

Chapter 2: Convergence

The new owners of Keith's old motel appeared to have brought the cavalry with them. This was Alex Romero's first thought as he and Deputy Zach Shelby pulled into the parking lot of the Seafairer.

"Jesus, it's like a fucking circus up out here! What're we gonna do?!" Shelby was on the verge of freaking out at the sight of the government-issue sedans. The county coroner was packing a black body bag into the back of his van. A rather large body bag.

"We're going to go into it with cool heads, for one." Romero told him. "We don't know anything yet. Someone's dead, obviously, but we don't know who it is or who was involved. I've got a bad feeling about Keith, but let's not jump to any conclusions."

Three or four men in FBI jackets were carrying boxes of what they assumed was evidence out of Keith's old house. Another was rolling yellow "Crime Scene Do Not Cross" tape across the front door and around the porchway.

Two agents, one male and one female, were standing at the top of the hillside stairs, and they made no move to meet the sheriff and deputy half way to the parking lot. The female agent was arguing heatedly on her cell phone:

"No, it's not acceptable! I said I want a hazmat clean-up out here tonight, not tomorrow!...So pay them double over-time, just get them out here....Yeah, it's the one on Highway 88...Fine, two hours'll work; thank you."

She ended the call just as Romero and Shelby reached her and her partner. As if they'd rehearsed this, the feds both whipped out their badges and held them out in front of them.

“I’m Special Agent in Charge Emma Spolee. This is Special Agent Michael Rivera.”

“Sheriff Alex Romero. This is Deputy Zach Shelby.”

The four of them shook hands, not without some territorial tension and with each side wondering if the other was going to play nice.

“You mind telling us who called in the bomb threat? I’m wondering what the hell could’ve happened here in White Pine Bay that warrants the FBI being called out?” Romero wanted to know.

“Not that I was aware of it, as I should’ve been.” he added.

Agent Spolee fired back at him, “You would’ve been aware of it, Sheriff, as soon as we needed your help, which I’m hoping you’ll be willing to extend--given we have mutual goals of upholding the law.”

“So what happened here tonight?” Shelby cut in.

Agent Rivera said, “B and E plus an intercepted assault. Another attempted assault on a federal officer, resulting in use of deadly force.”

This is why I like him as a partner. Agent Spolee thought. He usually knows when to shut up and when to give out only the most necessary information.

“Care to elaborate on that, agents?” Romero pressed.

“No, we don’t. The Bureau has jurisdiction on this matter and the investigation related to it.” She told him. “We appreciate your concern, Sheriff, and we’ll contact you as soon as we have any questions you may be able to help us with.”

Romero realized they were being dismissed, and it was not something he liked or was used to.

“If crimes like this have been committed in this town, we make it our business to be more than concerned,” he said. “It’s our business to bring in the suspects and see they’re held accountable if they’re guilty.”

“With all due respect, Sheriff, this is a little more serious than a cat stuck in a tree.” Agent Rivera sniped at Romero and Shelby.

Shelby had (rather stupidly) just been waiting for an excuse to start a fight. He started aggressively towards Rivera, “HEY! Care to repeat that, G-man?!” he yelled. Romero grabbed him by the shoulders and pushed him back in his place.

At the same time, Agent Spooler slashed her arm in front of Agent Rivera, keeping him back as well.

“ENOUGH!! ALL OF YOU!” she barked loudly enough to startle all three men.

At her movement, Romero caught a better look at her in the outdoor lamplight. Her bright blue eyes were flashing with anger, and she was glaring balefully at her partner for his taunting remark.

Wow. She’s really pretty... he thought for a second, but no longer as Agent Spooler went on, “I’m not going to stand for this bullshit over jurisdiction, not for a minute! I don’t give a shit who may or may not get along. The fact of the matter is: the more our two departments are willing to work together, the better we can do our jobs, and the sooner we’ll be out of here and you’ll never have to see us again.”

She drew in a deep breath and continued, “But yes, Agent Rivera’s technically correct. The very recently deceased owner of this property may have been involved

in a large-scale criminal enterprise. That's why we were called out: to track down any- and everyone involved and bring them in."

Romero had a sinking feeling about his old friend. He knew Keith Summers had plenty of trouble staying on the right side of the law, especially in the past few years. He'd figured Keith might have been involved in some drug deals gone bad, maybe some behavior that counted as sexual harassment, but his gut feelings were telling him this was much, much worse.

He swallowed hard and asked, "I take it you have evidence of this?"

"Stacks of it. Unfortunately most of it relating to White Pine Bay is circumstantial, at least so far. But enough of it points towards others in this town besides Summers who are still involved. We intend to find them and prove their involvement." Agent Spole told him.

