Home Invasion

by Rachel24601

Summary

Sara is six months sober and enjoying some time away from Chicago, in a remote cabin in the woods, when the Fox River eight break into her habitation looking for a place to hide, and Sara becomes a prisoner in her own house. Chemistry sometimes hits where it's least expected.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
I Smell Trouble

The whistling cry of the boiling kettle always made Sara think of a fast-racing train, blowing steam in the old-fashioned way, madly speeding onwards like a vengeful ghost.

The young woman resented her brain for over-thinking. Clear from morphine, it was surprising how fast her thoughts were, shooting every split second, her mind overheating, saturated, making sleep impossible at night, reminding Sara of why she’d started doing drugs in the first place. They’d certainly been a short-cut for inner peace, but Sara was done with that now. No more short-cuts. No more easy.

Sara poured half of the content of the kettle in a large coffee mug where Stephen Colbert’s smiling face shimmered from the porcelain. The mug had been her ex’s. Sara was more of a John Oliver girl herself. Late night shows were a good distraction and always efficient to fill hopelessly sleepless nights. Her smoldering mug in hand, Sara made her way to the bedroom, where she’d finish her latest read before dutifully trying to go to sleep like a good girl.

Though the lack of sleep sometimes drove in unwelcome thoughts, Sara wasn’t altogether unhappy with herself. Six months sober was something to celebrate. The cabin had been a good idea – her father’s idea, actually, and she didn’t doubt that he’d sent her there because it was the one place he expected she wouldn’t be found by reporters hungering to take her picture. But a good idea, all the same. Outside her window, the smell coming from the woods reminded her of childhood trips into the forest and picnics with Bruce Bennett, nice, grandfatherly Bruce, who’d always have time for the things her father didn’t despite also being a politician.

The cabin had belonged to her family for three generations. She’d spent a few weeks there every year since she was a child, and more recently she’d been there with Tom, but he wasn’t a safe topic for late-night thoughts. Maybe her father would have thought twice about sending her there if he’d known that the last time she’d been to the cabin, Tom had drunk cheap tequila from her belly button and they’d spent hours spread on the living room carpet, by the fireside, making love, high as kites, looking straight into the ceiling and seeing stars. Come to think of it, Sara decided he would have probably sent her anyway – what mattered was that she stopped being a distraction to his potential electorate.

She knew him too well not to know that when her father had said it’d be a good idea for her to take a few months of rest, away from the city, what he truly meant was: disappear.

And Sara couldn’t argue that this cabin was a good place to do exactly that. Maybe the best place in the world.

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The sound of breaking glass was what woke her, though she didn’t immediately realize it wasn’t all part of her nightmare. Soaked with icy dew, bare but for a black satin lounging robe and a pair of panties, the blanket clinging to her moist skin. For a few seconds, Sara was incapable of telling what had woken her. She knew she’d been dreaming about Tom. Sleep had always been scarce even
before she started drugs, but since the nightmares had made it that much worse.

Sara lay entirely still, waiting in the dark, her heart pumping at a feverish rate. The silence of the night and beam of moonlight shining from the window gave her a short-lived feeling of serenity.

Then more noises were heard and this time there could be no mistake made. Footsteps sounded in the living room, clear and ominous as an ogre rapping on the door. Shriill unpleasant notes when their shoes stepped on grinding pieces of broken glass.

“You sure it’s inhabited?” The voice was male, deep and hoarse, coming through distinctly enough from downstairs.

“It sure looks inhabited to me.”

Incredible, how her incapacity to see the men made it plausible to Sara’s freshly wakened mind that they may all be ten feet tall, huge, sharp-clawed, domineering boogeymen plucked from childhood fears she’d believed were long forgotten.

“It’s too early for people to be on holiday,” another voice remarked.

Not two but three men, so far, and soon enough a fourth made himself heard, “Ought to check upstairs, just to be sure. We should be safe here for a while.”

This much did a lot to shake Sara from her momentary paralysis. Each movement brutal, heavy, as if her body were made of granite. She got on her feet, clutching the blanket to her body. She’d fallen asleep above the bedcovers, so it might look like the bed hadn’t been slept in. In any case, there was no time to smoothen any telltale crease. Footsteps could already be heard up the winding staircase.

Before she could think of whether there would be a better place to hide or if she might have made it to the window, panic overcame all rational thoughts, and Sara plunged to the ground, rolled under the bed, concealing the blanket still damp with perspiration. Adrenalin left no place even for expected frightened thoughts. In her chest, her heart was hammering like an animal trying to claw its way out of a cage.

Soon, the door of her bedroom opened and she could see black sneakers and the beginning of a blue inmate jumpsuit. Her breath in her throat felt like something solid, a rock that she might choke on. The man stood still for a moment then started pacing the room, each footstep a distinct thump against the wooden flooring.

“Anything, Mike?” A man shouted from downstairs.

“Doesn’t look like it,” he answered. He no longer sounded like a fairytale giant but like a young man, maybe only thirty years old. “Check the other rooms, just in case.”

He lingered only a few more minutes, still planted on his feet, sweeping the room with his eyes no doubt. This was no thorough search, Sara realized. The man didn’t open the closet which was big enough for a grown woman to hide in, didn’t check under the bed – sweet lord, the most obvious of all hiding places, what had she been thinking?

The young man walked away, calm, confident footsteps, leaving the door open as he made his way to the corridor. Before he disappeared down the stairs, Sara got a glimpse of a tall, blue-clad outline, and the briefest flash of a shaved head.

Jesus. Her fingers planted in the wooden boards, as if something from inside her were about to jump out of her skin.
This wasn’t time for wasted thoughts. Sara had to be fast, very fast, draw conclusions and figure out the best thing to do. What came as a certainty was that the men didn’t expect anyone to be in the house. Of course they didn’t. That’s why they hadn’t done a proper search. Who would visit a cabin in the woods before the holiday season? It was the middle of April.

But the invaders could only be deluded for so long. Soon enough, they’d find evidence that someone had been living here for a while – fresh food in the fridge, plates and mugs in the dishwasher. Sara had to get away now, not ten, not five minutes later. Who knew how long it would be before she was discovered and found herself outnumbered?

Struggling against the fearful urge that told her to stay hidden, tucked under that bed no matter what, Sara rolled out from beneath the bed, leaving the blanket behind. The floorboards felt rough against her bare knees, but she didn’t dare get on her feet in case the flooring should squeak under her weight – it was an old cabin. They’d had it entirely remade fifteen years ago, but she didn’t find it safe to rely on that.

From her kneeling position, Sara cast a glance at the window which was such a tempting way out. Before the man came up to check the bedroom, panic had blinded her enough so that making her way through the small frame seemed plausible. But it was too small, of course. She’d only alert the intruders giving it a try.

The thoughts darting through her mind were quick as thunderbolt, not all of them made sense yet it came to Sara as a genuine breath of relief – thank God I’m not high right now.

Only a few seconds had elapsed by the time Sara came up with a plan. The bathroom upstairs had a bigger window than her bedroom. She could squeeze through, she was tall but skinny, had been slender as a girl but drugs had hollowed her out like a vampire. Even six months into her recovery, she couldn’t be over a hundred and twenty. The bathroom window would do – it was her only option, so it would have to do.

On her hands and knees, Sara started slowly crawling out of the bedroom, expecting each movement to cause a clamor, expecting the men would be rushing upstairs and their footsteps would make a soul-crushing symphony, like the galloping horses of death – maybe that’s what the men were, not loose inmates, but the four horsemen of the Apocalypse.

But the flooring made no noise as Sara scrambled to the bathroom. From the corridor, she caught snatches of their conversation – one of the men seemed to have gone to the kitchen. It could only be a few minutes at most, before they realized something was off.

“Got to get rid of him,” one of the men said, matter-of-factly. “The whole idea was for him to get us a plane, he hasn’t delivered. He’s outlived his purpose.”

“We have to wait, Linc. It can’t be right now.”

“I have to take your brother’s side on this one. Abruzzi’s a maniac. I mean, T-Bag was a scumbag – but what he did to his hand? Could either of you have done that in cold blood? Not me, papi.”

Sara didn’t give what she heard any thought. Her sole focus was on getting to the bathroom, prying her way out of the window and running, very far from here. It didn’t matter that the cabin was completely remote, that she wasn’t carrying a phone, that she wasn’t even wearing shoes or proper clothes. April had been rather warm so far, she wouldn’t freeze. She’d walk, even if it took her days to come across a living soul. Then she’d call the police. It wouldn’t be comfortable and it might even become life-threatening if she got lost in the woods, but it’d still be a great improvement to her current situation.
Finally, Sara was able to slither inside the bathroom, the tiling cool against her skin. There, she safely got on her feet, surprised at how nimbly her body followed her instructions, when her mind was rioting chaos.

“You guys!” Someone shouted from downstairs – from the kitchen. “There’s something not right here. Double-check the rest of the cabin.”

“What’d you mean?”

“Come and see.”

Sara didn’t wait long enough to find out what evidence had given her away. Pushing the window as far up as it could go – it came up in such a soundless, perfect way – she hoisted herself up and slithered through the small frame without a second thought. There was no pause, not even a split-second hesitation when she wondered if it was high enough for her to break a bone, if the untrimmed flowerbeds below would cushion her fall. In the end, she landed before she had time for any of these questions, feet first, like a pro, except pro’s legs don’t give way immediately after they’ve hit the ground. In Sara’s head, someone shouted in surprise. She hoped it didn’t actually come through but there was no way of telling, and no time for it anyhow.

A hot, sharp wave of pain spread from Sara’s left ankle, it must have taken most of the weight of the landing, but there was no nauseating flash as for broken bones. True, it hadn’t occurred to Sara she might have to limp her way to the nearest town, but desperate times, desperate measures, and yet more desperate results.

Getting on her feet was challenging enough, her brain was all pins and needles. She made it ten, maybe twelve steps before a storm of four furious men tumbled outside, and before she had time to get any further, the one that ran the fastest tackled her to the ground.

His weight on her was terror in its crudest state, could not have been worse if the earth had crumbled beneath her and hell had opened its mouth and swallowed her.

“Stop,” the man kept repeating, and it took Sara a moment to become aware of her efforts to push him off her.

His hands on her wrists, digging into the soft grass below them. The ground was dewy, wet against her legs. She could tell her robe was hanging open, the man above her inadvertently covering her bare breasts and stomach.

For a moment, she thought her own fear was reflected in the young man’s blue eyes. Then she heard the sound of his ragged breathing, as she stopped struggling, and she knew he was afraid, too. His face was vaguely familiar, and all of a sudden, everything came together, their conversation, their strange attire.

“You’re the Fox River eight.” She said before she could help it. The man who was pinning her down to the ground was called Michael Scofield. She remembered his face best because, a couple of days ago, when their prison break was all over the news, Sara had spoken with an old girlfriend who’d joked at how for a convict, the young armed-robbery one wasn’t too hard on the eyes, and she wouldn’t mind if he stopped by her house looking for shelter.

How absurd that Sara had been laughing at this forty-eight hours ago, and now she was staring into that cold blue-eyed face.

“Jesus,” one of the man said. Sara couldn’t tell which one. “Mike – what are we going to do?”
“Well, there aren’t a great deal of options, fellows,” the man who answered sounded older. Abruzzi. His name came back to her. “Come to think of it, I’ve got it slimmed down to two. Either I slit the girl’s throat right here and now – either we find ourselves with a plateful of trouble.”

The dilemma hung in the air – was it for minutes, seconds? – their silence restoring the peaceful nightly music of cricket song and fireflies.

At least, if I die, my father will hate himself for the rest of his life.

That was as optimistic as Sara was going to get tonight.
They used duct-tape to tie her up – she actually told them they’d find some under the sink, because before the man – Michael Scofield – released his hold on her, before she had the occasion to adjust the thin fabric of her robe on her nude upper body, before the threat of death wasn’t at a reasonable distance from her, Sara found she was incapable of anything but sheer, shameless compliance.

In the living room, with her robe knotted firmly at the waist, even with her hands tied behind her back, Sara felt a little less desperate than she had a moment before, outside, where the dark woods and sky had fostered an atmosphere of savage permissiveness.

The four men were a strange sight, in the living room, usually so quiet – just yesterday, she’d spent an hour reading on that same couch, drinking tea. Tea. Their inmate jumpsuits were brown with dirt up to the knees, their shoes leaving big muddy imprints on the wooden floor.

Only Abruzzi was sitting, his index travelling across the arm of the wicker chair with nonchalance. The three other men – Scofield, Burrows and Sucre – Sara remembered from the news, were pacing around, throwing ideas at each other. From a distance, their situation looked nearly as desperate as hers.

“You wanted to be the good guy, college boy,” Abruzzi commented wryly. “The hero. Hell, you’ve been calling the shots since the beginning of this operation, so go on, now, won’t you? What do we do now, Mr. Mastermind?”

“You shut up,” Burrows barked.

Sara thought he was maybe the sort of guy that looks like two different persons, depending on whether he is or isn’t dressed like a prisoner. At the moment, with his filthy jumpsuit, he looked like a bull if that bull had been shaved and had an angry vein protruding from his forehead instead of horns.

His brother, Michael Scofield, was a different matter. After that flash of fear she’d caught in his eyes when he was holding her down, he had quickly regained his composure. The smeared outfit didn’t change him much – really, he looked like a calculating businessman on the verge of winning a case. She bet that’s what he looked like, even when he was facing defeat.

“No, no,” Abruzzi went on, “we’ve been through too much to be coy around each other, haven’t we? I’m just asking what the lot of you think about our options if we don’t kill the girl.”

“We aren’t killing anyone,” Michael answered inflexibly.

Shock prevented Sara from finding it strange that they would say all this in front of her. Maybe this was shocking enough to them, too, that they weren’t really aware she was there watching.

Having her own murder discussed in front of her was not nearly as terrifying as she would have thought. A fleeting thought crossed her mind, that it was a shame there was nobody here she knew to witness her remarkable self-possession.

Don’t fool yourself that you’re some brave survivor. It’s just the shock. You’re there and you’re not there at the same time.
Of course, Sara wasn’t always so calm on the brink of death.

Last time had been rather –

A flash from the past struck her like a fist to the stomach, wreaking chaos in her brain.

*Oh God, oh God, let me go, please, TOM –*

Sara blinked and the memory was gone, panic vanished along with it, leaving nothing but this strange scene, the four intruders in her living room, her hands glued behind her. It might have been pulled out of one of those plays that like to show you how people behave like animals when they’re in a place remote from society. A *huis clos.*

Sara loved plays that dealt with the complex, flawed nature of humankind.

*But they never end well, do they? Not for anyone.*

Abruzzi shrugged – he looked very calm, Sara thought. The pepper-and-salt stubble on his face didn’t become him, made him look a little unkempt. If this had been a movie, he would have been his most impressive self, he would have been clean-shaven. He probably had been, in his glory days – Sara couldn’t help but remember what he was in prison for. There was a reason why John Abruzzi hadn’t been caught for a very, very long time – he was clever. Always did a neat job. No witnesses was the golden rule to any decent criminal.

*I’m going to die,* Sara thought as a matter-of-fact, logical conclusion. But she didn’t feel it, her body refused to have it. If she had been going to die at the age of twenty-nine, then it ought to have been six months ago, before she went through the pangs of rehab and the insanities of insomnia, before she half lost her mind from grief and guilt. If there had been any mercy in the world, any sense, she would have died in Tom’s arms, high, and death would have come over her like a train shooting into the night and not stopping for anyone.

Death, she felt, was not so bad when you didn’t feel it, when you didn’t have to come to terms with it.

“All right,” Abruzzi said, without raising his voice. “So what’s the idea here, fellows? We stay hidden here forever, hey? Or we get some rest then leave that woman behind – even if we cut all the phone lines, she’d have reached the next town in the next twenty-four hours. Less than that if she chances upon a driving car –”

“Lincoln’s right, John,” Michael said, calm also, but with a tone of warning. “You should shut up.”

“I’m just waiting for you all to come up with solutions.” He got up from the wicker chair with a sigh. For a second, Sara remembered seeing her father sitting in that chair, the newspaper in his hand, and a shiver momentarily shook her out of her numbness. “When you’re ready to move on to mine, you’ll let me know. After all, we have time to waste. No one should come looking for us here. In the meantime, I’ll be in the kitchen, fixing myself one hell of an overdue dinner.”

He disappeared from the living room in a series of heavy, still muddy footsteps. Sucre rubbed a sweaty palm over his smooth scalp, while Lincoln muttered something about keeping an eye on the “Toe-cutting freak”.

Michael turned away from them both and she could see his face, clear, distinct. It took her a moment to realize he was looking at her.

“We aren’t going to hurt you,” he said. “You have my word.”
She thought it was extremely funny. *Just trust the escaped con who broke into your house!* But laughter lay dead somewhere in the pit of her throat, like a block of ice.

