

DEADEYE

by

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CHAPTER ONE

Somewhere, far off in the distance, Jesse could hear the cheery songs of the police. They sounded drunk, hammered even, as they were already slurring their words. “Twas the night before Christmas,” they sang. “And all through the house, not a creature was crawling, not even a mouse!”

Jessie sighed, and he leaned back against the wall, his skin going frozen by the touch of the concrete. He crossed his legs, and he stared down at his Book, something he had learned to find an interest in over the last year. He flipped the page to Matthew 7:1, and he began to read. “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge.....”

“Jesse?” a voice interrupted him.

Jesse looked between the rusted silver bars of his cell, expecting to see a cop with a jar of uncooked soup, but he saw something else entirely. The person across from him....was someone he thought he’d never see again.

Her jet black hair flowed down her back, and her piercing blue eyes seemed to look right through him. She stood like a statue, both arms at her side, and she held a bottle of water in her hand. There was little expression shown from her mouth, but Jesse was sure he had seen a hint of fear in her gaze.

“You....” Jesse stuttered, and he couldn’t help but lose his breath. “Why are you here?”

The girl began to look Jesse up and down, almost analyzing everything about him. His now shaggy beard, his broken hands, his swollen eyes. Was she....about to cry?

The girl took a deep breath, and no tears came. She continued to roll her eyes around the room, noticing the one blanket in place of a bed and the bucket that never flushed. “I snuck in,” she said, and she took a sip of water. “I heard it was your last hour.”

Jesse scoffed, and he too, followed her eyes. He looked at his “bed” and his “toilet,” and he nodded. “Yep,” he muttered. “I’m a dead man today.”

The girl shook her head, and her voice started to break. “It never had to be this way, Jesse,” she said. “We could’ve been together forever.”

The two stared at each other for a moment that felt like a year, the silence only being broken by the drip of a broken pipe in the prison hallway. Each drip was like a raindrop, except the rain never stopped, and the sun never took its place.

Jesse could feel his eyes starting to burn. Maybe it was because of the girl. Maybe it was because of something else. But he stood up, and he limped towards her.

“Did you hurt your leg?” The girl asked.

Jesse nodded. “Was playing some basketball,” he said with a slight smile, as if he was reminiscing. “Got crossed a little too hard.”

The girl nodded, her face still sober as a stone. “I guess you won’t have to worry about that anymore,” she said. “You’ll finally be free.”

Jesse snickered, but it sounded more like a smoker’s cough than anything else. “Free,” he repeated. “I’m already free.” He thought of all the inmates he had become friends with. How they treated him like a human.

“You don’t deserve this,” the girl said.

Another moment of silence. For the first time, Jesse allowed himself to meet the eyes of the girl. “You’re wrong,” he said. “I deserve every single second of this.”

The girl raised her eyebrows, but it seemed like a fake expression, as if she was acting out her emotion. As if she was practicing in the mirror before she came here. She took another sip of her water. “But you didn’t do anything,” she said.

Jesse tried to laugh, but it sounded like he was hurting. Yes, the inmates loved him. But sometimes, he was beaten, bruised, and humiliated in front of them. He laced his fingers around his cell bars, the rust digging into the cuts on his palms. "I did everything," Jesse said. "By doing nothing at all."

The girl leaned in close, to the point where she could feel the breath of Jesse's unbrushed teeth. "So death is your consequence," she said, almost trying to force herself to accept it.

The burn in Jesse's eyes grew hotter, making him feel like he just stared straight into a flashlight for an hour. His pupils began to turn red, but still, he didn't tear up. He, too, leaned in closer. Part of him thought it was because he had once loved this girl. Part of him thought it was because he never wanted to see her again.

The two faces sat only inches away from each other. One face was beautiful and flawless. The other was beaten and broken. Only the bars of a cell separated them, but it seemed like they were entire lifetimes apart.

"If you're about to die," the girl said. "Then why not kiss me? The pain can't hurt as much as what's coming."

Jesse smiled, his eyes now as red as blood. He slowly reached into his pocket, and he grabbed a small bottle of eyedrops. He reached his other hand down to unscrew the bottle, making sure not to take his eyes off of the girl. He took a step backwards. Then another. And another, like a robot would. He stared into those piercing blue eyes, remembering that those were eyes he adored. The memories flooded his mind. The talks. The night at the forest. The sunset in Paradise.

