

# Incineration

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## IV: Stuck in a barb wire snare

*She's stable.* The doctor's words echoed through Judith's head. *You found her just in time.* Judith sat in a wooden chair gripping her sister's hand. *We pumped her stomach.* There were scratch marks on the arms of the chair left by nervous fingernails of the previous occupants' visitors. *There are phone numbers we can give you.* Judith's eyes watched how the fluids from the intravenous bag trickled down the medical tube and pictured rain drops falling down gutters.

There was a soft, subtle noise. Judith turned to look. Her sister's eyes were clenched. She was conscious, and in pain. Her hand lightly squeezed Judith's.

"Mary are you awake?" Judith asked.

"Yeah," her sister sighed, opening her eyes. "These hospital curtains are hideous."

Judith squeezed Mary's hand tighter. "I was so worried."

"I'm sorry," Mary said looking straight ahead.

"What did you do?"

"I was trying to sleep," Mary said.

"You don't take a full bottle of Ambien for that," Judith whined.

"It was a severe case of insomnia."

"You also don't leave voicemails like the one you left me."

"I thought maybe I'd sleep through winter. Wanted to make sure you'd come over and set my DVR."

Judith laughed, bitterly. "You don't watch television," she said as her eyes welled.

"Silly me," Mary said, turning away from Judith. She gazed up at the IV jutting from her arm, "They pulled me out of the sack and stuck me back together with glue."

Judith grabbed Mary's chin as if she were plucking an apple, and turned Mary's head to face her. The two sisters stared at each other. "I will always be here," Judith told her sister. She leaned in and hugged her, "I promise."

"But I can't," Mary whined. This made Judith grip tighter.

#

### **Ø: I made a model of you**

"Daddy, I'm here," Judith rushed into the cerulean bedroom and leaned close to her father to hear his quiet, scraggly voice over the puffing oxygen into his nose.

"Judith, honey, I called you here because I needed to give you something."

"Dad, mom said on the phone that you said this was urgent. What could be so important?"

"Well, if you shut your mouth for a second, I'll tell ya. There's no way around it, I'm dying sweetie. Everything I have to do now has to be labeled as *urgent* so I make sure all you knuckleheads are listening to me."

"No, da—"

"Yes, Judy. Don't you of all people try placating me, now. You're the only one whose ever been fully honest with me, because that's what I've given you from day one when I held you in my arms. Don't take that away from me now, not when I need it the most."

"Ok, dad. But the *only* one? What about Mom, or Mary?"

"Bleh, you're mother's too fragile for honesty. Can't handle it," Ezra said, as Judith chuckled. "Now, go over into my jewelry box over there."

Judith walked over to the mahogany little treasure chest and opened it. "What am I looking for?"

"My lighter."

"Dad, you're on oxygen! What're you—"

"I called you over here to give you something, Judith, put it together a bit faster!" Ezra coughed. "You're a smart girl, come on now."

Judith took the lighter out and shut the box. "Wow, this is amazing. Is this a bullet, and why does it say *Bastard* on it!" Judith asked in childlike amazement.

"You know, a lot of them Germans had no desire to be shooting at us. It was their duty. But there I was, faced with which path I would take for the rest of my life. Empathy for the weak or retribution for the helpless. Our people were being slain, Judith. I thought, let the Christians turn the other cheek, but I am a man of the Old Testament, a man of a vengeful God, I would not only fight for my people, I would be damned for them. You feel the bullet?"

"Mhm," Judith nodded, thumbing over the round.

"That's where one of them Nazi's shot me. Right over the heart. The force knocked me on my ass, but my lighter caught it. I was alive, with nothing, not even a scratch on me. My buddies said I was the luckiest man in the platoon." Judith eyes were wide and watery as her father continued to speak. "I did too, at first. I stood up after being shot and I went to win a Medal of Honor."

"Why haven't you told us this before?"

"I had to decide what it was I wanted to pass down to my children. I earned it by killing eight men... and you know what, I'm damn proud of that. You know I always wanted a son, to carry on the family name, but I knew you were going to kick a helluva lot of ass when you came into this world. That's why I named you Judith, a woman who used her strength to behead Holofernes, an evil general whose army was destroying her people. I knew you could shoulder that title like the son I hoped for.

