

Chapter 15: Butterfly Effect

The alarm on Norma's phone went off at 2am. She'd set it so Norman could get up and go back to his own room, thus avoiding Dylan catching them in her bed again. She quickly tapped it off and curled back into Norman's arms, running her hand up his smooth bare chest. He was so beautiful. It felt absolutely heavenly to fall asleep with all of her nude body wrapped around his, breathing in his scent, their warm skin pressed together.

I hate this sneaking around...so sick of it..

"Don't want to.." Norman grumbled, echoing her thought.

"Me either, sweetie. But you have to. Not for much longer."

Norman very reluctantly left her arms and felt around in the dark for his discarded boxers.

"Don't worry about the rest of your clothes, sweetie. I'll throw them in the laundry first thing."

"Yes, Mother."

Norma sat up, still wearing nothing but the stockings and garter belt that had made him so wild for her. She stood up, switched on her small bedside lamp, and went to him, giving him one more full view. She gave him one more lingering kiss. "For your dreams, baby."

"I don't want to just dream about you. I want it to stay real. With you. All night."

A rumble of thunder sounded outside, interrupting them; another storm was on its way. This time, the sound filled Norma with a strong sense of foreboding. Every hair on the back of her neck suddenly stood up. She threw on her robe and went to the window, cracking open the heavy curtains she always made sure were shut tight when they were making love.

“Norman, come here! Turn off that light!” she whispered. He did as she said.

A shiny black car was turning off the road and driving very slowly through the motel parking lot. Too slowly, as only someone looking for something would do. It circled around twice before the driver pulled close to the foot of the stairs and sat there with the engine idling. They were being watched, and all of her instincts were saying it wasn't by someone with good intentions.

Norma drew a sharp breath of fear and backed up into Norman, who put one arm protectively around her while pulling one curtain back with the other, getting a look for himself.

“Who is that? What do they want?” he wondered aloud, not wanting her to notice the fear in his voice too. All that mattered to him was keeping her safe.

“What if it's one of those sex-traffickers come back? I'm calling your aunt!”

“Mother, there's the FBI van across the road. I'm sure they'll--”

“I don't care! I want her out here, and I want that creep gone!”

As if on cue, the black car finally pulled out onto the road and took off.

“Aunt Emma's still on leave; can she really do anything about it?”

“All right, fine. Then I’m going to make sure SOMEONE’s noticed that car!” With that, she threw on the first clothes she could grab, shoved her feet into shoes, found a flashlight in her night stand, and headed downstairs.

Norman scrambled to get dressed and then followed after her, “Mother! You’re being unreasonable; they’re watching us and they’ll make sure nothing bad happens.”

“Norman, keep your voice down!” they’d been whispering up until that point. The last thing she wanted was to wake up Dylan. Not that she needed to worry much about that; he was passed out drunk in his bed and never heard a thing.

Norma threw on her coat and went outside, down the stairs, and across the road, Norman at her heels. No way was he letting her go out there alone in the dead of night. They had to maneuver down a swallow culvert and weave through some trees and shrubs before reaching the white van. Norma banged her fist loudly over and over on the van’s back window. The agent who opened the door was a non-descript-looking man in his mid-30s. “Mrs. Bates, is there a problem?” he asked.

“Did you see that guy driving around my motel parking lot? It looked like he was SNEAKING around! It gave me a really bad feeling.”

“Yes, we ran the license plate. It’s from a rental car agency in Portland. Unfortunately we didn’t get a look at the driver. Tinted windows. Nothing really to go on. It could’ve been someone looking for a room, checking if the place is still open; we can’t totally rule that out.”

“At two in the morning?! Come on! And he was sitting there watching our house, for a while!” she argued.

“We can’t automatically assume every late-night visitor to your motel is a suspect unless we have more evidence to back it up. But we’ll keep an eye out for that

vehicle. If you see it here again and it still seems suspicious, give us a call.” He handed her his card. “My name’s Agent Jameson, by the way. Yes, like the whiskey. I get that a lot.” he added, his face breaking into a smile, obviously noticing how pretty Norma was even in her disheveled state. Norman glared furiously at him.

No fucking way, G-man! Stay away from my mother!

“Thank you. I will. Have a good night.” Norma took it and headed back towards the house, Norman at her side. She’d noticed Agent Jameson’s appreciative look at her and she’d ignored it. To reassure him, she laced her arm through Norman’s once they were back on the other side of the road. After all, that was innocent-looking. No one could say they were together just from that, without more evidence.

