



REVISED & EXPANDED EDITION

# SUMMER OF SINS

"MIXING WIT WITH VIVID IMAGERY AND BELIEVABLE CHARACTERS"  
- HÉLÈNE WARD

CAN LEXIE WINSTON & HENRY CHURCHILL LEARN TO WORK TOGETHER AND PROTECT NEW YORK FROM SUPERNATURAL DANGER?

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DIGITAL SAMPLE EDITION

# PART ONE

NEVER

LET

AM

1.

“It’s way too early for this shit,” she said.

Lexie Winston leaned forward from the passenger seat and turned down the music, stopping only when it was barely audible.

“Excuse me?” Henry Churchill looked over from the driver’s seat of the remarkably well-preserved 1976 bright yellow Gremlin that served as the agency’s “company car.”

She rolled her eyes at him. “Not the music. Just...this.” She gestured at the general state of reality. It was barely 7:30 in the morning and they were crossing the Throg’s Neck Bridge on their way to meet a client in Fresh Meadows. Lexie had been barely awake when she shuffled into the office about five minutes before Henry had wanted to leave, so she’d been convinced he was messing with her.

“This city is stupid,” she’d said, gulping down her coffee upon realizing that was, in fact, both the name of the bridge and the neighborhood in Queens.

Henry, who’d lived in or around New York City for almost fifty years, held his tongue.

It was something he was getting used to.

“Well, this was when the client had time to meet, so there’s no help for it.” Henry had been happy to accommodate Mr. Chalmers’ specific schedule, as his high strung nature was apparent even through the phone.

Even more so given the little alarm bells that had started ringing as they talked.

Wanting to set the man's mind at ease, he'd made the suggestion to Lexie when they left the office last night about "making sure they looked professional" and hoped she'd take the hint. Instead, she'd shown up in jeans and a worn Metallica t-shirt under a light denim jacket, with her long brown hair pulled into a ponytail and threaded through the back of a Knicks cap.

Clearly, the hint had not been taken.

His walk to work in the mid-May heat almost made him regret the suit and tie. Now he regretted it for highlighting their contrasting appearances.

Henry was Black, in his late forties (with middle-aged paunch to go with it), and just about five-three. Henry's meticulously trimmed beard and hair were the same short length and blended seamlessly into each other, and if you leaned in close you'd catch a whiff of aftershave.

Lexie was White, just under six feet tall, and had long limbs that would have been gangling if not for the lean muscle. Her plain face was makeup free, and she'd made it clear she had no intention of changing that. On their first ride together, Lexie said that she guessed his aftershave cost more than her entire outfit, and that included her most expensive possession: a meticulously cared for pair of black combat boots.

The past few meetings with new clients had almost all started with them looking back and forth between the two detectives (although 'up and down' was more accurate, which was its own kind of frustrating). He'd spent decades keeping himself pristinely professional, but now that he was the agency 'point person' he realized he'd have to try harder. Especially for

those with a hard time figuring out if a white woman or a Black man was more likely to be in charge.

He turned the music back up, although just to background noise levels. Lexie studied him, and he said, "I like Jay-Z" and turned his attention back to the road.

He felt her gaze linger for a moment, but then she relented. "So, what show is this?"

Lexie had developed a habit of asking about what sitcoms were set in the various neighborhoods they'd visit around the city. She'd been a little disappointed that the closest to their office in Washington Heights was "Seinfeld," despite it being one of Henry's favorites when he was in high school.

"I don't know," Henry said, pretending to be deep in thought. "It's Queens, so maybe...The King of Queens?"

She looked away from the window and scowled at him. Just when Henry thought they were going to have a problem, she smiled.

"See, I told you it was too early for this shit."

Henry hoped his sudden relaxation wasn't too obvious.

"So is this a spooky thing or a regular thing?" She asked.

Henry shrugged. "Not entirely sure. Just that this is when his wife was out of the house and he didn't want to come in to the office." He'd almost told her, but decided he wanted to see if Lexie could pick up on things on her own. If she really was in this for the long haul, she'd need to make the distinction herself, sooner rather than later.

"Boo," she muttered, finishing off her coffee. "Y'know, there seems to be significantly less 'fighting the forces of

darkness' than you said there would be.”

“I never put it like that,” he said, finding himself once again holding back his irritation.

“Well, it was something like that,” she said. “That's why I took the job.”

“Oh, that's why?” Henry scoffed, and then immediately regretting it.

This time her gaze was like a blowtorch.

“I'm sorry,” he said. “That was rude.”

She looked away, the effort to calm her temper obvious. “No shit,” she eventually said, keeping her eyes on the passing traffic.

The rest of the ride was silent.

2.

When they parked across from the Chalmers house, Lexie got out quickly and studied the neighborhood. As was usually the case down here, the houses were small, squat, and far too close to each other. They did have little yards and the occasional tree along the sidewalk, so that was a step up from the city (although it was apparently also part of the city, another reason why this place was dumb).

“Ready?” Henry said.

She shrugged. The coffees she'd chugged had done as much as it was going to keep the bright and stupid morning at bay. “As I'll ever be. Lead on.”

As they walked across the street toward a small yellow house with a fenced-in yard, Henry took a small black notebook out from inside his jacket and consulted it. He nodded at Lexie and the two of them opened the gate, and headed to the front door. Before they even got to the steps, the door opened and a small man in late middle-age stared at them through the screen door. "Small" was generous, as he was probably just over five feet tall and managed to lose a couple of inches to a sagging hunch, like he was trying to fold in on himself.

"Are you from the detective agency?" he asked, his voice lowering to a whisper at the last bit.

"Yes, Mr. Chalmers." Henry said with a wave and wide smile. "I'm Henry Churchill, we spoke on the phone. This is my associate, Lexie Winston."

"Howdy," she said, trying to smile pleasantly. She still hadn't gotten used to being performatively friendly out of uniform, so she hoped it didn't look as uncomfortable as it felt.

Chalmers opened the door and then took a tiny portion of Henry's offered hand and shook it tentatively. He looked back and forth between them as if they were a puzzle to be solved, something that had begun to grow tiresome.

"Call me David, please," he said, holding the screen door open for them.

He motioned them through the foyer and into the living room, watching them nervously.

"Can I take your coats?" David asked.

