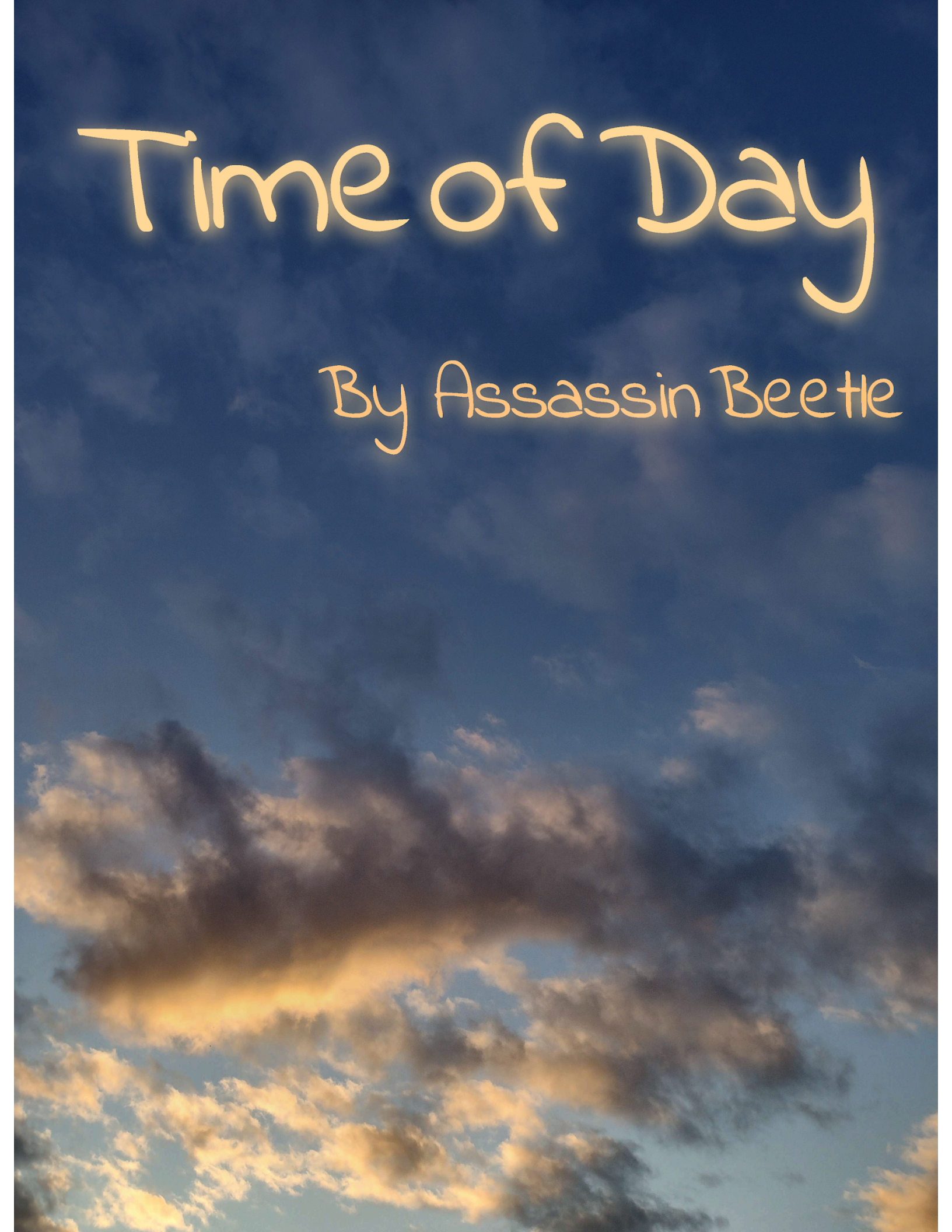


Time of Day

By Assassin Beetle



In memory:

*Terry and Gerry
I'll always Love you*

Chapter 1

A scream echoed off the concrete and steel as the alarms went off.

One of the inmates had tackled a guard and suddenly a flood of inmates took hold of the remaining guards. Mayhem swept through the prison!

They had planned it!

Insanity filled the inmates as they took over. They circled the few guards they had in large groups, taking turns with their violent brutality.

He leaned against the wall to watch. He wasn't about to stop them!

Time passed and he noticed it was getting warmer. Sweat formed at his hairline. He never did care for the prison garb as he itched at the back of his neck. He guessed the warden had turned off the air and he wondered when the lights would go out.

He noticed several inmates communicating with someone on the outside as they screamed their demands over the alarms. He knew their demands would never be met.

He happened to notice an abandoned laundry cart down the hall, partially in a doorway. An idea formed in his mind.

He saw Pyro, one of the inmates with accelerant and a lighter. He had no idea how the man had obtained them.

He caught hold of the cart and paused, the wheels barely budged. A feminine scent came from the cart. It was a maximum security prison, women were told not to wear perfumes.

He moved a couple of dirty shirts around and suddenly a face stared up at him. Terror filled her eyes and he could smell her fear. He tossed the dirty shirt back over her face. His heart began to pound hard as he pulled more clothes to cover her.

He immediately had to decide what path to take. Being in prison for eleven years had changed something in him. He didn't know if he wanted to do the right thing.

It would be minutes before she was found!

He knew he had to act fast. He pulled the cart behind him with two fingers, pretending the cart was light. The muscles he used burned from the amount of strength he needed.

His heart continued to pound, he worried the men would find her and he would be next. They would do to him what they were doing to the guards! They were mad men running down a crazy path!

He took his shirt off and casually approached Pyro. He couldn't move fast or their animal instincts would sense something amiss.

He took Pyro's accelerant and lighter. The man stood, looking like he wanted to fight, but he knew better.

He had a reputation of winning fights, even with the best of them. He had his own techniques and an unnatural ability to take beatings. His father's treatment had conditioned his body and he wore out his opponent until they were too weak to fight.

He quickly doused his shirt with accelerant. He tossed the shirt on the dirty laundry and rapidly lit it, just as an inmate started digging into the cart. Flames swiftly lit up.

Pyro started dancing up and down in glee.

He glanced at the monitors, seeing black screens as he quickly began pushing the cart down the hall. At first he thought the men yelled at him and wanted him to stop. He became tense and then forced himself to relax. They needed to not sense anything amiss by his body language.

He suddenly understood, realizing they were cheering him on! He turned the corner in the hall and saw dark forms behind the steel bars, holding rifles. They stood, an army of them next to the locked gate!

Was he ready to die? He thought it over as he continued to push the flaming cart closer. He stopped and put his arms out, waiting.

He heard the woman scream something over the alarm. He turned and went back, expecting a bullet to take him down.

The noise echoing off the walls from the alarms seemed to intensify their actions, as complete chaos grew among the men. Needs were not being met and fights broke out among them. Old arguments surfaced. As he moved around, trying to avoid the fighting. He noticed one of the guards laying flat. His hand limp and his chest not rising. A large blood trail led to his body. He was dead.

Suddenly the lights went out.

He noticed movement down the dark hall. Before he could even drop to the floor, they began firing their guns. The massive noise from the gunfire buried the alarms and screams from the men.

Laying flat on the floor he held still, not wanting to capture their attention.

A bullet still struck him. His body jerked hard from the sudden pain!

He was ready to die! He'd been ready for a long time! He wallowed in the most intense torment, it surrounded his body as darkness slowly pulled him in.

A doctor being paged over the intercom woke him.

Why was he still alive? He wondered in disgust, when he wanted death! He drew in a deep breath and slowly opened his eyes as frustration mounted. Most of his pain came from his head. Was he shot in the head? He reached up to feel for his injury, finding it covered with bandages. Whoever shot him, missed! He was still alive! The idiot needed lessons in how to shoot! He

never missed when he fired a gun! It might have been a ricochet bullet, but he didn't care. He wondered why they had used guns. A smoke bomb would've worked better.

He saw the hand he had used to check his head, swollen and twice its normal size. An IV trailed from it.

Movement caught his eyes.

"Knock, knock." A friendly feminine voice said. He remained silent. He recognized her perfume. The woman who had been in the cart during the riot, entered the room and came to stand by his bed. "They said you've awakened from your three day coma." A number of people stood next to her.

He hadn't spoken a word since his incarceration. One of the therapists called his not speaking, 'selective mutism'. He didn't care what they called it. They took away his freedom, they couldn't make him talk. He rarely even talked when he was young so it wasn't new behavior for him.

His swollen hand was beginning to really ache. He jerked the tubing and pulled the needle out. He didn't need it, he felt fine.

He heard a startled gasp and everyone took a step back. He refused to smile but he wanted to! He wasn't behaving in a prim and proper manner! Blood started to leak from the needle hole.

"Do you want me to call a nurse?" She anxiously asked.

He didn't care what she did. He pulled off a piece of medical tape that had been on his wrist and slapped it directly on the bloody hole.

She uncomfortably cleared her throat. "I'm very grateful for you saving my life, as they are." She waved her hand towards two people. She said their names while he ignored her. He stopped caring a long time ago!

If she was so grateful why didn't she just leave him alone? He thought in annoyance.

"Samuel Bass is the attorney I've hired to review your case."

He narrowed his eyes at the suited man. He didn't care for lawyers, they were in the same field as cops.

"He's already talked to a judge about moving you to a minimum security prison."

"I'm going to have your case go up for review. There are some questions about it and I'll bring them up in court. I'm going to see about getting you released." Said the attorney with confidence.

His eyes showed no emotion as he looked at the man. He didn't expect anything from anybody, having no hope, death preferred!

"If you could sign these papers I'll get the ball rolling." Samuel said with a nervous empty smile.

After he signed the papers he handed the pen back to the man.

"That's alright, you keep it." The lawyer said backing away with the paperwork. He looked worried blood might have gotten on it as he glanced at where the IV needle had been.

"Thank you." One of them said quietly as they left.

He fiddled with the pen that he shouldn't have. He didn't know what to think about their plan to help him. He didn't really care.

Chapter 2

He slowly stepped off the bus, one step at a time.

He was home!

A twenty-five year sentence without parole, dropped to eleven. Rich, fancy lawyer had gotten him off!

He hadn't expected that!

He hitched the backpack on his shoulder and under his arm while deeply breathing in the clean air. The stench of prison was behind him like the warm breeze brushing at his long hair strands. Light brown hair strands that soon became tangled in his beard.

Too warm for an October day.

He began walking towards home with trepidation. He didn't know what to expect.

The town had a lot of changes, he took it all in as he walked. His long legs ate up distance and his eyes fed on the sights. He saw people he probably knew but many he didn't. People drove past, looking at him.

It was a five mile walk to the gravel road, each mile stirred memories.

Memories he didn't want.

Halloween decorations covered people's yards he frequently noticed as he passed houses.

Annie loved the different holidays. He didn't want to remember how she would become so excited. The littlest things had made her happy.

He looked up at the cloudless blue sky and watched the trees wave in the breeze. He saw a squirrel race up a tree, a nut in his mouth. Nature was so beautiful to him. He wanted to absorb every moment. Soak up every part and feed his starving soul.

His heart began to race as he neared the gravel road leading to his brother's house. At least, he assumed they still lived there.

He turned off onto a gravel road. Another mile and a half left. Woods surrounded the road along with occasional house and a small driveway.

For another mile it became solid woods with a narrow gravel road running between the trees. The small gravel drive ran into Morris's land.

He couldn't remember how many acres his father owned and after his passing Morris had been the only one in his will.

Remembering the distance, he knew he was close to the old house.

The stench from the highly piled rubbish littering the yard met his nose before he saw it past the trees. Piles of debris laid everywhere in what was once a yard. He paused to view it. Broken down vehicles with most parts missing laid among the huge trash piles. A breeze caught plastic on top of piles and fluttered it, along with the reeking smells.

He glanced east towards the house their father had tried to build, years ago. The road leading to the other house appeared overgrown with decade old trees. He would have to walk a distance to check on the house, later. The years had given the trees time to grow and he doubted the house remained standing. Inhabited houses didn't age well. He wondered if Morris had forgotten about the house. If it had fallen from decay.

He noticed a narrow path between the trash piles and tried to use it. The rotting muck wet the path. He shook his head. Why did so much trash cover the yard? He could barely breathe from the smell.

He finally saw the house once he had passed enough garbage. The house looked old, decaying and not much higher than the huge trash piles. He didn't remember it being so small.

The roof had layering patches of tarpaper, large vinyl sheets, and even wood. He didn't see windows, they had been patched up with whatever else they could find. The foundation looked like it was sinking and cracking apart.

The porch had boards missing and woodrot in the ones it did have. He worried it wouldn't take his weight as it felt soft and gave under his feet.

He stepped carefully up to the door and hesitated before knocking. Loud male voices clearly heard, arguing. He noticed an older model car with expired tags, parked a few feet from the porch. It was the middle of the week, didn't they work?

His heart raced as he lifted his hand and knocked. Suddenly they stopped talking. He could hear their whispers.

"Pretend we're not here!"

"Probably family services again!"

"Let them knock!"

"Yeah, them again!"

It was the twins, Eddy and Freddy. Morris's two boys, now men. Their voices sounded the same.

He didn't bother knocking again as he opened the door. It had once been his home. They stood in unison with a startled looks. One of them stepped forward, defensively.

Identical twins. Most people couldn't tell them apart but he usually could. The defensive one took another step forward. Both wearing stained t-shirts and blue jeans.

"Who are you and what are you doing coming into our house?" Demanded the one stepping forward. His tone somewhat forceful.

"Move out of the way, Eddy. Unless you want to give me a welcome home hug." He said. Eddy had always been the more aggressive one.

"He knows us . ." Eddy said under his breath, confused.

"He knows you're you . ." said Freddy.

They looked at each other with perplexity, trying to guess who he was.

He looked around the house and it looked like it did outside. Trash and filth everywhere. He saw cockroaches skittering around. He sighed, he didn't want to put his backpack down. Had he gotten used to the prison's stark walls and floors?

"Uncle Vic!" Freddy suddenly exclaimed.

"Yeah, it's Uncle Vic!" Said Eddy in unison. They were quite a moment, staring at him.

"Did you break out of prison?" Freddy finally asked.

"Are the cops coming here?" Asked Eddy.

"I thought I'd take a vacation." Victor Zane dryly said. "Anyone using my old room?"

"What?" Eddy said, still confused.

"Vocation?" Said Freddy. "Did he break out?"

He carefully walked along a thin open area down the hall with stuff piled alongside. He could hear them talking to each other quietly.

His door stood ajar and he pushed it all the way open. He closed the door behind him. It didn't latch and appeared off one of the hinges. He looked for something to block the door. He didn't want his nephews coming in. A small amount of trash laid with broken drawers on the floor. He

picked up the empty dresser and set it up against the door. A filthy, stained mattress had some of the stuffing hanging out between tears. Mouse droppings covered the surface.

A piece of stained paper laid on the floor, where the dresser had been. His heart began to pound hard. He picked up the paper and flicked the mouse droppings off. He flipped it over and tried to straighten it out. Mice had Shredded some of it.

Annie's signature was the first thing he saw. He suddenly needed to sit down. Her precious little heart over the 'i' in Annie sent emotions violently through him and sending him down into his personal hell. With tears filling his eyes, he kissed her name on the marriage certificate.

He had told them so many times, he had been married to her! The marriage certificate was on his dresser! They claimed to have looked everywhere in his room!

They had said, 'he was lying'! He had stalked her and had violently killed her when she had rejected him!

He was guilty! He had left her side! He had gone back to the house for more money. He had been so happy, Annie and him had gotten married! She died because some monster had taken his pleasure in killing her!

A million times, he relived the moments!

A young teen had asked him for a quarter. He had tossed him one. The silver catching the sun just like his memories flickering in his mind. The young teen had killed her, he just knew it! A million times he had pondered, while in prison. If he ever saw the boy again he would kill him! He would beat him to the ground and tear off his limbs, slowly, piece by piece! He dreamed of that day happening! He lived for it!

He wiped his tears and stood up. He went to his empty closet and stepped in under the broken rod. He pushed and pulled the mechanism he had built years ago. It looked like part of the closet wall but actually was a hiding place for his things. He opened the door using a lot of strength. It stuck, eleven years of age.

His guns still rested where he had left them. A little hairpiece of Annie's nestled next to his guns.

He would not fall in love again with another woman! The pain wasn't worth the price! He would live an entire lifetime and still never forget her lifeless eyes as he slipped on her blood racing to her side.

He would never love again, he firmly repeated to himself! Too much pain! Way too much!

A banjo rested next to the rifles. She had loved his playing.

He noticed enough ammunition left for both rifles. No one had found his hiding place. He picked up the hair piece, it no longer carried her scent. He closed the secret door, leaving her blue hairpiece. He placed the dresser back to its original spot against the wall, under a tiny dirty window. He laid her precious paper down on top of the dresser. Their marriage license.

He stepped out of his room and could smell someone else in the house. He went down the darkened hall that led into the living room. A young female sat on the couch next to Freddy with a little girl sitting quietly near them.

The young woman didn't notice his entrance right away. She seemed too busy with Freddy, leaning into him, trying to kiss him. The pink shorts left her legs bare and momentarily paused Victor's thinking.

Freddy and Eddy saw him and acted nervous.

He wondered what they were up to, but didn't really care. Maybe they were uncomfortable with him around.

"Where's Morris?" He asked the twins. His thinking cleared. The young woman's eyes grew wide as she stared at him. Maybe his speech was rough because of living over a decade with violent inmates. She immediately didn't like him and shifted nervously.

"Pop, he's upstairs . ." Eddy said.

"Yeah, he's not doing too good . ." added Freddy.

He went up the narrow stairs, made even narrower by the junk stored there. A different scent caught his nose.

The scent of sickness.

He heard her whisper. "Who is he?" He paused to hear their responses.

"He just got out of prison. He was supposed to be in there a lot longer. He killed that girl, Annie Craig." Freddy said.

"Then went to prison," added Eddy.

"You're related to him!" She exclaimed. "You never said anything about this!"

"Baby, I'm not like him!" Freddy exclaimed, defending himself.

Victor rolled his eyes and continued up the steps. With no doubt in their tone over his guilt. They didn't have the virtue of family loyalty.

The first thing he saw was the shrunken form of his older brother. Saddened by the sight of Morris in such a condition and knowing whatever was wrong, he didn't have much time left. He sighed and stood next to the bed, not wanting to wake him.

Morris opened his eyes and gave a start. "Billy Dale!" He exclaimed. He coughed nonstop for ten minutes. With shaking fingers, he placed the tubing under his nose while struggling to breathe and straighten up in the bed.

A stool was buried under paper trash. Victor pulled the stool out and sat down on it. Brushing all the mail back so he had room to put his feet.

"Vic?" Morris managed to say hoarsely.

He nodded. His throat felt tight with emotions.

"You're here? How?"

Victor reached over, pulled out an official looking envelope, and handed it to him.

"You didn't open your mail." Victor said, his throat still tight which caused his tone to sound rough.

Morris glanced at it. "Nothing matters anymore, I'm dying."

"I noticed." said Victor as he tossed the envelope down. Quietness settled between them.

"You never were much of a talker." Said Morris.

Victor nodded.

"I'm all ate up with cancer." Morris said. "I need a smoke. Can you get me one? If I wait for my boys to bring it, I'll be waiting all day!"

Morris pointed with a pale slender finger towards a shelf built into the wall.

Victor found the cigarette pack and knocked one out. He used the lighter next to the pack to light it. He exhaled as he handed it to his brother.

"You learned how to smoke!" Morris exclaimed, coughing again.

"Prison does that to you." Victor replied. He could tell by the high pitch of his brother's voice, he felt excited to see him.

"If you want one, you're welcome to them."

Victor took one for himself. He didn't need to smoke but he wanted to be friendly. He tried to get more comfortable on the stool as he sat back down. "Who is Billy Dale?"

" . . guess it doesn't matter who knows now. Ma was cheating on pa. After the baby was born he took off one night. He took us both."

"Doesn't matter. They're never going to have me for a son."

"You look a lot like him."

"Think it's why pa was always beating on me?"

"Might be." Morris said, agreeably.

"Help me in prison when I got into fights. My body was so conditioned that it could take the pounding. I was able to beat some really bad men because of it."

"Life is strange." Morris said as he flicked ash to the floor.

Quietness filled the room except for the hum of the oxygen machine.

Morris's eyes drifted shut.

Victor grabbed Morris's tumbling cigarette before it hit the floor. He noticed burn holes in the floorboards when he moved his boot heel across the thick layer of ash. Burns holes riddled the bedding, he was lucky to have not burned down the house.

Morris opened his eyes suddenly. "Thought you were a dream!" He coughed for a while and adjusted the tubing under his nose again.

He motioned for the second cigarette that Victor still held. Victor handed it to him.

"Helps me breathe," he said, inhaling it.

Victor doubted it, but wasn't going to argue. He looked for a place to put out his cigarette, the nearby heavy glass ashtray overflowed with butts.

"How'd you get that scar on your forehead?"

Victor put his cigarette out on the ash covered floor. "Shot in the head. No brains there to leak out so I'm still alive."

Morris started to laugh and it turned into a fit of coughing.

The coughing eased slightly. "Come here," he said, motioning Victor closer.

Surprised to find his brother pulling him close for a hug as he leaned in. The sting of tears burned his eyes as he pulled away after gently hugging him. His body was so frail. Morris looked overwhelmed with emotions too.

"Good to see you before I . . ." Morris didn't finish speaking when his coughing started up again.

Victor waited until his brother's coughing let up a little then spoke. "Do you have a nurse?"

"They keep complaining of, 'the environment being unsafe'. I told . . leave!"

"I'll take care of it. Get some rest, Morris." He said. His brother had already closed his eyes. He noticed a large cup with a little murky water in the bottom. The cup didn't look clean. He sighed and took it. He'd get his brother a fresh cup of water.

He went down the stairs and came to a sudden halt. It looked like everyone had left except the little girl. When she saw him she let out a wail.

He didn't know what to do. "It's alright, little girl." He tried to speak softly.

She became louder in her cries. He slowly walked to the kitchen sink. Filth covered every single surface. The faucet ran continuously and he couldn't get it to turn off. He dumped out the cup and used his hand to clean off the inside of it. He cringed from the slimy feel.

He filled it with fresh water. The water didn't smell clean and he wondered if the garbage surrounding the house was getting down into the well's water line. He shook his head.

He glanced out the door, it hung open a crack. No car parked outside, they had left. He tried to shut the door more firmly.

He carefully passed the screaming and scared little girl. No quick moves, he thought to himself. He went back upstairs and set the cup down.

Morris opened his eyes. "Can you give . ." He started coughing. He pointed to the cup. Victor helped him drink between his coughing. "Thank you!" He said as he laid back down on his grungy pillow.

"I scared her." Victor said.

"No, she's always screaming . ." he pointed to the other bedroom, an annexed room to his. "They leave her there all the time."

"Who is she?"

"My granddaughter . ." He coughed more and Victor didn't want to make him talk anymore. "Bebe . ."

Victor nodded and went back downstairs. He looked through their kitchen supplies. Maybe, if he fed her she would stop screaming. He didn't find a thing to feed her. Cockroaches had been into everything that could have been eaten.

When he opened the refrigerator he almost fell over. He wasn't sure he'd be able to clean it! It smelled so bad. He checked the freezer part and found stuff frozen completely together. The freezer space was almost a solid ice cube. He checked the refrigerator again by holding his breath. Full to the brim of rotten food but it was cold.

He went to his room and unzipped his backpack. He snacked earlier on graham crackers and peanut butter. He grabbed the plastic knife and made a bunch of sandwiches on his lap. He put them back in the box.

He handed her one and she refused, continuing to scream. He put the crackers back in the box. He grabbed his banjo from his room and began to gently strum the old cords. It was seriously out of tune and he knew the cords would break. She quieted down and sat staring at him. When two cords suddenly popped, he reached for the crackers. He handed one to her and she timidly took it.

She hungrily shoved the whole graham cracker in her mouth, crumbs falling to the floor. She looked malnourished and exceedingly thin. Her hair looked brownish but he doubted it was a true color. It looked like the same grime that covered her body and clothes.

"Eat a little piece at a time." He tried to speak gently.

He continued to feed her small pieces until he took a guess when her stomach might be full. He didn't want her getting sick by eating too much. He looked around and didn't see anything he could wipe her face.

He searched for something to give her some water. When he found a cup he cleaned it and gave it to her.

He went back upstairs and waited until Morris opened his eyes. Victor didn't realize she had followed him, she had been so silent. She climbed up in Morris's bed and woke him. Her wide eyes watching Victor.

"Hey, kitten," Morris mumbled. He attempted to sit up more in the bed.

