



Their Darkest Needs (The Dark Influences #2)

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Category: Dark Erotica

Description: Taylor

What would you do if someone took the most important person in your life away?

I don't remember him, but I do remember her.

I had to do it, even if it meant losing myself along the way.

Ryan

I thought this accident was a blessing.

For far too long, I'd been watching her from the sidelines, hoping she'd finally notice me.

But now I suspect it was a curse—one that might destroy us both if I don't play my cards right.

Content Note:

This book is a horror themed story. It contains horror elements, graphic violence, and sexual content, so its not suitable for readers under 18. This book is also a no HEA. Check your triggers.

Total Pages (Source): 23

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:11 am

I have been following her for two years now. I know she's aware that someone is out there, following her every move, but I can't lie: I like that she knows it too. There's a strange satisfaction in the way she looks around searching for me.

At first, she acted like she was worried, always looking over her shoulder. I made sure she could never see me—it's something I learned along the way with my job—but somehow, she still knew, my clever little doe.

Now all she does is test me.

I look at the video playing on my computer. The way she takes off her clothes makes me think she knows I'm watching, like she's putting on a show just for me. The corners of my mouth lift up in a smile. I wonder what she'd do if I were standing there, looking at her perfect body while I touched myself.

Unzipping my pants, I take my hard cock out, and start to slide my hand slowly up and down my length to the live feed of her in the shower. The water cascades down, running over her full tits, making the need to run my hands over her smooth, wet skin unbearable. Soon, little doe, soon.

I turn up the sound of the live feed—I need to hear and see all of her, I don't want to miss out on anything as she is the addiction I so desperately need.

I love that she has a glass door on her shower. It helps my camera capture her from every angle, giving me the best view.

She throws her head back, her hands roaming over the curves of her body, while she

massages the soap on her soft skin. I groan while pumping my shaft faster.

It doesn't take long until my release hits me, and white hot spurts of cum fly onto my legs and chair. I tuck myself back in and look at her one last time before I close my computer and go get ready for work.

It won't be long now.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:11 am

“I am exhausted, Tay! Let’s go home.”

Mara is shouting into my ear like I’m deaf. Every time she gets drunk, she starts to yell like a madwoman. I mean, if she keeps going, I probably will be deaf soon. She’s so lucky I love her. Not that I could ever stay mad at her for long; she has been my closest and only friend my whole life.

“Mara, I’m right here, no need to scream. Let me grab my jacket, and we’ll go back home.”

“WHAAAAT?”

Ugh, seriously. I roll my eyes and place my jacket over my arm. I hold out my hand so Mara can grab it, and we both can leave. She’s a wanderer, and when it’s dark like this, you never know what creeps might be around trying to pick her up. It’s 2025 and the streets have never been more dangerous. Plus, I think she secretly likes being mollycoddled. I mean, who wouldn’t want someone in their life to take care of them, to be there and make sure they are safe and okay? If it wasn’t for Mara, I would never know what that feels like.

I look around and wonder if my stalker is out here. Not that he ever shows himself. I have never been able to actually see him and it’s making everyone think I’m just imagining it, but I know he—or she, you never know—is out there.

I don’t think this person is dangerous. I mean, after two years of stalking, if they had bad intentions, it would have happened already, right?

I sigh and continue our walk to Mara's place. I don't really talk to anyone about my stalker anymore, since I have never actually seen them, and people won't believe me because of it. Plus, having to hear people constantly tell me that 'maybe I should try a therapist' just makes me want to scream in their faces. I'm not crazy! I hate it when people call me that. It's like telling someone to shush when you are already being quiet, it bothers me to the core.

Some of the lights on the street aren't working properly, making this whole walk a little bit creepier. A movement to my side makes me screech. I turn my head, only to be greeted with an empty street.

There's an overfilled dustbin on the side, and there's no light coming from the houses around us.

I haven't checked the time yet, but I guess it's later than I thought .

My heart is racing, beating out my chest , and I have this feeling that something is wrong, as if something bad will happen, but as I look around, I cannot find anything.

"Mara, did you see that?"

she turns to where I'm looking and laughs.

"Maybee it's your stalker."

She lifts her eyebrows, giggling while saying the word 'stalker'. I look back at the empty spot.

"Maybe."

I decide it might be better if we just get home sooner, so hopefully this feeling will

stop.

I hold her hand tighter and pull her with me to walk at a faster pace. Maybe I'm just tired and seeing shapes in the shadows. Yup, I'm not crazy at all.

I take Mara to her apartment, help her remove her shoes, and tuck her drunk ass in bed, before I go to my own place. I know most people would just dump them at home, and let them figure it out themselves, but she's like my sister and I couldn't imagine living my life without her. What if she stumbles down the stairs or tries to take a bath and drowns? I would never forgive myself.

That feeling of uneasiness gets more intense after I leave Mara's apartment. I keep looking over my shoulder, still not seeing anything, which makes me more paranoid about it all. I should have gone to the party in my car, but I didn't think it would be this late, and it's not that far between our houses. Not to mention that it would be better for the environment if I take the twenty five-minute walk instead. My keys are in my hand, poking out near my knuckles, and I'm feeling a bit like Wolverine. They've been there the entire walk, helping me feel a bit safer. I also have a mini pepper spray keychain and a small rape alarm attached to them. Isn't it just wonderful to be a woman?

I quickly open my door and rush in, just in case there actually is someone following me. I don't turn any of my lights on—so he'll think no one is here—and stumble through the dark to get into my shower. Which seems more of a challenge than I thought it would be. “Shit!”

I yelp, holding my foot while a tingling, stabbing pain sparks up my little toe. Groaning, I continue my way to the bathroom. I'm sticky, sweaty, and tired. I could really do with some scorching hot water running over my body to ease my mind.

I open the bathroom door and start the shower, taking a deep breath as water begins

falling down, beating the bottom of the bath, and steam starts filling the room.

The moment the water hits my body a moan slips from my lips. I could stay here for days, but unfortunately, I have responsibilities in the morning, and I really should get to bed before I have to go back to work.

I grab the soap and rub it over my skin, the smell of lavender filling the space around me. Whenever I feel stressed, this is one of the things I do to make my mind quieter. The other thing is listening to music, but this is definitely what works best for me. I relax into the water, breathing in the scent and just letting all the stress go.

When I'm done soaping up, I grab the showerhead and hold it closer to my body, making the soap—and metaphorically speaking, the bad energy of today—drip down my body, into the drain. Once all is successfully removed, I up the stream level and guide it towards my pussy. There's nothing that helps me sleep better than a good orgasm.

The feeling of the pressure of the water against my sensitive spots makes me moan instantly. I grab my breast and pinch my nipple while thinking of my stalker breaking into my bathroom while I'm in the shower, watching me play with myself. I imagine him wearing some creepy hockey mask. He pulls out his huge, hard cock and starts to stroke himself while staring at me with an intense gaze. I bite my lip and give him a show, only our grunts and moans filling the room. He stops his strokes and walks into my shower, grabbing the showerhead from my hand, and pushing me up against the wall with one hand against my throat, while he puts the stream at a maximum against my throbbing pussy. My moans are getting louder and I can feel the peak of my orgasm coming. "Oh fuck!"

I lean my arm against the wall to steady myself and take a couple of breaths. It should be dangerous, thinking of my stalker that way, who knows who this person even is, but I'm too tired right now to think about any of that.

I place the shower head back and step out to dry off and go to bed.

BANG!

I jump up at the loud noise and frantically search for and grab my gun that is hidden away in my nightstand. Whatever this is, it's not good. Am I going to get taken or worse? I try to hold back all the horrible thoughts. Panicking right now is not a good idea. I need to keep it together.

Loud footsteps stomp up my stairs, and my breath hitches while all my hairs stand up. Fuck this is bad, really, really bad. I unlock the safety of my gun and hold it out in front of me. I know I'll only have a couple of seconds to make the shot once this person opens my door.

I quickly jump out of bed and run to the side of my door, right before it flies open and —BANG—the gun goes off, hitting the stranger in his leg.

I pull the trigger again, but an empty click sounds instead. I curse myself and try to hold back the feeling of impending doom that starts to take over. The huge bear-like man lying on my floor starts to laugh like some maniac. I can't see his face because he has a balaclava over his head, but I'm imagining him being an ugly bastard.

“Your gonna regret that bitch!”

he roars while getting back up like I didn't just shoot him in the fucking leg. I scream while running away from the man. I think he likes it because I'm sure he'd been able to grab me over there if he wanted to. What if he gets off on this? There are a lot of sick people in this world. Shit, shit, shit! I knew something was up, I just fucking knew it! I should have just gone with my gut and called the cops or something. Why did he even wait this long to attack me?

My hair gets pulled back, making me yelp. I fly backward, my head hitting the floor. Hot searing pain temporarily takes over, and it takes a while for me to register what exactly just happened. I groan out in pain while the man pulls me by my hair back up onto my feet and starts to drag me to the living room. I wait until he lets go of my hair, and then kick him in his leg right where I shot him. He curses and doubles over. I use this as an opportunity to get the fuck out of here. Running to my kitchen—because that's where all the knives are—I grab the biggest one I see. I don't know if I'll even be able to stab the man, but I gotta try, right?

I turn around, hoping I still have time to get to the back door, but my assailant grabs me and slams my head against the kitchen counter.

I think I drop the knife, my head is throbbing, and my vision is blurry. I can feel something wet and warm dripping down my face.

There's a heavy pressure on my neck, making it hard for me to breathe. Why can't I breathe anymore?

I frantically move, trying to get whatever is pressing on my neck off, but it won't budge. Blackness fills my vision until it fully takes over.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:11 am

I groan, trying to open my eyes. They feel so heavy and everything hurts so bad. I feel like I got run over by a lorry. What the fuck happened?

“Taylor, it’s okay. Can you open your eyes?”

I move my head to where the voice comes from and wince at the stabbing pain that comes from my neck all the way to my head. Slowly, I try to open my eyes, but the light is blinding me. I feel like I’d be better off just with my eyes closed and unmoving.

“I think it’s too light in here, close the blinds, Angelina.”

Who are these people? When the room is darker, I’m finally able to open my eyes without burning them, and I take in the scene before me.

The room is white, there are tubes attached to my arm, and a machine next to me is beeping

“Am I in the hospital?”

I try to remember what happened, but it’s all foggy, and my head hurts too much. The last thing I remember doing is helping Mara move her stuff from her dorm to her place.

“What happened? Who are you?”

I croak. Unease fills me, and I notice I have a tattoo on my left arm. It looks like

angel wings. When did I get that?

“You were attacked. Your husband heard the commotion coming home from work and scared the man off, he’s talking to the police now. You have a concussion, but nothing severe. Just rest and don’t watch any screens until you’re cleared — likely a few days, but it could be a couple of weeks. It’s mandatory.”

I look at the nurses and frown. My what? Since when am I married?

“I’m sorry, I think you have the wrong person. I don’t have a husband.”

Both seem worried when I finish my sentence.

“Taylor, do you know the date and year we’re in?”

the nurse, who I think is Angelina, asks while changing the fluid linked to my arm.

“I think it’s November 26th or 27th, 2019.”

Angelina looks at the woman behind her. The nurse seems strained and has her lips shut in a tight line.

The older nurse opens her mouth, holding out a glass of water.

“I think you might be suffering from amnesia. You hit your head pretty hard, it’s not uncommon for it to happen.”

Her eyes soften in what feels like pity. I hate it when people look at me like that. They must be mistaken.

“Well, what day is it then?”

I demand, anger slightly seeping out of my tone.

“It’s the 3rd of April, 2025, sweetie. But don’t you worry, there are lots of people who had their memories return after a couple of weeks or months,”

she says a little too happily for my liking. How can almost five years of my life be completely gone? My breathing turns more ragged and starts slowly building up into a panic. What am I going to do?

The nurse picks up on my panic and rushes over to me. There’s a kind smile on her face while she helps me guide my breathing.

“Don’t worry! Your husband will be back soon, and then you two can talk it out. I’ll warn him too, so he’s prepared, and it doesn’t strain your mind. If you need anything, I am Kathy, your nurse, and this is my health care assistant, Angelina, but don’t worry, she’s very skilled. Over to your right, there is this red button that you can press if you need anything. Okay?”

She smiles up at me, so I smile awkwardly back at them.

“Okay.”

I nod uncertainly at them, and they both walk away, leaving me alone in this room. I have a husband. I am actually married. Where is Mara?

Shouldn’t she be here too? She always worries about me, and it’s odd that she isn’t. Maybe she could help me gather everything that happened over these past few years.

Not too long after the nurses leave, there’s a knock on the door. Maybe it’s my so-called ‘husband’ who has finally come to visit.

“Come in,”

I say, my voice still hoarse. I think I must have been screaming when the accident happened. My throat hurts, and my voice sounds like I am a chain smoker of fifty years.

I frown seeing two officers come in and sit down on the chairs next to my bed.

“Mrs Addams, we are here in regard to your attack. May we ask you some questions about the events?”

The officer who spoke first looks kind of cute. He has short brown hair neatly cut and brought into model. His uniform is tight around his muscles, and I can see a hint of a tattoo on his lower arm. I wonder if my husband also has tattoos.

“Mrs Addams?”

I look back at him, not realising he had asked me a question. I nod at him, uncertain how this all will play out, since I don’t remember a single thing.

He takes a picture out of his pocket and shows it to me.

“Do you know this man?”

I grab the picture from him, trying to remember him, or at least remember anything that could help, but I don’t. He looks to be over forty with a bald head and broad shoulders.

“Sorry, I don’t. I don’t remember.”

I give the picture back to him, and he places it back into his pocket. He sighs, clearly

annoyed with my answer.

“I am afraid I have some bad news for you, Mrs Addams. A couple of hours after the attack on your life, we had a call about a possible murder. When we went to look, it turned out your friend, Mara, whom you went to the party with, had been found dead in her home. We have found evidence of it being the same man—the man in the picture—that attacked you last night. Thanks to your husband, we were able to make a clear image of the man, but we don’t know where he went when your husband scared him.”

Shock takes over the moment I hear him speaking the words ‘found dead’. Mara can’t be dead. This is not real. This is some sick joke.

“I—I’m sorry, but I think you are wrong. Mara isn’t dead.”

My hands are shaking, and I start to tear up. All I see through my blurry vision is the officer looking at me with pity.

No, no, she’s not. She can’t be.

She’s like a sister. I’ve known her all my life. She is not doing this to me. As my anxiety and the shock of the news I was just given rise, my machines start to alarm.

“I’m sorry for your loss, Mrs Addams. I think you should rest, take in the shock of your loss.”

He grabs a small card from his pocket.

“If you remember or see anything, please call this number.”

Angelina rushes in to try and stop the alarms.

I open my mouth a couple of times, but instead of words, all that comes out is a pained wail. How can she do this to me? She can't just leave me like that, and what fucking party is he talking about. This cannot be happening. But it did happen, didn't it?

The officer leaves after giving me a tissue from the side of the bed, with Angelina shooing them out

My heart feels like it's being shattered into pieces, and there's something sharp stuck down my throat. I start to cry harder until I feel like I might pass out from lack of oxygen.

Kathy walks in after Angelina presses buttons on my machines. She starts to curse, taking something from her back pocket, walking over to me. I can't fully hear everything she is saying, but she rubs something cold over my arm, and suddenly there's a small sting. My eyes grow heavier, and the room starts to spin. I close my eyes and let the darkness take over me, hoping it's all just a bad dream.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:11 am

I clench my fist at the sight of this cop giving my girl his number. After that, she starts to cry, and I get up, close my laptop, and walk to her room.

Anger boils my blood; he made her cry because he was or he's too incompetent. I told him to let me give the news, but of course, he acted like he would know it better and didn't listen.

“What did you think you were doing? She needs rest, not you making things worse for the poor girl!”

I see her nurse shouting at him. He's clearly cornered by her, and I hold back a laugh.

Over the telling off he's getting, he looks at me with hooded eyes.

“I think it's odd with one girl murdered and one on the brink of death, that no one else heard or saw anything but you, and there's no sign of the attacker.”

I sigh and take a step closer to him.

“Unlike you, I actually was able to save her. I know there were neighbours calling the cops because of screaming, but your men didn't show up until forty minutes after that. Where the fuck were you, huh?”

I ask angrily. He scoffs at me and hits my shoulder with his while passing through. Bastard!

He really thought he could try framing me, well, good luck. It was his incompetence

that got Mara killed, and I can prove it since I saw them through their cameras, getting the call while eating, and waiting until they were finally done to go over there.

I didn't know Mara that well; I knew about her like any stalker would know their prey's best friend, which isn't much, but enough to know she wasn't a threat and meant a lot to Taylor. I'm filled with worry over the thought of how all of this must lie heavy on her. I don't yet know what to say to her. I lied to the hospital, saying we were married, which technically isn't a complete lie since I had those papers filled out at the end of last year. She just has no idea about any of it.

A young nurse walks out of the room, giving me the perfect opportunity to see how she is doing and if she knows about me.

"We had to give her something to sleep. Your wife was very upset over the news."

Wife. One word I could never get enough of. She must not know about me yet if the nurse still calls her that. She seems tired and there's something like pity in her eyes too.

"I also wanted to let you know that she suffers from amnesia due to the injuries she sustained to her head.

Amnesia, huh.

