

Chapter Thirty-Four

Recap

He leans back against the armrest and stares at me in silence, probably expecting me to ask him more questions. So when none come out, we simply stare. I re-memorize every curve and dent in his expression.

He's wearing a solemn one this time.

His lips are dressed in a straight, blunt line and his eyes lack the energy they usually do. The show is over and the curtains have closed.

His guards are down, his gun unloaded.

He has peeled off his fearless and warrior-like mask, and for the first time, I see him for who he really is.

Broken.

I never saw it before—the raw emotion. It leaves me breathless and bittersweet all at once. For it has always been a secret motivation to fix him. Yet, for all this time, when I see him now, I realize that what I see in him is exactly what he must see in me.

"How are you holding up?" He breaks the tranquil ambiance with a barely audible undertone.

"I don't know." I mumble honestly, clutching the blanket in my fists. "None of this feels real."

He chuckles darkly, "I warned you that things could get really messy."

"I know." I agree slowly, watching his brows knit in confusion. Perhaps this is the first time we've ever agreed on something. "...I don't care."

"You don't care?" He repeats incredulously, outrage brimming furiously at the edge of his voice.

"No." I repeat with terrifying sincerity. I watch cautiously as astonishment occupies his previously vacant expression. "I don't."

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"You're crazy." The anger laced in his tone is present, though not as powerfully as a few minutes ago. It seems that with every ticking moment, his relief conquers the rage that cages his emotions.

"So are you." I point out, challenging him to object.

The corners of his mouth tilt up at my remark. Instead of replying however, he reaches for the knob of my knee and squeezes either side. The bone jolts at the touch of a tickling sensation and I jerk back.

When I look up, he's holding back a smirk.

I grumble at his surprising confidence and readjust the blanket over my legs.

When he recovers from his humorous fit, when his so-called gaze tightens at the thought of reality, he suddenly becomes serious. I watch, mesmerized, as the life vanishes from his eden green eyes as quickly as it came.

"What do you plan to do?" He asks while shifting the weight on his back.

The ghostly image of our isolated house reappears in my head, and I suppress the urge to shiver. Despite this, I feel goosebumps rise like an oozing volcano on the surface of my skin.

"I'm not sure," I whisper honestly, my gaze flickering to his face, "I was hoping you would have a plan."

"Well I did have something in mind," He purses his lips, "but it doesn't involve you."

I arch an eyebrow, "Does it consist of violence and irrationality?"

"Violence: yes." He glares, "Irrationality: no."

"That sounds really convincing." I deadpan, tilting my head to the side.

"I wasn't trying to convince you." He retorts, narrowing his eyes.

"Well," I say, rubbing my temple. I decide to play along—just to see his side of things. "Can you elaborate on your somehow 'violent yet rational' plan?"

"No." He answers bluntly.

I release an exasperated sigh and throw my head back momentarily.

"No you can't or no you won't?"

"Both." He says curtly. His lips form a taut, straight line, indicating to me that he is done talking.

"Then it's out of the question." I nearly growl in frustration at his stubbornness.

Travis takes his hands out and places them on the sides of his torso. He twists and roughly resettles into the cushion of the couch.

"Do you have any other ideas, genius?" He asks sarcastically.

I pause, his question catching me off guard.

My silence appears to answer his question and he starts to smile.

Then, amidst my chaotic thoughts, it occurs to me.

Wordlessly, I throw the blanket over my legs and so lightly touch my toes to the smooth surface of the floor. I make my way hastily yet with so much grace, up the marble staircase. My steps thud ever so gently against the upstairs carpeted floor, but the noise is minimal.

I curve around the hall and make the first right, directly into Travis's man cave. His room is absurdly neat and tidy—almost excessively prime. Not a poster or mark in the room that could possibly classify it as his.

I frown despite myself but remain intent on grabbing what I came to get my hands on. Finding his laptop isn't as hard as I imagined it would be, for I thought locating it would be next to impossible.

Nonetheless, I snatch the sleek laptop and dart back down to the main room in hopes that Travis is still in there. Lucky for me, he is—in fact, he still has his navy hood over his head, but his gaze is glassy.

It's only when I settle down across from him that he shifts his eyes to meet mine. I smirk, more to myself—at my intelligence—than to him, and extend my hand to give him the laptop.

"Do you still have those surveillance cameras up?" I whisper, silently praying that his answer is a resounding 'yes'.

