

Chapter 32: Because I Love You

The next morning, the social worker showed up to Emma's apartment right on time. Thanks to a combined effort, the place was spotless, and no one would've guessed anyone other than she and Norman were living there. It had been a major task getting Norma's dress rack, along with some of her and Norman's suitcases, into Em's walk-in closet. The rest, along with Dylan's stuff, got jammed into the hall closet, and the door had needed to be shoved firmly to get it to close. Emma wasn't worried that this pinched-faced, humorless woman would go opening either of those closets. That would just be weird.

Norman was seated at the kitchen island, appearing hard at work studying for the GED. He was dressed in a pair of his nicest tan slacks and the light blue shirt that brought out his eyes. Both she and Norman shook her hand, greeting her warmly, really pouring on the charm. Nothing out of the ordinary here. No, nothing at all.

The woman didn't return their smiles, launching instead into her monotone line of questioning, how many hours a day did Emma work, how often was she out of town, what she planned to do with Norman while she was out of town (in so many words), when was she planning to enroll him in school, and whether Em was considering getting a bigger apartment so Norman could have his own room instead of sleeping on the sofa bed in the living room. So far, aunt and nephew didn't seem to be scoring a lot of points. Emma told her that Norman was getting his GED, so he could study whenever and therefore go with her when she was called out of town. Social worker lady frowned in disapproval at the fact Norman wasn't going back to high school, but of course there was no rule against that.

Emma-Christine and Norman side-glanced at each other. They needed to come up with something to say to turn this around, and quick. Norman spoke up, "Aunt Emma's helped me and my mother a lot. I have, uh, a medical condition, and I wouldn't be able to get any treatment for it if not for her. She's doing everything she

can." This condescending woman was getting on his nerves, and he resented her implication that he needed a parent figure watching him 24/7. He was very nearly a grown man, for god's sake. But looking upset or being rude would only make things worse, so he forced a smile and a gentlemanly tone of voice.

The woman regarded them over the tops of her reading glasses for a moment, then wrote something else on the legal pad she'd been making notes on. "I'd like you to consider upgrading to a two-bedroom apartment. I'm aware it's an added expense, but it does provide an improved home situation, Ms,...I mean, Agent Spooler."

Emma hated being called "Ms." or even worse: "Miss." Call her "Agent Spooler" or call her by her first name. Or her first-plus-her-middle-name; that worked too. This bureaucrat was starting to irritate her as well, though she did appreciate the correction on how to address her. She worked her ass off to earn that title. Breaking the lease on the apartment and finding a bigger one was going to be an expensive hassle, and Norman's birthday would probably be close by the time a move was over with. Emma gave a tight smile and simply said, "Yes, I understand. I'll look into it."

"Besides that, everything else seems adequate. I'm going to approve your guardianship. I'll send the papers over to the judge as soon as I get back to my office. It'll be permanent as soon as he signs them." The woman scrutinized Norman and Emma for a few beats, then she added "You know, you two look almost more like mother and son than aunt and nephew. It's..unusual."

Norman and Emma-Christine smiled at each other. He thought of saying he considered that a compliment, but he worried it might sound odd.

Emma covered for them, "Yeah, people say that my sister and I look a lot alike. I'll have to tell her that when I talk to her. She'll get a kick out of it."

They politely said their good-byes, Em thanking the woman for the visit and the approval. Once the front door was shut, she turned and leaned her back against it, letting out a huge sigh of relief. Norman came up close, putting his hands gently on her waist and bringing her in for a hug. She wrapped her arms around his shoulders and held him, grateful for the support.

"We did it, Norman. Thank god that's over with!"

"You did it, Aunt Emma." he said. "I didn't do much of anything." Norman tightened his arms around her, then turned his face towards hers. "Don't think I'm gonna stop teasing you about being my guardian. The only guardian I'd ever want." He planted a soft kiss on her cheek, then one at the corner of her mouth.

"Norman.." her voice was a protest, but a weak one. She placed the palm of her hand against his chest, but she didn't push him away or back off.

