

Chapter 12: The Right Kind of Wrong

Norma lay with her head cradled on his chest, his long firm arms wrapped around her. They were still catching their breath, coming back down to earth, relishing the feel of each other. Norman kissed her forehead, her closed eyes, her cheek, finally her lips. "Mmm...I love you." he murmured, completely spent and so happy.

She snuggled even closer, her mouth moving slowly with his. "I love you too, sweetheart." she murmured against his lips. He'd never looked more beautiful to her: his hair a mess, his lips swollen from her kisses, a smudge of her lipstick on his face, some love bites already showing up on his neck. She was going to have those too, but in the moment she didn't even care about somehow hiding them.

"Norman, honey...there's something I need to tell you." Her voice started shaking, and he could immediately tell it was something frightening to her.

"What is it, Mother? What's wrong?" his voice rose in worry.

"It's okay, sweetie. It's just...last night, something bad happened to your Aunt Emma after she left. Deputy Shelby tried to hurt her, choke her actually."

"That's awful! Is she okay?" Norman was concerned but also relieved it was nothing to do with them. So it seemed.

"She's fine. She beat the crap out of him. He's still in the hospital, far as I know." Norma drew a deep breath. "The thing is, Norman, she doesn't remember most of it. She, um, blacked out while she did it. The thing is...oh god, honey, I've been wanting to tell you!! I've been so scared!"

"Tell me what, Mother?" his voice was quiet and serious, but his eyes were clear.

“The same thing happened to you, one of those black-outs. The day your dad died. That’s why you don’t remember what happened.”

The color drained from Norman’s face. “What happened, Mother? What did I do?! Mother, what did I do?!” his voice was rising in panic.

She lunged forward and grasped the sides of his face, pulling his forehead to hers. “He was hurting me. And you were trying to protect me. You were always trying to protect me.” Tears were running down her cheeks. “I covered it up. I made it look like an accident. No one can ever know. No one ever will know! They can’t!”

“What if I do it again, Mother? What if--what if I hurt someone else?! I could hurt you! Oh god I could hurt you and not even know it!!”

“Honey, you won’t! You wouldn’t hurt me! I know you wouldn’t.”

He pulled her even closer against him. “I’d rather die first. I’d rather be dead than ever do anything to hurt you!” The words came out in a strangled sob.

“Don’t say that, Norman! We’ll find some way to help you, and I’ll be right beside you every step of the way, I swear it!”

“Okay Mother..” his voice trailed off he struggled to process this revelation about himself, trying not to give in to total fear and despair. They held each other as he buried his face in the crook of her neck and cried quietly for long moments. Finally:

“Mother?”

“Yes, Norman?”

“That first night Aunt Emma came over for dinner...I-I’m pretty sure I saw her start to black out. She was coming up the stairs and she suddenly looked like she’d seen a ghost or something. Her eyes went all empty, and I, uh, I don’t know how to describe it. I’ve never seen anyone look that scared to death before. I thought she was going to start screaming.”

Norma sat up, her eyes wide. “What happened; did she do anything else? What stopped it?”

“She didn’t. She just stood there. I called her name and asked if she was okay, and she snapped out of it. She was fine after that.”

Norma’s mind was spinning with this new information. “She never said anything to me about that. She told me this morning about what happened with Shelby, but that was it.”

“I’m sure she was too afraid to. Mother?”

“What is it, sweetie?”

“I want to find out what’s wrong with me. Whatever it takes. Maybe we can find a way to help her too, at the same time.”

She smiled through her drying tears. “You are such a good person, Norman. So sweet. Another one of the million reasons I love you more than anything in the world!”

He kissed her lips again. “I love you too. Forever. Mother, I’m...I’m not sorry Dad’s gone. Doesn’t that mean I’m a horrible person?!”

“No! I’m not sorry either! Good riddance.” She kissed him fiercely. “You’re all I want, all I’ll ever want, all I’ll ever love. Nothing has ever felt more good or right to me in my life!”

Norman stroked her cheek with his fingers, tracing her jawline with his thumb. “We’re gonna have to keep this a secret. It can never leave this room, Mother.”

“It never will, ever! Not while I have breath left in me.”

