

# **The Joy of Revenge #Chapter 91 - Read The Joy of Revenge Chapter 91**

Chapter 91

CHAPTER 91 Crime Scene

Jack

| grew up in Brook Haven... And never had | seen something like this before. It was

gruesome.

At the entrance of my neighborhood, a black Honda was parked in the middle of the road. Two patrol cars, a white forensic investigation van and a medical examiner fleet vehicle were already at the scene. The area was cordoned off from the public with yellow barricade tape.

“What do we have here?” | asked the deputy in charge as | lifted the yellow tape so | could enter the area. | looked down and saw two pools of blood.

“Two male bodies. Cause of death, gunshot wound to the head. One has been identified as Anthony “Tony” Miller while the other is Dirk “The Jerk Harris. Tony’s younger brother, Johnny, was found dead on the floor in the living room of the Lawrence residence. Cause of death, gunshot wound to the head. There was no sign of force entry and Ms. Lawrence and her daughter Marla are nowhere to be found,” the deputy said, reading from his small

writing pad.

“Is Ms. Lawrence’s red truck in the driveway?” | asked.

“Yep, including a brand new Jeep Cherokee. | heard Marla’s new boyfriend bought it for her, the deputy smirked.

“You know who the boyfriend is?” | asked.

“No. But no doubt them nosy neighbors of yours may know something,” he smirked again. | slapped him on the chest with the back of my hand to stop his snickering. He coughed and pocketed his writing pad. “Sorry, Undersheriff.”

“Have the forensics team collect the evidence then haul that car out of here. This is the only entrance into Brook Haven. I don’t want to inconvenience the residents,” I instructed. He nodded his head and walked away to oversee the crime scene.

I ducked under the tape and entered my residential area. I muttered a curse under my breath, disliking the fact that I had to walk all the way to Marla’s house. As I approached, I could see the flashing lights of patrol cars and I could hear the ruckus from the crowd. Although I was expecting a group of bystanders around Marla’s house, I didn’t would be a big assembly of curious onlookers.

expect there

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I pushed through the crowd, slowly making my way to the yellow barricade tape.

Nothing could prepare me for what I saw. If I had thought the two bodies at the entrance to Brook Haven was bad, what I discovered here was way worse.

A black van with bullet holes on its windshield had smashed into the lamp post near the Lawrence Residence. Bodies from two cars parked along the street were being carried out in body bags by people from the medical examiner’s department. I turned my head towards Marla’s house and I noticed the lone figure of the Sheriff standing in front of two body bags laying at the doorway. I decided to check in with him first.

As I crossed the Lawrence’s unkempt yard, I noticed the new Jeep Cherokee parked beside the Lawrence’s old truck. I felt envious.

If I was only a girl...

Sheriff, what's the body count?" I asked as I walked up beside him. He turned to look at me and pursed his lips.

“Two here, two in each of the cars and one in the van. Little Ray luckily came out unscathed. He was in the back of the van, hidden between the seats,” the Sheriff said.

“At least we have a witness. Did he see anything?” | asked. Sheriff Combs shook his head.

“No. The electricity went out and it was pitch black,” he said.

“Did he say why they were here in the first place? Was he armed?” | asked, hoping for

clarity.

for

“He won't answer any of my questions and yes, he had a gun. He says he wants a lawyer Sheriff mumbled. He suddenly looked up at the sky as if he was praying to God for some direction. We have two missing females, Jack. | can only speculate, but this | can say

certain... This wasn't the work of an alcoholic woman and her frail daughter. All these dead men work for you know who. | need you to get me some answers from Little Ray. | have a feeling he'll talk to you.”

“Where is he?” | asked.

“He's in the back of my car. Be quick and be discreet.”

| nodded my head and quickly turned to look for the Sheriff's patrol car. | walked around the people working at their assigned areas and headed towards the vehicle which was parked a

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couple of houses away.

| opened the door to the driver's seat and entered the car. Little Ray, who was detained in the back seat, sat quietly, looking out the window. A wire grid partition separated the both of

us.

"I need answers, Little Ray, and I need them now. Why are all of you here at Marla's house? You guys know she's under my protection. She's like a little sister to me. I even drive her to work sometimes," I said.

"I want a lawyer," he said gruffly. I turned around and looked at him. Little Ray Thomas and Marla were the same age and were schoolmates in high school. He was thin, with dark brown hair, brown eyes and a protruding Adam's apple. I heard he was planning to go to college since he and his parents were earning enough from peddling drugs. What I didn't know is that he had branched out to become one of Pete's men.

"Alright. From the way I see it, you were found armed where seven people are found dead and two women are missing. That's life imprisonment from where I'm sitting," I reasoned.

"I didn't kill anyone, Jack. When Mason and Lewis didn't check in with Topher, Topher asked me to come with him to check it out, that's all," Little Ray admitted quickly.

"What were Mason and Lewis doing here in the first place? I know you know something. If you want me to help you, you have got to give me something, I negotiated. He closed his

eyes and hit his head against the back seat. He was probably debating whether or not to tell

me.

me.

"Fine," he finally exclaimed. "The guys were holding Ms. Lawrence as leverage," he spit out.

"Leverage? For what?" I asked.

na

"So Marla wouldn't put up a fight. Riley and his crew... they were supposed to deliver Marla to the boss. That's all I know," Little Ray said, lowering his head in shame.

"You were in the back of the van, right?" | asked

"Yes."

"And did you see anyone before you hit the lamp post?" | asked.

"No. The lights were out in the neighborhood. We had just turned the corner when all of a

board the windshield cracked then Tonher smashed into the lamp post. It happened

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so fast, he croaked. He averted his face and wiped his nose. He was crying. "I only figured out he was dead when | saw the bullet holes and the blood dripping from his..."

He lowered his head, hiding his face from me. | wanted to comfort him, but the partition was

in the way.

"I'm sorry you lost your friend, Little Ray. Don't worry, we'll get the son of a bitch who did this. As for you, the Sheriff just wants a short statement, then he'll release you from custody. You have North Dakota's permitless carry laws to thank for that," | said. | opened the car door and stepped out of the Sheriff's patrol car.

When | spoke with Liam earlier today, he said Dan told him Pete would be leaving New Salem for a vacation.

What the fuck was Pete doing kidnapping Marla and using her mother as leverage if he was leaving?

It must have been a lie.

| needed to find Riley or any one of his crew for more information. I'll call Dan and ask him to hold Riley's delivery so | could have a word with him.

Before speaking to Sheriff Combs, I made a pit stop at the van to check on those bullet

holes.

Luckily, one of our senior deputies was in charge of overseeing the van. He was staring at the hood of the van with a puzzled expression on his face.

“What's wrong, Randy?” I asked behind him. He walked towards me and pulled me aside so we could speak in private.

“If a person was shooting in front of the van with a smaller firearm, he would shoot repeatedly, then move out of the way. Not in this case. There are only two bullet holes and judging by the damage on Topher, I suspect long range and big caliber. I asked around and some of the residents said they heard something... like a distinct loud crack, but it didn't sound terrifying nor did it startle them. Some actually thought maybe it was lightning from a distance,” he explained.

“Where are you going with this, Deputy?” I asked, confused. After the Cynthia McDowell case, he obviously did his research. “The sniper used a suppressor. Undersheriff that kind of equipment is expensive. The

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cheapest is priced at twenty-eight hundred dollars and only fits with modern day weaponry. A suppressor brings down the sound of the supersonic boom of the bullet about... let's say, 200 decibels at least.”

“Okay. So, a sniper shot at this van?”

“Yep. And the two in the silver Kia plus the two at the entrance of Brook Haven. A smaller caliber was used on the two in the house and the two in the blue Camry,” Randy said.

“So you think there were two suspects who did this?” I asked.

“Two at least, maybe three at most, if you want to include a getaway driver. I asked the neighbors if they saw anyone walking around and all of them had

the same answer. None of them did. The only thing they did hear and see was this van crashing into the post and a black car speeding away from Marla's house right after." He suddenly leaned over and whispered in my ear, "This looks like another abduction case."

Randy was on Liam's payroll and believed everything had something to do with him. Since he was on a need to know basis, he didn't know about Pete or the organization.

Liam had money and employed trained guards. I knew a theory was already forming in his

head.

"I can't say for sure, Randy. Better we keep quiet for now," I told him.

"I know this is the wrong time to ask, but I need more money. Christine is pregnant again and with a baby on the way..."

"I gotcha. I'll get that money for you. I promise, I assured him, patting him on the shoulder.

He smiled.

"Thanks, Jack."

I walked away, shaking my head in disbelief. Randy was becoming a problem. I'll have the

Sheriff deal with him.

I found Sheriff Combs standing in the middle of the street, instructing the deputies to have

the two cars and the van towed out.

"Little Ray said Marla's mom was being used as leverage, so Marla wouldn't put up a fight," I whispered to the Sheriff. "He said Riley and his crew were supposed to deliver Marla to him."

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The Sheriff pulled me aside. He had a grim expression on his face.

“Unfortunately, Marla has to take the fall for this,” he said. “I need you to plant evidence.”

Chapter Comments.

Luna-Mom

Can't wait for Joy to teach you a really hard lesson pete

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Chapter 92

## CHAPTER 92 A Surprise

Joy

When I opened my eyes, I expected to see Xavier sleeping beside me. But to my surprise, he

wasn't there.

“If you're looking for Bo, he's been up hours ago a familiar masculine voice said.



| rolled over and saw Sebastian sitting behind my desk. | quickly sat up, my breasts peeking out through my negligee.

“What time is it?” | asked, yawning. | quickly covered my mouth, realizing | had morning

breath. Ew.

Sebastian chuckled at my reaction. “It’s almost nine. We decided to let you sleep after last night,” he said.

“When did you get in?” | asked, stretching my arms above my head to wake myself up. | pushed the blankets aside and put on my bunny slippers.

“Early morning. Your, uhm, rescue operation caused quite the stir. Everyone is-”

“Hold that thought,” | interrupted. | reached for my robe which was hanging behind my office door. “Let me brush my teeth first.” “Sure. I’ll prepare breakfast for you while | wait, Sebastian said.

| opened the door and bumped into a muscular sweaty chest. | looked up and found Cristo shirtless, in faded blue jeans. “Oops,” | mumbled, covering my mouth with my robe. “Need to brush.” Cristos opened the bathroom door for me, moved aside and gestured for me to walk in. | stared up at him, one of my eyebrows raised, questioning why he was here so early. | was about to ask when he pushed me into the bathroom.

“I can smell your morning breath. Brush.” He closed the door hurriedly without giving me a chance to speak.

After using the toilet, | brushed my teeth, still trying to figure out why Cristos was here. | quickly rinsed my mouth and walked out of the bathroom, only to find Xavier handing

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combos under his trusty blue apron which he usually wore when manning the shelves at

Bo's.

"What's going on?" | asked, demanding a straightforward answer.

"Breakfast, Xavier answered, opening my office door. "I brought those croissants you like." He grabbed my arm and practically dragged me into my office.

"Ow," | exclaimed, slapping his hand away. "I usually like being manhandled by the three of you, but you guys are acting weird." | suddenly paused, my eyes widening into saucers, as a theory formed in my head. "Oh my gosh! Did they find out it was me last night? Are they going to arrest me? Is the Sheriff here? Should | run?"