"Thank you so much," Henry said, handing him his suit jacket. When he turned to hang it by the door, Henry glanced

over at Lexie, who was taking off her own jacket. Specifically, he was eyeing the pistol she had holstered in the small of her back. He made a noise to get her attention. She turned and he shook his head, as if to say “Why are you wearing that?” She rolled her eyes and pulled the jacket back on, giving Henry a look that replied “Fine, even though this is stupid.”

“Please, have a seat. I’ll be right back with some refreshments,” David said with a nod before scurrying to the kitchen in the back of the house. The living room was filled with plastic-covered furniture and half-dead plants, giving it a “grandparent’s house” atmosphere. The walls were dotted with photographs, as was the wall by the stairs to the second floor. On the mantle of the decorative fireplace was a small colony of ceramic figurines. Lexie walked over to examine them, snorting a laugh when she saw that most of them were baby angels.

Henry cleared his throat to get her attention as he sat on the couch.

“What?” she said, turning to him.

He tilted his head to the spot next to him on the couch, glaring expectantly. Lexie rolled her eyes and waved him off, continuing a circuit around the room to examine the pictures. They were mostly of David and who she presumed was his wife at obvious vacation spots like the Grand Canyon, Mount Rushmore, and the typical scenes of family gatherings. The couple smiled thinly or not at all as they leaned against each other, both clearly unable to be human beings when a camera was trained on them. Up close, she could see there were lighter, and similarly sized spots on the wall, some partially obscured by

a recent rearrangement of photos.

“Thank you for coming all this way to see me,” David said, coming into the living room holding a tray with a tea kettle, cups, and fancy cookies.

“It’s no bother,” Henry said. Lexie settled in next to Henry, and David set the tray on the table in front of them. He took a seat in one of the chairs opposite and almost disappeared into the soft cushions.

“You said you were worried about your wife, and that she’s been acting peculiar the past several months,” Henry said.

David nodded. “Maybe it’s nothing, I don’t know. I could be overreacting but . . . I just get the feeling that something has happened to Mimi. She’s different.”

“Different how?” Lexie said around the cookie she’d just tossed in her mouth.

“The only time she used to go out was for her volunteer shift at the library. That’s where she is now, and it’s the only time I know she’ll be gone. Now she’s been leaving a lot more often, and at odd hours of the day or night. She says she started volunteer work at the church again. She’d done a lot of that...before.” His eyes glossed over with pained emotion.

Because of the glare Henry had given her when she last spoke, she waited to swallow before trying to follow up.

“Anyway,” he continued, “I eventually went to the church when she was supposed to be there and...well, they hadn’t seen her in weeks. Months, even.”

Lexie looked over at Henry with smug satisfaction, making it clear she knew what kind of case it really was.

The inscrutable look he returned neither confirmed or denied it.

“When I got home,” David continued, “she was waiting for me. She told me she'd had to run an errand and how worried she was when she came home to find me gone. She was...quite upset.”

“You mentioned 'before,’” Henry said. “Can you tell us what you meant by that?”

David took a deep breath. “Last year we lost our son, Conrad. It was devastating.”

“I can't imagine,” Henry said. “I have two teenagers myself, and I worry about them every day.” David nodded solemnly.

He looked over at Lexie just as she was about to devour another cookie. She froze, and then said. “Yeah, no, not a breeder.” David's eyes widened, and she could feel Henry's flinch next to her. It was all she could come up with at short notice, and she wasn't about to tell this sad little guy that she was gay. Down here everyone seemed to relish sharing that information, but she'd rather be electrocuted than participate in that level of openness.

“Conceiving was long and difficult,” David continued. “When it finally happened we were very, very grateful. We loved him so much and tried to take such good care of him. It was the purest blessing, and we thanked God every day.”

He had to stop to gather himself before he could continue.

“When he was six there was...an accident. He and Mimi were walking to the store and there was a drunk driver. Middle of the day, if you can believe it. Connie had been lagging behind, I

guess, and Mimi was holding his hand. She said she turned back to scold him when the car came and just . . . ripped him right from her grip. The driver got a block further before he lost control and hit a bus. Both Connie and that driver were killed.”

His wistful unfocused look sharpened to fury at the mention of The Driver, and then it was gone.

“The year after his death was very hard on us both, but it seemed like things were finally getting better. She left her room, she was eating. I even saw her smile at something on television. Then, right around his birthday she had a bit of a... well, I guess you’d call it a relapse.”

He gestured to the wall of photos. “She got rid of anything that showed Connie’s face. We’d been so proud of the life we gave him and all the things we’d do as a family, and now...now it’s just like we were before, missing a part of our souls. I was so worried. Scared, even, sometimes. She’d have wailing and crying fits and...she’d hit herself. I tried to stop her but she’s a...bigger woman. Bigger than me, at least.”

He gave Lexie an apologetic look, and then continued.

“I was about to do something. Call someone, if it kept up. But all of the sudden it just...stopped.”

Lexie gave Henry another look, this one being “So, it is a weird one.”

He shrugged his shoulders and looked away, as if to say “Wait and see.”

“Is that when she took the money?” Henry asked.

He nodded. “We’d hardly ever fought about the finances, but that was all of our savings. I’m an electrician, and I made a

good living. We'd been saving for when we had a child since we'd gotten married, and when Connie was born we started saving even more. When the...accident happened, I decided I needed to be with her, so I quit my job. We were able to support ourselves, modestly, on that savings. I only discovered last week that she'd taken nearly ten thousand dollars out. Almost half of it. That was the last straw. I just...don't know what to do."

Lexie cleared her throat, drawing the two men's attention.

"Mr. Chalmers...David, I mean," she smiled at him, relaxed enough to slip back into familiar territory. "You guys went to church, right?"

David flushed with embarrassment. "We did, at Saint Eustace. We're very devout." He paused. "We're...well, we were devout, I guess. It helped us through our infertility, and at the beginning of our grief. After his birthday we stopped, though. When she had her fits she'd...she'd yell awful things at God. Blaming Him for Connie's death, asking Him why it couldn't have been her, and sometimes..." he swallowed hard. "Sometimes she'd ask why He let the driver die so she couldn't...kill him herself."

"That's very intense," Lexie said, nodding with sympathy while picking at the story in her mind. "So she just stopped going?"

"Yes. And so did I," he nodded in defeat. "She didn't want me going either. Plus, the last time we went there was an incident."

"Can you describe this incident?" She leaned forward,

elbows on her knees and clasped hands under her chin. Henry made a noise, but she ignored it..

