

The Joy of Revenge #Chapter 121 - Read The Joy of Revenge Chapter 121

Chapter 121

CHAPTER 121 The World Has Seen

Joy

my pillow, | woke up to the sound of someone knocking on the door. | covered my head with praying the sound would just go away.

too

The knocking, however, turned into incessant banging. | quickly sat up, my tussled hair falling over my face as | scowled.

“I’m up, I’m up!” | yelled, hoping the sound of my voice was good enough to stop whoever was on the other side of my door. But it wasn’t. The banging continued.

Wait just a second... If | was at home, why would someone be banging on my door?

| flipped my hair away from my face and opened my sleepy eyes... just a tiny bit... and realized | was in my office.

| forgot. Cristos stowed me away in one of Bo’s delivery trucks after Xavier successfully rescued Sebastian from the Huff Hills mansion. He told me to spend the night at my shop because going home was way too risky.

| slipped into my bunny slippers, groggily walked towards the door and slightly opened it, peeking through the tiny slit with one eye open. It was Xavier still dressed in his tactical gear. He must have just arrived back from Bismarck.

| swung the door open and allowed him to enter

“The hero’s finally back. What time is it anyway?” | asked, walking back to the sofa so | could go back to sleep.

“Almost two in the morning | think,” he said, entering my office and closing the door behind him. “Sorry to wake you, but | need you to get dressed and come with me.” | stopped by the

side of my sofa and sniffed. He smelled like smoke and urine.

“You smell funny,” | said, yawning. “Why don’t you go take a shower and come sleep with

me.”

“I’d love to, but we have somewhere to go,” Xavier said.” Come on, Virtue. Be a good girl and

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“Someone’s waiting for me at two in the morning?” | asked, sounding skeptical. | was fully awake now. Maybe it was my dad? Or maybe my mom?

“Yes... and no, it isn’t your parents,” he answered, reading my mind. | pointed at the direction of the warehouse thinking that someone was waiting for me in his office, but he

shook his head.

“Where then?” | asked.

“Mandan HQ,” Xavier answered. “I, uhm, | did something incredibly stupid... out of anger. I’m terribly sorry that | did this to you... Unfortunately, there’s no turning back now.” He sighed, apparently frustrated, like a heavy burden lay on his shoulders.

What was he talking about? He was speaking in riddles.

| shrugged. The man in front of me was Xavier, the hero. | wanted to hug him for saving Sebastian, but he smelled awful. He was actually already starting to stink up my office.

“Do we have to do this now?” | protested.

“Yes. We need a decision from you now. Chip and Dom are waiting. While you get dressed, I’m going to take a quick shower. I’ll meet you outside.” He turned and left.

After spritzing my office with air freshener. I went to the bathroom to wash my face and my business. Then, I put on a pair of jeans and a plain white T-shirt, then twisted my hair into a messy bun. After putting on a pair of white sneakers, I grabbed everything I need placed the items in a small tote bag and went to the warehouse through the wall panel.

Xavier was already waiting for me beside a black BMW holding two disposable cups of coffee and a paper bag, his hair still damp from his shower. He was wearing a dark blue T-shirt, black jeans, and a shiny pair of black boots.

I stopped and looked down at what I was wearing. He looked dressed up considering he was only wearing a plain shirt and jeans.

“Should I change?” I asked.

“No, you're beautiful,” Xavier said, walking towards me and giving me a kiss on my forehead. “Coffee and donuts for my queen.” He lifted the bag in front of me then pointed at the car. “As well as a chariot, my queen.”

“Seriously? A black BMW?” I asked, my eyebrow raised while I took a cup of coffee from him.

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and the paper bag. My stomach suddenly grumbled at the mention of donuts. I was hungry.

“People will think it's Liam driving at this ungodly hour and won't even dare try to stop us, he replied, gesturing to the passenger side of the car. “Get in. Chip is getting antsy and as for

my coffee, Dom, well, let's just say he'll feel much better with you by his side.” I took a sip of realizing it was my favorite... a cappuccino. I closed my eyes in bliss, savoring its delightful cinnamon flavor.

“Mmmmm... perfect,” I purred before opening the car door. After I was seated comfortably inside, Xavier turned on the ignition, clicked on his small remote, opening the giant warehouse doors in front of us, and drove off.

"Where are we going?" | asked as we exited the boundary of New Salem.

"Mandan HQ, sleepyhead," he answered, chuckling. Oops. "I drove here to come and get you after Chip told me he sent you here through a delivery truck of mine." | noticed the angry tone in his voice. "| had thought he would listen to me after | explicitly told him not to leave your side. But what does he do? He sends you back here... alone."

"Bo, | was tired and needed to get some sleep. You've seen Chip's office... it doesn't have anything to sleep on," | argued. "Then he should have gone with you...period, Xavier argued back. "We can't afford to be reckless anymore. If anything were to happen to you, | know I won't be able to stop myself

"You won't be able to stop yourself from what?"

"From killing everyone in New Salem, that's what," he admitted. "All this is getting ridiculous. Dom's hurt, you're engaged to a man who raped you, there's an angry underboss hunting you down and there's an unknown capo who's an even bigger threat to all of us because we don't know who the hell he is. It's getting dangerous and | don't know if | still have it in me to wait until the Spring Formal. I'm on edge... this fear | feel is beginning to swallow me whole. You know me... I'm usually as cool as a cucumber, but tonight, | couldn't stop myself. | gave

in to the fear... and my anger.

"Bo, you've been speaking in riddles since you woke me up. What are you talking about?" | asked, confused.

"You'll see," he said. "We're almost there."

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"No, Bo. You woke me up at two in the morning, so you owe me an explanation," | said,

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turning in my seat to look at him. "Why don't you just say it? Hmm.... Everything is my fault. Yep, | was the one who got everyone into this mess. But | just wanted to stop them from hurting more people. Sure, it may include making them pay for all the pain they've caused me, but | deserve it." | pointed

to my face. "You probably think just because I'm beautiful now that I'm okay. No, Bo. I am not okay and will never be okay until I get the justice those pricks owe me." I turned around to look out through the window hoping he wouldn't notice the angry tears that were about to fall. "If you don't want to continue with what we first set out to do, fine... all of you can go home. I'll do this myself."

"Joy," he uttered, reverting to my real name. "That's not what I meant and you know it. I just want to be done with this whole masquerade. You know what I want to do? I want to grab a gun and just shoot all of them in the head. Including Veronica Ortiz. That bitch was in on this the whole time. She earned money from all those sick motherfucks who like watching all that horrible stuff happen to all those girls Pete and Cris abducted. When we're done with New Salem, I'm going to Houston to make a house call." I turned my head to look at him, a stunned expression on my face.

"What do you mean she earned money?" I asked, urging him to explain. He sighed.

"I found a hidden basement door in Pete's office at Huff Hills mansion. It was filled with monitors and computers. I had Dina check it out and there were tons of videos of women

being

ng sexually abused, mostly by a tall man wearing a black hood over his face. The server transmitted all the feed to a site found on the dark web that caters to all these sick fucks all over the world. From what Dina was able to pull out from the data of the million subscribers who pay to watch, it showed Veronica Ortiz has earned hundreds of that's not including the fee from the feed they send to their VIPS." I saw him open to say more, but he hesitated.

"Xavier," I said, using his name, "what else did you find?" I saw him inhale deeply then exhale. There was more bad news.

nd

"W-We, uhm, actually, Dina found the video of your assault. You were one of their first celebrities. Of course, I had her delete it. But there might be copies of it lying around somewhere. Who knows what these sick fucks have done with it!" I heard the stone cold fury in Xavier's voice. He must have seen it. No wonder he said he wasn't able to control himself.

|, too, felt my anger bubble up inside me. Not only did | have to suffer through the agonizing experience, those a ssholes took a video and distributed it to their sick pals... for a price!

The world has seen what those a ssholes did to me... and loved it! | wanted to scream.

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My hands clenched into fists as my rage took over me. | punched the dashboard of the car over and over again.

“Im so sorry, Joy. This is why | wanted to tell you at headquarters,” Xavier said meekly, maneuvering the car into what appeared as a neglected compound with a big warehouse and a rundown building beside it. “Whatever rage you're feeling right now, feed off it and channel it towards the person | want you to see.”

The doors of the warehouse opened, allowing Xavier to park inside. After he had turned off the ignition, | placed a hand on his to stop him from exiting the car. There was something |

needed to know,

“See who, Xavier?” | asked. “Is it Pete?”

Chapter Comments.

Morgan

cup of coffee

Morgan

mother of all cliffhangers!!

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CHAPTER 122 Cris Murdock is Dead

Joy

“Nope, it’s not Pete,” Xavier said, taking his gun out of the glove compartment and clipping the holster onto his belt. “But he’s here... somewhere. So you know what that means... We need to stay vigilant at all times.” He exited the car, then came to my door to assist me out from the BMW. “Let’s eat first. I told Chef you were coming to HQ and he cooked your favorite. Baked ziti and honey-glazed chicken.”

I squealed happily. This was such a good surprise. Chef was here... in North Dakota.

While the rest of us called him Chef, Sebastian called him Cook. This was because Chef was

Sebastian's best cook...in his laboratory.

If Chef wasn’t in the kitchen or in a lab cooking, he was usually busy torturing or disemboweling some poor soul at Sebastian’s Meat Shop. He loathed guns, loved knives and his favorite topics of conversation were the ‘Succinct Art of Knives’ and The Exact Science of Torture’. He was a heavyset, bull-necked man, really muscular, whose fashion staple was the muscle shirt... to showcase the tattoo of an image of his mother on his arm.

He looked quite intimidating, but Chef was a big scaredy cat... spiders and cockroaches

included.

“Oh my gosh! Chef’s here!” I jumped up and down excitedly. “I really miss his cooking!”

“Oh please,” Xavier said, sounding jealous. “You eat his gourmet pizza and croissants all the time. Who do you think cooks all that stuff? Me?”

“Well, I know it isn’t Cristos,” I said, giggling. “No wonder you only serve croissants and gourmet pizza twice a week at the cafe.” Xavier chuckled.

“Chef rides in the back of the delivery truck and comes in early in the

morning to make the croissants just for you.” He pointed to a pair of steel doors and took my hand. “Right this way, my queen.” From outside, the warehouse looked dilapidated and small, but inside, it was completely

renovated and larger than I pictured.

“This section of the warehouse is the designated parking area,” Xavier said, acting like a tour guide. My eyes quickly surveyed the large assortment of vehicles parked side by side and

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corner. It had a big white X taped on the rear window.

Xavier rushed ahead of me to open the steel doors. I thanked him and found myself standing in a well-lit hallway.

“This section is mainly office space, additional rooms for the men and storage,” Xavier explained briefly. “The makeshift bedrooms are located at the far end of the warehouse to give people their privacy.”

Xavier proceeded down the hallway towards another set of steel doors.

“Is that the last pair of steel doors we need to walk through?” I asked.

“Yes,” Xavier answered. “You must be hungry. Come on. We’re almost there.”

There was one particular room that caught my attention, a room with glass walls, where several Blood Disciples were watching the live feed coming from CCTV cameras

monitors.

on

"This is now a 24/7 operation," Xavier explained "I have my men watching round the clock."

Finally, Xavier opened the last set of steel doors revealing a narrow concrete pathway which led to the rundown building | saw as we were driving to the warehouse.

The windows and glass doors were covered with old planks of wood, the building had vines. climbing its walls while the flower beds were either full of weeds or full of murky green

water.

| glanced at Xavier as we stopped in front of the building's entrance, puzzled we would be eating here. "We're going to eat in there?"

Before Xavier could answer me, the front doors of the building suddenly flung open.

