

Doug's fingers twitched unthinkingly over the flames of the burner.

"Oh *SHIT!*"

Pulling away from the oven, he threw himself across the kitchen to the sink, fumbling for a minute with the handles before water began flowing freely from them. The cold water cooled the growing burn on his hands but did little to stop their shaking. It wouldn't, of course. The shaking had nothing to do with the pain.

There was another shipment of coke that had come in with the week's produce that was burning a proverbial hole in his pocket. He hadn't had time to cancel it, and with the cops running around all wide eyed and that alien nut with their video camera filming every goddamn thing, he'd have no one to push it onto.

Damn. Damn, *damn*, **damn**.

He pulled his hand from beneath the tap and let himself lean against the countertop. Restlessly, his foot tapped against the tiled floor until finally, he pushed himself up, stalking out of the kitchen, through the empty diner and towards the door where he flipped the sign from OPEN to CLOSED.

He'd text Margarit some pathetic bullshit about not being emotionally ready to come back to work; she'd buy it. It seemed like everyone in this town was coming apart about now anyways. What was one more sob story?

God, he knew he should've taken Gabe's body deeper into that goddamn mine.

But how was he supposed to know they'd find it? Doug pulled his apron off roughly, throwing it onto the table before pushing through the back door and out into the street.

He'd been betting on the snow keeping everyone away from the mines for at least a week longer than it had. Long enough for him to slip out of town unnoticed. He clenched his jaw, striding out from the alleyway onto the street. His scowl curled into a pleasant smile as a group of young tourists passed, and he kept it up as he continued through the town, a charming mask that, to all the world, looked like the face of a grieving man doing his best to keep it together.

And in part, that's exactly what Doug was, except without the grief. His life was so close to falling apart and he was trying desperately to hold himself together.

The air was brisk; the pale, cloudy winter sky had yet to give way to the sun and the air was biting. It was only a short walk to his truck, but the noise of the town, the constant chatter of what he knew to be gossip, theories, the neverending speculation of strangers, thundered in his ears with every step.

It was only when he reached the truck and practically threw himself inside, slamming the door and locking himself in the quiet, muffled atmosphere, that he began to think again. Looking over his shoulder, he felt a scowl pull at his mouth. A long overcoat lay haphazardly over the back seat and he knew what laid in its pockets. He wasn't about to go down for this.

With a grunt, he started the car, easing it into the street, hands tight around the wheel, unwilling to show that he was as panicked as he was. He knew where he was going, the mansion on the hill guiding him like a beacon through the grey of the town.

As he drove, his mind wandered to that night. If he'd only waited, if Gabe had only fucking waited they would have both been out of this town and living comfortably. They could have even gone their separate ways if Gabriel had been that broken up about the dealing. But no. There'd been one little overdose, and some goddamn nobody at that, and then it was all *we can't do this anymore Doug, we're hurting people, I can't live with myself.*

It was a crock of shit.

Gabriel hadn't even been there, neither of them had. They'd only heard about it when the sheriff announced that they had found a body in the mineshaft. Everyone had assumed it was just some tourist who had come to the mountains to get fucked up. Doug had even expressed his sympathy to the gossip mongers at the diner.

"Poor fella," he'd said, his phone ringing a hole in his pocket, voicemail after voicemail from Gabriel, "it's hard enough to handle the mountain sober. I can't imagine what he must have gone through."

Now, he drove down the streets of Rosewater, a package of cocaine and the gun both hidden in the pockets of the coat in the back seat. He knew he had to be rid of them, he couldn't risk keeping them around and there was really only one place where he could dump them, where it would make sense.

"Hi Mister Beaumont," Doug's smile was the one he usually wore for grieving family members; warm, pitying, bordering on condescending. It worked best on widows and heartbroken parents.

Thomas Beaumont was, as he usually was, a mess. Dark circles under his eyes, unfocused and blinking blearily. It looked as though he hadn't slept for days, which may have been true for all Doug knew. He looked completely out of it and Doug counted his blessings for that.

He'd shrugged on the long overcoat before coming to the door. The weight of the gun in the deep inner pockets unbalanced him just slightly; reminded him that this needed to be done quickly.

The Beaumont patriarch could barely string together a sentence and from the smell of his breath, Doug figured he was already well into his cups. All the better.

"Dave...was it?" Thomas asked, speech slurred. Doug only smiled brightly.

"That's right sir. I came to give my condolences for your loss. I was friends with Gabriel and he always-" Doug allowed his breath to catch in his throat, "Well, he always spoke about you. I thought I should come and-"

Doug's breath started to come in short, sharp bursts, just as he'd practiced in the bathroom mirror.

"Sorry, sorry. I thought I should - well I thought -"

He didn't allow himself to finish but instead brought a hand up to cover his eyes, turning away slightly with shaking shoulders. He'd learned from watching middle aged women at funerals that any display of emotion bigger than that only made people annoyed and god forbid he come across as insincere.

