

Chapter 39: Full Circle

When Norman looked into her eyes, the lights were out. Nothing but dark emptiness. He approached her slowly. "Give me the gun, Aunt Emma." His mother started down the stairs but stopped once she'd stepped over Caleb's body. Best to let Norman bring her back to them. Norman pulled the Glock slowly out of Em's hands, needing to tug until she surrendered it. It was heavier than he'd assumed, and it briefly occurred to him he'd never held a gun until now.

She handles this thing like it weighs nothing, he thought as he placed the weapon on the side table in the hallway, vaguely paranoid it might randomly go off. It didn't. That now-familiar burning-electric-shock caused Aunt Emma's eyes to focus and return to their usual life. Their focus also fell on the long-ago tormenter of her sister, now very dead and face-down on the carpeted stairs, bleeding into them.

"He was my brother too," her voice was still a monotone, "I killed my own brother." And she was now becoming fully aware of that, as the last of the black-out receded.

Norma came down the last three steps and closed the gap between them, put her arms around her sister's rigid body and hugged her close. "He was horrible, Emma. He made my life hell when we were growing up, and it went on until he moved out. He would've tried to again...would've tried to destroy us all..."

Drawing back from the embrace, Em spoke the four words she could read all over Norma's face and could hear unspoken in all the rest she'd said. "Did he rape you?"

Barely perceptible, Norma gave the smallest of nods. On some level, Emma had already known that. She wouldn't entertain certain any possibility tied to it, couldn't allow herself to. She didn't want to know, refused to let it enter her conscious mind.

"Oh, god Norma! You've got a gun powder burn!" Emma noticed the blackened road-burn-like wound on Norma's cheek, the residue burned into her skin that was turning red around the edges. "I'm so sorry..oh god I didn't know what I was doing! Norman, go get the first aid kit!"

Blinking back tears of remorse, she tugged Norma's hand and had her sit down on the couch, taking the kit from Norman who'd grabbed it in a rush from the downstairs bathroom. Norma winced as she swabbed it with hydrogen peroxide. "The residue'll work its way out, and it'll heal on its own. Just don't scratch or pick at it. It'll itch like hell after a few days, but leave it alone." Em stopped, short of breath, unable to stop the tears from running down her face.

"I'll be fine," Norma gathered her against her once more, her sister's head cradled in her lap for a long moment. "It's okay. You were only protecting me. Like both of you always do. Always will." Norman sat beside her, and his mother put one arm around him. The outside light was starting to fade before any of them moved from holding each other. An odd, cool calmness washed over Norma. She began to realize the knot of fear and pain she'd been carrying around for so many years, no thanks to her brother. It was gone now, along with his existence.

"You know what we have to do," Her voice was steady and rational.

"Mm..yeah, I know." Emma murmured, as she'd been half-dozing. Damn, she was so tired, and her head hurt. She'd love nothing more than to go upstairs and curl up in Norma's bed, sleep for hours, with these two wrapped around her. She stood up slowly, trying to defog her brain, "Okay, c'mon Norman." she motioned him to follow her, "We're gonna go down to the basement and get the tarps from the herb garden and wrap him up."

"We just finished planting it a couple weeks ago! What if there's another storm tonight?" Norma complained, crossing her arms under her breasts, irritated. Even in

death, Caleb had to ruin something good that she held dear. She and Norman had spent countless hours on that garden, first getting the planter put together and then everything growing. She prided herself on cooking with fresh herbs, and they needed to protect it by tying the heavy plastic tarps over the garden during rainstorms.

"Oh Mother! I'll go buy you new ones in the morning! Right now we've got this mess to get rid of, and fast." Norman wanted that body out of their house, now. "Uh...what are we gonna do with it after we wrap it up?"

Emma had been musing through possible solutions to that one. The stickiest part would be the ballistics from her weapon, the many ways of tracing the bullet path right back to her Glock, even with the exit wound it had made. She'd started clicking through the feeds from the security camera outside, on Norma's laptop that had them pulled up and was in its usual spot on the coffee table. The high-definition live shot of a beat-up brown 1970s van came on the screen, parked behind the motel building. The one Norman had described. Parked during the one rare time none of them had been watching the feed. Norma had spent a chunk on an even more sophisticated set of security cameras; images of the parking lot, motel, and highway looked like you could reach right into them.

One of the simplest solutions for them and the messiest for the White Pine Bay cops came to mind. "We're gonna put him in the driver's seat of his van, make it look like he got shot, lost control, and crashed into the bay. The water'll wash away the evidence that could be traced back to us. If it's ever found, though it won't be."

Three more pairs of those black evidence-gathering gloves were unearthed. Norman spread out the two large green plastic tarps on the floor in front of the staircase. Moving a recently-dead body was not nearly as easy as it always looked in every crime show on TV. Heavy and slack, requiring pulling and lifting from all three. Emma was only grateful it was too early for rigor mortis to set in. It would've made

the job ten times tougher. After a lot of maneuvering, some arguing, and some swearing (mostly from her), they got the tarps wrapped securely around it so any seeping blood would be caught, securing it closed with rope. Untying, unwrapping, and placing it would be the next major task at hand. Then came the immediate problem of what to do with the corpse until around two in the morning, when there were fewest chances of any passers-by seeing them carrying it down the stairs and into the van.