“This wasn’t meant to happen,” as if that were an excuse of sorts, that she was just a mishap in the grand order of things. “I’m sorry.”

Then he turned back to his brother and Sara felt she had suddenly ceased to exist. That’s when she knew, truly realized, that Michael Scofield stood between her and death. Part of her felt erased already, washed out like a sand sculpture on the beach.

“There needs to be someone watching her all the time.” Michael resumed. “I don’t trust what Abruzzi’s up to.”

“Sure,” Lincoln nodded.

Sara stared in silent astonishment. Here he was, king amongst the cons. Look at *that*. Acting as if he was their leader – and it didn’t look like it was all just about a prison break.

When you thought about it, there was a deeper level to the men’s exchanges, something that let on there was more going on than you would think.

*Jesus*, Sara closed her eyes, *am I living the adventure of a lifetime? How’s that for some quiet time alone in the countryside?*

Four runaway inmates, and at least one who very much wanted to kill her.

And you didn’t want to forget the one they’d been talking about before, the one who’d lost a hand.

By all means, this was going to be a long night. Longer still than she could guess.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you’ve enjoyed this second chapter. I’m really getting into the story, got a lot of ideas for it. I’m always happy to hear yours so don’t hesitate to comment!
Sleep had been bad in the six months that Sara had worked morphine out of her system, but now, tied up in a remote cabin in the woods, under the supervision of four escaped convicts – ranging from dangerous to professionally homicidal – it was unsurprisingly worse.

Tom’s hands were wandering down her stomach, his front to her back. His touch was amorous but not like it had been while he was alive. Death’s touch would feel like Tom’s now did to Sara.

Her nightmare was a variation of all the ones she’d been having in the past six months. *Just lie with me, doll.* Tom used to call her darling but in the last months of their relationship, it had been pruned to a single languid syllable. Sara was always incapable of telling whether it was just a lazy version of that first affectionate nickname or a new one altogether.

*Lie with me, doll.* His arms around her tightening, iron-gripped tentacles. Stars gleamed maliciously above Sara’s head. She and Tom were lying still, as they had been when he died, him pressing her body against his. The train tracks were deserted, a gloom romantic landscape. *Ain’t it a fine sky up there?* Tom said into her ear. *Ain’t the world quiet here?*

Then the sound came, whistling with all its might, and in the distant fog Sara could see the emerging figure of a train racing onwards. *Tom, we need to go,* she heard the words without moving her lips. Tom’s fingers were melting into her skin, fusing them both to the railway lines, from afar they must have looked like a modern tragedy. They’d been high, of course. He’d been slightly higher.

*Let me go. Oh God.*

The sight of that train rushing fatally towards them had been to Sara terrifying beyond comprehension. Surely the devil’s face must look a little like the front of a train, with two burning-white eyes and a cruel, mechanical, unstopping stride.

The sound was worse, was what had impressed itself on Sara’s mind the deepest. The horns blowing loud, making you think of tornados, of *catastrophes,* the scream of something devoid of human emotion.

*Please, TOM –*

A sudden hand prodding her shoulder shook her out of sleep. Sara couldn’t remember the last time somebody had woken her up – had she been screaming? How embarrassing.

But then her eyes blinked open, and she realized she wasn’t being cared for by a nanny, and for that matter, she wasn’t a child. The man was crouching so his eyes were level with her. They seemed the bluest, freshest eyes, to Sara’s drowsy mind.

It was another few seconds before Sara became aware of where she was – and who she was with. The duct-tape on her wrists was uncomfortably tight. She could barely feel her fingers when she tried moving them.

The man currently watching her was Michael Scofield. Sara could see none of the other cons in the room. They might be upstairs catching some sleep. Dawn was beginning to shine outside the window, gold and crimson tinges bleeding through the clouds.
“It’s okay,” Michael said. Then she had probably been screaming. Though his voice was patient, his face was a mask beneath which emotions smothered. You could guess nothing, could see but a gleaming surface. “You don’t have to be afraid of us.”

But she really did. Sara had read somewhere that people who come close to dying are often known to exhibit a reckless behavior, caused by an irrational feeling of invincibility. Sara was the farthest from those examples. She’d never been more afraid of dying than after what had happened with Tom.

Or at least, she’d though so, her heartbeat racing at the merest unexpected noise, as if death was a tyrannical husband Sara had managed to escape and who was lurking just around the corner.

Yet staring into the face of one of her jailers – the King amongst the cons, Sara had nicknamed him because of the authority he seemed to have over the others – she found an utter absence of fear in her chest. Maybe only because she was still numb from sleep, or because the room was gaining such a surreal aspect, bathed in the blushing colors of dawn.

“What are you all doing here?” She asked, wouldn’t have said anything at all, in her normal state, but considering she was currently being held hostage in her own living room, she doubted that normal was on its way back anytime soon. “Hiding here, in the woods. Everyone in the country’s looking for you.”

“I’d assumed they were, though I haven’t had much time to read the news.”

The look on his face was straight, but you could tell he’d meant to throw some lightness in his tone. An inmate with a sense of humor. Just her luck.

“What are you doing here?” He retorted. “That’s rather the question I should be asking. It’s not the holiday season.” There was silence. The air between them was thick, hot, yet the young man didn’t moisten his lips or swallow, didn’t in any way betray uneasiness. “I’m sorry. I actually need to know. Are you meeting family members?”

“I came here alone.”

It should be easy enough for him to believe her. There was only one toothbrush in the bathroom, if they’d dug up her closet – and they probably had – they would have found women’s clothes only.

“And no one is joining you?”

Sara’s jaw clenched tightly. She couldn’t even bring herself to nod. There was no other way to put it. Confirming that would be an open invitation to kill her.

The look in his eyes took an iron harshness as he sensed her hesitation. “Like I said, Sara. Not anyone here’s going to hurt you. I gave you my word.”

Your word, she repeated inwardly, saving her sarcasm for thoughts alone. There was no need to make the enemy any more hostile than he was already. “So you found my wallet,” she said instead.

“I did. Sara Tancredi. It’s working out well for me that your father’s something of a celebrity.”

Of course it was. What with shock wreaking chaos in her thoughts, it hadn’t occurred to Sara to raise that argument. You could get away with making some city girl disappear in the woods, but the daughter of an influential politician?

“Ironic, though, isn’t it?” She heard herself say.
She could imagine the calm look on her face as she said it, hear the cool in her voice. Remarkable, how little afraid she looked. Somehow, she felt worlds away from the woman who had crawled her way to the bathroom floor a few hours ago. Momentarily at least, fear had left her. But maybe this flashing moment of peace would disappear with the red glare of morning, and soon feel as distant as last night did.

“Ironic?” Michael repeated.

“You can’t not see it. My father’s been preaching tough on crime legislation for the past decade, making life in prison just a little more miserable. Now four escaped criminals stumble upon his daughter, in the closest to the middle of nowhere as we can get in Illinois.”

Michael chuckled softly. Yes, actually chuckled.

Sara’s situation climbed a notch higher into the surreal.

“You know,” he admitted, “I really hadn’t looked at it from this angle.” Shaking his head. “This is all a big mistake, Miss Tancredi.” He’d called her Sara before. “We shouldn’t be here. You shouldn’t have gotten hurt.” He sighed. This had to feel a little surreal to him, too, or he wouldn’t be telling her this. “If things had gone according to plan, we’d be out of the country by now.”

“Well, you can believe me. I’m sorry they haven’t.”

Chuckling again. Everything was dreamlike, the tiredness weighing on Sara’s lids, the numbness in her hands, the feel of the soft robe against her naked body.

Why wasn’t she afraid anymore?

What was it about this whole improbable situation that made her feel like she’d had it coming, like it’d taken long enough?

The past six months had been hellish guilt and sleepless insanity. Sometimes, looking out at the woods, breathing in the fresh air, she managed to delude herself that she was actually coping with what had happened. Like hell she was. What Sara was doing, had been doing since Tom’s death, was running. Hiding away from society because she had no idea how to go back to living as usual.

People said she was experiencing survivor’s guilt and it was a well-known syndrome, as if she’d never heard of it before. That’s not what it was. She hadn’t just survived Tom.

They’d both been high and it hadn’t been his fault any more than hers. Which one of them had spotted the train tracks and thought let’s lie down there, take a look at the world? She honestly couldn’t say.

It wasn’t that she blamed herself for it. But the incident wouldn’t leave her be, was clawing at her brain and reason. She had had to pry Tom’s fingers from her body. She’d had to hit him so he would let her go, because he was chanting along with the train, feeling her up, saying he loved her, whistling along with the train in a ridiculous, bloodcurdling imitation, and for a second she’d thought, He’s going to kill us.

When someone suffering from survivor’s guilt told her they’d had to bite and kick their way out of the arms of the person they loved before leaving them to die, then Sara might think they had something in common.

No wonder then, if she’d been running for so long, that four criminals breaking into her house at night would feel like fate catching up with her.
Suddenly, footsteps sounded down the staircase and Michael straightened up, took a few steps away from the chair where Sara was tied up. Alertness prickled its way into Sara’s mind. Though it was still dawn, she could feel whatever magic had existed about her situation was gone.

A few minutes later, Lincoln Burrows was stepping in the room. “Time’s up. I’ll take the next round.” Something about his way of speaking suggested he was always so economic with words.

“It’s okay.” Michael answered. “You go back upstairs. I’ll keep watching her.”

“I won’t have any of this, Mike. You need to rest. You said so yourself, at least two hours every night, or we start making bad decisions. I’m sure the girl here wouldn’t want that.”

Sara’s face felt hot at the mention. Maybe she was blushing.

After a short while of silent reflection, the young man and headed for the door. He turned back to Sara as if there was something he wanted to say, but he suddenly couldn’t remember what or why he’d even thought it would make sense. Maybe it had to do with that lost magic. Soon he had disappeared, his footsteps climbing the stairs.

Lincoln sighed, took a seat in the couch opposite Sara’s chair. They looked at each other for a long moment.

“Good.” Lincoln just said at some point. “So you’re not one to talk, either.”

Sara didn’t answer. Sometimes, there just aren’t any words.

Chapter End Notes

I’d like to thank you all for the great feedback I’ve been getting! I haven’t been able to reply to guest reviews but they’ve meant a lot to me! Please keep letting me know what you think about the story and where you think things will go. I’ll see you soon ; )
There used to be a great antique-looking clock in the living room of the cabin, whose soothing tick-tack punctuated young Sara’s daily activities – reading by the fireplace, inventing games, using every object in the room as playmates – and which actually signaled each passing hour with a majestic dong, a sound Sara had only heard before in historical movies.

Now the clock had been broken for close to eight years, still it remained on the wall, hanging proudly, an odd piece of decoration.

Sara couldn’t help but casting darting glances at it, though it no longer told the time, and though knowing the time wouldn’t be a great improvement to her situation.

The tape around her wrists had started sawing through the skin. She couldn’t tell whether she was to blame – she hadn’t dared fighting against the bonds because there was always an inmate watching, but she supposed she might have struggled in her sleep.

The man who was currently watching her – Fernando Sucre, if memory served – was walking into minute circles round and round the room. Though he was brawny like Lincoln, heftier than Michael, she found him perhaps the least intimidating of all three. John Abruzzi was far worse, to be put in another box altogether than his fellow convicts. But there was something about Sucre, less cryptical, more honest than the others. He was sweating and forever running his hand over his shaved scalp. Afraid, as they all were, but incapable to mask it.

It didn’t make Sara any less wary, of course. It’s the ones that are the most scared that are the most unpredictable.

It’d be ridiculous for either of them to make conversation yet Sara found the tense silence between them just as unbearable. In the end, it was because of the transparency in Sucre’s face that Sara realized something she’d been missing before.

Fernando Sucre threw regular glances at the window, not with paranoid apprehension but genuine fear. There’s something out there, she thought, something in the woods that scares them more than the police.

Sara could remember the group had been talking about another inmate but not what they’d said about him. At the time, she’d been a little busy crawling from her bedroom floor to the bathroom window. What name had they said? It hadn’t sounded like any that belonged to the Fox River eight. Tee-something. Raking her memory for the last news report, she searched for the faces and names of the four other escapees. The only one that came back was Benjamin Franklin – because come on, how could she not have remembered that?

Sara emerged from her thoughts. Sucre had started cursing in Spanish.

“Is there –” She heard herself say. The words travelled painfully up. Her throat was dry, tasted of blood and bile. “Is there someone else, out in those woods?”

Sucre stopped walking into circles, meeting her gaze with eyes that looked taken aback and yes, actually a little afraid. “No.” He said, but then didn’t seem to see the point in lying. “There better not be. No, I mean – there’s no chance he actually made it.”
The pieces came together slowly. Sara didn’t see what else to do but put them together. “You didn’t just come here to hide from the cops. You fought with one of the people who escaped with you, right?”

“I, huh –”

“Which one was it?”

“Doesn’t matter.”

The answer didn’t come from Sucre and it startled them both. Lincoln Burrows was standing by the door, which had remained open all morning. He was holding a glass of water. It had names of famous cities printed on it in yellow and blue, Paris, London, Roma, Chicago. When she was a kid, Sara drank orange juice from that glass every breakfast.

The knot in her stomach tightened slightly. Any minute now, she felt like she might burst into tears, and it would be terrifying and miserable and probably a little embarrassing.

She didn’t want to cry in front of these people. So long as she retained her dignity, she was still a woman, a full-blown subject like them, which was harder to kill than people you saw as victims. She hoped.

Lincoln stepped closer to her, added with a slight exhale. “He’s dead, anyway.” He brought the glass to her lips and the water glided down her throat, freezing but welcome.

“S’it your turn already?” Sucre said after a moment, looking anxiously at Lincoln.

“Nope.”

He pulled the glass away from her lips somewhat softly. A bead of water ran down her upper lip, the sensation a shameful and powerless tickle. Then Lincoln Burrows wiped it with his thumb and Sara decided that felt worse.

“But you can go, Sucre. Stretch your legs, go take a piss or something. Mike’s upstairs trying to come up with a plan with Abruzzi. He sent me here so we could make our prisoner more comfortable. No reason we can’t all behave like reasonable people.”

Sucre left the room without needing to be asked twice.

Lincoln was still crouching close to her. Sara’s insides felt twisted tight into a small ball of uneasiness. True, Lincoln hadn’t given her the impression that he was entirely true to the image of the monster the media had concocted; he’d been quiet, had given her no insistent stares. But that didn’t matter. He was a man who had broken into her home. He was a man who’d helped sit her on a chair and tie her up. He was a man standing close enough to her to breathe the same air as her. He had all the power and she had none and from one minute to the next, he and all of the others could become monsters.

“Mike said to hear you out,” Lincoln told her. “If there’s anything you want that doesn’t put us in danger. We don’t mean to scare you, okay? Or hurt you. This is just an uncomfortable moment and we’re all going to wait it out.”

Right, this moment was equally uncomfortable for all of those involved. Sara wished she could say something snappy and wry but kept silent in the end. Though her situation was far worse than uncomfortable, she felt in the pit of her stomach that worse, much worse could yet happen.
“We’re going to get you something for breakfast,” Lincoln said.

“I’m not hungry.”

The glass of water had been bad enough. The idea of being fork-fed by any of these men made her stomach heave.

“Well, if you get hungry or thirsty, you just say so, ok? Whoever’s keeping watch. We’ll just holler for someone upstairs. Is there anything you would like?”

Sara gave this actual thought. Putting on some clothes would be nice. The knot was tied firmly around her robe but the fabric was loose and so thin anyway she still felt overly exposed. But even in her most optimistic thoughts, she couldn’t see how she might be allowed to dress without one of them watching. If they refused to untie her, they might even do the dressing themselves and it was undoubtedly something she’d rather not go through. No matter what happened from now, even if she ended up getting killed, she felt there was still a number of nasty things she could avoid, if she was lucky enough.

“No,” she answered.

Lincoln Burrows appraised her for a while – as if she were the dangerous one. As if not even someone tied to a chair could be trusted. From up close, his face looked frightening, didn’t look like a face at all. Deep furrows on his forehead, eyeballs peering attentively at her.

Then he said the most unexpected thing. “I’m sorry.” His words like a stone dropping down Sara’s stomach. “You shouldn’t be caught in the middle of this. It’s my fault. I know you can’t believe this right now, but when we’re gone, when you look back on this – I hope you can see we aren’t bad people. Not Michael and I. Years from now if we manage to clear our names, we’ll answer for what we did to you. I swear. Maybe that’s even worse, Miss Tancredi,” he sighed, “but it’s the truth. We’re the good guys.”

Sara was too startled to think of a reply and had no time to come up with one. A second later, Lincoln’s eyes were riveted on the window, straightening up, his whole body alert, as if he’d seen a ghost. Outside, in the woods, there’d been the slight creeping sound of something getting close.