Cristos had been waiting for us.

"Oh, thank God, you're okay," Cristos exclaimed, ushering us inside. | was stunned to see that inside was quite the opposite of the outside. Inside, the building looked like a small hotel.

"Why wouldn't | be?" | asked him.

"Because the person beside you said you're in danger, Cristos replied dryly. "Sometimes you go too far. Xavier" | quickly assumed this was a safe space since they were using their real2/7

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at least called me to tell me she was fine. Xavier scoffed at him.

"You wouldn't have horrifying visions in your head if you had gone with her like | told you to do, Xavier said, walking to the lounge area. "If | didn't call, it's because | wanted you to feel what | felt when you told me you sent her to the commercial complex so she could get some sleep... alone."

"You

guys do know the person you're talking about is here with you, right?" | said, trying to dispel the animosity between them. "As you both can see, I'm fine. | followed all of Cristos' instructions, Xavier. | didn't turn on the lights in the shop just in case there's a crack between the windows and the steel coiling door and | went straight to my office and locked the door... after taking a shower and brushing my teeth. By the way, where's Sebastian?" | sniffed and caught a whiff of garlic bread. Yummy.

"He's in the in

firmatory, knocked out by the painkillers Doc gave him after he stitched him up, Cristos answered. He shook his head and waved his hands in the air, not wanting to be distracted from the ensuing argument he and Xavier were having. "What is the problem, anyway, Xavier? If | didn't-"

"Cristos, if you don't mind, let Joy eat first, then we can continue this conversation, Xavier

said. "Anyway, I'm hungry."

Cristos scowled at Xavier for cutting him off, but nodded his head, gesturing towards the dining area.

Chef was all smiles when | took a seat at a small table. He placed a large helping of baked

ziti and a platter of glazed chicken in front of me then poured me a glass of red wine.

"| was wondering when I'd finally get to see you Chef said while we ate. "I've constantly asked the three underbosses to bring you for a visit, but Beaufort said it's too much of a risk. | thought it was just an excuse to keep you from me, but the men watching your old home have said they've seen someone frequenting your neighborhood. Unfortunately, they can't tell if it's a woman or a man. So, since the old lady living in the house in the middle of your cul de sac is entering a nursing home and selling her house, I'll be buying it. I'll be dying my hair white to look like an old geezer, so no one will think I'm a mean motherfucker." "So we're gonna be neighbors? Can | come to your house to have dinner? Please?" | asked hopefully.

"You can come every day. I'll feed you and keep you healthy," Chef said winking, then left for

the kitchen.

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“At least if I tell Chef to never leave your side, he'll listen to me, unlike someone else I know,” Xavier mumbled. I rolled my eyes. The clash wasn't over.

“Excuse me, but I wasn't the one who came into the pub, all guns blazing, without a mask on!” Cristos exclaimed angrily. “Admit it, Xavier, if I didn't keep the pub open, you would

cover and this have gone to his house and would have done the same to him... Blowing your whole operation we have going. At least, it happened in my pub without any witnesses!”

“Yep, it happened in your pub without any help coming from you, thank you very much,” Xavier replied curtly.

“Oh yes, I did help you,” Cristos mumbled “I kept him comfortable until you got there. But you're missing the point. You have to learn to control your emotions, Xavier!” novelbin

“Woah! I'm sorry, but I'm confused,” I interrupted. “What happened when I left the pub?” Through the CCTV feed, I remember seeing Cris entering the Buzzed Pub without Lisa, dressed in casual attire with a cap hiding his face. He tried to go incognito, but he was so tall. It wasn't much of a disguise.

After Cris walked in, Cristos told me to change into coveralls Bo's delivery men wore and ride with them back to the commercial complex.

“Cris came in and told me he just wanted to drink alone. He ordered a bottle of scotch and asked for a bucket of ice and a small glass. Since the pub was empty because of the vigil Patrick and Beth had the night off, I tended to the bar watching him drink, shot after he was about to ask him to go home when I got a message from Xavier asking me if I knew where Cris was since Dina mentioned we saw him standing outside. I told Xavier that Cris was a

at the pub, alone, drinking himself into a stupor.

“To cut the story short,” Xavier interjected, “I went to the pub and beat the crap out of him. While he was lying on the floor, I aimed my gun at him, about to pull the trigger, when he uttered the name Bo. I was filled with such rage from watching the video of your assault that I forgot to hide my face. As I told you earlier, Joy, I was incredibly stupid and rash. But it’s too late now. He’s seen my face and knows who I am.”

“So you’re telling me the person waiting for me is Cris Murdock?” I asked surprised.

“Yes,” Xavier answered. “We need you to make the decision to kill him or keep him prisoner. Cristos wants to keep him prisoner, so we can use him. I say kill him since he’ll use every opportunity to bury us. Sebastian, on the other hand, said it was in our best interests to ask you to decide... right before he blacked out. Anyway, before you make that decision, I want you to see him. I’ll be right beside you.”

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“Me too,” Cristos uttered.

“No,” Xavier said. “You might stop me from shooting him in the head. By the way, find anything on his phone that will lead us to Pete?” “Dina’s working on it,” Cristos replied. “What about his car?”

way, did you

“I have Sam and Lou cleaning the car. They’ve removed all trackers including a tracker that isn’t ours, disabled the GPS system, removed the SD card from the dashcam and have deleted all footage,” Xavier said. “Jack will find Cris’ car somewhere in Bismarck with his clothes and shoes stuffed in the back of the trunk.”

While they discussed where to dump Cris’ body if ever I decide we should kill him, I sat quietly, sipping the rest of my wine, deciding whether or not we should kill him.

“Joy, you ready?” Xavier asked. | nodded my head. “Good. Let’s get you a weapon.”

“No need,” | told him. “I brought my own.” | opened my tote bag, took out my glock 17, and clipped the holster to the waistband of my pants.

“Good enough,” he said. “Let’s go. Cristos, you watch from the monitors.”

We left the rundown building and walked towards the warehouse, but this time, we went down a flight of stairs through a hatch at the side of the building.

“This serves as a basement for when a tornado comes,” Xavier explained, turning the light on. It was a clean open space without furniture. At the end were two doors of two small rooms fronting each other.

He led me to the doors and stopped. “That's the bathroom while this is the storage room. We had no other place to put him.”

He took his gun from its holster before opening the door and turning the lights on. | saw a bloodied Cris, on the floor naked, cuffed to a set of steel shelves that were screwed on to the floor. He was conscious, with one eye open. The other eye was swollen, with dried blood

around it.

“Hello, Cris,” Xavier said ushering me inside. It smelled of urine. “I've seen you've pi ss ed yourself. It doesn’t feel good to be the one on the receiving end, huh, Cris?”

“Why is she here?” Cris croaked.

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“What? You're embarrassed?” Xavier asked amused. “Why don’t you tell her what you sick f ucks have been doing at Huff Hills? No? Fine, I'll tell her.”

“Tell me what?” | asked.

“He and his bestfriend Pete have been kidnapping young girls who look just like you, same color hair and same blue eyes, locking them up in a basement,

then filming them while they sexually abuse them. Sick world we live in right, Joy?"

"Joy?" Cris asked, puzzled. "But her name is Virtue-"

"My name is Joy Taylor," I said, correcting him. "Where's Pete, Cris?"

"You can't be Joy," Cris said. "Joy Taylor had brown hair and blue-green eyes. She was as thin as a toothpick and had a nose that stuck out like Pinocchio."

"That was before you guys ruined my face," I said. "Tell me, where's Pete? You answer me and I'll have Bo here let you go." Cris stared at me with his one eye, looking at me like I was a joke. The small room was suddenly filled with the sound of his laughter. Obviously, he was mocking me.

"You guys are going to let me go?" Cris exclaimed, his voice full of malice. "Yup, you must be

think your

Joy Taylor alright... because she was one stupid bitch. You know what I think, you must be

came back because you missed me. Admit it, Joy.. you miss my big cock. That's right, I was the one who took your virginity. I remember you were so tight. And your screams were the sweetest among all the girls I've fucked." He smiled wickedly. "Look at that, Joy, I'm getting hard from just remembering that night. Sure, I've been fantasizing raping Virtue, but to do you again, well, that would be extraordinary. Pete regrets not doing you, but apparently luck is on his side, because he's going to get his chance!" I saw red.

I took my gun from its holster, quickly aimed it at his chest and squeezed the trigger.

I shot at him, over and over again, until my ammo ran out. I just kept squeezing the trigger,

not noticing the clicking sounds my gun was making since there were no bullets left.

Xavier took the gun from my hands and caressed my cheek.

“Sshhhh... He’s never going to hurt you again,” He said, taking me in his arms.” You killed

him. Cris Murdock is dead”

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We left Cris’ bullet-riddled corpse for the men to clean up.

It felt good to kill him. | felt good. | was finally getting what | deserved.

We found a smiling Cristos waiting for us beside the hatch as we exited the basement.

“Dina found something. We might have a location.”

Chapter Comments

Elizabeth Johnson

POST COMMENT

| really like this book and Im so glad Joy has started to get her revenge but please it is going so slow. Did we really need to give

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Joy

"You might have a location?" | asked, not wanting to get my hopes up.

"Lou found a burner phone in Cris's glove compartment and gave it to Dina for processing," Cristos said. "There were several numbers found, but the most recent calls made were from three numbers, all prepaid and were all bought from one store." "And?" Xavier asked impatiently.

"And the store is in Houston, Texas where the headquarters of the Angels of Darkness is located, Cristos said. "Unfortunately, everything was paid in cash, but the store has a CCTV camera. Dina is hacking into their system as we speak.

"When was the purchase made?" Xavier asked, leading us back to the rundown building.

"About two days ago," Cristos said.

"That's two days unaccounted for," Xavier replied. "Flight from Houston to Bismarck is approximately three hours. He could have flown back here the same day he made that purchase. Plus, we don't have any evidence proving it was Pete who made the purchase or even called Cris in the first place... which again leaves us with absolutely nothing. Good work, Cristos," Xavier remarked dryly as he entered the rundown building and headed

towards the lounge area.

"I'm sorry if | failed you, kind sir, but that gives us a lead. When Dina gets the image of the person who bought the phones, she will then match the biometrics of that person to the people at the airport, train stations and bus terminals from the time Pete left New Salem. If she gets a match, she will take note of the date and time of arrival and search for a name through the manifest." "Tell Dina to do away with bus terminals and train stations to narrow down the scope of her search," Xavier said, taking a seat on the long L-shaped leather couch of the lounge area. | sat beside him leaning back against the throw pillows blissfully. "He's definitely traveling by plane. He doesn't have the luxury of spending a day travelling by car, bus or train. Any messages on Cris' burner phone?"

"Yes, but the messages are in code," Cristos said. "I've got my team trying to break the code and piece all of this together-"

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Cristos abruptly stopped at the sound of footsteps coming down the stairs. It was De Luca.

"IT, The Shadow, it's been a while since I saw you last," De Luca greeted me. "I heard you're engaged. Congratulations!" I smiled at him and he winked at me.

"What is it, De Luca?" Cristos asked, annoyed by his interruption.

are sti

"I know you guys sour at me for leaving Domenico, but I was trying to save a poor girl chained to a wall," De Luca said, feeling quite the hero. "Anyway, I forgot to give this to you. I found this in the trash in that office at Huff Hills." He pulled a folded piece from his pocket. "It's a flight itinerary for a Luis Villegas.

of paper

"Let me see that," Cristos snatched it from him, took a quick picture of it, then quickly browsed through the printed document. "I was in Chicago the same day this Luis Villegas

arrived."

"You were in Chicago?" De Luca asked, surprised.

