



Chapter Twenty-eight: **Somewhere in New York State**

I was fine.

All of my bumps and bruises were merely that, minor and superficial. My neck looked the worst. I gave more than I got, but the ones he got in were bad enough. I knew I marked up easily, though. I would be alright in a day or two, and the rest would fade away in a couple of weeks. I had been in more pain after a good scene.

A few hours later, they let us leave the hospital. Despite being in the middle of the night, we were directly escorted to the FBI office by two agents and our bodyguards. The agency we hired from sent different ones, the others exhausted from their long day. Sam was waiting for us in the lobby, wringing his hands nervously. He was in a suit without his jacket, his white sleeves

rolled up his arms. It was wrinkled and stained in a couple of places. He had been working hard all day.

He brought me into a hug right away. His tie smelled like coffee. "I'm so glad you're alright."

"Me too," I smiled as I pressed my face into his shirt.

"What do we know?" Jasper questioned when I pulled back. His hands automatically went to my sides as he stood behind me. He was going to be more protective than he already was. I wasn't certain how that would be possible. He put his job on hold to follow me around all the time.

"Not a lot. Let's go to my office and talk," he murmured, nodding his head in the right direction. We followed him as he continued to speak. "The ID in this guy's wallet was old. And I'm not even sure it's real or his. It's been expired for close to a decade. It says his name is James Hunter, and he is twenty-nine if it's correct. Right now, his face isn't in good enough condition for a positive identification."

"Is he not talking?"

He shook his head. "He's currently in surgery. You broke his jaw in several places and crushed his cheekbone. They're going to have to stitch it back together with screws and wires. You also knocked out half of his teeth. I hope the rapist piece of shit enjoys drinking his meals through a straw." He pushed an angry breath through his nose. "Your restraint is stunning. I'd killed him. I still might if given a chance."

Frowning, he nodded in understanding. Jasper would have if I didn't get the handcuffs. He would have kept going until there wasn't anything left to punch. But it was better that he didn't. We could get more information out of him. Dead men tell no tales.

"Does he have a record?" He asked next.

"Longer than my fucking leg." He unlocked his door, the keys rattling loudly against the metal. It was so ominous. The rest of the hallway was quiet because almost everyone else was at home. But there were a few people moving around a large cubicle space, and I knew they were working on this. "He's from somewhere in New York State. Some tiny ass town upstate. I've never heard of it. Less than five hundred people. A hamlet called Piffard."

"How far is that from Rochester?" I asked in curiosity.

Sam thought to himself. "Uh, it's actually pretty close. Just a quick drive on I-390. Less than an hour, even if you stop for gas and snacks."

I looked between the men. “Do you think he was Royce’s... I don’t know, accomplice? I thought he worked alone. You still haven’t found any evidence that there were others.”

He shook his head as he flicked on the light. “He always had a wall of people and money to keep him safe. Honestly, it’s stupid not to consider it.”

“Do we think this is a mentor situation?” Jasper pressed.

“It’s a possibility, but I don’t have enough information right now to say either way. Once I get him in an interrogation room, it’s one of the first things I’ll ask about. But I got some pictures for you to look at. Let’s start with that and see if you know who this guy is.”

The first ones I saw were of him just a few hours before, right after getting arrested. No one would be able to recognize a human under that much swelling. It was horrifying. “Do you think you’ve seen him before? Maybe... remember him from the trial?”

I scoffed. “No.”

Then he pulled out an enhanced photo from his long-expired ID. It was issued when he was a teenager and first got his license. He had long, shaggy dish blond hair, gray eyes, and a scowl. He wasn’t attractive, covered in horrible acne, and his teeth were crooked. Though young, he seemed furious with his world.

Staring at it, I tried to imagine him smiling, but it only came out as a smirk. I couldn’t make it seem bright or pleasant. It was unnerving and uncomfortable. I didn’t like the way his eyes scanned over my body in my mind as I did. That, I could see clear as day.

Then it clicked loudly, and I found the name I had been searching for in my head for months.

“Riley!” I shouted as I slammed it down. I couldn’t remember it the last time I saw him when we were in at the Barnes & Noble at the signing. His hair had been longer. He must have just cut it. Probably to make it a little harder to recognize him. It was a lame attempt. We would figure it out eventually.

