

## Chapter 2: Marked

"Is any of this real, Mother? How do I know it isn't all in my head? That I'm not going to wake up back home, in the basement or wandering around in the woods and you'll have no idea what I'm talking about?! Then that bastard will see it as an excuse to have me locked up again!!"

They'd been driving in tense, still-terrified silence back towards White Pine Bay, in the right direction, their phones' GPS now working perfectly. Norma swerved the car into the parking lot of a gas station they'd been about to pass. She skidded to a stop in front of the restroom, got out and yanked Norman's door open, pulling him by the arm. "Come here!" She was so quick that he was too taken aback to protest. His mother guided him roughly into the small room and slammed the door behind them. "Look at us!" She cried, pushing him in front of the mirror and pressing her side to his. "This was REAL, Norman! It happened! There's no way these burns are something made up in your head!" The ugly fluorescent light over the mirror flickered and buzzed, seemingly at the shrill sound of her voice. It also showed the sunburns in all their bright shiny detail.

Norman winced at both the sight and the growing sting of the tender skin. They both looked like they'd fallen asleep on their right sides on lounge chairs in the middle of a scorching summer day. The blistered burns on Norma's neck were killing her as well, she'd give anything to get home and get some ointment on them. She turned and pulled him to face her. "I saw it all too, baby. You've got to believe that. I thought we'd end up blinded. That light was real, as real as me doing this," she cupped the right side of his face and kissed his lips fiercely. "He's not sending you anywhere. He'll have to get through me first."

It was just shy of midnight when the Mercedes' tires crunched through the gravel of the motel lot and Norma parked in her usual spot near the stairs. The two of them were barely out of the car when Alex was already down the steps and rushing up to

her. "Where were you? My god, Norma! I was about to call the state police; I was so scared something happened to you!" He pulled her into a fierce hug, though her arms stayed at her sides, the sheriff glaring at Norman over her shoulder. Norman returned it with a look of downright hate. He was going to lose his shit if accused of anything, and he kept that expression as he followed his mother up the stairs, as she'd broken away from her fake husband's now-unwelcome grasp.

"Oh, we just had some car trouble; calm down! I couldn't call you because we were in a dead zone: no service. But everything's fine now." Norma was assuring Romero along the way, her irritation growing when he didn't take her word for it.

"What was wrong with it?" He demanded, "How come it took so long?" They'd reached the front porch by now, and Alex didn't wait for answers before adding, "I don't like the idea of you being alone for so long with--my god, honey, what happened to your face?!"

Norma had a good idea of what he was about to say: that he didn't like her alone with Norman, and she was one breath away from screaming at him, even the unburned half of her face starting to flush. She paused halfway through the front door, exchanging a mildly panicked look with Norman. How the hell were they going to explain this one?

"It's some weird rash, that's all." Norman's voice was tight. "We both picked it up, but it'll go away. Mother will take care of it." He pushed past his stepfather, knocking him in the shoulder as he passed.

"Yes, that's it. Just a rash." Norma was relieved for that explanation, as flimsy as it was. "I'll get us some aloe gel upstairs. Come on, Norman." She beckoned for him to follow her, but Alex wouldn't let it go, stepping into their path.

"That doesn't look like a rash. Those are burns! How the hell did you two get--"

"Alex! I'm exhausted and I want to go to bed! Stop with the goddamn interrogation already! I TOLD you everything's good now, so let's all get some sleep, okay? Good night!" Norma side-stepped him and gestured toward the couch, where he'd been sleeping since Norman came home. Looking both defeated and worried, Romero skulked to the sleeping spot where he'd been banished. Following close behind his mother up the stairs, Norman looked back at him with a triumphant smirk. He and Norma now truly belonged to each other. The sheriff had no place in their lives, never had. His days in this house were numbered. Norman made a further point of kissing her lovingly on the cheek before retiring to his room. As he got undressed and into his pajamas, something felt different. Something he couldn't place: a quiet stillness in his head, a kind completely unfamiliar to him.

The door to her own room closed firmly behind her, Norma unbuttoned her sweater and discarded it, then reached behind her to unzip her dress. She recalled all the times when Norman had zipped it up for her, and now her body ached for him to be here, pulling it down. The terror of what had happened on that highway was momentarily forgotten, as her dress fell to the floor around her feet. Her sunburn was even bothering her less. All Norma wanted in that moment was the feel on his lean arms slipping around her, stroking her bare skin, his fingers wandering lower as he kissed her neck. She gave a soft sound of yearning as she ran her fingers over her upper right thigh, and it quickly became a sharp gasp of shock. The burn scar from her childhood was gone. Her skin there was smooth and flawless, as if it had never happened. Norma turned on another lamp and looked closer at her thigh in her mirror. "This can't be..."