Chapter End Notes

AN: I think this is starting into my favorite story to write. I can’t wait to hear your reactions! I’ll try to come up with a new chapter soon enough. Thanks again for all the great feedback!
Before Sara had time to realize what was happening, all four men were in the living room with her – except not really with her, because they seemed to have completely forgotten she was there, were too busy shooting questions at each other to see the woman tied to a chair.

A smell of fear was coming off from the inmates. They actually seemed even more afraid than when they’d had to decide what to do with her. What an interesting study in human psychology, how people reacted to fear: Lincoln Burrows raising his voice and Fernando Sucre rubbing the sweat from his forehead with sweaty palms. Only Abruzzi and Michael seemed their usual selves – if anything, calmer. Sara caught herself looking intently at the young man, searching for traces of nervousness, waiting to see if he would crack under pressure. But Michael looked like a rock in the middle of the ocean when a big storm is raging – stoically taking the weight of the waves, unshaken in its stone permanence.

Michael wasn’t looking at her, either. The men were caught in a bigger problem and all the small ones – herself included – ceased to exist.

True to that logic, they spoke in front of her freely, enabled her to get a better idea of their situation.

“He can’t be out there,” Lincoln repeated, his tone climbing an inch louder each time he said it. “T-Bag’s a scumbag but even the worst of those bleed out and die when you make them.”

“But you said you heard something,” Michael said, the calm of his voice inspiring leadership. “Outside. A few hours ago, you said –”

“It could have been anything.”

“And now, Sucre tells me he saw something outside the bathroom window.”

“I did, man,” he confirmed in a high-pitched voice. “I saw a figure. A man-shaped figure. Crouching in the bushes then –”

“It was dark.” Lincoln interrupted. “You don’t know what you saw. If T-Bag was out there he’d have stormed the house by now, right? And he’s not.” Such authority in the words, as though he could will them to be true only by saying them. “Because we ditched him miles from here with a missing hand. Tell me, Sucre, how would he have found us? How would he have not bled to death out there?”

“But,” John Abruzzi was the one to answer, in a smooth, languid voice. “Theodore Bagwell is a cockroach. And cockroaches are always the last thing creeping the earth after the apocalypse.”

Michael looked back at John and pondered this in silence. Lincoln just looked annoyed in his logic.

In the meantime, as the men weren’t watching Sara, Sara watched and watched, took advantage of her invisibility to study them, take them apart. Know your enemy. It was hard enough to try and determine which she could stand a chance against, so she started with figuring out which were out of range. Abruzzi. Abruzzi, for sure. The others, even tough-looking Lincoln might get fooled thinking she was just a harmless woman, say if she pretended to faint and made them untie her to lie her down, giving her the chance to punch them in the groin and sprint for freedom, but John Abruzzi
would not fall for it. Had seen too many people struggling for survival, probably, knew man or woman made not the slightest difference. Knew she’d scratch and bite and tear her way from their grip until she was out. There was some respect, at least, in his understanding of her.

Right now was a good time to think of an escape, now that they had bigger problems on their hands. Now that there wasn’t one man watching her but four looking elsewhere, Sara felt calmer than she had since that terrible night had begun.

The atmosphere outside was reaching twilight again. Night fell fast in the woods, the sun was slow to rise. Sara hadn’t caught any more sleep during the day, hadn’t managed to sleep under the cons’ constant watch, but the exhaustion of the past day left her untouched, though she suspected it was hovering in a corner and would shoot her down at the first second of reprieve she got.

Eventually, they’d made her eat some bread they’d defrosted and a few spoons of peanut butter. Sara couldn’t remember how long that peanut butter jar had been there, probably it dated back to her family excursions in the cabin. You saw hostage situations in movies and you never thought the prisoner would be forced to swallow peanut butter. The thick taste on her tongue had made her nauseous but it was a good thing for her to eat. She’d need all the energy she could get if she was going to get out of this alive – and she was planning to.

*I didn’t claw my way out of Tom’s arms to be murdered in the woods.* She refused the unfairness of such a fate. *If I didn’t die pressed against his chest, rocked to sleep by his love and the drugs in my veins, then I’m not going to die for a very, very long time.*

Cautiously, the inmates’ words a faraway buzz to her ears, Sara tested the strength of the duct tape binding her wrists. Though they were behind her back and the inmates weren’t paying attention anyway, her heart raced at the transgression, as she resisted the powerful spell of obedience.

“What?” A sudden outburst from Lincoln Burrows distracted her at some point. “Well, that’s a neat plan, all right, and while we’re out there looking for a crippled maniac in the woods, what’ll we do about her?”

Four pairs of eyes turned to Sara. The shift was so brutal heat crimsoned her cheeks, her hands behind her back becoming immediately still.

Sara’s own gaze swept over her four jailers until they set on Michael, whose lips were a statuesque line of self-possession, whose eyes on her were different – were seeing not just a problem or a mishap but a woman. Despite herself, it crossed her mind that she was seeing not just an inmate but a man. This unsettling symmetry sent a shiver creeping down her back.

“Someone must stay and watch her,” Michael said finally.

Though they were going to listen to him – who doesn’t listen to the King of cons? – Lincoln took the time to argue, shook his head disbelievingly at Michael. “You aren’t really going along with that plan, are you?”

“It’s possible that T-Bag survived,” Michael answered. “We can’t rule it out. If he’s actually gotten close to the house, or if he’s anywhere in those woods, it should be easy enough for us to find out. He must be leaving blood behind it, quite a lot of it. Finding him – dead or alive – is better than waiting for him to surprise us.”

His domineering blue eyes staring still at Sara. *He’s not really looking at me,* she thought, *because when you meet someone’s eyes you have to acknowledge them as equal or accept your power over them. He wants to do neither.*
If things had been different and they’d met on equal grounds, who could tell how he would look at her?

“If you hate the idea of going in those woods looking for T-Bag,” Michael resumed, willing his eyes back on his brother. “I suggest you stay here in the cabin. The three of us can go.”

“No,” Lincoln didn’t so much as consider this. “No, wherever you go, I’m with you.”

Laughter crept from Abruzzi’s lips, sounding like a black nasty beetle would look. “Brotherly love. I’m moved beyond words.”

“Then why don’t you shut up?” Lincoln was quick to retort.

“All right.” Michael’s intervention was ice-sharp, efficient. He’s the mastermind here, Sara thought suddenly, not just the boss. He broke these people out of prison. You could tell, from the respectful compliance his words were met with, that these men didn’t just follow Michael Scofield because they needed to follow someone. There was faith in their way of looking up to him, faith that he was the ablest person to help them survive out here.

What was such an intelligent person doing in prison in the first place? What was a man, with the presence of a princely leader, robbing a bank for?

“Then Linc and I will search the woods with you, John,” Michael settled.

“And I’ll stay with the girl,” Sucre was prompt to agree. Didn’t look disappointed to miss a hike inside the forest.

“Good,” Michael finished. “I suggest we get going then and try to head back before it gets too dark. Pack some food and water.”

“There’re some flashlights in the closet under the stairs,” Sara heard the words leave her mouth. “The battery might be dead, but you can give it a try.”

She resisted blushing when their eyes were on her again. So strange, she thought, to be a woman watched by men. Sitting with her hands behind her back, at their mercy. Strange precisely because it wasn’t, strange. Because she’d felt like this before, in a room full of male doctors or businessmen, had felt herself outnumbered, had felt the assertion of power in an imperious gaze. See, those eyes would say, how out of your depth you are. Go and play nurse now, honey, let the adults handle this.

For a short while, Sara looked back at the four men around her, the scared-sweaty Sucre, the murderous ex-mobster and the two brothers, both strong, impenetrable, yet different even in their similarities. Burrows’ grit made you think of steel but Michael’s was rather like ice. Ice makes you feel things, sends shivers throughout your soul; and ice can melt.

_I might be a lot of things to these escaped inmates_, Sara thought, looking back on the discrimination she had endured in her professional life, _but I’m not ‘honey’. _Which is all she ever was, probably, even to the colleagues who tried to take her seriously, every now and then. Never got past it, in the end. At least, if she ended up murdered tonight, it’d be because she was considered dangerous enough to fight back.

“Thank you, Miss Tancredi.” Michael turned back towards the team; didn’t sound patronizing as he said it. “Flashlights would be very helpful.”

“I’ll go get them,” Lincoln headed out of the room.
Fast, faster than Sara could realize, the rest of the inmates were following his footsteps, all except Michael. “You mustn’t be scared,” he said when they were alone.

A chuckle in Sara’s throat, sounding the right amount of wry. She was impressed with her own attitude, with how it would come off as brave or tough – not that it mattered because no one who’d be mind-blown to see her like this was around to watch. Still, it felt like a personal victory, that she hadn’t cried or begged for her life – yet. It was a defiant one-finger salute to everyone who’d ever seen her as a spoiled princess.

*How tough would you look, huh, in my position? D’ you crawl into a ball and scream ‘mercy’? Who’s the princess now? Still want to call me honey?*

“You know,” she remarked, “I keep hearing I shouldn’t be scared, but it’s just not the sort of things people actually tell you when there’s no reason why you should be.”

Lowering his eyes, amused. Really, he didn’t look like a bad man, Sara thought, then that she wouldn’t know, would she, what bad men looked like. “I meant about Bagwell.”

“Oh.”

Yes, from what Sara remembered seeing on television, Theodore Bagwell was undoubtedly the worst in the lot of the Fox River Eight. When he’d been caught five years ago, Sara was quite busy with med school still she hadn’t fully missed out on the fever that had all of Chicago trembling for his arrest. Everyone had been talking about this, the serial rapist who murdered young teenagers. *Men are animals,* one of Sara’s friends had said with disgust, and Sara had refrained from saying that, after all, they were. At the time, Bagwell had been like a spook story that got every table humming with outrage at the cafeteria and Sara hadn’t wanted to take part, hadn’t wanted to say it was a shame they weren’t practicing on *his* cadaver at school.

Maybe she just hadn’t wanted to join the rush, for no particular reason; or maybe she’d been thinking that there was good in every individual and, if prison wasn’t such a hostile environment – *thanks a lot, daddy dear* – then maybe people would be able to change there, to reform.

“I mean,” Michael resumed, “I want us to go out there because, if we don’t, we’re all going to be seeing ghosts for the next few days, but Bagwell probably is gone. So, there’s nothing —” somehow, he managed to smile, “nothing more you should be worried about.”

Sara didn’t have a chance to reply before the three other inmates joined them in the living room. The flashlights were functional, the supplies ready to go.

“How long will you guys be?” Sucre asked.

“Depends on how long it takes to find our friend,” Abruzzi was the one to reply. “Dead or alive, I’ve decided I ain’t getting out of these woods until I’ve seen him.”

“Don’t you have better things to do?” Lincoln sighed. “Like getting us a plane?”

“I’ve started the process, gentlemen, made all the phone calls I could from this god-and-signal-forsaken cabin. It’s out of my hands for now.” Admiring his very hands as he said so, a gloating smile on his face, as if to mock the one he’d recently chopped off an enemy.

“We shouldn’t be long, Sucre,” Michael said, regardless. John darted a half-appraising half-threatening look at him, but Michael didn’t grant this with his attention. You couldn’t tell whether the young man was genuinely unafraid of him or playing the part so well he could fool everyone in the room. “Just long enough to put our minds at ease. Right, fellas?”
Lincoln sighed wearily, though he didn’t look more at ease than any of them four. “Well,” he said, “might as well be gone. Get this over with.”

As they treaded out of the room one by one, Sara thought about the three wisemen from the Bible. As inappropriate a thought as they come.

The door shut behind them and Sara looked immediately at Sucre who for whatever reason immediately looked at her.

“Oh,” he cleared his throat awkwardly, “just the two of us then.”

Which made Sara think of another tale from childhood, considerably grimmer. And then there were none.

The evening was long, Jesus, it was long. That Sucre was relatively unfrightening didn’t make him the best company. Sara had too much of an overly-developed empathy to be immune to his extreme nervousness. You could count the sixty seconds filling each minute. Sara was pretty sure you could actually count them twice. How long could a minute be?

There was no attempt at a conversation, and he didn’t actually grab a book or look for an occupation to make time less unbearable. Though it felt like ages, it might well only have been half an hour since the three inmates had gone on their errand, when something drew Sucre from his anxiety-ridden thoughts.

Looking up towards the door then the window, his features were drawn tight on his face, unusually pale. “Did you hear that?” Momentarily forgetting not to speak to her.

Sara actually hadn’t heard anything, had been too busy fighting off the gut-twisting tension pouring out of Sucre’s sweaty frame.

“Hear what?” She repeated.

Hey, she thought absently, if we were in the middle of a horror movie and just about to get slaughtered, that’s exactly what I would say.

“There was a –” His Adam apple protruding as he swallowed. “A kind of cracking sound, don’t you think?”

“I don’t know.”

“What could it be?”

“I don’t know. Anything.”

But then she heard it, too, not a crack, but distinct enough weight padding the ground, drawing near – the entry door? The backyard? Sara joined Sucre in watching the window but to no use; though night hadn’t fallen yet, the atmosphere was sunless, nothing could be distinguished outside from a shadowy blue, the grotesque shape of trees and bushes still as statues.

“Wait here.”
Sara looked at Sucre almost with outrage. “What?” The rest of her question might have been anything. How could he just leave her like this, and what was she going to do but wait here, anyway?

The door closed behind Sucre and the sound of footsteps – yes, this limping weight approaching the house was definitely footsteps – became louder, more distinct. Suddenly, the sound of a door opening. Well, looky here. Then a bang, knocking something over that shattered on the ground.

The struggle made Sara immediately alert. She had to get out of this chair, now. Tape could tear, wasn’t as bad as handcuffs, she’d read enough pulp fiction to know that, and to know also that survival instinct will make a person get out of just about any situation, regardless of how improbable their escape is.

Acting out of instinct, Sara balanced her weight to the left and made the chair tip over to the right. The old wood gave in with a weak splintering noise. Who could tell what she’d been thinking? Weak chairs. Easy to break. If she’d been left a second out of the inmates’ watch, she would have tried this hours ago.

Her left knee and shoulder took most of the impact, but for some reason she felt absolutely no pain. In the corridor, she could still hear Sucre struggling with the thing that had broken into the cabin. Getting out of the tape proved easy enough. First, she tried tearing it with her strength alone but they’d put enough layers to make her task difficult. Still following no thought, only instinct, she used her shoulder to kick a picture off the wall and used the shattered glass to saw through the tape. It was a family picture taken on her eighteenth birthday, and she and her father were smiling as if they were automatons at a contest trying to look their human best.

When she held out her hands in front of her – to be able to do that felt magical, actually unreal – Sara saw a thick red oozing down her fingers and realized she must have cut herself with the glass. No trace of pain, and – Sara thought with a chilling alarm – no sound at all coming from the corridor anymore.

Without waiting to make a better assessment of what had happened between Sucre and the intruder, Sara leapt towards the window and started lifting it up. The hand-shaped blood stains on the glass looked like bad omens, not made by her or anything human.

The window squeaked open and Sara took her first breath of fresh air in the past twenty-four hours.

Then a hand grabbed her by the hair and she was pressed to a strange body, smelling of urine and earth and death. The man held her clasped with one arm, and she realized with speechless horror that a poorly resewn hand was hanging from it.

He tightened his grip on her hair to throw her head backwards and whispered into her ear. “Where you going, honey?”

Chapter End Notes
AN: thanks for all the feedback that keep this story alive. Please let me know your reactions.
Of all that was going on in Sara’s brain, sensations getting mixed up with thoughts and fear, she couldn’t begin to say how she felt. Like being hungry and nauseous at the same time, not sure whether a bite of food will help or make you sicker.

She imagined – maybe fantasized – sitting inside a police station, being asked by a tender-eyed officer, ‘What did it feel like?’ while she’d just shake her head. *I don’t know, I don’t know.*

Obeying orders was easier than to pause, think, debate. Sara was in a state to do nothing else. How strange, to have heard so much about Theodore Bagwell and to have him now in her father’s cabin. Frank Tancredi loved to have things to say about such sadistic individuals, it made him look good as he was all for being tough on crime and ‘Really, Sara,’ he’d once told her, waving his head at a poster where Bagwell was shown wanted for serial rape and murder, ‘these are the people you think are worthy of redemption?’

When T-Bag had immobilized her, Sara felt herself ceasing to feel, to think. She knew then, in her bones, that something was different about him, that he was much, much worse than the four inmates who had broken into her home yesterday evening. *There’ll be no mercy killing from this one. There’ll be no mercy anything.*

Sara didn’t know how a man who’d lost so much blood, who’d had his hand chopped off and grossly sewn back on a few days ago, was capable of threatening her so completely. Though he was unarmed, she didn’t try to break away from his grip more than once – he held her by the neck with his good hand and squeezed hard enough that she knew he’d be strong enough to strangle her, even injured as he was.