"So, I figure it's safe to assume you find the idea of dangerous organized crime in your town just as heinous as the rest of us do." she said. "Can I count on your cooperation, Sheriff?"

He couldn't be sure in the dim light, but Romero thought he saw her lips start to form a small smile. The effect on him couldn't be totally dismissed.

Shelby cut in and ruined the brief moment, "You know nothing about this town, about how things are done here!" he yelled at the two agents.

Agent Spole's half-smile turned into a smirk. "Quite the contrary, Deputy. The Bureau knows everything about this town, has for several years. There's only one thing we're assigned to, and therefore it's the only thing we're interested in. What I'm guessing you're thinking of? That's been deemed low-risk and low-priority."

Her words first struck cold fear into Romero but then gave him a sense of relief--somewhat. Still, he knew this much: Getting into a jurisdictional spat with the FBI would be the height of stupidity, given White Pine Bay's source of economic livelihood. Things could get very ugly very quickly. The town's days would be numbered, and that number wouldn't be a large one. He was not going to kid himself that he was vastly out-numbered, out-resourced, and out-manpowered compared to the feds. He'd hoped this day would never come, but he realized that'd been wishful thinking.

"Yes. You can count on our cooperation, Agent." he said in a tone that invited no argument. He offered her his hand and she shook it, lingering for a second as she looked right at him with those fiery blue eyes.

"Excellent." This time the subtle smile didn't leave her face, either. Romero then snapped out of it and exchanged business cards with both Agents Spolee and Rivera.

"I'll be in touch soon." she said.

"Right. The sheriff's office'll do whatever we can to help."

Romero and Shelby headed down the stairs, got into their SUV, and drove off into the night.

Agent Spolee quickly turned her back on both them and Rivera, who followed her back towards the house to wait for the hazmat crew.

"Cat in a tree? Really?" she berated him. "I hope that's the last time you antagonize local law enforcement, for everyone's sake. Otherwise it'll just cause more headache, and I have enough paperwork as it is without having to write you up, Agent. Got it?"

“Yes. Copy that, Spoole.” he said, then added: “I’m going on a coffee run; want one?”

She could tell he was trying to make amends. “Yes, that’d be fantastic! Cream, no sugar.”

Agent Rivera drove off in search of the nearest 7-11, leaving Agent Spoole alone with her thoughts.

The night was cold and a light rain was just starting to fall. Nonetheless, her face was flushed hot.

*Damn...since when do dark and handsome retired male models get elected Sheriff?
This investigation is starting to look up...*

She started at those thoughts and mentally slapped herself; Jesus, Spoole! Get a fucking grip! You just blew a man’s head off not long ago! Not to mention you’ve got two would-be victims to think about, never mind you’ve got some extremely crazy-ass long-shot idea they might be part of your birth family. And throw in the rest of the work you and the task force have cut out for you, ferreting the rest of the scumbucket traffickers out of hiding in this town. The last thing you need is for your libido to start interfering.

Before calling the agent she assigned to accompany the Bates to the hospital, Agent Spoole trekked back to the surveillance van and retrieved her electronic cigarette cartridge from where it had been charging in the van’s lighter. She clicked it on and drew a deep drag of nicotine-laden vapor. It immediately soothed her frayed nerves. She’d been trying to quit the real things for the past year, with varying rates of success. The e-cig cut out the tobacco but still thankfully gave her the nicotine fix when she needed it. She walked back to the bottom of that outdoor stair-master, exhaling vapor and watching the patterns it made as the misting rain carried it away.



The motel room phone starting shrilling loudly at 8am, drilling into Norma's head. She groaned and snuggled closer to Norman. After stitching up her hand, the doctor had given her a sedative last night, and it had done the job at calming her down so she could get a good night's sleep. It also left her feeling extremely groggy this morning. She'd been in a fog by the time she was discharged and one of the suits from the FBI dropped her and Norman at The King's Motel after checking them into a room.

I want ours to be nicer than this...Still, they're footing the bill and it's just for one night. This was Norma's last thought that night before she and Norman fell into the same bed; she fell into his arms and immediately into unconsciousness.

Now, in the harsh morning light:

"Norman, get the phone." she grumbled.

"Aw, it's already eight, Mother! I'm going to be so late for school!"

"Norman, the phone... And so what? You can miss one day....I'll write you a note..."

Norman rolled over and reached for the receiver as she reluctantly unlocked her arms from around him and rolled the other way, pulling the covers over her head.

"Hello?"

"Norman Bates?"

"Yes?" *Weird...she sounds a lot like Mother too...*

“Good morning; this is Agent Emma Spooler. Could I please speak with your mother?”

“Um, she’s still asleep...”

“Could you wake her up for me? This really can’t wait. It’s important.”