Xavier laughed. "Eat your breakfast, Virtue. We'll see you later." He winked and closed the door. | turned around to find Sebastian placing a croissant on a plate with some cheese on

desk. the side. Two large red mugs of coffee were sitting on my

Cappuccino. Just how you like it," Sebastian said. "Sit."

| shrugged my shoulders and sat down behind my desk, grabbing a mug. | raised the mug to my nose, inhaling the cappuccino's rich scent. If this was my last meal, | better make the most of it.

Sebastian had already fixed my sofa bed and had tidied up while | was in the bathroom. He sat down in one of the chairs in front of my desk, grabbed his mug and sipped his coffee.

"What is going on, Dom?" | asked before taking a sip of my coffee.

"Marla wanted me to personally thank you for saving her mother. In exchange, she gave me. the location of Pete's safehouse in Bismarck and has also told me some other usef information. Unfortunately, she doesn't know the identity of Pete's capo. She said no one knows exactly who it may be. Marla suspects it may be Cris, but he doesn't quite fit the profile. I'm waiting for De Luca to tell me if he's gotten some info from his contact in the FBI," Sebastian said.

"What happens to Marla now?" | asked before taking a bite of my croissant. It was so fluffy, it practically melted in my mouth. | closed my eyes blissfully, savoring it's buttery taste.

"I've sent her and her mother to Vegas. She makes a good spy. I've employed her to get useful information from the crime bosses who happen to make their way to my club," he said, leaning back in his chair.

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"Did you tell her about us?" | asked before realizing my mistake. "What | meant was this whole thing we got going on."

"About us being a rival organization? Somewhat he answered. "About Joy Taylor? No. About me being in love with you? Yes. It broke her heart, but she said she suspected. She hopes she can be you someday." | blushed as his honey-colored eyes stared at me. | felt my heart skip a

beat.

"So, am | going to be arrested any time soon? Is this the reason why you guys are so nice to me?" | asked. Sebastian laughed. "No, but we do have some bad news," Sebastian said. "Seems the Sheriff found bricks of meth inside Marla's home including some high-powered weapons. She, her mother and unknown associates are now wanted for the death of nine people. They have a witness, a young man named Ray Thomas who went to school with Marla. According to the Sheriff, Ray and the nine others were assets working undercover for him. The police have been monitoring Marla and her mother for a long while now and suspect them to be part of a drug trafficking ring."

"Oh wow!" | mumbled, my mouth full with the last piece of my croissant. | couldn't believe the Sheriff could concoct such an inconceivable story.

"| have new identities for Marla and her mother waiting for them in Vegas and | have instructed Marla to change her hair color and to wear contact lenses... and maybe get a tan, Sebastian assured me. "Right now, I'm waiting for Sheriff Combs or Undersheriff Emery to come knocking on my door. The perks for buying Marla a car and opening a bank account for her." He grimaced, annoyed at finding himself in the middle of an investigation. "If they want their story to stick, they'll conduct a search at Dom's."

“Do you need me to help you with anything?” | asked, standing up and grabbing my overnight bag. “I’ll get dressed and-”

“| don’t need help from you, Virtue. Link is already here to represent me and | have CCTV cameras all around my store and warehouse. If they plant evidence, we’ll catch them on camera,” he said. “Chip is helping Bo hide what needs hiding. Right now, they’re installing a wall panel to hide Bo’s hidden office, just in case they have a warrant to search his warehouse too.” No wonder Cristos is here.

“What about Old Man Eugene’s house?” | asked, wondering if Xavier’s men were still there.

“After Chip heard the news from Dan last night, the place is now clean and empty. The men are in Mandan awaiting orders,” Sebastian answered. He coughed, clearing his throat.

“Thoro’s another bit of news Chin got from Dan last night.”

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## CHAPTER 92 A Surprise

“Yeah?” | asked absent-mindedly as | placed a pair of folded jeans and a bra on my desk. | opened the small built-in closet and found the silk one shoulder scarlet floral blouse | was looking for. | had forgotten | hung it there yesterday.

“Last night, Dan asked Chip if he could get your ring size and help him pick out a diamond ring for you,” Sebastian said, amused. “Why in the world would Dan want to buy a diamond ring for me?” | exclaimed, exasperated.

Has the world gone completely insane?

“Dan isn’t the one who’ll be paying for the ring, Virtue,” Sebastian pointed out. | quickly spun around and stared at him with my mouth wide open.

Even in my nightmares, | have never dreamt of being engaged to that monster.

“No way...”

“Yes way...”

“No!” | yelled. “I am NOT going to accept his proposal!” | took off my robe and my lace gown. and began to dress.

“Joy,” he said, reverting to my name. “If you get married without a pre-nup and Theodore Cohen dies, you become the sole beneficiary of the Cohen estate once Liam is dead. As you know, Theodore Cohen is in the hospital. | only need to make a call to instruct the nurse administer some insulin into his IV line.”

“| don’t need his money, Dom,” | said, putting on some rust colored sandals.

“But wouldn't it feel good to burn his house down?” Dom asked. | rolled my eyes at him.

“| have a deadline. | want this done as soon as possible, so | can go back to California,” | argued.

“Then, get married as soon as possible and kill him once you go off on your honeymoon,” Sebastian suggested casually like it was the easiest thing.

“Why are you pushing this, Sebastian?” | asked, using his real name. “What are you after?” | bent down to look him in the eye. “Well after much thought the three of us have decided we want the Blood Disciples to take/6

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## CHAPTER 92 A Surprise

| stomped my foot on the floor. Ugh! They have fallen in love with New Salem.

Aknock on the door interrupted our conversation.

“The four of us need to talk before you finalize your decisions,” | said angrily. | fluffed my hair before opening the door.

Xavier and Cristos took one look at my red face and instantly knew my conversation with Sebastian didn’t go so well.

“Dom, they're looking for you next door,” Cristos said. “And, ah, Virtue, we have a surprise for

you.”

“I hope this surprise isn’t a wedding dress, a groom and a priest!” I hissed. Xavier tried to reach for my hand to console me, but I pointed an accusing finger at him. “You were

ere meant to be? supposed to be on my side. What happened to we

“W-we are m-meant to be, it’s j-just-

“It’s just expanding your territory is more important to you than me!” I inhaled deeply and let out an angry breath. “So where’s this surprise?”.

“Take a look.” Cristos pointed to the inside of my shop.

All the items that were packed in the boxes were either hanging on the racks or placed neatly on the shelves. Even the mannequins in the storefront windows were dressed in gowns that I had personally designed.

My anger evaporated into air. I walked into the middle of my shop happily. It was ready to be opened.

open.

On the glass door, I read the name of my shop printed with bright colored vinyl lettering. I suddenly felt a tug in my heart.

I silently wished it read Joy’s.

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The Joy of Revenge

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## Chapter 93

### CHAPTER 93 Message

Sébastien

While Joy

twirled happily inside her new store, | grabbed the box of pastries | had requested from Xavier, exited through the wall panel, and walked to my side of the warehouse through a sliding steel door. | entered the store through the back entrance to find an anxious Stanley waiting for me at my office.

“Dom, the Undersheriff is here. | told him to wait for you, but he wouldn't listen. They've already begun their search,” Stanley said nervously.

“How about you make a pot of your famous coffee, Stanley, served with Bo's finest eclairs,” | said, handing him the box, “while | handle this.”

Stanley nodded his head and quickly walked to the office kitchen, grateful he was excluded from the whole predicament..

With Stanley out of the way, | messaged Link to be on standby while | casually walked to the front of my store where Jack was overseeing the search. His deputies had K-9 units sniffing through all the merchandise.

“Undersheriff,” | greeted him, extending my hand. He took my hand and shook it warmly. “Sorry, | was out back overseeing the new couch Mrs. Wheeler ordered. What is this all

about?”

eyes. |hada

Jack handed me a sheet of paper, lowering his head unable to look me in the eye feeling he didn't like having to do this, but they had to make their story stick.

“A search warrant? Why?” | asked shocked as | scanned through the document.

“| have to apologize for this, Dom,” Jack said. “I gather you heard what happened at Marla's?”

| looked at him confused, pretending not to know.

“It says here you're looking for drugs. Why do you think | have drugs and what does all of this have to do with Marla?” | asked. “Where were you last night?” Jack asked without answering me.

“| was here helping Virtue set up her store,” | said, stating my alibi. “You can go check out Virtue’s. Everything is hung and folded, ready for the store’s opening tomorrow. You can even

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## CHAPTER 93 Message

what happened to Marla? I’ve been trying to get in touch with her since yesterday, but she won’t answer my calls.”

“Nine people are dead, Dom. All of them were doing undercover work for us,” he said. “We suspected Marla to be part of a drug trafficking ring and have been doing surveillance. Last night, we had a narcotics buy operation, but it went terribly wrong. We believe Marla had trained mercenaries with her.” | shook my head in disbelief.

“B-but she had financial problems. She couldn’t buy herself a new car or pay for tuition. This is why | decided to help her out. | bought her a new car and paid her tuition in full, so she wouldn't have to worry about money,” | explained, my mouth quivering as if | was about to

cry.

“She fooled you, Dom. Hell, she fooled all of us. It was just a front,” he replied. “We did a check and we discovered she has property up in Fargo. Her mother has been going back and forth readying their new house. They were about to leave New Salem, Dom.” He placed a hand on my shoulder in an effort to console me. “I’m sorry you had to hear this from me.”

“|-1 t-told her | loved her... that | would take care of her,” | mumbled. “She even told me she loved me...”

“I'm actually surprised to hear you and Marla are dating. | thought you and Nicole were... you know,” Jack said, hoping the change in subject would help lighten the mood.



"I think she's dating Noah," I said, taking a handkerchief from my pocket. I wiped my eyes discreetly, making it look like I was having trouble controlling my emotions.

Oh yeah?" Jack asked. It was his turn to be confused.

"It's none of my business, but I kind of assumed since she went out of town with him without even telling me," I said. He nodded his head.

"Oh... Now I remember," he said. "These past several days have been the worst I have ever seen. I grew up here and I have never seen anything like this before." I nodded my head absent-mindedly, sniffing loudly, lowering my head.

"Undersheriff, all clear," one of his deputies announced. I raised my eyes and saw his team walking towards us with Stanley beside them.

"Undersheriff, we have some coffee and pastries for you," Stanley said.novelbin

"That's mighty nice of you, Stanley, but we better get on our way," Jack said. "Thank you,

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## CHAPTER 93 Message

Dom, and sorry for the inconvenience."

As Jack and his deputies exited, I buried my face in my hands and cried, appearing to be heartbroken.

"Dom, what happened?" Stanley asked shocked. I wiped my eyes and blew my nose before

answering.

"Marla played me for a fool."

Jack

| felt awful having to conduct a search at Dom's, but | needed to clear his name or people would start thinking Dom was part of this drug trafficking ring. He, Bo and Chip were such nice guys. This was the least | could do to help him out.

"Men, I'll see you at the station," | said. Since | was already here, | decided to visit Virtue. | haven't seen her in days. "Undersheriff, if you can, bring back a box of eclairs," one of my deputies said as he boarded.

his K-9 into his truck.