*There’s more to him than it looks.* Had to be, since he’d managed to knock Sucre out cold when he was clearly at a physical advantage.

So Sara let him walk them both to the kitchen, passing by Sucre’s inanimate bulk in the corridor, where Bagwell got his hand on a knife and let her go.

“Careful, honey,” he warned, serious, a thick southern drawl. “You so much as look in the wrong direction, I’ll cut you open.”
Immediate relief at no longer being pressed to his body momentarily made her forget to be afraid. Things had gotten very two-dimensional. Her mind and body a chaotic whirling confusion, there was room only for one thing at once. Relief. A long breath of unpolluted air. Then appraisal. For the first time, Sara got a good look at her assailant.

Same blue uniform as the others though much shabbier. Mud and blood caked on his pants and shirt, the one indistinguishable from the other. Once in a while, she noticed the man’s tongue flicked out from between his lips in a chillingly reptilian fashion.

Sara realized while she had been looking at him, he had been looking at her, and was suddenly aware again of being covered only by the thin robe she’d been sleeping in. There was no lust in how he was looking at her. Right away, she knew his cravings to be more primal. What his eyes showed were appetite. Hunger. You could tell this longing for crime was there always, in a corner of his mind, despite how physically exhausted or challenged he was, that it roused in certain situations and then the urge was nearly beyond his control.

A professional thought flashed through her mind. *This man lives with an animal inside him. He’s learned to accept and indulge him but given the right treatment and medication maybe –* 

No. Now was no time to try and save him. Bagwell probably had seen more psychiatrists than she could imagine and no doubt had nothing but contempt for them.

*Let him think I’m a poor defenseless damsel. Please, let him underestimate me.*

But if she gave him a chance to despise her, there’d be little hope of besting him.

“Now, now,” hissing through his teeth, moistening his lips. How obscene his tongue looked, piercing through his mouth. Had he started doing this to shock doctors, was it an act of defiance? Or was it the animal gaining ground on him? “I can see I wasn’t the first to come a-knocking. Scofield sure picked the right house, the poor boy,” grinning, “you must have given him the scare of his life. Now, that little team of backstabbing traitors is going to come back here eventually, but I’m sure with your cooperation, we can get the better of them – give them a little surprise to thank them for what they did to me. And I’ve got your full cooperation, don’t I, honey?”

Nodding. *Let him think you won’t be trouble, won’t try anything. Play the model captive. This one’s a sly one. You want to get out of this alive, you’ll have to out-sly him.*

…

“Little tighter.”

Sara added an extra layer of tape around Sucre’s legs. The young man was still unconscious. T-Bag had left him exactly where he was, in the corridor, had had her fetch some tape and tie him up, insisted on her using almost all the roll of tape. No pointless precaution. Sucre was a strong man. Absently she thought this was good. Maybe there’d be no more left for her.

All the time, T-Bag was pointing the kitchen knife at her. “Yes, that’s better. Now, can you try hauling him into the next room?”

When he forgot to sound threatening, saying certain things, he actually sounded very charming. *People who try to lure in the woods and kill you always do.* There were two sides to this coin and
though both were dangerous.

Though she was sure it should look ridiculous, her trying to draw an unconscious twice-her-weight man into the living room, there was never a moment when the grotesque of it made her think of laughing. They got there inch by inch. The man Bagwell showed no trace of impatience.

Stealing stealthy glances at him, trying to estimate in how bad a shape he was. Could he be trusted to collapse at any moment? Had his earlier show of strength left him physically drained?

“That’s good enough.”

Sara left the inmate on the living room carpet. T-Bat caught her glancing at his hand, immediately defensive as any decent predator. Her mouth ran without her, “I can take a look at it if you like.” Better for him to think she wanted to nurse him rather than that she was studying his weaknesses.

A brow arched on his face, swarthy with dirt. Flicking his tongue. Sara’s heartbeat invisibly racketing.

“What are you, a doctor?”

*Lie.* “No. I just went to med school.”

She kept a calm surface, raked her brain for ways to stall. Why had she even brought this up, offered to help, if not to buy some time, to keep things decorous between them, to appeal to the man and keep the animal at bay?

Already Sara knew things would get dangerous if they ran out of things to do. Tying up Sucre. Moving him. But when there was nothing between them anymore, nothing but silence and the weight of his screaming eyes on her –

“Why not?”

He let her lead him to the bathroom at knife point, sat on the edge of the bathtub while she fished for supplies in the medicine cabinet. In the corner of her eye, she kept seeing the mud imprints he’d left on the tile floor and found it absurd, like waking up to find a bear in your bedroom; or maybe a snake.

“I reckon Scofield’s merry little troop gave you a proper thanking for your hospitality.”

“Pardon?”

Playing the fool. Stalling for time, gazing over the nearly empty shelves – her father had the meds cleared out of the cabin when he decided to send her there instead of rehab. Better to quietly disappear rather than cause an opportunity for scandal. Sara hadn’t minded. She hated rehab. Right now, though, she’d gladly made the trade if she could.

“Well, just barging in, restraining you in your house – hardly seems a way to treat a woman. That never would’ve happened if I’d been around, let me tell you.”

Even with panic in the way, Sara managed to focus, to try and read him. The very way he’d spoken the name *Scofield* had been heinous enough to spread gooseflesh down her arms. There was rivalry there, possible something she could exploit. But she must remain careful, *extremely* careful. Bagwell was a manipulator himself, the kind that knows the taste of his own medicine when you feed it to him.
He let out a sudden sigh. “This is taking awfully long.”

Sara shut the door of the cabinet right away, grabbing band-aids and a bottle of antiseptic. No more stalling or gazing enviously for a razor blade. No doubt, her father had had those removed as well.

His proximity when she crouched next to him was intolerable, the smell of him in her lungs. Struggling for a professional, strictly medical approach. The irregular constellation of stitches on the bright-purple skin of his wrist, occasionally leaking with blood and pus.

“What did you clean it?”

“Afraid not.”

The air in his mouth was thick, aroused. She thought she could get him focused on saving his hand, that practicality would save her in turn. But Bagwell seemed to her an intelligent man, and if he’d been capable of unflinching pragmatism he would never have been caught in the first place.

No. His type was starting to emerge more clearly in her thoughts. Rape was the means to assert his authority and existence, a brutal reaction to having felt debased and probably been subjected to enduring abuse himself. So it would make sense, in a way, after he’d been betrayed and mutilated by his fellow inmates, that those bestial urges that had got him in prison would resurface.

“What happened?” She asked.

Looking only at the hand. Talking because the sound of his ragged breathing was terrible.

“Oh, some dumb luck. I ran into a couple of hikers that happened to have a first-aid kit. Sewed me up.”

“While you were awake?”

Sara deliberately glanced up at him, watched as his eyes glowered with pride at her surprise. Flattery doesn’t always work, but when it does, it works like a charm.

“That’s right.”

She set her eyes back on his hand before she disinfected the area. He wouldn’t want her to see him flinch. “I actually didn’t mean how you patched it up but how you lost it.”

“Oh.” You could tell he was enjoying this – in an albeit strange and masochistic fashion. That he was so little used to being taken seriously, to being listened to as if he mattered. Why else would he need to kill people? “Classical tale of betrayal, honey.”

“Did Michael do this?”

“Michael?” The name slick on his tongue, smiling, as if he’d caught her red-handed. “Why’d you think that?”

“I don’t. Just –” She hesitated. Why had she wanted to know in the first place? “It just looks like he’s in charge, now. So I thought maybe –”

“He’d had to take me out, first?”

Yes. It was difficult to frame it in a narrative that Bagwell would look good in. Two alpha males competing for leadership. Miles away from the truth but the truth had never mattered least to her.
“Let me tell you a thing or two about Michael Scofield, darling.”

Padding the wounded area, the angry-red suture line. No choice but to listen. Gritting her teeth at the feel of his eyes on her, skimming up and down, resisting the urge to clench a fist to her robe. Drawing attention to her nudity would show weakness, which would be nearly as dangerous as showing strength. Right now, Sara was going for absolute professionalism – a blank slate.

“The boy hasn’t got half the nerves it’d take to bring an ax to a man’s hand. Know what I mean? Sure, he’s got the looks and the brain, but there ain’t much happening on the inside. No. The man’s empty as an ice box in there, let me tell you. No passion. Know how I call him?”

Though Sara couldn’t see him smile, was still focused on his hand, she could smell it, feel the hot air of his breath.

“The virgin.” She cleared her throat. He chuckled softly to himself. “Say, are you nearly finished here?”

“Well –” She actually was. Past giving him a clean bandage, there was little she could do. Still she felt the need to deny, wanted to run from facing the void between them. “Yes, almost.”

“Good.” This time she got a glimpse of his brown-toothed grin. His voice had taken a chiming ring of excitement. “I’m not usually so forward with a woman, but how about dinner? I don’t know for you, love, but I am hungry like the wolf.”
Sara wasn’t sure how to feel about what came next. Things got worse, but then, she felt so far from her own body, as if she’d floated to a corner of the room and was watching herself, with Theodore Bagwell, that it almost wasn’t happening to her at all.

A tall, redheaded actress, moving instead of her, doing the things she couldn’t do.

For some reason, Sara imagined herself explaining this to her father and saying things got out of hands. It would be funny because Bagwell only had the one left.

He made her give him food – well, not her. The actress. She made him a sandwich with what she found in the fridge. Whole-wheat bread, turkey slices, mayonnaise. That was after.

After what?

She wasn’t exactly sure.

In a flashing, putrid second, she felt the man Bagwell had grabbed her by the hair and forced his filthy mouth on hers but then the actress had taken over pretty soon and she couldn’t tell for certain anymore.

Now she was watching him eat his sandwich. It struck her that it was the single most horrifying thing. The act of chewing, the food grinded in that brown-teethed maw, the smell thick with the memories of family picnics with Bruce. Sara thought she’d die before she ate another sandwich. It felt like a very logical thing to think.

“Boy, are they taking their time.” Bagwell said, his mouth full, half-chewed unidentified pulp. “What are they doing in those woods, I wonder. Maybe it took a heated turn. Heck, Scofield sure did a lot of things for his brother – you’ve got to ask yourself if everything’s quite normal there, if it’s just plain old brotherly love, ain’t I right?”

Sara didn’t say anything; didn’t hear, really. The sky was black outside the window. The air was cold on her bare skin. Suddenly, she had no clear idea what she was doing here, clutching her robe close to her, barefoot in her kitchen, watching this strange man eat.
The remembrance of the four inmates breaking into her cabin seemed a faraway dream.

Pull yourself together. There was still that faint voice of reason but Sara couldn’t listen, couldn’t shake off her numbness. Do the smart thing. There’s a smarter thing to do. Think.

“You sure don’t talk a lot.”

Talking between swallows. The sound of his chewing was wet, eager. A wave of nausea hit her, so strong she felt certain she was going to throw up then mercifully pass out for the next few minutes. Instead, it wore off, leaving her feeling hot, dizzy.

Still, a little more clearheaded.

Think.

“I’ve got some booze to wash this down, if you like,” the actress said.

Bagwell gave her an intrigued look. “Really? Didn’t find any in the fridge –”

“There’s some in the basement.”

She and Tom had stashed some the last time they’d come here, beneath a weak slab on the floor. Her father hadn’t thought of looking there and, in that six-month recovery, she’d refused to throw them away, had preferred to endure the torture of temptation – then she’d know she was capable of quitting, not because she didn’t have any drugs or alcohol available, but because she’d chosen to. She was stronger than her father thought. Not that either of them cared.

Bagwell finished his sandwich in one great mouthful. Sara had to will herself not to look away, not to look sickened. “You know,” he said, his voice slick as a snake’s skin, “I’ll admit I’m curious as to what a lovely girl like yourself is doing all alone in a cabin, in the middle of nowhere – what, drinking booze? Waiting for the big bad wolf?”

“Just – taking some air from the city.”

He chuckled. “What a remarkable timing. Well, by all means, honey – if that was your way of asking, I’d love to have a drink.” His good hand closed around her forearm, strong, remarkably fast, when she got on her feet. “Now, you don’t think I’m going to let you wander off alone.”

On her face, his breath was warm and thick. For a second she felt faint again. “No,” she answered, didn’t try to tear from his grip. Playing it smart. “You can come with me.”

The basement in the cabin was so small, it felt like an afterthought. Dusty, packed to the brim with canned food and water, and some other things that would be of use on family trips – fishing rods, ice skates. And her father’s hunting rifle, at the top of the shell, in some innocuous-looking carton box.

Bagwell was like her shadow when she led him down the stairs then removed the lose wooden slab in the floor, but he relaxed a little when she took out the bottles – enough bottles to last her a full week with Tom when they were drinking hard. Strong stuff. Whisky, gin, vodka.

“Aren’t you full of surprises.”

He made her sit next to him on the ground. All the while, she was soft as a rag doll, impressively compliant. Maybe I’ll get a medal, like men get for bravery. Bravery is good in men but they like their women docile. But I’m being better than brave. I’m being smart.
She uncorked a couple of bottles at random and they each drank from their own. The taste of alcohol was fire in her throat, wonderful, forgotten comfort. She tried to drink as little as she could without drawing suspicion – knew she had to drink if she was going to get him drunk. The odds were in her favor. She was in a bad shape and lacking sleep but he was much worse off. With all the blood he’d lost, he might be out cold after just a quarter, maybe half a bottle.

“You know, you might look like a good girl on the outside, you’ve got some tricks up your sleeve.”

She answered softly, “Yes.” More thank you think.

“Yes,” he repeated, pleased with himself. He’d only had a few sips but you could hear in his voice the sweet grip of intoxication. After all, he’d been in prison for a while – that was a long time to go without alcohol, when she’d had years of practice.

Ha. How funny it would have sounded to anyone, before today, to hear that being able to hold her liquor would serve her so well one day.

“You play innocent but beneath all those layers of modesty – there’s something wild about you, isn’t it? What else would you be doing here?”

The actress smiled. It was supposed to look a little frightened – just as if she needed more disinhibition to get through the night.

She said, “Let’s drink.”

And wonders of wonders, wasn’t Theodore Bagwell spectacular. The meanest, most disgusting animals are always the toughest to die. He went through nearly the whole bottle and he was still talking, was still alert enough to try and steal a kiss every now and then, and she had to struggle to get him to drink more – she’d had more than she’d intended herself.

“Now,” he sighed, and she couldn’t taste anything on his breath anymore past the booze. “Let’s get down to business. Scofield and his little team will be back, we should be upstairs before long.”

His words were slurried, his movements heavier. For the time they’d been sitting here – how long was it, minutes, hours? – she’d gotten used to his proximity, like having a spider crawling down her neck or inside her mouth, and remaining still, trying to will the horror out of her mind.

“A few more drinks –”

“No.”

He took her by surprise, thrusting her backwards with his good hand, letting go of the bottle on the floor. On top of her, he looked uglier, worse than a man, something she had no word for.

“Okay.” She answered; maybe it was the actress. Fishing for more ways to stall and finding there was none.

“Okay.” He repeated.

Her body went completely limp. Now was when it mattered, she thought, that she’d been nothing but compliant from the beginning.

She didn’t think it through more than once. Was very political, very smart overall. Waited for Bagwell to open her robe before she hit him, hard, with her half-full bottle.
It got him in the back of the head. He made a strange gasping sound. The bottle didn’t break like they do in the movies, so it was just a dull, unimpressive thump.

Sara had time to crawl backwards sufficiently to be out of range before he collapsed. His body was face down but she could hear hushed grunts, stifled against the ground. There was no telling whether he was unconscious or just stunned from the blow, and she decided not to stick around long enough to find out.

Scrambling to her feet, Sara sprinted towards the stairs, kept waiting to feel Bagwell’s hand around her ankle, dragging her back in the cellar, for her to scream at the top of her lungs and drowned into this nightmare she couldn’t seem to find her way out of.

But nothing like that came. In a minute’s time, she was at the top of the stairs, still running, not stopping to catch her breath, even when she’d run past the exit door, when she could feel the dewy grass beneath her feet.

There was no time to think, not about her father’s rifle, still in the basement, or about Fernando Sucre who – to the best of her knowledge – was still tied up in the living room. No thought at all.

Sara just ran, and the air whipping her face, the harshness of occasional rocks cutting into her feet, felt free and exhilarating. If she got out of this alive, if she made it, she would never stop running. Insane it hadn’t occurred to her before, to replace the rush of addiction with this – her lungs burning, the pain in her chest raging like a mad hammer.

*I’ll never stop. Never. Never never never –*

What hit her felt so brutal, at first Sara thought she must have run into a tree. Though the impact didn’t knock her straight off her feet, it left her feeling dazed for a few seconds, her sight fogged.

She blinked a couple of times and suddenly – suddenly she could see the shapes of men around her, one, two three.

“Oh no.”

“What the –”

No way in hell was this happening again.

Sara lurched forward but soon the man she’d hit – Lincoln Burrows, of all – held her tightly by the forearms.