"What do you mean?"

I ask her, sounding a little bit too hopeful.

"She can't remember anything past November 2019,"

she tells me while sighing. I hold back the laugh that's trying to overtake me.

“Are you telling me that she doesn’t remember anything that happened after that date?”

She must think my question comes out of anger since she flinches away from me.

“We’re doing all we can to get her memory back, but until then I’d advise telling her stories of you together, but not to strain her mind too much, give her time.”

Oh, and time we will have as husband and wife. Whenever Felix asked me why I don’t just go to her and tell her how I feel instead of watching her from afar, I would tell him that I will once the time is right and the universe has given me a sign to do so. And what bigger sign would I need than this one right here?

“If you need some time to process it, we have a room where you can sit,”

she says in a flirty tone. Is she kidding me right now?

“I’d rather sit with her until she wakes. I want to make sure she’s okay. She’s my wife after all.”

I smile at her, making her blush slightly. It’s so easy to get the attention of this type of woman, but it’s not her attention or anyone else’s I need but Taylor’s.

“I understand. She’s lucky to have a man like you. If I were her, I would never forget you,”

she says, moving closer to me. I strain a smile and ignore her last comment, walking into Taylor’s room.

The moment I see her lying there, my breath hitches. She’s sleeping like those Disney princesses, waiting for her prince charming to come and kiss her awake. I’m no

prince, but to her, I would be something even better. Something more.

I brush a hair from her face and move the blanket higher so she doesn't get cold.

It's a whole different thing to see her so close and not from afar or through a screen. She's even more breathtaking up close, not that I doubted it. Her beautiful, long, dark hair spreads across her pillow. I sit on the chair close to her bed and wait, never letting her out of my sight.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:11 am

My head is foggy, and my eyes feel heavy. I try to open my eyes, but it's like gravity pulling them back down the moment I lift them. It takes a few times before I can keep them open and see the blur of what I think is a person sitting beside my bed.

“W—who are you?”

I try to focus on what I'm seeing, but it's so hard because I'm so tired.

“Get some more sleep, little doe, I'll keep watch for you,”

a deep male voice says. His presence feels familiar somehow, but I can't remember why. I close my eyes again, letting his voice lull me back into sleep.

Something is tugging at my arm, I sigh out of annoyance and open my eyes to see it's that nurse—Kathy, I think—changing the tube that is connecting my arm to the IVs.

“Sorry deary, did I wake you?”

she asks with a kind smile.

“Y—yeah,”

I sort of whisper. My voice isn't coming through properly, and my throat still feels like it's burning. But that might be from the crying too.

A pang of sadness hits me when I start to remember what happened yesterday. I'm still in the hospital, so I guess I didn't just make it all up. She can't really be gone

because if she is, I didn't just lose my friend, but also my sister. I don't know what I'll do if she's really gone.

My family never truly cared for me. All they did was complain about how much I cost them until they decided I had to buy my own food, and then it was the household bills, so I worked overtime to pay the rent, food, and electricity. You would think that after that, they wouldn't complain anymore. But no, it was always something until I had no other choice but to drop out of school. I had to work hard, hide money, and get myself enrolled into a community college while working so I could get out of that shithole of a house and still make a life for myself –before I lost myself completely.

It was hard, and Mara was the only one who knew about all of that– who supported me and helped me through it all. Now if she's gone, what the fuck am I going to do? Who am I going to go to for support? She is all I know. I don't even have tears anymore; I think my eyes have dried out by now.

Trying to distract myself from the bad thoughts, I look at the empty chair next to me, feeling slightly disappointed seeing there is no one there. Did I imagine the man? Was that my so-called husband?

The nurse turns around, seeing me frown behind her.

“Ah, looking for your husband? He just went to grab a coffee. He has been sitting here all night.”

I guess I didn't imagine that either.

“So, who is he? What's he like?”

The nurse frowns at me and takes the chair I was looking at to sit down.

“You poor girl, he’ll be back soon, and then you two can talk. Maybe it can help refresh your memory.”

None of this makes sense.

I’d sure as hell know if I was married. Right?

She opens her mouth to say something, but then the world's hottest guy walks into my room holding a cup of coffee.

He is tall, like really, really tall. His shoulders are broad; he clearly works out a lot. His hair is short on the sides and long on the top in a dark brown colour, almost black. He looks at me with the most beautiful, clear blue eyes and smiles.

“Ah, sleeping beauty has finally awoken,”

he says with a smile. Maybe I could get into this marriage thing after all.

The nurse looks from him back at me.

“Do you remember him now?”

she asks, worry edged in her tone.

“Don’t worry, love, take the time you need,”

he says with a smile. Why would he be smiling about that? His eyes soften as he looks at me staring at him, bewildered. The nurse gets up and leaves us alone.

The way he looks at me, like I’m the only thing that matters, makes my heart bounce harder, but it also makes me suspicious. How did I even find a man like that? He

could be straight from the romance books I read. Well, not really, since those men are huge red flags, but still.

“Who are you? And how do you know me?”

He keeps that damn smile on his face. It’s unnerving, but also nice to look at. He takes the chair and moves it closer before he sits next to me. He leans back with his legs open, one arm on his leg, the other holding his coffee.

“I’m your husband. The doctor told me not to strain your memory, so I won’t give you too many details yet, but we met in 2020, on the New Year, actually.”

He says the word ‘husband’ so casually like he’s been saying it for a long time. It feels odd that I met him two months after the last day I remember. But I shouldn’t get too paranoid, it’s probably a coincidence. People meet during New Year’s all the time.

“Are you really who you claim to be? I lost a lot already, I don’t want to add more to that.”

My eyes are burning, and they feel puffy, and it feels like there’s something stuck in my throat the moment I think about the possibility of Mara no longer being in my life.

He places his cup on the floor next to his chair and gets up to hold my hand.

I pull away from him, causing him to frown.

“I told you I’m your husband. You can check our wedding papers if you don’t believe me,”

he states, slight annoyance in his tone.

“I don’t recall marrying you,”

I snap at him a little too rudely. I know I shouldn’t, but something tells me that there are things not adding up. If only I could just remember what that was.

He sighs and sits back down, picks up his coffee, and takes a sip.

“This amnesia is definitely not going to make things easy, but we’ll get through it. One step at a time, right?”

He looks worried, and something else I can’t fully name. Maybe I’m hurting him with my questions?

“I’m sorry, I’m tired and I feel like none of this is real. I just want to go back to when I actually remember what was happening.”

I sob slightly.

He moves forward and kisses my forehead.

“Do you want to see pictures of us together?”

Before I can answer him, he grabs his phone and turns it to me. He shows me pictures of us lying on the couch, at a picnic, me in a wedding dress. How can I not remember any of this?

I gape at the pictures. This really looks like we are married. I try to think about my past, but my head is blank, and all I remember is me and Mara moving her stuff from college.

He takes in my silence and brushes his hand softly against my cheek.

“Don’t worry, love, you hit your head pretty hard. Try to rest so I can take you home soon.”

There’s sympathy in his eyes. He seems too good to be true, but maybe that’s a good thing. These last couple of hours have been horrible and confusing. I lost my friend, even if I don’t want to admit it. She would have been here already if she were still alive. I close my eyes again, letting sleep overtake me. I’m too tired to fight it all.

I feel soft lips pressed against my forehead and soft murmurs I can’t fully hear before sleep grabs me again.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:11 am

This accident is a curse and a blessing. I feel horrible for my little doe losing her friend like that. Sometimes I feel like she is not fully taking it in and that she doesn't believe Mara is dead. I just hope once it finally gets to her, she'll survive the hit.

At least thanks to her memory loss, she has her husband by her side to take care of her. This has been the best thing to have ever happened to me. Not that I wanted her to get attacked. I wish it were because of different circumstances, but you only get one shot at these things, and I am taking this moment with both hands.

I place my phone back in my pocket. She had some troubles believing it at first, that's why I made sure during the time she was asleep that I had all the photoshopped pictures downloaded onto my phone. Since I had already made our wedding papers before, she didn't know about them yet. It was going to be a surprise, but hey, I'm not complaining.

Felix laughed at me when I called him to explain the situation, but he has his way of getting his girl, and I have mine. At least mine is less fucked up than his.

She's sleeping again, but I can see pain and worry edged onto her face. Even in sleep, this haunts her.

Good thing her husband is here. Ha, husband. I'll never get enough of saying that.

I smile at the thought of her sitting in our garden, playing with our children. I want at least five of them, though I wouldn't complain if we had more.

Felix is already moving her stuff over to my place. He told Evelyn he was helping my

girlfriend move in, which isn't a complete lie.

“Mmmm. N—no, s—stop, no!”

I hate seeing my wife having nightmares like this, but she has been having them for as long as I have known her.

Sometimes, when I wasn't able to be near her and the nightmares would come, I didn't have much of an option to just see it out on my computer screen. Combining work and watching my little doe is not always efficient. The times, however, I was close by, I would just sneak in and hold her until it was over. I read that waking someone when they have nightmares can end badly, and I'd rather not take that risk.

I walk over to her and brush my hand over her hair while murmuring to her. So far, this has helped the most whenever she's had nightmares. She moves a lot, and it takes some time before she's calm again and stops moving around. I keep my hand against her forehead, repeatedly brushing her skin with my thumb. She seems so beautiful and innocent lying here.

After a while the older nurse —Kathy or Katie, I think—comes to take a look. She seemed wary of me from the moment I came in holding her, but I don't mind it; it means my girl has a nurse that cares for her. I just need her to give me more trust.

“This amnesia, is there a way to help it get better? I showed her our wedding pictures, and she doesn't remember it. Is there anything else I can do?”

I ask her. I even made a small tear come out of my eye. If this doesn't convince her, I don't know what will.

The nurse places her hand on my shoulder, her eyes softening slightly. Gotcha.

“Don’t worry, dear, it happens more often than you think after a head injury like that. She just needs time. Don’t force too much on her.”

I brush the tear away with the back of my hand, making a small sniffing sound. The nurse brushes her hand over my back a couple of times and moves over to check my wife. I don’t think I’ll ever get enough of that word either.

She winces at the touch of the nurse’s hand when she touches her arm to wake her. A pang of anger resurfaces from the small action; I should’ve knocked the fucker out to then torture him instead of beating him to death. My anger rarely gets out of hand like that, but when it comes to my little doe, it’s like I have no control over myself. Like there’s something darker that takes over, like I’m possessed or something. I should probably not use that term when explaining things to Felix.

A moan of pain leaves her beautiful lips and my cock already hardens at the sound. Down boy, this is not the moment.

I get up from what I’m sure is the world’s most uncomfortable chair and go to stand next to her. She’s trying to get up, but the nurse is scolding her and trying to make her lie back down.

“You know, love, if you keep moving like that, you’ll end up here longer than necessary.”

I raise my eyebrow at her and smile lazily. She doesn’t answer me at first, staring at where my sort of-boner is slightly tenting my pants. Don’t worry, little doe, you’ll get your fill soon enough.

I clear my throat, getting her attention back to my face. She scoffs, but I can see her face turning slightly red. Satisfaction fills me. She wants me.

All I can think of now is having her bent over this ridiculously small bed, so I can fill her up and mark her as mine.

“I have to pee, unless you want me to pee on this bed instead.”

She's staring, throwing daggers at me. I love how ballsy she can be. There's nothing I love more than a woman who says what she thinks, I hate it when people are without a personality.

I place my arm behind her and one under her leg, swooping her up from the bed in one swift movement.

“AAAH, what are you doing?”

she squeaks out in surprise while grabbing my neck like her life depends on it.

“Bringing you to the toilet. I thought you had to pee.”

I move her onto the pot in the tiny bathroom—if I could even call it that—linked to her room. She glares at me, her neck and cheeks turning red.

“I’m not peeing if you keep standing there,”

she tells me, crossing her arms. It’s adorable how she raises her nose a little bit when she’s mad. I’ve seen it on the cameras and from afar so many times, but seeing it up close. I can’t help the smile that pops up on my face.

“Why? What if you fall in or hurt yourself again? I don’t care if you have to take a shit. You are in pain, and you will have to do it in front of me. You're my wife. I’m just ensuring your wellbeing.”

I honestly never cared about those things; it's a basic need. I never got why people always use those stupid synonyms for going to the bathroom. Why try to keep it a secret? Everyone does it.

She opens her mouth a few times, and her face is turning redder and redder with each second that passes. She looks like the most adorable tomato I've ever seen.

“Because it's creepy and disgusting. Go. Away.”

I sigh and move out of the room. I really want to keep the door open, but I think it'll only anger her, and I don't want to fight after just being officially married.

I wait until I hear the flush of the toilet, and I knock on the door and ask if I can come back in. She grunts her answer, but doesn't fight me when I enter and pick her back up, then tuck her into bed again.

Her eyes are sleepy and heavy, but she's visibly fighting it.

“Go back to sleep, love,”

I murmur into her hair, giving her a soft kiss.

“I don't want to miss Mara coming to visit,”

she murmurs. I frown at her.

I liked her friend, and I knew it was going to hit her hard once she heard the news, but denial is not the right way to deal with it. I swallow some saliva and open my mouth, thinking about how I should word it to her.

“Babe, I know it's hard and it's not fair on you, but she's not coming back.”

She flinches at my words, small tears leaving the corners of her eyes.

“She wouldn’t leave me like that,”

she sniffs. It takes a while before she finally falls asleep, her cheeks still damp from the tears. I keep my fingers tangled in her hair, massaging her scalp to comfort her.

All I can think of now is all the ways I should have killed that bastard over and over again.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:11 am

The nurse is finally removing the tubes after the last checkup, I am finally released from the hospital, and I couldn't be happier. I hate it when people constantly fuss over me, and Ryan—my stranger husband—hasn't left my side this whole week.

His devotion to my well-being is driving me crazy, but also making me feel bad about not remembering him and for having this feeling like I shouldn't trust him. It's all so weird and confusing, and I just don't want to overthink too much of it now.

It's been a week of recovery and a week without Mara. I keep waking up hoping to see her at the end of my bed, but I only see him, and I feel so sad every time.

Not only that she's not there, but also that I'd rather have my friend there than my own husband. It's not fair to him after all he's done for me.

He seems excited about my discharge, saying he's going to take care of me—as if he hasn't been doing that already—and that I shouldn't worry. Everything about him feels too good to be true, but maybe it's because of this stupid amnesia.

“Do you need my help to get to the car, love?”

He gently grabs my arm with one hand and grabs my chin with the other, making me raise my eyes to his.

“Don't mother me so much, I'm fine. Truly.”

I get up from the bed and raise my arms to show him I can move myself. “See.”

He doesn't seem fully convinced, but hey, he literally came into our home to find his wife being attacked and beaten, it would make me overly worried too if I were in his place. Even though he is driving me crazy.

“Just don't strain anything. I'm finally getting you back home. I don't want you to be stuck in here again.”

His eyes are glassy, and I find myself reaching for him.

The smile that comes to his face at my movement lights me up. He's so beautiful when he smiles.

I softly graze my lips against his. I don't know why I haven't done so before. We are married after all. He moves his hand to support the back of my head and pulls me against his lips, kissing me intensely. Like we haven't kissed in ages, though I guess a week without kissing might be odd for a married couple.

I laugh, trying to pull myself away, but he's reluctant, keeping me in place.

“You're acting like it's been years, babe. I thought you wanted us to go home.”

I raise my eyebrow at him. He moves his arms away, going through his hair with his hand.

“Well, that one week felt like an eternity.”

He is such a smooth talker.

The drive back home doesn't take long, I stare at the house—well our house. Nothing about this place even feels familiar.

“What has taken my precious bride's attention away from her husband?”

Ryan holds my hips with his hands while he smiles up at me. He moves his hand to brush a stray hair behind my ear and kisses me again.

“I don't understand how I don't remember this house, it's so beautiful and big. I feel bad for not remembering you. I just, I don't know, this is all so much. I wish Mara was still here.”

I can feel a tear sliding down my cheek. I don't think I can fully do this without her, life is just not the same.

Ryan kisses the tear away and holds me close.

“When I saw you lying there, I thought I lost you for a second. I'd rather have you with amnesia and alive than live without you. Don't feel bad, love, we'll get through this.”

He brushes my cheek with his thumb and kisses my forehead before guiding me to the door.

This house is big and cozy looking. The hallway is filled with pictures of us together hanging on the wall—pictures I can't recall ever being taken.

A flash of guilt comes back up and I try to push it down again. It's not my fault. It's that man's, he not only took my friend from me but also my marriage. Well, the memory of it at least.

“On the bright side, look at all the things we could do for the first time again.”

He wiggles his eyebrows at me and pushes me against the wall, kissing me fiercely

while his hand crawls under my shirt, grabbing my breast.

“You're so perfect,”

he whispers against my lips while trailing kissing along my chin and then my neck. I moan at the feeling of him sucking on my skin while pinching my nipples.

“Mine,”

he says before pulling my shirt off. He moves down, placing his warm mouth on my breast and starts to suck on it.

I tangle my fingers in his hair, keeping him close against me. His hands slowly roam down my body while he sucks and bites my nipple. I can feel the wetness puddling between my legs, and I groan out my appreciation of his hand getting underneath my underwear. He circles my clit with his thumb before slowly pushing his fingers inside of me. I moan at the feeling, making him chuckle against my skin. He kisses my left nipple before removing his head from my breast. The loss of contact makes me whine.

