

Chapter 37: "I Made My Choice"

Emma was blissfully unaware of the commotion downstairs as Norma took off, butcher knife in hand. She was enjoying a hot shower in Norma's bathroom, the best one in the house, with her favorite 80s pop music blaring out of her phone she'd set on the counter. The last song playing was "Mad About You." Before hers and the entire family's lives took a hard left turn. In those final moments before, Em closed her eyes under the hot spray, recalling a long-ago memory of her 19-year-old self at a certain concert in Philadelphia, handing up a bouquet of pink roses to that song's pretty red-haired singer on stage. That lovely memory was shattered with frantic pounding on the bathroom door. As she would later look back on it, "Mad About You" seemed weirdly appropriate.

Dylan was yelling through the door: "Ems, get out here! Norma's taken off, and Norman's freaking out! I don't know what to do! She's got a knife!"

Sure for a second she was hallucinating what he'd said, she reached down fast and twisted the water off. She didn't have a chance to pull back the curtain herself before Dylan had opened the door and yanked it back for her. In any other circumstances, he would've ended up stripped and wrapped around her under the water. No time to think of it this time, as he handed her a towel as she got out fast, dried off for all of 30 seconds, and threw on her sister's blue satin robe, belting it as she flew past him and trailing behind Norman as he was already at the bottom of the hill stairs. Norma was speeding off in the Mercedes.

"What's going on?! What's she doing?! Norma!!" she yelled, "Get back here, talk to us!" When Norma ignored her and sped onto the highway, Emma screamed out so loud it burned her throat, "NORMAA!!!!"

"Shit!" she cursed as she grasped Norman's arm to keep him from running further after the car. Both of them gave yelps of pain as that burning sensation shot through

them. Neither could black out, and neither could stand the pain for long. Insult to injury: the rainstorm that had been threatening to start all evening now poured down freezing drops on all three of them.

Emma put an arm around Norman and pulled him back towards the house, "Come on. It's gonna be okay." She winced as more pain shot through her arm. "I'll call her, Norman. It's all gonna be fine."

"I want my mother." Norman muttered as they came back into the house. He clung to Aunt Emma, even as it hurt them both. He couldn't black out now, it would only make everything worse.

"Get a fire going!" Emma ordered Dylan, who did as she said, stacking kindling and logs into the fireplace.

Holding Norman to her, Em grabbed her phone off the coffee table and reclined back on the couch as he settled against her. The more both of them took deep breaths, the less intense the pain. She dropped a quick kiss to his forehead, "It's okay, Norman. It's gonna be all right, just try to relax. I know I'm a poor substitute, but I'm here. I'll take care of this."

"What happened?" she wanted to know, trying to stay calm and not upset him even more. Norman filled her in on his encounter with crazed Blair Watson and how it had set his mother off.

Emma called her sister and only got voicemail, "I know you're upset about what she did to Norman, but CUT THIS SHIT OUT!" she screeched the last four words. "You're only going to make it worse!! Get back here, Norma!!"

No answer from Norma, who'd turned off her phone and thrown it into the car's back seat. Em lay back onto the couch and held a half-catatonic Norman tight to her.

Dylan made himself scarce, knowing those two needed each other but still unsure how to deal with it. As long as Norman and Em both relaxed and took deep breaths, the burning pain from the contact wasn't as bad. Emma mused that she really needed to go back to the shrink herself, get some meds that might help this thing stop. Yet, what the hell could she say to Dr. Ross or any psychiatrist? That she and her nephew both had blackouts, and they could stop them when they touched each other? It sounded insane, any which way it was described.

Her thoughts were cut off as both she and Norman heard the car pull up outside. Dylan joined the two of them, though he wasn't as quick as Norman and Emma-Christine. Norman reached her first as he threw his arms around his mother.

When she heard his gasp, and then she saw the blood all over Norma's front, Em seized Norma by the arm, careful not to touch anywhere else on her.

"NORMA WHAT THE FUCK DID YOU DO?!?!" Emma screamed, seizing her sister's jacket collar with her other hand. As she saw the blood covering her sister's front, arms, and legs. "No..." Emma slowly came to the realization of the horror that was now at this family's feet. "No..no..noo.."

