Tales #5:

The Case

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Tis Was the Night

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**Chapter 1**

Halts Glee was a tiny town that was all but forgotten by the rest of the world. Nothing exciting ever happened there, at least that was the perspective of anyone who saw it on a map. It was a tiny dot that took up next to no space. But as unremarkable as it may appear to outsiders, those who lived there knew the truth. Weird things happened in Halts Glee with stunning regularity.

 Not that anyone in town ever talked about it. It was just an accepted reality that people were more than happy to sweep under the rug. After all, no one wants to admit that their lives are outside of their control. That they are just as likely to end up dead when going to the grocery store as they are to pick up milk. No. It is far easier to pretend that everything is normal.

 That is how Jacob, all of twenty-five years of age, lived his life. After all, he had real problems. Problems closer to home than a missing neighbors or long since dead friends from school. He was going on his first date in three years.

 He wasn’t unattractive in his own way. Nor was he unpersonable. He had dated before. He knew how to talk to women, not that he was a player or in any way, shape, or form. He was sweet, if a bit too earnest. No, the reason he hadn’t been on a date in three years was because the last woman he went out with broke him. Like the common verity narcissist that she was, she would tear him down to boost her own ego. All the while telling anyone who listen how he was emotionally abusive to her.

 No one who knew Jacob believed a word of it. No one, save for Jacob himself. He knew he wasn’t abusive to her in any way, shape or form, but he had to have done something to upset her so. She wouldn’t just say those horrible things about him. Not to mention that fact that he always annoyed her. The longer they dated the more she complained and the less he could do right. He was always a fairly confident guy, but that didn’t last long once they got together.

 None of his friends liked her, but he couldn’t hear their warnings. Not over all the warning bells he was already ignoring. He was a man in love, in love with a woman who hated him and used him before throwing him aside and going out of her way to ruin his reputation. Something she had made a pattern of with past lovers.

 It took Jacob a long time to understand the true depths of damage that she had done to him, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. He had never been the same since. Everyone in his circle knew it, but none wanted to be the one to call him out on it. They all figured that he would snap out of it when he was ready. He never did.

 Even as he walked into the Old Manor, a rundown dive bar on the outskirts of town, he was still terrified of putting himself out there. Every part of him wanted to turn around and run. Run back to the comfort of his house where he could grow old and die alone without bothering anyone. After all, she had made it clear that he had nothing to offer. He was a nobody, a nothing.

 The scars she left behind were slow to heal and quick to reopen. Every day he woke up and spent the day trying to live as if he had never met her, and every day he was reminded of how she had stolen everything from him. Not the least of which, was his self-respect.

 The only reason that he was even meeting this woman tonight was that he was tired of being alone. All he had ever wanted in this life was a family. He never knew his father, so he figured if he could just have a son, he could do all the father son activities that he was deprived of as a child. He knew it was a stupid fantasy, but it was his. She stole it from him. The mere thought of dating, of putting himself out there filled him with dread.

 It was what he was feeling now, but he pushed those feeling down as deep as they would go. All his friends had started to pair off, whether to just hook up or to date, it didn’t matter. The point remained; he was lonely. He put on a brave front for his friends, but it was hollow. Empty.

 He took a seat at an empty booth along the back wall. His heart racing, threatening to break out of his chest as he sat there. His mind screaming for him to run home. He ignored them both, just as he had when he signed up for the dating website a few nights before. He was going to force himself to date. Even if it killed him.

**Chapter 2**

 The morning sun was shinning usually bright, at least for Sheriff Mike McMallen, who was suffering from a not insurmountable hangover. The night before he had one beer, which turned to two which led to him finishing off the case. Not being one to allow fate to determine his course of action, he broke into the whisky. After that the night was a blur. He was fine with that. Some things didn’t require to be remembered. Most things didn’t if truth be told.

 Unfortunately drinking away your sorrows doesn’t do you any favors when you have to be at work in the morning. He wasn’t too concerned under the watchful eye of the moon, after all Halts Glee is a small town, not a whole lot happens there. Well, that’s not true. A lot happens, most of it just gets swept under the rug. Not much you can do when people show up missing more than any other city in the world. Or when people are murdered in ways that are out and out impossible. You just solve the cases you can and write the rest off. Most days he sits in the station and watches the clock. Today was not most days.

 He was woken from his sleep in the early hours of morning by deputy Nelson, there was a missing person. One Jacob Samson. He had a blind date the night before and never came home. His mother was worried sick. Annoyed at being disturbed so early he ordered Nelson to take care of it and tried to go back to sleep. Tried being the operative word. Once he was up, he was up. He had been that way since he was a kid.

 He jumped in the shower, attempting to wash off his shame. Spoiler alert, it didn’t work. Never did, no matter how hot the water, and he liked it hot. To the point where it felt like his skin was going to peel off. Needless to say, it never did. His skin was very much intact, if not a little redder for the trouble.

 He followed up his shower with coffee and a lot of complaining. The only proper way to start a day. At least as far as Mike was concerned. He wasn’t a happy man. A fact that anyone who knew him would attest to. Hell, most strangers would attest to it as well, they just wouldn’t be as polite about it. He was miserable and made others feel the same. One of the many reasons that his staff was so small and no one really called on them all that much. A fact that he was very thankful for.

 He finally made it into the station a little before noon, only to find Ms. Lin, Jacob’s mother, screaming at his deputies. She wanted her son found and she wanted him found now. She was tired of their excuses. She was sure that he was in trouble.

 “We’ll find him.” Mike said after she turned her yelling at him. She wasn’t doing his throbbing hangover any favors. He just wanted to shut her up. He had one of the deputies write down all of the information and promised they would find her son. With that he retreated into his office, closed the binds and shut off the lights.

 He wasn’t sure how long he sat in the darkness when the door burst open and one of the deputies, he tried to make it a practice to not learn their names, came in telling him in a rush that they had found a body. Jacob Samson was dead. Miss. Lin was right.

 Which is what brought Sheriff Mike McMallen out under the harsh sun. They were on the outskirts of town in an old junk yard. His body was thrown out with the trash. No one would have ever found him if some drifter looking for some bottles to steal so he could sell them hadn’t stumbled across him. It was an extremely unlikely bit of luck that Mike would have much preferred to wait a few more hours, if not days.

 “So, who in their right mind would drive all the way out here to hide a body?” Mike asked, more to himself than anyone else. He was trying to focus, something his head was not helping him with.

 “I don’t think that’s what happened sir.” Nelson said. She had stayed on duty out of some sense of guilt. She took the call, she felt responsible for it. As far as Mike was concerned, that was going to lead to some very hard times ahead for her. The false optimism of youth was something that Mike had left behind many years ago.

 “You don’t?”

 “No sir. Mr. Smith, not sure if that’s his real name, he doesn’t have an I.D., but that’s what he said to call him.” Nelson started to tell him. Mike was already growing tired of listening. It was too much noise.

 “The homeless guy.” Mike asked, attempting to cut short the explanation so that she would get to the point.

 “Unhoused, but yes. He was out here looking for bottles to liberate.”

 “Steal.”

 “Yes sir, steal, but Mr. Quinn isn’t pressing charges, so that’s unimportant at the moment. The point is sir, he found Jacob Samson’s body under a couple of bags. We looked over the area, there are no other footprints but his and only the dump truck as far as tire tracks go.” Nelson said. She seemed very proud of her investigate skills. For the life of him, Mike couldn’t remember if he was ever this annoying.