They lay in each other’s arms for a while longer, listening to the steady beat of the rain. Another dark secret they now shared, another way they would be bound together. Frightening as it was, knowing was also a relief.

Norma’s phone chimed with a text. She got up, one of the blankets wrapped loosely around her, and dug it out of her purse. Dylan. “I’m home. Where are you?”

She groaned and dropped back onto the bed, burying herself in Norman’s arms, not wanting to go back to reality. He couldn’t help feeling aroused again; she looked absolutely delectable with only that blanket around her.

“Uhh..I don’t want to go home! Guess I should answer him.” She texted back, “Went for a drive up north. There’s a bad storm up here. We’re waiting for it to let up and it’s safer to drive back. Should be a couple of hours.”

She smiled with quiet satisfaction; it was almost six and they’d made love for nearly two hours. She wanted to hang onto the beautiful memory of that, not to focus on what they were hiding from the world.

Then she turned to Norman, “Feel like going to find some place for dinner? I’m starving, actually.”

“Sounds great, Mother. Me too.”

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The house was dim and silent when Dylan got home. It was nearly six and he’d gotten the text back from Norma about where they’d gone.

*Figures she’d take off like that with Norman without bothering to check the weather forecast.* But that was their problem, not his, and he was grateful to have the next two or three hours of peace.

Stopping in the doorway of his room, he started at the figure of Agent Emma Spoole curled up on her side in his bed, sound asleep. Well, without the suit and the hardware, she looked a lot less like the agent she was. Somehow smaller, more feminine, even vulnerable--though Dylan knew that was the last thing she was. The hallway light caught the gloss of her deep chestnut hair. He had the crazy urge to go over to her and brush back a stray lock of it that had fallen over her cheek. But that was creepy. Wasn’t it?

And something about the image of her in his bed...it was doing something strange to his insides. He scolded himself to go away, leave her alone until she woke up, stop staring at her while she slept--like some kind of stalker. But his feet didn’t move from their spot.

“Mm” she let out a soft throaty sound as she stirred. She sat partway up and rubbed her face with one hand. Her blue eyes only registered surprise for a second when she saw him.

“Oh, Dylan! You startled me a little. I hope you don’t mind me sleeping here. Norma said it was okay, but I can always--”

“Of course it’s okay! You can sleep in here tonight. I’ll sleep on the couch. I insist, actually.”

She gave him a still-sleepy smile. “It’s just for one night, and thanks. I feel better now too. Refreshed. I take it the Norms still aren’t back yet?”

Dylan gave a short laugh, “The Norms? I like that!”

“Yeah, well, they’re always together. Saying ‘Norma and Norman’ gets to be a mouthful after a while.”

“True. And no, it’ll be a couple hours. She texted me they’re waiting for the storm to let up, guess it’s heavier up north where they drove.”

“Works for me. I was planning on ordering some take-out and watching a movie or two. There’s this great Italian place in town I’ve been to once, and they deliver. If you haven’t already had dinner, I could order you something too. But if you already have plans for tonight, don’t cancel them just because of me.”

“I don’t. And that sounds awesome.”

Em smiled, “Perfect. Let me go get my phone and we’ll call it in.” She pushed back the covers and got up, stretching her back and then reaching for the blue robe she’d borrowed from her sister. When she stretched, the silky fabric of her pajama top pulled tighter against her breasts, clearly outlining them.

Dylan whipped around to face away from her, his face burning. An awful revelation was dawning on him.

*What am I doing?! What the hell am I thinking? I can't be attracted to her like this!! She's my aunt! Norman's aunt. Norma's sister. This is perverted, twisted, insane! What the fuck is wrong with me?!*

He briefly recalled her date of birth he'd seen on her adoption papers. It made her 44, five years older than Norma. He'd turn 22 in a couple of weeks, making him exactly half her age. But she could easily pass for a woman in her mid-30s. He tried to squash the thoughts, but they kept twisting into his brain anyway. She was beautiful. With bed-hair, no make-up, her face slightly puffy from sleep, and a bruise on her cheek, she was so beautiful.

"Is everything all right, Dylan?" she sounded genuinely concerned, something else he wasn't used to being on the receiving end of.

