

NO VACANCY

A SHORT HORROR STORY PART 2

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 Created with Vellum

Dedication to everyone who continues to believe in me.

CHAPTER 1

ELLIE PAID little attention to the ominous dark purple clouds amassing over the Rocky Mountains to the west of I-70. Her focus was fixed on catching her flight to Miami, where she planned to retrieve the money she had shipped ahead to her new destination.

Upon reaching Denver, her strategy involved ditching the worn-out Toyota Camry, swapping its license plate, and leaving it on some obscure street. The car, obtained conveniently unlocked in the MGM casino parking garage, made odd noises but endured the eight-hour journey and quick stops—serving its purpose until Ellie could abandon it.

Midway through her thoughts, her cell phone interrupted her with a ring. Ellie contemplated ignoring it, pondering if she should have tossed the phone out hours ago. Nevertheless, she answered, delivering her customary warning, “I told you not to trust me.” Despite the upfront caution, they consistently fell for it, blinded by desire and deaf to her words.

The caller, Benny, responded with a brief silence, followed by a barrage of expletives after a pause. Ellie’s grin widened, and she teasingly asked, “Is there something else missing?” A breathless rustling ensued on the other end as Ellie continued to play her game.

When threatened, Ellie proposed a deal, promising not to hand over the laptop to the police if the threats ceased. The man, Benny, responded with more threats and pleas, revealing his desperation. Ellie, unwavering, ended the call, tossing the burner phone out of the window.

As the cold air filled the car, Ellie noticed the darkening sky, the clouds heralding an unexpected snowstorm. Driving through the snow was a dreaded prospect for Ellie, haunted by a past incident during college. Her reminiscence was cut short by the reality of her present situation and the worsening weather conditions.

Her anxiety surged as a tractor-trailer passed, prompting Ellie to consider stopping for the night. Her reluctance to halt clashed with the urgency imposed by the snowstorm. Gripping the steering wheel tightly, she debated her next move, realizing her knuckles had turned white.

The decision was made; Ellie needed to find shelter from the snowstorm. She reached for her smartphone, the one with non-burner features, reluctantly acknowledging the necessity of a break.

Passing the time, Ellie removed her wig, a disguise from her Las Vegas escapades, tossing it out the window onto the snow-covered highway. With a sigh of relief, she ran her hand through her short-cropped, dark hair, acknowledging the discomfort of wigs despite needing them to disguise her real identity.

The urgency to find a place to stop heightened as Ellie grappled with the wheel. Her latest job completed, and money in the car, she couldn't afford an accident. The need to find refuge became paramount in her thoughts as she continued the journey, navigating through the snow-covered landscape.

CHAPTER 2

ELLIE TIGHTENED her grip on the wheel as the snowfall intensified, swirling around the windshield.

Despite locating the button for the windshield wipers, Ellie still struggled with the blinding effect of the headlights reflecting off the snow.

White patches covered the road in places, indicating that the snow was sticking to the ground, a sure sign of impending icy conditions.

Despite the chill inside the car, Ellie felt sweat forming on her brow as the memories of that accident continued to haunt her.

She couldn't wait to reach the airport and board a plane, bidding farewell to cold weather forever.

Ellie cranked up the heat despite her perspiration because the car was growing colder by the second.

What should she do? Where should she stop?

Another semi-truck zoomed past her, and Ellie's knuckles turned pure white.

She needed to find a place to stop or pull over. Stopping on the side of the road was even more dangerous than any other option she could think of.

Ellie kept a close eye on the road and nearly missed the sign for the rest stop.

She must have entered Colorado some time ago without even realizing it, as the rest stop also doubled as a welcome center.

Just one more mile to go.

That's not far. Perhaps there were hotels nearby. She could stop for the night and set out in the morning, ready to catch her flight to Miami.

She passed one more exit and thought she spotted a sign for a bed and breakfast, though she wasn't entirely sure.

Shrugging, she continued driving and felt a considerable sense of relief when she saw the exit to the welcome center.

She pulled into a parking space, shifted the car into 'park,' and leaned back in her seat. She took deep breaths, closing her eyes for a few seconds to calm her frazzled nerves.

She realized she needed to use the bathroom. Opening her eyes, she glanced around. Two trucks were parked in the lot, along with a few other cars. It seemed these people had the same idea as her.

Ellie decided to make a quick trip to the bathroom, do her business, and then sit in the car while researching hotels in the area. She checked the gas tank and nodded; she still had plenty of gas. She had filled up the tank just before the storm began, and it was still three-quarters full.