"Look at you," He murmurs, a smug look of his own stretching past his lips. He flips the cover up, the immediate light from the laptop casting a vast pool of light across his sharp cut features. Travis looks up a few moments of intently staring at the screen before saying, "As a matter of fact, I do."

And so we both eagerly jump at the 'genius' idea to watch the tapes, rewinding but never fast-forwarding. He shifts the laptop so that the screen is facing both of us from the side. The instant he presses play, I'm mesmerized, both in awe and in horror, as dark figures enter the screen. While Travis stares intently at the screen, his eyes scrutinizing every inch of space, I watch for any clues.

There are two figures, both completely unidentifiable yet utterly visible. Visible in a sense that I know they are there. I squint, trying to take in the outlines, but it's too blurry, too dark, and impossible. The figures run across the screen, and we tilt our heads, our eyes darting to the next screen shooting a different angle of the house. They are still outside of it, wandering, viciously searching for a way in.

Suddenly, the two separate, forking off into opposite directions. One rounds the corner of the house past the gate. We both watch in silence as, moments later, the same figure appears on the fourth camera screen. The other figure, darts off, searching for another route in.

We scan the screens, wating, searching with our breaths held in tight, for the robber to re-enter.

Only, it never happens.

"Pause it." I murmur absentmindedly, trying to play out this scene in my head. He does so, glowering at the screen in mimicked frustration.

I take one final glance at the screen before looking at Travis.

"You covered all angles of the house." I ponder, not able to connect the dots that simply dissolve in my head.

Travis nods his head, "Yeah, absolutely."

"Then...how?" I manage to say, glancing back at the screen, "Where the hell is the other one?"

"He couldn't have gotten in." Travis eliminates that thought the minute the idea pops in my head. "Let's just continue it and see if it's a glitch."

I nod my head and he gives me a small smile.

For deep down inside, we both know, this can't possibly be a glitch.

I take a deep breath and nod, "Yeah, continue."

He obliges, and presses play. Seconds later, we're completely endorsed in the black and white action. A full minute goes by and there is still no sign of the other figure.

"Rogue rebel?" I muse without a touch of humor.

Without looking up, Travis holds a finger to his lips, "Shh."

I resist the urge to roll my eyes in that very moment. Instead, I glance back down, and to my surprise, I see the figure that's on the screen for more than just a figure.

"Wait!" I hiss, "Stop, stop it!"

Travis hits the keypad and the screen pauses. Frantically, I lean forward, inching my head closer towards the screen in an effort to help myself get a better view.

There is something familiar.

I look back at Travis in hopes that he can help me, but he himself has no clue.

"Do you recognize anything?" I ask nonetheless.

He pushes closer as well but eventually folds his lips towards his mouth.

Shaking his head, he mumbles in defeat, "No."

I sigh, "It's fine, just resume it. Maybe I will remember."

He rolls the tapes and I focus my sole attention on the current figure. The outline approaches the camera, inching closer and closer. And the closer it gets, the more I realize that the moves are intentional.

"Turn around..." I growl at the figure in growing agitation.

Surely, the figure whirls around.

My heart flips, my breath turns heavy and I get increasingly eager to identify the suspect. Only, the instant the outline turns, the cameras turn black.

I jerk back, my eyes wide in panic.

First the one at the top left corner, then the top middle, then the top right...soon enough, all the screens are screechy and black.

"Dammit!" Travis grunts, slamming the laptop shut.

I groan at the same time and throw my head back against the couch.

"Dammit." I repeat in a much softer, underlying tone.

With my heart still racing a mile a minute, I mentally churn over the one thought that repeats through my head—that as I was watching, I felt something strange—a prickling sensation. Not because I was witnessing a break into my house, but because while looking for answers through these evidently accessible tapes, I only stumbled across more questions.

Of all things, what was I so close to uncovering?

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Thanks for reading as usual! I'm always super pleased with your comments. I hope my gratitude shows in my responses (unless the comments are not nice...but that rarely happens these days). So glad y'all are reading and enjoying.

As I said before, I've entered this book and TYD (I believe) into the Wattys, so if you feel like either story deserves a title, vote your beautiful little hearts away.

QOC: what are your theories?

Oh, just FYI: Please no comments about the ending 'not being satisfying'. I'll just delete them.

Hope you understand why!

Anywho, thanks a million times.

Can I get 60 comments?

Read, Comment, Love me. (;

VOMMENT.

xxSummerxx