Her eyes were getting used to the dark. The moonlight made it easy for her to distinguish as Michael stepped closer to her – the look on his face was a whirlwind of incomprehension, worry. *That’s what he must look like when something doesn’t go according to plan.* She thought suddenly this was what she was; just one huge pebble in his mastermind scheme.

“Sara,” he said, “what happened?”

You could tell he was sounding calm, trying to calm her.

John Abruzzi whistled softly between his teeth, took a couple of steps forward. She hadn’t answered Michael’s question, but he did the next best thing after he’d gone over her from head to toe. “My oh my,” he said. “Girl, you look like hell spat you out.”
Chapter End Notes

I apologize if some bits of this chapter were hard to read. They were difficult (albeit very cathartic) to write. I’ll warn you at the beginning of each chapter if I feel things get too dark. In the meantime, I’d love to know your thoughts so please remember to leave a review.
Another Place, Another Time

Chapter Notes

I needed an “easygoing” moment after the past couple of chapters so here goes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Sara felt she was grasping the reality of her situation only through gasps. Lincoln Burrows, holding her forearms to keep her still. The men gradually forming a circle around her. This was now, yet part of her was still with T-Bag in that basement, thinking Will I get out, will I get out?

“Let her go, Linc.” Michael commanded.

His voice was stern, musical, and his eyes on her, midnight-blueness.

Suddenly it struck her, for God knew what reason, there was something tragic about her standing with Michael Scofield in that forest. It wasn’t a sensible thought – but again, none of the thoughts you have can be sensible, after keeping awake for nearly three days.

For what may be the first time since she was sober, Sara viewed life not through reasonable principles but sensations; instinct.

There was caution in the way Michael looked at her, the thin line of his lips, the angle of his jaw, but also torment. The truth spread from him to her, there, in the night, unseen by the others. There was no logical reflection and no need for it. Suddenly, she felt – knew – this was a man riven by guilt. Too clever for his own good. Things had gotten out of hands, far beyond the initial plan.

Michael Scofield shouldn’t be hiding in the woods, dressed like an inmate, in the company of thieves and murderers. He shouldn’t have been the man to make her a prisoner.

What would we say to each other, at another time, in another place, complete strangers –

Hustling into one another in the street, grocery shopping, sitting next to each other on a train. Any other chance encounter that wouldn’t have included him tackling her to the floor.

Sara didn’t wonder whether the other inmates had caught it. The night around she and Michael seemed a blue cloak full of magic. To Sara’s exhausted brain, it felt as if absolutely anything could happen: the clock would wind back and all at once, he wouldn’t be an escaped convicted and she wouldn’t be a recovering addict exiled to her father’s remote cabin, the persons they had both somehow ended up being.

In her head, she felt the wrongness of their unequal situation. Maybe her eyes said it. We shouldn’t be here.

The exchange between them was clear as rain. What did he see, right at this moment? Did he feel it, this inexplicable communication, or did he glimpse at something buried in her, did he see yet another life where they would have stood like this in front of each other for different reasons?
“I said, let her go.” Michael repeated without raising his voice.

“Mike —”

“She isn’t going anywhere. Step back, both of you. You, too, John.”

“Last I heard,” Abruzzi hissed, “this was a democratic country, and I don’t remember having a
fucking election —”

“Please.” Lincoln interrupted; he’d let go of Sara’s hands. Standing in the middle of the triangle the
men formed around her, Sara felt vaguely dizzy – the booze or the lack of sleep? – but there was also
something amusing, the threat of laughter in the back of her throat, in the way things are always
amusing when you don’t sleep. The picture we must make, in those woods, so dark, so late. If this
were a movie, she’d be cursing the directors – for Christ’s sake, put some clothes on the girl, don’t
have her just stand there like a bloody bait.

Funny how life doesn’t care about progressive politics, didn’t give her the occasion not to act like the
damsel in distress.

Now, she thought, that’s not quite fair. A damsel in distress wouldn’t have gotten out of that cabin all
by herself, would have waited for a prince to save her – and of all the living creatures in that infinite
forest, there was none that fit the description.

“Sara,” Michael’s voice drew her back to reality. The tone of his voice was soft but careful. Did it
look like she might do something crazy, like she had gone crazy? “Please, can you tell me what
happened? Where is Sucre?”

For a moment, it felt like she was never going to manage to describe what had taken place since T-
Bag had come to the house, so she might as well keep silent forever. Then, the words just came out,
with a decent – even remarkably calm – voice.

“He fought him. The man you were looking for. With the missing hand. He got to the house and he
attacked your friend.”

“Bloody hell,” Lincoln cursed, running his palm over his face.

“Ah,” Abruzzi sighed, “I told you I should have chopped his head off as well. You’re never too
careful, these days.”

“The man should have bled out in the woods —” Lincoln started.

“He got a couple of hikers to sew it back on,” Sara informed, for some reason. Maybe just the
pleasure of hearing how professional and cool she sounded. “It was amateur work – I helped him.”
She shrugged. “I’m sorry.”

She cast a look towards Michael, who still hadn’t said anything. The wariness in his eyes jammed
her throat with inexplicable disappointment.

Just because we’ve got a common enemy doesn’t mean I’m one of them. Did he think this was what
she was doing? Was it? Pretending like she was on their side, so she’d have a better chance to fool
them in the future?

That there was a worse evil than them out there didn’t erase what had happened. They had broken
into her house in the middle of the night and tied her to a chair.
The suspicion in Michael’s eyes was flickering, she watched as he tried to work out whether he could trust her.

There was nothing she would do in those woods that he wouldn’t interpret as a way to try to outsmart him. That strangely pleasant conversation they’d shared, when he was watching her as the dawn broke outside the window – it could just be two human beings finding magic in a nightmarish situation; or it could be that story as old as time of a woman trying to fool a man with her words and guile. Adam and Eve. *Won’t you give that apple a try?*

Maybe all the other men here, Lincoln, Abruzzi, Sucre and Bagwell saw her only as a victim – but not Michael. And for that, he wouldn’t trust her, would always wonder if she was hiding something up her sleeve.

And, anyway, nothing *he* did would make her trust him, would make her forget what he’d made her go through and what he might do.

It was this place and time. No *what if* would make a difference. A shame, she thought. As things were, they didn’t stand a chance at all.

“How did you get out?” Michael asked.

A flash of anger sprung to her chest. How brutal it felt, this sudden return, captive to captor. Was this how this was going to be?

“I was lucky.”

It was more strategic – albeit less satisfying – for him to think she couldn’t play smart.

“How did you really get out?” He asked, unwavering.

Lincoln cast him a reprobating look. “Might want to be easy on her, Mike. She’s distraught –”

“You underestimate her.” Michael replied. “T-Bag’s no fool. I want to know how you managed to leave the house.”

There was nothing to do but capitulate, so Sara answered defiantly, “I got him drinking.”

Maybe she also wanted Michael to imagine this – a glimpse of that terrible basement, whose very thought still started her heart madly racing. She could see the guilt in his blue gaze and she enjoyed it. He ought to feel guilty.

And yet, there was that faraway thought in her head, that, in another life, they wouldn’t have seen the point in trying to destroy each other.

“What do we do now?” Lincoln asked.

“If T-Bag’s really drunk,” Abruzzi said, “we might want to get in now. We’ll get the advantage.”

“Drunk or not, he’s capable of hurting Sucre if we push him.”

“People getting hurt, Scofield, that’s the way of life. Look at our young friend over here.” Sara didn’t flinch as Abruzzi waved a hand towards her. “She understands that. Don’t you, honey? You didn’t get away from T-Bag completely unharmed, most likely, and are you there whining about it? No. ‘Cause you understand all things in life come with a price –”

It felt no more than a split second before he was pinned to the closest tree – Michael moved swifter
than any animal she could think of for an analogy. Still, on his face, there was no trace of him losing his temper – just a look of dead determination and the vein on his forehead slightly protruding.

Lincoln took a step back towards Sara, maybe in case she should think this was an ideal time to make a run for it.

“You don’t talk to her anymore.”

In the night, under the dome of leaves above their heads that covered the sky, Michael’s hands looked a glowing white around Abruzzi’s collar.

“Well, if a man can’t talk to his hostage anymore –”

“I’ll talk to her.” Michael interrupted, the concentration on his face intense – wasting no words and no breath. “You’re done.”

After a moment of hostile silence, Michael let him go. Sara could see the look on John’s face – oh, he was a dangerous man to get angry.

“You shouldn’t try my patience, boy. I might decide you and I have a problem.”

“That’d mean you also have a problem with me,” Lincoln barged in.

“Yeah, yeah. I believe that went without saying. So,” Abruzzi resumed, putting the tension aside – for the time being. “Are we going to be at each other’s throats like cavemen, or are we going to be responsible adults here? It’s time we decide what we do about our friend T-Bag, isn’t it? Do we go back to the cabin, fight for our turf, our do we just leave and stay in those damned woods until my people send us a plane?”

“We can’t leave Sucre,” Michael said.

“He’s keeping him in the living room,” Sara said. She could feel Michael looking at her in that same suspicious, conflicting way. Let him look, she thought, see what he’d make of that. “Someone could draw Bagwell’s attention, draw him to the front door. Meanwhile, one of us gets in through the back. We’ll outman him, anyway. Four to one.”

“Oh, so you’re one of us now.”

“John,” Michael growled, “what did I say?”

Silence set in. It didn’t sound like anyone had a better plan.

Technically, Sara thought, when you put it like this, Sucre was the real damsel in distress.

Chapter End Notes

I hoped you’ve enjoyed this. Please share your reactions and thoughts in a comment.
The Eye of the Storm

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After a few minutes of deliberation – the three men trying to concoct a plan when, really, this was a simple situation, and any solution they came up with wouldn’t need to be elaborate – it was decided the group would storm the cabin and take it back from T-Bag.

What else was there to be done?

After a while, Sara stopped listening to their chatter, maybe out of boredom or because she was still a little drunk.

And what’s the plan for you, now, honey? Playing nice and waiting for a chance to stab them in the back?

Backstabbing sounds a little cowardly when you put it like that, but Sara reckoned when four men break into your home in the middle of the night, things are put into perspective. And isn’t all fair in love and war?

Michael said except if anyone had anything else to add, they should get going, and he placed himself at Sara’s side – not holding her by the arm, not making her feel like a prisoner outright. But if anything had changed between them since he’d tackled her to the ground and they’d both stared terrified into each other’s eyes, the difference was too slight to count for much.

He walked right next to her, Abruzzi a couple of steps ahead and Lincoln in the back.

Look at that. I get an escort.

Nothing was fair about this, in the end, and she’d be damned if this wasn’t love or war but some unimaginable combination of both.

The men had switched off their flashlights, in case T-Bag should have wandered outside the house to meet them. Though Sara had tried to convince them this was unlikely – drunk and injured as he was – none of them were inclined to underestimate him again. They walked at enough distance from each other that Sara wasn’t sure the others could overhear when Michael spoke to her.

“This shouldn’t have happened. Your being left alone with Bagwell.”

She heard a wry sigh part her own lips. “I keep hearing about what shouldn’t have happened. Do you think that makes a difference?” She tried to keep silent, but the rest came out all the same. “That your perfect plans are half as real as what did happen?”

“No.” His voice was cold, with something burning below surface. Michael Scofield was a paradox, she thought. Always one thing and its opposite rolled into one.

Anger was simmering inside Sara, eager to get out. What did she care, that he was sorry? Following the logic of sleepless frenzy, she wanted to punish him not for but with her own suffering. T-Bag’s lips on hers, fixing him a sandwich while he watched, all the while thinking to herself she had no idea what had just happened, what was currently happening. Michael, she felt, should see this and pay for it.
Why him and not the others?

Easy. Because he cared. Because it’d hurt him, and maybe Sara would score some points and it would matter, in their mental battle against each other.

A few days ago, Sara thought, I was safe, I was healing, and I was sober. If the inmates’ sudden irruption into her life was going to destroy her, then why shouldn’t she at least use it to destroy Michael Scofield in the process?

“Did he hurt you?” The words were still icy cold in Michael’s mouth. Did he want her to destroy him, too? “Bagwell. Did he?”

Sara was silent, not because she didn’t want to say the truth, but out of sheer confusion as to what the truth was. “What difference does it make?”

“A huge difference,” he said.

“Why?”

Then he was the one to hesitate, barely a second, before he explained. “When this is over, I want to know exactly what I’m responsible for.”

Sara stopped looking at the ground – dark, wet, mushy leaves – to appraise him. Maybe I picked him to bear the blame of this whole thing because he agrees to bear the burden himself.

“What difference does it make?” she repeated. Wanted him to hear the absurdity of it. “Because you’ll pay?”

He swallowed. In his voice, nothing betrayed emotion. “One day.”

“Yeah.” She chuckled. “Sure.”

“You don’t know me, Sara. You don’t know –”

“I know you’re the one who broke them out of prison.” She argued, finally revealed the hunch she’d had no means to verify before.

Part of her urged her to stop, not to reveal what she knew, to show her hand. But lack of sleep is inebriating, and she was half a bottle away from sober anyway.

“What’s easy to guess. Tell me, how many others like me are there?”

“Whatever for?” she continued, “I know you’re the one behind it.” King among Cons, she thought of the nickname without smiling.

Michael’s face was impassive. “What else do you know?”

“What else do you know?”

“Excuse me?”

“How many others,” she repeated. Suddenly, Sara felt elated, drunk on the gratification of existing once again, of having power, of winning. How does he like me without my hands tied? “People who got hurt,” she continued, “who got in the way. Things you didn’t mean to happen but didn’t stop from happening. Be realistic. Do you think it really matters that you keep track of all that, that you’ll really come back one day and make amends? And how do you intend to do that? How do you think you’ll mend me, Michael?”

His blue stare was shocked and silent. Now, she could see feeling in his eyes, asking her to stop.
Why should he expect mercy? What had she to be merciful for?

Then, Sara took advantage of his surprise to quickly glance at Abruzzi, ahead of them, and Lincoln behind. Neither man seemed aware of their conversation. Maybe this was the right time to play one last card – if she was going to make it out alive, she was going to need an ally.

“What?” She said, on the same tone. “Did you really expect I’d forgive you for my own death, make it easy on you?”

“Don’t.” He’d never spoken so harshly to her. It took her aback but didn’t slow her down. “You’re not going to die.”

“Abruzzi won’t leave this place while I’m alive. I’m too much of a liability. Aren’t you supposed to be the smart one?”

“Abruzzi’s under control.”

“You really think that?”

A tremor on his lips indicated he wasn’t. Not one hundred percent, anyway.

Before Sara could add a word, though, there was a loud call, precisely from Abruzzi. “What’s all this whispering about? You two better be sweet-talking to each other, because if it’s conspiracy, let me tell you, we’re not going to get along.”

“Shut up, John.” Lincoln growled. “You know? I think I could fill a book with all the times I’ve told you to shut up. It’s just not taking, is it?”

“We all ought to be quiet now.” Michael said. “We’re close enough.”

It seemed to Sara his tone was different – different from when he addressed her only. The men stopped walking, and Sara stilled right along. Through the meshes of leaves and branches, she could make out a faint glimmer beaming ahead. That cabin in the woods was starting to feel like a decent substitute for hell.

Chapter End Notes

I wanted another ‘quiet’ chapter before getting to the confrontation. Please let me know your thoughts and theories as always.
Sara had always hated those games in the schoolyard where two teams fight each other in a noisy tantrum of childish anarchy. Cowboys and Indians. Running, hair falling into your eyes, clinging to your perspiring face, your chest hurting with the quick pumps of your racing heart. Why create stress when you don’t need it, why imitate danger when there is none?

“Quicker now. Hurry!”

With their dark-blue uniforms, Sara could barely see the inmates moving in the night, could only make out quick dashes darting forward and back, the grass breaking beneath their boots.

Michael’s commands were quick, no louder than a whisper, still no one thought to counter or question them.

Least of all her. How would that be in her best interest?

They’d been careful when they approached the house, their progress sure and slow, seeking cover behind a bush here and there, crouching to make sure they wouldn’t be spotted out the window. Of course, she’d stayed behind, and Michael had stayed with her. *Surprise, surprise.*

He didn’t trust Abruzzi with her, but didn’t he trust his brother?

Or was it just that he felt it was his job, his *duty*, to watch her? *He let me out of his watch once, and look what happened.*

Next to her, Michael was remarkably alert, not overtly looking at her, but sure enough he’d spot it if she tried something stupid. There was that *fool me once, fool me twice* saying running through her head. He only sent Lincoln to ascertain T-Bag was still in the cabin — probably, because Abruzzi might be tempted not to head back and report but instead go straight for it. Not that Michael would be too unhappy for the two of them to be at each other’s throats, Sara reckoned. But he needed Abruzzi. Through the fuzziness of the alcohol, she remembered him saying something about a plane.

