me wants to protect him, to keep him from being hurt any more. But another part—the primal part of our relationship—is drawn to the idea of giving him what he needs, the one thing we have done countless times before but now feels like a bad idea. My gaze drifts back to him as he stares at me with pure determination, and I can't help the small smirk that tugs at the corner of my lips. "Be a good boy," I say, my voice barely above a whisper. "And beg for it."

The corner of his lips twitches into a grin. "Please, baby," he says, wrapping his fingers around my wrist, holding the knife. "Threaten me." He leans in closer, resting his forehead against mine. "Hold the knife to my throat like you have so many times before." He guides my hand up between us. My eyes land on the blade touching one of the scars on his throat. "Show me that you're the only one worthy of hurting me."

My lips part in a silent gasp as his free hand slides down my thigh, between my legs. Two of his fingers brush my sensitive folds through the sticky material of my thong. "Come on, baby, please." He draws out each word in a raspy, pleading tone as he applies pressure to my clit, eliciting a moan from me.

I rock my hips forward, into his touch, chasing the pressure and he responds, rolling my clit, sending a wave of pleasure through every muscle in my body. My grip on the knife tightens, my wrist flexing in his hold, which he takes as a sign. Releasing my wrist, his left hand slams down on the table beside me. His right hand between my legs rips the fabric aside and within a second he is thrusting into me with a violent

force that knocks the air out of my lungs as I scream.

My eyes fall shut as the unfamiliar yet familiar warmth of his cock stretching and filling me tears through my core. My free hand lands on his shoulder, digging my nails into it for extra support. When I open my eyes, my heart skips a beat as I find his stunning green eye staring back at me, its pupil dilated.

My mouth hangs open as he pulls his hips back and then thrusts forward again. The soft pace is short-lived though, with each roll of his hips his strokes become more violent, more desperate as he hammers into me, pulling a long series of high-pitched moans from me.

The dark room fills with our animalistic screams, our skin colliding in wet slaps, the soothing crackle of the fireplace, and the dangerous sound of his office desk feet scraping the floor in the sheer intensity of his pursuit.

Unable to hold myself up any longer, I collapse backwards, pulling the knife from his throat as I lie down on the cool surface of his office desk, soothing my heated skin. My cunt pulsates around the violent but so sweet thrusts as he drives into me. His hands then land on my thighs and he pulls my ass closer to the edge, lifting my legs and propping my feet on the edge of the table before catching my hand holding the knife and bringing it back to his throat. "Don't stop." He says through heavy gasps.

I nod and tense my muscles, holding the knife while my other hand flies over my head and grips the edge of the table, bracing myself for what is to come. His hands land on the table next to me as he picks up the pace again, driving into me with sheer force.

My jaw trembles as I try to keep my eyes open so as not to miss the beautiful view of him looming over me, illuminated by nothing but the warm light of flickering fire. I focus on the knife, the blade sinking deeper into his skin, droplets of blood pooling

around the sharp edge. Sucking my lower lip between my teeth, I muffle my moans, concentrating on not slashing his throat. When I deem the cut deep enough, the blood already running down his chest in narrow lines, I flip it over and press the thick, dull end into the wound, offering him the pressure.

Keeping the intense eye contact, Noah lifts a hand, brings it to his throat, and scoops up some of his blood, coating his hand in the thick crimson liquid. His hand then lands on my abdomen and he draws a perfect red line up my torso before pushing aside the cups of the lace bra and cupping one of my tits in his palm, squeezing the soft flesh and rolling my hard nipple between his fingers, sending a jolt from my chest, through my belly, right to my cunt.

A painful groan escapes my throat as he pulls at my nipple, stretching the skin only to have it snap back. His hand then follows the bloody path back down and slides between us, resting on my pubic bone as his thumb finds my clit, circling the nub, lighting a spark of pleasure. I throw my head back against the table and let out a throaty moan as he rolls my clit in perfect circles while he continues his relentless chase.

The stretch of his cock, the rough skin of his thumb on my clit is enough to set off fireworks after weeks of starvation. My walls contract around him in waves as my orgasm builds, higher and higher until it crashes down on me in a thunderous wave. The muscles in my legs spasm and I sling them around his hips, pulling him deeper, forcing him to bury himself inside me until our hips are pressed flush together.

Looking up at him, I catch a glimpse of his tongue sticking out between his lips, drops of sweat running down his temples, as he concentrates on rolling his hips and holding back his own orgasm just a little longer. "Let go, baby," I whine.

His arms begin to tremble as his muscles spasm, his hips stutter and he lets out a deep groan, followed by the familiar warm sensation of his cock pulsing inside me and

cum filling me, sending soothing warm waves through my body.

