

The Joy of Revenge #Chapter 101 - Read The Joy of Revenge Chapter 101

Chapter 101

CHAPTER 101 Intervention

Joy

After checking if I had bad breath, I opened the door just a bit and peeked through the small opening with one eye showing through the tiny slit.

I inhaled deeply and caught a whiff of Noah's cologne. It was a familiar scent, Acqua Di Gio, obviously bought during his shopping spree. His hair was still damp from his shower and he was wearing a new long-sleeved dark blue shirt with its sleeves rolled up to just below his elbows. He was grinning at me through the small crack, his chocolate brown eyes twinkling. As the sun's rays came shining from behind him, his wheat colored hair glistened like gold, something I used to stare at in awe when I was just a little girl.

Now is not the time to reminisce, Joy.

I opened the door just a bit wider showing him wasn't dressed to entertain guests. He coughed, quickly averting his eyes as he caught a glimpse of my silk pajamas.

I had to hand it to him. Noah was quick to redeem himself. Although he appeared to act like

man, I did see a flash of admiration and desire in his eyes as he looked at my lad body.

sk, tsk... Naughty, naughty...

The corners of my lips curled up into a small smile, noticing his red cheeks. As much as he wanted to portray that he was not all affected by my appearance, his body said it all.

He moved, shifting his weight while placing one hand on his waist. His eyes focused on my face, expertly ignoring my body from the neck down. He

cleared his throat and grinned again, even waving awkwardly with his free hand.

“Good morning, Virtue,” he said. “I’m sorry to barge in on you so early in the morning, but I noticed Chip’s car in the driveway and thought since you were awake, I’d stop by before I go to work. There’s just something really important I need to talk to you about.”

“Do

you want to come in?” I asked. “You can have a cup of coffee while I clean up the dining table. Chip’s in the den getting some rest. There’s still time before the ribbon cutting ceremony, so he asked if he could take a nap,” I said, opening the door even wider and stepping out a bit from behind the door to show off more of myself. I heard his sharp intake of breath as he quickly surveyed my body before his eyes rested on my face like a gentleman

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I fought the urge to smirk.

Noah was nothing like a gentleman.

“No, this is fine. Uhm, I don’t want to wake Chip up,” he said. He looked away towards the hushes of my yard, his brow furrowed, thinking of what he had to say. He took a deep breath, then focused his attention on me with a determination in his eyes. “Virtue, I guess you’ll see this as an intervention of sorts, but remember what I told you about Liam and the two scandals he was implicated in?” I nodded my head. “Well, whatever happens, I just need you. to trust me when I say Liam isn’t what you believe him to be.”

“What do you mean, Noah?” I asked, puzzled. “And why are you talking about Liam?” My tone didn’t hide my distaste.

We looked at each other confused. His brow furrowed further while he stuck his thumb out

and pointed to Cristos’ car.

I’m sorry. Chip hasn’t said anything yet?” He asked.

"Has said anything about what, Noah?" | asked impatiently. "Chip just told me how fun it was to bump into you and Nicole in Chicago yesterday and that all of you got to do some shopping." My voice sounded envious.

He shook his head and hands, denying his involvement with Nicole. | knew Noah would

notice how | added an emphasis on Nicole's name and that he would mistake my tone as jealousy.

"About me and Nicole, we're just friends, Virtue, he said, stating their relationship status.

"We've been friends since high school, so we're really close. | mean, close friends can travel

out of town, can't they?"

"Of course, friends can travel together, but your relationship with Nicole doesn't seem that way to me, Noah. I'm a woman. | sense these things," | said. "And what's wrong in admitting you and Nicole have a relationship deeper than friendship? | don't think Liam would mind. That is why you're here... Right, Noah? You're afraid Liam might not like you dating Nicole?"

He shook his head frantically, knowing we were going off-topic.

"No, no, no," he exclaimed. "I mean, yes, I'm here about Liam, but not because of Nicole and no, Nicole and | aren't dating." "Then, why are you here? Is there something | should know?" | stared at him waiting for 845

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to give me a straightforward answer. Noah, | saw, took a moment, mustering enough courage. to speak.

*41-1, uhm, y-you s-see," Noah stuttered nervously, struggling to find the words to say while he blinked rapidly just like when we were kids.

Suddenly, | saw Noah as the little boy who | used to go around town with. Like Wherever he was, | was right there beside him, not caring if he stuttered.

e peas in a pod.

| reached over and placed my hand on his arm, rubbing my thumb gently on his skin. | used to do that when we were children. It would calm him down and he would take a deep breath

and start over... slowly.

And that's what he did. He paused and took a deep breath. His eyes suddenly met mine and time stood still... bringing us back to when we were kids...

But | knew it wasn't like that for Noah. | could see it in those chocolate brown eyes of his. He was gazing at me as if he had won the lottery... as if he had finally found the woman of his dreams... as if he was head over heels in love with me...

12 me

I've seen that look before. I've seen it from Xavier, Cristos and Sebastian... the three men |

felt a slight tug in my heart.

still have feelings for Noah?

| pulled my hand away from his arm as | was flooded with a myriad of emotions, spiraling

again from a time from way back when.

out ag

| found myself going back in time, remembering how | longed for Noah to look at me the same way before | was raped. However, | also remembered the days | spent in the hospital hoping Noah would come and visit me, hold my hand and tell me he was there for me... that everything would be okay.

Yet, Noah never came. When his mother came to visit, | heard he was busy finishing at chemistry project and had no time to come and visit. It was then and there that | knew | was

all alone.

Noah had abandoned me. This a sshole, who | had thought was my friend, abandoned me.

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No, | didn't have feelings for this b astard.

My hands instinctively balled up in fists. | quickly hid my hands behind my back and tried to calm the anger that was beginning to surface, hoping he wouldn't notice anything.

The corner of my lips moved to form a small hopeful smile. "Yes? And you were saying?" To my surprise, he chuckled softly. "It's like | have my bestfriend back," he whispered low, his voice thick with emotion. He reached up and brushed my hair from my face.

"I'm sorry. | didn't hear you," | said, acting coy. He coughed and smiled, but this time he let his feelings shine through his eyes. "Virtue, Liam isn't the only man out there for you," Noah said. "You deserve much more. Just open yourself to the possibility." may have | am open to every possibility, Noah," | said. "Liam and | have only dated once and seen each other on occasion, but for now, Liam and | are friends. Good friends. He has not shown me anything that may ruin the trust I've given him."

"For now he hasn't, but trust me, Virtue, he has skeletons in his closet. All the Cohens do. If you could do some research into the Taylors and Cohens, you will find out that the Cohens have done everything in their power to ruin the Taylors. It was no different for Joy. Joy trusted Liam with all her heart. He was even her date during the Spring Formal when the rape happened."

"| can hear the regret in your voice again, Noah, | pointed out. "I know she was your bestfriend. If you could do anything differently, what would you change?"

| saw the surprise in his face. He wasn't prepared to answer that simple question.

"Honestly, | can't answer that with just one answer. Maybe if | could change who she was and who | am, maybe things wouldn't have ended the way it did," he said.

What? Change who he was? He was speaking in riddles.

"Maybe it's time to move on," I urged. "I need to give Liam the benefit of the doubt like I've given you and everyone else in this small town. Unless I find something concrete, Liam will remain my friend. Just like you, Noah. We're friends, right?"

I grabbed his hand and squeezed it. He grinned at me.

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"Yes, we're friends, but I-I am hoping we could be more than just friends," Noah answered.

"You're sweet, but there seems to be a long line of women who would like to be more than just friends with you. Nicole is my friend too and I don't want to step on her toes."

"I assure you, Nicole and I, we are just friends," Noah said, clearly frustrated. "And there isn't a long line of women who want to be more than just friends with me. Please, Virtue, just open yourself up to the possibility. In time, I'll prove myself worthy." "Okay. But just because you said so," I murmured, winking at him. "Anyway, I need to get ready. I hope you can come by for the ribbon-cutting. It'll be at ten."

"Sure, Virtue," he replied, grinning at me. "I promise I'll be there." He kissed me on the cheek, waved goodbye and left..

I quickly closed the door behind him. If he had said all of that ten years ago, I would have

agreed to what he wanted in a heartbeat.

The smile I had plastered on my face changed into an angry scowl. Men. All they wanted was

a pretty face.

"That was a long talk. Did he tell you not to marry Liam?" Cristos asked, emerging from the den. He was probably watching from the CCTV cameras.

"No. But he said he wants to be more than just friends," I answered exasperated.

“And what did you say?”

“I told him Nicole and many other women would like to be more than just friends with him,”

I replied, rolling my eyes. “Let’s get ready. We need to dress to impress.”

“Oh? Why?”

“Because once I accept Liam's proposal, it’s going to be front page news!”

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Chapter 102

CHAPTER 102 Pink

Joy

Cristos and I arrived at my boutique before nine-thirty in the morning. Like everyone else, I parked my car in the parking lot, right beside Cristos’ Range Rover.

Since my motif was pink like the color of the signage of my shop, Cristos had no problem donning his newly purchased pink collared dress shirt. He rolled the sleeves up to his elbows and paired his pink shirt with black skinny jeans and black leather pointed toe boots. I, on the other hand, decided to wear one

of my designs to showcase what I had to offer. It was a particular design that I had sketched while I hid inside my room, just before we left New Salem. It was a sleeveless white lace dress with a midlength tulle skirt embroidered with pink outfit with dainty flowers. I adorned my dress with a slim salmon colored belt and paired my light pink high heeled stiletto pumps and a matching pink leather shoulder bag. My hair I styled in a neat bun behind my head with my favorite bladed accessory hidden beneath small dainty pink flowers.

As Cristos and I walked towards my store, I noticed Xavier's people had already set up the large bouquets of pink and white roses on flower stands right in front of the storefront windows as well as an arch made entirely of pink foil balloons above the glass door to welcome customers to my boutique.

Last night, Xavier promised me he would handle everything so I could come in late, including opening the boutique. He made good on his promise. Everything was ready except for the appetizers and refreshments.

Sebastian, who was busy placing a long white table in front of the store, turned his head at the sound of my heels on the pavement. Just like Cristos, he was wearing a light pink long sleeved dress shirt, but he had paired his with tight fitting gray slacks.

"The woman of the hour has arrived. I'm guessing you didn't get much sleep," Sebastian greeted us. "Chip, I told you to come here from the airport."

"Virtue's house was closer," Cristos argued, placing a hand on his hip. "Plus, she needed my help in picking her shoes." Sebastian rolled his eyes as Cristos got into character.

"I asked you to come here because we needed your help to set up the decorations," Sebastian scolded him.

"Det I' es wearing Armani Cristos whined. Sebastian scoffed at him, not caring what he was

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wearing. "Fine. What do you need me to do?"

"Well, I'm waiting for Bo to bring me a pink tablecloth, Sebastian said. "After we decorate the table, you can help place the glasses and food for the townsfolk."

"That I can do," Cristos said, grateful he wouldn't have to do any heavy lifting. "I have to admit the complex is turning out to be like a scene from Barbie. I can't believe there's so much pink."

"Isn't pink suppose to be your favorite color?" Sebastian mumbled. Cristos laughed.

"Yes it is, but on me not everywhere else," he said, twirling around like a model. "Wait a minute. Where's the bubbly by the way?" "Some are in the chiller at Bo's while I placed a number of bottles inside a chiller in Virtue's office. We weren't able to get a license to serve because you and Dan left for Chicago," a familiar male voice said. I turned to find Xavier wearing a light pink suit to my surprise. Xavier hated pink.

"Oh wow!" I exclaimed, stunned. "You look-"

"Like cotton candy? Yeah, I know. The guys back at Bo's have been making fun of me since I stepped out wearing this," Xavier said, looking at what he was wearing. Cristos and I giggled. while Sebastian looked at his own shirt in aghast. He didn't want to be seen as a piece of

cotton candy too.

"Bo, I was gonna say dashing, sort of like Barbie's Ken, but cotton candy works too," I said, trying to stop myself from laughing. "And I thought we were friends," he said, regretting he wore pink. "I'm going to head back and change."