Victor handed him a graham cracker with peanut butter.

Morris broke off a piece and then handed her the rest of it. "He's your uncle Vic."

Victor wasn't sure Morris could eat it and wondered when the last time he ate something.

She continued to stare at Victor as she broke off a part and ate the other piece. Victor nodded his head at her. She had learned quickly and had listened. "Unl' ick". She tried to say.

Victor tried to smile at her. His cheeks seemed stiff and the muscles unused to smiling.

Morris didn't speak or cough as he let the piece rest in his mouth without chewing.

"I'm going to take a walk." Victor said. "Will you two be alright?"

Morris nodded slightly.

Victor set the box down with the peanut butter graham crackers sandwiches. He went down the stairs and out the door. His emotions became too much and he needed to get away! He was free and able to do that.

Trees surrounded him once he got past the piles of trash that filled the yard.

His heart began to pound hard and he walked quicker. Tears burned his eyes and ran down his cheeks, wetting his beard.

A bluejay squawked in the distance.

Leaves crunched underfoot. His stride led him deep into the woods before he stopped. He rubbed at the tears on his cheeks. Almost the end of October yet the woods looked so beautiful to him. He so agonizingly missed being there. The most precious place, the place of his heart. They took that from him and made him suffer way more than they could ever realize! The agony of not being able to breathe in the air, see the wildlife, see all the trees, listen to the birds sing, see the most beautiful wild flowers bloom in the spring and summer.

He went to his knees and began to cry in huge dry hacking sobs. They had no idea how much he suffered! He blamed himself for her death! He knew if he hadn't left her side in that motel she would still be alive! It had been his fault!

His brother was dying! They wouldn't have much time left to be together!

He didn't know how long he cried.

A squirrel scolded him.

He sat up, he had been on all fours. He smiled through his tears. How much he missed the life of the woods! He loved every inch of it! The squirrel made another sound and came upside down a couple feet, its little feet digging into the trunk of the tree.

He stood up. Likely the squirrel suddenly remembered he had a nut store in the ground where he had cried. The squirrel may have thought Victor was going to find his nut.

He smiled as he walked in the direction of the house their father had built years ago, but had never finished. Curious if it had rotted and collapsed after so many years, he just had to check.

He walked slowly, enjoying every second of the woods. He took in every sight and every sound. Nature's presence filled him with so much pleasure. So much happiness, even with the grief of losing his brother.

He saw the house in the distance, it looked like it was still standing. He thought it strange that it looked like someone lived there.

As he got close he immediately noticed it had a metal roof. Decaying leaves covered the ground but no trash. He slowly walked around the house. The windows once had some type of wood covering on them on the outside. They had rotted and laid on the ground. He examined the window frames and saw little wood rot. Still solid and in place.

He walked to the south side and stood looking at the door. The complete rot of the door had caused it to fall off two of the hinges.

He tried to open it and found it locked.

"Guess what, Pop." He said out loud, "I'm coming in!" He gave the remains of the door a hard kick and sent pieces of wood flying. He managed to get his hand in and unlock the door. He tore the pieces of wood off and started making a scrap pile. "You're not going to stop me now, pop!" He said antagonistically.

He walked through the house seeing only bare studs. Two-by-fours made the inside walls. His father had made the outside secure but the inside needed a lot of work to be finished. He didn't see leaks anywhere past the rafter since it had no ceiling. The roof leakproof showed how good a carpenter his pop's skills had been.

He noticed on the north end of the house where he guessed the walls of bedrooms, a bookshelf ran the distance of the entire north wall. He saw the rafters went more feet past the six inch shelves. He went outside to examine the missing few feet.

He came back inside. He reached up and pulled himself up into the beams so he could look overhead at the gap behind the shelves.

Piles of stuff laid between the fake wall. They may have been in boxes but now they laid in piles, the cardboard had decayed. Mostly what looked like tools.

He had hid his stuff like himself, with his guns. Pops had known of Morris's drug habit. How his brother would steal stuff and sell it for buying drugs. He shook his head at their similarities over hiding things. But he still hated Victor more. He remembered too well all the beatings.

He needed to get back to check on Morris.

He walked a little faster back to the house. Plans in his head of all the work he would have to do. Clean Morris's place and work on pop's house.

He went up the stairs not hearing anyone. They both laid sleeping. He went outside and checked out the vehicles scattered about the yard. An old truck looked in the best shape, but he needed a key.

He walked through the house, planning how to clean it and how much he could buy from what the prison had given him.

He thought about the mason jar where he had kept hidden in the woods. Annie was dead because he had come back to get more money from it. He didn't want to ever use it. It had been money he had saved working to buy things for her. In his mind it was almost like blood money. Morris and Bebe needed food! The refrigerator would have to be cleaned first.

He went back upstairs.

Morris had awakened and his eyes had a crazy wide eyed look in them. "Come here!" Morris whispered. He motioned Victor closer. "You need to find it!"

Confused by Morris's behavior, "What?" Victor asked.

Morris's eyes had a glazed look. "Find where they're hiding it! I need it!"

"You need a hit?" Victor asked. He wasn't about to buy his brother's drugs, even if he was dying.

Morris nodded vigorously. "The boys, look!" He said frantically pointing towards the other bedroom with a bony finger

Victor felt his heart drop like a stone hearing his nephews did drugs like their father. "I'll look!" He said in a hard tone.

He glanced around the bedroom after turning on the bare lightbulb. The floor looked clean unlike the rest of the house. A few items of clothes laid on the floor. He picked them up and felt the pockets. He felt a trace uncomfortable touching their things.

He went downstairs to the room across from his and started looking for a crack pipe or a small baggie. Clothes covered the floor, but still cleaner than the rest of the house. He tossed stuff about, checking pockets. He shouldn't be surprised, like father like sons. He still felt a little uncomfortable going through his nephew's things. Angry that they did drugs too! He doubted he could have stopped them had he been there. But maybe he could have, it pained him to think about it.

He bumped the mattress and lifted it. Nothing was under the mattress but something small fell. He picked up what had fallen on the floor, it was a key. He put it in his pocket. It might be an extra for the car they drove.

He heard a scratching at the front door. He opened it and the huge dog bared his teeth with a quick snarl.

"Chip?" Suddenly remembering Morris had a puppy when he had gone to prison. The dog sniffed then dropped on his haunches and wagged his tail, suddenly friendly.

He closed the door behind him and didn't let the dog in. He went to the truck and inserted the key which fit. The engine didn't turn over, the battery, dead.

He went back inside and Chip slipped past him and ran up the stairs.

He jumped up on the bed and woke Bebe. She frowned at Chip and got out of Morris's bed. She walked into the other room and laid down on the stained mattress on the floor.

Victor followed and covered her with a flimsy blanket. She looked up at him with wide eyes.

He went back and waited until Morris opened his eyes. It looked like he was in a lot of pain. He moaned softly.

Victor didn't want to wake his brother or he might act like he had earlier. Hopefully he wouldn't remember anything from before. Morris took opiates, he saw the medicine bottles on the shelf.

Victor looked on the shelf for a pen and found one. He grabbed a handful of mail and went downstairs. Leaving the three of them asleep.

Chapter 3

He waited for one of the twins to drive him to town to buy a battery. He spent a number of hours working on it trying to get it to run. He felt surprised to find the twins leaning over the grill to look in on what he was doing. He grew more impressed when they knew what was wrong with the truck. Another trip to town for more parts and finally the truck ran.

He needed to clean out the refrigerator and see if he could fix the stove. If he cooked at home, it would be a lot cheaper.

It had been a long time since he had driven a vehicle. He drove slowly trying to reteach himself.

He planned on taking out the trees growing in the driveway leading to pop's house and to begin hauling away the trash. He also planned on putting up drywall and painting pop's house. He thought of finishing in enough time to move Morris to a more comfortable and bigger house. He parked at a restaurant, thinking of ordering food to take home.

He stepped into the restaurant and a pleasant smell of food met his nose. He breathed in deeply, the scent made his mouth water.

A little sign in front of him said, 'wait here to be seated'.

They looked busy, he might be there a while. He stepped back and leaned his shoulder against the wall, near a coat rack.

He tried to not think about losing his brother to cancer. All the years he'd been away, locked up in prison had been time away.

A flutter of a skirt and flowery female scent swept past him as she rushed up to the sign. She dug around in her purse looking frantically for something.

"You can't use your feminine beauty to just cut in line." He said behind her. The flame of attraction lit up inside him. Her soft facial features had beauty that captured his interest.

Startled, she swung around with wide eyes. "I didn't see you! Where did you come from?" She looked about for another entrance, not believing him.

"From hell!" His answer just came out. He didn't like the feelings stirring in him as he noticed how her dress clung to her curves.

As she looked him over, her breath caught. The deep gray of his eyes held some chill. Her eyes swept over his masculine form, causing her heart to beat hard. Shock held her immobile as she tried to deal with the flood of new emotions. Who was he? What had suddenly happened to her? She couldn't even remember why she was rushing about.

"Do you have a phone?" She remembered suddenly.

"No." He said, indifferently.

Hurt came immediately. She tried to smile and act indifferent. Everyone had a phone, he lied because he didn't care to help her.

Her facial expressions were so easy for him to read. He sighed and pulled out the inner lining of his pockets. "No, phone." Keys on a key ring dangled from a finger.

He stepped closer and leaned against the wall and slightly over her. He breathed in deeply on her scent. He wanted to remember it later.

She looked up at him, "you're tall."

"You're short." He was quick to quip back.

"What's your name?" She breathed in almost a whisper.

"My little niece calls me un'le Ic. She can't say her V's."

Everything about him appeared perfect. As she stared up at him she saw his eyes darken. Her own breathing became faster.

"You're too close, back up." She ordered him.

"You gonna make me? You're the one who cut in line!"

"My daddy will!"

"Who's your daddy?" His tone sounded mocking. Like he didn't fear anything.

"The sheriff in this county!"

"You could call him. Oh, but you lost your phone." He said while smiling.

How dare he smile and mock her like a big bully! "Did you get that scar on your forehead from bullying the wrong person?" She asked snidely. She was breathing too fast. She needed to stop! She shouldn't be antagonizing a stranger! What was wrong with her?

"Shot in the head. They were definitely the bullies!"

"A bullet didn't penetrate your skull! That's just a graze!" She tried to use a stern tone she used with misbehaving children, who told her fibs.

His smile widened, showing his teeth. How could he be so attractive?

"Please," she whispered. Weakness grew and she worried her knees wouldn't hold up. Why would a stranger cause her to feel such powerful emotions? Emotions she'd never felt before.

"Please, what?" His husky voice sent tingles through her.

She couldn't think.

"Violet!" A woman said.

She startled with a hard jerk.

"There you are!" The woman added, approached her. "We're waiting, birthday girl!"

Violet looked back at the man who had her heart pounding and every cell of her body tingling. His slightly raised eyebrow and the look in his silver gaze burned a place permanently in her memory as she walked away.

She locked her bedroom door behind as she slowly walked to her large vanity mirror. She had turned twenty-six! She had done nothing she had planned in her life. All her dreams, down the drain. Being a model hadn't been too much of a dream. Being a librarian she had accomplished, but sometimes not quite so fulfilling. The most important dream of hers, having two of her very own children to raise. Not one like her parents had done. Not one lonely child, but two. The biggest dream and her deepest desire!

She tried so hard to find the right one. The man who would make beautiful children. Years passed and not one she felt close to making her dream come true. One man after another. Sometimes her father would intervene. Not the right one, he would say.

Caleb came along. He seemed perfect at first in all the ways. His dark hair, perfectly groomed. His clothes stood out. Almost handsome.

His father was very close friends with her father and had known each other years ago. Both almost cried when Violet and Caleb announced their engagement. They had been so happy with the engagement!

Time passed and little things started to bother her. Cutting comments that he would say, 'oh, I've just had a bad day', after apologizing.

It happened more often. Then demanding sex. She hadn't felt ready. It didn't matter. What she wanted never mattered to him. His eyes glazed over talking about things that interested her.

She didn't dress classy enough. Reveal some breasts, some leg. Why couldn't she wear stilettos? She needed to wear stilettos so her butt didn't look so fat.

She knew she had more pounds than she should. She tried hard to find the right diet, it was never easy!

She may never find someone looking like she did and getting older! She felt desperate!

She looked around her room. Such a teenager's room. The years had just slipped away. No longer sixteen, the childish toys that cover the shelves mingled with romantic nonsense books she read in her later teens.

She walked across the fluffy white carpet that lined her room. She had been so ecstatic ten years ago when her father hired someone to lay it down.

The princess canopy bed with lights that she never turned on anymore.

Life had passed her by and she had missed the train.

Her father's job interested her. She listened to his stories over the years. Her mother hovered over her and busied herself with different charity events.

She had finally met the one. He was likely married. Her heart had yet to stop racing. It had been hours.

Everything around her she saw in a different light. Meeting him had done something to her. Had awakened her senses!

When she looked in the mirror she didn't look any different. Her friends, she was glad to have, they looked different. When she stepped into the house, it felt different. Her room looked so childish. She wanted a room more mature. A room he would like. She had no idea what he liked but whatever he liked she wanted it.

He probably was married to someone and she needed to forget him. He probably had children already.

She didn't know if she would be able to sleep since she couldn't get her mind off him.

Who was he? Ic? Mick? Nick?

She wanted to know everything about him!

It would take a lifetime to forget him.

She was in trouble, she could feel it.

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He hesitated going through the doors of the library. The last time he went, he had been attending school and had barely been in his teens. He had a homework assignment and needed a book. The old woman working there had yelled at him for not speaking when she asked him questions. She had called him a retard! She refused to let him have a book saying 'retards' didn't have enough smarts to take care of a book!

He could barely sleep during the night, thinking of Violet. He wanted to know her last name, maybe even where she lived.

He hated his weakness and the insane need to mate. If he could destroy that part of himself, he would!

He couldn't believe himself. Thinking of a woman and being afraid of some abusive librarian!

Gaining courage, he boldly walked through the doors. He stiffened when an elderly woman stood behind the counter. He had a couple of envelopes from Morris's mail pile. He took a pencil and wrote he needed to use the computer on one of the envelopes.

"Is this your address?" She asked.

He nodded stiffly. Maybe they didn't allow an ex-convict to use the library.

She filled out some paperwork and before he could walk out the door she handed him a card.

She motioned towards the computers with a wave of her hand.

"Use any of them that are open." She said, busying herself with putting books away.

He looked at her and then at the card. It had Morris's name on it. He didn't say a word and suddenly he had a library card!

He set Morris's envelopes down next to a computer and sat down. He pulled up the name of the sheriff in the county. Weston Dakota was the name he found. He read some articles on him. Racecar driver at one point in his life.

Was her name, Dakota? Violet Dakota?

"I'm sorry I'm late Carla!" Violet's voice caused him to freeze.

He lowered himself in the seat, hoping she wouldn't notice him. Of all the places for her to work. She was a librarian? They talked together behind the counter about something.

"Don't be ridiculous," Violet said between giggles. They whispered more before the elderly woman walked out the doors, saying her goodbyes over her shoulder.

Violet walked on the other side of the computer tables. They may have been talking about him because it seemed she was attempting to look in his direction.

Tension filled him. She might think he was stalking her! Heart racing he stood up, he may as well get it over with. Let her think whatever she wanted!

She came to a sudden stop and her mouth dropped open. Her face reddened.

For a moment he actually felt like smiling. He hated himself for being so weak. Her gorgeous black hair piled on top of her head. Several tiny tendrils hung down framing her soft features.

He came to her side. "Did you have a good birthday yesterday?" He had no trouble talking to her. None of the stress he always had with others! "This is my brother's name." He handed her his new library card.

She nodded and swallowed hard. "What is your name?" She asked faintly, taking the card.

He swiftly slid it into his palm more so she brushed her soft, small fingers against his to pick it up. His heart raced with her touch. He watched her beautiful face redden. He could feel his own heat up.

"Victor Zane." He said, following her to the counter. He wanted to be with her all day, now that he knew where she worked. He needed to resist the temptation! He refused to have feelings for another woman again! Temptation burned through him, a strong and powerful feeling grew.

"Have another good day, beautiful." He said, huskily and walked off. He needed to stay away! He used all the strength he had in him to resist staying.

"Wait, I'll give you . . ." She said behind him.

He got in Morris's truck feeling a little shook up. Did people fall in love more than once in their life? He didn't want it to happen again! He needed to be stronger! Resist the temptation!

He drove around aimlessly. He saw a yard sale and parked. He needed to work on not thinking about her and focus on what he needed to do. If he could find cheaper stuff to buy he could save money. He didn't find anything. He checked out three more yard sales.

He drove down a busy expressway when someone on the other side lost some of their load. He quickly parked and ran to the large item in the middle of the road. He put a hand up at the

traffic as he saw in his peripheral the man had parked and ran to what looked like part of a cabinet. He helped the man move it off the road and traffic resumed.

"Thank you!" The man said, gratefully as they loaded the heavy woodwork back into his truck. "I thought I had it strapped down good. The straps must of broke."

Victor noticed someone walking in the direction of Morris's truck. Another man came from the opposite direction. When it looked like they were thinking about getting into Morris's truck. He yelled, "Hey!"

He had to wait before crossing the busy street, cars passing. His heart pounding in fear of them taking the truck. They just about grabbed the open door of the truck as he sped across the space between them and him. His fists ready to attack.

One had partially climbed in. The other came at him. He simply flung him off to the side. The man was short and had no strength. The other one he grabbed a hard handful of his hair and jerked hard before the man could put the running truck into gear. The small one pulled a gun and Victor kicked at the gun which followed by the kick landing in his stomach. He fell back and almost got hit by a car.

Victor kicked the gun into the ditch while the man came up behind him. He elbowed him hard in the face.

Suddenly they both ran off. The other man who had lost his load crossed through the traffic and approached Victor's side.

"Man, you know how to fight!"

Victor shrugged.

"I want to thank you again for helping. Do you work?"

He never knew why he was more comfortable talking with some people. "I came home . ." He hesitated. "My brother is dying and sometimes needs help."

"Flexible hours?"

Victor nodded.

"Cancer?"

Victor nodded again.

"Stage 4?"

Victor hadn't asked his brother too many questions since he always coughed.

"I just lost someone. I know what you might be going through." He pulled out a business card and handed it to him. "Just call me.""

Victor read the card and saw 'kitchen cabinetry'. He loved working with wood! "What day do I start?" He rarely got excited anymore.

"Take the weekend off to set things right with your brother. Come Monday morning."

Victor nodded. He got in Morris's truck feeling dazed. He hadn't told the man about his prison record.

He drove along residential areas, looking for more sales. He parked at another one and walked into the garage where a man sat. Boxes sat on tables next to items like soaps, makeup, jewelry and a few other things.

He was about to walk out when the elderly man stopped him. "I can't do this . . this was her thing working for that pyramid scheme company!" He began putting the stuff back in boxes.

"Selling this junk. You can have it! I'm done! I can't do it!" He sounded overly emotional and on the verge of tears.

He helped the old man, carefully placing items back in boxes.

"She passed away six months ago and I'm moving to another city to be close to my family and I don't want this stuff anymore!"

He hauled the boxes and put them in the back of Morris's truck.

When he was done he closed the garage door before Victor could thank him.

He drove off, not sure what to do with all the women's stuff. He needed gallons of bleach to clean Morris's house! Not makeup and lotions.

He saw a wheelchair resting against a small dumpster by the curb. He checked it out and found one of the wheels froze up. He put it in the bed of Morris's truck.

He kept driving through residential areas and saw another large sale. He parked and got out. He stopped first by a single table in a small yard. A young woman stood by it, busy on her phone. It was homemade baked goods.

He went back to Morris's truck and grabbed one of partially full boxes. He emptied it in another box and went back to the baked goods table. He began filling it up with bread, cookies, bars and muffins.

She stared at him as he motioned the box. He pulled out twenties and waited. She said the amount glancing into the box. He gave her some twenties.

"Wait!" She said, motioning for him to put the box down. She grabbed a box under the table and placed pies in it. She then piled the remainder of items on the table and filled his box. "I'm done for the day. Thank you. You can take all of it."

She walked off shoving the twenties in a pocket while typing on her phone with her other hand.

Victor grabbed the second box and put them both in the cab.

He walked around the large sale looking at a huge pile of towels. The price wasn't bad but he still needed other stuff to buy. He saw little girls' outfits and didn't know what to do about her size. He picked through the girl's stuff and took a few things. He grabbed a handful of towels and came up to the lady that had just helped someone else. He felt nervous, they might think he's a perv buying little girl stuff.

"Hello, are you done?" He shrugged and pointed to the ladders, some electric tools, shovels and other items.

"Let me get Kyle."

He waited for him to show up as he walked around looking at all the tools laying on the ground.

He went to put the girl's clothes and towels down in the truck bed. She followed and noticed the boxes of women's stuff.

"Are you into buying and selling?" She asked.

He shook his head. He grabbed some mail and started writing. He wrote about coming home and finding his brother with terminal cancer! There's nothing in the house! He needs everything! One of the garage sales gave me those boxes, he was done for the day.

He handed her the paper.

"Would you be interested in a trade for the stuff in the boxes? We're moving, but I could use this stuff."

He nodded and thought of Violet. He started writing, 'The librarian, I want to give her some of jewelry and stuff she might like. Her birthday was yesterday.' He could feel his face burn in embarrassment when he let her read it. He didn't know why he had to tell her. What was wrong with him?

He thought of the men he had fought with earlier. He was lowlife and not worthy of being in her presence. She was delicate with feminine frailty. If he was bold enough to give her gifts she should refuse them and throw them in the trash!

"Lyle, this man doesn't talk, he's been writing notes. He moved in with his brother to care for him and he doesn't have anything. He is willing to trade. I want these boxes, excluding a few things."

Lyle wasn't very patient and waved for her to finish.

"He wants to trade some of your tools."

He looked ready to argue.

"I'm standing firm! This stuff is worth money!"

A thought occurred to her. "Do you need all types of household items?"

He nodded.

"Well I'll bring some more stuff out and you can let Lyle know what you want."

Victor immediately grabbed a handful of the shovels and put them on the ground by Morris's truck. He went back and picked up the electric hand saw. He took a hacksaw, hammers, and screwdrivers. He saw a radiator heater and took that.

She came back with boxes with all types of things in the boxes. "I was planning on throwing all this away but if you can use it. Another woman put boxes in Morris's truck. They both began looking through the boxes of women's makeup jewelry and things. They started setting aside stuff saying, "she'll look good in this." They knew Violet.

He could feel his face burn like it was lit with fire.

They set down a hat and scarf, numerous sets of beautiful necklaces with earrings and bracelets, makeup of all types, soaps and lotions. A large box grew full as they put her stuff in it. They took four boxes and put the stuff he had picked out of the tools.

He wrote, 'could I have more girl clothes and towels?'

"Of course, let me grab them. She and the other woman came back with bags and bags.

He wrote 'thank you.' and drove off, careful to not drive too fast. Not that he drove very fast anyway. He was still relearning how to drive! He felt a little stunned over all the stuff he had purchased with spending money.

He pulled up to the house. He immediately got out of the truck. Eddy and Freddy were both screaming at a middle aged woman. He moved quickly to get in-between them. He put his hand up and gave the twins a stern look.

"She's threatening to take pop and put him somewhere!" Freddy exclaimed.

"They don't have a right!" Eddy added. Both of their faces were red with anger.

He turned towards the woman and pulled out his paper he'd been using and wrote, talk.

"If they would have attacked me I would have pressed charges against them!" She said angrily

One of the twins started to yell something and he put his finger up as a warning. He pointed at the house.

"Maybe I should just call the police!" She said in a rage at them.

He made a threatening move to get them to go in the house.

He wrote 'talk' again. His heart racing. He never wanted to see the police ever again.

"The house he is in is beyond filthy. No one should live like that!"

'Agree, I came here yesterday. I had to pick up stuff to clean it.' He motioned towards the truck.

She looked at the truck with a frown. She started peering in boxes and bags, pulling items out and putting them back. He didn't even know what the women had given him. When she pulled open a box containing a variety of cold food items he felt surprised. He would have to clean the refrigerator first. She opened the box of baked goods. She found the box of towels and a box of cleaning supplies.

She stepped back from the truck and sighed.

"Name?"

He wrote 'Victor Zane'.

"Do you work?" She asked writing down his name in her phone.

He pointed to the part of his writing 'I came yesterday'. He pulled out the business card the man had given him and showed her.

"You're working for this man? You just got here? Do you live around here?"

'400 miles from here.' thinking of the distance of the prison.

"You bought all this and found a job?"

He shrugged.

"You're not related to them by blood, are you?"