"I'll see," | replied, waving at them. | peeked through the glass windows of Virtue's boutique," impressed with its sleek and chic design. Finally, New Salem had a taste of city living. Sure,

Bismarck was close by, but it didn't hurt to have some of that modern day appeal.

| saw her behind the counter with Chip. They were huddled together in front of what looked.

like a cash register or a computer of sorts.

| tried the door and it swung open. Might as well walk inside.

"Virtue honey, it's like playing with a tablet," Chip said. "You use this to scan, press amount, then press pay, then the cash drawer should open."

Virtue took a tag and scanned it. Then, she tapped on the screen following Chip's instructions, but the cash drawer wouldn't open

"Do you

have one of these at the pub?" She asked, frustrated. Her voice was music to my ears. | felt myself relax from all the pressure from the past several days.

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## CHAPTER 93 Message

He uses the same one in his shop." Chip quickly took his phone out from his pocket. It was. surprising to see him in an old shirt and faded jeans.

He raised his eyes and saw me staring at them. “How long have you been standing there, Jack?” Virtue jumped, turned her head towards me, then smiled.

“Dom told me he helped you set up shop,” | said. “I’m impressed.”

“Yes, he did,” Virtue said, nodding her head. “Now he has to teach me how to work this thing before | open tomorrow.” She eyed her cash register with disdain. “How can | help you,

Undersheriff?”

“Just wanted to see you,” | said honestly. She blushed and smiled brightly.

“Have you had breakfast?” She asked. “How about | treat you to a cup of coffee and a pastry? | haven't seen you since Saturday and a lot has happened since then. Plus, | need a break from this thing before | throw it out the window.”

“Virtue, can | take a shower here?” Chip asked while clicking away on his smartphone.

“Of course you can,” she answered. “You can even get dressed in my office.”

“Going somewhere?” | asked Chip. He nodded his head.

“| have to meet up with Dan,” he answered while scrolling through his phone. “Uhm, Virtue, Dom says he'll teach you how to use the POS system after lunch. Apparently, he’s not feeli well.” Chip’s voice sounded baffled.

“Yeah, about that, | had to break some bad news to him about Marla,” | admitted.

“You tell Virtue all about it, Jack,” Chip said. “Because | need to take a shower.”

“Lock the door behind us,” Virtue instructed. “Don’t worry. | have a key.” She reached under

the counter and took out a small red-orange bag. After Dan mentioned one of her purses was worth more than what | made in a month, | wondered how much this

one cost.

She walked over to me and placed her hand around my arm. She was wearing dark blue jeans, an asymmetrical blouse and red- orange sandals which matched her small purse while her hair cascaded over her shoulders... always so beautiful.

At Bo's Cafe, I told her what happened last night and she was shocked beyond words.

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## CHAPTER 93 Message

an accident, but this-

"No need to worry," I assured her. "We're looking for her. There's no place where she can

hide."

She placed a hand on my arm. "Of course, Jack."

I was just beginning to enjoy myself when my phone began ringing. I muttered a curse under my breath. It was the Sheriff.

"I just got a call from the hospital," the Sheriff said. "Another one to Theodore Cohen. I need you to bring whoever that is here."

of Pete's men tried to get

"Got it," I said and hung up. This was bad. There was an ongoing war between Pete and Liam. Pete had men from neighboring states, but because this was such a small town, it was difficult for any one of them to blend in.

"Virtue, as much as I'd love to stay, I, unfortunately, need to get back to work."

"I understand. I hope you can drop by tomorrow" she said. "It'll be my grand opening. If you see Liam, tell him if he has time to please stop by."

"I will. If you see someone suspicious, don't hesitate to give me a call. Take care, Virtue."

| waved goodbye, feeling light on my feet. She always had that affect. It was like she was sunshine on a gloomy day.

As | started my truck, | saw Bo handing Virtue a box of pastries. She smiled at him, waved her goodbyes before exiting Bo's and walking back to her shop.

then

From the corner of my eye, | saw a man in a black sweatshirt walking towards her. | didn't recognize him from anywhere. | quickly exited my truck and ran towards her, silently praying | could get to her in time.

He stopped her and handed her something. But before he could run off, Virtue grabbed the

sleeve of his black sweatshirt.

"Who are you?" | heard her ask. He raised his hand to strike her, but | grabbed his arm in time, twisting it behind his back.

"Get off of me," the man cried. "I'm just a delivery man."

"I'm taking you to the station." | said, handcuffing him. | noticed Virtue staring at a small 5/6

## CHAPTER 93 Message

note. "What does it say, Virtue?"

Instead of answering me, she handed me the note with a troubled look on her face. | glanced at the small piece of paper, my eyes narrowing at the brief message.

"I'll see you soon. P"

Chapter Comments.

Luna-Mom

Oh dear Virtue you better lay down some very serious ground rules and boundaries. pronto

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Chapter 94

## CHAPTER 94 Awake

Liam

My father was stable, but it didn't seem like he was getting any better. His doctors explained that because of hi

age and the injury he sustained, the smoke had affected him worse than others. They assured me he was getting better and told me to be patient.novelbin

Honestly, I didn't want to get my hopes up.

Despite the mess from recent events, I decided to stay by my father's side until he was well. enough to continue his treatment at home. Pete was someone I didn't want to underestimate ever again... I had learned my lesson.

As I had anticipated, Pete sent another one of his men to the hospital, instructing him to leave a small note by my father's bedside. Just like the first note, this note also reminded me

of our agreement.

"Spring Formal is next week. I will be there to collect. P

I furiously crumpled the small piece of recycled paper into a ball and tossed it into the

garbage can.

Over my dead body, Pete.

I believed our arrangement was null and void, simply because he had left my father behind to die in the fire. The act itself indicated Pete wasn't going to hold up his end of the bargain, so why should I?

After tossing the small note, I walked over to the parking lot where a young African- American

in man from South Dakota named Carter was sitting in the backseat of one of the sedans parked in the back. We only had a few families of color living in New Salem and I knew all of them. I'm guessing Pete sent Carter to further taint my image... as a racist. If a video recording of Carter being accosted by my men ever surfaced, it would definitely ruin

me.

We detained Carter inside one of the vehicles used by my guards, waiting for Jack to arrive, so he could take him down to the station for questioning. I made the effort to make him as comfortable as possible knowing if anyone heard him complain, we would all be in trouble.

I felt bad for the man. He wasn't part of this, but since he needed money, he was willing to

## CHAPTER 94 Awake

deliver a note, so they grabbed the chance to earn some easy money. One of my men asked. where his friend was and he said he didn't know

I had most of my men waiting for his friend to show up at my father's room, thinking Carter was a mere distraction, but his friend didn't turn up. I assumed Carter lied to make us think he wasn't alone so we wouldn't hurt him.

I'd be upstairs with

When Jack finally showed up, I was angry for waiting for so long. I should.

my bedridden father, but I had to wait because I definitely knew Jack would rough Carter up, if I wasn't around.

"Where have you been?" I asked angrily after he placed Carter inside a patrol car.

"Sorry, Liam. There was an incident at Virtue's," he answered. My anger abruptly faded,

replaced with worry.

“You mean at the Old Taylor House?” | asked, shocked.

“Uhm, no. At her store,” he replied. “She’s there getting the place ready for the opening “tomorrow.” | didn’t expect her store would be finished so soon. | was impressed.

“And?” | said, urging him to continue.

“She got a visit from one of Pete’s men. He gave her a small note, but instead of letting the

pre, he man walk away, she grabbed his sleeve and asked him who he was. If | wasn’t there, would have hit her in the face,” he explained. | felt my anger bubble up inside me again.

Virtue almost got hurt!

Gosh, Pete was such a di ck!

“What did the note say?”

Jack took out his phone and showed me a picture of the note. It was a one liner like the message | received yesterday, signed with the first initial of Pete's name.

“Does she suspect anything?” | asked.

“| think she’s worried. | saw it on her face while she was staring at the note. | had to lie to her and tell her it might not mean anything... that maybe it was a prank. But she pointed out the man who delivered the message was about to hurt her for just asking him who he was. According to her, it’s not the kind of behavior she’s seen from folks in New Salem,” Jack said. “I kind of got the feeling she knew the guy wasn’t from here.

2/5

## CHAPTER 94 Awake

“She’s a smart woman and goes around town on her own. | bet she probably knows almost everyone in this town by now, so that’s not surprising,” | reasoned. “As for Pete, I’m guessing, he’s in South Dakota. Carter said he’s from there.” Jack’s eyes widened, surprised | knew the



man's name.

"I didn't know you were on a first name basis with the man seated in the back of the patrol

car," Jack scoffed.

"I had to keep him comfortable or he would cause a ruckus. Anyway, Carter said the boss paid him and a friend five thousand dollars each to deliver messages. I've been waiting for the friend, but apparently he was instructed to deliver a message to Virtue," I said, shaking my head in disbelief. "I have got to fix this."

"Well, just to keep Virtue safe, I've got Bo keeping an eye on her. Unfortunately, Chip is with Dan and Dom... he's not in a good place right now. But since they're friends, I know he'll keep an eye on her." My face scrunched up wondering what happened to Dom.

Dom isn't in a good place right now? Why?

It took me a few moments, but I finally figured it out. Oops.

"Ah, the Marla Lawrence fiasco," I uttered, grimacing. I don't know what happened last night, but maybe Marla got hold of a gun and tried to rescue her mother. It sounded far-fetched, but it was the only possible explanation, unless she had been planning to do this all along. Anyway, Jack was looking for Riley, to confirm if Marla was indeed with Pete.

If Dom only knew, he dodged a bullet. That girl has been used and abused by whoever

"By the way, Jack, I need you to escort Cris and Lisa home. I had them confined in H so Cris wouldn't add to all the problems we have now. Before you leave them at their

need you to put an electronic ankle monitor on Cris so we can track him wherever he

"I can't do that, Liam," Jack said. "First, I need a court order before I can put an ankle monitor on him and second, he'll probably kill me if I try. But I can put a tracking device on his car or have a deputy tail him. That's the best I can do."

“Fine. Have a deputy tail him, then tell Lisa I need to see her here later this afternoon. Tell her... I have something important that I have to give her,” I instructed Jack. “Question Carter and his friend for information, then let them go. Tell them if they ever set foot here again, their friends and family will never see or hear from them again.”

“Sure thing.” Jack said, tinning his hat and walking to the car. “S hit! I almost forgot Virtue 3/5

## CHAPTER 94 Awake

says if you have time to stop by her shop tomorrow. It’s her grand opening.”

“I’ll give her a call and tell her I’ll be dropping by, so she’ll expect me,” I said, waving at him. “Jack, thanks man. I owe you one.” “No Dr

problem. Call if anything happens... again.” He entered the patrol car and quickly drove out of the hospital parking lot. I waited for him to turn into the main road before I sprung

into action.

I wanted to tell him what I had planned, but I didn’t want to tell him, then have Virtue reject me later. Better he find out when I pop the question.

I took out my phone and dialed. Thank goodness Dan answered right away.

“Do you have the ring?” I asked, walking into the hospital.

“Liam, it’s not like I’m ordering pizza. Chip and just got to the airport. We’re flying to Chicago to get you that ring,” Dan said, annoyed.

