

The Joy of Revenge by Sheila Chapter 21-25

CHAPTER 21 An Old Friend

Toy

As expected, the doorbell rang. I swung the door open to find a tall muscular man, with silky blonde hair and chocolate brown eyes, standing in my doorway. He was wearing a plain gray T-shirt, jeans and brown boots.

“Hi! Since you’re new in the neighborhood, I thought I’d drop by and introduce myself. I’m Noah, Noah Jensen,” he said and extended his hand for a handshake, grinning from ear to ear. I took his hand in mine and shook his hand. I noticed his hand felt rough and callused; it was definitely from all the construction he did as a contractor.

“Nice to meet you, Noah Jensen. I’m Virtue,” I said, smiling shyly. Noah was still handsome. I believe he looked more masculine with his skin so tanned.

“Virtue, nice name. I live over there, the one with the black truck,” he said, letting go

of my hand and pointing at his house. “I just wanted to welcome you to the neighborhood. It’s been a while since someone lived here.”

“I know. Main reason why I got this house at a good price,” I said. “Where are m

my manners? Would you like to come in? Since we’re neighbors and all.” I moved to the side to allow him to enter.

“Sure,” he answered and walked inside. “Actually, I helped with the renovations. Your kitchen was done by me and my team. As well as the bathrooms.”

I know...I saw your portfolio.

“I had Lisa and Nicole do everything for me since they know everyone in this town. Anyway, thank you. You and your team created a beautiful kitchen. The white mable is just immaculate and the farm sink... perfect.”

I opened my new stainless steel refrigerator and found some orange juice. I guess Lisa left it knowing I didn’t do grocery shopping yet.

“All I can offer you is juice. Which reminds me, I need to make a quick stop at the grocery store. I don’t have any food. But I do have nice crystal glasses.” I took two glasses and poured

some juice in each one.

“I can help you with your grocery shopping,” he offered, after he took a sip of the juice I gave him. I shook my head, not wanting to impose.

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Oh don’t want to be a bother. Your family might need you,” I said.

“I actually live with my mother. My parents were in an accident a while back. I, uh, lost my father while my mother, she’s paralyzed so I have a private nurse taking care of her,” he

explained, a tinge of sorrow in his voice. He quickly hid his sadness and smiled brightly at me. “Anyway, I have a lot of time on my hands since we finished your house and my next job doesn’t start til next week. How about this? After I help you with your grocery shopping. I’ll give you a tour of the town... as a thank you for hiring me,” he said. I smiled sweetly at him.

Fine, but on one condition,” I said.

What condition is that?” He asked.

“I buy you dinner after we drop off my groceries. Does steak sound good?” I asked him. He grinned...

That will be great. So, do we take my truck or your nice car?” Noah playfully asked. I grabbed my purse and tossed him my keys.

“Mine.”

Ah, it was like I was Joy again. Me and my friend Noah, two peas in a pod. Friends forever...

This was all part of our plan.

Cristos

always have to go poetic on her, Cristos?” Xavier asked as he sat beside me, full of food.

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loves poetry. You should try it. It really...uhm, excites her,” I replied, without taking eyes off the monitor. He glanced at me with one eyebrow raised, shrugged his shoulders and opened his paper bag.

I’ll grab a poetry book at the bookstore on my way home.” He shifted his brown eyes towards the monitor. “Look at that... Noah Jensen is first to welcome Joy,” he said with a disapproving tone. “I still want him on the list even if he did help Joy, Cristos. There’s something about him I don’t like.”

“You’re just jealous, Xavier,” I argued. He scoffed at me.

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And you aren’t? When Jos talks about him, it’s like listening to her speak about her first love: I don’t know about you, but I hate it when he goes all starry eyed when the mention his name, Xavier muttered, frowning as Noah Jensen entered the house. “Do you think he might still have feelings for him?”

“No, I don’t, Xavier. Remember, Noah didn’t talk when the police questioned him and I knew Joy hasn’t forgiven him for covering for his friends. He may have saved her body, but he did not save her soul,” I answered.

Xavier threw one of his fries at me. "You don't have to use one of your metaphors, Cristos.

I'm not Joy.

"We have got to start calling her Virtue. We can't afford to slip and jeopardize this operation. If these hooligans catch wind Joy Taylor is back from the dead, they won't think twice. They'll put her in a body bag. We have to be careful. Real careful," I warned.

"Well, if they do figure out who she is, I'll just knock on their door and put two in them." Xavier said, aiming two fingers at Noah's image. Then we can all go home and forget about this crazy as s town."

"That's Plan B. Right now, let's stick to Plan A, I said. "By the way, where's Sebastian?*

"You mean, Dominic? He's at the shop with Nicole, Xavier answered. He coughed, then, in a high pitched girly voice he said, "Dom, thank you so much for your help. Why don't I treat you to a cup of coffee? You know, as a thank you for helping me find what I needed."

I couldn't help it; I cracked up. I disliked Nicole. She was always wearing revealing clothes which showed her breasts or her butt. When she bent down, we could always see her panties. sticking out from underneath.

itation of her, Xavier. You must see her alot at the grocery store," I said, oped laughing.

She keeps checking out my a ss, Cristos. I swear one time, she even squeezed it. I feel so violated, Xavier mumbled, before biting into his hotdog.

"Awww! She obviously likes you," I said, trying to pinch his cheek. Because you and

Sebastian are so adorable."

"If you hadn't told her you were g ay, I bet she would be at the pub twenty-four seven."