“Still in there,” Lincoln confirmed after stealing back to the wood border.

“You’re sure?” Michael asked, ever cautious.

“Absolutely. I saw him through the kitchen window, his brains damned near bleeding out of his forehead.” He gave Sara an appreciative glance. “You sure didn’t miss him.”

Sara shrugged. What was the point in fighting this, the complicity blooming before the threat of their common enemy?
Lincoln sighed. “I can’t figure out how the bastard is still standing.”

“Only good news,” Abruzzi replied. “A couple of days ago, our friend Bagwell was messed up bad. Now he’s messed up very bad. No reason we shouldn’t be able to take him.”

“That doesn’t mean he won’t cause trouble on the way.” Michael said. “If he knows he’s going down, it’ll give him all the more reasons to kick up a row.”

“We can go in through a window,” Lincoln suggested. “Try to make it discreet. Catch him by surprise.”

“No,” Sara interrupted. Cooperating was one thing but outright helping them was odd, like wearing a mask without knowing what it’s doing there or when it comes off. Who would she rather be stuck with, them or Bagwell? “No, he booby-trapped the house.”

Lincoln arched a brow, silently asking for specifications. There was no point in being mysterious. “You know,” she said. “Broken glass on the doorstep, on the window sills.”

“You’re saying this now?”

She shrugged again. Honestly, she’d just remembered.

Had it happened before or after the actress took over? How surreal, how oddly dreamlike, to spread shards of broken glass around her own house, it must have looked like a superstitious ritual. Like throwing salt behind your shoulder, drawing a cross in the air.

“Then we bloody torch the house,” Abruzzi shrugged.

“Yeah, with what?” Lincoln spoke wryly. “And what about Sucre?”

“You saw him?” Michael asked, not without feeling.

Lincoln shook his head. “He’s probably still alive. Bagwell must be keeping him as leverage.”

Still, there was no misunderstanding, no doubt amongst the inmates and Sara, that of all the things that might happen tonight, a peaceful reunion didn’t feature the list. Bagwell wouldn’t trade Sucre’s life to be part of the group again, nor would they go their separate ways with no more violence.

The time for reconciliation had gone with T-Bag’s hand and – Sara realized, half-unconsciously – with her own sequestration.

Yes, maybe the others couldn’t see it, maybe even Lincoln couldn’t, but Sara was watching closely the wild gleam in Michael’s eyes, which he was striving to keep in check. There was something in him being born he didn’t yet understand, something he probably didn’t think existed until Fox River. The kind of anger that comes from the pit of your belly and eats its way up with a ruthless appetite. Sara was all too familiar.

For a brief moment, she had a strange fantasy in which Michael Scofield was her patient and she could probe the hidden depths of his enigmatic mind, where she had all the time in the world to understand his mechanisms.

“Then we just do as we said,” Michael resumed. “Draw Bagwell’s attention. Try to get him out of the house through the front door – meanwhile, one of us goes through the back, gets Sucre. The remaining two handle Bagwell –”
“And what do we do with the girl?” Abruzzi interrupted. His voice seemingly casual, nearly a drawl.

A veil of caution dropped over Michael’s eyes. *Ha,* Sara thought triumphantly. She’d like to see him try and convince her Abruzzi was all under control now. When you thought about it, it wasn’t much to act smug about, but you had to count each victory.

“Well,” John shrugged, “who watches her? Like you said, Bagwell’s a sly one, even injured, it’s better for there to be two of us when we come against him. If someone else gets Sucre, makes sure Bagwell doesn’t make his way back to the house and execute him, *what do we do with the girl?*”

“I can help.” Sara heard herself say. It was still time to be smart.

Michael answered categorically, with that same unwavering suspicion. “No.”

“Mike,” Lincoln urged, “we don’t have time to debate.”

“We really don’t.” Sara argued, feeling emboldened. “Lincoln and I will go get Sucre. You and John can draw Bagwell to the front door and handle him if you can.”

Abruzzi arched a brow that seemed to suggest he hadn’t realized they were on a first-name basis. “*If we can?*” He echoed.

“You don’t make the calls here,” Michael said.

“This is my house.” Sara replied without lowering her eyes from Michael’s. “That you forced your entry in the middle of the night doesn’t give you the right to tell me otherwise. It’s my home, and we’re taking it back.”

Suddenly, it didn’t feel like Michael – or even his brother or Abruzzi – could intimidate her. If they threatened to kill her, she’d call their bluff. After what had happened with Bagwell, she realized the fear of physical violence had completely left her system.

What were they going to do? Hit her?

If one of them so much as tried, she’d bet the vein in Michael’s forehead would actually burst.

No. Under his watch, there would be nothing like that.

And hell, if it did get down to this, she’d take them on. Strike back, show them what was what. After everything, *everything* that had happened, she wouldn’t go down without *kicking up a row* herself.

“You heard the lady,” Abruzzi broke the silence. His assistance came as a surprise, but Sara did her best to mask it. “We’ve wasted enough time as it is.”

…

Anticipation was rising in peaks in Sara’s stomach as they approached the house. She remembered they hadn’t neglected the backdoor, when they were spreading broken glass on every entry. Bagwell would *hear* them come in. Hopefully, by then, he’d be a little too busy with Abruzzi and Michael to do anything about it, but still –

Still a thrill crawled down her spine when she remembered him grabbing her by the hair, his
sickening breath on her face. Where you going, honey?

“You okay?” Lincoln asked.

Pointless. They were in too deep to go back.

At the other end of the garden, through the house, Michael and John must be just about to make their move. Sara wasn’t only listening but seeing this, taking an imaginary trip through the cabin, each room tainted by Bagwell’s presence but also by hers, the ghost of that silent docile woman she’d played.

Suddenly, it didn’t feel absurd to think that she’d died in that house, and the inmates would find her naked cadaver among other things.

You don’t have to be a house to be haunted.

You could be a cabin.

Or something else entirely.

Finally, there was the signal – unstifled noise around the front of the house. Michael would be aiming for loud but not deliberate, so T-Bag wouldn’t know he was being set up. In all likelihood – if he was keeping watch out the window or so much as paying attention, the inmates’ presence in the garden would draw him out.

The windows, Sara had noticed while they were going around the front yard, were all open.

“It’s taking too long,” Lincoln whispered. “He’s not coming out.”

Sara had no time to reply before Bagwell’s voice, from inside the cabin, sounded loud and clear. He wasn’t shouting, but it came through distinctly enough. “Before any of you out there try to play smart, you should know I’m not in a particularly clement spirit. I hear you trying to make your way in,” and he’d hear them, sure enough, “and I’m slicing your friend’s throat.”

“You can’t win, Theodore.” She heard Michael answer. “You’re surrounded. But we all want this to be over – you let Sucre go, and you can be on your way as far as I’m concerned. No one’ll have anything to say against it. We’re all tired.”

Bagwell’s laughter sounded in the cabin. The hairs in Sara’s neck stiffened. When she was little, sleeping in the upstairs bedroom, and the night would fill her mind with terrors, she’d sometimes imagine the house was filled with malevolent creatures – goblins, gremlins, they were the ones that scared her the most, crooked claws on the end of long fingers, their faces elfin but mannish, all sharp edges and angles.

I’ll be damned if Bagwell’s laugh isn’t very goblinlike, she thought.

Did that make her like the little girl who gets stolen by the fairies, who eats their food and stays trapped in their immortal kingdom?

After a good night’s sleep, hopefully, she’d have forgotten every nightmarish second of those past few days in that cabin.

“Am I supposed to believe that?” Bagwell said at last. “No, pretty, you might have been an honest man when you came through those prison gates, but they spat you out just as lying and crafty as the rest of us. We both know your lot won’t let me go alive. None of you wants to have to look behind
your shoulder anymore, checking if that good old boogey is still around.”

“Then we settle this right now.” Lincoln hissed through his teeth.

Sara darted a furtive look at him – they weren’t supposed to give away their position, but something told her Lincoln Burrows had a way of unintentionally messing up his brother’s plans.

“Is that you, Burrows? Why don’t you come and face me then? How about a fair fight, huh? One to one. Though I’d much rather getting it on with your pretty brother, or with that feisty girl you guys left me all wrapped up like a Christmas gift.”

A sensation like vertigo shot down Sara’s body. Deliberately, she didn’t look at Lincoln and he politely didn’t look back.

“You guys ran into her by any chance?” Bagwell’s southern drawl sounded again through the cabin. “I would have liked to even things up with her – I do hate having unfinished business.”

“You want a fair fight, one to one?” Michael was the one to answer.

Involuntarily, Sara shivered at the primitive anger in his tone. It was all under the surface, but she could sense its might, imagine how deep it ran.

“How about you and me, Theodore?”

“Michael, don’t!” Lincoln growled.

His brother paid him no mind. “We let the others get into the cabin. You and I go into the woods, where you can make sure no one’s following.”

“And then?” Bagwell’s tone brightened with anticipation.

Michael’s answer came, low and serious – Sara could imagine the look on his face, that cold surface beneath which the stormy waters of anger ran wild and free.

“Then may the best man win,” he said.

Chapter End Notes

I was told it’d be great if I could update this chapter before the end of the week, so you may all comment on my remarkable punctuality ;-). More seriously, I hope you’ve enjoyed this, don’t hesitate to leave your thoughts and reactions.
Chivalry

“In song and story the young man is seen departing adventurously in search of woman; he slays the
dragon, he battles giants; she is locked in a tower, a palace, a garden, a cave, he is chained to a rock,
a captive, sound asleep: she waits.”

Simone de Beauvoir

“That’s it,” Lincoln whispered, more to himself, it seemed, than to the young woman.

He and Sara were still standing in the back of the cabin, hidden from view, but listening to every
noise coming from the yard or from the cabin with the direst attention.

“I’m going to talk some sense into him.”

Lincoln started around the house but then suddenly froze and turned back towards Sara. Maybe he’d
completely forgotten he was supposed to watch her, or just that she was currently his prisoner.

“You coming?”

True, there was no point in staying in the back anymore. Lincoln had given away their position, and
it wasn’t as if their initial plan – drawing T-Bag out and handling him while Lincoln and Sara went
through the back to get Sucre – was going to work now, anyway.

Still, Sara remained frozen, felt as if her feet had been turned to rock just by the sound of T-Bag’s
voice coming from her haunted cabin.

She didn’t want to have to look at Michael, to see him getting ready for battle like a noble knight –
dark, but then again, all the best heroes were nowadays – about to fight valiantly for his country.

No.

If she looked at him, his eyes brimming with burning secrets, it would feel too much like a scene
from a medieval romance, he’d give her a silent nod instead of kissing her hand, but the message
would be there. She’d called him King among Cons but it wouldn’t be like this, now, if they looked
at each other. His face would be impassive, but his heart would be tamed, it’d whisper, My queen,
and she’d know that he was fighting this battle for her, that he was avenging her ravished pride –

“Wait, did I make it sound like I was asking?” Lincoln resumed. “You’re coming.”

Sara started from her reverie. Probably, she hadn’t slept in so long that she was starting to dream on
her own two feet.

Michael Scofield was not a hero. He was a thief and a wanted felon and one of her captors.

But it was even more ridiculous to picture herself as a princess, in search of a knight to defend her
honor. Poor little black sheep, trying to cleanse your veins from morphine, trying to drain your brain
from the sound of your ex-boyfriend’s dying screams. One hell of a damsel she’d make.
Yet, something in Sara couldn’t shake off the belief that it was that same old story being told again, in this strange setting, absurdly domestic and terrifying, and full of ghosts.

“Come on,” Lincoln grabbed Sara’s arm – rough but not ungentle – and they started together around the house.

By the end of the night, she wondered, looking at the cabin that glowed like a lone eye in the wilderness, how many of us will be left, and whose ghost will be in there screaming the loudest?

…

“How could you do this, Mike?” Lincoln asked as soon as his brother was in sight.

Sara looked down after getting a brief glimpse of his grave eyes – maybe she was blushing. Maybe she was losing grip of reality completely.

“Without even talking to me? This wasn’t what we’d planned –”

“The plan won’t work.” Michael interrupted. “And I don’t think I really expected it to. T-Bag wouldn’t have let himself be played so easily, wouldn’t have allowed us to take him together. This is the way we all make it, the way we protect Sucre.”

“Yeah, and what if we don’t?” Lincoln shot back, his voice all anger and bile. What a marvel, Sara thought despite herself, that both brothers could be at such different poles from one another. Lincoln was all boiling blood and Michael was ice, collectiveness, silence.

T-Bag’s words flashed through brain. The man’s empty as an ice box inside. No passion.

Sara clenched her jaw. Raising her eyes towards Michael, just as Lincoln added, “What if he beats you, Mike?”

The young man didn’t flinch at the mention, though he probably wasn’t arrogant enough not to have considered it. “Odds are, he won’t. He has disadvantages. He’s one hand short, and you said Sara hit him pretty bad –”

“Why don’t you let me go?” Abruzzi intervened, in a rather calm voice. “No offense, college boy, but when it comes to killing folks I dare say I’m more suited for the job. I don’t want any bad surprises. I want Bagwell dealt with. I want him dead yesterday.”

“We don’t have time for this,” Michael sighed. “He’s going to come out any minute. Please, all of you just stay in check –”

“You want me to stay sitting in that cabin while you’re out there with this animal?” Lincoln snapped.

“Who are you calling an animal?”

All three inmates and Sara turned their faces towards the door. The blood in her veins ran cold at the sight of her persecutor. With his disheveled hair and clothes, he looked like he’d spent years in the woods, not days – and Sara couldn’t tell for certain she didn’t look just as bad herself.

Lincoln was right. She really hadn’t missed him.
Though he’d made an effort to wipe the blood from his face, gore had caked around an egg-sized wound at the base of his hair, just above his forehead, and there was more red on his sweater than when she’d sewn him up.

He was standing in the open doorframe of her cabin, the light from inside shone in his back, and it made Sara think of how superheroes were drawn in comic books (*superman always has the light on his side*).

Of course, superheroes don’t take people hostage, and sure enough, T-Bag was holding Sucre tight in his clutch, a kitchen knife pressing into his throat.

Sucre was awake now, though unusually pale and heavily sweating. Sara hadn’t minded Sucre when he watched her, had actually thought he could be sort of nice if she’d met him under different circumstances.

And yet, a strong, surprising sense of power stole over her as she saw him like this, trapped in T-Bag’s grip.

*If I hadn’t gotten away from him,* she thought, *it would have been me.*

And as pitiful a picture as Sucre looked right now, she was glad it was him standing there and not her. Just the law of the jungle.

Absently, she took in the woods around them, closing in around the cabin as if to dismantle whatever was left of civilization. *What better place for people to act like savages?*

Slowly, T-Bag’s eyes went over the three men, and her frame shook with dread when they set on her. Sara closed a fist on her robe reflexively, steeling herself.

“Look at you,” he said. “Alive and kicking. When I’m done with pretty here, I’ll come back for you.”

“I don’t know, Theodore.” Though the words left her mouth, though she heard them out loud, she couldn’t believe it was her talking. “That wound looks kind of nasty. I’m not sure you can take another hit.”

His brows arched with surprise. “You’ve seen nothing yet, love. I’ll show you nasty –”

“Shut up, you disgusting shit.” Michael interrupted sharply. Sara looked back at him, a little astonished, but his eyes stayed dead set on Bagwell. “Are we going to fight, or what?”

“Straight to the point, are we?” He said. “I like that.”

Since Bagwell had appeared in the doorframe, Sara hadn’t taken her eyes off him – you don’t lower your guard in front of a predator – but in the corner of her eye, she could see Lincoln putting his hand on Michael’s shoulder, whispering something, so low she barely even caught it.

“I don’t like this, Mike. I don’t like this at all.”

No one spoke for a moment. Time became impossible to measure, with everyone frozen, the inmates at the wood border and the man standing before the cabin.

“Let go of Sucre.” Michael said in the end. “Then we can be on our way.”

“You must think I’m a fool, pretty. If I let him go now, what’ll stop you all from throwing yourselves
at me like a pack of wolves?”

Now, Bagwell wasn’t laughing but *smiling*, and the sight of his brownish teeth made Sara’s soul shake like a house of cards. Suddenly, she, like Lincoln, had a very bad feeling about this.

She tried to resist – *What do I care if Michael gets hurt, if he even gets killed* – but for some reason, it wouldn’t take, and she was wrenching her cautious gaze from Bagwell and planting it on Michael’s iron-determined face.

“Lincoln’s right,” she said, didn’t care that Lincoln was staring at her with a blend of astonishment and suspicion. Michael was watching her carefully. He should know she was serious, should hear her out. “Don’t do this. It’s not right.”

Michael processed her words in silence, his eyes evaluating her as coldly as possible, but without achieving indifference.

Unfortunately, she found herself incapable of formulating *why* he shouldn’t fight Bagwell. The reasons were all there, in her mind, clear as day.