"That bitch got her filthy hands on Norman! And she was going to turn us in, I know it!! It would've RUINED us all!" Norma fired back in her face.

"Both of you, stop it!" Dylan tried to pull her off his mother, "Not out here! You wanna cause a scene for anyone driving by? Let's get in the house!" Norman helped, grasping his aunt's upper arm and pulling, doing his damndest to ignore the pain. Better than a black-out.

Shivering still only wearing Norma's robe, Emma paced back and forth in front of the fire, rubbing her crossed forearms with her hands, her still-wet hair in disarray.

"You didn't touch anything? Are you sure you didn't, Norma? Don't even think of putting that knife down anywhere!"

"No!" Norma held up her still-gloved hands, both of them streaked with drying blood. In her right hand, she clung to the bloody knife, its blade pointed towards the floor. It could have been the firelight, but she swore seeing a flicker of pride across her sister's face before Em's expression became stony again.

"Here's what we're gonna do," she went on, "You're going to follow my instructions to the letter. We're gonna make sure there's not one trace of evidence. Dylan, go get my evidence kit. It's upstairs on the floor of the closet, and get me a couple of towels while you're at it. Then go get the bleach and a bucket."

He got up and did as he was told, too shell-shocked to comment.

Norman stayed rooted on the edge of the sofa, looking at Norma with wide eyes both fearful and awed at once. "You did this for me, Mother. You killed for me.."

"I'd do it again, honey." Her eyes burned into his, "As many times as I had to." Norma wanted badly to go to him, wrap him up in her arms. But not with those bloody clothes; it would have to wait. Dylan set down the bucket of straight bleach on the floor, and Norma carefully dropped the knife into it to soak. She'd later scrub it down until any trace of blood was gone. Back in the knife block it would go. It wouldn't ever be used again.

While Emma held open her largest of the heavy plastic evidence bags. "Take those clothes off. Now." Under any other circumstances, this would've been a very tantalizing order. This time, she was only grateful and relieved to pull the sticky, ruined fabric away from her skin. She dropped everything into the bag before wrapping a towel around herself; she'd wash that several times on the cold cycle.

"Come on, honey." She held her hand out to Norman. "We're taking a shower."

It wasn't until they were under the steaming spray that she began to relax, his strong arms wrapped around her waist from behind. Norman felt her start to shake and tremble; he drew her tighter to him, kissing her neck and face until the tremors stopped. "It happened so fast," Norma murmured. "That crazy slut brought it on herself. Couldn't leave us alone. She put her hands on you, and she needed to pay!" Her voice was starting to rise and sound choked.

"Shh...Mother. It's all right." Norman got the body sponge and soap, started washing all the blood away from her chest and stomach. This time, they did watch the red-tinted water swirl away down the drain.

Back downstairs in front of the fireplace, Dylan watched as Emma dropped the wrapped-up bloody clothes into the flames, followed by the black gloves Norma had pulled off and added to the pile. Then each of them threw another log into it, making the fire roar bigger and burn away the damning evidence.

In the distant past, Dylan would've argued with anyone who ordered him around like that. But now he belonged to her, would do anything for her. He'd even follow her into this darkness they were facing, trusting she'd guide them out of it.

"I'm so damn cold," Em was also shaking badly. He took off his thick lined sweat jacket and wrapped it around her, put his arms around her and pulled her to him as hers clung to him around his waist. He rubbed her back as she buried her face in his shoulder.

"What're we gonna do now?" He asked, after pressing a kiss to her drying hair, as she'd blotted it with the second towel by this point.

"We're going to leave it. Let Deputy Harrison and the others at the sheriff's station find the crime scene, when they get to it. No fingerprints, no sign of forced entry. The street was dark, unlikely anyone saw anything. Harrison tries, but she's clueless in the field, belongs behind a desk doing accounting. Her and a murder case? Forget it. It'll go cold within a week."

"What if you went back to make sure? You know, that there's really no evidence?"

She looked into his eyes and shook her head, "No. Rookie mistake." Emma gave a brief shrill, humorless laugh at her own choice of words. "That's the number one way killers get caught, returning to their crime scenes." She had a slightly maniacal glint in her eyes as she drew his lips to hers in a fierce kiss, ending with a bite to his lower lip. A jolt of desire went through to his core, never mind the terrible event of this night.