"Well, darling. Someone has to stay close to Virtue without anyone suspecting we're lovers," I

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said, batting my eyelashes at him. Xavier suddenly pointed at the monitors.

"Check it out. They're leaving. Turn up the volume so we can hear where they're going." Navier said. I clicked on the keyboard and Joy's sweet sounding voice filled the room.

I buy you dinner after we drop off my groceries Does steak sound good? We heard Joy ask Noah. Xavier immediately wiped his mustard stained hands with a napkin.

"Time for us to keep an eye on our girl," he said. I'll see you at the store later." He exited Sebastian's office, closing the door behind him.

Joy was going to rent the commercial space in between the grocery store and Sebastian's shop. Soon, we would have our girl with us without anyone suspecting we knew each other.

Sebastian and Xavier, who moved here six months ago, acted as half-brothers who left the city after winning the lottery while I was a cousin who decided to join them a month later after receiving my inheritance.

Sebastian decided to open up a home furnishings store. Since his was the only store in New Salem which catered to home improvement, everyone came to him, allowing us access to their homes with every doorknob they bought.

Xavier, on the other hand, took over the grocery store which was once owned by Joy's parents. He gave the previous owner an offer she could not refuse.

Mrs. Larson took her millions and her pet cats and moved to Florida where she is now living near the beach,

sipping cocktails from sunset to sunrise, happily retired.

As for me, to provide some solace to the old man who recently lost his granddaughter, I took the pub off his hands. He's the only one in this town who the three of us spoke to in private.

Sebastian has copies of all the keys of all the doorknobs he has ever sold and one of them opens the door of the pub.

We found the old man drunk in the back office of the pub after he closed up for the night. He was seated behind his desk, his head bent backwards, snoring with his mouth wide open.

"Wake him up," Sebastian said while sitting down in one of the rickety chairs in front of the desk. "Cristos, I have several new arrivals, if you want to change these chairs."

"Will you give me a discount?" I playfully asked.

"Quiet, the both of you. He's coming to," Xavier said, nudging the old man awake.

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When he finally opened his eyes, he was surprised to see all three of us in his office. He opened his mouth to scream for help, but Sebastian raised his hand to stop him.

"Eugene, we are here as friends. You, once upon a time, helped some friends of ours, so we would like to return the favor," Sebastian said. He was always the smooth one among the three of us, one reason why Joy quickly learned to trust us.

"W-what do you mean?" Eugene asked, scared we were going to hurt him.

"We have heard of your loss and judging by the missing evidence" of your granddaughter's case, you and I both know, you will never get the justice your granddaughter deserves. Just like another

rape case almost ten years ago. You do remember her right?" Sebastian asked.

"How can anyone forget? The girl's name was Joy Taylor. She was such a kindhearted soul. Just like my little Joan. Do you know Joan was in the running to graduate valedictorian of her class?" he croaked. He covered his mouth with a trembling hand and began to cry. "Joan...she didn't deserve this, b-but those animals... Those animals had to lay their filthy hands on.... He couldn't continue. He covered his face and weeped quietly. Xavier placed a hand on Eugene's back to offer the old man some comfort.

"A lack of evidence usually means a conviction is out of the question and any defendant will be acquitted, Sebastian said. "What we can offer you and your family is vengeance. All we ask is for you to sell this pub to us and for you and your family to leave town to avoid any suspicions. We know you bought a gun, Eugene. You don't want to live locked up for the rest of your life because of scu mbags like the Mayor, do you? Let us help you get the justice your granddaughter truly deserves."

The old man peered at us through his tear-filled eyes, probably thinking we were crazy.

on his desk and opened it. Inside is one million in cash and a bank book ander your name with a deposit of ten million dollars. If you want more, name your price."

Eugene looked at the money, stunned to see that much money was in front of him. He

reached over to touch it, but he hesitated, not sure if it was the right thing to do.

"A-are you going to kill them?" He asked.

"The less you know, the better, Sebastian warned him. "So, do we have a deal?"

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Book a bundle of one hundred dollar bills and flipped through it. He placed the bundle be in the briefcase, closed it and placed it on his lap.

"My family and I leave tomorrow. You can have our house too. Just promise me you will make those sons of bit ches pay for what that did to loan... and loy

Before we left, I made a small request.

"One more thing. Eugene, when someone asks you why you're leaving, mention you're doing what the Taylor family did ten years ago. I want you to remind the good folks of New Salem of a young girl named Joy Taylor.

Chapter Comments

Mary Hall

Her guts really got in this plan, i love it

CHAPTER 22 Patience

Joy

Noah and I exited the house and walked towards my car. As I was about to open the car door, memories of our junior year in high school came flooding back. I glanced at Noah who was busy checking out the exterior of my car. If I had just waited a little bit longer for him to ask me to the dance, perhaps the terrible things that happened to me that night wouldn't have happened.

I entered my car, put on my seat belt and waited for Noah to slide into the driver's seat. This was how I imagined the spring dance would be. He would come pick me up in his car and I would be seated in the passenger's seat all dolled up, hoping he would be my first kiss come. night's end.

I scoffed quietly, covering my mouth with the back of my hand. Well, I got more than I bargained for. As he drove out of my driveway, I turned to look out of my window, pretending I was busy looking at the scenery.