“I need the ring by tomorrow. Virtue’s grand opening is happening and I want to do it out in public. It’ll be great for my image if she says yes I heard Dan scoff.

“You never make it easy, do you?” Dan uttered disdainfully. “I was hoping to spend the night in Chicago and do some shopping for myself, but since you need the ring by tomorrow, we’ll be back later tonight. I already made an appointment at Tiffany’s to see this stunning two

carat square

re cut diamond on a platinum band. It screams Virtue.” He sounded really excited.

“Good. Send me photos so | can form an opinion,” | said. | heard him scoff again.

“Sure, Liam. But | don’t want to hear you complain about the price. It’s more expensive your car.” | heard him sigh dreamily. “And | get to try it on...” No wonder he was excited

“You know what? | should just give her my mother’s old ring. | just need to have it clean and polished-”

“No, no, no, no! We’ll get her a new ring. Don’t be a cheapskate.” | heard an announcement on the PA. “That’s us. I’ll call you when we land.

When | got to my father’s hospital suite, several doctors were inside, surrounding my father’s

bed.

| felt my heart momentarily stop in my chest, thinking my father had died. | clutched my

4/5

## CHAPTER 94 Awake

chest, thinking | was going to have a heart attack.

Suddenly, | heard the doctors laugh.

What was going on?

| quickly walked in and found my father finally awake. His steel grey eyes moved to look at

me.

“Ah, there’s my son.”

S hit!

Well, this meant I would have to have a simple ceremony.

Only close family and friends in attendance with a judge officiating.

Before my father is able to get out of bed.

Chapter Comments

Luna-Mom

The intensity and mystery surrounding this whole town is ramping up | love it

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6

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The Joy of Revenge

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Chapter 95

CHAPTER 95 Chicago

Cristos

After an almost two hour flight, Dan and I were finally in Chicago. Unfortunately, since Liam was planning to propose tomorrow morning, instead of spending a full night at The Peninsula, we would be leaving in the early morning.

While we were seated in business class, sipping champagne and snacking on cheese and prosciutto, I silently prayed Dan wouldn't make any unnecessary

moves on me, Xavier and Sebastian would be able to convince Joy to accept the proposal, so she could gain control of everything once Theodore and Liam were out of the way, and I could get some useful information. I was looking for a hacker. After what happened at Aspire Tower, I needed to know who I was up against.

Dina, one of my best hackers, was already trying to trace whatever digital footprints the hacker might've left so she could at least get a location. She was currently in Mandan eager to move to New Salem, but she had to wait for Lou to pack up all his equipment, so he could set up base in the basement of their new home in Hillcrest.

When we arrived at The Peninsula, I heaved a sigh of relief, happy to be in the city. Rural living, although quiet and relaxed, was monotonous. I welcomed the hustle and bustle of the city, wishing I could stay a bit longer.

Dan was obviously happy to be out of New Salem for a change and experience the good life.

He said he was never able to fly out before because he couldn't find a friend to come with

him. This is where I fit in.

We both got our own suites and agreed to meet at the lobby for lunch after freshening up. Our appointment at Tiffany's was at two in the afternoon which meant we could have a long lunch, pick up the diamond, then go off and do our own shopping. Dan wanted more silk

shirts and needed to go see a dermatologist so he could stock up on facial products.

Unlike Dan's pricier suite, mine was small, good enough for one with a panoramic view of the city. I only brought a small carry-on with me, packed with my usual stuff, thinking if I needed more clothes, I could just buy them here. I needed more pink in my wardrobe

anyway.

After hanging my clothes, I changed into a beige button down shirt and brown chinos, pairing everything with dark brown leather shoes and a long light brown trench coat to fight the cold of the Windy City.

## CHAPTER 95 Chicago

When the elevator doors opened, Dan was already waiting for me at the lobby wearing a royal blue silk shirt and white chinos paired with a gray blazer and black loafers. Dan loved to mix and match colors.

"I made reservations at the Shanghai Terrace," Dan said, pushing me back into the elevator so we could go to the fourth floor.

"I love Chinese food," I said.

"Me too. Unfortunately, you can't find it in New Salem. When I really have a craving, I drive to Bismarck," Dan said. "We should really take a trip to New York. Maybe I can arrange everything."

The elevator doors pinged open and I could already smell the food. My tummy grumbled. I didn't know I was so hungry. Shanghai Terrace's main dining area was designed as a traditional 1930s style eatery decorated in red and gold, the colors contrasting beautifully with the dark brown of its tables and polished hardwood floors. Since the terrace area was not open for dining, we took a seat at one of the square tables near the large windows of the restaurant so we could admire the

view while we dined.

"Order whatever you want, Chip," Dan said, once we were seated. "Everything is on me." Then he paused, his eyes on the menu. "I have an idea. Let's just order everything on the menu, so we can try all of it. We don't do this everyday, so let's splurge." He smiled at the server. "We'll take one order of everything on the lunch menu and a bottle of Dom Perignon." The server nodded his head in acknowledgement and scurried away for our food and drinks.

"Back to planning a trip to New York. What do you suggest?" I asked. Dan twirled his

in the air, like he was a magician.

"I'll arrange for Virtue and Liam to have their honeymoon in New York and we can come with. While they do their thing, we can go off and do our thing. We

can go to Broadway, visit the bars in Soho, and shop until we drop. We can even walk around Manhattan in our most colorful outfits.” He sighed, placing his chin in his hand, imagining being in New York in a loud designer outfit. “I have been dreaming to go and spend a week there at least, but I never had the money,” he said. “Now I have the money. All my investments are doing well... so well, I can finally experience life.” The server came back with our champagne and a tray full of appetizers. Dan quickly put some shrimp in his mouth and purred.

“I want to invest,” I said. “Sure I own the pub and have some money saved up, but some extra money wouldn't hurt.”

2/5

## CHAPTER 95 Chicago

“I'll talk to Liam and see if you can put in some capital like the rest of us. Real estate is booming in New Salem. I promise you won't regret it,” Dan said before chugging down his

champagne.

“You finished accountancy right?” I asked. “Did you do any software or maybe encryption.

when you were in college?”

“Uh, no. My expertise ends with Excel, spreadsheets and numbers, Dan answered. He squinted his eyes, thinking who he might know with that kind of background. “Lisa I think took computer science if I remember correctly. She has a really expensive computer at home. and her laptop is the latest.”

“Really?” I asked surprised. Lisa?! It can't be possible.

“Yeah. I remember she mentioned she was looking for this girl who moved out of New Salem during our junior year in high school. She said she hacked into school databases to look for information on her,” Dan elaborated. “Sadly, she couldn't find anything about that girl, but she did say something about the girl's father working at a Target or something. I don't really

know.”

So Cris uses his wife to do background checks. Spry Cris, but Lisa found the information that I had planted. Still, I had to admit Lisa was a clever girl.

With her background on the basics of computer encryption, she learned how to hack on her own. Who would have thought? "So, Lisa knows how to hack?" I asked skeptically. Dan shrugged his shoulders.

"She says she does. Honestly, we go to her when our computers go on the fritz, so maybe she does," Dan said. "Anyway, when you encounter problems with your computer, you know

where to go."

When we get back to New Salem, I'm going to make an impromptu visit and check out her

system. Whatever firewalls and security she has, I'll make sure to bring all of it crashing down.

Our server came back with a tray of braised beef, Peking Duck, steamed halibut and bowls of noodle soup. It was all so flavorful and aromatic, I made a mental note to come back and bring Joy. She would love it here.

By the time we got to Tiffany & Co, Dan was buzzed. If I had previously thought he was talkative when tiny Dan was loud

3/5

## CHAPTER 95 Chicago

Good thing the people at Tiffany's didn't mind and served us each a wonderful cup of coffee. Dan was able to sober up before he made an utter fool of himself.

We were led upstairs to view the exquisite square cut two carat diamond and platinum ring. Dan placed the ring on his pinky finger and we both gazed at it in awe. As the light touched the surface of the diamond, it reflected a myriad of colors on the surrounding surfaces including white light.

I sighed. It would look perfect on Joy's finger.

As I stared at the diamond, I still couldn't believe Liam was going to propose to Joy. I mean... they only went out on one date! But then again, this was Liam. He was unconventional and unpredictable.



After Dan had paid for the one hundred thousand dollar ring including a couple of pieces for himself, we left Tiffany's like we had conquered the world, only to bump into two people we didn't expect to be in Chicago.

"Dan, what are you doing here?" | knew that irritating voice. | saw Dan purse his lips before he turned around to greet Nicole. "Nicole, it's so good to see you in clothes," Dan said before kissing Nicole on the cheek. And sure enough, Nicole was wearing a beige short sleeved, belted, buttoned down midi dress. A colorful silk scarf covered her blonde hair and a pair of oversized sunglasses covered her eyes while nude pumps adorned her feet. In one hand was a small Prada shoulder bag. She actually looked good.

"Nicole, babe, what's keeping you?" asked another familiar voice.

| turned around to see Noah walking up to us with two cups of coffee in his hands. He was wearing a dark gray single-breasted slim-fit Armani suit. He looked expensive... all the way to his designer leather shoes.

No f ucking way!

"Noah! Oh my gosh! | can't believe you're in a suit!" | exclaimed.

"Yeah, | had a wedding to attend," Noah explained sheepishly. "Cost me an arm and a leg."

"Well, if it's any consolation, you can wear that again at another wedding," Dan said.

"What Dan means to say is Armani never goes out of style. You can wear it over and over 4/5

## CHAPTER 95 Chicago

again," | said, trying to stop Dan from telling Noah about Liam's plan to propose.

"No, silly," Dan said, slapping me on the arm. "What | mean is New Salem will soon be the venue of The Wedding of the Year! If Virtue says yes, Chip and | will be organizing the Cohen and Sullivan Nuptials."

"What?!" Nicole screamed.

Dan nodded his head. Nicole gave Dan a hug and jumped up and down excitedly. Surprisingly, she was happy with the news. "Is that why you two are here?" Noah asked shocked. He, on the other hand, didn't look so happy.

"Yes." Dan waved his shopping bags in front of Noah's face. "Since we're all here, let's have dinner together at RPM Steakhouse. Wagyu steak on me," Dan announced, taking his phone out to make reservations.

| glanced at Noah who looked uncomfortable for whatever reason. Under the jacket of his Armani suit, | noticed a Tiffany T hinged gold bracelet. Nicole was wearing one too, but hers was studded with diamonds.

Noah was such a bad liar.

## Chapter Comments

Luna-Mom

Things not going according to Liam's plan.

Morgan

a 2 carat emerald cut diamond even the most clear and best color is less than 30k. doesn't he have a nice BMW?

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[The Joy of Revenge](#)

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## Chapter 96

### CHAPTER 96 A Difficult Decision

Joy

| was waiting for Sebastian to show up to give me a tutorial on how to use the POS system he had installed. | decided to arrange the accessories | knew the students would need to pretty up their gowns on the display rack while | waited.