One of his hands wraps around my wrist and pulls the knife from his throat before he leans forward, pinning me to the table and crashing his lips against mine in a loving but passionate kiss. I wrap my arms around his shoulders and cling to him, my eyes falling shut as I respond to the kiss with similar passion. All I can focus on is him—his cock inside me, his breath hot against my skin, the solid strength of his chest rising and falling against mine with each ragged breath, matching my own. Warm droplets trickle onto my chest, his blood running down my collarbones to my neck, causing goosebumps to form on my skin.

I rock my hips back and forth into him, enjoying the friction until he is too soft and slips out of me. Then I break the kiss and meet his green eye staring back at me, blurry and unfocused as he gasps for air, revealing the physical strain the act has taken on him.

A smile spreads across my face as I run my hands up his back, over his neck and through the short, sweaty strands of his hair. "Let's go take care of your cut," I say in a calm voice, planting a soft kiss on the tip of his nose.

He places his hands beside my head and pushes himself up, a lazy smile decorating his flushed face as he nods.



*Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 6:48 am*

Noah

Two months later

I watch as Evelyn stands in front of me, scoops up a good amount of hair wax from the plastic container and begins to rub her fingers together, heating the sticky mass, and the fruity, melony scent fills our bedroom, drowning out the lavender air freshener. She then begins to comb her fingers through the freshly trimmed strands of my hair, making sure to avoid my new prosthetic ear. I close my eye and enjoy the soothing motion of her styling my hair back the way she personally likes it best.

After fixing some of the more stubborn strands along my newly clipped fade, she takes a step back. "All done," she says, and I open my eye to find her standing in front of me with a bright smile on her face, wiping her hands clean on a wet wipe. My gaze roams over her figure and my heart skips a beat at how beautiful she looks tonight, all dressed up in a beautiful white silky slip dress. The thin straps hanging off her shoulders, the smooth fabric draping over her chest, clinging to her hips. Her hair falls over her shoulders in wavy curls and she has a full face of makeup. Meanwhile, I'm dressed in one of my best suits.

"Will you finally tell me why we are all dressed up? It's almost midnight."

"Which means it's almost your birthday. It's a surprise," she says, stepping between my legs, reaching for my tie and fastening the knot. "And I'm certainly not going to ruin it." She chuckles and leans down to plant a soft kiss on my lips. "Now come." She takes my hand and I push myself to my feet, trailing after her as she leads me down the stairs and out our back door.

I expected to find a surprise date downstairs after she had banished me to my office and our bedroom for a good part of the evening. A nice cooked dinner, a glass of wine, some classical music to dance to, but nothing of the sort is waiting for me. Instead, she makes us grab our coats and leads me down the stairs of our porch and down a dirt path that leads into the woods. "What the hell are we doing, Dove?"

"You'll see." She chuckles and squeezes my hand as she pulls me along.

"We're not playing hunt, are we?"

"No, although we should probably do that soon." She flashes me a little mischievous smile. This naughty Little Dove. "For now, just follow me."

After about thirty minutes of dragging me through the woods, a string of warm lights in the distance catches my attention and she begins to pull harder. "Hurry, we're almost there." The moment we step through the thicket and into a secluded opening in the forest, my eyebrows raise at the scene revealing itself in front of me. A naked man with a familiar face, tied at his hands and feet, hangs in the air between two tall trees. He is gagged, with barbed wire wrapped around his neck and a red bow on his head.

"Happy birthday!" Kyle's voice booms from beside me, hidden in my blind spot. My head jerks in his direction where I find him and Evelyn standing next to each other with big smiles on their faces and open arms pointing at the man hanging in the air.

"What's going on here?" I furrow my eyebrows.

Evelyn steps in front of me, wraps her arms around my stomach, rests her chin on my chest and looks up at me. "You didn't get your last kill, and Kyle and I thought we could make it up to you like this." My head tilts to look at her, then jumps to Kyle .

"Is that—"

"Our last client, Mr. Bloom, yes."

"What?"

"We found out he joined the Lancaster group and was tasked with luring you back. He is the reason I almost lost you. He almost tore us apart. And anyone who tries that must die," Evelyn says and my head snaps back to her. This is a...new revelation?

"What made you change your mind about killing?" I ask.

"I haven't changed my mind." She sighs. "I don't want either of us to go back to this job. But for you, I'm willing to cross any line. You said it before you killed Mr. Williams, anyone who tries to hurt me, let alone thinks about it must die, and the same goes for you. No one is allowed to hurt you. No one is allowed to hurt what's mine."

My heart leaps in my chest and I wrap my arms around Evelyn's middle, lean down and press my lips to her plump red ones. A muffled whimper escapes her throat and her arms fly around my shoulders, responding eagerly to the kiss.