"Yeah, I went with Dan to pick up the ring Liam sent him to buy. We so happened to bump into Noah and Nicole just outside of Tiffany's. Any one of the three could have gone to meet with Luis Villegas aka Pete McDowell," Cristos murmured.

"It's a possibility," Xavier said. "I doubt it was Nicole though, because they banged her up pretty good."

"That was the accident at the intersection?" I asked. "We saw that through CCTV."

"Yep, that was her. Link is with her while I have Max torturing the driver for information. If that doesn't work, I'll ask Chef to get the information out of him," Xavier said sleepily.

"May I interrupt?" De Luca asked. "Domenico sent me back to California to get in touch with my asset in the FBI for information on the capo who fled Texas. Little is known about his whereabouts after he left Texas, but the capo's name was Luis Villegas. My asset said he was married however, there is no information if Luis Villegas had a child. My asset said this happened almost twenty-five years ago."

"Did your asset give you a picture of this Luis Villegas?" Cristos asked.

"Yes, but it's a picture of him when he was in his early twenties," De Luca said, taking out his phone. He clicked on it and Cristos' phone pinged.

"He's light skinned with light brown hair according to his file. He can pass as a Caucasian 2/5

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with just a bit of work done," Cristos said. "He also has a clean rap sheet before murdering one of his own, a cousin of Ortiz. No wonder he ran."

"Let me take a look at that," Xavier said. Cristos clicked on his phone sending the photo to Xavier. "If this photo was taken when he was twenty-three that makes him forty-eight today." Xavier squinted his eyes trying to imagine what Luis Villegas would look like in his late forties. He shook his head. "I don't recognize him from any of the townsfolk. If he ran, that means either they betrayed him or he betrayed them. But the McDowells followed him to North Dakota, meaning there's a level of trust between them. There's something here that we're all missing."

"Well, if Pete's using the name Luis Villegas, it's for a reason," J said. "Maybe Luis Villegas was betrayed by his own. Because the way Pete's twisted mind works, everyone against him is

a traitor."

"Here, Joy, take a look," Xavier said, handing me his phone. "Maybe you know him. You've lived in New Salem most of your early life."

| took Xavier's phone and stared at the photo of the man named Luis Villegas. It was a black and white photo of a man who had chubby cheeks, a moustache and long hair. | shook my head. | didn't recognize him.

"I've never seen that man before," | told them. "Maybe he didn't move to New Salem with his wife, maybe he lives in Bismarck or Mandan."

"It's possible," Cristos said, clicking on his phone. "Maybe the McDowells, who were in Or favor, was given permission to live among the Cohens." He tapped on his phone one last time and smiled. "I sent the information to Dina. | hope she can find something while | help

decode those messages.

The door to the building suddenly opened and in came one of Xavier's men, panting."

"There's movement near the Cohen Mansion at an old barn."

Xavier quickly stood up. "Send the cleaners to the basement and tell them to bury the body.

where no one will find it," Xavier instructed him, "Cristos, I'll leave it up to you to find

whatever you can on this Luis Villegas. There's something that doesn't add up."

"Who died and made you king?" Cristos scoffed, standing up as well. Xavier glared at him.

"This isn't about being "boss", " Xavier said. "My priority is keeping everyone safe. Cristos, you're good with computers, with finding and gathering data... Right now, | need you to find. and gather the intel we need. You were right thinking a war is coming. it is. If my

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assumptions are correct, Pete thinks De Vega is behind everything happening in New Salem. He will attempt to ambush De Vega and take his territory in exchange for his life. This is why I need you and Dina to follow the bread crumbs Luis Villegas leaves behind. Right now, what we do know for certain is that he was in Chicago the same time you, Noah and Dan were. He might have been stalking you without you even realizing he was there. Joy, you coming?" I nodded my head.

I stood up and kissed De Luca on the cheek before following Xavier and Cristos to the warehouse.

The door to the glass-walled room automatically slid open allowing the three of us to enter.

"What do you guys have for us?" Xavier asked, standing behind four men seated in front of the monitors. I squinted my eyes as I stared into the monitors.

"We only have one camera in the area and the images are obscured by the dark, but that right there is the Sheriff's patrol car," one of them answered.

"At the Ol' Barn near Prairie Hill? That's Cohen land," Xavier pointed out. "What's he and his deputies doing there so early in the morning?"

"Looks like he's opening the place up," I said. "My dad said back in the old days they used to hold parties there the night after the Honey Bee Spring Parade. I don't know how the Cohens acquired it, but when they did, that was the end of the Honey Bee Dance. The Cohens prohibited everyone from going near the Ol' Barn."

"We need more cameras in that area. It seems they plan to use the barn for something," Xavier mumbled more to himself than to us. He was rubbing his chin with his fingers as he stared at the monitors, deep in thought. Suddenly, he jumped. "Woah, what's that?" Xavier pointed to a pair of headlights entering New Salem from the highway. "Zoom in on the license plate."

"I don't know how-"

"Get out of that seat," Cristos growled, shoving the Blood Disciple out of the chair and taking his place. "I'll have Lou bring a team of my men here." A few clicks and an image of the license plate popped up on the screen.

"I know this car," Cristos said. "It's Lisa's. It looks like she's headed towards the Sheriff's

Station."

"Is it possible to rewind the footage to see where she went?" | asked.

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"No need," Xavier said, his eyes narrowing into slits. "She'ssdooking for Cris. Get the footage from Huff Hills and look for her face in the crowd.|fsheisst there, she knows more than she's

letting on."

Cristos chuckled. "The poor little hacker can't find her husband Mill the signals from all the tracking devices are jammed. Not even Jack can help her. All ofadden his phone rang. He answered it. "Send me the decoded messages now. And who was st hac one who was able to cr ack the code? Yeah? And what do you want?" Cristos scratchcheck its head and grimaced while handing his phone to Xavier.

Xavier looked at the phone, puzzled. "What?"

It's K iki. Cristos said. K iki was Xavier's baby sister. "She wants to talk to you I'm sorry, Kavier. | promised to give anything to the one who c racks the code. She wentes in."

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Chapter 124

The Joy of Revenge

CHAPTER 124 Missing Person

Lisa

I was on the freeway, driving home from Bismarck, feeling utterly hopeless. It was almost four in the morning. I needed to get some sleep, but finding Cris was much more important.

He was ruining himself with this obsession he had with whatever he and Pete were into.

Last Saturday night, after the Miss Honey Bee pageant, I received a text message from Cris asking me to pick him up. I drove to Bismarck and found him standing on the side of the road beside Huff Hills mansion seemingly catatonic. Pete and I had to shove him into the backseat of my car just to get him inside.

As I drove us back home, he just sat there, wide-eyed, looking extremely scared, uttering the words, "I didn't mean to, but she was so small, over and over again.

"You didn't mean to do what, Cris? And who was so small?" I asked, hoping the questions would help clear his head and snap him back to reality. But he ignored my questions and just continued saying those nine words over and over again.

The next morning, I found him seated on the edge of his bed staring off into his

space, pillow untouched, making it quite obvious he didn't sleep at all the night before. I tried to feed him and bathe him, but it was next to impossible. So I let him sit and stare, making a mental note to have him admitted if things didn't get any better the next day.

Yes, I did panic when Liam and Dan showed up unannounced at our doorstep, looking for Cris, but I also felt grateful. I had a feeling they knew how to help him and I was right.

It only took Liam ten minutes to bring him back to his wits.

I was relieved to hear Cris yelling again, however the words I heard him utter made me realize the Cris seated in his bedroom was no longer the Cris I fell in love with. He was this monster who kidnapped and raped women. I had thought the rape of Joy Taylor was a one time thing, unfortunately I was so wrong.

Now, there was this mafia underboss named Alejandro De Vega of the East North Central States who wanted to exact vengeance because he and Pete couldn't handle rejection.

This was more than I could handle.

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CHAPTER 124 Missing Person

ever happened. But when he came back home from Chimes, he was agitated and angry, like he was betrayed. I tried talking to him, but he told me he just wanted to be left alone.

And that's what I did, I left him alone.

What I should have done was have him admitted into the psychiatric ward, then I wouldn't be driving around town looking for him.

Despite Theodore Cohen's death, my day was full of clients trying to snatch up newly listed homes on the market.

However, it was Bo's attorney, Lincoln Murphy, who caught my eye. He was dashing, very respectful and a complete gentleman. He bought the newly vacated McDowell residence without even negotiating the price.

"Til take it

it and whatever furniture is in it," he said, writing me a check. "I'll even add another hundred thousand dollars if you can give me the keys by tonight."

"Why would you want to move here?" I asked, suspiciously. "Your practice is in Bismarck, right? I believe there are condominiums in the city better suited for someone like you." He

sighed.

"I'm currently living in a condo," he said. "The view is amazing, I live with so many other people, but to tell you honestly, I feel so secluded, so alone."

"Well, that's an easy fix," I replied, smiling. "You should make friends with some of your

neighbors."

"And have them banging on my door late at night when they want to drink? Nah. Better keep them

at a safe distance, like the homes in Highland Oaks. Houses are at a good distance from each other, giving me all the privacy I need while the townsfolk will make me feel right at home." I nodded my head, agreeing with what he said.

I glanced down at the form I had him fill up. "It says here you're single," I said, surprised. "Why buy a house so big?"

"When I decide to start a family, I want everything in place," he answered. "Big house with enough rooms and a big yard for the kids to play in. I think that's what all married couples

want."

I grimaced, knowing I would never get that from the man I was married to. Cris Murdock was a sick man, but I couldn't leave him without damaging his reputation in this town. Actually/6

CHAPTER 124 Missing Person

leaving him would damage mine even more.

"By the way, any single ladies here you can introduce me to?" He asked casually.

"Well, there's my bestfriend, Nicole Davis, and a woman who just moved in from Nevada. Her name is Virtue Sullivan," I answered. "I have another friend, Abigail Reynolds, but she's in

the hospital."

"I've already met Virtue Sullivan through Bo," Lincoln Murphy said. "She's extremely beautiful. She's, uhm, out of my league. But I'm willing to meet your bestfriend when the

time is right."

"Sure, Mr. Murphy," I replied.

"Link. You can call me Link."

Even his nickname was sexy.

I wanted to kick myself. Here I was, a married woman, flirting with a handsome and witty man. I sighed. Cris used to be like that. Now, he was someone I didn't even know.

My car in our

After participating in the vigil, I went home exhausted. I was about to park my driveway when I noticed Cris' car was not in its usual spot.

Where the fuck did he go?

I rushed inside our house, grabbed my laptop, and began tracking him through the small GPS trackers I placed in all his shoes as instructed by Liam. While his other pairs showed a green dot on my locator, there was no signal coming from one pair.

I began clicking away, trying to track his car. Same thing, no signal. I went through the

town's CCTV feed and I found nothing.

There was only one place I knew he would go to late at night. I exited the house, dashed

back into my car, and drove to Huff Hills.novelbin

Last night, when he thought I was already sound asleep, he left the house. I tracked him down to the mansion on Huff Hills. I suspected he was meeting with Pete.

| was about to call Liam and tell him about Cris late night rendezvous, but decided to do it in the morning.

3/6

CHAPTER 124 Missing Person

peeked inside Cris' room and saw him sleeping peacefully. | decided to let his late night excursion slide since it was his first offense. | promised | would tell Liam if he ever did it

again.

| decided to call Liam. Maybe he found out about last night and met up with Cris to reprimand him. At least knowing where he was would alleviate the worry in my heart.

Liam answered after several rings.

"Liam, Cris is missing," | said.

