

## **Prologue**

**Washington, D.C.**

**11 months before the beginnings of “Bates Motel.”**

**Two months after the ending events of “Hostages.”**

Special Agent in Charge Emma Spoole. It was a mouthful, but she enjoyed saying it, even if only to herself. The magnitude of what she was about to take on was still sinking in. Despite a couple of setbacks, Emma S. had been the Violent Crime Section’s gradually-rising star for years, and now she was being trusted with this potentially career-making case. There was an alleged sex-trafficking ring operating on the West Coast, from San Jose to Seattle, kidnapping young women from Asia, assigning them to a life of unspeakable hell. Agent Spoole and her team of field agents were tasked with finding the scumbags responsible, hauling them in and shutting down the whole despicable, disgusting operation. And she would do it. Whatever it took.

Agent Spoole had been briefed and named SAIC in a meeting with the deputy- and assistant directors that morning. By evening, a group of her fellow agents were inviting her to get together for drinks at Casey’s Bar and Grill to congratulate her on the assignment. News traveled fast through the Bureau, even between different sections, especially when the SAIC on a major case happened to be a woman. Emma S. was rather rueful on that last thought as she freshened up at her desk, adding a necklace that complemented her grey pantsuit with the light blue blouse and brushing on fresh brown eye-shadow that made her blue eyes really stand out. Her eyes were her most striking feature; she’d been told that since childhood. So different from her dad’s brown eyes and her mom’s light hazel-green eyes. Emma S. had been adopted.

Her dad, a retired police lieutenant back in Toledo, would be so proud of her! Emma S. smiled at that idea. Of course, he was proud of her anyway, but this would take the cake. She couldn’t wait to tell him, but there was this get-together to get through

first. Emma S. finished up for the day and headed out to southeast D.C., to the popular hang-out among federal agents. She walked straight to the bar, ordered a glass of cabernet, and made small talk with her colleagues, thanking them for their compliments and assuring them the right agent for the job had been chosen.

“Congratulations, Special Agent in Charge,” said an all-too-familiar voice from behind her. Agent Spoole turned to see her oldest friend at the Bureau, Duncan Carlisle, behind her. She hadn’t been expecting for him to show up; they hadn’t spoken in...what? six months at least...and must have not seen each other in just over a year...They’d met way back in their first year at the Academy, become friends, study partners, running partners, and eventually lovers. But that ended over 15 years ago. They’d realized as young agents right out of Quantico that it wasn’t going to work, that they had different priorities, and they were much better off as friends and respected colleagues than as a couple. They’d parted amiably, remained on good terms, sent each other Christmas cards, crossed paths every so often...though not much; she was assigned to the VCS and he ended up hostage negotiation specialist.

“Duncan! It’s great to see you! And thanks, just doing my job.” she said as she gave him a brief friendly hug.

“They couldn’t have made a better choice. If anyone can hunt down scum like this, it’ll be you.”

Emma S. noticed the attractive blonde woman in a black dress, who’d had her arm laced through Duncan’s until a second ago. Em extended her hand, “I’m Special Agent Emma Spoole; and you?”

This woman looked familiar; but Emma S. couldn’t quite place her. Was she famous, someone on TV? Possibly... She shook Agent Spoole’s hand and smiled warmly.

“I’m Dr. Ellen Sanders. Nice to meet you, Agent Spoole.”

Emma S. suddenly placed her; “*The* Dr. Sanders, the surgeon who saved the president during that attack on the hospital a couple of months ago?! I saw the whole thing on the news; it is an honor to meet you! What you did was nothing short of heroic. I’d venture none of us at the Bureau could’ve been more courageous.” She was gushing, but she didn’t care in the moment.

The two of them grinned, and Duncan squeezed Ellen around the shoulders. “I’m in total agreement with you on that one, Agent.” he said.

Emma S. went on, “Well, let me buy you two a drink. I know it’s supposed to be ‘my night’ but who cares?”