“It was mass, halfway through, when she started to...I don't know how to describe it, She was twitching and wincing like she was in pain. After a few minutes she stormed out, yelling up that God had deserted her and that she didn't need Him anymore. It was mortifying.”

“Definitely not typical church behavior,” she said. This one earned a loud throat clearing. “But she told you she was volunteering there again?”

He nodded. “She said she was doing penance by helping out with the volunteer programs. She said that when she felt ready we would start attending again, but she's been...lying about it.” He looked up, a bewildered look on his face as if the very thought was beyond the realm of possibility. “The money, the lying...all of it. I just want to find out what's wrong.”

“When she left church that last time,” Henry asked before she could continue, “did you see anything on her? Smell anything odd?”

Lexie turned and glared at Henry to let him know that she was getting there.

David was lost in thought for a moment and then said “I thought it was nothing, but she was scratching at her arms the whole ride home, and it smelled like...burning.”

“And she was fine when you got home?” Lexie interjected. “Never happened again?”

“Yes,” David said. “She said it was just the sweater she was wearing, but I've never seen anything like that before. I don't

even think she's allergic to anything."

"Okay," Henry said. "Can you give us a few moments?"

"Certainly," David said, standing and taking the tray of snacks back to the kitchen.

3.

"So?" Henry asked Lexie, turning to face her. She stared back at him, eyes narrowed, but he couldn't tell if she was just thinking or pissed off. That was becoming a bit of a problem.

"So you did already know, huh?" she said.

He shrugged. "I had a hunch."

Her expression grew more sour. "You just wanted to see if I picked up on it, right? Since it looks like a simple surveillance and follow job, even though it's weird."

"Downright spooky, some might say," Henry got to his feet.

"Yeah, some," Lexie grumbled, following suit. "At some point," she continued in a measured and deliberate tone, "maybe you'll remember that I used to investigate things also. For a living, even."

"This isn't like being a cop," he said, perhaps a little too dismissively.

"You don't say? I wouldn't have known, even with the ghosts and magic and...whatever the hell this is."

"Fair enough," he said, raising his hands to admit fault. "But that was really good. The church angle definitely points to

some kind of magic.”

Henry hoped the praise would defuse the situation a little but, as was always the case with Lexie, it was hard to tell.

“So what now, Gandalf?” she said, crossing her arms defiantly. “Or am I being tested on that too?”

“It's not a...,” Henry trailed off, trying to reign in his exasperation. She'd also taken to calling him that, and the fact that he was obviously not a tall, bearded, British white guy made it that much more annoying. As he concentrated on that, something pricked at the edge of his senses. “Hold on a second.”

He closed his eyes, not waiting for a response, and focused on his inner senses.

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After watching Henry stand still with his eyes closed, Lexie started tapping her boot on the floor. He cracked open an eye to glare and she tossed her arms in the air, turning away.

“Sorry,” he said after some more deep concentration Lexie assumed was some kind of “magic thing.”

“It's fine,” she said, grudgingly making an effort to stop being so annoyed. “I take it you were doing something?”

He nodded. He called for David, who appeared with fancy butler speed.

“Is it okay if we look around a bit? Upstairs, specifically,” Henry asked.

David seemed skeptical and checked his watch. “I suppose,” he said. “Mimi won't be home for another half hour or

so. But please bear in mind she's very particular about where things are, so you must be careful."

Henry gave him a reassuring smile. "I understand completely." He motioned for David to lead the way, and they followed him up the steps and past another group of pictures on the wall. The lighter squares where pictures used to hang were obvious now, despite an attempt to arrange the remaining ones to hide them. The three of them stopped when they got to the top. David looked at Henry to see where he might want to go next, but he was clearly lost in thought.

"That's Mimi's room," David pointed to the end of the hallway. "Mine is over here." He gestured in the opposite direction. "The bathroom, obviously, and that's...was I mean, Conrad's room." The room in question was in the middle of the hallway, and it was clear to Lexie that was where Henry's attention was focused.

"I hope you don't mind, and I understand if you do," Henry said to David, "but would it be possible to look at his room?"

David wilted, and then drew himself back up again. "I...I suppose. We keep the door closed for...well, obvious reasons. I haven't been in there since it happened."

"You don't have to join me. And we'll be very careful," Henry said, giving Lexie a pointed glance at the last.

David nodded and backed away. Henry went to open the door, but the old-fashioned knob just rattled. David was immediately confused. "I didn't know she locked it, I'm sorry."

Henry re-positioned himself so he blocked David's view

of the doorknob. Lexie, catching his drift, moved closer to David.

“So,” she said, “is the separate rooms thing new since, y’know, or was it always like that?”

David couldn't look her in the eye, flushing. “Since Conrad was born, actually. She said she wanted to be able to get up and check on him without bothering me.”

Behind her, Lexie caught the tail end of Henry’s whispering, followed by the click of the doorknob and the door swinging open. “Just stuck, I guess,” Henry said, looking over his shoulder with an “aw shucks” kind of smile.

“Oh, good,” David said with little enthusiasm. He stepped back and was about to turn away when he saw what was in there. “Good heavens!”

Conrad's room had been stripped of everything but the furniture, which included a small twin bed shaped like a spaceship, a tiny dresser, and an empty bookshelf.

“When...” David trailed off, looking around in horror. “What did she do?”

“I take it this is new?” Lexie asked. The room was so bare and small, eight foot by ten if she had to guess, it felt oppressive. There was dust almost everywhere, and when Lexie looked at the ground there was a light trail going from the door to the bed. She nudged Henry and nodded down at the floor.

He looked, and then nodded at her with respect that for once didn't seem forced.

“I don’t know how long it’s been like this,” David said, voice cracking. “I tried talking about cleaning his room a couple months after it happened, but she screamed at me. She said I was

trying to get rid of him, and now... ”

Lexie wandered over to the bed, Henry trailing behind. When she got within a foot of it, Henry made a noise and gave her a slight nod. She squatted down to reach under the bed, but before she could, Henry blurted out “You wouldn't mind if we looked through things. Like the bed, for instance.” Henry looked back at her, glaring.

“I suppose,” David said in confusion.

Lexie rolled her eyes at Henry and then bent over to look under the bed. There were no monsters, although it took Lexie a second to realize that there were actual monsters and that was something she should keep in mind the next time she went crawling under furniture. There wasn't anything out of the ordinary, but as she stood up Henry lifted the thin mattress to reveal what he'd picked up on.