"He's what?!" Liam roared. Okay... Liam wasn't with Cris. "What about those tracking devices | told you to place in his shoes?" "The pair he's using isn't pinging me his location nor is his car," | said.

"Signal's jammed," Liam mumbled. "Where are you?"

I'm on the freeway heading towards Huff Hills, | answered truthfully. "It's the only place | can think of. Most of the establishments in New Salem are closed."

"Alright. If you find him, tell him if he wanders off again, | will kill him myself," Liam growled before hanging up.

As | reached the foot of the hills, | was shocked to see the police, the firemen and emerg medical services blocking the entrance to the prime neighborhood.

| rolled down my window to speak to the nearest police officer.

"Ma'am, this area has been sealed off from the public," the police officer said.

"What's going on, Officer?" | asked.

“Groups of armed men were seen shooting at each other near Huff Hills Mansion” the officer said. “For your safety, I urge you to go home.”

“But

my

husband is visiting a friend here,” I cried out. “I’ve come to pick him up.”

“All residents have evacuated their homes,” the police officer said. “You might want to head to City Hall and check the manifest. The people there will tell you where you can find your “husband.”

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CHAPTER 124 Missing Person

Hills. I parked my car to the side of the road and walked to a bunch of bystanders to get some information.

“I heard on the news police believe Huff Hills mansion was being used as a hideout by a group of drug dealers. I’m guessing a deal went south. Only reason for them to kill each other,” I heard a man say as we watched from afar. “They say there are dead bodies.

everywhere.”

I felt my heart constrict in my chest. It can’t be possible...

As I continued to watch, I noticed several white vans with ‘Medical Examiner’ printed on their sides exit the police barricade from Huff Hills. I entered my vehicle and proceeded to follow the vans. I needed to know if Cris was a casualty. If he was dead, it would be painful, but I would accept it.

At the morgue, I told them my story. They allowed me to look at the corpses to help identify my husband. Fortunately, he wasn’t among the dead...

So where was he?

I dialed the only person who I knew would help me. He wouldn’t be too thrilled I was waking him up, but he was Cris’ friend. Luckily, he answered right away.

“Lisa, shouldn’t you be asleep?” Jack asked, yawning.

Cris is missing, Jack,” | said as | exited the freeway to New Salem. “I need your help in

finding him.”

“When was the last time you saw him?” Jack asked.

“Yesterday morning before | went to work,” | answered. “I drove to Bismarck looking for him at Pete’s mansion on Huff Hills. Fortunately, he wasn’t among the dead the police pulled out

from that area.”

“What?!”

“It has something to do about two rival groups shooting at each other,” | said. “Something about drugs. Anyway, will you help me or not?”

“Of course, I’ll help you, Lisa,” Jack said. “Swing by the station, so you can fill up a missing.

person’s report.”

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CHAPTER 124 Missing Person

| heaved a huge sigh of relief.

| still had someone on my side.

My phone suddenly rang. The call was from an unknown number. | answered it thinking it

was Cris.

“You won’t find him,” a man’s voice said. It sounded familiar.

“Who are you? What do you mean | won’t find him?” | asked, panicking.

“De Vega swears it’s not him. He even gave me a piece of information as a sign of goodwill,”

the man said.

“What information?” | asked.

“Ortiz has sanctioned a hit... a contract made with Joy Taylor.”

Chapter Comments.

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Chapter 125

The Joy of Revenge

CHAPTER 125 Stale Donut

Jack

It was past four in the morning and | was still at the station.

Alot has happened... Theodore was dead, Nicole was in the hospital and now, Cris was

mise

| prayed next week would fly by smoothly, but | knew that wasn't going to happen. With all the festivities coming our way, it spelled disaster.

| was seated at my desk, rubbing my eyes from all the paperwork | had to finish. The Sheriff and several of our trusted men were at the Ol' Barn near Prairie Hill setting it up for the

meet tomorrow.

F uck! | almost forgot about that.

| was grabbing a cup of coffee and a stale donut when Lisa arrived. She looked distraught and clearly upset. Poor Lisa... | decided to make her a cup of coffee too, hoping the bitter

brew would help calm her nerves..

| gestured for her to grab a seat at my desk and wait for me. She nodded and sat down quietly, fidgeting with her phone. A couple of weeks ago, Cris was all about the election, but in a blink of an eye, he changed. The others believed it was all Pete's doing, but no, it was Cris. He was so into BDSM. Pete.... he was just a follower.

For a man, nothing beats the feeling of an intense orgasm and judging from the strained relationship between Cris and Lisa, | automatically assumed he wasn't getting it at home.

He couldn't rough up his wife without people noticing. He had to get that gratifying feeling

elsewhere.

And with Pete by his side, that meant he had unlimited access to most of the women who walked the face of the earth.

I've told the Sheriff repeatedly to keep a leash on Pete, but he said that was Cynthia and Theodore's department. Now that they were both gone, Pete didn't have anyone stopping him... and that meant more for Cris.

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CHAPTER 125 Stale Donut

| was walking towards my desk when a loud sob broke the silence of the station. Norma Martin walked out from the waiting area near the holding cells and headed to the restroom.

"Hey Lisa," | said, placing the disposable cup of coffee in front of her. "Here, have some coffee. I'd offer you a donut, but this was from yesterday."

"That's fine, Jack. Thank you," she said with a small smile and placed her shaking hands around the cup. "What's wrong with Norma?"

"Ford was arrested for the murder of Theodore Cohen, I told her. "There's substantial evidence pointing to him as the primary suspect. Her eyes widened in shock.

"B-but the Martins and the Cohens are close family friends, Jack. What reason could Ford possibly have for him to kill Theodore?" Lisa asked quietly. "That's practically suicide."

"He may not have a reason to kill Theodore, but Pete does. No doubt the Martins and the Cohens are tight, but the Martins have an even closer association with the McDowells. Cynthia bailed them out when they were on the verge of bankruptcy," I replied. "Yeah, I remember that," Lisa said, nodding her head. Her family was well off too and of

ant course knew the other rich folks of New Salem Norma asked my father to give her an extension on her loan, but her request was denied. Right before the bank could release a foreclosure on their properties, she visited my father and dumped a bag full of cash on his desk. To this day, my father wondered where the Martins got all that money. Apparently, they got it from the McDowells. She sipped her coffee and grimaced. Oops. I pushed the packets of creamer and sugar in front of her.

"Liam is suing the hospital for criminal negligence, but the hospital CEO is going to fight it." I glanced down at a sheet of paper on my desk and read the print. "The hospital stresses the evidence obtained shows Ford Martin was coerced to kill Theodore Cohen by someone

outside the hospital. Thus, this aggravating circumstance does not, in any way, reflect on his record as a nurse nor does it reflect on the health care the hospital provides. This was written by their medical-legal," I said, noticing Norma had come out of the restroom. I coughed to change the subject. "Have you heard Nicole is in the hospital?" Lisa shook her

head

"No. What happened to her?" She asked.

"She was in a car accident at the intersection between Main and Prairie. She's stable, but she doesn't look too good."

"Oh my gosh!" She exclaimed. "I'll visit her first chance I get. Was it like Abigail's accident?" 2/5

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CHAPTER 125 Stale Donut

“No. She flew out through the windshield of her car. She was fortunate that there were people at the scene willing to help,” | replied, wanting to change the subject. The driver was still on the run and | felt guilty about that. “So, you're here to file a missing person's report. | opened a drawer of my desk and took out a form. “Usually you have to wait twenty-four

you file hours before filing a report, but | haven't seen Cris for days. No one has. So, I'll file the report now. To aid in our investigation, you also have to tell me everything and anything you can think of that's happened the past couple of days.” Lisa let go of her cup of coffee and began to fill up the form.

“Before | say anything, can you promise me you won't say anything to Liam?” She asked, her voice fully of worry. | sighed. This was going to be harder than | thought.

“I'm going to be honest, Lisa. | won't say anything to Liam unless anything you say to me has a direct effect on him. If it doesn't, my lips are sealed,” | told her. “If it does, I'll have to

tell him.”

way. “You're a good man, Jack,” she said.” Actually, whatever | know won't affect Liam in any way. Well, Cris left New Salem the other night and headed to Huff Hills. | know this because Liam

in had me place GPS trackers in his shoes. | don't know what he did there. When | woke up the morning, he was back in bed, sleeping. |, then, left for work and was out the whole day. | even went to the vigil.”

“Yes, | saw you there,” | said, confirming.

“By the time | got home, his car was gone. | tried locating him through GPS, but his trac didn't ping

a location, nor did his car. So, | went to Huff Hills. When | got there, there were police, medical services and fire trucks barricading the entrance at the foot of the hills. According to the police officer | spoke to, two rival groups were seen shooting at each other. | decided to park my car and join the crowd of

bystanders to get information. That's where heard someone mention the police believe Huff Hills mansion was being used as a hideout by a group of drug dealers

"Then, what did you do?"

"4, uhm, followed the Medical Examiner vans to the morgue. He wasn't in any of the body

bags."

"How many dead?" | asked.

"According to the medical examiner, seventeen. Ten at the mansion, seven along the road. leading to Huff Hills mansion," she answered. "After the morgue, | drove back here."novelbin

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CHAPTER 125 Stale Donut

"Lisa, maybe

fears.

Cris will come home like he did the other night," | said, hoping to allay her

"| haven't gone home to check if he's there, but jack, | couldn't locate him with the tracker | put inside his shoes. He doesn't even know I'm tracking him," she said.

"There is a possibility that he blocked the signal himself so no one could track him," | muttered under my breath. She shook her head at the possibility.

"You don't know Cris like | do. He isn't into these... gadgets. He can't even figure out half of the functions on his phone. Sure, he knows how to use a computer, but that's it," she reasoned, leaning back on her chair, frustrated. "You have got to listen to me... Cris wouldn't know how to jam a signal from a tracker, Jack!

“But Pete would,” I replied, surprised at her outburst. “He would know what a jamming device is, where to get one and how to use it. Have you tried calling Cris at least?” She looked at me with a shocked expression on her face. “Well, have you?”

“N-No, I-I was so preoccupied in trying to find him that I didn’t even think of calling him,” she said, picking up her phone.

“I’ll call him,” I said, stopping her. Cris may not want to take her call, but he would need to take mine. I took my phone out of my pocket, placed it on speaker phone and dialed. It went straight to voicemail.

“See Jack,” Lisa said. “Even when he’s busy gallivanting with Pete, it rings before going to voicemail. Something has happened to him... I can sense it. Especially after I got that phone call from this unknown number telling me I’ll never find him.”

I paused, taken aback by that piece of information. “You got a call from an unknown number? Was it a woman or a man who called you?”

“Aman. His voice was familiar. It sounded a bit like Pete,” she explained, clicking on her phone. “Anyway, he said he spoke to Alejandro De Vega and De Vega swears whatever is happening in New Salem isn’t because of him. Here, this is the number he used to call me.” She slid her phone over so I could take a look.

I wrote the number down, making a mental note to call this number and triangulate its

location.

De Vega... Liam mentioned Cris and Pete abducted and raped a girl who happened to be the

niece of De Vega, the underboss of the ENC’s solving the puzzle of Cynthia McDowell’s

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death. But if De Vega swears it wasn't him, then who wanted Cynthia dead?

"Anything else this mystery caller tell you?" | asked.

"Yes, and this is where it gets really weird," Lisa said. "He said Joy Taylor made a contract with Ortiz for a sanctioned hit."

| froze.

Anightmare has become a reality.

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Chapter 126

CHAPTER 126 She's Back?

Jack

"Joy Taylor?" | croaked. My mouth had suddenly gone dry.

