

CLAIM WITNESS
BY
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The end of my vacation brought me to pack my bags, precisely fold the t-shirts into smaller versions of themselves, and tuck in my headphones and cassettes for lyrical relief. I didn't have much, hence my apartment looked empty; the rent would probably expire soon.

My doorbell rang and continued with a knock. I dropped the pictures in my hands at the top of my luggage then approached the door and didn't think twice when I swung it open. A police officer with dark hair looking quite young stood before me, with two others behind him. Then he began saying as the other officer moved towards me placing my hands behind my back "Florence Ellis Drime you are under arrest for the murder of Gordon Flynn you have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in court. You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be provided for you. Do you understand the rights I have just read to you?"

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Underwhelming circumstances she ended up being a smoker. Being ousted in a hard-fitting environment might have ignited her to steal her father's tobacco and her brother's lighter. She followed a clear routine at specific times and the same locations. At 2:00 pm, she would start her day smoking leaning over her balcony of the 6 floored building looking down at the streets. 6:00 pm, she would lounge on a hammock, on the same patio dressed like she was stepping out, she smoked another cigarette. Then the day ended at 10:00 behind La Coste, after her shift, cigarettes for the journey home. It was too planned to call it a coincidence, almost like the pretence that her platinum-dyed hair carried.

But this month accompanied substantial change. She met him outside La Coste after her shift at 10:00, a cigarette between her fingers. He stood in the alleyway behind the bar in a black t-shirt, loose dress pants and a black Nike face cap that hinted at his light brown hair which sprinkled across his dark brown eyes. Attractive enough. As soon as her eyes found

his presence, it also skidded past him. She lit her cigarette and moved toward home, accompanied by the pressure of his eyes.

“Lighter?” he asked halting her steps and thoughts. He stood in front of her aware of the one in his pocket. Approaching her had become a goal, especially when he saw her pale skin and timid olive eyes that looked up at him with a squint.

Smoke escaped her lips when she replied “Are you serious, or is that the shortest pick-up line I have ever heard?” Her voice was nighttime cool matching the bored look on her face.

“Why can’t it be both?” a smile crossed his lips waiting for a reaction. She stared at him for a second too long contemplating, but disappointment flooded his features too quickly.

“I don’t like chit-chat. Excuse me.” She walked past his left, reminding herself that she was 245 days sober of drama, but then she stopped with a cunning smile on her face “If I do see you again in a place that isn’t la Coste I’ll consider it then as fate.” she continued walking home. She decided to rely on fate to keep her sober or make life fun again.

A week later she picked a block of mozzarella from the rows of fridges that stood in the half-empty supermarket two bus stops away from her street. She drew in the cheese towards her basket when a figure appeared at her front, casting a shadow over her. She looked up to see the same eyes that had asked for a lighter.

“Fate?” he smiled at her; intention written in his eyes.

Gardening classes were nice but she knew, the next months would be fun. She cocked her head to the left, a cherry smile appeared on her face, and she answered “Fate.”

From that moment changes began. Phone calls started with a pristine routine within a month. At least thrice in the first week, after smoking two or three cigarettes at 2:00, she

made the phone call lying in the hammock right hand tapping on her thigh. The second week phone calls took place at 6:00. It came with an easy pace at the balcony and crushed cigarettes. The last two weeks were later at 10:00, with laughs, secret smiles, nail-picking and an ashtray beside her bed. They had formed a bud through the phone speaker.

To anyone watching the routine change became clear. There on the balcony, she sat in his lap straddling his waist and sharing kisses into the night that led to the bedroom. Some days they would sit in the living room, watch movies she picked, and eat food he cooked. However, there were some odd days when he disappeared without a scent. She didn't mind though as she was an emblem of wicked bliss.

A night had been different. They laid in bed, both facing each other. He traced the seam of her hair watching his motions, wondering what she was thinking.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" she asked, opening her tired eyes.

"Like what?" his sight moving to her eyes.

"Like you want to say something but you can't," She stopped his hands, wrapping them with hers as she hugged them to her chest.

"I'm sorry," he said suddenly, sincerely.