It was a small package, thin and rectangular, wrapped in a plastic shopping bag. Henry bent to pick it up and let the mattress back down. Inside the bag was a large hardcover journal, light pink and with the words “My Recipes” drawn on the cover with marker and in a nearly calligraphic script.

“That's not Mimi's handwriting,” David said, peering around Henry's shoulder. Henry nodded as he began to flip through it. The journal was only halfway filled, and with large and carefully penned handwriting similar to what was on the cover. Henry flipped through it quickly, but looking at the pages made Lexie's insides twitch.

Then they came to the diagrams.

“God in heaven,” David whispered from next to him.

There were unfamiliar symbols and a few circles with geometric patterns inside them. Then there were the anatomical illustrations, pointing to various parts of a faceless male body, with a specific attention paid to his balls. On some of the diagram pages there were dark brown stains that warped the paper.

“What is that?” David reached out to touch one, but Henry pulled the journal away from him. “Why is that in my house?” he continued, voice rising and breaking.

“It's not something that should be here, I assure you,” Henry said. “David...has your wife ever shown an interest in the supernatural?”

“What?” David looked like he'd been slapped. “No! Of course not! Is that...” he trailed off, staring at the book with growing confusion. “She wouldn't.” His voice dropped to a whisper.

“Okay, why don't we have a little breather?” Lexie said, taking him by the arm and gently pulling him out of the room. He didn't resist, which was helpful. She was pretty sure she could toss him out into the hallway without much effort, but it'd certainly be another strike against her. Once pointed in the right direction, David headed downstairs.

“Good idea,” said Henry, still staring down at the book and not moving.

“What is it?” she said, wandering over.

“Give me a moment.” He didn't look up until he reached the end of the handwritten pages. “This is pretty bad. You should go keep an eye on him while I figure this out.”

“Fine,” Lexie said, turning so he couldn't see the eye roll.

She found David sitting at the kitchen table, clutching an inhaler. Not only did it look like he'd gotten smaller, his eyes were now wide and bloodshot. She paced in the front of the table, hands in pockets, and tried not to look as annoyed as she felt.

"I'm sorry," he eventually said. "I just can't believe that she would have something...like that in our house. Right where our son slept, even."

"Yeah, it's not great," Lexie said, absently taking in the room as she walked. The kitchen was cramped, all manner of free standing shelves along the walls to make up for the lack of cabinet or pantry space. This was a space, even more so than the rest of the house, that had been lived in for decades. What little bare walls there were had kitschy crap on them, including slogans about Mama's cooking and cartoon Italian chefs that were way too happy. She was about to turn and pace in the other direction when something caught her eye.

Behind one of the less cramped shelves was a door. She walked closer and saw, right above the doorknob, a latch with a padlock in it. Unlike most everything else in the kitchen, both lock and latch were shiny and new.

"Hey David," she called, moving pots aside so he could see it. "Where does this door go?"

He walked over, peering at it intently. "It goes down to the basement," he said. "It's unfinished and just full of junk. There's a storm door on the outside of the house we use to get down there if we need anything."

"Huh," Lexie said, heading to the backdoor off the kitchen

as David scurried behind her. Poking her head outside, she could see the slanted metal door he was talking about. The padlock on this one was new as well. “When did she change this one?” she asked, walking over to it.

David shrugged and looked around like he didn't know where he was. “I don't know. I didn't notice it was changed.”

“Of course not,” Lexie murmured, examining the lock. It was sturdy, and the bolt that it latched shut was a part of the door and just as metal. For a moment she thought about calling Henry down from upstairs for some lock-opening mojo, but instead she got up and led David back into the kitchen. When she reached the door-obstructing shelf, she took hold of it at one end and moved it out of the way. David hovered on the periphery, wanting to help but wholly unnecessary.

With the way clear, she was able to get a better look at the latest edition to the Chalmers family security system. Unlike the outside door, this was a simple clasp that had been screwed into the door and door jamb. With a chuckle, Lexie took the Leatherman from her pocket and unfolded the screwdriver.

“There's more than one way to magic a lock,” she grumbled, going to work.

4.

Henry flipped through the journal, pacing around the room. Whoever had transcribed this was good. Magical texts couldn't be mechanically copied for a variety of reasons, and the

transcriber had a steady hand and artistic penmanship. He suspected that the ink was special in parts, particularly where incantations were noted.

Technical prowess aside, the contents were horrific. Generally, it included details on how to animate dead flesh and mold it into a personal servant. The amounts of flesh, and the method for harvesting what was needed for the ritual, were laid out in the anatomical drawings in vivid and precise detail. As he reached the end, Mimi's desired use for the text became apparent.

As he closed it, something caught his eye. Written inside the front cover that was an inscription that read:

Mimi,

Here's the recipes you needed! Here's hoping you bake up something sweet! Pleasure doing business with you.

Under that they'd drawn a heart and smiley face.

"What did you do, Mimi?" he muttered to himself as he got to his feet and headed downstairs.

He found David alone in the kitchen, wringing his hands together, gaze fixed on a door now visible beyond a displaced storage shelf.

There was no sign of Lexie, and Henry swore internally.

"Where did she go?" he asked, wanting to be sure.

David jumped, so preoccupied with the door he hadn't realized Henry was there. He pointed weakly at the door. "Down there. The basement." He looked at Henry, bewildered.

“What is happening here?” David asked in a panicked whine. “This is my house, and she just...” he tossed his hands in the air and then dropped into one of the chairs at the table.

“It's okay,” Henry said, walking over and patting the man on the shoulder. “I know this has been a lot to process.”

When David looked up and saw his wife's secret book he recoiled. “What is that?” he cried. “Why would she have that?”

Henry walked over and set it in an empty space on one of the other shelves. “David,” he said. “I know this may be difficult, but there are things in this world that are supernatural in origin. More than you would think.”

David looked at him as if he was actively fighting this new information. “No,” he eventually said. “That can't... and even if it were, Mimi's a woman of God. She'd never do...” he trailed off, looking past Henry at the book.

“You'd be surprised at what some people do when they've lost everything,” Henry said. “I've seen it far more times than I'd like.” And been there myself, he kept himself from saying.

“Even when good and decent people find something like this,” he gestured back at the book, “using it, even with the best intentions, can change them.”

David couldn't comprehend at first, but then he got it. “The church.”

Henry nodded. “Whatever she did with that it--”

He was interrupted by the muffled but undeniable sound of gunfire beneath them.

