

# The Past Never Dies

**Juan Mendez Scott's Mystery Magazine, Volume 4**

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THE PAST NEVER DIES

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Written by Juan Mendez Scott.

## Also by Juan Mendez Scott

**Juan Mendez Scott's Mystery Magazine**

Prom Queen

A Sizzling Affair

Big Sexy

The Past Never Dies



Me and Gabrielle were cuddling on the couch in our apartment watching a movie on Netflix when her phone rang. She looked down at her phone on the coffee table to see who was calling her. It was obvious she didn't want me to know who was calling her. She got up and went into our bedroom and took the call. I became suspicious right away.

I always hated it when a woman I was dating turned her back to me whenever she took a phone call. Especially when you can hear a man's voice on the other end.

I could hear her talking on the phone, but she was talking low. *Is it another man?*

I couldn't take it anymore, I needed to know who she was talking to. I got up and eased into the bedroom. She didn't hear me come in, she still had her back turned to me. Now she was whispering. I crossed my arms, watching her, suspicious. When she felt my presence I scared her. She jumped so hard she almost dropped her phone. Her curly hair almost smacked me in the face when she turned and faced me. Her eyes were big, mouth opened, and she put her hand over her heart.

I said, "So who're you talkin' to on the phone?"

She looked like she just got caught sticking a knife in my back. Her face softened up on me. "I'm talking to Eli, Cory."

I wanted to grab her and shake her until her head fell off. "The fuck you doing talking to him for, I thought we talked about this."

*I should have known!*

He needed my help with something," she said. She held the phone close to her chest so that he couldn't hear us.

"So why you sneak off to come back here to talk to him?"

"Because I didn't want to interrupt you watching the movie." *She really must think I'm stupid.*

"Bulshit. You snuck off back here because you didn't want me to hear you talking to him."

Now she felt stupid. "Right."

"I know damn well I'm right."

Now she's trying to avoid confrontation. "And because I knew this could turn into an argument when it's not worth an argument at all."

Now she was guilting me about my quick temper.

Now I could hear Eli talking. "My bad Gabby. Is everything all right? I'm not causing any problems am I?"

She smiled and said, "No, Eli, it's nothing wrong, everything's fine, he's okay."

I shook my head. "No, I'm not okay. I thought we talked about this."

Still, she's kissing ass and apologizing. "No, Eli, he's fine, he just didn't know who I was talking to."

I was about to snatch the phone out of her hand and talk for myself. "Why does he keep checking on you to see if you're okay, *I'm* your boyfriend. Not *him*."

She sighed, staring at the floor. She wished she never answered the phone. She put the phone on speaker. I gave her a look, daring her to keep pissing me off.

She stared into my eyes. "Eli, we're on speaker.

He said, "Yeah. My fault Cory man. I just didn't know what was going on. I didn't know you were home -"

"Yeah, I am home and yeah I am here with my girl."

"Like I said, I apologize for that. We're just old friends talking, that's all."

"Yeah, whatever."

"Ain't nothing going on between us."

Gabby wanted this shit to be over with *quick*. "I'll call you back later." Then she hung up.

I stood there, giving her the hardest look to make her tremble. "No, you won't be calling him back later. This is the last time I want you talking to him."

She threw her hands in the air as if I was getting on her last nerve. "Cory, we are just friends."

"I'm serious, that was the last time, I mean it."

"Eli is going to be staying at the halfway house in Berry farms in DC. He has a girlfriend, he has no interest in me like that. We're just friends now."

"I don't care what halfway house he's staying in when he gets out of prison. I don't care who his girlfriend is, I don't give a shit. And I don't like you being friends with him, I'm not comfortable with that at all. I told you that."

"It's not like we're going to be hanging out together. I'm just doing a favor for him."

I shook my head at Gabby, frowning. She disappointed me to the point of almost packing my shit and getting away from her. "You stay living in the past. Why do you keep doing that?"

She put her hands on her hips. "Doing *what*? I don't live in the past. Why do you say that?"

"Because you're one of those people that has a hard time letting the past go. You always talking about what happened in the past. Instead of just moving forward with your life and moving forward with *us* as a couple. That's why people get back with their exes. Because the past don't die. It's always something in the past that people always want go back and get. Either to correct it or to have it again." I pointed at her. "That's *you*."

I must've hurt her feelings. She didn't want to hear anymore, she stepped off back into the living room and back onto the couch. I wasn't done yet. I followed her. And I stood over her, I had some more shit to talk.

"Gabby . . . are you waiting for Eli to come home from jail . . . so you can be with him?"

She shook her head to herself and stared at me. "No, Cory, we're just friends."

"Yeah, right, *just* friends my ass."

"All I'm doing is helping him with this job interview that I'm setting him up with. That's it."

I shook my head, turning away from her. I shut my eyes so tight they almost popped. I knelt down to her and sighed. "I don't trust him Gabby."

She shrugged, so clueless. "What is there not to trust?"

I stood back up. "He's trying to steal you away from me, he's trying to get back with you."

The smile on her face was telling me that I was a big dummy. "He has a girlfriend, he's not thinking about me like that."

"Then what is he thinking about then?"

"We are just friends, I'm just helping him get this job."

I stared down at her, and I wasn't playing. "Because if he interferes with our relationship I will kill him first." And yes, I wasn't playing.

She frowned at me. Like when people frown at people who stand in grocery stores starting arguments with other people for no reason. "You're not making any sense. Killing somebody for what.?"

"All I know is if I catch him hanging around here . . . or the house we're about to move into . . . I'm gonna kill him."

She reached out and grabbed my hand, staring into my face. I had to admit, I loved it when she looked at me like that. Like she wanted to take care of me forever. "Cory . . . we are just *friends*."

"That friendship shit doesn't mean a damn thing to me, I want him to stay away from you. If I have to *kill* him . . . to make that happen . . . I will."

Still staring into my face, Gabby stood up and faced me. She hugged me almost breaking ribs. She was tiny and muscular, like those gymnastic type girls. She had cold, narrow smoke gray eyes but a charming smile that could charm a thief into giving you your wallet back.

I was too mad to hug her back but I found a way to hug her anyway.

She held me a long time, looking up into my eyes. "I love *you*. *Not* Eli. It is *you* who I want to be with, *not* Eli. *You*. I want to help him out because he did *good* in jail, he did what he needed to do to come home."



I snarled my nose. "He did what he was *supposed* to do . . . because that's what you're supposed to do when you're in jail, rehabilitate. What the hell is that got to do with me and you?"

"He just needs a fair chance out here when he comes home. And I'm helping him."

I stared down at her, not believing a word coming off those lips of hers. She gave me one of those grins a mother gives when you come home from school with a gold ribbon. She raised herself from the tips of her toes and kissed me on the lips. That kiss aroused me before she landed back onto her heels.

She held my hands. "I want to be with you forever. And I can't do that being with some other man. Yes, he is my ex. But it's been over with for two years now. I'm just helping him find his way and that is it. He and his girlfriend are getting married and moving on with their lives. Just like I'm doing right now, moving on with my life with you."

I wanted to let her hands go. "So you gonna help'im out? The way he used to *dog* your ass."

Her eyes left mine and pointed at the floor, pride grabbed her like an itch she couldn't get to. "Yes, he's . . . he's a pretty boy . . . he screwed around on me a lot." Then she looked at me, guiltling me. "But he *never* hit me. He *never* put his hands on me."

I shook my head, still not impressed with Eli. "It's called mental abuse Gabby, sometimes that's worse than knuckles."

She snatched her pride back like it was a floating balloon. "And that is why I broke up with him, Cory."

"And you'd be a damn fool to go anywhere near him."

She squinted her eyes at me, head to the side. "And you know what's funny Cory? He feels the *same* way about you."

I scowled, looking at her. *He's never ever going to impress me.* "What do you mean?"

She crossed her arms. "He says there's something about you he doesn't trust."

I turned my lip up on purpose. "I could care less about what he thinks of me. As long as he keeps his ass away from *you*."

"And he will, I promise you that. He loves his girlfriend so much he doesn't think about me like that either."

She grinned, ready to get back to us. She picked up the remote and rewind the movie back to where she left it when she got the phone call. I couldn't take my eyes off her, I was still *pissed*. She curled back onto the couch and held out her hand to me. After thinking about it I went on ahead and grabbed her hand. She pulled me onto the couch beside her and snuggled up under me.

She stared at the movie like she was in a trance. "I love you so much, Cory. I would never hurt you."