"Oh, uh, yeah..Everything's fine, uh, it's just..um.." He grappled for what to say.

"You, uh, you look better in Norma's robe than she does." It was true. The light blue looked lovely against her dark hair, fair skin, and deeper blue eyes. He hadn't seen her in any color but black until now.

*Oh god!! Now I wanna kill myself! I wanna go find the nearest bridge and jump off it! Why'd I say that?! Could I sound like more of an idiot?!*

She gave him another heart-stopping smile. "Flatterer. I look like I've been in a street-fight. Oh, yeah, I sort of was. Self-defense though. But that's sweet of you to say."

Emma S. gathered up a spare quilt and a couple of pillows and headed downstairs, Dylan beside her. She tossed them on the sofa and retrieved her phone off the kitchen counter. Back in the living room, he started building a fire in the fireplace to cut through the chill. The heating/cooling system in this old house wasn't exactly state of the art. Em sat on the couch, motioned for him to sit beside her. They scrolled through the Italian menu on her phone, picking out what they wanted, then she placed the order.

"Thanks for dinner...Aunt Emma. I could pay for mine if you want."

"Don't be silly! It's on the Bureau credit card, so no worries." She was frowning and seemed distracted as she went through the several messages she'd gotten.

He glanced one that seemed to be troubling her. "Who's 'A.D. Stabler'? Just curious."

"My boss. Give me a few minutes to go through this, okay?" She listened to the lengthy-seeming voicemail and then tapped out a couple of emails. In the meantime, Dylan threw a couple of logs on the fire and got it blazing.

"Well, not great news, but it could be worse." Em told him. "I'm on paid sick leave for the next week because of the concussion. Then I'm to report to Seattle to track the suspected traffickers up there. Anndd..I have three mandatory fit-for-duty sessions with a psychiatrist when I get there. Great. I'm not surprised, though still not thrilled about that."

"Is that because your boss found out about us, I mean, about us three being your birth family?"



“Yes. It’s just procedure and rules. Conflict of interest and all that. Don’t worry, I’ll be back to visit you guys afterwards. Sound good?”

“Yeah, it does.” A grin was spreading over Dylan’s face before he fully realized it. It sounded better than good. It sounded terrific.

“Oh my god. You’re smiling, a real smile. I was starting to think your face was stuck like that.” she gently taunted him.

“Very funny. Honestly, the last thing I wanted to do was move back here with Norma and Norman. But I had no money and nowhere else to go.”

“Feel like talking about it? I know you and Norma have problems getting along. It might make you feel better to get it off your chest.” Em had stashed her phone in her purse and was digging through it for her e-cig. “Damn. I need a new cartridge. Mind if I bum one off you? Just one. No more cheating for me after this. Tomorrow I’m going to get some nicotine patches.”

“I don’t mind, but we have to go outside. Norma would kill us if she found out we were smoking in the house.”

“I’m aware of that house rule. So come on, we’ll go out on the porch.”

She got up and headed for the coat rack in the front foyer. Dylan didn’t move for several seconds, caught in a mesmerized stare at her movements: graceful yet confident and purposeful at the same time..beautiful..

He snapped out of it and quickly followed her before she could notice. She took her black wool coat off the rack and handed it to him, “Care to be a gentleman?”

Dylan held it open and she stepped into it, backing up much closer to him at the same time. Just that movement was enough to bring a flush of arousal through him; they didn't even have to touch.

*I have GOT to get a grip on myself! I've got to knock off thinking about her like that!* Half his mind was berating him, but the other half was ignoring it and giving in to what couldn't be stopped.

He put on his leather jacket and found his cigarettes in the pocket as the two of them went out on the front porch, facing the rain, the fading twilight, and the last of Agent Spooler's task force packing it in for the night, after a long day of evidence-gathering in the motel rooms.

Dylan gave her one first, flicking open his Zippo lighter and lighting it for her, cupping his hand around the small flame to keep it out of the wind. Em leaned close to inhale and briefly covered his hand with hers to steady it. The contact sent licks of heat up his whole arm and sent his heartbeat into overdrive.

Then she moved back, took a drag, turned her head away, and exhaled a lungful of smoke. She looked back at him and smiled. "Thank you."

