

JUSTICE WAS SERVED

CHAPTER ONE

The lights were intense in the stark white room, too glaring for comfort. It was sterile and piercingly cold. The iciness was something he managed to adapt to over the last twelve months. All jails were cold. The wardens claimed that lower temperatures kept the inhabitants calm. All he had observed was an increase in physical activity in the futile hope of getting warm. Once the frigid air got under your skin, it stayed there. Not only were you cold, but also there was an ever-present ache that resonated from the center of your bones. Many nights he had found hands raw from unconsciously rubbing them together. The inmates' theory was that the guards kept it so cold because eventually they would spend the rest of their lives burning in flames, so they might as well soak up as much cold air as they could. They had accepted their fates.

They were the repeat offenders spending their time on death row, the ones who killed for the pleasure they derived from the act. To them death was a sport, their status ranked on the heinousness of the acts committed. He had received a vivid education on the many gruesome ways there were to die. His teachers were those who derived the plans for death and watched in awe as their victims suffered. Cruel heartless killers who would slit your throat without a second thought. Yet there was honor among these men, a code that when broken, resulted in punishment. Punishment at times more brutal than acts they had inflicted. Murdering children was taboo even in a place where death and gore were dinner conversations. He had learned that those who did not brag about their crimes were silent in fear for their lives. He had also seen those who were so desperate for escape that they created crimes against the young and innocent so they would be "free." Justice was swift and accurate in prison. It cut with a blade of steel colder than the air through which it was wielded.

Even though it was unbearable at times, the cold would also remind him of Ellen and that would fill him with warmth from within. She was always cold. Even when they had gone to the Cayman Islands and she her sunburn radiated so much heat he could barely stand to have her near him, she was cold. Then she got the brilliant idea to turn the A/C all the way down. When they woke up the next morning, it must have been thirty degrees in their room. There was ice forming on the windows. He would have been furious, but he looked over at her with her hair spread out on the pillow forming a halo around her head, and she looked at him with those eyes, and said in the most innocent voice imaginable "How else was I going to make sure you would cuddle with me, even if my skin is 110 degrees?" Ellen was one of the most complex women he had ever known, but she could state things so simply that you would think she was five. She had a way of making him want to do nothing else but hold her in his arms and protect her from the world. That was his Ell. It was not until she was gone that he realized how much he had missed her. Once the ache of realization set in that he would never see her again, a gnawing hunger grew that could never be satisfied.

As he sat on the side of the cot, head in his hands, he reflected on the last time he had seen her. They were at the beach in Lake Worth, just south of the pier. The night was refreshingly brisk that evening in January with a breeze that left icy kisses his cheeks. Florida was always more preferable than Michigan during the winter months. It had been over seven months since they had seen each other. He had relocated to Detroit fourteen months before. It was a career move. He was offered the position of Director of Finance for Northstar Cable. His career was critical to him, monetary rewards were

essential to him, the status was important to him. She had been both patient and understanding when he told her he was moving, which was something that he had not expected. He believed the physical distance would give him the emotional separation he thought he wanted. It was not the first time in their relationship he craved breathing space.

They met July 5th a decade before. Florida in July, the thought was enough to warm even his chilled digits. Both had attended a "Day After" party in celebration of the Fourth. Throughout the evening they exchanged stolen glances. Everyone drank more than he should, especially on a Sunday evening. Eventually they both went outside. The air was thick with humidity, but not as unbearable as during the daylight hours. After a quick smoke and some idle conversation, he kissed her. She tasted sweet like the rum and cola she had been drinking. They stayed out on the front porch, talking laughing and kissing. The moon was bright, illuminating her face and enhancing the natural twinkle of her eyes. They never made it back inside. When the other guests began leaving, they said their goodbyes. He walked her to her car and as they hugged for the final time that balmy evening, she handed him her resume.

"It's got my number on it and it was handy," she had said, sounding like everyone should hand someone resume when they met. "Plus, it's harder to misplace." He saw what would become a familiar and endearing twinkle in her eyes.

