

INDECISION

Damn! What am I gonna do now? She won't stay in that bathroom forever, genius.

Joseph's heart thumped in his chest and he tapped his foot as he always did upon growing anxious. As far as beds went, though, it was much softer than he expected. Shades of brown and green splotched the bedspread reminding him of a time, not so long ago, when he volunteered to serve. A smile tugged at the corners of his eyes. Not once had he been to a jungle, let alone needed to blend in one, but for six whole years he dressed in camouflage. Tradition, or whatever. Fitting, since something wild and primal was about to go down. Joseph loosened his tie in the mirror above the bed.

Stupid tie. Hate these fucking things.

Joseph kicked off his alligator skin shoes and waited. He hardly recognized himself in the reflection. The guy looking back at him appeared so confident and sure.

Amazing what a fresh haircut and tailor made suit can do. I need my drink.

He reached for the half empty glass on the end table and put his nose over the rim.

Mine, or hers? Ugh, rum. Definitely not mine. Where the hell did I put that whiskey?

Joseph retraced his steps over toward the monitor resting on a beat up, chestnut dresser. Late night news flashed sharply against

INDECISION

darkness; the volume muted. He enjoyed watching headlines and the ticker scroll by, not listen to color commentary. Behind the base of the monitor sat another glass that undoubtedly contained what he was looking for.

Found you, you little bastard. Why can't I ever remember where I put my shit?

Joseph took a sip bracing for the familiar sting at the back of his throat.

Hold on. Fuck! Where's my wallet?

Joseph patted his pockets even though he knew his wallet was not there. The pulse in his temples throbbed as he tapped his foot on the floor. Taking another sip, Joseph glanced back at the bedside table finding only his phone, that insufferable rum, and a few condoms Katie brought with her.

Damn! Did I leave it at the bar? No... used my card to pay for this room. Lobby, maybe? Naw... needed the key card to get in the room. I do remember putting the card in my wallet. Almost left the damn thing with the desk clerk.

"'Scuse me, sir? Don't forget your room key. You'll be needing it."

"Oh, thanks, uh-," Joseph looked at her name tag, "Amalie?"

"Ah-mah-lee. Real close, though."

"Forgive me."

"Forgiven."

INDECISION

Amalie had this hungry look in her pretty, little green eyes, or so Joseph thought. Strawberry blonde hair kept falling over her face forcing her to constantly brush it back. Young, but not so young Joseph felt like a major pervert.

Amalie didn't want your ass, old man. Just being friendly. That's her job. Now hurry up and find your wallet! Gotta be around here somewhere.

"Did you want to leave your wallet in here?" A sweet voice forced past the bathroom door. Katie, of course, breaking the silence causing Joseph to fumble his thoughts.

"Yeah, I guess," he let himself relax a bit.

Fucking bathroom, again.

Joseph could hear Lauren's voice, harsh as winter's chill, knife through his mind, "Stop leaving your shit in the washroom unless you want me to flush it." No matter how many times Joseph left his wallet, keys, or whatever in the bathroom she never did flush anything. What she did do was move it to the coffee table, or kitchen counter, or dining room table, or wherever, but never the same spot. Never. Joseph was pretty sure she did that on purpose and it infuriated him. Especially when he was running late in the morning. At least she didn't flush it.

Lauren. My little boy. I love them. I truly do, but something about Katie. Feeling her embrace, again. Her gentle, familiar touch. I know I shouldn't feel this way, but I can't help it. It's wrong,

INDECISION

stupid even, but my feelings for Katie betrayed Lauren long before tonight.

The bathroom door swung open with awkward, loud clicks. So loud, Joseph wondered if neighboring rooms could hear it. If they could hear that, what else might they hear? He found himself short of breath and his heart pounded, again. Dingy yellow light streamed room from the bath and Katie's freckled face, dark brown hair, and a naked, brown shoulder appeared from around the corner.

"Be a doll and fetch me some ice, love? Pretty sure we passed a machine by the elevator."

He loved the way she bit her lower lip when waiting for replies, "Of course, Kay."

"Katie," she said in frustration before sticking out her tongue. Those annoying clicks proceeded the pop of the door slamming shut and Joseph chuckled.

Oh, Kay.

Katie hated nicknames, and Joseph knew it. Every time he called her Kay, she promptly corrected him no matter how tedious. People called Joseph all sorts of things and not all of them good. He found it silly how adamant she could be about something so frivolous.

"Guess that still bothers you, huh? What should I call you, then? Mrs. Caine? Would that be better, milady?"