It isn't until the rumble of someone clearing their throat next to us that I break away from her and we both turn to face Kyle, who is standing awkwardly next to us. "Sorry to interrupt you two lovebirds, but," he says, nodding in the man's direction, "Noah has other things to do besides you, Evelyn." He flashes us a teasing grin.

"Shut up." I glare at him but let go of Evelyn and approach the man hanging from the trees. Evelyn follows me, pointing to the plastic patio table where my small black hard case sits, with all my tools perfectly arranged.

"All your favorite toys, cleaned and sharpened for the occasion."

"Thank you, my love." I walk up to the table, stop in front of it and look at all my trusted friends. A fluttering sensation, which I like to compare to a stomach bug, spreads through my gut. I slip on my leather gloves before picking up one of my favorite butterfly knives and flip it open before running my clothed finger over the smooth steel.

Then I turn to our client and approach him, dangling in the air. He is conscious but dazed, heavy stains of tears on his face, snot hanging from his nose. I glance back at Evelyn, my beautiful Little Dove, standing a few feet away in her white dress, covered by a white fluffy fleece coat all dolled up and beautiful, watching over me with so much love and admiration like my guardian angel.

I take a deep breath and look back at the man staring down at me with glassy eyes.

He betrayed me.

He betrayed us .

My pulse quickens with every breath I take as I look at the man. The anger in my chest boils to a heat I last felt when I killed Mr. Williams. When I slaughtered him for threatening my Little Dove. My chest heaves and my breaths come in shaky gasps until I snap. Reaching up, I grab a handful of hair and hold the man's head in place, raising the knife with my other hand, and just as the one who tortured me did, I ram the knife into the man's eye, drawing the first reaction from him, a muffled scream through the gag forced down his throat.

Evelyn lets out a high-pitched whine behind me while Kyle barks out into laughter. But I ignore them both, shutting out their presence as I give in to the primal murderous instincts I've been suppressing for the past year. I twist and turn the knife,

matching the muscle memory of my torture. The nerves in my face around my closed eye socket spasm, remembering how the knife drilled into my eye. Then I rip the knife out of his eye socket and watch the blood spill down his face.

The next time I drive the knife into the man, a twisted satisfaction washes over me as I savor every cry of pain, every desperate gasp for air as the man thrashes against his restraints, sending a primal thrill through my veins. With every twist of my knife that disfigures the man in front of me, I feel myself slipping further to the edge, dancing on the ledge, swaying back and forth between the light and the darkness that lurks in the depths of me. It feels good. Better than good—it feels liberating. For the first time in what feels like forever, I'm not holding anything back. I'm not holding in my desires or biting my tongue. I'm letting it all out and the experience is intoxicating.

With a final swing of the knife, I do what I do to each and every victim and cut off his genitals, dropping them to the floor as a pool of blood gushes from between his legs.

Gasping for air, I take long strides back to admire my work. The man hangs in the air, gurgling for air as his body fights for his life, covered in his own blood, both his eyes stabbed out, raging wounds marking his chest and the emptiness between his legs. My inner child screams with delight at the sight unfolding in front of me.

A whine behind me grabs my attention and I jerk around to find my Dove looking up at me, eyes wide like a deer caught in the headlights. She looks delicate, almost fragile, like the perfect prey. She knows what she does to me, how the sight of her like this brings out something wild and untamed in me. The way the dress accentuates her softness, hugging every curve. The way her beautiful brown hair falls in waves around her shoulders. It's as if she's taunting me, daring me to give in to my primal urges .

But no, not yet. I can't let her stand there untouched by this moment, when this man is

responsible not only for my wounds, but for breaking her heart. She has to show it—the side she hides behind her angelic appearance, the darkness that matches mine.

I reach for the pistol tucked into the holster at my waistband, making sure the safety is on. "Catch," I call to her, throwing it in her direction. She takes a quick step forward and catches it. Confusion is written all over her face in the form of a deep frown as she looks at it.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Shoot him."

"What?"

"Finish it," I say, my voice low and rough, "show me that you're not just my pure Dove, an angel walking this earth."

Her eyes drift back to the pistol in her hand. My gaze stays on her hands as she unlocks the safety and raises her arms, aiming at the man. "That's my good girl," I growl, rolling the R. "Remember the image of me when you found me, the blood, the broken body." Even from afar, I can see the veil of tears settling over her eyes as I drag the memories back to the surface. Me, tied up, barely hanging on. "Remember how I danced on the brink of death, ready to fall if you hadn't come in time to catch me."

"Noah..." My name rolls off her lips in a whisper, quivering with a flood of emotions—anger, fear, love.

I know I'm being cruel, but I can't help it—I need this. "Do it," I urge, my voice a growl, taunting her. "Kill him, for me, for us."

It's the one last push she needs, and she finally snaps, her mask slips, and she pulls the trigger, again and again. The first bullet hits his thigh, the next his chest, then his arm, his neck, until the last one goes straight through his skull. Each thunderous explosion makes my heart leap in my chest as I take in the beautiful sight of her releasing all of her emotions with each shot.

