



163 Me Or You

Eve 1

Jules lunged at me again, her speed blinding. I barely managed to dodge, feeling the air shift as her fist grazed past my face. My muscles burned, screaming at me to stop, but I couldn't afford to slow down—not now, not when survival was hanging by a thread.

I fainted left and dove right, aiming low. My shoulder slammed into her ribs, and for a split second, she stumbled. A surge of hope flared in my chest, but it was short-lived. Her hand shot down, tangling in my hair, and yanked me backward with brutal force. I choked on a cry, my scalp screaming in protest as I was thrown to the ground again.

Jules loomed over me, a strange dark amusement glinting in her eyes. "You fight like a cornered rat," she taunted, crouching beside me. "It's poetic that you will also die like one."

I didn't hesitate. My knee shot up, slamming into her side. She grunted, but it only seemed to fuel her rage. She grabbed my wrist before I could pull away, twisting it sharply. Pain exploded in



my arm, and I let out a strangled gasp, my grip on the glass shard faltering.

"Drop it," she whispered, leaning in, her breath hot against my ear. "Blessed twin."

With a roar that didn't feel like it came from me, I twisted, sinking my teeth into her exposed forearm. The taste of copper flooded my mouth, and Jules howled, her grip loosening for just a second.

I fought the treacherous bile rising in my throat. The coppery scent and the sanguine taste coated my tongue, my throat tightening momentarily as memories attacked me from the depths of my mind. I shook my head and spat out the blood.

I had only a second. ****I had to fight my reaction.****

A second.

****It was all I needed.****

I wrenched myself free and scrambled to my feet, staggering back toward the overturned settee.

My fingers fumbled along the broken frame, searching—there. A jagged splinter of wood, sharp enough to do damage. I gripped it tightly,

my knuckles white with desperation.

Jules wiped the blood from her arm, eyes flashing with something that sent a shiver down my spine. "You're full of surprises," she mused, cracking her neck. "But I've had enough games."

She launched herself at me again, faster than I anticipated. I swung the splinter wildly, aiming for her face, but she was ready this time. Jules suddenly pivoted, her grip still locked around my wrist like a steel vice. Before I could react, she executed a brutal roundhouse kick, her knee slamming into the side of my head with bone-rattling force. A blinding explosion of pain erupted behind my eyes, and my vision blurred, stars bursting in my periphery.

But she wasn't done.

With terrifying precision, she twisted my captured arm as she spun, wrenching it at an unnatural angle. A sickening pop echoed through the room, and a white-hot agony I like anything I'd ever known tore through my shoulder. 3

I screamed—raw and guttural—my knees buckling beneath me as the world tilted on its axis. The searing pain lanced through every nerve, radiating down to my fingertips in a



relentless, electric pulse. My stomach churned violently, the taste of bile mixing with the lingering tang of blood in my mouth.

My vision swam in and out of focus, tears burning my eyes, but I couldn't stop, couldn't let it end here. I gasped, clutching my limp arm against my chest, the sheer weight of it sending fresh waves of agony crashing through me. Every breath felt like fire licking up my throat, my pulse hammering wildly against my temples.

Jules towered over me, her smile widening at my broken form. "Pathetic," she sneered, eyes dark with cruel satisfaction. "You were never meant to last, Ellen."

My teeth clenched so tightly my jaw ached, my body trembling from the overload of pain, but I refused to let her see me fall apart. I forced myself to stagger back, my good hand still clutching the splintered wood. Every movement was torture, my shoulder a screaming void of agony, but I held on.

Jules took a slow step forward, savoring my torment. "You feel that?" she whispered, circling me like a predator toying with its prey. "That's the feeling of breaking. Your body knows it, doesn't it? It knows you can't win."

I swallowed the rising fear, forcing myself upright despite the way my entire left side throbbed mercilessly. My breaths came in ragged gasps, sweat dripping into my eyes, but I didn't let go of the makeshift weapon.

Through the haze of pain, a single thought cut through—keep moving.

Jules lunged again, but this time, I didn't run. I ducked low at the last second, ignoring the scream of my shoulder, and drove my knee into her stomach with all the force I could muster. The impact sent her stumbling back, a flicker of surprise crossing her face.

I didn't wait. I picked up the sharp wood with my other hand.

Using every ounce of strength left in me, I bolted forward, my legs shaky—almost jelly—from the agony. The splinter of wood in my hand found its mark—plunging so deep into Jules' side that I hit bone. The sharp crack of impact jolted through my arm, and for the first time, her expression twisted in genuine pain.

"Please don't make me do this. I'm begging you." I screamed in desperation, my voice hoarse with pain and grief. I never wanted to hurt her.



"Please, whoever you are," I pleaded. "Bring Jules back to me." 2

For a moment, the spark I knew entered her eyes before it was snuffed out by the corruption I had quickly learned to recognize. She looked down at the severe injury I had inflicted, biting her lip so hard it bled. She panted, "Fuck!" she whispered harshly, and before I could react, she dipped her hand into her shirt.

My blood turned to ice when she retrieved a gun. 1

She pointed it right at me, cocking it with a terrifying click that seemed to resound in my skull.

I took an instinctive step back, my stomach dropping to my feet.

"There's no use begging," she said, her voice low and deadly. "It's either me or you. And it's going to be me walking out of this alive."