 “Okay, I’ll bite. If there are no foot prints or tire tracks, how did he get here? The unhoused gentleman?” Mike said, his tone closer to mockery than he had intended.

 “No sir, I believe he came in the dump truck.” She said, completely earnestly.

 “What?” Was all he could think to ask. The sun bearing down on him was making his hangover all the worst. He really just wanted to go home and die. Or at least get some sleep.

 “I think someone put him in a dumpster.” She said, finally cutting to the chase. Mike stood there dumfounded. It was so simple he couldn’t believe he overlooked it. Maybe he shouldn’t drink so much, but that was an issue he would deal with later. Her theory brought up too many questions. For starters it meant they had no idea where the crime even happened.

 “Seems you have your work cut out for you.”

 “Yes sir! As soon as I can figure out where he was dumped, we can get to work on solving his murder.” She said, more excited than she had any right too. There was only one way to figure out what she needed to. He looked at all the trash around the body. It wasn’t work he would ever want to do.

 “Get to it.” He said, turning to leave. Out of the corner of his eye he saw her start to dig through the trash bag that was on top of the body. Hopefully it took her a while to figure anything out so he could go back to the office and get some rest. Let his blasted headache subside.

**Chapter 3**

 Any fantasies that Mike had of going back to the station and getting in some rest was quickly smashed when he found Ms. Lin waiting in his office. She had decided that she was tired of waiting at home and wanted to be here when they found him. How she got in his office, he could only hazard to guess that she had bullied one of his men to let her in. A trespass he wasn’t going to forget.

 “Any word?” the words were out of her mouth before the door was even fully open. Which meant that whoever had been so kind as to let her in, had also done him the enormous favor of leaving it to the sheriff to tell her of her son’s passing. A fate that Mike would have gladly pawned off on to someone else. Anyone else.

 With as much care as he was able, he started to confirm her worst fear. He attempted to leave out some of the finer points, such as where they found him, but she wouldn’t hear of it. She wanted to know everything. She demanded to. She was not a woman to be ignored, as the sheriff was just starting to learn.

 “What’s next?” She asked, after he went through everything that had happened at the junk yard. The fire in her eyes seemed to go out a bit as she asked. As if her reason for being was no longer there. Mike had no children, so he couldn’t understand the emotional bond a parent must have with their young, but he could imagine. This wasn’t something he would wish on anyone.

 “Well, because of where the body was found, we have no way of knowing where he was dumped. Our first task is to find the scene of the crime, if we can. A motive would be nice.” Mike answered.

 “How are you going to find that out?” She asked. He had planned to let Nelson figure everything out while he rested, but there was no way he was going to say that to Ms. Lin. She would murder him on the spot. He had to give her a real answer. One that she wanted to hear, that at least made it look like he was doing something.

 “My deputy is looking for clues as to where he was left back at the junk yard.” Mike said, stalling for time by telling the truth. Not a tactic he usually employed.

 “What about you? What are you doing sheriff?” She asked, it was the question he was trying to avoid. He would have to give her an answer and then actually do follow through. There was no way she would let him slide on anything.

 “I came back here to call you, lucky for me you were already here.” He said. She said nothing so he continued. “I need to know what he was up to. Where he went, who he was with. Anything and everything you know.”

 “I already told your deputies everything I know!” She said, on the verge of crying. “I knew something was wrong. You just wouldn’t listen!”

 “Ms. Lin, just, walk me through last night. Was he at home? Did he say anything. Every thing helps, no matter how little it may seem.” She nodded as he spoke. This was going to be a long night, of that, Mike was sure.

 “My son is. . .” Almost immediately her words give way to tears as it sinks in that her son is never coming home. “Was.” She corrects herself, the pain clear as day. “A sweet, kind kid. He was bright, always writing and studying. He excelled at school, was beloved by his friends. He was. . .was. . .the best son a mother could ask for.”

 Mike let her sit for a moment, it was obvious that this was going to be a difficult interview. There was no reason for him to make it harder, no matter how much he wanted it over with.

 “Let me just start by reiterating how sorry I am for your loss.” He said, she nodded her thanks and he continued. “And the last thing I would want to do is make this harder on you, but what I need to know is, what was he doing last night.”

 “He went to his best friend’s house, Kimberly.” She answered, wiping away the tears that wouldn’t stop coming.

 “Girlfriend?”

 “No, he didn’t have a girlfriend. At least none he told me about. He was always secretive about that. But Kimberly would know. He told her everything.” She told him, doing her best to keep it together. He nodded in what he hoped was a reassuring manner. He wasn’t going to get a lot of useful information from her. It was too fresh. She was already framing him as the greatest person who has ever lived, his flaws, whatever they may have been be damned. If he was going to figure out what happened to him and why, he would need to know more about who he actually was and not just the idealized version that his mother remembered.

**Chapter 4**

 It didn’t take Mike long to track down Kimberly. Her last name was Holland, she was a Photographer for a local paper, The Halts Report. It was a tiny paper with an even smaller circulation, but housed a staff with big ambitions. Or at least a photographer with some. It seemed that Kimberly wasn’t content with take pictures of feel-good events in town, which was what the paper mostly published stories on, she wanted to do hard hitting journalism.

 While the only work of hers that has ever made it into the paper were pictures of those before mentioned feel-good stories, such as when old man Johnson was the winner of the local cook off for the fiftieth year in a row. Never mind the fact that no one else really completes with him. It’s more a tradition to have him cook a big meal for the town and everyone tell him how great he is. A tradition that Mike happened to be a fan of. Old man Johnson was the owner and sole cook at Big John’s BBQ. Mike’s favorite place to eat. Her website, Hollandphotography.com, was full of stories about local elections, disappearances, murders. Mike found his name on the site more than once. Almost always in stories about how inept the sheriff department was.

 It was a fair complaint. One that any real journalist being honest about the state of affairs in Halts Glee would agree with. Mike couldn’t be angry about it, even less so when you take into account that there were next to no comments or recognition that the website existed to the outside world at all. The poor girl was living in her own world where she was the next Edward R. Murrow.

 The publisher of the paper, Nil S. Grinberg, was a tiny man who was dressed up as a character right out of an old Noir film. The only thing he was missing was that his hat didn’t have a little paper reading press on it. When he spoke, he had an air of importance to him that made Mike want to hit him. Hell, it might have given the paper an interesting story for once.

 “Where can I find her?” Mike asked, not for the first time. Grinberg was going of his way to be difficult. Almost as if he got a kick at being a real reporter, protecting his sources for once. Never mind the fact that Mike could care less about whatever imaginary sources the guy might have and he was only looking for the photographer.

 “Whatever you want with her, I, as her publisher, take full responsibility. I ask that you leave her out of it.” He said defiantly. His arms crossed in a matter that suggested it wasn’t up for debate.

 “That’s great, really, and if I wanted her for something to do with this paper, you’d be the first one I’d arrest, but I need to talk to her about her friend, Jacob Samson.” Mike said, starting to grow tired with the whole ordeal.

 “Her friend? You mean that annoying guy she’s always hanging out with. They argue obsessively. It gives me a migraine, truth be told.”

 “What did they argue about?” Mike asked.