He shrugged again.

"My name is Daisy James. I'm with a program like hospice and trying to get Morris Zane signed up for care with my nurses."

He nodded his head. Morris needed people to take care of him, especially if he worked during the day.

"I've set a date for Monday. When I return please have his home habitable. I'm not here to cause trouble. My people and myself come here to ease his passing."

He nodded, his throat growing tight.

She left and he stood for a moment calming his emotions. He noticed the twins peering through the doorway.

He leaned over and grabbed the box that had Violet's birthday presents and put it in the cab. He grabbed some of the other boxes of stuff he didn't want them stealing to sell for drugs.

Since he knew they were probably both users.

He grabbed a small flat bladed shovel.

He started with the refrigerator by pulling it away from the wall and unplugging it. A huge wave of cockroaches ran for cover. He pulled a thick layer of dust off the coils and cleaned the fan. Next he cleaned the blocked vents. He had no idea how the machine was still running.

He began scooping up the items with the shovel, trying to not breathe too deep. He walked down the end of the porch and tossed it. A number of nails stuck up out of the warped wood of the porch. He grabbed a hammer out of the truck and pounded down all the nails sticking up.

"Pop, wants to talk to you."

"Stay away from the truck!" He told them sternly as they started moving towards it. "Both of you, come with me!" He didn't trust them to start taking things.

They followed him. He could tell they weren't happy with him bossing them around with the tone he used.

Morris looked at him. "Did you deal with her? I don't want to die in the hospital!"

"I'm taking care of it, Morris. They need to be polite when these people come. They want to help you."

Morris made a scoffing sound and wound up coughing.

"Let me get the kitchen cleaned up and I'll make something for you to eat."

"Not hungry."

"Bebe, are you hungry?"

She shrugged her tiny shoulders.

Freddy snuck down the stairs and Victor followed not saying anything more to Morris.

He sat down on the filthy couch. The look in his eyes was of anger.

When he got to the freezer he put the shovel down. He could damage the freezer using a sharp hard object to clean it. He grabbed some bags from the truck and tried to empty the freezer.

"You think you're better than us, don't you?" Eddy said.

Victor stopped cleaning. He came to stand where they both sat. "Remember when I used to take you sledding down a steep hill in the winter?"

He gave them a moment to remember the positive memories. "You two could help me bring the stuff in. I wanted to make a decent meal before we ate up all the pies and cookies. Bebe needs to eat right."

"You have pie?" Freddy asked.

"And cookies?" Said Eddy.

He nodded and waved for them to follow.

He checked each box and handed one to them. He grabbed the wheelchair and set it down on the porch.

He saw cockroaches skittering around. "Set the boxes on the table."

"Yeah, they don't get up there too often." Freddy said.

He let them dig through the boxes as he moved the refrigerator over and pulled out the stove. Cockroaches continued to skitter about in a frenzy. The twins began stomping on the bugs and laughter filled the air.

"You're not getting my cookies!" Said Eddy.

Victor guessed the burners didn't work because of the filth embedded in where the coils plugged in. He grabbed a sos pad from a box on the floor that was full of cleaning supplies and began cleaning. Three burners worked by the time he was done.

He pushed the stove back in place and started cooking a large pan of water. He needed to speed up the process of thawing the freezer. He saw they were eating cookies, even though he had told them not to. Bebe was sitting quietly next to Freddy and when a crumb fell she would pick it up and eat it.

"Don't let her eat off the dirty floor, just give her one." He ordered Freddy.

After pulling pieces of ice out he put the boiling pan of water on a towel and closed the freezer. He did this a number of times while he was busy scrubbing surfaces of the kitchen. Eventually the kitchen floor became a mucky mess. He grabbed a wide flat bladed shovel and began pushing the muck out the door.

He didn't believe a house could get so filthy!

He used a bucket of water and cut up towels to clean the refrigerator several times. Eventually it was clean enough he felt it safe to use it. He plugged it in and it turned on.

He unpacked the boxes and loaded the refrigerator. He used the pans the ladies had given him and started to cook.

Aroma of onions in butter had Bebe stand right behind him. After almost tripping over her he had her stand back.

The twins were loud in their talking, seemingly excited to eat. Did neither of them know how to cook? All four of them had a slight build. He wondered if they didn't eat enough.

He used meat he found in the box and soon had a good smelling meal going. He realized he didn't have plates or silverware! He ran to the truck looking through the boxes still there. In relief he found paper plates and plastic silverware. He brought it into the house as the twins stood near the food. He gave them each a plate. He dished some out for Morris and himself and went upstairs. Bebe had followed. He handed Morris a plate.

"I'm glad you're here." Morris said, huskily.

He left his plate with Bebe and quietly went downstairs to find neither of the twins there.

He stepped out on the porch and watched them digging through his stuff, making a mess and not putting anything back.

They muttered to each other as they dug. They stopped when they noticed him standing there.

He slowly stepped off the porch in a threatening manner. "I asked you to leave my stuff alone."

They both backed up, away from the truck.

Chip came from out of the woods and tried to get into the house. He turned and looked at them.

"We're just looking for more food." Eddy said.

"Why don't you both have jobs?" Victor asked.

"It's a small town and jobs are hard to find," said Freddy.

"No one is hiring," said Eddy.

He pointed to the truck bed, motioning what they had their hands. "Really, I already have a job, I start Monday."

They began spewing off a string of foul words at him. "Mr. high and mighty! . . ."

"I love my brother and would hope you love him too." They threw down what they had in their hands and walked to the car. Eddy tried to spin his wheels as he took off but almost got stuck in mud and trash as he exited the drive.

Victor picked up the tools they had dropped. He would have to hide everything in either the house that pop built or his room. He worried they might break a widow to get to the stuff in the cab.

He went up the stairs to check on Morris.

Three pairs of eyes zeroed in on him.

"Heard you all yelling." Morris said.

"They're wanting to pick a fight with me, Morris. I'm not one to back down."

Chip approached him, wanting to be petted.

Morris sighed. His plate was actually half empty. Bebe was licking hers.

"I can get you more, Bebe." Her eyes widened. She handed him her plate. She seemed nervous around Chip. Victor worried about her safety around the big dog.

He went down and saw there was little left. He tried to not think critically of his nephews. He scraped the pan and got enough for her. He took it up the stairs and handed it to her.

"Thank you." Morris said.

Victor saw his water cup was empty. He filled it and spoke, "I need to go out. Will you be alright?"

"We'll be fine, Victor."

He remembered he had clothes for Bebe. He brought the clothes up before he left. Her plate laid empty again. A few toys and some slippers were with the clothes. He could hear her squeal of excitement as he exited the house. He wished he could have stayed to enjoy her joy with her new things.

He drove as far as he was able to pop's house. He put the high beams on and took as much as he could carry. He had found a flashlight and used it in the dark inside of the house. He found the latch on the shelves and opened the hideaway. He tried to organize the stuff and made two more trips.

He carefully closed the shelf door and got in to drive. As he drove to town his heart beats increased and became rapid.

He neared the sheriff's house where he had found she lived. He thought he might pass out from nerves. He scribbled, 'To Violet happy birthday' He thought about just tossing her stuff in the garbage. The porch light was on and the property was well lit. He boldly walked up the sidewalk and set the box down in front of the main door. He could hear talking inside. Heart almost beating out of his chest, he gently knocked.

He tried to not run as he quickly dived out of sight. He watched from a distance and saw Violet answered the door. Her hair flowed around her shoulders and she was wearing shorts and a t-shirt.

He knew by his stifling ability to breathe he was starting to like her too much. He had promised he wouldn't get involved with anyone ever again! He was doing it again! He needed to stop! She looked so beautiful to him.

He drove off in a frantic need to get away.

Chapter 4

Violet sat in her father's den. He talked about something but her mind wandered.

"Daddy, what does love feel like?"

He stopped everything and looked at her. "If you're asking, you already have it." He smiled.

"It's not Calib. Can you stop from feeling it?"

"It's not Calib! Who is it?"

"Can you get it to stop, daddy?"

"No, dearest. It's for life, usually."

"So, I can't stop it?"

"No, just in very extreme circumstances, it can die. And even then." He shook his head in sympathy.

She could feel tears in her eyes.

Her father handed her a kleenex.

He straightened up in his chair and looked at his security monitors that sat on a shelf above his computer system.

She noticed movement of a man approaching the front door.

Her heart began to race seeing who it was, Victor!

She got up and raced to the door. What was he doing? Was he crazy! She needed to tell him to go away before her father saw him.

She had moved too quickly, her father followed right behind her.

"It's for me, daddy. Go back. I'll be there in a few minutes." She didn't really know why Victor was there. But she didn't want her father to find out. He would know who she had fallen in love with! The man was at her father's house! His timing was so off!

"What's going on, Violet?" He resisted her request. "Who is he?"

Someone knocked on the door. "Daddy, please go!"

She quickly opened the door and was glad to see Victor had ducked out of sight. She grabbed the box and saw it was for her. Her heart continued to race hard in the most intense excitement. She shut the door and tried to move around her father. "Daddy!"

"What did he give you?" He persisted. "You're engaged! You shouldn't be accepting gifts from other men!"

"It's not like Calib is being faithful, daddy!"

"What . . . who told you that!"

"I can do whatever I want!" She had raised her voice, her mother might wake. Anger from how Calib treated her and her father's lack of understanding how she didn't even like Calib anymore, grew. She ran into her room and locked her bedroom door. She hated that she had shown her hand. He would know who she had fallen in love with.

Tears ran down her cheeks.

Her father knocked on her door. "If there's something about him and you don't tell me, I'll use face recognition on my computer.

He would know then.

Calib had told her the other night, she needed to lose weight after having sex. She knew he frequented a strip club and knew how he wanted her to look. He wanted her to look more like the girls there. She had a well endowed body but she had curves that he called fat.

She rubbed away her tears. She dug through the box pulling out little boxes. She opened them and gasped. A necklace with jewels sparkling brightly. She opened more tiny boxes and found more beautiful gems strung on bright golden chains and some shining silver. A bunch of different bracelets and many types of earrings, some matching the necklaces. All types of makeup, powders, perfumes, lotions. A lovely scarf and matching hat. The stuff looked so beautiful it took away her breath! She laid it all out on her white shag carpet. The decor of her room with numerous neon pink stuffed toys and occasional knick knacks on white shelves. A twenty six year old woman wouldn't have such a childish bedroom.

She would become middle aged and still live with her parents and still live in a child's room.

Calib would never spend that kind of money on her! She wondered where Victor got the money from.

She couldn't stop staring at the beautiful gifts.

What did Victor want from her? Being around her father her whole life and having learned his skepticism.

She decided she didn't care. She wouldn't think about it, what he might want. She would wear something he had given her every day!

"Violet, we need to talk."

She opened her door slightly. "Let me in, or your mother might hear."

She sighed and let him in. The last thing she needed was to deal with her mother about all of it. She would come unglued!

He looked at the stuff on the floor. "Where'd he get the money?"

She opened the letter he had tucked in the box.

'Hello beautiful, I've been hitting the yard sales. Older guy wanted to get rid of the boxes and stuck them in my brother's truck. Here's his address, 696 main ave. Didn't want you thinking I stole it. I thought of your birthday and saved a box for you. I traded the rest for stuff I needed. Vic.'

She looked at her father. He had read it over her shoulder.

He sighed and left her room.

She laid down on her bed, her thoughts and her heart racing

.

He brought more of the boxes into pop's house. He didn't want to leave them where they would become infested with cockroaches.

He parked the truck in the yard and didn't see the twins' car.

He went upstairs to check on Morris and Bebe. They both slept. Chip laid on the bed next to Morris.

She laid on her stained little mattress without a fitted sheet, wearing numerous outfits. He could see the sweat beading on her forehead. He gently took off the extra clothes, trying to not wake her. Her little body curled up around a large white soft ball. He gently took it from her arms and opened up to reveal a white blanket with pink and orange flowers. He covered her with it, thankful he had stopped to buy the stuff.

Morris opened his eyes and saw him moving around. He slowly pointed.

Victor grabbed a cigarette and lit it. He handed it to Morris and moved the stool quietly. He sat and waited for Morris to speak after his coughing eased.

"I need to make out a will."

It was not what he thought Morris was going to say.

"Find me a lawyer." Morris continued. "I don't want the state getting it." He paused, it seemed he hesitated. "I don't want the twins to get it either." He closed his eyes like it had been hard to say.

"Bebe?" She was his granddaughter.

"She's not . ." He didn't finish but swallowed hard. "I want you to get it . ." He drew in deeply on the cigarette, causing it to burn brightly. "Don't tell them until I'm gone." He said firmly as he handed Victor the finished cigarette.

"You have a couple hundred acres?" Victor never knew how many acres pop owned.

Silence filled the air.

"Nine hundred and fifty acres." Morris finally said. "They'll just sell it for drugs and then move to some city and live on the street."

"I'm sorry."

Morris waved his hand. "You didn't kill that girl, did you?"

"No." It pained him to have his brother realize he was innocent. "I could never understand what a waste my life has been. Pop hated me. School had been a waste. Wasted eleven years in prison for something I didn't do. My whole life I've suffered by the hands of others. My purpose was to be here and suffer! I'm so tired of living just for others to torment me. I wish I was the one laying in that bed dying!"

Morris sat quiet for a long time.

Victor could tell he was thinking.

"Sometimes there's a purpose behind things. Did you help someone, save someone from a fight maybe?"

Victor swallowed loudly. He fingered the stool. "I'm not supposed to tell anyone."

Morris sat up a little in bed, coughing some. "Go to my grave." He said with a smile.

"I saved three people's lives in a prison riot."

Morris nodded. "They might have children that grow up to help fix drug addition or cure diseases."

Victor sat thinking about what his brother said. Morris had gotten smarter with age.

"Did you know that pop's house is still standing?"

"Yeah, he always had the door locked and after he died I just left it alone. It could rot with him!"

He knew what Morris meant. "I busted the locked door down, if that's okay with you."

Morris smiled, "I hope he's turning in his grave! Did rain leak in and destroy the inside?"

"Inside is just two-by-fours and no, the tin roof didn't leak at all.

I found a wheelchair on the side of the road. I'll fix it and take you there. I prefer the twins don't know about it.

Morris's smile grew even wider. "I need another smoke to celebrate!"

"Both of us breaking into his castle!" Victor said, handing his brother a lit cigarette and sitting down on the stool to join him, again.

Silence filled the air.

"Why didn't you sell all your land to buy your drugs?" Victor asked the question he'd wanted to ask for sometime.

Morris sat in silence, drawing on his cigarette. "I planned on selling. I planned on helping someone out with a good lawyer but that friend turned on me, blamed me for something I didn't do." He paused to draw on his cigarette again. The ash fell off the end and landed on his bed. "I went to the city to think about it. I met some homeless people and I held up one of their cardboard signs. I made enough money to buy myself some enjoyment. I shared it with them. I stayed a few nights. I made some close friends while there. I would go to the city when I needed

money. Seemed to suit me. Having friends there and all. I already knew something was wrong with me."

Victor put the butts up. "Get some rest. I'm going to continue sleeping in the woods."

Victor had fed everyone breakfast, the twins had returned in the early morning. They went outside and Victor joined them while wiping his hands on a towel he had been cleaning with.

A sheriff car pulled up and he immediately knew why he was there. The twins thought it had something to do with them and started to panic.

He turned his back on the approaching vehicle. "Calm down!" He could see Eddy started to shake. "If you run, cops are like dogs, they smell fear and they will chase you!" He said in a hard firm tone.

He turned around and tossed the rag into the bed of the truck. He leaned against the truck and crossed his arms, slouching, casually.

"Victor Zane!" He could see the anger in his voice and on his face. He approached with his hand on his gun.

"I'm giving you a warning! You stay away from my daughter!" He nearly snarled and stood glaring at Victor.

Victor couldn't help but smile. He stood up to his height.

The law man stretched and stuck his chin up in the air the way shorter men sometimes do.

"If you trespass on my property again," he ground out, in a rage. "I'll shoot you!"

Victor continued to hold his gaze as he was being rebuked. The mighty sheriff was like a bantam rooster! He saw where Violet got her shortness from. His smile widened, he couldn't help it.

"I mean it!" He said hoarsely. He was trembling with suppressed rage. "And if I catch you driving either of these vehicles I give you tickets for expired tags and might even arrest you!"

Victor bent down to look at the tags in a comical manner. He jerked upright and made a gasping sound and put a hand over his mouth. He dropped his hand and put it over his heart. The sheriff knew he was acting in mockery.

"The stench is phenomenal! You're living like animals!" He said, viewing the trash filled yard.

Victor took his hand off his chest and pointed directly at the twins. He made a pointing motion several times.

The sheriff abruptly turned, got in his car and left.

The twins began laughing uproariously. They gasp for air, laughing so hard.

Victor turned and walked off. He needed to check on Morris. He felt fairly certain Morris had tried to open the window on the second floor.

He found Morris sitting on the bed, breathing hard. Concerned, he stepped so he could peer down at his face. Morris attempted to not laugh. His coughing started whenever he laughed.

"I forgot how funny you are." Morris managed to say. "You got a girlfriend already?"

Victor felt uncomfortable talking about her. "I've just seen her around."

"He's mad as a hornet!" Morris's smile stayed as he struggled to not laugh and suppress his coughing.

Victor felt glad to cause his brother some happiness. He went over and grabbed a cigarette. After lighting it he gave it to Morris who had laid back down on the bed.

He still had a lot of cleaning to do. He heard movement. Bebe got up, she had been sleeping in. She came to stand next to Morris.

"Did you sleep good, kitten?" She nodded to her grandpa as he gently rubbed her back.

"I'll get her something to eat." Victor said.

After feeding her, he wrote down a list of things he still needed.

The twins left and he spent the entire afternoon cleaning.

He sat at the table he had repaired and on one of the benches he had made with the wood he had found in the secret closet at pop's house. He had fixed the wheelchair and had carried Morris down the stairs and put him in it. Bebe sat on the second new bench.

They had almost finished eating when the twins showed up. Their eyes widened seeing their father downstairs eating at a table.

"Pop?" Freddy said. He sat next to Bebe after examining the bench.

"Regular happy home?" Eddy said bitterly. He went down the hall to the room across from Victor's.

"Girl he was seeing dumped him." Freddy said, diving into his plate like he was starving.

Victor continued to clean after taking Morris up stairs and getting him a smoke.

Nearing at sunset, Victor walked into the woods.

He pulled the list out of his pocket. He didn't think he had enough money for all the items on the list.

He sighed. He would have to look for the mason jar that held his money.

The reason Annie had died had been because of him leaving her side to grab more money from the jar. In a way he hoped he wouldn't find it because in his mind, it was blood money.

The terrain had changed so much in the eleven years. He recognized the large rock sticking out of the ground. He stopped to get his emotions under control. The huge tree he had stuck it in had disappeared, nothing left of it. It had been an old tree with much rotting in the center where the money hid.

He began to systematically move the leaves and duff that lined the woods' ground. He took a guess where to start. He hoped the glass had broken and the money had disintegrated. His hand hit small rocks a few times, making his heart pound. He passed another large rock sticking out of the ground when he bumped something into the rock that sounded like glass.

He sighed and picked up the jar. The lid had rusted away but he just had to store the money in a plastic container inside the mason jar. He struggled to get the dryrotted plastic out and broke some of the pieces from his force. He yanked the baggie pieces out and unfolded a roll of hundreds.

Just his luck, all of it still intact!

He sat on the ground for a long time. He had worked hard for the money, saving for Annie and their future together.

He watched the sunset and tried to deal with his emotions. He would have to find another hiding place. He remembered seeing knots in the wood that pop had built his wall-to-wall shelf.

He entered in the darkness and decided to hide it at Morris's house.

He went to his room and dropped the bent nail over the straight one, his makeshift lock on his door. He opened the door in his closet and dropped the money there. He closed it and left his room.

He saw their car missing again. He went upstairs to check on Morris. A mummer of Freddy and Morris talking met his ears.

"Do I need to leave?" Victor asked, not caring one way or another.

"No, come here." Morris said. He pointed to his cigarettes. Victor lit one and handed it to Morris.

"We're talking about Eddy. He's going to get into trouble if he doesn't leave that girl alone." Said Freddy.

Freddy sat on the bed next to his father. It looked like he had brushed his and Morris's hair. The hairbrush still sat on the bed.

He pulled the stool so he could sit. He had used a shovel to push all the ash and dupree on Morris's bedroom floor. He hadn't wanted to stir up dust and cause Morris to cough. He didn't know if he managed to clean the house enough for the woman when she returned.

He listened and didn't think they could do much with Eddy being an adult.

"I need to turn in, I have a job tomorrow." Victor said when their talking dwindled. "I'll sleep again in the woods." He made his goodnights and left.

The morning hours started lighting up the sky. He lazily remained in his ground bed. He stayed still, buried in the sleeping bag with a blanket over his head. He always kept every part of him covered at night to protect himself from getting bit by anything wild.

The soft sound of deer running past him gave him pause. He heard a growl and a snarl. He quickly grabbed his hunting knife and peeked out just in time to see Chip jump one of the small deer and tear at it with his large jowls. The deer violently struggled under him. He sighed and got up. He waited for the opportunity to cut into the deer and end its suffering. He finally made the move and Chip growled at him.

"Get back, Chip," he said in a hard tone. He wasn't happy about the kill. A drawn out death would make the taste of deer meat not as good.

He also realized why there had been a shortage of deer in the area. He had found uneaten carcasses and had thought it was coyotes. He bled the deer and started dragging it to the house. He wouldn't waste meat. Chip followed and started racing ahead.

The dog had a taste for blood!

Victor knew he would have to keep him chained up at the house. The dog won't like being chained and Morris wouldn't like it either. He worried about Bebe's safety around the large black dog anyway.

He entered pop's house, remembering there was nylon rope he could use to string up the deer to bleed it. He wasn't sure if the rope was dry rotted but he would use it and find out.

Once the deer was up he took more rope and tied up Chip. The dog went frantic and Victor released him before he got hurt. He picked him up and put him in Morris's truck. He drove to town and decided to stop for breakfast before driving back.

He wasn't sure if he had enough time to drive to town and buy a chain and collar. Then drive to work.

The hardware store had just opened. He bought what he needed and picked up breakfast at fast food.

He got the collar on Chip, it was a fight. The dog put his teeth on his hand but didn't fully bite. He attached the end of the long chain to a tree in an area with few trees and little garbage. Chip fought violently with the new collar and chain. He figured he would eventually break the collar but it was all they had.

He went into the house with a bag of breakfast food. He went upstairs and Morris saw what he had.

"Is that what I think it is? Morris mumbled sleepily. He started coughing as he sat up straighter in the bed.

Victor set the bag down on his bed and helped his brother sit up.

Morris fixed the tubing under his nose and tried to breathe through his coughing.

Bebe got up and crawled into bed with Morris. "Kitten . ." Morris said softly touching her head. The coughing had worn him out.

Victor knew his brother was fighting to live. Tears burned his eyes.

"What's wrong . ." Morris asked, his coughing was shallow in his weakened state.

Victor worried his brother spoke of his lack of control over his emotions.

"with Chip?" Morris added.

Victor swallowed hard. He didn't want to upset him. "I put a collar on him . ." He hesitated, "and chain."

Morris surprised him by nodding in agreement.

He opened the bag and laid out the biscuits and gravy for them both.

He went downstairs to make Morris coffee and poured himself a cup as well.

Bebe had already drunk up the juice box, clearly hungry, eating the biscuits and gravy.

He handed Morris the coffee cup that had an ice cube to cool it a little.

"Food's good!" Morris said then added, "he killed the neighbor's chickens and some goats."

"He's a killer, Morris. I'm sorry."

Morris waved the apology away. "I know he is. I just couldn't put him down."

Bebe licked the inside of the styrofoam container.

"Ready to go, Bebe?"

Morris pointed to his smokes.

Victor took the pack and knocked one out. After lighting it he handed it to Morris. He waited until he was done smoking and then left.

Chapter 5

He enjoyed working with wood, the job was hard but perfect. He had found a lawyer for Morris. He wanted to get home to tell him and see how it went with the nurses.

He got off early walked to the store since it was in walking distance. He had bags of stuff that he needed for cleaning and personal things. Anxious to get home and see how it went with Morris and the nurses.

The key didn't start the truck. Disappointed ran furious through him. He popped the hood and tinkered with what he thought it could be.

No sound, nothing, it wouldn't start.

He got out, trying to think what to do. He had some food and he didn't want to carry it all the way home. The bags wouldn't hold.

He remembered where the sheriff's office was years ago. Tension filled him with strength he continued walking towards the place. He forced himself to breathe as the tension caused his lungs to freeze.