"Awwww, it's just for the day," I pointed out. "Remember... on Wednesdays, we wear pink."

"No, no, no... Just for this Wednesday. After this event, I am never wearing pink again," Xavier said gruffly. "You do know I'm only doing this for you, Virtue. You owe me."

"You owe me too," Sebastian piped up. I looked at the two of them astonished they would gang up on me for wearing pink. There was already a coup.... sheesh!

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"I'll take all of you out to dinner for helping me, | promised. "But for now, stick with pink and please... wear a smile."

"Easy for you to say," Xavier said, sulking. "You look ravishing in pink." Xavier turned to Cristos. "Chip, although | can tell you're wearing Armani again, | need some help with the food and drinks."

"Hold on. Before | help you out, I'll call Dan and get that license. What are you going to serve, anyway?" Cristos asked.

"The usual finger foods. Pigs in a blanket, fried ravioli, mini tacos, gourmet pizza rolls, fried mozzarella sticks, vegetable sticks, tomato bruschetta and mini red velvet cupcakes with watermelon juice and strawberry lemonade, Xavier replied. "My kitchen prepared

everything. Come on. It's almost ten."

After Sebastian tested the sound system | had Lou install yesterday, he and | prepared the pink ribbon for the ceremony, the plates, glasses and utensils while Cristos and Xavier placed the appetizers we were going to serve on the long table amidst the growing crowd of curious onlookers. It was relatively quiet until a small group of privileged middle-aged women pushed their way through the crowd. | glanced at Cristos and we both rolled our

eyes.

pull

"Bo, oh my gosh, you look stunning in your suit, Norma Martin gushed. "Not most men can

that look off. Chip always looks great in pink, but seeing you in this makes me want to

eat you."

"And there goes the cotton candy image inside my head," Sebastian muttered under his breath. Cristos averted his face, snickering at Sebastian's comment. As hard as he tried, he couldn't stop himself from laughing. | elbowed him in the ribs to get him to stop..

Xavier, hearing the comment, shot Sebastian a dirty look before quickly turning his scowl into a welcoming smile.

“Ladies! So nice of you to come,” Xavier greeted the four women who were all wearing something pink in their outfits. Xavier suddenly took my arm and pulled me towards his friends. “Ladies, I would like to introduce you to Virtue Sullivan, owner of Simply Virtue Boutique. Sullivan, I want you to meet Norma, Linda, Morgan and Charlotte. They were some of Cynthia’s closest friends.”

I smiled at them, however they didn’t smile back. Instead, they looked at me from head to

toe.

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They reminded me of the Plastics from the movie “Mean Girls”.

“Sullivan? Norma asked, smirking at how Xavier called me. I think Xavier decided it would be fun to address me by my fake surname so it would appear we had a completely platonic

relationship.

“Yeah. That’s her last name, right? I like how it sounds. Makes her one of the guys, Xavier said, playfully punching me on the arm. “Right, Sullivan?”

“Next, you’ll be calling me Sully, Bo,” I answered dryly. “Just stick with Virtue.” I turned my attention to the ladies who were still staring at me. “Anyway, it’s really nice to finally meet all of you. Bo always speaks fondly of you.” I checked my watch. “It’s almost ten. If you can wait patiently, our guest of honor should be arriving shortly.”

“Is it a celebrity?” Linda Jacobs asked excitedly.

“Well, if you can call our mayor a celebrity, then yes,” I answered. She frowned, clearly disappointed, but Norma Martin had an opposite reaction.

“Sure, he’s a hero,” Norma said, smiling. “He saved me during the fire.” Liam obviously had Norma’s loyalty. She was the one I had to befriend.

“And he shielded me from the explosion,” | replied. “This town has a wonderful mayor. He’s willing to sacrifice himself for his constituents.”

“Amen,” Norma replied. “And here he comes right now... with his entourage.”

| turned to see Liam’s black BMW, Dan’s silver Subaru and Jack’s RAM pickup truck enter the parking lot one after the other. As | scanned the vehicles, | noticed Noah’s pickup parked at

the end.

Noah is here, but where is he?

| quickly scanned the crowd, but | couldn’t find any sign of him.

The crowd parted to allow Liam through. He was wearing a dark blue suit with a pink tie for the occasion while Dan was wearing a dark pink short sleeved silk shirt, white chinos, and black leather shoes. Jack, on the other hand, had his uniform on. Well... he was on duty.

Liam greeted me with a warm smile on his lips. He quickly kissed me on the cheek which drew the attention of the crowd. They began to murmur among themselves while Xavier's

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“You look absolutely stunning,” Liam said while his eyes quickly roamed the length of my

body.

“Thank you, Liam,” | replied. “You look really handsome too. And... you have a pink tie on.” | reached up and fixed his tie. We stood still for a moment, staring in each other’s eyes like a couple in love. | heard the clicking sound of several smartphones. Our public display was

news.

“It was a gift and has been hanging in my closet for some time waiting for the perfect occasion, Liam said. “Bo, Chip, Dom... It’s good to see you’ve been helping Virtue with the preparations.”

“The least we can do for our new neighbor, Sebastian said, extending his hand to Liam. Liam grabbed it and shook it enthusiastically.

“By the way, Dan has the license you requested. You can serve champagne, just don’t allow minors to get their hands on a glass,” Liam said while he shook hands with Xavier and patted Cristos on the arm. After everyone exchanged pleasantries, Liam turned around to

address the crowd.

“It's nice to see everyone here. How are you folks doing?”

While Liam did some last minute brown-nosing, | quickly picked up the microphone | had left on a small table Sebastian had set up for coupons and flyers.

While | prepared for my speech, | noticed a head with golden colored hair at the end of the crowd. There, standing beside Jack, was Noah. Both of them had scowls on their faces.

| guess Noah told Jack.

“Hey, Virtue... honey..,” Cristos said, interrupting my thoughts. “Let’s start.”

| nodded my head and positioned myself beside Liam. | glanced at him and noticed how uncomfortable he looked. His face was flushed and he was sweating profusely.

He’s scared | might refuse his proposal.

“Liam, are you okay?” | asked as he wiped the sweat off his brow with a handkerchief. | placed a hand on his cheek to calm him. His lips moved upward into a small smile while he slightly nodded his head.

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Chapter 103

CHAPTER 103 Ribbon Cutting

Xavier

Pink was definitely not my color. | was silently praying all of this would be over soon so | could change.

“And here he comes now... with his entourage,” Norma said, pointing at the black BMW that had entered the parking lot. | coughed, quickly moving away from Joy and the irritating

group of privileged older women. | headed to the juice dispensers at the end of the long table to grab a drink to ease my sham of a scratchy throat,

“Sam, | need you to keep watch,” | mumbled as | raised the glass of watermelon juice to my lips.

“Copy, X, Sam replied. “I’m shadowing Noah. Right now, he’s standing behind his car at the complex parking lot. He’s on his phone arguing with one of his girlfriends.” | smirked.

Which one? Well, it didn’t matter.

“Make sure no one makes trouble... especially him,” | said, after taking a sip of my juice. “This is already stressful for all of us. | don’t want to deal with anymore problems.” None of us liked the idea of Joy eventually marrying Liam, but it was a means to an end.

“You can count on me, X.” He paused. “I gotta go. Noah is on the move,” Sam whispered.

“Find out what he’s up to, Sam. The rest of you, blend in and keep watch. If you see anyone. suspicious, grab ’em and make them talk. But if you see Pete, kill him,” | instructed my team.

“Over and out.”

There was news Pete was in the Caribbean, unfortunately, we were still waiting for confirmation. After | argued that it would be better if Sam was here just in case Pete never left, Sebastian sent one of his men to track him down in the Bahamas. If that person was indeed Pete, Sebastian gave explicit

instructions to kill him. I know Joy wanted to kill Pete McDowell herself, but we couldn't take anymore risks.

We all made the mistake of underestimating Pete McDowell. We weren't going to do that again. The faster we get rid of him, the better.

I placed my glass on a glass rack atop a small table designated for used glasses and turned around to see Liam and Dan making their way to Joy. The both of them seemed to be

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He and Dan suddenly stopped just before they reached the noisy crowd of well-wishers. I raised my hand to cover my eyes from the glare of the late morning sun and squinted to see the expressions on their faces. I noticed the panic and dread in Liam's usually calm gray eyes while Dan's face was apologetic. I had an inkling Dan had finally told Liam that their dinner in Chicago last night didn't go so well.

Judging by the petrified look on his face, I quickly assumed Liam was going to back out or

agree to either postpone his proposal knowing there was a high possibility Joy would not marry him. If Virtue were to refuse, Liam would become the laughingstock of New Salem. Just the mere thought of Liam backing out made the corners of my lips curve upward into a

small smile.

But Liam has to propose and Joy has to accept. She needs to destroy the Cohens from within.

I know it was wrong for me to feel this way, but there was a huge part of me that didn't want this wedding to happen. Sure, I was the one who talked her into accepting Liam's proposal, but deep down, it was difficult to accept that a simple plan for vengeance had come to this.

Admit it, Xavier.

| sighed. Fine, | should be the one asking her to marry me and not that bastard.

| should have told my mother. My mom told me when you love someone with all your

heart

it. | should've asked Joy to marry me years ago when my mother gave

to propose with. God, I'm such a fucking idiot.

shoulda...

and applause suddenly erupted from the townsfolk, as Liam walked through the door, interrupting me from my thoughts. Even in his somewhat flustered state, the show

Must go on.

However, as Liam greeted us, | could tell by the uneasiness in his eyes and the sweat dripping from his face that he was determined to go through with the proposal. | had to

hand it to this guy... he had balls.

While Joy prepared herself to make a short speech before the ceremonial cutting of the ribbon, Sebastian glanced at me and Cristos, tapping on his watch with two fingers. We needed to speed things up.

The nurse was on her way to Theodore.

2/5

CHAPTER 103 Ribbon Cutting

"Hey, Virtue... honey... Let's start, Cristos said nudging her elbow to move things along. Joy nodded her head and raised the microphone to her lips, but she paused noticing how

anxious Liam looked.

“He looks as if he’s going to faint,” I whispered to Cristos as he took the spot beside me, pushing Norma Martin aside. Sebastian quickly maneuvered himself in between Norma and Chip, casting her even further away from me. While Norma gave Sebastian a dirty look which he ignored, Linda grabbed Norma’s hand and pulled her away to sit on some chairs Sebastian had pulled out from his office.

Ugh... Norma was becoming obsessed.

“Damn it. Well, we can’t have anymore interruptions or distractions. When Virtue’s done, Bo, I need you to hand her the scissors and grab the mic,” Cristos mumbled his instructions. I

gave him the thumbs up sign.

“Chip, offer Liam some reassurance,” Sebastian murmured to Cristos. “We need this done

now. Cristos nodded his head.

“Just keep those meddling ol’ biddies away and I’ll handle the rest,” he said before

positioning

whis

side Dan who was standing behind Liam. Cristos bowed his head and

in Dan’s ear that made Dan grin from ear to ear. Good. Now that’s

ist Virtue. Get the bottles of champagne ready. I placed a small cooler under

just in case we got that permit.” Sebastian nodded his head and walked behind the

able to take out the bottles.

grabbed the scissors from the coupon and leaflet stand and walked to Joy, positioning myself behind her as she welcomed everyone to her new store.

| looked out towards the parking lot and saw Jack and Noah, standing beside one another, both looking angry and irritated. Noah was shaking his head while | could clearly see the betrayal written on Jack's face.

Liam didn't tell him, so Noah did.

| heard Joy cough through the speaker. Game time.

"Welcome everyone! Today, we celebrate the grand opening of my humble boutique. | am so grateful to all of you who have come to celebrate with me, especially the people who have been with me every single step of the way, helping me achieve my dreams," she said, pausing

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to smile at Liam while placing a gentle hand on his arm. "To those who don't know me yet, my name is Virtue Sullivan and | am the very proud owner of Simply Virtue. With me on this most auspicious occasion are Mayor Liam Cohen, New Salem Auditor Daniel Williams, Bo Xavier of Bo's Supermarket, Dominic Samuels of Dom's Home Furnishings, Chad Hendrix Palmer of Buzzed Pub and, of course, our hardworking undersheriff, Jackson Emery. Now,

let's cut that ribbon!"

