

Working Title

Liv H. Scott

Prologue

"They asked me to show you 'round, I'm Duke. Been 'ere awhile." Duke said. He was a beefy stereotypical man with a red face and slick wet eyes said extending his hand. He'd just walked in the office's glass doors; cake like crumbs stuck to the drooping elastic skin around his mouth.

"I'm Officer Adam Fellows." Officer Fellows responded, his voice soft and sleepy. A tall man by comparison, he wore a suit, carried a brief case, and shook Duke's hand with the firmness of an aging CEO.

"You must have just come in, huh?" Duke asked raising thin blonde eyebrows that were invisible against his well-padded forehead.

"I was transferred into the precinct... yes." Officer Fellows said with a slow blink and nod.

"At'a boy, you'll like this town. This town ain't like no town you've been to before." The hulking cop slapped a hand to the new man's shoulders. He lumbered past, and after checking over his shoulders Officer Fellows followed him to the front of the station.

"Present for you Duke. Dropped off just this morning." the secretary, a small girl with bright red lips and dull brown eyes called out to the old officer before turning back to the phone tucked between shoulder and ear, pressing a button on the answering machine and speaking to the phone. "Still there Mrs. Ramirez...? What's the matter this time?"

"Yeah, this town ain't like no town," Duke spoke laying a palm on the lid of the flat white donut box. Officer Fellows' crisp colored, alert eyes flicked to the note taped across the top of the box.

Chow,

C.W.

"Got enough problems 'ere to feed the national news, yeah, well you know the best way to get to know this ol' town?" The cop's fat fingers scrabbled against the top of the box with low cut fingernails. He crunched the paper note, pulling it off, crumpling it, and tossing it into the waste basket.

"Best ta take a ride 'round. Learn the area." Duke grabbed the box and headed towards the door, breathing heavy as he moved.

Chapter1

"How come he asked you to watch me? He hates you." Natalie pushes her long blonde braid back across her shoulder with a sweep of her hand. She grabs the plates off the table and swings around to rinse them and place them in the dishwasher; before glancing back at the young man lounging in her kitchen chair, dirty shoes propped on the table.

“He can trust me.” Loon shrugs looking to her with soft, sea-ice colored green eyes. “Those are two very different things.”

“Yeah, right.” she wrinkles her nose and pushes herself up to sit on the counter. Natalie pulls random drawers open and searches through them. Her fingers hit a green lighter. She picks it up, running a quick heavy thumb over the metal wheel and watching a flame spring to the top of the lighter.

“What d’you mean they’re not the same thing?” Natalie asks, looking back to Loon as he leans back in his chair, eyes closed.

“He trusts me, ‘cuz I’m family. ‘Cuz he knows I won’t try and fuck you, or let you buy only junk food with the grocery money.” Loon says without opening his eyes and Natalie rolls hers. She looks back to the lighter in her hands, flicks the flame on and off again and again.

Loon opens his eyes at the silence and moves to drop his feet off the table. He leans forward and catches Natalie’s deep brown eyes with his own pale ones.

“Your brother trusts that you aren’t going to get into trouble on my watch.” he says, a small sharp little grin appearing on his lips. “But he doesn’t like me,” he says before shrugging and leaning back in his chair.

“So you’re the only one who’ll actually follow his fucking rules.” Natalie asks raising an eyebrow. Loon laughs.

“Don’t cuss. It makes you ugly.” he says with a serious tone. He stands up and moves to the other side of the kitchen to stare at the calendar nailed to the wall. The picture is of a stream in Yellow Stone. He flips through the other months looking at their pictures. “Yeah... I’m the only one who’ll keep you Safe.”

Natalie watches him, the lighter forgotten in her hand for a moment. She watches the way he flips through the pictures, barely looking at any one for more than a few seconds.

“Loon, you smoke?” she asks.

“No. Cigarettes kill people.” Loon shoves his hands in his pockets kicking the dirty, near decaying door frame back into place. Hard enough to drive the nails deep into a fresh spot of dry-wall.

“That’s what Daryl says.” Natalie blows out a sigh.

“Yeah? It’s true. It’ll shave a few years off your life. Cigarettes Kill people.” Loon turns to frown at her. “And just because you’re brother says that doesn’t mean shit. He still smokes.”

“You still in the Craziest?” Natalie replies with a slight smile. Loon raises his eyebrows and shakes his head with a soft smile and laugh. He looks at a picture when he does it, like someone out of a perfume ad.

“Now how’s a sweet girl like you know that?” he asks.

“Everyone knows that,” Natalie laughs. “Besides, Daryl’s with them too.”

Loon leans against the newly fixed doorway and crosses his arms.

"Bluff's an idiot." he says.

"Well that's what a guy likes to hear when he gets out of prison." A man a little older than Loon, appears in the doorway from the living room. He tosses keys on the table. There's a new pack of cheap smokes in his hand, and he packs it with solid thumps against his palm.

"Out Loon." he snaps tearing the cellophane wrapper off the pack. Daryl exchanges a look with the brunet, before Loon is moving.

"See ya 'round Natalie." Loon jerks his head in a parting nod to the girl before disappearing into the dark living room. Seconds later the front door is shut hard on its hinges. The sound resonates off the kitchen walls.

Bluff glances to the door, his sister, and then down to his hands. His fingers slip into the carton and pull out a cigarette. Unfiltered. He places it between his lips and produces a lighter from his pocket.

"Hand me that ashtray." he says as he holds the flame steady and lights the cigarette.

"That's a great way to greet your sister after getting outta prison." Natalie snaps not moving to get the ash tray.

Bluff tosses the pack of cigarettes and the lighter onto the table, before looking up to Natalie and blowing out a steady stream of smoke. He says nothing, and his clear royal blue eyes hold a kind of lingering sadness. More so than usual.

Bluff strides past her and grabs the grey glass ashtray himself. He tosses it onto the table like a Frisbee, and drops into a seat, tapping his ash out into it.

There's a difference in his quietness that Natalie notes. With Loon it always felt as if he could talk too much without saying two words. He filled the room with himself. Daryl isn't like that. When he's quiet there aren't unspoken words hanging in the air. She knows he's not empty, but she feels the emptiness when Daryl is silent.

"He doesn't bug you too much?" Bluff asks. Finally, saying something. He doesn't look up at his Natalie, and she rolls her eyes. She doesn't need to hear him say it to know he's asking how Loon treated her.

"I like him, he's an ok guy." she says. She drops the lighter she was playing with on the counter and reaches to tug her braid over her shoulder, playing with the end. "Out of all of them, he seems like he's got a good heart."

"He's a psycho." Bluff says exhaling out more smoke and finally looking up at her. "The only thing that kid's got is his looks. But you didn't mind him being here?"

"No. I like Loon." Natalie says, shrugging her shoulder and dropping her hair from her hand. "I'm going to bed." She sighs and slides from the counter.

Natalie walks over and leans down to hug Daryl. For a moment she doesn't think he'll return the action but then he's dropping his cigarette in the ashtray and wrapping his arms around her.

"I love you Nat," he whispers into her hair, and kisses her head, before letting go.

Natalie gives him a small smile before she slips off down the hall towards her bedroom, leaving her brother to pick back up his cigarette and smoke over his first night of freedom.