"What are you sorry for?" she laughed.

"I'm sorry for loving you," an apology and confession he whispered.

Her laugh stopped and she looked at him baffled "Why would anybody be sorry for loving somebody?"

"Because they know they aren't worthy of such love," he replied looking away from her strong stare.

“Then I'm sorry for loving you too,” She kissed him because she meant it, neither was she worthy and she too had something to be sorry for.

The third month spiralled. She stood in front of the mirror combing her hair and the air felt dew. Empty eyes stared right back at her. With a sigh, she glanced at the object on the sink. A forced smile found its way to her face as she picked it up. She approached the sleeping figure on the bed and sat beside him. Leaning to his ear, she whispered loud enough with fluorescent enthusiasm “I'm pregnant.”

“You're what?” he woke up with a questionable expression.

“Pregnant,” she repeated ignoring the speechless features on his face “I'm keeping it. I love you.”

Within the second week, he stopped coming as often, and if he did, it was usually after 10:00. It became a burden that held untold secrets and mild contempt. She concluded at the end of the week that maybe being sober now for 328 days had been enough.

The Friday of the third week she turned around from the sink and looked at him across the kitchen island with a smile “I want to buy a frying pan tomorrow, come with me?” he looked up at her and smiled back with a nod.

After that conversation, the day after they brought the frying pan, he disappeared.

Six months after his disappearance the police flooded her doorstep at 10:30. If they had stepped in thirty minutes later, she would have been gone the same way she came.

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The cold light irked her eyes as she frowned at it. A voice brought her attention to the man who sat in front of her.

“What do you mean by he disappeared? He’s dead!” Blotched red with frustration he yelled at his so-called witness.

“Oh, I saw that too at around 2 o’clock when they brought the frying pan...”

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He stood at the counter by the coffee machine staring at it almost in a daze, taking in the silence of the room. She approached him from the back, with soundless footsteps She stood behind him. Wrapping her arms around him she rested her forehead on his back and took a deep inhale of his scent eyes closed.

“You know I love you right?” she explained with a delicate whisper.

“I know,” he replied, holding her hand for a few seconds, releasing it to pick up the coffee.

She released her hand from his body, resting back on the island behind her. He turned around and handed her a cup of chamomile tea.

“TV?” he asked avoiding her strong stare.

“Sleepless in Seattle,” she replied taking a sip of the tea so hot it burned her tongue. With a nod, he started moving around the island and she followed behind leaving the tea on the table. Her hand moved to the frying pan that stuck out of the shopping bag on the floor beside the island. She had enjoyed the metallic weight of the object in the store earlier but now it seemed lighter as she increased her grip on its handle. Walking behind him, she gently called his name “Flynn,” As he turned around from his right, with the weight of the frying pan she swung her left arm straight to his head. The mug he held shattered to the ground leaving a splotch of coffee on the brown wooden floorboard. For a short second, his eyes blurred at her figure. Surprise and confusion flooded his features before he fell to the ground and blacked out.

Fading out of the screeching headache. His eyes peeled open heavily. It took several blinks to settle into his current predicament. His eyes settled on the time- 6:01 before they shifted to the figure that held a cigarette between her lips smoking out the balcony window.

“What are you doing Flore?” he muttered with a sour voice, taking in his bound wrist and feet to a chair.

“I say I'm pregnant and you panic,” she said slowly almost sadly, still staring out the window “I was trying to protect you. Maybe with a baby, you wouldn't try to kill me but it's funny because it's exactly when I tell you I'm pregnant that you actually try to kill me”

“You found out.” Flynn said alarmed, eyes wide “It's not what it looks like, I love you and especially the baby-”

“I'm not stupid Flynn. I knew who you were from the moment you stepped foot in that bar. I'm quite versed in Hugo's chain of command. I wasn't sure why though but right after that I found out Hugo sent you.” Crushing the cigarette out in the ashtray beside her, she stood in front of him “I have good news though.... I'm not pregnant.” A cherry smile flooded her face again with unreasonable tears. He looked up at her with different emotions anger, hurt, frustration and disgust.