Joy Taylor... hearing her name come out of Lisa's mouth felt like a bucket of cold water was dumped on my head. Joy Taylor was in contact with the Big Boss of the Angels of Darkness? She had ties with the mafia?

What?!

It couldn't be possible.

| coughed, trying to hide the dread | was feeling. After all these years, someone had come back from the dead.

"I'm sorry," I said. "Did you just Joy Taylor? The same Joy Taylor we went to high school

with?"

ip to make

"Yes, Jack," she answered harshly. "Do you know any other Joy Taylor?" I bit my lip sure this wasn't one of my nightmares.

"Did this man tell you who the target is?" I asked, beginning to sweat. It could be any one of

us or all of us.

"Unfortunately, he hung up before I could ask." She leaned forward and looked around, before she continued. "Jack, I have never asked either one of you, not even Cris, what happened that night of the Spring Formal. But think about it. Spring Formal is next week marking the ten year anniversary of Joy Taylor's sexual assault by unknown men who until this day have not been apprehended. Theodore and Cynthia are dead, Nicole is hurt and now, Cris is missing. Although I have no idea what Cynthia McDowell has to do with all this, I do know Mayor Theodore Cohen used all his connections to keep you guys out of jail. Cris is already one off her list." I could tell she felt betrayed by all the lies. It was in her voice. "That leaves her with just three left... Liam, Dan and you, Jack."

I grabbed her arm and squeezed it. "Let me make this clear. We had nothing to do with Joy Taylor. You hear me?" I quickly let go of her, before I did anything more to hurt her.

answers

"You're scared," Lisa said, massaging her arm. "I can see it in your eyes. I can see the to all my questions regarding that night ten years ago just by looking at you." The corner of 6

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CHAPTER 126 She's Back?

Joy Taylor is truly back to get her revenge, there is no doubt in my mind, she'll come for me too. | was her bestfriend, a person she trusted. And what did | do? I lured her to you." She stood up and grabbed her phone. "Find my husband. | don't care if you bring him back to me in a body bag. Just find him. Thank you, Undersheriff."

"If Cris gets in contact with you, don't hesitate to call," | said gruffly. "And don't forget to

visit Nicole."

That went well...

"Oh, | will," she said, sighing. "I can't help, but reminisce about high school. You know, | was so lucky to become a cheerleader during our senior year. All thanks to Nicole, of course. For three years, | was a nobody, just like Joy, but come senior year, | was popular. If there's one thing | regret, it was that need to become one of you guys. | should've just accepted the fact that | could never become popular. Maybe Joy would still be here. Maybe instead of Bo's, it would still be the Taylor's supermarket. Maybe Joy would have married Noah."

Maybe Joy would have married me. | was kind of getting to know her our junior year since Abigail made it clear | disgusted her. But my dad was diagnosed with cancer during that time

we needed the money.

"Stop it, would you? You're giving me goosebumps." Lisa looked at me with a smug expression on her face. She knew she was getting to me.

"How about a cheer before | go?" She asked, her eyes twinkling with mischief. "You better watch your back, because Joy Taylor's back!" She laughed and turned to exit the station. |

wanted to shoot her in the head.

"Joy Taylor is back?" A curious voice asked behind me.

| closed my eyes, annoyed someone had overheard us. | turned around and found Norma Martin standing behind me. Of all the people who could have heard, it was big mouth

Norma.

“No,” I said. “We were just reminiscing about high school.”

“I’ve always wondered if she’d ever come back, Norma said. “Especially after Cynthia took

her inheritance from her.”

“What?” I thought hard. I remember Dan telling us Pete would pay us once the land was sold to his mother. I didn’t know that land was Joy’s inheritance.

2/6

CHAPTER 126 She’s Back?

“You didn’t know?” Norma said, smiling wickedly. Even though her eyes were all puffy from crying, she still managed to look evil. “The land Hill Crest is built on formerly belonged to George Taylor. Cynthia tried everything to get that land, but George wouldn’t sell. He said it was Joy’s inheritance. Well, we all know what happened right? Joy Taylor was brutally raped and they left town, that is, after George sold the property to Cynthia. Cynthia, may her soul rest in peace, always got what she wanted... by hook or by crook. If I were Joy Taylor, I’d definitely exact revenge on the person who started all of this in the first place and the one person who covered it all up.” She moved closer to whisper in my ear. “My son is innocent, Jack. He didn’t murder Theodore Cohen like all of you nitwits are implying. But I know who did. By the way, if you can get in touch with Bo’s lawyer, I’d appreciate it. I fired our lawyer for being such a pussy to go against the Cohens. Do hurry. I want my son out when the sun comes up.” She smirked and turned to walk back to the waiting area.

Cynthia, Theodore, Nicole and now Cris...

Abigail wasn’t part of the whole thing, but she did keep quiet all these years.

But people would notice a tall, brown haired, blue-green eyed woman walking the streets.

Hell, I would.

She was the one girl who haunted my nightmares, every night for the past ten years.

| decided to walk outside and make a couple of phone calls. | didn't want Norma to eavesdrop on me again.

| dialed, hoping Liam would answer. He didn't. | decided to call Dan. Luckily, he answered

"Jack, it's five in the morning. Not even my mother wakes me up this early."

"We have a problem," | said. "Lisa came by to file a missing person's report. Cris has gone missing." He scoffed.

"Like Cris hasn't gone off the radar before, Jack, Dan said. "He's a grown man. He'll come home when he's good and ready." "That's the thing... Lisa placed GPS trackers in all his shoes. She says the one pair he's wearing isn't pinging a location, including the tracker she has on his car. We tried calling him, but it goes straight to voicemail. Anyway, before | tell you more, | gotta ask, have you any idea where Pete is?" | asked.

"No and I'm telling you the truth," Dan replied. "Maybe Cris is with him that's why the signal on the trackers you have on him are jammed"

3/6

CHAPTER 126 She's Back?

"| don't know, Dan. Cynthia and Theodore are dead, Nicole's in the hospital and Cris-

"Nicole's in the hospital?! What the f uck! Why wasn't | informed?" He screamed. | had to pull my phone away from my ear. "Sorry about that. I've been really busy with the Theodore Cohen investigation," |

apologized. "A truck crashed into her while she was driving her mother's old car last night. She flew out the windshield. She's stable, but from what | saw, she's gonna need a lot of

therapy."

“Poor thing... I'll visit her later,” Dan uttered sadly. “Okay, is there anything else you want to tell me? Since I’m wide awake from the news of Nicole’s accident.”

“Well, Lisa said she got a call from a man using an unknown number. She said the man told her Alejandro De Vega says he has nothing to do with all the s hit happening here. The man also mentioned she would never find Cris and that Ortiz has consented to a sanctioned hit.”

Sanctioned hit? Did this man tell Lisa who the target is?”

“She said the man hung up before she could ask him,” | answered.

“And aside from Ortiz, who is the other contracting party?” He asked. | sighed.

“Joy Taylor.” | heard him laugh.

Is this a prank? Are you and Lisa in on this together? Because it isn’t funny, Jack,” he

scoffed.

“Then why are you laughing, Dan, because Lisa wasn’t laughing when she told me,” | said.

“Who called her?”

“She said the voice sounded like Pete’s,” | answered.

“That lu natic is here watching us, toying with us,” Dan muttered. “I don’t believe a thing that he says and you shouldn't either. Cris must have sk ipped town to make it appear it was Joy Taylor. Pete's right... you can’t find someone who doesn’t want to be found. Gosh, Jack, stop being gullible and think. Pete is behind all of this and he’s using Joy Taylor to mess with our heads!”

S\$ hit... Dan was right. Why did | have to give in to my fears?!

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CHAPTER 126 She’s Back?

impeccable.

"I have another problem," I mumbled. I heard Dan let out an angry sigh.

"What is it this time?"

"Norma heard Lisa, now she believes Joy Taylor killed Theodore and her son is innocent."

"Do I always have to do the thinking for you? Complete and utter deniability. When she uses Joy Taylor as Ford's scapegoat, make it appear she's sick in the head."

I smiled. Ford gets incarcerated and there's a chance I could get Norma Martin locked.

the psychiatric ward.

It was a win-win.

up in

I took out the business card Lincoln Murphy gave me and dialed. He answered.

"Mr. Murphy, good morning," I greeted him. "This is Undersheriff Jack Emery."

"Good morning, Undersheriff. Seems... I dozed off," he said, obviously annoyed at being caught off guard. "How can I help you?" "Norma Martin asked me to call you. I think Bo Xavier, a client of yours, told her to get touch with you. She needs you to represent her son. He's here in a holding cell at the

Sheriff's station."

"On what grounds?" He asked.

"Murder," I answered.

"Does this by any chance have to do with the former mayor's untimely death?" He asked.

"Yes, it does." I heard him mutter something unintelligible under his breath.

“I'll just check up on Nicole Davis first, take a shower, then I'll head to the station. I'll have my secretary set a bail hearing for this morning,” he rambled like he was reading a ‘to d

do’

list.

“You're still at the hospital?” | asked, surprised.

“Yes. | wanted to make sure she was stable before | left. Tell my client not to say a word

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Tue, Apr

CHAPTER 126 She's Back?

It was almost half past five, so | decided to head to the diner to get some breakfast. | was

g my mouth with bacon and eggs when my phone rang. It was the Sheriff.

“I've got some bad news.”

S hit.

Chapter Comments

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Chapter 127

CHAPTER 127 Staged

Beil Ss w

Emma

It was half past four in the morning when I finally exited the hospital, completely exhausted. I was assigned to pull an all-nighter since we were understaffed.

Ford Martin, as expected, was arrested for the death of Theodore Cohen, Rodney Marshall was promoted to Junior Nurse Administrator while some of my colleagues decided it was best if they called in sick to stay away from the controversy the hospital was currently in.

It didn't matter to the townsfolk though. They had no choice. St. Elizabeth's was the only hospital in New Salem.

Take Nicole Davis, for example. She was better off going to another hospital for treatment since she was clearly in danger. Apparently, some truck crashed into her car while the driver... well, he fled the scene and would have disappeared, if it weren't for Beaufort and

Max.

Unfortunately, she didn't have a choice. So, it was up to me, Autumn... and Link... to keep

her safe.

Nicole was rushed into the ER with a fractured leg and arm, several broken ribs, a punctur

lung yet she was lucky to have sustained minor head injuries. After the doctors' initial assessment, she was immediately wheeled into an OR.

She finally came out from surgery in the wee hours of the morning, stable, but unconscious. The doctors decided to put her in a medically induced coma to prevent parts of her brain from swelling, given she had sustained trauma to the head..

While I waited for her to come out of the operating room, I had to endure watching... with disgust... the dashing Lincoln Murphy flirt with the nurses on duty at the nurses' station near Nicole's designated room at the ICU.

Because he was so charming, my colleagues giggled at all his wisecracks and innuendoes.... something they never did with Ford.

If they only knew that he was a ruthless assassin. All of Beaufort's men were.

I remember the day when I sawed off the finger of the young wife of Nikolai Devin... I remember how my hands shook uncontrollably. Beaufort, unfortunately, sees puking or

1/6

CHAPTER 127 Staged

because of my shaky hands.

While Beaufort sees it as a weakness, I, on the other hand, see it as human. But I do

sav

understand Beaufort. You can't be an assassin and have a conscience. It doesn't work that

way.

I had just finished checking on Nicole and was about to grab a cup of coffee when I heard my

name.

"Hey, Clarke, Rodney called out to me from behind. I quickly turned around and saw him with a clipboard. "You've been here almost twenty-four hours. You should go home and get some rest. Come in around noon. I'll have someone else cover your shift for the morning."

"Junior Administrator Rodney Marshall," I said, smiling. "How's your first day?"

