The Lesser of Two Evils

“Jordan, what did you do?! Dominique screamed, placing her hand over her mouth as she looked down at the bloody mess.

“Oh my God!” Casey screamed, jumping up and down in a panic.

“Everybody just shut the fuck up and calm down!!” Jordan barked, pacing the floor. He took a long sip of Mylanta and continued to pace.

Dominique was haunted by thoughts from her past as she sped home from seeing Casey in the hospital. The sight of Casey had brought back memories Dominique worked hard to suppress. The story Jordan had given her about what happened to Casey didn’t add up. Knowing what Jordan was capable of, Casey’s “attempted suicide” just didn’t sound right.

Dominique finally made it home. Fumbling through her pocketbook for her keys, Dominique looked around nervously. Alton’s car was missing from the driveway, which was a good sign. Letting out a deep sigh, she finally located her keys, peering over her shoulder once more before she rushed through the front door.

A bolt of lightning flashed behind Dominique’s eyes. With a scream stuck in the back of her throat, a brutal force pulled her down on the hardwood floor of the foyer. The sudden motion caused her pocketbook strap to twist, making a tourniquet on her arm, cutting off the circulation. She could hear his animalistic breathing.

Another blow caused an unbearable pain in her head. “Ahhhhhhhh!” she was finally able to let out a blood curdling scream. Instinctively Dominique placed her hands up in defense, but to no avail. Another blow to the top of her head caused the images from her past to appear again. Dominique saw herself stumbling backwards. She watched Jordon’s foot connect with the center of her face. She felt the bone between her eyes crack. “J…Alton no!” Dominique finally managed to scream, catching her words before the wrong name slipped from her lips. The scenes were so similar—the past and the present were blending into one.

“You are the most disobedient woman alive!” Alton growled as he wrapped his gorilla hands around her ponytail. Dominique let her body go limp. She knew the results of fighting against Alton. “Where have you been?!” he screamed, reaching under her bowed head and slamming his balled fist into the same spot that Jordon had injured years earlier. Blood sprayed from Dominique’s face onto Alton’s pants like a lawn sprinkler. As he yanked her head back to look into her eyes, blood from her nose dripped into the back of her throat, threatening to choke her.

“Alton pa-lease!” she gasped out, pleading as he dragged her across the floor. She could feel the skin on her knees splitting. An open-handed slap landed on her cheek. Dominique saw small squirming flashes of light out the side of her eyes. Now she knew what people meant when they said they saw “stars.” She prayed Alton wouldn’t kick her this time. Dominique was sure her
ribs hadn’t fully healed from the last time. Another blow would surely send bone fragments into her heart or lungs and kill her instantly. The pain pulsing through her head became unbearable. She placed her hands on top of Alton’s, trying to pry his fingers from her scalp.

“You need to repent today! For God says the husband is the head of his wife! She must obey and be humble!” Alton roared, continuing his assault.

Dominique knew that he would beat her until the demon that she was sure lived inside of him had finally had enough. Then he would reach down to the crumpled pile that was his wife and help her up off the floor. He would force her to have Bible study, followed by sex. As he dragged her up the staircase, Alton punched her in the back causing her to involuntarily emit a loud cough. He’d literally knocked the wind out of her. Urine ran down her legs. As she drifted to a place between consciousness and hell, she thought about Casey, lying with tubes coming out of her body, close to death. At this moment, Dominique would have gladly changed places with Casey.

When Alton had finished “God’s work,” he threw her limp, injured arm around his neck and carried her like a wounded comrade in a war. “I’m sorry. I just love you and the Lord so much,” he whispered as he placed Dominique gently on the floor of the bathroom. Dominique struggled to breathe. She felt like all of her ribs were broken. Her knees burned from the friction burns she had suffered while being dragged. As bad as she wanted to scream out or even moan, Dominique did not want to take a chance on making him angry again.

“Come here, let me help you clean up,” Alton consoled in a low soft voice that was completely different than the booming maniacal voice he’d been using just a few minutes earlier. Dominique struggled to open her eyes. Blood and tears had dried and crusted around them, nearly sealing them shut. She lay in the fetal position in a growing pool of blood, every inch of her body on fire.

Alton went in to the linen closet and got a hand towel. Dominique could hear the water running. Then she felt the warm rag against her battered skin. “Sssss,” she winced, shrinking away from his touch. “I am so sorry,” he said, wiping more blood from her face and neck.

“I know you are. I forgive you,” Dominique whispered, knowing it was what he wanted to hear.

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Brice looked at his new gold badge again. He breathed on it, rubbing it on his shirt to get it to shine. He liked the sound of his new title, “Detective Brice Simpson.” Placing his belt badge back on his Armani suit pants, he stretched his arms out and looked around the bustling detective squad room of the Brooklyn North Task Force. He tapped his fingers on his new desk, albeit old and rickety. He had finally made it. As a patrol cop, the only thing he had was a tiny steel locker sandwiched between slews of other lockers in his precinct. But street patrols and uniforms were a thing of the past

Brice looked around the room at the WANTED posters. Being only twenty eight years old and from Brooklyn, he recognized more than a few faces on the posters. He probably knew where to find the suspects too.
“Hey Simpson, you think the good commissioner promoted you to sit there and look at the manicure Kim Ling gave you,” Detective Sergeant Curruthers yelled out as he walked towards Brice, his joke garnering snickers from the rest of the squad. Brice felt his cheeks flame.