 “What they didn’t argue about would be a shorter list. My god, you ever spend five minutes with them and you’d hear one of these arguments for yourself. Hell, half the time they are arguing the same thing, or switch up what they are saying just to keep the fight going. It tiresome.”

 “I was told they were best friends. You make it sound like they hate each other.” Mike said, attempting to get a better understanding of the man that Jacob was.

 “Oh, they are. There was nothing but love between them. Anyone who sided with either one of them in these arguments of theirs, would end up on the wrong side of both of them. It’s how they had fun. Just imagine spending all day with wannabe lawyers. That’s what it’s like being in a room with them.” Grinberg said, doing his best to maintain his imagine of being above it all.

 “So, they weren’t real arguments?” Mike asked, not sure he was getting it.

 “No, they were. Passionate arguments. Yelling, the whole nine yards, but it was fun for them. They enjoyed it, if that’s what you’re asking.”

 “I see, so what is Jacob like? You know him well?” Mike asked.

 “Fiercely loyal to Kimberly, as she is to him. Smart, a lot smarter than you would think by looking at him, but once he starts talking, it comes through. I’ve seen him talk circles around people, tearing them down without ever coming across as the asshole. I’ve also seen him just come right out as the asshole, but honestly, only to defend her. Most the time he is either lost in his own head or sitting back and observing everything.”

 “Observing?”

 “I don’t think most people notice, but I am a journalist. I know when someone is paying attention, and Jacob pays attention to everything. He’ll just sit there and take it all in, not saying a word until he has everybody figured out. He’d make a hell of a reporter, as I keep trying to tell him.”

 “What does he do with all this information that he observes?” Mike asked.

 “He uses it. Normally in arguments. He finds weak spots and when someone crosses him, he goes for the kill. Since most of the time it’s Kimberly’s enemies, he fights her battles for her, telling her what to say. I’ve seen it countless times.”

 “Does she have a lot of enemies?” Mike asked.

 “She’s a strong independent woman with even stronger opinions and the will to share them. What do you think?” Grinberg asked rhetorically. It was a fair point, just reading a few of her articles on the website, he could see how people would be rubbed the wrong way by her.

 “What about Jacob? He have a lot of enemies?”

 “As far as I can tell, he keeps his circle small. The way Kimberly tells it, he cut a lot of people out of his life a few years back. Anyone he felt was too negative. Only kept a couple close friends. Kimberly being first of that number.”

 “Where can I find her?” Mike asked once more.

 “She’s getting some pictures of the football game at the high school. She should still be there.” Grinberg finally answered. Mike nodded and thanked him for his time. He started to leave when Grinberg stopped him. “Is he okay?”

 Mike wasn’t sure if he should answer that. The murder was going to be found out soon, but Ms. Lin didn’t need it to be front page news moments after she found out. He should give her a little more time to grieve. That being said, this guy knew him, and was asking about his wellbeing.

 “Off the record, at least for tonight.” Mike told the reporter, who just nodded, looking genuinely concerned. “He was found dead this morning.” Grinberg’s face fell, clearly he wasn’t expecting that. Who would be? Without another word, Mike left the building, on his way to go and speak with the best friend.

**Chapter 5**

 The Elbis high football stadium was nicer than the rest of the school put together. Not that the Razorbacks warranted the expense. They hadn’t won a game since before Mike was a student, yet the town kept pouring money into the team. It was tax payer money being put to good use. Or at least that was what mayor Ennis always said. A former quarterback and the last one to win a game at the school, so you know his judgment is sound on the issue.

 Mike walked around the outside of the stadium, taking it all in. The sounds of the football game washing over him. He was never much into sports when he was in school, but he went to a couple games. It was always because of some girl or other that he was dating. More than once a girl would come with him and leave with one of the players. Not his proudest moments.

 The front entrance was unguarded. Which meant either that the game was far enough along that they didn’t think anyone else was coming, or the school had just given up any hope that people cared enough to go and watch them play.

 As Mike entered the arena, he quickly learned that his second guess was the right one. The stands were sparse, a few parents here and there, watching the game halfheartedly. Mike couldn’t help but feel bad for the players when he caught more than one parent playing games on their phone. The other side was almost as empty. No one wanted to make the journey up here to witness a pointless massacre. Even the cheerleaders looked bored. Half of them weren’t even in uniform. It was a sad sight to see, almost made Mike ashamed of his alma mater. Unfortunately, that ship sailed years ago.

 Down on the field the two teams were giving it their all. Mike had no idea who the second team was, not that it mattered. They weren’t the reason he was here. No. The reason he was here was on the sidelines taking all the pictures she could manage. In fact, she was only person watching the game who seemed to care.

 “Miss.” Mike said, as he made his way down to the field. She didn’t even look up at him. Her focus was locked in on the game, or at least the view of it through her lens. “Miss. Holland.” Mike said, once again, this time a few feet away from her. Startled she turned to look at him, almost tripping as she was kneeling on the edge of the field trying to get her balance.

 “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you.” Mike said, holding out a hand to help her up. She ignored as she checked her camera to make sure it was okay.

 “What’s your problem, sneaking up on people like that?” She demanded, brushing dirt off her clothes. Once she caught sight of him, or to be more specific, the uniform, her demeanor changed. “Officer.”

 “Sheriff. I’m the Sheriff, Miss Holland, and I need a few words with you.” He said, enjoying for a moment the power his position had. It had been some time since his title brought out the proper respect.

 “What did I do?” She asked, doing her best to hide the shaking in her voice. She was nervous. Reminding Mike of a little truth that he didn’t much care for. The respect that his title earned him, was more often fear than respect.

 “Nothing that I know of, unless you want to confess.” He said, attempting to lighten the mood and put her at ease. The look on her face told him he had failed. “Okay, um yeah, so I am here to speak to you about Jacob Samson.”

 “Jacob? What about him?” She said, even more defensive than when she thought he was here for her. “He was with me. The whole time. We were watching movies. Sleepers. So, yeah, you got the wrong guy. I’m telling you now.”

 Mike couldn’t help but smile, it wasn’t unhappy. At least at the start. That kind of loyalty, of friendship was rare. It made his job here all the harder, because he had to be the one to tell her that that friendship was at an end. That her best friend was found dead in a junk yard.

 “He must be a great friend for you to lie for him.” Mike said.

 “Whose lying? I stand by what I said, it’s the truth.”

 “You were with him last night?” Mike asked.

 “Damn straight!” She exclaimed. Now on her feet, locking eyes with him.

 “I respect your loyalty, but. . .” He stopped himself, how were you supposed to tell someone their loved one was dead. It was the worst part of the job, a part he always tried to pass onto other people. And the fact that he was expected to follow that up with asking her questions about it made it all the harder. “Maybe we should go inside.”

 “Am I under arrest?” She asked, trying to sound firm.

 “What? No. Why, why would you be under arrest?” He asked confused.

 “Than I don’t have to go anywhere with you. Now if you don’t mind, I have work to do.” She said, turning back to the game and lifting her camera up.

 “Miss. Holland, I hate to be the one to tell you this, but while the two of you, I’m guessing, were not watching Sleepers last night, Jacob was murdered.” Mike said. Almost as soon as the words were out of his mouth, her hands dropped the camera. The lens shattering as it hit the ground, her face turning pale.