Three months before the spring dance, I had begun to sew my own gown after months of sketching. I had asked Lisa for her opinion, showing her all my designs that I painstakingly drew and she had pointed to my favorite- a backless dress with a dramatic plunge neckline. and a mermaid silhouette. She suggested that I should make the dress white rather than blue which I had previously pictured it to be. Lisa said I would look like an angel.

I remember closing my eyes and imagining myself wearing the white creation, looking like an angel and being the envy of every girl there, as I walked into the school's auditorium with Noah by my side who looked so handsome in his tuxedo. I decided Lisa was right and proceeded to make the gown white.

Two months before the spring dance, news circulated in school that Liam and Nicole had broken up. I thought it was all gossip until Liam and his posse would regularly show up at my locker every morning and they would join me for lunch. Suddenly, they treated me like a princess and showered me with attention. Actually, the only reason why I allowed them to get so close was because of Noah. He was who my heart yearned for.

There were times when Liam would visit me in the library or drive me home in his BMW. He

did, at times, say he had feelings for me, but I would keep him at arm's length and tell him I wasn't ready for a relationship. Thinking we were friends, I thought he would respect my

choices. I had forgotten he was a spoilt little child.

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A month before the dance, many of the boys began asking the girls to be their date for the dance. I had thought, since Noah and I were friends again and we were regularly talking to each other, he would ask me straight away. However, Liam asked me first. I told him I would think about it, hoping to buy some time so Noah could ask me.

It was two weeks before the dance and still no Noah. I called Liam up and told him I had decided I would be his date to the dance. He was so ecstatic! He promised me we would have a good time and told me he would take care of everything.

Then, the unthinkable happened. After I had gotten off the phone with Liam, the doorbell rang. It was Noah!

“Hi Joy! Do you mind if I spoke with you alone? I have something I need to ask you.” He looked shy, nervous even.

I smiled at him and closed the front door behind me. We sat on the steps in front of my house, looking up at the night sky. I waited for him to speak, wondering what he needed to tell me.

“Joy, we’ve been friends a long time. Remember when I didn’t have any teeth and I used to talk with a stutter?”

“Yeah, I remember. There were times when you would stutter on a word that started with ‘s.... You would make this really cute whistling sound,” I said, giggling. He laughed, remembering how we were like when we were children. “You know me so well,” he said after he had stopped laughing, his face suddenly turning serious. “Joy, I-I, uh, I was h-hoping... I mean, 1, uhm...” He sighed. “I’m just gonna spit it out. Joy, would you be my date for the spring dance?”

I found myself just staring at him, not knowing what to say. How could I tell him I just agreed to be Liam Cohen’s date just a couple of minutes ago? I wanted to kick myself for not having the patience to wait!

“Noah, I am so sorry. I just called Liam before you rang the doorbell,” I said, thinking if there

was a way to tell Liam I had changed my mind. Noah bent his head, trying to hide his disappointment.

Tell me you love me, Noah. Tell me to tell Liam I changed my mind...

“No, it’s okay Joy. It’s my fault. I’ve been trying to find the courage to ask you. Anyway, it

really doesn’t matter. We’ll still see each other at the dance,” he said.

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CHAPTER 22 Patience

“Of course. I promise I’ll dance with you. I don’t think Liam would mind, right?”

We're all friends."

"Sure, Joy," he said, standing up and pulling me up after him. "I better go on home. I'll see in school tomorrow. Good night, Joy."

you

He looked so crestfallen as he walked home. If he had just asked me to tell Liam I had changed my mind, I would have...for him. I sighed. Well, I made a commitment, I had to honor it. As my father would always say, "You are only as good as your word."

Images of that night began to plague me once again. How they tied me to the vertical bench press with my legs spread apart, my dress ripped open, and a piece of cloth tied around my mouth. How they took their turns with me, laughing in my face as they pumped harder and harder and harder...

Suddenly, an image of me punching Noah in the throat for keeping quiet all these years flashed through my mind. I remember him telling me he had picked up a pair of underwear off the floor when he was driving me home.

"Don't worry, Joy. Whoever did this to you, we'll find him. I got his underwear in a plastic bag. They'll probably get some DNA or something off of it. Please Joy... don't die on me." I wanted to tell him 'thank you, but my jaw was broken at the time.

Yet, the Sheriff said Noah didn't tell him anything nor did he give him any evidence. Neither

did Lisa or Nicole who lied to me and told me Noah was waiting for me at the boy's side of the gym. They had told me he had something very important to tell me. I was such an idiot to believe Noah would be there, waiting for me, so he could confess his feelings for me.

Instead, they branded me a whore, telling everyone I was to blame for wearing a slutty dress.

to the spring dance.

Patience Joy....

I squeezed the handle of my purse to calm myself as I felt my rage begin to bubble inside me. That's when I noticed we were already in the business district of town. I ran my fingers through my hair and blinked rapidly, making myself look as sweet as possible. I glanced sideways at Noah and was relieved he didn't notice I was going through one of my episodes.

"This is such a lovely town," I said, trying to break the ice. He smiled and nodded his head, agreeing with me.

"You looked so deep in thought, I didn't want to bother you," Noah said

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"I was thinking of plans for my store. I'm planning to rent the commercial space beside the grocery store and put up a clothes shop," I quickly replied.

"And I want to hire you to help me set it up." I saw his eyes lit up..

"Sure. What are neighbors for."