“Who?” Jasper questioned in confusion. He looked at Sam, trying to remember the name. I could tell he did, but he didn’t know how he did. It was on the tip of his tongue as he searched his mind for a connection.

“The pretty but boring DA’s cop boyfriend. Um, fuck, what is her name?” I snapped several times as I tried to think of it. Flustered, it was right there. I could see her face clearly. “Ms. Rachele! You know, the strawberry blond with the big tits that you thought was hot.”

Sam blinked for several seconds and then picked up the picture. He was struggling to remember his face. It had probably been a year since he saw him. We were at the bar in Albany, and he had been drinking. He tilted his head to the side. "Shit," he drew out slowly. "She's right."

My husband snatched the photo from his grip to look. "Fuck. They were at the big reading in Manhattan. We need to talk to Ms. Rachelle right fucking now."

"I'll get someone to pick her up. Do you think she's an accomplice or a victim?" His former partner asked seriously. He picked up his phone.

Softly, he sighed. "I don't know."

I quickly shook my head. "She couldn't have known! I hope she's okay," I breathed. "I don't think- I mean, she was so nice to us! And she worked incredibly hard on the case. Do you remember how upset she was that it ended the way it did? She was in tears!" I shook my head again. "Maybe he used her to get information." My mind scrambled to make sense of the situation. "And she's not the tiny terrorist. She can't be. She's taller than me."

"Mm, she is tall," Jasper replied, then grunted. "I don't know. Either way, we need to talk to her. This needs to start as a wellness check, not an arrest. If she's not involved, she should be happy to help. In fact, check on all the DAs. Alright. Anything else?"

Sam shook his head. "I've got to look into this new angle. A first name isn't much to go on."

I pulled my tablet out of my purse, so I could jot down my jumbled thoughts. I worked best visually. Sitting down in the chair, I started a new document. The first thing I typed was 'Royce?' Then I put 'Riley-' directly under it and then stopped. When they lined up, I noticed some similarities in them.

Royce?

Riley-

They both began with R and had E and Y. Plus, they had five letters. That didn't seem like a coincidence. It just lined up so neatly. We knew the man wasn't above using a fake name, even if it was terrible and self-absorbed. If he had an apprentice, he was the type to give him a matching moniker. But surely he had learned from the experience. It seemed like something you would call annoying twin toddlers.

I showed Jasper without saying anything. His eyes narrowed, and he just hummed. I wasn't sure if he saw what I did, or if I was looking too hard.

The phone on the desk rang. Sam picked it right away. "Uley." He paused, nodding his head along with whoever was talking. "Great. Thanks." He hung up and looked at us. "He's out of surgery. Fancy a field trip, doc?"

I stood up, and Jasper put his hand on my shoulder, so I plopped right down. "Is that a good idea?"

Smirking, he grabbed his jacket off the back of the chair. "I'm not going to let you in there with him. I just want you to get a better look at him. We need to confirm our suspicion about who he is."

The thought rolled around in his mouth for a moment. Finally, he sighed. "Yeah, let's go." He offered me a hand up. He leaned down to speak in my ear. "You tell me the minute you need a break."

"I'm fine," I said quickly. Both of them stared at me. "Do either of you think you can stop me?"

"No," they declared at the same time. Sam got his keys and waved towards the door. "Let's go."

We arrived at a different hospital from the one I went to. He had woken up according to the nurses and was not happy. He was violent even after being sedated. Two FBI agents were outside his door. We could see him through a window, his hands handcuffed to the bed. His legs had been strapped down too, probably as much for his own safety as it was for others.

Sam put something in his ear and cockily smiled at Jasper, then he winked at me. He took out his phone and dialed his number so we could listen to the other side of the conversation.

We didn't need it to hear him grunt when he first entered. "Fuck you!" It was slurred and muted because his jaw was wired shut. Spit flew from his mouth.

"Hey, hey, hey. I'm just here for a little chat. No need to start with that. I want to help you," Sam spoke as if he was a wounded wild animal. He jerked at his restraints, ignoring him. He sat about two feet away from the bed and crossed his legs casually. "So, what's your name, pal?" He growled and snarled like a monster, jerking his face away. "We only want to know so we can get you the help you require. You didn't have any wallet or ID on you."