It was an interesting morning.

| had noticed the young man in the black sweater approaching even before Jack exited his truck and dashed towards me. Knowing Jack wouldn't get to me in time, | decided to stall the young man. | grabbed on to his sleeve and asked him who he was. | had already anticipated that my unexpected action would agitate him. If it weren't for Jack, | would have kicked the man in the balls despite the numerous passersby coming in and out of Bo's. | didn't care if kicking him would reveal | had the capability of defending myself. After my assault, | vowed no one would hurt me again..

Yet, luck was on my side. Jack made me look... helpless.

| showed Jack the small note, looking anxious. After he placed his handcuffs on the young man, he roughly pushed the man against the wall of the commercial complex building.

"Who are you?" Jack asked. The young man hesitated. "ANSWER ME!"

"My name is Floyd," the young man quickly spat out as Jack's quiet demeanor changed into a murderous rage.

"Floyd like the boxer," Jack said. He grabbed his radio which was holstered on his belt and called it in. "I have a twenty year old male, five foot ten, answers to the name of Floyd. L need someone to pick him up at the commercial complex.

"Copy that, Undersheriff," a male voice said through the radio. "ETA, five minutes."

"You can't arrest me," the young man argued. "I didn't do nothing."

“Oh

yes

I can. I can hold you for assault and battery,” Jack said, his voice low and intimidating.

“I want a lawyer,” the man said, putting on a brave face. “I have rights you know.”

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## CHAPTER 96 A Difficult Decision

worry, Virtue. We'll get this sorted out. He won't ever hurt you.”

I nodded, lowering my head, so Jack wouldn't see the anger in my eyes. My hands were shaking, making me look frightened. Actually, they were shaking because I was angry.

Xavier suddenly came out, wondering why there were so many people gathered near his

grocery store.

“Jack, what happened?” Xavier said, pointing at me, then at the young man in the black

sweater.

“This guy here thought it would be funny to play a prank on one of our own,” Jack answered.

“Prank? He almost hit me,” I said incredulously, acting hysterical, like whatever happened had just finally sunk in. “I've been here for two weeks and no one else has ever done something like this to me.”

Xavier took me in his arms and consoled me. “Hey, hey, hey... ssshhhh... Calm down. This is probably all a misunderstanding. Right Jack?”

“I was paid to give-” The young man didn't finish his sentence. I glanced behind me and saw Jack with his hand on the young man's shoulder shaking his head, warning him not to

speak.

“Yeah, Bo. This was just all a misunderstanding, Jack assured him.

We suddenly heard the sirens of the patrol car. In a matter of minutes, Floyd was dragged into the back seat of the patrol car and driven away by a deputy.

After Jack took a picture of the note with his phone, he placed a gentle hand on my arm.

“Virtue, I know he scared you, but him raising his arm was just probably a bad reaction to you pulling on the sleeve of his shirt,” Jack explained. “I promise you, you're safe.” He turned to Xavier. “Bo, can I count on you to keep watch?”

“Sure, Undersheriff,” Xavier answered quickly.

“Call me if you see anyone suspicious. I'll drop by later tonight to check up on you, Virtue. Thanks, Bo. I'm glad I can count on you,” Jack said and waved goodbye. I moved my hand, acknowledging his wave before entering my store. Xavier followed me inside and locked the door, but waited for Jack to drive off before speaking to me.

2/5

## CHAPTER 96 A Difficult Decision

“What was written on the note?” He asked.

“I'll see you soon. P,” I answered. He smirked and looked up at the ceiling amused.

“Lou will be here later to install the security system with a door chime and place a steel coiling door in front of the shop. Although the storefront window and door are made of security glass, double the protection is better,” Xavier said.

“I would have kicked that guy in the balls if Jack hadn't intervened. And this note is just a reminder from someone pathetic,” I said, placing the note on the counter. “Pete wants everything to coincide with the Spring Formal. So we have to plan for that night.”

“While you were having coffee, Chip left with Dan. They’re headed to the airport bound for Chicago,” Xavier said, suddenly changing the topic.

“What are they going to do there?” | asked, knowing what the answer to my question would

be.

“They have an appointment at Tiffany’s,” Xavier said, avoiding eye contact. He walked to the counter and stood in front of me. “I know you don’t want to be engaged or even marry Liam, but | think it’s poetic justice in a way. You marry him, kill him and everything the Cohens have to stand for

all they’ve accumulated throughout the decades from their underground operations, becomes yours, Virtue. One of the Taylors his family has been warring with for generations.”

“But that prick raped me! | can’t, Bo, and | won’t,” | murmured angrily at him.

“| understand, Virtue, but hear me out, Xavier said. “You do this and you not only get to kill the bastard and his merry bunch of a sholes, but you get to wipe out his family name from memory. No more statues or relics of the Cohens, no more mansion sitting on the top of Prairie Hill, no more reminders that the Cohens ever existed, not even books. You can do all of that when you seize control of their lavish estate. If the Cohens yell ‘death to all Taylors’, you can answer back with ‘death to everything Cohen’ when you stand in front of their graves. You, no one else, but you can do that.”

I stared at him, stunned, that he was able to explain things so coherently and so vividly. Xavier, the quiet one. While Sebastian thought | would agree with his proposal for the purpose of expanding their territory, Xavier made it clearer that | would benefit the most by giving a much bigger perspective... a dazzling culmination to the revenge | still seek.

| could destroy everything the Cohens have tried to build and wipe them out from the face of this earth.novelbin

3/5

CHAPTER 96 A Difficult Decision

| sighed. He had a point. But deep inside my heart, | felt so disgusted that | would have to marry Liam Cohen... the bastard I wanted stab with a knife until all his guts were hanging out from his body.

two carat

“Think about it, Virtue. Chip and Dan are on their way to Chicago to pick up a diamond ring. If | know Liam, he will make his proposal public to better his image. I’ve been handing out fliers for your grand opening tomorrow. | have this nagging feeling, he’s going to do it here, in front of everyone when he assists you in cutting the ribbon to open your new boutique. You have asked him to cut the ribbon, right?” Xavier asked.

“| was going to call him later and ask,” | answered.

“Well, think about it okay? | gotta get back to work. Dom will be here later when he’s done. pretending to be heartbroken over Marla.” He patted my hand and turned to leave. “And sweetie, | meant what | said. You and |, we’re meant to be together. All of this, all our sacrifices, is for you to get what you want... so you can live your life with a happily ever after. We want you to be happy.” He unlocked the door and exited to head back to Bo’s.

| closed the display cabinet, finished with my task of displaying the accessories... asking myself repeatedly... could I... would I... should I?

Did | have it in me to pretend to love someone | have hated since | was a teenager?

| was still debating with myself when my phone rang. | looked at the screen and saw it was

Liam.

Speaking of the devil...

“Hi Liam! How are you?” | asked like a lovesick teenager, hoping he would hear the

enthusiasm in my voice.

“| should be asking you that,” he replied, chuckling. “I just heard what happened from Jack Are you doing okay?”

"I'm fine," I answered, shrugging the incident off. "Jack explained it was all a prank. Anyway, the young man just handed me a note. It was harmless." I quickly changed the subject. "By the way, tomorrow is my grand opening. I was hoping you'd stop by, but I have something else that you can help me with... if you have the time, that is."

"Anything for you," he said. "What do you need me to do?"

"Can you be my guest of honor for the ribbon cutting ceremony? It would be such a privilege

## CHAPTER 96 A Difficult Decision

if the mayor of New Salem could be here," I said, my voice sounding hopeful.

"I thought you would never ask," Liam replied happily. "Would ten in the morning sound

good?"

"That would be perfect!" I exclaimed. "Ten in the morning it is. Promise me you'll show up?"

"I promise, Virtue. Gosh, I miss you," Liam said, breathlessly. "Just hearing your voice has

made me smile."

"Aw, I miss you too," I said. "How's your father by the way? Do you need me to drop by at the

hospital?"

"No, there's no need for you to come here," he answered. "My father is awake and perky, thanks for asking. He'll be going home soon. We've decided he can continue his recovery at

the mansion."

That's great news.

tomorrow then."



| lied. | had hoped he would remain in the hospital. "I'll see you.

"Yes, tomorrow. Bye, love," he said. | grimaced. He called me love.

"Bye, Liam," | said and hung up. | threw my phone on the counter and cringed.

"So, have you decided yet?" Sebastian said from behind me. D amn that wall panel.

"It was a difficult decision, but yes | have decided," | answered. "You are looking at the soon-

to-be Mrs. Liam Cohen."

## Chapter Comments

Luna-Mom

Aha looks like Noah is going to have a lot of lies to tell

Anna Murray

| know you must be busy but please please more chapters, | need more

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Chapter 97

CHAPTER 97 Nurse

Sebastian

| stood stunned, hearing Joy refer to herself as Mrs. Liam Cohen. | thought it would take a little bit more... persuasion.

| also felt a tug in my heart. As much as | didn't want to admit it, but it hurt to know Joy was about to accept a marriage proposal from someone else even though | knew it was for another purpose. | had always imagined she would eventually get married to one of us to cement her position among the Blood Disciples.

Stop it, Sebastian. She'll be a widow soon enough.

"Bo explained if | do marry Liam, | could erase the Cohen name from memory and destroy everything they've built once he dies. It's something I've wished for ever since | woke up in the hospital after | was raped. Back then, | believed it would never become a reality, but now, it has become a possibility," Joy gushed happily. | grinned at her. She looked so pleased.

Luckily, Xavier had gotten through to her after | failed to convince her earlier. He and Joy have always had this connection which I've always been envious of. Xavier, | believed, had a

gift.

"Fortunately, Liam agreed to be at the ribbon cutting tomorrow at ten," Joy said, walking behind her counter. "But we have another problem. Theodore Cohen is awake and they're moving him to the mansion soon to recover."

"I'll handle Theodore," | said, walking around her so | could check the wires and connect of the POS system. "I saw from the CCTV cameras you were given a note earlier. What o

say?"

"I'll see you soon. P, she answered. | grimaced.

Pete was relentless.

"When Lou gets here, I'll be going to Bismarck to check if the information Marla gave me is correct. | asked Chip to pull out the information | need, but he's busy at the moment. He said they've bumped into Nicole and Noah in the Windy City," | said while | took a price tag to test if the barcode scanner worked properly. Joy stood right beside me watching me use her POS system.

## CHAPTER 97 Nurse

to Nicole. Yesterday, I caught them fighting here of all places.

“What about?” I asked, scanning the tag. It beeped showing the price on the monitor. I pressed on pay and entered a number higher than the price scanned, then I pressed enter. The cash drawer opened without a problem.

“They

were fighting about a woman with black hair, she answered as she crossed her arms and tapped her foot, glaring at the cash drawer. Of course the cash drawer will open for you.” Joy scoffed and pursed her lips.

Nicole knows about Sarah Hughes. That I didn’t expect.

“So Nicole knows Noah is doing Sarah Hughes too, but they’re still together. I’m impressed,” I said. “That will be one messy love triangle though. If Sarah becomes mayor and Noah decides to marry her, that will leave a spiteful Nicole. I wonder how he’ll be able to work around her.”

“He’ll probably keep her as his mistress,” Joy smirked. I looked at her appalled she would say such a thing. “Why are you looking at me like that? You don’t think Noah won’t smooth-talk his way in keeping Nicole in his bed?”

“Maybe, but I have a feeling Nicole won’t like it, I said, taking my credit card from my wallet to test the credit card reader.