I couldn't imagine another man - *any* man - touching my Gabby. And I knew right then and there, that if I ever found out Gabby was sneaking around to get back with Eli . . . somebody was definitely going to die.

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**ON OUR WAY TO GABBY'S** mother's house, it started raining as we picked up a bushel of crabs and some beer. I drove a black 2012 Range Rover Sport. Gabby was quiet the whole ride, curled up in the seat, staring off in space, her elbow resting on the door, her head resting on her hand. There were times I'd turn the radio down and tried to strike up a conversation. But she still had nothing much to say. Probably thinking about how she was going to get away with seeing Eli behind my back.

When we got to Miss Mallory's old split foyer brick house on Glen Way in Fort Washington, she and Gabby's sister had everything already set up. Cups of steamed Artichokes with garlic and butter. Lemon and garlic butter dipping sauce. And one of my favorites, Brandy-Infused Mayonnaise dip. All I needed to do was put the case of Heinekens in the fridge and set the crabs down on the table so that we could sit down and start cracking.

So as we snapped, crackle and popped our way through the crabs, I noticed Gabby's mom Miss Mallory peeping over at Gabby. And Gabby - for some reason, probably thinking about Eli - was kind of quiet as we ate. "You know we usually talk every day," Miss Mallory said, "but for some reason, you didn't call me yesterday. And when I called you I didn't get an answer and I didn't get a call back either." Like her daughter - which of course is where Gabby got it from - Miss Mallory, who was in her early fifties, had cold, narrow eyes. And she had long, braided hair down her back and she was short and kind of stocky.

Gabby tried to smile. "Yeah, I'm sorry Ma, I was just laying around all day, napping all day."

I nodded. "She was being straight lazy, that's what she was doing," I said.

"Yeah, sis," Brianna said, "seems like you've been laying low lately. Everything okay?" Brianna, twenty-seven, was a tall, athletic woman who was as graceful as a ballerina on the dance floor.

Gabby tried to smile again. "Everything is fine, y'all, I'm good. Just been chillin' lately."

"You know we're a lot closer than that," Miss Mallory said, "we are a close-knit family. I don't ever want us to slack off from keeping in touch and talking every day."

"I know," Gabby said.

Miss Mallory studied Gabby, cracking open a crab. "You've been tired lately?"

Gabby thought about it. "Mmmm, kind of, I don't know."

We all paused and looked at Gabby.

Miss Mallory sat back and said, "You're not pregnant are you?"

Gabby started laughing as she cracked open a crab. "Nooooooooo!"

"Okay," Miss Mallory said. "Just checking."

While the women sat back laughing at the thought of their little Gabby getting pregnant, I watched them. Waiting for the right time to say what I wanted to say. So now, it was the right time. "I want to ask

you all something.” They all stopped and looked at me. I looked at Gabby a minute, making her uncomfortable. Grinning and staring at Gabby I said, “What did y’all think of Gabby’s ex-boyfriend Eli?”

Gabby’s nostrils flared up so bad it looked like she was breathing fire.

And there was an uncomfortable silence. Looks were exchanged around the table.

Alexis, the oldest at twenty-nine, smiled. “Eli was a nice guy, very nice looking guy too. If I must say so myself.” Alexis was also tall, but skinny. From my understanding, Brianna and Alexis took after their dad, who was six feet something. And Gabby was the only one who took after moms.

Brianna said, “Yes, he *was* handsome, still is I guess.”

I nodded and I tried to smile, but there was a twinge of jealousy nipping at me.

“He never did anything to *me*,” Brianna said.

“He never did anything to me either,” Alexis said.

Then I caught Gabby eyeballing me like she was about to stab me in the neck with one of the forks.

I said, “Okay. How do y’all think he treated Gabby?”

Gabby sighed. “Can we not have this conversation please?”

“I’m just curious, I need to know,” I said.

Gabby - getting pissed - said, “Why do you need to know?”

I threw some garlic dipped crab meat into my mouth, chewing hard. “Because I wanna know.”

Gabby said, “Can we please not do this?”

“How do y’all think he treated Gabby?”

Mom and daughters exchanged looks.

“I think he treated my daughter okay,” Miss Mallory said, and she was serious.

I thought about it. “Just okay?”

Miss Mallory thought about it, dipping crab meat in garlic butter.

Gabby said, "Mom, you don't have to answer that question if you don't want to. Matter fact you can just stay out of it if you want to, I wouldn't mind at all."

I said, "No, I want you to answer this question if you don't mind please."

Gabby rarely got mad about anything, but I thought she was going to punch me in the face. "Well, I *do* mind. Come on Cory, stop now."

Miss Mallory watched Gabby as she answered the question. "The only problem I had with him was that he couldn't stop cheating on my daughter. And he stayed in and out of jail too much for me."

*Music to my ears.*

Alexis said, "Yeah, if I can say that I had a problem with him on anything that would be it. I didn't like him cheating on my sister the way he did." Then she gave her baby sister a look of apology.

I said, "So how do you all think . . . okay, let me put it this way. What do y'all think about him coming around?" The sneaky smile escaped my face.

Miss Mallory looked at me. "What do you mean coming around?"

Lightning struck and it thundered, a loud, scary clap across the sky. I guess that was a sign because Gabby was so embarrassed she couldn't move. I was pretty sure from the way she looked at it *I* embarrassed *her*. She did not want her family to know that Eli was coming home. She looked at me, sad and disappointed. And I was loving every minute of it.

I said, "You didn't tell your mom and your sisters that Eli was getting out of jail soon?"

Gabby was so mad she used her cottony soft bare hands to break open the crab.

Miss Mallory stared at Gabby for answers. "Oh, he's getting out of jail soon? How soon?"

Gabby glanced at me. "In a couple of days."

I looked at Gabby, wanting to snatch a knot in her ass. I didn't know it was that soon. "I think those two are planning on hanging out," I said.

The family was wondering what was going on, shooting looks at each other. *Uncomfort mixed with spicy crabs and beer make you sweat.*

Gabby wiped her hands with paper towels. "Cory . . . we are trying to sit here and enjoy these crabs. I don't think this is a topic of conversation."

"Well, I think it's a great conversation to have," I said.

"I don't know about that, Gabby," Miss Mallory said. "I mean . . . you're with Cory now."

I threw my arms up. "Thank you."

"You two seem to have a lot of good things going on together," Miss Mallory said. "You don't want Eli coming around causing problems."

"Eli is not going to be coming around and he is not going to be causing any problems," Gabby said, rolling her eyes at me.

"Yeah, sis," Brianna said, "that may not be a good idea."

"I agree with y'all," Gabby said, "I don't think it's a good idea either. Like I was trying to tell Cory," she again rolled her eyes at me, "we are just friends now. That's it. Nothing else nothing more. I'm just helping him find this job I'm setting him up with, getting him to the interview."

I dug the knife in deeper, being a smart ass. "Oh, you're taking him to the interview, I didn't know that."

I just knew Gabby was about to elbow a few teeth out of my mouth. "No, I'm not taking him *to* the interview, his girlfriend is going to take him to the interview, she's going to drive him."

"But you just said you were *getting* him to the interview," I said, grinning.

"What I meant to say was I'm setting him up with the interview, Cory. Stop trying to start something."

"I'm not trying to start anything. I'm just having some fun with this right now."

Still rolling her eyes. "I don't find it funny."

Miss Mallory continued staring at Gabby. "What kind of job?"

“Any kind of job, anything that’ll get him on his feet first. When he gets out of the halfway house he’s going to move in with his girlfriend Tamika.”

I cleared my throat. Gabby glared at me, ready to cut out my vocal cord. “If I can get serious for a moment. I’m a little nervous about him coming home.”

Concerned looks on faces took the place of the crabs.

Miss Mallory scooted her chair up. “Concerned about what?”

“I remember when Eli was stalking Gabby,” I said, nodding.

“Yeah, I remember too,” Alexis said. “He better not be starting that shit back up.” And Alexis wasn’t playing either. I heard that when she was a senior in high school she chased this girl all the way home and whipped her ass in front of her whole family.

Gabby said, “What is it that you don’t understand? He’s not going to be stalking me. He *has* a girlfriend. He and Tamika are going to get married and start a family. He doesn’t want me, he is not going to be stalking me.”

I said, “How do you know that? Seriously how do you know?”

Gabby frowned. “What do you mean *how do I know*? How do *you* know?”

“Because the past *don’t* die, Gabby. I keep telling you that. The past has a way of catching up with us sometimes.”

“No. Because he’s not *interested* in me like that anymore. We’re not in love with each other like that anymore.”