The crowd broke into an applause. | stepped forward handing her a pair of gold scissors while taking the microphone from her. "Mayor Cohen, would you please do me the honor of cutting the ribbon with me?" she asked. He nodded his head, placing her hand on his arm and escorting her behind the long pink ribbon.

Joy glance down at the sharp gold plated scissors in her hand and | saw that familiar stone cold look in her eyes. Whenever she thought of Liam or any of his friends and how they hurt her her beautiful aquamarine eyes would turn cruel and heartless.

| knew what was going through that mind of hers. She was picturing herself stabbing Liam in the heart with those sharp scissors in front of the crowd. | imagined a triumphant Joy laughing sinisterly as Liam's blood spewed all over the horrified people including the four middle aged women who were desperate to get my attention.

Sadly, | also imagined Jack intercepting her before she could even make a run for it. Eventually, they would discover she was Joy Taylor and lock her up in an institution for the criminally insane for all eternity.

Joy's eyes suddenly met mine and she smiled. She knew that | knew what she was thinking.

Not today, Joy.

| scanned the crowd and noticed the hopeful faces of the people as they recorded Joy and Liam's every move with their smartphones. They wanted to be the first ones to tell their friends that Liam and Virtue were seeing each other.

| had a feeling all of them will be having the shock of their lives when Liam proposes.

Joy handed the scissors to Liam before positioning themselves behind the pink ribbon with Joy's hand atop Liam's.

Suddenly, Cristos shoved a bottle of champagne in front of me, obstructing my view. | quickly placed the microphone back on the small 'welcome' table and began shaking the

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champagne bottle.

Joy and Liam's hands moved in unison and together, they cut the massive pink ribbon. While the crowd erupted in applause, Cristos, Sebastian and | sprung into action, popping the corks from each of our bottles. The crowd shrieked excitedly as bubbles of champagne came bursting out.

From the corner of my eye, | saw Dan whisper something in Liam's ear. Liam immediately relaxed and an ecstatic grin erupted on his face.

We began pouring the champagne in the glasses, eager to get the party started but before we had the chance to serve some of the champagne, Liam cleared his throat and loudly said, "Virtue, there's something | have to say."

My heart began to beat loudly in my chest.

Even though this was all planned, Joy was the love of my life... and here | was going to watch the most precious thing on this earth become engaged to another man.

I did

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ave to wait for another update to find out!

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Chapter 104

CHAPTER 104 The Proposal

Liam

Virtue took the cordless microphone and began her speech. | wiped my forehead with handkerchief, annoyed at myself for not being able to hide my anxiety.

my

As | exited my car earlier, | surveyed the people gathered in front of the commercial complex and immediately saw Virtue. She stood out in her white

and pink dress looking very pretty. There was no doubt in my mind, she'd probably look like an angel in a wedding gown for

sure.

I shut the door of my car and waited for Dan who had parked his car across from mine. He smiled, walking with a skip in his step, clutching a robin's-egg blue jewelry box in his hand.

Jack, who had parked further away, was concerned with security. He was seated inside his car, speaking to someone on his CB radio while he eyed the growing crowd.

Dan's eyes followed my gaze, noticing it had fallen on Jack's truck. "You haven't told him, have you?" He asked while he handed me the Tiffany & Co. jewelry box. I quickly took it from him and opened it to check. The two-carat diamond ring sparkled under the sunlight, casting a rainbow of colors on the black paint of my car. It was even more beautiful than I had imagined... It was perfect.

From the corner of my eye, I saw a black head of hair emerging from the RAM truck. I quickly snapped the jewelry box closed and pocketed it. I didn't want to spark a

confrontation here.

"No, I haven't. I didn't want any problems from him before proposing, especially when there's a good chance she'll probably say no," I answered, straightening my jacket.

"I have a feeling she'll say yes, unless Noah was able to get to her, Dan said.

"What do you mean?" I gestured for him to walk beside me so we could talk while walking.

"We, uhm, bumped into Noah and Nicole in Chicago. After we had dinner, Noah dumped Nicole like a piece of trash on the sidewalk while he rushed back to New Salem," Da

answered.

“And how do you know he rushed back to talk to Virtue? He may have had a prior commitment he overlooked or an emergency,” | pointed out,

1/15

Sat, Mar

CHAPTER 104 The Proposal

“| don’t know how I’m going to say this, but | might have made a slight boo-boo,” Dan mumbled, lowering his head in shame. What the f uck was it this time?!

| waited for him to continue, to tell me what had happened in Chicago, but | was only met

with silence.

“Spit it out, Dan. | can’t read your mind for crying out loud!” | said impatiently. Dan sighed, looking defeated.

“| kind of mentioned the name of the girl who left New Salem during our junior year in high school,” Dan answered sheepishly. | automatically stopped walking and placed my hand on his chest to make him stop too.

“You what?!” | asked incredulously. “In front of Chip of all people?!”

“| had been drinking all day and | slipped. But don’t worry... Nicole made up a plausible story and Chip... well, he really didn’t care too much about the details. He was more concerned about Virtue and the wedding,” Dan rambled nervously..

“And Noah?” | asked, staring into his eyes to check if he was lying to me.

“He, uhm, he was angry. He advised Chip to tell Virtue not to accept your proposal,” he answered quickly.

“Why did you have to tell Noah about the proposal in the first place? | wanted it to be a surprise.” | took a step forward and resumed walking.

“| couldn’t help it... | was just so excited,” Dan replied, chasing after me

“Do

you

think Chip told Virtue about me and what happened in our junior year?" | asked.

"| don't think he did. He did ask for a liquor permit for the event though, knowing the both

you would want to celebrate your engagement. | have the permit in my pocket."

of

| closed my eyes for a second, feeling a bit relieved. If Chip was optimistic, then | should be

too.

"That's good to hear, but I'm still nervous. It's either | come out a champion or become the biggest joke of New Salem... no thanks to your big mouth. Just keep your mouth shut and

when | non the question, nudge her to say yes, ok?"

2/5

CHAPTER 104 The Proposal

"Promise," Dan said. "By the way, where's Cris?

"He's at home... feeling unwell. | have someone keeping an eye on him," | said, fixing my hair. "Now, smile, Dan. This is suppose to be a happy occasion."

As we made our way through the boisterous crowd, | took a moment to observe our surroundings. A large colorful sign on an easel announcing a promotional fifty percent sale on all items for the day was standing beside the glass door of Virtue's shop. Surrounding the storefront windows were pink and white roses arranged in large bouquets positioned atop flower stands while appetizers, refreshments and glasses lay neatly on a long table covered with a pink tablecloth decorated with white-ribbons. It was simple, but everything was nicely arranged.

After greeting Virtue with a kiss on her cheek, we started the ceremony amidst the murmurs of the crowd who were already making speculations of my relationship with Virtue. Not many have seen us together and none knew we may be romantically involved. My kissing her on her cheek was a surprise to all.

I noticed Jack was standing in the back beside Noah who kept shaking his head, hoping Virtue would notice him. I immediately suspected Noah probably had a thing for Virtue. But

if there's

knew about Nicole, she was a jealous psychotic bitch who would make hell for him. That was one of the reasons why I dumped Nicole in the end. She was an animal in bed, but she was always jealous of other women.

life

trying to get yourself out of that one, Noah.

Though Noah kept his mouth shut and his head low, he never looked at me with the same respect after Joy. Apparently, he was just biding his time, waiting for the perfect opportunity to sabotage me. Guessing by the scowl on Jack's face, Noah probably already told him what

my plans were.

I couldn't have Jack become my rival. After I propose, I'll talk to him and fix this. As for Noah, I'll get to him through Nicole.

The crowd suddenly broke into an applause, jolting me back to the present. Unfortunately, Virtue was already done with her speech. My time was almost up.

My heart began to beat loudly against my ribcage, my hands began to shake, and my body

went cold and clammy all over. For the first time in my whole life, I was

so terrified.

Virtue turned off the microphone, gave it to Bo while he gave her a pair of oversized

scissors. She suddenly placed a hand around my arm, leading me to the pink ribbon. I was.

\$65

CHAPTER 104 The Proposal

out of it... I was completely lost.

“Mayor Cohen, would you please do me the honor of cutting the ribbon with me?” Virtue asked, handing me the scissors. I nodded my head, inhaling her sweet scent of rose, patchouli and orange. Her scent made me light-headed and woozy, like I was about to faint. If it weren’t for her dainty hands on top of mine, I would have surely collapsed.

Unlike my sweaty palms, hers were soft and smooth. She was obviously at ease with the crowd. Virtue definitely had the makings of a politician's wife.

First, I needed to cut the ribbon, then I can go on one knee and propose. Let's do this.

I raised my eyes to look at the crowd and noticed everyone had their phones out recording everything. I gulped, fervently praying to God that Virtue would say yes.

Our hands moved in unison and together we cut the massive pink ribbon. Chip, Dom and Bo sprung into action and popped the corks out of the champagne bottles. People shrieked excitedly as the bubbles from the bottles came bursting out.

Dan suddenly grabbed my arm. “Chip said Virtue will most probably say yes. She likes you. Come on. You can do this, Liam.” I smiled feeling a bit more at ease. All I had to do was ask.

It was now or never.

I held on to Virtue’s hand.

“I have something to say,” I said. Everyone stopped moving to look at the two of us.

“Liam...” Chip said, handing me a glass of champagne. Liquid courage. I downed the glass, not even savoring its fruity taste.

| handed Chip the glass back and took a deep breath. For luck, | raised the back of Virtue's hand to my lips and kissed it.

"You are so beautiful. Virtue, whatever happens, believe me when | say | adore you," | whispered. She smiled and reached up to caress my face. It was a simple gesture, but it gave

me all the courage | needed.

| took another deep breath, thinking of what to say. | had prepared a speech, but standing here in front of her and the growing crowd had made me forget it. | decided to speak from

the heart.

4/5

15.03 Sat, Mai

CHAPTER 104 The Proposal

"Virtue, if | could only explain how you make me feel when we're together. How every time | hear your voice, | feel all giddy inside. How every time you smile, you make my heart literally skip a beat. How every time | see you, | get butterflies in my stomach. How whenever I'm with you, | get lost in your eyes..." | sighed. "No one has ever made me feel this way. Honestly, | feel like I'm in heaven whenever I'm with you."

"Since the day | first met you, | have continuously thanked Go d because | finally found the missing piece to my existence. With you, I'm complete. With you, Virtue, I'm happy."

| knelt down on my knee and | saw the stunned expression on her face as | took the little jewelry box from my pocket.

"Oh my Go d!" She exclaimed. She covered her mouth with both her hands and | noticed the tears begin to well up in her eyes. | smiled at her, feeling more confident. This was the same reaction Lisa had when Cris proposed to her.

"Virtue, | don't want to waste any time on a long and fancy courtship because | know in my heart | love you and that | want to spend the rest of my life with

you. But marry me now, Virtue, and I promise you, I will court you forever. Please make me the happiest of men. Say

yes and let me love you forever.” I opened the jewelry box and I swear I was momentarily blinded by the sparkle of the diamond. It was quite a rock.

The noisy crowd suddenly grew quiet, so quiet I could hear the vehicles driving by on Main

Street.

We patiently waited for her to answer. My heart began to beat rapidly again. As I gazed at her beautiful face, I silently prayed to God.novelbin

Please make her say yes.

Chapter Comments.

Susan Wynne

I like the story but it's starting to drag on.

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5/5

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Chapter 105

CHAPTER 105 Play The Angel

Joy

My expensive acting lessons were finally paying off. I had the people at a standstill. Everyone looked on, seemingly frozen in time, eagerly awaiting my response.

If only my acting coach could see me now, he'd probably be impressed. It was such a pity I couldn't send him a video of this to show him how much progress I have made. Maybe after all of this was over, I could come over and we could laugh about it over a bottle of his favorite Italian red.

During the first four weeks of our almost four month acting course, I believed Francesco, our instructor, was a hack. That was until one of his beloved students, an A-list celebrity, came knocking on his door, interrupting our private lessons at his posh Beverly Hills estate.