“I know, I know, but the doctor said to take it easy. And with you making noises like that, I'm not sure I can keep my promise.”

He removes his fingers, smiling at my protest, and hooks his arm under my leg, picking me up again.

“You seriously stopped mid orgasm because I need to ‘take it easy’?”

I seethe at him. He laughs loudly, a small dimple showing on his cheek. I sigh. I can't stay mad when he looks like that.

He walks up the stairs, and I grab his neck out of fear of him losing his balance.

“I don’t think it’s smart to choke the man holding you on the stairs, love,”

he says while walking up.

I scoff at him.

“Then don’t drop me. I’d rather not die falling off the stairs before I’ve even had an orgasm.”

“Have some faith, will ya?”

He kicks open the first door next to the stairs and carefully places me on the bed.

“See, still one piece. Now about that orgasm.”

He stands at the end of the bed, pulling my pants and underwear down in one swift pull.

“Look at you all ready and needy.”

His finger brushes over my slit, gathering my wetness. Lifting it up towards his mouth, he sucks his finger clean and pulls it out with a loud pop.

There’s a sinister smile on his face. It makes me feel like my body is on fire with the way he watches me.

He pulls his shirt off and slowly stalks over me like I’m his prey. There's a dragon tattoo on his chest, and he has a softly visible six pack, like he works out, but not too much. I’m pretty sure he can see how I’m drooling over his incredible body, but I

don't care. We're married anyways.

His tattooed arms reach forward, leaning against each side of my body, his veins sticking out all the way to his big, masculine hands. There must be a god somewhere giving me this fine specimen. But then why take my closest friend from me?

Good job Taylor. I'm about to get the sex of my dreams, and here I am ruining the mood with my depressing thoughts.

I don't even remember getting married, and now he'll surely divorce me.

My head starts to spiral, and my breathing is hitching until I can feel warm hands hold my face, and I look into the most beautiful deep blue eyes. Whatever he just did seems to work since the way he looks at me is making all the thoughts leave my head just for a second.

"Hey, what's wrong? Do you want to take a shower and watch a movie instead?"

God, this man is so kind, I don't deserve him.

I open my mouth to answer him, but it's like my voice just doesn't want to work.

He brushes his hands over my cheeks. Am I crying?

He moves away from me. Guilt and anxiety start to hit me. I haven't even been in the house for thirty minutes and he already regrets me.

I can't hold the sobs in anymore as I let all the negative thoughts fill my head. My parents were right. I'm worthless, no one could ever love me. I know I shouldn't think all these things, but if everyone always said this to me, doesn't it make it true then?

“Love, what’s going on? Talk to me.”

I look up and see him walking back into the room towards me. He sits down next to me and pulls my body into his, holding me. I sob into his neck while trying to keep it together, but failing horribly.

He keeps holding me, kissing my forehead while talking to me, though I’m not sure what it is he is saying.

It takes me a couple of minutes before I am all cried out. My head hurts and my eyes are puffy, and I am feeling that daze you get when you get it all out and are too tired to continue crying.

I can hear the sound of water falling from afar and focus on it while he holds me a little longer.

“How are you feeling?”

His rough voice takes me out of my daze.

“My head hurts, I’m sorry I didn—”

“Shh, it’s okay, my love, you need time. I’m sorry for pushing you. I put the shower on, I thought maybe it’ll help you feel better.”

If I were able to, I’m pretty sure I’d be crying with appreciation right now.

How I could even forget a man like this is beyond me.

He helps me off the bed and brings me to the bathroom. If I thought the house looked big, I should have seen this shower. I think three people could easily fit in here, and

there is even a place you can sit on. Are we that rich?

Don't tell me not only is he built like a god and incredibly thoughtful, but also rich. Someone pinch me.

“Wow, this all seems so unreal.”

Literally, what is he hiding? He laughs and takes his trousers off. I know it's rude to stare, but can you blame me? Look at him. There has got to be something wrong, no way he's this perfect.

I can see the big bulge in his underwear, and I'm relieved that at least that's not what's wrong.

“Enjoying the view?”

I look up to see him smirking. He looks so beautiful like that.

He removes his underwear, his huge dick jumps free, and I have never been more attracted to any man in my life before than I am to him.

I take off my shirt and walk with him into the shower. I move to grab the sponge, but he stops me and grabs it instead.

“It's my job to take care of you,”

he says before I have a chance to protest.

He opens the bottle and pours the body wash onto the sponge in his hand. I can feel the wetness dripping down my thighs as he walks up to me and starts to glide the sponge over my naked body.

I moan softly when his hands reach my breasts, kneading them roughly. His hands trail down my curves until he is at my hips, and then he pulls me around and starts to knead my ass.

He's crouching down, and kissing my skin as he continues to lather me up. His hands are brushing over my legs one by one while he licks and sucks at my skin.

A pinching sting at my right ass cheek makes me yelp while he laughs. Did he just bite my ass? Since when do I find that hot?

He trails his hands back up and turns me around towards him, then grabs the showerhead and starts to spray it over my body. For some weird reason, the action seems familiar to me, but I can't come up with why it does.

Once all the soap has been washed off, he changes the stream setting of the showerhead and places it at my core. The hot pressure makes me gasp and moan the moment it touches my most sensitive area.

"That's it, little doe, keep making those noises for me."

He grabs me by the back of my head and crashes his lips against mine. Fuck this feels so good.

"Hmm, Ryan y—yeaah,"

I moan onto his lips. I can feel he is enjoying this while he sucks and bites on my bottom lip.

He clicks on the showerhead again, making the stream more intense.

"Oh my god!"

I yelp while he holds it closer to my core.

“No god, baby, Ryan. R-Y-A-N.”

I whimper at the sensation, unable to hear everything he’s saying. I will call him anything he wants if he just keeps holding it there.

I lean back, placing one hand on the glass of the shower door and the other against the wall. He takes this as an opportunity to grab my nipple with his teeth, sending me over the edge and making me come in record time.

“Oh g—Ryan!”

I scream. He moves from my breast to my forehead giving me a kiss there while placing the showerhead back.

“Turn around, hands on the wall in front of you,”

he instructs me. I am unsure if I can actually keep doing this without passing out, but I am too into it to not follow his instructions or demands.

I do as he says while he nudges my legs wider and bends my back further, making my ass stick out.

His hands are trailing my bum, spreading my cheeks, and I stiffen a little bit. He's not going to go there, is he?

“Don’t worry, baby, I need to make you ready before I go there,”

he says while slapping my cheek with one hand. He leans over me, and I can feel his breath against my ear.

“If it’s too much, tell me,”

he says before burying himself in me in one deep thrust. I scream his name while he pounds into me like this might be our last time together.

It doesn’t take long before I reach my second orgasm, and he pushes himself in for the last time, grunting out his. This man does not only look like a god but also fucks like one.

I slump down onto the ‘sitting area’ of the shower, making him laugh while turning off the water. He walks out and comes back in, placing a towel over me.

“Are you okay? Was I too rough?”

He crouches to my level, his eyes filled with worry. I smile at him. He looks so cute when he is fussing over me like that.

“I’m okay, and you were perfect. I just feel like I could sleep for days now,”

I tell him. He seems happy with my answer and helps me get dried off and get dressed.

Once we’re both done, he walks me to the bed and places the blankets over me, giving me a quick kiss before walking away.

“Aren’t you going to sleep?”

I ask him while yawning. He turns around with a soft smile on his face.

“I’ll come soon. I have some work to do first.”

He leaves it at that and closes the door. Right, what does he actually do? I lay back and remind myself to ask him that once I wake up again.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:11 am

I wake up to an empty bed. I can see he slept here earlier, but his side is feeling cold now, which means that he must have gotten up a while ago. Did I do something wrong? I didn't like how he left when I went to sleep too. What if he's already tired of me?

Disappointment and insecurity cloud my mind, making me curse myself. Why am I always like this? Maybe he just had something important to do? Desperation isn't sexy, Tay! I tell myself, even though I can feel the insecurity trying to reach the surface. Not today, Satan!

Maybe I should just get up and start the day instead of sitting here overthinking everything like some desperate housewife. There's a delicious smell filling the hallway, making my stomach growl in response.

The sweet smell of pancakes brings me to the kitchen. Is he seriously now also a cook?

Looking through the door, I see him standing there, unaware of my presence yet. Just the sight of him takes my breath away. Ryan is completely shirtless, showing off his abs and perfect ink. And yup, it's actually him making pancakes while wearing a white apron with 'Suck the cook' written on it. Like he just came straight from one of my romance books. Only now I also notice that he has a tattoo on his back; two eyes of a big wolf are looking at me. It's creepy and oddly attractive too. He stiffens for a second when noticing me standing there, staring at him like a creepy stalker. I am so not acing this married couple thing.

It's not long before he breaks hold of his freeze and turns towards me. "Good

Morning, little doe,”

he chirps at me. I awkwardly smile and walk closer, giving him a kiss.

“What did I do to deserve a man like you?”

He smiles at me, the sight so perfect I don’t think I would survive losing him too.

He moves the pile of pancakes onto the table, and I frown, seeing there's only one plate. Is he not eating breakfast with me?

He notices me looking and moves his hands to hold my head. His eyes soften.

“I have work to do, but I’ll be back before it’s dark.”

He gives me a peck on my lips and cleans up while I sit down and take a bite. At least he cooked, I guess.

“Babe, this is amazing!”

I say while moaning with my mouth still full. If my mother were to see me, she’d be yelling at me, calling me a heathen. But to be fair to her, nothing I would do was ever good enough.

He laughs, taking his keys before he walks back towards me to kiss my forehead.

“I’m glad you like it. Don’t open the door for anyone okay?”

he says while going to the door.

“What if it’s important?”

I get up and walk closer to him. His hand is on the door and his jaw tightens. He's clearly annoyed at my question, but why?

“You open for no one when I'm not home. I'm not going to come home again to my wife being attacked.”

His voice is deeper, and there's anger in it. Okay, yeah, that makes sense. I can understand his fear and it only happened recently, but that doesn't mean I should get locked up here. Besides, his security is so tight, I don't think anyone would be even able to get here without someone at least being warned. Hence the question: how did my attacker get in here, and why didn't I stay in this house with Mara? The police told me that she died in her house, and since it's so safe here, why wouldn't I just let her spend the night here? If only I could just remember.

Dark thoughts are filling my head again, and I can feel something heavy in my throat. I think it's guilt. I mean I could've saved her—I should've just let her stay here.

Before the tears come, someone is holding me tightly, whispering something in my ear.

“I shouldn't have brought it up, I'm sorry, baby. Just stay safe, and if you want to take a walk, make sure to stay on the terrain and to keep a taser with you just in case, okay?”

He wipes his thumbs over my cheeks. Was I crying?

I nod at him and watch him leave the house. I wait until his car is fully out of sight before I close the door and go to the living room to sit down and grab my new book, *Run Rabbit, Run* by Talia Lane. If there's something that helps me take my mind away from things, it's reading books, and Talia is one of my favourite authors.

It's been over four hours now since Ryan left, and I have never felt so alone in my life. I've thought about texting him, but I didn't want to come across as 'too needy', so I kept deleting a message and then retyping to delete it again. I should just wait till he's home, I mean, he's busy and I don't want to intrude just because I'm lonely. Ugh, I hate it, I hate this.

I used to be able to call Mara, and she would always be there, but I guess that's not possible anymore. A small sob leaves my lips.

This is unfair. Why did she have to go? She had so much to live for and it's all because of some sick fuck. Tears are pouring down my face, but it's not only sadness I feel, oh no, there's anger too.

Not only did he take her from me, but the police said they couldn't even find him. So this sicko could literally go and attack more innocent women for no reason.

The buzzing of my phone pulls me out of my own head. Lifting it up, I notice it's Ryan calling me, probably to check up on me. I can't say I don't feel relieved that he's calling me now, though. I felt like I was going to spiral again, and I really don't like being alone in this quiet and big house with no one to talk to.

"Still alive in there?"

I laugh through a sob and try to sound as happy as I can, but it feels so forced and untrue.

"Yeah. H—how is work?"

My voice hitches slightly and I really hope he doesn't notice it. It's quiet for a couple of seconds on the line before he starts to talk again.

“What’s wrong? Are you crying? You know what, I’m going to come home early today. I shouldn’t be leaving you alone so quickly.”

He starts to mumble some things to himself, and I can’t fully hear anything, but he’s definitely cursing himself. It’s almost making it impossible for me to say something between his ranting.

“Why? It’s okay, everything is okay. I just need some air, that’s all.”

I can hear him packing his stuff on the other side while he talks to someone in the background.

“Because you are alone and crying. Don’t think I don’t know you enough to know when you are not okay.”

I can’t hold the tears from flowing anymore as I start to full-on cry on the phone, not even able to say a simple word. Why am I like this? Get it together.

“Baby, I’m coming home okay. Just—why don’t you go into the garden? Take some breaths of fresh air and calm your mind until I’m back home.”

I’m not used to this kind of thing and I don’t know how to feel about it. I am a grown woman. I should be able to take care of myself, and I don’t want to become that one person who always relies on others. I mean, look how far it got me with Mara. I relied on her for everything, and now I’m just a total mess.

“Baby?”

“Y—yeah,”

I make out between sobs. Maybe going outside might do me some good. I walk

towards the garden while still having him on the phone. He is telling me some stuff about when he'll be here and the things I can do in the meanwhile, but I can't fully focus on everything because of how fast he is talking, and feeling drained from the crying isn't helping me either.

“So, you'll be careful, right?”

He sounds so worried, leaving his work early to come here. All because I can't deal with Mara's death. Don't think like that, it will only make things worse.

“Babe? You there?”

I hum my response, still slightly distracted with my own thoughts.

“I'll give you some time to clear your head. I'll be there in twenty minutes tops,”

he says. I might not be able to see him, but I can definitely imagine him smiling while saying it based on his tone.

“Okay. See you soon,”

I say before I hang up on him, while finally opening the door to his garden. Fresh air greets me and I take in a deep breath before I start to explore the area. It's huge here, there's flowers on both sides, a small fountain, and a pathway that leads to the forest that is attached to his garden.

I also notice an older man who is planting something close to the forest.

“Oh, hi.”

I wave at the man and he looks at me and smiles. There's a tooth missing and his back

is slightly bent. Does he work here?

“Hi miss. Here because of the cemetery too?”

he asks, making me frown at him. There's a cemetery close by? Ryan never mentioned anything about it.

“I’m not sure I know what you are talking about?”

He takes a breath and looks around before turning back to me.

“Don’t go there. What gets in doesn’t come back the same way.”

I open my mouth a few times, unsure of what to reply. Does he have dementia or something like that? Maybe I should just call the police, or if he has family, call them for help.

“Are you okay? Do you need me to call someone?”

He frowns at me like he found my question rude. He bends down and pushes a small seed into the ground again.

“Don’t enter. What goes in doesn’t come out.”

He repeats the sentence like a broken record. I pick up my phone to call Ryan again, unsure what to do, but the man grabs my hand to stop me and looks me deep in the eye. ‘You cannot go there, you can’t! They aren’t the same!’

He starts to shout at me and I scream back, trying to hold back the panic as I attempt to get him to let me go. He looks behind me, his expression changing into one of pure fear, and then he lets go of me and starts to run into the forest.

“Wait!”

I yell, quickly glancing behind me. There’s a grey cat standing near the fountain. Is he scared of cats? I press 911 on my phone and call for help while I go after the man. He’s old and confused and clearly needs help. I can’t just leave him alone in there, what if he falls?

“911, what’s your emergency?”

I hear a soft calm voice ask. I’m sort of out of breath from the running already, but I try to talk as clearly as one who is currently running into an unknown forest can.

“Hello? There’s this old confused man a—and he ran in the forest. I—I don’t know who he is, he needs help, I think.”

My breathing is hitching, and I can feel an asthma attack coming if I don’t take a break soon. Shit!

“M—ma’am, I can—”

The line goes dead, and I curse myself even more now. Great, I am alone in the forest, no connection, can’t find the old man either now, and I don’t have my inhaler with me. Just great!

I try to focus my hearing hoping to hear the old man running somewhere close by, but it’s dead silent. I do some breathing exercises while I slowly walk back to the house.

Of course, I don’t know where I am, and therefore am lost, which is what I can add to the pile of ‘shit I get myself involved in’.

How hard can it be to find my way back? If Ryan finds out I’m lost in the woods,

he's going to lose his shit and probably never let me leave the house again. I mutter a few curses and walk to where I think I should go.

The further I go, the darker the forest gets, giving me an ominous feeling. The hairs on my body are starting to stand up, and the air is getting colder.

Coming here was clearly a mistake.

Something moves to my right, and I almost scream from the jump scare it just gave me.

“Sorry, miss. Didn't mean to frighten ya.”

The man seems to be in his early forties and he is wearing dirty, old farmer clothes with small holes in them. He seems young, but he feels old. That's odd, right? Maybe I am just being weird about this.

“It's okay. I'm going back home to my husband,”

I tell him, hoping the mention of Ryan will scare him away. I don't know the man, and there's something about him that makes my skin crawl.

I take a step to continue leaving, but it seems that the conversation isn't over yet for him.

“Ah, came to the cemetery too? Who did you lose?”

he asks while smiling up at me.