“Of course she won’t like it, but she’s in love with him. It’s either that or she loses him forever. But if I were Nicole, I would leave town and move on,” Joy stated matter-of-factly. “Anyway... what information are you going to check in Bismarck?”

“The location of Pete’s safe house. Pete plans to abduct you during the Spring Formal and once he has you, he’ll need to hide you from Liam,” I said while I tried to pay using my card. A receipt came out of the card reader indicating a successful transaction. I smiled while Joy rolled her eyes in frustration. “Marla says Pete has a sprawling brick mansion on the top of Huff Hills, but she also said she heard him mention a property near the Missouri River, a small cabin on Red River Hills. According to Joan Summers’ file, Liam knows the safe house on Huff Hills, so I’m guessing Pete won’t dare bring you there.” She heaved a huge sigh of

relief.

"It's good we know where Pete may hide once he's here," she said.

"Once I confirm all of Pete's properties, I'll have our men surround the area. Dina has a hit on someone who looks like Pete coming off a private plane in Bimini, Bahamas. I have

2/5

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here.

After fifteen minutes. I was able to maneuver herself around the POS system I had installed. It was nice to spend some time with her after living apart for so long. I had already noticed the clothes Cristos left in her small closet in the office. Soon, this commercial

complex will be our home where we can do whatever we wanted.

It would be like before. Three men living with the woman they loved.

My thoughts went to Maria. She was heartbroken when I admitted Virtue was someone dear

to me. She asked why I had showered her with attention when I was clearly in love with someone else.

I'm sorry if I got you involved in all of this, but need information. I've seen the black sling bag carried around by the majority of the cornsfolk and I also noticed you carry it around. What's inside the bag?" She sighed before she answered.

I'm a drug dealer, Dom. The black sling bag matters shouldn't be touched. Most, if not everyone, knows about the drug trade. The thing about New Salem is jobs are few and farm owners employ people with such a low salary, not much money because my mom can't find work. When my father left her pregnant with me, she disowned her. She had to do everything on her own. After she gave birth, she suffered from depression and found happiness in a bottle, she explained.

Do you have any information on Pete McDowell? asked her. Do you know where his safe house in Bismarck is?" She nodded her head.

I've only been there once. A brick mansion on top of Huff Hills. He and Cris had s cover and they wanted me to get the party started, | usually enterram Pete in his bas

Highland Oaks, so | can't give you directions to le s place on Huff Hili

No, that's good enough," | said gratefully. "That information is a los llettp

| did hear him talk about a small cabin in Red River Hills that he recently tough. This wa

bad a week ago... after he negotiated with Mayor Cohen. | was in the tossement when MEU Cohen came to see Pete, but he didn't notice me. He saw this other named Holly, warta aid, lowering her head in shame. | know Pete kidnaps young garis. Most people in

mthink its the mayor. 1-I can't say anything because Pete pays me nowy

kill

dpentyrly, Link came through the door carrying an unconscious Ms. Lawrence in ins arm. sucht differently. She quickly bounced on Link, hitting and licking him

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## CHAPTER 97 Nurse

while screaming on the top of her lungs. | had to pull her away.

"Virtue had to drug your mother or the both of them would've been killed," Link explained after | had subdued Marla. "The effects should wear off in about an hour or so."

"Place her in one of the rooms on the second floor, Link, | said. "How's Virtue?"

“She was smiling when I left her at New Salem... happy to have helped, Link answered before entering the elevator.

“So it’s true? Miss Virtue helped my mother? She’s trained to do all that stuff?” Marla asked shocked. “I thought she was just this pretty woman out to get all the men.”

“Well, she is out to get all the men and she’s succeeding,” I said.

“You love her, don’t you?” Marla asked.

“I do. She means a lot to me, I answered truthfully.

“Then why date me if you're in love with her? Don’t you know I’ve fallen in love with you?” She asked, tears forming in her eyes. could givenovelbin

“I needed information, Marla, and I had to make you fall in love with me, so you me that information freely,” I answered. She shook her in disbelief realizing I had played her. “I’m so sorry, Marla. I hope we can be friends.”

I put a hand on her arm to comfort her while she cried quietly.

“Did you make her come here to help you get Pete?” Marla asked after she compose

“Not exactly. Virtue has an agenda of her own,” I admitted.

“So, what happens now? My mom and I can’t go back home.”

“You'll be moving to Las Vegas. Honestly, Marla, you re beautiful on stage. I want you to channel that beauty and get me information from certain men who enter a club of mine there. A new identity, house and car will be waiting for you. Unfortunately, your mother will enter a rehab center once you arrive. When she has embraced sobriety, I will have her become one of the hosts of the club. She will have a job which can sustain the both of you while you finish school.”

My phone suddenly pinged. It was a message from Lou do was outsid a candy to install loAS

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CHAPTER 97 Nurse

“Lou’s here. Once I’m out, let him in,” | instructed Joy.

“No problem. And Dom, be careful. Pete might have people watching us,” Joy said.

“will.”

While | dialed a number on my phone, | walked through the short hallway to exit through the wall panel.

After we found out Abigail was the one who saved joy, we had three nurses of our own apply when we heard there was a vacancy. Only two were hired, but that was enough to have eyes, ears and hands in the hospital.

One of them was feeling homesick after only a week of working here. She wasn’t accustomed to the quiet and the mundane. Luckily, the nurse was assigned to Theodore.

“Emma, | need you to give Theodore an insulin overdose,” | said as | walked out of the wall panel.

“My shift doesn’t start until tomorrow morning, she replied.

“That’s perfect. | need you to do it around ten in the morning when the mayor is busy doing other things.”

## POST COMMENT

Chapter Comments.

Luna Mon

Oh dear Joy you really have such a terrible time ahead of you. Think of the end game

Morgan

Teven cringed! yikes! poor Joy. | know | couldn’t have....

[VIEW ALL 2 COMMENTS](#)

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The Joy of Revenge

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Chapter 98

CHAPTER 98 Drunk

Cristos

After shopping all day, we were finally seated in a private room on the top floor of RPM Steak at North River waiting for our orders arrived.

Dan and Nicole led the way to Michigan Avenue better known as the Magnificent Mile, the shopping district of Chicago, the home of luxury brands which were non-existent in New Salem.

We went directly to Oak Street, the high-end enclave in the city's Gold Coast neighborhood. If Los Angeles had a Rodeo Drive, Chicago had Oak Street. All the high-end luxury brands and designers like Armani, Hermés, and Escada including Harry Winston and Buccellati were

here.

To my surprise, the first store we entered was Giorgio Armani. Unlike the others, I was looking for a more trendy and casual look. But then again, this was Armani.

I have to admit Noah was a good looking man. I could easily see why I fell in love with him when they were teenagers and why most of New Salem's single women were vying for his attention. His natural golden blonde hair glistened under the sunlight, his tan skin oozed masculinity, while his dark brown eyes, veiled beneath his long eyelashes, possessed a mysterious character behind them. Then, there was his dazzling smile which I noticed had caught the



attention of the svelte brunette sales clerk standing beside him. She was eyeing him with a twinkle in her green eyes.

John was the boy who every girl in New Salem High wanted to be with. Joy, being his best friend, must have been the envy of every girl in school. Destroying her the way Liam, Iran, Jack and Chris did, paved the way for others to get Joy's coveted role in Noah's life.

I wondered what had happened after Joy left. No one spoke of her. They always referred to her as the son who left New Salem. I shadowed Noah wondering if he was going to purchase anything. While Nicole took clothes off the racks like she could afford anything and everything, Noah rubbed his fingers on the edge of the hanger, loving the feel of the smooth delicate fabric on his fingers, seemingly debating with himself whether he should buy one.

As I looked around the store, I decided to play the little devil who whispers in one's ear.

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## CHAPTER 98 Drunk

"As an owner of a company, you sometimes need dress shirts and slacks when you're meeting with someone," I said casually. "That's okay. I don't usually have to meet the client," he said. "Lisa and Nicole are the ones who meet with the clients and draw up the plans. I just do the work."

"Yet, there are clients who need to meet you before they agree on anything. When Bo and Dom moved here, I heard you weren't able to meet with Dom, so he decided to hire Bo's contractor instead. You could have earned a lot from Dom alone. But I guess it's a good thing you were hired by Linda Jacobs to do the funeral home," I said, shrugging my shoulders. "No use crying over spilled milk."

"Speaking of Dom, have they cleared him?" He asked. I saw him smirk before he quickly turned his head to look at some socks. "From being involved in the Marla Lawrence drug bust? Yes, they did. Jack conducted a

to a pink silk search at Dom's before Dan and I left for the airport," I answered, walking over shirt hanging on a rack. "Why do you ask?"

"I heard Dom bought Marla a new car. Didn't they just meet at the pageant last Saturday?" Noah asked, his tone curiously spiteful.

"Cynthia McDowell died, the funeral home went up in flames and nine people were found dead. If there's a lesson these past few days have taught me, it's not to waste any time," I said while putting the pink shirt I took off the rack against myself as I stood in front of the mirror-to see if it fit. "If you think buying someone a car is a bit excessive, how about a marriage proposal? Liam only went out with Virtue one time and he's going to propose to

her tomorrow.

"Are you guys sure he's going to propose to Virtue? Noah asked while he stood in front of the mirror and checked if a necktie would go with his outfit. "I remember Nicole mentioning Liam is arranged to marry some other girl. I know Liam, Chip, and I can tell you his father's approval means a lot to him. And what about Virtue? Virtue has only known Liam for a couple of weeks and they've only gone out once. Virtue doesn't strike me as a power-hungry, gold digging bitch. Why would she accept his proposal?"

"Seems like you're against Liam and Virtue marrying," I said, handing the sales clerk the pink shirt. "Any particular reason why?" He laughed, as if what I said was a joke.

"It's none of my business really and I actually don't care. I'm just saying... whatever this is, Chip, isn't going to end up in a fairy tale wedding and a happily ever after. Virtue and Liam? They don't make any sense. Just like Dom and Marla. Noah said, handing a neck tie, some?

2/6

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CHAPTER 98 Drunk

socks, and a belt to the sales clerk. "Let's just say you guys are right and Liam proposes to Virtue, guarantee Virtue won't accept his proposal and whatever future you guys are imagining isn't going to happen. Personally, I believe Virtue deserves someone better... someone who can take care of her, who

will love her, cherish her and never leave her side. That someone isn't Liam, Chip."

I was surprised to hear a jealous tone in Noah's voice.

You think that person is you?" I asked.

"Maybe he answered, admitting he wanted Joy.

Why am I not surprised? novel bin

What about Nicole? She seems to be in love with you, I pointed out. "But you aren't in love with her, are you?" Noah chuckled. I couldn't say, Noah admitted. "I grew up with Nicole. To be honest, I think she's over 7 2010 over Liam.

But we were happy when she heard about the proposal. I think Nicole has moved on."

Well, I'm considering my options, Noah said. "Plus, I need to focus on work and earn more money. and I have a paralyzed mother to care for.

"Now? I'm not sure, I wanted to hear what Noah had admitted to me. Noah daring me to pick one, but she just lowered her eyes. I've picked out

Let's pick

er,

"I don't know if I should do this, Noah said, pointing at a dark blue silk shirt.