“Goddammit, Lexie,” Henry groaned.

Once she got the latch unscrewed, Lexie cracked open the door, keeping herself back to make sure nothing was waiting to spring out at her. There'd been a faint odor she couldn't place as she was working, but now it was unmistakably artificial pine. The old steps went down into darkness, but she saw the oppressive pine smell came from dozens upon dozens of pine-scented car fresheners hanging from the ceiling and along the wall. Some were faded but others still bright and brimming with chemically-powered "freshness."

"What's that smell?" David said, inching closer as reluctantly as possible.

"Don't worry about it," Lexie said. "Just wait here for me, okay? If anything weird happens, go get Henry. Clear?"

It was by the look he gave her that it was, and that he didn't want to be.

"Weird?" he whispered.

She nodded. "Yeah. But it might not be, so just stay put."

She turned back to the door, found the light switch and turned it on. When that didn't provoke any kind of response, she headed down the stairs and closed the door behind her. The clasp and the lock had been new, but the thick, sliding metal bolt on the back of the door wasn't. Deciding to err on the side of caution, Lexie slid it into place.

Now out of sight, she drew the Walther P99 from its holster. After a quick inspection, she flicked off the safety, and held it up and close to her chest. She took a step forward, thought

for a moment, and then stepped back.

The descent down the stairs was uneventful and quiet, save for the clatter of air fresheners colliding in her wake. The basement was one large open space, with four cement pillars that turned the space into a three by three grid. As she swept the room left to right, she saw the closed exterior door, a water heater, and other ventilation machinery, none of which were hiding anything. In the back left corner, blankets were hung from the ceiling on two sides, turning that quadrant to a makeshift room.

There were more of the air fresheners around the foot of stairs, and Lexie started to wonder if that's what Mimi Chalmers used the ten grand on. Thankfully, the ceiling was high enough that they didn't hang directly in Lexie's face anymore. Most of the fresheners were concentrated on the right side of the room, and in the middle of that wall there was a cluster of shelves and a six-foot long deep freezer against the wall under them.

Lexie cautiously walked in that direction, and as she did the pine smell was joined by a floral one so aggressive it made her eyes water. Multiple power strips were daisy chained in a semi circle on the floor around the freezer. Liquid air fresheners were plugged into every available outlet, many forced in at awkward angles in order to fit next to their neighbors.

“Oh yeah,” Lexie sighed. “It's gonna get weird.”

When she got close to the freezer, the “naturally fresh scents” gave way to something truly foul and nauseating. And it was definitely of the “rotting meat” variety.

She held her breath and lifted the lid. A burst of cold,

putrid air washed over her. She turned away, wincing at its potency. When she was as accustomed to the smell as possible, she looked inside.

Laying on a bed of ice was a naked Latino man, slender and in late-middle age. He had dark hair, an unkempt beard, and his remaining bright green eye was staring past her. A ring of dark bruises covered his neck. His legs were bent in ways they shouldn't, and his arms were crossed over his chest.

Part of them, at least.

In addition to the eye, he was missing his left foot and right forearm at the elbow. There were chunks of his thighs and biceps missing as well, apparently hacked off in long, rough strips. Tucked between his shoulder and the wall was an imposing meat cleaver in desperate need of washing. He wasn't actually naked, she realized, but wearing a thick and opaque diaper of cling-wrap. Butchering was fine, but clearly full frontal nudity was going too far.

“Real, real weird,” she said as she closed the freezer. Right after, the sound of rattling metal came from the cordoned off back corner. She brought her pistol back up and waited, but none of the blanket walls moved. She crossed the basement and took cover behind the pillar that was the corner to the makeshift room.

There was another metallic rattle, but no other indicator of movement. Pistol up and close, she pulled back the edge of the blanket to get a look inside.

The good news for David was that he didn't have to look too far for his son's missing things. This corner of the basement

was filled with Conrad's old toys, books, and boxes overflowing with clothes. A dirty rug that had probably been “rescued” from the trash was barely visible under the mess, and this side of the blanket walls were bright sheets with trucks and dinosaurs on them.

The actual walls were covered with all of the photos removed from upstairs. Nearly all showcased the late Conrad between birth and age six. In every picture he was beaming, almost always held up, hugged, or shown off by an exceptionally proud Mimi Chalmers. She was a bit heavy, tall enough to tower over both Conrad and David.

Pushed into the corner was a crib with the side facing out removed. On the mattress rested a large rectangular object that Lexie guessed to be a box or a crate, covered by a blanket with colorful smiling clowns. She stepped toward it and whatever was under the blanket shook, making that metallic rattling sound again.

Lexie continued forward, fully on alert. When she was an arm's length away there was another shake, this one violent enough to make the box rock back and forth. She stopped, and there was a slurring whisper.

“Ma...ma?”

“Oh, fuck me,” Lexie said in exasperation.

There was a screech from under the blanket and Lexie took a deep breath and yanked the blanket off with her free hand. Underneath was a large dog crate, about four feet wide. The thing inside was not a dog and definitely did not care for Lexie's language.

It was about three feet tall, with pale skin and an oversized, misshapen skull covered with sparse blond hair. The face looked like someone had taken one of Conrad's photographs and lightly roasted it until it had melted. The large head lolled slightly to one side, and its right eye socket had been cracked and pulled open so a bright green adult-sized eye could fit in it. The crack was held together with a trio of large medical staples. The thing's other eye was lazy and cloudy, but she could still see some of Conrad's blue under the milky white film.

He was dressed in worn, stained overalls with no shirt underneath. His left arm was proportionate to the rest of his body, and the overall strap hung loosely over its shoulder. The other "arm" was the corpse's missing forearm, broken in the middle and given a hinge as a kind of makeshift elbow. FrankenConrad hooted and wailed, hopping up and down on one normal-sized leg with wild anger. The other "leg" was the cadaver's foot, attached at an odd angle.

It glared at her with its over-sized eye, and then started slapping the front of the cage with his "donated" arm.

"No, hey," Lexie cooed as best she could, raising her hands. "It's okay. Calm down. Good...boy?"

The jumping and thrashing intensified, not wanting to be calm or a good...thing. It threw itself against the thin metal bars, rocking the cage forward. Lexie backed up, but before she could push it back from the edge with her foot, the cage toppled to the ground. The door on the side popped open, and FrankenConrad tumbled out.

