

## The Best Laid Plans

Perry still couldn't believe how much his life had changed. Groceries. He never thought he'd be responsible for the grocery shopping. His hands full of grocery bags, Perry struggled to open the door that led from the garage to the house. As soon as he entered the mudroom, he punched in the four-digit code. Six months and still not use to this thing. Glad I followed Detective Williams' advice. The detective had insisted on Perry getting an alarm and a gun while that lunatic was still at large. Detective Williams—Tony Williams, had been a godsend during the whole ordeal with Allison. He said he'd find her and bring her to justice. And he did. Now, that crazy woman was locked away. Still, Perry knew he needed to be cautious for Sara's sake. He knew she felt better having the alarm--no one could hurt her or her daddy with the alarm on.

Perry put the groceries away then stacked the breakfast dishes in the dishwasher. He had a couple of hours before he had to pick Sara up from her play date, so he went to the laundry room and started a load of clothes. Saturday mornings were always hectic. He didn't know how Marisa had managed--swimming lessons, ballet, shopping, laundry and then fixing dinner—it was overwhelming. But it all had to be done and it was his job now.

Leaving the laundry room, he started down the hall toward his study then stopped. Something lay in the middle of the hall. Perry looked around then stilled himself and listened--the house was quiet. Slowly, he approached the object. It was a picture from the wall. It laid face-down on the floor. He turned it over. The smiling

faces of Marisa and Sara with Mickey Mouse greeted him behind the shattered glass. Perry looked up at the wall where the picture had hung. He stood up and looked around again; everything seemed in order. The picture could have just fallen. But, it was odd, very odd.

He carried the picture and a few shards of glass into his study and placed them on the credenza. The room seemed unusually dark. He realized the blinds were closed. He didn't remember closing them, although he had worked late last night—maybe he had. "Pull yourself together man," he admonished himself. But Perry was beginning to feel uneasy—his stomach churned. It was the same feeling he got when he sensed Allison was near. "Come on. She's 500 miles away."

Perry sat down at his desk. He turned on the desk lamp. Everything was in its place. Relieved, he sank into the leather chair and closed his eyes. He and Sara had been through so much these last few months. He was tired. Sara was tired. But today, she finally seemed happy to be going to her friend's house. For a nine year old, her big blue eyes were always sad, without life—she missed her mom.

His cell phone rang, startling him. Perry pulled it from his pocket and answered. It could only be one person. "Hi."

"Hi Honey," the sultry voice said. I know Sara's at her friend's. I thought maybe I could see you now. I could come through the back," Cheryl said.

"Uhh...I don't think so. It's still too soon."

“No one will see me. Haven’t I always been careful not to be seen? Plus, I’m your administrative assistant. I have legitimate business with you,” she cooed.

“We’ve never met here and now’s not a good time Cheryl,”

“But, I want to see you. I bought something I know you’ll like,” she said, trying to entice him.

“Not now! I’ll try to call you later. You knew this was how it was going to be for a while,” he said, exasperated.

“Yeah, but—“

Perry’s house phone rang. “Listen, I’ve gotta go. I’ll call you later if things change.” Perry flipped the phone shut and cut it off before Cheryl could object. He answered the cordless phone checking the caller ID first. The number looked familiar. Perry answered, “Hello?”

“Mr. Grayson, it’s Detective Williams.”

“Oh, I thought I recognized the number. It’s been a long time. How have you been?”

“Mr. Grayson, this isn’t a social call,” he sounded frantic. “Listen. Allison Craig escaped from Ravenhurst Asylum two days ago when they were transporting her to a court hearing. We believe she’s--“

“She’s coming here,” Perry said. His stomach churned again. Why didn’t someone notify me before now?” Perry waited for an answer. “Detective—Detective Williams?” The line was dead. Perry dropped the phone. He pulled his desk drawer open. The gun wasn’t there. He pulled the drawer out farther and looked. I cleaned it and I know I put it back in *this* drawer. Unsure, he turned to the other side of the desk. He jerked the drawer open and the one beneath that. It wasn’t there. The gun was gone. Perry stood up, but the fragrance of jasmine and sandalwood stopped him. It was his wife’s signature fragrance.

“Looking for this?” Allison asked standing in the door to the study holding the gun.

“How did you...?”

