

CHAPTER ONE

“I guess this is what happens when you avoid your problems by moving into a serene neighborhood” Leila sighs.

“A little boredom won’t kill you, Lei. Besides, this is what you need.” Her best friend, Ava says. She sees a silver lining in any situation. But that won’t work for Leila now.

After the dramatic few months she’s had, a little peace is what she needs. That was why she decided to move to Cappa Villa. It’s a very small neighborhood where little to nothing happens. And she liked it that way...at least up until she stayed three months in boredom.

“I know, I know,” Leila replies. “You know what would have made everything perfect?”

“Don’t tell me”

“If you came with me to this darn place.” Leila honeyed in hopes it’ll work this time.

“Nice try. But you know I can’t. My workplace is lightyears away from Cappa Villa. I’d never be able to get to work on time” Ava says. She was always so dedicated to her work. Quite understandable since she’s a Doctor. She sighs.

“But Leila, are you okay? I know you don’t like talking about it, but Aaron was a psycho and a murderer. None of it was your fault, okay?”

She was right, Leila didn’t like talking about how her ex-boyfriend, Aaron messed up her life and possibly her sanity. He was a little possessive and borderline obsessive still, she didn’t see it. But Ava was wrong, It was her fault. When she sensed how intense Aaron was after a fight, she decided it was best to end things with him. She then later hooked up with a guy at the club. Then the next morning, she woke up to the dead body of the guy whose name she didn’t even know. Terrified, she called the police. It was later revealed that Aaron had killed him and then fled the scene.

“I’m fine, Ava. That was like ages ago, I’m better now. And before you say it, no I don’t need to see a therapist. ” She could hear Ava’s disappointment over the phone. Leila smiled.

“The last thing I want is a shrink telling me shit I don’t need to hear” She looks over at her watch. “Hey, gotta go grocery shopping”

“Alright. Hey, be safe. And let me know if anything happens” Ava warns.

“C’mon Ava.. Nothing ever happens here.”

Taking a quick shower and changing into clean, white cotton sweatpants and a black baggy T-shirt, she took her car keys and searched around for her white purse. Staying in just a two-bedroom small house in the secluded part of town, you can’t exactly lose something in there. Putting her braids in a tight ponytail, she headed out.

Leila placed her purchase in her small car, turned on the ignition, and drove away. She could only get groceries that would last her till the end of the week. Being a writer means she needs to be very careful about how she spends her money. It wasn’t a very chivalrous occupation as being a Doctor like Ava, but writing is something she had always wanted to do since she was a teenager.

Parking by the side of her house, Leila got out of her car and was in the process of lifting her bags from the back when she felt it.

Her neck stiffens and that familiar tingling sensation spreads down her spine inducing a slight shiver her. She knew that feeling. She felt it before in a similar situation. She was being watched. Alarmed, she whipped her head to the back and scanned her environment.

Nothing. Just buildings and a small bush opposite her house.

“ Relax Leila. You’re just paranoid.” She said to herself.

She looked back to the bush. “You’re not scared of plants now, are you Leila?”

Quickening her pace, she opened the door to her house, the tingling sensation still on her back.

After taking a highly-needed shower, she lay on her bed contemplating whether or not calling she should disturb Ava again. She never really had that many friends. She had only ever had one friend. Concluding not to, she decided to try something else.

“The things boredom makes me do” Leila groans

Grabbing her second phone from the nightstand, she called her number intending to speak to herself through her other phone. She had seen a funny TikTok where a bunch of teenagers in the same room called each other. Whereas that was sweet, hers was more pathetic. As she couldn't call anyone but herself. Sighing, she hit the green “call” button. Her second phone rang three times before she decided to pick it up. Right as she was about to hit accept, the line automatically connected, eliciting a shocked gasp from her. One thing she was certain of was the fact that she hadn't yet accepted the phone call before it connected. *Add that to the list of weird things that have been happening in my life lately*, She thought.

Hoping she received the call unknowingly, she said in a small voice “Hello?” Silence. More silence. What seemed like an eternity passed by.

“Is someone there?” She asked with more confidence. *Do you want there to be someone else, Leila? Get a grip!*

“Leila” A husky voice rasped.

She let out a shocked gasp, her phone almost slipping from her fingers. Leila looked at her phone, making sure she didn't mistakenly call a different number. But sure enough, that was her number.

