

Chapter 13: Folie a Trois

She'd forgotten to lock the door. In the early morning light, Emma S. was sprawled on her back, one arm flung over her head and the other at her side. Norman was curled on his side, still facing away from her and wrapped tightly in Norma's arms. Norma had one hand outstretched, and it was resting on her sister's forearm. The three of them made quite the tableau.

Norman was the first to stir awake, and he automatically snuggled even closer to the woman he loved. He felt right away he had serious morning wood. Spending so many (it seemed) lonely and hated nights alone in his own bed, this was what he'd been dreaming of: to wake up like this with her every morning. Norma felt it as she woke up at his movement. She reflexively pulled him to her, before she fully woke and realized her sister was not even four inches away.

Although his mother was the most beautiful woman on earth to him, Norman was aware his aunt was at least attractive--though not nearly as beautiful as Norma, in his eyes. The fact he'd slept between these two lovely women: it did something definite for his manhood.

He grumbled wordlessly, in sleepy protest as Norma moved to get up and quickly kissed him on the cheek. "Come on, sweetie. Time to get up." she said softly, even as she pulled the covers higher over his arousal.

She can't see it! She can't find out! Oh god..

But they had little to worry about in that regard, as the bedroom door creaked open.

At first, Dylan was sure he was sleep-walking and having a whacked-out dream. He'd gone up to his room to see if Em was awake and ask her if she'd like him to make a pot of coffee, since the two of them seemed to be the main coffee-drinkers in

the family. His bed was empty and unmade, and she couldn't be in the shower. He would've heard the water running and the rather noisy old pipes. No way she could've left this early without waking him up downstairs either. He'd only slept lightly during the night, when he'd slept at all.

When no one answered the knock on Norma's bedroom door, he tried the knob and quietly opened it. He leaped back as if he'd been burned.

What in the actual FUCK?!?! I can't be seeing this!!

The three of them laying in Norma's bed...his mother and his brother looking extremely close, with each other...and close to her. Too close. Way too close.

His mind spun with shock, disbelief, disgust...and then settled on rage. The kind that blotted out all reason.

That rotten little Mama's boy bastard!! All the unhealthy smothering love in the world from Norma isn't enough for him?! He has to...THEY have to start pulling HER into their sick web too?!

"Norma! Aunt Emma! What the HELL?!"

His retreating footsteps down the hall roused his mother and aunt, causing them to get off the bed and start after him. Norman muttered, "Fuck off, Dylan. Go away. None of your business.." He rolled over into the warm spot his mother had just left on their side of the bed, pulling the covers up further over himself.

Em rubbed her face, trying to defog her brain. She realized how this might have looked, but they'd simply fallen asleep. That was it. Nothing more. So what was he getting so upset about? All three of them were dealing with this horrific realization about her and Norman. So he wanted some comfort from his mother; so what? If

she'd been in the same position when she was his age, if it had started happening to her then, she probably would've been scared to the point of wanting the same from her mother.

"Dylan!" she called out, chasing after him, Norma beside her. He stopped by the top of the stairs and spun on them.

"What do you want me to say?! I don't care what you say about it, that is NOT normal!! He should NOT be sleeping in the same bed with his mother! Let alone in the same bed with the two of you!"

"We just fell asleep, all of us!" Norma told him. "We stayed up really late, talking about everything. That's it!"

"Like what?"

"Oh, I don't know!" Norma said sarcastically, "Maybe the fact that neither of us knew we had a sister until now. Maybe how our lives have been so different, yet in some ways we're so similar...Maybe how you two feel about having an aunt now.

"Yeah, right. Don't you two even get how weird it looks?!"

Em cut in, "Dylan, you're blowing it out of proportion. Nothing at all inappropriate is going on! Like she said, we all just fell asleep!"

He glared at her. "You're a cop, and you don't even see it! You don't get it, do you? Can't you see how close they are all the time? They're so close that it's too weird! No normal teenager is that close with his mother! Or maybe..you don't want to see it; is that it?"

The “normal” comment felt like a knife plunged in her chest. Her throat started to constrict and unwanted tears sprung to her eyes. That was it: her youngest nephew was not normal. Neither was she. They had some unknown, uncontrollable darkness inside them. Maybe it would always be there. If he knew that about her..about Norman..he might walk out of her life forever. She couldn’t have that. Though she’d promised to keep it secret from him, the thought of losing him was unbearable.

“You always have to do this!! Can’t resist it, can you Dylan?!” Norma yelled at him. “You HAVE to stir up trouble whenever you can, making these insinuations when nothing’s going on!”

Em’s voice was rising as well, before she fully realized it. “If something inappropriate was going on, I’d know about it! NOTHING is! Give me some fucking credit, Dylan!”