"What, Aunt Emma?" he said with that sweet pretend innocence. A playful smile came over his lips. "I'm just kissing you. That's not against the rules, is it?" Norman knew he was playing a little with fire. She was not a woman who needed a man to protect her. He knew she could throw him on his back and knock the wind out of him in three seconds flat. That bit of danger made it even more exciting, causing his dick to start hardening. "I'm so happy, so grateful for you..I want to show you how much." Norman took her chin gently in one hand, brushed a slow soft kiss over her lips.

"Because I love you." he murmured close against them.

Emma knew she needed to end this, right now before she lost what resolve she had and this grew into something neither of them had the will or the desire to stop. His sweet loving words, those puppy-dog eyes...damn it, he knew exactly how to melt both her and Norma, and he was well aware of that effect he could have on them.

"Norman..honey.." She returned his kiss as he brought his lips back to hers. Briefly, though her tongue did brush his bottom lip. Then she pressed her hand a bit more firmly against him. "We need to not do this; your mother and your brother could be back any minute."

Norman looked hurt and rather sulky, though he did loosen his arms around her, secretly to her body's disappointment. "We've already done it. More than once. I don't see what the big deal is now."

"Oh, I get it. You don't like the idea of me and your mother having sex by ourselves, but now it's okay for you and me to do it by ourselves, hm? That's definitely a double standard you've got going on there." she informed him.

"Huh." Norman didn't know how to respond to that at first. True, he only wanted Aunt Emma and Mother getting intimate when he was there to join them. And take care of them both. When did this all become so complicated? "Yeah..I guess." he admitted. "I didn't think of it like that." Because sometimes..well, more often lately..he'd only been thinking with his cock. He was young, full of those urges, and living with two gorgeous and insatiable women (one of who was his soulmate), so could anyone blame him? He smirked, thinking most guys would kill to be in his place with Mother and Aunt Emma. Speaking of the devil, Aunt Emma had that same smirk on her lips; she was likely thinking the same thing about him.

"I know lately it's been tough to think with the head on your shoulders," she said. "But there is a time and a place for both, honey. That next time will be tonight." Em gave him one more smoldering look of promise before dropping her arms from around him. "Well, I'm going to text your mother, see how long they're gonna be. After they get back, what to you say we all go out and do something fun? Like go to the Smithsonian, maybe."

"Sure, sounds perfect." Norman had been looking forward to going there, especially to the Natural History Museum and the International Spy Museum. He got out his laptop and started browsing through pictures of both, excited about the rest of the day ahead. Emma-Christine was in a fairly good mood too, though she figured it was probably best that Norman hadn't seen the look his brother had given both her AND Norma when they'd picked him up at the airport. Things were going to get interesting tonight.



There wasn't any point in trying to deny or ignore it: Dylan was a different person now than the one she'd known for the first 21 years of his existence. He'd always been the horrid reminder of rape at the hands of her brother. Now..Norma had a difficult time trying to explain it even to herself. It seemed he saw her as a reminder of how he'd met the woman he loved. It was like he believed he never would have, if it hadn't been for Norma. Then there was also the fact she'd gotten much closer with Emma-Christine herself. As close as she could possibly get.

They walked for a while through the outdoor shopping district not far from Em's apartment building. Dylan was enthralled with the city, and who could blame him? He'd been raised (if you could even call it that) in an Arizona suburb, then after he'd taken off when he was 16, he'd lived in rural logging towns and whichever nondescript town his drifting had taken him to. Norma picked a nice-looking diner a couple of blocks away from Bainbridge Bethesda. As she sipped her hot tea while they waited for their order, she studied him as he'd been looking at her.

Dylan was the first to speak and break this unspoken tension, "So..Norma..umm..". His face flushed as he tried to get the right words out, "Do you..uh..feel any different?" He was immediately embarrassed to the Nth degree as he let that question out.

Their food got there before she could respond. Waffles for her, an omelette for him. "Different as opposed to what, Dylan?" She asked as she started digging in. Norma knew what he meant; she simply wanted to hear him say it. She couldn't help the smile spreading over her lips at the sight of him starting to squirm. She was relishing him being so uncomfortable; she couldn't help it.