"Great," she thought. "Let's get this over with."

She exited the car and practically rushed into the bathroom without bothering to put her jacket back on. She just wanted to use the restroom and get out.

She did so, and before anyone could notice her, she was back in her car with the heat still cranked up, retrieving her smartphone from her backpack.

There were hotels and motels a few miles to the east, but all of them were fully booked, according to the desk clerks. Each attributed it to the sudden snowstorm that had swept through the area. One clerk was complaining about having to stay at the hotel all night since

his shift was almost over and the night clerk had called out due to the snow.

Ellie let the phone drop into her lap and sighed. Would she really have to spend the night in this parking lot? No way. Even with state police around, it could potentially be dangerous.

Ellie picked up the phone again. She scrolled through Google and spotted the bed and breakfast. Foxworth House, it said. No website, but it was there on Google Maps. No reviews, nothing, but again there were pictures of the place. It looked really old, and Ellie wondered if it was still open.

That must have been the sign she passed right before she spotted the rest stop.

Did she take a chance or did she risk waiting for the snow to stop? Did she risk possibly freezing to death out here?

Ellie rubbed her forehead. There was no way she could stay here.

Ellie didn't expect someone to answer the phone because all she could hear was static over the line, but a woman did answer.

CHAPTER 3

“MA’AM, I CAN HARDLY HEAR YOU,” Ellie remarked, struggling to maintain a clear connection with the woman on the other side of the phone.

Typically, Ellie would have disconnected and moved on, but her need for a place to stop was pressing.

“Yes, I said...” Ellie strained to make out the words through the persistent static. “There’s a ro—” More static interrupted the transmission.

“Are you saying yes?” Ellie inquired.

“Ye—” The word came through, and relief washed over Ellie. She began to reserve the room when she realized the call had abruptly ended.

“Ugh!” Ellie exclaimed, slamming the phone shut. She had no choice but to take the chance, pondering if the woman’s connection issues were due to the snow. Odd, considering other nearby chain hotels had clear calls.

Shrugging off her concerns, Ellie started her car and cautiously drove off, just minutes away from Foxworth House.

Foxworth House, huh?

Ellie anticipated a place that was likely dirty, rundown, and barely holding its doors open, but options were limited.

Planning to leave first thing in the morning, Ellie intended to drive to Denver, catch a flight to Miami, and escape the cold.

Her heart sank with every suspicious noise from her car, possibly just her imagination, yet she gripped the wheel tightly. She breathed a sigh of relief when she reached the exit for Foxworth House.

The area was dark, devoid of lights from other buildings or street lamps. Her instincts screamed at her to turn back to the safety of the rest stop.

“No,” she thought, unwilling to drive through the snow again. Her past accident in the snow had left her cautious.

Ignoring her instincts, Ellie turned onto the main road. A red neon sign greeted her in a small parking lot.

“Motel,” it read, with “Vacancy” blinking beneath.

Lights illuminated the parking lot from an older three-story home. Smaller buildings flanked the sides, their lights revealing doors and cars covered in snow.

Although the sight of cars reassured her, Ellie remained on alert. This seemed like a shady place, reminiscent of her early days of conning.

She reminisced about those days, the drugs, and the easy money. Benny came to mind—a deserving target.

As Ellie found a parking space next to a snow-covered car, she eyed the entrance of Foxworth House. A lace curtain covered the front window, revealing an orange glow behind it. The “Open” sign blinked outside the door labeled “Entrance.”

Surveying the surroundings, Ellie cringed at the thought of what might be happening inside those dimly lit rooms. She resolved to forget this place once the roads were clear.

Exiting the car, Ellie locked it—unusual for her. Snow fell overhead as she walked into the office, a bell tinkling overhead. Stale cigarette smoke and musty air greeted her, evoking memories of similar places from her past.

A low yellow light hissed above, attached to a weary ceiling fan.

The worn-out furniture and a huge oak counter suggested neglect.

A guest book lay open on the counter, and Ellie frowned at the last entry—Lacey Marshall, exactly three years before today.

Her instincts flared, questioning the absence of recent entries. A feeling of unease settled over Ellie. She didn't want to know why.

Deciding she disliked the place, Ellie resolved to leave and never look back. Trouble was not something she sought; she had enough scars from her past.

She planned to deal with the snow, driving slowly until she found a gas station to wait out the storm.

Putting her phone away, she turned to leave but froze as she noticed a woman behind her, holding an axe.