The three of them got drinks and gathered at one of the tables right across from the bar.

Duncan went on before she could ask about it. “Nina and I are going through a divorce. We were just drifting too far apart, even before she got sick.”

“Oh, okay...so how’s Nina doing? And Sawyer, she must be practically a teenager by now!”

Duncan chuckled at that, “Well, not quite. And Nina will be fine...she went through a bad patch, but she had a successful bone marrow transplant. Thanks to Dr. Sanders, never giving up until she found a donor match.”

Agent Spoole’s eyes narrowed. “So...that’s how you two met, I take it.” She needed a second to let this register. Had Duncan really cheated on his cancer-stricken wife with one of the doctors consulting on her bone marrow transplant? It appeared so.

Duncan admitted, "Yeah, like I said....Nina and I didn't have much of a marriage by the time the bone marrow transplant was a go....It just happened; what else can I say?" He leaned over and shared a brief kiss with Ellen.

She didn't recognize it consciously until now, but Emma S. realized she'd thought better of Duncan, didn't think he'd do something like this. *Jesus, fidelity is becoming rarer than diamonds in this town*, she thought. But she was in no position to pass judgment or get on any kind of moral high horse. Almost four years after her partner and lover Agent David Maddoc's death, she still wouldn't have been able to look his widow in the eye if she were to ever run into her. She'd been a coward not to tell the truth about the affair, and now all she could do was try to move on. As difficult and painful as that had been.

The three of them spent the rest of the evening chatting, laughing, drinking, and getting to know one another..some for the first time and some all over again. After a while, Emma S. didn't even feel that third-wheel awkwardness she usually did with friends who were in relationships.

Her colleague and his new love looked so happy together. It was genuine happiness and love; anyone could see it in their faces, in the way they looked at each other. She couldn't help but be happy for them, even with a passing feeling of envy due to her terminal singleness. It had just happened. You met that someone, locked eyes with them, and lightning struck when neither of you could've seen it coming. Plus, she liked Dr. Sanders; the pretty blonde surgeon seemed perfect for him. She could see the two of them becoming friends, and she didn't have a whole lot of opportunities to make female friends.

At the end of the evening, Dr. Sanders was still inside getting her coat from the coat check while Duncan and Emma S. went outside to hail taxis.

Agent Spoole turned to Agent Carlisle and (maybe it was the wine) was totally honest:

“I understand, Duncan. I’m happy for you two, truly...I am. These things do happen. Sometimes the right thing and the thing we really want are completely, incurably divergent. She is a gem, not to mention a hero. Promise me one thing, okay?”

“What?”

“Don’t fuck this up and lose her. ‘Cause if you do, I might just fly back from the Northwest and kick your ass.”

Duncan laughed but then turned serious quickly. “I promise. It’s a promise I’ll do everything and anything to keep.”

They briefly hugged; Emma S. and Dr. Sanders shared a quick friendly hug as well before those two got in a cab.

“Let’s get together for dinner, the three of us, when you get back, okay?” Duncan suggested.

“Perfect; I’ll see you two then, as soon as I get back.”

As she waved good-bye and flagged down her own cab, her nagging investigator’s intuition was telling her that there was more to Duncan and Ellen’s story than they’d told her...possibly a whole lot more. She couldn’t shake the feeling they might have even lied to her about how they met...

She got in the taxi, told the driver her address in Bethesda, and then stared out the window at the passing D.C. streets. She shook her head briefly, as if to dislodge those thoughts.

*Let it go, she scolded herself. Focus on the case. The specifics of your long-ago boyfriend's current love life are none of your business anyway...*

By the time she got back back to her apartment, Emma S. was mentally immersed in all the plans and tasks for the upcoming investigation out in California, Oregon, and Washington state.

She had no idea the words she'd spoken to Duncan about "the thing we really want" would come back to haunt her....