For the first time, Xavier sat starstruck, blushing to the roots of his hair, while mustering the courage to meet the female celebrity. She politely waited for him to say something,

noticing

he moving, however nothing seemed to come out of his mouth. I smiled

and while I took Xavier by the elbow to urge him to his feet so we could

meet the famous actress.

He continued to struggle with his words, I nudged him gently with my elbow, hoping to provide him the small push that he needed. It worked. He finally said hi. As much as I wanted to laugh at his reaction to her, I didn't want to embarrass him. Plus, I knew Francesco wouldn't approve especially when such an important person was with us.

So, I continued to smile politely instead and waited for introductions.

"She is one of my masterpieces," Francesco exclaimed in his thick Italian accent and high-pitched voice, obviously proud of what the actress has accomplished. "Just like you, she did not know how to act. But look at her now, an award winner." He picked up a paper bound screenplay from a table nearby. "Come. Let us give them a sample."

“Of course, Francesco, but there is no need for a screenplay,” the female actress said, waving off the paper bound manuscript. “I’m guessing this one needs some encouragement?” She eyed me with interest.

“Si,” Francesco answered in his native Italian, the disdain apparent in his voice. I was having trouble from the very beginning. “This one is not interested in movies. She wants to learn. how to lie.” The actress nodded her head, acknowledging the situation. 1/6

CHAPTER 105 Play The Angel

“You’re an honest person,” she said. “In my line of work, I appreciate honest people, however Francesco here hates your type. He believes honest people have difficulty playing pretend.” She sat down on the couch across from Xavier and I, gesturing to Francesco with one hand for something to drink while with the other, she motioned for us to sit back down. “You have

to see it in a different perspective. Pretend isn’t a lie, it’s imagination. As we all know,

imagination is conjured by our psyche and whatever is created by our mind can’t all be a lie.

Because if it were all a lie, than all of it would be impossible to achieve. Right?”

“Right,” Xavier answered quickly, without even taking the moment to think. I turned to stare at him, my eyebrows raised in shock. Xavier was obviously captivated by her, hanging on to her every word. I actually felt a bit jealous.

Unlike Xavier who was eager to please, I paused and contemplated her words. After several moments, I finally nodded my head in agreement to her argument. What was impossible decades ago was possible now. Thanks to innovation and little imagination. you want to learn to lie?” She asked, leaning back against the cushions.

nce,” I told her honestly while trying to lie. I kept a straight face and made sure my

was devoid of all emotion. Her eyes scrutinized my appearance while I gazed at her,

ty praying she would think | was lying.

ou almost had me, but | can see the iciness in your eyes. It's an improvement nonetheless.

What did he do to you?" She asked.

"They," | corrected her. "They raped me." | tried to control my anger as | answered her, but I

felt my face heat up.

The actress shook her head in disbelief, not expecting the answer | gave her.

"| would want vengeance too," she said apologetically as Francesco came with a bottle of wine and a couple of glasses in his hands. "Francesco, she has deep-seated anger."

"| know, but she must learn to control some of that anger if she is going to face them,"

Francesco said.

"What's your name?" The actress asked.

"Joy." The actress smiled, amused.

"You are such a contradiction. You have such a beautiful face and you are blessed with a

name which means immense happiness, but in reality, you have so much anger and hate.

26

CHAPTER 105 Play The Angel

inside. Tell me, Joy, what will make you feel happy again? She asked nonchalantly.

"All of them dead by my hand," | said, smiling warmly. This time she clapped her hands.

“Now that sounded like a lie, because you used your attributes to shield your true intent,” she remarked. “I guess now you know why I’m here. Francesco called me over to show you

your the necessary tricks to fool your audience. But to tell you frankly, your pretty face and pleasing voice should be enough to fool anyone. All you have to do is play the angel, Joy, and they will never suspect that you’re the devil.”

“Play the angel?” | asked.

“In slasher films, the killer is usually the one who everyone least suspects. The goody two shoes, the innocent virgin, the prettiest girl, the cool guy. All of them share one distinct characteristic... they are perceived by the audience as either perfect, naive or angelic... intrinsically good. And that, Joy, is what you need to portray. To be the one who everyone least suspects. An angel.” The actress’ words echoed as | looked down at Liam’s pleading gray eyes. He didn’t know | killed those men at Marla’s. No one knew. Truly, | am the one who everyone least suspects.

An image of Liam’s dead body seated in front of his desk flashed through my mind, blood. dripping from a wound at the back of his head inflicted by his own gun held tightly by one of his limp cold hands. On his desk his tablet lay showing the headline of the town’s newspaper announcing his involvement in the rape of Joy Taylor as well as the death of young Joan Summers via documents found from the coroner’s office. Liam Cohen’s death would be deemed a suicide, wiping the last of the Cohen bloodline from this earth.

With him and his father gone, | would inherit everything.

Just thinking about it made me very happy. So happy, tears began to well up in my eyes

again.

Now all | had to do was say yes.

Say yes, Joy.

“Y-yes, Liam... I’ll marry you.” My voice was barely audible, but as soon as the words came out of my mouth, everyone erupted

in an ear-splitting applause.

Liam slipped the diamond ring on my finger. It was a perfect fit. | could see the smug

satisfaction in his gray eyes as he stood up and twirled me in the air.

3/6

CHAPTER 105 Play The Angel

When my feet finally hit the pavement again, | glanced at Xavier, Sebastian and Cristos. Xavier looked on like a proud mentor while Sebastian and Cristos looked extremely happy.

The three of them, including Dan, congratulated us to the absolute joy of everyone.

*Engagement party at my house later,” | told each of them as they kissed me on the cheek.

That’s right... Play the angel...

The angel of death.

Noah

While everyone cheered, | froze. | didn’t know how to react to what | just heard.

It wasn’t possible. Virtue said yes?

“Well, she said yes,” Jack said, sounding defeated. “We better go over and offer our congratulations. That’s what friends do in situations like this. We hope for the best.”

| shook my head. | couldn’t be happy for them. No, this was all a lie.

“This is probably a farce... just to get Liam votes for his re-”

“You think Virtue of all people would agree to take part in a ploy so Liam can get reelected?” Jack asked, cutting me off. “Liam ask

her to marry him and she said yes in front of so many witnesses. There is no way that this is a scam,” Jack argued.

“Jack, he asked her at the grand opening of her store knowing there would be a crowd. And

ow Chip and let's not forget that Chip was with Dan when he picked up the ring. We all know Virtue are practically inseparable. It's impossible she didn't know that this was going to happen,” | reasoned out.

“So cry me a river, Noah,” Jack scoffed, not wanting to listen to any of my arguments. “If whatever you're saying is true, then maybe they won't get married. Until then, let's be good men and offer our congratulations.” He gave me a sideways glance, his brow furrowed. “What is it with you anyway? Aren't you seeing Nicole?”

“No. Nicole and | are just-” Jack chuckled, my denial expected.

4/6

15:09 Sat, Mar 30

CHAPTER 105 Play The Angel

Remember that Christmas during our freshman year in college when Cris started dating Lisa? Nicole broke into his car and slashed his leather seats,” Jack said. “I, on the other hand,

you know made the mistake of sleeping with her after Liam and Cris' victory party and do what she did when | told her it was just a one night stand? She went to my mother at her school and told her | had an STD. Sure, she didn't do sh it like that to Liam, but that's because Liam has enough power to bury her. So, if you don't love Nicole, you better end it.... now. She'll probably put some negative reviews on your website, but hey, you're the only contractor in this town.”

| wanted to laugh, but | kept a straight face. | didn't want Jack to know | knew about all that.

Of course | knew Nicole had abandonment issues and | also knew all the problems Nicole gave them after they used her and threw her away. | was the one who helped-her do all that s hit to them. Cris had to spend so much money to have his car fixed while everyone stayed clear of Jack not wanting to catch whateve r sexually transmitted infection he had,

| had so many clever ideas, yet my cleverness never seemed to work on Virtue and Chip

Why is that?

Anyway, | wasn't worried about Nicole. | had her where | wanted her.

"Come on," Jack mumbled as he nudged me in the ribs. "Let's act like gentlemen and congratulate the newly engaged couple." "Sure," | said, knowing there was nothing else | could do for now. If this was a lie like | believed it to be, no wedding will happen. They'll just keep telling people what they want to hear until they get sick and tired of lying.

But then again, if this wasn't a lie, | had to do something before they say their | do's.

| had more tricks up my sleeves.

| Virtue will never become Mrs. Liam Cohen...

on saranten

Over my dead body.

516

Sat Mar 20!

CHAPTER 105 Play The Angel

Chapter Comments.

Morgan

POST COMMENT

Noah is most likely the one who gives Pete his orders... | wouldn't underestimate him.

Elizabeth Johnson

| can't fathom Noah out. Pete is a degerate sick psychopath, Chris is a weak sick abuser, Jack and Liam are both pathetic cowards Noah seems to be more calculating...

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Chapter 106

CHAPTER 106 The Mystery

Sebastian

After congratulating the newly engaged couple, Xavier positioned himself at the long table and began his duty as a gracious host. He handed out plates and assisted the people with appetizers and drinks, making sure they had their fill before entering Virtue's.

Since | was the one who installed the POS machine, | went behind the store counter and started ringing up sales.

Everyone was happy eating, drinking and shopping, seemingly clueless of what was yet to come... Especially Liam.

He had a possessive arm around Joy's waist like he didn't have a care in the world. He was beginning to look like his usual self... conceited and arrogant. After the fire, he lost his confidence, but now, he was back in the game.

Unfortunately, in an hour, maybe less, the rug will be pulled from under his feet once again. I, for one, will enjoy watching him squirm.

Earlier, startled gasps echoed all around as the unsuspecting public watched their mayor confess his feelings for Virtue. Although Liam appeared to look brave, | noticed the beads of sweat that formed on his forehead and how his hands shook uncontrollably as he presented Joy with the ring. He was obviously terrified she would reject him, but | believed that was all

an act.

By proposing to her in front of everyone, Liam had the support of the people. He was counting on the backlash that would happen if ever Joy said no. A rejection of him was a rejection of New Salem. Joy would be ruined in this town without Liam having to do anything.

If Joy answers yes though, no one would say she was coerced into accepting his proposal when in fact, Joy didn't have much a choice. Liam was very clever indeed.

Wanting to look as terrified as his friend, Dan gripped Cristos' hand tightly in his, closed his eyes and began mumbling a prayer. Cristos repeatedly tried to pull his hand away, but Dan held on firmly. Since there was nothing he could do, Cristos endured the discomfort, his eyes looking up towards the sky, praying Joy would voice out her answer as soon as possible so Dan would let go.

CHAPTER 106 The Mystery

The four middle-aged women who were seated off to the side, looked on expectantly, however only one of them watched with disdain... Norma Martin. Unlike the others who seemed to accept Joy, Norma didn't hide her contempt.

Norma was a lioness who was utterly territorial. She couldn't accept that soon her position as the leader of the matriarchs of New Salem will be taken by another... by someone who was much younger, definitely more beautiful than her and who would soon bear the name Cohen. That family name was the ultimate weapon in this town and Norma Martin could lose all the things she worked hard to build just because Liam wanted to get married.

| knew what was going through her head. She didn't want to share power again... not with

Joy.

Her eyes narrowed sinisterly while her lips curled into a disdainful sneer as she recorded the proposal on her phone. | had a hunch she was going to send the video to Pete McDowell. She and Cynthia, despite their power struggle in the organization, were good friends after all and Pete was probably like a son to her.

| believed she would inform Pete of all this. It was the main reason why | had Xavier invite her and her friends. | needed to trigger Pete into coming out from wherever he was hiding.

young women in Bismarck all the way to South Dakota, his trail went dead. My men in the Bahamas were having trouble finding his location while Dina had problems spotting him through facial recognition..

Although he left a series of raped and savagely beaten

Currently, Dina was tucked away in Xavier's office, hacking into the four women's phones through the public wi-fi system that Cristos set up himself. Actually, he was getting everyone's information. Cristos was sick and tired of going through the townsfolk one by one. This way he will have all he needed on file.