"Ms. Caine, if you prefer, but you know my name. Use it properly before you lose the right to say it at all."

INDECISION

"That why Mr. Caine's no longer in the picture?"

"Joseph. Ice. Now, please?" Her tone a pleasant grey area between command and request.

"Ice. Got it. Anything else?"

"Let's see if you can complete that task first. Don't want to overload you too quickly, now, do we?"

"No. I suppose not."

A little over eight years ago since the last time Joseph was alone in a room with Katie. Life hit them hard after the Academy, as it does everyone. The two of them did keep in contact, as they promised each other, at first. As time passed, messaging back and forth important milestones in their lives was all they had time for. 'I'm engaged!' and 'Having a baby!' messages hit Joseph harder than he'd like to admit. He wondered how Katie felt when he told her of his marriage. Ultimately, phone calls stopped all together and messages dwindled making reaching out at all feel awkward. She was the first woman he had been intimate with and for a long time held the delusion that she would be the only one.

Reconnecting with Katie after all this time seemed like riding a bike. No, that's not accurate. Intricacies of their history might be better referenced as getting back on a bull after being thrown in the dirt. First time Katie cheated was with their professor, Dr. Bascol. A short fuck in his mid forties. Joseph understood Katie's infatuation with the man. Charismatic, assertive, and in a position

INDECISION

of power, but it hurt Joseph all the same. He figured her crush on Dr. Bascol was innocent, until, in the middle of an argument, Katie blurted out graphic details of her many counseling sessions with Dr. Fuck-face.

Joseph didn't understand the shame he was swimming in. After all, it was her who cheated on him. Since he couldn't reason his pain away, Joseph replied in kind and tried to seduce the good doctor's wife, Barbara. She, too, taught at the Academy. Not the most attractive lady, but what he desired was much more than skin deep beauty. To his chagrin, however, he soon discovered Mrs. Bascol didn't like men all that much, including Dr. Bascol.

Joseph would not be deterred. He sought revenge and would do anything to make the two of them hurt just as they had hurt him. That train of thought led him to Jhene Bascol, the doctor's little sister. She wasn't attractive by any of Joseph's standards. She shared many of Dr. Bascol's features. Mannish, in many ways and awkward and stiff. Joseph couldn't look her in the face because she reminded him so much of Dr. Bascol. Posting the video on the Sphere made Joseph feel like he had fucked Dr. Bascol twice.

Joseph dropped that course and avoided any future classes held by Dr. Bascol. Eventually, Joseph and Katie forgave each other as best they could and continued on with their romance.

Joseph wrestling with his shoes, grabbed the bucket near the mini fridge, and stepped outside. Blue and red of the hallway carpet

INDECISION

reminded him of his son's superhero costume he wore a couple months back. Memory of that night brought a smile to Joseph's face. Lauren and he had been on their best behavior. Going door-to-door didn't seem like the chore he figured it would be and actually enjoyed himself. That night seemed to breathe life back into their marriage, but that bliss was temporary and short lived. Ice tumbled from the machine rattling loudly in the tiny bucket.

"Joe? Joe Stanton?!" called a deep voice from behind Joseph, "Well, I'll be triple-dogged, damn! I thought that was you!"

A portly man carrying a couple soft drinks in one hand jogged familiarly toward Joseph.

Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck! Of all the motels in the goddamn city! What the hell is he doing here?

"Derrick? Wha- How you been, man?" Joseph scrambled. Derrick embraced Joseph firmly. He wasn't wearing much at all; an undershirt and small trousers and just shy of indecent. The hairy mongrel reeked of red meat and cheap cologne.

"Good, good. What you doin' in this dump?" Derrick asked. Joseph couldn't blame him for that slightly accusatory tone. He knew how it looked.

"Naw, nothing like that," Joseph lied, "Meeting downstairs in the lobby ran a little late. I had a few drinks at the bar and didn't feel like making the trip home. I'll be home by first light."

"Oh, here for work," Derrick responded.

INDECISION

Nosey Motherfucker. Does he believe me? Shit, I can't tell!

"What about you, bro?" Joseph hoped to catch his brother-in-law in an equally precarious situation.

"Lauren didn't tell you? Elena and I are celebrating ten years. Yep. Rugrats are staying with y'all so we can celebrate properly, ya know what I'm sayin'?" Derrick shifted the two soft drinks from his massive left hand to his right.

His hands are freaking huge. Don't think I can take one of his punches if he finds out I've cheated on his sister.

"Must've slipped my mind."

