

## Chapter 10: One of Us

Emma S. flipped her phone to vibrate as Romero kept calling it. She was done with being on the phone while wrapped in only a towel and shivering. He could wait. She wiped the remaining steam off the bathroom mirror and started getting dressed. Before she pulled her right bra strap in place, she ran her fingers briefly over the scar just below her collarbone on that side. It was darker-colored than the rest of her, roughly quarter-sized, indented, with puckered skin around the edges. A bullet scar. She's been hit four times that horrific night almost five years ago. The last shot pierced her Kevlar vest at a closer range, leaving a nasty flesh wound that had taken a month to fully heal.

She pulled on blue jeans, a white button-down shirt, and her weapon holster belt, shoving her gun in its holder and then slipping her badge-on-a-chain around her neck. Her hair was frizzing as it dried, mostly a lost cause, but she ran the hair dryer over it all the same.

*This is not going to be pretty. Not one fucking bit. How did my life get this fucked up this quick, so it has to be between my birth family and this case?! I knew this would happen; I just didn't want to think about it.*

She tapped "Answer."

"Spoole."

"Do you take me for an idiot, Agent Spoole?!!" Romero ranted.

"No, I don't."

“So you kept conveniently forgetting to tell me you and Norma Bates are sisters? You expect me to believe that?! Since when can you lead an investigation involving your family like this? Law Enforcement 101: conflict of--”

“YES! I KNOW!” she snapped. “Conflict of interest. It’s not how you think it is, Alex! She’s my biological sister, but I just saw her for the first time in my whole life the night Summers attacked her! I was adopted at birth and had no clue I had a sister! She had no clue I even existed! None of them did; no one ever told them about me! You think this is easy for me, or that I planned any of it? I sure as fuck didn’t!”

Romero was at a temporary loss for words. Finally: “How do you know for sure she’s your sister?” Somewhere in his mind it briefly registered she’d called him “Alex.”

“I had our DNA run. They’re nearly perfect matches. My listed birth parents on my adoption papers and her birth parents are one and the same. There’s no mistaking it.”

“This is crazy, Emma. You don’t mind if I call you ‘Emma,’ do you? I can’t imagine what you’re going through with all this. I’m amazed you can totally focus on the job like you have. Not many people could. It’s got to be a shock.”

She smiled, her eyes welling up a little. It was definitely nice to hear those sympathetic words from someone. Even from Sheriff Romero.

“I throw myself into work in order to deal with things in my personal life. Though obviously this one’s caught up with me anyway. And no, I don’t mind if you call me that when we’re off duty. Of course, it looks like you’ll be getting some of your wish: I’ll be out of here and headed back to Seattle or San Francisco soon. Until a new SAIC’s assigned, I’ll hand over the reigns to Rivera here in White Pine Bay.”

“I never said I wanted that, Emma. No offense to Agent Rivera, but he’s not the law officer you are. Not even close. Even though part of me hates to admit it: you’re needed here. I can tell you were put in charge for a reason. It’s probably not the best idea to keep talking about this over the phone. Could you meet me somewhere? Say at that coffee shop next to your motel? You’re all staying at the King’s Motel, right?”

“Yeah, that’s the one. Good idea. I need to make one stop first. I’ll see you there in about an hour, all right?”

“All right. See you then.”

“See you then..Alex.” Saying his first name felt odd; she normally had to know a fellow law officer much longer before getting this informal. In the back of her mind was a small nagging thought it was a bad idea, but she brushed it aside.

She ended the call, put on her coat, grabbed her purse and evidence gear, and headed out for the Seafairer Motel.

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“Norma, have you been crying? What happened? Did Romero or Shelby threaten you? ‘Cause if they did, I’ll tear them a new one!”

The first thing Emma S. noticed in Room 4 was not the journal but her sister’s red, puffy eyes.

“No, they didn’t do anything like that. I hit my hand on the bed frame earlier. It hurt like hell. But I’ll be fine.”

“Uh-huh.” Emma S. wasn’t convinced that was the whole truth, but she let it go. She snapped on a pair of blue latex gloves and picked the journal off the bed, putting it under a table lamp and then spending a while paging through it slowly with a pair of long-tipped tweezers used for such purposes.