**Chapter 6**

 They managed to find an empty classroom that opened. Or, more accurately, Mike found a room. Kimberly Holland just followed him, silently, her hands holding the remains of her broken camera. Every so often Mike looked back to make sure she was still with him and she looked completely lost.

 Once they finally found the empty classroom, Mike closed the door and ushered her into a seat. He sat on the teacher’s desk facing her, not saying a word. He wanted to give her a few moments to process everything that had happened. He’d lost people before. It was never easy. It wasn’t something you just snapped out of.

 “I need to ask you some questions.” He said as kindly as he could. Kimberly, whose eyes were locked onto the broken camera, slowly looked up. Her eyes were red, as if she had been crying, only there were no tears. It was almost as if she wasn’t even there. She looked vacant. “Can you answer some questions?”

 Her only reply was a slight nod. If he wasn’t careful, she was going to fall apart on him. That wouldn’t do either of them any good. He needed to get answers out of her. The fact that she was so quick to lie to him, meant either she knew what he was up to and it was bad, or, more likely by the way she reacted, she had no idea what he was up to and just wanted to make sure he didn’t get in trouble.

 “Do you know Jacob was doing last night?” Mike asked. She just stared at him, looking more like a lost puppy than the hard-boiled journalist she painted herself out to be. “If I’m going to find out what happened to him and who is responsible, I need to be able to retrace his steps.”

 “Wha. . .wha. . .” She started to ask, but she couldn’t get the word out.

 “His mother came to the station this morning to report him missing. We didn’t think anything of it, until a few hours later we got a call that he had been found at the junk yard. Someone dumped his body in a dumpster.” Mike said, answering the question that he knew she was trying to get out.

 “Oh god!” The tears finally started. He let her cry for a few minutes. Part of him wanted to try and console her, but how do console someone who just lost someone so close to them? Finding the asshole who did it would be how he made it better. Or at least it would be a start.

 “Ms. Lin has no idea what he was up to last night. She is under the impression that he tells you everything. I need to know if he told you anything.”

 “I. . .oh god! Ms. Lin. She must be. . .he was. . .fuck.” was all she could get out.

 “Anything would be helpful.” He said, doing his best to sound caring.

 “I. . .I talked to him, he. . .he . . .he did this thing he does, where he.” Her words were drowned out by a fresh wave of tears. Mike didn’t interrupt, he just sat there waiting. “I was telling him about shit with, oh god it was so stupid. I just kept going on and on and he just listened. How can that be our last conversation?” She asked, not expecting an answer. The question was more for herself.

 “He was your friend. That’s what friends do. They listen.” Mike told her. He didn’t do well with death, which was not a good attitude when you were the sheriff. “Did he tell you anything?”

 “I asked him what he was doing, and. . .he hated lying.” She said, her voice shaking. “If he didn’t want to tell me something, he would avoid telling me. If I asked him point blank, he would tell me.” She stopped, clearly replaying the conversation in her mind. “I asked what he had planned and he. . .he asked me about my date and I started talking about that again. That’s all we talked about. That can’t be our last conversation! It was so stupid!”

 “He never answered the question?” Mike asked. She shook her head. “Why wouldn’t he tell you? Did he keep a lot of secrets?”

 “If he didn’t tell me, he either thought I’d get mad or that I would make fun of him.” She answered, her voice hollow. “He was scared to tell me what he was doing. If . . .if he had just told me, he would sill be here.” The hollowness overtook once more. As if any last bit of humanity had left her. She was just an empty husk now.

 “Why? Why would you get angry? Why would you mock him? Point me in a direction. Please, any direction. Tell me where to look.”

 “He was either doing something that he knew I would want to do, but since I was busy that night with my big important date, he had to go by himself and he didn’t want me to talk shit.” She said, the tears welling up again. “I would have gone with him. I should have gone with him!”

 “You don’t know if that would have saved him. You don’t even know what he was doing, or if that was the reason, he didn’t tell you. Why would you have made fun of him?” Mike asked, attempting to move the conversation away from her blaming herself.

 “If he was doing something I thought was stupid, maybe hanging out with his ex.” Kimberly said, she sounded so far away despite sitting right in front of him.

 “Did he spend a lot of time hanging out with his ex?” she shook her head.

 “Not as much. They used to be really close, but then he dated,” she looked down at the ground.

 “Go on.” He encouraged.

 “Eliza, she used him, broke his heart and told people that he assaulted her.” She said, anger coming into her voice. “He didn’t. She lied; he wasn’t the first person she lied about. Nor was he the last, but Jacob took it hard. He had only been with two women in his whole life, she was number two. He hasn’t dated since. He doesn’t do much of anything anymore.” She said, anger and sorrow switching back and forth as she spoke.

 “This is the ex he would have been hanging out with?” Mike asked, not understanding why anyone would want to hang out with someone who ruined their lives.

 “No, that ex, would be Linda. She’s the only girl he flirts with, the only girl he shows any interest in. I think he is. . .was. . .was. . .scared to open up to someone new.” She said, doing her best to keep it together. Only doing an okay job.

 “So, this Eliza girl, she said he assaulted her?”

 “He didn’t! I was there, nothing she said happened. I was raped. It’s not something to joke about. It’s not something to just throw around. She uses people and then doesn’t want to be the bad guy so she cries wolf, making it harder for the rest of us. She’s the worst kind of scum.” Kimberly said. Her voice rising as she spoke. “It’s so hard to speak out. So many people are so quick to not believe you, or worse, blame you for what happened. As if you are responsible. Any time someone lies about it, every time that comes out, people point to it as if it discredits all of us.”

 “I’m sorry for what happened to you.” Mike said, he meant it. No one should have that happen to them, to have their power stripped away like that. To have no one believe them, or worse, believe them and just not care. The world was shitty place.

 “It happens. Far too often, but it didn’t to her. Jacob, he wanted a family. He wanted a relationship, before her. After her.” She just shakes her head.

 “Did he have any interaction with her?” Mike asked. “Does she have any family or friends who might have believed her?”

 “She moved not long afterwards. Went back home.” Kimberly said.

 “Home where?”

 “Who knows. I can’t even give you a last name. Met her twice. She was a bitch.”

 “Okay, Linda, does she have a last name?” Mike asked, attempting to find some lead for him to follow.

 “Cartwright. As far as I know, they haven’t talked in a few months. I wouldn’t know how to get ahold of her.” She told him. Mike just nodded; he could figure that out on his own. “Any chance he might have been on a date with someone new? Maybe he was nervous and didn’t want to jinx it?”

 “That sounds like him. I would hope he would have told me, but I could see him telling me after the fact. I don’t know. He was my best friend. We hung out almost every day. We talked every day, about everything! I don’t. . .I don’t know what to do without him.”

 “You survive. You live your life. If he was really your best friend, if he cared about you half as much as you clearly care about him, he would want you to be happy. He would want you to live the best life you could.” Mike said, forcing a smile. He wanted to make her feel better, he knew that wasn’t likely, but he could at least try.

**Chapter 7**

 The station was near empty when he arrived back. There were only a few deputies still on duty. Nelson wasn’t one of them. He was still waiting on any word about where Jacob’s body could have been dumped.

 He made his way to his office, signaling for Deputy Miles to follow him. He was half expecting Ms. Lin to be waiting for him, but thankfully she was not. One small victory. He didn’t feel up to telling her that they were still no closer to solving her son’s murder.