"Toxic," he said. "Hartman has me doing all of her work. I dropped by her office around six yesterday evening and found it empty. I guess since she has me as her assistant, she gets to leave the hospital whenever she wants." He peeked into Nicole's room. "She's stable... good. I'll assign Nurse Roberts to take care of her until you get back." He pointed at Link. "Is that the boyfriend?" "No," I answered. "He's just a Good Samaritan."

"He looks more like a Prince Charming to me," he muttered, pertaining to his goatee. "Anyway, Clarke, go home and get some rest. I'll see you later at noon."

"What about you? Aren't you going to get some sleep?" I asked, concerned.

"I'll grab a couple of hours of sleep in my new office," he answered, waving goodbye and walking away. "Go home, Clarke. That's an order."

Ss.

After getting all my stuff from my locker, I exited the hospital and walked through the parking lot to where my car was parked underneath a pair of old trees. They were huge trees, their trunks filled with carved initials of loved ones who have passed away at this very hospital. While others saw it as tragic, I saw the beauty of still being kept as a part of the community even in the afterlife.

"I've been waiting for you to come out of the hospital," a familiar female voice said. "I want the truth and you, Emma Clarke, are going to give me the truth."

Lindsay Hartman came out from the shadows of the trees, a gun in her right hand and a Bluetooth earpiece inserted in one ear. She was hither recording our conversation or relaying it?

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it to someone through her phone. Damn this bitch.

I dropped my bag on the ground and raised my hands above my head, steadying my breathing. I had to stay calm.

Remember your training, Emma.

I needed to distract her.

"The truth is your grandnephew sexually harasses women and is a murderer," I said calmly. "Is that so hard to accept?"

"Ford said he bumped into you in the corridor right before he gave Theodore Cohen his medication yesterday morning," Lindsay Hartman said, ignoring what I had said. "I went through the CCTV footage and couldn't find you anywhere in it."

"That's because Ford is lying. He's a liar!"

"I know he's a liar, Nurse Emma. I'm the one who taught him how to lie. This is why I know Ford is telling the truth. You bumped into him and changed the IV bag, didn't you? Why Emma? Just because he showed interest? Touched you in an offending way? Or is it because someone wants the Martins out of the way? If that's the case, why not hurt Ford? Why would

need to kill Theodore Cohen?"

you

"I have no idea what you're talking about, Nurse Administrator Hartman, because I'd Theodore Cohen. Ford did," I replied, keeping the status quo.

"Oh, sure, keep using my name, Emma. There's nobody here. Even if you scream, no one will be able to hear you. The guards are busy sleeping at their stations and it's around this time when most of the staff doze off," Hartman said, her face blank. She obviously had her poker face on. I was having trouble discerning whether she was hell-bent on killing me or if this was just a bluff. "So tell me, who are you working for, Emma Clarke?"

"I work at St. Elizabeth Memorial Hospital," I answered gruffly.

"Wrong answer!" She screeched. "You think I'm playing with you, don't you?" She was starting to feel frustrated.

"No, I don't. I just think you're talking to the wrong person." This time she smiled sweetly.

"You're right. I am talking to the wrong person. You know, I went through your file again and I found it so well-done that it felt strange... and it made me wonder. So I did some digging³⁴⁶

CHAPTER 127 Staged

called all the hospitals in the West Coast when I happened to stumble upon Palmer Memorial using the number I found on their website. They said no one with the name Emma Clarke has ever worked there, but they did have a nurse named Emma Caruso working for them until a month ago. What was even stranger though was when I called the number I found on your file. The person who answered enumerated everything on your file like she was reading it, but accidentally uttered a different surname before reverting back to Clarke. I believe you're real name is Emma Caruso, yes?"

S\$ hit! I'm goi

going to have to tell Domenico that Primo's call center agents screwed up!

When I didn't answer, she smiled at me, clicked the Bluetooth earpiece off and lowered her gun. "I want twenty million dollars wired to an offshore account and I want it done by the

time the sun rises."

She was after money... This is why she sent Ford to negotiate with the hospital director. They wanted to milk the Martins... Maybe so she could retire with a sizeable nest egg of her

Own.

I lowered my hands to my sides and stared at her with a bewildered expression on my face.

"Aren't you related to the Martins? Shouldn't you be rich on your own?" I asked.

is

*My niece never learned the virtue of giving nor sharing," she scoffed. "All she ever did was take and take. Where do you think Ford gets that from? His mother! If it weren'

mess, Ford would have offered his trust fund in exchange for my position. Well

retire rich. That's where you come in. So, will you send me the money or should

you now?"

| sighed. It was always about money.

| was about to negotiate, when, from the corner of my eye, | saw a figure in a suit dar behind the trees. No need to negotiate. Help was on its way.

"You are barking up the wrong tree, Nurse Administrator Hartman," | said. "I don't have th kind of money."

"Surely the person you work for has that kind of money," she replied.

"Again, | work in that hospital... just like you. I'm guessing the board has that kind of money, but you know they'll never give it to any of us. We're just pawns who they work to the bone," | explained.

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"Then, I'll just have to shoot you now and tell everyone you confessed to the murder of one Theodore

Cohen," she said, raising her gun and aiming it at me.

"| don't think so," a man's voice said.

Before Lindsay Hartman could react, Link shot her on the right side of the head, his silencer stifling the sound of the gunshot. She collapsed on the grass, her blood pooling beneath her.

Link pocketed her gun, placed his gun in her hand then squeezed the trigger. | noticed he was wearing leather gloves. He came prepared.

He patted her down, found her keys in one of her pockets, and removed her earpiece.

“Leave now,” Link said. “Autumn is already handling the CCTV footage. Don’t leave anything behind.... because I’m going to stage this as a suicide.”

Without a second thought, | picked up my bag, entered my car and drove off.

The Martins are going to be pissed when they hear Lindsay Hartman committed suicide.

So long, Hartman.

Since Hartman figured out who | really was, | needed to ask Domenico for my next c action. | dialed his number.

“Emma, this is De Luca. Domenico has been shot and is unconscious. How can | help yo

“I’ve been found out, but the person is dead. What should | do?” | heard a couple of voices the background before | got an answer.

“Emma, this is Beaufort. Call in sick so we can assess the situation. Where are you now?”

“I’m on my way home,” | answered, yawning.

“Can you drive to Mandan HQ?” Beaufort asked.

“| don’t know. I’m really tired.”

“That’s okay. Head to the warehouse behind the commercial complex. I’ll have someone drive

you hare And ramamber call in sick

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CHAPTER 127 Staged

Finally, a day off.

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Chapter 128

CHAPTER 128 Purse

Link

| thought North Dakota was going to be boring, but it turns out it's much more exciting than California. Here, we were playing with people, toying with their relationships, messing with their heads. Back home, we would be hung by our testicles if we tried doing this to any of

our mafia brothers and sisters.

But here, in this small rural town, we had full reign.

| always wanted to be part of a bit and | feel blessed Beaufort included me. Usually, it was either S

Sam or Max working with him, while the rest of us assisted. It was disappointing, but we understood. Sam could move around like he was invisible while Max could practically do the same... which made those two Beaufort's most valuable assets.

"Stealth is your greatest ally. Beaufort's words of wisdom.

When | got the call to move to North Dakota, | didn't hesitate. | immediately volunteered. my services, hoping Beaufort would realize | was as indispensable as Sam or Max, then maybe, he would finally include me in all his missions. Sure, | was valuable to him as his lawyer, but | wanted to earn his respect as an assassin... and | vowed | would gain his respect before we all had to go back to California.

Truly, this week alone has been mind-boggling.

From killing a woman in her home to setting the funeral home on fire...

From murdering a man in his hospital bed to torturing a driver for information...

| swear, without the three big bosses watching over us, we had the freedom to act as we saw

fit.

No wonder people wanted in. Even snotty Emma Caruso found her way here, playing the dutiful nurse bit. | saw her mouth, "Babysitter," as she walked past me earlier.

| didn't mind babysitting Nicole Davis. She was in danger which meant there was a chance | would see some action. Plus, this hospital was in the middle of a murder investigation. Roaming these hallways gave me the opportunity to gather information, Emma looked like she was going to puke while she watched me flirt with the female nurses/5

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CHAPTER 128 Purse

or the other, so these women would open up to me.

And in a matter of thirty minutes, | found out that some of these nurses took drugs to stay awake. Surprisingly, one of them even told me who their dealer was, pointing at him as he walked towards Emma.

It wasn't shocking watching Emma make googly eyes at the man who these other nurses called their go-to person for meth. Drugs and smuggling were Domenico's area of expertise. As they say, "Like attracts like."

Since Junior Nurse Administrator Crystal Meth sent Emma home, | decided to stay until sunrise, then have someone else guard Nicole while | got ready to represent Ford Martin, the alleged nurse killer. | haven't received his call yet, but | was sure he was going to make that

call soon.

Just when | was thinking this may end up as a slow night, out of the blue, Autumn came to alert me that Emma was in distress.

| was seated in one of those hard hospital chairs along the hallway, playing games on my phone, when Autumn suddenly sat down beside me, sipping on a cup of coffee. | noticed she was wearing latex gloves.

“We have a 9-1-1 situation. Emma has her hands raised above her head, standing in the parking lot beside those two old trees. It's Hartman,” she mumbled while her cup was in between her lips. “You help her while | take care of the footage.” She quickly stood up. walked away leaving a folded sheet of paper on the chair she vacated.

Good thing Beaufort had me dip my fingertips in silicone. No fingerprints.

| pocketed the sheet of paper, stood up and walked to the nurse's station.

“I'm just gonna grab a cup of coffee downstairs,” | said. “I'd really appreciate it if you keep an eye on Miss Nicole.”

“Sure, Link,” the pretty brunette named Bea said, smiling. “Anything for you.”

“I'll see to it that | bring you a cup,” | said gratefully and quickly walked towards the stairwell. As | walked down the steps, | took out my leather gloves and put them on, feeling gloriously excited.

This was why | was under Beaufort. | was a stone cold killer.

2/5

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| took out the sheet of paper and read it, knowing what | had to do. I'll confirm Hartman's identity first, then slip this piece of paper onto her corpse.

Quick thinking, Autumn.

| screwed on my silencer and tucked my gun under my jacket. It was time to play assassin.

| decided to use the service entrance at the side of the hospital to avoid being seen. Outside was quiet. There were no guards and there was no one driving along the streets fronting the hospital.

| dashed towards the two old trees, noticing Emma was speaking to someone hidden beneath the shadows. As | got closer, | discovered Emma was talking to an elderly woman who had a gun in her right hand.

Seemed like Domenico's team was having a streak of bad luck. Beaufort repeatedly stressed

we should never underestimate the people we were dealing with. | guess Domenico and his

team never got the memo.novelbin

| darted around the trees to listen to their conversation. | made sure to only step on the

grass and not the dirt. | didn't want to leave any shoe prints.

"Well, | can still retire rich. That's where you come in. So, will you send me the money or

should | just kill you now?"

"You are barking up the wrong tree, Nurse Administrator Hartman," Emma replied.

have that kind of money."

Confirmed. The old lady was Hartman.

Hartman had some balls. She confronted a person thinking she had the upper hand just because she held a gun.

And she wanted money... lots of it. "When a person negotiates for money, you know they'll double cross you once that money runs out." Another of Beaufort's words of wisdom.

Emma didn't negotiate, instead she played the poor nurse part. | saw the old woman's hand shake. That wasn't what she was hoping to hear.

"Then, I'll just shoot you now and tell everyone you confessed to the murder of one Theodore Cohen," she said, raising her gun and aiming it at Emina.