My eyes darted back to Norma who had an ugly scowl on her face. Poor Norma... she and her ex-husband will be shunned by the public after the people hear of the death of New Salem's beloved patriarch. If everything goes according to our plans, Norma and her ex-husband will be on Liam's s hit list.

While Xavier poured champagne in the glasses, hit him on the back knowing his feelings for Joy would be more obvious to the trained eye. With four older women eyeing him so closely, he didn't have the luxury of showing any emotion except a reaction to actual physical pain.

"Ow!" Xavier mumbled, wincing in pain. "That hurt, Dom."

CHAPTER 106 The Mystery

some support. Soon, she will get what she wants and we will be in charge of this town."

Xavier stretched out his sore back like a big baby. "I wish it were that simple, Xavier muttered under his breath.

"It is that simple, Bo, | argued, grabbing the empty bottle and handing him a glass of champagne. "You should be proud of what she's accomplished. Everything she has done to get to where she is now is all because of you." Xavier grinned at me and raised his glass.

*| really appreciate you saying that, Dom. Thanks,” Xavier said and drank the champagne.

“You’re welcome. Now you know what you have to do. Norma is going to be knee deep in s hit if everything goes according to plan,” | told him,

“Gotcha, Xavier said, fixing his hair and pushing his chest up like a stud. “So many women, so little time. Keep an eye on Noah, will yah? | don’t want anything funny coming from him.” My phone suddenly vibrated as | nodded my head to Xavier’s request. | quickly took it out of my pocket, thinking it was Emma.

“It’s Nicole,” | said surprised.

“Noah dumped her, so she’s running back to you. Isn’t that convenient?” Xavier said. “Ignore her. She’s bad news.”

“You’re right.” | quickly pocketed my phone. | was getting antsy. Emma told me to make sure whatever we had planned should happen without delay since it was possible Theodore’s health could take a dive in a span of minutes. However, nothing yet.

| wanted to message her, but Emma warned me not to send her any messages nor to call her. | had to be be patient.

Well, at least luck was on our side. Theodore’s time was up and Emma needed a fall guy for Theodore’s unexpected death. Previously, | had thought she wanted to go home because she was homesick. Apparently, the main reason why she wanted to resign from work was because of a male nurse named Ford Martin who harassed the female nurses while on duty. She said if Ford gets arrested, she would stay in New Salem. The rest of the nurses were her friends and she was in good terms with most of the hospital administrators. It was just that putz who she needed to get rid off.

Xavier nudged me with his elbow as the crowd began cheering and applauding Virtue and Liam’s engagement. | poured a glass of champagne for Joy and rushed forward to

CHAPTER 106 The Mystery

While | manned the cash register, | was pleased the townsfolk were clearly enjoying themselves. When Xavier and | opened our stores, we didn’t serve

appetizers or refreshments. This was our way of giving back while helping Joy with her store.

“You seem to be deep in thought, Dom,” Noah said, appearing in front of me with an empty glass in one hand and a couple of silk scarves in another. He placed the scarves and some money on the counter.

| felt embarrassed. | was so deep in thought | didn’t notice him inside the store.

“I’m just surprised Virtue and Liam are engaged. None of this was expected,” | said, lying to him, while scanning the tags. “I mean, they’ve only known each other for a couple of weeks. | guess, maybe they’ve been seeing each other in secret. Have you ever noticed Liam at Virtue’s? You guys are neighbors right?” | placed each of the scarves in customized ‘Simply Virtue’ paper bags and placed his change on the counter.

“Yeah, we’re neighbors,” Noah answered. “But I’ve been working nights for the past couple of

weeks, so | can’t really say if Liam has been visiting Virtue. But Virtue is usually with Chip,

so | doubt

ve been seeing each other,” Noah said while he pocketed his change. “So ne, you didn’t know?” | shook my head..

You

sked back.

y. | bumped into Chip and Dan in Chicago,” Noah answered, puzzled. “You didn’t Chip left

oah, of course they knew | left,” Cristos answered, making his way through the crowd of customers. “I just didn’t tell them why Dan and went to Chicago.”

“Well, | said my peace last night and I’m sticking to it. Virtue is making a big mistake. Liam isn’t the right man for her,” Noah insisted.

“Noah Jensen!” Linda Jacobs called out, her hands on her hips. “I’ve been looking all over for you. We need to go over the schedule of your demolition

team.” She grabbed his arm and pulled him away. “If you would excuse us, boys. Noah and I have some things we need to straighten out.” Before Noah could say anything else, Linda pushed him towards the exit.

“Don't listen to Noah,” Norma Martin suddenly said, carrying a dress in her arms. “That boy has always been jealous of Liam. Whatever Noah's told you about Liam, none of it is true. If there is anyone with skeletons in his closet, it's Noah.”

CHAPTER 106 The Mystery

There are rumors his parents' accident wasn't an accident,” Norma explained. “There are some people who think Noah had a hand in that. Something about faulty breaks. Noah was top of his class in their automotive course during their senior year in high school. If there is someone who knows how to sabotage a vehicle, it's him. Nothing was proven back then, but

some suspect him.”

“Norma, you're forgetting one pertinent question, though,” I said as I scanned the tag of her

dress. “Why would Noah want to kill his own parents?” Norma Martin laughed. It was shrill

and incredibly wicked. We stared at her, waiting for her explanation.

“Why would Noah want to kill his parents? Now that's the mystery,” Norma said, winking at

me. “But I'll tell you this

... Noah... he isn't what you think he is. Not even Liam knows what he's capable of.”

“That sounds intriguing, Cristos said. “I would love to hear more.”

You would, wouldn't you?” Norma paid for her dress then took the paper bag from the

counter. “Maybe if Bo proposes to me, then maybe you two will become part of my inner circle. Until then, my lips are sealed.” We watched a very smug Norma Martin exit the boutique to say her goodbyes to Joy, Liam

and Xavier.

“We'll see about that.”

Chapter Comments.novelbin

Tracy Smith

I

please update, this is why | try not to start ongoing stories

VIEW 1

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Chapter 107

CHAPTER 107 Emma vs Ford

Emma

St. Elizabeth Hospital

It was after ten-thirty in the morning and | was standing at the nurse's station finishing my charts. | kept looking at my wristwatch, anxiously waiting for the alarm to sound, but all was

quiet.

| rubbed my forehead, debating whether | should go and find Autumn so | could ask her if she was able to inject the IV bag with the cocktail | gave her.

After | bumped into Ford earlier, | scurried away from the third floor back to the nurse's station without even assisting Autumn out of the utility closet.

| paused, covering my mouth with my fist in absolute horror.

What if she's still up there waiting for me to help her?

God, | was such an idiot. | forgot about the safety of one of my own. | wanted to kick myself for making a mistake. | knew Domenico wasn't going to like this.

| was about to go and check on her when | heard her voice. Without moving my head from my chart, | surreptitiously glanced at my surroundings, hoping to catch sight of her... just to confirm if it was indeed her.

It was her... | let out a sigh of relief when | saw her characteristic black armor sleeves as she entered the ER. | continued scribbling on the form in front of me, trying to steady the nervous beat of my heart. | needed to be more careful. Autumn was the only person in this hospital | could count on. Without her, | was basically alone.

| volunteered for this assignment not because | knew | was right for the job, but because | wanted to work under the three underbosses again. Beaufort, Domenico and Primo had the thrill of what mafia life was supposed to be and after years of working a non-existent life as Domenico's capo, | wanted to be in the middle of all the action once again.

And after just a week, | finally felt alive! | never thought that it would be in this pitiful rural town where | would feel my heart beating painfully against my chest. This was what was missing from life... the action!

CHAPTER 107 Emma vs Ford

firstborn child of the Famiglia Caruso, a family whose roots helped lay the foundation of the Blood Disciples, was given the privilege to serve as it was my birthright. None of my siblings could openly oppose the issue, although both my younger brothers initially believed a female like myself had no right to be in the organization. Well, | proved them wrong.

Like all Caruso firstborns before me, | underwent training in firearms, explosives and combat. Because | was a girl, | had to train harder and more often than the men. My father, Don Emilio Caruso, didn't want me to fail the three underbosses during our diciottesimo or the Blood Disciples' version of

celebrating one's coming of age. He wanted me to be seen as an indispensable asset to the underbosses and not just someone from an important family.

Unlike any other regular diciottesimo, the eighteen year old children of the high ranking Blood Disciples' members are given a mission to complete. If completed, we would be immediately inaugurated as high ranking members of the organization without question. However, if we were caught, the organization would wash their hands of us and if we failed, we would be remembered as those who brought shame to the organization.

For our diciottesimo, Beaufort, Domenico, Primo, and I, were ordered to extract

payment the Grim Reaper's godfather, Nikolai Devin, had accrued for breaching the pact he made with the

three bosses. We were tasked to kill his son as well as steal a diamond ring worn by his

young wife... with her finger still attached to the ring. Unfortunately, our test wasn't something any of us imagined although Beaufort, Domenico and Primo had already done something similar to the Angels of Darkness.

The night before I left for the East Coast, my father sat me down and gave me some advice. He told me to listen to the underbosses, to observe and learn from them. He told me to make sure I voiced out my opinions and made suggestions. Every small bit of information was crucial for a successful hit. Lastly, he reminded me to work as a team and to never leave one of your own hanging. Sorry, Autumn.

We divided ourselves into two smaller groups. Beaufort, the best assassin of the Blood. Disciples, was tasked to kill the son while the rest of us were tasked to cut off the finger of the young wife while she was at the spa. We had to synchronize our efforts since one mistake would alert the whole Grim Reaper organization, making it more difficult to finish off the job.

The killing part was Beaufort was able to neutralize our first target, Stefan Devin, from

easy. almost a mile away after shooting all of his bodyguards before any one could alert any of his family members. According to Beaufort, he took down

the bodyguards one by one, before he shot Stefan in the head while he sunbathed on his luxury yacht in the clear blue waters off

the coast of Miami.

CHAPTER 107 Emma vs Ford

I, on the other hand, had to be the one to chop off the finger of the unsuspecting wife. In an expensive trendy spa in New York City, I posed as a manicurist while Domenico passed himself off as a masseur.

When the young wife arrived for her appointment, she took one look at Domenico and asked for him to be her masseur for the rest of the afternoon. While she showered, I went through her things in her locker while Primo cloned her sim card and diverted all her phone calls and messages to another number so she wouldn't be disturbed.

After Domenico knocked her out with a sedative, I took a bone saw and cut off her ring finger where the beautiful diamond ring lay. It was a rare pink diamond on a simple platinum band, an important heirloom of the Devin Sem'ya, the ruling family of the Russian mafia. The bosses of the Blood Disciples wanted to take everything from Nikolai to prove a valid point.

I felt so bad, I made sure I bandaged the severed area properly and elevated her hand to help stop the bleeding. During those tense moments, I decided to go into the medical field and

become a nurse.

And here I am... a nurse. A nurse who was actually trying to kill a patient... a patient who did everything in his power to cover up the fact that his darling boy was a rapist.

"Look who I get to bump into again," said a familiar male voice. I looked up and saw Ford Martin smiling down at me. Ugh.

I was hoping he'd be so busy with Theodore he wouldn't have time to harass any of us, but Theodore was proving to be a very difficult man to kill.

I came to work early this morning with an airtight plan along with a syringe filled with a lethal cocktail of digoxin and insulin which Autumn and I had to administer into Theodore Cohen's IV Bag. His IV Bag was usually dispensed

and changed in the morning by the one and only Ford Martin, the male nurse who every female nurse in this hospital abhors.

New Salem was such a small town that even their hospital lacked the necessary technology to be called world class. Here, there were no automatic drug dispensing machines. Instead, the nurses have to go to the pharmacy to collect each patient's prescription. Those who have been working here the longest are able to dispense medication for VIPs like Theodore Cohen while new nurses like myself and Autumn, needed to be evaluated before we were able to handle medication for such important people.

Whatever I had to do went against my oath, but that asshole hurt one of ours. Miss IT has

CHAPTER 107 Emma vs Ford

lived in such a tragedy.