“Hmm, I'm not sure what you are talking about?”

I frown, he laughs, and waves his hand as a sign to make me follow him. I know I really shouldn't, and this is usually how people die, but my curiosity is getting the better of me, and I decide to follow him, but not before picking up a piece of a branch. Because I'm not that stupid.

He brings me to an old cemetery that is hidden within the woods. The ground is almost black, and there are statues of angels that seem dark and cold, and big stone crosses that are partly scratched. This is definitely the creepiest cemetery I've ever seen.

“What is this place?”

I ask with worry etched in my tone. He doesn't look at me and just stares at one of the graves. I walk closer, seeing the name on it: 'Toby Higgins'. The date is partly scratched off, making it impossible to see it properly.

“Here is where we bury those whom we can't miss,”

he says, eyes not leaving the grave.

“Why not bring them to a normal cemetery?”

I ask him, taking a small step back from the scene. From him.

“Because they don't come back like they do here.”

Huh, almost the same thing the old man said. Maybe he was actually telling me something.

I clear my throat and take another step away. Nothing here feels right, and the warning of the old man rings in my head. I should've just continued going home

instead. The man turns to me, his face seems paler than before, and his eyes seem to start to lose their colour. I swallow the scream that wants to break free. What the fuck is this?

“I know you lost, I know your pain. Bring her here and you will have her back.”

His voice sounds rougher, and he opens his mouth. There’s a spider, yes, an ACTUAL SPIDER crawling out of it, climbing back up over his face into his hair. What the fuck?

“T—there’s a—a s—spider,”

I rasp, unsure how to take in what is happening. He smiles and takes a step closer, making me back up one too.

“I was buried here too. Don’t you want her back?”

I can feel tears of fear sliding down my face, and my breathing is hitching, making me gasp for air. Is this a panic attack? Am I dying? He stays still and moves his head to the side like some creepy scarecrow from those Halloween maze games. His skin is turning a pale blue and his eyes are turned into a pure white now. He opens his mouth again, making more mini spiders creep out.

I scream and start to run as far away from this place, from this man, as I can. This did not just fucking happen.

“You’ll be back soon!”

he yells after me. No, I won’t!

I keep running for a while until I hit something full force, making me fall and taking

whatever I hit down with me.

There are strong hands holding my hips, and I look up to see the most beautiful blue eyes staring back at me. I have never been as glad to see him as I am right now.

“Are you okay?”

His voice is filled with worry, and he moves one of his hands to brush the side of my face.

Relieved to see him, I bury my head into his neck and let him hold me. I don't think he's very comfortable in this position, but he doesn't show it if he isn't.

After a while, he decides it's best to get off the mud. He moves me off so he can stand up, then helps me up too. He grabs my face in his hands, our lips barely touching. If I wasn't scared shitless right now, I would definitely be turned on.

“Babe? What happened? Why are you running and screaming in the forest? Didn't I tell you to stay within the terrain?”

What the hell am I supposed to say to that? That I saw a zombie? If that even is what he was supposed to be. I'm pretty sure he'll just bring me back to the hospital if I do. And do I even mention the old man, since I might have also made that up because no way that actually happened.

“Babe?”

His brows are furrowed and he clearly seems worried. Do I tell him the truth or do I lie?

“There was this old man in your garden, and he ran confused in the forest, so I went

after him. But then I lost him, and there was someone else, but he creeped me out, so I ran.”

There, it's not a complete lie, but just information with some missing extra facts.

“You should’ve called me instead of going after him. You don’t remember this place and this forest is big.”

He is scolding me, but at least not calling me crazy, so that's a win, right?

I look behind me, making sure whatever that was didn’t follow me. The forest seems warmer again too, filled with more colour and the air is less heavy to breathe. Maybe it’s because of my concussion?

“Babe? Are you listening?”

I look back at him, not knowing what it was he said, but I nod anyway. He’s already mad at me, no need for it to get worse.

He sighs and gives me a fast peck on the lips.

“Why don’t you go wait inside while I call 911 for the old man?”

He holds me steady with his hand over my hip while he guides me out of the forest until the house is visible.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:11 am

There's a cool breeze roaming over my body, I can feel the fabric of my nightgown move with the wind. My bare feet are in some kind of wet, squishy, cold substance, making me want to move away from it, but something is holding me in place.

Slowly opening my eyes, confusion fills my thoughts. Is this a dream? I can remember going to bed but not getting here.

It's dark, but I can see the tombstones surrounding me. I'm in that fucking cemetery again.

“You returned.”

I yelp and jump away, seeing the guy from before standing next to me. Either this is a nightmare or I am losing my mind.

“Did you take me here?”

The ghost, zombie man thing—whatever he's supposed to be—is smiling at me like he knows something that I don't know yet. Something I don't want to know.

“No, not me. The cemetery did. It can feel your pain.”

Right, the cemetery did. Okay I am officially losing my shit.

The cold air is getting worse, making me clench my teeth. I hug myself in hopes of getting some warmth out of it, but it seems almost impossible, like the cold is not just the air itself, but it's also coursing through my bones.

“Once she’s buried here, she’ll come back. Isn’t that what you want?”

I shouldn’t even consider it, but he does seem very real, and what if it actually would work? Would it bring my friend back? But that would mean I would have to dig her up from the grave where her parents will be placing her. From her final resting place. I can’t do that, can I?

“I can’t just steal her body and bury her here.”

The words leave my mouth without me realising it. I can’t actually be considering this.

“What harm would it do if no one knows?”

I look back at the dead-but-also-not-dead man next to me, thinking his words over.

It’s getting darker and even colder. I feel as if I might actually faint from the cold now. I’m shaking uncontrollably until suddenly my body feels heavy and everything turns dark again.

I can feel the sweat dripping off my brows while I try to catch my breath.

Inhale 1-2-3-4

Exhale 1-2-3-4-5-6

Inha–

“Babe? What’s wrong?”

Ryan's rough, sleepy voice catches me off guard, and I yelp while almost jumping off

the bed.

He quickly moves, holding me in place so I don't fall off. I laugh awkwardly, like I always do when I'm embarrassed.

"Sorry, I had a strange dream, it all felt so real,"

I mutter out while he brushes the side of my face. He moves closer and kisses my forehead. I love it when he does that.

"Don't worry, you are safe here. I wo—what?"

Ryan moves away from the bed and pulls up the sheets. There's dried mud and leaves at my feet, and my dress is dirty too, as if I have been walking in the forest at night. He gets up and pulls me off the bed, checking my legs for injuries.

"Babe? What the fuck?"

Lost for words, I stare at the scene in front of me. What the fuck indeed. Was it not a dream? I can't remember getting up and going into the forest. Does this mean it's all real? Everything the man said, could it be true?

"Well? Are you hurt?"

He keeps patting my body as if he'd find a random knife or something else sticking out of me. Though if he keeps petting me down like that, he might have to check himself soon too.

"No, I—I don't know, I thought it was a dream. Can you stop that!"

I slap his hands away from me, in an angrier way than intended. I'm frustrated,

confused and a little bit pissed off—okay maybe more than a little bit, but what the actual hell just happened?

His eyes widen, and there is hurt in his expression, but he seems to mask it faster than it shows. Way to go, Taylor.

“I—I’m sorry, I don’t know what happened. I’m just going to take a shower and clean all of this up.”

His mouth is in a tight line and he nods. He seems unsure of what to do or say about all of this and therefore isn’t saying anything. I’m relieved that he doesn’t push the matter and lets me take the time I need.

Sighing, I walk away. I can feel him staring at me, and I start to feel guilty for just leaving him there, but what else can I do? Go to him and say: Oh hey, I think I was sleepwalking in the forest where there is a cemetery that brings people back from the dead, and uh, I might be interested in trying it out. I don’t think that will go over well.

Turning on the hot water, I take some small breaths and start to peel off my nightdress. The lower part is crunchy from the dried dirt, and it seems I have some cuts on my feet from walking on the stones and branches. I didn’t even feel them being there.

Nothing about any of this makes sense, and I am trying to hold on to the small thread that is my sanity, but the more I think about all of this, the more I can feel it slipping through my hands.

What if I have a second chance to have Mara by my side again? What if this is a sign?

Tomorrow is her funeral. I don’t even know how I could bring her there.

All of this is madness. I am just mourning and it's clouding my head. This can't be real.

I step into the shower, letting the water pour over me. I move my head backwards so I can feel it sliding over my face, dripping down. There's nothing that helps me more than a hot shower to burn away the darkness.

Page 10

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:11 am

“Babe? You there?”

I almost jump out of my skin from the sudden noise and start laughing.

“Yeah, where else would I be?”

I can hear the door opening to my left and I look to see Ryan standing in front of it. He seems so worried and it makes my heart skip a beat. Did something happen?

“What is it?”

His throat bobs and he slowly walks closer to me.

“Why don’t you turn the water off and come here, babe?”

Frowning, I turn around and put it off before walking out to where he is standing.

“What’s going on?”

He moves a towel over me, and the feeling of the fabric on my skin burns slightly , making me flinch away.

“You’ve been in the shower for almost two hours, babe. Not to mention your skin is all red. Why did you shower in too hot water? You could really hurt yourself that way.”

What is he talking about? I just got in, it hasn't been that long, has it?

“But I just got in.”

He signs and carefully dabs the towel over my skin. It feels very irritated, and when I lift my arms to look at them, a small gasp leaves me. How did I not notice this?

“I think you need to have an MRI done, babe.”

I don't answer him and just stare down at my arms in slight alarm. I don't remember being that long in the shower.

“Earth to Taylor? Are you listening?”

I raise my head until our eyes meet and slowly nod at him. I can feel something wet trail down my cheek, Ryan notices it too and softly grabs my head in his big hands, kissing the small tear away.

“You probably have bad side effects from the medicine they gave you for your concussion. Don't worry, we'll figure this out, okay?”

“Y—yeah, okay.”

I don't think it is actually this, but he's already been doing so much for me. I just can't let him down, and if I'm lucky, maybe they will find out what is going on and that I'm actually not losing my mind.

Page 11

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:11 am

I'm exhausted.

The light that's shining—well burning is more like it—through the room is blinding me, and everything aches.

All I want to do is just spend the rest of my days in this very soft and comfortable bed, but the grumbling of my stomach is trying to ruin those plans for me. The traitor.

I sigh and get up. Cool air brushes over my skin, causing me to get goosebumps. I walk over to the window and close it. It's odd because I swear it was closed when I went to bed, and Ryan doesn't seem like the kind of guy to be leaving windows open unguarded.

Talking about Ryan, where is he? Every time I get up, he's no longer in bed and sometimes he doesn't even sleep at the same time as me, making it almost feel like I've just been alone in this bed the whole night. If it wasn't for his sleepy hugs and soft kisses, I would not have known he slept here at all.

Where does he even go in the morning? All of this doesn't help with the insecurities that go through my head, and so far, he still hasn't told me what his job is. He's going to have to tell me at some point.

“Ryan?”

My voice is echoing through the hallways. This place sometimes feels like an abandoned building. Every time I'm alone in here, I feel as if this house is just empty. No matter how many decorations and furniture, it's only me and my thoughts in this

big empty house.

Out of habit, I open my phone to text Mara, but then realisation hits me, reminding me she's no longer here and I'm alone.

I sit down on the cold floor and go through the photos Ryan was able to save when my phone got damaged during the attack. Ryan bought me a new phone, so I can't see our old messages to each other anymore, even though he saved her old number there for me to still hear her old voicemail. He tried to get it all back, but these pictures were the only survivors. Well, I am too, I guess. Sometimes I just don't feel lucky about that at all.

A tear starts to slide down my cheek, and I don't even bother to wipe it off. I just want all of this to be over.

"Love, why are you on the floor?"

Ryan's voice breaks through my thoughts and I look up to see him standing over me. It only takes him a couple of seconds before he moves and picks me up to seat me on his lap, holding me against his broad chest. Instead of just making me get up, we both stay there while he holds me. I hide my face in the crook of his neck and just let it all out. I can feel his hold on me tightening while he keeps telling me that I'll be okay and that things will get better, but it all just feels like one big lie.

I don't think there's a way out, not without her. So I cry, and I cry until I'm too tired to keep going, until there's no more tears left to fall, and until my body goes into that numb state that ends up making me fall asleep.

"I got your clothes for the funeral. Do you need help getting them on?"

he softly says against my hair. I wipe my face with the back of my hands and look

into his eyes. I completely forgot about the funeral being today. I'm supposed to give a speech too, but I don't think I can do it. I don't want to mourn in front of all these people who didn't even know her like I did. I want to just be alone with her and give my goodbye while telling stories of us together that I still remember. Not in front of a family that never cared for her.

"I don't want to go."

I embrace myself for Ryan telling me I am behaving like a child, but all he does is kiss my forehead.

"I know it's hard, and if you don't want to, you don't have to, but I think you'll regret not being there when they give their last goodbye."

I hate that he's right about it, and I know I can't just abandon her like that. She died because I wasn't there. I should be there now. What kind of horrible friend am I right now? I don't think she would've wanted this for me.

Ryan helps me stand back up and takes me to the bathroom, helping me into this stupid black dress. I used to love wearing black, now I feel like burning everything and never wearing something like it again.

I don't really talk on the way out of the house, even though Ryan talks to me to try keeping me out of my own head. He even tries to make me laugh, and sometimes it slightly works, but it's never for long because I know this will be the last time I'll ever be close to her again. It will be the last time I'll see her and it hurts, so fucking much.

Ryan walks me to the car, and the dread I have been feeling before is starting to multiply. The whole ride was just a blur and suddenly I am standing there.

She's in the coffin in front of me, her eyes are closed, and it looks like she's just sleeping, like I could wake her up and everything will be okay again, only I can't and it won't be. My breathing is shallow and I feel like throwing up. Is this how life works? We're born, we live, we die, and then get buried while the rest moves on. Like you never existed in the first place.

Only she did exist —she lived, she laughed, and she breathed the same air we all do now. She shouldn't be forgotten, she shouldn't be lying there. She should be here with me, laughing, living life to the fullest like we intended to do.

I take a step closer even though my mind is telling me to run. I can't do this to her. She can't do this to me. How does she fucking dare to die on me like that. Doesn't she know how much I need her? That I can't do this, life without her.

There's a hand on my shoulder, and I look behind me to see Ryan standing there, his eyes slightly watering. He knows it's hard for me, and he gently grabs my elbow and walks me to the chair, placing his arm around me. If it wasn't for him, I would've just ended it myself. I wouldn't even try living without her.

Right now, he is my anchor pulling me back from the darkness and the loneliness that's in my mind. I don't think I'll ever be able to repay him for this.

“We don't have to stay after the burial, we can go back home and have a lazy evening with takeout and movies.”

I wasn't planning on staying here anyway, but I am grateful for how understanding he's been to me about all of this, not just today. No one has ever been so understanding to me, except for Mara, of course.

His friend—I think it was Felix —is also here with his very pregnant wife as a support for me, but I haven't had a chance to talk to them yet. I look behind me to see

his wife showing me a sad smile. I turn back. I don't want to be rude, but I don't know her, and even though she means well, I'm just not sure how to feel about all of this.

"I'm sorry, is this seat taken?"

I frown at the woman but nod anyway. I don't know her and I've never seen her before, but maybe it's from a time I don't remember. She seems oddly familiar.

"I'm sorry, do I know you?"

I whisper to her while she sits right beside me.

"Oh yes, memory loss, right. I'm Adelina, I am—was, I guess Mara's girlfriend."

She grabs my hand and gives it a squeeze. Her girlfriend? How can I not have thought about the possibility? I forgot about my own husband too, so I mean I could've forgotten her girlfriend as well. I'm so selfish to not even ask about it. She must be having such a hard time too, and here I've been wallowing in my own grief, not even thinking about whether there might be someone out there also feeling the same way I do.

"I—I'm sorry, I didn't know."

She lifts our entwined hands up, shushing me.

"Sweetie, don't you have enough to deal with as it is? Don't apologise. If you need to talk, I'm here."

She's very beautiful. There's an innocent look to her; she has long, wavy, red-dyed hair, and is wearing a cute dress with flowers on it. There are tears sliding down her

cheeks. I can see why Mara would fall in love with her.

I nod at her and we sit back in silence while Ryan keeps rubbing my back. Don't get me wrong, because I am extremely grateful to both of them, but all I want to do is just make a run for it and hide away in my room. Ignore this whole day.

After the speeches, where I'm glad Ryan arranged that I didn't have to do one, we all get up so we can place our hands on the coffin as a final goodbye. I don't know if it's the need to get out of here or the last bit of strength I still have left, but somehow, I make it over there.

Having Ryan and Adelina both standing close to me, looking worried like I might break down any moment now, I think I actually might.

Adelina grabs my hand in hers again and places both of our hands on the coffin, as if to say we are in it together, you are not alone. I think I love her already.

"To a better afterlife,"

she whispers to the coffin. She's having a private moment with her old lover, so I try to give her some privacy while waiting for her to leave the room with me.

"And don't worry. I will take care of what you left behind babe."

She's sniffing and looking back at me, forcing a smile. I hate these forced smiles; they all seem so fake.

I do admire her for the strength she has. She lost her love just as much as I lost a friend. We shouldn't have to be going through it like this. It's not fair.