CHAPTER 4

“CAN I HELP YA?” The woman asked. She was wearing a plaid shirt over a gray sweatshirt. Her stringy gray hair was covered in snowflakes, and her boots were caked with snow.

Ellie caught her breath and asked, “Did you have to scare me like that? You came out of nowhere.”

The older woman frowned. “I walked through the door. I guess you didn’t hear me.”

Ellie was sure she hadn’t been too lost in thought not to hear the woman walk through the door.

Ellie darted her eyes around. The way the woman looked with snow all over her, there was no way she came from another entrance since Ellie didn’t spot a side door except the one that probably went to a back office or something.

She didn’t come out of there because Ellie would have seen her.

Ellie shook her head. Whatever. It didn’t matter.

The woman eyed her, waiting for a response. Ellie noticed something that made her almost shiver.

The woman’s eyes looked like... death.

Soulless and lifeless.

Ellie had known many like this woman for years as she navigated

her way through the outliers of society. A hard life, an even more complicated past, and a present does that to a person. No matter what the person endured, you could easily see their soul had left them long ago.

Yet, Ellie thought there was something different other than a hard life, and she couldn't quite place her finger on it. Ellie almost thought the woman's blue eyes also glowed in the darkness.

Shaking off her weird thoughts, Ellie answered, "Yeah, I called about a room. You still have them?"

The woman nodded and said, "Yeah."

The woman placed the ax against an old sofa and maneuvered around Ellie to reach the other side of the desk.

Ellie watched in silent amusement when the woman pulled out some papers and an old credit card sliding... thing.

"Do you accept cash?"

The woman stopped and eyed her. "Sure."

Ellie reached into her pocket and said, "Good, most places don't anymore."

The woman shrugged and said, "You pay, you stay. Simple."

Ellie grinned as she counted some cash. She liked what the woman said. Straightforward and to the point.

"How much?"

The woman answered, and Ellie was taken aback. Cheap.

"Wow, OK." Ellie shoved some of the money back into her pocket.

She handed it over, and the woman made her sign a piece of paper and the guestbook.

Ellie frowned again. "How come I'm the first person to sign in three years?" Ellie pointed to the signature and the date. "I see other people's cars here."

"Had to switch books," the lady answered in a bored tone. "Are you going to sign in or what?"

After some hesitation, Ellie signed her name under the Lacey Marshall person.

The woman looked over Ellie's name and then turned to grab a key from the board behind her.

"Check out at 11 AM sharp. Breakfast is at 7:30 AM. Curfew starts at 10 PM."

Ellie wasn't really listening until she heard curfew. "Curfew? Why?"

"Past problems. No parties, no drugs, or drinking. Got it? Or I will call the cops."

The old woman handed Ellie the key. Their fingers brushed, and Ellie almost jumped at how cold the older woman's fingers were.

"Do you understand about the curfew?" The woman asked after placing the cash inside a drawer.

Ellie was still reeling from how ice-cold the woman's fingers were, but she finally answered with a shrug and said, "Yes, of course. No one but me checking in."

"Good," the woman said and turned away.

Feeling dismissed but amused, Ellie turned to leave the office, but before she turned to the doorknob, she realized she hadn't eaten in a long time.

"I know you serve breakfast, but do you have vending machines to hold me over until then?"

Without looking up, the woman said, "Yeah, to the far right of your room at the end of the building."

"Thanks."

Ellie exited the office. The cold air hit her, and it was kind of a relief. The oppressive atmosphere inside that office made Ellie very uneasy. It wasn't the dust and the stink of old cigarettes. It was as though she was walking through a thick fog that was weighing heavily on her shoulders.

Or maybe she was tired, and everything seemed odd.

The older woman seemed overworked and probably didn't make much money from this place. Her wrinkled and dry face told the whole story. The woman probably worked hard her whole life and never had any reward to show for it.

Ellie swore she'd never end up like that. Flashbacks of the trailer ran across her mind, but she pushed them away.

OK, get to your room. Get some sleep and drive the hell out of this depressing place in the morning but not before picking up some of that breakfast. It's probably horrible, but it's food, and right now Ellie didn't care.

Ellie walked past a couple of lit rooms, careful not to draw attention to herself. She glanced through one partially open curtain. One person was sitting on the bed, and another sat in a chair.

She thought it was odd that she didn't hear muffled voices coming through the wall or the window, but again, she didn't want to stick around long enough to listen in on a conversation.