Noah was really fun to be with. We laughed and chatted as we went aisle by aisle at the grocery store. Many of the customers stopped to welcome me in town. They also thought Noah and I made a lovely couple and were happy to see Noah smiling so much. He looked embarrassed each time someone said that, but I didn't make an issue of it. I wanted him to learn to trust me, maybe fall in love with me, so I could break his black heart.

my

While we were at one aisle, looking for some alcoholic beverages I could buy for housewarming party, I bumped into a tall man wearing a simple white v-neck shirt, jeans and an apron. I took a deep breath, inhaling the wonderful scent of his crisp, clean expensive cologne that I was so familiar with and loved.

I looked up and saw light brown eyes smiling down at me while a lazy smile played on his perfect pink lips. He was sporting a five o'clock shadow.

Obviously, he had forgotten to shave.

"Bo!" Noah exclaimed happily while shaking the hand of the handsome fellow.

"I'd like you to meet a new addition to our town. Virtue, this is Bo, Bo Xavier. He owns this grocery store now. He bought it off Mrs. Larson then expanded it."

"Oh wow! Nice to meet you, Bo," I said, smiling tenderly while extending my hand to shake his. My darling, Xavier. It seems he has forgotten to take care of himself since taking his duties as a store owner so seriously.

We shook hands enthusiastically, his hand lingering before he let go. He averted his eyes and coughed to hide the momentary faux pas..

"Virtue. That's a nice name," he said, redeeming himself. "So what brings you to these parts?" He asked nonchalantly.

"I just wanted to get away from the hustle and bustle of the city. Try something new, more quiet and intimate," I answered casually, looking at a can of soup.

"Married?"

plied.

not? A pretty little thing like you must have men knocking at your door, Xavier

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said, really getting into character. Noah was staring at me, interested at what I had to say. I shook my head and shrugged.

"I can't seem to find the right guy, that's all," I answered.

"You must have some high expectations, Xavier said, winking. "Noah, you got your work cut out for you. Virtue, if you need anything, give me a holler. If I don't have it here, I can order it for you and have it delivered on your doorstep. By the way, where do you live?"

"She lives in my neighborhood, Bo. At the old Taylor house, Noah answered.

"Old Taylor house? Xavier asked, acting clueless.

"The nice colonial in the cul de sac. You've seen it. White big house with the blue door and blue shutters. Xavier nodded his head, realizing he had.

"Ah, yeah. Isn't that house haunted? Some of the people here told me a young girl died there, Xavier said.

"Who to

told you that? Nah, the whole family just upped and left. Haven't heard from them ever since, Noah said.

"Strange," I said. "It's actually a beautiful house. Bo, I'll be having a housewarming party soon. I'll send you an invite so you can see it for yourself," I said.

I had the sudden urge to kiss him and run my fingers on the small hairs on his face. These past several months have been tough being apart from them, but finally we were together again. Maybe not in the same house, but still in the same area.

I absent-mindedly dropped a bag of chips on the floor. I sighed. I really missed the three of them.

"I'm so sorry. I'm really clumsy," I apologized. Xavier picked up the bag of chips for me and smiled, showing me his perfect teeth.

"No harm, no foul. This is actually my favorite brand," he said, putting the bag of chips in my cart. "I gotta go back to work. I hope to see more of you Virtue. He scurried away to help another customer.

I turned to Noah. "My c can show you the spa

ll. Let's head to the cash register and put these in the car so I enting for my clothing shop."

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CHAPTER 22 Patience

Xavier

I secretly watched Joy pay for her groceries while Noah, the putz that he was, was just standing around like a goof, not even helping her. I wanted to walk up to her and help her, but I had to restrain myself.

Instead, I busied myself, stacking up merchandise near the entrance of the shop, trying to listen to their conversation and wondering where Cristos was.

Maybe he was still at Sebastian's shop, watching through the CCTV cameras.

I glanced at Noah who was carrying some bags of Joy's groceries and I felt the hot white was mine and no other surge of jealousy. Every fiber in my being

was screaming that Joy man besides my Blood Disciple brothers were allowed to be with her. Especially a man who turned his back on her when she needed him the most.

I have always been protective of Joy. Even on that day when I first saw her in school.

It

I had thought it was someone who walked in the same circles as we did, but I was wrong. was a bunch of punks masquerading as squeaky clean, good-natured boys who liked hurting young girls who gave them the cold shoulder.

Ten years may have gone, but revenge has no expiration date.

Nothing goes unpunished.

CHAPTER 23 Reliable

Joy

After placing the grocery bags in the car, I took Noah to the commercial space just beside the grocery store which would soon become my boutique. Luckily, he came prepared. Apparently, he keeps his builder's tape hooked on his belt at all times.

He promised me he could get the place done in two weeks just in time for the spring formal.

As we were leaving the empty commercial space to go around town, I noticed a man walking

down the sidewalk. It was Cristos! He was wearing a form fitting black T-shirt, skinny jeans,

and black loafers with no socks. He was sashaying quite ostentatiously with one arm on his waist while his other arm swung forward and backward with his every move.

Noah followed my eyes and grinned at me. "Ah yes. I had a feeling you would notice him.

Come on. I'll introduce you. Hey, Chip!" Noah called out.

"If it isn't my favorite construction man!" Cristos said flamboyantly, his hand twirling in the air. He glanced at me and winked. "And he has a date!" I bit my tongue to keep myself from giggling.

"It's not like that, Chip. I'm just showing Virtue here around town. She just moved into my neighborhood," Noah quickly explained, embarrassed I was called his date. Cristos began to fan himself with his hand.