It was Norma’s turn to reach the verge of tears. Em was defending them. Protecting her and Norman. Because she didn’t know the whole truth...didn’t know the true nature of what they meant to each other. And she never could..

He started down the stairs. “I’m going out. I’ll be back later. I need some time alone to clear my head.” The front door slammed, followed by the outer door, leaving them.

Em swiped angrily at her eyes. Before she could say anything, Norma rubbed a hand on her upper arm, looking her in the face. “Hey, you didn’t do anything wrong. None of us did. Dylan’s a troublemaker, always has been, always will be. He resents me, resents Norman, and he’ll never stop, never let it go. I never wanted you to be put in the middle of that; I’m sorry.”

“I know. And I’m more than aware how close you and Norman are. You’re not doing anything wrong by that. I think it’s..sweet. And I think Dylan’s saying those things ‘cause he can tell it gets to you. Maybe it’d be better to ignore it; don’t even acknowledge it.”

Norma nodded, "He needs to move out. Whatever it takes to make that happen."

"I think so too, and I told him it'd be better if you two put some space between you."

Norman had come out of the bedroom to meet them halfway down the hall, his hair a mess and his eyes still looking sleepy. "Dylan needs to mind his own goddamn business." he interjected.

Like always whenever he was around, Norma's face softened into her usual loving smile. "Makes three of us agreeing on that one. Great way to start the morning. But come on, you two, I'll make us waffles; how does that sound?" She wanted to move on and salvage the mood of a new day, the best she could.

"Sounds perfect. Afterwards, you mind giving me a ride back to my motel room? I need to get some clean clothes on and get some work done for Seattle. I can't be directly involved in the forensics sweep, but they should be making progress on that down in your 12 rooms."

"If it helps catch whoever was kidnapping those women, it'll be worth it. Want to come back for dinner tonight?"

"Of course. Just text me what time."

Norman added, "Could I stay home from school? I want to watch what they're doing at our motel. I promise I won't get in the way."

"Sure, why not?" Norma told him. Honestly, she wanted him with her. The idea of being a lone observer of the FBI squad all day was less than appealing.

True to her previous word, Emma S. was hopeless in the kitchen. She tried to help Norma with breakfast but burned a couple of waffles. Her younger sister chuckled, "Have a seat, don't worry about it."

After getting a second cup of coffee, Em took a seat next to Norman at the table. They exchanged smiles. Much of the early awkwardness had vanished. If not for the reality of the black-outs of and the earlier drama with Dylan, it almost felt like a normal morning with her family. A much nicer morning than her usual ones back at home, which entailed D.C. traffic and the start of long hours in the Hoover Building's bullpen. Always alone in a rushing crowd.

Despite the pleasant breakfast with Norma and Norman, unbidden thoughts of her other nephew kept going through her mind. She briefly recalled the taboo things that had invaded her headspace the evening before: what his lips might feel like on hers, of him pulling her into his muscular arms, of running her fingers into that sandy-blond hair. Before that evening was over, the images had led to a pulsing longing between her thighs.

I need to stop this. I'm just horny and lonely. Lonely as in been without a man for too long. I should go out some time this week, before Seattle, pick one up and get it out of my system. Maybe I can get Norma to go with me. Lord knows she could stand to get out and have some fun.

But the idea of falling into her old behaviors only depressed her. Those were fleeting, shallow physical connections. She used those men. They used her. Neither cared, and she rarely if ever saw them again. It was no longer enough. For the first time since David, she wanted more.

But he's my own nephew. No matter how many times she thought it, it didn't make an iota of difference. And now the apparent estrangement saddened her further.

As they were gathering up the breakfast dishes, her cell phone chimed with an incoming text. Grateful for the distraction, she retrieved it from its charger: Romero.



“It’s the sheriff. He wants to know if he can come over. He arrested Shelby, and he said he has more to tell me.”

“It’s about time; he belongs in jail. Tell him to give us a couple of hours so we can swing by your motel room, so we all can get dressed and ready, okay?”