All the cars sitting in the parking lot were covered in snow, including hers.

Ellie arrived at her room. It was room #2. Ellie placed the key in the lock. Before she turned it, she made sure her car was close enough and that no one was watching her enter the room.

Ellie happened to look down and spotted a crushed Pepsi can at the corner of the door.

Any other time, Ellie would have kicked it away, but this time the rusty can caught her eye.

It was an old Pepsi logo printed on the can. Maybe the '70s or '80s. That bothered Ellie for some reason. She realized that many companies sometimes bring back old logos and products to trigger nostalgia in consumers so they'll buy their products. It was genius.

However, there was one older can sitting in the corner of her door.

Ellie, you must be tired. You're harping over some old piece of trash.

Groaning, Ellie opened the door, walked into the room, and made sure it was locked behind her.

She searched for a light and found one on the left wall. After flicking the switch, she groaned again.

Thankfully, she didn't see any critters scurry out of the light, but

she did spot stains on the wall, and dust on the table next to the window. The blanket didn't look fresh on the bed, and she smelled a musty odor.

Ellie sighed. What to do. What to do.

She moved deeper into the room.

Flicking on the bathroom light, Ellie sighed again. At least the bathroom was clean. The towels were hard but usable.

Well, that was one good thing when she wrote her review.

Laughing lowly, Ellie sat down on the bed and shook her head. She wouldn't write a review. She didn't have the time, nor did she care enough to. This place would be forgotten once she was back on the road.

CHAPTER 5

ELLIE'S HEAD shot up as she heard a low scraping noise right outside her door. Cautiously, Ellie rose from the foot of the bed and held her phone tightly in her hand. She looked around for a weapon, and the only thing she found was a small lamp on the desk near the window. She grabbed it and unplugged it. She then approached the window and carefully pushed it back to peer outside. She caught a glimpse of the old lady walking away from Ellie's door.

Putting the lamp down, Ellie flung open the door and called, "Ma'am!" The older woman turned around, and Ellie noticed she was holding a paintbrush and a can of paint. Ellie happened to catch a drip of white paint coming off the brush. The woman turned around, obviously annoyed. "Whatcha need?"

Ellie stared at the woman and said, "You were just outside of my door. What were you doing with that paint?"

"Don't worry about it. Now go back into your room and stay there. It's time for curfew."

"Well, OK then." Ellie blinked for a minute at the sternness of the woman's voice. Ellie shut the door and locked it and then burst out laughing. She hadn't had someone talk to her like that in years. When was the last time? Her grandma? Yes, her. Ellie rolled her eyes and

chuckled again. She sat down at the edge of the bed and waited a few minutes. She was thirsty and really needed something to drink. She only hoped that the vending machines were full and stocked, or she'd have to disturb the old woman again.

She grabbed her bag and reached for a bunch of change. Hopefully, she could grab a snack as well as a soda. Ellie pulled back the curtains and peered outside. She didn't see any movement from anyone in the immediate area. The old lady had disappeared, and she couldn't hear anyone around. She knew it was cold outside, but she expected someone to be walking around for something like a vending machine snack or requesting extra towels.

Shrugging, Ellie figured the coast was clear, and she could quietly leave her room, get a snack and drink, and slip back in without being noticed. Grabbing her jacket and some loose change with a few dollar bills, Ellie quietly opened the door and stepped outside.

Shivers ran up and down her spine as the bitter and dry cold seemed to seep through her skin and into her bones. Her breathing became quick and steady with frosty puffs of air exiting from between her lips. The freezing air just reinforced her goal to reach Miami as soon as possible. She always hated this part of the United States. It was so blah and bland. She wanted palm trees and sky-blue water, but she knew she had to make certain sacrifices here and there to make the money she was saving to get out of the con game once and for all.

The silence of the night was deafening. No animal noises, or any other sound from the outside world. There was no white noise. None. Which unnerved her. She breathed a little heavier on purpose just to hear a noise... something. It was really weird. She didn't hear a heater kick on. She didn't hear muffled noises coming from other rooms. She eyed the snow one more time and sighed. She would hurry to get her drink and snack and lock herself in the room for the night.

Ellie walked to where the old woman said the vending machines were located. She reached the corner of the building and cautiously peered around the corner. A yellow light flickered above the vending

machines. Ellie felt goosebumps form on her arms, but she was hungry and thirsty and needed something to sustain her until morning. Approaching the vending machines, she was grateful both were lit up with snacks and sodas.