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"I thought you were going to say she just moved into your house! Boy, you almost gave me heart attack! Virtue, darling, I'm Chad Hendrix Palmer, the town's bartender, but you can call me Chip for short. Let me take a look at

you, beautiful, Cristos said, lifting my chin up and scrutinizing me with laughter in his bright blue eyes. "So pretty. Oooohhhh, Nicole has some competition." He snapped his fingers, delighted at the idea. "Virtue, tonight is lady's night at the local pub, half off on all drinks. Do come. It will be an interesting night." I was so busy gawking at him that I didn't answer. "Virtue, cat got your tongue?" Cristos asked.

"Oh, yeah, Lisa told me about that. I'll stop by after dinner," I answered quickly, embarrassed I was caught off-guard.

"Oh, Lisa, poor thing," He grimaced, then quickly changed the subject. "Well, what can I say. What happens at the Buzzed Pub stays at the Buzzed Pub. You, darling, have to witness it
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CHAPTER 23 Reliable

firsthand. So, where are you two headed?"

"I'm going to show her around town. We'll even drop by at the Mayor's office, so we can get a head start on those permits for the construction of this place, Noah answered, pointing at the empty commercial space.

"Oh, so you're headed to the town hall to see Lim. Well, ta-ta darlings. Virtue, I'll see you later tonight," Cristos said and sashayed away to the grocery store.

"I like him," I blurted out loud, giggling. Oh Cristos! You are such a character! "That makes the two of us," Noah said, chuckling. "Come on. Let's grab a cheeseburger from the diner and head to town hall. Once the permits are approved, we can start shopping for the construction material and furnishings at Dom's. Don't worry. The permits will be processed quickly because I know the Mayor," he said proudly.

When he noticed the cynical look I gave him, he quickly explained, "Well, yeah, I know everyone knows the Mayor, but he and I are really good friends." Good friends, he says.

Sure, Noah. Good enough to stab me in the back. You are sooo reliable that way.

It's only my first day back and I have to face the monster in all my nightmares. Sebastian

"Virtue is headed to the Mayor's office, Cristos whispered through the phone.

"I'd like to ano

apologize for the delay. I'll call you as soon as your order arrives," I said to him. "You too. Good day." I abruptly ended the call and hid my smartphone in my pocket.

"Who was that?" A high pitched nasal sounding voice said in front of me. I

wished I could. tell Nicole to leave, but she gave me priceless information for free. If she wasn't so useful, I would tell her what a bitch she really was... to her face.

"Just
t some

person asking me to follow up on his orders," I said, making it seem call wasn't important. "Anyway, before you make a decision on lights, how about with you to town hall and take a look at that office?"

Nicole's face lit up like a Christmas tree. This was one of those rare times she'd be a

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HAPTER 23 Reliable

patade me in front of all the women in this town. She couldn't get any attention from Xavier and Cristos had seemingly made everyone believe he was gay, so that left me, the reliable one. I had to make the girls in Liam's group trust me enough to tell me if not all, most of his deep and darkest secrets.

When the three of us 'moved here, all the single and unhappily married women vied for our attention. Cristos got sick and tired of all the groping, so he told everyone he was gay. Xavier, on the otherhand, was only sociable at work. Outside of the grocery store, he was quiet and moody, angry at all the people living in this small town for what they did to Joy. If he had his way, he would take a machine gun and kill each and every living soul. It's actually a relief Joy is finally here with us. I actually saw Xavier laughing when he came back from the diner with his lunch. He's now in a better mood.

If people in this town only knew all three of us were in love with Joy. It seems strange how three men could fall in love with one woman and share her. I even thought it was going to be difficult, being in this kind of relationship, but it wasn't. All four of us were happy and we wouldn't have it any other way.

"Oh, Dom, really? You would come with me?" Nicole asked, not hiding her surprise and excitement. I nodded my head.

"Stanley can watch the store for me. Right Stanley?" Stanley, an employee of mine, was a high school graduate who was trying to save some money for college. He was actually really helpful and had a good eye with regards to interior design. I was thinking maybe I could. leave the store to him when I left.

"Sure thing, Mr. Samuels," he said enthusiastically.

"If there are any problems, you can reach me through my cell, I told him, then focused my attention to the short platinum blonde standing in front of me. "It's a beautiful day. How about if we walk?" Nicole giggled and wrapped her hand around my arm. I was teny remove it, but I needed information on Liam and Nicole was one of Liam's clo

"Sure, we can walk, Dom, Nicole said, grinning from ear to ear. We exited my

shop while Nicole clung to my arm, smiling smugly at every woman who walked by.

OF

course, I'd rather be with Joy, but I had to make a sacrifice. If we wanted to achieve our goal, we had to hide our feelings.

Joy...

Joy was now beautiful, although to me and the boys, she had always been The Joy of Revenge:

CHAPTER 24 Beauty

Joy

We bought some burgers at the diner where Noth used to work at when we were teenagers. As we entered the diner, I remembered how he told me he didn't want to speak to me ever again.

"Noah, I thought we were friends," I reasoned with him at the bar. "Can't we still be friends. even if you have new ones?" His new group of friends were at a table nearby, snickering at me for being so pathetic.

"Joy, how can we still be friends if I don't want you around me? Here," he said, shoving at paper bag with my order of burgers and fries in front of me. "Take your food and just leave." I took the paper bag and rushed towards the entrance of the diner while his friends made cry baby faces at me as I walked away.