The next morning while waiting for the bacon and eggs to cook, Norma called her sister anyway and told her about the black car incident.

“Can you come over? You can work here; we won’t bother you. I just feel safer when you’re here, even if the rest of your squad is too.”

“Of course, Norma. As charming as my squad can be, I still like your company a lot better than theirs. Give me a little while to pack up the rest of my office, and then I’m going to go rent a car. I need to anyway, with leaving for the airport day after tomorrow.”

“All right. See you soon.” Norma smiled as they ended the call. A minute later, her phone rang again. It was the sign company she’d ordered the Bates Motel sign from, letting her know it had shipped and would be there in three days. Only adding to the good news, Agent Rivera dropped by the front door after breakfast, letting her know they’d be finished with the evidence-gathering within the next 24 hours, a day or so ahead of schedule.

“That’s wonderful! Thank you for letting me know!” She felt happier, more optimistic than she’d been since the whole FBI/human-trafficking-ring saga had started in their new home town.

“Norman!” she called up the stairs, as he’d gone up to finish getting ready for school. She relayed the news to him about both.

“That’s great, Mother! I can’t wait to see the sign.” he smiled and pulled her in for a hug, his long arms wrapping around her waist.

“Yes, we’re moving forward! You and me. It’s all gonna be good. From now on.” Norma threw her arms around his shoulders and hugged him tight to her. When they finally pulled back, they looked in each other’s eyes and could read what they were both thinking: They wanted to capture each other’s lips so badly in that moment, so much it hurt. Unfortunately, Dylan was headed towards them and out of the kitchen after getting coffee.

“Morning, Mr. and Mrs. Bates.” he said with a roll of his eyes. Norman shot him a nasty look, then pointedly kissed Norma on the cheek. “I’ll see you right after school, Mother.”

“Bye, honey. Have a good day.”

Norman left for the bus stop.

Ignoring Dylan’s remark, Norma told him “The FBI’s going to clear out of the motel by tomorrow, so we can start getting it fixed up and ready to open for business. The new sign’s on its way too. I want you to get to work putting together the flower planter around the base of it, and I want that done before it gets here. The boards and the potting soil are out back. After that, you can get started planting the flowers I picked out.”

“I’ll get right on it, Norma.” Dylan grumbled, sounding extremely unenthusiased. He started for the back door.

Norma thought of telling him that his coffee cup was a piece of her china, not a to-go container. Payback for the dig he’d made at her and Norman. But she remembered what she’d talked about with Em: She was not going to let him get a rise out of her. Not worth it. Not worth spoiling her good mood about their new life going forward in White Pine Bay.

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Meanwhile, Emma S. was in her command post office, packing up case files she’d need. She carried the boxes out to the empty desk in the reception area; once she came back with the rental car, she’d pack them in the trunk.

Turning towards the glass office door, she saw that a blonde teenage girl had stopped to look through the glass, presumably to see if anyone was there. Before Em could react, the girl pulled it open and stepped into the office.

“Excuse me? You’re Norman Bates’ aunt, aren’t you? The FBI agent?”

“Yes. None other.” She figured the whole town knew who she was by now. “Is there something I can help you with?”

“I hope so. My name’s Bradley Martin. Norman and I have a couple of classes at school together. The thing is...my dad’s missing. He went on his lunch break three days ago and no one’s seen or heard from him since! Can you do anything to help? My mom and I are going crazy worrying!”

“I’m sorry to hear that, honey. But that’s a local matter, means there’s really nothing for me do about it. Has your mom filed a missing-person report with Sheriff Romero?”

“Yeah, but he’s not doing ANYTHING about it! Nothing! Just tells us we have to be patient and hope for the best. I think something terrible’s happened to my dad; I just have such a bad feeling!”

Em felt bad for this understandably-upset girl, part of her mind wondering if Bradley’s father might have been involved in the trafficking and thus got the hell out of Dodge once he found out the FBI was in town and closing in. Or been “disappeared” by someone to keep him from talking. Such things were not uncommon.

“I’ll tell you what: I’m going to see Sheriff Romero some time today or tomorrow, and when I do I’ll ask him about it. That’s the only thing I can do. What’s your dad’s name?”

Bradley wiped a tear from one of her eyes. “Okay. Thank you. His name’s Jerry Martin.” Her gaze fell on Em’s desk name plate that was at the top of one of the boxes. “What does S-A-I-C mean?” she asked.