“What the hell... Who is this?” She demanded, fear trickling down her spine.

“Did you really think you could escape me?” The voice said.

“If you don't tell me who you are right now, I'm going to-”

Then it struck her. A cold feeling washed down her as she could feel the realization dawn on her. No way, that can't be. Leila was certain he was in prison. There's no way her ex-boyfriend could be out already.

"Ah, so you recognize me now, huh? The whole two years we've been together and you don't know my voice, Leila?" Aaron said, his voice slowly getting louder.

She took her first phone intending to call the police.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," Aaron warned.

There's no way he could have heard that through the phone. As if reading her thoughts, he said "I know every single motion you make, sweetheart. I see everything you do. There are cameras at every nook and cranny of your apartment."

That coward. She slowly eyed her surroundings for anything suspicious or out of place. Nothing

"What do you want, Aaron?" Fear coating the words.

Silence.

"Aaron?"

"I'm ready to forgive you, Leila. I'm aware of how very ignorant you were for breaking up with me, but now you know how deep my love for you is" He uttered frantically. "I will gladly kill ten more, and anyone that tries to come in between us."

"Aaron, please stop this. You deserve to be in jail. Locked up forever. How on earth did you even escape? And all this talk of cameras and shit, what are you, James Bond? Never call me again, Aaron. And we aren't dating anymore" Leila replied sternly.

That unsettling feeling in the pit of her stomach spread. Deep down, she knows her words are falling on deaf ears. If Aaron wants something, he gets it no matter what. But she'll be damned if she sits back and allows him to control her like he did before.

Leila heard a long intake of breath from the other line and held hers, already dreading what he was about to say.

He snickered “You’re going to regret saying that, my love. But don't worry, I’ll be there when you do. Oh, and I have a surprise for you, Leila”

“What?”

“You’ll see.” He hung up.

What does that coward mean? She picked up her phone and called the cops, not caring if the house was bugged or not.

After the long process of scrutinizing her apartment in hopes of discovering all the hidden cameras which Leila was certain took years, it was discovered that five cameras were strategically placed in the nooks and crannies of her place.

“ How is that even possible? How can five cameras just suddenly appear in my small apartment? And there’s no way I couldn’t have noticed it. ” She replied incredulously.

“We suspected he bribed or hired someone to do the job. A repairman or plumber would have access to your house and sneak in those cameras.” The detective said. A dark-skinned man with almond-coloured eyes who seems to be in his late thirties.

“Oh my God. So that bastard has been watching everything I did in this house?” Her mind went back to all the weird things she had done in the name of boredom. She shuddered. The reality of the situation finally sank in. She dated an obsessive psychopath.

“I’m sorry, Ma'am. I know how unsettling that must be for you” The detective said.

“But Aaron said something about a surprise. He said he had a surprise for me. I have no idea what that means but it definitely isn't good. “ Leila said.

“Don’t worry, Ma’am. We will station a man outside your house. You’re safe here” The detective said while pointing to another man. “This is James. He’ll be stationed outside your apartment. You have nothing to be worried about.”

After tossing and turning on the bed, Leila eventually concluded sleeping that night was impossible. Sitting up on her bed, she stretched over the counter to

check the time on her phone. The time is 2:28 and she still hasn't been able to get a wink of sleep. Contemplating calling Ava to tell her about what had occurred that afternoon, she once again decided not to. The last thing she'd want was to burden her best friend at such a late hour. She'd rather just call her the next morning.

A subtle *click* of the door sounded somewhere in her apartment. Very vague to be noticed by most people, but she has always had sensitive hearing. She got up slowly, as if making a single noise would mean the whole house crashing down on her. Holding her phone in her hand, she made her way to the living room. Depending on the self-defense class she made herself take back in the day, Leila walked down the passageway that leads to the living room. Another soft thud.

Leila's heart was beating so hard, that she was almost sure the whole building could hear it. Reaching the living room, she scanned the environment. There was nothing but pitch-black darkness. She looked towards the kitchen. Something was not right. The dim torch set directly above the kitchen island was on. She was certain she had put it out before going to bed. Fear enveloped her making it almost impossible to move. Forcing every bone of her body to move, she walked towards the kitchen.