Norman figured as much. “Just a minute.”

He shook Norma gently on the shoulder. “Mother, it’s Agent Spooler. From last night.”

Norma dragged herself up to a sitting position, rubbed her eyes with her good hand, and took the receiver from him.

“Yes?” She still sounded very sleepy.

“Mrs. Bates; how’re you feeling this morning?” The agent sounded unbelievably energetic by comparison, and she was probably running on less sleep than they were.

“I’m okay, just tired from the medicine I got last night. They said, um, he nicked some tendons in my hand. It’ll be fine, eventually...it’ll just take a while to heal...”

“Glad to hear that. I’m calling to let you know your house is totally cleaned up, scrubbed down actually. You can go back today, but I need you and Norman to come down to our command office to give statements. Can you be there in two hours? That way you two can go home first and get some fresh clothes.”

Nothing sounded better to Norma at the moment, that plus a hot shower. She planned on throwing away her blood-splattered blouse and skirt from last night.

As if reading her mind, Agent Spoole went on, "I'm going to need you to bring any of your clothes that got blood on them last night. They're considered evidence."

"All right. Where is it? At the sheriff's station?"

"No; we have our own. It's close though. If you give me your cell, I can text you the address. I also have a check to cut you to replace the door we kicked down. After I hang up, I'll get you a cab home. Again, both courtesy of the United States government."

This struck Norma as funny; the laugh she let out startled Norman. When was the last time he heard her laugh? He couldn't even remember.... It must've been in the car when they were moving here, but that seemed forever ago...The sound of it was almost...magical...It brought a slow, cautious smile to his face.

Norma gave Emma S. her cell number, while thinking *This is so bizarre; it must be the drugs wearing off...has to be..because it sounds like I'm talking to another version of myself...*

"Okay, Mrs. Bates. I'll see you both at ten, then." Agent Spoole was concluding the call.

"Please, call me Norma." There was something about this tough-but-kind, take-charge-type female federal officer that put her at ease and made her feel much better, like everything was going to be okay for her and Norman.

"As you wish. See you then, Norma. Bye."

"Bye." Norma handed the receiver back to Norman, and he dropped it back in its cradle.

Norman then moved behind her on the bed and tentatively wrapped his arms around her waist, pressing a kiss to her neck and then pulling her close. She sighed and relaxed her body against his.

“Are you mad at me? Because of what I did? I snuck out of my room and went to a party. I thought I was going to study with them, but they took me to a party. I didn’t know; I’m sorry.” The words spilled out of him in a rush. Would this guilt ever leave him? It felt like a heavy weight in his chest, threatening to suffocate him.

Norma twisted her head so she could trail several kisses along his jawline and then his neck, while threading her non-bandaged hand through his hair. He let out a soft moan, and both their heartbeats sped up a notch. She turned further so their eyes locked.

“I’m not mad at you, as long as you tell me one thing: do any of those girls mean anything to you? And don’t you dare lie to me.”

“No! They were nice to me, but I don’t want to be with any of them. I swear it. You are everything to me. Everything! I love you.”

“I love you too, Norman. We’re going to have to keep this a secret, from anyone. From the whole world. So I get it if you hang out with other kids, because that helps. But don’t leave me. Don’t ever leave me! I’d die if you did.”

“I’d die if I lost you! If anything...really bad...had happened to you last night...I wouldn’t have been able to go on living..”

Norman was fighting tears with those last words, but she silenced him by closing the last space between them. Their lips met, softly at first but soon more passionately, obliterating any more capacity for logical thought. All he wanted was her, and she’d be lying if she said she didn’t feel the same way. To the outside world: It was wrong,

horribly wrong. But it had been inevitable...a long time coming. Neither of them any longer had any power to fight it; that had slipped away like water down a drain, not that they wanted to fight it anymore anyway. They loved each other beyond reason, beyond any sense of right or wrong...the world could go straight to hell for all they cared.

Norma finally broke the kiss, "Everything's going to be fine, honey. We just need to be careful, especially around any of those FBI agents, okay?"

But Norman wasn't totally listening. With his arms still around her waist, he lay back down on the bed, pulling her on top of him and kissing her again-- even more urgently this time. Norma was now acutely aware she was wearing only her camisole and underwear. And he was bare-chested, in only his boxers. Her body was starting to wake up as his hands roamed over it. Suddenly that sedative was wearing off fast...

She groaned, "Ohh...sweetie, not now, we don't have time...we need to get dressed before the cab gets here...and we both need to get showered and changed before anything else..."

Norman looked disappointed and a bit frustrated. "At home? Maybe...two in one for the shower?" he asked hopefully.

She gave him a seductive smile. "Sounds like heaven."