"Uhh...different since you...umm...oh shit, Norma! You know what I'm getting at! Don't play all innocent and pretend you don't."

"Different since I had sex with your girlfriend who also happens to be my sister?" Norma could never have predicted in a million years that those words would come out of her mouth. Her mind flashed back to being on all fours on Em's bed, naked and gasping in ecstasy as Norman and Emma-Christine took turns spanking her. The image brought warmth to her cheeks and a faint pulsing ache at the juncture of her thighs.

"You're blushing, Norma. I don't think I've ever seen you blush before." Dylan's turn to start smirking. "That good, huh? Doesn't surprise me. She's incredible. In every way." he reached across the table and took her hand, squeezed it lovingly. Also a first. "She's the best thing that's ever happened to me, in my entire life. I never wanted to move back home with you, but it turned out to be the best thing I ever did. Because it brought me right to her. I still think about that day."

Norma was surprised to find herself squeezing his hand back. "Emma's a remarkable woman. Yes, I do mean in every way. The only one I'd ever think of..being intimate with. She's so good for you. I, um, didn't like the idea of you two being together at first, but I would've been a total hypocrite. As we all know now."

Dylan's eyes seemed to burn into hers, "Norma, I can't get it out of my head: you and her together on her bed. I still have those pictures she took." His thumb stroked the back of her hand. Before, she would have pulled it away. Now, she didn't.

"Oh I'm sure you do! I'm sure you enjoyed yourself to exhaustion with those."

"Do you...uhh...want to..again with her?"

Norma figured he was getting territorial, or else hopeful. She couldn't exactly tell which. "Yes." she said with a note of defiance. "If we're both in the mood, I'll want to. And let's not kid ourselves: four of us are crammed in that apartment that's not that big. We've already seen plenty, and I know we're going to see plenty more of each other." She decided not to mention Norman as part of that equation, not yet anyway.

"Yeah, I know. What would you do if I saw you and her together?"

"I imagine we'd keep going," Norma smirked at him. "Em gets a kick out of tormenting you. I can see it. She's got you eating out of the palm of her hand."

"It's the sweetest torment I could ever imagine." Dylan was quiet for a few moments as he finished up his breakfast. "I love her, Norma. I want to spend the rest of my life with her. She asked me if I wanted to move here to D.C. with her, and I said 'Yes.'"

Conflicting emotions whirled inside Norma, at hearing his words. A sense of pending loss, at the idea of their very intimate little family being split in half, separated by a whole country. It was shocking, because at one time she would've wanted nothing more than just her and Norman alone in their house, running their motel. Now she hated the idea of life without Emma-Christine in it. Hanging out with her, doing all the fun stuff sisters did, making up for all that lost time. Inviting her into her and Norman's bed when the mood struck all of them, as it so frequently did.

Unbelievably...was Norma even feeling a trace of..jealousy? No. That couldn't be it. And anyway that was a fantasy in her head. Her sister and her older son were in love. There was no changing that, no getting around it. If Dylan had to be part of that deal..well, she could live with that. She didn't exactly feel her old dislike and

revulsion at the idea of him around. Not completely, anyway. Em had brought out the best in him; that was obvious in so many ways.

Speaking of which, after they both finished eating and the check came, Dylan grabbed it before she could protest. "I'm paying. I insist." he said, counting out enough cash to cover the bill plus a small tip. He'd managed to make his savings stretch somewhat, after buying his truck and after his job in White Pine Bay had disappeared. But it didn't matter. He'd find something here in Washington. Maybe be a museum guard. Yeah, that sounded cool.

Dylan stood up and took Norma's coat from where it was hanging up behind the diner booth and held it open for her. She stepped against him and slipped it on, before turning and smiling at him. "You're such a gentleman now. I really like that."

He returned her smile and held open his elbow for her to thread her arm through. Norma usually reserved that privilege only for Norman, but this one time wouldn't hurt. Dylan was so sweet and polite now, so much more like his brother. She indulged him, taking his arm as they exited the diner.