Usually, trauma like that makes a person implode from within. Not Miss JT. She used all her pain and came out a better person. going to takenovelbin

I checked my watch and noticed I had some time before the asshole, who was

the fall for Theodore Cohen's death, arrived. He usually came in at eight which gave me enough time to check on my patients and make myself pretty. My task seemed difficult, but

honestly it wasn't. I just had to wait and offer myself up as bait.

I decided to visit Abigail Reynolds, the young woman who was said to have been in a

vehicular accident before she was sent to the ER, an ER I believed had no capability to treat

trauma of her kind. Based on my personal experience of patients who were driving before a

road mishap occurred, blunt force trauma to the head was usually seen in the front along

with facial fractures and not necessarily in the back of the head.

In Abigail's peculiar case, I suspected there was foul play involved.

I don't know how all of the hospital staff could keep quiet, but since Abigail needed to be silenced, no one was doing jack s hit. As always

Her mother was seated in the corner. She stayed with Abigail, day in and day out. I would wake up from her coma. I didn't have the heart to tell her that if she woke up, she

she would be paralyzed from the neck down. Whoever did this to her would have to hit her. Every time I saw Mrs. Reynolds, I had to bite my tongue. I told her the truth. Abigail's prognosis wasn't good and as much as I wanted to tell

I couldn't. It would make me the next target.

Abigail Reynolds caught my attention not because Beaufort asked me to check up on her from time to time, but because I caught sight of her file in Ford Martin's locker... the same nurse who, at this very moment, was sneering wickedly at me.

Right now, Ford was smiling like he didn't have a care in the world.

I smiled back at him.

Soon, all of that was going to change.

The Joy of Revenge

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Chapter 108

CHAPTER 108 Code Blue

Emma

It appeared as if I was smiling at Ford when in reality I was smiling at Autumn who gave me a thumbs up sign behind him..

| glanced at my watch and saw it was almost eleven. Mayor Cohen's proposal to Miss JT was probably done by now which only meant Domenico was waiting for the other Cohen to kick

the bucket. Unfortunately, the digoxin seemed to be taking its sweet time.

"You're in a good mood," | pointed out before looking back at my chart.

"Why shouldn't | be? All my patients are doing well and you and | are going out tonight, Ford announced proudly. Pam, the motherly looking nurse who was in charge of the nurse's

station, gasped in shock. Lucky for her, she was one of the few nurses Ford didn't harass given she wasn't his type. Ford liked his women fit and voluptuous while Pam was just a bit overweight for his sensitive tastes.

Since the Martins had money and had a close relationship with the Cohens, Ford roamed the hallways like he owned the hospital. He was a sex predator and was known to have sexually harassed almost every female nurse here. To my dismay, | was no different.

Unfortunately, being his new target meant | had to be at the receiving end of all of his sexual innuendoes including his inappropriate touching. During my first day on the job, | made the mistake of reporting his behavior to our superior. So, instead of fixing things, | made matters worse and to top it all off, I've gotten reprimanded twice from blunders Ford

purposely fabricated. As a result, | was taken off of Cohen's service to his entertainment.

"Hey, Clarke," he greeted me as | exited the nurse administrator's office after being lectured. He was seated by the door waiting for me to come out. "All you have to do is be my girlfriend and all of your troubles will disappear."

"Eat hit, Martin," | growled at him, my hands balled up tightly in fists. If it weren't for Domenico, | would have kicked his ass. "Ooooooh...Potty mouth. | like that," he said, pushing me against the wall, not caring if our superior was on the other side. "I can already imagine that pretty mouth of yours wrapped around my c ock. Just thinking about it has gotten me soooo hard."

"Get off of me, Ford," | said, pushing him away. He chuckled, his hands raised above his head,

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in surrender.

"I'm not doing anything to you yet, Clarke," he reasoned. "And even if I was doing something to you, there's nothing you can do about it. Typical chauvinistic response... I can get away

with murder, woman.

"Stay away from me, you ashole," I said through clenched teeth. "Unlike you, I need to get back to work." I quickly turned and walked away controlling the anger that was pushing through the surface.

"Remember, Clarke, all you have to do is be my girlfriend." It took all the willpower I had not to turn around and punch the fucker in the face.

At the moment, I vowed to have the last laugh..

"I'm sorry, Ford. You and I are going out tonight? When did you make that assumption?" I asked, not even looking up from my chart. I hinted on that earlier when I bumped into him, but I had to say something to distract him.

Earlier, after I had checked on Abigail, I took the stairs and headed to the psychiatric ward located on the sixth floor of the hospital to meet with Autumn. Fortunately, there are no CCTV cameras on that entire floor and the psych ward is always practically deserted in the

morning.

As usual, the sixth floor was dark and empty with the sounds of the pitiful moans of the psychiatric patients resonating throughout its walls. I exited the stairwell, pausing to take a look around the corner to check if Tamara, the middle-aged African- American female nurse who was constantly assigned the graveyard shift, was awake.

Tamara, like always, was asleep. She was seated in her trusty desk chair, her head thrown back against the head rest while she snored with her mouth open.

I quickly turned the corridor towards the opposite direction and headed to the women's restroom at the end of the hallway.

| walked quietly inside the restroom, accustomed to the flickering lights and the dank smell and quickly noticed one of the stall doors was closed. | bent my head down to look through the small opening near the floor and saw Autumn's familiar white sneakers.

The toilet suddenly flushed..

"Eme is that you?" The stall door opened and out came Au

a nurse who worked for

2/7

CHAPTER 108 Code Blue

Primo. Just like me, she was wearing light blue medical scrubs and her dark brown hair was tied up in a ponytail.

When we both came in for our job interview, Autumn covered all of her body ink and took out all of her piercings. She swiped out her usual dark lipstick and opted for a light shade of pink, looking like a proper young lady.

Everyday, she wears black arm sleeves to cover the tattoos on her arm, but now she has begun to add more of her jewelry to her repertoire. Under the flickering light, the small diamond stud attached to her nose sparkled.

"| can see you got your nose ring in and you've decided to go back to your usual dark shade of lipstick," | said, liking how much it complemented her.

"| gotta keep that a sshole from looking my way. He thinks piercings and tattoos are grotesque," she said while she washed her hands.

"He's the one who's grotesque, | mumbled annoyed.

"Well, you only need to put up with him for just a bit longer," she said, winking at me. "You have it with you?"

"Yep," | answered, taking out the syringe from my pocket. "A sshole comes in around eight in the morning. He dispenses Theodore Cohen's bag at around nine-thirty which gives us enough time to get ready. | have to psyche myself up to flirt with him. | flirt and you squirt."

"That sounds terribly gross," Autumn smirked. "By the way, I already hacked into the system and put all the CCTV cameras on that floor on loop. I guarantee you no one will see us. Just make sure that none of the bodyguards notices Ford's accident." Aside from being a registered nurse, Autumn did some hacking on the side. Everyone who was under Primo had a way with computers. This hospital was so ancient anyway, I'm guessing she had no problem taking over the system.

of

Thanded the syringe to her. "You'll have to inject this into the IV bag. I'll knock the contents his tray out of his hands and aim for the utility room like we've planned. When you're done, throw the used syringe in a toilet tank where no one will be able to find it. Make sure you check if the IV bag is for Theodore Cohen. I don't want someone else to die," I instructed. Autumn took the syringe and nodded her head.

"No problem. I'll check the bag before I inject," Autumn said, pocketing the syringe. "See you at the utility room later."

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CHAPTER 108 Code Blue

"I'll go ahead. I have to fix my hair and put on some make-up and perfume." Autumn smiled

wickedly.

"I'm just happy that after today I don't ever have to see his ugly ass again," Autumn said.

"Take care, Ems."

"You too, Autumn."

I quietly opened the bathroom door and listened for the sound of footsteps or voices, but I only heard the harsh sound of Tamara's snores. I ran back to the stairs and headed to the private bathroom on the fourth floor reserved usually for the doctors. The nurses were allowed to use it just as long as we didn't make a mess.

| wasn't ugly nor could | be considered exceptionally beautiful. But with a little help, | could make my plain face look pretty when | needed to.

| fluffed my hair with the blow dryer in the bathroom, letting my long light brown hair cascade along my back. | put some color on my cheeks and added some mascara on my lashes to make my light blue eyes pop out. Lastly, | glossed my lips with my favorite shade of pink and peach and dabbed some Chanel No.5. | exited the bathroom, looking perky, as my hair bounced around my shoulders with my every step.

| noticed | caught the attention of some of my other male colleagues. They smiled at me as | walked by, surprised | looked so done up.

It was after eight when | got to the nurse's station to pick up my chart for the day.

"You look pretty today," said a thirty year old nurse named Rodney, the surprise evident in his voice. He was one of the few male nurses here who treated everyone with respect. "Is this because of what happened the other day? Ems, don't listen to Ford. You're a grea you have to do is stay out of his way."

great nurse. All

"Are you sure that's all | have to do, Rodney? Stay out of his way? He's given me the option of becoming his girlfriend or getting the boot," | said loudly, hoping the female doctor beside us would pick up on my sentiments regarding Ford Martin. "It sounded like Ford wasn't giving me much of choice. | don't want to get fired. | need this job." Rodney shook his head.

"You do have a choice, Emma. | gotta go and do my rounds, but we'll talk later. Just stay away from him. Evaluation is coming up and | think I can fix this. Ems, please just listen to

me." He picked up his chart and waved before leaving me at the nurse's station.

"I'll see you later, Pam" | said to the nurse in charge of our station and grabbed my chart. 14/7

CHAPTER 108 Code Blue

only had a few patients under my care given | was reprimanded twice thanks to Ford.

“Sure, Emma, Pam replied. “Now scoot. Ford is on his way here.”

“How can you tell?” | asked, looking around for any sign of him.

“All the women on this floor are making themselves scarce,” Pam replied, gesturing for me to leave. “That means you better go too.”

After o quickly finishing my rounds, | went to the third floor to wait for Ford. As | turned the corner, | saw Mayor Cohen leaving the VIP suite while Ford approached from the other end of the hallway. | quickly took a seat in one of the hard plastic chairs reserved for patients waiting for lab results and hid myself behind a burly man who looked terrified.

| watched Mayor Cohen pause to greet Ford who was carrying the tray of Theodore Cohen's meds in his hands. While they exchanged pleasantries, my eyes went to the utility room, noticing the door was open. Autumn was already inside, waiting. After Mayor Cohen waved his goodbyes and entered the elevator, Ford proceeded towards Theodore Cohen's VIP room, his eyes on a sheet of paper which | suspected was given to him by Mayor Cohen.

| got up from my chair and walked towards him, my head bent down, looking at my chart. As Ford neared the utility room, | rushed over, bumping into him, knocking the tray from his hands. The IV bag flew into the utility room while his arms circled around me, one hand. grabbing my butt.

“Oh my gosh,” | exclaimed. “I’m so sorry, Ford.” | batted my eyelashes at him..

“That’s okay. Just help me collect everything off the floor,” he said, pleased | didn’t get mad at him for grabbing my butt. “You look really pretty today. Are you going to ask me out?” He

smirked.

“A friend of mine and | are going to have brunch together, but if we’re able to leave work early, maybe we can go and grab a drink later,” | suggested as | began picking up the medication off

floor. Good thing they were in plastic containers.

"S hit! Where the f uck is the IV bag?" Ford asked, panicking as he searched for the IV bag.

"It must be inside the utility closet. Let me check," | offered.

"No. I'll do it." Ford said, pushing the door open.

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Lying on the floor was the tray with the IV bag inside of it. Ford quickly picked it up and closed the door while | placed all the meds back on the tray.

"I'm really sorry," | apologized again. "I'll bring you back some dessert as an apology." He smiled wickedly.

"Nah. Let's just grab a drink later instead," Ford replied. "See you, Emma." He suddenly. slapped me on the butt.

What a p rick. | glared at him as he waved smugly at me. | quickly left, heading back to the

nurse's station.

It was almost eleven and nothing yet. Maybe my mixture wasn't potent enough.

Patience, Emma."

"You said you had a brunch to go to, but if we leave work early, we can go and grab a drink," Ford's voice interrupted my thoughts. "Admit it, Clarke. You got dolled up for me and brunch

was just an excuse."