 “Miles.” Mike said as they closed in on his office.

 “Yes sir?”

 “I need you to track down a Linda Cartwright.” Mike told him, hoping that she would have more answers for him.

 “Of course, sir.”

 “Also, go ahead and get me a copy of his phone records. I want to know who he was talking to. If he didn’t tell Kimberly anything, maybe he told someone else.”

 “I’ll get right on it, sir.” Miles said, before turning and heading back towards the rest of the station.

 Mike headed into his office and closed the door behind him. He was exhausted. The hangover was more or less gone, but the events of the day were starting to catch up to him. He hated being the one to give bad news. Watching Kimberly fall apart like that was not a pleasant experience.

 He still had a lot of work to do before he could call it a night, but he just wanted to take a few moments to catch his breath before he started on any of it. Unwind a bit. It was a wish that was deprived him when a knock on his door startled him. He looked up to find Nelson on the other side of the door. Reluctantly he waved her in.

 “Sir, I found something.”

 “I’m listening.” Mike said, doing his best to seem interested. The last thing he wanted to do was look exhausted in front of Nelson who hadn’t been home to sleep once since the body was found. She had stepped up in a big bad way.

 “Near the body I found a notebook. I discarded it at first, but then I remembered that his mother said he was a writer. Inside was a receipt for a bar called Old Manor from the night before.” She told him.

 “The Old Manor. You think the notebook was his?”

 “I do sir.” She told him. Mike nodded, getting to his feet.

 “I guess I’m going to a bar tonight.” He told her.

 “Try not to have too much fun.” She told him with a smile.

 “Don’t make me fire you.”

 “Perish the thought.” She said as she headed back towards her desk. She looked even more ragged than he did. He made a mental note to give her a raise when this was all said and done.

**Chapter 8**

 The Old Manor was one of the few bars in town that the sheriff wasn’t a patron of. It was a hole in the wall. Tiny little place that didn’t have a lot to offer. It was perfect. When this was all done, he was going to have to come back and check it out.

 The inside was even more run down than the out. It had clearly seen better days, which only served to endear it to Mike all the more. There were a few people scattered around the bar, mostly drinking alone. Working the bar was a middle-aged guy who seemed upbeat. He seemed to smile and bounce from costumer to costumer. Doing his best to make everyone feel at home.

 “Can I have a word?” Mike asked, walking up to the bartender. He stopped and turned to look at Mike.

 “Sure thing, boss. Give me one second and I’ll meet you at the bar.” He said, before starting back on his rounds. Mike took a seat at the bar, watching the bartender greet each and every person. The man seemed to really love his job.

 “So, what do you have?” The bartender said as he made his way back behind the bar, a grin glued to his face. Mike couldn’t tell if it was real or not, but it came across as such.

 “Answers, if you don’t mind.”

 “Not the normal request, but shoot, maybe I can help you out.” He said with a laugh. Mike pulled out a picture of Jacob Samson, handing it to the bartender.

 “You see this kid in here?” Mike asked. The bartender looked the picture over, nodding.

 “Yeah, yeah. I think he was in here last night.” He said looking at the picture. An older gentleman at the end of the bar waved him over. He handed the picture back and went to take care of the customer. He was back moments later.

 “Was that the first time he was in here?” Mike asked.

 “Yes sir. He had a date; one he was a bundle of nerves about. That he was.” He said with a laugh. “You his pop?”

 “No, I’m Sheriff McMallen. I need to know everything about Samson’s experience here last night.”

 “Samson? That’s his name?” The bartender asked.

 “Yes sir. What can you tell me?” Mike asked, yet again.

 “Is he in some kind of trouble?” The bartender asked, attempting to avoid the conversation.

 “Look, Mr.?”

 “Grimm. Zackery Grimm, owner of this fine establishment, and no disrespect to an upstanding man of the law like yourself, but I don’t fancy getting this young lad in a world of trouble.”

 “I’d say the ship for that has sailed, seeing as he was murdered last night. His last known location? This fine establishment.” The sheriff said, enjoying the look of shock on the bartender’s face just a bit too much.

 “Dead? Dead, dead?” He asked, his eyes gone wide. “Leaving here? What happened?”

 “All good questions, which brings us to why I’m here, Mr. Grimm. What can you tell me about his date?”

 “Ah, Ms. Masters. Charisma, I believe her first name is.” He answered a bit too quickly.

 “I see you picked up on her name, not his. She a looker?” Mike asked. Mr. Grimm just let out a low whisper. Admitting that she was.

 “Yet, even I am not so bold as to request the honor of her name in front of her date. No, she’s in here a lot. Always with different guys. Never the same one twice.”

 “Really? You get the impression that there is anything more to these dates?” Mike asked. “If you get my meaning?” At first it seemed that Mr. Grimm was lost as to the meaning, but after a few seconds he picked up on the real question being asked.

 “Oh god no. Well, maybe, whose to say. But, you being a man of the law not-withstanding, if she is a lady of the night, I might needs to pry into my piggybank.” He said with a laugh and a wink.

 “Right. If there’s nothing else you can tell me, I really must be going.” Mike said, getting to his feet. “If you think of anything else, please call the station.”

 “Will do law man.” The bartender said, cleaning out a glass. “By the way.” Mike stopped, turning to look. “I hope you catch whoever did it. Kid seemed like good people.” Mike just nodded. Glad to be away from the overly happy bartender. He would have to rethink coming out here to drink once this was all over.

**Chapter 9**

 Mike sent his men on the task of tracking down Charisma Masters. She was easier to find that Linda Cartwright, whose name had changed to Linda Reyes. Turns out that she had gotten married. Mike couldn’t help think that Jacob calling her in the middle of the night might not have sat well with her husband Darrel.

 A little fact that he picked up from Jacob’s call log. The only calls he made that whole night was to Kimberly, early in the evening and then to Linda at around 1 or 2 in the morning. A late-night call more than likely meant he was drunk and got rejected from Charisma. Or, if Mike’s theory was correct, he might have felt guilty after what happened with the call girl.

 Early the next morning Mike showed up at her house. He wasn’t sure what to expect, only that this woman was by all measures a knock out. When Charisma answered the door, he found out just how much of one she was. His mind went blank for a second as she asked him what he wanted.

 It took him close to a full minute to remember that he had a name, let alone what it was. When he finally put it together and spit it out, she invited him. She seemed nice enough. They made polite small talk and he couldn’t help but hang on her every word. If he didn’t know better, he would have sworn he was falling in love with her. She was perfect. Everything that he had ever wanted in a woman.

 “So, what brings you out here Sheriff? Surely not just to see me?” she asked at last.

 “I would love to come and just see you. Anytime.” He said, the words streaming out of his mouth faster than he could think them. She smiled at him.

 “Yet we have never met before. What else could it be?” She asked, not unkindly. He felt like an idiot. Of course, he was here for a reason. She was the last one to see Jacob alive. He was here to find out anything that he could about that night. It was almost as if a fog lifted from his head. It was the most off-putting feeling he had ever experienced.

 “I’m sorry, I don’t know what got into me. Um, yeah, I’m here to talk to you about a Jacob Samson. You were seen on a date with him a few nights ago.” Mike said, his face blushing as he thought about how stupid he had to look. How unprofessional.