I told you though, our God is one of vengeance, and I am a vengeful man. I carried that home with me. If anyone in the slightest messed with our family, there were consequences. A lifetime of me running around avenging the smallest infractions, that's what made your mother so fragile. I'm hoping you find a better way to take care of your sister, than I did your mother. She is still so young, and full of starlight. Don't let anyone cloud that with their darkness,"

Judith nodded. "Then why the lighter, why now?"

"As a guide, but also as a warning. None of the members of my platoon made it back. I was the lone survivor, the *lucky one*. I thought I could leave *the Bastard* behind in the war, but

he's the one who came home from the war, dying of the very cancer which saved him the first time."

#

**V: There's a stake in your fat black heart**

"Oh, fucking-a, Judith. What're you doing at my job?"

"I tried telling you over the phone—"

"And I told you, I don't want to talk about what happened with your sister. I'm trying to put all that behind me."

"Behind you? You think you can just put that *behind* you?"

"Yeah, I go to anger management meetings now, okay?"

"So what, is that the crucifix of your sins keeping away witches like me?" Judith asked.

"Ugh, come on, get the fuck out of here," Joseph said, getting up from his desk.

"I'm not here to talk about Mary. Sit back down."

Joseph looked puzzled, but did as he was told. "What could you and I possibly have to discuss? Business? You need some insurance, or something?" He chuckled, pulling on his green paisley tie.

Judith reached in her black Hermès purse and pulled out a manila envelope. "No, I think I'm satisfied with the plan I currently have," she said dropping the envelope on his desk as she sat down across from him.

"What's this?"

"It's my insurance. Go ahead and open it." As Joseph undid the latch of the folder he looked inside to see a stack of photographs. "Now I know the cocaine thing isn't much to threaten you with. I'm sure you don't have too much of it lying around here, only about an eighth, right? Don't worry you don't need to flush it. I just want you to consider something. Most obvious, is that you could lose your job. You'd have a hard time replacing it for years to come, yada yada yada.

Now, if you go through the photos, you'll not only see yourself, but also your dealer. His name is Tony, and you'll see who Tony gets his cocaine from, yes that would be the photograph you're looking at right there, his name is Bruno. Now, I know you don't know Bruno, but I've heard that the cops have had their eyes on him for awhile. You'll notice there's nothing shady going on with Tony and Bruno, but let's say I get the cops involved. They will set up a sting, who knows when. They will arrest you, and they will arrest Tony. Tony will have a lot more coke on him than you will, so he will get more time sentenced, and he'll bargain with the cops to give up Bruno for a slap on the wrist. The cops may be successful, or they may fail, but either way, Bruno will be mad, and will have a guy on the inside shank you for the inconvenience."

Joseph stared at Judith for a minute with his mouth open, then leaned over his desk. "There's more than one person in the world who sells cocaine, you sociopath. Try that shit you're spewing, and I'll bury you under the ground while you're still breathing. Right after I smack your sister around a bit, just to give you something to think about when you're struggling for air," he snarled.

"Yeah, but the thing is, it doesn't matter. You'll be in the same position, just with a new set of characters for my guys to photograph and for the police to bring down. It just doesn't matter."

"Get out of my office."

"I didn't say that's what I was going to do though. You never *listen*," she said pointing to her ear, bulging her eyes. "I told you to consider that little story," Judith leaned over the desk, "so that the next time I call you, you pick up your goddamn phone, or *I'll bury you*," she snarled back, and stood up. "You can keep those if you want," she said pointing to the photographs. "Hang 'em on your fridge, or something. I've got plenty." Judith turned, and walked out of his office.

She clenched her chest to soothe her pounding heart. She heard Joseph yell behind his closed door, followed by the sound of glass shattering as she walked down the hall. She looked back to see a few of the people in the cubicles peering over at his office to see what happened. Judith did her best to look upset or concerned for any onlookers and then pressed the down button on the elevator.

The doors opened and she stepped inside, pressing the 'Door-Close' button like a woodpecker striking a tree with its beak. After the doors fully closed, her hands fumbled around her waist where she disconnected a tape recorder in her pocket from a black chord stemming from the inside of her top. She hit 'Rewind' and then 'Play'.