Live a little, Noah persuaded him to buy the thousand dollar shirt. "One shirt hurt.

He nodded his head and immediately took the shirt. The brunette smiled brightly at

him which earned her a smile from him.

Sincerely, Minnie and Dan were close friends, there was no way Noah could talk himself out of having dinner with us. It was my two by the drinks and get them

drunk so they'd talk. We had been sipping on champagne whole afternoon... just a little bit more and my companions would be drunk.

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## CHAPTER 98 Drunk

While we waited for our food, I ordered cocktails and appetizers, paying extra to have them put in an extra shot of tequila in their Crystal Paloma cocktail.

Our servers came back with our orders of Bone-in Ribeye steaks, Big Eye Tuna Sashimi, Bacon Mac and Cheese, Millionaire's Potato, Chilled Oysters and our platters of expensive Wagyu micro steaks. To compliment our dinner, I bought bottles of Bordeaux.

After the hearty meal, I leaned back on my seat and waited. After our third bottle of red wine, the stories began..

"So all of you went to school together?" I asked. Nicole and Dan nodded their heads enthusiastically.

"Yep, we were all part of the same group in high school," Dan said loudly. "Noah became friends with us during the summer before sophomore year and Lisa came in during our

senior year.

Yeah, you guys used to come in when I was flipping burgers at the diner," Noah said, slurring. After his third glass of wine, he opted to drink beer instead.

"But I thought you were all friends even in grade school," I said, puzzled.

"Uhm, no. I was friends with Abigail and Liam in grade school," Nicole said. "Abigail was my closest friend and Liam was my childhood crush. We became girlfriend and boyfriend middle school. That's when I started growing boobs while the rest grew pimples."

"And

you

Noah? Why weren't you guys friends then?" | asked.

"Because Noah had this awful stutter," Dan answered quickly. "The only person who could actually understand him was Joy." Nicole roughly nudged Dan in the ribs after he said her

name. "Joy?" | asked while | refilled their glasses. Here we go...

"The girl who left during our junior year. Her family used to own the grocery store and the Old Taylor House, Dan said. "Joy was this pathetic little girl who used to follow Noah all around high school. Sure, she was this cute little thing during grade school, but when puberty hit, she was awkward and gangly."

"Old Taylor House? The same house Virtue moved into?" | asked curiously. Dan nodded his4/6

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## CHAPTER 98 Drunk

head. "What happened to her?"

\*During our junior year, she sprouted boobs and became the town's wh ore," Nicole hissed. "She did Liam, Jack and Cris, then | guess she promised some other boys to... you know. They ended up gang raping her in the boy's gym. She pointed the finger at Liam, but everyone in school knew she was lying."

"Nicole, Noah uttered, giving her a warning look. Nicole shrugged her shoulders, looking unperturbed.

"Oh my gosh! Did these boys get arrested for what they did to her?" | exclaimed, shocked.

"No. As | said she was the town's w h ore- | cut off Nicole.

"Rape is rape," | pointed out. "If she said no, whether or not she was known to have multiple partners, that is considered rape. Noah, you lived next door to her, right? Did you help her?" Noah was so busy glaring at Nicole that he jumped when he heard his name.

"| did. | was the one who brought her home... she was all bloodied up from the assault," he answered grimly.

“So what happened when she left?” | asked.

“We forgot about her,” Dan admitted, averting his eyes, “Lisa came into our group began following Noah just like Joy.” Nicole kicked Dan underneath our table and

him..

Nicole

at

No wonder Nicole led Joy into the boy’s gym.

“Well, Nicole, since you dress up like the town’s w h ore, if you ever get gang raped, ren your schoolmate named Joy,” | said, disgusted.

“Chip, we were teenagers,” Dan reasoned “We-”

“It doesn’t make it right,” | said. “| remember in my neighborhood, there was this young girl who was raped by a group of teenagers. After a week, those teenagers disappeared. Here in New Salem, you walk among them. How is that possible?”

“If you have enough money and connections, that s hit disappears, Noah admitted harshly.

“Noah!” Dan exclaimed, trying to hush him up. Noah raised his finger to silence him while

raising his glass to his line..

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CHAPTER 98 Drunk

After ch ugging the rest of his beer, to my surprise, he laughed sinisterly.

Noah leaned over our table and sneered at Dan. He had this insane look in his eyes which was unsettling... and frightening. Dan gulped down the lump in

his throat while | stared at Noah, stunned to see a side of him that | have never seen before.

He slowly turned his face towards me while | quietly sat in my seat, looking at him wide- eyed and uneasy.

“You know, Chip, you're right. We at New Salem, we walk among them, giving these sons of bi tches opportunities to become rich and powerful. They've forgotten their true place in society... a jail cell. Sadly, they're a bunch of lowlifes who act like they own the town, he said, his voice harsh and angry. “If you care for Virtue, Chip, you should do everything in your power to sway her decision. Tell her not to accept Liam’s proposal.”

“Im sorry,” | said, confused. “How does Joy’s rape figure in with Liam’s proposal to Virtue? | thought joy accused him, but another group was guilty of the rape.”

joy was my bestfriend, Chip, and she never lied.

## Chapter Comments

on now things are ramping up, hope Marla’s mum gets back to being stable.

Morgan

mock ner head”

WWW ALL 2 COMMENTS

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616

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## Chapter 99

### CHAPTER 99 Mascara

Cristos

| was an outsider looking in.

It was evident Noah was against Liam for whatever reason while Nicole, who was trying to remain loyal to Liam, was on the verge of destroying what little a relationship she had with Noah. Dan, on the other hand, was sweating despite the cold from the air conditioning system. He was obviously worried he would be implicated in Joy's rape knowing it would change my perception of him and | would look at him in a different light.novelbin

Dan wiped the sweat off his face with his handkerchief, then crossed his arms in front of his chest, sitting quietly, afraid a rebuttal would fuel Noah even more. Nicole, on the other hand, played with her table napkin absent-mindedly, but her face could not mask the hurt she felt. Even after ten years, Joy had a special place in Noah's heart.

| nodded at Noah and patted him on the back. He blinked rapidly, as if | had awoken him from a stupor, realizing he had put his friends in a bind by blurting out a forbidden secret.

For those who really knew Joy, what Noah spoke was the truth. This was the one reason why | always brought her shopping with me; she could never keep a straight face when the pieces of clothing | tried on didn't do me justice.

Before we all left for New Salem, she took acting lessons with Xavier to help her ease into her role as Virtue Sullivan. She learned how to lie naturally without the telltale signs she was being dishonest. So far, she was doing beautifully. After weeks of mingling with people she grew up with, no one knew she was Joy Taylor.

Noah, noticing the awkward position he had placed his friends in, raised his hands in the air, silently apologizing for his behavior. "It must have really hurt you when she left. Before | moved to New Salem, most of my friends tried to talk me out of it. It really hurt them to see me go," | said, coaxing Noah to admit his feelings. He leaned back on his chair and shrugged his shoulders.



"It did," he admitted. "I lost the one person who didn't care if I stuttered or had an ugly old car." He eyed Dan and Nicole separately as he enumerated both. "But she's gone now and life moves on. I just hope... wherever she is... she's happy." He raised his beer glass and gestured to the waiter for more, but Nicole shook her head.

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## CHAPTER 99 Mascara

That's enough, Noah," she muttered. He scowled angrily at her.

"Fine. If I can't drink, I'll just go to the restroom," he mumbled, standing up from his seat before Nicole could say anything else. He left the private room rather quickly for someone who was drunk.

After Noah had exited the room, I watched Dan and Nicole both heave huge sighs of relief.

"Chip, Noah's drunk. You have to excuse him," Nicole said, looking sideways at Dan who I figured was trying to think of something to clean up this whole mess Noah created. "If you could just allow me to explain to clear this whole thing up. Joy's assault... it happened during the Spring Formal and Joy's date to the event that night was Liam. Anyway, the reason why Joy blames Liam for what happened to her is because he left her standing alone on the dance floor. You see, Liam and I had just broken up a few months before the event, so when he arrived with her, I felt really jealous. While Joy was busy talking to Lisa and enjoying some punch, I pulled Liam away and took him outside to convince him to get back together with me. By the time Liam and I got back to the dance, she was gone. Our schoolmates said she excused herself to go to the restroom, but she didn't come back. We all thought maybe she went home or you know... did the nasty with someone else. We didn't think much of it until the next day when we heard she was in the hospital, raped and badly beaten. None of us talked because we all didn't see or hear anything. So you can imagine the shock we felt when we heard that Joy was accusing Liam, Cris, Jack and Dan of rape." I turned to look at Dan, pretending to be shocked to even hear his name.

"Dan, she accused you too? Aren't you?"

"Gay? Yes, I am. I've always been gay although I tried to hide my true self when I was in school, Dan said. "So you see, Chip, Joy was obviously lying. I can't even begin to imagine myself humping a girl. It's inconceivable... and totally gross."

It took all my energy not to stab him with my steak knife. He may not have used his pen but he used the end of a mop to rip Joy up from the inside.

I had to hand it to Nicole. It was a clever story. These people would go to great lengths to

twist the truth and keep the past a secret.

Dan took his glass of red wine, crossed his legs and tucked an imaginary strand of long hair behind his ear. "When Joy left town she was in such bad shape. For all we know, she eventually died from all her injuries." Nicole slapped him on the arm for saying that. "What? What did I say wrong? Nicole gave him a dirty look instead of answering the question.

"I'm guessing you harbor a grudge from her accusing you of rape," I said nonchalantly. 2/5

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## CHAPTER 99 Mascara

"No, I don't, but I would rather think of her as non-existent," Dan said gruffly. "As for Noah, although he believes in certain things, he never did say anything to Sheriff Combs. Deep inside, he knows the accusations aren't true."

"I feel really uncomfortable talking about her this way. Let's just keep it in the past where it should be," Nicole said, drinking the last of her wine and ending the discussion. "I better go and check on Noah. She opened her purse and quickly did her make-up. "You do that and we'll take care of the bill," Dan said. "Chip and I will be leaving early in the morning. When do you fly back to Bismarck?"

"Tomorrow around ten in the morning," Nicole said, after applying lip gloss. She checked herself one last time with her compact before zipping up her

her

By the way, where are you guys staying?" I asked.

At the Waldorf, Nicole answered, standing up. I'll see you guys downstairs." She grabbed

her things and hurriedly left while Dan gestured to our server for the bill.

CLipp, I know you're close friends with Virtue, but I hope you won't listen to Noah and try to antismé her decision. I heard what he said while we were shopping in Armani and contrary to what he said, I believe Liam and Virtue do make sense. They'll make a good-looking couple," Liam said.

"I know. If Noah hasn't said anything to Virtue and I doubt if Virtue hasn't heard from him, I'm not sure. Freplied, pointing out the inevitable. "But I do like the idea of me marrying the mayor. I feel it would be in her best interests to marry Liam and a woman who is close to her. It would be in my best interests as well. Dan laughed and raised

his

4

Let's drink to this, Dan said. I raised my glass and clinked mine against his. We both finished the rest of the wine, seemingly forgetting what was discussed earlier. He clapped his hands excitedly. If Virtue says yes tomorrow, I have a feeling you, Virtue and I will be

traveling to Chicago together, W ang!