"Hey, are you okay?" Noah asked concerned. I quickly blinked away the memory of his rejection.

"Sorry, old diners like this one always make me feel sad. It's like an age forgotten," I answered. He nudged me playfully on the arm.

"I didn't see you as the nostalgic type," he said. Then, he sighed. "But yes, this place has many memories."

"Of course it does for you. You've what...lived here all your life? So, when do I get to meet your bestfriend?" I asked. To my surprise, his smile disappeared and his expression changed to sorrow. I even noticed a deep sadness lingering in the depths of his chocolate brown eyes.

"She and her family left years ago. I haven't heard from her and I don't know where she is. I wish I could, you know, bring back time and change everything. Maybe she'd probably still be here," he said, his voice full of regret.

"Why did she and her family leave?" I asked, curiously.

"Something bad happened to her. Well, I pray for her everyday. I just hope wherever she is, she's happy," he replied.

Oh, I'm very happy.

"And you? Aren't you happy?" I asked. He glanced at me and smiled.

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CHAPTER 24 Beauty

"I'm happy now because I made a new friend."

We took our burgers and ate while we walked through town. He showed me the park, the local schools, a nice restaurant that served steak, and the town hall.

"Come on. I told you I know the mayor. I'll introduce you," Noah said. I smiled at him.

Of course you will.

"Oh wow! You'll introduce me to him? I exclaimed, sounding impressed. He chuckled.

"This is a small town. We all went to school together. Even Lisa and Nicole are friends with the mayor." He took my hand and led me inside.

The town hall was still the same on the outside as it was on the inside. The town wanted to preserve its historical landmarks and the town hall was the town's prized possession. I remember when I was a little girl, I used to come here with my father when he needed to renew his business permit. I would run up and down the stairs, reveling at the echo my shoes made on each step. When Noah and I became bestfriends, we would compete with each other, trying to make the loudest echo.

The heels of my sandals made a clickety clack sound and echoed around us as we took the stairs to the second floor. The railings of the staircase had gotten themselves a fresh coat of dark brown paint while the tall windows had been freshly polished, reflecting the colors of the rainbow as the sun streamed in.

On the second floor, Noah guided me to the huge door of the mayor's office. He opened the door and walked in, ushering me inside after him. A woman with striking red hair pulled back in a ponytail wearing a simple tan business suit was seated at a small desk in front of a pair of double doors made of oak. The office was pretty much the same except for the painting of Liam hanging on the wall beside the double doors to his main office and the black leather couch set which used to be brown. Polished hardwood floors and wood panelled walls spanned the entirety of the room.

"Hi, Abigail! Is he free?" Noah asked the mayor's secretary. She was also part of their group in high school. She used to take my chips during lunch. It wasn't enough that her family had money; she had to steal too.

"Hey, Noah! He's currently on the phone with a sponsor. I'll ring him up for you in a couple of minutes," she answered politely. "Oh, who do you have behind you?" She moved her head to the side to look behind Noah and our eyes met. Her light green eyes widened in awe and I

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could see the admiration in her smile.

“Virtue, I would like to introduce you to the mayor’s executive assistant, Abigail Reynolds. We went to school together. Abigail, this is Virtue. She just moved into the Taylor’s old house, Noah said, introducing us.

For a moment there, I saw a flicker of surprise, fear, and panic in her eyes as she stared at me, but she hid it quickly.

“Yes, I remember Lisa and Nicole said a woman purchased the house. I thought it was some old biddy. I didn’t know it was a beautiful young woman,” she croaked then sighed. “Virtue is such a unique name. What is your family name? Abigail was always the nosy one.

“Sullivan. My name is Virtue Sullivan,” I said, smiling at her and extended my hand for a handshake. She clasped mine and marveled at my smooth skin.

“You have such nice skin. Where are you originally from, Virtue?”

“Nevada. I’m an accountant. Well, I used to be an accountant. Now, I’m venturing into clothing,” I replied, smiling at her. I felt like my face was going to crack from all the smiling I was doing. “I’m planning to open a boutique beside the grocery store. Noah and I thought we’d have a start on the building permit for construction.”

She nodded her head, then fleetingly glanced at the double doors of Liam’s office.

“I’ll tell you what,” Abigail said while quickly opening a drawer and taking out a couple sheets of paper, “you fill this up and pay the necessary at the Auditor’s Office downstairs. Come back tomorrow and I’ll have your permit approved and signed.”

“Sure,” I said, taking the printed documents from her. It seemed she didn’t want me to meet the Mayor. Of course, I knew why.

“You can sit over there and fill those forms up while I have a word with Noah,” Abigail said, handing me a pen and pointing at the small one seater which was against the wall near the double doors.

I took the pen, sat down and began filling up the forms, making it appear I was paying attention to them.

ny

But we were in a room surrounded by wood.

And wood coincidentally amplifies sound.

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Noah

I was starstruck. I couldn't believe my new nextdoor neighbor was such a beauty and so down-to-earth too.

I couldn't figure it out, but she was so easy to talk to... like I've known her my whole life. Her voice somehow reminded me of Joy Taylor, my childhood friend. Despite the similarity, I felt at ease with Virtue. Usually when I meet someone new, I begin to stutter.

It wasn't like that at all with Virtue though. The moment she opened the door and smiled at me showing her exquisite white teeth, I was smitten. Yet, she was a new acquaintance, obviously educated, well-off and very beautiful. A woman like her valued her independence. For now, I'd take it slow. I'll be a good friend to her and hope it possibly blossoms into something more.