"I'll keep you alive,"

I croak out in a final whisper, almost sobbing through my words. My throat feels like it's stuck and it's hard to get my breath out. Ryan can see how much I'm struggling and gently pushes me forward away from the casket while I try, I really try not to break down right now.

We're all waiting outside for the coffin to be brought below the ground. Both Adelina and I are a sobbing mess from the moment they started to lift it down, and while Felix is beside Ryan, talking to him, his wife Evelyn is here with us too, giving us tissues and holding our hands.

I haven't had a chance to talk to her a lot, but she seems very sweet. I'm glad Ryan has people like this in his life. Maybe someday I could too.

"You know, if you want, after this you guys can come over to our place and we can have a girl's night,"

Evelyn tells us with a sad smile. I appreciate that she's trying to distract us, but I don't feel like being social after all of this. I just need my warm shower and a warm blanket.

"I'm sorry, I think I just need to be alone for the time being, but in the future I will,"

I tell her. She nods and starts to talk to Adelina while I stare at the pile of dirt that is now my friend's final home. Somewhere I still had hope that all of this is some nightmare and that she'll wake up in that damn casket. but seeing her lying there and being placed in the ground has shattered that hope completely.

I take a breath, trying not to scream how horrible all of this is.

I don't know how long I have been standing here, but I'm guessing it's been longer than I thought. The sky is getting darker, and when I look behind me, I only see Ryan

standing there looking at me.

“Ready to go home, love?”

His voice is so gentle, and it just makes me love him even more than I thought was possible.

I turn around to look back one last time, only now the grave is gone, and when I turn to look at Ryan, he’s no longer there either. The air feels cold. No, not just cold but freezing. There are dark trees surrounding me. I think I am in the old cemetery again. When I look back to where the grave was supposed to be, my suspicion is confirmed. Yup, I’m back. Shit!

Panic is rising in my chest, my breath is hitching, it's only getting darker and darker. I don’t understand what’s happening. Is this a dream?

“Don’t you want her back?”

The voice sounds old but familiar, and I look around me, finding the same man standing there, next to that same grave like the first time I came here. He’s still wearing those old farmer's clothes. They’re dirtier than the last time, though. Like he’s been working all day, but I know that’s not true because he’s not real. None of this is.

“Not real, you are not real.”

I keep repeating it like it’s my personal mantra, hoping it will make him go away, but all it does is make him laugh. The sound echoes through the forest.

“Do you lie to yourself often?”

he asks while I turn to make a run for it. But he won't have it. The moment I turn, he's standing there, so close that we are almost face to face. What the fuck does he want from me? I need to get out of here.

"Do you want her back, girl?"

he asks, his voice sterner this time. It looks like he's getting annoyed at me for not answering, as if I'm a child not listening to its parent. After repeating the question for the third time, I give in, hoping it will make him go away. Leave me be.

"I do, but I can't."

I'm sobbing, panicking, and I have this heavy feeling on my chest that I can't get rid of. I feel like my heart might break through my ribcage like those xenomorphs do in the movie Alien.

"You can! Bury her here and you'll see her again."

I walk backwards away from him. This is not happening, he's lying. No!

"You think it's unfair, her death, her rotting corpse while the killer is still alive. Living his life to the fullest."

A foul smile plays on his face.

"You can have her back. Don't you want to see her again? We speak, she and I. She says she misses you."

He takes a step closer to me, raising his hand, wanting me to take it. I hold back a breath. What if he's honest and she did send him to me to get back here with me?

“How do I know you aren't lying to me?”

I ask him in a voice I do not fully recognise as my own.

“See for yourself,”

he says, pointing behind me. I turn to where he's pointing and sobs uncontrollably. She's there, Mara. She's actually there. Standing. Alive. How?

Her dark hair is waving in the wind, but she doesn't fully seem right. She feels odd too.

“M—Mara?”

I ask in between sobs. She moves her head to the side and a smile that I haven't seen her have before plays on her lips.

“Don't you want me back?”

Her voice is soft, but the way she looks doesn't seem to fit the tone.

“I—I do. I miss you so fucking much!”

I scream out, crying. Why isn't she coming to me? Trying to hug me?

I run to her, hoping to hold her, but it's like touching the wind. All I feel is a cold breeze while she stands before me again, looking down, annoyed.

“You can't touch me, I'm dead,”

she coldly states. Like she blames me for it all too. Maybe she does. My heart feels

like it has been ripped out and then stomped on.

I keep sobbing, trying to tell her how sorry I am, but nothing coherent is coming out.

“If you really are sorry, want to hold me again, then bury me here. As soon as the funeral is over, so I will still have a chance to be back.”

I look back at the empty spot I am standing at. Is this where they want me to bury her? There’s a spider crawling in between the dirt, but I don’t move away from it. What if it’s a sign? What if it’s trying to tell me something?

I look back to where Mara is standing and see she’s no longer there and has been replaced by the man from earlier. There are spiders crawling over his clothes into his hair, but he doesn’t seem fazed by it.

“You know what to do,”

is all he says before a heavy wind passes me and I close my eyes to keep the mud from getting into them.

“Taylor? Are you okay? Please say something.”

Groaning, I open my eyes. It’s so bright out here, and Ryan is right in front of my face, crouched down on the ground.

“What happened?”

I croak out. He seems relieved the moment sound comes from my mouth and takes a deep breath, pulling me in for a tight hug while he laughs in between sobs.

“You fainted. I called the ambulance. They will be here soon, just keep talking to me,

love.”

“I saw her.”

He moves my head, holding it in with his big hands, to make us stare into each other's eyes. His beautiful blue eyes seem filled with worry as he frowns at me.

“Does your head hurt?”

He starts to rub my head with his hand, seeing my reaction to the spots he touches.

“No, stop that! I really saw her.”

He opens his mouth a few times and then closes it again.

“I really did,”

I tell him confidently.

“You have to believe me.”

I try to push myself away from him but his grip on me is like iron, unmoving.

“Love, I need you to calm down.”

I try to hit his chest, trying to make him let me go, but he’s not giving in. He’s as hard and unyielding as a stone wall.

“Taylor, stop! The ambulance will be here soon, okay?”

He keeps holding me while I keep trying to push and scratch him. Why doesn’t he

believe me? Why isn't he letting me go? I didn't imagine all of that. I know I didn't. It was real.

He wasn't lying about the ambulance. I can already hear the sirens coming from afar, but I don't care. I know what I saw and I need him to see it too. I don't give up and keep yelling and pushing at him, so he'd let me go, so I can show him that it's real.

At some point, I feel a small pinch in my arm, and then everything feels heavy until it gets dark. Only then do I give in and let go.

Page 12

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:11 am

I don't know what came over her. Her pupils were dilated and she was so hysterical, hitting and clawing at me while shouting so loud I think she might have strained her vocal cords.

I was glad when the medics came and gave her something to calm down. I wasn't sure I would have been able to hold her any longer, but I was so worried she would hurt herself.

She kept talking about having seen Mara, but I think maybe her concussion was more serious than we thought before. That's why I asked for every scan and check-up possible. I want to make sure she won't have these episodes anymore. My heart broke seeing her like this.

I curse to myself. Just married and already she's losing it.

I should've never left her side that night. I thought they would be fine. A mistake I'll take full blame for. Never again. I can promise you that, little doe.

"Sir, we just checked the scans, and so far, everything seems well. There's also no sign of a concussion still being there."

I look at the doctor angrily.

"So then what? She never behaved like this before,"

I snap back, raising my voice at him.

“We cannot find anyth—”

I get up, the act making the chair fall over, and stand in front of him.

“Then look better,”

I tell him face to face. He gulps for a second and then regains his position before moving away from me.

“Grief can do a lot to a person. Maybe you should consider getting a psychologist. I’ll prescribe her something for her hysteria.”

He closes the door, and I grab the chair out of anger and throw it at the door.

Who the fuck does he think he is? She’s not fucking crazy. I know her, something is not right.

I turn back to where she’s lying. She seems so peaceful now, and I don’t know what to do to keep her that way anymore. If I could bring Mara back, I would, but that’s impossible. I tried to make Evelyn and her get along, but she doesn’t even want to try it. Maybe I should invite her over to the house next time. She can’t just shut herself off like this. I won’t let her.

“Ryan?”

Her eyes slowly start to flutter open while she’s mumbling something I can’t fully understand.

“It’s okay, love, I’m here.”

I keep my hand on top of her head, brushing it with my thumb.

“I really saw her,”

she whispers, unable to keep her eyes open for longer than a couple of seconds.

“I know, love, just rest a little bit more,”

I shush her. She seems content with my answer and stops fighting the sleep that is trying to drag her back down. I had hoped she would have stopped talking about it when she woke up, but maybe I have to look for a psychologist for her so she can deal with this the proper way, since leaving her to mourn by herself clearly isn't working.

I sit back down on the chair and call Adelina. I briefly looked into her when Mara was still alive and dating her, and I saw that she used to be a psychiatrist in a mental ward before she lost her job and was forced to work in between two minimum wage jobs to get by. I don't exactly know what happened—everything is pretty sealed and hard to crack—but her boss claims she was abusing her drug prescriptions to her patients. She still claims she's innocent and I believe her. Call it instinct or whatever, it just never made much sense.

“Hello?”

Her soft voice fills the line, and I lower my voice to talk to her so my wife won't wake up from the noise.

“Hello, Miss Owen. It's Ryan from the funeral.”

I can hear her moving things around on the line like she's cleaning up or something.

“Oh, hi, Taylor's boyfriend, right?”

She asks me. I'm slightly annoyed by how she referred to me as 'boyfriend' instead of husband.

"Husband, actually. I am calling you because I wanted to talk about Taylor. I heard you are a psychiatrist, and Taylor could really use someone to talk to. I'm worried about her outbreaks, and earlier at the cemetery she fainted and then kept saying she saw Mara and then started to freak out,"

I quickly tell her, hoping my little doe isn't hearing any of it.

"I'm actually not a psychiatrist anymore and therefore not allowed to see patients. I could give you someone. I know his number maybe tha—"

"No, I'm asking you because she trusts you. Don't see it as a doctor-patient thing, but more as a friend in need. She won't accept help if it's not from someone she trusts."

I feel like I'm starting to sound desperate, and I hate it, but I'd crawl on my knees when it comes to Taylor's well-being.

She sighs.

"Okay, okay, I'll do it. I have some time on Monday evening."

Relieved, I give her the location and we settled for a time quickly.

I really hope this might help her, because if it doesn't, I don't know what would, and I hate feeling like this. Clueless and helpless.

Page 13

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:11 am

I feel like every time I wake up, there's something that either hurts physically or mentally. And then they say I'm in the prime of my life. I think I might be at the end of mine at this pace. I feel like I'm just a couple of steps away from death and this fucking headache is not helping me. My throat is dry and my limbs feel heavy, like I have been walking in a desert for days without water.

“Love?”

Ryan's voice has been like an anchor to me these past days, and I am eternally grateful for it, but right now, I just want to throw something at him so he'll shut up and I can suffer my pounding headache in a quiet room.

“?”

Ugh.

“Please, my head hurts,”

I groan out, hoping he can fully understand what I'm saying.

The stabbing pains in my head are only getting worse, and I feel like smashing my head on a wall at this point to make it stop.

Trying to sleep doesn't feel like an option either because I cannot think straight, and the pain is just keeping me constantly awake.

There's some tugging at my arm, but I don't even feel like reacting to it; all I want is

for the pain to stop. I'd do ANYTHING to make it stop at this point.

“This should do it,”

A woman's voice says. I don't recognise the voice, and I'm not sure I know where I am right now. I can feel something cold rushing through my veins. I think I should be concerned about that but honestly, I feel like I don't care anymore. I just need it to end.

Slowly, the stabbing pain starts to fade, and I'm finally able to open my eyes and take in the scene around me.

There's an IV linked to my arm and some kind of clipper linked to my pointer finger.

Why am I in the hospital again?

“How is your head feeling now, Miss Addams?”

a kind voice asks me to my right. I look next to me and see a young nurse with black, tied-up hair standing there.

“Uh, it's better now,”

I assure her, hoping it will make her go away. I hate hospitals, and now that my headache is gone, all I want to do is be at home.

“Good, if it gets worse again, just click this little button over here, and I'll come,”

she tells me while holding a small remote that is connected to the bed I'm lying in.

“Oh, okay.”

She seems to have taken enough with my answer and quietly leaves the room, leaving me alone with Ryan, who I'm guessing is the reason I got brought here in the first place.

“Why am I here, Ryan?”

I spit out his name with venom, making him slightly wince at it.

“You fainted and had a panic attack, so I made sure they went to check your concussion,”

he says. He's looking down, and there are bags under his eyes like he hasn't slept well either. He just seems so tired.

“How long have I been here?”

He seems to be in some internal battle with himself, whether he should answer me or not on the question. I don't like that.

“Two days,”

he finally tells me.

Two days! Two fucking days! What the fuck! I jump up out of the bed and try to pull out the tubes connected to my arm, but Ryan moves towards me and stops me before I can actually get anything out.

“You are going to seriously hurt yourself doing this. At least wait until a nurse comes.”

His voice is stern like I don't have a say in the matter but he must have hit his head if

he thinks I'm just going to sit back and do whatever the fuck he says. I squint my eyes at him and take in a breath so he can see how annoyed I am.

"If you think I'm staying a moment longer in here, you are very, very wrong, Ryan. You either help me take this shit out or I'm doing it myself."

My ultimatum seems to work since he sighs and puts pressure on the place the tube is in my arm, slowly pulling it out, as if he's done this stuff before.

He grabs a piece of cotton and a bandage he found next to my bed and places it on the wound, tying it up tightly.

I don't ask him about it, not here anyway. I just want to be out of here quickly so I don't get anyone annoyed about us leaving already.

I walk out of the room, not having to check if Ryan is following. I can feel his gaze on my back, and it gives me this strange familiar feeling I can't seem to put a name to. Like my mind is trying to tell me something, but can't.

I'm surprised how easy it was sneaking out, especially since it's a hospital.

"I know you think I'm crazy and maybe I am a little, but not about this."

He doesn't answer me so I just keep going.

"I need to go back to the cemetery tonight alone."

Loud laughter fills the space and I turn around in anger.

"I'm not joking,"

I snap at him, making him stop laughing and turning serious in seconds.

“No.”

I scoff at his answer.

“Yes.”

I cross my arms at him. He walks closer, his back straight. It's kind of scaring me, but it's not like I would show that to him. I hold my stance. I can look scary too. His hands cage my head and he leans over as if he's going to kiss me, but then he stops. A sinister smile plays on his lips.

“If you think, for one second, I would allow you to even step one foot outside of the house alone, you clearly do not know me enough. You are not fucking going.”

“Oh yeah? And what are you going to do about it? Last time I checked, I make my own fucking decisions.”

He grabs the back of my hair, pulling it down, forcing my head backwards.

“You don't want to know what I'm going to do about it. And you don't want to try me. Now get in the fucking car like a good girl,”

he snarls back.

My heart is racing. I have never seen him like this before. I keep staring into his eyes in defiance, and he forces his mouth on mine, biting my lip before moving away from me.

“Get. In. Now.”

I gulp and try to bring back the air I was losing. I think he can see the surrender in my eyes and lets go of my hair. I walk over to the side of the car and open the door while he is standing right beside me. Probably making sure I don't make a run for it. The moment I'm seated, he closes the door and walks to the driver's side and gets in.

I don't speak to him the whole way. I'm pissed, but so is he, and he is kind of scary like this. But not scary enough to make me listen to him.

Page 14

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:11 am

I open the door and get in while Ryan comes in behind me. He locks the door and pockets the key. I'm seeing red the moment I find out what he's doing. Is he seriously going to fucking lock me in like I'm in some kind of Disney movie?

I scoff and turn back to him in anger. I can feel my blood boiling at this point, but he just looks at me once with a stupid smile on his face. Like this is all just a joke to him.

"What?"

He asks me, delight filling his tone.

"You know what! Are you seriously locking me up?"

I sneer at him. He doesn't seem fazed in the slightest and just hums, he fucking hums while walking away. Who does he think he is?

"I'm not fucking done here!"

I shout after him, grabbing my shoe and throwing it at his head. He ducks away, making the shoe hit the wall instead. Goddamnit!

"I am!"

he shouts back, slamming the kitchen door closed.

I take in a couple of deep breaths before I plan my next move. I need to be calm; I

need to play this smart if I want to get out of here tonight. They said I shouldn't wait too long to rebury her, and it's already been two days.

I walk upstairs and start to rummage through the closet, looking for the best outfit to make my plan work like I need it to.

I need him to calm down a bit first because he'll just see it as suspicious if I do this too soon, so I'll take my time getting ready for the next step.

I put on my favourite red lacy outfit that I think will be perfect and start to put my hair up in a high ponytail. He seems to like it when I put it up like that.

Once I'm done with that, I grab my makeup bag and perfume for the finishing touch and then wait a little bit longer, so at least an hour and a half has passed.

It's getting darker and I really think I shouldn't wait too long anymore. I can hear the TV playing downstairs, so he's probably calm enough now.

I stand at the door opening, waiting for him to acknowledge me, but it seems that Fast the need is blinding and I can feel my release coming soon.

"Ryan, I—I'm coming,"

I moan out loud. He seems to be enjoying this as much as I am as he presses in a third finger, stretching and fucking me with them.