“Three fucking months, this has been a fucking game to you right?”

“A game? You're the one trying to kill me.” She wiped the blood that trickled down his head he jolted away from her hand “Honestly, this was meant to be a therapeutic break from work as advised by my therapist. It started getting boring. I tried to warn you that first night you know but then you came to the supermarket. Fate? You have got to be kidding me. You followed me throughout that entire week.” She cupped his jaw lifting his face

towards hers “It was like the world was rewarding me with a little fun. You just had to ruin it didn’t you.”

“I should have killed you when I had the chance,” he said quietly knocking her hand off his jaw.

“Now that I wondered. why didn’t you?” she asked cocking her head to the left and staring him in the eyes. He stared right back at her contemplating the question. Absent of an answer he looked back down, eyes shut tight. She sat down on the center table looking outside the balcony window “Love is a stupid word, right? It holds so much feeling that could render one mentally crippled.”

“Hugo will still kill you, I’m just one of many.” A warning

With a sigh she stood up, walking to the cabinet close to the door “That’s the difference between us, you seem to have forgotten the world we live in. I’m a priceless daughter nobody wants to play with and here you are,” she opened an old looking case with words inscribed in Japanese. Inside, laid a 30-inch wakizashi sword. Taking it out of its case and scabbard, she walked back to him and stood in front of him. “Falling for the enemy is a sin in this game. It has to be one of us. Hugo will be very disappointed.”

“You’re right. Either way, I actually loved you,” he said with a resigned look in his eyes. She rested her forehead on his when a tear ran down her face. She placed her lips on his for the last time before pulling away slightly.

“I loved you too, I’m sorry.” The blade ran across his neck fast and deep rendering his body cold and lifeless. She whispered a thank you before settling into the couch with a sigh. She pulled out another cigarette.

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“End of my story, what do you think detective? Would you publish me?” the cold metal chair and table were familiar yet bothersome. The only thing that bothered me more was the scolding that waited for me at home.

“Is that a confession Miss Drime?” Detective Homer had deemed me guilty of a crime I clearly swore I witnessed. I told him everything, I was getting hungry and worst of it all I didn’t even finish packing.

“I told you it’s a story of a crime I witnessed,” I explained again. He didn’t seem to appreciate my story.

“Where were you when this crime happened?” he had asked earlier and I’m really sure I answered the question but of course, he wasn’t listening. I’m getting tired of this.

“I’m not a fan of chit-chat detective.” I smiled but he looked at me with annoyance about to sputter out more unnecessary words.

Finally, Winston entered the room bringing in the shameless cool air he embodied, perfect hair-sleeved back, a dark red suit and a loose black shirt. His tattoos peeked out of his wrist. His dark eyes looked at me with disappointment.

“Detective.” He greeted “Florence it’s time to leave, Let’s go.” The deep commanding baritone jolted me to my feet.

“And who might you be, walking into this room!” the detective yelled at Winston, fuse igniting.

“You must be new here. Winston Black,” he handed his card to the detective whose face turned pale white in realization “Miss Drime is fond of telling obscene stories, I apologize

for the inconvenience but we must take our leave now I'm too busy for this. If you have any follow-up questions, be sure to call that number."

"It was nice meeting you detective." I waved cheerfully to the mute detective while Winston had already stridden out the door.

Once we were out of the police station Winston stopped in his footsteps which led me smack into his broad back, sending me a step backwards. He turned around and looked at me expressionless but I could see the annoyance in the veins of his clenched hands.

"Indie Ellis Black. What happened to not killing anyone? You are gone for more than a year and this is when you call? This is not how you take a break."

"I was but it got boring and Flynn was really...." I started explaining but stopped when he started walking again to the car and I followed. When we settled in the car, he broke the silence again "Your break is over, we're going home" he said sharply. Murmuring to himself "So much for fucking therapy."

"I missed you too brother," I said quietly laying back in the passenger seat, hand on my belly. 6:00 and I couldn't think of a cigarette but Flynn's tearful confessions and my lies. I concluded that Hugo's death would be a reward for the love, and the father I killed.

As Florence is me, as I am Florence.