She doesn't stop until the magazine is completely empty. Then she turns and aims the gun at me, her teary eyes meeting mine once more, holding a challenge, a silent invitation. My tongue darts out of my mouth, moistening my dry lips. I take the invitation and toss the knife aside, rip off my gloves, shrug off my bloody coat, and stalk toward her with long, heavy strides. She takes a couple of steps back, but she can't escape me. She will never escape me. My long fingers wrap around her throat and squeeze as I force her back until she is pinned against a large tree .

Leaning down, I press my lips to hers in a ravenous kiss. She responds immediately, her arms flying around my shoulders, pulling herself up higher. I let go of her throat, my hands finding her thighs and lifting her off the ground, pressing her against the tree as I grind my growing erection into her core, drawing high, muffled moans from her.

Evelyn

The uneven ridges of the tree dig into my back as Noah presses his full body weight against me, humping me hungrily as his tongue devours every inch of my mouth and I lose myself in the sensation, drowning in the taste of him. A high, muffled moan escapes my throat as I run my fingers through the short, sticky strands of his hair, clutching them to keep me anchored.

As his predatory side consumes me, heat pools between my legs, my arousal soaking through the thin fabric of my underwear, coating my skin. My clit throbs with every thrust of his hips against mine, expanding the void that begs to be filled.

"Guys?" Kyle's voice rings in the distance and Noah breaks the kiss, his head jerking in Kyle's direction. His murderous stare fixes on him. Unable to find the strength to even utter a word, I cling to Noah, struggling to catch my breath.

"You have one minute to get as far away as possible. If you're anywhere near when I start fucking her, you're a dead man." Noah speaks in a threatening tone that sends shivers down my spine.

Kyle's face morphs from one of amusement to one of playful fear. "This is fucked up, but..." He raises his hands defensively before aiming finger guns in our direction. "Got you. I'm going back to the house and you call me later to clean up. Have fun." He waves his hands in the air and disappears into the woods toward our house.

My breath catches in my throat as Noah's head whips back to face me, his pupil dilated, dimming the beautiful green in his eye. My heart pounds against my ribcage



in a violent rhythm of anticipation. I should be afraid, should try to flee. But there's nowhere to run. And deep down, I know he would never hurt me. I'm too precious to him, the most valuable bird in his collection.

"This is your only chance to stop me," he says through gritted teeth, his lips brushing against mine. His hot minty breath tickles my skin. "Or I will fuck you, right here, however I want, until I'm satisfied, my Little Dove. No safe word will protect you."

"I'm all yours," I say with a moan and crash my lips back to his. Within seconds, one of his hands finds its way through the slit of my dress, grabs the waistband of my thong and pulls. The narrow strip of fabric stings as it digs into my skin until it finally snaps in half and he tosses it aside. Now exposed, the cold air tickles my damp skin.

Noah sets me back on the ground before dropping to his knees in front of me, pushing up the skirt of my dress and forcing my legs open and over his shoulders so that I sit on his face as I lean against the tree. I scream and my hands fly up to his head, grabbing his hair as he flicks his tongue over my aching clit.

With every delicious lick he devours me, sending electric shocks of pleasure through my nerves. He opens his mouth wide and runs his tongue from my clit between my folds, feasting on my arousal. As he wraps his lips around my clit, sealing the sensitive bundle of nerves in his mouth, I throw my head back against the tree and let out a loud cry of pleasure. Rocking my hips against his face, I chase the ecstasy, my gut clenching with the nearing orgasm.

His hands grip my thighs, his short nails digging into my skin as he lets me ride his face. I arch my back off the tree, rocking my hips back and forth in a fierce chase as his tongue circles my clit. One of his hands slips from my thighs between us and I feel his thumb squeeze between his chin and my cunt. The finger rests against my opening before slipping in with ease. With the added pressure, I dance on the edge, almost slipping .

"Noah," I scream his name as my muscles spasm and I lock my thighs around his head, pinning him in place by crossing my legs on his back. A low growl rises from his throat, the vibration against my cunt rippling through me in waves, adding to the shudders of pleasure. "Noah," I say his name again, this time more like a whimper.

As my muscles loosen, he lifts me off his shoulders, puts me back on the ground and stands up, one arm wrapped around my middle, holding me upright as he towers over me. I clutch at the soft fabric of his shirt, lifting my head to admire his beautiful face, covered in my arousal. He still has that dangerous predatory look on his face. He is far from done with me and I want more. I want him to ravage me, to ruin me in the best possible way.