"You need to quit that bounty shit and come work with me on the force. You'd make a damn fine Guardian. Pays good and the perks! Let me get dressed, we go grab a drink--"

"No, no. I'm good. I'm actually kinda tired. Just gonna let the television watch me and catch some shuteye. Let me think on it and get back to you? You go tend to Elena."

"You sure? No problem, really."

"I'm sure. I'm sure. Give Elena my best."

"Yep. You bet I will, Joe-Joe," Derrick sighed giving Joseph a firm clap on the back with his cold free hand, "You take care of yourself. And thanks for letting the kids stay over while the wife and I get some alone time. Let us return the favor some time."

"I'll hold you to that. And congratulations."

INDECISION

A mound of hair and muscles waved as he made his way past the elevators toward a room further down the hallway.

Same fucking floor, too?! Unbelievable! I'm a fucking dead man.

With a heavy heart, Joseph meandered his way back to his room painfully aware of the eyes that might still be upon him. He approached the door. Dark numbers of '312' stood out against the offwhite door and Joseph reached for his wallet.

Bathroom. The fucking bathroom.

Joseph rapped lightly on the door so as not to draw any more unwanted attention. No response. He put an ear to the door only to be greeted with his own shallow breathing.

Probably still in the bathroom. No way she heard me knock.

So, he knocked with a bit more force, but the heavy door swung open mid knock. Joseph found Katie just as stunning as he always had. Her neck and shoulders bare as her gown draped loosely from the tops of her breasts. Satin shimmered off the soft glow of the monitor behind her and the lights in the hallway above. Joseph let his eyes take her in. Her slightly upraised nipples beneath the gown acted in concert with her exposed belly button creating a fertile triangle of sorts. Her small clothes were just that; small and tight. So tight, it left very little to Joseph's imagination contouring her femininity below in great detail. Above all, Joseph loved the vibrance of her bright, brown eyes. He swore she held the wonder of the universe in the depths of her irises. Her face was beautiful; a combination of

INDECISION

sharp angles with plump cheeks full of freckles. Joseph lost himself in her gaze.

"Forget something?" Katie asked posing on the door frame.

Yep. I'm a dead man. She's even more beautiful than I remember.

"Ice?" Joseph put a cube in his mouth and offered her the bucket. Wisps of smoke drifted from the ice. Katie ignored the bucket and wrapped her arms around his neck. Joseph received her placing his free hand firmly on her hips. He fingered her elastic waistband with his thumb and gripped as much of her as he could. Katie arched her neck and back and placed her lips on his. He let his worries go for a moment; his brother-in-law, job, family. All of it. He slipped to a simpler time when the only two people that mattered were him and Katie. A moment was all he could afford. Visions of Lauren's brothers holding him down while Derrick went to work on his ribs prevented any further delusional daydreams. Self preservation wins out more times than not. Joseph led Katie inside the room letting the door close behind him.

Is this what you really want? Is this familiarity worth losing Lauren? Your son? Is it worth not seeing little J.J. off to bed every night? Checking in on him before you head to work? Will I have to defend myself from Derrick and the others with a baseball bat? Oh, dear god. Fucking shit, I can't do this! What am I doing?!

"Kay, wait a sec," He pulled away despite his urges.

INDECISION

"Not my name, Joseph. You know that," She reached for him only to have him pull away again.

"I'm serious. Hear me out for a second." Oddly enough, silence followed. He half expected a rebuttal of some sort. Some gesture of defiance, but when he looked over his shoulder, he found her sitting on the edge of the bed.

Now that's different. When did she discover patience?

"Go on," she pressed. Her eyes unflinching.

Amazing how much composure she's acquired. No longer that brash, impulsive firecracker from years past.

"Look, you know I love you. I'll always care for you, but maybe we should slow down a bit."

"No, I get it. Worried about your wife, right? What's her name, again?"

"Lauren," he struggled with the word.

"Lauren," Katie left her name suspended in the air for a moment, "And your son?"

"J.J.," Katie's stare could wither stone, "Joseph. Junior. Don't look at me like that. J.J. just rolls off the tongue better."

"Another Joseph. I like it. Strong name."

"Thank you."

"I'm not trying to break up your home or nothing."

"Can't break what's already broken."

INDECISION

"That's not fair and you know it. There's a difference between cracked and destroyed. What about counseling?"

"Sick and tired of people telling me what to do. How to feel and how to think."

"It works, if you let it."

"Sure. For some," Joseph didn't know what else to say so he said nothing. Katie leaned back assuming a relaxed position using her arms for support. Dark as the room was, Joseph saw bruises running up and down her athletic frame, "What happened to your legs?"

"Kickboxing," Katie smiled.

"Yeah, right."