"I'm not ready to go home yet, and they're probably not done with that social worker anyway." Norma said, "How about we go for another walk, explore a few more blocks?"

"Sounds great. I'm gonna need to get familiar with it, what with moving here. This city is so exciting. I can't wait to go to the museums and stuff. When are we gonna do that, anyway?" Dylan wanted to know.

Norma tried not to let him see the crestfallen look on her face. Dylan was happy, for the first time ever, and he was so excited for the future. "After your brother gets settled, going to that hospital every day. We'll give him a few days to get adjusted, then we'll plan all that, okay?"

That seemed reasonable to Dylan. As they walked, she listened to his enthusiastic chatter about his plans after he moved here to be with Emma-Christine, what kind of work he'd look for, maybe they'd get a two-bedroom apartment for when the Norms visited, and on and on.

"Norma, you're being awfully quiet." he finally remarked, looking into her face. "What is it?"

They'd stopped in front of the fountain near the entrance to the Bethesda Metro Station. Norma glanced away, staring at the splashing water for several seconds. "It sounds great, Dylan. All of it. You're going to have a whole new start here. I'm happy for you, happy you're going to be doing something decent and not guarding a pot field. This is going to be so good for you, all of it. It's just..It's going to be hard to say goodbye to you and Emma. I love Norman more than anything, and until she--then you--came into our lives, I always wanted it to be just me and him. But now.." Norma was surprised her throat was tightening. She swallowed hard, then went on, "The house is going to feel so much emptier with just me and him. I've gotten used to it being the four of us. You two sure liven things up, never a dull moment. I can't believe I'm saying it, but I'm going to miss you."

Dylan took her hand and stepped closer. Before Norma could say more, he enveloped her in his arms, in a strong hug. She stiffened for second, then her body relaxed against his, her arms wrapping around his shoulders. They remained like that for a long moment. Norma's fingers ran over the back of his neck, a little bit into his neatly trimmed hair. She breathed in the wintry cologne he was wearing, that her sister had undoubtedly bought him. Her oldest son. That constant reminder of the hell she'd endured at the hands of her brother. He didn't ask to be brought into this world, though. Norma told herself she should remember that more often. All the same, she couldn't ever tell him who his father really was. It would destroy him and destroy Emma. Let them be happy and have their future together. They didn't need to know. It was all in the past anyway.

"Dylan.." she said softly. "I should have been more of a mother to you. I'm sorry. It wasn't right of me. It was just so bad..with Sam..and I got so wrapped up with Norman as soon as he was born."

He squeezed her a bit tighter, and she welcomed it. "It's never too late to change things..Mom. Move forward from here. We can't change the past, but we can have a better future together."

Norma felt closer to tears at his calling her "Mom." She couldn't remember the last time he had. She turned and kissed his cheek. Then she pulled back slowly, their arms loosening somewhat. Her own cheek brushed against the light stubble on his face. The next thing she knew, her lips were on his. Dylan jolted slightly, then he was holding her firmly again and kissing her back. His full soft lips ran slowly over hers, exploring, savoring them. Then he gently coaxed them a little further apart, his tongue flicking over her bottom lip. Warmth was spreading through her body, then her mind caught up with what they were doing.

"Jesus!" Norma quickly broke her lips away from his, before the kiss could get any deeper. "Dylan..." She dropped her arms from him, and he released her. What the hell could she say? Where on earth had THAT come from?!

"I'm sorry! I, uh, I don't know what happened there, Norma! I..I lost my head for a sec.."

"It wasn't just you. I'm pretty sure I was the one who moved first!" Norma's head was reeling. She'd just locked lips with her other son, who was also her sister's lover, and she'd also been sleeping with said lover. Not to mention her youngest son was her true love. It was enough to give anyone on the outside a serious mind-fuck. Yes, their family of four was truly one of a kind. Norma shook her head, giving out a short dry laugh. "What the hell. What's one more kiss among this family? We've all seen--and done--pretty much everything else." She cupped his chin and gave him another

brief but enthusiastic kiss on the lips. If Dylan wanted to see a show between her and Emma, that's what they'd give him. Probably more than he bargained for, especially with Norman right there watching them too. She winked, then took his arm again, "Come on, let's head back." Norma enjoyed the crisp air of November in Maryland as they walked back through busy downtown Bethesda, her mood much improved. Dylan was speechless at first, taking several minutes to recover from the shock of what she'd done, and what she'd wordlessly promised.

