

Chapter 4- Daisy

People say men are stupid. I've never particularly agreed. Until I watched Cole dance about like a startled meerkat all over the churchyard.

I *literally* pointed to the damn tomb. How is that hard?

Not as hard as pointing a finger in full rigor mortis. I'll tell you that for free.

I had intended on using his number for a date, but I could not stand and watch him ruin my genius plan to get those women out of there. My gut filled with ice as I watched the cops consistently ignore my *very clear* instructions. Those women were suffering because I'm the idiot that killed the priest outside the tomb before I could get it open.

And now I'll never be able to say sorry.

So I messaged. From a phone I keep for emergencies like these, obviously. But I made it very clear he needed to hurry up, along with a sneaky extra clue in case he didn't see my love hearts everywhere- you'd be amazed how stupid stupid people can be.

On the plus side, at least I know I'm in no danger of being caught with these idiots running the show.

Watching the detectives find the tomb and finally do in seconds what I was unable to do in hours of trying was like a wave of relief. The gnarly, grating sound of stone on stone is like a symphony to me. And then... there they are.

Four starved, filthy women. On their own two feet. I breathe more easily when I see them emerging from the tomb, four women who now have to live their lives with the memories of what he did to them in a room full of the promise of death.

As the police flood the churchyard yet again, I lean back on the tree trunk behind me. I did the right thing. It was risky setting the scavenger hunt for the victims. It was even more risky messaging Cole but they're safe and that's all that matters.

The phone in my hand lights up with a message from Cole:

"They are safe."

I sigh, I knew they were but... somehow hearing it from him makes it more real. Cole's got them. They're safer than they've ever been.

My dogs are everything. They're not technically mine. I rent them. I get paid to rent them. Some of them twice a day, some of them every week for a day and one who I'm fairly sure the owner has moved to Spain because, although she's paying me... she's been gone two months... Not that I'm complaining, Donut is the most adorable overweight lab ever. I'm very proud of the fact that her weight has gone down by a tenth since I've... learned to never leave food unattended no matter how high.

But today... today I'm so glad for their loving, warm bodies as we lie on our stomachs to watch Cole together. It's soothing after the day I've had.

And, as we watch my future husband cook (*again!*) for another woman, I delight in feeling a little less insane talking to them.

Snuffles, an aging pug with cataracts and a bowel issue (You ever put a nappy on a pug? It's an interesting experience.) is the noisiest of my co-conspirators. But he can't help that he snorts twice with every breath. But it does mean that next time he may have to stay home.

I pat his teeny soft ears as I watch Cole dicing coriander. "She doesn't like coriander," I tell Snuffles and Jake, the (technically illegal) american pit who's drooling on my shoulder. "You know because he only ever puts it on his plate after he's finished cooking. He won't have to do that for me." My voice ends on a whining noise, I do find that sometimes I end up sounding like them the more I hang out with my pack.

I should probably be more careful with that. It earns me a big drool smothered lick from my chin to my hairline.

"Thanks for that."

It's close to nine. She's late. He's sitting there alone.

It would be the perfect time for another little meet-cute...

"Oh, Cole, I had no idea this was your house, can you help me find a dog??" That line works more than you'd think with my guests. Not that I would ever *hurt* Cole.

Never.

His jaw is too pretty for that.

What about *"Oh my God, this is your house?! My car broke down right when my phone ran out of battery and it's raining so hard..."*

I look up at the perfect twinkly summer sky. Stupid bloody weather never does what I need.

I bet I could get Jake to bark for a really long time to get him to come outside...

It's just then that Little Miss Perfect (aka. Eliza Swade, Ph fucking D) comes to the door looking gloriously bedagglled after a long day at work, her hair all messy like she's run her

fingers through it a million times, her top buttons done dangerously low, her stockings- Yes, she wears *stockings*, not tights. I found the package in her rubbish- with a long ladder shooting under her pencil skirt.

I hate her so much.

I'm sure she's perfectly lovely and women supporting women and all that but I really really want to hate her.

I want to *be* her.

But then, I suppose being a cop - even a good one in the domestic violence sector - would be bad for my guest entertainment side hustle. So, I'll just have to figure out how to get Cole to realise that I'm The One some other way.

She goes straight in- she has a key now, do you see why I hate her? - and I watch her give him a kiss and get changed into her pajamas which she keeps in her *drawer* before going to eat her lovingly-prepared-coriander-free-food with him.

I give a frustrated '*urgh*' and throw down my binoculars to count my dogs.

"Han? Leia?" I call softly to the twin mutts that have trotted away to dig something up from under a tree - they don't get to come when I'm burying my guests.

Because some things need to stay buried.

They don't come. Which isn't unusual. They're little assholes, the two of them. So I sigh and get up to go fetch them from whatever corner of the park they've decided has treats under the soil, the rest of my pack trotting on my heels because *they're* good dogs.

"Han! Leia! Come on, babies. You're ruining Auntie Daisy's show."

They come trotting back soon enough with a grime covered sock stretched between both their mouths like they couldn't decide who's treasure it was.

"Oh you gross little things." I murmur and reach for the sock, which, incidentally, is not what you do when you need to be somewhere because after ten minutes of play bows, waggy tails and excited yaps, I finally get the disgusting sock out of their mouths and I'm holding it up in triumph when I see-

He's kissing her.

He's not kissing her. He's *kissing* her. Like hands all over, tongue all over, clothes all over the floor.

Frosted cracks fracture fissures all over my heart. My stomach sinks so low I could stand on it. Seeing him with her, backing her towards the bed, is like watching *All Dogs Go To Heaven* all over again. You know it's going to happen... it's in the bloody title.... But seeing it...

"I'm going to be sick," I warn the pack as Leia gleefully snatches the sock from my limp fingers and takes off through the park to play tug of war with Han.

I don't follow.

I can't follow.

I'm dead inside.

He actually loves her.

I sink down on a tree, wiping myself down the trunk as the tears start to drip from my chin, only to be lapped up by an American Pitbull. In seconds I'm surrounded by wet snuffing noses and concerned huffing sounds that stay with me as I weep for the fact that Cole doesn't know the woman of his dreams is so close by.

He doesn't know.

I know he doesn't know. And I haven't done anything to show him. I bring out my phone, looking at the unsent message still sitting in the box "You're welcome". I wanted him to message me. I thought for sure he'd send a message to the strange number who gave him a tip that saved four lives and gave him a kill-site.

But no. No message.

He tried to track the number when he was at his desk. He contacted the services provider but they have nothing. It's like... It's like I'm just a job to him.

Not a person with feelings.

I look at the closed curtains and the faint orange light twinkling in the cracks between them.

He's in there. He's with *her*.

I've been hating the wrong person. She hasn't done anything wrong. She's only loving the most lovable man on the planet. And who can blame her?

He's choosing her. He's all over her right now.

It's him I should be punishing. It's him who's making me feel like this.

My face sets in a tight grimace as I realise: Cole has to pay.