He went through the doors, the stuff in his hands, clunking noisily.

The sheriff sat at his desk and saw it was him by. "Hey, what are you doing?" He thundered at him. "Get that out of here!" He boomed.

"Sir, I've got to go." A deputy said.

He waved the man away. The man turned and left.

He came up to Victor. "I said, get out and take that with you!" His tone sounded lethal.

"Repeating yourself always makes delinquents obey!" Victor said with a trace of mockery. "I need a ride home."

"What!" He sputtered in shock. "No!" I'm not a taxi! What the hell? What game are you playing?"

"I need a ride. Now you have me repeating myself!" Victor wasn't serious but it sounded funny.

"I guess I could go and ask Violet." Victor said, watching the emotions shift in the man's eyes as he reached for his bags.

"You've got some balls. Alright, I'll give you a 'ride'."

Victor felt uneasy with the man's tone on 'ride'.

When Weston stepped outside he wet his finger and checked the wind direction.

He had him get into the back seat with his supplies.

He took off with tires burning the rubber. He zoomed past the speed limit once he left the town.

Victor saw the dial in the dashboard was nearing ninety.

He was going to die. He could feel his stomach churning as he made sharp turns and spun the wheels up and down the hills of the ozark mountains. From a distance he heard the dispatch on his radio. He suddenly slowed, his foot dropped heavily down on the brake pedal.

Victor's head swirled dizzily. He swallowed hard to keep the stuff in his stomach down.

"I've got a call." He said to Victor in a hard tone.

He drove normally and they both exited the car. Victor stubble forward and double over, not sure he would keep it down.

He noticed the sheriff watching him.

Victor straightened up. He put a finger up in the air to mark an imaginary score board. He checked the air and pointed to the sheriff.

Sheriff had a huge smile on his face as people came walking quickly towards him.

Someone with Alzheimer's was missing and they looked everywhere.

Victor thought he recognized the family but he wasn't sure. He started walking around, the ground still soft from rain the day before.

He heard her describe what the old man wore. A footprint matched the slippers she described as well as the size. He turned around and gave the sheriff a light whistle.

He gave Victor a frown. He waved at him to come. He saw a crushed weed growing in the field. It looked like it would be easy for him to follow Herald. He knew the man from years ago. He had been close friends with the Craigs. He walked to the crushed weed. A heel from a man's

slipper had left its mark. He didn't really care if the sheriff followed him. He wanted to find him before he got hurt. He heard the sheriff's heavy footfall. He continued to walk through the field, occasionally seeing signs of the right path.

"Are you trying to send me on a wild goose chase?" Weston asked.

"Herald was close friends with the Craigs. I don't need your help. I'll find him before he gets hurt."

"No, I'll go with you. Craigs, Annie?"

Victor nodded. He couldn't talk about it.

The sheriff didn't press and they walked in silence across the field. The sound of a small river filled the silence.

Victor sat down and began taking off his boots.

"What are you doing? I know you can't track across water!"

"You've been watching too many Hollywood movies, sheriff. Some Ozark backwood's man knows how. Easier to do in the summer when the snails cover the shelf rock."

He tied the laces of his boots and tossed a boot over a shoulder. He stood in the middle of the stream and slowly his eyes traveled first steadily up one bank and slowly down the next bank. He turned in the opposite direction. Slowly, he looked down one side then down the other side. He paused and started walking.

The sheriff followed along the bank on the opposite side. He hadn't crossed the river.

They both walked quite a ways before the sheriff cried out and a huge splash filled the air.

Victor's laughter echoed across the water.

"Shut up!" Weston snarled, "I got my gun wet!"

Victor tried to smother his laughter.

"I'm going back!"

Victor pointed ahead, "Clothes."

The sheriff looked where he pointed and saw clothes laying on the riverbank.

Victor exited where the clothes laid. He walked out of sight for a while and he started following Victor walking through the water. He suddenly saw him returning.

"Herald, the ladies are waiting for us to eat supper. We should probably put some clothes on, so we look presentable." Victor said.

Herald muttered something under his breath

He took the pants Victor gave him. "Have you seen Pete Creig lately?" Victor handed him the shirt and Herald pulled it on.

"I'll help you across." Victor said, "water is cold."

Herald muttered again.

"Didn't you and Pete use to fish? You caught some nice sized fish, remember?"

"Catfish, big 'ol catfish." Herald muttered as he stepped out of the water.

"Makes one hungry right now, good thing we're heading in to supper." Victor said, walking slowly across the field with a hand on Herald's arm. He heard the sheriff's dispatch talking to him on the radio.

Herald stumbled. Victor guessed he was tired. Plus it couldn't be too comfortable without his shoes.

The family came running to meet up with them.

"Grandpa! The sheriff found you!" They reached for him in happiness.

"Catfish." Was all he said as they led him into the house. "tree money."

"Thank you so much for finding him!"

The sheriff nodded and motioned towards Victor to get in. "I've got another call but it's not an emergency. I'll take you home."

Victor relaxed seeing he drove normal speed.

He got out once near the trashed yard. "Thank you." Victor said quietly.

"Thank you." The sheriff said.

Victor could tell by his body language that the lawman had a problem thanking felons. He nodded and closed his door. He didn't smile until he had his back to the lawman walking away.

He moved quickly, worrying over what he might find. For once it was peaceful. Freddy was sitting on the couch watching TV. Eddy was in the kitchen tampering with things and stomping on cockroaches.

He put down the stuff he was carrying and went upstairs. Morris looked like he was resting and Bebe was sitting on her bed playing with her new clothes.

He went down stairs to talk to Freddy.

"Did the woman come today?"

"Yeah, Pop on some strong stuff for the pain. They got the doctor to get it done."

Victor sighed in relief. He sat down on the couch and for a minute he let himself rest.

"Did you work today?"

"Yes."

"Where's the truck?"

That's what he forgot. "The key didn't work. It didn't start or click, nothing!"

"Oh, it does that sometimes. Wait a minute or two and try again. Where did you leave it?"

"The boss's workplace."

"Eddy, can I use the car?"

"It's out of gas!" Eddy said, leaning on the back of the couch.

"I'll put some in." Victor said.

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The following weekend came and he started having more time to work on pop's house. His brother had gotten to see the lawyer. He wanted to take him to a restaurant to eat but Morris had said no. He needed to stay laying down, he had grown weaker.

Victor knew then that his time was close. He spent as much time as he could with his brother. Bebe sat near playing with a few toys Victor found at yard sales.

He made sure Morris had everything he could give him. He hugged him, trying to be as gentle as he could, knowing his brother was in so much pain.

Chapter 6

Rain came down and wetness sent a chill through him. He didn't know it would hurt so much to lose his brother.

He blinked away the tears and the rain. Bebe shivered hard as she stood silent. She needed a heavier coat. He walked over and picked her up. He wrapped the dark buckskin he wore around her and held her against his chest.

The twins were so grief stricken that they weren't even aware of their surroundings. He wondered if they even believed Morris would die.

No one spoke for the rest of the day.

He knew anger was a form of grief. Somehow he knew the day would come with the twins.

Somehow they all got through the days and one day he got up to take Bebe to her babysitter before work and the twins were talking close together. He knew they were up to something.

Their anger from the day before in the reading of the will had caused them to become white with rage. Their hatred towards him came off them in waves and they continued in silence.

. A week passed and on the weekend he went out hunting. He didn't really want to kill a deer, he just needed time in the woods. He had to deal with his own grief. He couldn't do that around others.

The woods almost looked as depressed as he was. He tried to find solitude but failed.

When he got home he entered the house and the first thing he noticed was silence. He saw paper on the table. He quickly reached for it. They had left. They weren't sure which state they were going to, Colorado or California. They had people they knew in the two states and they were going to see which ones they wanted to live with.

He ran through the house. They took Bebe didn't they? He frantically searched everywhere. He saw stuff missing but he didn't care. Why did they take her? They didn't care about her! They didn't take care of her! Morris was the one that loved her! Morris and himself! Breathing rapidly and his heart hurting he started having hatefuled thoughts about them.

The truck was gone! How did he miss seeing it! They took his truck!

He was going to beat them up! How was he supposed to get to work? Their broken down car sat amidst the garbage piles! With a shattered front window and engine that knocked he knew it would never pass inspection! He couldn't drive it with expired tags! Much less get it to run after they had hit something with it while driving drunk or whatever they had been on.

He didn't want to report the truck stolen or maybe he should! He grabbed his gun and went into the woods.

He was so tired of living! Why bother with trying to do anything! Morris was gone. His boss had treated him decent until the sheriff had destroyed his reputation! The sheriff had been by his job, questioning him about a violent rape!

Maybe, he should be what they accused him of! A rapist! He hadn't been told to come in and work the last couple days. He may have to look for another job! He couldn't afford to not have a job!

What if it happened again and they falsely accuse him again? The big'ol sheriff asking questions! Just doing his job! He suddenly deeply hated the sheriff! He wanted to really hurt him in the way he suffered!

Rage pulsed hard at his temples. He had no idea how long he walked. He felt drowning in rage. Suffocating with it!

When he walked to town people sometimes knew who he was and they would throw excrement at him!

He needed to kill something! He contemplated doing himself in! Temptation had reached a limit. He really needed to end his life!

Morris died, maybe it was time for him to die too!

His thoughts continued for a long time as he walked.

He blindly stumbled over a very old foundation.

He had wandered off his own property. Years ago it had been a large farmhouse and one of the biggest barns in the area, at the time. Hardly any of it remained. It rested on the edge of Morris's property. He walked to a huge system that left a hole in the ground. It was ten feet deep and about that wide. Water sometimes filled it a few feet and when animals fell in, they drowned.

He looked in the hole and saw a few small animal's decaying carcasses. He didn't feel surprised. He needed to become a rotting carcass.

He walked back onto his property when he noticed a shoe imprint. He got down to examine it. Fairly fresh. Someone had just trespassed on his property!

His violent thoughts swirled in his mind as he trailed whoever the person was. He tried hard to dismiss the violent thoughts of brutality. It felt foreign to him! A strange rush came from the thoughts. Why did he have to be good? No one really thought of him as good! They thought of him as a violent rapist killer!

Maybe time had come and he needed to just stop trying to be good! He felt like making someone suffer!

His breathing became labored. He saw a female curled up on the ground, crying. He intended to make her cry more!

He stood for a moment seeing the woman who filled his recent thoughts. His body started to violently tremble. He suddenly wanted to cry. How could he think of hurting her? Part of him wanted her to suffer, like he suffered.

She suddenly noticed him with fear filled eyes.

Everyone did think of him as an evil and violent man!

He put his rifle down and grabbed her ankle. He saw the other one swollen twice its normal size. He pulled more on her good ankle, getting her flat on her back. Terror seemed to spread across her face. He could smell her fear.

He was about to throw up. He couldn't hurt her! Tears burned his eyes!

Maybe he could make her suffer a little by watching him blow his brains out! Time had come to end his useless life!

He picked up his rifle and walked over and sat with his back against a tree. He took the safety off and put the stock between his legs.

Violet suddenly realized when he put the gun between his legs he intended to kill himself!

She frantically raced to his side, bumping heavily into him as she tried to not put weight on her injured ankle. His body felt hard and solid. She impulsively put her hand over the top of the barrel.

He looked at her. His eyes like frozen granite.

"Get your hand off my gun!" He said, low and harsh with clipped words.

She desperately wanted him to not hurt himself, especially over what had just happened! All he did was pull on her ankle a little! She had trouble with men, now! Calib had often hurt her, especially when she allowed him to have sex. More like when he coerced her to have sex.

Forced her, actually. She desperately wanted to break up with him but she felt so afraid of what he would do to her!

Victor didn't hurt her! He needed to understand she was alright! He didn't need to kill himself over it!

"Everything is alright, Victor!"

"No! It's not!" His tone, lethal and sharp.

"Please," she said, wrapping her other arm around his shoulder. "Tell me what's wrong! Maybe I can help!" She begged. He felt so good, as she leaned into him. She wanted him alive!

"You're about to get your hand blown off, lady." He said, his words stung.

She stuck her head between the gun and his head. "Take me with then!" Tears rushing down her cheeks. He had no idea how powerful the love she had for him! She didn't understand how it had happened but she'd rather be dead than not have him around.

She was willing to die! She thought as she shook and trembled against him.

She grew tense waiting. Her whole body, continuing to shake as she waited.

The gun slowly lowered as he rested it on the ground.

She wrapped her arms around him, hugging him. "Thank you!" She whispered.

His mouth was so close. His breath grazing her face. She couldn't help herself. Trembling, she pressed her lips against his. His mouth wasn't full of drool like Calib's she noticed as she deepened her kisses. She melted into him. Intense pleasure filled her. She didn't know it would do that with just kissing. He moved and began kissing her back, gently pulling her against him. The unexpected burst of pleasure caused her to moan.

"Did I hurt you?" He asked, tenderly.

"I just . ." She tried to swallow, her mouth had become so dry, she couldn't tell him she got swept away by the most intense emotional feelings, it would be embarrassing. "I'm sorry." She whispered. He likely didn't know how attractive she found him.

His eyes held warmth. "Why are you sorry, beautiful?"

"I don't . ." How could she say what she meant? She was not normally so forward with men! He was more attractive than most and she loved him so much!

He gently brushed some of her hair strands back. "You're dehydrated. Your lip is bleeding."

"Did I get blood on your lips? I'm sorry!" She felt overanxious and didn't want to displease him! Embarrassment flooded her.

"Violet, stop apologizing! Next you'll apologize for being human! I'll get you some water. I don't have a phone to call your family. My nephews stole my truck so I can't take you home!"

"You can get someone to come get me! That would be great, Victor!" She trusted him more than he knew. She had gotten scared because she'd been scared all night. The look in his eyes had been terrifying. She hated the woods and she hated when men got angry! It scared her! "I have my purse over there. It has a phone in it, but the battery is dead."

"You want me to just leave you here?"

There was a sparkle in his pale eyes. What did he plan on doing? He couldn't carry her, she was too fat!

He stood up and swung his riflebelt across his shoulder. He walked over and grabbed her purse. He came back and handed it to her. "Stand up on your good leg," he said, motioning her up.

He came up close to her and wrapped his arms around her. He gently swung her off her feet and she squealed. She clenched him tightly, fearful he was going to fall with them both!

"What, did I hurt you?" He said calmly.

"Put me down! I'm too fat!" She started breathing fast in fear.

"Seriously? In my opinion, you're not fat. Just lots of soft feminine curves." He said with a scoff.

"How weak do you think a man is, Violet?"

She didn't answer. How strong was he?

"Who told you that you were fat?" He asked.

She realized she was breathing harder than him. She relaxed slightly but continued to hold him close.

"Beautiful, I want an answer."

She pressed her face against the side of his head. She couldn't help kissing where her lips rested. He was so muscular, it sent thrills repeatedly through her. "No." She whispered.

"I'm going to guess it's the bastard you're engaged to. Maybe, he likes women thin on crack!"

"Some strippers he likes." She said painfully.

"So, he's not faithful."

"He said they're gay."

"You believed him?" He asked with skepticism. When she didn't answer, he said, "like I said, high on crack or meth." He said, "your body is the type of body I want in my bed every night."

She lifted her head to look into his eyes. He was serious. She swallowed hard.

"Were you here all night?" He moved around a tree branch as he walked.

"I hit a little deer. I parked and got out of the car to pick it up. I was going to take it to a veterinarian."

He stopped walking.

"Am I too heavy?" Worried he was too tired to go any further.

"Violet, never try to pick up a wild injured animal! Never!" He said sternly. "They slice you up with their hooves! Hear me!" His arm around her ribs tightened briefly for a second in emphasis.

He continued to walk in silence. His breathing increased slightly as he walked uphill. She realized he was a very strong man and surefooted. Not like her tripping a number of times until she broke her ankle.

"Did you just find me?"

"No, I tracked you."

"What?"

"I can follow people, where they walk."

"I know what tracking is. Just surprised you know how."

"Your father knows I can. You tripped over an eroded brick" he paused to step past a fallen tree. "from an old farmhouse foundation."

"You know where I fell?"

"Yes. There's an old cistern there. It's open and sometimes has water in it, which it did today. You could have gotten hypothermia if you had fallen in."

A chill went down her spine. "Why haven't you covered it?"

"Not my property." He stated.

"You go on people's land?"

"You gonna arrest me?" His beautiful lips were turned upwards.

"Only if I can be in the cell with you." She whispered boldly. "I want to have two children before I'm thirty." She didn't know why she shared such a huge secret with him. Even her best friend didn't know.

"With Calib?" He asked indifferently. He going up a steeper hill and his breathing deepened and became faster.

Her heart dropped. "With you." She whispered.

He stopped. "Get down."

She stood not looking at him. She thought that not sleeping all night had made her tongue loose. Embarrassment burned like fire through her.

He pulled the tail of his t-shirt up and wiped the sweat off his face. "You're not going to look at me?" He sounded amused.

She faced him, his torso looked so muscular. She was so in love with him. He looked so good to her.

"Traditional fashion?" He was smiling.

She nodded, her throat was locked up.

"I accept. Come," he wrapped arms around her, carrying her on his opposite side.

"Your parents aren't going to be happy. Or aren't you going to tell them? Hard to hide a couple pregnancies and kids." He was smiling again.

He stumbled and she grabbed him tight, thinking they were both going to fall. She looked at him in concernment.

"A small ditch and I miscalculated. I thought I had bypassed it." He breathed harder even on level ground. It seemed he was walking faster.

She remained quiet, worried she was too heavy. She closed her eyes and pressed her face against him. She started praying he would be strong enough and that he wouldn't hurt himself.

"Here." He let her down. He had set her down by a house buried in the middle of the woods.

He walked up to the door and opened it. Was the lovely house his home? He came back carrying a couple water bottles. He handed them to her where she had sat on a stump.

"Is it your house?"

"No. I just 'break and enter' when I feel the need." He briefly smiled. He did a number of stretches and wiped his face again with his shirt. "It was pop's house. He never finished it before he died. My brother just passed away a few weeks ago. I'm angry about losing him, I guess." He waited until she drank her fill then motioned for her to stand.

He picked her up and started walking. "I'm so sorry, Victor. If you need anything." She said, with warmth.

"Just you," he said, "looking forward to making children."

He didn't walk much longer before another house came into view. The stench met her nose upon nearing it. "I was planning on hauling it off in my truck that I no longer have. I'm angry at my nephews too." He said while carefully walking past trash piles. "The house breaks the world's record of the most cockroaches." He stepped up on a rickety porch. He walked into the house and towards the back, down a hall. He stepped into a small room and he hit the light switch with his tricep. He carefully let her down.

The pain in her ankle was excruciating from the movement of him carrying her. She sat back on his bed. He unclipped the belt from his rifle. He ducked down in his tiny clothes closet. He used his palm to open a door. He took the safety off and cocked the gun before placing it past the door.

"Shouldn't you have the safety on when you store it?" Violet asked, leaning forward. "Did you pull back the hammer?"

"If I see a rabid animal I want that gun and the other one there, to both fire, no waiting "

"That's not safe!" She said getting close to examine the door. She breathed fast from the pain in her ankle, which she ignored. She opened and closed the secret door a number of times.

"This is so cool! You don't even notice it when the door is closed!"

She stood up on one leg. The pain in her other ankle continued with sharp pain but it didn't stop her curiosity. She saw a single paper on top of his dresser.

He took his shirt off and rubbed the sweat off his face and chest. He did some twist and stretches.

She made it to the dresser, the whole time staring at him. "You're beautiful." She whispered, not meaning to say it out loud.

He arched a single eyebrow. He grabbed another shirt and was about to put it on.

"Unless you want me to run around shirtless?"

"You have a beautiful masculine physique." She smiled, trying hard to ignore her pain.

She picked up the paper. It was dated twelve years ago. A marriage certificate with a woman's signature that had a large heart over the 'I' in her name. "She was married to you!" She gasped.

"I'll see if my nephews left a charger that will fit your phone." He said, leaving her alone, not responding to what she said.

She hopped to his bed and sat down. He had told the truth about Annie and him being married.

He came back to his room and avoided her eyes. He picked her up and carried her to the kitchen and sat her down on a bench.

"I'm deeply sorry, Victor." She gently caught his cheek and met his eyes. His throat worked and he moved away. Nodding slightly. He seemed overwhelmed with his own emotions.

He left her on a bench and went upstairs. He came back carrying a cord. He took the phone after she grabbed it from her purse. When it fit he plugged it into the wall.

"I would like to buy you a phone." She said. He still didn't speak.

"So, your nephews just took your truck?" She asked.

"I have the only key, so they had to have hotwire it. Morris, my brother, gave it to me." He sighed.

She reached out and touched him. He wrapped his hands around hers, crouching down.

"Un'le lck." A soft voice said.

"Bebel!" Exclaimed Victor, jumping to his feet and swinging around and startling Violet.

She came into the house and he came to her and picked her up. "I looked all over for you! I thought your daddy took you!"

"I hide." She said, staring at Violet.

"Violet, this is my little niece, Bebel!" He hugged her for a long time and then put her down. "You've been home by yourself all day! What have you been doing? Are you ok?"

She nodded and pointed to the refrigerator. "Hungry."

"Right, I'll make something. Violet, do you want anything?"

He was good with children, it made her happy. "Anything."

"Grilled ham and cheese?"

Bebe sat at the table, waiting and staring at Violet.

A plate of sandwiches on the table and the three eating when the phone rang.

Violet looked at him in confusion.

"I turned it on." Victor said as he got up to get it.

"Hello," Violet said.

"Violet, baby?" He sounded like he choked.

"I'm ok, daddy!"

"You're mother and I have been sick with worry. We were up all night. I've had men looking everywhere for you!"

"Daddy, I got lost in the woods! My phone battery was dead. I didn't sleep last night either. I was lost in these thick trees everywhere! I broke my ankle, daddy."

"So, you're with someone. You're safe?"

"Daddy, are you crying? I'm sorry!" She started to cry too. Victor crouched down and leaned closer. She leaned to rest her head on him, sobbing. He tenderly rubbed her hair, picking at bits of grass and dried leaves.

"Where are you, your mother and I are coming right now to pick you up!"

She didn't want them to know. "Victor found me."

"Give him the phone."

"Daddy?"

Victor heard since he was so close to her. He took the phone. "Yes, Weston?"

"How'd you know to look for her?"

"I happened to be walking around."

"Walking around?" He paused. "Keep her safe until we get there!" He ordered.

They finished eating the sandwiches when a car pulled up.

Victor heard them muttering about the trash in the yard.

"Daddy! Mommy!" Violet exclaimed.

They came into the house and both wrapped their arms around her. Raw emotions and then the embarrassed pause as they looked around.

Victor leaned back to look at them.

He knew the mother didn't like him on sight.

The sheriff bent down to look at her ankle. "Do you think it's broken?"

"I heard it crack daddy. It hurts so much! My eyes keep watering from the pain."

"We'll help you walk to our car, Violet darling." Her mother said, "we'll take you to a hospital."

Victor slowly stood. He got in between them and helped her stand so he could pick her up.

"What?" The mother muttered.

"We can . ." The sheriff said in protest.

He carefully brought her up against him and gently picked her up. He turned to take her out.

"Goodbye Bebe! I hope to see you again soon." Violet said, over his shoulder.

He carefully set her down on the seat in their car.

"Thank you so much, Victor!" She said, holding the side of his head, affectionately. She desperately wanted to kiss him but she knew she couldn't yet in front of her parents.

She felt sad when he didn't speak. He didn't even say goodbye. She remembered what he had said before. He didn't talk around people who didn't like him. She looked at her parents. She leaned back in the seat and closed her eyes. She would have to wait a long time before she would be able to say anything about her plans.

"Daddy, he said, you knew about his ability to track people. Why didn't you ask him?" Violet said. What if she had fallen into the old cistern?

"Violet, dearest you know you can't trust felons. They're bad people! He probably doesn't really know how." Her mother cut in.

"Mom, he knew where I tripped and fell!"

"Are you in a lot of pain? Let me see if I have something you can take."

That was her mother, getting into the middle of it.

"Daddy?" Violet persisted in a firm tone. He glanced back at her in the rearview mirror.

"Violet," . ." He was trying to avoid an argument with her mother. She didn't care. She suddenly astutely knew she would have to move out of their house if she wanted to have children with him. She didn't think marriage would work since all married people did was argue. If she lived in an apartment or even a house in town she could raise her two children by herself. She didn't need a mate. It hurt to think of not marrying him, but she wasn't going to ask, since she had already taken on the role of pursuing him.

Victor was the one, there would be no one else in her life.