When she unlocked the apartment door with the key Em had given her, Norman was lounging on the folded-up couch, watching some video on his laptop, and Emma-Christine was at the kitchen island, looking at something on her own computer. Both of them looked up with bright smiles at seeing Norma and Dylan returning. A little too bright, actually.

"Mother!" Norman called out, "It got approved; we did it!" He moved his legs and sat up, as Norma came over and sat down next to him. She wrapped her arms around him and held him to her. "I never had any doubts about it, sweetie. After this is all over, once you're out of the hospital, it'll be us together forever." She gave him a kiss on the forehead, before he lifted his face to hers.

"I know, Mother. I've always known. Forever. I'm going to work really hard to get better, and I know I can do this." Norman leaned in and gave her lips a lingering kiss. For a terrifying second, she thought he'd detect his brother's cologne on her, but he didn't say a word about it if he did.

When Norman drew back from her, his eyes darted to Emma-Christine for a second, then back to Norma. She saw that vague sadness in them, and she knew he had to be thinking what she had earlier. Norman could take or leave his brother, but he was going to have a rough time saying good-bye to his aunt, once it was eventually time for him and Norma to fly back to Oregon by themselves. She wouldn't be his guardian by that point, he'd be his own man, returning with the woman he loved to

their home. All the same, there was going to be a hole left in their lives when that day eventually arrived.



Two days later:

He'd figured he could handle it, if he didn't think too much about it. Shoved it down and denied it, so similar to what his mother had often done ever since he could remember. When Norman opened his eyes in the dim morning light, he knew that day he'd been fearing was here. The part of his troubled mind that was still logical said it was the right thing, the good thing for him. For all of them. It was that twisted, dark side of his nature that was railing against it. That side of him that he still couldn't begin to understand, that darkness he shared with Aunt Emma. To say the four of them were bonded by blood wasn't the half of it. Letting a stranger--especially any psychiatrist--get close to their secret world was dangerous.

Aunt Emma undergone therapy before, even been hospitalized, but Norman wasn't the smooth operator she was. She had this way of saying things, of answering any questions, with total authority. So no one, not even a shrink, questioned or doubted anything she said. He was going to have to study her even closer, figure out how she did it. He had to, if he was going to protect all of them as they'd all sworn to protect one another.

Norman had been laying on his back, staring at the ceiling as these thoughts swirled through his mind. The worry was causing his heart to pound harder. His arm tightened around his mother, as she lay curled against him, still asleep with her face buried against his neck. She gave a sleepy wordless murmur. He smiled softly, her beautiful presence calming him somewhat. There was no way he could ever wake up again, without the first thing he felt being her smooth, warm, perfect body wrapped around his. Norman turned his face closer to hers, dropped a soft kiss onto

her forehead. "Mother. I love you." he whispered. "I don't want to leave your side, ever."

"I don't want that either, baby." Norma was waking up more, tightening her arms around him and rolling over so her hardening nipples were against his chest."

Norman found her lips with his. "Not even for a day," he murmured after giving her a sleepy kiss.

"Mmm..It's not even a day, sweetie. Just until five. It'll all be good; I don't want you to worry about any of it."

He pulled her completely on top of him, "I know, Mother. I know what I have to do." Norman gave her a longer, deeper kiss, then: "And what I'll never do or say."

Norma smiled against his lips. "That's all I need to hear."

They moved together as he slid inside her ready opening, her movements languorous and slower than usual.

"Still tired, Mother?" Norman asked with a wicked little smile.

"Yes..Good lord, those two! I'm surprised we didn't get a noise complaint. They kept me awake half the night, at least!" She let out a brief chuckle, "When you and me weren't keeping each other awake!"