"What? You don't believe me?"

Joseph sat next to her on the bed examining her thighs, "Looks painful."

"Maybe I like the pain."

Joseph ran the flat of his hand along her inner thigh, "Who did this to you?"

Katie ignored the question and seized Joseph's wrist. She nestled his hand firmly between her thighs. Humid like the jungles Joseph had never been to, heat radiated from her. He rubbed her over her small clothes tracing her.

He placed his head between her thighs taking as much of her into his mouth.

This is it. No going back.

INDECISION

Joseph ran his hands all over Katie's body, ever mindful of the bruises about her thighs.

Don't worry, Kay. No one will ever hurt you again.

Her aggression took Joseph by surprise. He half expected her to stop him, but the strength of her thighs threatened to suffocate him with pressure less he wrench himself free. Joseph flipped her over. Her panties resisted, damp and clinging to her. Joseph felt her tremble as her undergarments traced the length of her legs. He let her small clothes linger about her ankles restricting the movement of her legs.

You will remember me. Remember you love me!

Joseph's belt buckle rattled and clanged before dropping his slacks to the floor. He didn't bother removing his own small clothes either pulling the fabric to the side. Nor did he bother with the condoms, either. They had never used condoms before and he never liked using them anyway.

Damn the consequences! I just want to feel her, again. All of her.

"Jos-," Katie tried to speak, maybe even protest, but the pressure she felt superseded her need to talk. Instead, she gasped and grabbed handfuls of camouflage.

"Joe?," Joseph asked, "That's not my name. What's my name, Katie?" Again, she tried to speak but all that came out were moans of

INDECISION

pleasure. Joseph threw all of himself deep inside Katie robbing her of her air, "What's my name?!"

"Joseph!"

Twenty minutes later, the two of them laid in a tangle of limbs. A thin layer of sweat covered their bodies and their breathing was deep and in sync.

Did I satisfied you? If not, let me try again. Let me be worthy.

"What is it?" Katie asked.

"Nothing. Just you."

"Stop be creepy," she gave him a playful shove before getting out of the bed. The monitor flashed spotlighting her silhouette as she blew him a kiss. Joseph cringed when he heard those awkward loud clicks of the bathroom door. He heard the shower and thought he might join Katie until he heard a knock at the door. He froze.

Derrick?

The knock came again, this time followed by a voice Joseph couldn't make out.

"Who is it?" Joseph asked but the locking mechanism sounded and the door swung open, "What the fuck, dude?!"

Joseph found himself in a 'good news, bad news' situation. Good news, Derrick was not in his room to paint the walls with his blood. The guy was tall, but didn't have Derrick's size. Very, very good news. Bad news, Joseph had an intruder barge into his room in the

INDECISION

middle of the night. The stranger flicked on the lights by the door causing Joseph to squint and shield his eyes.

"Please, Mr. Stanton, no need to get up. You look exhausted! Feel free to cover up, if you wish."

Muthafucker! Who tha hell...

"You some kind of comedian? You got the wrong room, buddy. Get the fuck out of here before we have a problem," Joseph looked around for his underwear.

"No, I'm right where I'm supposed to be. Are you?"

"What?" Joseph put his slacks.

"Are you where you're supposed to be, Mr. Stanton? Maybe Lauren would like to know where you are? Who you're with?"

How does he know my name?

"Who are you?"

"Nevermind who I am. Let's just focus on what you are going to do."

Am I being robbed? Blackmailed?! Fuck a bunch that!

"Look, man, If it's money you're after, I don't carry cash-," without hesitation, Joseph burst toward the intruder. *You picked the wrong guy to fuck with, buddy!*

Joseph saw the gun and didn't care. In truth, he didn't think the asshole would fire, but the shots filled his ears just as his body's deflected them. Deflecting a bullet was difficult in the best of circumstances. Joseph was practically naked and physically

INDECISION

drained. Still, he evaded three bullets in rapid succession. The room spun wildly, a common side effect of electromagnetic amplification, but Joseph bit the inside of his cheek allowing the pain to reorient himself.

Not today, bitch!

Joseph closed the distance between himself and his assailant with little effort.

Three shots. I'm alright. Caucasian. Average height. Average build. Disarm, disable, diffuse. Disarm, disable, diffuse.

Joseph side stepped out of the line of fire and jabbed at the wrist of the shooter. One of many techniques Joseph honed over the years. The gun popped free and landed across the room as Joseph expected. He did not account for the right cross planted on his jaw. Joseph stumbled and recovered spitting blood on the floor.

Fast! You got me. I'll give you that. Let's see how you fight, asshole.

