

Friendly Neighbourhood Killers

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Friendly Neighbourhood Killers

by [orphan_account](#)

Summary

Skilled assassins, Audrey and Duke, have been happily married for years and have struck fear into the hearts of the most vicious criminals across the globe. When work leads them to Haven, they aren't quite so enthusiastic about moving into a small town and even less enthusiastic about the people in it until they meet Nathan. The couple take an odd shine to their next-door neighbour and the three get along famously. There is only one minor problem: Nathan is a cop.

Notes

Inspired by KaelsMiscellany's tumblr post prompting Duke and Audrey(/Mara?) as socially inept married assassins with their sexy next-door neighbour, Nathan, who happens to be a cop. Whoopsie-daisy. This was written with Kael's permission and with a slightly different approach. Enjoy!

Home Sweet Home

“Tell me again, Audrey, why the fuck we’re moving here.”

“You *know* why.”

“Remind me,” Duke urges. “Because if I recall correctly, honey, we agreed we’d sooner drive off a cliff with a bomb in the backseat than move to the suburbs.”

Audrey rolls her eyes. He only ever uses that ridiculous pet name, among several others, when he’s annoyed with her because he knows she hates that.

“Sweetie,” she says in retaliation. “You know it’s wrong to judge a book by its cover. I’m pretty sure even Norman Rockwell had a dungeon somewhere. Besides, we won’t be staying here for very long; just until William is dealt with.”

The very mention of the bastard’s name turns Duke’s knuckles bone-white around the wheel. Audrey notices this and reaches to caress his cheek. Her touch is gentle, regardless of the gun calluses on her nimble fingers, but it's the cool band around her finger that soothes him. He releases a heavy sigh, takes her hand in his, and presses the semi-precious stone to his lips.

“We’re almost there.”

Haven is everything that the Crockers had vowed never to inhabit: a small town with pretty people in pretty houses with pretty white picket fences where their pretty brats can wreak havoc. By the time they reach the welcome sign, they almost expect to be greeted by a musical number performed by pagan locals, plotting to sacrifice them to a giant man made of wicker. Their new home—at least, what they can call home—is just as quaint and picturesque as the rest of the town and equally as unsettling. A modest grey house stands proudly before them at their stop, surrounded by an overgrown garden of weeds and wildflowers.

“Look on the bright side,” Audrey quips. “At least it doesn’t have a white picket fence.”

Nathan is proud to say that he rather likes his quiet life, thank you very much. Growing up, he had never experimented with drugs nor drank to excess, never smoked on school grounds, never stole from the general store, and never *ever* laid a hand on an innocent. Needless to say, he has never prided himself as anything more or less than a law-abiding citizen.

It *is* his job, after all.

Nathan knew from a very young age that he wanted to serve and protect. He barely remembers much of the particular day, other than the bumps and bruises and kicking and screaming. More importantly, he remembers waiting for his father to look back at him before he disappeared from the courtroom. He never did. Nathan never stopped waiting. He figures that if he waits long enough he’ll be able to shed himself of the traces that remain of his

father's hand. The bullet gives him just enough release to return him to the mundane. Nevertheless, Nathan is perfectly happy with the mundane. He has to be.

His new neighbours are anything *but* mundane. He knows that from the moment he sees them.

On his way home from work, he sees the moving vans from a block away. From his front door, he can see the happy couple stretching their legs once they step out of what looks like an old Land Rover. A tall, tanned, toned, and long-faced man holds a blonde beauty by her slender waist. A husband and wife, Nathan guesses by the faint glimmer of silver on both their ring fingers. They pay no attention to him when they see him; not even a casual smile or wave hello. Instead, they simply talk and while Nathan is not privy to their conversation he can vaguely hear the brusque tone in their voices.

The woman's voice sounds of metal and the man's of velvet.

The Crockers unpack their weapons first. Years of travel have taught them to deal with their heaviest baggage before all other things and they know that unpacking at midnight will only raise eyebrows. Everything is carefully concealed and hidden in plain sight, so they can unload the truck without any disturbance.

The house is perfectly plain from the inside out and so clean it's almost as blinding as it is suffocating to them. Ivory walls and ebony grounds surround them from the hallway to the balcony but it's the basement they focus on first, once the moving vans are gone. The underground space is dark and deep but not nearly enough to muffle out any screaming, so they make a note to pad the walls from top to bottom before arming every corner to the teeth. In time, with enough tests, they can hear the rest of the house echo with little more than a pin drop, no matter how much noise comes from below. Perfect. They set up the rest of the house with anything else that can be used as a weapon, from household poisons to kitchen knives, just in case.

By nightfall, Duke has already opened a bottle and cooked up Audrey's favourite meal. They enjoy dinner before an open fireplace and leave everything else for tomorrow.

"This," Audrey says. "I could get used to."

"It's not exactly Rome," Duke shrugs. "But it'll do."

"I remember Rome."

"I remember the right hook."

Audrey cringes at the memory. "Not exactly the best way to meet a guy."

"I've never complained. You could say I was already *hooked*."

He receives a well-deserved slap on the arm for the joke but at least it made her laugh. He would kill for her and gladly make her watch and she still laughs at his worst jokes.

“Do you ever wonder what we’d be like if I’d just smiled at you from across the room and asked you to dinner or something like that?”

“No.”

Audrey furrows her brow. “You don’t?”

“I don’t like to.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t think I would have fallen in love with someone who just smiled at me from across a room and asked me to dinner.”

Audrey can find no response, so Duke stops her mouth with a kiss. Lips part and tongues tie. His clever fingers creep their way under her blouse, stripping her button after button until both their clothes are nothing more than a pile on the floor.

It isn’t until he’s inside her that they notice someone watching.

Nathan is busy with paperwork when he sees them. All thoughts of William seem to vanish into thin air, only to be replaced by the view from his open window.

The couple from this afternoon lay before a burning fireplace. Their clothing is scattered around dirty plates and half-empty wine glasses. Though only fully visible from a certain angle, Nathan can see every kiss, every touch, and every movement outlined by the golden gleam of the fire.

The woman holds her husband down. Her back arches, her slender frame in full view and her pert breasts heaving with every breath she takes. Her wine-stained and kiss-swollen lips hang open in a moan that Nathan wishes to God he could hear. If he looks closely he can just see her pubic hair trimmed neatly enough to make out her delicate slit. He can even see the outline of her husband's cock moving in and out of her. The husband, as far as he can tell, is just as beautiful as his wife. His body is lean but strong and even in the shadows, Nathan can just make out the intricate details of his tattoos. As his wife's hips move in circles against his, gradually quickening her pace, his clever hands reach for her breasts before he devours them completely. He moves to meet her level, giving Nathan a good view of his lithe frame. He holds her close, one hand resting on her back and the other on her ass. Nathan can only guess by the look on the wife's face what her husband's fingers are doing.

He whispers something in her ear that makes her shudder and for a moment, Nathan wonders what kind of lewd words a man would say to make such a woman wriggle and writhe in the way that she does. No sooner than the thought enters his mind does he find that he doesn’t have to wonder.

They see him and they don’t stop. He can see them both smiling at him, as if laughing at him, and they keep moving against one another. They *want* him to see.

The wife begins to tremble and her husband says something just fluently enough for Nathan to read his lips. "Come with me," he says.

They both look him dead straight in the eye when they come together.

Shaking, Nathan shuts his blinds and goes to bed hard. He abandons the paperwork.

Meet the Neighbours

The first time the Crockers hear a knock on the door, they are kindly greeted by the Teague brothers from across the road, who welcome them to the town with cheap wine. The couple both grin and bear their presence for an entire hour. The second time, they are not-so-kindly greeted by the Reverend Driscoll from three doors down the road, who welcomes them with more cheap wine before inviting them to church on Sunday. The two “politely” decline his offer. The third time, they are more casually greeted by Dwight from around the corner, who also welcomes them with even more cheap wine and suggests a housewarming party. The couple promise to think about it.

By mid-day, they’ve already met half the town and their refrigerator is filled with enough cheap wine to last them until winter. Their cheeks are sore from faking so many smiles and their tongues cramped by so many promises they’ll never keep. Still, they keep coming, one stranger after the other.

For once, they have time to themselves. Audrey unpacks in the living room and Duke in the kitchen until that dreaded pounding echoes through the house once more.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

Duke’s body stiffens at the sound. If he hears the door knocking one more time he fears that he will either burst a brain cell or use his chef’s knife on someone that he really shouldn’t. Audrey, likewise, is tempted to use whatever she can pull from the next box as a weapon but has to remind herself that they only ever use household items in emergencies.

“It’s my turn,” Audrey groans. “I’ll get it.”

Her heart skips a beat when she opens the door.

“Oh,” she says. “Hello.”

The stranger from last night bears a crooked smile on his face. Even as he waves to her, as if standing several feet away, he smiles as if nothing had happened.

“Hi,” he says. “This is probably a bad time but I just got off work and wanted to apologize for last night.”

Audrey doesn’t know what to say to that, nor does she know why her cheeks have gotten warm. She didn’t even blush when Duke first asked her to dinner.

“For the record, I’m not a pervert. It was late, I was busy, and I guess my head was in the clouds. I don’t always ogle my neighbours when they’re having sex.”

She smirks. “Just when they let you?”

The question seems to startle him but it isn't long before he's laughing nervously. Audrey's smirk turns into a full smile when he finds his hands in his pockets and free of cheap wine.

"Would you like to come in?" she asks, almost surprised with herself. "There's plenty of wine in the fridge."

The stranger from last night nods and steps through the door. Leading him to the kitchen, Audrey can see Duke stop in his tracks when he sees the man from last night smiling at him from across the room.

"Sorry about the mess," Audrey says. "We just moved in yesterday, so we haven't fully unpacked yet."

"I thought that was the two of you with the moving vans. Where did you move from?"

"Colorado and, before that, Toronto, Manchester, Paris, Madrid, Venice, Istanbul, Minsk, Sydney, Tokyo..."

"Honey," Duke interrupts. "I think it'd be quicker to name places we *haven't* hailed from."

The stranger laughs. It wasn't meant to be a joke but he laughs.

"You two travel a lot, I take it?"

"Mostly for business," Audrey nods. "Would you like red or white, um...I'm sorry, I didn't get your name."

"Nathan," the stranger smiles and extends his hand, which Audrey is reluctant to take. "I live next door."

"Audrey," she says. "And this is my husband, Duke."

Audrey holds her husband by the waist but feels his body stiffen. Even as he shakes Nathan's hand, she can feel how firm his grip is by the way his muscles tighten.

"Nice to meet you," he says through gritted teeth.

"Likewise," Nathan smiles. "I'll have red wine, thanks."

Audrey gathers three glasses from a nearby box, despite Duke's hard stare. Nathan, meanwhile, keeps smiling and keeps the conversation—or at least *a* conversation—going, as they accept their glasses.

"You don't strike me as the white wine type," he says, pointing to Duke's glass.

Duke shrugs. "I snore when I drink red. Audrey hates it; don't you, sugar?"

Audrey responds with hard smack on her husband's backside. Duke does not blush and instead clenches his jaw. Nathan does his best to hide the heat in his cheeks when he remembers a similar image from last night.

“It’s not like you could even get a hit from this swill,” she says before eyeing Nathan’s furrowed brow. “The neighbours have been giving us cheap wine since we got here. We’re so used to the real stuff.”

“There is a marketplace by the beach,” Nathan adds. “They usually sell good food and wine. Everyone goes there on weekends.”

Duke raises an eyebrow. “Everyone?”

“Yeah. Anyone who likes to eat, anyway.”

“Well,” Audrey smiles. “Maybe you could show us around sometime and you *must* come by for dinner once we’re settled in. Duke is an excellent cook; aren’t you, love?”

Duke only manages to smile because “love” is one of the very few pet names he can tolerate. “I do make a mean waffle.”

“Sounds great,” Nathan says with a broad smile. “As long as the clothes stay on.”

“We make no promises.”

When the wine is finished and Nathan says goodbye, he only *tells* himself that last night is behind him. Throughout the evening he has done his best to suppress the memory of his neighbours making love and he has already apologized for watching them but by the way they still smile at him, it would seem as though there is nothing to apologize for. Neither of the Crockers have slapped or scolded him for what he did, nor have they even shrugged it off and told him not to worry about it. As he leaves their place for his, they smile and wave to him as though nothing had happened at all.

Nathan tries to concentrate on the ten-month-old paperwork when he gets home but finds that not even the strongest whiskey in his cabinet helps. He can just hear the chief’s voice ringing in his ear.

“Good,” he’d probably say. “I don’t have time for this hardboiled detective shit, Wuornos. As long as you can let this whole William thing go and do your damn job, you can *join* them for all I care.”

Although Nathan has always been content as a bachelor and is perfectly happy with a conventional sex life, the very thought is enough to make him bite his lip. Against his own will, he finds himself remembering the way Audrey’s body moved against Duke’s and he can only wonder how she would move against his own body. Would she writhe beneath him and beg for his cock or would she ride him the way she did her husband? How would Duke move against him? Does he like to fuck or be fucked by other men? What would they both do if...?

Nathan shakes his head of the images and takes a long swig before getting back to work, only to look to his window. No one is there.

Duke's touch draws an ecstatic sigh from Audrey's lips as she takes another sip of wine—this time *not* curtesy of their earlier guests—and sinks into the steaming suds, as he circles his thumb deep into the sole of her left foot. He doesn't join her in the bath he's drawn for her. He only rests at the rim of the tub because he loves to see her like this: relaxed and full of her favourite meal after a long day and gloriously naked.

"What's that look for?" she asks.

"Nothing," he says. "I was just thinking about our new friend from today."

"Nathan? What about him?"

"Why did you give him our real names?"

"Slip of the tongue," Audrey shrugs lazily. "Anyway, he seems harmless enough."

Duke eyes his wife, as she takes another swig of wine. "Do you like him?"

Audrey laughs heartily. "Don't be silly, Duke, he's not even my type!"

"You invited him over for dinner."

"Which will probably never happen, since he's likely to forget about it. Anyway, I didn't see *you* making any complaints."

He shrugs and returns his attention to his wife's dainty foot. He tries to ignore the way he looks at her because he knows that she only has to look him in the eye to tell what he's really thinking.

"You like him too, don't you?"

Duke scoffs. "He's a bit vanilla for my liking."

"I'm pretty sure you could break him in."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

When he finally has the strength to look her in the eye, her smile changes. He knows that smile. He loves that smile.