“Okay. Remember what I said about the past. Sometimes people try to get back to the past to get something they miss, something they want back. Rather it’s a memory, a person, something they miss and want back.”

“Well, my past with Eli is *over*. There will be no going back in the *past* to get anything between us.”

We continued eating crabs. Gabby stared down at the crab she was eating, her rage heating up the room. You could hear a pin drop outside

on the sidewalk. I smiled and gulped down my third beer. *That . . .* you could definitely hear.

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**I MADE A RIGHT TURN** onto Allentown Road, and I peeped over at Gabby. She was still pissed, she didn't have much to say.

I wanted to kill the tension. "I was thinking. You wanna go by the house real quick?"

Gabby kept her head turned away from me, staring out the window. "For what? We're moving in next week."

Her attitude left a cold chill for it to be late March. I wanted to grab her hand and hold it, but I was scared she would snatch it back. "I know but . . . I don't know, I just feel like seeing it."

Her shrug was lazy, and her tone was dry. "I don't care."

I turned down the radio. "Why ya so quiet?"

Out of nowhere, she had tears in her eyes. "Why did you bring up Eli? And why would you embarrass me like that?"

"Gabby I wasn't trying to embarrass you."

"But you *did* embarrass me."

"I just wanted to know what ya moms and your sisters thought about him coming home. That's all."

"Not trying to be funny . . . but it's really nobody's *business*."

I sighed, feeling like a piece of shit. "I understand."

"That man has a right to get his life together just like everybody else."

Now feeling like a piece of shit on the heel of somebody's shoe. "And you're right . . . he does."

Gabby rolled her tongue around her teeth, staring straight ahead, no eye contact still. "That's why I've been wondering."

"Wondering about what?"

She continued to stare straight ahead, with no eye contact. "Moving into this house."



A warm feeling came over me, and I started to sweat. I didn't want to drive my baby away from me spending the rest of my life with her. "And what is it that you're wondering?"

"Just wondering if we're moving too fast. Because if you don't *trust* me . . . then it doesn't make sense to get this house together."

It was chilly that night, but I got so hot I cracked the window open on my side. I thought I blew it. I had already put down the down payment on renting the house. In which it was a rent to own deal. Once we owned the house, we rent it out and build our dream home. Start a family. That was my plan.

Gabby wasn't finished, speaking with hand gestures, like she was really trying to get her point across. "Because if we can't trust each other . . . that's not good."

I gave it some thought. I gripped the steering wheel tight, ready to come real and correct. "To be honest with you . . . I'm glad I *did* bring Eli up. I just think that your mom and your sisters should know. Just in case it starts back up again."

She finally looked at me. "You will see when he gets home. He will not be stalking me, probably won't be getting in touch with me at all! I know Tamika and she's cool. And she's cool with *me*. And she knows there's nothing else between me and Eli."

I pulled up to the house on Trenary Circle. A three-bedroom, colonial house, with powder blue siding and black shutters, and a two-car garage. The house was built somewhere in the late eighties, way before Gabby and I was born in the mid-nineties.

We got out and walked around the yard as if we owned the house already. As if we could already see the happiness we were going to have in this house. And I could see Gabby lightening up a bit, walking around in the perfect grass in her bare feet. She was off into her own world with a lot on her mind, and I didn't want to interrupt that. I could see that she wasn't questioning the move anymore.

“Just think,” I said. “Next week we will have a garage to park our cars in. No more riding around the apartment complex looking for a place to park.”

I grabbed Gabby by the hand, and we walked around the side of the house to the fenced backyard. One of those old, gray fences from back in the day. The back yard wasn’t big enough to play football in, but it had a lot of trees back there, definitely good enough for some cook-outs.

“I already have it planned. I’m glad I hired movers to move us in. While they’re moving us in, I’m going to be cooking out, have something for us to eat after we’re all settled.”

From out of nowhere, Gabby hugged and kissed me. I wanted to take her inside the house and make love to her, but we weren’t given the keys yet.

I stared down into my tiny queen’s face like it was an eternity. “I can’t wait to move in.”

Her eyes dotted at the ground and then back up at me. “I can’t wait either.” Wasn’t the most convincing thing I’d ever seen. But good enough to be happy at the moment. Then. She wrapped her arms around my neck and pulled me down for some slob, kissing me like she was practicing for the kiss on our wedding day. At that moment, I knew I was going to be making love to her all night, keeping our neighbors up.

“And thanks for the crabs,” she said. “Again.”

“That’s our thing, baby,” I said. “At least once or twice a month, there’s always going to be crab day.”

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**AFTER WE GOT BACK TO the apartment**, Gabby fell asleep on the couch while we were watching TV. And I got a text from my best friend, my boy Nathan Harrell, that he just pulled up. So I went outside to meet him, and I got in the car with him, a 2019 pearl white Benz, GT class. We shook hands.

I said, “What up dog?”

He said, "What's up with ya?"

He reached over and popped the glove compartment open. And there it was. A nine-millimeter pistol. I took it out and held it, looking it over. I looked around to make sure we weren't being watched.

Nathan shot me a smile and a nod. "Joint nice, ain't it?" Nate was my best friend since high school. He had his own courier business in D.C. He was a small, wiry dark skin dude, but like a little Mighty Mouse, he was so strong he could damn near lift a car. He had wide, crystal green eyes, curly hair, and he always wore POLO, every single day.

*Eminem's Godzilla* was playing on the radio. He turned it down. "If this dude starts stalking Gabby again . . . and you have to pop his ass . . . don't throw the gun away."

I looked at Nathan. "Why?"

"Because I'm gonna come and pick it up from you so you won't have to ride around with it."

"Why don't you want me to throw it away?"

"Because I'ma sell it. It's probably got a few bodies on it anyway. That's why I bought it. Just in case I had to *bust* somebody and run. But I'm gonna go on ahead and sell it. Let somebody else take the chance of carrying it around."

"Okay. I understand."

Nathan and I grew up in Oxon Hill, near the D.C. line. We were good kids, we never got into trouble, never went out of our way of disrespecting anybody. But we saw friends of ours who were murdered in the streets. Some of them may have had it coming. Some didn't. But when it came to protecting ourselves, all bets were off. We did what we had to do.

Nathan shook his head, puzzled. "I'm a little curious. Why would Gabby bring this dude back into her life after the way he dogged her out?"

"That's what I don't understand. Yeah, he loved her. Apparently. But he wanted his cake and eat it too. He was even smashing a few of her

friends. And she still forgave'im. Although she broke up with him. But she still forgave'im.

"Because if dude still obsessed with'er, and can't get'er off his mind, he might start stalking her again. Things might get dangerous for y'all my friend.

"She claims he's got a girlfriend waiting for him to get home. That they're going to get a place together and get married and all that."

"That still doesn't mean he's not still in love with Gabby. But if he starts stalking'er again you'll be ready."

After thinking about it I shook my head. "If I find out she's messing around with him on the side . . . I'm killin' both of'em."

Nathan looked at me and frowned. "You got to be careful if your motives, man. If you kill him probably ain't gonna be too many people who give a fuck. But if you kill *her* along with *him* . . . all the arrows point in your direction. And then you're gonna be just like Eli sitting up in prison. Probably for the rest of your life."

"I know me, I know how I can get. If I find out she's fucking around on me I'll probably lose it and end up killing'er anyway."

"Just don't kill her when you kill *him*. That's if you *have* to kill him. That way you won't look so suspicious."

"Right, I got you."

"Hey, look, me and Pam are going out of town for a few days. If somethin' go down with that dude hit me up. I'll come back to town if I have to."

"Where're y'all going?"

"Going to North Carolina to see'er grandmother."

"All right. I'll hit you up if I need you."

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**SO, LIKE I SAID, I hired a moving** company to move all of our stuff into the house. We didn't have a lot of furniture coming from our one-bedroom apartment. Just the living room set, the bedroom set, and the

dining room table. All the other little things we brought over in our cars. While the guys were moving our stuff in I put some food on the grill. And by the time they were done I was able to serve them some hamburgers and hotdogs and they all left happy with smiles and mustard stains on their faces.

Once the movers were all packed up and gone me and Gabby found ourselves on the couch in the family room, watching a movie on Hulu. We were so tired I was lying on one end of the couch, and Gabby at the other end. Every now and then I'd reach down and grab my Heineken to take a quick sip.

Staring down her legs at me, Gabby tried to smile. "I am so glad you have a job working with Verizon."

I threw my leg over the back of the couch and sighed. "Baby, even if I wasn't working for Verizon, I still would have had the cable turned on before we moved in here."