 “I remember Jacob. He was just the sweetest. How’s he doing? He ran out of here in such a hurry.”

 “He ran out of here? So, the two of you came back here after the Old Manor?” Mike asked.

 “What’s this about Sheriff?” she asked instead of answering the question. “Your questions are starting to get a bit intrusive. You aren’t jealous, are you?” She said with a laugh, running her hand on his arm. He couldn’t help but blush. He was jealous. He didn’t even notice it until she pointed it out. He wanted her all to himself.

 “No.” He lied. “Um, uh,”

 “Jacob.” She said, supplying the name that had slipped his mind.

 “Jacob, yes, um. He uh, he was found dead.” He replied, pulling back a few steps from Charisma. The farther he got from her the clearer his mind seemed to become.

 “He what? When?” she asked, seeming genuinely concerned.

 “His body was found the morning after your date. Someone left him in a dumpster.” Mike told her, trying to get his bearings.

 “That’s horrible! Who would do that?” She asked. “He was so sweet, so full of life. His poor mother. They were so close.”

 “That’s what I’m trying to figure out. Can you tell me where he went?” Mike asked again.

 “We came back here from the bar. We were having such a great time, or at least I thought we were. Once we got back here, he went to the restroom. I guess he thought I couldn’t hear him, but he made a phone call. Arguing with someone. I couldn’t make out who he was talking to, but he seemed upset when he came out. He made up an excuse about having to go home and took off. Promising me to call. Now I know why he didn’t.” She said, taking a seat on the sofa.

 “Did he mention anything about anyone who might have problems with him?” Mike asked.

 “I’m sorry, he didn’t. He seemed very likeable. I can’t imagine anyone wanting to hurt him.” She said. Mike just nodded, not knowing what to say. Once again, he cursed himself for his inability to deliver upsetting news.

 “I’m going to find out. No one should have to be found the way he was.” Mike promised. “If you don’t mind me asking, how did the two of you meet?”

 “A dating app, Love Connection.” She chuckles to herself. “Not that I’ve had any luck with the app. Jacob was one of the better ones.”

 “Sounds like.” Was all that Mike could say before taking his leave. There was something about Charisma that Mike couldn’t shake. She was the most exquisite woman he had ever laid eyes upon.

**Chapter 10**

 Linda Reyes worked from home, doing some form of online notary jobs. Her husband worked construction. Mike made sure to pay her a visit while her husband was away. He had to figure that the late-night fight already put enough of a strain on their relationship. No reason to add to that farther.

 “Can I help you?” She asked as she answered the door. She was clearly apprehensive at seeing the uniform.

 “I’m Sheriff McMallen, I take it you’re Linda Reyes?” He asked, already knowing the answer.

 “I am. What’s this about?” She asked, holding the door as close to closed as she could.

 “I need to talk to you about your phone call with Jacob Samson.” The sheriff said. She stuck her head out and looked around, almost if she was freaked out that someone would over hear. She pulled open the door and ushered him in. “Not so loud.”

 Mike walked inside the house; it was nice. Everything a young couple could want in a first home. She had made a nice life for herself. Made him feel all the worse that he was about what he was about to tell her.

 “What do you want to know?” She demanded, shifting uneasily on her feet. Mike wasted no time in telling her about Jacob’s untimely passing and asking her to recount the phone conversation. It turned out that Jacob had called her to confess his undying love.

 An unexpected phone call, seeing as they haven’t spoken in a few years. Jacob started telling her about how much he regretted not fighting for her. It was almost romantic. She just didn’t feel the same way. She was married now, and while she loved him once upon a time, that time had passed. She was happy now. That’s what she told him, Jacob didn’t like the answer. He begged her to talk to him. To just meet him and they could talk about it. He didn’t seem himself.

 “Do you know anyone who would want to hurt him?” Mike asked.

 “No one, everyone loved him. He was the sweetest guy.” She told him, tears in her eyes. “He always put everyone before himself. Anytime it came down to his happiness or someone else’s, he picked them. Every time. It cost him a lot.”

 “What about your husband? He couldn’t have liked that late night call.”

 “He didn’t know about it. He was out with his brother at the time.” She replied. Mike nodded. From all accounts, Jacob was a great guy. Who could have done this to him? Why?

 “I’ll get out of your hair.” Mike said, leaving a decidedly less happy Linda behind him. He took a few moments in the car to catch his breath. This whole affair was starting to get to him.

 “Sheriff, are you there?” Nelson’s voice came over the wire.

 “I’m here.”

 “I got the report on the dating app.” Nelson said. Mike asked her to go on. “She was Jacob’s first match on the site.”

 “How about her results?” Mike asked.

 “Those were far more interesting.” Nelson told him. “Everyone that I’ve checked on so far is missing.”

 “Missing?”

 “Missing.”

 “Well, isn’t that something.”

 “I thought so.”

 “Maybe it’s time I go have another word with her. Nelson,” Mike said.

 “Yes sir?” She replied.

 “Keep going through her records. Find me someone who isn’t missing, that I can talk to. Also find me out anything you can on her past. She’s suspect number 1, start building my case.”

**Chapter 11**

 “She’s suspect number 1, start building my case.” The sheriff’s voice said over the dispatch that Kimberly had hooked up in her car. She had invested in one for her reporting duties. Charisma Masters. That was the name of the woman who had murdered her best friend.

 She did enough stories about people that the law had failed. Either through malice or negligence. Kimberly didn’t plan on allowing Jacob to be one of those people. She was going to take the law into her own hands. She was going to revenge her friend, no matter what it cost her.

 If the sheriff was heading towards Charisma’s house it didn’t give her a lot of time. She had to beat him there. She had followed the sheriff since he left the station that morning and marked each location on her gps.

 Kimberly pulled it up and raced there, running more than a few red lights. Only to discover that she was too late. She pulled up to the apartment just in time to witness the sheriff walking Charisma out to his car.

 “Fuck!” She said to herself. She sat there for a few moments after they drove off trying to figure out what her next plan of attack was. The sheriff wasn’t the most efficient officer, there was no way that he solved this on his own. If this bitch was going to be put away for killing Jacob, she was going to have to help.

 It didn’t take long for her to pick the lock into Charisma’s apartment. The inside was the most elegant room that Kimberly had ever laid eyes on. This woman clearly had money, but Kimberly wasn’t there to sight see. She needed to find evidence.

 Kimberly walked around the apartment, taking everything in. It didn’t take her long to find Charisma’s office. It was larger than one would have expected in an apartment of this size, with a large oak desk in the center of the room. On top rested a PC and laptop that was open. It seemed that she was in the middle of some work when the sheriff has arrived.

 The laptop had locked back up, but the pc was still open. One of the taps was for a dating site called, Love Connection. Kimberly looked through passed matches and found numerous men, including Jacob. She started reading through the messages. They were all pretty much the same, Charisma reaching out to the man and asking them for a date at a local bar named the Old Manor. There didn’t seem to be any second dates.

 Nothing else on the computer seemed of much help in her investigation. Kimberly was all set to give up when she spotted a feeding journal left open on the desk, besides the laptop. Next to each date she had a single name, followed by a description of how they tasted. Kimberly couldn’t believe what she was reading. This crazy woman was writing about how men tasted. Not their physical taste mind you. She was talking about their essence. Their souls.