My muscles tighten and I ride out my orgasm on his fingers while he keeps sucking on my breast. I never even really had a guy get me off during sex alone before, unless I played with myself first. But this, I only ever read about this in books.

He releases my nipple with a loud pop and pulls his fingers out.

“See what you get when you are a good girl.”

I bite my lip in response. His mouth is like a holy relic, the things he does and says with it.

He lifts my hips up, pressing his member at my entrance.

“Do you want me to fill you up baby?”

he asks, voice rough.

“Yea—yes, please.”

He doesn't wait long after my answer and pulls me down on him. His thick length is basically impaling me at this point, and I wouldn't want it any other way. Yeah, rip me in half as long as you don't stop.

“You take my cock so well, baby,”

he moans while I try to ride him. It's almost impossible for me to move because of his size, and I think he notices it as he lifts me up and then pushes my chest against the couch pillows, taking me from behind. The noises I'm making are making me sound like I'm possessed or something. Well, technically I am, with his dick impaling me. And I am so not responsible for anything that's coming out of my mouth.

I can hear him talking but I can't for the life of me understand what it is he's saying. All I can think about is how good he's fucking me right now.

My ears are ringing and I can feel tingling all over my body. I don't think I'll last long. I can feel the muscles in my body tightening again and the sweat dripping down my back, my breathing is becoming more and more frantic, until I can't keep it in

anymore and I scream his name out as I come. He pumps himself a couple of times after, grunting out his release too.

The plan was to get the key and make him go into a deep sleep, but now all I want to do is sleep too. I guess the plan has been working a little too well.

“I’m glad you’re no longer mad at me,”

he says out of breath. I laugh and try to sit up, which is more of a task then I thought it would be.

Unsure what to answer him, I decided to settle o.

“I don’t want to keep fighting”

and hope he’ll just fall for it.

Am I still mad? Yeah, I am. He’s my husband, he’s supposed to support me no matter what, and always have my back. But he isn’t doing that. Not right now.

Mara would’ve.

“Let’s take a shower and go to bed,”

I propose, trying not to sound as annoyed as I feel thinking back about all of this.

He’s still picking up his clothes and doesn’t respond immediately to my question, which is making me a little anxious. What if he realises I’m planning something? I am so close to getting her back, I won’t let him take her from me.

“Okay, are you tired already?”

Relief floods me with his question. I'm just being paranoid, I guess. I don't think I've ever lied to someone like this before, I mean some little white lies, but not lying to trick someone. I guess I became a whole new person after Mara died.

Grief can do weird things to people, and in my case it must have awakened something in me, something I didn't think I was capable of.

"Yeah, I am. And I don't want to sleep alone,"

I tell him innocently.

He nods and leans over, kissing my forehead.

I know that I'm doing something bad, but I don't care anymore. Not when I can get her back by doing so.

Isn't it funny how it's a man's fault she's gone, and now another one's fault I might never get her back again. And then some claim that women have it easy.

I'm tired of being told what I can't and can do by a man, of having my life decided for me. I deserve more than that.

Husband or not, I am getting her back, and there's nothing he can do to stop me.

All I need to do now is wait until he sleeps.

Page 15

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:11 am

The clock strikes 1 AM and his breathing is stable, so he must be in a deep sleep. It's now or never.

Slowly, I slide away from his heavy limbs that are draped over me. It's more of a task I had accounted for, since, well, I didn't realise how heavy a sleeping body can be, and imagine it being a six-foot tall muscular dude. Note to self, I should start lifting weights.

He moves to his side, and a small sigh comes from him, making me freeze on the spot. Dread fills me. What if he wakes up? I mean, I can just lie and say I needed to pee, but he'll probably wait until I'm back, so it might go to shit way sooner than anticipated.

His breathing sounds steady again after a couple of seconds, and he doesn't move anymore. It gives me the sign that it's okay for me to go on and move out of the bed. As relief fills me, I tiptoe to the bathroom.

I quickly put on my pants and pull my hoodie over my oversized sleeping shirt, grab my bag, and then quietly go down the stairs. I feel like I'm doing something illegal, while I'm pretty sure locking me inside a house against my will is illegal too.

So far, he hasn't woken up yet, and I pray to the god I never really believed in to please make this work.

It's dark and the house is silent except for my own ragged breathing. I grab the key from between the couch pillows and get to the front door, slowly unlocking it and getting out of here.

I park the car I borrowed from Ryan, though, is it borrowed if he doesn't exactly know about it? I'm just going to go with yes.

I have some plastic garbage bags in my backpack so the dirt wouldn't get everywhere, so I don't think he'd even notice that I used it anyway.

I pull the hood of my hoodie over my head. I know that cemeteries are not very well protected based on all the grave robberies I see on the news often, but you never know.

Grabbing my shovel, I walk towards the place I hate the most, and start digging.

PING PING

Looking down, I notice that my car is almost out of gas. How odd. I had just filled it two days ago. I guess I'll go to the garage tomorrow to see what's going on. It's not like anyone else had access to the car, and my keys were still in my pocket exactly where I left them.

I'm almost home anyway.

I look at my phone again to see if I have any messages from my wife but I guess she's still sleeping. When I left, she was in a very deep sleep, barely stirring when I gave her a good morning kiss.

I wish I could sleep like that. Everytime I close my eyes, another nightmare begins, and I end up waking up covered in sweat. It's one of the reasons I get up early.

Well, that and I don't want her to find out what I do for a living; she might not agree with the fact that my job is to stalk people. I guess in some fucked up way that is why I did the same to her. I also think it's because I don't have the greatest people skills—usually, they just ignore me or leave me.

I don't want her to do the same thing, but I feel like the reins are slipping while we haven't even really had a chance to bloom yet.

I place the key in the door and hold the handle to open the lock, but the door shoves open by itself. Panic is rising in me while I grab my gun from under my jacket and slowly move inside. I hadn't gotten an intruder alert. How odd, did I forget to lock

the door? What if Taylor got hurt, again?

I see something moving to the left, and I move, pointing my gun to the living room, ready to shoot whoever it is.

WHAT THE FUCK! I move the gun down and rub my eyes because no fucking way this is what I'm actually seeing. Is this a fucking prank?

"Babe?"

I shout, not moving from the spot. Am I tripping?

"Ryan? What's wrong?"

Taylor's gruffy morning voice comes from behind me, and I can feel her hand on my shoulder as a small gasp leaves her throat.

"Are you seeing what I'm seeing?"

I whisper to her. I don't know why I am saying it so quietly because I shouted before and that fucking thing is now looking at me. And yes, I'm calling it a thing because no fucking way that, that is the actual fucking Mara sitting on my fucking couch, covered in dirt and some—I don't want to know what it is—wet stuff, eating a fucking pack of raw meat with her bare dirty fucking hands.

"Mara! Your back, it worked!"

Taylor shouts excitedly, running over to the thing on the couch. What the fuck? What worked? Why is she hugging that? I need a drink, yeah, I need a lot of drinks.

I grab Taylor's arm, pulling her back. I should've done it earlier—what if it tried to

bite her or something.

“Ryan, what the hell?”

I pull her out of the room, closing the living room door.

“Are you crazy?”

she screeches at me, trying to open the door again. I hold her firm against me.

“Am I crazy? Last time I checked she was six feet under. Why would you fucking hug whatever the fuck that’s supposed to be? Do you want to die? It could be a zombie for all we know!”

I don’t care, I’m shouting loudly at her at this point. She needs to stop being so naïve and start thinking rationally.

“HAHAHAHAHA!”

Taylor laughs like a maniac, tears rolling down. She slides out of my arms and down onto the floor. Fuck, is she losing it right now?

“I don’t see what’s so fucking funny, TAYLOR!”

She wipes the tears from her eyes and tries to get back up, ignoring my stretched-out hand.

“A zombie, this isn’t a movie, babe. She is just reborn because of the cemetery,”

she blatantly states, like it’s a normal thing.

“This isn’t a movie.”

I sarcastically say back.

“Babe, there’s a fucking dead person on my damn couch covered in god knows what!”

I hold my head with my hands, trying to wrap my head around what the hell is happening.

“What did you do?”

I keep repeating the same question over and over again, like a broken record. I guess maybe Felix wasn’t so crazy after all. Maybe I should call him and ask for help. I mean, he’d believe me, right? I don’t think anyone else would.

“You didn’t believe me, so I had no choice,”

she answers softly after a while. What the hell is that supposed to mean.

“I brought her back,”

she whispers.

How does that even work? I mean, did she do it Frankenstein style, oh god, I’m definitely losing it, no way that this is actually happening.

“How did you bring her back?”

I grit out the words like they’re poison, unsure I want to know the answer to it.

“I buried her in that old cemetery.”

She what now?

“I’m sorry, I don’t think I heard that correctly. Could you repeat that answer?”

I ask, looking down, while really, really hoping she did not just say that.

“Does it even matter? Look, she’s back! That’s what we wanted, isn’t it?”

she says happily.

God fucking damn it. That’s what you get for stalking a girl and making her believe we are married, when in fact, she didn’t even know me. It’s just a cruel joke from whatever god there is. A punishment for my crimes.

I need to think logically and get rid of that thing, but I can’t just do it in front of her. She’ll never forgive me. She’ll go mad. I mean, see what she just did.

“It’s not natural, who knows what it’s capable of.”

I try to reason with her, but it’s all in one ear and out the other.

She just scoffs, fucking scoffs at me, and opens the door and goes to sit with that supposedly-dead-person sitting on my goddamn couch.

“How are you feeling, Mara?”

she asks it. I laugh at the ridiculousness of it all, making her look up angrily at me, brows furrowed.

“What’s so funny?”

she asks. I can’t believe her. She's not just crazy, she's deranged.

“I can’t believe you, this! God woman, you need help.”

I pick up the gun I dropped on the floor while I was trying to make sense of it all, and sit behind them on a chair holding the gun in front of me. Friend or not, if she even looks funny at me or Taylor, I’m blowing that thing's head right off. I’ll pay for Taylor’s psychologist, I don’t care anymore.

Taylor keeps asking it questions, but all that thing does is make grunting noises. I guess the saying that the dead don’t speak has taken a whole new level now.

I grab my phone with my other hand and dial Felix, because what else can I do?

He picks up instantly after the second ring, knowing I don’t just call for no reason.

“Hello? Ry, what’s up?”

“Dude, I’ve got a problem.”

How the hell do I even explain this, like for real. I’m pretty sure he’s going to either think I’m pulling a prank or that I lost it, so I grab my phone and click on the FaceTime button, pointing the camera in front of me at Mara.

“Uh, dude? Who is that? Is she okay?”

It takes me a bit too long to reply to answer because I have no freaking clue how to explain this. Making him repeat the question.

“That’s Mara, she, uh... she died,”

is all that comes out of me.

“Yeah, right, she seems very alive to me. Are you drunk or something?”

He laughs. I wish I were.

“Or something. Taylor, uh, well, she... Taylor dug her back up.”

There’s a silence on the line for a couple of seconds before Felix answers me.

“Could you repeat that? Because I sure as fuck didn’t just hear that.”

I clear my throat before continuing the conversation.

“No, she dug up the corpse and reburied it, and now it's back. And on my couch,”

I say in a louder tone to him.

“That’s not fucking funny, Ryan!”

he shouts at me.

“I fucking know that! Do you see me laughing, Felix? DO YOU?”

I feel like we're just in a shouting contest now, and I know I’m supposed to be nice when asking for help, but it’s better than losing it at Taylor, I guess.

She is sitting there, and I know she can hear us but she is deliberately not listening.

“Okay so fucking kill it! I don’t need that shit anywhere near my wife!”

Taylor and that thing both turn their heads at me and I guess the camera too.

“Oh shit, that’s fucking creepy man, get out of there!”

Felix says on the phone.

I’m not leaving without Taylor, no matter what he says. She's crazy, but she’s my crazy woman. But now it looks like I might have to use my gun sooner than I thought.

“He’s just kidding.”

I laugh nervously at both of them.

“The fuck I am dude!”

he shouts out.

Taylor walks over to me, her back straight, taking confident steps, it’s almost like it’s not really her.

Even though I don’t think she’s walking over to me to tell me that she’s now realising how fucked up this really is, there still a small spark of hope flying through my chest.

She grabs my phone and throws it to the floor, lifts her foot up, and starts to stomp on it. As if the million pieces on the floor weren’t proof enough that it was damaged beyond repair.

“She is not to be harmed.”

She seethes at me, and I swear I see a small smile play on that thing's lips from afar. Like it's enjoying this.

Shocked, I stay frozen in my chair, while Taylor turns her back on me and walks back to Mara, talking to her like that didn't just happen. Not getting any answer back from that thing.

What the hell am I supposed to do? Do I call a priest? Would that even work?

I can hear the sound of Taylor's giggles. It's all she's been doing ever since Mara came here, talking and laughing at it. It's been hours and that thing still hasn't said a word back. It looks like some kind of scene from those horror movies where the woman slowly turns mad, only this isn't a movie, and she's really turning mad right now.

I don't think it bothers Taylor, that thing not speaking I mean. She just seems glad Mara is there and acts like it's her job to protect it or something. I don't think she's fully herself anymore either.

I still don't trust it. I have this bad feeling, like this is not going to end well.

I really need to do something about all of this before I lose her to it.

I've been messaging Felix through my laptop since I don't have a phone anymore. He agrees with me; we need to get rid of it.

Which brings me to the next question—how do you kill what is already dead?

I made an appointment at the local library tomorrow evening and I should probably also go and visit the cemetery, but I don't like leaving Taylor alone here with that thing, and I'm pretty sure it would just follow us if we would leave since they haven't

left each other's side ever since it got here.

How can she not see how insane the whole thing is? Maybe if I kill it, it'll release the hold it has on her. But the way she reacted to my phone proves she's going to do anything to protect that thing. I need to get them separated first.

Page 17

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:11 am

BAM BAM

I look over to the side where Taylor is sleeping soundlessly. How she sleeps through these noises is beyond me.

I slowly get up, taking the gun I've been hiding underneath my pillow—no way I'm going to let it get the jump on me—and walk to where the sounds are coming from.

It's dark in the house, and I don't dare put the lights on because who knows what is going on down there. Slowly, I push the living room door open, but the room seems empty so far.

TAPTAPTAP

There are footsteps behind me, making me turn around instantly,, but once I do, it's empty here. What the hell is going on? My heart is racing and every sound I hear is making me jump out of my skin. There's anger rising too, because what's it playing at?

CLINK

I turn around again, holding my hand over my heart, trying to make the beating go slower, but it's nearly impossible. I slowly walk over to the kitchen door since that's where the latest noise came from. Taking a deep breath, I push the door open.

It's hard to see inside, but I swear I think I just saw a shadow move behind the table below.

I click on the light button, holding the gun, expecting something to jump at me. But once it lights the room, there's nothing there. Is it fucking with me?

I walk inside, looking around, and then some random grey cat comes jumping out from behind a closet, scaring the shit out of me. Where the hell did it even come from? I've never seen this cat before, and the doors and windows are locked.

“What are you doing here, buddy?”

I ask the cat, knowing damn well it can't answer me. I put my gun next to me on the floor and lean down to pick it up, but all it does is hiss at me, showing its sharp teeth, and then runs from me. I crouch on the floor, rubbing my face with my hands, and look up to see two dirty pale feet with blue veins standing there.

Gulping slowly, I move my eyes up and see Mara standing there, her skin a pale-ish blue. Her eyes are pure black, her hair is all messy and dark, and her mouth seems bigger somehow.

Frozen in fear, I stare up at it, and then it moves.

“HOLY SHIIIT!”

I grab the gun next to me and—BANG BANG—I can smell the smoke from the gun, which means that it really did go off, but I can't fully remember doing it. What I do know now is that shooting it does not work.

It's right there before me, face covered in pieces of raw meat and something reddish, which I guess is the juice from it, staring up at me. It looks down to where I shot it, but there's no blood coming out.

“What the hell are you?”

I whisper to it. It looks back up to me and smiles, it actually freaking smiles up at me. Like some psychopath.

“What the hell, Ryan? What happened?”

Taylor is running down the stairs, almost losing her footing, but then picking herself back up again.

“Taylor, get back! Don’t come closer!”

I yell at her, hoping she’ll listen, but of course, she doesn’t and runs up to that thing, checking for injuries.

“Mara? Are you okay??”

I scoff at her question, making her turn back at me, her face contorted in anger.

“You could’ve killed her! What were you thinking?”

she yells. There’s a vein pumping on her forehead, making me worried it might pop open soon.

“What was I thinking? Oh yeah, I was trying not to die, Taylor! Look at it! There’s not even blood anywhere!”

“Luckily for you, there isn’t!”

she snaps back at me. What is that supposed to mean? It’s allowed to kill me, but oh no, if something happens to that demon!

“You are being ridiculous! It is clearly not your friend, Taylor. This thing, whatever it

is, just took her fucking body and is lying to you!”

Hurt flashes over her beautiful face. Her pupils turn smaller, and I swear I just saw the colours in her eyes change for a second before they settled back again.

“You’re saying I’m being ridiculous, but do you hear yourself even speak?”

She crosses her arms and stares me down with a look that tells me my next words might be my last.

“Baby, what did it do to you?”

I cry out, holding her head in between my hands.