"When I say trust me, will you trust me, baby?" She asked, her voice soft but with an underlying edge. "I know what I'm doing, know a crime scene backwards and forwards, what they'll look for. I made my choice between the badge and our family a long time ago. I choose us."

"I trust you." He breathed.

"Emma!" Norma and Norman rejoined them, freshly scrubbed, both in robes and pajamas. "Now what? What are we going to do now, go cover it up? Get rid of the--"

Em held up a hand against Norma's panicked words. "Settle down. We're doing nothing. Let this town's pitiful excuse for a police force realize she's gone missing, then they'll find the body eventually. You left no prints, no concrete evidence you were even there."

The Norms were both saucer-eyed at her decision, then Norma's eyes grew bright with tears, relief and fear all mixed together in her. Her sister was turning her back on the law she'd once been so devoted to upholding. But something was miles above in importance to the law: their love that same law forbade. Love that would be protected, no matter what...or who...became collateral damage.

None of them wanted to separate for the night; sleep wasn't going to happen if they did. There wasn't room for all four in any of Bates house beds, so they pulled all their comforters and bedding into the living room, made a nest on the floor in front of the smoldering fire. It would burn down to ashes by morning. Norman pulled Norma into his arms, facing each other as she nuzzled her head into the crook of his neck. Improbably, both were fast asleep sooner than either expected.

Emma lay down with Dylan spooning her, wedging herself against Norma from behind, her arm draped over her beautiful, murderous little sister's waist. This lovely position in the middle would've put her right to sleep, especially after it normally followed so much exertion in bed. Around 3am, Em woke up to flickering lightning and the still-pounding rain outside. Some primal sense told her another threat was on the property, maybe right out in the parking lot.

Trying to slip loose from Dylan and Norma while not waking either, she slowly got up and headed upstairs, where the view from Norma's bedroom window would give her a view of any more stalkers driving around the parking lot. They really needed the security system replaced as soon as possible. Emma pulled back the curtain and saw nothing but rain and the streetlight by the stairs. Also the outline of the darkened Bates Motel sign. The vandals had spared it, for some unknown reason. Probably too tired from their smash-up job on the rest of the motel. No matter. The family would find who did it.

Norma had woken up and followed her, quietly coming to her side and slipping an arm around her waist. Em gave her a one-armed hug again.

"I wanted to say I'm sorry for killing her, but I'm not." Norma looked up into Emma's face. "Thank you. For protecting me. Us. All of us."

Grasping Norma's hand in her own, Em's gaze back at her was as intense. "Take care of Norman. Make each other happy. Don't worry about any of this. I'll keep all of us safe."

Even as she promised her beloved sister, an icy ball of fear was forming in the pit of her stomach. There was a way. One phone call and one meeting to arrange. A favor to call in that had been offered to her nearly two decades ago. The man who offered it put no expiration date on it. So much as thinking his name made her ill with dread: Burton Delaney. It would make the Bates family above the law. Any whispers of "incest" would be ignored by the lackey placed in White Pine Bay as the new sheriff. The same with any of "murder," and those whispers would be silenced if they got too loud. The price: extremely steep. She'd have no choice but to do something dangerous and unconscionable as repayment. Shuddering, she slipped her arms closer around Norma. One phone call she hoped to hell she'd never have to make.

Four Months Later:

Late March brought the start of spring in White Pine Bay. It still rained almost every afternoon, but it was becoming a warmer and gentler rain. The warmer weather also brought a small but steady number of vacationers who booked rooms in the remodeled motel. In recent weeks, a couple of low-lives had been arrested for trespassing on the Bates property for late-night attempts at more vandalism. No luck from Deputy Harrison and the latest sheriff (there had been several; none had stuck it out) on getting them to talk and name who'd hired them. Norma wished her sister was still there. Em would get it out of them, unlike these incompetents.

Even so, Norma now felt more at ease on this lovely morning as she locked up the house and headed down the stairs to join Norman already in the office.

He looked up from the front desk and grinned, admired her in her new pink-and-blue floral dress, love and pride all over his handsome features. Of course she was glorious in anything she wore, or opted not to wear.