Chapter 7

It was late in the night before they got home. Her father helped her to her room. He helped her into her bed. He quietly closed the door behind him.

Mother had probably taken her sleep aid and had already gone to bed. Everyone was tired from not sleeping the night before.

She heard the house phone ring. She heard her father answer it.

He opened her bedroom door and peeked in, "It's Calib. Do you want to talk to him?"

She shrugged. She took the phone, "hello," she said, politely.

"Where have you been?" He said, sternly.

"I got lost yesterday evening . . ."

"When I call, you need to answer!" He reprimanded her. "I don't need to be bothered by dealing with you thinking only of yourself!"

She cringed feeling insignificant, "I'm sorry . . ."

"Did you forget to charge your phone? Or did you just forget it somewhere, again? You're always losing it! If you could stop being so stupid and try to focus! You might not lose it all the time!"

"I don't want to talk right now." Violet said. She could feel tension building and her ankle was hurting more.

"I'll decide when and where we talk!" He snapped. "Are you cheating on me? Is that where you were?"

"What? No! I'm not cheating!"

"So you haven't been with a man in the last twenty four hours?"

"Calib, I think we should take some time away." If she could get him to agree, then over time they could break off the engagement.

Silence was on the other end.

"So, there is someone else! How dare you cheat on me!" He screamed over the phone at her, distorting the sound.

"I haven't . ." She tried to say. She was so tired of dealing with him and his moods. She wanted, desperately wanted to say, he thought she was fat! Go hangout at the strip club and pick up a girl more your type, but she couldn't get the words out.

"You have! Stop lying!" He continued to yell into the phone causing it to reverb. "Next, you'll try to break up with me! If you think that, you've got another thing coming!" A dial tone sounded on the other end.

She was shaking all over. He kept getting worse, saying things more hurtful. She couldn't please him and the harder she tried the worse he got! She was so tired of dealing with him. She wanted it to end! She wanted to never see him ever again!

Her bedroom door opened, startling her from her thoughts. Her father walked in and was carrying another phone.

She sat up straighter in bed. "Daddy?"

He deeply sighed and sat down on her bed. He held the phone, looking at it.

"Does he always talk that way when no one is around?"

"Yes, daddy." She felt tears run down her cheeks. "I'm sorry." She said, quietly.

"You need to break the engagement and give him the ring back."

"I'm afraid of what he might do." She said, with a quiver.

"Has this been going on from the start?"

"Yes." Thinking of him hurting her during sex, she added, "sometimes worse."

He closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have encouraged this. I didn't know he was like this. When you go somewhere with him, who pays?"

"I do, usually."

He shook his head, "he's been saying he spends very much on the food you eat."

"No, I rarely eat around him. I don't like arguing. It's easier to just do what he wants." She defending her actions.

He stood taking the other phone.

"Daddy, don't do anything. I'm really afraid of him and what he'll do."

"I don't want my precious daughter around an abuser. Don't be with him alone anymore." He looked at her expectantly. "Promised?"

"I promise." She finally said, knowing he wouldn't stop until she agreed. "You have to promise something daddy."

"Anything. I was so afraid something had happened to you last night!"

"Find Victor a used truck that he can afford."

"Why is he with that little girl?"

"She's his niece. Daddy, please don't do anything about that. I saw the marriage certificate. That weakens the case they had against him. I don't believe he killed Annie."

"You don't really know him, Violet. Something might have set him off." She thought of what had happened with him.

"You're probably right about Victor." It hurt her to agree with him. "But we didn't really know Calib either!"

"Good night, Violet." He softly said and laid a light kiss on the top of her head. "I love you."

Sleep took awhile for her with all the troubling thoughts swirling in her mind and the pain in her ankle.

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He got up when the sun hit the horizon. He walked around the house, not sure what to do. The weekend was over. He still had a job but after the day ended, he probably wouldn't. He didn't have a phone to call his boss and he didn't have a vehicle to drive. Plus, he had the responsibility of a little girl. He couldn't just leave her alone all day if he walked to town and to his job.

Where would he put her? He could carry her the five miles and then another three miles on the other side of town to the babysitter. Her little body couldn't handle such a trip.

The house had a chill. He put more wood in the woodstove. He went upstairs to check on Bebe. The little oil heater worked. She laid in Morris's bed, the covers bunched up.

He quietly went back downstairs. After making coffee he sat down on one of the benches. The coffee machine from a yard sale had worked after he ran vinegar through it.

He drank a couple cups and then went outside.

The outside felt too cold to walk with her. He pulled his dark buckskin coat close. The icy wind caught the coat's fringes.

He eyed all the trash he had planned to haul off. He had a house that needed supplies to finish. He needed a truck.

He didn't want to give up. Violet said she wanted children with him. Her parents might influence her otherwise but it gave him hope.

He heard gravel under wheels. He widened his stance and waited.

Two vehicles pulled up to the house. The sheriff's car was one and the other a truck, a much newer model than Morris's.

The sheriff came to his side. "Didn't know you would be up."

"Had my coffee already." Victor said, nodding.

"Violet said to give you this." Sheriff handed him a phone. "Don't talk to her, don't call her, don't text. Just for work. The man in the truck is offering to sell you his truck. I've vouched for you and you have to make payments to own it. I'm busy, there's a storm coming in today so I have to go."

"It won't be here until later tomorrow." Victor said firmly.

"What? No, the weather man and mo-dot said . . .," he waved his hand and walked off, not finishing the argument as he got into his car and sat.

An old man got slowly out of the truck. Victor walked up to him.

"I've got paperwork for you to read and sign." He said.

Victor took the paper and read it. If he continued to work he would have enough money for payments. He signed the paper and saw the man's name. He handed it to the man after signing

it. The man handed him the keys and got into the front seat next to the sheriff. They drove out of sight and Victor stood staring at them.

He suddenly had a truck. He raced back into the house and as quietly as he could, went up the stairs.

She was starting to wake up.

"Let's go make some pancakes and then I'll take you to the babysitter." Victor said, feeling a little happy. The beautiful woman in his life made him happy.

Excited, she got up and went downstairs with him. When they both finished eating they dressed warm and went outside.

Her eyes widened a little as he excitedly opened the door on the truck. He helped her into the back seat. He would need a car seat for her.

He started it up and surprised how well the engine ran. He wasn't sure which dial controlled the heat. It felt as warm as summer. He figured out all the dials and got out and lifted the hood. He checked the glove box and found a manual. He had never had a manual before. He checked which side it fueled on. The gas gauge showed half full.

He looked briefly under the hood again, looking at the newer parts.

The truck, even though it was five years old, seemed like a dream. He had never owned such a new vehicle.

Bebe waited patiently. He looked at her and she touched everything in awe too.

He looked at the trash in the yard and thought it might scratch up the bed. He actually cared about the new truck.

He drove her to her babysitter and when he parked at work, where he normally parked his boss came out thinking it was a customer.

His eyes grew wide. "Coming up in the world, Victor. Come, I have a huge order we need to get started on."

Chapter 8

Violet wore the jewelry he had given her. She knew what her father and her had talked about made sense but how she supposed to stop loving him?

Her mother had pulled grandmother's wheelchair out of the attic and in doing so hurt her back. After breakfast she went back to bed.

Violet was on medication for the pain in her ankle and wasn't sure if she wanted to work. She could call in, she had some days saved up. If she used the wheelchair she could work. She looked at the thermometer out the window. It was cold, her fingers might freeze, wheeling the wheelchair. Six blocks to the library, not too far, she thought.

She decided to work. She could do it. She would have to dress warm enough.

She wore the hat and scarf Victor had given her. She thought of the man and her heart began to race. She needed to forget about him, once and for all.

She went to work and had a good day, thinking she could work with her ankle broken. People were so helpful with her and her injury, by helping her with things she normally did.

When she was about to leave and close up the library her mother called.

"Violet, I'm so sorry to bother you."

"It's not a bother, mommy I had a good day."

"I didn't notice but I need my medication picked up at the pharmacy."

Violet felt dismay and grew full of dread thinking going half way across town! Did she think she drove? It would be hard to pick up the wheelchair and put it in her car. Her car sat at the house.

"You're father's busy with some storm coming in."

"Okay, mommy." Violet said weakly.

Violet made it a good ten blocks before she realized she might not be able to do it. She needed to take one of her pain pills but had nothing to drink it with. She rested her face against the palm of her hand. She noticed a newer model truck drive past her when it did it a second time she started to get nervous.

She frantically looked for her phone when the truck pulled up beside her. She had left it at the library after talking to her mother!

Heart racing in fear she stared wide-eyed at a broad shoulder man getting out of his truck. Traffic went around them, all wanting to get home because of the storm coming.

He stepped closer to a street light as he approached her.

It was Victor!

She sighed in the most intense relief.

"Violet, what are you doing sitting here?" He asked as he came to her side.

"I have to pick up my mom's medication at the pharmacy. I don't think she knew I had left the house in this wheelchair." She tried to not stutter from the cold as she talked.

"Come here," his warm voice near her ear sent wild tingles through her body. He picked her up and put her in the passenger side. He put the wheelchair in the bed and got in.

"Next time, call me, Violet sweetheart." With the doors shut she felt warmth from inside the truck cab. And a different kind of warmth from being close to him after he got in. She noticed Bebe sitting quietly in the back seat.

"Hello, kitten."

"Grandpa called me that." Bebe said softly.

Violet wasn't sure what she said and looked at Victor.

"Morris, her grandpa. He called her that."

"I'm so sorry." Violet said emotionally. She suddenly felt the need to cry. She knew how much Victor missed his brother.

Victor reached over and grabbed her hand in gentle hold. "It's alright." She looked at him with a pained look. He winked at her. She breathed a quivering sigh and smiled. She loved him so much.

They all rode in silence for a little bit.

"It's 'alrite." Bebe said. "You're nice like grandpa, you can call me kitten."

She continued to hold his warm hand. It made her feel happy. "Daddy gave you the phone? He said he wouldn't have time today because he was going to be busy!"

"He doesn't want us to be communicating on it."

"I know. I'll try not to, but it will be hard." A hand went to her mouth. She hadn't meant to say that out loud."

He was grinning. He glanced at her, lifting a single eyebrow. He parked behind someone in the line at the pharmacy.

"You're wearing my scarf, sweetheart."

"Everything you gave me is so beautiful, Victor." She loved even how saying his name felt on her tongue.

After she had picked up her mother's medication he drove her home. He grabbed her wheelchair and brought it around to the passenger side.

The sheriff's car pulled up right as he was about to help her into the wheelchair.

"Violet?" Her father's voice didn't sound happy.

"I know daddy! I'm not supposed to be around him."

"Sorry, sir." Victor said. He wasn't letting her throw herself under the bus alone. "It just occurred." He glanced at her father and saw his hands on his hips. "It won't happen again, sir."

He saw her father shaking his head and her lovely face looking up at her father, smiling and talking as he drove away. He felt a little relief knowing he had been there to help her.

The next day after he had gotten off work early, he picked up Bebe and carefully drove home. He stood on the porch watching the downpour of rain, sleet, and snow. He tried not to gloat. He had been right about the storm!

Violet took the phone from her mother. Apparently, her father had not talked to her about Calib.

"Hello," she said, hesitatingly.

"Why are you not answering your phone?" She didn't want to tell him that she had turned off the ringer. She avoided all his calls.

"Look! I've been having problems at work and I need you!"

She normally said she was sorry. She tightened her lips and refused to respond.

"Violet, please I need you. I need to see you!"

She didn't want to hear all his excuses anymore!

"It's partly your fault that I'm having problems at work! You're not being there for me!"

She almost said she was sorry again. She hated that she did it so often. Victor told her to stop.

"Are you even there? Did you hang up? He said with a few foul words.

"I'm here." Tension built in her.

"I'm getting tired of you not responding!" He added more bad words. "What's wrong with you? It seems like I'm getting nowhere with you!"

"What do you want me to say?" She said.

"What's his name?"

"Calib, I'm not seeing any one. Didn't you say I was too fat to be attractive?"

"I didn't say that! You're making stuff up! Are you crazy!"

"I think so," she said, agreeably. Put up with him way longer than she should have. Thinking he would get better but he only got worse. She was definitely crazy.

"You think so about what?"

"You just called me, crazy." She said.

"What! I did not! You're hearing things! I need to talk to your father and see what is going on! If you're cheating on me, someone is going to pay!"

He suddenly hung up. All she heard was the dial tone.

She went and put the phone on the hook.

"Violet, what's going on? Are you having problems?"

"I want to break the engagement."

"Oh, no!" She sat down in an easy chair. "Does your father know?" She looked like she was about to get really stressed and getting overly emotional. Violet hated when she did that!

"Yes, I talked to daddy. He knows all about what's going on."

"You have?" She seemed shocked.

"Mother I'm going to my room to lay down. My ankle hurts." She wheeled herself to her room and locked the door behind her. If her mother did have a blow-up she didn't suffer from it. She hated to do that to her father. He would be getting the blast. She might have to go out and take the blow. Her father was out doing a dangerous job helping people through the storm. He would be exhausted when he got home. Her mother's emotional state needed time, so she would wait until later in the evening.

She took her phone and started typing on it. She needed to warn her father that mother was falling into one of her fits. She heard something. She got up and could hear her mother talking to someone. She closed her door, she would ask her later when she felt better and not so much pain. How strange her mother talking on the phone while she was having a small emotional meltdown.

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She was dreading seeing him again. She talked only briefly on the phone. He sounded a little chilly but calm.

Her mother had gone out to a meeting that was required with her job.

She set up to meet with her best friend, Angela and her boyfriend Pike. Pike had been friends with Calib for a few years so it seemed like a good plan. She planned on doing what her father wanted and not meeting up with Calib alone.

They came to her house and she invited them in while they all waited for Calib. They seemed in good spirits.

When Calib did show up, they had waited for almost an hour.

His eyes looked bright and Violet hesitated walking out the door with him. Something seemed off about him but she couldn't put her finger on it. She glanced at Pike and he was laughing at something Calib said. She followed with the group after locking the door. The three talked of all riding in Calib's truck. She stood silent.

"Violet, get in!" Calib said a cheerful tone that sounded hollow.

She grimaced as she got into his truck. She tried to not flinch when he grabbed her arm. Her arm hurt after he had grabbed her. She had taken a strong painkiller before meeting up with her friends. She still had some pills left from her broken ankle.

He drove them to the restaurant and they got out and talked. He wanted her to stand next to him. She slowly moved closer and he patted her hard on the back when he got done telling a dirty joke. His overly loud laughter had people looking at them. His patting on her back sounded more like slaps in the night air.

The pain pills weren't working as well as she had hoped. They entered the restaurant and decided on what to order.

Violet had completely lost her appetite. She ordered a salad and he said something about it.

"Good, you're making an effort to lose some of that fat." He said loudly.

Pike looked like he wanted to say something.

"What, Pikey ol'boy say it! Cat got your tongue?"

"We could've gone another time, if today wasn't a good day." Pike said.

"It's a perfect day, Pikey!" Said Calib.

Pike didn't like the way Calib said his name and frowned down at the table.

Calib became the only one talking.

Violet could tell his boisterous talking bothered the other customers.

They didn't order much, like Violet they ordered salads. Calib ordered a huge meal and beer on top of it. He took forever to eat, mainly drinking beer.

By the time they left the restaurant Calib looked buzzed with his loud laughing. They didn't want to get into the truck with him. Their hesitation obvious and they stood quietly.

"Calib, you've had a lot to drink. We'll catch a taxi." Pike said, friendly like.

"Violet, I have something for you." His tone for the first time sounded kind and not harsh. Violet looked at Pike and Angela.

"Please," Calib's voice quivered like he was about to cry. "It's a late birthday present."

All three of them looked at each other. They got in together.

Calib immediately took off with rubber burning black smoke behind them. They knew they had made a mistake trusting him.

He sped down a black top going too fast. Violet grabbed her phone out of her purse to call her father. Calib ripped the phone from her hand, crushing her fingers in the process and flung it out the window.

Violet let out a cry.

"Calib!" Pike exclaimed.

Violet felt an icy cold chill go through her.

He was driving to Victor's house!

"Stop driving and let me out!" Violet demanded.

Calib grabbed a handful of her hair causing her to cry out. "You're coming with you slut!"

He parked while swerving. He pulled her across the seat by her hair causing her excruciating, fiery pain on her skull.

A large dog on a long chain barked aggressively at them

He drug her up the porch. Pike had enough and took a swing at him. He countered the attack and sent Pike flying off the porch.

"Shut up!" Calib screamed at the dog with a string of foul words. He kicked the door in and started grabbing things and breaking them.

"Please, stop!" Violet begged beseechingly. Who had told him! Who had told Calib about Victor?

He turned the refrigerator over and tried to rip the door off. He tore through the house looking for things to break. He found glasses and threw them at the wall. He found glass bottles and

threw them. He went upstairs and came back with a large glass ashtray. He threw them barely missing Violet's head.

"Calib, that's enough! Let's go!" Said Pike.

Calib suddenly pulled out a large blade knife. They all took a step back. He dove into the couch shredding it. He went upstairs and to the back. They could hear him cutting everything up with his knife. He came back to the room where they were standing. He suddenly sliced a light bulb over Violet's head.

Tiny glass pieces fell on her.

"Stop it, Calib!" She screamed. She was worried she got a piece of glass in her eye.

"It's a nice birthday present for a nasty fat slut!" He snarled.

"Calib, let's go!" Said Pike.

"Please!" Said Angela.

"You're not much of a man!" Violet said low and harsh to the man she was starting to hate.

He violently shoved her and sent her slamming down to the floor.

She knew immediately she was hurt badly. Blood started pouring out and running down, making a pool. At that moment she realized she might die! She didn't know if he had caused her to nick an artery. A broken ashtray laid under her head. The blood felt like it was flowing from on her neck. She closed her eyes. She felt shock sweeping through her body. She heard Angela screaming and screaming. Pike was yelling at Calib to take her to the ER.

Pike tried to get Angela to calm down. They found some towels in a tote and started to apply pressure. Angela was sobbing.

"If she dies, her daddy is going to kill you!" Pike said calmly.

Calib walked out the door.

"Angela help her up." Pike said as he did the same. They got her up and Pike pulled her into his arms and Angela held on guiding him. They got her into Calib's truck between the both of them. Calib reaved his truck engine, hardly waiting for them to get seated and close their doors. He started doing wheelies in the yard. Angela whispered something under her breath at Pike.

He reved the truck again and drove right for the aggressive barking dog. The dog made an awful loud cry of pain and they could hear the dog under the truck making thumping sounds. He continued to make a horrific noise of pain when Calib backed up and hit him again, silencing him.

The quiet stillness in the cab of the truck was deafening. Angela threw up what was in her stomach. Violet went numb with pain and weakness. She felt the urge to throw up but felt too weak and afraid she would choke to death on it!

He squealed the rubber of his tires and sped down the highway. He kept slamming on his brakes as he came to stoplights. He did the same as he pulled up to the ER doors. They quickly scrambled out his truck and pulled Violet with them.

They held Violet's head off the concrete as she lay still on the ground. Nurses came rushing towards them with a wheelchair.

"Oh, you're all covered in blood!" One of the nurses exclaimed upon seeing the extent of her injury."Hayley, get a gurney!"

They stayed close to Violet, still in shock from what Calib had done. They calmed down but Angela couldn't stop crying.

Later Violet became more aware of what went on around her. Angela and Pike remained with her.

"Do you want to call your father, Violet?"

"No! Please don't!" Violet begged.

"It's alright, we won't. We're not like that monster!" Pike said. "We'll do what you ask, but I'm pressing charges for what pertains to me!"

"I called my grandma, she used to work the night shift. She might still be up and willing to take us home later."

"Did the nurses give you guys clean clothes?" Violet whispered.

"Yeah, not the best thing to wear. But I'm happy to just be alive!" Angela said, breaking down into an agonizing crying spell. Pike held her close.

"Pike, thank you for not responding too much with him. I believe if we would have all fought him, he would have killed all of us! I think he's on something."

"I didn't want Angela to get hurt." Pike said. "I don't think what he's on is going to make him flip like that. I think he had this badness in him the whole time. I always felt a little on edge around him."

"When your father finds out, do you think he'll arrest him?"

"I'm not telling my father!" Said Violet.

"This is the worst night of my life." Said Angela.

"Same," said Pike.

"Not even in my nightmares!" Violet sobbed. Thinking of all Victor's things in his house being destroyed.

Violet quietly entered her parents house. She knew she wouldn't be able to sleep and had asked for sleeping medicine too. She took the sleeping pills before going to her room. She went down the hall and quietly shut her door. She thought about locking it. She didn't want her parents to come if she cried out from nightmares. She had trouble falling asleep because of pain and discomfort of her injury but also because of the massive hurt she thinking of what Victor would go through, especially when he found his dog.

She cried until the sleep aide kicked in.

Chapter 9

Victor immediately noticed how his yard was torn up. His boss and he had worked late with an order and they drove four hours one way to deliver it.

He didn't pick up Bebe from the babysitter because in an hour the sun would rise. . He walked with a flashlight he had in the truck, looking at the tire tracks and knew who it was. Calib and his dual tires in the back axle. He felt positive it was Calib. Someone must have told him about Violet and him being friends.

A stillness of the dark hump at the end of the chain. His heart dropped seeing Chip lying still. Morris had loved that dog so much! He brought him in to lay on the bed with Morris everyday until he passed. Now they could be together on the other side. His eyes stung a little from tears.

He went up the porch and saw the door partially open in the darkness. He turned on his flashlight again when the kitchen light didn't turn on.

He felt stunned when he could smell her scent. That gave him pause. Seeing the debris of what he owned sent his emotions into a tailspin.

Why would Violet come and help trash his house? He stood still, reeling with hurt. What happened to make her hate him? The sudden emotional pain suffocated the life in him. He loved her. How could she do this to him?

He moved forward and smelled blood. He found another light switch and turned it on.

It worked and he saw a huge pool of blood. He stood over it, looking down at it. He somehow knew it was Violet's. There was too much blood on the floor. For a moment he thought he might pass out from fear for her life.

He had worked all night and felt tired but that didn't stop him from running to his truck. He drove fearfully to the sheriff's house.

He knocked a few times, waiting. He wasn't leaving until he knew she was safe.

He knocked hard again.

Her mother finally opened the door. "Oh, it's you! Go away!" She tried shutting the door and he put his arm up and used it to push the door open. She stumbled back. He walked past her, she yelled at him to get out of her house!

He looked over the layout and took a guess where the bedrooms were located. He felt her grabbing him and he shrugged her hand off. At the top of the stairs were four doors. Three were opened. He flicked the hall light on and looked into each of the open rooms.

"I'm calling my husband!" She stormed and left.

He tried the doorknob and found it unlocked. He opened it and went in. He flipped the light switch on and walked up to the still figure in the bed.

He laid a hand lightly on her shoulder fearing her stillness. Relief swept through him seeing she breathed.

She awoke with a hard jerk. Wide eyed she turned quick to see who had touched her.

"Victor," she sobbed. She reached for him, uncovering herself.

Victor saw a bandage on her neck as she shoved the covers away. She got up to embrace him. The little shorts she wore and a sleeveless top caused his knees to go weak. The beautiful bareness of her scantily dressed body up against him weakened everything in him and he sat down on her bed, dodging her canopy. He pulled her warm body close to comfort her. He felt so happy! He breathed in deeply on her scent enjoying the pleasure he felt being so close to her.

She was safe from the abuser that had trashed his house.

"Violet, stop crying!" He gently and tenderly said.

"But he killed your dog and destroyed everything in your house! Now, I'll have an ugly scar from falling on the ashtray he broke! He shoved me hard!"

"We'll have matching scars and names that begin with V's!" He said, trying to make light of it.

She giggled between her sobbing.

"We're made for each other!" Victor said. He heard her mother approach. "Chip was old and getting arthritis."

"Victor," she whimpered.

"Let me see it?" Victor said, peeling the edge of the tape back. She helped, her soft fingers brushing against his. A number of stitches closed the wound. Her mother had been watching and made a strangled sound and slowly started to sink to the fluffy white carpet.

He got up and caught her, setting her on the bed. He went back to Violet who was crying again.

"No more crying, Violet!" He said, getting down on his knees on the fluffy white carpet and leaning in to hold her close. He gently covered the stitches, putting the tape back and covering her wound.

"How'd he know about me, did you tell him?" Victor asked. He didn't plan on blaming her, he just wanted to know. He heard her father come up the stairs, the equipment he wore rattling.

"No, I never told him anything! We've not even done anything! He kept calling me a slut."

Her mother moaned loudly. "He was crying, and crying! Saying how broken he was in losing you."