“Perfect.” Em texted him back as much and got an affirmative.

~~~~~

The night before, sleep was not going to happen any time soon for Sheriff Romero. He sat in an uncomfortable chair in the hospital waiting area, close to the room where Shelby was recovering from surgery. He'd been waiting hours for the deputy to wake up, but in the meantime he had that video footage on his laptop, to keep tormenting his conscious with.

He also couldn't get the images in that hand-drawn journal out of his head. On several of the pages were drawings of the men who'd kidnapped, tortured, and brutalized those young women. Three of those sketches were of a younger, light-haired man who bore a resemblance to Shelby. Not perfectly, and a couple of them didn't show his whole face. But close enough for anyone who knew him to make that connection.

Romero had spent most of the day and evening at the FBI command post, going through that journal and the video footage with Agent Rivera. Although he didn't like the guy's smartass attitude at times, he made an effort to get along with the acting supervisory agent. The sickening things portrayed in that sketchbook were hard to forget. It was all about catching who had committed these atrocities, not about jurisdiction. Besides, the feds had some excellent state-of-the-art equipment and software he could never have fathomed adding to the sheriffs' station.

They sharpened and cleaned up the previously-grainy footage of the attack on Agent Spolee, so much it was no mistake who committed it. They also had facial-recognition software used to try to match enough features of Shelby's face to scans of those drawings. That last endeavor took a lot longer, giving him time to head back to the hospital and confront his soon-to-be former deputy with the video. As Romero waited, he clicked "Play" for at least the dozenth time.



The camera angle was up high and to the left of where Agent Spooler was walking. Shelby sprung out of the bottom corner of the frame, locked his right arm around her neck, and they struggled for a few seconds until he doubled over with her hard and fast jabs to his ribcage. She definitely knew how to use a man's heavier weight against him in an attack. She bent over and grabbed his forearm, moving in exactly the right way so he was flipped off his feet and onto his back. It also moved him partially out of the frame, but if Romero paused it at just the right spot, there was a clear view of Shelby's face. Clearly damning evidence against him.

Romero still winced every time he saw her hit the pavement when Shelby had grabbed her ankle, but she was up in a split second and slamming her night stick into his arm, cracking the bones and breaking his hold on her. That part of the fight moved Shelby the rest of the way out of the frame. The only action still visible was her raising that metal baton and slamming it repeatedly into him. The question was, how long still he'd been subdued? Had she gone too far? Had she kept beating him beyond self-defense? Impossible to tell for sure. Questions for a grand jury, if Zach tried to bring countercharges against her.

One of the nurses came out and told him Shelby was awake. "Keep it short, okay?" she said. "He's got a long road ahead of him."

He nodded in agreement and went to the deputy's bedside. Shelby was heavily bandaged for the broken ribs and sporting an arm cast along with a brace to keep his head from moving too much while the skull fracture healed. Romero started the video footage and turned his laptop around so Shelby could watch it.

"Care to explain this?"

"Uhh.." Shelby groaned. "Not talking without a lawyer." he grumbled, sounding foggy from the pain meds.

“Fine. Zach, I hate to do this. I know we normally take care of things our own way in this town. But you’ve crossed a line. There’s no jury on earth who’ll not find you guilty after they see this. You attacked first, unprovoked. Zach Shelby, you’re under arrest for aggravated assault on a federal law officer.”

“What--What’re you doing?! You can’t--”

“I can and I will.” Romero handcuffed Shelby’s good wrist to the bed frame. “I’ll never understand what you were thinking. You honestly thought you could do that and not bring on a hell of a lot more trouble? Needless to say, you’re fired too.”

Ignoring Shelby’s protests, he left for his own station. Upon his arrival at Maggie Summers’ holding cell, she looked up from the cot she’d been laying on.

“You look terrible, Alex, like you haven’t slept at all.” she informed him.

“Yeah? Well, you don’t exactly look like Ms. Oregon yourself.” He unlocked the door of her cell. “Get out here. I have something to show you. In the interview room.”

She did as he said, dropping herself into a chair. Romero opened his laptop again and pulled up several scanned images of the drawings in question from the journal. Clicking through them, he asked her, “You recognize that younger guy in these? Who does he remind you of?”

Maggie got a look of complete terror in her eyes, but she said nothing.

“Come on, Maggie. You know and I know we’re both thinking the same thing. We both know who this individual looks like. No point in trying to lie about it.”

She bit her lip, slowly shaking her head. “I can’t, Alex. They’ll kill me. They’ll torture me first, then kill me.”

“Deputy Shelby’s in the hospital. There was an altercation last night, and I also fired him. He’ll be out of commission for a while. Now, I know you think you can’t say who that partner of your brother’s was, but here.” He pulled out a small notebook and pen and put them on the table. “All you have to do is write down ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ Is it him?”

She took the pen and turned it nervously over and over in her hand. Finally, she wrote down a word:

YES

Romero inhaled sharply. The whole time. Practically right in front of him, and he’d had no clue. One of his own deputies. Righteous anger flooded him.

“Will you testify? You’ll be protected, Maggie! Nothing bad will happen to you; I swear it! I want these animals brought down! I’m not resting ‘til they are.”

Maggie hesitated, then underlined the “YES.”

After escorting her back to her cell and promising to get in touch with the DA as soon as possible, Romero headed home. Sleep was still elusive for hours, as the realities of White Pine Bay sunk further in. Worse realities than he’d ever imagined, thought, or assumed.

*Not in my town. Not now, not ever. I don’t care what it takes, how many feds I have to work with, or who I have to hunt down. We will find them. They will pay for this.*

Late the next morning, he arrived at the Bates house and was greeted by both sisters at the front door. They led him into the living room, where Norman Bates was seated on the couch and appeared to be working on homework.

“Not feeling well, Norman? I’m guessing that’s why you’re not in school today.” he commented.

“Uh, yeah. I woke up with a stomachache this morning.” Norman lied quickly.

“Hope you feel better soon.”

“Thanks.”

Romero turned to Agent Spooler, who seemed none the worse for wear since he saw her in the hospital the day before.

“How’re you feeling, Em-Agent?” He really needed to stop almost calling her by her first name when it was in an official capacity.

“Fine, just not supposed to exert myself a lot for this week, and I’m on paid leave because of the damn concussion.”

“I have some more good news. Here, take a look at these pages from that sketchbook.” He showed them to her on his computer. “Maggie Summers positively ID’d Shelby as the guy in these drawings. He was running that human trafficking hub here with Keith Summers.”

“Holy fucking shit!!! That’s wonderful to hear!! Amazing work!!” she briefly flung her arms around his shoulders and hugged him, startling him. Then she quickly let go, on seeing Norma returning to the living room with some coffee for Romero.

“Yeah, you’re back to your old self, from what I see.” he quipped.

“Whatever. The point is, that’s one more down. Up next: we need to find Fieretti. And he could be anywhere. Here, Seattle, San Fran, who knows? But I’ll be hunting him there, and you’ll be here. We’ll get him.”

“I’m only sorry it’s not you and me working the rest of this case together.” Romero hadn’t meant to say that out loud. Too late. He tried to cover for it with:

“It’s just..the idea Shelby might have been involved in this...I have no idea who I’m supposed to trust in this town anymore. The fact there was a sex trafficking ring going on is not the half of it. And I hand-picked the guy as deputy too. So if he’s found guilty, than I’m a complete idiot! You think you know someone, put your trust in him—“

“Stop blaming yourself. It’ll do nothing but make you crazy. You can trust my team here. Work with them. I hand-picked and thoroughly vetted all of them myself. The worst any of them have is a speeding ticket.”

She paused and then added, “If you need me, you know, just to talk, I’ll be around for another week. I’ll be back and forth between here, my motel room, and the command post ‘cause I need to get up to speed on Seattle. Then after that, I’m only a phone call away.”

“I’ll keep it in mind. I appreciate that. And I’ll work with them; you have my word on that. When I say you can trust me, you CAN trust me.”

“I know I can.”

“Emma, there’s one more thing.”

“What?”

“The footage of you and Shelby. The last part of it’s questionable. I’m not saying you did this, but it suggests you were beating him after he was subdued. It’s not easy to tell for sure because he’s out of the frame, but, um, it could be bad if he tries to claim excessive force, or even some kind of police brutality.”

“Alex, I don’t remember doing that. I mean, it happened so fast and the adrenaline was pumping. All I was focused on was breaking his grip on me. Let me see it.”

*There’s something wrong with me.*

He put the laptop on the coffee table and pressed “Play.” The four of them watched in silence, then both her sister and nephew turned to gape at Emma S.

Romero voiced what was probably close to their thoughts, “I wasn’t aware they teach you how to fight like that in that fancy FBI school in Virginia.”

“They do to a certain level. I trained on my own after that. Still do. Anyway, Shelby’s going to be indicted for multiple counts of human trafficking, and all the rest of the charges that go along with it. On top of the assault charge on me. My gut tells me he’s going to be too preoccupied to try to make some ‘excessive force’ claim stick to me. So I’m not that concerned about it. Besides, if we bring down Fieretti, and therefore his whole enterprise, the Bureau has a way of conveniently ‘forgetting’ about possible agent-missteps like this. Means to ends.”

Romero nodded, not surprised. “I’ll send you a copy of this footage. I should get going, back on duty. Thanks for the coffee, Mrs. Bates.”

“You’re welcome.” Norma said as she and Emma S. saw him out.

After closing the door, Em turned to her. “Don’t say it! We’re simply respected colleagues, and--”

“I wasn’t going to.” Norma was still staring at her with saucer-wide eyes.

“What?” Em asked her on seeing that expression.

“Will you..teach me how to do that?” her voice was barely above an awed, breathless whisper.

Em looked hard in her eyes. ‘You don’t know how to defend yourself at all, do you Norma?’

Norma slowly shook her head. “I want to. I want to protect myself, and Norman, from anything--and anyone--hurting us. Ever again.”

A smile spread across Emma S’ face. “All right. That’s something we can work on.”