After a quick glance to ensure no guests were outside near the office to catch a glimpse of them, she stole a soft kiss to his lips. His smile when she pulled back still kicked her heart into overdrive. She recalled late nights of them on the couch on the back office, the door locked against the intruding outside world. Norma bent over, holding onto the back of it while he took her from behind, rolling his hips with his full length thrusting back and forth deep into her until they both found that sweet release. More than one time, she'd made him switch places with her right after he withdrew from her, pushing him to sit on the sofa as she tugged his pants further down. She'd knelt between his open legs and sucked all of their mixed fluids from his cock, making him hard again in seconds, his moans only spurring her on.

Norma gave a playful little smile at those memories, "Good morning, baby. How's it been so far?"

"It's okay, Mother. Slow. Only three rooms booked, and none of them need anything at the moment." Norman had started sorting through the mail, picking out a letter with the return address of a literary magazine he'd submitted one of his stories to. It was the standard "Good, but not for us." boilerplate rejection letter. He gave a heavy sigh as he took the piece of paper to the back office, where he's nailed his growing stack of rejection letters to one wall.

"Don't let it get to you, honey." She tried to assure him, even as she wasn't crazy about the stories that most often included outlaw lovers/killers. Much of it that she read brought back memories of her knife sinking into that woman's neck, the hard gush of warm blood hitting her. She wanted to forget, wanted to erase it from her memory. Every morning, she'd scoured the daily White Pine Bay Current for

anything new on Blair Watson's murder. Emma-Christine had been right. Should there ever have been any doubt she was? After fruitless investigation, the haphazard sheriff's department had uncovered nothing. No solid leads, no suspects, zilch. The case had indeed gone cold. Ms. Watson's rich and influential father was offering a \$5,000 reward for any information leading to an arrest. Of course it did more harm than good, as many of the creeps in town tried to frame one another in some lame way or another, hoping to collect. The results kept the local cops even busier chasing down leads that went nowhere. After a while, Norma and Norman began to relax.

Norman's writing had become a passionate hobby, and he was always working on something new when not busy helping her with the motel. Even as the stories bothered her, and a few had even given her nightmares, Norma wasn't going to stop or even discourage him from writing about what he wanted. It wasn't her place, and it was good that a man has a hobby. And he was her man, now and forever.

Meanwhile, in Washington, D.C:

Agent Spooler sat in what was feeling like the longest department meeting in FBI history, feigning alertness at one of the longest and duller budget reports ever. The agent droning on about the numbers should offer out the sound of his voice as a remedy for insomnia. Not like it was that complicated in the Cyber Crimes Division, as far as what they spent; everything needed was equipment, tech experts, and agents to monitor illegal dark web activity. After the first month in her new assignment, Em was almost convinced she could set up a dark net "honey trap" website and teach Norman, Norma, or Dylan to monitor it. Cyber Crimes agents saw little, if any, action in the field. Others took care of the arrests for them. It was the price she'd had to pay for what had gone down in Seattle.

She and Dylan were barely settled back in Bethesda and looking for a bigger apartment, when Emma was called into an FBI panel inquiry about the

circumstances of Joe Fieretti's arrest. After recounting the facts, she was pressed for an explanation why she'd allowed the late Alex Romero onto her squad, when he'd been untrained and unqualified for that kind of tactical raid. The only reason she could speak of? Romero had convinced her he HAD been qualified, and she made an error in judgement. She'd never speak the truth, that it had been blackmail. Romero would've gone to A.D. Stabler about her and Dylan. Better him than the family, their first collateral damage on that night she still hated to recall. From a side glance at Stabler seated next to her at that panel, his grim expression told her the outcome wasn't going to be good.

Emma's mind drifted fully back to that afternoon following the inquiry. Dylan was waiting for her by the fountain in the courtyard of the Hoover Building. He was wearing one of the sport jackets she'd bought him, though he still looked out of place among the suits walking back and forth to different parts of the huge FBI building. To her, he always looked good enough to devour. To everyone she worked with, he was simply her May-December romance. It set off comments about "cradle-robbing," and "mid-life crisis," and "Mrs. Robinson" jokes at her expense, but neither cared. As long as no one ever found out they were aunt and nephew. Genetically closer than aunt/nephew in reality.