She was right. The next day at work, he debated whether to call her. He had said he would call at lunch, but kept rethinking it. After work that evening, he saw the document sitting on the kitchen table took a deep breath and called her. He asked if she wanted to come over for dinner, she readily accepted. He made pizza. They ate and watched television. He felt an almost eerie comfortableness when he was with her, the kind of comfort that is too comfortable and ends up making you uneasy. There was something about her though. He kissed her and she kissed back. This time her kiss tasted like the Boboli he had made. It was warm and inviting. He loved the way she closed her eyes and melted into his embrace. An hour or more passed in what seemed to be seconds. They were at this point lying on the couch together, wrapped in each other's arms. The moments of awkwardness each new couple experiences weren't there. They moved together in harmony. Each action felt like they had done it a thousand times before, but at the same time was exciting and new. Eventually they ended up in the shower together. He wanted her to stay, but she had to go.

The next day he called her at work. He wanted to see her again. They made a date for Saturday, July 11th. She and a friend were going to the Strip on Ft. Lauderdale Beach. Some friends of hers were playing at a club there. During the evening, he was surprised when she was asked by the band to do set with them. Her resume hadn't mentioned singing. She started with Pink Cadillac, did some 60's stuff and ended with Wind Beneath My Wings. Not necessarily his choice in tunes, but they showcased her well. When she got off stage, he called her his "siren." She beamed. On the way home, they stopped at an all-night grocery to satiate the two a.m. munchies. She made alfalfa sprout sandwiches on pita bread with Caesar dressing. This was a woman his stomach could love. When they got to his apartment, she came in and stayed the weekend.

Over the next four months they fell into a dependable pattern. On Wednesdays, they would go to her mother's for dinner, and then play cards or watch television there until about 9:30. She'd come over and spend the night. Saturday afternoon they'd get together, she'd stay until Monday. The only time that they didn't spend weekends together was when he went out of town.

She was worried when he went to Lollapalooza. It was right before Hurricane Andrew ravaged south Florida. "Watch, she said. " The hurricane will hit and you won't be able to come back to me." She was right about that – sometimes she just knew things. Andrew made a last minute turn and destroyed Homestead. He called her to see if she was ok. She was. They had barely gotten anything where she lived. They were really lucky. He came home and they continued their Wednesday Saturday schedule. Before he knew it, it was November and he was packing to drive to his mother's for the holiday. They spoke Wednesday morning before he started out. He called her Thursday to wish her a Happy Thanksgiving. He could tell that she was happy to hear from him. You could always tell how Elle was feeling. They talked for about a half an hour. When they were saying their good-byes, she asked "Page me when you get home so I know you made it safely." He said that he would.

Instead of paging her, he stopped by her house. He had bought her a Calvin and Hobbs "Save the Earth" shirt and wanted to give it to her, plus they hadn't seen each other in almost a week. He missed her, though his ego prevented him from telling her that. When he got there, he found her eyes red and swollen.

"What happened?" he asked.

Her answer spewed forth "I thought you were dead. I was up all night because you didn't call to let me know that you were ok last night. You didn't tell me you were staying Sunday too. I was so worried and so scared. Dee called the office for me and they told her you were still on vacation. Do you know that you have to call the Highway patrol for each county to see if there was an accident? You know I am geographically challenged. I didn't know what route you took or anything."

She was scared. It was incredibly cute. He hugged and kissed her. He had never had anyone care that much about him besides his family.

She loved him and as much as that realization scared him when she had calmed down he asked, "So, are you coming with me for Christmas?"

They went to Homosassa for Christmas. It went well until the last night that they were there. He had gone out with his cousin Ian and his friend John. They were out a lot later than they intended. When he got home, she was pissed. They fought, and for the first time slept with their backs to each other. He thought it was too much too fast. She was too close. Something felt different. On the drive home they were both quiet. They had plans for New Years; he guessed it was too late to cancel them. After about two hours, she broke the silence and they began talking. They held hands the rest of the way home – her hand was cold until he warmed it. Things were almost ok that week, but he couldn't forget the fight, and the fear that having someone that close caused.. On the 31st, they went to his boss' home. There had always been an animosity between Anne and Ell. He knew Anne was attracted to him, and Ellen's jealousy of that was a turn on. When midnight rolled around he happened to have been closer to Anne than Ellen. Anne turned to him and wished him a happy new year. He kissed her – it wasn't a passionate kiss, but Ellen was hurt and from her hurt. He could feel it. Not the enticing jealous reaction he had hoped for. He knew she had wanted tonight to be special. She had bought champagne and special flutes for the evening. As they were leaving, he heard the glasses shatter. He turned around and saw the shards glittering a brown Christmas tree. She looked like it was her heart that he had just heard splinter. He felt as if someone had made a giant hole in the center of his being. He didn't like to feel that way, and she apparently was someone that could initiate that feeling. He needed to breakup with her. The next morning he told her. She was

inconsolable. He could tell from her sobs, the hurt that he witnessed the night before was minimal compared to this. Part of him wanted to take back the words, hold her and make everything all right. The other part was terrified of commitment, and she represented more of that than he would allow himself to handle.