"You didn't look at him," she says darkly, "and imagine sharing me with him?"

Duke raises an eyebrow but doesn't deny the stirring in his pants.

"You liked when he was watching us, didn't you?" she continues. "You can deny it all you like but I can tell when you're turned on. I bet you were imagining what it'd be like if he were there, taking me up the ass while you were still in my cunt. Do you think he'd—ow! Jesus, Duke, I always knew you liked it rough but mind the toes, will you?"

Duke laughs at Audrey's struggle until she snatches her foot from his tightening grip and kicks him out of revenge.

"I'll admit," he says. "He seems nice. Maybe not enough to fuck but nice enough. Anyway, that's not the only thing I was thinking about."

Audrey cocks her head. "What was the other thing?"

"I was thinking about what he said about the marketplace."

"What about the marketplace?"

"He said that everyone goes there on weekends, right?"

"Yes, and...?"

"Everyone, Audrey. *Everyone*."

Her eyes light up. "Everyone including William."

"Exactly. It might be hard to find him in a crowd but if we spend enough time there, we should be able to track him down."

Smiling, Audrey lifts herself from the water and kisses Duke thoroughly.

"I knew I married you for a reason," she says and kisses him again and again until he sinks into the water with her.

Family Portraits

Like any other married couple, the Crockers hang old photographs on the walls of their new home. Some are of adventurous times, though not adventurous enough to raise eyebrows, like Duke eating a meal made of crickets in Thailand or Audrey swimming with a shark in the Mediterranean Sea. Others are of more mundane things. One is a simple selfie from New York after a show, another is the one wedding photo that doesn't look like they eloped in India, and one that stands out is of Audrey under a tree in Hyde Park, deep in thought and seven months pregnant.

There are certain photos that the Crockers do not hang on the walls. All are of James from aged three minutes to three years.

One is of James when he was born. Audrey, pale and sweat-soaked from hours of pain, was holding the baby in her arms with tears in her eyes. Duke was leaning next to her in a hospital gown and cap, smiling through his own tears. James was still screaming from his first breath of life and was still stained with his mother's fluids. A nurse took this picture. She didn't have to but Duke and Audrey loved it so much that they couldn't bear to part with it when it was time to go home.

Another is of Duke playing with James. Duke had had David Bowie's *Changes* stuck in his head all day and began singing it to James. To this day, neither of the Crockers know why, but it was that very song that made their son laugh for the first time in his short life. Audrey will never forget that beautiful sound. She can't. She still hears it in her dreams as well as her nightmares. She took this picture because she wanted to remember this moment, if for nothing else that to see both her boys smiling so brightly.

Duke's personal favourite is of James' first steps. Audrey was crouched behind her son with the biggest smile on her face. James, proud of himself, bore his mother's smile as he rushed towards his father, who was behind the camera with a free arm extended for an embrace. Most of his tiny body is a blur in the photograph, but his face is as clear as the midday sun. He was seven months old when Duke took this picture.

There are several others. James' first birthday, James' first tooth, James' first day at sea, James' first time fishing with daddy, James' first time swimming with mommy, and so many moments that not even a camera could fully capture. Audrey keeps them all in an album. She should be working now. Instead, she flips through pages and pages of long-lost memories because it keeps her motivated.

The only picture of James that the Crockers do hang up is his last.

He had just turned three. They were in Prince Edward Island and for his birthday, Duke and Audrey decided to take him to the beach, where he spent much of the afternoon playing with his favourite toy boat. Audrey managed to take the picture while Duke was swimming just meters ahead of them. Every day, Audrey wishes to all things good that she hadn't turned

away to check on her husband—a grown man who could more than fend for himself—so that her son would still be with her. One look away and James was gone.

That picture stands proudly on the mantelpiece in the living room, centered in between two sunflowers. James had always loved sunflowers. It stands there not only for people to see, but to force them to look.

Duke had better find William soon.

There is a picture of William in Duke's pocket. He's memorized every detail of it by now: the cold blue eyes that he could easily crush beneath his thumbs, the dusty brown hair that he could peel from the skull, the smug grin that he could punch in the teeth, and the thick neck that he'd be more than happy to slice through just to see the bastard bleed. Resting at the picture's side is the Swiss army knife that was freshly sharpened enough for that reason alone.

Duke keeps both items as discreetly hidden as William appears to be.

The marketplace is filled with people with smiling blurs for faces. They swarm to food and drink like ants to the honeycomb, saying their hellos and making their small talk. The crowd is almost suffocating. He finds himself lost in a maze made of people, constantly meeting dead ends that take the forms of a hundred smiles, not one of them William.

Until he sees someone.

A man in a blue shirt talks to a mother and her daughter. Although Duke can only catch a glimpse of the stranger, he recognizes the smile. That smug fucking smile. The dusty brown hair seems to have grown since last Duke checked and his voice sounds different. It would, of course, if it were raised enough octaves for a child to connect with. When he sees that smile and that voice directed at what looks like a three-year-old, he begins to feel the blood in his veins boil and the grip on his knife tighten.

The stranger stands to wave goodbye to the little girl's mother and turns away. Feeling the adrenaline rush through him, he marches after the stranger and quickly conducts a plan.

He will start by “accidentally” bumping into the stranger. If it is William, he will apologize for his clumsiness and make it up to him with a shared cup of coffee. Their conversation will start small and soon lead up to an invitation to dinner. Once he has the bastard in his web, he and Audrey will make a dinner that they will never have. They will start with a tour around the house that will end with the picture of James that stands so proudly on the mantelpiece. And then...

“Duke!”

Duke curses the voice that calls him but swallows his urge deep enough to respond. When he turns around he sees Nathan waving to him.

It's what he's wearing, though, that causes the breath to catch in his lungs.

"I thought that was you," Nathan says with a smile. "How are you liking the new place?"

Duke tries to fish the words from the back of his throat but finds nothing. He can only stare at the patch on his jacket and the gears on his belt.

"Um," he manages to say. "Great. It's...great."

"You and Audrey settling in okay?"

"Yeah. W-what are you doing here?"

Nathan smiles and opens his jacket to show his badge. Its gleam is almost blinding. "I'm on duty."

"Huh. I didn't know you were..."

"Yep! Like my old man before me."

"Your father was a...?"

"That's right. Well, adopted but still my old man. It's a long story but I always thought it was a calling of mine to continue the family business. Actually, I never did ask; what do you and Audrey do?"

We're not too different from you, he wants to say but cannot. Instead, he holds his breath a moment and remembers their cover. He's rarely had to use it.

"I'm a chef," he lies. "Audrey is a psychiatrist."

"Really? Funny, I pegged her as more the dangerous type."

Duke can't help but smile at the irony. "So did I, at first, but she loves to help people. Any trouble you have, she'll fix it."

Nathan smiles back. "You must be really lucky to have her."

The smile that Duke returns is almost genuine because he does feel lucky to have Audrey. He'll need her when he has to deal with the man standing in front of him. In his mind, he counts every single weapon on Nathan's belt and calculates a way of using any one of them against him if he has to. It wouldn't be the first time he's had to fight off a man in a blue coat.

"Duke?"

Duke barely manages to shake his head of his thoughts. "Hmm?"

"I was just asking if you were looking for something? You looked a little lost there."

Duke looks back to the crowd, finding no trace of dusty brown hair, and then back to Nathan.

“Actually,” he smiles through his teeth. “Can you recommend anything from here?”

Nathan smiles again and goes on about how good this is, how bad that is, best avoid those if you’re having these, and no dinner is complete without any of them. Also, those are great with pancakes. Duke barely pays attention. Somehow, he manages to balance his study of the other man with his curiosity. Even when armed to the teeth he smiles at everything and everyone. He’s almost like a wolf pup, Duke thinks; so full of fresh fervor and yet still a dangerous creature.

“We’re in trouble.”

Audrey is working when Duke storms in and takes her glass of wine. He swallows the entire portion in one gulp.

“Sure, honey,” she says. “By all means. It’s not like I was going to drink that.”

“Don’t give me that now, Audrey, I mean it. We’re in deep shit.”

She furrows her brow when her husband pours himself a generous refill.

“Duke, what is it? Is it William? Did you find him? Please tell me that you did.”

It takes another large swig before he’s buzzed enough to answer.

“I thought I had,” he says. “But you know our new friend from next door?”

“Yeah. What about him?”

“Well,” he says before taking another gulp. “He’s a cop.”

Rear Windows

The Crockers are fighting when Nathan comes home from work. He can hear them from outside their house. When he goes inside and sees them through his window, he sees them in the kitchen. Duke has a knife in his hand and Audrey a glass of wine in hers. He can no longer hear them shouting, nor can he read their lips but he can see the fury in their faces. Audrey's hands tend to do the talking for her and Duke's jaw is clenched as he somehow manages to make the act of chopping vegetables seem threatening. At some point, he points the knife at Audrey. For a moment, Nathan thinks to act and stop Duke from whatever it is he might do.

Until he looks at her.

Nathan furrows his brow. He knows abuse when he sees it. An abuser will act and a victim will react. Audrey does not react at all. She doesn't even flinch. It's as if she's seen it all before. Given how much she and her husband have traveled, she probably has. She frowns and casually sips her wine, as their argument continues like any other.

In a fit of rage, Duke stabs his knife into the chopping board and steps firmly towards his wife. Still, Audrey stands her ground. Before Duke can so much as shout at her, she places her glass down and places both hands on his cheeks. This, somehow, stops him. His stiff body begins to soften as if her touch has some kind of power over him. Her words, though inaudible, seem to soothe him enough to rest his brow against hers and he reaches to caress her cheek the way she does his. Something passes between them than Nathan can't put a name to.

"I love you," are the only words that he can read on their lips. Everything else seems a blur but he can only describe the way Duke kisses Audrey as an act of pure devotion.

It takes a full ten minutes for Audrey to find her voice.

"Duke," she finally says. "If you're fucking with me right now, I swear..."

"I'm not fucking with you, Audrey, he's a cop. I saw him on duty in the marketplace today."

"I don't believe you."

"I saw the patch, I saw the badge, and I saw the weapons on his belt. Fuck, he showed me his ID."

Audrey's heart catches in her throat. Her pulse begins to quicken and her breath to pace when she pictures everything that Duke tells her.

"Okay," she says. "I think I'm gonna need another drink."

Audrey grabs another glass from the nearby cupboard and pours herself more generous portion. Duke gives her a quick and cold smirk before taking another large swig and marching into the kitchen. He takes out his favourite knife: the French chef's knife that he can use for anything from chopping onions to slicing a grown man's throat.

"What are you doing?" Audrey asks.

"I'm making dinner, honey, isn't that what small town folks do when they can't make a killing?"

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Duke doesn't answer. He only gathers whatever vegetable he's gotten his hands on since the market, each and every one of them highly recommended by Nathan. He pictures the onion as the cop's skull, the garlic his digits, the carrots his limbs, the celery his bones, and later he is likely to picture the fish as one of his internal organs and the broth his blood. Audrey has never seen anyone, least of all her own husband, chop vegetables so furiously in her life.

"Duke," she urges. Before she can get another word out, he points his knife in her direction.

"This is all your fault," he says. "You know that, right?"

"How is this *my* fault?"

"*You* made the decision that we come here, *you* failed to check our surroundings, *you* let that cop into our house, and *you* gave him our real names. We never give *anyone* our real names, Audrey. We lay low and we remain anonymous. You know that."

"Well, how was I supposed to know he was a cop?"

"It's called a background check, Audrey, it's pretty fucking useful."

"Duke, please, it's not like we even talk to anyone here. We're no swarm of social butterflies. How was I supposed to tell if we'd actually get along with someone here?"

"But we *did*. Now he knows who we are *and* where we live. Soon enough, he might know too much. If he even finds so much as a drop of blood on us, Audrey, we're fucked!"

Duke stabs his knife into the chopping board, nearly breaking the thing in two under his strong arm. His eyes burn when he marches towards Audrey but she only has to touch him in order to calm him down. Quickly, she places her glass down, places both hands on his cheeks, and whispers: "Hush." The word alone is enough to still him. With each "hush" she utters against his lips, his stiff body begins to soften. Her breath begins to sound like the sea in a storm; as beautiful as it is dangerous, much like Audrey.

"I love you," she tells him. "You know that I won't let that happen."

"What if it does?"

"Then we'll do what we have to."

Duke opens his eyes to meet Audrey's.

"We're here for a reason and one that means more than just getting the job done. We're not going to let some cop get in the way of that."

"You don't mean..."

Audrey nods.

"But we only kill the people who *need* to be killed. He's innocent."

"I know, but keeping him alive is too risky. We can't afford that right now."

For a moment, Duke thinks back to the first man he killed. He was barely twenty and had sliced a grown man's throat for laying his filthy hands on a child. The moment his knife had punctured through the bastard's flesh he had to force himself to swallow the bile in his throat. He remembers the feeling of self-loathing and disgust starting to permeate, no matter how many times he told himself that the pig *needed* to be killed and that the world was better off. For so long he had learned to hold back that repulsion to the point that he could only feel the rush.

That was years ago and only now does he remember what that first kill felt like.

Once again, he forces himself to swallow that ugly feeling when he feels his wife stroking his cheek. He takes her hand and presses the gun-callused palm to his lips.

"Don't make me do it by hand," he tells her. "Tomorrow, after he leaves home from work, we'll break into his house and tamper with anything that will make his death look like an accident. Just don't make me do it by hand."

Audrey nods and kisses her husband deeply. His hard hands are warm on her jaw and his touch is firm. He holds her so close when they separate and his voice is so soft. "I love you."

Nathan doesn't see the Crockers watching him. As Duke watches from the bedroom window and Audrey from the back porch, they take note of his every move from waking up in the morning to locking the front door.

At precisely six o'clock, Nathan wakes to the alarm on his phone. For some reason, when he uncovers himself Duke half expects to see his neighbour in a full set of pajamas. He is only half right.

Duke *should* be studying Nathan's ritual. Instead, he studies the man himself. He isn't entirely surprised at how good Nathan looks in nothing but his pajama bottoms, nor is he surprised to see him drop to the floor for a morning work-out. He *does* come from a very physically demanding job, after all. The tattoo, however, is unexpected. As Nathan sits up and down, up and down, up and down, Duke finds himself searching his body for any other signs of ink. Is the circle on his forearm the only imprint in his skin or are there others hiding in secret places? If he took those bottoms off, would he find the results of a drunken night with friends

or the name of an ex-lover imprinted onto his skin? What does the circle—or whatever it is—mean to him?