"You told Calib about Victor!" Violet tensed up with sudden rage. Victor loosen his hold and moved back to allow her to deal with her emotions.

"Daddy! Calib destroyed Victor's house and killed his dog! Mother told him about Victor being my friend! Look!" Violet peeled back the tape so her father could see the wound.

Her father breathed in sharply. He tenderly put the bandage back. "You could have been killed!" He said gently.

"Daddy, Pike and Angela were afraid he was going to kill all of us!"

Her mother let out a whale.

"Mother, could you please allow me some time to forgive you." Violet tried to sound kind but suppressed rage lingered still in her tone.

"Margaret, go take your pill and lay down." Her father ordered her with a trace of disdain.

"I'll drive you out to your place, Victor." Her father said. "Violet dearest, get some rest." He gently embraced his daughter.

Victor tenderly kissed her forehead and stood up.

Her father and Victor walked towards the door.

"Daddy," Violet said, pointing to her mother, who had been silently standing.

"Margaret, let's go. Let her get some rest."

She followed in a defeated look.

"We'll talk later," he said patting her on the shoulder. "I need to appraise this man's damages!"

He walked outside to his car and Victor went to his truck.

They pulled up to the house.

The sheriff looked around seeing all the trash had been hauled off. "We'll start with the dog." He said, firmly.

Victor led him to the edge of the woods where he'd been chained.

He wrote down stuff on the phone and took pictures.

Victor felt sadness and thought of how close Violet could've lost her life as well. He breathed in a sharp sigh.

The sheriff walked to the house and took more pictures and type more on his phone.

"I'm not sure I want to press charges." Said Victor.

"He's already being charged with animal cruelty and the assault on my daughter. Is this where she was injured?" He asked pointing to the large pool of blood.

"Yeah." Victor said. "She said it was on a broken ashtray."

After taking a number of pictures at different angles he went upstairs and down the hall.

They left the house together, not speaking."

Before the sheriff got in the car he spoke, "I'm sorry."

Victor nodded and watched him drive off. His phone rang. For a moment he thought it was Violet. But, they were not supposed to talk. He decided he was no longer going to follow that rule. It was the babysitter's number.

He needed to pick up Bebe. She had a family emergency and wouldn't be able to babysit for a few weeks.

He drove to town. He picked up Bebe and the sitter would let him know when she would be back.

He parked by the sheriff's house and helped Bebe down. They walked up to the house and knocked. She saw the doorbell button and pushed it. He didn't realize she pushed it a bunch of times, his mind was on what to do with her when he had to work. He really shouldn't be asking Violet to babysit but he needed to clean up all the broken glass.

He gently moved her hand away.

"I don't hea' un'le lck."

"That's because we're outside and they inside with the doorbell."

"Oh," she said, nodding.

The door slowly opened. Violet's mother stood looking at them through the screen door. Like she still lingered in a trance and somehow blamed him for her problems.

Victor opened the screen door and went in.

She shrugged with indifference and walked off.

He closed the door behind him and went upstairs to Violet's room, motioning for Bebe to follow. He again knocked. "It's Victor and Bebe," he said.

"Come in!" Violet said, excitedly.

He opened the door and went through it first so he could see Bebe's reaction to the brilliant pink and white artifacts.

Like he thought, her eyes grew wide. She slowly moved forward looking about as her mouth dropped open.

He knew she had never seen something so grand. Violet came to his side and wrapped her arm around him. He gladly did the same.

Bebe continued to move over to each side of the room and stare.

"Victor, she's so adorable!" Said Violet.

When she came to stand next to Victor she whispered to Violet, "doorbell don't work."

"Victor, maybe you should go check it." She smiled at Victor.

He smiled back and gently tugged one of her hair strands. He turned and went back down the stairs

The doorbell rang loudly through the house.

"It works!" Bebe exclaimed, smiling.

It rang a few more times. Victor came back into the house and came face to face with Violet's mother.

"Why are you here, annoying everyone? Just go away!"

"Just remember you started this." Victor said in a quiet yet hard tone. The woman needed to hear the truth! "Why don't you grow up and stop moping around! You made a mistake like the rest of us, just say your sorry to your daughter! You have a wonderful husband and a beautiful daughter, love them!" He went past her and up the stairs to Violet's room.

"Ok, that's two . ." Violet was saying to Bebe. "You need four more!"

Bebe's eyes were bright as stars. She clenched two bright stuffed toys.

"Remember, pick whatever you want."

Bebe picked a small tote full of a verity of toys.

"That counts as three. You need three more."

Bebe made a happy noise and pointed to the biggest stuffed animal.

"You want Mr. Bunny?"

Bebe squeaked and nodded. Violet handed the stuffed toy that was bigger than her.

"Two more." Violet said, smiling happily.

Bebe ran to the totes and picked two of them.

"Yay, you have six!" Violet said, clapping.

Victor joined in clapping. He leaned close and before he could think about it he kissed her. Violet dropped the toys and wrapped her arms around his shoulders and kissed until they were both breathless. She leaned against him and he left his arm lightly around her.

"I should let you rest, but . ." He sighed before finishing. "Bebe's babysitter had an emergency and I don't have anyone to help watch her. I need to clean up the house so she's safe there."

"I will gladly watch her. I'll pay you for all the damage Calib did too, Victor."

"I'll pay for it," Violet's mother said behind them in the doorway, startling everyone.

"It was all yard sale stuff. I didn't buy anything new." Victor said. Violet stared at her mother and the change in her. "Mommy?" Violet said, suddenly worried over the drastic difference.

"I'll take care of Bebe too. Violet, you get some rest."

"Didn't you have plans for today?"

"I need to take care of my daughter and the little one."

"Bebe this is my mommy."

"Hello. I've had a granddaddy, he's sleeping in the ground, a Uncle Ick, Eyelet, daddy Eddy, Janet, she's my babysitter."

"You can call me, grandma Maggie."

Victor looked down at Bebe in surprise. She was talking more than normal and with better enunciation.

"Bebe I've got work. These ladies will take care of you, for now." He gave her a quick kiss and the same with Violet who kissed him back.

He drove back to his house, thinking how he shouldn't have fallen in love again. It controlled him and his emotions. He cleaned the upstairs first, cleaning nearly everything, leaving the floor almost bare.

Calib had urinated on Morris's mail and the mattress. So, he cleared it all and then scrubbed really well, bringing stuff he needed from pop's house.

He started in the back of his room. At first he couldn't find his marriage certificate with Annie. He looked with his heart pounding a little faster. He drew comfort from the paper.

Calib had broken the drawers to the dresser, again. Victor had fixed them when he had returned home. The certificate was under one of the drawers, wrinkled a little. He rolled it up and stuck it in the wall alongside his guns.

By the time he had emptied the house of everything he cleaned as well as he could.

He would need a new refrigerator. The stove didn't work anymore.

He hauled out the broken cabinets Calib had busted. He drug out the couch and put it on top of the pile. He decided to burn it and haul off the remainder. It made more smoke than he expected. He dumped buckets of water around it and paid attention to flying pieces of debris.

He considered working on pop's house since he needed to stick around.

It was late in the day when he finally drove back to pick up Bebe.

"Violet went to bed. She said for you to write down what you need and we'll buy it.

"Refrigerator and stove.

The sheriff came into the kitchen where they were both standing.

"He said he only needs a refrigerator and stove."

"We could just give him the money and he can buy what he needs."

"Where's Bebe?"

"She's asleep too."

"Can I see her?"

"Watching my game." Sheriff said, touching his wife's shoulder.

"Go," she waved.

She went upstairs and waved in Violet's room. He walked in and saw Bebe was asleep in the princess bed. Her toys all around her. A blissful look on her sleeping face. He suddenly noticed the motherly and tender look the woman was giving Bebe. Had the woman actually bonded with Bebe?

He waited until he was out in the hall. "Violet?" He whispered.

"Guest room." She responded.

He felt a little empty as he drove home. He wondered if he had fallen in love so quickly, because he liked having someone around. He never thought that about himself. He believed he was a loner.

He parked the truck near pop's house. He debated with himself if he should sleep in the woods.. He needed a fire if he slept in the woods because of the cold. He brought firewood in pop's house and built a fire in the fireplace. He had earlier cleaned the chimney so it was safe to use. There wasn't a whole lot of heat coming from it but laying near he eventually fell asleep.

The days became similar and seemed to set the pattern of the following days.

Bebe always acted happy to see him and he felt like he took advantage of the women by leaving Bebe so much of the time.

The work in pop's house continued and over time he installed all the walls and started painting.

One time when he went to visit Bebe after work, Violet answered the door. She didn't look at him and refused to speak to him when he asked her a question.

"I'm the one with a talking problem, Violet." He said, making a light joke.

She ignored him and he felt uncomfortable forcing her to listen. When he tried to get her to face him she had tears in her eyes that tore at his heart.

"Sweetheart, please," he said, getting on his knees in front of her.

She fought to suppress a sob. "I went to your house the other day so we could be together, to do what you promised. Remember what you agreed on Victor!"

His heart twisted painfully. She had grown so insecure after Calib.

"You're with someone else now and you could have warned me!" She sobbed in anguish as she dove past him.

He wanted so badly to stop her by grabbing her and making her listen. Her pain became his! It could be stopped by her listening to what he had to say!

"Leave, please." Her mother politely said.

He didn't know where to go. He parked the truck at his job, his boss didn't mind if he didn't have a lot of customers.

He walked the streets aimlessly.

He saw a bar and went in. He sat on a stool and ordered. There were too many people and tension builded. He never understood how people enjoyed being around a room of strangers. He tossed twenties on the counter.

The bartender came up to him.

"What'd you'll have?"

Victor put his hand over the counter to the height of a whiskey bottle.

"What? Do you not talk?"

Victor shook his head. Not with that many people around, he thought.

"Deaf?" He put a couple bottles on the counter. Victor shook his head at type of liquor in the bottles.

"You're a whiskey kinda guy, should've caught that, but got stuff on my mind."

Victor nodded his head but the man had already turned and grabbed a bottle. He held it up and Victor nodded, again

He opened it and set the bottle down in front of Victor along with a glass.

Victor didn't know how long he drank or how many glasses it took to empty the bottle. The bottle sat empty on the counter and he could feel a buzz start.

He ordered another bottle and threw twenties on the counter, again. He didn't care if he was wasting money! Violet acted angry at him and nothing mattered anymore! He felt completely defeated!

He slowly lowered his glass when a thin female well endowed sat on the stool next to him.

He tilted his glass ignoring her. Her purse was on the floor and he moved his bottle away from her, he happened to look down. She had a bottle of medication on top in her purse. She noticed his glance and moved her purse to the opposite side.

He took his phone out. Having memorized what was on the bottle, he began to use the internet for the first time. The internet pulled up what the medication was. Is used often to help manage symptoms with HIV.

He tried to think of other things to look up. He typed random things and had trouble reading the small print.

"Stranger, why don't we go find a room and share a bed?"

He looked at her, she wasn't serious, was she? He shook his head no and got down from his stool. He barely could get up onto another stool, he had become so drunk. He probably had enough to drink, he thought. He poured himself another glass and noticed his hand trembling. He had past feeling a buzz. He had become fully intoxicated. She got down and pressed her body into him.

"Come on sugar." she said huskily. Leaning in for a kiss. Her hand slowly sliding up his thigh. He jerked away and found himself falling. He hit the floor with a loud thump making everyone jump from the noise. He heard laughter and the barkeep came around, "alright you! Go home. You've had enough!"

Victor slowly got up and stood to his full height. He stared the barkeep down. He saw him motion to someone and he knew if he didn't leave they were going to throw him out. The bouncer didn't look at all threatening, he thought with a scoffing sound. Victor felt sure he could whup him but he decided to leave since he wasn't wanted there. He didn't need them to pin something on him that he didn't do!

He stumbled a few times as he walked down the streets. He found himself at the edge of the sheriff's property. He desperately needed to tell Violet something, he thought. He stumbled down the sidewalk and knocked loudly on the door. He rubbed his arm, trying to remember how he had injured it. He waited for what he thought a long time and knocked again.

"Victor, hold on! You're waking up mommy and Bebe!" Violet exclaimed under her breath.

"I've something I need to tell you, beautiful!"

"Hurry up and say it!" she snapped.

He pushed the door open and let himself in. "I've got some. ." He stumbled forward.

"Victor, you're drunk!" She whispered harshly, "you're disgusting! I don't want anything to do with you anymore!" She started to cry.

"No! No! Sweet precious heart! Hurts me so much when 'cry!" He rubbed his arm. "Hurts," he mumbled.

"Really, do you think this doesn't hurt me!" She shoved her phone in his face.

"New phone!" He exclaimed. Knowing how Calib had tossed her phone out the window.

"Look at it stupid!" She snarled.

"Is that me?"

"You're going to lie and say it's not!" She exclaimed.

"Ohhhhh," he said, lovingly. "You are so, so, so, beautiful!" He said leaning in to kiss her flashing eyes.

She stepped away and he almost fell.

"Ohhhhh'. That's why my arm hurts!" He said, rubbing his arm.

The picture was of him a second before he fell off the stool in the bar.

"The woman wrapped around you . ." She called him foul names and added, "moronic idiot!"

"Violet precious, your words hurt." He braced himself against the wall and tried to pull her towards him. She fought and he fell directly into a chair. It creaked loudly from their weight.

"I've som'n to tell you! She needed to stop calling him names! Hurt boiled up in him

"I'm going to scream!" She hissed.

"I love you!" He said.

"I hate you!" She sobbed.

"I love you!" He said kissing her head and anywhere he could.

"You're cheating on me!"

"Huh? No."

"With the woman in the picture!"

"No, I've been building pop's house for you. I'm not supposed to tell you. Secret, Violet! Don't tell!"

"You fool, you just told me!"

"Woman in picture has AIDS."

"You had sex with someone who has AIDS!" She screamed. She fought to get loose but, couldn't budge his strength. She breathed rapidly. Her rage pulsing through her.

"I love you!" He said. "There's no one else." Trying to calm her. "Look, I've been doing this with this phone." He pushed buttons on the phone panel.

"Are you trying to show me how to use the internet? You're on my plan! It comes with the plan, stupid!"

"That hurts! I'm go'na cry!" Victor said. "I love you and you are done being mean to me!"

Violet felt a tiny chill of fear go down her spine. Was he going to hurt her? Would he become abusive? Would he be like Calib?

He brought her face up by his strength. He began kissing her nonstop. She felt her anger sliding away.

"I don't like being accused of what I haven't done!" He growled in anger. He started sobering up. He continued to kiss her until she was limp in his arms and melted into him. "I'm sorry." She said between the kisses. "I love you too. I'm so jealous!" She said crying.

He kissed away her tears, becoming passionate in his kissing.

"That's enough!" Her father said in a hard tone, slicing through their passion like ice.

"Daddy?" Violet said, startled. She got off Victor's lap.

Victor started making a strange noise upon seeing her father. "Cockadoodledoo, rreadoodledoo!"

Violet knew what Victor was implying and burst into a fit of giggles.

"Stand up!" He ordered Victor.

Victor stood, swaying a little and with a smile he wrapped his palms around the sides of her head. He gave her a single noisy kiss on her forehead.

She grabbed one of his hands and planted a kiss in the palm before letting go.

The sheriff sternly led Victor to his car and put him in.

As the sheriff drove off and Victor began singing loudly off key. "Shut up!" The sheriff snapped.

Victor stopped, "I looovve your daughter!" He said in an off key, singsong voice. The sheriff ignored him and Victor continued to sing off key about loving Violet.

The sheriff brought him inside and up to one of the holding cells, just past a row of desks. He motioned Victor to go in.

Victor sighed and grumbled about something under his breath. He sat down heavily on the cot as the sheriff locked the cell door.

Victor stretched on the too small cot with his boots resting on the floor and fell asleep.

The sheriff's voice woke him a couple of times as he talked to his men, but he fell back to sleep.

His dreams suddenly became terror filled. He was walking in a mist that cleared as he walked further into the field. Flowers were at his feet. Ones shaped like bodies of humans. Each one began to reach for his ankles with their tiny hands. Pulling and grabbing him. He tried to avoid them but they were everywhere he went. They talked in their tiny voices but he couldn't understand them. The sky darkened. And a giant black lung dragon flew past him. Another human was in the field, he couldn't yell at him because he couldn't find his voice. The other human was using a shith to slice the heads off the flowers. Their tiny screams filled his ears. The other human laughed at their misery. He wanted to stop the evil killer but he couldn't get to him. The black lung dragon showed up, again, darkening the sky. It swooped down and took the head off the evil man. The tiny flowers cheered for joy. They were released and floated up into the indigo sky, singing with joy.

His laughter echoed again, waking him. Sweat drenched him as he sat up with his heart racing. The laughter of the killer was talking to the deputies.

He was the boy at the soda machine years ago. He was there in the sheriff's office! Rage filled Victor, the man needed to die!

He yelled out to one of the deputies.

"What do you want?" one of them yelled back.

"Let me loose!" he ordered them. He heard them laugh but he didn't hear the man that had killed Annie. He rested his head against the wall next to the bars. Rage continued to pulse through him.

He wanted to kill the man! He needed to be free so he could find him and beat him to death! He didn't know how long he remained in the same position. His whole body violently trembled with the need to decimate the man! Voices and noise around him continued as time ticked by. A couple of the deputies walked past him, talking. They came back he moved with the speed of a hummingbird. He immediately brought the man's back up against the bars and started to strangle him with a forearm.

The other deputy backed up with wide eyes.

"Release me!" Victor said harshly in a lethal tone. He had a man to kill and they were stopping him!

The deputy ran off talking rabidly to another. They had the sheriff on dispatch. The man tried to dig his fingers into Victor's forearm and he tightened his hold on the man. He made a choking sound and remained still. It didn't take long for the sheriff to show up.

"Release him, Victor!" Ordered the sheriff.

He didn't move. "Release me now!" Victor said harshly!

He ordered one of his deputies to get the keys and let him loose.

"Sir, I don't think we are supposed to do that!" one said.

"Did you get elected sheriff, Dace?"

Victor flew out of the cell and came to a sudden stop. "Where is she?" he asked the sheriff, breathing fast.

The sheriff looked at him in confusement.

"The killer was here!" Victor exclaimed.

"What?" Dace said.

"Who was just here?" Asked the sheriff.

"Andy Gromes," said another deputy. "He was just visiting."

The sheriff grabbed his phone with a frown and called. "Margaret, where's Violet?"

"She went to drop off some stuff at Victor's house." She continued to talk but he had already hung up.

He moved out the door, still frowning.

"Why do you think she's in danger?"

"He was asking questions." Victor stormed.

The sheriff unlocked his car and got in.

Victor got in quickly as the sheriff put the car in gear.

The sheriff moved faster once it sunk in that she might be in danger.

He put the sirines on while taking off.

Violet didn't know if she wanted to go back to work. She thought of how people would be asking how she got the horrible scar. She didn't know if she would be ready to answer questions. She parked her car next to Victor's house and got out. She grabbed the boxes and totes filled with things she thought he would need. She checked to see if his house door was locked and found it unlocked. She went in and set the stuff down on the counter.

She hoped Victor would be happy to see all she had found up in the attic of her parents house. She started to put the dishes on the shelves over the counter. There wasn't any cupboard doors, just shelves over the counter. She thought it was funny since he worked for a man who made really nice cabinets and he had horrible ugly ones.

Once she had empty the boxes she walked back for more. She grabbed them from her car and went back inside. She dropped a pan and went to pick it up when suddenly a man came swiftly towards her.

A scream tore from her throat as he violently grabbed her, tearing her dress.

Chapter 11

Fear filled Victor as the sheriff flew across the black top to his house. Terror grew as they pulled up and saw not only Violet's car but another car parked behind hers.

He heard a curse from the sheriff as he called in his cordince. Victor raced inside. He didn't want to relive what had happened with Annie but it was happening again! His mind screamed 'no', over and over again. It was happening again!

Upon entering his house he could smell burned gunpowder. Did the evil man kill Violet with a gun? Anguish rushed through him like a flashflood! Agonizing emotional pain caused everything to stop in his mind. Not again! Not like what happened to Annie! He felt like he moved in slow motion. A roar filled his ears.

He came to a sudden stop.

Andy Gromes no longer breathed as his sightless eyes stared straight ahead. His limp body rested back against Victor's old bed and his limp legs sprawled on the floor. Blood splatter was arched behind him where the bullet had blown a hole, threw his heart and sprayed behind it!

Victor saw his rifle laying on the floor and her whimpering in his closet.

He dove for her hearing her father behind him. Her father brushed his shoulder as he leaned in. She saw them both and with a startled cry she flew into Victor's arms. He picked her up and carried her away.

A deputy came up behind them and another followed causing the hall to be tight quarters.

"Take her out." The sheriff said firmly, gently guiding him down the hall.

"Jimmy, take over." The sheriff said quietly. He followed Victor out and walked to his car.

She clung tightly to him as he went to his porch. He carefully sat down. He noticed her badly torn dress and tried to cover her legs. He held her close.

He saw the sun drop in the sky. Spring was coming with a warmth in the breeze.

The sheriff came to her holding a blanket. He covered her.

"Daddy," she sobbed, catching his hand.

"It's alright, baby." He said, kissing her cheek.

"Daddy, I can't hear!" She sobbed. She held his hand while she stayed up against Victor.

Victor knew the gun being fired inside could be deafening.

"I called an ambulance for her. She'll likely want to be with you."

Victor nodded.

Jimmy came out. "Dace, check out his vehicle and then rope off the house." He walked to his car and got in the driver seat.

Dace had all four doors open and then opened the trunk. A sound came from him as suddenly stumbled away and lost what was in his stomach.

Sheriff stood and approached and Jimmy got out of his car and stood looking into the trunk. Sheriff shook his head and came back.

Jimmy had his phone out as he wrote on his phone. Victor could see him taking pictures.

The sheriff sat back down next to his daughter. He pulled her against him in a tight embrace and then let her go.

"I think she's still in shock." Victor said.

"I know, just grateful!" Whispered Weston.

Victor didn't ask what was in the trunk. He didn't need to, he knew. Like most serials he likely had something of his victims in the trunk.

"So am I," Victor said.

An ambulance showed up and Victor stood up with Violet. He carried her to them and got in with her as they laid her down on the gurney.

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Victor took some days off to be with Violet.

The sheriff didn't say anything about him staying there. He didn't say anything when she went to bed at night wanting him to hold her close until she fell asleep.

Days passed and grew warmer. The sheriff had told him he could go back to his house, it had been cleared.

Victor itched to be in the woods. He loved Violet but he needed to be there. He knew how she felt about the woods and didn't think she would want to be with him so he didn't ask.

He told her one morning that he needed to do some things but didn't tell her what. His boss had heard about what happened and had given him time off.

He drove to his house and slowly got out of his truck. He walked through the house and the stretch of it made him extremely nauseated.

The winter had the north side of the house sagging and the roof was leaking in a number of areas. The wood on the house was too dryrotted to fix. He took everything from the house that had value. Violet had given him so much stuff and he went through each room to make sure he didn't miss anything. He double checked and triple checked every room. His guns rested in the seat next to him. He was tempted to go hunting but he had work to do. He tried to open the windows but the wood was rotted and the foundation had shifted too much for them to open.

He went back to his room and took the last thing he would be taking. He couldn't get used to the most putrid foul smell. Human rot smelled worse than animal rot.

He took the paper and set it in the truck. He took some gasoline and spilled it over the floor.

He poured a tiny line of gasoline across the porch. He lit a match to it and the flame tore across the floor and into the house. He stood far back, making sure the wind was light and he had a hose attached to the pump from the well.

The entire house soon became engulfed in flames. In a matter of minutes it burned to ground level. He worried someone would call the fire department.

He waited a while for the flames to die down. He drove to pop's house and first put his guns up in pop's secret wall, behind the shelves. He bought the other things in, finding places for everything. He drove back to the house and checked on the dying flames and then circled around the house, making certain flying debris didn't start a fire anywhere in the woods.

He drove to pop's house and began painting one of the bedroom walls.

He checked the fire and then went back to painting. Deep into the night before the flames completely died out.

He drove to check on Violet.

He knocked and the sheriff answered and let him in.

"Did you clean up the house?" He asked Victor as he sat back down at the table. He was working on some paperwork and wearing glasses.

"In a way." Victor said.

The sheriff leaned back in his chair looking at him over his glasses. "Someone made a call about a fire but they couldn't figure out where it was."

Victor shrugged. He got up and poured himself something to drink.

"If you burned your house down I hope you're not thinking about living here!" He said sternly to Victor.

Victor smiled and set his cup down. "Why can't I live here forever, with you?"