Looking over the choices in the vending machines, Ellie scrunched her nose. The packaging looked old, like it came out of a time machine. Her gaze turned to the soda machine and found a soda named Slice, which looked like Sprite. Ellie decided she would just stick with what she knew, and that was Pepsi and Ruffles chips.

Dropping the coins into the slot, she figured she'd spend over a dollar, but was surprised when the cost was less than fifty cents. Shrugging, she pressed the button and heard the can drop. She dropped more coins into the snack machine and grabbed the Ruffles potato chips when they were ready.

She lifted the can and immediately popped the top, hearing the familiar hissing of the air escaping inside. She drank a few big gulps, not caring about the freezing air around her while she downed the cold soda. It tasted kind of weird, but she didn't care. She needed refreshment, and it was provided with it.

The burp came out fast and loud, making Ellie snicker in the darkness. Oh, boy did she need that. Dropping a few more coins into the slot, Ellie purchased another Pepsi and grabbed the potato chips from the other machine. She hoped the old lady hadn't heard her burp.

Taking another swig from the opened can of Pepsi, she burped again, but much quieter this time as a big smile formed on her face. She walked and turned the corner to return to her room, and when she did, she thought she heard a deep, low laugh behind her.

CHAPTER 6

ELLIE HAD LEARNED LONG AGO from many horror movies that you never stop; you just keep going. Don't look back.

She swallowed hard as she felt a presence behind her emerging from the darkness. Her instincts were in overdrive as she reached for her keys in her jacket pocket.

Her room was only seconds away. As she hurried forward, she glanced into one of the other rooms with people inside and noticed something that made her heart jump into her throat. In fact, it made her stop in her tracks, and that was the last thing she wanted to do.

One of the curtains had been opened wider than the others, and the lights shone brightly through the windows. Ellie gasped when she realized that the people inside the rooms were not people at all; they were mannequins.

Her wide eyes turned to the cars in the parking spaces next to hers. Even with the snow covering the cars, Ellie could clearly see that they were all broken down, rusted out, and the tires were flat.

How had she not noticed? She prided herself on being constantly aware of her surroundings. She hadn't just learned that from her life experiences but from her grandfather, who had taught her to always

watch her six. It had kept her safe and on top of her life for many years, but would it be enough now?

She heard a low laugh behind her that sent chills down her spine. It was a deep, rough, male laugh that triggered every red flag in her head.

"Oh, God," she thought.

She rushed to the door of her room, fumbling with the key in the lock. She risked turning her head to the right when she heard heavy footsteps crunching through the snow. She cursed when she couldn't get the key into the lock. She needed to do something.

Taking a quick glance to her left, she saw a bald man standing about six feet from her. The evil sneer across his thin lips almost made Ellie faint right on the spot. She'd seen a lot of horrible things in her life, but she had never seen such evil.

She had to run. That was her only option. She didn't have a weapon, and she couldn't reach her car keys for a quick escape. The only other place she could go was the office, hoping the old lady would call the police and keep them both safe.

Before turning to run, Ellie noticed that the man's eyes seemed to glow white. It was as if he didn't have eyes at all, just glowing dots where they should be.

Breathing heavily, Ellie turned to run the rest of the way to the office. Coming up to the red sign that said, "Open," Ellie turned the knob on the door and found it locked.

She frantically banged on the door and the glass, crying out for help, hoping the lady inside would hear her.

The man slowly started walking toward her. Ellie cried out and once again banged on the door and the glass while trying to open the door.

Fear coursing through her, Ellie had no choice but to run, but where could she go? Into the forest? She'd freeze to death in no time. She had no idea where she was. Could she hide long enough to escape?

Ellie didn't know, because a hand reached out to grab her arm and barely missed.

She had to run somewhere.

She took off running as fast as her legs and feet would allow on the icy snow. Her lungs immediately started to scream at her from the freezing air. Her breath came out in large moist puffs, and her light ankle boots crunched in the snow. Behind her, she thought she heard another set of footsteps following her.

In the distance, Ellie spotted a barn. Should she try to run to the main road, or should she try the barn? What should she do? Maybe in the barn, she could defend herself and buy some time.

Digging deep for a burst of energy, Ellie ran to the barn, no longer worrying about the snow and ice. She reached the door fairly quickly and pulled on the wooden handle. To her relief, the door opened with a spine-tingling creak.

She heard a faint laugh before she entered the darkened barn. Ellie realized she might have made a huge mistake. Where did she go now? She wasn't familiar with this building. Was she trapped here? Did barns even have back doors?