“Holy shit! You guys..this cracks the whole case wide open, gives us enough evidence to search the rooms, enough to maybe even ID more suspects from these drawings!”

Agent Spooler bagged and sealed the journal as evidence before stashing it in her shoulder bag and tossing the gloves.

“So, what did Romero and Shelby say they wanted, exactly?”

“Just to introduce themselves and make sure everything was okay here. Though I wouldn’t be surprised if they were snooping around, in reality. Sheriff Romero thought I was you when he first saw me.”

Emma S. burst out laughing, “Oh my god!! That’s fuckin’ hilarious! Good grief, it’s not like we’re identical. Typical men! Lucky thing our hair colors are different. They probably *really* couldn’t tell us apart otherwise! Oh, no offense, Norman.”

Norman smirked, “None taken.”

Em was still trying to get her laughter under control. “I’m going to bust his chops about that when I see him. It’s too funny to let that opportunity pass!”

Norma laughed a little too, but she briefly thought her sister’s laughter had a little hysterical edge to it. “I’m really sorry I told them we’re sisters.” she said. “I wasn’t thinking. Like I said, it slipped out. I should’ve known better!”

Emma S. put her arm around Norma's shoulders. "Hey, don't beat yourself up. Don't worry about it. So I'm going to go back to hunting the rest of this trafficker ring down in San Francisco or up in Seattle. It's not that big a deal; they're all connected anyway. Every one of them we catch there, the more it weakens their nasty little business venture everywhere else. Including here."

Her mind flipped back to the investigation, "My squad's going to need to search the whole motel, comb it for evidence--as soon as I can get a warrant in the morning. I'm going to have my partner do that, since now I technically can't be directly involved."

"How long will that take?"

"It could be as little as a week, but probably more since they'll need to go through all 12 rooms plus the office."

"What're we supposed to do about earning a living in the meantime, Emma? I sunk almost everything I had into this motel, and we don't exactly have a lot left over!"

"I'll have Agent Rivera bring you some forms to fill out so you can get some lost-income compensation. That moves at the speed of government efficiency, but it's better than nothing."

"Thank you, Emma."

"No--thank *you*. Norma, we'd still be treading water with this investigation if it weren't for you finding this journal."

Norman wanted to know, “When it’s all over, will you be back here? Or will you go back home?” He and his mother were having the same conflicting thoughts: they wanted to spend some time with her, but they’d have to be VERY careful she didn’t catch them, didn’t find out the truth of their secret love..

“Would you two like me to come back here? I plan on taking some time off...”

“It sounds great. I’d like it if we could keep getting to know each other.” Norma was willing to take the risk. After all, it wouldn’t be much of a risk as long as they pretended..as long as they kept them a deep secret..

“I’d like that too. You’re our family too, after all.” Norman added.

*She isn’t like Dylan. Or our parents. Or Caleb for that matter. She’s blameless. She didn’t ask for any of this. She only wants the best for us; she’s proven that. It makes her one of us. We’ve got the same blood, but it’s more than that..*

As if sensing her thoughts, Emma S. looked her in the eyes. “Norma, I know you’ve been through a lot. This is still your chance to start over, and I’m going to do everything I can to make sure you can do that. I think at this point, you need a friend more than you need a sister; am I right?”

“Yes. You are. Emma, I trust you. And normally I don’t trust anyone. But I’d trust you with our lives.”

*Even though we’re always going to have to lie to her.*

Emma S’ cell phone chimed with a text: Romero: “I’m here. Where are you?”

“I can’t leave him alone for 45 minutes!” she said with exasperation. “It’s the sheriff; I have to go. You two get some sleep. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

This time, first Norma, then Norman hugged her.

*My god, these two are like magnets. The way I’m drawn to them. I can’t leave them; I don’t want to leave them. Not now, not ‘til this case is all over. Maybe not even then. I owe them, though I’m not even totally sure for what reason. How can they have such an effect on me? Why do I feel like I’m exactly where I’m supposed to be, where I should have always been? Maybe there doesn’t have to be a reason..*

Once again, Emma S. took off driving into the night, leaving her sister and nephew. She always seemed to be doing that, pulled away by her never-ending obligation and quest for justice, for protecting the innocent and punishing the guilty. On some level, she looked forward to a time when she didn’t have to keep running off.