A long narrow red box rested on top of the kitchen island. *What if it's a bomb? How did I get myself into such a ridiculous situation?* There's no doubt who this is from, whatever "this" is. Her ex-boyfriend has gone way too far. Deep down, she has always known how unpredictable he was. Dangerous, yes, but she had deluded herself into thinking he would never hurt her. Now staring at the ominous box in front of her, she realized how stupid she was. Anything could be in there. And he could be in her house now, watching her every move. Waiting for her to open the package and reveal whatever "surprise" he has planned for her.

Summoning up her hidden courage, Leila grabbed a knife from the rack and turned on the living room light.

Nothing. She checked her curtains, all her rooms, and the bathrooms. Still nothing.

Leila headed back to the kitchen counter. As if handling a motion-triggered bomb, she slowly weighed the red box with her hands. Well, at least it was red. She opened the box.

“What the hell!” Leila gasped.

A single white rose with its thorns carefully sniped off laid on the carton-colored interior of the red box. What startled Leila was not the delicate flower or the expensive material used in making the box. But it was the blood. Deep red blood marred the rose petals, a sharp contrast to their white color.

“Is this some kind of a joke, Stain

Aaron?” She said to no one in particular. Her fears slowly bubbled up to the surface.

She didn't bother picking up the rose, scared that the blood would somehow ruin her just like it did the rose. Picking up her phone, Leila called Ava. She just couldn't keep it from her best friend anymore. She didn't want to burden her, but the load had become way too much for her to bear. Ava picked up on the second ring

“Ava”

“Goodness Leila, it's three in the morning,” Ava replied sleepily.

“Ava, I don't know how to tell you this,” Leila said frantically, feeling the burden of everything clogging her throat and making it hard to speak.

“What do you mean, are you ok?” Ava replied, the sleep immediately clearing from her voice.

“Aaron, he followed me here. He threatened me, Ava. I don't know what to do. And now, he's leaving me a bloodied rose”. Leila replied, the reality of everything bringing her to the verge of tears.

“Goodness Lei, why didn't you tell me all these since? Ok, don't worry. We'll fix this. Stay calm. I'll grab the next flight to Cappa Villa. Just stay put.” Ava said, handling the situation more reasonably than Leila could.

“Please hurry, Ava. Cause I don't know what else to do at this po-”

Sharp pain exploded from Leila's head, turning everything black. She could vaguely hear her best friend calling her name urgently as the pain from her head consumed her, turning her world into black as she fell to the ground unconscious.

Leila woke up to an empty, dimly lit room with a throbbing ache at the back of her head. She moved to touch the bump that seemed to be growing but realised she couldn't form movement in her hands. Panic gripping her chest, she looked down at her hands but found that they were tied to the very chair she was sitting on. Leila tried tugging on the ropes but to no avail. She was strapped to a wooden chair in a room with only one door after being knocked unconscious. Raw fear cut through Leila as she tugged harder on the ropes, probably giving herself little cuts and bruises in the process.

"Four months," A voice coming from the dark corner of the room said. Surprised that she did not notice a second person in the room with her, Leila let out a shocked gasp.

"Aaron?"

"For four months I couldn't touch or speak to you, Leila. Do you know how hard that has been for me?" Aaron asked

"You Idiot! Let me out of here" Leila screamed, still not being able to see his face

Aaron swaggered towards her and leaned down to her chair, his face merely inches away from hers. "You are never getting out of here, Leila. You and I, are meant to be together. You may not know it yet but soon, you'll come to adore me just like you did before"

Leila brought her face even closer to Aaron's, testing him "I don't know how I ever fell in love with a monster and a murderer like you in the first place. But trust me, the love I had for you is now six feet under, Aaron"

Aaron chuckled as he slowly sauntered away from her. The squeezing anxiety in her chest easing a little.

“ I saw your pathetic attempt at calling Ava for help.” Aaron said, causing the hold in Leila's chest to tighten again.

“She's not going to help you. You know why?” He asked as he opened the single door in the room. What was inside almost made Leila pass out on the spot, her eyes wide open in terror. Her best friend, Ava, was tied to another chair with a tape covering her mouth. Blood lined her brows and her eyes were damp and filled with fear.

“No, Ava!” Leila screamed

“This is going to be interesting”

WATCH OUT FOR PART TWO