"| do have a brunch to go to," | said, placing my chart on the wall. "Since I'm finally done with paperwork, I'm off to Harold's." | turned to leave, but Ford grabbed my arm.

"You think you're so clever," Ford said.

"What do you mean?" | asked coyly.

“This is a ploy, so I can buy you brunch. Well, it’s working. How about-”

Pam suddenly coughed, interrupting Ford.

“Ford, Emma, Rodney and I are going out for brunch. We’re just waiting for Rodney to show,”

Pam said.

“Hey, Ford, I wasn’t talking to you,” Ford said harshly, but Pam was used to it.

“Aw, Ford’s hurt, Emma,” Pam teased.

“Keep it up, Pam or I’ll-”

“You’ll what, Ford? Have me fired from my job?” Pam scoffed. “One day, that will be you.”

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Ford wasn’t able to finish his sentence. A loud voice screeched through the intercom. “Cold

blue. Cohen.”

He let go of my arm and ran to his patient.

Goodbye, Ford.

Chapter Comments.

Elizabeth Johnson

Is there a point to knowing Emma’s story? I hope so because otherwise it’s pointless.

VIEW 1 COMMENT

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Chapter 109

CHAPTER 109 Time of Death

Ford Martin

If someone had told me Theodore Cohen was going to die today, | would have never believed

him.

However, nightmares can turn into reality.

“Code Blue. Cohen. | repeat. Code Blue. Cohen.”

As | pushed the people aside to reach the VIP suite, a cold dread washed over me. | couldn't believe this was happening. Theodore was alive and well when | changed his IV bag and gave him his medication earlier. He even complained about the food.

He wasn't supposed to die... he was supposed to be discharged later this afternoon to

continue his recovery in the comfort of his home.

“G od, save him,” | prayed while | took the stairs two at a time. “G od, help the doctors save

Theodore.

After giving T

Theodore his medication, | roamed the third floor, deciding whether | should accept Liam's proposal and become Theodore's private nurse. The pay he was o

ffering

ng was

three times my salary and | would have the privilege of living with them at the Cohen Mansion... just like family.

It was a great offer, but if | were to accept, it would mean | would no longer be the king of my own palace. Here at St. Elizabeth Hospital... this was my playground. | was King Kong seated atop a throne while the rest were insects | could crush within the palms of my hands. Here, | could stomp my feet, beat on my hairy chest and scream!

This dreadful hospital was my kingdom and | could not allow someone else to sit on my throne.

Before returning to the nurse's station, | took a little detour and headed to the office of the nurse administrator on the fourth floor. | had overheard that Rodney Marshall, a fellow male nurse, was petitioning the female nurses to voice out their concerns at my upcoming evaluation. Although a few agreed, most of the female nurses refused and he was having trouble convincing them otherwise.

Rodney didn't know who he was up against. | had an ace up my sleeve....

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CHAPTER 109 Time of Death

Unbeknownst to him, | had a collection of naked pictures of almost all the nurses employed at St. Elizabeth's. Out of fear of a scandal, these women would never talk.

But still, | had to get rid of Rodney. He was going to ruin me just to protect that new nurse,

Emma Clarke.

This job Liam needed filled would be the perfect alternative for Rodney. He would earn the big bucks working at the Cohen Mansion while | could keep my position as the big man at St. Elizabeth's. | didn't need money... what | wanted was control.

It was a win-win situation for everyone.

| couldn't do this alone though. | needed help from our nurse administrator, Lindsay Hartman, who was an elderly woman nearing her retirement. She was my mother's aunt and has been working at this hospital for over forty-five years.

Since we were related, Lindsay Hartman always took my side. It didn't matter what it was. In

-her eyes.novelbin

0 wrong...

colleagues were jealous of that.

ed on my grandaunt's office door, my thoughts went to Emma's first day here eth's. Emma, the stupid cunt that she was, thought she was doing everyone a reporting back to the administrator. Little did she know, the joke was on her.

iced the surprise in Emma's eyes when | casually walked into the nurse administrator's ice without even knocking.

"You wanted to see me, Great Aunt Lindsay?" | asked, smirking. | saw Emma close her eyes.

when she realized we were related.

"Yes, | did, Ford. Please take a seat," Great Aunt Lindsay said while she pointed at one of the chairs in front of her desk. "Nurse Clarke, please tell Nurse Martin what you just told me." My aunt looked at Emma, urging her to speak. "Go on, Nurse Clarke. If you can tell me then you can tell the person you're accusing. | believe everyone should be given the chance to properly defend themselves given the circumstances."

| watched Emma bite her lip nervously. She didn't expect a confrontation.

"I-I don't like how you touch me," Emma finally spat out, her chin raised in defiance. "I don't like the way you speak to me too. You make me feel uncomfortable."

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"| make you feel uncomfortable?" | asked bewildered. "You practically threw yourself at me, then you accuse me of touching you? I'm sorry, Great Aunt Lindsay, but you can't possibly

believe her?"

"What do you mean, Ford?" My grandaunt asked

"She's obviously lying," | pointed out. "She was flirting with me at the nurse's station, practically flaunting herself at me. You can't blame me for misinterpreting her actions."

"| wasn't flirting with you," Emma said, boldly denying the allegations. "I was merely introducing myself to you."

"Sure, you were, Emma," | scoffed. "First day on the job and you're already creating a me too movement. | bet you do this to all the male nurses you come in contact with. That's not fair to me or to any of us male nurses." | moved forward to my grandaunt's desk to plead my case. "Great Aunt Lindsay, in my defense, | was just being friendly." | was about to say more, but saw the warning look on my grandaunt's face and decided to shut up.

"Nurse Administrator, if you don't do anything now, you yourself may face charges in the future for not reporting Nurse Martin's actions," Emma argued. "| assume you know what happened to the people who were responsible for covering up Larry Nas sar's sexual abuse. They were sued by Nas sar's long list of victims."

| stared at Emma, stunned she was using the term sexual abuse.

"| have never abused anyone sexually. All my sexual encounters WOTD.

with consent. And who

is this Larry Nas sar anyway and what does he have to do with any of this when there has.

been no abuse?" | asked angrily. She was really pushing it.

"He was an orthopedic doctor who worked for the USA Gymnastics Organization and is

currently incarcerated serving over 3 life sentences. His victims, gymnasts of the national team, were all accused of lying... just like what you're accusing me of doing right now. But it was proven that his victims weren't lying," Emma pointed out. "I'm not lying, Nurse Administrator Hartman and despite what Nurse Martin has said, I can distinguish friendly from harassment."

Ford, I want you to apologize, my grandaunt suddenly said while she studied Emma through her glasses.

"Apologize for what?" I asked her. "I didn't do any of the things she's accusing me of doing!"

"It's her first day at work. Ford. Please understand she doesn't know you like I do lu

CHAPTER 109 Time of Death

can keep the peace, I need you to apologize to her." Great Aunt Lindsay lowered her glasses, gesturing with her eyes for me to apologize. I fell back on my chair and crossed my arms in front of chest like a petulant child.

"I'm sorry, Clarke, I mumbled under my breath, my apology insincere. I glanced at Emma and found her smiling smugly at me. My apology was like an admission of guilt.

However, her small victory was short-lived. Ha!

"As for you, Nurse Clarke, never in my life has anyone accused me of covering up a molester. I can assure you, Nurse Martin is a smart, charming young man who was raised by God-fearing folks. Any woman would be honored to have him shower her with attention," Great Aunt Lindsay said, peering at her through her bifocals. "I don't know how they do it where you're from, but here we treat our supervisors with respect. If you ever come into my office again telling me I'm just as bad as a rapist, I will call the Sheriff and have you thrown in jail."

Emma's

widened in horror. "You can't do that!"

an. Here, in New Salem, we know our place. You should learn yours," Great

y said before opening a folder. "Both of you... get back to work. | don't want to d for the rest of the day."

out of Great Aunt Lindsay's office that afternoon feeling vindicated while Emma d an important lesson... | was a hard man to bring down.

ter witnessing how my grandaunt put Emma in her place, | knew she could help me. If anyone could convince Rodney to become Theodore's nurse, it was her.

| fixed my hair before knocking on her door and waited for her to let me in.

"Good morning, Great Aunt Lindsay," | greeted her enthusiastically. She was wearing a light. blue business suit with a white silk blouse underneath. Her short salt and pepper hair was neatly styled while a string of large pearls adorned her neck and bronze framed eyeglasses

rested on her weathered face.

She appeared to be reading something on that large tablet of hers before | interrupted.

"Ford, what do | owe the pleasure?" She asked as she curiously looked at me over the lens of

her bifocals. She gestured for me to sit in one of the chairs in front of her desk.

"| was hoping to talk to you about someone," | replied before | seated myself.

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CHAPTER 109 Time of Death

"Sure. What's on your mind? Great Aunt Lindsay asked, putting her tablet down and giving me her undivided attention.

"You know Rodney Marshall, right?" | asked her.

"Of course, | know Rodney Marshall. I'll be promoting him soon, she answered.

"Promoting him?" 1 croaked.

"Yes, Ford. Promoting him. I'll be retiring soon and I need a replacement. I had initially wanted you to take my place, but there is no denying your inappropriate behavior. I even took the time to speak to your mother about this, but the apple doesn't fall far from the tree, does it? Your mother is the same way, always canoodling with that collegiate boyfriend of hers," she scoffed disapprovingly as she mentioned my mother's current beau.

state of

"Are you promoting Marshall to be your replacement?" I managed to ask despite my

an you do this to me, Great Aunt Lindsay? How could you betray your own

shock

tongue, Ford Martin," she scolded me, her face turning red with fury. "I didn't do you. Whatever is happening is your own doing. Did you think the board wouldn't our behavior? That the doctors would turn a blind eye? Did you think Rodney

or any of the other nurses wouldn't go against you?" She suddenly chuckled, finally ing why I wanted to speak to her about Rodney Marshall. This is why you've come to me. You want me to fire Rodney Marshall for you. I'm sorry, Ford. It's out of my hands."

"Actually, I wanted you to offer Marshall a job working for the Cohens. Liam is willing to provide three times the pay and free board and lodging at the Cohen Mansion on Prairie Hill," I said, showing her the sheet of paper Liam gave me earlier.

"Why don't you take it?" She asked.

"I would rather stay here and become the nurse administrator," I said, smiling. She laughed and shook her head at my answer. My smile quickly disappeared. Even with Marshall gone, I

still wouldn't be considered for the job?

“Grandnephew, I submitted three candidates to the board and you were rejected outright. Marshall was their first choice and Pamela Reese was their second. It’s a shame, but it was based on merit, and you Ford, lacked the necessary credentials. For now, Rodney Marshall will become my junior administrator while he trains under me. When I retire, Pamela will then take the vacant junior position and work under his tutelage,” my grandaunt explained.

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Chapter 110

CHAPTER 10% Ture of th

“I missed the part about me, I muttered, trying to digest all the information What is going to happen to me?

My grandant sighed and took off her glasses before she focused her beady eyes at me. I noticed the sad look and I instantly know it wash good

“You will stay on as a nurse until I retire. Knowing Marshall, once he becomes the sentier nurse administrator, he will fire you,” she replied. “My suggestion? Take the job the Cohens have offered and work for them or you can help your mother instead. I heard she purchased the pharmacy. She’ll be needing an extra set of hands to manage another businen!

rap

I shook my head at her suggestions. I didn’t want to leave. I wanted this hospital to be ra

by me.

“Is there any other way for me to become nurse administrator? Come now, Great Aun Lindsay. What can my family offer so I can become the first choice as your replacement! The elderly woman sighed.

| suddenly felt like she didn't want me for the job. The bi tch.

"Your mother will have to bribe all the members of the board with a substantial monetary donation. And when | say substantial, | mean hundreds of millions of dollars. This hospital needs several renovations done. If she can offer the board the money they want or need, she can negotiate and add a clause stipulating that you will take my place as nurse administrator, she admitted. | smiled. | could use my trust fund without having to burden my mother.

"Thank you, Great Aunt Lindsay | said. Tll see what | can do."