CHAPTER 128 Purse

The old woman

Was 5

distracted, she didn't notice me come up to her side. I positioned.

myself near her right hand and aimed at the side of her head.

"I don't think so," I murmured, squeezing the trigger.

She collapsed on the grass... without a sound. I quickly pocketed her gun and replaced it with mine, placing her fingers on the trigger and squeezing it. With that done, I patted her down, taking whatever was in her pockets, including her earpiece. "Leave now," I instructed Emma, "Autumn is already handling the CCTV footage. Don't leave anything behind.... because I'm going to stage this as a suicide."

Without even a 'thank you, she left. Of course. Domenico's team members have always been proud, especially the one named De Luca. God, how I disliked him.

I slipped the piece of paper into the old woman's pocket, unscrewed my silencer and walked

away to look for her car. I messaged Autumn asking for the make and model of Hartman's

car. She messaged me it was a Subaru parked in front of the gift shop right across the street.

I opened the car and quickly searched for anything important. I found her purse stashed inside the glove compartment.

I opened it and checked to see what was inside. I found her phone, wallet and some other stuff. Nothing else was inside the car except for a spare car key hidden inside the center console. I was hoping to find a laptop.

Well, I have the keys to her house. I'll have someone sneak in before her body is found... maybe I can do it myself.

| took the valuables from her purse except for her wallet, removed the SD card from the dashcam, left her car doors unlocked and walked back to my car to take a look at the stuff | took. | was seated in the backseat deciding whether | should sneak into Hartman's home. when | accidentally dozed off. | was awakened by the sound of my phone ringing.

"Mr. Murphy, good morning," a man's voice greeted me. "This is Undersheriff Jack Emery."

"Good morning, Undersheriff. Seems... | dozed off," | said, annoyed at being caught off guard. | checked my watch for the time and heaved a sigh of relief. | was only asleep for ten minutes. "How can | help you?"

"Norma Martin asked me to call you. | think Bo Xavier, a client of yours, told her to get in touch with you. She needs you to represent her son. He's here in a holding cell at the

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Sheriff's station."

"On what grounds?" | asked.

"Murder," he answered.

"Does this by any chance have to do with the former mayor's untimely death?" | asked, confirming.

"Yes, it does."

| didn't expect Jack to call me. | was waiting for Norma or Ford Martin.

"I'll just check up on Nicole Davis first, take a shower, then I'll head to the station. I'll even have my secretary set a bail hearing for this morning," | rambled like | was reading a 'to do'

list.

"You're still at the hospital?" He asked, surprised.

“Yes. I wanted to make sure she was stable before I left. Tell my client not to say a word until

I arrive.”

I stretched, preparing myself for battle. If Norma Martin thinks her son can get out scot-free,

she’s wrong.

I hate losing, but for this particular case, I’ll gladly take the fall.

But first, I needed someone to sneak inside Hartman’s house while it was still dark. The number of one of our men named Jake. “Wait for me at the corner of Main near the complex. I have something for you to do.”

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Chapter 129

CHAPTER 129 Suicide Note

The Sheriff

It was almost six in the morning when I got the call from Bismarck Police. It was a phone call I wasn’t expecting.

“Sheriff Nathan Combs, I’m Detective Carl Matthews of the Bismarck Police Department. I’d like to apologize for the hour, but there seems to be a series of untoward incidences that seem

to be linked to the small town of New Salem. The most recent being a shootout at the Huff

Hills mansion which intel says is owned by CMD Enterprises. | called the number listed. down and it was answered by a man who claims he's the attorney of the CEO of the company, a woman named Cynthia McDowell, who happens to reside at Highland Oaks, New Salem. | was hoping you could get in touch with her and tell her to drop by the precinct. There are a few questions | need to ask her," the man said.

"That's not possible, Detective Matthews," | replied, scratching my head, "Cynthia McDowell passed away last Sunday around midnight." | heard his sharp intake of breath.

"That's, uh, that's unfortunate. Is there anyone else | could talk to? Her husband, a brother or

sister, maybe her son or daughter?"

"Her son is out of the country on vacation," | told him. "No one knows when he'll be back.

Her husband has been dead for years and from what | know of her, she doesn't have any brothers or sisters. I'm sorry if | can't be of much help to you."

"No, no... you're helping me just fine, Sheriff," he said.

"If there aren't any more questions, Detective, | have work to do," | said, hoping that was it. Apparently, there was more.

"Hold on, Sheriff... Before you hang up, | also called to inform you that we found a car at Elk Cliff, abandoned, registered to a Cris Murdock who | understand is a councilman of your town. We didn't find anything inside except for a pair of shoes and a set of clothing in the trunk. Dashcam is missing and it seems the car's exterior and interior have been wiped. clean. The people from our crime lab can't find one single print. Engine's cold... so we figure the car has been here all night. | have my men looking through the CCTV footage near the area and unfortunately, we haven't found anything yet. Has anyone reported him missing?" "No, not that I'm aware of," | answered.

"I've been preoccupied with the investigation on the circumstances of the death of our former mayor as well as an ongoing investigation on the /6

CHAPTER 129 Suicide Note

murders of several others, assets of mine who was helping us bust a drug syndicate. We believe a Marla Lawrence together with a group of unknown assailants murdered our assets."

gman

"Marla Lawrence... the name Marla was mentioned by a man we found injured at the diner several days ago," he said, pausing to go through his little notepad. "Here it is, a young named Riley Harris. He was struck by a vehicle and is currently in the hospital, unconscious." | closed my eyes, trying not to panic.

This was bad.

If Riley ever wakes up, there was a big chance he'd talk, putting everyone in jeopardy.

"| wasn't informed Riley Harris figured into an accident there. I'll call his grandmother and

have him transferred here-"

"Sorry to interrupt, but it wasn't merely an accident, Sheriff. Currently, he is under the custody of the Bismarck Police. We're hoping when he wakes up, he'll be able to help us with our investigation," the detective said, starting to sound suspicious. "I called your office a couple of days ago and informed one of your deputies, a Deputy Randall Evans, about the incident. | was under the impression he notified you of the situation. Anyway, if it isn't any trouble, I'd appreciate it if you could come by our police station. Any time is fine."

"I'll see, Detective. I'm really busy. Maybe | can send someone else to answer all your

questions," | replied, angry at Randy for not informing me about Riley. He was obviously sor

at me since | refused to give him more money.

“Sure, Sheriff. That'll be fine too. By the way, if you get in touch with Councilman Cris Murdock, tell him to come by the station so he can pick up his car,” the detective said.

“Thank you, Sheriff, and good day.”

This was just fantastic.

Riley Harris and Cris Murdock's car were in Bismarck Police custody and to top it all off, they needed someone from New Salem's Sheriff Station to help with their investigation.

| dialed Cris' number and it went straight to voicemail. | debated whether | should call Lisa.

It was too early and | didn't want to alarm her if Cris was indeed missing.

There was only one person | could trust to handle the situation.

Jack.

2/6

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CHAPTER 129 Suicide Note

60%

“| got some bad news. | just got a call from Bismarck Police. They found Cris Murdock's car abandoned near the side of Elk Cliff,” | said after he answered. He uttered a curse. “Do you know anything about this?”

“Lisa came by the station around four this morning to file a missing person's report,” Jack answered. It was my turn to utter a curse. Cris is missing!

“Well, | need you to head down to Bismarck and while you're at it, inform Lisa,” | instructed.

“And ask Randy why in the hell didn't he tell me Riley Harris is in a hospital in Bismarck.”

“Riley’s in the hospital? | spoke to his grandmother the other day and she said she didn’t know where he was,” he said, sounding frustrated. “Sheriff, if Riley talks, we’re all going to go

to jail.”

“| know. I’ll send someone to take care of him. In the meantime, | need you to put on a show and speak to Detective Matthews at the Bismarck Police Station.”

Sure. | just

need to finish my breakfast and head back to the station first. After | finish with the Martins and their new attorney, I’ll call Lisa and have her come with me to Bismarck.”

“Who is this new attorney?”

“Lincoln Murphy, the one who sprung Bo out after the Cynthia McDowell fiasco,” he

explained.

Vv

“| know him,” | said. “Take your time. The detectives at Bismarck said they’re in the wake of our investigation on the death of Theodore Cohen. Maybe I’ll see station after we get this barn set up. We can’t be seen here at sunrise which is h

less than an hour. I’ll contact Bismarck Police and tell them to expect you. And, of

forget, call the district attorney so the both of you can meet this Lincoln Murphy-”

| paused, noticing one of my deputies running towards me with his phone in his hand. “Sheriff, | just got a call from St. Elizabeth’s. Seems there’s a dead body in their parking

Female.”

it

God damn it! This shit isn't going to end.

"Jack, you head on back to the station and wait for the Martins' attorney and the DA. I gotta shuffle it back to St. Elizabeth's. There's a dead body in their parking lot," I said, informing him of our new case.

"Who is it this time?" Jack asked shocked.

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CHAPTER 129 Suicide Note

"I don't know, but they say it's female," I answered. "It's going to be another long day. I was hoping to go home and take a shower. Seems I'm not going to." I sighed and ran my fingers through my oily hair. "Call me if you have trouble keeping Ford Martin in lock up. I don't want that shit out."

"Will do, Sheriff," Jack said and hung up.

"Men, that'll do," I said, surveying the chairs and tables in the barn. I pointed at my deputies. "You two, take the crates back to Cohen Mansion and you three, you guys are with me."

"Sheriff, what do you need us to do after we've unloaded the crates?" A deputy assigned to the crates asked.

"I need you to give this to the judge," I said, handing him an envelope full of money. "Liam doesn't want Ford to make bail and skip town. Tell the judge, if he wants more, he knows who to call."

By the time we reached the hospital, the sun was up. Several of my men from the station had cordoned the area off from the public and were trying to subdue the media.

I saw the medical examiner crouching down beside a woman's body. Her salt and pepper hair was twisted in a bun and she was wearing white coveralls with 'Medical Examiner' printed on

the back. She was a woman in her early fifties with light green eyes and soft features, something her daughter, Sarah Hughes, didn't inherit from her.

| looked down at the dead body lying on the ground and recognized the face Administrator Lindsay Hartman.

This just keeps getting better and better.

“Dr. Hughes,” | greeted the medical examiner. “What do we have here?” She stood up

walked towards me.

“Lindsay Hartman, aged 62, cause of death gunshot wound to the right temple. There’s stippling around the entry point consistent with suicide. Body’s still warm. | give time of death approximately around five in the morning... give or take. By the way, | found this in the pocket of her Chanel suit. It’s a suicide note. She handed me a folded sheet of paper. “I don’t know, Sheriff... It just seems so bizarre.”

“What do you mean?” | asked, putting on the latex gloves | have in my pocket and taking the sheet of paper from her.

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CHAPTER 129 Suicide Note

“She’s suppose to be retiring in a week or so,” she said. “I even spoke to her last week about retirement homes in Florida. She was thinking of moving to some place warm when she retired. But now... this. It seems so out of character.”

“The suicide?” | asked. Lindsay Hartman was a cold woman, alone and lonely. Her contemplating suicide was a possibility.

“No, Sheriff. Killing Theodore Cohen,” Dr. Hughes answered to my surprise. “It’s all there in that note. She confesses to injecting Theodore Cohen’s IV bag with a lethal cocktail of digoxin and insulin. | mean, what did she have against Theodore? It doesn’t make any

sense.

“She what?!” | hurriedly unfolded the sheet of paper and quickly read its contents.

On the thin sheet of paper was Lindsay Hartman's well-written confession as well as an apology for including Ford Martin in her plans, stressing there was no other way to kill Theodore Cohen. Although the suicide note was well crafted, Lindsay Hartman didn't leave a reason why she wanted Theodore dead.

