

Crisscross

The hotel room holds two beds with a nightstand and rotary phone between them. Air freshener and cigarette smoke waft through the balmy air as I cross to the patio door and prop it open. Waves can be heard crashing and receding in the distance. “Here’s your drink, Mary. Sit, please.”

She walks through the doorway and around the table to sink onto a patio chair. An ocean breeze fans her blond hair around her oval face.

“Alright, Ed. So how are we going to do this?”

“You mean kill your husband?” I know it’s a brazen tactic, but I had to get my job back and recording these tapes would help.

“Shh, don’t say it so loud.” She puts her finger to her lips and waves at me with her left hand. “People might hear you.”

“Oh, calm down. There’s no one staying on either side of us. Plus, we have plenty of privacy out here,” I say, motioning to the high fence bordered by potted plants.

“Still, please keep it down, Ed. I don’t want to go to jail over that bastard.”

It was going to be hard to turn in my high school sweetheart, but she DID want to kill her husband. I lean forward so the microphone in my tie catches her every word. “And you won’t. But are you sure you want to do this? Once he’s dead, there’s no going back.”

She twirls her drink around in slow circles. The ice clinking against the glass is the only sound outside the waves. A heavy sigh lifts her chest, as she looks up and says, “yes, I’m sure.”

“Okay. How do you want it done?” I ask.

“I want him to suffer.” She gets up and walks inside to sit on one of the beds. The striped duvet is ugly and yellowed from years of use. I get up and follow her inside, closing the patio door behind me. I sit on the opposite bed and wait.

“I brought your money, but I want to know how you’re going to kill him first,” she says, leaning back and sprawling out like a cat. Her arms and legs hanging off the side of the bed.

I tick off the methods on my fingers as I say them, “I was thinking poison, mugging, or innocent bystander.”

She sits up straight and targets my eyes. “No. I want him to know it came from me. Cut off his penis and bring it back.”

“What? Whoa. Isn’t that a little drastic?” I can feel my mouth opening and closing like a fish, but I can’t stop myself. I hope I got that on tape.

“It’s what he deserves. No more, no less.”

I reach out to touch her and she filches. She draws her body tight and her long sleeves pull back, revealing bruises. They stand out in sharp contrast on her pale flesh. I grab her sleeves and yank them higher to reveal an impossible crisscross of burns, cuts, holes and inch-high scars from elbow to wrist.

“He really hurt you, huh?” I walk over to the bed and remove the recording device from the lamp, turning off the light.

“He did things to me that will burn my soul long after I’m gone.”

“But you won’t tell me what?” I go outside and pick up our glasses, as I retrieve the hidden microphone from under the table.

“I can’t. I won’t ever tell a soul what he did.”

I stop inside the door and look at her face. Purple highlighted both eyes and weariness added twenty years to her otherwise youthful face. She looked like a puppy who'd been kicked too often.

I drop the mic and the recording device in my half empty glass with a plop. I set it down and walk out of the room— far away from Mary and her justice.