

Thorn
Introduction

“Trevor, welcome back. It’s good to see you.”

The man hunched over in the antique chair raised his head. It was evident that he was once handsome, with brown hair, an angled jaw, and clear blue eyes framed with long lashes. Yet the years were not kind to him. Dark bags under his eyes, deep facial scarring, and the restructured bones of a face victim to many fists caused the middle-aged man to look more like a rearranged Picasso painting.

Trevor smiled, the misaligned flesh and muscles of his face twisting and wriggling in opposite directions. He grabbed the chair and tried to move the lower half of his body, but his legs immediately gave out and he landed back in the chair with a thud.

Dr. Bryan moved towards the man in an attempt to help, but Trevor put up a hand. “I got it, doc. I’m not decrepit yet.” The silver-haired doctor stepped back.

After struggling to his feet, Trevor walked towards the door. His steps were short and staggered, but they were solid, and he made it past the door frame. Trevor’s eyes wandered over the familiar shapes and colors of the room, the dim lighting, the smooth wooden floors lined with purple and red chairs, love seats, recliners, and pillows. But what comforted him was the scent. There was always a soft jasmine scent that seemed too real to be a fragrance and too light for it to be actual flowers.

He would never know that the scent was designed by K-Pharma specifically to instill trust and openness between psychiatrist and patient. All Trevor knew was that he could be himself and reveal his deepest, darkest secrets, without fear or judgment.

A safe place like this was hard to come by nowadays. After all, he was 45-year-old Trevor Harding, notorious rapist, kidnapper, murderer, drug and human trafficker, and listed organ donor. His resume includes thousands of charges, hundreds of convictions, hundreds of denied appeals, and a prison sentence of two thousand years.

Trevor sat down on one of the sofas lined with pillows and winced as he favored his right knee.

Dr. Bryan sat across from him, placing himself in a black rolling chair.

“What can I help you with today, Trevor? You sounded quite frantic.”

“I had that dream again, Dr. Bryan.”

“You know you can call me George. We’re all informal in here.”

Trevor waved a hand across his face. “I know I know, but I’m so used to doing it already.”

Dr. Bryan nodded. “Go on.”

With that same hand, Trevor rubbed it roughly up and down his face. “It happened when I was on that spree four... no, three years ago. When I was mainly running women.

“So... on our little trips, we’d occasionally filter through the streets, to see if there were any just hanging around, eager to be taken. Our normal method, we were doing all the work, so whenever we could, we looked for easy prey. We got about a third of our girls that way, because they were just so easy. By themselves, in groups...” Trevor licked his lips.

“Anyway, we were just heading back after dropping off a really good payout, twenty women from these fucking stupid ass battered women’s shelters, and one of my boys sees this girl standing on the sidewalk, next to a park fountain. She was alone. There was no one around.”

He paused. "I don't know what it was about her. It was about three in the morning, even the police were fucking napping. It would have been the easiest steal of all, just a single girl. But I just felt so weird about the whole thing. Just... off. She was this pretty young thing, tall with boobs and hips, and looked like a money cow, nice hair, all that stuff." Trevor stopped.

Dr. Bryan nodded, prodding him to continue.

"Anyway, it pissed me off that one little girl could make me so uncomfortable, so I had my boys drive closer to her. Everyone felt weird about it, despite the alcohol and drugs." Trevor's eyes took on a gleam of reminiscence. "So we drove closer, and it just weirded me out even more. It seemed like she was wearing a nightgown, standing absolutely still, even though it was the dead of winter. My boys were a little nervous that it was a trap, or that she was bat-shit crazy. I was... well, I guess scared was the right word now, so I decided to do it."

"You're the leader. Why risk it?"

"Hell, you try being the leader of a group of bloodthirsty, hormonal fucks. Yeah I was craziest, but sometimes you still had to show them who was boss. That I could fuck them up if they got out of line. I sure as hell was not going to back away from something, especially when it involved minimal effort- did you know sex trafficking is the cheapest shit to do, since women are a lot easier to transport than thousands of pounds of coke? So I had them drive to the curb and I got out." He patted his pockets. "At that point, the adrenaline started pumping and I had no more fear. I had Hell and Kiss, my guns. They've never failed me before. Yeah, this was going to be a piece of cake, I thought.

"She was just standing there, hadn't moved a muscle. The nightgown was fluttering all about her, and it was goddamn cold- swear almost forty degrees – and she was just standing there, facing the fountain, with her left side towards the street. So I walked up behind her and said, "Hey, how you doing?" which was a classic. They respond positively, we grab them. They start running, we grab them. This girl, she didn't respond at all. Didn't move a muscle. So I walked to stand beside her and asked the same thing. Still nothing. At this point I was getting mad, so I yelled "Hey bitch" right into her face. She finally acknowledged my presence, as I saw her take a breath. She tilted her head up so I could see her eyes... they were dead. Dead. Just... empty."

Trevor stopped to look at Dr. Bryan.