As we walked through town, she caught the attention of the town's folk.

Everywhere we went, I could see the admiration in their eyes. No doubt, there would be many single men vying for her attention.

But if she were to become a problem, she'll have to face Liam and his father. Abigail knew what they were capable of.

Matter of fact, I think everyone living in this town knows.

They were a dirty little secret.

"Noah, what the hell are you doing bringing someone as beautiful as her to meet him. of all times," Abigail hissed at me.

"What am I supposed to do? She's going to bump into them eventually. Better I introduce her now and offer her my protection," I said.

"Your protection?! That didn't help Joy Taylor and you know what they did to her," Abigail mumbled through clenched teeth. "Noah, a piece of advice, make sure that poor woman is with someone at all times. She seems like a really nice girl. I don't want to happen to her." Abigail sighed and glanced at Virtue who was busy writing taken a liking to Virtue and she had only met her.

hing

ilhad

"I'll ask Dom and Bo to keep an eye on her since her shop will be in between t

CHAPTER 24 Beauty

her. "Dominic-

"I heard my name," a low manly voice said behind me.

"Dom, hey!" I turned around to meet his honey-colored eyes. He was a good-looking chap, tall, muscular and well-spoken. Actually, his brother Bo was just like him, but Bo was a bit temperamental which kept the lady's away. Dominic, on the other hand, was a complete gentleman. "Yeah, about that, I have a new neighbor who will be opening a small boutique at that space beside your store. I was hoping you could help her out."

“Who? Virtue?” The distinct high-pitched nasal sounding voice of Nicole echoed within the confines of the office. I lowered my gaze and found her clutching Dominic’s arm. I raised my eyebrows, shocked Nicole was hanging on his arm when everyone knew she was madly and deeply in love with Liam despite his many flaws... if you can call them that.

Nicole’s eyes met mine and a flicker of fear flashed, but she expertly hid it before anyone could notice..

“Yes? Virtue suddenly said, hearing her name mentioned. I didn’t notice, but she was already standing in front of Abigail’s desk, handing Abigail her pen back. She smiled warmly at Dominic and Nicole before addressing me. “Noah, I have the forms all filled out. I just need to pay the fees at the Auditor’s office.”

Suddenly, we heard the double doors open.

“Isn’t this a fine day!” Liam’s golden voice reverberated through his office. He walked out, sporting a nicely tailored blue suit. As expected, his dark eyes went immediately

He instinctively combed his fingers through his dark hair and fixed his maroon co.

“And who do we have here?” Liam asked, winking at Virtue.

Chapter Comments

Luna-Mom

POST COMMENT

totally love how all their planning is wonderful and getting information on Liam is a bonus

CHAPTER 25 The Mayor

Cristos

After alerting Sebastian of Noah’s plan to bring joy to meet the Mayor, Xavier and I walked towards a corner of the warehouse section of the grocery store where huge boxes laid. stacked on top of each other. Behind these boxes concealed a door to Xavier’s secret office.

After we entered, Xavier clicked on his keyboard and all the monitors lit up.

“Where are they headed?” Xavier asked me once we were safely inside.

“To town hall. I have Sebastian following them,” I told him.

“Noah is so predictable. He meets a beautiful woman and the first thing he does is send her out to the wolves,” Xavier said, his eyes seething with rage.

“If we didn’t need him, I’d knock on his door and shoot him in the head.”

I suddenly saw Sebastian’s image on the monitor as he walked by one of the CCTV cameras. Walking beside him was a short blonde who seemed to be clinging desperately on his arm.

“Fuck! Sebastian’s with Nicole. Noah and Nicole spell disaster. I’ll head to town hall and make sure everything moves smoothly. I don’t want those assholes to put Joy in a compromising position just because she’s new in town,” I said before pointing to a monitor which showed footage from the grocery store. “Lisa’s here. She invited Joy for a drink later tonight at the eyes of yours. Remember, it’s Ladies’ Night. Use your charm and those expressive brown Xavier rolled his eyes. “It’s not my fault her husband is into raping and murdering girls I’ll flip the switch and charm her to get an invite for tonight so I can weed my way to “making friends” with Virtue. By the way, make sure you make Noah and Nicole look and feel like idiots.”

“With pleasure. Ta-ta!” I exited Xavier’s secret room and took the back entrance, not wanting to bump into Lisa. I’ve had enough of having to take care of her during the nights she would get so drunk at the pub.

I waved at a few people across the street as I quickly sashayed my way to town hall

wanted to do what Xavier has always wanted; knock on the doors of the four men and attempted to kill Joy and just shoot them in the head. But then, they would be remembered as martyrs and I wanted this town to spit at the mere mention of their

CHAPTER 25 The Mayor

Mayor Liam Cohen, son of the former mayor, loved the challenge, hated the rejection. He was said to have been seen stalking Eugene’s granddaughter, Joan, before she went missing. However, before her body was found floating at a nearby lake, nude photos of Joan circulated around town including a nasty rumor of her selling sexual favors online.

Despite Joan’s reputation in ruins, valuable evidence from the coroner’s office had gone missing. Because of Joan’s questionable character and an obvious lack of evidence, Joan’s family did not pursue a case against Liam Cohen. Lisa’s husband, Cristian Murdock, was the town’s councilman and Liam’s closest confidant. One thing is for sure, he didn’t give two shits about Lisa. He was busy molding his political career and having a beautiful wife by his side proved handy to build a better image. I caught him roughing up some girl before fucking her in the men’s bathroom one night at the pub. Apparently, he was a sadist.