Nathan finishes his workout at exactly six-thirty. When he finishes, he takes a gigantic gulp from the glass of water on his bedside table and doesn't hesitate to slip off his pajama bottoms and toss them to the bed. Duke only catches a glimpse of Nathan's naked body before he makes his way to the bathroom. He stays in the bathroom for precisely ten minutes, likely to shower, but Duke finds no windows to it. In the back of his head, he wonders what Nathan does when he is alone, naked, and with hot water rippling down his skin. Is that where he touched himself after he saw Duke making love to Audrey?

Audrey waits with a cup of coffee that is already cold and a book that she only pretends to read. Nathan makes his way into the kitchen. His hair is still wet from the shower, he is dressed well for the day, and he is making himself pancakes for breakfast. She should not find this arousing. Although she has enjoyed watching her husband cook for her, it seems such a mundane thing. Nathan should be such a mundane thing but she knows that it is so much more than that.

Finally, at seven o'clock sharp, Nathan leaves the door for work.

"Good morning, Nathan!" Audrey calls, probably too loudly. Nathan turns to her, smiles more easily than she does, and approaches the nearby lawn fence.

"Audrey," he says. "You're up early."

"So are you. Busy day?"

"Busy schedule."

"I'll bet. Duke says he saw you at the market yesterday. You didn't tell us you were a cop."

Nathan shrugs. "I tend to keep a low profile, I guess. Actually, speaking of Duke, how are you guys doing? Settling in okay?"

"Yes, we are."

"So, you're settling in just fine? No issues with the place or anything like that?"

"None at all. We love it here."

Nathan nods and looks her up and down, studying her. Her limbs are relaxed but her smile is forced. There's something she isn't telling him.

"Because," he continues. "I saw you guys last night..."

Audrey can only laugh. "You sure like to watch, don't you, Nathan?"

The question startles Nathan. With wide eyes, he looks to her and finds her smile no longer forced and her eyes lock with his. She looks at him as if she would have him here and now if

not for the fence between them or the husband likely still sleeping inside. He makes a poor attempt to laugh it off.

“I just mean that I saw the two of you arguing last night. I don’t mean to be too intrusive but it looked serious. Are you guys okay?”

Audrey’s smile begins to fade, as she recalls the argument as well as the agreement, but she manages to keep it nice and wide as she simply shrugs it off.

“We’re fine,” she insists. “The move was just a bit rough on us, that’s all. Couples fight. You know how it is.”

Nathan smiles weakly. He knows that it was no ordinary fight but says nothing.

“Well, if you ever need anything, if you ever want to talk to someone or vent about anything, I’m right here.”

It’s Audrey’s turn to be startled. She has been told several times by several men that they would be there when she needed someone. Duke was the only one who ever meant it, until now. She smiles again, truly this time, and nods.

“That’s very sweet of you, Nathan,” she says. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

Nathan’s smile widens and he waves a last good morning to her before heading off to work. Audrey watches him until he is out of site. She’s suddenly sorry that this could be the last she ever sees of him.

When Nathan is gone and his house is empty, Audrey looks inside to find Duke in the kitchen. With a shared nod, they each make their way to the house next door.

The neighbourhood is practically empty by nine; just empty enough to pass through the back lawn. Duke uses a paperclip to unlock the back door. Once open, their clever hands are gloved. Once inside, they get to work. Audrey searches through the living room and Duke through the kitchen. The house is every bit as vanilla as Nathan is, they think. White walls and wooden furniture; mahogany, of course. Most of the kitchen is made of steel and the oven of gas. *Perfect*, Audrey thinks, as she tampers with a switch just enough to cause a fire, should Nathan decide make dinner. The ceiling fan above the table is made of steel, too, and with just enough measurements, Duke can just loosen the screws up enough to have it fall from the ceiling and decapitate Nathan over a meal or otherwise.

“What else?” Audrey asks.

Duke thinks a moment to when he was watching Nathan. What did he do? He woke up, he worked out, and...

Duke snaps his fingers. “He keeps a glass of water on his bedside table.”

Audrey nods. “I’ve got something. You keep a lookout.”

The Crockers make their way to Nathan's bedroom. As Audrey fumbles through her pockets for whatever drugs she has, Duke observes the room further and notices the window that Nathan had watched them from. Below the window is a desk and on that desk is a mess of files. One of which makes his heart stop.

"Audrey."

"I've almost got it, Duke, I just need..."

"No, Audrey. Look."

When Audrey turns to Duke, he has the file in his hand. Her brow furrows and she approaches him. Her eyes widen when she sees the name on the file.

"William."

The Other Man

On his way to work, all of Nathan's thoughts turn to the Crockers. They shouldn't but they do. They're so different. Audrey is warm when Duke is cold. Audrey smiles at him when Duke only glares. Audrey seems to welcome him with open arms when Duke seems to push him away.

More specifically, he thinks of Duke. How does someone like Audrey marry someone like Duke? But then, he thinks, he can't be all *that* cold. He's seen Duke smile before, though only a couple of times, so he can't be as joyless as he makes himself out to be. Audrey must have married him for a reason.

There is so much he doesn't know about them and so much he's desperate to.

He doesn't know why they thought sends a chill through his body. It could be the way Audrey looked at him earlier. It could be the way Duke seemed to look through him the other day. It could just be the sea-salted breeze coming from the beach. Shuddering, Nathan stuffs his hands into his pockets only to furrow his brow when he finds them empty.

He's forgotten his badge.

The Crockers stare at the file for what seems like hours.

"How is this possible?" Audrey asks and Duke can only shake his head. So many other questions burst in their heads like fireworks. How does Nathan know about William? *What* does Nathan know about William? Why is William walking free if Nathan knows about him?

Before any of these questions can be answered, the two are startled by a loud *click* coming from downstairs, followed by the creaking of the front door, and heavy footsteps.

Nathan is home.

The Crockers begin to panic. Duke looks left and right for a place to hide or escape from. As Nathan's footsteps come closer, he manages to find a place in the closet to hide. Audrey freezes. Even when pulled by her husband's firm grip, her body will not budge. She can't move.

"Audrey," Duke hisses. "Hide!"

She tries to squeeze into the closet with him, but there's no room. There's no room under the bed either. She can't hide in another room.

Audrey's body turns to stone when he opens the door. Nathan's eyes widen.

"Audrey?"

Thinking quickly, Audrey hides her gloved hands behind her back and struggles to take them off and stuff them in the back pocket of her jeans. She manages to smile.

“Hi, Nathan!”

“How did you get in here?”

“You left the back door unlocked.”

Nathan raises an eyebrow because he’s quite sure that he didn’t. He makes sure to lock both the front and back door before going anywhere. Then again, he has made mistakes before. Did he lock the back door?

“Okay,” he says nonetheless. “What are you doing in here?”

Audrey searches through her pockets and pulls something—anything—out for him. A Swiss army knife. Better than nothing.

“You left this at our place the other day.”

Nathan’s brow furrows. “No, I didn’t. Actually, I don’t even think that’s mine.”

“Is it not? Oh. My mistake, then. I’ll just...”

In the corner of her eye, she can see Duke in the closet shaking his head. *Don’t leave me here!* he manages to say without even moving his lips.

Before another word can be said, Audrey marches towards Nathan and stops his mouth with hers. She can hear both him and her husband gasping but does not stop. To her surprise, neither does Nathan.

He’s soon kissing her back.

Nathan’s kiss is so different from Duke’s. Duke’s lips are hard; Nathan’s are soft. Duke’s mouth tastes of green tea; Nathan’s of black coffee. Duke’s tongue is quick and clever; Nathan’s is careful and quaint. Duke kisses her the way he fucks her; Nathan kisses her the way he *would* fuck her.

It doesn’t take long for Nathan to hold Audrey in the way he’s wanted to since he saw her making love with her husband. *Oh, shit. Duke!*

“Audrey,” he tries to say, but anything else he wants to say comes out as a moan when he feels her hot mouth moving to his earlobe. “Audrey, you’re—oh, God!”

Audrey’s surprisingly hard hand quickly moves to grab the swelling in Nathan’s pants, managing to shut him up. Once she’s sure that his eyes are closed, she looks to Duke, who can only watch with wide eyes as Nathan kisses her neck.

“Get out,” she mouths, but he doesn’t move.

When Nathan kisses her again, she is quick to grab him by the jacket and all but ripping it off his back before pushing him onto the bed. She straddles him before he can even sit up and she can feel how hard he is between her legs. Grinding her hips against his, she begins to strip herself of her jacket and her t-shirt, watching his confusion turn to total and complete lust. He moves to sit up, but she is quicker and stronger. She pushes him back to the bed so that he can avoid finding Duke in the closet. She begins to undo his shirt, button after button, but holds him down by the wrists whenever he tries to touch her. He tries again. She pins him down. He struggles, but smiles. He wasn't expecting her to be so dominant. It's strangely arousing.

“God, you're beautiful!”

Audrey smiles. Truly, this time. It isn't the forced smile that she gave him earlier this morning, nor is it a weak or faded smile. Nathan honestly manages to make her smile and it doesn't feel as bad as it should feel. After one, two, and three kisses, she quickly slips out of her jeans and stands naked before him. He studies her from head to toe and stops when he starts to notice the scars. A knife wound here, a bullet wound there. He names each weapon by each wound.

“What...?”

Before he can say another word, she climbs over him, stopping when his head is between her legs, his hands on her thighs, and his mouth on her cunt. As Nathan begins to lick her, Audrey can only gasp and moan. He very easily finds her clitoris and uses his voice as well as his tongue to send a vibrating sensation through her body. Throwing her head back, her hips begin to roll against his mouth. She didn't expect him to feel so good; not *this* good, anyway.

Duke is helpless. She gestures him to leave but he doesn't. To his surprise, he doesn't want to. He can only watch his wife writhing against the other man's mouth. They're beautiful. As his pants begin to tighten, Duke thinks back to the night he and Audrey had moved in next door and made love while Nathan watched. Where they this beautiful to him, he wonders? Was it this exciting to him to watch something so private between lovers? Would it be just as exciting if...? Duke shakes his head of the thought but has to control his breath when he sees Nathan teasing himself through his pants until unzipping them, allowing his cock to spring free. He is shorter than Duke would have expected but thicker. As Nathan begins to stroke himself and Audrey to quicken her pace against his mouth, Duke has to lick his lips to keep from salivating.

Nathan isn't sure whether he's in heaven or hell. With one hand palming Audrey's ass and the other stroking his cock, the married woman continues to writhe and moan against his lips, his name a desperate cry on hers. As her voice rises and falls, he can just taste how close she is but stops.

“Nath...”

She looks down. Before she can ask why he stopped, he manages to sit up between his legs and reach for a condom in his bedside table. He kisses her so deeply when he sheathes himself.

“I want you,” he whispers between her lips.

Audrey doesn't respond. She shouldn't. Not with Duke watching, she shouldn't. She should. With the way Nathan looks at her, she should.

She does.

Duke can only watch in awe as his wife holds the other man and sinks onto his cock. As Audrey begins to move, Nathan's hands are gentle on her body; far more gentle than Duke has ever been but nonetheless skilled. He knows where to touch her, where to kiss her, what to whisper in her ear. It's as if he's fantasized this since they moved in next door. He probably has. Duke has to bite his lip as hard as he can to keep from moaning at the very thought and before long he is almost certain he can taste blood. He fears he might come then and there when he hears how close Nathan is.

Nathan holds Audrey so close when their climax approaches. Audrey quickens her pace and tries to hold him down but is stopped by the way he kisses her. He's close, that much she can tell. She isn't too far behind.

“Come with me,” he tells her. “I want you to come with me like you did with your husband that night.”

She remembers that night. The night she and Duke moved in next door and fucked while Nathan watched. The memory alone is enough to bring her to the edge. It almost startles her that he would even think of someone else but she nods and meets him thrust for thrust until their climax hits them hard.

Nathan has never broken a single rule in his life. As a boy, he did everything that he was told to do; as a teenager, he never rebelled the way most are known to; as an adult, he has always valued himself as a law-abiding citizen. Today, he calls in sick when he is perfectly well. He really shouldn't but then he's already broken a neighbour's trust, so what's another rule? There's something in Audrey that makes him want to break every rule he's ever lived by.

Audrey feels strangely content when Nathan holds her. She shouldn't feel like this. With her husband hidden in the closet, with William's files on the nearby desk, and without a weapon within reach, she should at least feel vulnerable and at a loss. Yet she feels a strange sense of peace that she doesn't think she's felt since the honeymoon. Nathan makes her feel at peace.

Duke is still in the closet waiting to get out. His trousers have loosened and he can breathe normally again but he still watches them. Nathan is tender with Audrey, though he probably knows that he doesn't have to be. He knows how strong she is.

He should feel jealous when he watches them kiss. He should have felt jealous when he watched them fuck. Instead, he can only feel...well, intrigued.

“Can I get you some water?” Audrey asks.

Nathan smiles and nods, pointing to the direction of the bathroom. Audrey doesn't even bother with her clothes. Most women that he's been with would grab one of his shirts and cover up but not Audrey. She simply walks across the room completely unashamed of her naked body, scars and all, and he can only admire that about her.

He completely ignores the sound of pills popping when she's in the other room.

When she returns with a full glass, she hands it to him and lies next to him.

"What were you doing here, anyway?"

"Nothing," she smiles sweetly. "I just wanted to see you."

"You mean that?"

"I do. After you went off to work, I kept thinking about what you said and...well, I couldn't stop thinking about the night you watched me and my husband when we moved in next door."

Nathan freezes at the very mention of Duke. He silently curses himself.

"Is something wrong?" Audrey asks.

Nathan sighs and takes an unusually large swig before answering: "This is just new to me, that's all."

Audrey furrows her brow. "You mean you've never...?"

"No, I have. Of course, I have, just...not with a married woman."

Silence fills the room. *Oh.*

"You didn't seem to mind earlier. You even mentioned him."

Nathan blushes. Audrey never thought she would see a grown man blush.

"I'll admit," he says. "To answer your question from earlier: yes, I did like watching you two. I know I shouldn't have but I did. You are both amazing but you're also married. I may not know either of you that well but I really like you and I don't want to cause any trouble in your relationship."

Audrey can only smile and nod, understanding, though she is secretly fighting the urge to kiss him again.

"I understand," she says. "At least let me stay here for a little while. Just until Duke gets home."