"So, are you waiting for me to fall asleep so you can go down in the basement and finish fixing up your man cave?"

I thought about it. "Hm. That's not a bad idea. Since you're gonna fall asleep on me anyway."

"Or are you gonna just lay here with me, watch TV until we finally drag ourselves to bed?"

I was too tired to think about sex at that moment. But maybe later? "I think I'm gonna choose to lie here with you . . . until I drag *you* to bed."

Gabby laughed, but she was so tired she looked like she was crying like it hurt to laugh.

I stared at her a moment, so in love that I'd *kill* for her. "I'm so happy right now. Moving into our first house together."

Her nod was lazy. "Me too."

"Do you think we're gonna be happy here together?"

She shrugged. "I don't know. I hope so. Do *you* think we're going to be happy here together?"

"We better be."

With no eye contact, she nodded.

"Look, we get all the furniture we need for the house in the next year or so. Get our money saved up. Then we work on our wedding. Then starting a family."

Gabby gave it some thought, still no eye contact. Then she said, "Cory, I want you to know that I . . . I love you very very much."

"And I want you to know that I love you very very much too."

She looked into my eyes finally. "I don't want you to have any doubts about that."

I sat up. "Once we get settled into our regular routine in this house we're going to be just fine. I mean . . . I've even been thinking about fixing up one of the three rooms we got here, turn that joint into a little nursery." I grinned. "Know what I'm sayin'?"

Giving it some thought, Gabby raised up herself. She looked at me a moment, concerned. "If we're talking about marriage and kids in our future we definitely need to get our circle of trust together first."

I looked at her. "Baby I haven't mentioned Eli."

"I know. I know you haven't mentioned him."

"You haven't talked to him recently, have you?"

"I haven't talked to Eli since the last time you caught me talking to him."

"Okay, so . . . he doesn't need you for anything anymore - right?"

"He has all the information he needs as for the interview that he's going on. Like I said Tamika is taking it to the interview so he won't need me."

"Okay."

Her eyes stayed in my face. Now I was looking down. She grabbed my hands and said, "Once I know you can trust me as your woman, as your wife, I will give you all the babies you want."

I nodded. "Cool."

"If you want to start putting together the nursery," she shrugged, "sounds good to me."

“Cool, that’s what’s up.”

Gabby got up and stepped into her flip flops. “You hungry, you ready to eat?”

“Sure. I’ll take a couple of hamburgers, a couple of hotdogs. And I’m good.”

Gabby headed for the patio door leading to our backyard. I said, “Baby.” She stopped and turned. I said, “This is the beginning of our happy ever after. I want you to know that.”

She nodded, crossed her arms, and stepped out into the backyard to fix me a burger.

---

**I WAS TIRED AS HELL when I got home** from work, parking my cable truck in front of the house. Then I noticed one of the garage doors was opened, where Gabby’s BMW X5 was parked. Of course, I thought it was strange that she left the garage door open like that. I always thought Fort Washington was a safe spot to live, but there is a crime there at times. Although most of the time it’s domestic.

I hit the button, closing the garage, and I walked in through the kitchen door. I looked around for Gabby and there was no sight of her. She had chicken wings frying, so I knew she was around somewhere.

I called out to her. “Gabby.”

No answer.

Heading for the bedroom, I tossed my backpack into the room we turned into an office. When I walked into our bedroom I looked around. All I saw was the new pair of Gucci sneakers she bought last week.

*She went somewhere today. And she didn’t tell me where she was going.* “Gabby.”

The older homes in Fort Washington - like a lot of the older homes built over twenty years ago - didn’t come with the big ass master bedrooms they build with houses these days. So she can’t be far.

Louder this time. “Gabby.”

I stepped over to the window and looked outside. There was Gabby. Walking around in the backyard, talking on the phone, smiling like she just got let into Heaven.

I went outside through the patio door in the family room. Gabby's back was turned to me and she was still talking on the phone. I'm pretty sure it was Eli. I crept up behind her intending on listening to her conversation.

Even though she was outside she still whispered as if she didn't want the birds and the bees to hear her conversation. "Okay, baby. Talk to you later."

When I heard her call her caller baby I thought I was going to boil to a crisp with rage.

When she ended the call and turned around to walk she found me standing right in front of her, waiting for the next excuse.

For a minute her eyes were big and watery. Then she got herself together. She looked like she wanted to spit on me. "You scared me. Why do you keep walking up behind me like that scaring me?"

I stood there hating her guts. "Don't tell me. Another fuckin' conversation with Eli, huh!"

Like she was pleading to a judge to keep her from the death penalty. "Cory . . . it was nothing -"

"What the fuck do you mean it was nothing?"

"He was just calling me to let me know he got the job -"

"I don't give-a-fuck, he could have texted you! He could have texted you, Gabby!"

"Stop yelling at me!"

"Why do you keep disrespecting me with him?"

Gabby stomped off away from me, her flip flops popping the back of her heels, and with every pop, I got more and more *pissed*.

"Where ya goin'? Don't walk away from me. C'mere!"

Gabby kept walking, ignoring me. I hated her guts more.

*You love Eli more than you love me!*



“Gabby.”

I ran and caught her and I grabbed her by the arm, damn near snatching it off her shoulder. She yanked away from me hard, trying to snatch her arm back. But I wouldn't let go, digging my nails into her arm.

“Answer my question. Why do you keep disrespecting me with Eli?”

“I said let me the *fuck* go!”

“No, you answer my question first.”

She yanked her arm away and shoved me so hard I tripped over my feet, falling backward. She dropped her phone in the process. Gabby took off running into the house. I picked up her phone and threw it at her. I missed, hitting the wooden deck and shattering it to pieces. The hell with the phone, I chased after her ass.

“Stop walking away from me when I'm talking to you.”

Gabby tried to lock me out of our bedroom and I busted the damn door open just as she locked it, breaking the doorknob, knocking her down to the floor. Within seconds, Gabby tumbled to her feet. And she charged after me as if I had a blood-red Brega cape dangling in front of me, swinging wild and hard like she was trying to knock out a bull. I leaned back, trying to push her off me. And I was tall enough where she couldn't reach my face to scratch it to shreds.

I yelled, “Gabby, chill the hell out.”

But Gabby kept fighting and swinging . . . until I had enough. I placed my large hand over her face and shoved her as hard as I could, knocking her off her feet and out of her flip flops.

When Gabby's head hit the sharp corner of the dresser . . . it didn't sound good. I could tell by the way she was lying beside the dresser it wasn't good. She didn't even *twitch*.

My heart started racing. “Gabby!”

I rushed over to her, kneeling down to her. When I turned her over on her back and saw her eyes wide open and staring up into mine . . . I knew then this was not going to end well.

**I SAT THERE ON THE floor, crying,** watching Gabby's lifeless body, with nothing I could do for her. The house was a little smokey because of the chicken overcooking. Of course, eating was the last thing on my mind.

I was sad and hurting because I didn't mean to kill Gabrielle. At the same time, she pissed me off, talking to Eli when I told her to *stop* talking to Eli. And I decided that I wasn't going to prison for the rest of my life over something that could have been avoided. All she had to do was listen, instead of being hard-headed and doing what she wanted to do. Instead of respecting me and my wishes.

It was going on ten o'clock, and after sitting there for hours thinking about it, I came up with a plan. A plan to get away with murder.

I ran outside in the backyard to look for and find as much as I could of what was left of Gabby's phone. And I was going to get rid of it along with Gabby's body. I had to play the concerned boyfriend, so every ten minutes I called Gabby's phone as if I was looking for her.

I wrapped Gabby up in a blanket and put her in the trunk of her car, which no one could see since I was in the garage. There was no blood to clean up, just a few things knocked over.

I could have just pretended I found her that way. But I didn't want to take any chances with a police investigation. And those forensic people figuring it out that I shoved her into the dresser. So I thought it was best she decomposed to hide what *really* happened to her.

So I drove her car to Accokeek, Maryland, five minutes from the house. I installed cable at a house off Farmington Road in Accokeek. I could believe how thick those woods were at Piscataway Creek Stream Park. The perfect place to hide a body. And that's what I did. I hid Gabby's body in the woods of the park, near the area they called Auburn, not far from Piscataway Creek. I told Gabby I was sorry, jumped in her car, and headed for D.C.