"*Bury you*," the silver, little box crackled. She clenched it tight to her chest, smiled, and put it in her purse before the doors opened and she left the building.

#

**I: The rack and the screw**

The moon was full, and the stars were shining as bright as any night the city could allow. Mary was walking home from picking up a few groceries about three blocks from her apartment. She breathed in the passing aroma of Indian cuisine, and couldn't wait to start cooking dinner.

Mary turned the corner of the next block. She only had a block and a half left to get home when she was yanked into an alley. Her groceries fell to the ground, pouring out over blue sidewalk chalk doodles.

"Say nothing," said the shadow leaning closer. Mary wasn't sure whether it was the knife he was holding which kept her quiet, or the fury she could see from the glint of the moon in his eyes, but her tongue stuck in her jaw. She told herself that he smelled like a chimney, but that was just to cope. The shadow smelled more like a cremation furnace, breath hot like a savage beast, exhaling dirty sulfur gas against her neck.

Mary watched as the moonlight danced against the blade of the knife as he slid her dress up, and carefully sliced open the side of her underwear. The tip of the blade left a thin cut on her thigh. She looked like a martyr burning at the stake—and when it was finally over, she picked up the ashes that remained and carried them home.

She walked through the door of her apartment, and headed straight to the bathroom.

"Hey babe," Joseph yelled from the bedroom. Mary said nothing. "Did you get the groceries?" Mary said nothing. Joseph had only just arrived home from work, and was halfway through undressing, but left the bedroom to see her. "Mary?" he asked as he walked toward the

entrance of their apartment. "You left the door open." He heard the shower turn on. "Are you mad at me?" Mary said nothing. "I can't help if you don't say anything." Still silence. "Fine," Joe said, walking away.

On the other side of the door his fiancé sat in the tub, still in her dress, as the shower rained down on her. She thought nothing, but hoped for a revelation.

Twenty minutes went by; steam poured out from the bottom of the bathroom doorway. "Come on, Mary, will you say something to me?"

The door opened. "I didn't get groceries, so how about delivery tonight?" she asked, smiling, with water cascading from her dress.

#

## **VII: And then I knew what to do**

"It took you long enough to get here," Joseph said.

"I had to wait for a taxi," Judith replied.

Joseph cocked his head in frustration. "You said that you had," Joseph looked from side to side, "an important *package* in the trunk for me. Why didn't you bring it?"

"I'm going to bring you to it," Judith said.

"I'm really sick of this little bullshit game you got going on. And stand the fuck back up, we're not having lunch or anything."

A pear shaped waitress named Gene, who was about sixty and smelling of Febreze, walked up to the table. "I see your lady's finally here," she said, smiling at Joe. "You sweethearts know what you want to drink?"

"N-" Joe began.

"Some chamomile would be lovely, my throat is a little scratchy," Judith said.

"I'll make sure to bring ya some extra lemons and clear that right up honey— Oh, I could look in the back for honey, too! Meanwhile," she dug through her apron, "I got these lozenges. They're cherry. I mean sometimes I even have one if my throat isn't bothering me, who can resist?" She handed one to Judith.

"Thank you." Judith smiled back at her, taking the lozenge from her hand. "And your nails are just lovely."

"Stop it," Joe muttered.

"Why thank you," Gene exclaimed, "I'm surprised you can even see them behind those big Jackie O sunglasses of yours!"

Joe was still standing, massaging his temples with his pointer fingers. "Get up," he said curtly.

"Oh, these, well... my eyes are sensitive," Judith said looking away.

"Well here, I can get rid of the glare for ya," Gene lowered the blind. "There!" she proclaimed, and took the sunglasses from Judith's face with the familiarity of a mother. Gene

looked from Judith, over to Joe who had become a bit pale. "Sensitive, huh?" Gene asked with disgust.

Joe brushed past Gene and dragged Judith out of her seat, and the diner, by her arm.

"Hey, get back here!" Gene called after the two.

"What the *fuck* happened to your eye?" Joseph asked, dragging her around back to his Camry.

"I'd call it a happy accident. Anyway, the faster you start driving," she said leaning up against him, "the faster you finish playing."

"You're some kind of psycho."