Nathan nods but as he traces the knife wound above her hip, he has to ask: "Audrey, I need you to be honest with me. Duke hasn't hurt you at all, has he? Because if he has..."

“No, of course not! He’d never hurt me.”

“But your scars...”

“They’re from other things.”

“Why are you here, then?”

For the first time, Audrey answers honestly: “Because I like you.”

Nathan doesn’t say another word, not even when Audrey lies next to him. He can only hold her, though he really shouldn’t. As she nuzzles closer to him, he traces and studies her scars—the bullet wound on her shoulder, the knife wound above her hip, the familiar calluses on her hands—until his eyelids begin to grow heavy. His head begins to spin, possibly with all the questions that he hasn’t the strength to ask. *Who are you?* he wants to ask, above all else. *Who are you really?*

Duke is going to kill him.

Over the Picket Fence

When Nathan is finally out, Audrey slowly reaches above his left ear and snaps her fingers three times. He doesn't even flinch. He's out cold. Carefully, she slips out of his embrace and gathers her clothing before writing a note and leaving it on the bedside table. Finally, she opens the closet door and finds Duke practically gasping for air.

"Are you okay?" she asks. "I'm so sorry, I couldn't think of anything else to do."

Duke can only look to Nathan, as he lies naked and near dead.

"What did you give him?" he asks.

"Sleeping pills. I couldn't kill him."

She expects him to scold her but he doesn't. He only nods.

"We have to leave," he says.

She agrees but stops him before he can reach for the files on Nathan's desk.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm taking these."

"No, you can't! If he finds them gone, he'll know where to find them and then he'll know why we're here. Put it back."

Duke is hesitant but obeys because only for Audrey will he ever do as he's told. With a heavy sigh, he places the files down exactly as he found them and follows his wife. They rearrange the house before leaving. Duke switches the stove back off and opens a window. Audrey fixes the ceiling fan and puts its screw back in place. When they make it home, they can only pace around the first room they enter with a glass of whiskey each in hand, both asking the same question.

"How did this happen?"

Both are well aware that "this" could be anything: the fact that they happened to get along with their (admittedly cute) next-door-neighbour, the fact that said (admittedly sexy) next-door-neighbour just happened to be a cop, the fact that said (admittedly gorgeous) next-door-neighbour also happened to be after their target, and—above all things—the fact that said (admittedly fucking beautiful) next-door-neighbour knows what their target has done. They rant and rave about this for gods know how long until they are both out of breath.

"What do we do now?" Audrey asks. "We can't kill him and we can't ignore him...."

"And who's fault is that?"

“...and we can’t just run away from him, so what do we do now?”

Duke growls and leans towards the nearby window. When he looks to the window where he watched his next door neighbour this morning, he can’t bring himself to push the memory of the other man’s body from his mind. Even when he closes his eyes all he can see is the muscular form moving against his wife’s voluptuous frame. The memory alone is enough to make his cock stir.

That’s when the idea hits him.

“Why did you fuck him?”

Audrey rolls her eyes.

“Duke, please.”

“I’m serious, Audrey, why did you fuck him?”

“Um...because I couldn’t think of anything else.”

“Exactly: you fucked him because it got you closer to him.”

Audrey looks to her husband and furrows her brow. “What are you talking about?”

“Think about it, Audrey; he has William’s files. He knows who he is, what he’s done, and what he’s capable of. Chances are he also knows where to find the bastard. If we get closer to Nathan, we get closer to William.”

“What what you’re saying is...”

“We entice him. ”

Audrey’s eyes widen and an unusual smile plays at the corner of her lips. “We?”

Duke blushes—for fuck’s sake *blushes*—and does his best to avoid her gaze, though he knows that he can never escape it. She’s always been able to read him like a book.

“You really *do* like him, don’t you?”

He doesn’t answer. If he knows her at all, he knows that he doesn’t have to.

Nathan wakes alone. He isn’t surprised by this, though he can’t help but feel strangely disappointed. In the back of his mind, he had hoped that Audrey would wake by his side but knows that the very idea is a luxury that does not belong to him. He is suddenly struck with the ugly feeling that makes him want to punch himself in the gut.

Duke.

Although Nathan doesn't know Duke as well as he does Audrey, he can't help but feel like he's betrayed a good friend that he's had since he was a child. How he feels such a connection with someone he's barely talked to and is practically a stranger to him, he isn't sure, but he's a stranger that will not leave his mind.

Nathan can't stop thinking about Duke. He can't stop thinking about the intricate details of his tattoos and wonders what they mean to him. He can't stop thinking about his firm hands and what they might be capable of. He can't stop thinking about who he is and where he came from. Who the hell *is* Duke, exactly? When was he born? Where did he grow up? What were his parents like? Who was his first kiss? When did he lose his virginity? Where did he attend college? What made him happy?

Nathan wants to get to know Duke. More than anything, he wants to know him from the inside out.

And I've just fucked his wife.

Cursing himself, Nathan just barely manages to push himself off the bed, finding his limbs surprisingly heavy. When he is finally able to stand from his bed and dress he brews himself a fresh cup of coffee and finds the Crockers at the window.

They are drinking what looks like whiskey—*It's a bit early for a drink*—and are simply talking. It's as if nothing had ever happened.

But something did happen.

The Crockers keep a watchful eye on Nathan from the moment he wakes up. His day goes about as it usually does but Duke can see the way he pulls at his hair over what he's done. He feels guilty, that much he can tell, though he can't help but wonder why it's killing him so much. It's not like they've become the best of friends.

Duke watches Nathan. Audrey watches Duke.

“What are you thinking?” she has to ask.

“Look at him, Audrey. He can't live with himself.”

“You say that like you actually feel bad for him.”

He can only shrug and continue to watch his neighbour.

“I've never seen you like this,” she continues. “It's not like you to pine over someone. Even when we started dating, you just dove in headfirst.”

Duke manages to smile at the memory. After quite literally bumping into one another, he hadn't even bothered to ask her to dinner. He simply insisted he make up for a less than savoury way of meeting.

“Are you suggesting I demand a dinner date with him?”

Audrey shakes her head and kisses her husband's neck. "I'm suggesting," she says. "You entice him."

Nathan tries to work, but his thoughts are scattered. All thoughts of William are buried underneath the images in his head; Audrey writhing above him, Duke's eyes burning with rage, Audrey touching herself as she rides him, Duke's jaw clenching, Audrey screaming at the top of her lungs when she comes, Duke's fist knocking him between the eyes.

"Goddamn it!"

As he abandons his work for a drink, he sees the Crockers from his window. They're kissing. It's almost as if nothing had happened this afternoon. Duke has Audrey by the hair and she is completely at his mercy. She wears only her blouse while he wears only his jeans.

It doesn't take them very long to notice that they are being watched.

Nathan's stomach jolts when Duke looks at him. His eyes are dark and his gaze deep. The sharpness of his wicked grin could cut through skin and bone.

He knows.

Duke smiles when he brings Audrey to her knees and does not dare break Nathan's gaze. She also smiles, as she all but rips her husband's jeans from his hips. As she takes her husband's cock in her mouth, she practically puts on a show. She touches herself while she traces the length with the tip of her tongue before she all but swallows it whole. Nathan's mouth goes dry. When they are both close, Duke again takes Audrey by the hair and brings her to her feet. He turns her around, presses her body against the window and enters her from behind. They're smiling at Nathan when they fuck.

They're mocking me.

Nathan's face burns. He has to turn away because he has no other choice. Whether Duke knows what he and Audrey have done, he isn't entirely sure, but he knows *something*.

As he hides from the couple next door he can't ignore the tent in his pants. The Crockers have made him so hard it's almost painful.

I'm going to hell for this.

Nathan closes his eyes when he opens his pants, barely able to look at himself. When his cock springs free he can't bring himself to watch his right hand move up and down the length or the left fondling his balls. All he can see behind his eyelids are the way the Crockers look at him when they fuck. He can see Audrey's breasts pressed against the glass. He can see Duke's cock moving in and out of her. He can even see them taking turns on his own cock. If he listens carefully enough he can hear them moaning for him.

Their climax is enough to bring him to the edge.

I am definitely going to hell.

An Invitation

Nathan arrives at the door with a bottle of whiskey. Not wine; whiskey. As soon as Duke notices this, he doesn't have to ask why his neighbour is here.

"Come on in," he says. "I'll fetch us a glass."

Nathan is almost hesitant to step through the door but looks around.

"Is Audrey here?" he asks.

"No, she's out for the day, but she should be back for dinner."

"Good."

Duke raises an eyebrow

"I-I-I just mean," Nathan stammers. "Since you two moved in, I've been talking more to her than with you and I thought this might be a good opportunity to get to know you."

"You two have been getting along well, haven't you?"

Nathan's lips go tight. He simply nods and says nothing further.

Duke leads Nathan into the living room and pours them a glass each. Nathan takes his seat on the sofa. Duke *could* sit next to him but he takes the nearby reading chair because he wants to study his new friend. As they drink, Nathan makes an attempt—albeit a rather pathetic one—at conversation. He talks about things that don't matter. First he talks about the weather, then he talks about how his day went, then he rants about an annoying colleague, and finally, he talks absolute nonsense after the third shot. Duke stops him with a hand on his wrist before he can pour himself another glass. His touch renders the man frozen.

"Nathan," he says. "You didn't come here to make small talk, did you?"

It takes a full minute for Nathan to swallow his pride and give an answer.

"No," he admits. "Well, yes."

"I take it the whiskey is needed, too?"

Nathan laughs nervously. "Yes and possibly the bottle, if you feel the need to smash it over my head."

Duke's brow furrows.

"Your wife," he begins. "Audrey came over to my place the other day."

Duke widens his eyes but says nothing.

“I don’t know how she got in or why she was there in the first place but there she was and... well, she kinda...pounced on me.”

“Pounced?”

Nathan nods, looking nowhere. “She just...kissed me, out of nowhere and...well, one thing led to another.”

“So, you...”

“Yeah, I did. Well, *we* did.”

For a while, Duke says nothing. He simply sinks into his chair as Nathan spews apology after apology and excuse after excuse. He tries his best to fight back the smile threatening his lips when he remembers watching them. He knows that Nathan will never talk about the way she rode his face and then his cock, let alone how much he loved it.

“Well?”

Duke blinks. “Well, what?”

“Aren’t you going to say something?”

“Like what?”

“I dunno. Something like ‘How could you do this to me?’ or ‘Get the fuck out of my house!’ At least throw me a punch or something.”

“Why would I want to punch you?”

“Because I slept with your wife.”

“So?”

Nathan is speechless. Duke can only stare at him and try to ignore the twitching between his legs when he recalls the same look of shock on Nathan’s face when Audrey kissed him.

“Y-you,” Nathan stutters. “You don’t mind?”

Duke shrugs. “Why would I? She likes you, you like her, and you’re both gorgeous. Why should I mind?”

Nathan looks here and there for an answer but can only respond with: “Both?”

Duke nods and leans back further into his chair. His legs part casually enough to go unnoticed but wide enough for Nathan to catch a glimpse of the tent in his pants. Nathan remains frozen in his own seat but finds himself beginning to stir.

“You like to watch, don’t you, Nathan?”

Nathan drops his jaw. “I...”

“That night we moved in and the other night after that, we saw you watching us but I don’t think it was just Audrey you were looking at. You were looking at me too, weren’t you?”

A nod.

“I’ll bet you were thinking about joining us. I’d put my money on it. I’ll bet you were fantasizing about the two of us taking turns on her, maybe even taking her at the same time. You probably thought about watching me fuck her from behind while she sucks your cock. Am I right?”

Another nod.

“You probably thought about fucking me too, didn’t you? Pinning me down, spreading my legs from east to west, and shoving your dick in my ass while you watch me touch myself. Would you like that?”

Another nod, this time with a smile.

“Did *you* touch yourself the other night, Nathan?”

Nathan’s smile widens. He has to lick his lips to find his words.

“I couldn’t help it,” he finally says. “You probably wouldn’t blame me if you saw what I did. The two of you...you’re so...”

Duke returns the smile and cannot stop himself from casually stroking the hard length through his pants. Nathan can only watch with wide eyes and a dropped jaw.

“It’s okay, Nathan,” he says. “There’s nothing to be ashamed of.”

“I’m not ashamed.”

Without another word, Nathan lunges towards Duke, grabs him by the scruff of his neck, and kisses him. There is nothing chaste or gentle about their kiss and it doesn’t take long at all for lips to part and make way for tongues. Their hands are not idle either. Their shirts fly off within seconds. Nathan’s hands and mouth are all over Duke’s body; his chest, his waist, his hips, his thighs, until finally...“Jesus!” Nathan is settled in between Duke’s legs now. His hands are shaking, as he fumbles through the married man’s jeans. Duke can only lick his lips as he watches Nathan’s eagerness. Finally, his cock springs free and Nathan, starving for him, does not hesitate.

“Nathan...”

“I’ve wanted to do this since you moved in.”

Duke opens his eyes to look into Nathan’s. The pupils are dilated and the irises almost appear silver when he works his way between his neighbour’s legs and exposes him. Without another word, he opens his mouth. Nathan all but worships Duke’s cock. With one long lick along the length, he quickly learns the shape because he wants to memorize it. Duke can only watch in awe, as Nathan teases the frenulum with the tip of his tongue before devouring the

head completely. With each bobbing movement, he takes the length deeper and deeper into his mouth until it just reaches the back of his throat.

He's done this before.

Duke's eyes roll into the back of his head. One hand grips the edge of his seat and the other rakes through Nathan's hair. Nathan, now just as hard, fumbles through his pants and exposes his own erection, stroking himself with one hand and stroking Duke with the other. Every now and then he will tease the balls and stroke the shaft, as he sucks even harder on the tip. It isn't long before Duke begins to thrust.

"Oh, fuck yes!"

Nathan moans but doesn't gag on Duke's cock. He happily allows him to fuck his face the way he's wanted him to since they met. God, how he's wanted this!

Duke feels himself getting close and tries to push Nathan away, only to have him push back.

"No," he says. "Let me taste you. Please, Duke, I want this."

Duke looks down on Nathan, who looks back up at him with big eyes. He maintains eye contact as he teases the tip with his tongue before taking it whole. This time, he does not stop. Duke comes and Nathan takes every last drop of him.

Audrey had never sucked him off like that.

Nathan lifts himself to Duke's level and kisses him again and asks: "Can I fuck you?"