“Couldn’t we at least be friends?” she pleaded. He agreed more to shut her up than anything else. He figured he could just blow her off under the pretense of being friends. Initially her attempts at keeping in touch did nothing more than drive him further away all the while confirming that he had made the right decision. Eventually the calls became less and less frequent, until they stopped all together. He began to miss her. About that time, she called him, and they were back together again. They fell into a pattern of 6 months on 6 months off for about three years.

They winter before he moved to Michigan for the first time they fell into each other for the third time. She had called because she had some tickets to see the Celts play and wanted to know if he wanted them. Their relationship would always re-ignite when they contacted each other for simple things. He never realized how much he missed her until he saw her again. Then the feeling was overwhelming.

When he realized that he would never be where he wanted to be career-wise working for the city, he began applying in Michigan. He had a college roommate there who was going to help him get a job. Florida is a service-oriented state. As soon as he got his DUI cleared up he wanted to move and he knew that he had to leave her again. He definitely was not at the point where he was ready for her to move with him. He told her on February 16th. He had just come back from Detroit. “That’s why I didn’t get you anything for Valentines Day,” and then he left.

About six weeks later she called, she was pregnant. The word commitment flashed in his mind. Warning bells and whistles were sounding. No way was he getting caught in this trap. He had offered to pay for an abortion. She asked if they could meet to talk, he begrudgingly obliged. It was that Catholic guilt making him do it; he knew it and knew she did too. They met at a bar called The Red Parrot on a Wednesday night. She looked great. He was sure that she was going to ask him to marry her and start a family. He was going to be strong and tell her how it was in everyone’s best interest to get rid of the baby- He was moving, he wasn’t ready to get married. It simply was not the right time. He had his whole speech prepared, he was ready. Then she surprised him. When he saw her there was something different in her eyes, a determination. She didn’t force the marriage / family issue. She had drawn up a document for him to sign. She asked him to swear that he would never contact her or her family again, and that he would sign off all rights as a parent to her child. He didn’t want to sign the contract, but she persisted. She said that she didn’t want him coming in and out of her baby’s life like he had done to her. She had a point. Accepting that there was no argument, he signed. As he did, he realized what was different about her. She was now a mother protecting her young. She had the strength of generations of mothers before her to protect her offspring from being hurt. It was an act of nature that affected females from all species across the globe. When he saw the lengths she would go to protect her child, he realized the extent to which he had hurt her. He walked to his car trying to shake that empty alone feeling that made his heart ache, he knew how she felt when they separated a couple months before.

He had been in Michigan about two and a half years when he got a letter from her. She had lost the baby. Something about getting her karma in order caused her to draft the letter. When she thought about it, he had the right to know. The idea of calling her ran through his mind several times, he had gotten to the point that he had the phone in hand, but couldn’t make his fingers dial. Besides her letter had a new address on it

and he didn't have her new number. He knew it was a bogus excuse, but he managed to rationalize its validity.

When he had to go to Florida for business, he wrote her. He had been there about a month before she called. She explained that she had just gotten the letter. The address he had had been an old work address. They had just forwarded it to her. She wanted to see him. He was leaving in two days, so he didn't see what it could hurt. She came to his hotel that night. He was nervous about seeing her again. That excited nervous that makes you want and not want something at the same time. He had just come back upstairs when he saw her walking towards his room. He walked up behind her and hugged her. She felt so good. He had forgotten how good holding her felt and they spent one of their most memorable nights together.

When he returned home, he forgot to call, even though she tried to reach him. Finally she stopped calling and writing... again. He figured it was for the best. Even though he loved Ellen, he always seemed to hurt her and felt that it was better to not be around her than to keep hurting her. It wasn't until he relocated back to Florida that he called her, though it took him a few weeks to work up the nerve. She was always there when he wanted her though this time had the feeling that she might have finally moved on

Her number had been changed, but he was able to locate the new one. His heart pounded a little harder when he heard her answer the phone. He could tell by the lilt in her voice that she was glad to hear from him. They spoke for about an hour. That was the beginning of what would lead to her end. The recollection sent a chill creeping up his spine.