Lexie trained her Walther on it and backed up more. It

shook its bulbous head and glared at her. “No!” she yelled. “Bad!” Hopefully he knew those words.

“You bad!” it hissed, and with a sweep of the large arm pelted a pile of Matchbox cars at her. She ducked and, despite raising a hand to protect her face, one bounced off her forehead with a significant force.

“Goddammit!” she snapped, trying to get a shot as it leapt from the ground and up onto one of the shelves. It grabbed one of the pictures and chucked it at her like a frisbee. She moved to the side just in time for it to sail over her head, and took two wild shots that just sent more pictures falling to the floor.

It jumped, grabbing one of the overhead beams with its little arm and swinging to the side. She took aim before realizing another miss would be sending rounds through the ceiling and into the kitchen. It swiped at her pistol as it passed, and she dodged out of the way. It dropped back to the ground next to another pile of toys. She took aim, but it grabbed the trailer of a larger toy truck and jumped again. It hit the concrete pillar at the corner of the space and vaulted toward her. She couldn't get a shot off before it slammed into her chest.

It grabbed the front of her jacket and then cracked her in the temple with the metal trailer. She stumbled, and then stepped on a toy car. Her leg swung out and she fell backward, FrankenConrad clinging to her shirt. Her head hit the cement with tooth-rattling force, and the weight of the thing on her chest forced the breath out of her.

It skittered up her chest, faster than she'd thought possible. It tugged the bill of her hat down over her eyes and

slapped her with the trailer again. She blindly raised a hand to ward off the blows it rained down while shrieking in her face. She half-heartedly raised her pistol, still unable to see, when a loud pounding noise started. FrankenConrad looked up, the trailer still raised in the air. There was a pause and then another sound of impact coming from above them.

Lexie tried to sit up, her senses refocusing.

FrankenConrad took the trailer with both hands and swung at her head like it was a golf ball. It struck her right on the temple, knocking her head to the side and making everything disappear.

5.

Henry took a second to catch his breath, and then swung the heavy hammer David had gotten for him at the door. After rattling the door in its frame for a bit, he'd gotten the general idea of where the sliding bolt keeping the door locked was. He'd managed to crack the panel of the door on the opposite side of the bolt, but not enough so he could reach it. The lock opening charm had come in handy more times than he could count, but there wasn't much it could do on a simple sliding bolt.

The panel finally broke enough that he could finish the job by hand, and he tossed the hammer onto the table. He pushed at the broken wood until there was a hole big enough for his arm. A heavy rotting smell rolled into the kitchen, and it was one he was all too familiar with. Holding his breath, Henry reached in and around, feeling for the bolt.

Just as he found it, there was a sudden clatter of things being knocked over, then the sound of something scampering up the stairs.

Henry pulled his arm free just as whatever it was smashed into the other side of the door. David yelped in surprise, and Henry backed up and moved between him and the door. A lump of metal and flesh started furiously pounding around the edge of the hole. Chunks of door broke off and flew into the kitchen, and once the hole was large enough, a malformed head poked through. It looked around thoughtfully, big green eye blinking rapidly.

“What is that?” David asked in a timid whisper that still caught the thing’s attention

It turned to them, over-sized eye narrowing with dim recognition. Before Henry could respond, David let out a low moan.

“Conrad?” It was barely loud enough for Henry to hear.

David tried to move around him, but Henry reached back with his arm to block his path without taking his eyes off the thing.

“That’s not your son,” Henry said over his shoulder.

The poorly-copied face crinkled in confusion. “Pa-pa,” it slurred.

“Connie, what did she do?” David’s voice was louder this time, and Henry could feel him trying to move out of Henry’s reach.

The thing’s features twisted in rage and it yowled angrily. It forced itself through the hole, sending a spray of broken wood

onto the floor as it flopped onto the ground. Henry hurriedly backed up, forcing David to do so as well. The creature shook its head and then vaulted onto the table.

Right next to where Henry had left the hammer.

Henry barely had time to push David to the side as it grabbed the hammer and flung it at them. David yelped as it hit the wall. What had been his son jumped from the table to the counter. The creation stalked toward them on all fours, surprisingly nimble given its disproportionate limbs. One arm was dark brown and covered with bits of metal and thick stitches. The left leg of its overalls had been cut up the side, and a man's left foot was attached at its hip and angled so it could act as a too-wide, too tall leg.

"Connie," David said softly when it stopped to regard them again. "It's okay." Henry felt David trying to move around him again, and Henry shifted to block him.

"David," Henry said in his Angry Dad voice. "Your son is dead. That creature is just a poorly made copy."

"No, let me see--" he started, but the thing lunged forward again. The toaster and spice rack were easily swept down to the floor, and when it reached the end of the counter, a block of butcher knives followed suit.

Henry backed the two of them up even more as the knives scattered out of their home. Henry had been moving them toward the doorway to the living room, but the creature now blocked their path.

The thing looked at the shiny objects on the floor and then hopped down in the middle of them. Henry backed them up

until the kitchen table was between it and them. David moved close enough to reach past Henry and hold out a welcoming hand.

“It's okay, buddy. Come to Papa.”

“David--,” Henry started, but it scooped up one of the smaller knives and clumsily threw it at them. They ducked out of the way and it clattered against the wall. The thing screeched and bounced around, slapping the bigger hand against the ground.

Henry tried to keep the table between them, but he knew it wasn't going to be an option for long. He grabbed “My Recipes” off the table, as it was the only thing he could grab without taking his eyes off it. With a hiss, the little monster darted from side to side, trying to figure out its best angle of attack. Henry cocked the book back like a weapon, hoping it would give it pause.

It did not.

The creature zig-zagged across the kitchen floor at them. It grabbed a large butcher knife with its big arm and jumped, swinging wildly. Henry pulled his arm back and prepared to punch, but before he could there was a crack of gunfire.

The shot twisted it in mid-air, making it bounce off the wall next to them and flop onto the ground. It looked up in pained surprise, and then down to the black blood oozing from the hole in its chest.

“My boy!” David shrieked. The thing tried to sit up, but Henry picked up the knife it dropped and plunged it through the giant eye. More black blood splashed up, and the creature gurgled before going limp.

“Sorry,” Lexie said. She'd shot the thing through the hole

in the door. She tucked her pistol into the holster at the small of her back before opening the ruined door and walking into the room unsteadily. Her hat was askew, with several strands of hair poking out from under it. There were bruises rising on her face, and she held a hand up to her temple to staunch the stream of blood coming from the wound there.