Duke almost laughs at the question, but nods and is lead to the ground.

When both men are naked and entwined, Nathan's hands are not idle. He explores every inch of Duke's lithe body and frowns when he notices similar scars to Audrey's, but shakes his head of any question he has of them. He does not want to know where they came from. Not now.

Nathan soon turns Duke on his stomach. Duke shudders when he feels a hard cock teasing his hole and a hot mouth warming his neck. Before long, he feels that mouth trailing kisses down his spine until it reaches the crack. He then feels a warm tongue brushing against his hole and all but growls when he feels clever fingers. Once he is stretched open and lubricated, Nathan stops. Duke groans in disappointment like a child but looks back to see Nathan fumbling through the nearby mess of clothing until pulling a condom from the pocket of his jeans.

He wanted this to happen.

With the condom rolled on and Duke ready for him, Nathan enters slowly. They both cry out when he is fully sheathed.

"Are you okay?" Nathan asks, though he probably doesn't have to.

"Yeah," Duke nods. "Yeah, this—ah! Fuck, this is good!"

Nathan smiles and begins to move. His rhythm is slow and steady at first and only begins to pick up the pace when Duke begs him to. Before long he's fucking the married man the way he's wanted to since the day they met. Duke feels hotter and tighter than Nathan had fantasized and is not as vocal as he'd imagined, but when he talks dirty it almost sounds like poetry. He thinks back to how Audrey felt in comparison to Duke and the very memory of her is enough to bring him to the edge.

Both men collapse to the ground, breathless and exhausted. Both weak and twitching from the aftershock, their shared caresses are surprisingly tender. Nathan traces the details of Duke's tattoos and is met with a response not too dissimilar to a cat's purr.

“You’ve done that before.”

Nathan smiles. “You sound surprised by that.”

“Never pegged you as the type, you know? I didn’t know you were...well...”

“Bi? Well, there’s a lot you don’t know about me.”

“Oh? Such as?”

“Such as...I’m a Hufflepuff, I make amazing pancakes, and I secretly adore *Pride & Prejudice*.”

Duke laughs, honest to goodness, *laughs*.

“Huh. So you’re not such a grump all the time.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’ve just never seen you laugh is all.”

“I have my moments.”

Nathan’s smile widens. “Your turn. What don’t I know about you?”

Duke thinks a moment. “I’m a proud Slytherin, I make the best waffles, and my favourite book is *Wuthering Heights*.”

“And Audrey?”

“She’s a Ravenclaw, she could eat her weight in cupcakes, and she loves *Jane Eyre*.”

“There’s something else, though, isn’t there?”

The question startles Duke. “What do you mean?”

“About the two of you,” Nathan explains. “Well, mostly you. ‘Cause I get Audrey, at least I think I do, but you I’m still trying to figure out.”

Duke smiles weakly and strokes Nathan's cheek. He almost feels sorry for the guy. There is so much he wants to know and so little that he should. Gods help him if he ever knew. *Really* knew.

"Audrey and I are just about settled in now. Maybe you could get to know us over dinner this weekend."

"Are you asking me out, Mr. Crocker?"

"I could be."

Nathan smiles widely and kisses Duke's palm. "I'd love to."

Dinner for Three

It's Nathan's day off. He spends most of it deciding what to wear for dinner. He's never worried about what to wear to a date. Is this even a date? Well, he's going to have dinner with two gorgeous people that he's already had sex with. That could be considered a date, right?

When he runs errands, he thinks to buy a bottle of wine for tonight. On his way home, he passes by the local bookshop, which is noted for having everything that any book-lover would want from leather-bound classics to the latest bestsellers. He recalls Duke mentioning his and Audrey's fondness for the Brontës. There should be something that they'd like.

Sure enough, there is a boxed set of *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Nathan isn't sure if the Crockers have read the latter but is certain they would appreciate the gift.

"The Brontës," he hears a voice say. "They were an odd bunch."

The voice makes him sick to his stomach. When he looks up and forces himself to smile, William smiles back. Nathan would very much like to punch that smile until it's bloodied and raw.

"Officer Wuornos! I thought that was you. I hear you've been getting along with those new neighbours of yours. Good people?"

The best, he thinks. Not that you'd know what that means.

"They're great," he manages to say with a rather poor attempt at a smile. "I'm actually having dinner with them tonight."

"Nice. What are their names? Craw? Copper?"

"Crocker. Duke and Audrey Crocker."

You stay the fuck away from them.

"Good names."

Nathan says nothing else. As he watches William walk by and take a book from the shelf—*It* by Stephen King—he keeps a close eye on his wrists. He still has his handcuffs on him. He could do it. He could take his cuffs and lock those dirty hands together. He could put everything to rest. He could arrest the bastard here and now.

Steal the book, you son of a bitch. I dare you.

But William buys the book. He smiles at the cashier and shoots Nathan a wink like butter wouldn't melt in his mouth.

You sick fuck.

Nathan stands in his place for what seems like hours until he is asked if he needs anything. He manages to shrug it off and buy the boxed set. When he leaves the bookshop he feels his blood turn cold.

Nathan arrives at seven o'clock sharp with a bottle of wine in one hand and a gift in the other. It's a box of three hard cover books: *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

"Call it a housewarming gift," he tells them. "Duke told me that you were both fans of the first two, so I thought you'd like it."

Neither of the Crockers know what to say. Duke manages to smile, wondering whether the gift is a genuine gift or an apology for what he's done. Audrey just barely manages to smile when she remembers that the protagonist of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* has a son near James' age.

"Did he now?" she says at last. "Good to know you two are finally getting on."

Nathan blushes (and it's fucking adorable) and shares a not-so-secret smile with Duke, who offers to pour the wine.

"I managed to get my hands on the good stuff, too. I remember you guys mentioning how much cheap wine you were given when you moved in."

"That's very kind of you," says Audrey. "I'll put these on our bookshelf. Why don't you make yourself comfortable?"

As Audrey leaves the room and Duke pours the glasses, Nathan looks around. He finds himself observing the pictures on the wall and smiling. Many are of the Crockers on their previously mentioned travels and some are simply of their married life, one being their wedding portrait. One, however, catches Nathan's eye. He takes it from the mantelpiece for a closer look. The picture is of a boy of perhaps three with Audrey's hair, Duke's eyes, and his own smile.

"Who's this little fella?"

Duke stiffens when he sees the picture in Nathan's hands but offers the drinks nonetheless.

"That's our son," he answers. "James."

"I didn't know you had a son. He's cute. Where is he now? With grandma and grandpa, or...?"

"No, both our parents died when we were really young and James died when he was three."

Nathan's smile falls. "Oh, I'm so sorry!"

Duke shakes his head. "You didn't know."

“If I may ask?”

“Cancer.”

“God, that’s awful!”

Duke watches as Nathan further observes the boy’s picture. He’s never seen another man look so heartbroken.

“You know,” he says. “Being a cop, you think I’d be used to death but when it happens to a kid, I just...I...”

Duke squints. “You what, Nathan?”

Nathan takes a moment to breathe. “It just awakens something in me, you know? It’s hard to describe, but it’s this ugly feeling that eats me up from the inside and makes my blood run cold. It makes me want to kill something, anything, just to bring back some sort of balance. You know what I mean?”

“I know exactly what you mean.”

Both men look to the picture of the boy. They do not see Audrey observing them as they do and it takes all her strength to swallow the lump in her throat. James would have been five now, nearly six.

“Is that why you two moved in?” Nathan asks. “To start afresh?”

“Something like that.”

Nathan smiles weakly. Duke manages to smile back, as he places the picture back on the mantelpiece. They lift their glasses for James and drink to new beginnings.

“Dinner should be ready soon.”

The starter is a course of fresh oysters. Nathan is lucky enough to find a pearl in his shell, which leads to a crude joke from Duke about how some men never find “the pearl.” Nathan keeps the little gem in his pocket because he doesn’t want to forget it. The main course is pasta puttanesca. “The whore’s dish,” according to Audrey. Even as she explains how the prostitutes of Italy would make it often because it was as cheap as it was satisfying, he cannot help but blush at the very implication. The third course is a platter of cheese shipped from Paris. It brings up a story about the Crockers’ trip to Paris, where they had thought it would be a good idea to make love in the church of Notre Dame, only to be caught in the act by a class of Catholic schoolgirls and their Mother Superior. Nathan nearly chokes on his next bite of brie when they mention the nun’s particular eye for Audrey. Finally, the dessert is a Belgian waffle with raspberries and Nutella. Reminded of Duke’s claim to make the best waffles, Nathan shares a private smile with him before taking his first bite. It is the best waffle he’s ever had in his life.

“Duke,” he says. “This is delicious.”

As Nathan finishes his dessert, the Crockers share a wink before Audrey leans towards him.

“Speaking of which,” she says. “Do you mind if I ask you something?”

He nods and takes a large swig.

“Does my husband’s cock taste as good as my cunt?”

Nathan chokes on his drink and coughs out what he’s swallowed the wrong way. “I beg your pardon?”

Audrey smiles. “It’s okay, Nathan. I know.”

Nathan turns to Duke with wide eyes, only to find him smirking. “You told her?”

“Of course I did,” Duke shrugs. “You told me that you fucked her. It’s only fair for her to know that you fucked me too.”

“And you don’t mind? Neither of you mind?”

To his surprise, Audrey laughs. “Of course, not! Why do you think we invited you here?”

“Well, I...I assumed it was just dinner.”

It is now Duke’s turn to laugh. “Nate, you’ve slept with the both of us and you thought this was going to be *just* dinner?”

Nathan has no answer. He is rendered speechless. The Crockers both smile so sweetly at him and he’s fairly certain he feels Audrey’s foot caressing his ankle and Duke’s hand on his thigh.

“Are you guys asking me to stay the night?”

“Yes,” Audrey says. Her toes begin to creep up his trousers and caress his leg. “Of course, we are. We really like you, Nathan.”

Duke’s hand begins to further caress his thigh. “We aren’t going to force you into anything. You don’t have to if you don’t want to but we both had a great time with you and we know that you’ve been watching us, so we were wondering if you were interested in joining us.”

He looks to Audrey, then Duke, and then back to Audrey. When he feels Duke’s hand slowly creeping between his legs and Audrey’s foot caressing his calf, he can only smile. He knows his answer.

“Okay.”

When the Crockers take Nathan by both hands and lead him upstairs, he almost feels like a teenaged boy about to lose his virginity again. He’s never been with more than one person at

a time and wonders if he should worry. The looks he shares with both Duke and Audrey reassure him.

You'll be alright, they manage to say without saying anything at all. *We've got you*.

They want him and he wants them. He wants them more than anything.

The moment they reach the bedroom and the door is closed, the married couple tends to him. Audrey is the first to kiss him. Her lips are soft and taste of raspberries and wine. Duke is the next to kiss him. His lips are hard and taste of chocolate and whiskey. Their hands feel different on his body too. Audrey's hands are small and clever. Duke's hands are large and warm. Both are surprisingly rough. They soon begin to strip him, hardly bothering with their own clothing. With Duke working his way through his shirt and Audrey through his pants, he feels as if he is being treated like a king. *They treat him like a king.*

The Crockers push Nathan to the bed. Once they start to strip each other, he can only watch, licking his lips as he observes every kiss and caress they share. He is hard, hot, and ready for them but doesn't dare touch himself. *Not yet*, he tells himself. *There will be plenty of time for that tonight.*

Once they are both naked and by his side—Duke on his left and Audrey on his right—he reaches for them both but they stop him.

“No,” Audrey says. “This is about you.”

“Tell us what you want.”

Duke takes Nathan's hand in his and sucks on each finger. Audrey, in turn, moves to kiss his neck. The sensation of both hot mouths makes him shudder.

“I want—ah! I want you both. Please.”

“Not good enough,” Duke says. “Tell us *exactly* what you want.”

As Duke circles his tongue around his ring finger and Audrey's lips find a sensitive spot behind his ear, her fingertips teasing a nipple and his tracing a vein on the wrist, Nathan can barely answer with anything more than a moan.

“I—oh, God!—I want you to touch me.”

“You only had to ask.”

Audrey is the first to reach for his cock. Duke follows suit. Nathan loves that he can tell the differences between their strokes by his nimble fingertips and her firm grip but he ignores the familiar callouses on their hands. They feel too good. He closes his eyes, savouring the pleasure of it all. He does not see the secret smile that the Crockers share but he can feel two tongues taking turns on his cock. He can tell by their lips who sucks him. Audrey's lips are strong and tight around his length. Duke's lips are gentle and tentative around his balls. When he opens his eyes he fears he might come then and there when he sees them kissing just above the head of his cock.

They're both so beautiful.

"I want you."

The Crockers break their kiss and smile at him.

"Tell us," Audrey says and moves to kiss him too.

Nathan finds himself lost in Audrey's kiss and then Duke's before he tells him: "I want you to fuck her from behind while I fuck her from the front." He opens his eyes and looks to Audrey. "If you want to," he says to her as an afterthought.

But she kisses him and moves to sit astride him, just like she did when they first fucked. "Oh, I want to," she purrs. "Believe me, I want to."

No sooner does she tell him this does she take a condom from the bedside table, roll it onto his cock, and sinks onto it. All three moan in unison. As Audrey leans onto Nathan, he takes the opportunity to take a nipple into his mouth while she presents her ass to her husband. Duke, smiling as he watches them, wets his fingers with a nearby bottle of lubricant and inserts the first finger. His touch causes both his wife and his neighbour to shudder. Smiling wider, he begins to experiment with his touch, feeling Nathan's cock through Audrey's skin. One finger, then two, then three, until finally, Audrey turns to Duke. Her pupils dilated and jaw dropped, she nods. She's ready. As he slowly sinks into her, he watches how Nathan's eyes roll into the back of his head.

"Can you feel me?"

Nathan only answers with a nod and a hearty moan. He can feel them both. He can feel Audrey's cunt closing in around him and Duke's cock through the thin barrier of her skin.

"Yes," he cries. "I need...oh, God! Move!"

"We will, love."

Audrey looks back to Duke. He's only ever called her by that name. Anyone else would have slapped him in a fit of rage. Instead, she shares with him a secret smile before beckoning him for a kiss. He passes the kiss onto Nathan's lips. Only when all three pairs of lips meet that both men begin to move. They move slowly, at first, because they want to savour the feeling of each other. Their hands are everywhere; scratching skin, pulling hair, groping Audrey's breasts, Nathan's thighs, and Duke's ass. Lips crash into one another with shared words of affection. Audrey is the first to quicken the pace. Duke responds with a hearty groan. Nathan follows in kind. She is just as desperate to feel her boys as they are to feel her.