“Special Agent in Charge.”

Bradley’s eyebrows went up, “So you’re, like, the boss agent over the rest of them?” She looked clearly impressed, as if the idea was new to her.

Em read into that expression and thought, *Jesus, what is it with young girls today? It’s like we’re back-pedaling half a century, putting women back in their place. I see it more and more, and that sucks.* Her mother Candace was a 1960s-era feminist and had raised her as such.

“Yes, I am.” she told her. “And yes, women can be the ‘boss agent’, and in a lot of ways we do a hell of a lot better job than the men.”

Bradley smiled at that. “Good to know. Well, I’ve got to get going, don’t wanna be late for school. Thanks again.” She exited the office and headed down the street, still fretting over her missing father. But a seed of inspiration had also been planted in the back her mind. One that would grow into her considering a very different future from the one she’d previously envisioned for herself.

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After getting her rental car and packing it from the command office, Em drove out to her family’s motel. She parked, got out, said some cursory greetings to the agents working to finish the forensics sweep, and then went over to Dylan. He was busy building the planter around the bottom of the poles for the motel sign, and not looking happy doing so. But he brightened up right away when he saw her.

“Hey there, what’s with the grumpy face? I never thought gardening would be THAT bad!” she gently teased him, almost...flirting..a little..before she fully realized it.

He set down the boards he was carrying. “Just more chores Norma’s dropped on me. At least I’ll get to rest while I’m at work. Not much hard labor there.”

“If you’d like, I can help you. I could use the fresh air for a while. Let me get some of this stuff out of the car and take it up to the house first.”

“That’d be great. Is it okay for you to do that? I mean, with the concussion..”

“It’s all but gone, Dylan. I’m not exactly made of glass, you know.”

He grinned, “Nope, you sure as hell aren’t!” Not only would he like her company, he wanted the chance to clear the air over what had happened with her falling asleep in Norma’s bed.

Em only had time to get her laptop bag out of the car before the sheriff’s SUV pulled up and parked beside her.

“Morning, Sheriff.” she greeted Romero when he got out. “Is this police business or a social call?” It hadn’t escaped Em’s attention that Dylan hated it when she called the sheriff “Alex,” so she refrained from it.

“The first one, this time.” Romero handed her a narrow light blue folded piece of paper. “Grand jury summons. For Maggie Summers’ hearing. The judge subpoenaed both of us as the arresting officers. The courier didn’t know where to find you, so I told him I’d take care of it, figured you’d be here.”

She unfolded and read it. “This is for next Tuesday morning! I’m supposed to fly to Seattle this Friday! I figured this would take a few weeks, at least. It usually does.” Part of her was irritated at the delay in her return to the field, but on the other hand she wasn’t truly disappointed she’d be staying longer in White Pine Bay.

“Since we arrested both her and Shelby, the DA’s starting to ramp up the pressure. I imagine we’ll be back in court over him too, before much longer.”

“I suppose we will.” The idea of that sadistic former deputy brought to justice did please her immensely.

Romero struggled with what he wanted to say to her next. Her nephew Dylan was watching them like a hawk, hanging on every word. It was evident the guy didn’t like him, thought Romero couldn’t fathom why. They’d only met once and hadn’t exchanged more than a sentence between them.

“Well, I’ll see you around. See you in court Tuesday morning.”

She smiled, “Looking forward to it. Don’t be a stranger while I’m still here in town.”

He couldn’t help breaking into a smile. “I won’t. Until next time, then.”

Then Em remembered Bradley. “Hey, wait a minute. A girl named Bradley Martin dropped by my office earlier, said her father’s gone missing and you’ve taken the missing-person report. I told her I’d ask you if there’s been any progress.”

Romero shook his head. “Sadly, no. Jerry Martin took off during his lunch break and vanished. Just gone, along with his car. No notes left behind, no response to any calls or texts, nothing. Occasionally, that happens in this town. Someone disappears and the case goes cold more often than not.”

Em understood, given the nature of this town. “It’s a shame. His daughter’s really broken up about it. Seems like a sweet kid.”

“Yeah, it is. Well, take care, Agent Spooler.” He got in his SUV and headed onto Highway 88.

That effect she had on him was still there, couldn’t be ignored. But as he drove away, Romero was starting to mentally face some realities: she lived 3,000 miles away. Even if she came back to visit her birth family on a regular basis, did that much of a long-distance relationship still have a chance in hell of working? And that family of hers was another thing: they seemed very...insular...and they were quickly wrapping her into that. All of this assuming she was even interested in him. Fleeting attraction was one thing, being interested in more was quite another.