"Can he lie to him like that?" I asked my husband softly. Silently, he nodded.

The man looked at him. Slowly blinking, he was confused. He must have known he had it on him before. But maybe he lost it along the way in the struggle. His eyes searched for what to do in his head. It was a chance to be honest, but I knew he wouldn't take it. So did Sam.

Finally, he swallowed. "Riley."

Scoffing, I raised my eyebrows. "Riley... What?"

"Riley... What?" Sam repeated, hearing my question.

His hands curled into fists on the bed. "Kingston."

Jasper drew in a sharp breath and looked at me in surprise. "I'd bet you a thousand dollars he says his middle name is Matthew," I declared as I peered at him. I had never felt more confident about something in my life.

His former partner leaned in with a charming smile. We watched through the glass. "Good. This is a great start. And what about your middle name, huh?"

There was a long pause. His eye was so swollen, it could barely open. It was red and purple, sticking out an inch, at least. The way it moved rapidly seemed painful. "Matthew."

"Oh, my god," Jasper uttered to himself, leaning against the wall. He put his bandaged hand over his eyes like his head was aching. "You're right. What a conceited asshole."

I knew the man in the bed had to know who Sam was. He had to. And there was no doubt in my mind that he thought Agent Uley didn't know the reverse. The fact he decided to talk without a lawyer was proof enough that he was an idiot. Nothing he had done or said yet was intelligent. The only thing our friend would help him with was getting into a jail cell as fast as possible.

Peeking into the room to watch again, I hoped he couldn't see me from his position. He was too focused on Sam, though. "Man, I got to say you've done a very stupid thing. See, you endangered my godson and his very wonderful mother, which pissed off not only the father and me but every single friend we have at the FBI. There are a lot of us, too. So, do you want to tell me why you did it?"

He closed his eyes. "I just picked a random room."

Sam laughed and then made a buzzer noise. "Ha, wrong answer. Try again." They snapped open to glare at him before he struggled again. "You know, you'll have to do a lot better than that, James." He stopped at the sound of his name. That was actually it. "Now, do

you want to tell me how you met Royce? We should start from the beginning. But if you really want me to help you, you need to stop lying to me right this second.”

“LAWYER! I WANT A LAWYER!” He finally screamed through his grotesquely clenched teeth.

Without a word, he got up and walked out. He didn’t even look back. Our friend smirked as he came out. “Damn, you nailed that one right on the head. It’s not subtle at all. But I’m guessing this tool bag is about as smart as a sack of bricks. And his tox-screen came back fucking nuts. He’s pumped up on a cocktail that would kill a horse. I’m surprised his brain isn’t mush.”

“What do we do now?” I asked as I looked between the men.

“Well, I got somebody checking on Ms. Rachelle and the other lawyers from the trial. Both sides. Next, we need-” His phone began to ring. He brought up a finger. “Give me a sec. This is probably about her. Yup?” He answered. His eyes got wider. “Shit. Okay. Alright. Call me back when you get something for me.”

“What?” Jasper questioned. “Please don’t tell me they found her body.”

He shook his head, his expression grim. “But she hasn’t shown up to work in a few days. There isn’t anyone at her apartment, and her car is gone. Her place looks tossed.”

I rubbed my aching forehead. “That poor woman. We just saw her the other day. She and Ms. Stanley came to support my book! She even invited us out to drinks! And I told them I was pregnant! He was right there. Fuck. I bet that’s what really set him off.” I closed my eyes, trying to focus. “And this still doesn’t tell us who destroyed the cars or set the house on fire either! Because that’s not a little girl in there.” I pointed at the door. “Wait...” I gazed at Jasper. “Do you think he’s the one that killed Bree’s mother?”

“He lives in the area. It’s a strong possibility,” Sam answered. “I’ll look into it. I think you might be right, though.” My husband nodded in agreement.

I looked into the window. “You need to ask him about Bree, too. I bet he knows what happened to her.” The savage peered up, and I knew he saw me standing there. I didn’t move or blink. He couldn’t hurt me anymore. I wasn’t frightened in the least. He was powerless.

With a defiant smirk, I flipped him off.