“It gave me my life back,”

she seethes, pulling back away from me. She grabs Mara by the hand and guides her upstairs, while she talks to it like nothing happened.

Am I seriously losing my wife over a walking-dead person?

I hear the door closing, and I shake my head and grab a bottle of whiskey from the drawer.

Shooting it is out of the question, since it doesn’t even bleed, so I guess stabbing it will be the same thing. What if I strangle it? But does it even breathe?

I have too many questions and absolutely zero answers. So, I do the only thing I do know how to do, and that is drink.

My body feels heavy from the lack of sleep I’ve been getting. I don’t feel safe in my

own house and I constantly have to check the cameras to see if Taylor is still okay.

I tried looking at what that thing was doing in the middle of the night, but every time it came into view, there were signal problems. It's like it's only showing me what it wants me to see.

Felix will be here soon, so I'm just really hoping we'll find something to make all of this go away. It's not healthy for Taylor to bond with a corpse—because let's face it, that's exactly what it is—but she's too naïve to realise that it's not her friend. It doesn't talk, and it moves differently like it's not fully comfortable in the body it took.

PING

I shake my head and walk over to the door.

“Do we have visitors?”

Taylor is standing over the stairs with Mara next to her.

Mara just stares at me with no emotion on her face. She shows that vile smile of hers only when Taylor isn't looking, and it's creeping me the hell out. But no matter what I say, she won't listen to me. It's so frustrating.

“Uh, yeah Felix is helping me with work,”

I quickly lie to her. When it comes to my job, all I ever do is lie anyway, so what's one more, right?

“He's not going to hurt Mara, is he?”

Her eyebrows shoot up and she's fidgeting with her hands like she's worried.

"Don't be ridiculous, love. Besides, she started growing on me."

The only thing growing here is my hatred and anxiety.

She smiles back at me and walks Mara back into the room, while they hold each other's hands. What are they, twelve?

I barely open the door and Felix already starts to push his way in, making me almost lose my balance.

"Dude, ever heard of patience?"

I curse at him. Felix scoffs, raising one eyebrow.

"I thought it was killing you, based on the time you took to open the door," he jokes.

Or maybe it wasn't a joke. Well, at least he would've come to save me if it wasn't, I guess. I give him a grateful look.

"Don't get sentimental on me, dude,"

he scoffs..

"Who else would keep track of Evy for me?"

He laughs while walking to the kitchen. Jerk

"So, eh, is it here?"

he asks, sitting down at the table with an apple he picked up from the fruit bowl.

“Yeah, they’re upstairs. I was thinking maybe we first go and check out that cemetery, and then see if we can find something on it. Unless you want to meet her first.”

I grab the apple back from his hand and put it down on the table.

“No thanks, dude, I’ve seen enough in the last haunted house I was in. Let’s go!”

I guess I’d be the same. I always thought demons and ghosts weren’t real, but now I don’t know what to believe anymore.

I lock the doors and take the key with me so I’m sure that thing doesn’t try to kidnap Taylor, holding my phone in my hand to keep an eye on the live feed of the house. The moment there’s the slightest blur on the screen, I’m running over.

Felix walks ahead of me, and I’m kind of relieved he is here too. You can say what you want, but I don’t think anyone else would be doing this for me.

He’s a good friend, and he’s changed a lot after the haunted house incident. He became less crude, less angry.

“Did you have similar issues with your demon?”

I ask him, and he stops in his tracks and turns around. His mouth is in a tight line.

“No,”

he tells me before turning and walking again.

“Are we close by?”

His immediate change of topic makes me feel that there are things he is hiding from me, and I don't like that. Especially not now.

“Yeah, to the right, the trees look darker there.”

Felix lets out a humourless laugh and shakes his head.

"Of course it does.”

he mumbles out.

The air is turning colder, showing us we're going the right way.

“Why don't you talk about it?”

I didn't realise I had asked the question until Felix stops walking again and sighs with his head down.

“I don't know. I don't want to think about it because it makes me feel things I don't want to deal with. Do you really want to know, Ry?”

He looks at me from the side, his eyes filled with untold trauma. I nod my head and answer a rasp.

“yes” to him.

“When I was a kid, I went in there once, the basement I mean. I saw some shit. I don't know, something got attached to me, I guess. I don't remember everything, I just—I remember a lot of anger. I remember Evy, I had this unwanted hate for her,

but I don't think it was really me who felt it, either way. She got hurt badly, and I lost my sister because it wanted our souls, and we almost let it win."

He wipes his hand over his cheek. Is he crying? This might be the most personal talk I've had with him since I've met him, and I don't want to ruin the moment, so I don't push further on it.

"Doesn't matter, it's dead and Evy survived. The past is the past, and sometimes it's better to keep it like that than trying to bring back the demons that used to haunt you."

He moves further and I follow him in silence. He's right, but it doesn't exactly help me with my current issue.

He doesn't say anything for the rest of the trip, which bothers me more than it should. I guess I had hoped he'd open up more.

"Well, here we are,"

I announce with more doubt in my voice than I should have. Maybe coming here wasn't the greatest idea, but I feel like I'm out of options.

I glance once again at my phone screen, seeing if Taylor is still doing well. They are just sitting on the couch watching TV. Taylor is a bit more away from her than usual. I guess that's a good sign, maybe she's finally getting her senses back.

"How can you live near this shit and never question if something is wrong?"

I turn my head and see Felix staring me down like I'm an idiot.

"I don't believe in that shit, and I never had an issue before with this place."

I shrug. I feel like such an idiot. I thought the woods were darker here because of the air or something, not because it's possessed by demons. I mean, we don't all always look into the radical side of things first.

"Well, here's where I guess she buried Mara,"

Felix announces. I move away from the gravestone of a 'Toby Higgins'. The date isn't visible and it gives me this odd, familiar feeling I don't like.

"How do you know?"

I ask Felix before coming to his side. The earth seems like it was ripped open from the inside out, there are worms crawling through it, but they don't seem like normal worms, the way they move is odd and disorganised, the name is carved onto the tombstone in big letters.

"Do I still have to tell you?"

Felix raises one eyebrow at me while a coy smile plays his lips. I don't answer him,—all I can do is just stare at it. Fear is trying to take over my mind and I think I'm shaking. I knew she did it, because well, it's in my house and everything but actually seeing it is a whole different thing.

"Hey, Ry? You okay?"

I crouch down over the open grave with my hands in my hair. Some part of me had hoped that the body would still lie there and that it was some kind of imposter. I know it sounds dumb, but none of this makes sense, and I think I'm officially losing it now.

My body shakes harder —wait, no, someone is shaking me.

I turn my head, seeing Felix crouched down next to me.

“We’ll figure this out. Okay?”

I know he’s trying to make me feel better about all of this, and I appreciate it, but I can’t seem to see a light at the ending of this tunnel.

“Do I have a choice?”

I ask Felix instead. He shakes his head in a clear no, with his lips pulled tight. Great, this is just great.

Page 18

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:11 am

One of the worst things about all of this is the lack of time I get to spend with Taylor. That thing keeps demanding all her attention, and the only time I can sit with her in peace is when it sleeps—if it's actually capable of that. God knows what it does.

I grip the steering wheel a bit too tightly and my hands are turning white from it.

I woke up with a phone call from Felix, saying he had found something in the library, and that I had to come to see it. So that's where I'm going to go to now, I guess, yet again leaving Taylor alone with that thing. I feel like I'm just becoming a bad husband.

I park the car and walk in, seeing Felix sitting before one of the computers. He's completely focused on what is on the screen. This better be good. I don't like leaving her alone and especially if it's for nothing.

"So, what did you find?"

I ask him, taking the chair to his right.

"Ah, Ry, this cemetery, it's some kind of old ritual ground,"

he says, pointing his finger to the screen. He's got some old newspapers in front of him too and a notebook with some scribbles I can barely read since he writes like a five- year-old.

Looking over at the screen, I read over all the information on it.

“So, this was some kind of burial ground from a cult that used to live in my neighbour's house?”

I turn to Felix, who has his nose into the newspapers humming a yes at my questions.

“Maybe we should go to his place and ask about it?”

I propose. Felix doesn't seem convinced by my idea and places the papers down. The picture shows it's still the same neighbour I have now, so he must know something.

“Well, I looked into that, and the owner of the property died like ten years ago.”

Shock hits me and I look at him with my mouth open. That's impossible. I see him taking a walk daily.

“Your paper is wrong. I see him every morning,”

I state to him. Felix raises an eyebrow at me and moves one of the newspapers in front of me. I frown at it.

This article claims that there was a house fire and that he died in it, but the house always looked in good condition to me. Maybe it's his brother.

“Well, I guess his brother lives there then or something.”

Felix lets out a laugh while shaking his head.

“If that's what you want to go for,”

he mumbles under his breath.

What is that supposed to mean? Ignoring him, I continue to look for further information.

There have been claims from others having similar situations before, but none of them are still alive, which makes me even more anxious about how this will all play out. There are a few news articles talking about a grave being robbed and that a neighbour had claimed seeing the person who was buried walking to their old house while grunting, I haven't heard from others that they found out about Mara not being in her coffin anymore, so I guess she filled the hole back in with dirt properly.

I sigh. I can't believe Taylor did that, I should've seen the signs better, but I was too blind with my own pride that I decided to ignore the fact that she needed more help than I could give her. I guess she still does.

I need to solve this so she can finally get the help she needs, and none of this is helping me.

The feeling of Felix's hand on my shoulder makes me turn to him.

“Hey, we'll figure it out,”

he tells me. I feel like it's the only thing he keeps saying. He's being very optimistic about it, which surprises me because he's usually the pessimistic one of the two. Maybe it's because he has previous experience with the subject, but that doesn't mean this time it will go well.

There's a buzz on my phone from my camera notification, and I look to see that Taylor is downstairs with that thing on the couch. I frown at it—why is it giving intruder alerts when it's just them there?

“What the fu—”

Felix grabs my phone out of nowhere and zooms in on the window reflection.

My eyes widen in surprise. I don't think I've ever seen something like this before. I can see Taylor clearly in the reflection, but next to her, instead of it being Mara, sits an ugly, tall, pale-skinned woman with long straight black hair and eyes open like she has no eyelids. Her nose is small and her mouth big, with sharp teeth. It's staring at Taylor like it wants to eat her. I quickly make a screenshot of it and run out of there, not checking if Felix is following. I need to get to Taylor and get her out of there.

I look in my pocket for the keys, but then my car peeps, and I see Felix had grabbed them and followed me. We both jump into the car and drive off as fast as we can while he keeps an eye on the phone.

"Is it doing anything?"

I ask with panic in my voice. Felix gives a quick no but keeps checking on it through the reflection on the mirror.

"I guess that because it's not Mara's soul in there, the reflection doesn't show her,"

he states.

He grabs his own phone and starts to type something out.

"What are you doing?"

Felix doesn't respond immediately to my question, so I repeat it because I really don't have the time for this.

"I'm messaging Evy. I just had an answer from a friend about what we need to get from the store to trap it."

Who is this friend, and how does he know it would work and what to get? One does not simply walk into a store and go: Oh hello, got any anti-demon repellent here?

“How do we know that the stuff will help?”

Felix sighs at my question, like I’m being an annoying toddler asking stupid questions.

“Got any better ideas? I know what I’m doing,”

he says. Well, I guess he’s had a demonic issue before too, but as far as I know, they were locked in a house and didn’t have anything useful but an old knife in the basement. I guess I really shouldn’t be picky in a situation like this.

The car hasn’t even fully stopped yet, and I’m already flying out, hearing a shouting Felix behind me, cursing.

The door flies open and I run to the living room, but there’s no one there. Where the hell is she? Panic rises, and I can feel my heart beating so hard it might break through my chest. What if I’m too late and it’s eating her or something?

I check all the downstairs rooms, and every single one of them is empty. My head is getting dizzy, and my body is shaking like a leaf in the wind.

At this point, I’m not thinking clearly anymore and start to shout her name while running upstairs. I can hear someone behind me shouting something too, but I can’t fully take in what it is. I just need to see her and be sure she’s okay. I won’t be able to calm down until then.

“Babe? What’s going on?”

I see Taylor walking out of the bathroom wrapped in a towel, and I finally feel like I can breathe again. She seems okay, but just to make sure, I double-check by patting her down while she tries to swat me away with her hands.

I keep asking her the same question over and over again, and I know she keeps saying she's okay, but I don't believe it until I am absolutely sure by checking it myself.

Someone is clearing his throat, making Taylor look up and shriek, holding her towel up with her hands. I don't worry about Felix seeing her like this; he's watched me following her for years, and he's too obsessed over Evelyn to even think about other women.

"I uh, I'm just gonna go home and let you two figure this out,"

he says awkwardly while returning to the stairs. I nod at him and mouth a thank you before he goes.

"What's going on, Ryan?"

Taylor asks me with a stern voice while crossing her arms.

She's so adorable like this.

I look around us to make sure that thing isn't anywhere near us, and take Taylor into the bedroom, locking the door.

"It's not Mara, love, I saw its reflection,"

I tell her quietly, hoping it doesn't have some kind of super demonic hearing powers. Taylor frowns at me and shakes her head.

“No, no! It is her. She asked me to bring her back. It was her.”

I knew she wouldn't believe me so I grab my phone showing her the screenshot I took earlier.

“Just look, okay? Why would Mara even ask you to do something like that? She would never let you do anything that could remotely bring you in trouble. She's too kind for that.”

Taylor grabs the phone out of my hands. She opens her mouth a few times but doesn't say anything. Does this mean she'll finally believe me?

“But, I—I saw her ghost, she told me.”

A tear escapes the corner of her eye, and I move to wipe it away, but she beats me to it while sniffing.

“It wasn't her. It wanted you to think that so you could give it a body to use. So it could walk on this earth. It saw you were hurt and used that.”

She shakes her head and crouches down onto the floor while she holds her head with her hands.

“No, I just got her back, this isn't real.”

She slams my phone on the floor—good thing I had bought two new phones—and tries to leave the room. I grab her arm and stop her before she's able to. Does she really think I would make something like this up? Why can't she just see that this is wrong?

Unless it's no longer really her I'm talking to. I need to get rid of it soon, but she's

going to make it difficult for me. I can't have her going to Mara either and telling her that we are on to her, so I do something I never thought I'd do.

I'm going to make Felix's special tea to knock Taylor out and forget everything that has happened.

"I'm sorry, baby, I didn't mean to upset you. Why don't you get dressed and rest in bed? I'll go and get you some calming tea and a movie to watch in bed."

She looks at me, confused, and I'm not sure she's going to fall for it, but then she nods and walks over to the closet to grab her clothes.

I wait until I have her tucked in so I'm sure she's not leaving the room and go downstairs to make her tea.

Felix once gave me the white powder for a 'in case of' scenario, and even though I had never thought I'd actually use it, I still had kept it hidden in an old cooking book. Once she's out, I'll check if my phone still works so I can message Felix to get the plan set for tomorrow. I don't like having Taylor involved but I don't think it would trust me enough.

I add the powder to the tea and wait until it's fully dissolved before bringing it back up with a DVD.

I open the door to the room and see her lying there waiting for me. I wish it were for other reasons than this, but once all of this is over, I promise I will love and hold her like a man is supposed to. I will do all I can to wash away the sins I have committed towards her and to be better than I am right now.

I give her the tea and sit next to her, waiting in guilt until she finishes the whole thing and starts falling asleep.

Page 19

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:11 am

It's almost midday and she's still out, but Felix told me that it was normal and not to worry so much, which is easier said than done.

My phone luckily still worked, and Felix and I got a plan together. Everything is set and ready to go. The only thing I didn't account for was the fact that I had booked an appointment with Adelina for Taylor when she was still in the hospital, and she's now standing at the front door. Shit.

"What do you mean the session is off, is everything okay?"

I hold the door as close as I can hoping that Mara won't pop up out of nowhere.

"She got sick overnight and I've been so tired taking care of her, I forgot to call."

Adelina frowns while rubbing the back of her neck.

"Well, I hope she's better soon. Else we can just plan a new appointment?"

she asks me, and I'm relieved she's not pushing on the matter. I agree and plan a new date. I can see Felix coming up behind her, confusion on his face.

"What's going on?"

he asks us. His hair is dishevelled like he hasn't slept the whole evening. He is also holding a plastic bag which I'm guessing contains all the stuff we need to make this work.

“I had forgotten to cancel Taylor's psychology appointment. Thank you for bringing the soup for Taylor.”

He stares at me and lets out a sarcastic laugh.

“Yeah, no problem, I love being your maid,”

he retorts. If Adelina wasn't here right now, I would've smacked the back of his head for being such a pain in my ass.

“I guess I'll just g—”

Her eyes widen.

“Wait who was that?”

Adelina steps closer, trying to look into the house. I move in between her and the door, not letting her through.

“I think it's best if you go. She's sick and needs rest, I'll see you in three weeks.”

Felix walks past her and I quickly slam the door closed. He goes still, and I follow his line of sight, seeing Mara standing there. Shit did she see her. I really cannot have that added to all of this.

A vile smile plays on Mara's face, like it knows what it's doing.

There's a silent pause for a while, and then I can hear Felix clearing his throat; he always does this when he feels uncomfortable. I can understand him, since the last time he had an interaction like this, he lost his sister, his aunt, and almost his wife.