Dylan was all too happy to see Sheriff Romero leave. Not that he had anything personal against the guy, but he saw the way he looked at Emma S. It would have been pointless to deny what it set off in him: seething jealousy. That, followed by black despair. Getting to be with her was likely nothing more than a fantasy. They shared the same blood. It would never happen.

Em told him, "I'll be back in a few, to help you finish that." She took her laptop and a box of case files up to the house.

Norma saw her sister through the glass on the front door, and she opened it for her so Em wouldn't have to balance the box while knocking.

"Hey, I found out this morning the forensics crew's going to be done by tomorrow. That's great!"

Em set her stuff down and dropped herself onto the couch. "Yeah, I'm happy about that too. Great for all of us, in several ways."

Norma joined her, "The doctor I called about Norman finally called me back. The earliest they can schedule one of those PT scans is in six weeks!"

Emma S. frowned, "Not surprising. It always has to be a mix of good and bad news, doesn't it? We'll work with that, Norma. Try not to worry too much. I'll try not to as well."

Norma nodded. "So what did the sheriff want?"

"We both got a grand jury summons, for next week. Which means I'm sticking around for a few days longer."

That bit of news set off the same now-familiar war within Norma. She and Norman were going to have to find more creative ways of sneaking around. He was going to skip some more school, they were going to need to take at least one more long drive...being pulled in these opposite directions emotionally was taking a toll on her.

Is it always going to be between them? I want both of them in my life...how the hell could we ever get out of this mess?!

But Norma let her face betray nothing but a warm smile. "I know it might be a delay with your job, but I'm still glad. I enjoy having you around. I keep wishing we'd grown up together, even though we can never change the past."

Em looked her in the eyes, "I've thought that too. But it's never too late 'til we're dead. We can make up for lost time."

"That's true. I'd like that." Norma admitted. "I've got an idea; why don't we go out to dinner tonight? Just you and me. It'll be a night out away from the boys."

"That sounds fun! Let's do it."

"It can be a little celebration of sorts, since I can get the motel up and running now. I'm going to go make Norman and Dylan a turkey pot pie, so all they'll have to do is heat it up in the oven."

"Perfect. I told Dylan I'd help him with the planter, if that's okay."

"Sure. If you want to."

Norma went to the kitchen to start on the pot pie. After some searching, Emma S. found a pair of work gloves and then went back down to the parking lot to join Dylan.

As they started work on the planter, Dylan said “Look, I wanted to say I’m sorry about what I said to you the other morning. When you fell asleep next to the Norms. It was stupid of me. Sometimes I can’t shake the thought something inappropriate’s going on between them. But you’re right: you would have seen it if there was. So there mustn’t be. I guess I just resent the fact he’s gotten all the love...and I never did.” He could scarcely believe he was admitting to her what he’d never have considered voicing to anyone else.

But after their first (and lovely) evening alone together, he felt he could probably talk to her about anything and she’d listen, without the bad attitude or coldness he’d always gotten from his mother. Well, about almost anything...

In truth, he’d been having a very difficult time keeping her out of his head for long. \$300 a day just to sit and guard a pot field left a lot of time to think. Ethan often had to repeat himself when he said something to Dylan, finally asking: “Hey, man, you been tokin’ or something? You’re off in another world most of the time.”

“No! Of course not! I’ve just got a lot on my mind, that stuff at home, you know, with my aunt. We all just found out about her, that my mom even had a sister. None of us had any idea. My grandparents never told anyone they had another kid they adopted out. It’s a lot to take in.”

“Yeah, I can imagine. Just keep your focus when we’re on duty, okay?”

Dylan knew Ethan was right, and he tried his best. Still, his mind wandered.

Emma S. looked a hell of a lot like Norma, but she was everything and more that Norma never was. She was kind, considerate, smart, compassionate, educated, witty, accomplished, financially stable, tough-but-not-hardened, level-headed, rational...he could go on and on. Even the previous night at the strip club with his

new work colleagues, he'd seen a couple of dancers who also had shoulder-length dark brown hair, then he couldn't stop himself from picturing her instead.

She looked intensely at him, her heart going out to him. Well, that...and those very inappropriate feelings she was having towards him. "It's okay, Dylan. It's forgiven. I know life hasn't been easy for you, in a lot of ways. I understand how you'd feel resentful; it's perfectly natural in this situation."