"Boys," she begins to cry. "My boys."

"That's right, love."

"Love," is all Nathan can respond with when he feels himself getting close. The Crockers are not too far behind.

The room seems to shake when they all come together.

Nathan doesn't remember falling asleep. It's only when he wakes up to feel his limbs weighed down by four other legs and his hand held by two others. He can smell love-making in the air mingling with a woman's perfume. When his eyes finally adjust to the dark morning he can see Duke holding Audrey, as they sleep peacefully with his hand in theirs. Smiling, he presses their fingers to his lips and tucks them in. They both smile in their sleep at the gesture. They are all he can see before he falls back asleep.

“Good night, loves.”

The Mornings After

The Crockers wake to a warm but empty bed. Duke is the first to notice that Nathan is gone but it's Audrey who notices the smell of coffee and pancakes coming from downstairs. As they gather enough clothing to make their way downstairs, they find Nathan in the kitchen wearing nothing but his boxers and one of Duke's t-shirts. Laid before them on the counter is a set of pancakes with butter, syrup, berries, and a steaming pot of coffee. Nathan flips another pancake before turning to them with a smile.

"Good morning," he says cheerily.

"What's all this?" is Duke's only response. Audrey's is complete silence.

"Breakfast. You didn't think I'd just get my rocks off and leave before dawn, did you? Not really my game. How many pancakes do you want?"

The Crockers take three pancakes each. Nathan, meanwhile, pours them both a cup of coffee before sitting down and serving himself another three. The Crockers, though sitting down at the table with a full breakfast, still stare in awe at the feast before them.

"Nathan," Audrey laughs nervously. "This is all wonderful and we really appreciate it but you really didn't have to."

Nathan smiles into his first bite of pancakes. "I know," he says. "But I wanted to. Isn't that what folks do after they sleep together?"

The Crockers take their first bites in awkward silence. Nathan can only watch them with a smile imprinted onto his face.

"I had a great time last night," he continues. "I can't say I've ever done anything like that."

"You've never had a threesome before?" Audrey asks.

"You have?"

"Twice," Duke says, "with Chris from New York and then Evi from Toronto." Duke doesn't dare tell Nathan about how he had to shoot Evi Ryan in the chest or how Audrey had to smother Chris Brody in his sleep but, instead, changes the subject. "You've seriously never had a threesome before?"

Nathan shakes his head. "Never. I suppose I've always wanted to but never really connected with the right people."

"And *we're* the right people?"

Nathan—a grown man—blushes like a little girl admitting her feelings to a crush. "Let's just say that I wouldn't sleep with just *anyone*. I'm not really the type to grab a stranger from the bar, take them home, and never see them again. It's not really my style. I'd rather get to know

someone and...well, I'd only ever sleep with someone that I had feelings for; *genuine* feelings."

Neither Duke nor Audrey can fight back the smiles threatening their lips. Audrey has to clear her throat just to break the silence. "Such sweet words."

"And I mean every one of them."

The three eat their breakfast in an awkward silence that can only be broken by what can only be described as small talk. Neither of the Crockers can abide small talk. They only tolerate it because Nathan looks adorable when he shows even the slightest bit of excitement over a sunny day or an upcoming event in town. When breakfast is over, Nathan insists on cleaning up in spite of Duke's attempt to do so for him. It only takes a kiss on the cheek for him to give in. Once everything is cleaned, he excuses himself from the house but not until he asks the question that's been burning through his skull all morning.

"Do you guys want to go out for dinner sometime?"

Duke nearly chokes on his coffee. Audrey's eyes go as wide as saucers. Eventually, they manage to laugh nervously.

"Nate," Duke chuckles. "We had dinner last night."

"I know. I was just wondering if you'd like to do this again. Maybe go out for dinner and a movie? There's a great seafood bar by the waterfront that I think you two might like and there's a drive-in cinema not too far off."

Audrey furrows her brow but still manages to smile. "So...like a date?"

"Yeah. Exactly like a date."

"Okay."

Nathan goes to work with a smile that lasts him the entire day. That evening, when Nathan sees the Crockers making love and they both smile at him, he doesn't turn away to touch himself. He simply smiles back at them and watches them.

Nathan doesn't mind the looks he gets when he takes the Crockers to *The Grey Gull*. Audrey doesn't seem to mind linking arms with two men, anyway, and the people staring and gossiping may well be invisible to Duke. A date between anyone else but a straight couple simply isn't heard of in Haven. They can hear the whispers surrounding them but manage to silence them out with even the most chaste kisses. The movie afterward is more peaceful. Audrey rests her head on Duke's chest and her feet on Nathan's lap, as they curl up under the blanket together on the back of Nathan's truck. *Cabaret* is playing. While Duke pretends to hate musicals, Nathan has to suppress his laughter when *Two Ladies* starts to play and he sees him smile. Audrey quietly sings along just to make her husband laugh. When the movie is over and the three make their way home, they stop at Nathan's place, where they stay the night.

This goes on for some time. At least every week, Nathan comes up with a new idea for a date. Dinners, movies, walks on the beach, dances at the bar. They'll do other things as well, of course, and sometimes they'll do nothing at all. Whatever they do for the evening, one way or another they always end up sleeping together.

The sex is amazing, of course. It's like nothing Nathan has ever experienced in his life. Everything he's done before can be described as perfectly vanilla. The Crockers change all of that.

Audrey is a passionate lover. She likes to be in control when they fuck and Nathan loves it. He never thought he would enjoy being dominated by a woman but he finds that he likes the grip of her shockingly firm hands on his wrists when she pins him down. He especially loves to watch her kiss-swollen lips hang open and her pert breasts bounce when she rides his cock until she's screaming like a wild animal.

Duke is a more tender lover. Nathan hadn't expected this at all. He had first pegged the other man as more dominant and selfish but finds that when they fuck he is surprisingly gentle and tentative. He tends more to his lover's needs than his own and makes dirty talk sound like poetry, even when he's balls deep inside and close to climax. When he comes he muffles his cries of ecstasy with the deepest kiss.

Nathan loves both Duke and Audrey together the most. He loves to watch them making love while they pass the same love onto him. He loves to feel their hands on his body and their mouths work wonders on his cock. He loves to taste the whiskey on his tongue and the honey on her cunt. He loves to smell the remains of their lovemaking in the air mingling with her perfume and his cologne. But above all things, he loves how he has never felt more at home than in their arms. For the first time in his life, he feels completely, perfectly, and incandescently happy.

Nathan is falling in love. He hadn't intended to, of course, but who ever *really* intends to fall in love with anyone? Nonetheless, he knows that he is falling in love. He knows it when he's with them and when he's without them. At home, he finds himself imagining spending the rest of his life with them. When he imagined spending the rest of his life with someone before, he had always pictured a wife and child before a white picket fence. He had never in his life imagined bringing someone else into the marriage, let alone leaving his small town behind and traveling the world with them both. It's a terrifying dream to have but also an exciting one.

Much to their dread, the Crockers are falling for Nathan too.

"You know this can't last."

Duke can't bring himself to take his next sip of wine. Audrey's words feel like a punch to the gut. She doesn't have to remind him that this can only be temporary. He knows that their mutual lover can't be anything more than a pawn to them but by gods, has he tried so hard to forget it.

"I know," he mutters.

“Do you?”

“Of course, I do.”

“I don’t think you do because I don’t see any sign of William yet.”

Duke sighs heavily and takes a large swig.

“We can’t keep stalling, Duke. Every day we waste, that bastard is still out there and God knows what the hell he could be doing right now.”

The stem of the glass nearly breaks when it clashes onto the table. Duke has Audrey cornered and tries to ignore how red her eyes have become.

“You think I don’t know that? You think I don’t go to bed at night without thinking about what that bastard has done? You think I don’t regret every single day that passes where I haven’t sliced his fucking throat? Tell me something, Audrey, how come you haven’t found him? Come on, honey, I’ve got all day. It was your idea to come here, after all, and it was your idea to use Nathan to get to him, too!”

The very name renders Audrey frozen and speechless. She tries to find a response but finds her mouth too dry, her tongue too heavy, and her throat too swollen. Without so much as a word, Duke has his answer.

“I know,” she barely manages to say. “And I’m sorry.”

Duke furrows his brow. “What are you sorry for?”

“Well, this is all my fault, isn’t it? *I* brought Nathan into our lives, *I* made the decision to come here for William, and *I’m* the one who turned away from James for three fucking seconds.”

“Audrey...”

“It is! If it weren’t for me, we wouldn’t be here using a perfectly nice man as a pawn to get to someone who should never have meant anything to either of us.”

“Audrey, stop it!”

“He was three years old, Duke! Three! If I had just...”

Audrey’s voice trails away into sobs. Duke says nothing. He merely reaches for his wife, kisses her forehead, and holds her. All he can do is let her cry. He knows that no word of comfort will do any good. “Hush,” is the only word that is able to give her any sense of peace before she eventually finds her voice again.

“I can’t stand it,” she chokes. “I can’t stand to leave Nathan to hang and dry but I can’t stand to let William walk free anymore either. I can’t stand it anymore, Duke, after what that man did to us...”

He kisses his wife's tears away before kissing her salted lips. "Ssh," he coos. "I know, love, and we'll find him. I promise."

"What about Nathan?"

Duke opens his mouth but finds no answer. All he can do is hold her while he tries to ignore their mutual lover watching from the window.

"We'll think of something."

Killers in the Crowd

Nathan wakes with a start. His phone will not stop ringing and he sighs heavily when he remembers who would be calling him at this hour. Whatever the chief wants from him now, it must be really bad if he's calling before the crack of dawn. Carefully, he slips stealthily from under Duke's arm and Audrey's leg and creeps out of his bed. He doesn't want to wake them.

Why they so adamantly insisted on sleeping at his place this time he still isn't sure but he can't help but smile at how peaceful they look, especially after last night. Audrey looked so beautiful with Duke's cock buried deep inside her that Nathan feared he would come then and there once she wrapped her kiss-swollen lips around his own cock. At another ring, he shook his head of the memory and reached for his phone.

"Officer Wuornos."

"Hey, Wuornos! Glad you're still among the living."

Nathan rolls his eyes. "What's up, chief?"

"We've got a breaking and entering in the Shawshank area. Robbery and assault. There's no serious injury that we know of yet but we could really use your assistance."

Nathan's heart stops at the very mention of the name. Not caring of any noise he'll make, he rushes to his desk and rummages through his files. When he finds William's he cannot help but smile. 27 Shawshank Ave. If it's William's house that was violated he could grill him just enough to get him to confess, perhaps not to *everything* but anything worth arresting him for. If it's William doing the violating...well, Nathan is nothing short of ecstatic at the thought of putting the bastard in his place.

He doesn't hear either of his lovers waking up.

"Wuornos? Wuornos! Did you hear me?"

"I heard you, chief. I'm on my way."

Nathan scrambles for his clothing, much of which is scattered on the ground. He could care less if he wears the same clothes as yesterday. It's only when he reaches the bed to pull on his trousers that he notices Duke stirring.

"Sorry," he says softly, trying to hide his excitement. "Did I wake you?"

Duke shakes his head and stretches with a jaw-cracking yawn. Audrey still pretends to be asleep in his arms. "Was that the police department?"

"Yeah, the chief says there's been a violation in the Shawshank area."

"I guess something like that can't wait, can it?"

Nathan sighs because he hates to leave them like this. "I'm afraid it can't. There's probably going to be a lot of paperwork involved as well, so there's a chance I won't be home all day."

Duke manages to sit up. "So, I guess you won't be here for dinner tonight?"

Nathan sighs heavily. He'd forgotten. "I'm afraid not. I'm sorry, Duke, I really hate leaving you two like this but..."

"But work is work, right?"

Nathan hangs his head and nods but finds his chin lifted by a soft touch. Duke smiles when he manages to meet his eye.

"Don't worry about it," he says. "I'll let Audrey know where you went and we can do dinner another time, okay?"

"You're sure?"

"I'm sure."

Nathan smiles back, reaches to caress Duke's cheek. "I don't know what I've done to deserve the two of you."

"Nate..."

"I mean it, Duke. You and Audrey mean a lot to me and I'd do anything for you. I hope you know that."

He does know and so does she, gods help them. Before he can say a word on the matter his lips are stopped by Nathan's. "I have to go now," he says and makes his way to the door but he doesn't leave until he offers one last smile. "I love you; both of you."

Duke opens his mouth but nothing comes out. Nathan is gone before he can say a word. The entire house is silent until the front door is slammed shut.

"We love you, too."

When all is quiet, Duke walks to the nearby desk and carefully searches the mountain of paperwork for one name and one name only. It takes him all but five minutes to find it. The name alone makes his heart leap and he rummages through his pile of clothes for his phone. His hands are shaking. When he finally has it, he rushes back to the desk and takes a picture of each page in the files. He can't help but smile when he has them in his hands and he looks to his wife, who is already awake and returning that knowing smile.

They have found William.

When Nathan makes his way to Shawshank, he wishes to God that William were either the victim or the victor. Instead, both are complete strangers to him and William is nowhere to be seen. The scene is violent. Burglaries tend to be, after all, so Nathan is prepared. He has his

gun loaded and at his side, ready to shoot if need be. Secretly, he hopes to use it, though he knows he shouldn't.

The house's owners a set of innocent parents trying to protect their children and the burglar is just a kid. He is a drug-addicted twenty-something looking to a neighbour's place to get money for his next fix. Pale, puny, and pathetic. When he sees the kid he wants nothing more than to pull the trigger. Anyone who threatens harm on a child doesn't deserve to live.

"Please," the kid cries. He is on his knees, his hands in the air, and his face and eyes red. His pupils are dilated from whatever is running through his thinning blood. Nathan has his gun loaded and aimed at him. He could do it. He could end the boy's misery here and now. "I just need a hit."

Damn straight you do, Nathan wants to say. If it's not coming from whatever it is you shoot into your veins, it's coming from me.

"One more hit," the kid continues to beg. "Just one more."

Nathan steps closer and the kid flinches. He shouldn't do it but he could. He knows he could. He *wants* to. Nathan unlocks his gun. The kid runs before he can pull the trigger.

Nathan ignores his boss's protests when he does.

Bang!