I drove straight down Indian Head Highway into D.C., where it turned into Martin Luther King Avenue. And I drove to Barry Farm,

a neighborhood in Southeast Washington, D.C., located east of the Anacostia River. At one time - in the eighties and nineties - you couldn't walk through the Farms without getting your head blown off. They demolished all four-hundred and thirty-two units of the old Barry Farm dwellings. Turned them into expensive townhouses and condos.

So I parked Gabby's car on the corner of Barry Road and Martin Luther King Avenue and tossed her broken phone on the sidewalk across the street. A stone's throw away from the halfway house Eli was staying at. I got out and started walking down King Avenue toward Saint Elizabeth's Hospital for the insane. I called myself an Uber to get me back to Fort Washington.

After that, I called my boy Nathan. It sounded like he was in his car because I could hear rap music in the background.

"Yo, look. If anybody asks you, I left your house at about ten tonight. All right?

I wanted to start crying. But I had to stay cool. "Something like that. But, um . . . things didn't turn out the way I thought they would though."

Nathan paused for a moment. "Whatcha mean?"

My voice was quivering. "I'll tell you later when you get back to town."

He paused again. "You sound a little shook up, man. You sure you're alright?"

"Not really. But I'll let you know what's up when you get back in town."

"Where're now?"

"I'm near Saint Elizabeth Hospital, not far from the halfway house Eli is staying at."

Nathan thought I killed Eli. "Mmhm. I think I know what's up. I'll just get up with you when I get back in town. You did what you had to do?"

---

**WHEN THE UBER DRIVER** dropped me off, I ran into the house and took a shower. I got dressed and jumped in my ride and headed to Miss Mallory's house. Part of my murderous plan was that I hadn't seen Gabby since I got home from work.

When Miss Mallory opened the door I rushed in. This was my first acting job. "Hey, Ma."

She knew something wasn't right. "Cory, what's wrong?"

"Ma, you heard from Gabby?"

"No, I haven't talked to Gabby today."

I started pacing back and forth in the foyer. "I've been calling and calling her and I'm not getting an answer."

"Have you talked to her at all today?"

"Not since this morning before I left for work. I called her while I was on my lunch break and didn't get an answer then either."

Miss Mallory looked at me. It all started to sink in. "Yeah, that is strange."

I acted like I was about to have an all-out meltdown. "Ma, this is not like her."

"Where do you think she could be?"

"I don't know. When I got home the house was all smokey."

Miss Mallory looked at me, with her hand over her heart. "What do you mean the house was all smokey?"

"She was frying chicken and it overcooked. She was nowhere in the house."

I followed Miss Mallory into the family room where her phone was sitting on the coffee table. "Just try to calm down, you're scaring me."

"I'm just wondering why she won't call me back."

Miss Mallory picked up her phone and started dialing. "She might be hanging out with some of her friends."

I started pacing back and forth again. "I hope so. You think she's with her sisters?"

"I'm going to call around and see."

Miss Mallory must have called Gabby what seemed like a hundred times. Between the two of us, I was the only one who knew she wasn't going to answer. Now it was time to call the police.

---

**AFTER A WHILE OF PACING back and forth**, I sat down on the floor against the wall of my family room, near the fireplace. Miss Mallory had been pacing since she got to my house, worried sick of course. Brianna and Alexis sat close together on the couch, both staring off into a daze with tears in their eyes.

Miss Mallory crossed her arms and shook her head. "Why isn't my daughter calling me back?"

"Ma," Alexis said, "why don't you try to sit down. Let's just try to stay calm. Until we can go out and search for her."

Miss Mallory stopped and faced her daughters, close to tears. "I can't stay calm. It's been a *day* now, it's Sunday night. She would have called us by now if nothing was wrong."

I stood up. "How long has Eli been home?"

Brianna and Alexis looked at each other.

Brianna said, "Gabby told us he came home last week, I think it was Wednesday or Thursday."

The doorbell rang and I went to get the door. Detectives Baltimore and Torres walked in. I led them into the family room. Baltimore was a cute, tiny black woman with eyes like a lie detector. Torres was a short, slightly chubby Latino guy with thick curly hair and a thick mustache.

"We've knocked on all the doors of the houses on this street," Detective Baltimore said. "Everyone we talked to said they didn't see anything suspicious going on in the neighborhood yesterday."

Miss Mallory approached Baltimore, with hope dripping away from her eyes. "So there were no witnesses to anything suspicious, nobody saw anything?"

"No ma'am," Detective Torres said. "No one saw anything suspicious. Most of the people we talked to said that this is usually a quiet neighborhood."

"And it is," I said, "it's a peaceful neighborhood."

Detective Baltimore took out her pen and pad. "Can you tell us again what happened when you got home from work yesterday?"

"I got off around five yesterday. I work for Verizon, I install cable."

"Right, I saw the cable truck in front of the house," Detective Baltimore said, jotting down my lies.

"After work, I went over a friend of mine's house, Nathan. And I stayed over at his house until about nine-forty-five. So I got home around ten and that's when I discovered the food burning in the skillet. I thought she might have fallen asleep. When I didn't see her in bed I searched all over the house. And when I couldn't find her that's when I knew something was wrong. Because she would have never left food cooking like that. I kept calling her phone and . . . didn't get an answer. That's when I went over to Miss Mallory's house looking for Gabby."

"No signs of Foul Play?"

"None at all. Like I said, the only thing that was suspicious and out of place was the food burning on the stove. Other than that . . . there was nothing out of place."

Detective Torres said, "You two get along pretty well?"

All eyes were dead on me with that question, so I wasn't going to miss a beat, turning my lies into gold, keep Gabby in the present tense. "We *get* along very well, we're a close-knit family here. Gabby and I just moved into this house and we love it here."

Still jotting, Detective Baltimore turned to Miss Mallory. "Mom. Sisters. Has Gabby ever expressed to you all about her having any problems with anyone? Disagreements with any friends?"

Miss Mallory shook her head without a doubt. "Gabby gets along with everybody."

"She's never given anybody any problems, no reason to hurt her," Alexis said.

Detective Baltimore closed her pad and looked into my eyes. "Ok, if we have any more questions we will contact you all."

"I want to add something," I said.

"Yes, sure," Baltimore said.

"A close friend of hers was just released from prison last week," I said. "And she's been helping him out with finding a job or whatever."

Detective Baltimore said, "What was he released from prison for, anybody knows?"

"Selling drugs," I said.

Torres said, "Does anybody have his number?"

"No," Brianna said. "We don't have Eli's number."

"The reason I brought him up," I said, "is because Gabby had a problem with him stalking her at one time."

The detectives stopped and looked at me. Then at Gabby's mom and sisters.

"Was that ever reported to the police?" Detective Baltimore asked.

"Yes, we did report it," Miss Mallory said. "We were told if Eli kept stalking her to get a restraining order. But eventually, he stopped. Just before he went to jail. He never hurt her or put his hands on her or anything like that. He cheated on her and she broke up with him and he didn't take it well."

After giving it a good thought, Detective Baltimore nodded. "Ok, if we have any more questions we will let you know. In the meantime, we're going to try to track Gabby's phone and start there. And we will definitely keep this guy Eli in mind for some questioning."

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**I HAD JUST GOTTEN HOME** from handing out flyers. Me, Miss Mallory, Brianna and Alexis and about fifteen other members of their family were all over the place handing out flyers. Mostly at shopping cen-

ters in the Accokeek, Fort Washington, and Oxon Hill areas. The photo of Gabby that we chose was of her smiling at the last cookout her mother gave.

When I pulled into the driveway and got out, I noticed my neighbor Jeff Quirimit from across the street walking over to me. Jeff was a skinny guy in his late thirties, with gentle warm eyes, greasy black hair and some stubble.

“Hey, Jeff.”

“I heard your wife was missing.”

“Actually she’s my fiancé and ... yes ... she’s missing.”

“What do you think happened with’er?”

It was time for me to start pointing the finger at Eli. At least put the thought in people’s heads. “I think her ex-boyfriend had something to do with it.”

Jeff looked at me a moment. I could tell that he really felt bad for me. And that is what I needed. “You think her ex-boyfriend had something to do with this?”

I nodded, putting a worried look on my face. “He just got out of prison.”

“Oh my God!”

“He was stalking her. And she called the police on’im. That’s why he went to jail.”

“Now he’s out stalking her again, huh?”

“Yep. He started stalking her again.”

“How did the stalking start?”

“When she caught him cheating she broke up with ‘im. And . . . and he didn’t take it well.”

“Oh, I see.”

“He was never happy that she broke up with him, always stalking her.”