Daniel Williams was New Salem’s Auditor. He, according to Joy, was the smartest of the four and went on to graduate top of their class as expected. The thing with Dan, there was something different about him. I would

sometimes catch him staring at me when he was at the pub. I had a very strong feeling he was in the closet and men, like Dan, who have been pushed into the darkest and darkest corners of a closet, can be very dangerous. Yet there was a way for me to coax him out of his shell and I intended doing so. Then, there was Jackson Emery. He was the Undersheriff of this town and was patiently waiting for Sheriff Combs to retire before vying for the position. As much as Jack wanted to be Sheriff of New Salem, he could not go against the wishes of Theodore Cohen, former mayor of New Salem and Liam's father. Theodore Cohen was known to be a force of nature. Everything these boys had was all because of Theodore Cohen.

I entered the town hall and ran up the stairs like my life depended on it. I slightly opened the huge door to the mayor's office and peeped through the tiny space to get a good look at what was happening. Anyway, I needed some time to catch my breath before entering the office.

I couldn't see much because Sebastian's back was blocking my view, but I did hear the double doors to Liam's main office open and I heard the unmistakable timbre of his voice.

"Isn't this a fine day!" Liam exclaimed, walking out of his office. There was a pause

heard him say, "And who do we have here?"

An awkward silence fell.

Xavier was right. Noah was only feeding Virtue to the dogs. I thought Noah would have

CHAPTER 25 The Mayor

grown some balls, but he's just a limp dick. I wanted to put my hands around Noah's throat and squeeze the life out of him.

I quickly opened the door and sprung into character.

Joy

I coughed, taking a moment to muster all of my courage to face one of the cold-blooded brutes of my past. I took a step forward and raised my head so my blue-gray eyes could stare into the bottomless pits of hell which Liam called eyes.

He stared at me with interest like a predator watching his prey. However, this time, unbeknownst to him, he was the prey, and I, the stalking apex predator. An uncomfortable silence settled in the room as we both regarded each other, neither of us wanting to back down.

I waited for someone to say something, but no one, not even Abigail, introduced us. Of course, Sebastian couldn't be the one to make introductions because we weren't supposed to know each other.

Liam just stood there, smiling at me, like the jackass he was while I stared back, hoping Noah would at least say something, but obviously he chickened out. With Liam as mayor, Noah was at his mercy. Nothing has changed. Liam still controlled all of them, just like it was in high school.

As I continued to stare, an image of him laughing as he struck my face with a barbell breaking my jaw in the process, flashed through my mind. I wanted to take out the knife Sebastian had given me and slash his throat.

I imagined the feeling of satisfaction I would get while I watched a shocked Liam struggle to ask for help. I imagined the immense pleasure from the sight of his blood gushing out as he covered the wound with his hands, trying helplessly to stop the bleeding. I imagined myself laughing hysterically, so pleased with myself, as he collapsed on the floor, bleeding out until his black heart stopped.

But I didn't want to be whisked away for first-degree manslaughter. Oh no no... The just too many witnesses. There was a time and a place to confront Liam and his merry of misfits. Now, fortunately for him, wasn't that time.

CHAPTER 25 The Mayor

I was about to introduce myself when I heard a very familiar and very theatrical voice behind me.

Why are you people blocking the doorway? What is going on in here? Cristos asked loudly while trying to walk in between Sebastian and Nicole who didn't want to let go of Sebastian's arm. "Move over, Smurfette! This is the Mayor's office not some place you go to for a first date. Although, Dom, that's pretty unique."

"Thanks!" Sebastian answered, smiling.

"That wasn't a compliment," Cristos quipped and turned around to face me, smiling brightly. He shooed Noah away and wrapped his arm around mine.

"Virtue, you're here! Isn't this a fabulous coincidence! Virtue, this is the Mayor of New Salem, Liam Cohen," he said, introducing us. "Liam, this is Virtue. She's new in town and my new bestfriend. Right, Virtue?" We giggled together while I nodded in agreement.

"Right, Chip." I answered, feeling at ease. Cristos' touch always comforted me. I placed hand on his arm and snuggled closer.

"Anyway, you have inspired me to get some renovations done at the pub, so here I am!" He raised his free hand in the air in a ta-da pose, then quickly pulled it down. "Well, to grab a building permit, of course. What about you, Dom? Why are you and Scrappy Doo here?" Nicole gave Cristos a dirty look, but he ignored her. I bit the inside of my lip to keep myself from laughing.

"We wanted to ask Liam for lighting suggestions for the newly-renovated office downstairs,"

Sebastian answered.

“Virtue, have you met my cousin?” Cristos asked, I shook my head. “No? This is he owns the furnishings shop.” Then, he pointed at Nicole. And that is his pet goldfish Cristos checked his watch and gasped. Look at the time. I need to open the pub soon.

Anyways, we better get going. Noah, don’t worry, Virtue is in good hands. I’ll be the one to show her around town.” Cristos took my hand to lead me out of the office, but quickly stopped. “Oooops, I forgot! Abigail darling, forms please!”

As if on cue, Abigail handed him the same forms she gave me. “Don’t forget to pay your fees at the Auditor’s office,” she reminded us.

Before we exited the office, I turned to face Liam. “Mayor Cohen, it was a pleas

you.

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The pleasure is all mine, Virtu