"I thought about what we talked about, about me moving on with my own life. I started looking for my own place that I can afford. So far, most are out of my price range until I can save some money, but I'm still looking."

"Sounds great. So, how's the security job going?"

"It's all right. A lot of sitting around, actually. Not a lot to talk about."

"What weapon did they issue you?"

He'd gotten his own, but he told her, "A snub-nosed .38 Special."

"Not bad. Mine's a 9mm Glock, standard Bureau issue now. When I first started, we had Sig Sauer 228s, which I liked better, but they were discontinued. I also have a Smith and Wesson 1076 at home."

I'm falling in love with her...I can't help it...went through his mind. Stop it! You've GOT to knock off thinking about her like that! Wishful thinking anyway.. Half his mind was berating him, but the other half was ignoring it.

"Maybe before I leave, we can make time to go to the shooting range. if there's one not too far." she suggested.

“Yeah, you have a Combat Pistol medal; you’d probably smoke me!” Dylan laughed. “Not that I’d mind or anything,” he added quickly.

Emma S. laughed too, and damn he loved the sound of her laugh. “I guess we’ll have to see about that, won’t we?” She gave him another heart-stopping smile, and...Dylan wasn’t sure, but was that smile a little...flirtatious?

“Um, I was meaning to ask you something else too, since you’re going to be here a few more days...I’ve been wanting to ride my bike up the coast some time, you know, ‘cause it’s supposed to be really beautiful and I’ve been wanting to see it...Would you..like to go with me?”

“I’d love to!” She sounded delighted.

“Really?”

“Sure; that’ll be fun. I’ve been wanting to see some of that famous Oregon coastline while I’m here. I didn’t think I’d get the chance to, until now. How about tomorrow, at 11? I’m going out to dinner with your mom tonight, just in case we get back late.”

“Perfect. I’m looking forward to it.” Dylan grinned at her, the first time he’d smiled so hard like that in so long he didn’t even remember.

“Me too. It’s a date then.” Emma S. dropped what she was doing and went over to him, her heart overruling her head.

Before he had time to move or even think, she slipped into his arms, giving him a close hug, enough to where their chests met and the side of her head was against the side of his.

Oh my GOD; she feels amazing!! Plus he thought he could get intoxicated just off the scent of her alone...

They broke apart, and she gave him a rather mischievous-looking smile. They spent the rest of the afternoon finishing the planter, then adding the flowers to it. Dylan felt so elated, it was hard to describe. He felt like the high school outcast who'd just asked the most beautiful, popular girl in school to the prom, and she'd said YES!!!

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Later that night, Norman had finished his homework and was in bed with his laptop when Norma came in wearing her pajamas and flopped into bed beside him. She kissed him in the hollow of his neck, in that one spot she knew he liked.

They grinned at each other and both started to say exactly the same thing in unison: "I think-" Both stopped and laughed.

"Sorry, Mother."

"No, you go ahead sweetie, what is it?"

"I think Dylan's got a crush on Aunt Emma."

Norma gasped in mock surprise. "No! Really?! Whatever gives you that idea? Not like he might as well be wearing a neon sign about it or anything!" she joked before dissolving into a fit of giggles.

Not that Dylan crushing on Aunt Emma was that funny; it made Norma and Norman both giddy for another reason: it would be a big distraction, taking his focus off them and really lowering the chances of his finding out about them. Yeah, she was her sister and Norma cared for her a lot--but it's not like Emma S. would actually go for it



with Dylan. She wasn't like them, at least not in that sense. Some harmless puppy-love would keep Dylan occupied and hopefully away from the house even more. Not being able to make love throughout the house whenever and wherever they wanted was beyond frustrating, making them both want him gone ASAP. Norma was just looking for an excuse to make him move out, but so far one hadn't presented itself.

When Dylan got upstairs to his room and started getting ready for bed, he could hear faint voices coming from the old-fashioned heating/cooling vent near the ceiling. That sometimes happened in this old house. He heard Norman murmur something unintelligible, followed by Norma's laughter. Then they grew quiet. So, he guessed they had figured it out. Now they were talking about him and laughing at him behind his back. Typical.

*Screw them. Who cares? Let them laugh like they're both a couple of stupid teenagers. I still get to spend part of tomorrow alone with the most wonderful woman I've ever met in my life. Nothing's going to spoil that--especially not those two!*