My eyes narrowed suspiciously. This made things so convenient for Ford...

"You're right, Dr. Hughes," I said gruffly. "Lindsay Hartman committing suicide doesn't make any sense unless this was all done purposely." Dr. Hughes raised her eyebrows at my sudden implication.

"Well, her confession absolves the hospital of any and all liability, Sheriff," Dr. H pointed out. "As for Ford Martin, if he gets a really good lawyer, he can either be all charges or go to jail for maybe twelve months on involuntary manslaughter cha thing is, if you think about it, the pharmacist who dispensed the medication should liable as well. If the pharmacist isn't held accountable for Theodore's death, the same apply to Ford Martin. His attorney will definitely use that argument in Ford's defense, charges against Ford will be dropped."

"But there were text messages on his phone," I argued.

"Which could have all been sent by Lindsay Hartman before she grew a conscience," Dr. Hughes said. "It's easy. All you need is an app on your phone." I raised an eyebrow and looked at her skeptically. She bounced her head and rolled her eyes. "If this was truly a suicide."

"I'll talk to the DA about the pharmacist, but twelve months for involuntary manslaughter isn't enough. If I can't get Ford for killing Theodore, I'll get him for sexual ha

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non-consensual pornography instead," I told her. She sighed, nodding her head.

"If it isn't one thing, it's another. A lot of the female staff at the hospital will be grateful. Well, I'll leave it up to you to inform next of kin, I'll call you if anything

comes up from the autopsy. Have a good morning, Sheriff.” Dr. Hughes gestured to her team to put Lindsay Hartman's corpse in a body bag.

After taking a photo of the suicide note, | placed the note in a plastic bag and gave it to our crime scene operatives. “I want you to check this for fingerprints asap and have the lab examine if that signature is a forgery.” Then, | instructed my men. “Get this place cleaned up

and tell the media they'll get a statement later in the day. When you're done, divide yourselves into two teams. | need one team to search Lindsay Hartman's home and another

to search her office and to look for her car.”

After giving my instructions, | quickly drove back to the station before the news of Lindsay Hartman's suicide spread.

There was no way in hell I'd allow the Martins to win.

Chapter Comments

Elizabeth Johnson

I'm getting more confused with each chapter.

VIEW 1 COMMENT

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Chapter 130

CHAPTER 130 Meeting the Martins

[Link](#)

The sun was rising when | left Highland Oaks.

Before meeting up with Jake, I made a quick stop at the diner to pick up a sandwich.

As I was leaving the diner, I saw a black Jaguar enter the parking area. But instead of parking, it continued moving towards the back. It was my first time to ever see that car in New Salem, so I quickly memorized its plate number before driving off.

I found Jake casually seated on a bench along Main Street, drinking coffee from one of Bo's disposable cups. When he saw my car, he threw his cup in the trash bin, opened the car door to the passenger's side and climbed in.

Jake was what the Blood Disciples called a 'cross. He was exceptionally gifted, being both a skilled hacker and a trained mercenary, so it wasn't a surprise when Primo and Beaufort both tapped him to join their crew. Jake was given three days to decide, a cross that laid heavily on his shoulders. Ultimately, he chose Beaufort despite being heavily courted by Primo. It was one of those rare chances for Primo to employ a man with almost the same skillset as Beaufort, however the excitement of pursuing your prey on the field was something a computer or any gadget couldn't give Jake.

Jake was a muscular man of average height. His short brown hair matched the color of his eyes while his muscular physique was well-hidden under an oversized gray hoodie.... he loved wearing hoodies.

"I got a copy of all of Hartman's files on her laptop," Jake said, showing me a USB flash drive. "She was planning to leave New Salem under an alias, Mary Turner. That note you said you got from Autumn was actually written by Hartman herself."

the note

"So Hartman was going to take the fall by skipping town," I said. "The signature on looked authentic, so I'm guessing Hartman left the note in her office and Autumn took it." I maneuvered my car to the Sheriff's station, then handed him Hartman's phone. "I checked her call log and noticed most of Hartman's recent calls were from Norma Martin. One guess is they were conspiring together. Did you find a money trail?" I asked.

"Yes, I did," he answered, scrolling through the phone. "Half a million dollars was sent to Hartman directly from Norma Martin's account. I grimaced. Five

hundred grand wasn't enough. No wonder Hartman held Emma at gunpoint. "I also checked Hartman's finances

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CHAPTER 130 Meeting the Martins

60%

and found she has a sizeable amount saved up in her bank account. The five hundred thousand dollars together with her savings is actually enough to buy this house she was eyeing in Miami, but that would leave her with little left. I figured the money was a down- payment, but..."

"But what? I mean it is possible it's a down-payment. If Hartman was planning to sk ip town, she would lose her retirement benefits," I pointed out.

"I thought the same, so I checked Norma Martin's account and discovered she's mostly in debt with the credit card... the five hundred thousand being the last of her money. Surprisingly, though, Ford Martin's trust is still intact. According to the stipulations provided by the grantor, Ford is allowed to withdraw a hefty sum at any time, given the money is intended to be used for livelihood, business or an emergency."

I had to make a call to Beaufort and inform him, Norma needed money and he had lots of it.

"Link, what's up?" He shouted. The background noise was really loud. I suspected he was in

the back of one of his trucks heading back to New Salem..

"I just wanted to inform you it seems Norma Martin paid Lindsay Hartman all the money she

had left, so Hartman would take the fall for Ford. What if Hartman told Norma about Emma,

so the both of them could milk Emma for money?"

"I doubt it," Beaufort answered. "But it can't be possible Norma's broke though... She bought the McDowell's pharmacy after Cynthia died." Apparently Primo has checked Norma's

finances yet.

"Who said she bought it?" I asked, surprised.

"Marla Lawrence. She got the info from the ex-husband," he answered. The ex-husband who

no one has ever seen or met.

"It's probably all a lie. I had Jake do some recon at Hartman's house and he says Norma is in debt," I explained.

"I see... Emma did mention Lindsay Hartman believed Norma was one selfish bitch. I

guess she didn't know Norma's broke. Thanks for the info, Link. I'm going to have Cristos look into everything and plan accordingly. Where are you headed now?"

"To the Sheriff's station to meet my new client," I answered.

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"Don't forget to put in your earpiece. By the way good work on Hartman. I knew I could

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count on you, Link."

Hearing his praise made my heart swell. I was finally gaining his respect.

"Jake, take my car and hand the USB and the phone to Beaufort," I said, stopping the car right across the street from the Sheriff's Station. It was around seven-thirty and the sun was already up in the sky. After inserting my earpiece and making sure it was hidden, I opened the car door. "After you report to Beaufort, tell him I need you with me today, just in case I need someone to carry out some important errands."

"Sure thing, Link," he said, but paused before opening his door. "I forgot to tell you... | also found out that about forty female nurses filed sexual harassment complaints against Ford

Martin, but most, if not all, didn't pursue it."

"That many?" | asked before getting out of the car. And what did Hartman do?"

"She sent the complaints to the hospital director. | checked her email and the hospital director said he would take care of everything. | don't know what he did or say to these women, but they immediately withdrew their complaints," Jake said after he exited the car.

"Autumn must have that information. Tell Beaufort to have Primo ask Autumn for it," | instructed Jake. "Soon, we'll be able to piece all of this together. Personally, | think this sexual harassment thing Ford has got going on has something to do with drugs." "Drugs?" Jake asked, surprised.

"Some of these nurses do drugs to stay awake. It's possible Ford targeted them because he knew he could use his knowledge of their drug use as a shield."

"That sounds really fucked up," Jake replied, realizing how twisted everyone in this town really was. "I thought we were only dealing with a handful of sick fucks. | wasn't expecting.

there'd be more."

"| know what you mean. By the way, change into something nice will you... like a suit."

"Hoodies are my thing, Link," he said as he climbed into the driver's seat of my car. He gave me a small salute before he drove off heading towards the complex.

Since it was still early, the parking lot at the station was practically empty. Good. | still had enough time to confer with my client before the district attorney arrived.

Inside, | went straight to Jack who was on the phone with someone. He mouthed, “Norma 6

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over there,” and pointed towards the back of the station.

At the waiting area, | found Norma Martin on her phone, looking quite frustrated.

“Having trouble contacting someone?” | asked, smiling down at her.

“I’m trying to call my aunt,” she murmured, a small smile playing on her lips. “But her phone’s off. She’s probably getting ready for work.” She waved a dismissive hand in the air,

pretending it was nothing. “You must be Bo’s attorney.”

“Yes, I’m Lincoln Murphy. Undersheriff Jack Emery informed me of your son’s case. I’d like to have a few moments with your son before we speak to the district attorney on the circumstances of the case-” | paused, noticing Norma’s eyes widen with shock. “It can’t be...,” she mumbled under her breath.

| turned around to find a rather short, stocky fellow in a gray suit standing behind me. His oily dark brown hair was slicked back while his dark moustache was well trimmed. He had dark beady eyes, a wide nose as well as a wide mouth while his lips were dark from smoking. | could tell... he smelled like a cigar.

“Norma, what is this nonsense | hear? Ford killed Theodore? Is this true?” The man asked, scowling at her. Norma tried to answer, but her lips wouldn’t move. | decided to butt in

“I’m sorry. Have we met? I’m Lincoln Murphy, attorney to Ford Martin-”

“It’s Martin, Mr. Murphy,” the man corrected me, using the Spanish pronunciation of M “I’m Tomas Martin, Norma’s ex-husband, but you can call me Thomas.” He grabbed my and shook it. “Mr. Murphy, | don’t care how much | have to pay, but | want my son out by day end. If he is truly guilty, | want him to have the lightest sentence possible for his crin You do this for me and | will make you a wealthy man. | can assure you... | keep my promises.”

“Tomas, I already made a deal with Liam. This is why I need-”

“Enough, Norma,” Tomas Martin said, cutting her off. “The pharmacy stays in the organization. I can’t believe you. You only had one thing to do... to watch over our son, but you keep gallivanting with that college nifio. I thought maybe you would grow up if I gave

you

less money, but you have become worse.”

This is where Norma’s money troubles stem from.

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60%

“Our son is not a child. He is a grown man, Tomas,” Norma replied haughtily. “And you have no right giving me less money. I am entitled to a piece of the pie, you jackass!”

“Link, cough once for yes. Is this Tomas Martin Hispanic?” Beaufort asked through my earpiece. I coughed to answer Beaufort, but ended up interrupting the Martins’ little spat. They both looked at me, embarrassed at their vile behavior.

“I think it’s better if we take this discussion away from prying ears... yes?” I said, gesturing for them to move further into the waiting area while I waited for Beaufort’s instructions. The last time we talked about Ford, Beaufort wanted me to make sure he went to jail. But Tomas

Martin was a game changer.

“The Angels of Darkness is primarily the Mexican Mafia. I want you to get on Tomas’ good

side. If he wants Ford out, get him out. Do whatever it takes, Link, Beaufort said. I

undoubtedly heard the excitement in his voice.

I smiled at Ford's parents as they both calmed down..

Aplan was already forming in my head.

"Mr. Martin, leave it to me. I'll get your son out.

Tomas Martin grinned at me. "I like you already.

| excused myself to call Autumn. On my way outside, | bumped into the district at

needed to act fast.

Outside, | saw a lone deputy admiring himself through his car window. | quickly hid hoping he wouldn't notice me.

| was about to dial when | saw the Sheriffs car speeding towards the station. | decided to send Autumn a message instead and head back inside.

What stopped me though was the harsh greeting the Sheriff gave the lone deputy.

There was something else going on.

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The Joy of Revenge

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