"N-No problem." He lit one for himself, inhaling deeply to try to smooth out his raw nerves. He thought it was probably a trick of the dim light, but he could've sworn she'd had a mischievous glint in her eyes, just for a second or two.

"So, what've they been doing down there?" he asked her, wanting to distract himself from his untoward feelings. "Or are you allowed to talk about that?"

"It's fine. I can." she responded. "They've been testing every surface for bio-evidence, you know; blood, saliva, other fluids. We use chemicals, Luminol mainly,

that can pick those up even after they've been cleaned up. Then it'll get run for DNA matches against anyone who has their DNA in any criminal databases. I should probably tell your mother: I'd very highly advise getting all new carpeting and bedding, and repainting all the walls in those rooms. After this is all over."

"I think she plans on doing that, from what I've heard."

They stood in silence for a minute or so, smoking and watching the steady rainfall.

"So, want to talk about it? You've seemed pretty upset since this morning. I hope it's not because of what happened to me. I've been through way worse, Dylan. So don't worry."

"It's not just that. Though I wouldn't mind the chance to take a swing at that guy myself. Sounds like you already did plenty of that though. Norma and I got in a big fight this morning, right before we found out you were in the hospital."

"What was it about?"

Part of him didn't want to unload all the depressing history of this family on her. But then again, she was part of that family too. Dylan had only known her a week, but already she'd been nicer to him than Norma had been in his whole life. For once, there was someone who didn't make him feel he was completely alone in this dark, uncaring world.

"She doesn't want me here any more than I want to be here. She's never been much of a mother to me. Her whole world begins and ends with Norman. Always has, always will. Even when I was a kid, I was the black sheep, someone merely tolerated. I think she ended up hating my dad by the time they split up, and therefore

she hates me 'cause I remind her of him. I'm sure she'll crack open a champagne bottle the day I move out."

"I doubt she really--"

"She told me she DOES hate me." he cut her off. "This morning. So yeah, it is possible, if that's what you were going to say."

Emma S. was stunned at that. For a parent to truly hate her own child and admit it, it normally meant something outright horrid had happened surrounding the circumstances of his birth. Some pretty dark and terrible pieces of this puzzle were starting to move around in her head.

She took another drag, fighting the urge for another cigarette. "Dylan.." she steeled herself for what she was going to suggest. "Is there any chance, um, that she might not have had a say in whether to have you? Like maybe she wanted to end her pregnancy and your dad wouldn't let her?"

"I don't know...didn't really think much about it. She sure as hell wanted Norman after she dumped my dad and hooked up with his."

"I gather as much. Well, for whatever unknown reason, your grandparents didn't want me. I've wondered plenty about why. Yet here I am, and here you are, all the same. Maybe it's better to focus more on what's ahead, rather than what's behind us."

"I did get a job last night. I just didn't get the chance to tell anyone yet."

She grinned, "Hey, there you go! One problem solved. Doing what?"

“Uh, private security.”

“Even better. That can pay fairly well, provided you put in the hours.”

Emma S. had a feeling Dylan was doing security for something other than the fancy gated homes of White Pine Bay’s richest. But she didn’t press for more details. Not her case. Not her jurisdiction. Not her business.

“Save up what you can, okay? So you can afford to move out sooner. I think if you and Norma are really that toxic towards each other, it’s best to put some distance between you. Go on with your own lives.”

He nodded. “I will. Our family is so screwed up. I don’t get why you don’t run for the hills, run back to your good life you built for yourself. I sure would.”

She looked him hard in the eyes. “I can’t. I won’t. I care about all of you way too much! You’re all parts of me. Parts of me that were always missing, and I was too busy building that so-called ‘good’ life to notice that, until the day I literally kicked in your door.”

Her vehement, passionate tone caught him off guard. He didn’t know how to respond to that, but he was saved by the delivery driver arriving with their take-out order. The two of them put out their cigarettes, Em paid for their food, and they retreated to the warm fire-lit living room, getting settled on the sofa.

Dylan chuckled a bit, “Norma would also throw a fit if she knew we were eating tortellini and flatbread in the living room like this.”

Em waved her hand dismissively. “So, she doesn’t have to know. They’re not going to be back for another hour and a half, at least. Plenty of time to stash the evidence.”