The kid falls to the ground before he can make a turn. For a moment, Nathan thinks that he might be dead. His heart stops and his breath catches in his lungs. Had he killed him? No, he's still moving. He's in pain but still alive. The team crowds around him and has his hands at his back, cuffing him while stating his rights and then guiding him to the nearby ambulance.

The gun is suddenly heavy in Nathan's hands and when he turns to his chief he knows what is ahead of him.

The paperwork that comes with the incident is hell but Nathan would take it over the chief's lecture any day.

"I don't know what's gotten into you," he scolds. "You know that we only use weapons for emergency, do you not, Wuornos?"

"Yes, chief."

"And that we only shoot to wound?"

"Yes, chief."

"Then what the hell was that?"

"I don't know, chief."

“You don’t know? *You don’t fucking know?* You almost killed the kid!”

“I don’t know what came over me, chief.”

“I don’t know what’s come over you either and, frankly, I don’t want anything to do with it.”

Startled, Nathan looks his chief in the eye for the first time since he pulled the trigger. His chest tightens and he holds his breath for what he is about to here.

“Wuornos,” the chief says. “Once you’re done with the paperwork, I’m suspending you for a month.”

“A month? But, chief...”

“And I won’t hear another word of it. Understood?”

Nathan sighs and hangs his head. “Yes, chief.”

“Good. Now, you’ve got a mountain of paperwork to deal with and I don’t want you leaving this office until it’s all done and I better not see you here tomorrow morning.”

“Yes, chief.”

With that, Nathan is all but drowning in paper and ink. The hours pass by as slowly as dripping molasses. By the time the office is empty, his hand is already stiff and his eyelids heavy. He loses count of how many cups of coffee he has to drink to keep himself going and fears the next cup will cause him to crash. Eventually, the last piece of paperwork is signed and completed. With a sigh of relief, Nathan takes the heavy pile and takes it to the chief’s office, though not without effort.

Once the pile is on the chief’s desk, he turns to the door only to lose his footing and bump against the office drawer. Another pile of paperwork falls into a mess on the ground. Cursing under his breath, Nathan falls to his hands and knees and cleans up the mess.

More paperwork, he thinks. *Lovely*.

Nathan pays little attention to the mess he’s made. His thoughts turn to his home and to his lovers. He wants nothing more than to sleep a month with them.

Until he sees their faces.

His heart stops. The Crockers stare back at him with dead eyes in the pile of paperwork. He shakes his head and hopes that he’s only hallucinating from exhaustion. He isn’t. There are their faces and there are their names.

Name: Audrey Prudence Crocker née Parker.

Sex: Female.

Date of Birth: July 9, 1981.

Nationality: American.

Ethnicity: Caucasian.

Skin: White.

Hair: Blonde.

Eyes: Blue.

Height: 5'5"

Weight: 125.8 lbs.

Occupation: Assassin.

Scars and Marks: Bullet wound on chest, knife wounds on left forearm, right thigh, and lower abdomen.

Wanted For: Manslaughter, Physical Assault, Fraud, Identity Theft.

Aliases: Veronica Harker, Sarah Vernon, Lucy Ripley, Alexis Dewitt, Mara Cross.

Name: Duke Fitzwilliam Crocker.

Sex: Male.

Date of Birth: May 25, 1977.

Nationality: American.

Ethnicity: Caucasian.

Skin: Olive.

Hair: Black.

Eyes: Brown

Height: 6'2"

Weight: 167.5 lbs.

Occupation: Assassin.

Scars and Marks: Several tattoos, including sugar skull on right shoulder, symbol on left, and calligraphy on left upper arm, bullet wound on lower abdomen, knife wounds on upper abdomen, right upper arm, and left thigh.

Wanted For: Manslaughter, Physical Assault, Robbery, Smuggling, Identity Theft.

Aliases: Jesse McNally, Gabriel Dimas, Milo Pressman, David Virgo, Michael Grey.

Nathan's throat begins to swell and his eyes to burn. He wants to die. He wants to kill.

Story Time

When the doorbell rings, Audrey furrows her brow. Duke looks from his cooking to his wife, then to the door, and back to his wife again. They hadn't been expecting anyone. Audrey shrugs. It's her turn. Taking a knife from the counter, just in case, she makes her way to the door.

"Nathan," she chirps. "What a surprise!"

But he doesn't look like Nathan. His eyes are as wild as they are red. Audrey can tell that he's been crying but she recognizes the way he looks at her. He looks at her as if he is about to kill her.

"Morning, Lucy," he says.

"Lucy?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. It's Audrey now, isn't it?"

Before Audrey can ask what the hell he's talking about, Nathan marches past her and makes his way to the kitchen. He may well have pushed her against the wall. He could have.

"Duke," he calls. "Which name do you go by today? Jesse, David, Milo...?"

Duke is startled by the first name. It was his first pseudonym. "What?"

"What about you, Audrey? Veronica, Sarah, Mara...?"

"Nathan, what are you talking about?"

With a heavy hand, Nathan slaps the files on the counter before them, not caring if he ruins whatever Duke is making. The Crockers freeze when their faces stare back at them. Nathan's jaw is clenched when they finally have the courage to look him in the eye. His gaze is so cold it chills them to the bone.

"Did you ever plan on telling me about all of this?" he asks. The Crockers have no answer.

"Well? What were you going to do? Tell me about your plan *before* killing me, like some Bond villain, or leave it as a surprise?"

"Not you," Duke finally says. "Never you."

"Oh, no?"

"We were *going* to," Audrey admits. "But then we found out what you knew."

Nathan furrows his brow. What the hell are they talking about?

Audrey looks to her husband. "We should tell him," she says. "He won't understand unless we tell him everything."

"Tell me what?"

Duke swallows the growing lump in his throat and nods. He abandons his cooking, rummages through the liquor cabinet for a bottle with three shot glasses, and leads his wife and his lover to the dining room. Nathan is hesitant to sit down with the Crockers, remembering the first time he sat with them for dinner.

"What's the bottle for?" Nathan asks.

"It's for you," Duke explains. "Trust me; you're gonna need it if you want to hear the whole story."

"What's in it?"

"Bourbon. Just bourbon."

To prove it, Duke pours a shot for himself and his wife. He doesn't dare take his eyes off of Nathan when he swallows his share in one gulp. Audrey does likewise and says: "You're gonna want to sit down, Nathan."

Eventually, he does so, but is careful to take the first sip.

"We met in Rome," Duke begins. "We both had different targets and yet somehow we ran into each other. Quite literally, actually, and somehow a fist fight ended in dinner."

Audrey smiles weakly at the memory. "You always said it was the right hook that had you hooked."

Duke returns the weak smile and holds her hand. "From then on, we did everything together, including kill. On the surface, we were like any other couple that traveled together but behind closed doors, we were bringing in some of the most wanted criminals across the globe. We'd entice them, somehow, earn their trust, and then give them what they deserved. Household poisons were her weapon of choice and kitchen knives were mine. We were a team."

Audrey squeezes Duke's hand and he brings it to his lips, kissing the semi-precious stone on her ring finger. Nathan tries not to smile at the way they look at each other.

"We were together for three years before we decided to settle down," Audrey continues. "We eloped in India. After the honeymoon, I found out that I was pregnant. We knew that we couldn't raise a baby in this environment, so we agreed to hang up our weapons and leave contract killing behind. It wasn't easy, of course, it's not the kind of job you retire from like any other but we managed. Eventually, we found ourselves a stable home in Maine with more stable work. Duke found work as a chef and I found work as a psychiatrist. We still traveled from time to time, of course, but the mundane life was as dull as you can imagine it was for us. It was all worth it when our son was born."

Nathan looks back to the picture of the boy. "James."

The Crockers both nod. Audrey's voice begins to shake when she continues the story. "He was born on August the thirty-first and weighed seven pounds. I'll never forget the first time he looked at me with those big, beautiful, brown eyes. They were his daddy's eyes."

Audrey's voice becomes weaker but she refuses to let herself cry. Now is not the time for crying. Duke's grip tightens on her hand.

"James meant everything to us," he says. "Any parent will say that having a kid changed them, somehow, but this was different. In a way, he saved us. If we hadn't had him, we would have become complete monsters; hell, we probably wouldn't even be here today but James... James changed everything. He gave us a chance to start over and live a life without so much bloodshed. For the first time in our lives, we had a home and a family. We were happy; so happy."

"William took all of that away from us."

The name startles Nathan. "William?"

Audrey's first tear threatens to fall. "It was James' third birthday. We had taken a trip to Prince Edward Island and took him to the beach. He always loved the beach. Duke was swimming and I was watching James while he was playing with his favourite toy boat. One second I turned away to check on my husband and the next, my son...our son...he was gone. We searched everywhere for him. We went to the police and he was reported missing for a week before...before..."

"Before his body was found," Duke says for her. His voice is just as brittle as his wife's. "He was found in a ditch, like a piece of trash, three days dead and wrapped in plastic."

The silence that fills the room is almost suffocating. Tears are streaming down Audrey's cheeks now and she will not dare look her husband or her lover in the eye. Duke's jaw is clenched and his own tears begin to fall from his burning eyes. Nathan's eyes are only just beginning to burn but not with the anger he bore earlier. He has never seen either of his lovers look so vulnerable.

"William," he growls. "You told me your son died of cancer."

Duke's jaw clenches. "William *is* a cancer."

Audrey continues. "The bastard fled the police before they could smoke him out. We kept waiting, and waiting, and waiting for them to find him but he was nowhere to be found. He was always running, like the coward he is. After a year, they found nothing. It was like they'd given up on us; on our son. That's when we decided to take the matter into our own hands. We had no other choice than to come back to contract killing. It was the only way we could get to him. We searched everywhere for him but eventually, we managed to track him down. That's how we ended up here, in Haven."

"And then we met you," Duke adds. "When we found out that you were a cop, we panicked but then we found out that you were after William too."

For a moment, Nathan struggles to find his own voice. It isn't until he tastes salt in his open mouth that he realizes that he, too, has been crying.

"So," he finally says. His voice is shaking now. "That's what this was all about? You were *using* me?"

"No!" Audrey jumps.

"You brought me into your lives, into your home, *into your fucking bed*, just so you could get to the man who killed your son?"

"It wasn't like that!" Duke shouts.

"What *was* it like then, Duke, or whoever you are?!"

"Yes, we'll admit to using you to get closer to William but that doesn't mean we never loved you."

Nathan huffs. "*Loved* me? You never *loved* me!"

"That's not true!" Audrey bursts. "All that time we shared together, Nathan, that was as real to us as it was to you!"

"You would have left me to hang and dry once you found William!"

The Crockers are left speechless and cannot look their mutual lover in the eye. The gaze they share is what breaks Nathan's heart.

"You've found him, haven't you?"

Their silence is their answer. Nathan slams his fist onto the table and marches towards the door. Duke chases after him, calling his name. Audrey is too weak to even stand up. Instead, she buries her head in her arms and bursts into tears.

"Nathan," Duke calls. "Nate, please hear us out!"

He reaches out for him, only to be slapped away. Nathan stops and points to Duke. "Don't," he says through gritted teeth. "Don't call me that. I don't want to hear another word from your smart mouth for as long as I live."

"But if you could just listen..."

"No! I've heard enough."

"Then tell me something: how do *you* know about William?"

"I'm a cop, Duke, it's what I do."

Duke shakes his head and steps closer. "No," he growls. "There's something else to it, isn't there? Something more, right? Otherwise, why would you have his files at home instead of

your office where they belong?”

Nathan stiffens for a moment and sighs heavily. “You said in your story that the cops couldn’t get their hands on William, right?”

“Right.”

“Well, there’s a reason for that. Your son wasn’t the first kid he’s killed and I know that he isn’t the last. Not too long after he moved into Haven, a nine-year-old girl was found wrapped in plastic, just like James was in your story. William killed her and got away with it.”

“How did he get away with it?”

“Same way he got away with killing James. He’s smart. He knows exactly what to do with the evidence when he’s done his business and he knows how to charm people into thinking he’s just the guy next door who made a terrible mistake that’s really sorry for. I know how dangerous he is and I have been looking for a way to put him behind bars for ages, only my team won’t help me.”

“So *you* have to find him.”

Nathan hangs his head and nods. Duke takes a step closer. Just close enough to reach for his face and kiss him because he wants to. Gods, he wants to.

“You can’t catch him on your own, Nathan.”

“At least when I do, it’ll be through *honest* work.”

The implication feels like a knife in Duke’s heart.

“I love you both,” Nathan continues, though weakly. “But you used me and you represent everything that I stand against. I can’t forgive that. I’m sorry.”

Before Nathan can take one step away, Duke is quick to grab him by the wrist and pull him close. The other man wriggles out of his grasp only to be wrestled against the wall and pinned back by a forceful kiss. He can taste the salt of their tears on his tongue. Nathan only responds for a brief moment before pushing Duke away from him.

“Don’t you ever touch me again.”

With that, Nathan marches out the door and slams it shut. Duke stands frozen and begs for his lover to come back but he never does. Eventually, he gathers enough strength to return to his wife. Audrey is still sobbing into her arms. She only manages to lift her head when she feels her husband’s hand on her shoulder. He holds her until they are both out of tears.

They are all alone now.

It's Not Me, It's You

Nathan doesn't watch the Crockers anymore. He doesn't watch them when they're eating, sleeping, cooking, cleaning, or making love. When he sees them in the neighbourhood or in town, he simply passes by them without so much as a look. They may well be ghosts to him. He almost wishes they were.

I don't love you, he recites. I don't want you. I don't need you. I don't miss you.

He remembers what he stands for and what they stand for. He remembers the story that they told him. He remembers the monsters they were and the monsters they are. He remembers what monsters do and where they belong. He remembers what he does to monsters like them. He remembers what he *has* done to them. He remembers how good it felt to be with them. He would give anything to forget. Had he not been suspended, he would have easily found a way to distract himself from his thoughts; shoot something, kill something, *do* something, anything. Anything to forget. Forget him. Forget her. Forget them. He tries drinking. That doesn't work. He tries online dating. That doesn't work. He tries running for miles. That doesn't work. He tries meeting people at the bar. That doesn't work. He tries punching a hole into the wall. That doesn't work. Nothing works. Nothing helps.

The only thing that comes close to helping is crying.

I do love you. God help me, I love you!

Work is slow for the Crockers. They know why but neither of them will say it. Duke will not let his wife see him cry and Audrey will not let her husband see her cry. They've done enough crying and they will not discuss it. Neither of them will dare. There is no time to discuss it, after all, as they have more important matters to attend to than a quarrel with an ex-lover.