Norma gave the green plastic a shove with the toe of her shoe. "Causing so much trouble, even when he's dead." She grumbled. The empty calmness in her was starting to nag at one corner of her mind; she should be feeling more, shouldn't she? Her big brother had once been the one she'd run to, so many years ago, for solace away from their abusive father and absent mother. Then he'd betrayed her, destroyed her innocence and trust. It had taken so long, but it had finally come full circle for Caleb. Weird poetic justice, that the other sister he'd never know had blacked out and shot him. Norma's cool demeanor was becoming a growing concern for Norman, as he kept watching her closely during the whole grisly task.

He and Aunt Emma dragged the heavy thing to the inside front door and dropped it. Not like it was going anywhere, and not like they were expecting anyone to come up to the house. They'd see them long before, if that was the case. Norma seemed nearly in a sleepwalk as she moved to the kitchen, got out the chicken pieces she'd had marinating in a sauce made with fresh thyme, oregano, and rosemary from the garden. Norman followed her lead and started cutting up potatoes and carrots for roasting with it. They needed that familiar evening routine, badly. Em went to the fridge after, rummaging around until she found some leftover sandwich helpings they'd taken on a picnic recently.

"Will you at least put that on a plate?" Norma snapped when she saw it.

"What? I'm saving you one more dish to wash," Emma shot back, before biting into a mouthful of turkey and ham club sandwich. Seeing it, Norman grabbed a piece as well, finishing it off fast before going back to the chopping.

"I can't believe the two of you are *eating*, right after what just happened!"

"Mother." His voice was calm and serious. "It takes a lot of of us." Norman wiped his hands clean and went to her. "I don't know how to explain it, exactly." He slipped his arms around her waist from behind, kissing her ear, feeling her tense body relax by degrees against him. "But it's okay. I'm right here, Mother. It'll be fine."

She turned and kissed his cheek. "I don't know what I'd do without you. I love you more than anything, Norman."

Em had finished noshing and seated herself on one corner of the counter, only glad he was able to make her feel better. It would take time, but Norman was the one who would pull his beloved mother through this. Norma turned to her, "I'm sorry I yelled. This is...so much to take in...I need time.." She leaned over and washed her hands, "Put this in the oven, sweetie." Norman took the chicken in the baking dish and did as she said. Norma went to her sister and buried her face in her neck, her arms sliding around Emma's waist.

"I know," Em squeezed her back. "Hey," She pulled back to look in her eyes, "He got what was coming. You don't have to explain it, don't have to go into details. I see it in you, that pain. I always have. I realize that now. You can let it go now, Norma. He's never coming back."

Hours slipped by as if in a waking dream. They managed some semblance of a normal family evening, not darting so much as a glance towards the front door. The alarm sounding 2am went off on Norman's phone, when it was hardly believable that much time had passed. He gave a soft wordless complaint as his arm tightened

around Aunt Emma from behind. This time, he'd ended up between them with his mother spooning him tightly. Em got up first, pulling slowly free from his sleepy grasp. She'd gone to sleep in a navy blue sweatsuit, ready ahead of time. "C'mon," she urged them, "Get up and put on dark clothes. Let's get this over with."

The ancient van's keys had been located easy enough, in the pocket of Caleb's jacket before the last of the tarp was secured. Norman lifted up the middle of the corpse, while his mother and aunt grabbed an end each. Norma got the unpleasant task of backing down the stairs, moving as fast as she possibly could, wanting to let go of the gory thing quick. Caught blood had turned the green plastic dark and slippery on the inside, causing her gorge to start rising when the body slid around inside. Thankfully the outdoor lights weren't bright enough to show just how much red had slicked the plastic. It was probably Norman's and Emma's knot-tying and some pure dumb luck that no red droplets ended up on the stone stairs.

"What a dump! He lived in here, obviously!" Norman's tone was nothing more than disdainful. There was so much junk in the back they had to shove some of it aside to make room in the back. He also insisted on being the one to drive. He still had only a learner's permit and had only driven the Mercedes for practice, though this seemed an absurd thing to be concerned about. Two licensed drivers were with him in the van, after all. The lack of room required Norma to sit on Emma's lap, her being the smaller one made it the most practical. She grasped her sister's hands and pulled her arms around her. Norman holding her kept the shock and dread away, and Emma had nearly the same effect. None of them spoke much, and Norman parked the van at the top of a boat ramp on the outskirts of town, again time seeming to speed up.