"That can be easily arranged."

The server came in with the black Dan, I took it and handed my yellow ones

assured him. "I just hope we have enough time to prepare."

she presented it in his hands, but before he could give it to

Dinner it on me."

"Why, thank you, Chip, Dan said gratefully. Yes, I do hope we have more time to prepare, but knowing Liam, he is impatient. Anyway, he does have the money to make it

Fri, Mar

## CHAPTER 99 Mascara

We quickly gathered our bags and left the private room, happily talking about bridal gowns as if we were the ones getting married. | wanted a more conservative gown while Dan wanted a more trendier look. We were loudly debating among ourselves as we exited RPM Steak when we found Nicole crying outside, her bags scattered on the sidewalk.

Dan handed his bags over for me to carry, rushed towards Nicole, and quickly embraced her, as she continuously sobbed. If | didn't know her, | would've felt sorry for her.

After | had gathered all her things from the sidewalk, | pushed back the pleasure | was feeling from seeing her so distraught and rubbed her back to comfort her. She raised her face from Dan's chest, her mascara and eyeshadow smeared all over her face. "He left me," Nicole sobbed. "Noah left me. He said he's going straight to the airport to fly back to New Salem tonight.

"What?" | asked. "Did he say why?" She nodded her head. | waited for her to elaborate, but she didn't say anything. And? Why is he flying back so soon and without you?" | asked, urging her to tell us.

"He said something's happened that needs his immediate attention," she said. "Since | didn't want to fly back until tomorrow, he said | could stay, but he needed to get back."

"And here | thought he broke up with you, Dan said, grabbing her by the arms and shaking her gently. "He probably just has an emergency, Nicole... his mother is sickly. Dry your tears. You're probably crying for nothing.

"| thought the same thing," | said, chuckling. "You are overreacting, Nicole. Now, let's get you back to your hotel.

Dan placed his arm around Nicole and led her to the taxi stand while | quickly group messaged the others to tell them Noah was flying back to stop Joy from accepting Liam's proposal.

So much drama... and it wasn't even midnight yet.

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Chapter 100

## CHAPTER 100 Stalker

Joy

I woke up to the startling sound of my doorbell rolled over in my bed, groaning at the incessant chimes echoing through my house, and opened one eye to look out my window. I was surprised to see that it was still dark outside although the first rays of the morning sun were already lighting up the horizon.

Who in the world is ringing my doorbell so early in the morning?!

While I covered my ears with a pillow to muffle the sounds, I rolled over again and grabbed my smartphone on my nightstand, noticing I didn't have any messages nor did I have any missed calls. I quickly swiped the screen to check the CCTV footage, fighting the urge to just ignore the sound and fall back to sleep. However, I immediately sat up when I saw Cristos standing on my doorstep, pushing on the doorbell like his life depended on it. He was facing the yard, his back against my door, looking around as if he was waiting for something... or someone... to attack. I also noticed his other hand was inside his coat pocket. Apparently, he

was armed.

Joget

Joy, get out of bed. It's an emergency!

Without putting on my robe, I hurriedly walked down the stairs in my skimpy pink silk pajamas. Cristos needed me and I needed to help him."

Downstairs, I made my way to the front door, fumbling for the light switch. I figured with the lights on, whoever or whatever was causing Cristos to behave in such a way, would flee.

As soon as I unlocked the door, Cristos came barging in with all his luggage in tow. He pushed me aside, closed the door and quickly punched in my code to arm the security

system.

“Get down! Cristos instructed, pulling me down to the floor. “Stay away from any of the windows, keep your head down and when I tell you, go hide in your media room.”

Crouching low himself, he swiftly went to each of my windows to untie the curtains, obstructing the view of anyone lurking outside.

I quietly obeyed Cristos instructions and crouched low, practically crawling to hide in between the stools underneath my kitchen island. My heart was beating madly against my chest while my zrozziness shifted into panic.

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## CHAPTER 100 Stalker

“What's going on?” I asked nervously trying to make myself as small as possible so I wouldn't be seen through the cracks of my curtains.

“I thought I saw someone in a track suit when my car entered the cul-de-sac. It was weird. One second that someone was there, the next, poof, he was gone like a ghost. I saw him. move towards the tree in your front yard, but when I went to check, no one was there,”

Cristos said.

I rolled my eyes. This kind of behavior was seriously going to blow our cover. I could already imagine what Old Man Tucket from across the street was thinking with Cristos barging into my house!

“Chip, don't you think you're overreacting? Maybe it was someone doing some early morning jogging... a neighbor of mine. Just check the CCTV footage around the neighborhood before you make me die of a heart attack,” I said before standing up from my hiding place. I headed to the kitchen, turned the

lights on and began preparing to make us some coffee. This sort of paranoia was just absurd.

"Virtue, I said, get down!" Cristos hissed. "Most of your neighbors are elderly people and can't move as fast as the person I saw a while ago."

"Noah can, his mother's nurse can and oh... Old Man Tucket's grandson can, I enumerated all of my young and capable neighbors from the top of my head. "All the windows in this house is made of security glass and I doubt if a person in a track suit can hide a high. powered weapon under his jacket. The sun is already rising and usually Old Man Tucket is up before dawn watching the neighborhood through his windows. That someone disappeared because he or she might get caught."

"But Pete-

"But Pete wants me delivered to him on the day of the Spring Formal, so no, Chip, he won't hurt me," I argued. "Check the CCTV footage for a clearer view of whoever was here while I

make us some coffee."

"Fine!" Cristos quickly stood up from his crouching position and fixed his coat, looking more.

irritated at himself than at me.

He grabbed his laptop bag on top of his carry-on, sat down at my dining table and began working his magic. In a matter of minutes, he was muttering something under his breath.

After t

the coffee was done, I poured us each a cup and went to him to serve him his coffee. I peeked through the crack of my curtains to check if anyone was snooping before I sat down

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beside him. I quietly began sipping my coffee, patiently waiting for him to speak.

“Seems you were right,” Cristos eventually said after clicking through all the footage from all the CCTV cameras they had placed in my neighborhood. “The person in the footage wasn’t

here for you.

I heaved a small sigh of relief and leaned back on my chair, stretching my neck muscles to relax. Honestly, after yesterday’s note courier fiasco, I’ve been on edge. Cristos barging in on me like this at six in the morning only fueled my anxiety.

I decided to find something for us to eat. Food was always comforting. I stood up and walked to my refrigerator to grab the box of croissants brought home with me. I placed them all in the toaster oven and took out plates and utensils.

“How can you tell that person wasn’t here for me?” I asked, hoping he had an explanation.

“The person was scoping one particular house. Noah’s, Cristos said. That was unexpected. I’m sorry if I scared the bejeezus out of you so early in the morning, but since Pete has been sending people to scare us, you can’t blame me.”

“Can you tell if that person is a woman?” I asked. Cristos looked at me puzzled. “I remember Nicole mentioning she saw someone at Noah’s office. If it weren’t for the person’s long black hair, Nicole wouldn’t have known it was a woman.”

Cristos nodded his head at the possibility and began clicking away on his laptop.

“I can’t see the person’s face or hair because of the hood of the track suit, but the sneakers are most probably a girl’s,” he said, leaning back on his chair and crossing his arms in front of his chest. “The sneakers are definitely smaller in size including the hands... the person’s hands are dainty. It’s highly possible it’s a girl.”

“Well, I can always go next door and ask Old Man Tucket if he saw anything, but he might get suspicious,” I said, placing the warm croissants on a plate. I walked back to the dining table with the plate in my hand and a couple of forks in another. “Noah, I believe, has a stalker.” Cristos nodded his head in agreement.



"I won't be surprised if this person turns up to be Sarah Hughes or any of the women who went to high school with you guys," Cristos said before biting into a croissant.

"Why do you say that?" I asked while covering my full mouth with my hand.

Following Noah around after I left," he replied. I stared/5

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at him wide-eyed and surprised, not believing what I had just heard. I had always thought. Nicole disliked Noah when we were kids. She would laugh at his old Ford pickup truck when it came chugging into the school parking lot and make snide comments at Noah when he would join their group before class started.

"I find that hard to believe," I mumbled.

"That's not all. Nicole was crying her eyes out last night when Noah left her to come back to New Salem. She looked so pathetic. Her mascara was all over her face," Cristos said, smirking. He raised his cup of coffee to his lips and took a sip, then raised his finger like he forgot to tell me something. "Mmmm, I almost forgot... The biggest surprise was seeing Noah in a Armani suit and wearing expensive jewelry."

"What?!" I exclaimed, almost choking on my croissant. He pointed his fork at me.

"I had that same reaction," he said. "And get this, he even bought more stuff at Giorgio Armani, Dolce and Gabbana, Bloomingdale's, and Nordstrom. He even bought some jewelry. from Harry Winston."

"Oh wow," I said. "But if he has money to spend, why doesn't he just buy a new truck

instead?"

"I have no idea. I assume he doesn't want people to know he has money," Cristos answered.

"I doubt if the money is from his business. If he's doing jobs with Nicole, the money is most likely from smuggling meth across state lines."

“So I’m guessing you guys talked about Joy,” | said, going back to what he had mentioned earlier about Nicole following Noah after | had left. “What did they say?”

“The topic on Joy kind of slipped when | asked why Noah wasn’t friends with them in grade

school. Dan answered Noah had this stutter that only Joy could understand. | asked who she was and that’s when the conversation took an ugly turn. Nicole went on to explain Joy was

the town’s wh o re who slept with everyone. Noah, | can tell you, didn’t like that. Not... one.....

bit.”

“Noah finally grew a pair of balls, huh?” | said. Cristos laughed.

“He actually did. Noah said and | quote, “Joy was my bestfriend, Chip, and she never lied.” And he also pointed out that s hit could disappear with the right connections,” Cristos answered. “But there was something off. Noah was different. He was assertive, calculating even frightening, not the usual charming Noah we know who’s a pushover. He made Dan and Nicole fidget uncomfortably in their seats. I’ve never seen that side of him...” Cristos’s voice

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trailed away. “Unfortunately, he also told me to sway your decision. You have decided... yes?”

“| have,” | said, chewing on my croissant. “I’m going to say yes.” He smiled brightly.

“Who convinced you?” Cristos asked.

“Bo,” | answered. “I’ve been waiting for Noah to show up on my doorstep, but | guess | wasn’t the reason why he came home so soon in the first place. Actually, | don’t even know if he’s next door. | got home so late. Lou installed my security system at the shop yesterday and brought Dina.”

“Ah. She’s finally here. Oh, thank G od. I'll have her shadow X from now on. | am such an idiot for not getting her to come sooner. If | had-”

Cristos stopped mid-sentence hearing the unexpected chime of the doorbell. He clicked on his laptop to access the CCTV feed. y went into

“It's Noah!” He mouthed. He closed his laptop, picked up his luggage and quickly my den, closing the door quietly behind him.

| looked down at myself to find my nipples peaking through the flimsy cloth of my silk camisole. | quickly moved my long hair to the front of my body, fluffing it so | wasn’t exposed.

I inhaled deeply before opening the door.

Here we go....

Chapter Comments

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