"No..." I try to speak but squeak as he whips me around, one of his hands resting on the back of my neck as he forces me to bend forward. My hands fly to the tree in front of me to steady my weight. His other hand pushes up my dress, exposing me to him. There is the sound of his belt, the rustle of clothes and finally his fly unzipping. My legs tremble in anticipation, my cunt throbbing with every sharp breath I take, eagerly longing for salvation .

His hand comes back to rest on my hip, his weight pressing against my back, his hard cock slipping between my thighs, and without any resistance, my body welcomes him with a long, violent thrust that pushes the air out of my lungs with a scream. My body jerks forward, but his hand on my hip holds me in place.

My head lolls forward, my eyes closing as he begins his relentless chase, his hips slamming into my ass as he pounds into me, forcing his cock so deep that it hammers against my cervix. A series of high-pitched screams fall from my lips. The mix of pain and pleasure is overwhelming, but so delicious and addictive.

"Good girl," he grunts. My heart leaps in my chest and my muscles tighten around his cock at the praise. I claw my nails into the bark of the tree, my perfectly manicured

nails stinging, threatening to break from the pressure. With my mouth wide open, I don't hold back, letting out every animalistic scream he elicits from me with his violent assault. The wet sound of his skin slapping against mine with every thrust. Accompanied by his guttural moan, our shared voices echo through the dark and eerie forest.

Tears sting in the corners of my eyes, my chest heaving with sobs as the pleasure builds inside me, climbing higher and higher. My legs tremble, my weight becoming too much for me to bear, but his grip on my hip is tight and he won't let me fall.

The hand that holds my neck lets go, running down the arched curve of my back before grabbing my coat and dress and pushing it even higher until the fabric wraps around my shoulders, exposing me completely. He then moves his hand around me, cupping one of my tits, squeezing the mound between his fingers, pinching my hard nipple.

My cunt clenches, my muscles screaming in agony as another orgasm crashes down on me, sparking a raging fire inside me. One moment I'm filled to the brim, so full and tight it feels like my womb is about to burst. But then it all slips away, spilling out of me as I squirt all over him, soaking him in the clear fluid that pours down my thighs.

Noah lets out a deep and animalistic moan behind me and with one last violent thrust he buries himself inside me, pushing out the remains of the fluid with a loud squirt, driving himself against my cervix and releasing himself inside me. With each contraction of his cock, he pumps his warm, soothing cum into me.

We remain motionless, connected by our hips. Now the only sounds around us are our heavy breathing, gasping for air, and my snot-filled sobs. As my muscles begin to relax, I lose control of my body, sagging, about to fall to my knees, but I don't. He wraps his arms around my stomach, holding me up and my dress falls back over my

chest, his arms preventing it from covering me entirely.

"I got you," he mutters, his chest rising and falling against my back in a rapid rhythm. I nod, still sobbing. Carefully, he turns me around, letting my dress fall back down to cover me completely. He wraps his arms around my middle and I curl mine around his shoulders as he lifts me off the ground. "I'm here, just hold on to me," he whispers into my ear.

With slow steps, he carries me to the plastic patio table and sets me down next to his black case. Through my tear-filled vision, I watch him tuck himself back into his soaked pants before cupping my cheeks in his hands. "Are you okay, Dove?" I nod again and he bends over to plant a soft kiss on my forehead. "I love you," he mouths against my skin.

"I love you too," I say with a shaky voice.

Noah drops to his knees in front of me, his hands resting on my thighs. I lift my hands to my face and begin to wipe away my tears, clearing my vision. He looks up at me with a soft and genuine smile and just like that, the predator is tame again. In the blink of an eye, he has turned back into the loving and caring man I've come to know over the past year.

"I know it's not the most romantic moment next to a dead body hanging from the trees." Noah takes his eye off me to steal a glance at the dead man before turning his attention back to me. "And I'm sure you had other dreams of how this would go, but..." He pauses and takes my left hand in his. "Tonight has proven to me once again that we are meant to be. You see the monster I am, in and out, yet you don't try to escape; you stand by me. You watch over me like my guardian angel. You are the one I need to control the darkness that lurks inside of me." He pauses and reaches into his pants pockets, pulling out a small velvet box, opening it to reveal a beautiful engagement ring. My breath catches as I look down at the ring in his hand, the gold

band catching the dim light. Two tiny doves, wings outstretched, frame the diamond in the center, facing each other as if in flight. "Evelyn Black, will you marry me?"

I launch myself off the table, throwing my arms around his neck and tackling him to the ground. "Yes," I cry out loud, my heart doing summersaults, drumming against my chest. His arms wrap around my middle as we lie on the cold muddy ground. "Yes, I'll marry you."

The weight of the moment presses down on me in a wave of emotions that makes it hard to breathe. Tears spill over, followed by a choked laugh, the joyful sound echoing through the otherwise hushed forest. This is the moment I've been dreaming of, but never dared to fully believe would come true. Maybe I will get my white picket fence after all.

*Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 6:48 am*

Noah

Four months later

I'm committed to winning this staring contest, no matter what.

Sitting in front of me, trapped like a prisoner in a small wooden playpen in the middle of our living room, is the new furry intruder in our once peaceful home: a Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever puppy. His coat is golden red, almost maple, with white spots on his chest and nose, as well as white spots on his tiny paws that make him look like he is wearing tennis socks. And just like me, this little guy is determined to win our staring match. He sits on his fluffy round butt, his tiny tail wagging uncontrollably, swiping across the pee pads that protect our wooden floor from potential accidents as he stares at me. Every now and then, he lets out a high-pitched whine, followed by what I assume is meant to be a bark.

I still can't believe I agreed to us getting a dog. But when Evelyn introduced me to this particular breed and its traits, it was hard to say no. Besides her plan for him to become my service dog because she thinks I have PTSD. Which I don't. At least I think so. I can train him to retrieve my hunts, like ducks. That may be the main reason I agreed to get him in the first place. But ever since we picked him up yesterday, I've been regretting my decision.

"Noah, stop staring at the puppy," Evelyn says as she walks over to us with a bowl of fresh food for the little guy.

"No. I'm the man of the house and I'm not going to back down."

She sighs, and I don't even have to look at her directly to know she's rolling her eyes at my comment. "I can't believe I actually thought you weren't a caveman like all the other men."

"What?" The puppy breaks eye contact the moment Evelyn steps into the playpen and waddles excitedly around her feet, waiting for his meal while I silently celebrate my victory.

"You are literally competing with a puppy to be the most dominant male in the house. You're acting like an animal." She chuckles and kneels down to let the puppy sit before he is allowed to dig into his bowl. She then leaves the playpen and joins me on the sofa, sitting down next to me and wrapping her arms around one of mine, pressing my biceps against her chest.

"I am not an animal..." I snort.

"To be frank, we are animals. Just evolved differently." She chuckles. A small, disapproving rumble rises from my chest, but I remain silent. "Have you decided on a name? He's supposed to be your dog after all."

I tilt my head to look in her direction before returning my attention to the puppy. "His color reminds me of whiskey, so I thought it would fit."

"Really? Whiskey? Isn't there anything more...I don't know...cute?"

"I like Whiskey, or do you want me to name him something like Mr. Fluff Puff?"

"No," she bursts out laughing and squeezes my arm tighter. I look back at her and my lips curl into a smile. My heart swells with love at the sight of her cheerful face. I can't imagine anything more perfect than this view, this sound. She is so beautiful when she laughs, the way her cheeks flush and her eyes crinkle at the corners.

"Although it would be hilarious to hear you call him that when you are out hunting. But I guess Whiskey it is then."

My eye drifts back to the puppy, his tail wagging as he eats.

"Kyle will be here soon," she says, intertwining her fingers with mine and giving my hand a gentle squeeze. "Are you sure you want to tell him today?"

"Yeah, it's about time."

I mouth a thank you as my gaze lands on Evelyn carrying two bottles of cold beer as she joins us on the back porch where Kyle and I are sitting on the outdoor sofa, smoking and discussing his latest job.

"And then he had the nerve to die before I could have my fun with him," Kyle blurts out. She hands each of us a bottle before sitting down next to me and placing a hand on my thigh. "Thank you." Kyle smiles at her before changing the subject. "Anyway, why exactly did you two let me drive all the way out here? I'm sure it wasn't just for a nice dinner," he says before taking a sip of his beer.

"No, of course not," I say with a sigh, glancing at Evelyn as she leans into me. "We wanted to tell you that we are getting married." I can't hide it as my lips curl into a small smile. I asked her months ago, and at first it didn't feel real because nothing had really changed in our relationship. But now that we're taking the first steps toward actually getting married, it's slowly sinking in that it's really happening.

Kyle's eyes widen and his jaw drops. "You what? No way. When did you ask her?"

"On my birthday." I shrug, taking a sip of my beer.

"What?!" Kyle raises his voice. "That was fucking months ago, your birthday is in



February and we are in June."

"Yeah." I lower my beer and raise my eyebrow at Kyle's outburst.

"Why the hell did you keep it a secret?" Kyle looks back and forth between me and Evelyn.

"We just didn't feel like telling anyone," she answers his question, stealing a quick glance at me and squeezing my thigh before turning her attention back to Kyle.

"And since I am in debt to Mr. Hunt for saving my life, I had to take care of a few things for him over the past few months." I nod in the direction of Evelyn. "It was not like we had the time to get married right away."

Kyle nods. "So with that taken care of, things are getting serious now?"

"Yes," Evelyn answers and I wrap my arm around her waist. "We, or rather I, have started planning." She chuckles.