Yanking at the corpse to get it out of the back, Norman almost dropped the whole thing to the ground before Aunt Emma managed to get out and grab one end of it. Norma scrambled out and stood shivering, rubbing her arms. Suddenly so cold despite her black lined jacket and the relatively mild spring witching hour. Then she snapped out of it, grabbed a handful of plastic with black-glove-covered hands and

helped hoist the body upright into the driver's seat. More pulling, untying, twisting, yanking followed - seeming to take hours. So weird how time kept speeding up and then slowing down. It was making her head swim. Norma wanted nothing more than for it to stop, for this to be over.

The ruined bloody tarps were cast into the back of the hoarder-messy van. Most of it was still wet, running in droplets. Em and Norman frantically wadded it up, careful not to let any reach the ground; even one tiny droplet could spell disaster, in terms of an investigation. If one were to ever happen...

Six glove-covered hands managed to get the body into a sitting position in the driver's seat. "Keep away from the blood! Don't get any on you, it'll make even more of a mess!" It had soaked all over Caleb's front by this point. Emma didn't have to remind the Norms of that fact, but she did all the same. After she pulled the seatbelt and fastened it over the corpse, Norman ran around to the passenger door, opened it, and reached in for the gear shift lever to put the van in neutral. Norma reached the door right behind him.

"Honey, don't!" She grabbed him by the wrist.

"Mother?"

"Let me," Norma yanked the lever, then pulled him close, her arm around his shoulders as they backed out. She slammed the door as the van started to roll slowly down the incline. The three of them pushed on the back of the van; a few steps was all it took before it rolled fast down the ramp and crashed into the water with a loud splash. They were still the only ones around to hear it. Norma clasped her sister's hand, pulling Norman close with her other arm and nuzzling against him. They were silent, watching as it sank into the black water, until the last ripple finally stilled.

"No one'll know about this." Emma was first to speak, "There's a way to make sure of that, though I sure as hell hate to do it. And what are we gonna tell Dylan?" Her last question was more to herself than to them.

"Do we even have to tell him anything?" Norma wanted nothing more than that horrid truth to follow Caleb into his watery grave. "What'll it accomplish, honestly?"

Norman added, "If it comes up, we'll tell him what Caleb did to Mother. Then he showed up, and we ran him out of town." He gave a shrug, "Easy. Doesn't have to be any more than that. He was more interested in how she could make it so they were never caught. "How can you 'make sure of it'?" He wanted to know. They were making the long trek back up Highway 88 back home. It would take more than an hour, walking. Norma wanted to know the same thing.

"There's someone in Washington I know, go way back with. I dated his now-former-son-in-law, years ago. That's another long story. But anyway, this lawyer guy's name's Burton Delaney. He used to be an advisor to President Kincaid, back before Kincaid was president though. Kincaid got involved in some bad shit way back when. I don't know the details, never wanted to know. Delaney and his 'associates' made it go away. Made anyone who might've talked 'go away,' if you see what I'm getting at."

The Norms' eyes widened as yes: they realized what she was getting at. After all this time, there was more to Aunt Emma than what was on the surface. Em went on,

"Anyway, Delaney's got his hands in all kinds of back room dealings in D.C., has for decades. He offered me a favor, whenever I really needed it. Anything, no matter how illegal. No questions asked. There's no expiration date. I never intended to cash it in." She looked hard at both of them, her eyes blazing in the light of their flashlight beams along the side of the road. "Now I'm going to. There's just one thing: he's

going to want the favor returned, at some future date. I won't have a choice, but I don't care."

"You'll do that?! Emma, that sounds really dangerous! What'll you have to do?!"
Norma couldn't keep the alarm from sounding in her voice.

"Yes, I'll do that, and have our other problems in this town dealt with. I don't know what I'll have to do in return. We'll jump off that bridge when we come to it."

It was after five in the morning when they returned to the Bates house. Norma stifled a yawn as she leaned against Norman and they trudged up the stairs. "I think we should have the house painted," she mused absently, wanting to distract herself from the uncertain future. "It does look dreary. Maybe a nice pale yellow to go with the motel..."

Norman dropped a soft kiss to her forehead, "Anything you want, Mother."

Exhausted, she dropped onto the couch and held her arms out to him. He eagerly folded himself into her arms, wanting to rest for just a little while before making breakfast. They would've fallen asleep if not for Em pulling an armchair close and tapping Delaney's private number in her phone. It was still the same one after so many years. She put it on speaker when that deep, deceptively fatherly-sounding voice answered,

"Agent Spoole. It's been a long time. To what do I owe this unexpected pleasure?"

"Burton." her voice was cool, guarded. "I'm here with my birth sister. Yes, I have one. Never mind that. We've got a couple of problems that need to go away. I'm cashing in that offer."

He was quiet for a second, "You do realize what you're agreeing to, don't you?"

She struggled to keep the tremor out of her voice, "Yes," Her eyes were locked with Norma's.

"All right, when can you meet me? We'll need to discuss the specifics in person. I'll get the next flight to Portland."

The unspoken acknowledgement of who they were dealing with passed among the three of them.

He already knows where we are...