"You're joking, right?"

"I don't know if Violet is going to like it. It's in the woods."

"She'll like anything with you around. It's a house, isn't it?"

"I can show you, if you want."

"I'm always so busy."

"Night," Victor said, rinsing his cup.

Chapter 12

Victor looked at the picture on his phone. He tried to do it the way the video said. He was painting a mural of the woods on the wall in the kitchen. He was almost done with painting the little insects flying around. The golden sunlight and the green grass didn't look too bad. He had painted some tree frogs and a squirrel. He didn't think it looked all that great. He went and put the paint up.

He had bought a small crystal chandelier and had it hanging over the table with some chairs.

He walked past the mural and came to a stop. From a little distance it looked good. He sighed in relief.

He drove to the old house and took out the rose roots he had purchased. He already had holes in the ground. He planted them and covered them with nutritious soil.

Annie loved roses, every color.

He planted all the rose bushes around the old foundation and put his tools up.

He had one more errand to do. Violet, her parents, and Bebe had gone to church. He had told them he had stuff to do.

He drove to where they had buried Annie. He parked and got out, taking the paper with her name on it. He grabbed roses he had bought her as well, tossing the wrappings in the truck. He walked through the graveyard and found her headstone. He knelt on the ground in front of it.

"Annie, I've found someone else who I want to spend my life with. I'll leave this with you. He ran his finger along her headstone, pushing dirt aside. He tucked the folded up paper into the crevice he had made. He laid the colorful roses on the ground, over her.

He sat silent for a long time, the memories of her and the past filled his thoughts. He felt a little burn of tears in his eyes.

Birds were singing about the day. The warm spring air and the bright sun set the mood.

He heard someone slowly approaching and he remained still.

"What is it?" A elderly woman pulled the tucked in marriage certificate. She opened it to read it and gasped. Annie's father leaned in to read it.

Victor stood looking down at the elderly couple, Annie's parents. They had aged terribly, the stress of losing their only daughter. They had played a part in sending him to prison. "The blood on it is from Annie's killer." It had only a tiny drop of blood.

"Patricia, put it back." Annie's father said.

Patricia tried to tuck it back into the ground where Victor had it. She leaned against her daughter's headstone to brace herself. Her fingers trembled hard and it was difficult.

"He tried to go after the sheriff's daughter? It was on the news." Annie's father said.

"She's the nice lady who works at the library?"

Victor nodded to both their questions. He couldn't continue to stay angry at the old couple.

"You never did talk much." Patricia said. "We're sorry for our part. Sorry you went to prison. We had no idea Annie had really married you!"

"We're deeply sorry, Victor." Said Annie's father.

"We'll leave if you want time with her." Patricia said.

Victor put a hand up and shook his head. He turned and walked off. He got in his truck and drove away, his chest tight with emotions.

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It had been a week and he thought the house was ready for Violet to see it. She said to meet her at church and they could all go in together. He walked through each of the bedrooms making sure the carpet laid nice.

He checked the master bedroom, he hadn't been sure of a color. She said she had grown tired of the color of her room at her parents house. He had painted it a pale blue. It matched the walnut furniture he had bought for her with the money he had saved years ago. He checked the seal on the sliding glass doors in the bedroom. The entire north wall still had shelves that went from floor to ceiling. He found things at yard sales and put them here and there on the shelves. The master bedroom was on the north east side of the house. He had bought things for Violet and had put books, nicknacks, and a variety of other items to make the shelves look nice. Pop had been a good carpenter. The wood shelves didn't match the walnut furniture but it did look good with the light blue walls.

He had installed a toilet and a tub shower combo with the money. The wall was painted shell pink with a shower curtain of herbs and flowers.

In the kitchen he had touched up his mural on the one wall. The appliances sat ready to use. He had installed wall lamps on either side of the fireplace.

The house stood ready for her.

He drove to the church and parked his truck. He buttoned his shirt and put a tie on. He pulled his suit jacket on. It wasn't clothes he liked to wear but she would probably like it.

He approached the crowd outside the church doors, looking for her. He stood next to her and she didn't seem to notice him. She seemed flushed when he leaned down to peer into her lovely face. He lifted an eyebrow in question.

"Victor!" She exclaimed. "I didn't recognize you!" She embraced him. He wrapped his arms around her and pulled her close. He had shaved and had his hair tied up at the base of his skull. He kissed her a few times. "Church." She whispered breathlessly.

"You're so handsome, women are going to want you!"

"And you'll get jealous, again?" Victor said.

"Probably!" She hissed.

Her parents came up to them. Bebe stared and hesitated before coming to Violet's side.

"You look beautiful, Bebe." Victor said admiring how her hair was done up like Violet's hair.

Margaret looked confused, "what . . . who?"

"It's Victor, Margaret." Violet's father said.

Victor allowed himself to be led into church while feeling tension. Bebe sat between Violet and Margaret. She would sometimes crawl over and sit next to Violet's father. Victor's hand found Violet's soft warm hand. He tenderly held it. Bebe glanced at him a number of times, he winked at her. She came back to sit with Violet. She reached up and patted his cheek. He smiled at her.

Violet breathed in and put her hand over her heart. He winked at Violet too and smiled again. Her face turned red and he could feel his own do the same.

He stayed close to her as they exited the church. Bebe came to him and he picked her up. She kept patting his cheeks. "Uncle Vic." She finally said.

"You said Vic! Good job, Bebe!" Victor exclaimed, hugging her.

"Mommy's been working with her." Violet said. "Years ago, she thought about being a speech therapist."

"She would be good at it." Victor said.

Violet's parents took Bebe and left.

Violet got into his truck. "My parents keep giving me a hard time, saying you're getting your cave ready." Violet said, buckling her seatbelt.

"It's that house I got the water bottles from. The one surrounded by trees."

"I wondered."

"The inside wasn't finished. I had to do a lot of work on it."

When they came close to the old house she stiffened. He reached a hand out to hold hers.

"Do you feel alright? You don't have to see it now."

"I'm not sure."

He drove a little more so she could see the house was gone. He waited for her to look.

"It's gone?" She whispered in surprise.

He had to back up and catch the new road to pop's house. He parked and got out to help her from his truck.

"You removed an entire house?"

"It wasn't much of one. The foundation was breaking up, the roof had boards so rotten you couldn't attach anything to it. I didn't want you to deal with bad memories so I took it out."

"Thank you. You didn't have to. Daddy's been helping me deal with it. He's had to use a firearm too in his line of work."

"It was either him or you, Violet."

"I know."

He took her hand and led her away from the truck.

He hadn't had time to do much with the yard. He would get to that later.

He brought her to the door and unlocked it. He motioned her to come so he could pick her up. He carried her into his house. He set her down as she looked about in wonder.

"Victor, it's beautiful!" She walked to his mural to examine it. "You did this?" She exclaimed.

He nodded.

"These cabinets are so lovely. Your job?"

"Payment arrangement."

Her eyes aglow with the work he'd done. She walked into the living room and up to the large rock fireplace. He had left the wall lamps on.

"Wow!" She touched the rocks.

"Pop built it. I think he's a better mason and carpenter than me."

"Don't be modest, Victor. Those cabinets in the kitchen are very well made."

She walked down the hall and looked into a bedroom. "Nice."

She walked further and stopped. "Master bedroom?" She whispered. She looked out the sliding glass doors. She looked at the furniture, rubbing her fingers across the wood.

"My boss helped me with the plans on how to build these pieces."

"I'm speechless, Victor! The color of the wall goes perfect with it. She stood admiring the floor to ceiling shelves.

"Pop built this one."

"His work is good."

"I had to revarnish it." Victor said.

She went into another bedroom. The color of the wall was a bright mix. "Bebe's?"

He nodded. He caught her arm and gently led her back to the main bedroom.

"I love you, Victor." She said.

"I love you, Violet sweetheart." He leaned in to kiss her and brought her up against him.

She was quiet. He was worried he had not pleased her.

She started to cry and his heart dropped. All the plans he had for their future together seemed at risk.

"It was beautiful. I didn't know it could be like that. You're a wonderful man. You made it so enjoyable."

Victor breathed in a huge sigh of relief and the tension left him.

She looked at him moving across her pillow. "Everything is wonderful. I feel like I'm dreaming. Thank you for the best day of my life, Victor."

"Thank you too, Violet."

Laying in each other's arms they talked and made plans for the future.

Violet went still, hearing something.

Victor looked at her. "What?" He only heard the night birds singing.

"That bird singing, what is that?"

"Have you not heard of whippoorwill?"

She sat up.

He got up, pulling his pants on. "Come on, we'll go outside and listen to them.

She quickly dressed and followed him outside. The darkness filled the woods and at first she couldn't see anything.

"Here sit down, I brought you a chair from the kitchen."

The timber of his voice near her ear gave her tiny chills. "There's more than one!" She exclaimed under her breath.

He had put his chair next to her. He reached for her hand and held it.

"They sound beautiful, Victor!"

"Everything about the woods is beautiful to me, Violet." He said tenderly.

"I could sit here all night."

"Do you want to?" He asked, suddenly excited.

"Okay, if you want." She felt a little nervous.

"We'll stay near the house, since it's your first time staying in the woods."

They sat listening to the birds sing and the moon moved higher in the night sky.

A vehicle slowly came down the driveway. He got up to turn on lights over the driveway.
"It's my parents!" Violet exclaimed.
They got out and approached. Bebe was holding Margaret's hand.
"You kids being good?" Weston asked.
"Daddy, listen!" Violet said.
"I just hear insects, baby."
"Victor, did they stop singing because of the car?"
"They'll sing again, give them a minute, sweetheart."
Suddenly a whippoorwill began singing loudly.
"It's very nice," said Margaret.
"Oh, mommy come inside!" Violet said with excitement.
"We can't stay long."
"Your father wanted to make sure Victor wasn't living in a cave."
Violet laughed and grabbed his hand. "You're silly!"
As soon as they saw the kitchen their eyes widened in surprise. They looked at the cabinets, the mural, and the chandelier.
"It's lovely." Margaret said in a surprised tone.
The rock fireplace had a small fire going and the two wall lamps still on. They all went down the hall, looking in the bedrooms.
Margaret ran a hand along the walnut furniture.
"This is beautiful. I like the shelves on one side of the wall."
"Pop actually built this house. He never finished it. I've been working on it since I've been here and when I had the time."
"This sliding glass door face the east?" Asked Weston.
"Yeah," said Victor.
They went further down the hall. "We're thinking this could be Bebe's room." Said Violet after turning on the light.
"Really, for me?" Bebe said with a huge smile. She walked around looking at the few things already on the shelves.
"We need to go. I need to get some sleep." Weston said.
"Do you have everything you need?" Her parents asked before leaving.
"Oh, we're good!"
"I have to say, I'm impressed, Victor." Weston said before he drove off. "Take care of my little girl!"
Violet sat with Bebe on her lap and listened to whippoorwills. Victor sat next to her, smiling. Violet was starting to like nature! And it made him happy!

Chapter 13

Months later

"Hey, how angry do you think Victor is for stealing his truck?" Said Eddy

"Not as angry as we are for him conniving pop to give him all our land!" Said Freddy. He was silent for a moment. "We should get a lawyer. Pop was dying and he took advantage of him!" Said Freddy.

"He's going to be so surprised when we show up!"

"He probably filed a claim that we stole his truck. Him being so lovey dovey to that sheriff's daughter! He never dreamed we had the spare key. He never bothered to ask!"

"How can someone who's been in prison be so stuck up?"

"I don't think he's stuck up as much as standoffish towards us, his kin!" Said Freddy.

"Well, not exactly."

"Pop, tell you too. Someone named Billy Dale."

"Doesn't matter. Pop probably told him we did drugs! After growing up with pop always being fried on something and drunk. Did he really believe we'd do that shit?" Exclaimed Eddy. "He told that sheriff we did that trash mess!"

"All of pop's friends made that mess!" Freddy said.

"Yeah, I guess they thought it was payback time, dumping their trash!"

"Pop, let them and he wouldn't tell us why they did that!"

"Well, you did trash my car!"

"You trashed the other one and lost your license!" Said Freddy.

"It was your fault!"

"No! Yours! You were the one driving drunk!"

"I'll get my license back soon!"

"That's what I'm saying, uncle Vic didn't even ask us about it! I don't know who he thinks he is! Stealing all our land!"

"I know, we had plans!"

"Eddy, you're driving. Don't get so worked up."

Eddy glanced in the rearview mirror. A string of foul words filled the air. He pulled over and parked. "I should run!"

"No. Switch places!" Freddy said while ducking low and climbing over him. "I got an idea, play along!" He motioned for another switch. They did it a few more times before the cop knocked on the window. Being out of breath from their antics, Freddy spoke politely, "yes, officer, sir."

He looked sternly into the truck, starting to say something and stopped.

"Which one of you was driving this truck?" He asked sharply.

They tried to refrain from laughing and pointed at each other.

"Get out of the vehicle!" He barked.

Freddy pointed to his driver's license behind his back.

"Keep your hands where I can see them!" The officer barked.

Eddy quickly covered it as he exited the truck behind his brother, both coming out the driver's door.

"I didn't tell you to both come out this door!" The officer snapped.

"Sorry, sir," they both said in unison.

"Identical twins? I bet you think you're both being funny!" The officer said.

"No, sir!" Freddy said.

"Yes, sir," Eddy said.

They looked at each other. "was it a question . . I don't know . . should I've said yes? . . should I've said no?" They spoke to each other in a conundrum.

"Enough!" The officer barked. "Now, who was driving?"

They both pointed to each other.

"No! You both weren't driving! Give me both of your licenses!"

"We only have one, sir!" Freddy said. They both pointed in unison at the driver side seat.

The officer looked in and picked up the license.

"Who does this belong to?" The officer was getting frustrated.

They pointed to each other, again. They stood trying to look innocent.

"No! Stop doing that!" He rubbed a hand over his face and bumped his hat loose. "Listen, I'm giving one of you a ticket for speeding! Which one of you was driving?"

They again pointed to each other.

"I'm going to ask just one more time!" He ground out the words. "Which one of you was driving this truck!"

They barely moved, pointing to one another.

"Which one!" He screamed.

They both wiggled a finger at each other while humbly bowing their heads.

"No, no, no!" I can't do this!" He rubbed his face again and knocked off his hat. "Get out of here!" He said laughing and handed one of them the license. He picked up his hat and walked off to his car, laughing harder.

Freddy got in the driver seat and carefully pulled into traffic.

They started laughing and Freddy was soon laughing so hard that he had to use an exit ramp. Their laughter waned.

"I can't believe we got that cop to laugh!" Said Eddy.

"I can't believe it either!" said Freddy, his laughter waning. "I'm hungry but, if we use the last of our money, we'll be stuck somewhere without cash and never make it home."

"Same," Eddy said, sinking down in his seat. "We could steal some wallets at that shopping place by the truck stop. The way we used to do, to buy pop's little baggies."

"I can't imagine making Bebe do that! It makes me sick, thinking of what we went through!"

"Yeah, pop didn't teach us anything either. How to cook, clean, and all that."

"Yeah, Victor looked down at us for not being able to do anything."

"He had no idea what we went through!"

"Druggy loser was our pop and made us the same."

"Yeah, living our pop's legacy! Losers the both of us."

"Remember the first time I took off from the house. One of pop's methheads had crawled into my bed and started grabbing between my legs. I hit him right in the face on that really big shnaz! I took off outside during that winter storm!"

"I know I had to follow you, slipping and sliding on snow and ice! We didn't even have coats on!"

Keep driving, uncle Vic can almost cook as well as grandmama Judy."

"We'll just be hungry for a while. Sure not the first time. Pop never fed us!"

"Grandmama Judy and her cooking. We knocked on that old couple's door almost frozen to death. Our adopted grandmama Judy and grandpapa Harry."

"Oh, you poor little boys!" that old lady said, "come in, I'll get you nice little boys something to eat."

"Grandmama Judy always fed us, right from the start."

"I wish I'd learned how to cook from her before she passed."

"No, we liked working with that old man. He grew so many different plants in those huge fields of his. Remember he said we both had greenthumbs."

"Yeah, we had to hide our produce when we brought it home to eat later."

"Can you imagine how furious uncle Victor would be if we started bulldozing some of his precious trees! Us, dumb farmers, wanting to make fields and plant something!"

"Deer would be a problem."

"Chip got rid of those nuisances."

"Then, uncle Vic had to come around and chain him up!"

"Do you think maybe pop knew who got shnaz in trouble for trafficking large amounts of drugs? They thought pop did it."

"Yeah, us sneaking around and hearing things. They should've been more careful."

"I really think they thought pop did it."

"We're lucky he didn't have pop taken out."

"Pop died anyway."

They both sat quiet as the truck ate up the miles. Memories in their thoughts.

"Do you think pop knew?" Ask Eddy.

"Do you think he did?" Freddy said, thinking.

"He knew he didn't do it."

"You don't think he was angry about it? Do you?"

"Do you think . . . , No!" Freddy went silent, changing lanes. "Was he ever vindictive?"

Eddy scoffed. "All the time, mr. abuser did everything."

"Sweet as a baby when uncle Vic showed up."

"I think he was afraid of him. He's got a hard edge. Prison probably did that to him. Pop couldn't get out of that death bed to go buy his drugs. Do you think uncle Vic bought for pop?"

"Victor buy his drugs? No! I don't believe he would."

"Did you ever follow him when he went into the woods?"

"Yeah, couple times. He just sit there, like he was meditating or something."

"I did too. He usually went to grandpop's house."

"He didn't find our crop?"

"Not even close."

"I've been worrying about it since we've been gone so long. What if someone harvests it?"

"I've been worrying too. Visiting distant family members was a flop!"

"Yeah! In Califorknee, we went down that one residential street and every house had subwoofers blasting! Cousin Quinn and his family lived the same way! Way too many homeless there too!"

"I couldn't live like that!"

"I couldn't find a way to like Colordoo, either!"

"Same!"

"Uncle Vic is gonna be surprised to see us!"

"We need to get gas and maybe grab some coffee."

.

Victor locked the door behind him. Violet wanted to meet him in town.

He was about to get into his truck when Morris's truck pulled up behind him. Heart racing he stood bracing for them to be angry about the house.

One of the twins spoke, "seems we're missing pop's house. Didn't think we'd been gone that long." They were seething in anger. Victor tried to guess which one talked first. Usually the more aggressive one was Eddy.

"Also, it seems we've got some hippie neighbors living off our electricity!" Said the other twin.

Victor didn't understand what he meant about hippies. He built the house for them to live in if they returned. He had hoped they would stay out west.

Violet and him had taken out a small loan for buying the old homestead with the cistern. Plus, supplies and hire help so he could be with his new wife. He felt dread over them being there and Bebe.

"You've been busy!" Said the first one. They both approached him with their fists clenched.

He waited for them to make the first move.

"We'll just go inside this house and see if it's suitable for us."

"Oh, I think he doesn't want us to look inside."

"What are you afraid of uncle Vicky'?"

"He's afraid we're going to take everything and sell it for drugs!"

"Is that what pop convinced you of?"

"That we're methheads like him?"

"I think we should tell him."

"I think we should go inside and do a check on items."

"He looked nervous at first, a hint friendly."

"Now a cloak swept over him. A prison cloak, he's intimidating now. He's ready to take us both on."

"Are you going to attack your nephews?" One of them said, tauntingly.

He couldn't tell who was who. They were both angry and both wanting to fight. He didn't want them messing up the house or taking things. Violet might get upset with him and he couldn't let her get upset.

"The hippie house is yours!" He finally said.

"I don't think he wants us in his precious place."

"I think he's lying. We're not hippies!"

Their anger led them forward. Victor thought about physically stopping them. He knew he could take them both but the heart of their anger was Morris giving all the land to him.

They watch him as they boldly opened the door to Pop's house. They went in, ready to fight. They stopped, staring at the mural.

"Did you hire someone?"

"No, that's my work." Victor said, trying to sound civil.

They pointed and looked at things, keeping their conversation to themselves. Violet's things laid around.

They both raise their eyebrows in question.

"We're married."

They looked at each other and nodded. "We're not good enough to come to your wedding?"

They nodded, again.

"He's ashamed of us."

"Let's give him the benefit of doubt. Is she?" One of them made a motion of a round woman's pregnant belly.

Victor could feel his face burn in embarrassment. He nodded. "I would have gladly had you two there!" He said firmly.

Their eyes widened, imagining him with a baby.

He began to lead them out but they stopped in the kitchen.

"We ran out of money."

"If you want us to leave your castle," said one of the twins.

"You need to feed us." Said the other twin.

They sat at the table like they had come to a restaurant.

He would have to let Violet know they had showed up. Change of plans. He texted while he pulled out pans and started cooking.

She texted back it was fine. He sighed in relief. He tried hard to please her in everything.

The kitchen quickly had a delicious aroma.

"Aren't you going to ask about Bebe?" Victor said while putting plates and silverware on the table.

"Clever," said one.

"Yeah, then he knows."

"Eddy you have a tiny scar along the edge of your hairline on your forehead." Victor said in a nearly paternal tone. "You were little and fell, cutting your head open."

"I did, I do?" Eddy said, feeling for it. "Why didn't you ever say anything, Freddy?"

"I never paid attention." Freddy responded.

Victor placed a pan of food on the table. He went back to the refrigerator and pulled out a bowl of salad.

"Is she alright?" He sounded stressed over missing her.

"She's with my mother-in-law. She's doing good."

Freddy sighed. "Do you have any more food?" He asked, scraping the now empty bowl.

"Pancakes?" Victor asked, getting up.

"Yes!" They said in unison. "Some beer too." Added one of them.

"You're a couple months short." Victor said.

"He remembers!" They both nodded.

They cleaned their plates while Victor flipped pancakes. He set two opened beer bottles on the table which widened their eyes.

He finished cooking the pancakes and laid the plateful on the table. They divided them amongst themselves. When they were finished they got up.

"Hand me your dishes." Victor said, having them help with cleanup.

"Why did you think we were methheads like pop?" Asked Eddy before stepping from Victor's house. He looked like he wanted an answer.

"I found a lot of needles in that trash I hauled off." He stopped, he didn't want to talk bad about his brother. "Morris said that . . ." He couldn't finish.

"So, pop, not only said something completely untrue, you didn't question it?" Said Eddy.

"He lied!" Freddy added. "He hated us!"

Victor looked at them in confused amazement. "He loved you boys!" He resisted what they said, thinking it untrue.

"You saw a different pop than the real one." Eddy said.

"No, I was around when you were both born. I helped change your diapers!" Victor said. They attempted to tell him something. He suddenly saw a different side of both of them, especially Eddy.

"Pop changed, the drinking, the drugs. Not only had he become abusive he fell deeply in love."

"Where is she? Is she still alive?"

They leaned against Morris's truck, not answering, just looking at him.

"The first time Schnoz crawled into my bed, I hit him on his wart covered nose, he doubled over with blood coming flying. I managed to get free and took off." Eddy said.

"It was during a winter storm. I followed. It's when we met the Shaws. Sometimes we called them grandpapa Harry and grandmama Judy. Their names were Judy and Harry Shaw. We spent a lot of time with them. Especially after what we did, pop hated the sight of us." Freddy said.

Victor shook his head in disbelief.

"You didn't think it strange he gave you all his possessions?" Eddy said.

"No, he told me to take care of you both."

"He believed you killed Annie. He figured you'd do it again and the state would get the money."

"No, You're the one who's fooled, Victor."

"He said he didn't want the state to get it!"

"Just one of his many lies."

"He's not going to believe anything we say!"

"Yeah, let's go."

"Wait!"

"Did Morris abuse you that way?"

"No, just physical abuse."

Freddy sighed, "I lied, Eddy. Schnoz couldn't tell us apart."

Eddy suddenly looked like he was about to cry as he looked at his brother. "I'm sorry, Freddy." He said brokenly. He grabbed hold of his brother and embraced him.

Victor felt his throat get tight. He was beginning to understand what they were saying.

"Where is this, 'Schnoz'?" He wanted to beat the man to death.

"Wish he was dead!" Said Eddy.

"Don't know and don't care!" Said Freddy, while laying back on the hood of Morris's truck.

"One night he came over. We climbed out the window, planning to run to the Shaws."

"We heard him sobbing about killing someone."

Freddy sat up. "We stayed to listen. Pop was kissing him telling him it would be alright. No one knew about it. He was safe."

"Except, someone did hear." Eddy said, crossing his arms as he leaned against the truck.

They both looked at him without saying anything.

"Pop completely hated us after that." Said Eddy.

"After we called in an anonymous tip, they locked up Schnoz. Pop changed after he got locked up."