His face softened into that easy smile when he saw her, as he again admired her supple legs in that slim suit skirt she'd chosen that morning. It was too bad she didn't wear them more often, he thought. Dylan's focus shifted to the expression on her face.

"Hey. That bad, huh?" he asked softly.

"Worse. I'm out of the Violent Crimes Section. I've put everything I have into that division for almost 17 years! They just railroaded me, transferred me to Cyber Crimes. Which means a whole lot of fucking desk work. And I'm probably not seeing a promotion or another supervisory assignment anytime soon." Emma inhaled

deeply, trying to get a handle on her emotions. If smoking had been allowed on the property, she would've lit up right there.

He met her burning gaze, "I'm sor-" he began.

She pressed her hand to his chest, "Don't. It doesn't matter. I took this for us. As long as we're together and safe, that's all I care about. It's knocked my ego down, but my career'll survive. It used to be my world, but not anymore. You are, darling. Now come on, let's go to Casey's. I need a drink."

The two of them settled into a routine before long. They found a two bedroom-apartment at Bainbridge Bethesda, down on the fourth floor instead of the ninth, and spent a weekend moving in. Less of a cityscape view, but more space for when the Norms visited. Many more possibilities there. After several weeks of searching, Dylan got a job as a janitor in one of D.C.'s posh private high schools attended by the kids of the elite. It actually paid well, though of course not as well as guarding pot fields. He didn't mind though. He and Emma both got home around the same time each night, as she rarely had to stay at Cyber Crimes past 6:30. After dinner came their increasingly elaborate roleplay that left both more sated than they'd ever been.

Every week or so, Emma video-chatted with her parents back in Ohio, taking her laptop onto the balcony or into the second bedroom. There was talk of her and Dylan making a visit back to her childhood home and meeting them. Both became tense at that subject. There would be a lot of questions from Candace and James Spooler: how/where had they met, what was Dylan's family like, etc. And Emma was expecting Candace to pull her aside and ask her if she really WAS going through a mid-life crisis, being with this admittedly gorgeous 22-year-old young enough to be her son. It would be skating very close to the abyss of dangerous truth, and her parents knew when she was lying or hiding something; they were law enforcement

too after all. Em and Dylan kept pushing it to the side, not wanting to think too much about whether they could pull it off.

The interminable meeting finally wrapped up, and Emma gathered up her file folders, packed them in her shoulder bag, and got ready to head to the Metro station, bound for home. She texted Dylan, *I'm on my way. Be ready for tonight, baby ;)*

I can't wait <3 came his response.

Em's smile grew wider as she pictured that shiny black vinyl corset she was going to wear, paired with her black boots with the silver metal heels. Completing the outfit was a strap-on harness. Slowly, they'd been exploring the sensations of her taking him from behind, Dylan on all fours as she carefully slid the thin and very lubed attached toy into his tightness. After his first time, he'd cum so hard inside her that only the whites of his eyes showed for a few seconds.

For now, they were happy. All four of them. They should've known it was too good to last.

Back in White Pine Bay:

Norman waited in the small grocery store for his name to be called, as he'd called in their order ahead of time. They'd needed lightbulbs, toilet paper, and a few other essentials for the motel rooms. Mother was giving him more responsibilities for managing the motel, and he was proud to take them on. It made him feel like even more of a man. When the clerk called out "Norman Bates," he took the box of supplies she handed him, made his way to the register to pay. He was too distracted to notice the sandy-haired older man who followed him outside, having been watching him since hearing that name.

"Excuse me, I overheard you're Norman Bates. From the Bates Motel?" the guy asked as Norman was loaded the box into the Mercedes' trunk.

Norman turned and smiled politely, "Yes, I'm headed back there now. If you're looking for a room, we have a few available. Follow me if you want." Vague alarm bells in the back of his head told him it was weird the stranger was asking for their motel specifically, when there were others closer, like the King's Motel just up the street. But hey, they sure could use the business.

"I'm not looking for a room. I'm looking for Norma Bates. I'm guessing you're her son?"

Norman whipped to fully face him, eyes darkening. "What do you want with Norma Bates?" he demanded.

"I'm her brother."