"Her eyes took every ounce of the high I felt. I wasn't sure if anything appeared on my face, but I felt so... weak. It's hard to describe in words what it felt like, but I was filled with dread... not fear, but a black hole in my stomach. It was dark so my men didn't notice my reaction... that could have been it for my reputation. But all they knew was that I stopped moving after I got close to her." He rubbed his arms, as if to warm them up. "She just stared at me for a good two minutes. I... that part of the dream is the most terrifying. If she moved at me, I don't know if I could have gotten away."

"What did you feel?"

"Weak. Powerless. Drained. I pride myself on my ability to be in control, to not let my fear or feelings get in the way of business." He rubbed his hands together. "But this... I still have dreams... nightmare about what could have happened that night."

Dr. Bryan nodded.

"So... she finally broke eye contact with me. I'm not sure what she was looking for, what she was trying to see in my eyes, and I'm not sure if she found it. But she looked down for a brief second, and all I saw was a flash of steel." He shook his head. "She had a chef's knife clenched in her right hand. None of us had seen it, and if she hadn't looked down, I would never have known. Her eyes... I backed away a few steps and drew my guns and pointed them at her.

"Don't you do it! I could fuck you up so bad right now!" He raised his hands in a simulation of that moment.

"She didn't react to what I said. I don't know what she was seeing in her head, but God knows she didn't see the guns. I've killed so many people, some just for looking at me wrong!" Trevor breathed heavily.

Dr. Bryan made a comforting sound. "I'm sure she would have reacted if she still could."

Trevor nodded furiously, his hands balled into fists at his sides. "You know what she did? She smiled at me. She FUCKING SMILED AT ME. Not just a grin or a snicker. But a full-blown, white-as-fuck teeth, I'm-the-happiest-person-in-the-world smile. As if everything was great. As if she didn't have guns pointed at her. As if she wasn't about to be kidnapped and sold! I should have run, everything in my body told me to run and get the hell away from her, but I couldn't move. I could only take small steps back, put as much distance between me and her. If anything was the devil's gaze... that was it."

Dr. Bryan kept his hands on his lap, clasped together, his feet spreading a little further as he leaned in.

"She lifted the knife. With that same smile on her face. I knew, if she took a step towards me, even if she leaned an inch towards me, I would have blasted away. There might not have been any body parts to retrieve. But even then... I don't know... I don't..." Trevor's eyes took on a glazed look, as if lost in that particular moment.

The clock ticked softly in the background.

With a shake of his head, Trevor was back. "She said, "Thank you.""

Dr. Bryan furrowed his brows. "You've never told me this before."

Trevor waved that comment to the side. "I've always forgotten about it. Repressed, more like. I was always more scared of those eyes. Always thought that was scarier than what she said." He pursed his lips. "Although now that I said it out loud, what she said was fucking terrifying."

Dr. Bryan did not comment.

"Yeah, she had this sharp ass knife in the air, about to stab the shit out of me – I thought. And she says "Thank you." Her smile was still there, white and clean. And then she plunges the knife downwards. It was so goddamn fast that I didn't see where or what she had struck. For a brief second I thought she had run towards me and plunged it into my stomach, that was how out of my mind I was, but then she fell to her knees, the smile still on her face. My eyes finally left her face, and I realized that she had stabbed herself. In the wrist. Vertically. Along the vein. I don't know how, but she had stabbed with so much force that the tip of the knife stuck out from the other side. I guess she missed the bone? But there was so much blood. So much FUCKING blood."

Dr. Bryan lifted his hand and faced his palm towards the agitated inmate. "It's okay. We don't have to go through this if it's causing you distress."

Trevor shook his head. "No... I need to get this in the open. It's the only way, maybe, that I can sleep in peace." He rubbed the bottom half of his face. "So she falls to her knees. Her left wrist was just impaled on a chef's knife. The smile is still on her face. Her right hand is pressed to the ground, to keep her upright, but there is a pool of blood under her hand... spreading larger and larger. One of my boys got out of the car and was next to me, saying something like "T, T, are you alright?" for the past thirty seconds, but I didn't even hear him. He asked me if we should dump the body, so I slapped him and told him to get back in the car."

"Why did you slap him?"

"I... overreacted. I guess. But if we moved the girl it would have given the police evidence. And this one we weren't even technically responsible for!"

Pause.

"And?"

Trevor pressed his lips together. "I didn't want to touch her."

Dr. Bryan nodded again.

"I mean, not just because of the blood – we've gotten rid of blood and body parts and all that shit- but I didn't want to because there was something weird. And I didn't want any part of that." He turned to face the wall, his hands hanging loosely at his sides. All of a sudden his hands clenched into fists.

"So what did you do?"

"I went back to the car. We drove off. We drank and smoked and fucked and partied." Trevor glanced at the doctor. "Yeah, we just left her there. We're fucking criminals, not boy scouts. It was the first and only time ever we didn't grab the girl."

Trevor leaned back into the sofa. "And it fucking only takes one time for me to have nightmares forever." He rubbed his temples with his right hand. "I just don't understand why."

Dr. Bryan leaned back in his chair. "Something about her must have triggered you."

"I don't know, doc. I've never been the same." Trevor looked up, his gaze thoughtful. "You know, I think it was because of a bad flashback that I got caught up with the pigs in the first place. That bitch got me locked up."