They shared a laugh at that. He loved that little rebellious side of her. She found the TV remote and flipped through the channels until she landed on *Coyote Ugly*. It was just starting.

“Oh my god, this is one of my favorites! Haven’t seen it a while. Is it okay if we watch it?”

“Sure.” Normally Dylan would’ve hated being stuck watching some chick flick. But this time, he didn’t mind at all. Just being in the same room with her was so nice. For the first time since he’d stepped into this ancient-looking house, he felt something close to relaxation and contentment. It was too bad it couldn’t last.

The movie was close to over when a tired-looking Norma and Norman came through the front door. Em twisted her head around and called out, “Hi, you two! How was the drive?”

Norman answered first, “It was nice, just rainy. How’re you feeling, Aunt Emma?”

“A lot better, thanks.”

Norma was hanging up her coat and looking at the sight of them on the couch, with narrowed eyes, especially since he was watching that movie with her sister and looking perfectly happy doing so. “I figured you’d be out, Dylan. Like usual.”

“I, uh, I wanted to keep her company. I didn’t mind. I can go out whenever.”

Em smiled at him, “Yeah, I appreciated that. I did enjoy the company. Thanks Dylan.” She winked at him. They’d since gotten rid of any trace of having dinner in the living room. Their secret. “Well, I’m going up to bed. I’ll see you guys in the

morning.” She retreated towards the stairs and Dylan’s room, Norman and Norma close behind her.

*What’s happening to me?! I can’t keep having these twisted fantasies about my own nephew!! It’s horribly wrong, incestuous, immoral, illegal..What the hell?!*

But her heart..and her body..were rebelling against her rational mind.

Em didn’t have long to dwell on those thoughts, since Norma took her by the arm.

“I’m not asking salvation from you.  
I’m just asking to be saved for a while  
In a timeless search for love that might work  
Still we’re already paying the price.”

–Stevie Nicks, “Secret Love”

“We need to talk. The three of us. In my room. Give us about 10 minutes to get ready for bed, okay?”

“Of course.” She looked in both their eyes. Unspoken truth passed from Norma to her, and then to Norman. They knew her secret. She knew his. And those two secrets happened to be one and the same.

After showering quickly and getting into his pajamas, Norman came into his mother’s room through the door connecting their bedrooms and sat next to her. She was already in bed, looking through something on her laptop with a troubled expression. On seeing him, her face broke into a smile, with an unmistakable glint of lust in her eyes. Even after their afternoon getaway, what she wouldn’t have given to be able to pull him in bed with her. All night. With no one else in the house to worry about.

“Anything wrong, Mother? Anything else, I mean?”

“I just saw on the town’s website they’re building a new bypass that’ll take all the traffic away from the highway here. I bought a motel that no one’s even going to know is there!”

“Why didn’t the real estate guy tell you that?”

“Because, Norman, people suck. Almost everyone I’ve ever known has sucked. Except you...and your aunt..and with her: so far.. But we’ll talk about this later. I don’t want you to worry about anything else.”

Norman grinned, “I do suck. Sometimes. And you don’t seem to mind at all.” He leaned close and kissed her neck, his lips lingering just behind her earlobe.

She stifled a giggle, as a shiver of delight ran through her. “Norman! Not now, careful!” she hissed in a half-whisper. She did steal a quick kiss to his lips a split second before a knock sounded on the door. Norman leaped further away from her as if he’d been sitting on firecrackers, situating himself cross-legged on the bed at an innocent-looking diagonal distance from her. His movement caused the collar of his pajama top to slip and show a fresh hickey she’d left on his neck earlier. Norma frantically motioned for him to fix it, and thankfully he got the point, pulling it higher so the mark was hidden.

“Just a second, Emma!” Norma called as she closed her laptop and got up to unlock the door, letting her sister into their inner sanctum.

Emma S. assumed Norma was keeping her bedroom door locked because it made her feel safer, after Summers’ break-in. Not unusual at all in those situations, so she



didn't think anything else of it. She sat on the bed at a diagonal to Norman's right, with Norma sitting against the headboard, the three of them forming a rough triangle.