Too deep in thought to be aware of what he was doing, he had allowed himself to be led to the large stainless steel slab in the center of the room. Mechanically he lay down on the table, oblivious to the clanking caused by his leg irons as he swung his legs on the steel bed. The sharp sting of the restraints cutting into his wrists and ankles brought him back to the present. He looked around what was to be the last place he would see in his lifetime. There were white Formica cabinets on one wall; another held the metal door he had entered through. The door had been secured, but through the narrow window on the side, he could see the back of the guard's gray uniform, and the gray fringe of hair that almost met the rim of his hat. The guard's name was Sam Peterson. He was one of the more friendly presences at the facility. Across from that wall there was a nearly identical door, but with no window. Through this door, the medical staff and warden entered. Draperies in a milky green shade covered the fourth wall. He knew that the audience was sitting behind the glass that the fabric covered. A group of spectators who had come to make sure that the state carried out his sentence, to make sure that in a few short minutes his body would be left lifeless on this cold metal slab.

Her murder and his arrest were the top story. Florida wanted to make an example of his case; more particularly Ruth Ellis wanted to make an example of his case. She knew how to work the media. She used her skills to try him before he ever went to court. He was glad that his mother lived in Utah with his brother. At least they were safe from the calls, he looks, the herd of reporters following him everywhere. He didn't have time to grieve for Elle. He was a victim of the crime too, not the culprit. They had to believe him. He had sworn on his life that he was innocent at his trial. His lawyer assured him that the only evidence they had was circumstantial. When the verdict came in he was shocked, even more so when he was sentenced to death. His attorney filed for appeal. He was sure that he would win on appeal. The months passed as he waited. His attorney had brought him the news. The appeal had been

turned down. She was a judge and very active in the governor's campaign for re-election. She had called in her markers to get a speedy trial and swifter sentencing. Her family had suffered enough with this brutal murder, she pled to the court at sentencing. "I beg you, in the memory of my cousin Ellen, that you let your judgment be swift and fitting of the loss we have suffered." He had hoped at the very least they would change his sentence to Life. Now as he walked into the execution chamber he realized how little of his life he had left. Minutes really.

The sharp prick of the needle piercing his skin forced his eyes open. The curtains had been spread; exposing a dozen sets of eyes waiting to watch him die. He scanned the crowd until he saw the familiar set he knew would be there. He and Ruth had at one point been friends. In fact, she was the one who had introduced him to Ellen. He could not escape the irony that the woman who had given him his life when she introduced them was now also the one fighting so fiercely to end it.

The tick of the clock as the second hand landed on twelve resonated in his head. It was now exactly 11:00. He watched the saline solution as it rhythmically dripped down the IV tube into his arm. The Warden said, "It's time Gregory" He watched as the assistant pressed the needle into the tube. The poison burned as it mixed with the blood in his veins. He closed his eyes again, not wanting to watch them watch him die. He thought again of Elle of how he loved the way that she would stand on tiptoes to kiss him, of how she could touch his heart with one look, of the last time he saw her, of saying that final goodbye at her funeral. He hoped that when he died they would be reunited, and found an odd peace in it.

The second hand of the clock ticked loudly echoing in his head as his brain began to sputter. His thoughts were incoherent. Ellen's face, the beach, the taste of her pumpkin muffins, his dog Nixon, Ellen's casket, the feel of her hair... It became harder and harder to think. Fighting the inevitable, wanting to live. He didn't notice the odd numbness spreading through his body. He felt his mind liquidating in his skull. The memories rushing through his mind, their colors mixing, getting muddier, fading to black.

The monitor in the room whined a high-pitched monotone signaling death. The doctor's voice broke through the fatal droning "Time of Death 11:05 p.m." He signed the death certificate for Ryan Gregory and left through the door he came in. The spectators began gathering their belongings as the attendant removed the IV tubes and electrodes from the motionless prisoner. When the final onlooker left the gallery, the curtains were closed and the light turned off as Ryan Gregory's lifeless body was wheeled to the prison morgue.