She dropped into one of the chairs and looked up at Henry in annoyance. "Little fucker hit me with a truck."

Henry grabbed a roll of paper towels, and Lexie eased her hat back with a wince. No longer held back by Henry, David slowly approached the downed creature. He stood for a moment, and then dropped to his knees. He put a trembling hand on the remaining wisps of hair on its head, one of the only places not splashed with black gore.

"So," Lexie said, holding a wad of paper towels against the wound. "I'm gonna go out on a limb and say this is one of the weird ones." After grimacing at how much blood was already soaked up, she tossed the towels on the table and took another handful of towels from Henry.

"By the way, there's a dead guy in a freezer down there."

6.

As Lexie sat at the kitchen table, staunching the flow of blood from her temple, Henry cleaned up FrankenConrad's mess. David had been moved into the living room once he'd gotten done weeping, although she could still hear the occasional wet,

miserable sniffing. When the time came to dispose of the culprit, Lexie held the trash bag (which was inside another, which was also inside another) open as Henry rolled the little corpse inside.

“This feels wrong on a lot of levels,” Lexie grimaced as she cinched the bag shut, the awkward weight a reminder of what was inside.

“It’s wrong on every level,” Henry said, washing his hands in the sink. Once done, he came back to the pools of sludge-like blood and other less savory liquids. He knelt down with a wince and held a hand palm-down above the largest puddle. He closed his eyes and murmured in his weird magic language that made her ears tickle. The residue bubbled and began to evaporate, burned away by some kind of invisible fire.

“I’ve got some stuff growing in my apartment,” she said when he’d finished with all the spots. “Maybe you could come and give it the once over?”

Henry rolled his eyes as he stood up. “That’s not what magic is for.”

“Says who?”

“Says me. Come on, let’s go see how David’s doing.” She watched him leave and resisted the urge to heave the sack of dead kid at him. Instead, she dropped it by the back door and followed.

“David? How’re you doing?”

David sat on the couch and looked up at him. He’d somehow shrunken in on himself even more. “I don’t understand. What…was that?”

“Your wife made something that was almost like Conrad,

but not completely.” Henry held up the book. “She used this to make a copy of him. And also to figure out how to adjust for any...defects. Those were taken from the man downstairs.”

David looked at the book, still not understanding. “But that...,” he thought for a second. “That’s blasphemy.”

I’m pretty sure that’s a few miles past blasphemy, Davey-boy, Lexie thought. She considered the fact that she kept from saying it out loud an indicator of deep personal growth.

Henry nodded. “Your wife has done some very bad things. We’re going to have to call the police, so I want you to prepare yourself for that.”

“Of course,” David nodded, probably out of instinct rather than comprehension. “But what can I tell them about all this?” Lexie was curious about it herself.

“We’ve removed the creature,” Henry said, “and we’ll take care of disposal. I think you’d agree that it’s best not to bring it up when we talk to the authorities. For Mimi’s sake.”

“Oh yes,” David said, perking up. “People can’t know that she did... that.” His face contorted in sudden anger. “That she’d defiled his memory like that. That she’d turn from Christ so far.”

“I agree.” Henry nodded as if that made sense. “But... we do have the gentleman downstairs, and that’s what they’re going to see.” The anger left David’s face. “All you have to do is leave out this book and what she grew. You were worried, you called us, we looked around and then we found the body downstairs.”

“Who was he?” David asked.

“He looks like a homeless guy,” Lexie said. “Maybe someone she saw around the church?”

David nodded again. "That really is a shame." He took out his phone and started dialing. Henry got up and the two of them went back to the kitchen.

"It's that easy?" she said, dubious. "What about his missing parts? And where she carved off snacks for the thing?"

Henry shrugged. "'Crazy people do crazy things' is usually how it goes."

"And if she mentions FrankenConrad?"

It took Henry a second to realize what she was talking about. "It's not a Frankenstein," he said. "It's a homunculus."

"Oh, how silly of me," she said with exaggerated chagrin. "That changes everything."

He glared. "This may surprise you, but they aren't going to believe her."

Of course Henry was right, which totally didn't annoy the crap out of her. At all.

The police showed up about ten minutes after David got off the phone, and Mimi ten minutes after that. Thanks to her panicked shriek, everyone heard her before they saw her. Lexie, Henry, and David had been separated and were each giving statements to one of the four uniforms that had arrived. Lexie had managed to wash her forehead clean and pulled her hat low enough that it covered the wound. The bruising on her cheek and the corner of her eye had been played off as an accident while breaking the basement door open.

"My baby! What happened to my baby?" she cried, flinging open the door and skidding to a halt.

Lexie recognized Mimi from the pictures in the basement, even though she currently bore no resemblance to the smiling, happy mother she'd been.

The patrolwoman at the door reached out to take her by the arm, but Mimi outweighed her by at least fifty pounds and yanked herself free.

“Where is he? Where is my baby boy?” she yelled again.

The officer taking Lexie's statement hurried over to her, and the ones interviewing Henry in the kitchen and David in the hall soon joined him.

“What did you do?” Mimi screamed, seeing David. She lunged forward, but the combined strength of the officers held her in place. “What did you do to my baby? Where is he?”

“How could you?” David shouted, trembling with emotion. “How could you do this?”

She kept screaming the entire time it took to get her to the ground. There was a cop holding down each arm, while another pinned her legs. The female officer sprawled across her back and reached for her handcuffs.

“Miriam Chalmers,” the officer said, “you're under arrest for murder.”

Mimi bucked and yelled through being Mirandaized and as they tried to get handcuffs on her. Henry put a hand on David's shoulder and tried to move him into the kitchen. “You don't have to see this,” Henry said.

“I want to,” David said, his lips making a little snarl.

“Ma'am, please stop resisting,” the officers kept yelling. Once they'd gotten her wrists cuffed, they still had to pin her to

the ground as she alternated between wailing miserably and hurling insults and curses at David.

The small man just stood there. His trembling had stopped, but the steel in his expression never softened.

7.

The cops let them go after a couple of hours, and Lexie once again found herself very annoyed at being on the other side of an investigation. Both times had been when she was with Henry, and it dawned on her that this would be far from the last time she'd have to do it.

Before they made it back to Manhattan, Henry navigated them to an out-of-the-way lot to get rid of the evidence. By then the Gremlin was flooded with the dead creature's foul smell. She caught herself looking back at it, as if it were going to claw its way through the back seat. This didn't seem to bother Henry at all, and he hadn't said much of anything after leaving the Chalmers'.

