

The interrogation room felt like a coffin. The ceiling fan was on the lowest setting, moving so sluggishly that the three blades were easily distinguishable from each other. The stagnant air clung to Joy's skin in the form of beads of sweat and strands of hair stuck to her forehead and neck.

"Do you know why you're here?" the man asked, leaning back in his metal folding chair. He was intimidating; surely taller than six feet with a bald head and closely shaved beard. For some reason he was wearing a leather jacket instead of the usual dark blue one, and it contrasted in an unnatural way with the badge hanging around his neck.

"Do you have air conditioner in here?" Joy asked. "If you do, I think it's broken. I feel like I'm about to pass out."

"The repair guy is coming later today," the leather-jacket-man said after a momentary pause. "His van broke down earlier."

"And you don't have, like, a fan or something? 'Cause it's pretty bad in here."

He smiled thinly. "Thanks for the advice, Ms. Lovett, but we only have fans for the people not currently being persecuted for first degree murder."

Joy shifted in her seat, her hands clasped on her lap tightly. "Slow down there. I haven't been convicted of anything yet, have I?" she said.

"Not yet." The man studied her for a second before continuing, "I'm afraid I haven't introduced myself yet. I'm Detective Perry Locke, and I'm going to be asking you a few questions."

"I figured."

"I'll reiterate: do you know why you're here, Ms. Lovett?"

“Yeah.” Joy’s eyes hovered over an invisible spot on the carpeting, resolutely not making eye contact. “I’m here because I killed Ricky. I did it, and I’m sorry. What else is there to know?”

“Now, I think we both know it’s more complicated than that,” Locke said.

“Nope. I got him. He died. I did it. That’s it. Put me away for as long as you want.”

Locke sat up straight, opening the file that had so far been sitting on the table in between them for some time untouched. He turned it so it faced Joy, but she kept her gaze on the floor.

“Look, Ms. Lovett, it’s not every day that I get to interrogate the only person who’s ever committed murder in space before, and frankly this is going to be the biggest trial in decades. There have been deaths in space before, but never like this. People want to know how you did it and why. I’m the one who’s going to find out those things. But I’m not doing it for them. I’m doing it for her.”

He tapped one finger emphatically on the table, and Joy almost unconsciously turned to look at what he was pointing to: a picture of a young girl, smiling brightly with a missing tooth and braided hair, a band-aid with hearts on it across her cheek.

“You know her, right?” Locke asked.

Joy’s lips tightened. “Yeah. Bailey. Ricky talked about her a lot. She’s cute.”

“Well, cute Bailey is about to turn eight next week and her dad won’t be there to wish her a happy birthday. I just want to get answers for her and the rest of the family.”

“Being an astronaut has always been dangerous. His family knew that. I lost my dad when I was around her age and I turned out fine.” The last part was accompanied by a little dry laugh. Locke narrowed his eyes.

Joy tore her gaze away from the little girl who would need a lot more than a few band-aids to fix her up from now on and turned it towards the one way glass, which of course she could only see her reflection in.

“How many people do you have watching me on the other side?” she asked, almost to herself.

“It’s just me.”

“Mhm.”

“What made you angry enough at Richard Ford to attack him as viciously as you did, Ms. Lovett?”

“I wasn’t angry. I liked Ricky. He always shared his taco sauce with me.” She was still looking at her reflection, talking almost as an afterthought. “I can’t eat tacos anymore. It makes me throw up.”

“Why? Does it make you feel guilty?”

The ends of her mouth twisted downwards and she didn’t respond.

“Ms. Lovett, Mr. Ford was found with scratches vicious enough to tear through skin. His eye sockets were basically empty from the way you scraped them out with your bare hands. Forgive me for assuming, but that seems personal.”

Joy hummed. “That was hard to do with the zero gravity, you know. Very difficult. And the bits of him just kind of... floated. Got stuck in my hair.”

For the first time, a look of genuine disgust passed over Locke’s face, but it was gone in a moment. He pulled another paper out of the file, scanning the lines until he found the one that he wanted. He turned so he was also facing the mirror, making eye contact through the reflection. She looked away.

“Here,” he said. “One of your fellow crew members said that you were, quote, ‘hysterical and shouting about staring and eyes and medicine’, end quote. You have no apparent history of mental illness, so there must have been an inciting incident that caused you to attack him. Did he hurt you? Provoke you?”

“No,” she said, and at this point she was starting to coil in on herself, tensing in a way that was probably unintentional. Shrinking down. “Ricky was a good guy. It wasn’t his fault.”

“Then *why*, Ms. Lovett. Why kill him? And- and mutilate him?”

Joy shook her head hard enough to send droplets of sweat flying from the ends of her hair into the air. Her eyes were akin to those of a caged animal.

“Just tell me,” Locke said, putting his hands on the table, palms out. “It’ll help if you tell someone.” A pause. “And I want to understand.”

Joy’s animal-eyes flicked back and forth uncertainly, but after a few seconds she leaned forward and after a second Locke did the same, so that their faces were about a foot away from each other and their breaths mingled in the space in between.

“Are you recording right now?” she said in a voice so low it was almost a whisper.

Locke’s hand shifted to the tape recorder and, without looking, appeared to turn it off.

“Not anymore,” he said, matching her volume. Whether or not he was telling the truth is both unknown and irrelevant. What matters is it worked.

“Okay. Listen, I didn’t want to kill him. But I couldn’t let him live. He was *sick*.”

Locke’s eyebrows drew together. “Sick? As in mentally unstable?”

“No. No. He was fine for a while, but then he just- you wouldn’t get it, he was just different. And none of the others saw. Not even when I tried to tell them.”

“He became ill?”

“Not like anything I’ve seen before. I’m the medic on the crew, you know- well, yeah, of course you know. He was showing cold symptoms, which was weird because where would he get a virus if we’ve been isolated with recycled air for five months? But this- this was different from a normal cold. It’s like it was eating him alive. From the inside. I tried to help him but he was violent. And dangerous.”

“I thought you said it wasn’t his fault.”

“It wasn’t. That wasn’t him in the end. It was someone else. Something else.”

“Okay. But even if all of that is true, why attack him like you did?”

“I don’t know. I don’t remember.” Joy wasn’t whispering anymore.

“You blacked out?”

“No. Maybe? No.”

Locke’s eyes flicked to where her hands were gripping the table so hard they were turning yellow to her eyes, glossy and red-tinged. Her chest went up and down, up and down as she breathed heavily.

“Do you remember, Ms. Lovett?”

“I... I’m not... I don’t-” Abruptly, Joy backed up, the chair clattering to the ground as she stood shakily. “Why am I talking to you? Stop. I want to get out.”

Locke got up too, putting his hands up in an attempt to calm her. “I’m just trying to help.”

“I don’t want your help! I want to leave! I want-!” her voice was cut off by a sudden burst of violent coughing. Her entire frame seemed to shake with the force. She stumbled back until her back hit the wall, elbow covering her mouth. When it passed, she lowered it, both hands

trembling. She raised her eyes to meet Locke's, and when she did they were brimmed with tears and wide with fear.

“Oh, god,” she said, the fear turning to understanding to horror to something else entirely. Her chest was outright heaving now, arms clutched around her stomach. “Put me in quarantine,” was all she was able to get out before pitching over onto the floor, sweat coating her pallid skin.