Mara turns away and walks to the living room like we didn't just have a standoff.

I don't want to follow it, but I need it out of my house, so I walk after it with Felix. It's sitting on the couch, eyeing the bag Felix is holding, but not saying anything. Not that it has since it got here. I do think it's playing us. I mean it was able to talk to her as a ghost, but now that it has an actual body with real vocal cords it can't speak. I might not be Sherlock, but I'm not that dumb either. So what is it playing at?

Felix doesn't move away and keeps staring at it like he knows something I don't yet, or maybe he's just challenging it? I want to ask him, but then Taylor walks in, still wearing her nightdress. Her hair is slightly messy, which makes me start thinking of the times it was like this because of me. I can feel my pants starting to tighten and I shift trying not to get any attention on it. This is really not the time to be sporting a boner.

"Hi, Felix I didn't know you were going to be here again,"

she says while side-eyeing me. To be fair, if I had told her yesterday, she would have forgotten about it anyway, as it's a side effect from the tea.

"He just showed up."

I shrug at her, I know it's not a very good lie, but what else can I say? 'He came to help me kill your already-dead-friend'? Yeah, that would've gone well.

Felix smiles up at her like he doesn't notice the annoyance in her tone. He's good at that, ignoring other people's feelings.

"Came to bring a surprise for Ryan,"

he says, winking at her. Taylor seems rather annoyed at his display, so I walk in

between them before they start going at each other too now, grabbing the bag and Felix's arm. I drag him into the kitchen.

"What the hell was that?"

I whisper-shout at him. He laughs and leans down against the counter.

"Just gracing your wife dearest with my sparkling personality,"

he retorts. If I didn't need his help so badly, I would've smacked him for that. Though I can always do it once we're done and I no longer need his help.

Keeping the annoyance at bay I open the bag to see what's inside. There's salt, garlic, some whitish, see-through and black crystals, white and black candles, and some old rusty dagger. Don't tell me this is what's going to solve this whole mess. Does he seriously think we can kill an undead-demon-thing with salt and garlic? It's not a goddamn vampire.

"Is this a joke?"

I ask him, slightly angry. Okay, I'm more than slightly angry now, but I gotta keep my head cool for the time being.

"We have to trap it in a salt circle first, the protective candles and crystals will be around it to make sure it can't escape, and as for the knife, it's the one I used at my aunt's home. I don't know if it will work here but it might do something."

I frown at him. He's explained almost everything but two things.

"What about the garlic? And what will we actually do once it's trapped?"

I guess the protective circle might work, if not we'll be very fucked though.

"The garlic is so our scent is masked, and it will only notice Taylor, but not us. And we are going to get that thing out of her body into this vial. He holds up a tiny pot with a cork on it. Is he joking? This isn't really going to trap it, is it? Right?"

I stare at him, hoping that at some point he say.

"just kidding", but it's not coming, and the worries I thought I had before just unfolded.

"Are you serious right now? Like for real, for real?"

Felix looks at me like I just insulted him and grabs the bag out of my hands.

"If you don't want my help, you can just figure it out on your own."

Well, what do I have to lose? Except for, of course, my or Taylor's life. I can't believe I'm actually going to agree to this.

"No, I guess we can do your weird garlic trap plan."

Felix smiles at that.

"Well then, make them go somewhere else so I can make the house ready."

I raise my eyebrows at him in bewilderment. Where the fuck am I supposed to take my crazy possessed wife and her walking-dead-friend? I can't just go and take them shopping.

"Where could I possibly take them?"

“You’ll figure it out.”

He blatantly states. Well fuck, that’s just really bloody helpful. He doesn’t say more in answer and just points at the door. I guess we’ll go out for a walk in the forest then.

Page 20

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:11 am

I wait till they both get out of here. I'm worried how all of this will play out, but ever since the incident at my aunt's place, Evy started going to these medium sessions. Of course, at first I had my doubts about it, most of the time those people are scammers, but everything she said had always been head-on, and with what we went through, what I saw, I just don't doubt this stuff anymore.

The first thing I did when getting in the car was call Chloe and ask for advice.

She told me the best ways to get rid of it and would write on paper what I needed to say and do, and that I had to follow it by the letter.

Ryan isn't fully believing it, which I guess is fair enough, but at some point, he's going to need to get his head out of his ass and take all of this seriously before it's too late.

I start to make a huge circle in the middle of the living room in salt, hoping that way it would be less obvious. All I need it to do is walk in there.

Chloe also gave me something called 'moonwater', whatever that is, and told me to rub it over all the doors and windows; any way of entrance to the room needs to have it.

I place the crystals behind the TV stand and on bookshelves in a white-black-white order—always in the order of three—hoping it won't notice all of this.

My phone goes off, making me jump up. I usually am never this nervous, but I guess this whole thing is too close to home, and the last thing I need is that thing following

me home and hurting Evy.

“Hey Felix, I had a feeling you were going to need my advice.”

Ah, Chloe. This better not be her telling me we're all going to die.

“What is it, Chloe? I’m kind of busy.” Am I being a jerk right now? Yes, I am. Do I care? No, I don’t. I need to do this stupid setup on my own, and I am stressed enough with the whole situation. And her calling is almost never a good sign.

“Did you put the moonwater on any entry and exit place of the room?”

Is she kidding me right now?

“Yes, Chloe, it’s all nice and wet there.”

I can hear her humming on the other side of the line. What is going on with her now?

“Well, something isn’t right. What about the crystals? Are they in the right order?”

Her line of questioning is definitely not helping with the stress I’ve been having so far.

“Yeah, one white, one black, and one white again, what isn’t right?”

There’s a pause on the other side. “Chloe?”

I can hear some shuffling like she’s looking for something.

“Ah! Felix, those tokens I made, where are they?”

Oh, crap they're still in the car!

I run over to the car quickly to pick up the little bag of whatever it is she put inside and place it in my pants pocket, and quickly run back to the house.

"I got it!"

I tell her once I'm back in the living room.

"You're welcome!"

She sing-songs to me before closing the line. Well, I can't lie, she really is impressive. I forgot to give Ryan his and Taylor's token so once we have her locked in this room, I'll just give it to them. Maybe by then, Taylor will also be thinking more clearly about all of this.

Ryan just messaged me saying they'll be here soon, so I quickly call Evy to check on her and to say how much I love her in case things go bad.

I hope she doesn't pick up on the meaning of the conversation. I don't need my eight-months-pregnant wife to be worrying over this.

I also will not go down easily if it comes to it.

Page 21

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:11 am

I can't believe it's actually taking a walk with us. I mean at this point I just thought it might burn once the sun touched it or something like that. I guess not...

Taylor and Mara are walking ahead of me. I don't trust it enough to make them go behind me. I mean, what if it would knock me out and kidnap her or something?

Taylor thinks this walk is to strengthen our bond, so 'Mara' and I would get along better. She couldn't be more wrong.

"Isn't this nice?"

Taylor's soft voice brings me back from my thoughts.

"What is, beautiful?"

She giggles at the nickname I gave her and moves her hand in the air.

"This! Us all together. Like a family."

Ah, I take back my previous statement.

This would be the most fucked up dysfunctional family there is.

"Sure thing, babe."

I smile up at her while she smiles back. She's going to lose it once she finds out what we're planning on doing. Which is why Felix brought an injection version of his tea

with him.

I also don't want her to see her friend die—well again, I guess. She might be scarred for life if we do. The only thing I just don't get is why it hasn't done anything yet? It has had multiple chances to kill us and it hasn't taken any of them. Which means it needs something from us, I just don't know what.

We're almost done with the path we took to walk, and Taylor is already a bit tired, which worries me since she just got up. Maybe it's just a side effect from the tea?

I grab my phone and quickly text Felix we're on our way back to him.

Not long after, he sends me a K, which I'm guessing means all is done on his part.

The anxiety increases tenfold and I feel like throwing up from all the stress. I need this done fast, so I can finally enjoy my marriage with Taylor.

I can see the back door coming closer and closer, which is making my heart start pounding.

“You okay, baby?”

Taylor grabs my hand. She's smiling at me. She acts soft and innocent and not like herself at all. Her eyes are no longer their beautiful soft green but a darker colour, and her pupils are bigger than they should be.

“Everything is fine, my love. Why don't you and Mara get in the living room while I get the food ready for us all?”

Taylor looks confused for a second.

“Why can’t we wait in her room?”

Is she kidding me right now? It’s really not the time to not listen to me.

“So you two can watch TV together, I—Felix got your favourite movie to watch.”
Lies.

“Oh really? You want to watch The Notebook, Mara? It’s going to be just like old times.”

She smiles at Mara while Mara obviously doesn’t answer her and just stares at her. There is a little pause and then Taylor starts again.

"Great! It’s going to be amazing!"

she says afterwards. Did she just pretend to have a conversation with it? She might have been further gone than I thought.

I don’t say anything, though.

When we reach the door to go inside, Mara suddenly stops walking and Taylor pulls its arm.

“What’s wrong, Mara? Why don’t we go inside?”

It turns its head at me.

Our eyes link and I don’t dare move away.

Taylor pulls at its arm again. “Mara?”

That seems to pull her back from the freeze it had, and it slowly takes a foot inside of the house, looking unsure.

I think it knows something's up, but I try not to show it. Its head is looking around, which I haven't really seen it do before. Is that a bad sign?

Taylor is either oblivious or chooses to be ignorant of its change in behaviour and just keeps talking to it about the movie while going into the living room, holding its hand. The thing looks at me before it goes inside and then completely turns rigid.

Felix snatches Taylor's arm, pushing her out of the room, making her fall. I grab her and hold her still while she struggles against me, and Felix quickly closes the salt circle before Mara is able to get out.

There are gurgling noises coming out its mouth and it's staring very angrily at us.

Felix injects Taylor to make her go calm. Once she's knocked out, he places a small black fabric pouch in her hand.

“I got one for you too, keep it on you,”

he tells me. I don't know what it is, but it seems important, so I'll stuff it in my pocket. He smells of garlic and his hair is all messy like he's been going through it hundreds of times.

He opens a paper that was in his sweater pocket and starts to read it out loud. I don't recognise the language and it seems to upset Mara a lot since it started screaming and yelling.

“You think this will stop me?”

Its voice is deep and male-like. The sound of it makes Felix stop for a second. He seems to get out of his daze not long after and starts to read it again.

Sancte Michael Archangele, defende nos in praelio. Contra nequitiam et insidias diaboli esto praesidium. Imperet illi Deus, supplices deprecamur. Tuque princeps militiae caelestis, Satanam aliosque spiritus malignos, qui ad perditionem animarum pervagantur in mundo divina virtute in infernum detrude.

Amen.

The thing is screeching, and then Mara's body falls down and starts to convulse.

There's black liquid coming out of the mouth, ears, nose, and eyes. I keep looking at it while Felix repeats the same words over and over again.

The body stops shaking and the black liquid starts pooling together, making Felix get into action and grab the small pot, placing it on the floor right inside of the circle.

The black stuff starts to go to it; it's like it's pulling it to it.

We both wait until it's all inside of it when Felix quickly closes the cork on it and grabs a white candle, burning it and making the wax fall drip down, sealing it.

Okay so that just happened. Does this mean it's over?

Felix wipes the sweat of his brow and starts to laugh.

"Holy shit that worked!"

I laugh with him because what the hell was that?

That wasn't as hard as I thought it would be. Thank God!

Page 22

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:11 am

I look next to me, seeing Taylor's sleeping form lying there. I have never felt as peaceful as I do now. I smile to myself, that thing is really gone!

Once Felix had everything sealed, we reburied her body where it's supposed to be and cleaned up the entire room while Taylor was sleeping in bed. He gave the vial to his 'friend', who I still don't know, but he assured me there was no safer spot than with her.

We were both unsure how Taylor would be waking up, so Felix stayed to make sure she was going to be okay.

Once she finally woke, she didn't remember anything. It was like it was completely removed from her head. The last thing she remembered was being at the funeral and then all black. I made new doctor's appointments for her, and Adelina agreed to do sessions once a week because we both decided it might be better for her that way.

I turn off the TV and pick up Taylor to carry her to the bed.

Once I'm finally in the room, I tuck her in and go to the bathroom and brush my teeth so I can go to bed too.

I switch off the bathroom light and walk to the bedroom.

A sudden loud hiss scares the living shit out of me and I notice the grey cat laying on the bed, partly draped over Taylor's sleeping body. What the hell, how did it get inside now.

“Shush, you! Get away from her!”

I whisper-shout at it.

The cat makes angry noises and shows its teeth at me again. It better not scratch Taylor, because then I’ll turn it into a new coat!

I grab the angry cat by the neck, lifting it up while it tries to claw at me, and walk downstairs to the front door, opening it so I can put it back outside.

I really need to check the house for any ways it could be getting inside, but that’s for tomorrow. Now I’m going to go to bed and sleep with my beautiful wife.

BAMM BAMM

Sweat drips down my brow as I jump up. I look next to me and notice Taylor is no longer lying in bed next to me. I touch the sheets to see if she left a while ago, and the coldness of it tells me it’s been a while now.

“What the hell now?”

I murmur to myself. I grab the gun on the nightstand next to the little pouch Felix had given me when we got rid of that thing, and walk downstairs slowly.

GRRRRRRRAARGG

“Taylor?”

I whisper, hoping she’ll hear me. I don’t hear her, and I don’t see her, and I don’t like it. I look down and see that there are muddy footsteps on the floor, making me scared shitless. I turn around to go and grab my phone and call Felix because no fucking

way I'm doing this right now unprotected.

The moment I look behind me, Mara is standing right there and flings itself at me.

“AAAAAH!”

I scream, jumping up from the bed. I look around and see Taylor stirring next to me. My shirt is wet, covered in sweat, making me laugh out a humourless laugh.

“What's going on, baby?”

Taylor's soft hands massage my shoulders, and she kisses the side of my neck, making me groan.

“Just a nightmare, sorry baby, I didn't mean to wake you.”

Taylor hums at me and pushes my body down and slowly pulls off my underwear.

“I know just what to do to make the nightmares go away, she says while taking her shirt off and placing herself right above my hard on.

“Oh yeah?”

I ask her as she sits down, taking my cock all at once. We both moan at the sensation and she starts to move on me, pushing her amazing breasts in my face while she rides me. I grab one with my hand while I start to lick and suck on the other.

“Yeah, baby, you like me fucking you like a whore, don't you?”

Fuck, since when did she get a mouth like that on her.

“Yeah baby, you fuck me good,”

I tell her, making her smile.

“Good because it’s your last,”

she says, making me halt. What the fuck did she just say?

Suddenly, her hand slashes and my throat burns. It’s hard to breathe and I can feel a burning pain in my throat. There’s liquid pooling, and I hold my hand over where my throat hurts. Stunned in shock, I see my hand covered in blood and I look back at her.

My eyes widen once I see we’re not alone and fucking Mara is standing behind her. Holy shit!

I try to say something, anything, but it’s impossible as my breathing becomes more haggard and everything turns black.

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“It’s been a year now, one year without you.”

I look down at the grave of my girlfriend. She didn’t deserve to die like that, and I’m still not over it. I don’t think I’ll ever really be.

I’ve been dating other men and women, but it never really feels the same, even though I know it’s what she would’ve wanted.

I feel all alone in all of this too. After the death of Taylor and Ryan, there’s been no one I can talk to about her either anymore.

I knew she had difficulties, but then she killed Ryan and herself. Ryan's friend Felix found them after he had a bad feeling and went to check up on them. They were both dead on the bed, their throats slit. I was supposed to help her talk about it as a former psychiatrist and then she became sick and now I just don’t know. Maybe I should’ve gone inside that day. Ryan was acting all weird with his friend, and I saw someone else walking through the door opening. Maybe he was cheating and that’s why Taylor killed him.

I’m sobbing until I hear a branch crack. I look around but don’t see anyone.

Oh, come on now, Addie, you are being paranoid again. Ever since that haunted city incident I had as a teen, I’ve been looking around for shadows, for him. The man with no face.

I can’t explain it because I don’t remember anything from back then. All I know is that I went as a dare with my friend to a ‘ghost town’ and then when I woke up, they

were all dead and I was covered in blood. They brought me to a mental institution, thinking I killed them. I know I didn't, but no one believed me, not even my parents.

But still I get these dreams of a masked man and I feel like he had more to the story, that I didn't just make him up in my head.

After a couple of years, they released me for not having enough proof I actually did it, but no matter, the damage was done, and now it's just me again. Well me and my shadows.

Something moves from afar to the left and I squint my eyes trying to look at it.

I think there's someone standing at the tree further, but I'm too far to fully see it. It's odd because from here it kind of looks like Mara. But that can't be. I saw her corpse before we buried her, and I was the one who identified her when the cops found her.

"I wouldn't stay too long here. Cemeteries are made for the dead, not the living."

I almost jump out of my own skin and look behind me, seeing Felix, Ryan's best friend, standing there.

"Ah, yeah, what if I prefer their company over the living?"

I ask him. He snorts and looks behind me, going completely still.

If I didn't know any better, I'd say he seems scared, which is something I would've never guessed seeing on him before.

"What's wrong?"

I ask him. He shudders and looks at me and then back behind me, releasing the breath he was holding in.

“Nothing, Addie. Let’s get out of here.”

He places his hand on my back and walks me out.

I guess he’s just as paranoid as I am.