#

## **II: I have always been scared of you**

Mary paced back and forth in the bathroom. A timer shaped like a chick hatching from an egg *tick-tick-ticked* with the fury of Gatling fire, and Mary's fingernails dropped to the linoleum like the discarded casings of each bullet. *Ding-ding!* She picked up the white pregnancy strip, and saw that a blue cross materialized.

#

## **VIII: An engine chuffing me off**

Operator: 911, what's your emergency?

Caller: I think... an, uh domestic dispute.

Operator: What's your name ma'am?

Caller: Gene Louise Tamland

Operator: Where are you, Gene?

Gene: Max's Diner. Out on 95...

Operator: What happened?

Gene: A young lady had quite the shiner on her and once I saw it, well, the boy she met up with dragged her off by the arm.

Operator: Did they get in an altercation?

Gene: No, he dragged her around back and drove off. I'm just worried about her. He seemed very tense.

Operator: What kind of car was it, and what direction did it head?

Gene: It was a tan Camry, I think.

Operator: Did you get the plates?

Gene: It was New Jersey, ummm, P-O-S-something-somethin. Or was it a zero? I didn't see the last three numbers though. I wasn't wearing my glasses. I was scramblin' for 'em but—

Operator: Ok, that's enough for now, thanks. We're sending units to the area, ma'am.

Gene: Oh God, help that poor girl... She deserves better...

#

"Where are we driving to?" Joseph asked.

"Put in 12 County Rd, West 95. It should only be about a twenty minute drive from here," Judith said.

"What's over there?"

"The dump."

"You parked your car in the black hole of New Jersey?" Joseph asked, bewildered.

"I have something special for you there," she replied.

Joseph looked at Judith with a scowl, "You're dodging the question."

"What I have for you is no longer in my trunk, Joe, but it's waiting for you there."

"I fucking swear—"

"Mhm, you do swear quite a lot, actually."

Joe's face grew redder. "So what happened to Mary?" he gritted through his teeth.

"I'll tell you after you get the GPS set up so it doesn't interrupt me."

\*Now starting route guidance,\* the machine spurted out. "Continue, straight, on, County, Road, West, Nine-ty, Five, for, fif-teen, miles.\*"

"Technology," Judith stated. "Isn't it great? Started with simple machines like a wedge... now we're here."

"Are you ever going to tell me?"

Judith turned off the radio. She pulled her cell phone out of her purse. "I'll let her." Judith put her voicemail on speakerphone:

#

### **III: Every woman adores a Fascist**

"Babe, what's going on in there?"

Mary looked up at the door. "Nothing... just, give me a minute."

"Come on, I gotta take a shit. I'm going to be late."

"Mmm, fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck," Mary muttered. She opened the cabinet under the sink and threw the pregnancy strip inside like dynamite down a mineshaft. "Okay," she smiled, "all yours."

Joseph kissed her on the cheek as he squeezed past her through the doorway. "Thank you sweetheart," he said shutting the door. "Ughh, Mary, couldn't get your clippings into the trash? I'm stepping on nails all over the place. Are you biting them off again? I thought we got that anxiety under control?"

"Sorry babe, I just... got nervous with you shouting. Tried to hurry."

"It's alright," Joe said between flushing the toilet and opening the door, "just try to hit the garbage next time."

"Yeah, yeah, I will and—"

"Oh, right. I know babe, I'll Lysol in here," Joe reached down toward the cabinet, "I know you can't stand when I leave it—"

Mary's eyes dilated. "No! I wasn't—"

Joe stopped. He slowly turned around holding the pregnancy test. "What's this?"

Mary had started slowly backing up. "Joe, it's not—"

"What the fuck is this?"

"It's—"

He looked down at it. "There's a plus sign."

"Joe—"

"You're pregnant?" he said as he moved closer. "With whose fucking kid?"

Mary was in the kitchen by this point, and Joe was about five feet away, but crept closer and closer. She reached in the drawer and pulled a large chef's knife from the drawer. "Joe, let me explain," Mary said shaking.

"Explain? You're gonna hold a knife up to me and explain?" He backhanded the blade out of her hand. "We both know I'm sterile." He shook his head. "Ya broke my heart," he said as he jumped and grabbed her by the base of her ponytail. "Now I'm gonna break the little heart growing inside ya." His hand rushed down through the air, slamming her face on the counter. She crashed to the ground, her nose broken.