“How did I get in? Umm,” she pretended to think. “Perry you never changed the code to the garage. And you really should lock the door. Oh... and the alarm code...I knew it either had to be your darling daughter’s birth date or your wife’s. I bet on your daughter and here I am,” she smiled and curtsied. “Now sit down,” she motioned with the gun. Allison walked into the room. “Perry. Perry. Perry” She was wearing Marisa’s favorite lavender and cream sundress. Her dark hair hung in spiral curls framing her face. “You were a very bad boy. You let them lock me up,” Allison said, leaning against the credenza.

“Allison, you killed my wife. What was I supposed to do?”

“But how else were we going to be together? You said you wanted *me* to be your wife. And she wouldn’t give you a divorce. What was I to do?”

“I never said...I didn’t mean for you to--”

“Oh...oh...the flirting... asking me to change my hair...the long romantic lunches...that night at the office...the ‘if only I could be free.’ What? You didn’t mean it?” Allison yelled.

“You’re angry. I understand. But you dressed up for me and you did your hair the way I like it. So you can’t be too angry with me,” Perry said, trying to calm her.

Allison ignored the flattery. “Angry? No. Try pissed. You made them think I was crazy--that *I stalked you*,” she said. “You sat there and did *nothing*--nothing to help me after all I did for you—for us,” Allison said. She shook her head. “I can’t believe I was so stupid.”

“Allison why don’t you give me the gun before someone gets hurt?”

She didn’t answer. She noticed the broken picture next to her on the credenza. She picked up the picture frame and caressed it with the barrel of the gun. She stared at it for a while and then she looked at Perry. Sara had his same dark features. Those features are what attracted her to him—his wavy dark hair and those mesmerizing blue eyes. Sara had those same stunning blue eyes.

Perry watched Allison carefully. He needed to get that gun away from her. He had imagined this scenario or one like it countless times. What would he do if Allison

ever came after him and Sara? And now, Allison was here just as Cheryl predicted. Amazing. He couldn't help but to smile.

"You have the nerve to laugh at me?" She said pointing the gun at him again.

"I...I wasn't laughing at you. I was remembering..."

"Don't you know I could punish you? She pointed the gun at him. "Sitting alone in my jail cell I had plenty of time to think. And you know what I realized? It wasn't Marisa that you cared about." She waved the gun from side to side. "No. All along it was Sara. Your darling, little daughter. So where is your precious little Sara?"

Perry's eyes narrowed as he looked at Allison. "Leave Sara out of this!"

"Oh, you're making demands." Allison dropped the photo. "I'll kill her just like I killed that whore wife of yours." Perry got up slowly. He held his hands up and walked around his desk toward her. "I didn't tell you to move, did I?" Allison snapped. "Maybe I should kill you then kill myself. We would be together then," Allison held the gun inches from Perry's chest.

"Wait. Wait." Perry pleaded. "You don't want to do that. I can still make things right," Perry softened his tone. "What do you want me to do?" She didn't answer. "Would you at least look at me, please?" He begged. "Just look at me."

Perry was so damn charming. It was overwhelming. When he wanted something, she could never say no to him. And those piercing blue eyes--if I looked into his eyes, I would lose all of my resolve. Focus. Focus. The memory of handcuffs and

a jail cell rekindled her fury. "What do I want from you? You bastard," she screamed. "You told me you loved me...that you wanted to be with me." She put both hands on the gun to steady it. "Remember that! Remember?" She took a deep breath, "I did things for you --things that could get you in trouble."

"What are you talking about?" Perry asked, backing away from her.

"You know. I know you know. I can't believe I was so stupid," she said crying.

"What are you talking about Allison?"

She wiped away the tears. "I loved you. You told me you loved me too. I would've done anything for you." She sighed, "I killed for you and where did that get me?"

"You're right," he finally said. "And I'm sorry." He heard the police sirens in the distance. "I do love you, Allison. I'm sorry I lied at your trial. I'm sorry I denied our love and denied I wanted you to be my wife." He paused and moved toward her. "Can you forgive me?" Perry waited for Allison to respond. When she didn't answer, Perry knew it was working. He went on, "I just couldn't let them know... I couldn't let Sara know I didn't love her mother anymore. I still want you," Perry said softly, moving closer to Allison. He reached out and caressed her cheek. "That is, if you'll still have me," Perry said as he lifted Allison's chin and kissed her gently on the lips. The barrel of the gun pressed against his chest. Perry knew he was taking a chance, but he had to.

Allison had longed for his touch, but quickly stepped back. She steadied the gun. She didn't know what to believe. Does he really love me or was he lying... just using me again. She wanted to believe him. The last few months had been so hard without him.

"Come here." He held out his arms as he moved toward her. I promise I'll protect you—I'll tell them that it was all my fault. Just give me the gun."