She spun around and grabbed her phone out of her purse, her hands shaking so badly it took a few tries to text Norman:

Come in here right now! You have to see this! And be quiet.

Norman was through the door adjoining their bedrooms, quick and light on his feet to avoid making even a slight noise that would be detected downstairs. He stopped short at the heavenly vision of his mother in her white lace bra and panties. Those same panties he'd watched her drop onto the floor of their car. He had little time to linger on her beautiful bare skin, as he saw what was freaking her out. That burn scar from the clothes iron, which his disgusting rapist uncle had caused. It had become part of her, and one of their secrets ever since she'd told him. Now that secret had vanished.

"Mother. How could this have happened? That scar...they don't just disappear!" He knelt before her, slid his fingers along Norma's now-flawless thigh. Norman was shirtless, only in his pajama bottoms, having rushed in. Norma caught a view of his back in her full-length mirror.

"I don't know. Honey, something happened to your back!" Norma gripped his bare shoulders and guided him to his feet, looked closer. A deep pink semi-circular mark was right between his shoulder blades, roughly as big around as the top of a soda can. Three short horizontal lines were etched through it, and it opened to Norman's left. The tips of the open circle were sharp points, and the skin of the etching was warmer than normal body temperature.

"What, what is it?!" Norman twisted around to see it in the mirror, then he saw his mother's bare back above her white lace bra. Norma had the exact same mark, exactly flipped: the semi-circle opened to her right. He spun her around and grabbed her bare shoulders, turning her gently so she could see both their bare backs in the mirror.

"Holy shit." Norma barely acknowledged the obscenity escaping her lips. "Oh my god..." Her voice shook. "I'm scared, Norman. What happened out there?" Thinking she heard something from downstairs, Norma paused and listened. She could now hear every little noise in this old house. Then she slid her arms around his bare

waist, trembling with fear. As he wrapped his arms tight around her, their bare warm skin rubbed softly together. She couldn't help it; her fear began to melt as she threaded her fingers into his hair and began kissing along his neck, giving a low hum as that sweet ache began between her thighs.

"Mother." Norman breathed, "Wait...we can't. Not here. It's too dangerous." He managed to hang onto that much rationality even as his cock was throbbing for her. Norma slowly separated her body from his, disappointment all over her face. Norman was right, of course. They couldn't risk it. Not with the man she'd had the foolish idea to marry still downstairs.

"Okay, honey. Let's try to get some sleep. Though I don't know how, any time soon. I'm wide awake. I feel so...alive. My skin's tingling."

"I do too." Norman agreed, "I feel wired, but not in a bad way. Not like I might black out." He left several soft kisses along the right side of her jawline, then one on her lips. "I feel good. Very good, Mother."

Nonetheless, they had to restrain themselves from going any further. Norma found the aloe vera cooling gel in the bathroom cabinet and slathered in on their faces, both giving sighs of relief as most of the burn subsided. She also rubbed much-needed burn ointment into that side of her neck. Without the need to put their agreement into words, Norman climbed into her bed and pulled the sheet up to his chest. The ancient furnace wasn't working that great, but the two of them didn't feel the chill in the air. Their bodies felt feverish instead. His eyes never left her as she removed her bra and panties, slipping on a pale pink satin pajama top and matching shorts. Norma joined him, laying on her right side, her head cradled into the crook of his neck.

Sleep was impossible at first, as could only be expected. Shortly after 3am, Norma opened her eyes and sat up, unable to fight off the burning need raging through her body. Every part of him that touched her was driving her insane.

"Come on, honey. Get your coat and shoes. Let's go." She said in a low, urgent whisper. "Just for a little while. We'll be back before he wakes up!" Norman didn't question her, that same need was obliterating most of his rational thoughts.

The clouds had moved away from the moon outside, giving them enough pale silver light to find their way downstairs and to the front door. Slowly, he managed to get the locks undone and the knobs turned without making any noise. Thank god he kept the door hinges oiled on a regular basis. The two of them held hands, their fingers laced as they flew through the cold night, down the stairs and to the closed-up motel. Norman reached up and grabbed the spare master key kept hidden off the top of the door frame. He unlocked the empty Room 1, barely getting the door open before his mother was already inside, pulling him inside and slamming it behind them; to hell with anyone hearing it.