For the past couple of nights, Emma and Dylan had told the Norms good night and retreated to Em's bedroom, after the four of them had cleaned up from dinner and watched part of something-or-other on TV. They also shut the door behind them, to Norma's admitted disappointment. Since that kiss by the fountain, Dylan seemed a bit embarrassed whenever they made eye contact, his face reddening for a few

seconds. Of course he hadn't brought it up, though Norma caught him looking back and forth between her and Emma, whenever the sisters were close together and he thought they weren't noticing. An unmistakable look of lusty desire darkened his eyes.

Norma and Norman soon got up, put on their robes, and joined Em and Dylan at breakfast. Norma did most of the work, making eggs, bacon, and pancakes. It didn't escape her attention that Dylan leaned against the kitchen counter while he was eating.

"Is there something wrong with the chairs, Dylan?" Norma asked him, unable to stop the wicked smile from forming on her face. She could tell exactly why he was avoiding sitting down. The hard, loud slaps of the paddle and the cries of pain-mixed-with-pleasure had told enough during the night.

He glared at her, knowing she was taunting him. "The chairs are fine, Norma! I feel like standing up, that's all."

Norma glanced at Emma-Christine across the table, raising her eyebrows. Em grinned and gave a slight shrug. Norma smiled, her cheeks growing a bit warm. Her ass had gotten a few glorious bruises at the receiving end of that same paddle. For the time being, Dylan was on a need-to-know basis about those details, and he didn't need to know.

None of them had time to dwell on that though, as they finished up breakfast, headed down to the parking garage, and piled into the Mustang. Norman was getting more and more agitated, the further northeast they moved along the freeway toward Baltimore. He tried to distract himself with the views of all the D.C. monuments they'd be visiting, when he didn't have to be at that hospital during the weekends. Tried to focus on something positive, but it wasn't working. The blood

kept on roaring in his ears, getting louder as they got closer, even with the crawling traffic.

He squeezed Norma's hand, cuddling against her. "I don't want to leave you, Mother."

She leaned into him, stroking the side of his face, down to his pulse point and feeling his rapid heartbeat. "Norman, sweetie..we talked about this. You're going to be fine! We're going to be right there at the front door to pick you up. You know what to say to them, how to keep your guard up; you have to!"

As much as they'd tried to prepare themselves for it, they weren't ready. They probably never would be ready. When they reached the front entrance, the psychiatrist and one of the psych nurses greeted them, and Norman was to go with them. Norma pulled him tight to her, racked with sobs. "I'll be back, honey! We'll be back, I promise!"

Dylan and Emma each put a hand on her shoulder and gently pulled her back. Time to go. They only made it a few steps back down the front walkway before Norma almost collapsed, crying hysterically. Her sister gathered her up in her arms and held her as Norma cried into her shoulder. Dylan kept his hand on Norma's upper back, gently stroking it. He felt a stab of disappointment and even hurt that she hadn't turned to him first, wrapped herself in his arms. He didn't need to be disappointed for long, though. Norma let go of Emma-Christine and slid her arms around his neck, crying more against him, her tears soaking into his shirt as she buried her face against his chest. He rubbed her back, "Hey, Norma. It's okay. He's gonna be okay. We'll be back to get him in eight hours. It's not that long. You can go for eight hours, can't you?"

Norma released her grip around him. "I know. It's so hard, my god it used to be so much easier when he went to school for that same amount of time...but this..this is so different.."

"Hey, I have an idea." Emma cut in, hoping this would distract all three of them. "How about we go to the practice simulation room for the Combat Pistol Qualifier? You two can watch me. I fully intend to win this fucker again. It will shut anyone up about whether I'm completely fit for duty. Plus, you two can take the FBI Building tour at no cost, since you're family of an agent."

Norma and Dylan looked at her with wide eyes. Though it hurt like hell to leave Norman, this was something very special. Very much a welcome distraction until five that evening. Both nodded, practically at once. "Okay, Em. Let's go." Norma told her, wiping the last of the tears from her eyes.