Jeff looked around at my house and my yard as if he’d never seen it before and then he looked at me as if he was holding some secret. “My



wife and I weren't home when the police detectives came by last week. They left a card for us to call 'em."

"Thanks, Jeff, thanks for your support, I really mean that."

Jeff stared at me for a minute and then nodded his head, ready to tell the secret. "But I did see something that day."

I tightened up, lost for words. Did he see me leaving in Gabby's car with her body in the trunk? "You say you saw something?"

Jeff shoved his hands into his pockets, giving me this look, about to hit me with some big surprise. I started sweating, which is not good when you're trying to hide a crime.

He said, "I was in my study getting some work done and . . . I heard some laughing and talking. When I looked out the window I saw your fiance talking to three men in the driveway."

My eyes followed his eyes when he looked over at my driveway. Goosebumps attacked me. I couldn't believe what I was hearing, I became super pissed. *You mean to tell me while I was at work she invited Eli to my house.*

I bit my bottom lip, trying not to show anger, which would have shown motive. "You say they were laughing and talking?"

Now Jeff was wondering if he should continue with this information. So I really had to be careful with my facial expressions from there on out. "She definitely knew them," he said.

I frowned, suspicious. "She definitely *knew* them?"

The smile on his face was one of those *I feel sorry for you* smiles. He shook his head. "Hate to tell you this."

*Hate to tell you this* is not good words to tell someone. And I thought I was about to get sick. The anger inside me was growing into a time bomb and I needed to be careful. "What happened Jeff?"

Jeff sighed hard. That's never a good sign either. "Well . . . it didn't seem like she was trying to hide anything. Not to get in your business. But she kissed one of them."

*Fuck! She kissed Eli in my driveway. Bitch!* “What do you mean she kissed one of them?”

Jeff just stared at me and I could tell he was sparing my feelings. There was a part of me that didn't want to go any further. But I needed to. And it started feeling like I was looking for an excuse for my crime. Now *my* hands were in *my* pockets. “What . . . she kissed him on the *lips*?”

Still staring into my face, Jeff slowly nodded his head. I thought he was going to pat me on the back like a baby. “So those three guys were probably the last people to see your fiance before she disappeared.”

I bit my bottom lip again, accepting it. “Okay.”

“I called the detective and left a message.”

“Detective Baltimore.”

“Yeah, that's the name.”

“Appreciate that, Jeff.”

“No problem. I hope she's okay.”

“Yeah . . . me too.”

---

**DETECTIVE BALTIMORE** said, “So you think your girlfriend's ex has something to do with this.”

“I *know* he had something to do with it. And the reason I think this is because of their history. When he took their break up hard he started stalking her.”

Detectives Baltimore and Torres had stopped by the house that evening after I got off work. They stood as I sat on the couch, at times with my head buried into my hands. They did another quick search of the house with their gloves on. I followed them, trying my *best* to stay cool, dying inside that they would find *something*. Again, they couldn't find anything or any evidence Gabrielle was murdered there.

“Your neighbor Jeff called us,” Detective Baltimore said. “He told us what he saw.”

“Yeah,” I said. “She was talking to three guys in the driveway.”

Detective Torres said, "Is this what Jeff told you?"

I nodded.

Detective Baltimore said, "What else did he tell you?"

"He was telling me Gabby was having . . . I guess a friendly conversation with three guys that she seemed to know."

Detective Torres said, "Did he tell you that Gabrielle kissed one of those guys?"

"Yeah, he did mention something like that, that she kissed one of the guys she was talking to."

The detectives *observed* me for a moment and I knew why. *Is that why you murdered Gabrielle?* I'm sure that was what they were thinking.

Detective Torres said, "How did you feel when he told you that?" Then he smiled. "I know I would have been *pissed* if *my* girl was seen kissing some guy in my driveway while I was at work."

*Nice try Detective Torres.* "Yeah, I was pissed when he told me that. It hurt me. But I was too upset about her disappearance to let that bother me right now. I just want her home. I just want her to come back home safely."

Detective Baltimore said, "Did you and Gabrielle talk about Eli coming home?"

"Yeah, we talked about it."

She said, "Were there any arguments about Eli coming home? Like them rekindling their relationship?"

"No, we didn't argue about it or anything like that. I just told her she needs to be careful. Because he might start stalking her again. No, I knew she wasn't trying to get back with them or anything like that. Especially after what he put her through, cheating on her and then stalking'er."

Detective Torres said, "If Eli is the guy she was seen kissing I'm . . . wondering why she would lead you to believe that she had no plans to get back with him."

I thought long and hard about it. I shook my head at them. "I don't know. Jeff said she kissed this guy on the lips. That's not like her. She bare-

ly kisses *me* on the lips in public.” Both detectives got a chuckle out of that one. “Usually she would have called me at work and told me if she was having company over. but she didn’t. This is all strange behavior. This is not like her.”

Detective Baltimore said, “Did Gabrielle mention to you where this guy was going to be staying when he got out of prison?”

“From what Gabby was telling me he’s at the halfway house across the street from Berry Farms. I hope y’all lock his ass up tonight.”

“We will talk to him, but we can’t arrest him,” Detective Baltimore said. “You know, we have to have proof first that he had something to do with Gabrielle’s disappearance.”

For a more dramatic effect, I got up and started pacing back and forth like I was about to lose my mind. “I understand, I just want my girl back home. He scared us the last time he was stalking her, that’s the only reason why I think he had something to do with this. If Eli didn’t do anything to my girl . . . I will apologize, but I just want Gabrielle *home*. Jesus!”

Detective Baltimore faced me. And I could see it in her eyes that she meant well. “As I have said. We will go by the halfway house.” I started walking them to the door. “And we will talk to this Eli guy. If we have to bring him in for a lineup we will. Your neighbor said he will come in to identify him or either one of the three guys he saw talking to Gabrielle if he has to.” I walked them outside. “In the meantime, if you can think of anything that will help us out give me a call. I know you think this guy has something to do with this.” Detective Baltimore faced me again and this time she was dead serious. “But do *not* . . . take this matter into your own hands.

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**WHEN I HEARD CAR DOORS closing**, I got up from the couch in the family room and went outside. It was Miss Mallory, Brianna, and Alexis getting out of Brianna’s Volvo SUV. I got so nervous I almost

tripped down the front steps. *What kind of news are they showing up with?*

I said, "Hey family. Any good news?"

I met the ladies in the middle of the yard. I could tell by the looks on their faces that there was no good news. Pretty much the same. She's still missing. And definitely still *dead*.

Miss Mallory sighed hard before she spoke. "The detectives handling the case told us they took Eli in for questioning."

"Good! Good! I hope they locked his ass up!"

Miss Mallory didn't blink, looking into my face. "I don't think he had anything to do with it." The excitement of Eli being jailed for Gabby's murder slid off of me like baby oil. "That's just *my* personal feelings."

I said, "Whoever took Gabby away from our house, she had to know that person. She had to know them, whoever this person is. I think the three guys she was talking to had something to do with this. And I think Eli was one of those three guys."

"I know he was stalking her at one time but I just don't think he would harm her" Miss Mallory said. "It wasn't physical for him it was just mental. He cheated on her, yes. He stalked her when she broke up with him, yes. And we eventually forgave him for all of that. But I don't think he would harm Gabrielle at all. He never put his hands on Gabby the whole time they were together."

I crossed my arms and I shook my head. "I'm sorry, I just have the feeling he had something to do with this."

And to our surprise, Eli drove up in a red 2012 Toyota Camry and parked behind my cable truck. I became heated, ready to fight him. Ready to show my *ass* that I was both Gabby's man *and* her hero.

As Eli walked into my yard I rolled up the sleeves of my work shirt. Miss Mallory, Brianna, and Alexis moved in close, they could smell a fight coming. "Why the hell're you showing up at my house like this?"

Eli put his hands out as he was asking God for forgiveness. His eyes were big and his mouth was open as if he was watching a bullet coming

at his face. "I mean no respect Cory, man. I've been trying to call Gabby all week and didn't get an answer. Then I saw it on the news that she was missing. I just came by to see what happen."

I bawled my fists and bit my bottom lip. "You already know what happened because you're the one who kidnapped'er."

He frowned. One of those frowns you make when you're caught in a lie. "What!"

I charged after Eli, swinging at him as if I was trying to knock down a 100-year-old tree. His eyes got bigger, backing up so fast like he had wheels on the heels of his shoes, he didn't want to fight. Miss Mallory and Gabby's sisters moved in fast between us, breaking it up. but I was still able to grab him by his collar and pin him against his car. Or his *girl's* car.