*He doesn’t fight like you do. He doesn’t fight fair.* The only way to get Bagwell was foul play – Sara was well placed to know that – but what if Michael didn’t go there, what if he preferred the glory of death in an unsullied combat?

But there was still that glimmer of rage burning in his eyes.

*Don’t underestimate him,* a voice said in Sara’s head. *He’s a con, after all.* How ever had she forgotten *that?*

“Well,” Bagwell sighed, “when the two of you are done saying goodbye.”

“I’m not going anywhere until you’ve released Sucre.” Michael thundered.

“No,” T-Bag chuckled, “that’s not how this’ll work. You, me, and Sucre here, are going to walk into the forest, like you said. If your little team tries to follow me, I’ll kill your Mexican friend.”

“Puerto Rican, hijo de puta.” Sucre hissed through his teeth.

T-Bag paid him no mind. “When I’ve made sure we’re far enough in those woods that no one’ll hear you screaming or come to your rescue, I’ll let Sucre go. Then it’s just like you put it – the best man wins, the loser bites the dust, and all’s right as rain again.”

“I hate this.” Lincoln said, to himself, maybe to the air. “I hate this.”

“It’ll be all right.” Michael spoke firmly.

He was still the leader, trying to keep his people from mutinying.

Then, Sara watched as Abruzzi made his way towards Michael. He spoke very close to him, almost as if they, too, were brothers.

Suddenly, Sara could read the tension, the *threat* in Abruzzi’s calm-looking face. “You better win this, Michael,” he said. “You screw this up, you’re putting us *all* in danger.”

“I know that.”

“Good.” Then his hand was on Michael’s shoulder, exactly like Lincoln’s was a moment before. “If
you’re not back in an hour, I’m killing the girl.”

Sara barely registered she was the girl in question. She was too busy admiring the change in Michael’s features, the sudden flash of outrage, the unmistakable fear of exposure. “What? Why –”

“Just putting it all out there, making sure there’s enough at stake.” John shrugged.

In the background, Sara heard Bagwell laughing. “My, my,” he whistled, “can you believe how exciting this is?”

“Your big brother won’t stop me,” Abruzzi resumed. His voice was low, calm, even somewhat charming. “Don’t you think that he will.”

“You’re ridiculous,” Michael said, in a tone that was collected enough. But Sara could see the turmoil in his eyes, the effort of keeping himself together.

“No, Michael,” John shook his head, smiling. “I’ve just been in the game long enough to know how things work. And I’ve been watching you, these past few days – watching you closely.”

“What are you –”

Abruzzi didn’t let him finish. “You want to save your friend, Sucre, even if it puts the whole lot of us at risk? Make decisions for the whole team? All right, your majesty.”

He drew Michael closer to him, his face disappearing behind his ear, so Sara could only see the look on the young man’s face, strained with speechless terror.

The rest of Abruzzi’s sentence was spoken so low, Sara doubted Bagwell or even Lincoln heard it.

“You want to play the game, that’s fine, but you win it. I don’t care how you do it, Michael. I don’t care if you have to rip off his throat with your own teeth.” Then he pulled back, removed his hand from Michael’s shoulder. “One hour.” He said. “And I’m calling for an execution on this fine morning.”

“You don’t have to do this,” Michael said.

Sara’s jaw slackened with disbelief. He was pleading.

“You really don’t,” T-Bag sighed. His tongue flicked out of his mouth once. “I’d much rather you left her to me.”

Michael looked just about to crumble under the weight of the situation. “Please,” Lincoln said, “you’re in no state –”

“Now, not that this isn’t fascinating, folks,” T-Bag resumed, “but I believe Sucre here is getting a little nervous. Are we doing this or not?”

“Yes.” Michael answered firmly enough.

Slowly, still holding Sucre at knifepoint, T-Bag drew away from the cabin, treading into the darkness.

“Get in.” Michael ordered, his eyes going from Abruzzi to his brother. “Please, Lincoln. Just trust me.”

The two inmates started towards the house in silence. Lincoln’s face was red with impotent
frustration and concern. Sara realized she should go with them but, for some reason, her limbs had turned to stone again.

Then Michael looked at her, and it was all that she had been afraid of, the thought piercing through her defenses and denial.

*He’s doing this for me,* she thought, wanted to protest, wished she could pretend it was about something else, that it was just about getting Sucre to safety.

A sudden violence overcame her, at the silence between them, at their motionless bodies. She wanted to hit him across the face, to grab him by the neck and kiss him, anything that would mean control, that would mean *something*.

“*You’ll be all right,*” he said. “*I promise.*”

Why should she believe a word of it? Why did he have to say it, to make them look like Lancelot and Guinevere?

Sara only realized T-Bag had gotten closer to them when he spoke, “*When you’re done being chivalrous, pretty.*”

With his eyes still on Sara, Michael drew away, joined T-Bag into the woods.

“*Why don’t you light a candle for him, honey?*” Bagwell said, with that goblinlike grin. “*He’s going to need it. He’s sure going to need it.*”

Before Sara fully registered what had happened, Lincoln was holding her by the arm and leading her into the cabin. “*You just have to trust him,*” he said, as if it mattered to her, and with a newborn proximity.

When Sara looked back at the wood border, Michael and Bagwell had both disappeared.
Charlotte

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It took Sara a while to realize Lincoln was acting different to her. Sure enough, they were still captor

to captive, but in his tone, a newly developed softness, a slight enough change, she supposed you
could miss it. Though evidently no talker, he did share reassuring thoughts with her, once in a while
– It won’t be long now or I’m sure Michael will get the better of him.

The time they spent in the living room, just she and Lincoln and John Abruzzi, probably wasn’t

longer than half an hour. But Sara felt the weight of every second, was aware of each glance Abruzzi
gave her, of Lincoln’s silent anger, at his powerlessness to protect his brother.

“We should tie her up,” John said at some point.

Lincoln had been looking uneasily out the window, very intent and serious – it was like he could will
his brother into stepping out of these woods unharmed.

“What?” Lincoln said.

John was sitting in one of the armchairs in the back of the room, apparently relaxed. When they’d

first gotten back to the cabin, Lincoln had motioned for Sara to sit in a chair, strategically between
John’s seat and the window, and she hadn’t moved since.

The living room looked and felt altogether different from what it had been before the inmates broke

in. Her father’s cozy but expensive furniture broken – the chair the inmates had tied her to in the
beginning was lying shattered on the floor, its wooden limbs severed and staring wistfully at her.
One of the pictures – a family portrait, featuring her father and herself – cracked in the middle, a
glassy cobweb covering their strained-smiling faces. A thick streak of blood on the ground where
Sucre had been lying. And, of course, there was none of the quiet feel of nature brought by the
majestic sight of the woods, outside the window.

Of all the times Sara had been to this cabin, child or adult, she had always been convinced of the
utter desertedness of these woods. Looking at them had been like looking at the ocean, and anyone
emerging from them could have only been a drowned corpse – or a sea monster.

“Tie her up,” Abruzzi repeated, naturally. He’d fetched a loaf of bread from the kitchen and he
occasionally tore pieces out of it and shoved them in his mouth.

How underwhelming, Sara thought, to have your life threatened not by a devil but by hungry human
 beings looking for somewhere to hide.

It took the magic, the dignity out of her own death.

“You know. Executions work better that way, when there’s no fighting back. Less bloody. Less
painful. After all, the girl’s given us food and shelter. Least we can do is be humane.”

Lincoln looked like he was maybe about to sigh or act like this was ridiculous, but in the end, he
only remained planted in front of the window, staring at Abruzzi, his lips fading into an invisible line.

While chewing on a mouthful of bread, Abruzzi checked the time on the pocket watch he must have
found in her father’s bedroom. “I gave your brother an hour. We’re about halfway through.”
“You’re not really going to go through with this.”

“Of course. And though I told Michael his brother wouldn’t stop me – the truth is, Burrows, why would you want to stop me?” Abruzzi shrugged. Slouched on her armchair, with stray breadcrumbs at the corner of his lips and in his beard, he made Sara think of a bear.

*This is like the Goldilocks story,* she thought. *One in which the bears would be the ones breaking into the girl’s house, eating her food and sitting in her chairs and sleeping in her bed.*

“Do you know why I gave your brother this ultimatum, Lincoln?”

“Because you’re a piece of shit?”

John didn’t flinch at this suggestion. “Because Michael needs to understand what part we’re playing here. A nice person, your brother. Wanting to be the hero and save everyone but that’s not *what we do.* We’re wanted felons trying to stay out of jail, for Christ’s sake. Not knights in shiny armors looking to save the day. And we are going to have to kill her at some point. That’s just pure logic. Now, I know neither of you wants to face the music, but the longer you wait, the harder it’ll be to catch up with it –”

“Don’t sit there acting like you know how this will all play out,” Lincoln interrupted. Taking a single step closer, waiting for John’s reaction, who didn’t move an inch, still slumped in his seat.

*How long would it take him to get on his feet and strike?*

Something was uncanny precisely about how unthreatening he looked.

“I know,” Abruzzi answered, “that when I hear back from my people and they tell me they have the plane ready, we’re going to have to make a decision. Let the girl live, when she’ll call the police the second we’re out of here? Even if we tie her up, even if we knock her out – that’s only buying us time.”

It crossed Sara’s mind she should be trying to defend herself. What stopped her wasn’t really embarrassment at miserably crying for mercy – it was simply that begging for your life never really seemed to work. How many people had it really saved, in the end? Was there even a record of anyone who had so eloquently defended their life that they had persuaded their to-be-executer not to kill them? When such things did happen, it was more probably a flaw in the killer themselves.

And Sara could not imagine John Abruzzi hesitating to take anybody’s life.

If he was ever in the position where he needed to shoot his wife to save his children, she was sure he was just the type of person who could do it without blinking.

“If we kill her, Lincoln, the police won’t know we’ve been here for days, maybe weeks. By then,” Abruzzi shrugged, “we’ll be halfway across the world.”

“He’s right.” Sara surprised herself by saying.

Two pairs of eyes, green and blue, were suddenly fixed on her. Still, she didn’t feel like a sheep facing two wild animals. Really, Sara felt exactly as she was – a woman caught in an impossible situation, who’d endured more in three nights than most people suffer in a lifetime.

*If I survive this, if I get through,* she realized, *I’ve no idea who I’ll even be.*

“But you’re not going to tie me up,” she said, calmly. No tremor or trace of bluff in her voice. “First,
because I don’t want to spend my last minutes on earth restrained. Second, because there’s no point. Even if I could outrun you both, you really think I’d make a shot for the woods when Bagwell might be the last man alive in there?”

A flash of rage stabbed through Sara’s chest. She’d sounded strategically untroubled emitting the possibility and yet something, some inexplicable loyalty resisted her indifference.

*Michael’s not going to lose.*

In her head, she could picture him returning victorious, covered in mud and blood, his blue eyes showing unwavering courage.

Sara had never even been the type to *like* heroes. In books, in fairytales, they were always the characters she had the hardest time to swallow. What kind of man would be selfless enough to sacrifice his life to protect his lady’s honor? Sara had never seemed to understand why a woman’s honor was supposed to matter so much, anyway.

And what did she have left of it?

After morphine addiction, after clawing her way out of her boyfriend’s arms and leaving him to die, after being turned into a plaything by a sadistic rapist and actually fixing him a sandwich?

If she got out of this alive, there would be therapy sessions, but not enough to express how incredibly absurd it was to make a sandwich for a man who’s sexually abused you. Maybe just absurd enough that Sara could never quite see the world in the same way she had prior to this, or be exactly the same woman. An indelible rupture.

But Michael, Michael was different, didn’t care about the purity standards of womanhood, wasn’t currently fighting for her honor but for her life.

And there was such a striking untaintedness in his eyes. Crime is almost always selfish, but Michael, criminal though he was, seemed the exact reverse, seemed someone who would be willing to die for someone he’s barely met, who would endure such torment for the suffering he’d caused that the mere thought of revenge was moot.

Through the haze of sleeplessness – and she wasn’t quite sober yet – Sara was aware of an unaccountable, growing fascination for the young man.

He had made her a prisoner and tied her to a chair and yet, yet she couldn’t fully bring herself to view him as the other inmates.

When they looked into each other’s eyes, something meaningful, something *honest* happened. Sara wanted to feel safe with him, wanted to believe he cared about her.

Already, she could see herself sitting in front of a doctor and being diagnosed with a Stockholm syndrome. Would she defend him, find him excuses, try to convince a juror of the inherent goodness of a man who had broken into her home and put her through hell?

“That’s a fair point, I think,” Lincoln said, looking back at Abruzzi.

Sara felt miles away from the conversation taking place. *Until I’ve slept at least an hour,* she thought, *I won’t know anything for certain.*

John stayed silent and kept a sharp, resolute gaze on Sara.
There was no time for him to raise another argument.

A moment later, without warning or introduction, there came the sound of the entry door being kicked open.

Chapter End Notes

I know I’ve spent a lot of time on Bagwell and now I’m spending a lot on Abruzzi. To me, one of Prison Break’s strong points was always its villains – which is what I really wanted to explore with this story. Please let me know your thoughts. See you soon with an update.
For a moment, surprise was such that Sara, Abruzzi and Lincoln were incapable of speech or motion, staring with a slackened jaw at the spectacle before them.

Michael’s face was dripping with perspiration, sickly and pale. With a sigh, he dropped the body he’d been carrying over his shoulder. Sara was barely shaken from her paralysis when Theodore Bagwell came crashing on her living room floor.

“Tie him up,” Michael muttered. The words, though barely carrying to their ears in his exhausted breath, were still full of that natural authority that had made Sara nickname him King Among Cons.

Slouched against his side, Sucre was visibly unconscious, and Michael dragged him further in the room before sitting him down in an armchair – only around this stage did the room start coming alive.

“Jesus, Mike, are you hurt?”

“Right on time, college boy. Very impressive.”

But Sara couldn’t think of anything to say, couldn’t pretend, suddenly, that she was part of this group – or that she didn’t care Michael had come back alive.

This was enough of a shock, him returning both with friend and foe, having visibly not slain the latter but saved the former.

Sara cast a cautious look at Bagwell’s body on the ground, bloody and still, apparently lifeless. When she looked back at Michael, his brother was already at his side, easing him down on a chair. Michael’s hand was clamped over his shoulder, where his convict’s uniform was smeared with red. The blood was fresh – Sara could see it soaking the shirt still.

“How did it go?” Lincoln inquired, not aiming at casualness but obviously captivated – suddenly, Sara had this strange impression of the brothers as children. The older brother is more often idolized but you could see, for them, it was the reverse, that Michael was – had maybe always been – Lincoln’s hero.

“He knocked out Sucre,” Michael answered with effort. “Kept his blade.”

“So much for fighting fair,” Abruzzi remarked, unsurprised.

“You could have killed him, Mike,” Lincoln said, staring into his brother’s eyes, paying no attention to Abruzzi – or to Sara. “You could have just killed him.”

Michael’s eyes were closed, concentrated on staying awake. He’d lost a lot of blood, too much to still be losing it in such quantities. “It’s not who I am,” he said.

Sara’s throat was jammed with inexpressible, inexplicable feeling. Suddenly, she wanted to disappear from this cabin or blow it up or scream.

The stabbing worry in her chest, at the sight of Michael’s face –

He still hadn’t looked her in the eye, he better not.

How could she stand his honesty now?
Everything was going on fast around her, until her sheer incapacity to move or be heard was driving her half mad.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

Sara had hardly realized she’d turned towards the door until Abruzzi spoke up. Lincoln looked up from his brother’s face to catch her with her back turned, a hand on the door handle.

Somehow, she didn’t feel exposed or in danger. “I’m going to get a first aid kit upstairs.” Her voice came out astonishingly calm. “Your brother needs stitches.”

Then she was out, without waiting for permission, without so much as looking behind her shoulder.

Abruzzi was waiting for her at the foot of the stairs when she came out of the bathroom. It was difficult to hold the supplies while keeping her robe closed, but her nudity wasn’t so bothering anymore, didn’t feel like such a terrible marker of vulnerability.

She might have stilled at the sight of the bear-man, menacingly blocking her exit, she might have pleaded her with tear-filled eyes because it was clearer than ever, regardless of the fact that Michael had delivered his part of the deal, that John Abruzzi still wanted to kill her and wouldn’t be swayed by mercy.

Unmoved, Sara continued down the stairs after meeting his eyes – eyes that showed nothing but implacable resolution. “You need Michael alive,” she said, sounding rather implacable herself. Somehow, she had gathered Abruzzi needed Michael, that Michael was the only reason why all the other inmates and herself weren’t already dead. It was in the way he looked at him that it showed most, when the others weren’t paying attention. But a tied-up woman has nothing in the world to do but pay attention. “Let me stitch him up. He’s lost too much blood. An infection or a fever could kill him.”