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Romero was sitting in a corner booth, sipping black java in the all-night coffee shop. Before he could say hello, Agent Spoole dropped into the seat across from him.

“Just so we’re clear: it’s me, not Norma! You really mistook her for me?!” she was smirking, joshing him. She couldn’t help the laugh that escaped from her lips yet again.

He didn’t appreciate her making fun of him. Yet the sound of her laughter was delightful all the same.

“It was dark! Except for those halogen lights on the motel porch, and you know those aren’t that great. You two definitely look related; anyone could see that!” he said in his defense.

“Okay, I’ll give you a pass on that--this one time. It’s very bizarre, you know? The fact I have a sister...I grew up an only child. No, I guess you don’t know. No one could, unless they’ve been in the same situation.”

“You really had no idea, did you?”

“Not in the slightest.”

The waitress came around. Emma S. ordered coffee and a bagel with cream cheese. “Make sure it’s real cream cheese, not that light cream cheese crap.” she added.

When her order came, she mixed cream in her coffee and sipped at it, looking at him over the top of the cup.

“So, what now? Where are we going to go from here?”

“It’s complicated, Emma. I’ve got a lot of loyalties in this town, loyalties that don’t always run parallel to the law, you know what I mean?”

“I figured as much. Have you been watching C-SPAN or the local legislature broadcasts at all? It looks like marijuana has a great chance of becoming legal for both medical and recreational use in this state. We’ll see after the elections next month.”



“I’ve thought about that. It’d change things dramatically. This town would have to adapt or die. But getting back to the matter at hand: I really had no idea something as bad as what Keith was involved with was going on here. I knew he had his problems, but nothing like this. Since you..and your task force..are here, it puts me in a tough position to know what the right thing really is.”

She scrutinized him for several seconds, then: “My god: You’re a cop’s kid too, aren’t you?”

“How did you know?”

“It’s written all over you. Always wanting to both please daddy and do more than he ever did. Prove you’re more than worthy of the badge.”

He nodded, “Yes. My dad was sheriff here before me.”

“My dad was with the Toledo P.D. for over 30 years, made L.T. when I was 13. Always tough, isn’t it? Trying to do the right thing and wondering if our dads would think it was the right thing.”

“I think my dad’s idea of ‘the right thing’ would run pretty counter to what the Bureau thinks is the right thing. Anyway, as far as this supposed sex-trafficking ring that was going on at the Seafairer: what do you want me to do? I’m at your disposal, even if you’re in another city.”

She smiled, “Do you have a history with Maggie Summers? Then get it out of her: who Summers’ third partner was. As soon as she gives that up, get in touch with the D.A., have them hammer out whatever plea deal they come out with. As long as she gives that name, she has a good chance of getting a reduced sentence, plus parole.”

“I will. I promise. I’ll do whatever it takes to make her see reason.”

He watched as she noshed on her bagel. She must work out if she eats like that.

“Having coffee and bagels at 1am with an FBI agent... Seems like a weirder first date than I ever could have thought of.”

Emma S. laughed once more, “Really? If this is your idea of a ‘date’, then your social life is even more pitiful than mine.”

“Anyway, I’ll do what I can with Maggie. And I’ll do what ever I need to with Agent Rivera, all right?”

“I’m glad to hear that.”

They parted ways outside the coffee shop. He watched as Agent Spoole scrolled through the names in her smartphone, stopped on one, then shook her head slightly and closed it out.

“Until next time then.”

They shook hands as colleagues. “I’ll be back in town when this is all over. I’ll let you know. I’ll be in touch.”

Agent Spoole was halfway across the motel parking lot when an arm seized her around the neck, trying to choke her. Her training kicked in. She jammed her elbow hard into her attacker’s rib cage, knocking the wind out of him, grabbed his forearm, threw him over her shoulder to the ground. He grabbed at her ankle, knocking her hard to the ground, her gun scattering away as she pulled it out. She ripped her

retractable riot baton out of her belt, snapped it to its full length, slammed it into him over and over until he was still.

She came to, seeing the bloodied body. “Oh shit! Oh god! Oh no! “ She turned on her walkie, “I’ve got an officer down! I need EMS, right now!”

Deputy Shelby was unconscious, bleeding from his head. Beyond elbowing him, she couldn’t remember any of it.