Jesse found himself back in the spot he started, pressing his spine into the concrete wall. He held the opened bottle of eyedrops in the air as if he was about to make a toast. "You know,"

he said. "They told me it would be the electric chair." Jesse made sure his stare never moved away from the girl. She stared back at him, frozen, motionless. The truth is, Jesse couldn't tell if she cared or not, but it didn't matter now.

"They....they told me," Jesse stuttered. It was as if his mind was finally starting to understand the inevitability of his fate. "That my body would be sitting limp, eyes wide open, dead." Jesse twisted his wrist, and he turned the bottle of eyedrops upside down, letting all of the liquid pour to the ground. "I promise you one thing," he said to the girl. "I'm going to make sure those eyes are my own."

As if on cue, the sound of footsteps stormed through the hallway. Jesse guessed it was about seven different cops. The girl broke her gaze with Jesse, and he noticed that her expression wasn't an act. She *did* have a look of fear, a kind of bone chilling fear that you'd only get when you're about to die. "I have to go," she said. "Bye Jesse." The girl chugged the rest of the water, tossed the bottle in the corner of the hallway, and disappeared out of sight.

Forever.

Jesse sat back down one last time, and he chose to spend it finishing his verse. Matthew 7:2, he continued. "For with what judgement you judge, you will be judged." Jesse could hear the sound of the cops shoving a key into his cell, but he continued. "And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but not consider the plank in your own eye?"

Jesse heard a click, but he didn't care. He kept reading. "Or how can you say to your brother...."

"Up Mr. Ackerman," one of the cops boomed. "Your time has come."

Jesse remained trained on his Book, refusing to respond until he finished what he started. He knew he was soon to get forced away, so he skipped to his favorite line. “Hypocrite!” the Bible read. “First remove the plank from your own eye.....”

“I said, UP!” Jesse felt his arms being ripped to the ceiling, and he found himself being dragged across the cell. His side scraped across the brittle ground, and blood drew from the area around his ribs. Jesse didn’t mind. He already knew the end of that verse. He blinked a few times, and he appreciated the gift of his eyes. He was hurting, but he could still see clearly.

“What are you doing?” The officers yelled down at his limp body. “Get up, and WALK!”

The cops forced Jesse to his feet, but not without a few bats to his neck. “Go.”

They chained his hands behind his back, and they shoved him every time he moved too slow. They mumbled behind him, knowing he could hear everything. “You know you killed my daughter?” One asked.

“My father?” Another said.

“My wife?”

Jesse didn’t say a word. He dropped his head, and he counted each of his steps. With each crunch of his foot against the concrete ground, he felt a shooting pain run up his leg, but for some reason, he was grateful for it. He was glad he could still *feel*.

After a few more bats to the back and even the head, the group headed into the room labeled, “Final Destination.” The cops shoved open two double doors, the sound creaking like the floorboards of a broken house.

Jesse closed his eyes, and he only listened as he moved forward. “Jesse Ackerman,” a voice, the judge’s voice, spoke into a screaming microphone. “You have been charged with the

crime of harboring a fugitive for six months, the blinding of over 700 people, and the murder of 40 innocent lives.”

The cops pushed Jesse into the chair, and his brain was screaming for him to run. They strapped his body in, and he heard one of them tell him to, “*enjoy the ride!*”

Then, the judge spoke the sentence that sent chills down Jesse’s spine.

“What are your last words?”

For the first time, Jesse opened his eyes, and he scanned the room where he would die. It was painted brown and gold, and it reminded him of some kind of museum. Luxurious paintings scattered the walls, each one another scene of a victory from war.

Around 30 people surrounded Jesse, and each one of them watched with fear on their face. They all wore some kind of hat to cover their gaze, and they lowered their eyes to not meet Jesse’s. Only one of the spectators, one with a white fedora, revealed his eyes. But instead of eyes, he wore a blindfold. The blindfold was a midnight black, and it had a certain kind of slogan written across it: “M2GAC0R8.”