"We destroyed our pop by what we did. He was broken!"

"Schnoz wouldn't believe him when he told him that he loved him and would never do that to him!"

"He hated us after that."

"His people dumped all that trash in our yard."

"Pop couldn't get his drugs like he did before."

"He was suicidal."

"He loved him so much."

"He went mad from it! One night he went outside, digging through the trash. He used the needles he found."

"He injected himself with the needles he found in that trash in the yard. I knocked him out." Eddy said.

"We carried him inside and went back out to look for all the needles we could find."

"We hid them from him."

"We had to keep an eye on him."

"We took turns."

They stopped talking and silence filled the air other than a distant cricket.

Victor had to step away and lean into a tree. He couldn't imagine what they had gone through. The mental image of what went on while he had been incarcerated didn't match what happened. Would Morris leave everything to him just to get back at his own sons? He remembered a certain inmate he intensely disliked. He had his emotions better in check, so he went back to talk to them.

"What did this man look like?" Victor asked.

They both looked at him.

"Ugly!" Said Eddy.

"Huge nose, kinda tall, not tall as you." Freddy said.

"You don't remember his name?"

"Pop called him, 'Lacey', but I don't think it was his real name."

"Did he have a small cluster of warts on the left side of his large nose?"

They both stiffened and their eyes widened.

"Was he there?"

"In your prison?"

"Lacey Kline, he was shot to death in a prison riot. You don't have to worry about him anymore."

Relief swept across both their faces.

"Another thing, there was a couple witnesses at his trial."

"Wow." Freddy breathed out.

"If you need to talk . ." Victor hesitated, "things happened in prison . . you can talk to me."

They both nodded slightly.

Victor moved closer to hug them and waited for them to give him the okay. They looked at each other and slowly moved to embrace him. He waited until they pulled away. He fought to keep his eyes free of tears, he didn't want to stress them.

He noticed as he moved the ignition was still intact. "Do you have a key?" He asked, confused.

Freddy pulled out a keyring. "Hid them from pop."

"He kept promising he planned on driving off a cliff," said Eddy. "Or speed into a tree!"

Victor dug into his pocket and pulled out his keys. He undid the second key to the truck and handed it to Eddy.

Eddy put a hand up, "we're not charity."

"Don't be that way, you're blood!"

"Guess we don't need this anymore." Eddy tossed the key to Morris's house.

Victor didn't say anything, but picked it up.

"Sorry, we're used to trash everywhere." Eddy said. "It's a habit."

Freddy handed him the other key to Morris's house.

"What happened to the house?" Asked Freddy.

"The man that killed Annie went after the librarian." Victor stopped for a minute. It still deeply bothered him. "She blew a hole through him, inside the house."

Their eyes widened in shock.

"Don't talk to her about it, please. Unless she does."

"We don't want you talking about pop and stuff either, uncle Vic."

Victor nodded, "I agree."

"So you couldn't clean it?"

"She used a twenty gauge shotgun."

The north side of the house was breaking off the foundation and I couldn't keep up with repairing the roof." Said Victor.

"Show us our hippie house." Said Eddy.

"When will I be able to see, Bebe?" Asked Freddy.

"She'll be bringing her home in a few hours."

"Let's check out the hippie house, again!" Said Eddy.

They got into their truck and Victor got in last on the passenger side, "move over Eddy."

"Uncle Vic is riding with us!"

Freddy parked in front of the house. They got out eyeing the house.

"Tin roof, big porch with roof overhang, hammocks on both sides of the porch, and large pots of plants" Freddy softly said.

They both tried to get into the hammocks. They started laughing at their struggles.

Victor felt glad he had bought them, it had been an impulse buy at a yard sale.

He unlocked the door and handed them the key.

Freddy took it and put it on his keyring.

"I have another key at the house." Victor said, leading them into their new house.

They looked about in awe.

Victor had put in furniture when he found some. Violet had helped with knowing people who were moving and wanted to sell things cheap.

They sat down on a loveseat and then a couch. They got up and went into the kitchen. They opened cupboard doors and found dishes and pans. A large bedroom was built on both ends of the house.

They found the bathroom attached and looked through the cupboards and checked the shower tub combo.

They started arguing over who would get the bedroom with the bathroom attached.

Victor wiggled a finger and led them across the house to the other bedroom. They sounded ecstatic seeing an identical bedroom with another full bathroom.

"Which one are you going to pick, Eddy?" Freddy asked, pushing down on the quilt covered mattress.

"I don't care which. Victor did you spend a lot of money making this house?" Eddy asked.

"Why do you want to help with the payments?"

"Shut up Eddy!" Freddy said.

"I hired people to help with building it. I'm not as good as my pop was."

"We never liked him. He was always really grumpy!"

"Pops and him would get into fights all the time."

"So, are you two going to get jobs?"

They both started laughing. "We have a job, uncle Vic!"

He cocked an eyebrow in question.

"Can we show him?"

"We need to check our crop anyway!"

They raced out of the house.

"Hey," Victor said, motioning, locking the door first.

The three of them entered into the woods. Their excited voices sounded through the woods.

They suddenly came to a complete stop.

"Someone has been here!"

"They destroyed our crop!"

Foul words filled the air and continued to. Their hands quickly and tenderly tucked the exposed roots of each individual plant back into the ground.

"We need to set up a camera!" Snarled Eddy, "not go on some stupid vacation!"

"We needed to take a break, man! We've been planting and harvesting for years! Not counting all the years learning and working with the Shaws!"

"We need to beat up whoever did this!"

"Yeah, crush them!"

"Like we could figure out who did it!" Eddy said, standing up ready to hit his brother.

Victor had been circling the plot. "Hey," he said, motioning which direction the intruders went. It was a clear path where they trampled the ground. They looked angrily at him.

"I know how to track down who did this! I'm angry too. I don't want people trespassing on my property and I will be putting up signs! In this case I'm thinking, 'trespassers will be shot!' would be a good sign to make! Do not walk outside of your garden. I'm going back to get my rifle! And then I'll track down whoever did this!"

"He's on our side!" Freddy said, quietly as they both watched him walk briskly away.

"He's getting his gun!" Eddy said.

"He's a badass. I'm starting to like him." Freddy said.

"Me too."

Victor drove his truck back to their field as far as he could with the tree branches. He got out and took his rifle. He led them through the woods following the trail the thieves had left.

He got to where the thieves had gotten into a car, Victor rested his rifle butt against his thigh as he crouched down looking close at the wheel impressions.

"He's got his prison cloak on." One of them muttered under his breath to the other.

He started walking down a path that eventually led to a dirt road. He kept walking and the twins talked about how far they could walk. They didn't sleep but a couple hours during the night and they were tired. They followed, trustingly.

The dirt path lead to a real gravel road. The road came to an end and hooked up with a cul-de-sac. A row of houses littered the road. Victor walked by each house examining each of the cars parked. One house had some trash in the yard and more vehicles than the other houses. Victor pointed to a car with decal covering it.

"I'm guessing that's the car." Said Victor. He remained standing as the twins knocked on the door. The door opened and when the young teen saw them and Victor he ran past and down the street.

"Shoot him!" Exclaimed Eddy.

He stumbled and almost fell as he became frantic to get away. He ran to another house and swiftly in.

Victor nodded at them to knock again at the same house but someone opened the door before they could.

"Get away from my front door!" An obese older woman snarled with foul words. "I've called the police!"

Victor nodded at the twins to come back and stand near him.

"Your son has been stealing property from my land!" Victor said coldly.

The older obese woman spat at him.

"Next time he comes, he will be shot!" Victor said in a lethal tone that carried. He turned and the woman tried to spit some more and screamed profanities at them, following them a little ways.

They walked back to the damaged plants. The twins had huge smiles on their faces.

"You wear that prison cloak really well, uncle Vic!"

"He scared even me!" They both burst out laughing so hard they fell to their knees.

He let them laugh. When their laughing eased he spoke, "do you two like farming?"

"We love it. Harry said we have a green thumb."

"Come with me, I'll show you something."

He drove them back to the house. He went into his house for less than a minute and returned. He motioned them to get back in the truck.

He drove slowly through the woods, pausing a few times.

"We're not going to miss, Bebe are we?" Freddy asked, worried.

Victor pulled out his phone. He shook his head.

"How much longer?" Eddy asked.

Victor pointed ahead.

"You don't talk much, do you?" Freddy asked.

They exited the truck.

The woods cleared some. He led them past a barwire fence that laid on the ground, decaying.

"Are we trespassing?"

"No." Victor answered. He led them to an old crumbling foundation. "This used to be a large homestead."

They looked around.

"They had cistern they stored water in. When Violet and I bought this land, I filled the old cistern. They had a very large farmhouse, barn, huge fields and some sheds."

"Is the fence yours?"

"What's left of it," said Victor.

"I think you need a new fence," said Freddy.

"All nine hundred fifty acres?"

They both looked at him in shock.

"Pop lied once again!" Exclaimed Eddy.

"Couple hundred acres, my ass!" Added Freddy with a snort of disgust.

Victor walked between treelines. Small open meadows were scattered about.

"This used to be huge open fields. A lot of trees have grown closer over the years. The ground should still be good. Look how high the weeds and grass are."

"Farmland?" Said Eddy

"Farmland!" Said Freddy. It finally registered their tired minds.

"Used to be!" Replied Victor. "Should still be."

"Yes!" They said in unison. They grabbed each other's hands and danced around, singing joyfully about planting and selling at a farmers market. Tomatoes, beans, onions, pumpkins, their list went on.

"I'm going back. She's coming." Victor said sliding his phone into his jean pocket.

They piled into the truck, talking nonstop over what to plant.

They made it back just in time to see Violet pull up. She parked her car and helped Bebe out of her car seat.

"Daddy!" She screamed, running into his arms. He pulled her close burying his face. His shoulders shook as he held her as she curled up into him.

Violet looked concerned over them showing up. Victor hadn't texted her about them. "What's going to happen to Bebe?" She whispered to Victor. He brought her up against him. "I missed you." And he began kissing her. "You have some explaining to do later." She looked passed him, "why is daddy here?" She looked up at him, concerned.

He saw the twins shuffle their feet nervously.

Weston got out of his car and walked up to Victor.

Violet went up to him. "Daddy?," she said.

"Victor, I've had a complaint tonight." He said in his best lawman voice.

"Daddy, you look tired. Do want some coffee?"

"Yes, darling. My thermoses is in the car.

She got it and went to the house.

"Someone said you were had a rifle that looked like an AK-47. That you were shooting it."

Eddy made a choking noise that sounded like laughter.

The sheriff stopped talking and looked at them. "What's your names?"

They looked at Victor and straightened up the way they were standing. Freddy hitched Bebe up.

"Eddy."

"Freddy"

"They're my nephews." Victor said. He had a feeling he could be in trouble. It made him a little nervous since he had so much to lose now.

"I guessed that. How are you doing tonight, Bebe?"

"My daddy is home!"

"That's wonderful!"

"I didn't fire my rifle. It's the same gun from before." Victor said, not wanting to talk about the past.

"Were you on their property, threatening them."

Victor sighed. "I stood in the street. I said if they trespass on my land and steal our crop again that I was going to shoot them."

"That's a threat Victor, you know that!" The sheriff said sternly. "You have to think before you do something so impulsive. What did they steal?" He was typing on his phone.

"They had a crop of marijuana growing." Victor said.

"It was our last crop for the year. We have to bring them inside now." Freddy said, "and wait for spring."

"I don't know what I can do." The sheriff said. "The law is vague with this."

"It's well over a thousand dollars." Said Freddy.

"I think it's more like two thousand, Freddy!" Eddy argued.

"I try to talk her out of pressing charges. I can't guaranty anything. She said, 'she was so scared that she wet herself.'"

He wrote more on his phone. "Don't go anywhere tonight." He said sternly to Victor.

"She spat at him." Eddy said.

The sheriff stopped getting into his car. "You saw her do this?"

"Yes," said Eddy.

"Why didn't you say anything?" The sheriff asked Victor.

"What?" Victor said.

"She spat at you. That's an assault!" The sheriff said.

"Really," I thought it was just an inside thing. We just got written up when we did it in prison."

"Did she spit just once?"

"She kept spitting." Freddy said.

"Like four or five times." Said Eddy.

"She followed Victor down the street." Said Freddy.

"This is going to be a long night." The sheriff said under his breath with a deep sigh. Violet brought out his thermos. "Here, Daddy."

"Thank you dearest." He kissed her cheek. "I'm leaving. Good night, Bebe," he said, waving at her.

"Night, night." She said, cheerfully.

After he drove off the twins come up to Victor. "She knows the sheriff?" Freddy asked Victor. "His wife watches Bebe during the day, while I work." Victor answered.

"Hold on, I need to know what is going on?" Violet said, interrupting. "You guys . . "

"Violet wait. . " Victor said touching her gently. "Why dont we put Bebe in the house so us adults can talk?" Victor said.

"I have a feeling this is about Bebe, so I'm going to the other house." Eddy said, walking off.

They entered and Bebe spoke, "Daddy, do you want to see my stuff?"

"Sure," he said, glancing at Victor, who nodded slightly. He followed Bebe to her room while she guided him by holding his hand.

"Victor he abandoned her! What is going on?"

"This is why I took out a loan to build their house. It gives them a home and keeps her near us. They want to grow and sell produce. They had marijuana growing and someone trespassed and stole their crop."

"So, they want to grow marijuana on your land?" She scoffed. "Does Daddy know?"

"Yes, he listened to our complaint."

"I don't know if I like this!" She said.

"They want to grow other things, Violet and they can sell at a farmers market. That's how they've been working."

"A job growing marijuana?" She said in disbelief.

"It's actually an old couple that taught them how to grow things. Pop was abusive and they would run off and some elderly couple fed and raised them."

"Victor you're okay about this? Daddy talked about a gun."

"When I see people trespassing I get my gun, Violet, sweetheart."

"You need to think before you do that!" Violet's disapproval was in her tone.

She stared into his eyes. He wasn't backing down. She sighed. He pulled her close and kissed her.

"Mommy's not going to like any of this."

"Don't tell her! I was really surprised that someone taught them how to farm. They actually love it!"

"This old couple taught them how to grow marijuana?" Violet said.

"Apparently."

She shook her head, smiling.

"Is it alright if Bebe goes to sleep? She wants me to do it."

She was holding her father's hand and nodding.

"I'll show you." Violet said.

"Are you going to be here tomorrow, daddy?"

"Yep, daddy's going to grow things and be a farmer. Then sell them at the farmers market."

"Aren't you already a farmer, Freddy?" Victor said, in amusement.

.

The sheriff put the car in park and called in the location. He put the flashers on and got out of the car. He went up to the door and knocked. He had to knock a second time before the door opened.

A heavy set middle aged woman opened the door.

"Whatchu' want?"

"You said earlier today that the man had an AK-47? That was incorrect, he had a deer rifle."

"Looked like one!"

"I'd like to talk to your son." He positioned his body so she couldn't shut the door.

"Ain't here!"

"Ma'am, I need to talk to him!" The sheriff said firmly.

"Nope!"

"They made a complaint that stuff was stolen off their property. I'm pretty sure it wasn't you."

"Maybe it was!" She replied.

"Ma'am, that's trespassing and theft! Are you admitting to these crimes?"

"Nope! Need to leave!"

"Ma'am, I want to talk to your son." He was being patient because he guessed she had a disability. Then he noticed she was moving her mouth a certain way. She was getting ready to spit.

He pushed the button on his radio and called for assistance, using code tems.

"Ma'am if you spit at me I will arrest you!" He said loudly and firmly.

"Fer' what?"

"Spitting at people is a crime!"

"Is not!"

"It's under assault! You can't spit at people!"

"Mom! Stop!" A male teen suddenly came to face the sheriff. "He's telling the truth!"

She looked at her son with affection. "I can't spit?"

"No! I told you to stop doing it a long time ago!"

"She spat earlier at the man with the rifle." said the sheriff. He could faintly hear the siren of his deputy.

"Mom! No! He can arrest you! You didn't tell me this earlier!" The teen became emotional.

"Do you have an ID on you?" The sheriff asked the teen.

"No," he hesitated, "sir."

"School ID?"

"No, I don't go to school!"

"Driver's license?" the deputy had silenced the siren and the sheriff could see him parked behind his car in his peripheral.

"No, I don't have one."

"If I catch you driving with a license, you'll get into trouble." The sheriff said.

"I know."

"Give me your name."

The teen sighed and gave him his name and spelled it for him. Deputy Dace approched his side.

"Thereo' another one!" she said. "I cant spit at him either?"

"No! Mom! You cant spit at anyone any more!" the teen exclamided.

"She needs to not spit at anyone ever." the sheriff said firmly. "Go get the stuff you stole from them and bring it out to my car." The sheriff said. He walked back to his car, he gave Dice the rundown of what happened.

"I thought I would have to arrest her." the sheriff said.

"The teen seems to understand more."

He got into his car and typed on the screen in his dashboard.

"He's coming out," said Dace.

The teen came to the car carrying baggies.

The sheriff got out, surprised at his cooperation and glanced at Dace. he was surprised as well.

"Here. I only took it to buy some medicine for mom. I've watched them come and work in that field for awhile. Two men who look alike. I never took any until now. I'm sorry mom spit. You're not going to arrest her, are you?"

"Just get her to stop. The man with the rifle didn't seem interested in filing a complaint. Why aren't you in school?"

"I hate it."

"There's other schools, like GED or get online. Also, there's programs that help pay for medication."

He nodded listening. "I thought about doing that. You used code to call him, didn't you?"

"Yes, you can learn that online too. Learn about everything anymore," said the sheriff.

"My mom doesn't understand stuff. I shouldnt have run off."

"You shouldn't steal either."

"I know. Thanks for stopping by." He said politely, nodding and listening to what the sheriff said.

"That's unique." Dace said after the teen went into the house.

They drove off and the sheriff drove back to Violet's house. He parked in front of the new house that Victor had built. He called in and exited to car. Lights were on so he went up to the door and knocked.

After a bit the door opened and a very wet head peeked around the slightly. "Yes, sir," the wet headed twin said. The sheriff handed him the two baggies and turned to leave.

Freddy closed the door, holding the baggies up so they couldnt get wet. He put them on the counter. He was still in amazement over the house. It seemed larger than pops house even though it was one floor level. The rooms much bigger.

Eddy stepped out, rubbing his eyes, he had been asleep in the other bedroom. "Is that what I think it is?" Eddy asked.

"Yep," Freddy said, tucking in his towel. The only thing covering himself.

Eddy opened a baggie to check it. "Unbelievable a thief returning about one tenth of the crop."

"I feel like were in a dream or something."

"Yeah, we've become like, middle class or something. A sheriff getting them to return stuff and having our own house?"

"Yeah,"

"I even feel a need to tell you to go dry off and clean up that water mess!"

"I feel a need to do that? Crazy uh?" Freddy went back to the bathroom and dried off. He dressed and grabbed the towel. He wiped the floor to the door. "It feels strange."

"Who ever thought we would have all this?"

"Maybe pop knew what he was doing by giving it all to Victor.

"Yeah, I thought he did it because he hated us. But this is better. Bebe is being taken care of and we have a place to do what we always wanted. Maybe pop did care about us and knew what to do better than ourselves"

"I like this arrangement. By the way I ate all the cereal you like that was in the cupboard."

"Freddy ran to the cupboard and checked. "No. theres more!" he poured himself a bowl and sat down on the couch to eat it dry.

"Do you think the tv works?"

"I don't know, I ate in the kitchen, somehow I felt like I shouldn't get crumbs on everything."

"I'm being careful."

"Here's a remote. Lets see." Eddy said as pushed on the power button and the tv came on.

"There's channels!"

"Whoa!" Freddy said with a mouth full of cereal.

"Victor's smart. He builds us a nice house here and makes it so we stay out of his hair but stick around."

"We sure surprised him with stuff we told him."

"I've been wanting to go to sleep since we got here but I'm so wound up."

"Hey, I've been thinking. I saw Victor didn't get rid of those fifty gallon barrels that had been in that trash. I was thinking to put one on each side of the house and fill them up with dirt. Plant some yams, asparagus, and maybe peanuts. And right in the center plant a couple of sunflowers."

"Oh!" Freddy put his bowl down, the box stood empty. "Like a giant planter like the plants. Mrs Shaw had everywhere. Except ours would be huge. Then in the fall, we dump the barrel over and harvest!"

"We need to paint it. Like put a peace sign on it and other hippie stuff."

"We need a name for our farm!"

"We can do that later. I'm wanting to stay awake but I'm almost asleep sitting here."

"Yeah, me too."

They turned off the lights and went to sleep, while excitement still filled their dreams.

Chapter 14

"Let's go, we're going to be late!" Said Freddy. He leaned over and adjusted boxes of his first harvest of the spring.

"Victor we're going to be late!" Eddy said to him as he exited the house. Violet carried her baby carrier which Victor took and placed the infant in the truck. They both made cooing noises as they leaned over the baby.

Freddy and Eddy both rolled their eyes.

"Hopefully they get the repairs done on our truck today." Said Eddy

"Can't be too soon!" Said Freddy. They held in their excitement with their first time at the farmers market as they all got into Victor's truck.

Violet's phone rang as Victor drove to town.

"Your mother?" Victor asked.

"No, it's my father!" Violet said, answering quickly.

"I have something here at my office." Her father said. "For both of you."

She looked in confusion at Victor as she hung up the phone.

He parked and saw an older couple near Weston. One of them sat in a wheelchair. His heart began to pound hard when he saw the man's face. It was himself in twenty years, Billy Dale. Morris had said he looked like him. He had been right.

He slowly got out of the truck, glancing at Violet. His heart pounding almost out of his ribcage as the older man approached him.

"Victor Zane?" The man reached a hand out.

Victor nodded and accepted the hand. His eyes roamed the older man's face. A warm feeling filled his chest and seemed to bloom within him. The warmth of the man's gaze seemed to pull him in.

"Can I hug you, son?" The man whispered.

Victor nodded and he felt himself being drawn in by a force stronger than his own. The man's arms went around, pulling him in. A gentleness that was as old as time.

He pulled away gasping for air. The older man had tears running down his cheeks. He felt the same on his own.

The older woman in the wheelchair had her hands up, reaching for the sky. Victor found himself in those open arms, bringing him up against the woman who had an invisible connection to him since his beginning.

He stood up fighting to find his bearings.

"My prayers have been answered!" The older woman was saying over and over again, many times.

"Is this beautiful woman your wife?" She asked, ignoring the tears running down her cheeks as she stared up towards Violet.

He nodded.

"Hello," Violet's smiled, "Are you my husband's parents? He mentioned you." She came close and gave the woman a long embrace.

Victor looked and saw Freddy carrying the baby carrier. He took it from him, "Thank you, Freddy." He whispered.

He stood next to his wife.

"You remember us?" She asked, looking up at him. She still hadn't wiped her tears.

"Morris mentioned you." He said, huskily.

"Where's Morris?"

"Pop's gone." Said Eddy

"He passed away from cancer." Freddy added.

"Pop?" She whispered. "Are you. . ."

"We're his sons, ma'am." Freddy said.

She opened her arms again towards them. Love in her eyes.

"This is your grandmother, Theresa and I'm Billy Dale." The older man said.

After they had each given her a affectionate hug, Eddy spoke with a grin. "Are you going to check out our stand at the farmers market?"

"We would love to, grandson!" She said, tenderly.

Victor saw his mother in law pull up with Bebe. He moved around the twins "You've got two more to meet," he said, bring his baby to rest on her lap. He crouched down in front of her, keeping hold of his son. She saw the tiny head peeking out from his covering. She shook with intense emotions and suppressed sobs. She very lightly touched the infant.

"Meet Billy Dale Zane." He said, huskily.

She tried to speak and had to try again. "It was your name." She whispered hoarsely with intense emotions. "I prayed so much to be able to hold my little, Billy Dale in my arms one more time." She lightly kissed his blankets and the top of his forehead in awe.

"Why are you all crying?" Bebe's question cut through the intenseness.

Everyone smiled for an answer. Victor stood with little Billy Dale. Theresa reached out to pull her in. "Because we are so happy!"

"This is Bebe, she's mine," Freddy said.

"Billy, this means, I'm a great grandma!" She sobbed, reaching for his hand. He leaned down and kissed the top of her hand.

Violet introduced her parents and Victor let little Billy Dale rest on her lap again.

The twins had to go set up at the farmers market. Victor drove them and had his parents follow to Violet and his house.

She wheeled her wheelchair so she could watch little Billy Dale sleep.

The slight breeze waved the leaves on the plants on the other side of the high fence.

A young deer had a slight hitch to her gait as she ran with the others.