"You won't let them send me back to that place, will you?" Allison lowered the gun. "It's a horrible place Perry," she said, relieved she wouldn't have to go back.

"I know. I know it is. And I won't let them take you. I'll explain... I'll protect you this time," he reassured her. Allison fell into Perry's arms still holding the gun. He held her and caressed her hair. He wanted her to feel loved. He pulled away slightly and kissed her then pulled her against his chest. He heard the police banging on the front door. They would be in there any moment and this would all be over.

"I am not going to let them take you back. I promise," he whispered to her as he felt for the gun in her hand. He heard the door being kicked in, and then men yelling "Police. Police." And a single shot echoed in the room.

"Mr. Grayson! Mr. Grayson, where are you?" The police called as they searched the house.

"Mr. Grayson!" Perry recognized Detective Williams' voice.

"In here Detective," Perry called, "I'm in the study."



Detective Williams and two other officers rushed into the study. Perry was standing over Allison with the gun in his hand. Allison lay on the floor--a blood stain spread across the front of the lavender and white dress. Detective Williams walked over to Perry. "Mr. Grayson, give me the gun."

"Uh?" Perry looked at him puzzled.

"The gun," the detective said again.

Perry looked down at his hand that held out the gun. "I didn't mean to do it. We were struggling and the gun went off. She made me kiss her and tell her I loved her...How she could think..." Perry broke down.

"It's okay Mr. Grayson. Allison Craig was a poor, unstable woman. Her imaginary romance with you wasn't your fault," Detective Williams said, as he bent down and checked Allison. "She gone," he said as he stood up. He shook his head then ran his hand over his balding head. "We never thought she'd carry out her threats to kill you. We tried to find her...I should have called sooner. I thought we'd find her first." The detective surveyed the scene and saw the broken picture nearby on the floor. "Just go with this officer and he'll take your statement. She broke in and tried to kill you. Right? Your statement is just a formality." Perry stood there unable to move. "Help him to the other room and take his statement," Detective Williams said to a patrol officer and tag this." He handed the officer the gun.

"Oh Mr. Grayson one more thing," the Detective said.

“Did Allison have the gun when she confronted you?”

“Yes, she did.”

“You have a gun don’t you?”

“Yeah, I do. Allison—she had it. She used it to confront me,” Perry sighed. “I usually keep it in a lock box in the bedroom closet. But I—I brought it down to clean it last night. It was in my desk drawer. If I had only--” his voice broke.

“Thank you, Mr. Grayson.” Detective Williams said. Perry nodded and then followed the officer to the kitchen to give his statement. Detective Williams turned back and looked down at Allison; he could have sworn she was smiling.

Perry wasn’t allowed to stay at the house. It was a crime scene once again. He had to spend the night at a hotel while Sara stayed at her friend’s house. No need for her world to be turned upside down again. On his way to the Marriot, he turned on the cell phone and pressed Send. The phone rang a couple of times; Cheryl answered, “I didn’t think I’d hear from you tonight.”

“It’s over. She’s dead. Meet me at the Marriot in an hour,” he said and hung up. Perry checked into the hotel and took a long, hot shower. It had been an unbelievable day. He ordered dinner, had a drink from the mini bar and waited. His cell phone rang. “I’m in 602 at the end of the hall.” A few minutes later, there was a soft knock on the door; he rushed to open it. He smiled and asked. “What took you so long?”

Cheryl admired Perry as he stood in the doorway of the hotel room. He was sporting that charismatic smile. That smile and those gorgeous blue eyes--with them, he could convince you to do anything. Glad I saved the emails he had me send--my insurance policy. She flashed her own charming smile as she entered the room, "I was just being careful that no one saw me. That's all." She opened her coat and revealed her new lacy teddy. "It would be a shame if all of this planning was for naught," Cheryl kissed him then pulled him down onto the bed...

Detective Williams had had a long day. The ordeal with Allison Craig was finally over. Now, his lieutenant would never know that Grayson's administrative assistant was his sister, Cheryl. Cheryl was so worried about the Graysons and begged him to stay on the case even though it was against protocol. Everyday Allison was alive—the shit could have hit the fan, but now it was done. All of their secrets were safe.

Detective Williams made one stop before he went home. He wanted to get a card for Cheryl. Once in the store, it didn't take him long to find it. He paid for it and left the store. In his car, he pulled the card out and signed it. It read, *Congratulations* on the front with multi-colored confetti. On the inside it read, *All your dreams and wishes have come true.*