"Joey, I was r—"

Her words were lost among the thunder raging inside him. Blood dripped down her face from her nose, which only made him angrier. His boot pummeled her stomach again and again.

"Raped," she groaned, coughing up blood..

Joe stopped. He stood with clenched fists, exhaling steam like a coal engine. He subdued his heavy breathing and slicked his greasy, sweaty hair back. He opened the freezer, took out a bag of peas, and tossed it down to Mary's side. "Put that on your face, it'll reduce the swelling. I'm going over to Tony's," he grumbled before storming out of the house.

Mary lied on the kitchen linoleum, like a kid in the snow trying not to ruin their snow angel's wings. After thirty minutes she heaved herself up, bones marble-heavy, by grabbing the oven door's handle and limped out of the apartment. She dialed Judith, and slumped inside her apartment complex's elevator.

"Hello?" her sister answered.

"Judy," she groaned, "I need your help."

"What's wrong?" Judith answered abruptly.

"I fell down the stairs."

"In your apartment? I'll be right over!"

"I'm on the landing of the fifth floor," Mary coughed.

"Ok, I'm leaving now. Hold tight sis!" Judith hung up the phone, curious if she just heard the bell to the elevator.

#

**IX: I thought even the bones would do**

\*You have, one, old, voicemail, and, no, new voicemails. First voice message:

"Hey, Judy Bloom, it's your sister. I'm heading to bed... the sun's still out, but I guess I just don't believe it's there, ya know? There is no light in my world anymore, only an accustomed darkness. Haha, oh my God, I'm so sorry. That sounded soooo melodramatic. I didn't want it to sound that way, but, oh well. I just feel so forlorn— Not by you! But forlorn by my spirit. I feel like a house after an eviction. I just can't— Anyway... when you wake up... I just want you to know that I love you, Tiger Eyes."

Message, deleted.\*

The two sat silently for a few minutes. Tears filling both sets of eyes, but each refusing to let the dam break. Judith pulled out her lighter and lit a cigarette.

"I listened to it over and over again, hoping it would make sense. I don't know if it does. I don't think these things ever do. How can someone sound so happy when they..." She shook her head and exhaled smoke from her lips, "Anyway..."

"So..." Joseph started, "she..."

"Killed herself?... Yeah," Judith took a drag of her cigarette. "That was after the first attempt."

Joseph looked over at her, biting his lip, and shaking his head. Judith closed her eyes and nodded. "Fuck," he said tears rolling down his face. Losing the crying game the two never admitted they were playing.

"Didn't think you cared, Joe?"

"Screw you, I loved her," Joseph said.

"Screw you, you slammed her face into granite."

"I...I just... I couldn't do it. I saw she was pregnant and... I just knew it would grow up to have her face and not mine... That it would know I was never its father. I saw red and I charged at her. I was high... I..."

"Did the only thing a brute like you knew what to do."

"I couldn't even look at the aftermath. What the drug— What I did to her... I had to leave."

"I cleaned up that mess, you know?" Judith snapped, ashing her cigarette.

"Seems like we both got our specialties, huh? You clean messes, I make 'em."

"She told me she fell down the stairs, as she rode the elevator down to cover your tracks. Why would she bother, Joe?"

"She must've known I loved her."

"And why would she still think that after you turned her inside out?"

"Like you said, I'm a brute. She knew that going into things. She knows I carry home the ugly with me."

"That's the best you got, *carry the ugly home*?" Judith asked. "You sell insurance."

"I'd reconsider what it is you think I do, Nancy Drew. Was your little P.I., photographer, or whatever the hell he was, little friend still following me when I went out after I hit her?"

"No."

"Well, he should have been. You would've had so much more on me."

"What did you do?"

"I went over to Tony's. You know Tony, my cocaine guy, right? Well, heat of the moment, I found my aggression to be a direct side effect of Tony's involvement in my life. So I cut him out... *in a manner of speaking*. It was my first step in trying to change for her."

"Trying to change, by repeating the same actions which put you in that predicament?"

"Well, not the same. I didn't beat him up."