"You're not involved in the planning?" Kyle flashes me a playful grin.

"No. I've tried. But everything I like is not good enough."

"That's not true," Evelyn gasps.

I raise my eyebrows and chuckle. "If you say so, name one thing I suggested that you agreed to?"

She remains silent, her eyes narrowing as her lips press into a thin line. "That we use your credit card for everything."

Before I can even answer, Kyle interrupts us with a burst of laughter. "All you're good for is your money."

"Shut up." I shoot him a glare.

"But this is exciting, congratulations to both of you," he says, his amusement fading into a chuckle. "I never thought I'd see you get married. I figured the only ceremony type event I would attend for you would be your funeral." Kyle looks at me and I can't keep a straight face; my expression changes to one of annoyance.

"Well, thanks to you, that almost became a reality."

"Stop you two." Evelyn sighs. "I thought we were past this."

"Yeah, sorry," I say, planting a kiss on the top of her head before turning my attention back to Kyle. "There's something else I wanted to ask you."

"Of course, what is it?"

"Will you be my best man?"

"What kind of question is that? Of course!" Kyle says, getting up and swinging his hand in my direction, slapping me on the shoulder before raising his beer. "Here's to you two and your future."

I nod and clink my beer with Kyle before we both take a big gulp, then I offer my drink to Evelyn, and she takes a sip of the beer as well.

Watching her reaction, a smile tugs at the corners of my lips. Her nose wrinkles and deep lines form on her forehead as she squeezes her eyes shut as the bitter taste hits her tongue. She looks so cute, her face scrunched up as if she's trying to force herself

to like it. She hates beer, hates the bitter taste, the way it bubbles in her mouth. But it's not just beer. She hates a lot of things. But there are so many more things she loves, and she loves them all with all her heart, including me.

How did I get so damn lucky? I can't believe I'm actually marrying her—my Little Dove, my guardian angel. I never thought I'd find someone like her, someone who loves me with her whole being and isn't afraid to show it. She looks past every scar, inside and out, and not only accepts them but embraces them, soothing my wounds that will never fully fade. For the first time in my life, I feel like I'm truly home. She's my safe place, and there's nothing I wouldn't do to make sure she stays right where she belongs—by my side.

Evelyn

Six months later

As another deafening, explosive gunshot echoes through the otherwise quiet, somewhat chilly summer morning air, I look up from my bridal magazine and turn my attention to the dock that belongs to our property, where Noah is standing, lowering his steaming hunting rifle. He is finally getting back to his old self; his body is almost completely healed. The only challenge we face is his immune system, which is still compromised and struggling to regenerate after all the stress it has been through. It's manageable with medication, but I know he would prefer it to be the way it used to be.

A smile spreads across my face when Noah goes to his knees and just mere seconds later, Whiskey climbs out of the water and jumps back onto the dock, carrying a duck in his mouth as he excitedly waddles around Noah, wagging his tail so hard that his little butt swings from left to right.

Adding Whiskey to our family was a challenge for the first few weeks, as Noah is not the biggest fan of dogs. But now they are inseparable. Just like any other man, he was completely against getting a dog, but is now best friends with the little guy. The only line we haven't crossed is letting him sleep in our bed. But Noah's walls are crumbling with every night Whiskey sits at the foot of our bed, whining to be let in, and I'm sure in a few weeks, we'll all be sleeping together. The strong bond they have will be helpful in the future, for sure. While Whiskey is a natural at retrieving for Noah, he is also a very intuitive dog. We haven't even started service dog training yet, but there have been a few incidences when Noah has gotten anxious and Whiskey has

picked up on it and stayed with him, trying to distract him.

I push off the thin blanket covering my legs and stand up from our outdoor sofa, the fresh air tickling against my warm skin. I straighten the skirt of my long white summer dress before slipping into my cozy outdoor slippers and making my way down the porch toward the dock. The moment I step off the soft grass onto the wooden planks, both Noah's and Whiskey's attention shifts to me. Whiskey immediately comes running toward me, still carrying the duck, and begins to circle me excitedly as he presents his trophy to me. "Good boy." I chuckle and pat his head .

He stays by my side as I walk up to Noah who sets the rifle down, leaning it against one of the pillars of the dock and welcomes me with open arms. Not hesitating, I wrap my arms around his stomach and press myself flush against him as he wraps his around me.

"How many ducks did you shoot this morning?" I ask, my words muffled as I bury my face in the soft fabric of his t-shirt.

"About four." He chuckles, his chest vibrating against my face.

"So many?" I tilt my head up, resting my chin on his chest to look at him. "We don't eat duck that much, baby, it's too high in fat..."

"I know, I thought we'd keep one for us in the freezer and feed the other to Whiskey. I'm sure he'll love it."

"That sounds like a good plan." I smile and he leans down to plant a kiss on my lips.