About an hour and a half's drive later, the three of them were back at the J. Edgar Hoover FBI Building. Well, back for Norma and Emma. Dylan's eyes were nearly popping out of his head, "Ohh my god..this doesn't seem real.." he breathed, taking it all in.

Em turned around and smiled at him as she found a space in the garage. "Believe it, honey. Because it's real."

The three of them took an elevator to one of the upper floors and exited into a dark, windowless hexagonal room. Em strode to a computer terminal at the center of the room and logged into the system. All six of the screens lit up with different first-person-shooter scenes in detailed high definition. She turned to the two of them, "Your tax dollars at work." She said with a smile. "Have a seat. Watch and tell me what you think I might do better." Em gestured to some folding chairs at the edge of this practice room. Norma and Dylan each took a seat. Emma picked up a simulation Glock 9mm that was modified to hit opponents only digitally, just like in

any video game. She scraped her hair back and tied it with an elastic band, then yelled "GO!" at the voice-activated program. Digital thugs, mobsters, bank robbers, all kinds of criminal scum pulled out their weapons and tried to shoot at her. Em aimed and fired, turned and fired, turned and shot again, dodging red digital lines of light that represented bullets fired at her. She hit all of them from all six sides, ducked and shoulder-rolled a few times, still hitting the enemy when she came back up. Each time she took out a shot that hit one of them fatally, each computer-simulated criminal shattered into small red blocks and disappeared. When there was only one of them left, she took a calculated risk. Admittedly, she wanted to show off for the two of them. Em got a good running start, raced to one of the darkened hexagonal walls where she'd already killed an opponent, took a hard jump and kicked one of her boot-clad feet against it. The motion sent her into a back tuck through the air, her landing on her feet but barely, with her hands reaching out to catch herself. She hadn't done that move in years, but she still managed to stand up, aim and fire at the last computer-simulated criminal. It hit him square in the face. The lights came back on, and she turned to see both their shocked faces.

"Emma! Jesus Christ, fucking Xena Warrior Princess, where did you learn to do that?!??" Dylan was stammering over himself. He'd seen plenty of action movies, but those had no comparison to this. Live. Right in front of him. Norma was equally flabbergasted, unable to form coherent words.

"Krav Maga training." She told them both with a smile, "I recommend it to anyone. Come on, you two. Let's go get you set up on that tour, then after that let's go get lunch. I'm sure we'll all be starving after that."



It helped a little that Bayview was so picturesque, a series of multi-story brick buildings surrounded by immaculate green lawns. The ground-floor common area had large windows on all sides, letting in plenty of light. It didn't feel like a mental

health treatment hospital at all, more like a college or a fancier high school. The first thing on the agenda for him was a bunch of medical tests that would take up most of the morning, to determine what medication had the best chances of making the visions and the hallucinations stop. After Norman sulked and winced at being poked and prodded with needles a handful of times, he was told he could get dressed and head to the dining area, time for lunch. The food there at Bayview was actually quite good, a lot of organic salad and sandwich choices; it seemed the place had an emphasis on healthy eating as well.

After the lunch hour was over was when it really got interesting. Norman learned that every afternoon at this time, he'd be grouped off for a "meet-and-greet" for half an hour with two random other patients relatively close to his age, whom he might see again in group therapy later. There was no one younger than 16 or older than 24 at Bayview, so it seemed that might help in making them all relate to one another..ideally anyway.

He took a seat in a circle with the psychiatric nurse assigned to their group of three. The first to tell her story was Heather, age 16, from a small town in Indiana, recently committed to Bayview after being found mentally incompetent to stand trial for what she'd done: she'd tried to drown and had nearly killed her five-year-old cousin in a bathtub. She swore that demons kept talking to her, telling her awful things, that they'd stop and go away if she took her little cousin's life. Then she said tearfully that the demons lied, they never stopped. Only her medication helped keep them quiet.