She turned, trying to catch her breath, and saw the dark figure entering the barn.

What should she do now?

In full panic mode, Ellie ran deeper into the barn. She bumped into a wall and felt around for an escape. All she felt was wood and dust, getting her feet caught in the hay. She kept moving along the wall, but nothing opened up for her.

She turned around, expecting the man to grab her at any second, but he didn't move. Instead, he stood in the middle of the barn, staring at her with those white, glowing eyes.

Tears ran down Ellie's face and blurred her vision. She didn't want to die. Why had she stopped here? Her gut had told her to run several times, and she hadn't listened to it. She prided herself on getting out of so many questionable situations. She would have been safer continuing to drive in the snow.

"Please," she pleaded in a shaky voice. "Please, let me go."

Just as Ellie said that, she felt drops of liquid hitting her head and face.

CHAPTER 7

ELLIE WIPED her face when a drop hit her cheek. The liquid felt warm to the touch.

A bright light turned on inside the barn, partially blinding Ellie for a few seconds before her eyes adjusted to the light.

That's when she gazed down at her hand and realized the liquid was not water. The smear from her cheek was a crimson color.

Her head quickly shot up as the droplets continued to fall around her and on her.

Several sets of feet hung above her, some with shoes still attached and others barefoot, with blood dripping from the decomposing toes and feet.

If you asked Ellie how loud she screamed, she could never explain it if she survived this night.

Pure instinct took over, and she took off in a run, hoping to get past the man with the ax and out of the doors before she turned into one of the people hanging from the ceiling.

She had no other choice; there was no other way out.

She didn't make it. A strong hand reached out and grabbed her arm, practically pulling her arm from the socket. She screamed again

and tried to straighten herself, but instead, she collapsed to the ground.

The man with the white eyes let go of her arm and laughed while Ellie finished sinking to the ground.

“No,” he said.

Ellie sobbed and said, “I give up. Just please make it quick.”

The man turned and faced her crumpled figure. Ellie thought about reaching for the ax in his hand, but he was too strong. She would never be able to fight him for it. He was a big and tall man with the strength of an ox. She didn’t have a chance to overwhelm him.

“Please do me one favor,” Ellie whispered.

The man cocked his head to the side, and the white eyes seemed to glimmer in the dim light.

The man opened his mouth but shut it again. He then raised the ax above Ellie’s head and laughed lowly. “No,” he finally answered.

Ellie sobbed again and closed her eyes. She guessed she would finally pay the price for all the things she did in her life. The lives she ruined, the money she stole from unsuspecting victims. Some of them deserved it, she told herself. It was her way of paying back what had been stolen from her and her mother many years ago.

Ellie had one last vision of her and her mother sitting on the curb with all their belongings beside them while her mother shakily smoked cigarette after cigarette. Her long, thick raven hair suddenly turned gray in an instant. That was when Ellie changed, and her innocence was lost forever. That was also when she vowed to get her revenge on those who hurt innocent people.

But she became greedy, and the cons hurt more innocent people. In the last few years, her cons took more sinister turns, and she was hurting innocent people. There was no more revenge; it was criminal activity.

At least, she decided Benny was her last con, and she would leave it forever. She would move to Miami and start a new life.

One last sob before the ax would come hard down on her head.

“My name is...”

“Silas!”

Ellie’s eyes popped open as the old woman screamed out the man’s name.

CHAPTER 8

"“SILAS!”

Ellie watched as the man stopped with the ax in mid-air just inches above her head.

“Silas. What have I told you? We do not hurt women.”

The man lowered the ax the rest of the way beside Ellie’s head and stepped away from her. He turned with a disapproving grunt and stepped further back as the old woman stepped forward.

“I am so tired of telling you, Silas. When I mark the door, you stay away.”

Ellie hugged her body, still reeling from the events that had just taken place. Blood still dripped on the top of her head and her arms were covered with little streaks of the blood drops.

The woman walked up close to Ellie and said, “Get up.” Ellie heard the annoyance in her voice and not wanting the woman to change her mind, she stood and faced the old woman. “Please, let me go. I won’t tell anyone, I swear.”

She could feel the white eyes of the man gazing at her from her left. She chanced a glance at the man and saw he kept moving the

small ax from hand to hand as if he was ready to ignore the woman and still chop Ellie into small pieces.