"Are you done yet?" I ask and he nods.

"Yes, I will wrap up." He lets go of me and turns back to his rifle and the bucket of ducks. Meanwhile I turn to face the lake and walk to the edge of the dock, looking

down at the clear water.

"Want to go swimming?" he asks from behind me, and I shake my head.

"Not now, it's still a little chilly, maybe later today." I chuckle and turn to face him again. My eyebrows shoot up as he flashes me a smirk. "Don't you dare." I raise my finger at him. Ever since he opened up to me about his childhood and let me help him embrace his inner child over the past few months, he has been much more playful, as if he is actually letting that side of him take over and enjoying those little moments. Which I love because he seems so much happier and more content than before when he was more reserved, closed up and didn't really allow himself to have fun. "Noah Philip Holman," I warn him as he takes a step toward me, leaving me no room to escape.

The moment his long arms wrap around my waist and my feet leave the safety of the ground, I scream. Within seconds, the air is knocked out of my lungs as the cold water completely surrounds us. Holding on to him, I wrap my arms and legs around him. I squeeze my eyes shut and hold my breath as we go under, only to come up again, my mouth falling open as I gasp for air.

Pulling an arm from around his shoulders and pushing away the hair that clings to my face, I open my eyes to find him shaking his head like a dog before looking at me with a stupid grin. "I hate you." I playfully slam my fist into his shoulder. The water is up to Noah's chest, and if he were to let me go, I could barely stand on my toes. I steal a glance at Whiskey, who has settled down with the duck and is pulling the feathers out of the dead bird.

"You don't. You love me," he says and catches my lips in a hungry kiss, distracting me. My eyes fall shut and I answer in the same starving rhythm, clinging to him and running my fingers through the wet strands of his hair. His hands trace the curve of my back until he stops at the zipper of my dress and pulls it down. The heavy wet fabric clinging to my skin falls away and I break the kiss, furrowing my eyebrows.

"What are you doing?"

"Getting you out of those wet clothes." A grin spreads across his face.

I sigh and roll my eyes so hard they almost hit the back of my skull. "We're still in the water, silly."

"I know, but wouldn't it be more comfortable without the dress? It must be heavy." He pushes the sleeves down, exposing my bare chest as the fabric gathers around my hips. A low growl rumbles from his chest, sending a jolt of excitement through my nerves as his eye lands on my exposed tits, my nipples stiff from the cold water.

"It would be." A smile spreads across my face and I wrap my arms around his shoulders, pressing my tits against his still-clothed chest. Pressing my lips to his, I close my eyes and tilt my head, engaging him in a softer, more loving kiss. My fingers clutch the neckline of his shirt, tugging at the fabric. We break apart and for a brief second, he lets go of me, lifting his arms and allowing me to remove the shirt.

The moment he is free, he chases my lips for another kiss, but instead I shove his shirt in his face and push him back, forcing his head underwater. Seizing the opportunity, I break free of his hold and swim further away from him.

He immediately comes back up, shaking his head and running his hands over his face, looking around until he spots me a few feet away. "Just you wait," he says with a grin, and I can't help the bright smile tugging at the corners of my lips.

"You're going to have to catch me first."

"Nothing easier than that," he says and jumps forward, pushing through the water. In a desperate attempt, I turn to swim away, but Noah's long fingers wrap around my ankle as he pulls me back, forcing me underwater and knocking the air out of my lungs, until he hauls me back up into his arms. I gasp for air and throw my arms

around his shoulders. Blinking my eyes open, I meet his gaze as he looks at me. A broad smile of genuine amusement and happiness graces his face, his eye shining with a new but welcome emotion .

Our chests rise and fall against each other's with each breath, falling into sync in a steady rhythm. Water drips from our hair as our breath mingles between us. My heart rate quickens and I can't help my smile growing wider, so much that my cheekbones begin to ache.

All I can focus on is him—my future husband. In just a matter of a couple months, we will be officially married, and the reality of the situation hits me like a roller coaster of emotions. We've come so far, survived so much, fought so hard to win back what we almost lost. The memory of the fear of possibly losing him flashes through my entire body but is quickly drowned out by the overwhelming relief that he's here, that I can feel him. I trace the outline of his back, over his shoulders, up his neck until I cup his cheeks in my hands and find his stunning green eye staring back at me.

I have accepted the fact that we will never have the perfect, quiet life I always dreamed of. No, we will always be surrounded by chaos, by the demons of our past, but I don't think I would want it any other way now. The world could fall apart around us, but as long as we're together, I know we'll be okay.

I lean forward and press my lips to his, letting my eyes fall shut as I lose myself in the sensation of his lips moving against mine.

He is mine. He is the one I'm meant to be with. My safe haven. My white picket fence. With him, I am whole. With him, I am home.