“Here you go, some work. I know you’re not used to it, but up here we work,” Sergeant Curruthers said, slamming a stack of case files on Brice’s desk.

“I ain’t never scared,” Brice said jokingly, letting out a short nervous chuckle. Looking down at the files he saw a big red sticker labeled, COLD CASE FILES.

“Aww shit,” he cursed, flipping through the stack. He looked up and saw that the other detectives were staring and laughing at him.

“The new guy gets the dogs… you know the shit nobody else wants. We don’t care how much cops and robbers you played as a street cop, solve those sons of bitches and you really earn this promotion,” Sergeant Curruthers said utterly serious for a change, popping his suspenders that looked stretched to the limit over his huge gut.

Brice had been a New York City Police Department patrol cop for six years before he shot two fleeing armed robbery suspects who had turned their weapons on Brice’s partner, wounding him in the stomach. Brice had been lauded by the NYPD for his heroic and courageous actions and earned a promotion to Detective as a result. What the Department didn’t know was that, yes, Brice had given chase and drawn his weapon, but the only reason he hadn’t also been shot was because one of the robbers had been Brice’s childhood best friend, Earl.

Brice could still hear Earl’s words. “Wait nigga, don’t shoot. Wait the fuck a minute!! B-boy? You a fuckin’ cop?!” Earl had asked, calling Brice by his childhood tag name. Earl was clearly shocked to see his best friend in the graveee blues, which is what they called the navy blue NYPD uniforms on the streets, making reference to how many black boys the NYPD had put in the grave.

Brice had ignored his old friend’s question, but kept his gun trained on Earl. They locked eyes. Their past indiscretions standing between them like a giant ogre, scary and threatening to eat them alive.

“A’ight B-boy I’ma drop my weapon,” Earl said, calmly placing one hand up and preparing to bend down to drop his weapon

“Fuck that!” Earl’s accomplice screamed out, raising his gun. With that distraction and without thinking first, Brice opened fire on both of them. He watched Earl fold to the ground like a deflated balloon. “Damn B-boy…you was my brother from another mother,” Earl rasped before throngs of police officers descended upon the scene in response to the 10-13 that Brice had previously called over the radio. Brice found out a few hours later that he had “heroically” taken the suspects down. The entire scene had taken a toll on him and he still suffered nightmares. He had not planned for Earl to find out his secret like that. Brice was determined to take his promotion to detective and fuck the wheels off of it to move up the ranks. The further removed he was from the streets, the
easier it would be to live with the choice he’d made during the robbery.

Brice flipped through several of the cold case files. Many of the cases were related to indigent people found dead under bridges and in abandoned buildings; some were of known gang members found dead in project elevators and stairwells; and others of dead crack heads. But one case stood out from all the rest. A fourteen year old girl found bludgeoned to death in a dumpster behind a Brooklyn bodega. Brice immediately thought of his little sister, Ciara who’d just turned sixteen. He was Ciara’s big brother, but acted more in the capacity of her father. He had stepped in where his alcoholic stepfather had stepped out. Overprotective big brother was an understatement.

Brice opened the folder and on the inside cover were several crime scene photographs. Brice winced, feeling the pain the girl must have endured. He could hardly make out the girl’s face in the pictures. Her head, from the neck up, resembled a blob—a red clump of flesh with no definition. Brice couldn’t distinguish her eyes or nose. Her hair was matted with blood. Whoever murdered her left her butt naked. She’d been beaten all over her body and then dumped atop bags of trash, an indistinguishable mass of flesh and blood. Bugs had already started eating away at the flesh by the time the pictures were taken.

Brice shuffled the photos and looked at the girl after she had been cleaned up by the medical examiner. Although her face was completely disfigured, like someone with elephantitis, Brice could tell that she was just a baby. Her breasts barely developed, her fingers small and slender like delicate straws. The medical examiner had ruled the cause of death as a brain hemorrhage. *Who would beat such a young girl so unmercifully?* Brice’s fingers closed tightly around the file. He meticulously reviewed each piece of paper and flipped through all the notes. A handwritten Post-It note had been left in the file, where someone had scribbled: “Runaway prostitute got herself killed. Case closed.” Brice squinted his eyes into little slits and feverishly turned the pages to find out which detective had been assigned the case. “D’Guilio,” he mumbled under his breath. “It fucking figures...white prick. If she was a white runaway, would he have come to the same conclusion? It was apparent that the detective assigned the case didn’t bother to fully investigate before having it deemed a cold case.

Brice glanced at the address where the body was found. He grabbed his gun out of his desk drawer and put it in his shoulder holster. “I’ll be back!” he yelled to no one in particular.