"So what did you do to Tony?" Judith asked, flicking the butt of her cigarette out the window.

"I shot him," Joseph said. "Right in the fucking face. How did Mary do it?"

"The first time wasn't too painful. Whole lot of Ambien. Stomach pump. Good as new."

"And the second time?" he asked.

"Well..."

#

## **VI: The vampire who said he was you**

"Judith, I just can't sleep anymore, I can't eat anything, I feel so hollow. I'm withering away and I don't know how to hang onto anything anymore."

"We're going to get through this Mary, I promised you I'd be here. I'm going to take care of things."

"How? How can you do that? You're not the one up all night, you're not being followed by darkness, you... you don't smell Hell on your neck every time you breathe."

"No, I don't," Judith said. "But I can help you get rid of it all."

"What? Get me more pills? File a police report with a sketch of a set of eyes that they'll laugh at and just file away, telling me to walk a different way home at night?"

"I want you to walk with me where it happened."

Mary shook her head. "I can't do that."

"Yes, you can. First, we'll go a few times in the daylight. Get used to it again. Then, we'll go back and face it together—"

"What're you talking about? I don't even feel safe enough in my home let alone—" Mary stopped herself.

"I'm going to help you feel safe again. We'll lure the monster out. And then we'll destroy him."

Mary paused. "Is this a game to you?"

Judith shook her head. "No, of course not."

"You're treating it like one. You just think, the man who... the, that he's just sitting waiting for girls to pass by every night and just step into his little spider web? That he doesn't think people will try to find him there?"

"...Yes"

"Why? How can you possibly think that? And how can you possibly think we can catch him?" Mary asked.

"Because monsters never stop burning down villages until they incinerate themselves amongst the ash of their enemies. And I have to believe we can kill him before the blaze sweeps over us, because you're my little sister, and I need to make you feel safe."

"...Kill?"

"Kill. I will bury your monsters so deep in the ground, I will be personally delivering them to Satan's doorstep. And you will be able to sleep again."

#

### **X: If I've killed one man, I've killed two**

"The second time," Judith continued. "She shot herself."

Joseph, sighed. "With—"

"Your missing gun."

"Why?"

"She wanted to make sure they *"couldn't put her back together again,"* as she put it."

"Why my gun?"

"Probably so she wouldn't have to wait seven more days."

"So—"

"The cops took it as evidence. But there's a note, and forensics was there and everything."

"I need a minute," Joseph said pulling the car over.

"Worried?"

He looked at her, "Of course, but it's more than that."

"What then?"

"I loved her, Judith. I know you don't believe me after what I did to her, but I do. And she's gone. And she did not go gently. I killed her. That rapist killed her. And then she... pulled the trigger and did it herself. I just... And now I'm sitting here in my car with you, the one person in the world who looks like her if she were alive for a few more years, driving down a deserted highway to a garbage dump in New Jersey. Taunting me. Like you're her angry ghost. And I wish *so* goddamn much right now, that you were her and we were going to all those places I promised her."

Joseph collapsed into his hands for a few minutes, and then started driving again until the car pulled near the entrance of the garbage dump. "Now what?" Joseph asked.

"Hold this up at the gate over there." Judith pointed and handed him a laminated card..

Joseph kept driving, but looked down at the ID. "Why is my photo in this, and who's Patrick Holloway?"

"Just show the ID and look like you work here," Judith replied.

The two pulled up at the gate and the guard greeted Joseph, "Mr. Holloway, it's so nice to meet you in person after all this time."

"You as well," Joseph replied.

"I know you're the boss and everything, but I'm still going to have to ask you to sign your guest in."

"Of course, just... following procedure," Joseph said, shrugging his shoulders.

"Why do you have a guest, Mr. Holloway? If you don't mind me asking? This isn't the place for a date or anything," the guard laughed.

"I'm from the EPA," Judith chimed in leaning over Joseph.

"Oh, excuse me, Miss, I was only playing around."

"It's alright, darling. Just a routine check around the place is all this is about."

"Right," the guard said, handing them a clipboard. Judith signed it: *Mary Anne Bachman*, and handed it back over Joseph.

"All set," the guard said opening the gate. "Take care."

"Thank you, keep it up," Joseph said, driving away. "He was pleasant, I guess," he said to Judith.