William has to go.

They find his address and arrange to "casually" bump into him. Once they do, one or the other will strike up a conversation that will lead to an invitation to dinner. When he accepts, they will set up their trap. Duke will cook up a magnificent dinner that they will never have while Audrey will lace a drink with Rohypnol and give it to the bastard. As soon as he is passed out, the Crockers will drag him down into the basement, where all of their weapons are waiting for him, and they will do whatever they like to him when he wakes up. He is likely to last for at least three days before he finally dies.

"Good," Audrey says. "I want him to suffer."

Duke holds her hand. "I know, love, I do too."

He does, really he does, but his thoughts turn to Nathan.

“Audrey, do you really want this?”

She frowns. “Of course, I want this! I’ve wanted this since the moment James was found. Haven’t you?”

“Of course I have. Believe me, I have, only…”

“Only…?”

“It won’t bring him back.”

She nods. Her grip tightens around his hand and her thumb traces his wedding ring. “I know,” she says. “But if it will stop him from destroying another family, we’ll at least have done something.”

On Monday, they find him on 27 Shawshank Ave. On Tuesday, they record when he leaves his house in the morning and when he returns in the afternoon. On Wednesday, they follow him throughout the day and record his schedule and whereabouts. On Thursday, they find his favourite places to buy food and drink and seek out children. On Friday, they bump into him at the marketplace.

Neither of them spot Nathan.

They are out shopping, at least they say that they are, when Audrey’s hand “accidentally” brushes against a well-known stranger’s, as they both reach for the same apple.

“Silly me,” she giggles. That’s yours, isn’t it?”

The stranger looks up at her with cold eyes and a warm smile. “No, go ahead.”

“Oh, I couldn’t.”

“I insist.”

Eventually, she takes the apple and sniffs it. “Thank you. This will be great with a pork belly.”

He raises an eyebrow. “That’s a challenging meal to make. Are you a chef?”

“No, but my husband is. He’s an excellent cook. Oh, there he is. Eric!”

Duke approaches his wife with a kiss on the cheek. “Find anything, Em?”

“Yes, I have. I’ve got some apples for tonight and it seems I’ve made a new friend on the way. This is… I’m sorry, I didn’t catch your name.”

“William.”

Nathan tries to ignore the Crockers at the market. He also tries to ignore William. This proves more difficult when he sees all three of them together.

They are at the fruit stall, collecting apples and making small talk. The Crockers can't abide small talk, that much he knows. William talks and talks and they smile and nod. Nathan has to plant his feet to keep from saving them the trouble. The devil on his left shoulder tells him to run and tackle the bastard, beat him, break him, make them watch. The angel on his right shoulder tells him to stay where he is and let them deal with it themselves. They'll know how. He can tell by the way they look at him that they'll know how. Audrey throws her head back in laughter as if cackling. Duke shakes the prick's hand as though he could break it. William only smiles.

Stay away from them, you son of a bitch.

Nathan turns away and returns to his errands the moment he feels Duke's eyes on him.

The Crockers only say that they are still fairly new to Haven. William talks about this and that, where to go and what to see. Eventually, they invite him to a housewarming dinner.

They ignore both Nathan watching them until they don't anymore.

He is pretending not to see them but they knew that he's been watching. Duke pretends to shrug him off and promises to meet his wife home. Audrey pretends to need one more thing before they're done for the day.

She finds him hiding behind the fish stall. When she does, he plants his feet.

"Fancy meeting *you* here, Nathan," she says with a bright smile. "I thought you'd be out catching predators at this day and time."

"Not today," he says plainly. "I was suspended."

"Suspended?"

"For a month."

"Whatever for?"

Nathan chokes on his words. "I...I shot someone."

Audrey's eyes widen. "Did you, now? Interesting. What did you shoot them for, Nathan? Was it in self-defense or was it for something that they did? Was it a victim or a perpetrator?"

"Both."

Audrey raises an eyebrow and tilts her head.

"He was a junkie. He broke into a family's home to get his next fix."

“Why did you shoot him, Nathan?”

Nathan chokes on his answer: “The family he burgled had children. I shot him because he could have hurt a child.”

Audrey smiles. It sends an icy rush through Nathan’s body.

“Very interesting,” she says. “I suppose we’re not so different, after all.”

“I am nothing like you.”

“Don’t be so sure. I heard you talking to my husband about James when you came over for dinner. ‘It makes me want to kill something, anything, just to bring back some sort of balance.’ Isn’t that what you said?”

“Stop it.”

“Don’t tell me that you didn’t feel a sense of relief when you pulled the trigger.”

He bites his lip and stands his ground when she takes just a step closer. If he opens his mouth or takes a step back or forth, he’ll only give her what she wants.

“Duke and I are having William over for dinner tomorrow night. You’re welcome to join us.”

He wants to tell her that he’d rather rot. He wants to grab her by her pretty little neck and choke the life out of her. He wants to make love to her in the middle of the market and make everyone watch. Still, he stands his ground and says nothing. She turns away with a smile.

William arrives at precisely six-o’clock sharp. He holds a bottle of red wine in one hand and opens the other to greet Audrey with a hug. Duke is in the kitchen preparing what looks to be a seafood chowder. They share jokes and stories and are all smiles when someone opens a bottle. Duke and Audrey share a secret smile before they pour a small dose of white powder into William’s glass. Nathan is the only one who sees it.

He shouldn’t be watching them. He shouldn’t feel jealous. He shouldn’t wish he were there with them. If anything, he should be enjoying his own dinner and company. *Yes*. He promises himself that he’ll ignore the Crockers and William. He’ll pretend that he doesn’t have a clue what they plan to do with them. He’ll put on a movie at the highest volume and enjoy his own time with a pizza and a beer. He’ll tell his own department that he knew nothing of the murder next door. He’ll pretend that he never had anything to do with the Crockers. He’ll move on with his life as if nothing had ever happened.

Yes, he thinks. That’s exactly what I’ll do.

Nathan turns away from the Crockers’ house and rummages through his pockets. His phone should be buried in there somewhere. Soon, he manages to dig it out but is startled by something else.

Tap. Tap. Tap. Taptaptap...

Something small and hard falls to the ground and rolls its way under the window: a small, white, glistening orb. Nathan kneels down and gingerly takes it in his hand. His throat begins to swell. It is the pearl he'd kept from his dinner with the Crockers.

The best night of his life.

Suddenly, such a little thing means the world to him. In the little gem in the palm of his hand, he sees everything he'd shared with the Crockers as if he were staring into a crystal ball. He sees the day they moved in, the day he welcomed them to the neighbourhood, the day he first kissed her, the day he first kissed him, the day he first made love to them, and all the days that came of them. Above all things, he sees the moment he knew that he loved them and that they loved him.

The Crockers are sharing drinks now. Nathan can see them still from the window. He sees William too and feels his stomach tighten when he does.

Audrey doesn't see William switching his spiked drink with hers.

Nathan runs to the door.

Kill Me Goodnight

The door crashes open. Both the Crockers and William feel their hearts jump, as no polite knocking or quaint invitation precedes the man who rushes through their house. Nathan quickly knocks the glass from Audrey's glass, letting it shatter on the ground and charges at William. He can just hear that delicious crack of the jaw when he throws the first punch. Nathan has William on the ground with his hands clapped around the bastard's throat. He could smash his skull in if he wanted to. The Crockers' voices are faint against the sound of William choking.

"You stay away from them," he growls. "Do you hear me? Stay away from them!"

It isn't until Nathan feels a heavy hand on his shoulder that he stops. He turns to see Duke seething with a wine bottle in hand. William chokes out a fragile cry for help, as Duke raises his hand and nods to Nathan. It's a risky move, but he nods back. In a moment of weakness, Nathan allows William to break free and wrestle him to the ground. Duke smashes the bottle over William's head.

William falls to the ground like a stone.

Nathan nearly suffocates under William's weight until Audrey rolls the unconscious man off of him and Duke offers his hand. His limbs are weak and his body shaking. It is only when he takes the other man's hand that he feels his strength returning to him. He can feel his fragile body begging for more. Against his better judgment, he collapses against the other man and holds him close. Four strong arms surround him in a close embrace that he never wants to let go of.

"He was trying to poison you," he says. Only now does he feel the weight of tears in the back of his throat. "I saw it. He knew what you were going to do. I don't know how, but he did and he switched his drink with Audrey's."

Two arms—Audrey's arms—loosen around him. Nathan lifts his head from Duke's shoulder. Through a vision blurred by tears, Nathan sees her looking at him with wide eyes.

"I had to stop him," he continues. "I know this wasn't part of your plan, but I had to...I couldn't let him..."

"Ssh," Audrey coos and rests a delicate hand on his cheek. Duke's hand joins hers. "It's alright, Nathan."

Nathan shakes his head. "No, it isn't. It's not alright. I could have stopped him sooner. I could have stopped you from letting him into your house. I could have..."

Audrey stops Nathan's mouth with a kiss. His tears fall onto her cheeks as well as his own.

"You saved me," she whispers against his lips. "I'm alright."

Nathan kisses Audrey again, desperately this time, and moves to kiss Duke.

“I’m sorry,” he whispers against his lips. “I’m so sorry.”

“There’s nothing to be sorry for, Nate.”

But he can’t stop apologizing. until all that lingers on his lips are slips and slurs of “I’ll never forgive myself,” “I’ll never leave you again,” or “I love you.” The Crockers have to drown out his sobs with kisses until he can taste their tears mingling with his own. He stays in their arms for what could be forever.

Until they remember the mess they’ve made.

“Come on,” Audrey says weakly. “We better clean that up.”

Nathan looks back and forth between his lovers and the body on the ground. “I’ll help you.”

William wakes with a heavy head. For a moment, all that can be seen is darkness and a row of three dark shadows before him until a white light blinds him.

“Good morning,” a woman’s voice shirts through gritted teeth. “Did you sleep well, William?”

All that escapes William’s lips are lazy moans and groans. His tongue does not cooperate with his teeth and his lips are numb. When he just barely manages to open his eyes, he sees three people before him. A tall, long-faced man that he recognizes as Eric with a knife in his hand, another soft-eyed man who he doesn’t recognize at all with a gun in his hand, and between them is a shorter blonde beauty that he recognizes as Emily with something clutched tightly to her chest that he cannot quite make out. He is too dizzy

“We were hoping you’d wake up soon,” the long-faced man says with a cold smile. “You missed dinner. I hope you don’t mind but we’ve invited an extra guest. He’d like to apologize for being so late, though.”

The strange, soft-eyed man’s lips curl into a cold smile. Officer Wuornos.

“I’m sure you’ll recognize Nathan,” the blonde beauty says. “Do you recognize us, William? My name is Audrey Crocker and this is my husband, Duke Crocker.”

William looks between the couple from before. They are little else but blurs to him until she takes a firm step towards him. Clutched to her chest turns out to be a picture frame and in it, now forced under his nose, is the picture of a child. A little boy with her hair and his eyes.

“Do you recognize him?” she asks.

“His name was James,” her husband says. “You killed him.”

William only stares at the picture of the little boy. Before he can get a good look, his face is struck with three hard cracks, each one from different fists: one from Duke, one from Audrey,

and one from Nathan. He has to spit out what looks like a cup of blood and a broken tooth before he can speak.

“S’not true,” he slurs. “I’ve never seen that boy in my life.”

Nathan shakes his head. “No,” he says. “You have, though I’m sure you’ve forgotten him among all the others.”

“Others?”

“We know who you are, William, and we’ve been searching for you for a long, long, *long* time.”

William shakes his head. “You can’t have...that’s impossible. I know you, officer, you can’t have known these...”

“But I do. I know them very well, in fact, more than you ever will. That’s why I’m here.”

Nathan takes a step back and looks to the Crockers with a nod. They both nod in return. When they turn around, William struggles in his seat, only to find that his wrists and ankles are tied to the chair. The ropes dig into his skin and appear to tighten with every struggle.

“Don’t move,” Audrey warns and sits astride him. She holds a syringe in her left hand and a chunk of his hair in her right. “This will only hurt for a moment.”

There is a deep sting on William’s neck. He screams, but before long his voice begins to fade. The needle has hit his voice box and filled it with bleach. He can no longer speak, shout, or scream for help.

Duke smiles and pats Audrey on the shoulder when she’s done. “Good job, love. What do you want to do with him now?”

Audrey returns her husband's smile and looks up at him. “I want to play a game.”

The game in question is something similar to Russian roulette. Take a device, any device, and take a chance with it. Duke starts with his old switchblade and moves onto his best kitchen knives. Audrey takes her turn with one drop of a different household poison at a time, from acetaminophen to zyrtec. Nathan simply watches with a smile on his face. He finds himself fascinated by the way his skin pales against the pretty ruby red of his blood, which now decorates the faces of his lovers. It strikes him as funny that just two weeks ago the thought of seeing them both like this would have made him sick, but now...now, he can just see Audrey in white and Duke in black, all in red and all for him. They’ve never looked so beautiful.

William’s head hangs loosely from his body. The Crockers stand covered in his blood and panting as if they’d just made love before him.

“Amazing,” Duke pants and lays a hand on his wife’s shoulder. “How do you feel, love?”

“Wonderful,” she said. “But I think we should leave the rest for Nathan.”

Nathan's heart leaps at the very mention of his name. The Crockers turn to their him and approach him. Duke takes a clean knife—his best knife—from his nearby collection and places it gingerly in his hand. Once the instrument is wrapped tightly in his palm, he feels Duke's lips on his left cheek and then Audrey's on his right. He can smell the blood on them.

"Nathan," Audrey says. "You've wanted this for as long as we have."

Nathan shakes his head. "I can't..."

"You can," Duke urges. "We've done our job, now it's your turn. Finish him."

Finish him. Finish him. Finish him. The words echo in Nathan's brain and they almost sound like a chorus. *Finish him. Finish him. Finish him.* He takes his first step past his lovers and towards his enemy. *Finish him. Finish him. Finish him.* The knife almost feels as if it's a part of his hand. *Finish him. Finish him. Finish him.* Before a second thought can slip into his mind, Nathan takes William's hair by the scalp and swiftly runs the blade across his neck. *Finish him. Finish him. Finish him.* The blood that showers him almost feels like a baptism.

William shakes and quakes and then falls still. Nothing left of him remains but a body. It's over.

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