“I told you to stay in your room and you didn’t listen,” the old woman said. “This could have been so much worse for you. My son doesn’t care who he takes, but I do. I have one rule. No women.” She scolded Ellie like she was a teenager trying to climb through a window after staying out way past her curfew.

Ellie looked between the woman and the man named Silas for a few moments. Tears were still streaming down her face mixing with the droplets of blood that fell from the ceiling.

It was weird that the woman or the man cared about the blood, but she guessed they were murderers after all, so why would they?

“Now get back to your room and don’t come out until mornin’” the old woman said.

“I don’t have the keys to my room,” Ellie said in a shaky voice. “I think I dropped them.”

The woman reached into her pocket and handed Ellie a key. “Now go,” she said.

Ellie hesitated at first, she expected the man to walk over and ax her once and for all and that the old woman was lying.

However, both mother and son just stood there waiting for Ellie to make the first move.

“I said, go! Jesus, girl, don’t you listen?”

Ellie didn’t need to be told a second time to leave. Taking a huge breath, she took off into a run, flying past the old woman leaving her in the dust of the barn as she exited through the door and into the frigid air of the night.

She expected the man to chase her down, like playing some cat and mouse game, but she didn’t hear heavy footsteps behind her.

She almost slipped and fell into the snow twice, but she was able to keep her balance as she reached the room.

She dropped the keys twice before she was able to open the door and grab her things to escape this hell hole.

Just as Ellie threw on her jacket and grabbed her keys. As she was

turning around to run to the car, a strong wind burst through the door.

The gust of wind was so strong it made Ellie have to take a step back and her already trembling body shook so hard that she thought she would freeze into a popsicle right then and there.

Ellie had closed her eyes against the wind only momentarily but when she opened them, something around her had changed.

Ellie was now surrounded by darkness. No more light inside the room. The only light was now coming from the outside, near the barn.

Freezing air continued to flow through the room, but it was almost like the temperature had plummeted another 30 degrees.

Inhaling a sharp breath, Ellie stood there in shock wondering what had happened. Why had the electricity gone out suddenly? Ellie looked towards the window.

Wait...

Through the dim light, Ellie could see through the window because the curtains were not there. She took a step forward and something cracked below her feet. It sounded like glass.

Ellie reached for her phone and turned on the flashlight. The sight in front of her made her gasp.

The walls were covered in moisture and some of the walls near the bed had a huge hole through it. There was dirt and debris everywhere. The bedding had decayed and the headboard had fallen to the floor. The desk was covered in dust and debris. The windows to the room were now shattered and Ellie spotted some graffiti on the walls.

Ellie stood there in complete shock.

What the fuck just happened?

This room...this room hadn't been like this only minutes ago. It was old and dirty, yes, but it was warm with lights, and bedding, and....

Her mind went in a million different directions. What happened to her? What happened to this place? Where was she?

With all those thoughts racing through her mind, Ellie stumbled outside into the cool air.

The two broken-down cars were still there sitting next to hers but everything else was different. The “Vacancy” sign was nowhere to be found. The front door to the main office was broken down and only blackness showed through the doorway.

Ellie didn’t know how to feel, or think about what just occurred. What the hell happened to the Silas guy? Where was the old lady?

Ellie quickly turned to the barn. All she saw was an outline of the barn in the darkness. No shapes or silhouettes appeared before her. No one yelled at her to enter her room and lock the door. The silence in the area was almost unbearable.

Ellie didn’t know what happened and at this point, she didn’t care. All she could think was that she still might be in danger, and it would be in her best interest to get in her car and leave this ungodly place as fast as possible.

Ellie entered the car and started the ignition. She turned every dial on the heat to high so she’d warm up.

Taking a deep breath, Ellie put the car in reverse and backed out of the parking spot.

She couldn’t fathom what had happened to her. Who were those people? Where did they go? Why did they just disappear into thin air?

She should have rushed out of there, but her curiosity overcame any kind of sense.

Everything was darkened, and dilapidated, the windows were all broken. She moved the car a bit and spotted some old graffiti on the walls near some of the rooms with the headlights.

What the hell happened here?

She turned the car again and set the headlights to shine on the old barn.

The barn still looked pretty solid. It didn’t even look like there was wear and tear from the elements like the house and the rooms.

Ellie’s stomach churned when she remembered the bodies

hanging from the ceiling, the decomposition she could see in the feet, the blood.

Wait....

Ellie flipped the button for the interior car light.

She should be covered in blood. She distinctly remembered how it dripped from the bodies into her hair, onto her clothes, and skin.