Norman figured he might as well end the tension and be the one to talk first, "I know what's been happening to you. It's happened to me. How long has it been going on with you?"

Her eyes were fearful and yet relieved as she looked at him. He shared the same fear, ever since his mother told him about his blackout. He'd done a bad thing. She'd done at least a couple of bad things. They could both be...dangerous...and yet they weren't alone. Somehow that fact made it more bearable..somewhat..

"Since I was 39, so five years. "I'd passed the FBI psychological screening long before that. It only happened once then, but it's happened twice since all of us have met, since I came here to your place. I don't know, maybe that means something."

Norma wanted to know, "What can we do about this, Emma? How can we fix it? How can we find out what this thing is?"

"First off, we should both get PT brain scans, to rule out anything physical causing this."

"We don't have health insurance! Not yet anyway. I know that's expensive, and--"  
"I'll loan it to you."

Norma's jaw dropped. "You'd DO THAT?! But, those scans are about \$4,000!"

"I have federal health coverage, so mine's covered except 5%. So I'll get it out of my savings; big deal! I know you'll be good for it. Just pay me back what you can, when you can. After that, we'll go from there."

Norma's mind was still reeling, and some deep tight knot of fear inside her was starting to loosen. A knot that had been there so long, she'd nearly forgotten what life had felt like without it there.

Em went on, "Oh yeah, I found out I've been moved up to Seattle for the rest of this case, and I need to meet with a psychiatrist three times before I'm allowed back in the field. Actually that's good news because it's a Bureau shrink, and he or she will have gotten my records from the last one I saw after David's murder. After a few rounds of general questions, I'll just get rubber-stamped with 'temporary memory loss due to trauma.' That's what happened the last time."

"What does that mean for me, Aunt Emma?"

"It means, Norman, if there's nothing physical causing this, it's something mental. So I can find out—in general terms—what could be done to help. For both of us. I'm going to have to tell the Bureau shrink about finding you three, but I'm not saying a word about you blacking out, only about me. You two have my word."

"This can't ever leave this room. You can't tell Dylan. Or anyone else. Ever." Norma told her.

"It won't. I won't. Ever. I swear it!"

Norma was starting to tremble again, tears spilling down her cheeks once more. Partly from gratitude, partly from fear, partly from what other emotions: she didn't even know; it was becoming too difficult to even separate them all. She opened her arms to Norman and pulled him to her in a tight hug.

“It’s all gonna be okay, sweetie. You’re going to get the help you need. Nothing bad’s going to happen to you, I promise!” She covered his face with kisses. “I’ll always be right here with you.”

“I know, Mother. It’ll be fine. I don’t want you to have to worry.”

They finally broke apart, and she faced her sister. “I’m still finding it hard to believe you’re doing this, helping Norman like this.”

“Believe it, Norma. Because it’s true. We’re family. And family takes care of their own.”

She started to get up, “I should get some sleep. We all should--” But Norman caught her by the hand, and Norma clasped her around the forearm. They both gently but firmly pulled her, keeping her sitting on the bed.

“Stay here. It’s okay.”

“Yeah, it’s all right. Just for a minute.”

A silent agreement had already passed between the two of them.

Her breath caught in her throat. Something felt a little..off. But she couldn’t define exactly how. She was much too drained: physically, emotionally, mentally, every which way, to try to process it further. And she was so tired of feeling alone. On some level, she’d never stopped feeling alone for most of her life. They were offering her..what? Affection...belonging...that had to be it. Of the kinds she’d never been able to find anywhere—or with anyone—else.

Norma lay down on her side, and Norman curled up into her arms, both of them still pulling her with them. She lay down facing Norma, very close to spooning with her nephew. Norman put his arm around his mother's waist, bringing Em's with him so it was resting on top of his. Norma reached over and wrapped her arm across both of them. She briefly ran her fingers through a strand of her sister's hair, looking into her eyes over the top of Norman's head as he was sandwiched between the two of them, burying his face in the crook of her neck. She whispered one word: "Thank you."

Em squeezed her arm tighter around them before the movement even registered in her mind. Strange...yet somehow not strange at all..She dropped into sleep only seconds after closing her eyes.

She was too close, and yet at the same time too far away, to see all of the truth.