Joseph delivered a few strikes of his own. Quick as Joseph was, the stranger proved graceful evading punches and kicks with relative ease. Joseph picked up his intensity, but the intruder matched each offensive flurry with well-timed parries and devastating counters.

He's trained. Trained good, too. But not better than me!

Joseph spun into a roundhouse, and the bastard ducked as Joseph anticipated. Using his momentum from the kick, Joseph reared back, coiled tight as snake, and extended both palms out toward his foe.

INDECISION

Let's see you dodge this, Muthafucker. Magnesium: repurpose, ignite!

There's a little bit of Magnesium in everybody, but some have more of it than others. For Joseph, this is especially true. His unit wasted no time teaching him how to re-appropriate excess elements within his body. An untapped set of resources that, with adequate training and the utmost care, could be utilized effectively with minimal cost to the user. Cost is relative, however. Even when Joseph closed his eyes, the flash he generated threatened to blind even him. There was no way for Joseph to brace himself against the reaction he created and the force of the blast flung him across the room and into the wall knocking down portraits. He tried to stand, but his knees buckled and he vomited what little remained in his stomach from lunch.

Guess I overdid it a bit. Hope I didn't kill'em. Serves the fucker right if he died, though.

"Aren't we just full of surprises, Mr. Stanton. I knew you were prior military, but from this little performance, I'd swear you were special forces!"

Joseph blinked the tears from his eyes. Everything was spinning and he figured he didn't have much longer before he passed out.

"Now that you've calmed down, let me introduce myself. My name is Eric Howard. The way I see it, you have a decision to make Mr. Stanton and I'll be honest with you, your not gonna like your

INDECISION

options. But I'm willing to bet you'd rather not die on this shitty motel floor."

"How did-, " Joseph had a million questions running through his mind, but words failed him, "Kay. Kay!"

"Never you mind her. She's a big girl and can take care of herself. Sleep. You've got a big day tomorrow."

Fury consumed Joseph and he tried to get back on his feet. His body reached its limit, he knew, but he had to protect Katy. Instead, his eyes rolled back and everything went dark.

"It's done. You can come out now."

Fucking, Eric. I bet he killed him. Gunshots? An explosion?! Was all that necessary? So much for being discreet.

"I said it's done, Katie. Get your ass out her! I don't like repeating myself!"

She finished fixing her face in the mirror. She wore the second set of clothes she had brought; an all black sweater and matching fleece bottom with the royal blue heels she wore earlier that evening. Everything fit tight, just how she liked it. The bathroom door clicked as she exited. There, she found Joseph lying in a pool of vomit half naked. His hands were singed black and the wall above him cracked and busted.

INDECISION

"Nice. Real nice," Katie threw up her hands, "Was all that really necessary, Huh? You kill him? Is he dead?"

"Not at the moment. That can change, though. I'm fine, by the way."

"In case you forgot, you fired a gun in here! And what was that explosion? We gotta get out of here before the cops show up."

Eric swiped at a device on his wrist, "Not worried about cops. If a Guardian is sent to our location, I'll know. Until then, quit your bitching and tie him up," Eric tossed her a couple zip ties.

Katie secured the zip ties around Joseph's thick wrists and ankles, "I don't think this will hold him if he wakes up."

"Oh, you don't do you? Your lover too strong for Plarosteel? And what do you know about Plarosteel, Katie? Got much experience with it, do you? He ain't getting out of those and if he does I'll just kick his ass, again. "

Alright, Eric. I get it. You're a badass. Stop being a prick, now.

Katie stepped over Joseph her heels tapping on the floor. She didn't like seeing Eric like this; tense and agitated. As she got closer she noticed burns on the left side of his face and neck.

"You're hurt," she reached out to touch him and he smacked her hand away.

"Don't touch me! I'm fine."

I can't believe it! He's jealous!

INDECISION

"I'm just trying to help."

"Yeah, sure. I would ask if you enjoyed yourself, but I saw that plain on your fucking face!"

"Eric. We talked about this. I love you. That meant nothing to me. We needed dirt, we got dirt. That's all this was," she swore she could see anger steaming off him, and realized his clothes were still smoking.

"I know. I know. Doesn't mean I have to like it." he flinched as she touched the irritation on his face.

"I have a salve in my bag. You want me to get it?"

"I can get it. Let me know when this fucker wakes up so we can get this over with."

Katie watched Eric give Joseph a deft kick to his ribs on his way to the bathroom. She knew this was not going to be pleasant. She hoped Joseph cooperated. No boy should grow up without his father.

The End.