"And stupid. And new here."

"Explains the timing," Joseph said. "So, again, who's Patrick Holloway?"

"Who you're here to meet."

"Why?"

"You have something in common with him."

"Why's that?" Joseph asked.

"Drive over there," Judith said, directing him to where smoke was coming from.

"I said *why's that*," Joseph repeated, parking the car.

She looked at him. "You both fucked over my sister. Now, pop the trunk," she said, getting out of the car. "This is Patrick Holloway," Judith said, motioning to the man bound like a pig for a spit roast in the trunk.

Joseph had never been so calm and so still in his life. "This is the guy?" Joseph asked.

"He's the one."

The two stood over the trunk looking at the motionless man, whose monstrous eyes were readjusting to light. Joseph looked him up and down. "Why are his hands covered in oven mitts, where are his shoes?"

"So he couldn't grab the crowbar or kick as hard, even though he's wrapped up in duct tape. I think I broke some of his bones when I railed on him like a piñata, I think that's what kept him from bouncing around."

Joseph turned and looked at Judith. "Why did you bring me here?"

"Revenge. Don't you want to be a part of this? He's what started this all."

"Why here?"

"I was researching him. He works here. No one will find his body. The smell of burning garbage will throw the dogs. No one will even know he's missing."

"What about the guard?"

"He doesn't even know what Holloway looked like."

"But he knows our faces. You signed that sheet."

"I didn't use my name," Judith replied. When Joseph didn't answer she said, "We can kill him too, if necessary."

Joseph moved and heaved Holloway up and sat him on the trunk. "I'm going to ask you a question. I want it answered honestly, because I'm going to kill you no matter what you say. Your honesty determines your pain. Do you understand?"

Holloway's eyes looked like a puppy whose nose was just rubbed in its own shit, but he nodded silently.

Joseph removed the duct tape from his mouth. "Question one: Did you rape her?"

"No, man, of course not," Holloway said.

Joseph picked up the crowbar and smashed Holloway in the ribcage. Holloway fell over coughing. "I asked you to be honest. I didn't believe you." he picked Holloway up by the neck

and sat him up against the trunk again. "Did you rape her," Joseph asked staring menacingly into Holloway's eyes.

Holloway shuttered. "Y-y-y-y-ess," he said breaking into tears.

"Question two: Did you enjoy it?"

"N—" Holloway began, before flinching at Joseph's jerk movement of the crowbar. "Yes! Yes, I enjoyed it."

"How?" Joseph asked.

"How?" Holloway repeated.

"Describe how you enjoyed it."

"I-I-I, ugh... it felt, it felt like... Christmas morning. Like I got to open my presents early."

Judith turned away and vomited. Joseph continued, growing more and more disgusted , but growing calmer and calmer. "Third question: Was she your first?"

"No... she was just... my type."

"What's your type?"

"Empty..."

They all paused.

"How many?" Joseph continued.

"Eight."

"...Was she your last?"

"There was one after her."

Joseph rubbed his temples and cried. "Last question: Why?"

"People like you," he motioned to Joseph.

"What?" Joseph replied, his face reddening.

"You didn't give her what she wanted... She was lost... That look on her face, she was a mother with no child."

Judith was in tears holding her mouth. Joseph's red rage left his face, his eyes were empty. He picked up Holloway and threw him over his shoulder.

"What're you doing?" Holloway screamed. "I answered your questions! I don't understand." Joseph kept walking and placed Holloway down on a conveyor belt. "I answered your questions!"

"And the truth shall set you free," Joseph said hitting a button. The conveyor belt started moving.

"What, what're you doing?" Holloway wailed and wailed as his body passed over a metal grate, and dropped into the dump's incinerator. He burned, dissolved, and became ash amongst the filth of the disposed and decomposed waste of society.

The two waited in silence, both their heads filled with the ringing of Holloway's tormenting screams.

"So, is that it? I finished off the dirty work you couldn't muster, because that's who I am to you? A killer? Evil?"

"Do you know where I got my name, Joseph?" Judith said, shooting him in the neck. He fell to the ground, blood spurting, gasping for air. She looked down over him, "I behead monsters," she said shooting him once more, square between the eyes.

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