 Kimberly thumbed through the feeding journal until she found Jacob. “Sweet, kind, innocent, hurt, damaged, just a tad of bitterness smothered under compassion.” The words hit her harder than she expected. It described Jacob to a t. Ever since he was hurt, he hadn’t been the same. He had a deep pain that he did his best to hide. To bury under layers and layers of happiness that never seemed to ring true.

 “You enjoying what you’re reading?” A voice said from behind her. Kimberly turned around to find Charisma standing there with a smirk on her face. Kimberly felt her stomach drop, a sense of dread washing over her.

 “What is this?” Kimberly demanded holding up the food journal, doing her best to sound brave. To sound in control.

 “A food journal. What does it look like?” She said, taking a few steps towards Kimberly. “I mean, maybe you don’t know this yet, you’re still young after all, but us girls need to start being more careful with what we eat, as we age.”

 “You didn’t eat Jacob. This isn’t funny!” She snapped.

 “Didn’t I?” Charisma said, taking yet another step forward. “Not everyone eats in such a brutal manner, as you humans. Some of us are a bit classier.”

 “What the fuck are you talking about?” Kimberly asked, the fear starting to make itself clear on her face as she fell back a step. Charisma responded by taking a step forward, an almost hungry look on her face.

 “How did you get in?” Charisma asked, forcing Kimberly back another step. “I know I locked the door.”

 “What is this?” Kimberly demanded again, attempting and failing to put anger into her voice. The only emotion she was feeling was fear. “What did you do to Jacob? Tell me!”

 “I took a little nibble. I don’t kill when I feast. Haven’t in a long time. It gets messy. People start looking around, asking questions. So, I take a bite and throw them back into the water. It’s more humane.”

 “A nibble?” Kimberly asked, her mind racing, trying to figure out what the hell was going on.

 “My sweet, dear girl. I’m a succubus. I feed of sexual energy. Some of my kind feed till their pray dies, I don’t. It’s part of why I have to feed so often. Jacob was a tasty treat, to be sure, but I sent him packing to his real love. Some woman named Linda.”

 “His ex.” Kimberly said.

 “He loved her, deeply. I merely pulled it to the surface.” Charisma said.

 “You’re a demon?”

 “I’m a succubus. Think of us as demon adjacent. I didn’t kill your friend. I don’t know who did.” Charisma promised. Kimberly didn’t know what to believe, this all sounded so radical. None of it was real, it couldn’t be.

 “The sheriff doesn’t believe you!” Kimberly spat, feeling around on the table behind her, picking up a silver letter opener, holding it tight in her hand until it bled as Charisma came closer.

 “The sheriff asked me out on a date, forgetting the reason he dragged me down to the station. Men are putty in my hands.” She said, closing the distance between the two of them.

 “You did kill him!” Kimberly said, swinging her hand with the letter opener in it at the Charisma, catching her off guard. She tried to block it, but Kimberly caught her off guard. Stabbing her right in the side.

 “Ahh!” Charisma screamed, stumbling backwards. Suddenly she didn’t look as stunning as she did moments ago.

 “You took my best friend from me. Just as he was trying to get back on his feet! Just as he was starting to come out of the hell that he was forced into! And you stole him! Stole him from the world!” Kimberly screamed as she lunged forward, stabbing the letter opener into her heart. Charisma let out a final scream as she fell to the floor. The stunning woman that Kimberly had met moments ago gone. All that was left behind was the rotting remains of an elderly old woman.

 Kimberly couldn’t process what she had just seen. It was all too much for her. She wanted justice for Jacob, but she didn’t want to become a murderer. Although, truth be told, she wasn’t sure if that was even what she was. Charisma hadn’t been lying about not being human.

 Before Kimberly could get her wits about her there was a knock at the door. A knock which quickly turned to a banging. Kimberly’s heart started racing. She had to figure a way out of here.

 “This is the sheriff, sorry to bother you again, but we really need to talk.” The sheriff’s voice called through the door. Panic started to build up inside. There was only one way in and one way out of this apartment. She was trapped.

**Chapter 12**

 Mike was kicking himself for letting Charisma just walk out of the station in the middle of his interrogation. Some interrogation. The longer he spent with her the more he was consumed with her beauty. Falling more and more in love with her as they spoke. He wasn’t even asking her questions about Jacob by the end.

 He had never felt that way before. It had just come over him in a wave, he couldn’t resist it. He all but proposed to her right then and there. She had agreed to a date with him and it had been the happiest moment of his entire life. He had never felt such joy.

 It was quick lived. No sooner had she left the station than he started to come back to his senses. He replayed the conversation in his head and felt like a damn fool. That was being too kind. He was worse than a fool. He had almost let a murderer go free because he had a crush like some kind of child. He couldn’t believe his own actions.

 “She’s not answering.” Nelson said, stating the obvious. Mike just nodded, signaling for the other two deputies to get the door down. Deputies McCloud and Ryan brought forward the battering ram.

 Mike motioned for them to wait and called out to Charisma one last time. When there was no reply he nodded for McCloud and Ryan. They rammed the door, bursting it open. “We’re coming in!” Mike called, pulling out his own gun. The others followed his lead.

 The apartment was much as it was the last time, he saw it, except with the added debris from breaking down the door. “This is a nice place.” Nelson said, as she started to clear the rooms.

 “Sheriff!” Ryan called out. Mike followed the sound of his voice to the office, where he found an older woman’s body laid out on the ground. She had been stabbed through the chest. “Who is she?”

 “I wish I knew.” Mike said. Nelson and McCloud entered the room. “Any sign of her?” They both shook their heads. Charisma had gone, most likely fled the city and murdered one last victim before taking her leave. “Fuck!”

 There were signs of a struggle all over the room. It seemed this old lady had put up a fight with Charisma before the younger woman took her life. This was all his fault. This woman lost her life because he couldn’t keep his lust to himself.

 “Sheriff.” Nelson said, she was holding her phone out to him. “We found a survivor.”

 “What?” Mike asked, taking the phone from her. It turned out that there was at least one person that Charisma went on a date with that survived. One Zackery Grimm. The owner and operator of the Old Manor.

**Chapter 13**

 The Old Manor was busier than it had been the last time he had visited. Which was only going to make this worse. For whatever reason Mr. Grimm had lied about knowing Charisma. That didn’t look good. Not in the midst of a murder investigation.

 “Sheriff, you’re back. Have a seat, I’ll be right with you.” Grimm said, as he carried drinks to a nearby table. Mike took a seat, his eyes glued to the man the entire time. He didn’t want to tip his hands to soon. The last thing he needed was to get this wrong in front of a whole crowd of people. The station was already getting shit on from all sides.

 “I take it you’re here for a drink this time sheriff?” Grimm said, coming to his table.

 “Have a seat.” Mike said, kicking out a chair for the man.

 “If you haven’t noticed, I’m working.” Grimm said. A bit of the humor gone from his voice. He didn’t like being told what to do. Mike made a note of that.

 “I insist. Unless of course you’d rather have this conversation down at the station.” Mike said, nodding once again to the chair. Grimm looked around the bar before taking a seat.

 “What can I do for you?”

 “Have you ever heard of Love Connection?”

 “That old show?” Grimm asked, his eyes scanning the rest of the bar. He was missing out on money, and not all that happy about it.