She examined her face and hair in the rearview mirror.

Nothing.

No signs of blood at all.

Ellie sat back in the driver's seat thoroughly confused as to what happened here and what she experienced.

She saw the man, she was the old woman. The old woman took her money and placed it into a drawer in the office.

Ellie turned her head sharply.

Did she dare? Maybe she should just leave and forget about this place.

Who cares about the money? She had plenty of money in her bag.

But...

She had to know.

Ellie set the car in park and left it running. Still shaking a bit from the experience, she exited the car and hurried over to the front office.

She peered into the darkness and nothing jumped out at her. She turned on her cellphone flashlight and shined it into the room. The ceiling was collapsing. Furniture and papers were strewn everywhere.

Ellie carefully stepped into the office and again shined her flashlight back and forth. She still expected someone to jump out at her and attack, but all she heard was a breeze coming through the broken windows.

Stepping over the cracked glass and avoiding the collapsing ceiling Ellie made it to the desk and stepped behind it.

Keys were thrown onto the floor and a chair was overturned beside the desk.

Ellie was able to pull out the first drawer without any issues.

There sat her cash.

Ellie grabbed it and stuffed it into her pocket.

She needed to get out of here. She would deal with the snow but at least it had stopped and she was safe.

At least, she thought.

Ellie exited the crumbling building, pulling the car keys from her pocket.

Whatever took place here, must have been horrible. The next time she was in front of her laptop she would look up the history of this place and see what happened. Until then she wanted out of there.

Ellie turned to unlock the car and noticed something. A car was parked behind hers. A police car.

Ellie gasped and stepped back. In a way, she was relieved to see a cop and in another way, she was probably going to jail.

She stepped towards the police car and said, "Sir, I am so sorry, I seem to have gotten lost. Can you help me?"

Ellie hadn't realized there was no one sitting in the driver's seat of the police cruiser because of the darkness.

It was a split second later that she felt a figure approaching from behind her.

It was too late to react and Ellie never saw the blunt object coming down on her head.

CHAPTER 9

HERE's the edited chapter with grammar and spelling corrections while keeping the dialogue and content intact:

Ellie was drifting in and out of consciousness. She attempted to move, but she found herself incapacitated, feeling dizzy and nauseous. She fought to keep her eyes open, although all she truly desired was to sleep.

The only thing preventing her from succumbing to slumber was the cold, icy snow, as she was being dragged across the parking lot.

A man continued to speak, but she could only catch fragments of what he was saying.

"Mom and Silas must have woken up again."

"They left me a present this time," he chuckled softly.

"Only a few have managed to get away, but you were not one of them."

Another sinister laugh.

Ellie realized she was being dragged into the barn, and she could feel the scratchiness of the hay against her skin.

She tried to speak, but only incoherent moans escaped her lips.

She was now lucid enough to recognize that, in all her years of experience in staying safe, she had made one fatal mistake.

She should have left when she had the chance. She should have never stopped at this place.

Tears welled in her eyes, knowing she would never make it to Miami, and consequently, she would never see her mother again.

She could only hope her mother had received the money.

She also understood that she would never again hear someone say her real name.

She groaned in pain as the man continued to drag her up a set of stairs she remembered seeing earlier. They must have led to a loft or something.

Ellie was flung onto the ground, and she struggled to open her eyes once again.

A bright light shone on her face. The blurry figure of the man turned away from her, and all she could hear were scraping noises.

Ellie didn't believe in God, but now she was silently praying and begging for forgiveness for all her crimes.

"All I hope is that my mom got the money."

Ellie turned her head slightly. A scream escaped from her numb lips as the horror in front of her sharpened her vision.

A decayed face sat right in front of her own.

The last thing Ellie heard was laughter.

CHAPTER 10

LACEY MARSHALL CLOSED her laptop and took a long sip of her wine.

Michelle Osborne had gone missing six months earlier on I-70 and had never been seen since.

Security cameras had recorded her car stopping at the rest stop, then leaving. A few hours later, it was captured again on East I-70.

Michelle was a criminal, so the police didn't really care about the fate of the 30-year-old woman. Her mother had been pleading for help from anyone to find her daughter for months.

No one seemed to care about Michelle Osborne.

No one, except Lacey Marshall.

Lacey gazed out of the window, contemplating how close she had come to becoming a victim.

Her body trembled at the thought.

Lacey reached into her pocket and retrieved the business card.

She turned it over and over in her fingers.

It was time to bring this to an end.