"Time is of the essence, Ford," she wamed. | will be announcing my retirement by next

week. Good luck."

| left my grandaunt's office feeling hopeful. After Theodore is discharged, | will visit the hospital director and offer him a cash grant that he wont be able to refuse, thus solidifying my status in this hospital where | can continue my rule without any further resistance.

| wanted to celebrate. | looked for Emma to take her up on her offer, however she suddenly reneged... the cu nt.

And now | was racing like a mad man to Theodore's suite.

CHAPTER 109 Time of Death

"Enough, Doctor Lewis, Doctor Morrison said as | arrived at the suite. | found Doctor Lewis

s gone." performing CPR, hoping to revive Theodore Cohen. "I said enough, Doctor Lewis. He's

Doctor Lewis stopped doing chest compressions and glanced at the huge clock hanging on the wall. He sighed before announcing what no one wanted to hear.

"Time of death... one minute after eleven in the morning."

Chapter Comments.

Morgan

POST COMMENT

I'd really like to learn about the main story. Not sure why | need to know Emma, Ford, or any of these characters. we've been at 11 am on this day for almost 3 weeks now.

VIEW 1

COMMENT >

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The Joy of Revenge

CHAPTER 110 Fault

Lindsay Hartman

As soon as the elevator doors opened to the third floor, | hurriedly walked out, my black pumps making a staccato tapping sound on the ceramic tiles of the hospital floor.

| heard the voice on the PA system announce, "Code Blue. Cohen," but maybe | heard

wrong...

Maybe his doctors have already revived him and it was just something they overlooked.

Halfway down the hall, | saw Ford leaning against the doorway of the VIP suite, his head resting on his arm while he repeatedly kicked the frame of the door in anger.

| abruptly stopped in the middle of the hallway. My mouth immediately went dry, beads of cold sweat suddenly appeared above my brow, while the sound of my galloping heartbeat filled my ears.

| was terrified of what the implications would be for me and this hospital now that Theodore Cohen had died on my watch.

What happened? Theodore was as strong as a horse.

Dr. Rachel Morrison and Dr. Mitchell Lewis appeared from the room, pausing at the doorway to give Ford some instructions before proceeding towards the elevators. They both shook their heads sadly as they approached me, defeat clearly in both of their eyes.

"I've instructed Nurse Martin to bring Theodore Cohen's body to the morgue, Nurse Hartman," Dr. Morrison informed me without even greeting me first. She was a slim dark-haired woman in her forties, bright, and the Department Head of the Department of Cardiology. She looked grief-stricken... her lower lip was trembling and | could see tears welling up at the corner of her eyes. "If you will excuse me, | need to make a painful phone call and inform Mayor Cohen his father has passed away."

| nodded my head, acknowledging her simple request. She placed her hands in the pockets of her white doctor's coat, lowered her head to hide her face and quickly left me with Dr. Lewis to use the elevator.

"What happened, Mitchell?" | asked Dr. Lewis. He was one of our newly hired attending physicians specializing in orthopedic surgery. He was of average height and build, bald with

CHAPTER 110 Fault

"He suddenly went into cardiac arrest, Nurse Hartman, he answered, shaking his head in disbelief. "Rachel and | were in his room doing our last routine check-up so we can start the paperwork to discharge him this afternoon. He was laughing, clearly in good spirits and appeared to be in good health. But right after | was done with my assessment of his arm, Rachel checked his heart sounds and said she heard something that concerns her. She was checking his ECG print-out for arrhythmias when all of a sudden he lost consciousness and flatlined. It just happened so fast. | tried my hardest to revive him, but there was nothing more I could do."

"Do you

ou suspect any foul play?" | asked. Dr. Lewis shook his head.

“No, I don’t, Nurse Hartman,” Dr. Lewis replied, peering at me through his glasses. “Theodore Cohen was diagnosed with an underlying condition several months back and has been taking maintenance medication since then. Unfortunately, one’s health can worsen when we least expect it. Perhaps, given the trauma he experienced several days ago, his condition worsened even though he appeared to be in good health. Complications of smoke inhalation can appear after four to five days.”

“Do you think Rachel may have missed something?” Dr. Lewis raised his eyebrows in

surprise.

“Nurse Hartman, are you implying Dr. Morrison was at fault?”

“Of course not. It was just a simple question,” I said quickly.

“Dr. Morrison has been monitoring his ABG along with his ECG. If you want to point the finger at someone, point it at the one who is never around when you need them,” he said

openly, frowning at me.

“Thank you, Dr. Lewis. I’ll have Nurse Martin transfer the deceased to the morgue and I’ll personally wait for the mayor so he can say his goodbyes before transferring the body to the mortuary of his choosing,” I said.

“Please offer my condolences to the Mayor,” Dr. Lewis said. “Now if you can excuse me... I have patients I need to attend to.” He gently patted me on the shoulder and quickly walked

to the elevator.

I sighed and continued to the VIP suite to assist Ford. I noticed two of Liam’s bodyguards seated beside the doorway, looking straight ahead at the wall across from them, both appearing to be in shock. I decided I’d take care of them after Theodore’s body was

transferred to the que

2/7

CHAPTER 110 Fault

It was like | was standing in a surrealistic nightmare. Theodore Cohen was indeed dead!

“Nurse Martin,” | gently called out to Ford to grab his attention, however he didn’t respond. He was standing beside the dead body of Theodore Cohen laying on the hospital bed covered with a white blanket. An empty stretcher stood waiting behind him. | patiently waited for a few more moments, allowing Ford to say his goodbyes, before | called out to him again.

“Ford!”

He jumped, startled by the sound of my voice. He moved his head to look at me and | saw

me, Great the fear in his eyes. “I promised Liam I'd take care of his father. He’s going to kill

Aunt Lindsay.”

“Sssshhhh. | spoke with Dr. Lewis. There was nothing more that they could do... that we could do,” | said. “Wheel the deceased to the morgue and wait for me outside. We need to be prepared for Mayor Cohen’s arrival.”

Ford nodded his head and sprung into action. After he had thoroughly wrapped Theodore Cohen's body, he positioned the body near the edge of the bed. | quickly went to Theodore Cohen’s head and helped Ford move the body to the stretcher.

After he left, | handed the two bodyguards some water and urged them to wait for the mayor

downstairs.

| had gotten them up from their seats when Sheriff Combs appeared with a set of deputies following him.

“Why are you here, Sheriff Combs? Where’s Mayor Cohen?” | asked puzzled.

“Lindsay, it was part of protocol to alert me first if anything happened to Theodore. Terry was the one who alerted me,” he replied, pointing at the bodyguard on my left. “I need this place cordoned off to everyone else and | need a list of all the people who had access to Theodore. For now, I’m

treating this as a potential crime scene.” He glanced at the room. “Where's the body?”

“Thad a nurse transfer the body to the morgue,” | answered.

“Alright, I'll have the medical examiner conduct an autopsy. She's on her way,” he said. “Deputies, | need you to seal the room off and | need you to search all the rooms on this floor for anything out of the ordinary. Lindsay, | need that list as soon as possible and no one, | mean no one, leaves this hospital until I've cleared them. This is a homicide

investigation until the medical examiner establishes cause of death.”

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CHAPTER 110 Fault

“Sure, I'll get that list for you. | just need to go to my office on the fourth floor,” | said, flustered. Theodore's death was a now crime scene

What was happening?

“By the way, before you go, | need all the footage from the CCTV cameras and the list of people at the pharmacy as well as the list of his medications,” the Sheriff further instructed, believing | had access to everything he needed.

| coughed, clearing my throat.

“Sheriff Combs, I'm sorry. | am not the hospital director nor | am the hospital's CEO. | can get you the list of nurses who was under Theodore's service, but regarding the other things

need, I'm afraid you'll have to talk to our hospital director Dr. Michael Smith or our CEO Dr. Nora Williamson for all the information you need.”

you

“Dr. Nora Williamson?” He croaked.

ww

I rolled my eyes. They still can't be fighting? "Yes, Dr. Williamson. Her office is on the fifth floor right above mine," I said, pausing to look at who just exited the elevator. "And you're in luck! Here she comes right now."

He quickly novelbin

uhm.

turning red.

Are you doing here? And why are your deputies placing yellow tape all

I smiled apologetically at Dr. Williamson, gestured to the bodyguards to leave and quickly made my exit. I took the elevator to the first floor and headed to the nurse's station.

I found Rodney finishing his charts while Pam was talking to the new hire, Emma Clarke.

"Pam, I need you to tell all the nurses on duty today that no one leaves until they are questioned by the police. This is regarding Cohen's death."

I turned and left to get the list the Sheriff requested. As expected the whispers began as

soon as I left.

Ford had nothing to do with this. Dr. Rachel Morrison... she was at fault.

4/7

CHAPTER 110 Fault

Sheriff Combs

Of all the people I had to deal with, it had to be her.

Nora Williamson was my childhood sweetheart until she decided to leave me to pursue medicine. By the time she came back, I was married to my Julie while she was a newly hired attending physician.

I had to admit, she looked good for an older woman. Underneath her doctor's coat, she was wearing a gray pantsuit paired with a pink blouse. Her straight

long brown hair lay below her shoulders and her make-up was expertly done. She obviously took care of herself.

“Unlike you, I’m a busy person, Sheriff. It’s either you deal with me or I’m calling our lawyer.

Well?”

Nora-”

“Dr. Williamson, if you don’t mind. She took offense by my use of her first name. Doctors!

“Fine. Dr. Williamson. Since there has been a threat to Theodore Cohen's life, | need to rule this out as a homicide. For now, this is ongoing investigation. Once the medical examiner has established Theodore Cohen died of natural causes, | will stop my investigation,” | explained. Her eyes narrowed icily.

“The way | see it, there is no crime committed here,” Nora Williamson said, her voice low. “Theodore Cohen was a sick man and died of natural causes. Now, if there was foul play, one of my doctors would have reported it to me which would lead me to call the proper authorities to investigate the matter. Just because the patient is a Cohen doesn’t mean he gets preferential treatment.” She suddenly took a step forward closing the gap between us to whisper in my ear. “From what | know of the Cohens, this is poetic justice. | remember this room. | remember treating a young lady who was brutally raped and if memory serves me

right, you didn’t arrest the people who were responsible for her being in that room. You remember her, right, Sheriff Combs?”

Of course, | remembered. Nora screamed at me in the utility room on this very floor to arrest Liam and the others. She said Joy Taylor wouldn’t stop scribbling their names on whatever piece of paper she could get her hands on. Nora was sure Liam had raped Joy Taylor. She said Joy had no reason to lie.

CHAPTER 110 Fault

| replied, avoiding her question. Her lips turned up into a scornful smile.

"You don't have probable cause to question my staff, Sheriff. Whatever threats you say Theodore Cohen had received are from people outside this hospital," she countered. "As for the body, you will have to get the permission of Mayor Cohen for an autopsy. Only then will this hospital release the body into your care. When the medical examiner finds proof of foul play, then I will allow you to question my doctors and nurses after you present a warrant."

I chuckled. The nerve of this woman to delay an investigation. I had to turn the tables on

her.

"Are you hiding something from me, Dr. Williamson?" Her eyes widened in shock.

"Don't you dare pin this on me, Sheriff! I am merely protecting this hospital from the likes of you!" She muttered through clenched teeth.

God, this woman was a tiger! Roar!

"If you don't cooperate with me, Nora, I will release a statement about the man who entered this very hospital disguised as a nurse. It will ruin you and this hospital that you're protecting," I said. "What do you think will happen to you? To this hospital? Hmmm..."

She stared at me angrily while she tapped her foot. I knew what was going through her head. If I went ahead and announced these allegations she will lose her job.

"Fine, do what you need to do. But I'm warning you... No statements until we get all the facts. Now, if you will excuse me. I need to call the board and do some damage control."

"Nora, I want the footage of the CCTV cameras and a list of all his medications," I said as she turned to walk to the elevator.

I watched her practically run away from me. Although she was right that Theodore's death was poetic justice, I had to make sure it wasn't Pete.

Because if it was him, it meant there were townsfolk loyal to him.

It also meant I would need to open up the killing fields again.

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