Eli put his hands out he still didn't want to fight. I said, "Where is she? I know you know. Tell us where she is right now. Or I' ma beat the shit outta you out here!"

I noticed Jeff rushing out of his house to see what was going on. From the look on his face, he knew I was about to kill Eli.

"I have not seen Gabby since I've been home from jail. I've talked to her on the phone! But I have *not* seen her!"

I said, "More bullshit!"

"I've been calling her to let her know that I got the job she set me up with. That's *it*."

I said, "You're a lying piece of shit! Your main purpose when you got out of jail was to get back with Gabby."

Eli frowned again. He thought I was crazy. Good. "Dude, I am *not* trying to get back with Gabby, I have a girlfriend, we're about to get married. What are you talkin about?"

"More lies, you know you want'er back."

"Gabby and I are just friends. I *have* someone special in my life."

"Yeah, and that special someone is Gabby," I said. "Who helped your sorry ass find a job, and this is how you show your appreciation."

“Dude, I’m gonna be honest with you. Things are good with me right now, I’m happy. I am not going back to jail for fighting you out here. I have nothing to do with Gabby’s disappearance. Matter of fact, I’m here to help you.”

Miss Mallory tugged at my work shirt. “Cory let him go. I want to talk to him.”

So I let the bastard go. But the collar of his shirt still looked like a curling iron roughed him up.

Miss Mallory looked dead into Eli’s eyes. “Did you talk to the detectives yet?”

“Yes, the detectives took me in for questioning. I cooperated as best as I could. I had proof that I was in the halfway house most of the day studying, I’m in school now.”

“Miss Mallory said, ‘And what happened?’”

Eli shrugged at us like we were stupid. “They let me *go*, they don’t think I had anything to do with Gabby’s disappearance.”

I said, “The Saturday that she went missing. Did you talk on the phone with her that day?”

“No, I did not talk to her at *all* that Saturday,” Eli said. Then he looked at me as if a room full of people had just pointed me out for a crime I committed. He said, “If you ask me - and I hate to say this in front of everybody. I wouldn’t be surprised if *you* had something to do with this Cory.”

All eyes slammed in my direction.

Now it was *me* frowning, about to be caught in a lie. “The hell’re you talking about?”

Eli had a nasty smirk on his face, shaking his head. “Gabby told me that y’all had been getting into it about her talking to me on the phone.”

Gabby’s mother and sisters looked at me, and I could tell they weren’t at all surprised.

Eli nodded his head, grinning. “She said you got mad at her every time she talked on the phone with me. That you gave her a lot of shit about it.”

Guilty or not I stood my ground, walking away and throwing my hands in the air. “I have every *right* to get upset when she talks to you because I don't *trust* you. Especially the way you used to stalk her.”

“I stalked her because at that time I was in *love* with her, we just broke up. I was *wrong* for that. And I apologized to her for that. I apologized to her for loving her just that much. But I'm with someone else now, Gabby is just a friend.”

“More bullshit,” I said. And I screamed at the top of my lungs. Jeff wouldn't take his eyes off me. “Gabby is my *life*, she is my *heart*, I would *never* hurt her. Mentally *or* physically.”

Eli started moving toward me, getting in my face. He could see he had me in a corner, and he did. But I had something for him. He said, “So where were you that Saturday when she went missing?”

I stepped up like I had nothing to hide. “I went to work that day, asshole, and I went over my boy Nate's house after work. When I got home from Nate's house around ten that night is when I noticed Gabrielle was missing.”

Eli raised his eyebrows. “Yeah, well, will your boy Nathan confirm that?”

“Yeah, he will.”

“Yeah, I bet.”

“Yeah, he and his girl Denise went out of town but when they get back he will confirm that I was over his house most of that evening.”

Then we noticed the detectives driving up and parking. Both detectives Baltimore and Torres got out of the unmarked cruiser with their eyes to the ground. We could tell by the looks on their faces that it was bad news. Everybody else braced themselves. I pretended to brace myself.

It was like Miss Mallory was *Punch-Drunk*, her knees were wobbly. “Oh my God. Where is my baby?”



We all stood before Detective Baltimore as if she was the judge. Her eyes darted around with no eye contact. Finally, she sighed and looked into Miss Mallory's eyes. "Family. I'm sorry."

When Miss Mallory, Brianna, and Alexis started wailing, holding onto each other I closed my eyes and turned away. I couldn't help it. It wasn't hard for me to come up with the crocodile tears. When I peeped over at Eli, he dropped to his knees with his head buried into the palms of his hands.

Detective Baltimore swallowed the lump in her Throat. "We found her body off Indian Head Highway, off Farmington Road, in the woods of Piscataway Park. She's on her way to Baltimore right now for an autopsy. Again I'm sorry." While the tears flowed down the streets, Detective Baltimore stepped up to Eli. "At some point, you're going to need to come in for more questioning."

Eli stood to his feet, pleading with his eyes. "Why?"

Detective Baltimore said, "Gabrielle's car *and* phone were found near the halfway house you're staying at in DC, right around the corner as a matter of fact."

We all turned to Eli, convicting him of murder.

Crying, Eli nodded as if he was accepting punishment. "Of course, I will be glad to cooperate. Like the first time when you took me in for questioning I told you I had proof that I was there at the halfway house most of the day studying."

Taking my time I started moving toward Eli. "No, what it proves is that you had something to do with Gabrielle's disappearance and probably her death."

As if he was facing the death penalty, Eli said, "No, I did not, I swear to God I didn't."

With more crocodile tears I said, "You' a liar."

I rushed Eli, attacking him again. Baltimore and Torres grabbed me by my work shirt and clipped me to my knees.

Detective Baltimore stuck her pretty face into mine. “Put your hands on him and you’re going to jail. I told you to let *us* handle this.”

And for my Oscar performance, I buried my face into the grass of my yard and screamed, “He murdered my girl.”

Then Jeff stepped up. He looked at me for a minute . . . then he turned his eyes to Eli. He said, “Detectives. This young man right here . . . he was not one of the three men Gabrielle was talking to before she disappeared.”

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**I WAS SITTING ON THE couch** in the family room, pouring glass after glass of vodka, praying that they would charge Eli with Gabby’s murder. I planned to get so drunk until I passed out on the floor. And I wasn’t far, sipping on my fourth glass, rocking back and forth, feeling good and woozy.

After we got the news of them finding Gabby’s body we all went over to Miss Mallory’s house. It was almost impossible sitting with them as they cried so much, finally crying themselves to sleep. Them not knowing that the person who took their loved one’s life was sitting right before them. Miss Mallory told me that she, Brianna and Alexis would probably be waking up off and on through the night, and told me to go on ahead home. I hug and kissed her and told her that I would be back later on.

I had the TV down low while I watched a repeat of the NBA playoff game that played earlier, the Lakers against the Blazers. I looked down and grabbed my drink from the coffee table to take a sip. And when I glanced up, a photo of Gabby flashed across the screen on a news break that her body was found. The same photo from the flyer. It was like she was standing there right in front of me, staring at me. An eerie feeling came over me and I had to stand up.

When the doorbell rang I grabbed the pistol and almost snapped my neck turning to the door, wondering who it was. I wasn’t expecting any company. So who could it be?

I thought maybe it was Jeff coming over to get an update on everything. Or was it Detective Baltimore coming to tell me at three in the morning that they had enough evidence to charge Eli for Gabby's murder.

With the body-count gun in my hand, I crept up to the door. This person kept ringing the doorbell as I stood there at the door, wondering if I should open it. I took a deep breath and sighed. With my finger on the trigger, I said, "Who is it?"

His voice was low and quiet but clear. "Nate."

*My boy Nate. Just the man I needed to see.*

The first thing Nathan did when he walked in was he gave me a big tight hug. A hug I needed. And he had tears in his eyes, he had been crying. "Man, I'm so sorry to hear about Gabby."

"I don't know what I'm going to do without her, man. This shit is killing me, I want my Gabby back."

He wiped tears from his eyes and placed his hands on my shoulders, making sure I was alright. "Yeah, I got your message. I just got back in town. I figured you'd still be up."

I sat the gun down on the kitchen counter and grabbed a glass for Nathan from the cabinet. "Let us fix us a drink."

Nathan picked up the pistol and looked it over. He sucked in his bottom lip and nodded. "So I guess you didn't even get to use this huh?"

I handed Nate his glass and we headed into the family room. "Imma kill 'im. I'm gonna kill 'im the first chance I get."

Nate looked at me, wondering who I was talking about. "You talkin about the guy at the halfway house?"