As he'd hoped, Thomas let out a displeased little sound and when Doug straightened back up, he saw the look of disgust mixed with a frozen kind of uncertainty.

"I'm sorry Mr. Beaumont. I thought I was ready for this," he rubbed at already dry eyes before letting out another shaking breath that sounded too much like a sob to be ignored.

"Would you...like to come in?" was Thomas' terse reply to the display and Doug had to hold back a grin. Hook, line, and sinker.

"Oh," he sniffed, "no. I really should be getting back to the diner. I only - do you mind if I use your washroom? I should probably put myself back together."

He said it in the same self-deprecating way he always did when he wanted something but didn't want to let on that he wanted it. And like always it worked a charm. Thomas Beaumont, the drunk idiot, awkwardly stepped to one side, and held the door wide open.

"Of course. It's just through the hall at the back."

Doug stepped past him with a sad little '*thank you*' before slipping into the house and making his way down towards the back halls. As soon as he was around the corner, he straightened his hunched shoulders, shaking off the guise of misery and softening his footsteps.

He passed the bathroom, glancing inside quickly before continuing down the hall. It was slow going, keeping an eye out for the staff who worked the house as he crept, peeking into each room, the weight of the gun in his pocket growing with each step. He passed by one of the windows, noticing the out of place

wooden boards which covered it and wondered briefly what was going on in this house.

Finally, he paused. He was deep in the maze of the Beaumont house now but as he stared through one of the open doors at an elaborate vanity, he figured he might be exactly where he needed to be. Stepping closer and through the door, Doug noticed an open closet full of expensive looking dresses, a beautiful changing screen with some stupidly ornate vision of parakeets flying over a jungle, and as he saw from outside, a tall, stupidly ornate vanity.

Bingo.

Doug wasted no time. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a pair of well-worn gloves, putting them on before crossing the room and opening one little drawers, marveling at the bizarre shape of its handles. Embroidered white towels stared back at him and without hesitation, he pulled the gun from inside his coat and placed it beneath the top two cloths, the grip just peeking out from between the white fabric. He pushed the drawer shut without a second look and opened one of the lower ones on the other side, setting the bag of cocaine near the back of the drawer before sliding it closed.

And then he stood, staring at the vanity while his hand worried at the fabric of his coat. *Would it be enough?*

But he'd been here too long, there was no time to worry about it now. He left the room and made his way back through the labyrinthian halls of the Beaumont estate. Thomas Beaumont had moved from the door to the open living room and was already half passed out in one of the large armchairs. Doug made his way over.

"Thank you, Mr. Beaumont," Doug ran a shaking hand through his hair, making sure to keep his eyes on his shoes, "and...my condolences again. Please, don't hesitate to let me know if there's anything you need."

"Of course," was the stilted, grumbled reply and Doug knew without a thought that Thomas Beaumont would most likely barely remember this conversation tomorrow.

All the better, he thought as he saw himself out, pulling his coat tighter around himself, his shoes crunching on the gravel of the driveway. He reached his car and pulled the door open but made sure to send Thomas a happy little wave. The man stood for a moment before stepping back inside and slamming the door shut. Doug blinked but couldn't help the smile that crept up his face.

"Alright."

He slipped into the car, immediately reaching into the glove compartment to take out an old looking phone from between two maps. A burner phone he'd bought a month or two ago, the one he'd use to call or text clients. With the keys in the ignition, he punched in a series of numbers, holding it to his ear as it rang.

"Hello, Rosewater Sheriff's Department."

"Hello, I'd like to report some strange activity at the Beaumont Estate."

"And what kind of activity would this be?"

"Well that's the thing," Doug made sure his voice was pitched just low enough, adding a melody to it that would be, if not unfamiliar, strange enough that no one would connect it with

his own, "I've found a gun in one of the rooms and a- a bag of...kind of white powder? I don't want to touch it--"

"No, yes," was the immediate reply, "Don't touch anything. Can you repeat where you found this?"

"Mrs. Beaumont's changing room? There's a- a big vanity; I found them there. I was just- I was just cleaning,"

"And can we get your name--"

"I can't, I can't," Doug let out a short gasp, "Oh shit, she's coming--"

He hung up the call abruptly and stepped on the gas, turning slowly out of the driveway and onto the road. As he went, he rolled down the window and once he was sure that he was far enough away, he tossed the phone out into the bushes of the forest.

That would keep them busy long enough for him to get out of town. He'd need to stop by the house and grab his emergency bag from beneath the bed as well as the cash he and Gabriel had been saving up.

At the thought, Doug felt the smile on his face drop just slightly. They'd always talked about what they were going to do with that money, where they would go. It felt...odd to actually be using it, and without Gabriel. He'd had such plans too. Doug let the frown sit on his face for a moment before it ticked back up into a grin.

There was no use letting those plans go to waste, was there?