

Chapter 14- Daisy

I feel sorry for people who go to therapy. They don't know what it's like to have healthy habits, and they need all the help they can get. Which really is sad.

Admittedly, I'm a little bit distracted when I make my move into the office of Harriet Ingleman. My mind split between the, quite frankly, adorable night I had with Cole on the phone last night. I don't care what anyone says, that boy is more mine than my own nose.

Bad example. That's plastic.

But whatever: point stands.

We made word-love all night. We fucked linguistically repeatedly. Verba-gasms all over each other.

When I out Eliza and her treachery, he will most definitely come crawling over to my side of the pond. Although, if last night is anything to go by, I'll be the one crawling over to him.

See? Distracted.

I had planned my perfect snatch of Cole's files from Ingerman's desk. I always plan perfectly. Harriet goes on break. My appointment is next. I come too early (oh no! I'll just wait). Slip into the office, snatch the files, and out I go before her lunch break is over.

However, today I'm running late because someone had to get all romantic at four am and lure me into one of the best sleeps of my life.

So, when I come into her office, I only have ten minutes before she's usually back. Her receptionist lets me right in (I love receptionists), files right in front of the door and I'm reaching for the file marked "Maddox" when I hear Ingleman come into the office even earlier than usual.

Shit!

I grab the file and stuff it in my bag, but there's no time for escape and I only just get my ass on the sofa when she comes in with this big professional smile.

She's got that old-lady skin that screams "organic products have only ever been consumed by this body" and her make-up compliments both her age and professionalism. Her hair is growing-old-gracefully-grey and flicks out at the edge in even patterns all the way around. Her lipstick is perfectly applied, so she's even had time to eat lunch, reapply her lippy and still beat me at my game.

Hats off Ingleman.

"Daisy Rayne?"

I nod. She has connections to the department where I routinely go to stare at Cole and take care of Uncle M, so the likelihood of her coming to the precinct professionally and seeing me was slim, but not zero. Hence the real name.

"It's a pleasure to meet you. Would you like a tea or coffee?" she says in the silky, hypnotic voice, which lets me know everything is going to be just fine and I subconsciously sink into the sofa.

"No, thank you."

But she gives me a tea anyway and settles in her armchair and tucks her feet up like we're galpals (no-one says that anymore, can we bring that back?) and looks up at me, tea steaming on the coffee table between us.

She's scouting me out.

We're not so different, her and I. We both dissect. I just do it literally. So I know when she's measuring me, looking into my soul, seeing past my mask and I wonder if somewhere, like my guests, she can see who I am.

So I give her my absolute best good-girl beam.

But she just looks at her papers, writes something which makes my cheeks twitch, dropping the smile slightly. What's she writing? How can she have something already? But I can't ask about it or I'll give away that I care. And if there's anything I know about this, it's to not be genuine. At. All.

"You said you're having trouble sleeping?" she asks and I curse myself for the truth already given to her.

"Uh, yeah. It's probably not a bad thing. I just go for a walk and everything feels better. No biggie."

Nothing says big deal like the phrase 'no biggie'. I messed up.

"Well, if it's disturbing enough to keep you up enough to go for a walk, I'd say it was a very big deal. What helps you sleep?"

"Cole."

Fuck. She's good.

I massively underestimated this woman. I thought I was a good player. Nope. Harriet Ingleman is the endgame monster that you have to defeat on multiple levels before you complete the game. The one that murders you twenty times in twenty different ways until you google how to defeat it. That's Harriet Ingleman.

But she doesn't acknowledge the victory. Not in a way that anyone else would see, no. She just smiles sweetly, like she's offering me biscuits with my tea.

"Would you like to tell me about Cole?"

No. Stay away from Cole.

I give a carefully measured laugh. "I didn't mean to imply we're anything...We're friends."

Ingleman smiles gently. "Friends." And I nod, reaching for the tea I never asked for. "Do you worry about the stress he's under with the Heartbreaker case?"

"No." I say firmly. "The Heartbreaker wouldn't hurt him."

I take a burning gulp of my tea and feel the ball of a liquid trail down my throat and into my stomach.

"You seem so sure about that. You must spend a lot of time looking into his cases."

I look up at her. OK, new tactic. Breathe, think it through. I haven't had to think about my mask in years. How would Eliza respond?

"I want to help. Being helpful is good."

"It is. Do you feel that he'll stop being your friend if you're not helpful?"

"No," I say, no trace of my usual smile. No twinkle I spent so long crafting. "Cole wouldn't do that. I just like being helpful. No-one likes a burden"

Ingleman doesn't blink. "A burden? Is that what you think you are, Daisy?"

There's something hard in my throat. I take another fiery sip of tea, but my fingers are trembling so hard the liquid is rippling like there's a dinosaur coming.

"Do you feel you're a burden, Daisy?"

I don't trust my voice, so I shake my head at my teacup, willing myself to be smaller, invisible to her questions.

She hums like I just confessed it all. She has all she needs written on that paper in her hands. "Who taught you that? That you're a burden unless you help?"

I flinch at the memory before his hand even touches me. There's no-one there but the grip on the back of my neck tightens. He's not there.

"No-one."

She doesn't say a thing. She doesn't move. It's like the room is empty. Like it's not the cosy, safe room I'm in. It's the sparse attic space once again. It's the bed. Not the sofa. There's a creaking. Not a soft hum of traffic. There's the weight on my chest. A breath in my ear. Words I'll never forget.

"I-" I start. I will myself into the room. To the mask that's so familiar it's normally second nature, but it won't come. It's like he's got it.

"Daisy?" she soothes, and my eyes flick up to hers. Warm brown, like chocolate. Safe. "Who was it?"

I swallow an excuse. Any excuse. But the only thing that rises to my lips is the truth. The biggest truth I've never said.

"I was only young." I whisper, my voice crepe-paper thin, and yet my confession fills the space like the entire room is listening. "He told me I had to be perfect."

Ingleman leans closer, her elbows on her knees. "And if you weren't?"

I stare down at the cup in my lap, my fingers clenching around it. "Then it was my fault." The words are in the air like the Hindenburg between us. Unintentional. Disastrous.

Even Ingleman looks surprised. She hadn't known at all what she was digging for but here she is at the nucleus of my why.

I jump to my feet. The room spins and I realise I haven't taken a real breath in a while. "I'm sorry. I think I should go."

She scrambles to her feet as well, her eyebrows high, genuine, her hands open, inviting and I need to back away, bumping into the coffee table in my rush. "Daisy-

"No- I think we figured out why I can't sleep. Don't you, doc? Thank you for your time. I really... Yup," I bluster as I back towards the door, throwing it open and rushing through the building into the biting autumn air.

I gulp it in, letting each breath push the scream down, until I'm just standing gasping on the open street as cars hum past. I get enough air to think enough about running away in case she comes out to find me and I stumble aimlessly through random streets until I can get my vision straight.

Finally, coming away from the attic room and into reality, I gather enough of myself to pull my phone out with a trembling hand.

I have enough time before Chelsie Dennis gets off work.

Thankfully, because I haven't needed to kill someone this much in years.