The second in their circle was Danny, age 19, here all the way from San Diego, California. He'd been here at Bayview for nearly three years already, and it was likely he'd spend the rest of his life in some mental hospital or other, by order of the law. When he was 15, he learned through the news and through the police scanners he listened to of a child-abducting pedophile in a clown's mask who was snatching children from his neighborhood. After Danny learned of the kidnapper's windowless white van description, he stole his dad's Colt .45 revolver and kept it in his backpack.

Luck would have it, one day while walking home from school, Danny saw a guy in a clown mask trying to wrestle a little girl about six years old into the back of that very same white van. Danny sped up to him and held the loaded gun to the would-be kidnapper's head. "Drop her. Let her go." He said. The abductor let go of the little girl. "Run. Home. As fast as you can." Danny told her. She did, sped off. He kept the gun on the child-rapist's head. "Drive. Now." He ordered him. The 15-year-old boy ordered the child-p0rnographer to drive out to the middle of nowhere in the California high desert, ordered him out of the van, then made him get out and kneel before shooting him right through the head.

Norman looked incredulously at Danny as he'd told his story. "Dude..You shouldn't be in here. You should be given a medal." he told him.

Danny looked back at him with a cynical smirk, "Tell that to the judge. Not that it makes one fuckin ounce of difference."

Norman's turn to tell his story. "Umm...nothing like that.." he stammered.. "I, um..have blackouts and I can't remember what happens during them." Yeah, that was it..Nothing else happened during them. Nothing at all.

So it went; the foursome got into something of a routine. Norman spent the next three weekdays at Bayview. He had individual sessions with a shrink as well, telling only what he knew was safe. The hospital also prescribed some medication he was to take every morning. It made any voices of his mother or aunt go away. It also made him sleepy, groggy, and irritable. He got tired during love-making much more easily, at least at first. He lay there on his back while Norma did most of the work; not that he was complaining about enjoying the full view of her beautiful body.

Finally, it was Saturday and he could stay home all day. The four of them spent the day at the Smithsonian, visiting several of the museums there. Emma-Christine had been fighting an internal war about what to tell Dylan. She'd fucked his brother, and

she knew it was not going to be okay, not at all. After a day of museum-visiting, the four of them ended up at the Law Enforcement Officers Memorial at the National Mall. She took Dylan's hand and led him to where she'd been told the name would be etched. She'd made a phone call and shelled out a small fee for this to happen. Yes, there it was: **Alexander J. Romero: White Pine Bay, Oregon**. She squeezed Dylan's hand, "I know what you're thinking, but right before.." She swallowed hard. "Right before he died, he told me to tell you.." Em tried and failed to suppress a sob, "He told me to tell you to make me happy, that it didn't matter anymore, that he was sorry.."

Dylan took her in his arms, holding her tight as she started to cry harder, her face buried in his shoulder. "Oh Emma.." he murmured. "I WILL make you happy, I swear it! I love you. You're such a good person."

She had her doubts about his last words. There was darkness inside her. Violence..maybe even..evil. Nonetheless, Em knew for sure that she loved him, with every ounce of her being. "I love you too! So much, more than anything. You do make me happy! I'm gonna win another Combat Pistol medal; it's in a week and a half, and I want you to be there to watch it happen. All of you."

"We will, no worries there!" he promised before kissing her lips. She returned his kiss, not caring who might be around to see their public display of affection. Not the Norms who were nearby, not anyone.

That evening, Em talked Norma into taking a break from cooking, despite her sister's objections. She called in their take-out orders from a couple of popular restaurants, one Chinese and the other American-Japanese fusion. Emma-Christine was on a first-name basis with seemingly half the food delivery guys in downtown Bethesda, plus she tipped them well. While they waited for their order to arrive, Em stole away to her room and closed the door, slipped on a very sexy lacy black lingerie set that none of them had seen yet. She smiled as she glanced herself in the mirror. If they

all wanted to fuck her, this would make every one of them melt. If it was going to happen, it was going to happen good. She belted her robe over it and strode over to the sofa bed Norman had already pulled out. Emma gave a come-hither gesture to Dylan as she settled onto it. Norma joined her, at her side. Beckoning to Norman the same way.