After a while Lexie asked, "So how do you make one of those humunculoids? I'm assuming magic is involved." To her disappointment, he didn't respond to the choice of word.

"Well, you need to have something of the person you're trying to recreate. And then, traditionally, it's grown in the semen of a man who's been strangled to death. So yes, magic."

The picture that developed in her head of the formerly proud and smiling mother choking that man's throat and chicken

at the same time was beyond unpleasant.

“So,” she said, “I’m guessing you don’t get a book like that one doing volunteer work at the library.”

Henry nodded, keeping his eyes on the road. “Not usually, no.”

Lexie waited for Henry to continue, but he didn’t. “So where do you think she got it?”

“That is an excellent question.”

“Why was it hand-written? You’d expect it to be some dusty old tome and not some journal from Target.”

“Real magic formulas and symbols can’t be mass-produced. If it’s not copied in a specific way, or with specific kinds of ink, then trying to cast from it doesn’t work.”

“So someone made it for her, then?”

“That would seem to be the case.”

“Do you think this is what she spent her ten grand on?”

Henry shrugged. “It’s possible. But there aren’t a lot of people who’d be willing to do it, much less for so little.”

“This is going to be a thing, isn’t it?”

He hadn’t looked at her the entire conversation, but now he did. “Most definitely.”

She was quiet the rest of the drive, her patience for single-sentence answers exhausted. Once they stopped at the Super Secret Evidence Disposal spot, he got out and walked back to the trunk. Lexie wanted to stay in her seat in defiance, but curiosity got the better of her.

By the time she reached him, the trunk was open and the sack of remains was on the ground. Henry retrieved a small can

of lighter fluid from the stash of weird magic supplies hidden behind the locked panel where the spare tire would normally live. Lexie watched, leaning against the car with her arms crossed.

“Everything okay?” he asked, squirting the bag with lighter fluid but not looking over at her.

“Maybe,” she said. She wanted to leave it at that so he'd get a taste of his own medicine, but personal growth only went so far. “You knew it was a weird thing, didn't you?”

Henry capped the lighter fluid and tucked it into his jacket pocket. “I did indeed.”

“So why the little game? Why not just tell me?”

Henry closed and rubbed the fingertips of his right hand together. There was another magic phrase, and then green sparks dropped from his fingertips and on to the fluid below. Green fire roared to life, and Henry kept reciting the magic words. Lexie tapped a foot impatiently.

“I just wanted to see if you'd figured it out,” he said once the flames were out and the trash bag was just a small scorch mark on the pavement. “And you did, which is good.”

He walked back to the car and she stomped after him. “Look,” she said, “I don't need this Mr. Miyagi shit. And if you're going to test me, how about you actually teach me something first? We've been doing this for months and it's just been 'follow my lead' or 'hold on, I'm doing magic.’”

“Magic requires concentration,” he said.

“Fantastic. The point is, what the hell am I doing here?” She'd been asking herself that question for weeks, but not being

in the office made it feel like they could talk on equal footing. It was his office, after all, and had been for decades. She hadn't even sat at the desk that was supposed to be hers yet.

He waited for several moments, and took a deep breath. "Correct me if I'm wrong," he said in a tone that attempted to hide his frustration, "but I thought you were the one who wanted to do this. I'm happy to work with you an--"

"That's the point!" she snapped. "You don't work with me. You either tell me exactly how you want something to go or you try to get me out of the way!"

"Because when I don't, things like exploring a basement by yourself happen. And then we almost get ourselves, and our client, killed by a homunculus!" The patience was rapidly leaving his tone.

"Just talk to me, dude," she said, throwing her hands up in a mixture of surrender and exhaustion. "Trust that I can interview people and take statements and be observant. I was a cop for like, seven years. I know what I'm doing." Henry raised an eyebrow. "Yes, this is the big bad city, but it's all the same basic shit. Just louder, dirtier, and with more take-out options. And sometimes monsters and shit."

He chuckled.

"We're both in uncharted territory, I get it," she said. "And I get that you've been doing this for, what, thirty years or something?"

"Twenty five," he said, nodding in agreement.

"Well, I just discovered this shit and basically ruined my life. So try to remember that, while I'm still getting up to speed

with this, I'm essentially starting over. It seemed like a good idea to stick close to the only other guy who knows about this, and I thought that meant helping people, killing monsters, and stuff like that. But today is the closest I've come to any of that. That damn 'haunted house' doesn't count."

She could see Henry fighting the smile, but he wasn't trying that hard. "I told you, that's not how these things usually go. That was a bad first job."

"No shit," she said, now smiling as well. "I still don't understand why you think everyone learned Latin in school. My school had one building for all twelve grades. We barely had math."

"That wasn't Latin. And even if it was, you wouldn't pronounce it like you were trying to get on the Sopranos," Henry said, smiling.

"I just want this to matter, okay?" she said when the mirth faded. "I got my eyes opened to weird and scary shit, and if I can save other people from dealing with it then that's what I should do. I'm fine with you taking point on stuff, but if we're working together that means we're equals. I didn't come all this way to be your sidekick or intern. Is that still the deal?"

"Deal," he said. "Just give me some time to adjust, okay? I'll get there, I promise. I did this the same way with the same guy for a very long time and it was just the two of us. I just need to remember to be more helpful and patient."

He hesitated.

"Also, it took me a pretty long time to learn the ropes myself. I may have been the better caster, but Owen had all the

practical experience. I had to figure that out pretty quickly, and he was... not patient.”

“Well, at least he's out of the picture.”

Henry's eyes narrowed. Instead of responding he got back in the car.

“Okay,” she said, getting in, “too soon, I get it.”

“It's fine,” Henry said, clearly not fine. After a few moments Henry looked over at her. “I know what happened was awful, and I'm sorry you got caught up in it. I'll try to be better, but we're both still adjusting, which means we're going to have to keep giving it some time.”

She nodded in understanding. She'd been told many times patience wasn't her strong suit, but she supposed this was where the ‘personal growth’ came in. Frustrating or not, Henry had been good to her when he didn't have to be, especially given how all of these changes were her own damn fault.

She had to remind herself that he hadn't planned on finding a new partner, just like she hadn't planned on killing his old one.

**THE STORY CONTINUES IN PART TWO OF**

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