 “A dating app.” Mike said, Grimm just laughed and gestured to the bar behind him.

 “If you haven’t noticed, this is kind of my dating app. I do alright.”

 “So, you’re telling me, you didn’t match with Charisma Masters and go on a date with her, two months ago?” Mike asked, locking eyes with Grimm, who suddenly looked worried.

 “Me, with her” He said, his voice shaking. For the first time since they’ve met, he seemed out of place. “I really don’t have any idea what you’re talking about.” He said, getting to his feet, all but falling out of the chair. Mike may not have been the most efficient cop, but even he could spot a liar. The sweat pouring from his forehead, the quivering of his lip. The way his voice cracked as he spoke, all while doing his best to sound confident. He was their guy. Mike was starting to rethink Charisma as his prime suspect. Which only served to bring up the question, where was Charisma?

 “I’ve read the messages. All 145 of them.” Mike said, which wasn’t exactly true. He skimmed them, he was sure that Nelson read them all, after all, she was a good cop, but he couldn’t be bothered. There were too many of them and after a fashion they got repetitive, begging her to talk to him, to give him a second chance. Asking what he had done wrong. Offering her free drinks if she would just come to the bar. Which explained why she started bringing her other dates to the Old Manor.

 “You did?” He asked, pausing in spot. His eyes going wide. So far no one else in the bar had picked up on the tenson. A small bit of luck. Mike wanted to do this without too big a scene. Not that that was likely. Grimm looked to be on the verge of a nervous breakdown. If Mike was a betting man, which he was from time to time, he would place large numbers on him confession everything in a fit of tears. Just like in the movies.

 “I did, so why don’t you sit back down and we can discuss this.” Mike said, doing his best to sound calm and in control.

 “I. . .I have nothing to say, really. Just didn’t work out. As things are happen to not work out. You know? You know. It happens. I mean. . .” Grimm was talking faster and faster, almost as if Mike wasn’t even there. “I loved her. Not love in the sense that people just throw the word around, like I love this pizza or I love this whatever the fuck. None of that is real, not like the love I felt for her when I first laid eyes on her. She was. . .I loved her.” He was crying. Real tears coming down his cheeks. It wasn’t a full-on confession, but Mike still felt vindicated. After all, he did have a breakdown.

 “Breath.” Mike said, not making any sudden movements. The last thing he wanted was a chase, not if he could help it.

 “I have to get back to work!” Grimm said, attempting to back away, looking guilty as sin.

 “I’m not going to ask you again to sit down.” Mike said, his voice firm, commanding. Grimm took his seat, his eyes darting around the room, as if hoping an escape would present itself. “You told me that she came in here a lot with other men.” Grimm just nodded, not volunteering anything. “How’d that make you feel?”

 “How you think?” Grimm said, some of the fear replaced with anger. “I loved her and she just flaunted other men in front of me. Like I was nothing.”

 “Enough to make you want to do something about it?”

 “What?” Grimm said.

 “You know, these apps they got nowadays, are amazing. Right in the settings, you can find out all the locations someone has logged onto them. Did you know that?” Mike asked, enjoying the look of panic that flashed across the man’s face. “What?” Was all he could get out. “It seems that someone right out of this bar, logged into her account. Numerous times.”

 “That doesn’t prove anything!”

 “You’re the jealous type, am I wrong? If I can’t have her, no one can. Sound about right?” Instead of an answer, Mike got an ashtray to the head. It happened in an instant. He didn’t even notice it. Grimm snatched it off the table it and rammed into the side of his head. Before Mike even knew what was happening, Grimm was running for the door.

 “Fuck!” Mike said getting to his feet. He felt the blood on his forehead. The damn ashtray drew blood, and to make matters worse, the whole bar was paying attention now. “Don’t make me shoot you!” Mike screamed, as he pulled out his gun. The wrong reaction, no sooner were the words out of his mouth, than everyone in the bar started freaking out. People were on their feet and running. “God damnit!”

**Chapter 14**

 “He got away?” Ms. Lin asked, she was sitting across from him in his office. She sat there stone faced. She was still wearing the same outfit that she was in when he had first met her a few days before. Mike very much doubted that she had slept much since that meeting. He couldn’t even begin to imagine the loss of a loved one. Let alone a child.

 It was one of the reasons that he had worked so hard to solve this case, to try and bring her some kind of peace. Which is why as soon as he made it back from the bar, he called her and asked her to come back in. He started telling her the whole story. She was taking it better than he thought she would. Or maybe she wasn’t. Maybe she was just too heartbroken to show what emotions she was feeling.

 “I caught up with him outside the back of the Old Manor. He was trying to make a run for it. Luckily, I caught him. He gave a full confession in the car ride back. He murdered everyone she went out with. I have men out now finding the rest of the bodies.” It seemed he dumped them all in dumpsters. He had been doing it for months and no one had even noticed. Mike was really bad at his job.

 “What about the woman, the one that my Jacob went out with?” She asked.

 “Mr. Grimm swears he had nothing to do with her disappearance. He would never hurt her. I’m not taking him at his word, and it still doesn’t answer who the dead woman at her house is. It’s a mystery, we’re looking into.” Mike told her, Ms. Lin just nodded, not asking anymore questions. She just nodded and got to her feet, thanking him. “Ms. Lin, I know this might not be much solace, but everyone I spoke to, loved your son. I never had the chance to meet him, but it seems like you did an incredible job.”

 “Thank you.” With that she was out the door, leaving Mike alone to his thoughts. There was so much wrong in this town. So much that he didn’t even notice. For two months people had been being murdered and he never got wind that anything was even wrong. It seemed that no one noticed. Once upon a time he signed up for a badge to help people. What happened to that? He wanted, no needed, to get back to. He was going to make a change. Change Halts Glee for the better.

**Chapter 15**

 The interstate was empty as Kimberly raced out of town. Her heart hadn’t stopped racing since she had revenged Jacob’s murder and killed Charisma. Part of her wanted to call his mother and tell her, but that would just lead to her getting caught. She would find out soon enough, once they found the body. If they figure out that it was her body.

 The way it had just aged like that still haunted her. It wasn’t human. A succubus is what she called herself. Whatever that was, there were more of them out there. Them and who knows what else. Her whole life Kimberly had wanted to report the news and help people. She wanted to shine a light on corruption and expose the underworld that destroyed people’s lives. It turns out that there was more than one underworld. Just shining a light or reporting on events wasn’t enough. She needed to save people from these monsters. No matter what it cost her.

 In order to do that she had to find out everything she could about the supernatural. What they were, how to stop them. What they haunted. How they haunted. She had a lot of research to do. The smart thing to do would have been to go to the library and read all she could. Only she couldn’t do that. The police would be looking for her. She had no doubt. She tried as hard as she could to hide the fact that she was there, but what did she know about covering up a crime? No, if she wanted to help people, she first had to help himself. That meant getting out of town and getting far, far away from here. Quickly.

 It also meant leaving everything behind. Her whole life. Everyone that she loved. Everything that she had built for herself. Start all over, but she was ready for it. She sacrificed it all to get revenge for Jacob. As far as she was concerned it was worth it. He was her best friend, he was always there for her, even when no one else was. It was worth it, she told herself not for the first time. She had no real idea what was next for her, only that it was a new beginning. And those can be exciting.

The End