"Yeah, the dude that was stalking Gabby before he went to jail."

We sat down on the couch. Nathan sat the gun down on the coffee table and fixed himself a drink.

Nate sighed, shaking his head, staring down at the floor. "When you called me and told me that you were in Berry Farms and you couldn't tell

me over the phone what was going on . . . I thought that was what you were doing. Finding this guy and killin' im.

I nodded, frustrated and thinking about Gabby. "I wish I did when I had the chance. Gabby would probably still be here."

Nathan downed his drink within seconds and poured another one. He dropped his head and shook it, getting himself together. "I know, man. It hit me hard too when you called me and told me Gabby was found murdered. I didn't even know she was missing. I'm just sitting here trying to deal with everything."

"Yeah, and I was going to call you to let you know she went missing for a while. I thought she might've run off with Eli, to tell you the truth. But then I thought maybe he kidnapped her and was holding her hostage somewhere."

Nate nodded, staring down at his drink. "So you think this Eli cat murdered Gabby."

"I know he did, Nate. Had to be him. He was stalking her before he went to jail and he was stalking her when he got out of jail. I *know* it was him."

Nathan hung his head in shame, squeezing his glass. I studied him, wondering why. He said, "The dude couldn't have murdered Gabby." He turned and made eye contact. "He didn't murder Gabrielle."

I didn't know if it was the alcohol or not, but it felt like I was having a dream that felt too real. I said, "Nate, what're you talking about? What do you mean he didn't murder Gabrielle?"

Nathan killed his drink and turned his body to face me. "This dude Eli was in the halfway house pretty much the whole day, studying."

I looked at Nathan, baffled. "How . . . how would you know that?"

Nate snatched the gun from the coffee table, got up and walked to the middle of the family room. "Why would this guy Eli want to murder Gabrielle when she helped him out . . . number one. Number two. Eli's trying to get himself together, he's not trying to go back to jail.

"Wait a minute . . . Nate."

And number three? He's got a beautiful girlfriend that he is about to marry, Tamika is *like* that."

I wondered why Nathan had that gun in his hand. "Wait a minute, dawg. Nate, how do you know Eli? Besides what I told you about him. How do you know his *girlfriend*?"

Nathan was so excited to get to the point he was trying to make, his mouth became watery. "How do I know Eli?" Then he smiled. "Because I interviewed him for a driving job with my company. The job Gabrielle set him up with." It felt like Somebody dropped a ton of bricks down to the bottom of my stomach. "Matter of fact . . . I met him at the halfway house that day and hung out with 'im most of the day after I interviewed him." His smile became a chuckle. "So I'm his alibi, I was with him that day, he couldn't have murdered Gabby."

I stared at Nathan, lost for words. My heart started fluttering, and I started to sweat. *Where the hell is he going with this?*

Then Nathan - my best friend since pre-teen years - looked at me as if I *wronged* him in some way. "Cory, what happened? If Eli didn't murder Gabby . . . then who did?"

So I figured since Nathan *was* my best friend, I could come clean with him. I didn't go into full-blown crocodile tears mode, but I forced some tears into my eyes. "I didn't mean to kill'er Nate."

But Nathan didn't seem all that surprised. "So *you* murdered Gabby."

I shrugged, begging Nathan to stay my best friend. "It was an accident."

Nathan moved closer. "How so is that?"

I came close to tears. "I caught her on the phone talking to Eli and I got mad. We started arguing. One thing led to another and we ended up in our bedroom. She started fighting me. *Hitting* me . . . and I lost it. I didn't mean to shove her that hard. Her head hit the dresser. And that was it."

"Oh, that was it. Just like that. That was it."

"Yeah. That was it. And right now I'm scared I'm gonna get caught. Especially when they look at my phone records and see that I was in this area or *here* the time she died. That's why I was hoping that they charged Eli with the murder so they wouldn't have to look any further."

"Okay, but what about Gabby's phone records?"

"If and when they check her phone records they will see that she was talking to Eli."

Nathan shook his head like he was trying to make fun of me or something. "Cory, Gabby wasn't talkin to Eli when you caught her on the phone."

I stood up from the couch, staggering a little bit from the alcohol, wondering where my best friend was *really* going with this.

His tears came back. "She was talking to *me* on the phone Cory. *Not* Eli."

I frowned, my brain was all muddled. "Talking to you for what?"

"A lot of the times when she was on the phone you thought she was talking to Eli." He gritted his teeth, my boy was *livid*. "When she was really talking to *me*."

I stepped around the coffee table to face Nathan, but he backed up, giving us space. But I needed some face-to-face time. I didn't remember him ever sticking a knife into my back. "Why would my girl be talking to *you* on the phone?"

Nathan looked at the gun in his hand. "Because I planned on marrying Gabrielle once you were out of the way."

Now Nate had the eyes of a murderer, they probably matched mine.

"Once *I* was out of the way? Nate, what the fuck are you talkin about, man?"

Nathan raised his voice. "It was *me* all the time, Cory. *I* was the side lover, not Eli."

I felt like I had just been struck by lightning. "Side *lover*? As a matter of fact, me and two of my friends came over here that Saturday morning

why you were at work.” Nate had a winner’s smile on his face. “She kissed me and everything.”

“That’s why I was hoping that you *did* murder Eli. Don’t get me wrong. He’s a good guy, nice guy and all. But we needed Eli to get you out of the way. Hiring him for the job was part of me and Gabrielle’s scheme to get you out of the way. To make you jealous enough to murder him.”

“So how does *me* murdering Eli play along with your scheme?”

“So we could turn your dumbass over the police. You had the motive. It was perfect. Until you *fucked* it up. That first-degree murder would have put you away for a long time. Me and Gabby would have been married with kids by the time your sorry ass got out of jail.”

“Nate, what the hell’re you talking about? What about Denise?”

“I just moved her down to North Carolina. She got a job down there and a house. We broke up, *been* broke up. That’s why I was out of town. I just wanted to help her move and get down there. We’re still good friends.”

*This has to be some sick joke.* “Nate, stop playin, man!”

But it wasn’t some sick joke. Nathan pointed the gun at me. “Sorry I gotta do this to you, my friend. I loved Gabby very much. She was going to be my wife and the mother of my kids. And you just ruined all that for me.”

My voice quivered. “Nate, don’t point that gun at me, man!”

A tear dropped from Nate’s eye as he breathed heavy. “But it was one thing you were right about. The *past* . . . the past *don’t* die. Because I was in love with Gabby the first time I laid eyes on her, The first time you introduced her to me three years ago.”

Before I could say anything, Nathan - my *best* friend - shot me right in the heart, killing me instantly.

And all this time I thought it was Eli that Gabby was sneaking around with. And it was my *boy* all along. Dude I grew up with, like a brother to me, who I would have died for.

Damn.





## **Don't miss out!**

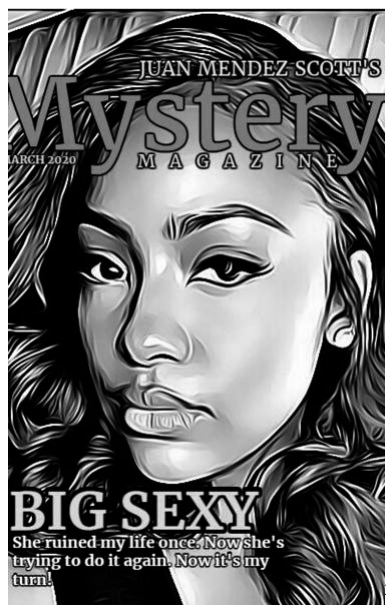
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*Big Sexy*, the suspense riddled story of Maggy and Netta, rivals in high school where it ended in tragedy when Netta stole Maggy's boyfriend away from her, the most popular boy at school, Craig Blackburn. When Netta broke poor Craig's heart he decided to get back together with Maggy, but to her shock, he committed suicide right in front of her on prom night, leaving a note behind that he blamed Netta. Ten years of mental problems and nervous breakdowns followed Maggy into her marriage with rich real estate mogul Duane Marretti. And finally when she thought she could move on, leaving her dark past behind, Maggy runs into Netta at the mall, and it all comes back to her, how Netta almost ruined her life. When Maggy catches Netta flirting with Duane she

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1. <https://books2read.com/u/bMpAo5>

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promises Netta that if she tries to steal Duane from her the way she did with Craig, she will kill her this time. Excepting the challenge, Netta goes after Duane, promising to do again to Maggy what she did to her back in high school. Ruin her *life*!

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