A funny chuckle broke from Abruzzi’s mouth. “You’re a strange bird. You know that? You and I both know I’m not the type to be moved, but that doesn’t mean I can’t be impressed. If that’s any comfort – you’ve quite impressed me.”

“I don’t care.”

She suddenly didn’t, not even a little. Back in the days, Sara used to care that she was good not only because she was saving lives – performing extraordinarily difficult surgeries without her hands shaking, it mattered in a large part because she was proving herself to others. Oh, the glory of being admired by her colleagues’ authoritative male gaze.

How powerful, how oddly blissful, to be approved of, to have your talent, your status validated by those who never needed validation, whose every act just seemed legitimate to them and others.

How much it mattered, not just to have power, but what power looked like.

Like a horde of brutal men breaking into your house.

No.
Sara was utterly indifferent, now, to how her choices would reflect. That she would look brave or fearless or bloody Stockholm-syndromed after this.

“Move,” Sara said, when she’d reached Abruzzi’s level, when he was standing between her and the door to the living room. “I need to save him. You need me to save him.”

Abruzzi’s smile suggested there was a difference between those two statements and it wasn’t lost on him.

There was no feeling of victory in Sara’s chest when he stepped aside, no impression that she’d triumphed against evil.

The more time she spent in this cabin, the less she was sure evil could be easily diagnosed and ought to be destroyed.

…

Michael was unconscious for the first few minutes when she started cleaning his wound. Sucre wasn’t really looking better, but his grogginess had started looking like much needed sleep. As it turned out, he was their only supervision because Lincoln and Abruzzi had taken on the task of dragging Bagwell to the kitchen and tying him up.

Maybe Abruzzi had more ambitious plans than this, but Sara didn’t care, didn’t give them thought. Whether or not he sliced Bagwell’s throat while Lincoln was looking for some tape below the sink made not the slightest difference to her.

What mattered, what surprisingly mattered, was that Michael hadn’t. That he had worn himself out carrying his friend home as well as his enemy –

There was something odd and unsettling, in that noble heroism. Though Sara had made it her life’s purpose to save lives and Michael had wound up in prison, she realized there was possibly more violence in her than there was in him. As she sponged the blood off his shoulder and wiped the sweat from his face, she found it obvious that her way of looking at him had changed, had maybe started changing earlier than she realized. It wasn’t just that he was playing the part of the patient, that she was suddenly in control. It was the untamable belief in her heart that the young man lying down beside her was good.

Sara walked to the cabinet near the door and grabbed a pair of scissors. As she kneeled next to him and started cutting through the material of his uniform, it didn’t occur to her that she might kill him. The power of life and death was maddening only during the first few surgeries, then you got used to it, holding a scalpel to someone’s skin, having them more exposed and vulnerable than they could ever get outside an operation room, with their insides revealed to the neon lights.

Doing away with his shirt, Sara was momentarily taken aback by the pattern of blue ink on Michael’s skin. The tattoo looked meticulous, somewhat hypnotic, blue-dreams of sword-fighting angels waging war on the young man’s body. Of course, as she lowered her eyes and discovered his right arm, she wasn’t surprised to find, all along, he’d had the devil tucked beneath his sleeve.

That Michael was good didn’t mean he wasn’t dangerous.

Possibly, it made him more dangerous, if only because of how she looked at him, because –
The young man stirred slightly at her touch as she padded the gash on his shoulder with antiseptic. Deep, maybe ten-inches long, the wound was surrounded by a rosy halo that Sara thought far from reassuring. When she looked up, she found Michael’s eyes were open.

“How bad is it?” He asked. The softness in his tone was striking though, somehow, not surprising. It had been there, right from the beginning, masked by his need for authority over the other inmates which, alone with her in this room, he no longer saw use for.

“Bad.” She said honestly. “I wished you’d remained unconscious. I’m going to have to stitch you up, and I haven’t got anything for the pain.”

A shame that, when her father had sent her here, he’d made sure there was not so much as an Advil pill left in the house.

Michael’s eyes were unimpressed by her conclusion. They remained fixed on her for a moment – still careful, always careful. Not wanting to trust. Without trust, there can be no betrayal.

“You don’t have to do this.”

“No one made me,” she conceded.

“Then why? Why would you possibly help us?”

Sara arched a brow. Thought Michael was rather a coward for saying us.

“I’m helping you,” she answered. Had no idea what she was going to say until the words left her mouth, only found the sense in them when she heard them out loud. “Because you’ve helped me. Because since you broke into my house, you’ve been trying to save me.”

“How do you –”

The rest of his words was lost in the low groan he let out as she stuck the needle through his skin. Clenching his teeth to utter as little sound as possible. Bagwell wasn’t the only one who could stand pain.

“You aren’t like them,” she said, after a moment of silence – work was always fit to keep her absolutely focused on just doing what she did best. It was a slim reassurance, after six months of sobriety, to find she hadn’t lost her touch. She was almost finished by the time she said this, meeting Michael’s eyes – it was unfortunate he hadn’t passed out.

What was more, he seemed aware enough to ponder her words.

“Sucre. Abruzzi, Bagwell. Even your brother,” she said. “You’re different.”

“How so?” Though his voice was hoarse with the effort of keeping himself in control, the question sounded defiant.

So she spoke from instinct, the things she had sensed since the inmates’ invasion without necessarily acknowledging them. “You were only in prison for a few months. Armed robbery, when you clearly didn’t need the money.”

“I needed something.”

“Naturally.”

Sara only allowed herself to meet his eyes again when she was done with his stitches. The young
man was still pale, but his blue gaze intent enough that she could dismiss his sickliness.

“It’s your brother,” she said. Taking a step back from her struggle for survival, it was easy to put the pieces back together – hadn’t Lincoln come to her one night and urged her to believe he and his brother were innocent?

Michael gave no answer, but he didn’t cover his face with an impassive mask that would have prevented her from guessing the truth.

Sara thought she and Michael had been playing a game, battling for power – yet part of her had known all along he wasn’t interested in fighting her. Just keeping up appearances, for his safety and his brother’s. And hers, she unwillingly acknowledged.

“You got yourself into prison, just to save your brother.”

For a while, he remained silent. In his eyes, there was an unexpected glimmer of shame. “It doesn’t erase all the things I’ve done.”

Sara couldn’t argue with this.

Unthinkable to imagine a few days ago, she was going through ordinary days in her father’s cabin, convinced she was utterly alone, fighting for sobriety and what remained of her sanity.

The craziest was she was already afraid then.

Not afraid that her home would be invaded by runaway felons. Somehow, afraid of something much worse.

That there was simply no potential for emotion left in her. That after Tom, after the morphine, after the screaming nightmares had subsided, her life would tone down to a livable numbness, and she would never feel anything so intense or real as she had before all this happened.

Those six months in that cabin – it had been like slowly falling asleep, being unable to help it, watching the colors of life fade to a distant blandness.

She’d been afraid she could live to be a hundred years old and yet be just as dead as Tom to the world.

Suddenly, she realized why this cabin felt like a haunted house, realized she had been preparing herself to die there from the moment she’d settled in, allowing the drugs and her boyfriend’s dead clinging love to leave her system.

“But you saved him,” she said, found herself unable to keep silent. “You fought for him. Isn’t it better than watching him die, than lying safe in your bed every night –”

“Sara.”

The feel of his skin surprised her. Warm, not feverish, the softness of relaxed muscles. Her hand was on his chest and yet, she couldn’t really believe she’d touched him. The fact that there was no surprise in his eyes – only dead seriousness – wasn’t of any help.

“You’re a criminal that saves lives,” she said softly. “And I’m a doctor who lets people die. Don’t you think that’s absurd?”

The increase of his heartbeat was oddly pleasant against her palm. The avidness of his blue gaze
made her own pulse quicken. Since Tom, she hadn’t felt anything so extreme. Her life had been like a graveyard of solitude, a bubble of gray loneliness, less alive than dead.

The air between them was thick again, not with hostility or power games, but hot, compelling as a magnetic field. There was no stopping it, no point in resisting. For a second, Sara had the odd impression she was floating in space, outside the sphere of gravity, her body rising to the call of forces beyond her control.

“Isn’t that what you call a twist?”

Sara and Michael both turned around, gasping for their breaths rather than for a decent argument. They must look like secret lovers caught red-handed, she thought, and it was ridiculous that though this felt miles from the truth, she couldn’t think of an explanation that would convince even herself that this wasn’t what it looked like.

Soon, she realized it didn’t matter that she or Michael could convince anyone.

John Abruzzi was standing in the doorway, looking not truly more menacing than he had when he was waiting for her at the bottom of the stairs.

Except, now, there was a kitchen knife in his hand.

“Good news,” he said, casually enough. “I got a call back from my people. The plane’s going to be waiting for us about a mile from here in an hour. We should get going, Scofield. Then, while we’re in the air, you can tell me all about where I can find Fibonacci.”

“Where is my brother?”

“Oh, he’s alive. Killing him would be stupid of me, when you might need motivation to tell me what I want to know. I just wanted to make sure he’d be out of the way.”

“For what?”

Sara felt Michael’s hold around her tighten.

It was as surreal to be in his arms as it was to be face to face with a professional killer holding a knife.

“For when he kills me,” Sara gave the obvious answer.

Abruzzi granted her reply with a small chuckle. “Much to my regret. Like I said, you rather impress me. Now, because of all the trouble you went through for us, I’ll be a gentleman – I’ll make it quick.”

In her mind, Sara heard the echoes of Tom’s dying screams, no more than a split second, before the train hit him.

Quick still counted for something.
They stared at each other, cautiously, absurdly. Sara wanted to move, to get on her feet, but Michael’s hand was tight around her wrist.

Not yet.

She could hear his voice, a gentle whisper into her brain.

*If you struggle now, throw yourself towards the exit, he’ll kill you in a heartbeat.*

“We can talk about this, John,” Michael said.

Remarkably calm and still leaderlike, for a man who had freshly been sewn up and was currently lying helpless on a couch. Although Sara’s pulse was throbbing, spreading a dizzy rush to her head, it had a strange allure of comfort, if not safety – being here, flush against Michael’s skin, finally dropping head first into that strange universe that had made her leave rationality behind.

And the raging concern beneath the surface of Michael’s impassivity, fear of losing her.

She hadn’t felt anything so real, hadn’t felt so *alive*, since what happened with Tom.

“Of course,” Abruzzi half-smiled, took a single step further into the living room, “you would want to talk.”

Michael and Sara reacted accordingly. She straightened up, not quite breaking from his embrace or really motioning to get up, but making it easier to move quickly if she needed to run. Though her upper body was no longer pressed against Michael’s, she felt as one of his hands slowly travelled towards his waist.

For a moment, she couldn’t tell what he was trying to do, until she remembered what he’d said, when he’d returned from his duel with Bagwell in the woods –

*He kept his blade.*

And what would Michael have done with Bagwell’s knife? Left it forsaken in the woods – surely not. Sara dared not glance at Michael’s hands, dared not make sure what he was reaching for. It was enough that her body was hopefully covering his movements.

“You want Fibonacci, John?” Michael said, holding eye-contact with Abruzzi, willing him to stay
put. It was his authoritative voice. He was stalling for time, Sara realized; no longer wondered why
she could read him so well, could nearly forget they weren’t in some way one.

“Oh, you’ll give me Fibonacci.”

“I will. But on my terms.” Michael warned. “That was the deal. You can’t shift me, you know that.
You’ve tried me before.”

Abruzzi broke into a warm, genuine enough laughter, before making a wave of the hand, as if
sweeping away the few months they had known each other. “But that was a long time ago, Michael.
Back when all I had to use as leverage was yourself. True enough,” he admitted, “I underestimated
you. Now, I understand a little better what metal you’re made of. What’s losing a couple of toes in
your mastermind picture, huh?”

He’d moved slowly, and carefully enough, so that even though it was all Sara was focused on, she
didn’t truly measure how much distance he’d crossed until he was halfway across the room.

Still, Michael’s hand was tightening around her wrist, urging her to trust him.

Not yet.

“But with your brother’s life hanging in the balance,” Abruzzi resumed, “I dare say you won’t be so
shy on sharing what you know. With or without the girl.”

Michael’s voice didn’t betray fear. Scared people aren’t taken into account during moments of
negotiation.

“We can tie her up,” Michael said. The words didn’t hurt, didn’t even seem to apply to Sara’s fate.
“Knock her out. By the time she wakes up, we’ll be flying.”

“And she’ll be calling the police in, what? Two hours? Three at best? The cops don’t have to know
we were ever there. It might take them months to find her body and Bagwell’s. They’ll think they
killed each other, won’t have to know the rest of the gang lived here for a few days.” He shrugged.
“And even if they do. By that time, I consider we will be far enough that it won’t make a difference.”

“There are other ways.”

Another burst of laughter rattled the grey, stubbly lower half of his face. “A few months in prison
haven’t taught you anything, have they, Michael?” Abruzzi said. His advance was sure, not
particularly quick – that was his trump card, Sara reckoned. How sure his hand was. No faltering, no
second thoughts. No pity. “We always come first. That’s how we survive. Now, I am sorry,” he
didn’t actually seem not to mean this. “Little did I expect I’d be finding you hooking up like there’d
be no tomorrow.”

“John –”

By then, he was just a few steps from the couch. How terrible it was, to be huddled there like mice in
a trap, while the bear-man towered over them both. Sara felt her pulse rocketing beneath Michael’s
fingers.

“But you’ll have your brother,” Abruzzi added, as if that was non-negligible compensation. “You’ll
have your brother.”

Each second was filled with thousands of possibilities, flashing by Sara’s brain at light-speed, and yet
at the same time, she was only aware of what her body felt, at peace – the warmth of Michael’s bare
skin, the feel of his hand around her wrist.

*Tom must have felt like this,* she thought. *Comfortable.*

That might even be why he’d tried to keep her on the rails, drawing her to him – just the familiar comfort of holding her, breathing in the smell of her skin.

“Now, you should move away, Michael,” Abruzzi warned. “I don’t want to have to kill her in your arms.”

But the words were a cover, masking his already well-set intentions. Sara knew Abruzzi was going to strike, now, without further delay, his hand firm around the kitchen knife, blending speed and the element of surprise. He thought, if Michael just kept on talking, he could kill her before the young man really had the chance to save her.

For a moment, all was absolutely silent in Sara’s head. She was oddly at peace.

Then Michael let go of her wrist.

She moved without thinking, faster than people can move in ordinary circumstances, as fast as she’d run when she’d heard that train coming and jumped off the rails.

It was just at the time that Abruzzi raised his arm and sliced the air with his knife. Sara dashed beneath his arm, reached the opposite end of the room before his arm had finished this downward arc –

The motion was set, and where could that knife land but Michael, Michael who was sitting where she had been a split second before?

*My God.*

The two only words Sara had time to think of.

*Please, don’t tell me I’ve left him to die like Tom.*

Instead, she watched as Abruzzi’s knife plunged fatally towards Michael’s face until it stilled in midair and fell back impotently.

Michael’s eyes were ice and harshness once more, the coldest thing Sara had ever seen.

His own fist was raised, stuck at the base of Abruzzi’s throat, and Sara could make out the hilt of Bagwell’s knife protruding from his tight grip.

*You could have just killed him, Mike,* Lincoln had said, when Michael had returned, carrying Bagwell on his back.

And the young man’s answer, running in loops into Sara’s head –

*It’s not who I am. It’s not who I am.*

Abruzzi’s eyes were open wide, so it was very much like he was staring back at the young man, and he might say something at any moment –

‘Didn’t think you had it in you, Michael’

‘Full of surprises, college boy’
Then Michael drew the blade out of Abruzzi’s flesh and a spray of crimson burst out of the wound, painting over the young man’s impassive face.

There was such a heavy thump when Abruzzi’s body crumbled, Sara started, and realized her back was pressed flush against the wall.

No way of saying how long it lasted, that moment of transitionary silence, their gradual acceptance of what had happened –

Sara moved back to the couch, aware of each footstep, the rugged feel of the flooring beneath her bare feet. When she kneeled back so her face was level with Michael’s, which was now colored with John’s blood, she felt instantly how lost he was and self-hating.

“You need to get out of here, as fast as possible,” she said.

Now, it wasn’t like an actress was talking instead of her, but rather like the woman was a brand-new Sara that she was yet to discover.

“If Abruzzi’s people have the plane ready, they’ll be wondering where he is. You and your brother can’t end up with the Italian mob at your heels.”

Though Michael didn’t look up at her, was still staring at the ground, his head boiling with shame, she knew he heard her.

“He was going to kill you,” he said.

As if she hadn’t gotten that part. He might have been the most surprised of them both at how calm she sounded, “I know.”

She could sense as Michael dared to glance sideways and met her eyes in a flashing glimpse of blue helplessness.

“You have to take your brother and your friend Sucre and run,” she said.

Pragmatic.

It was better that way. No thinking things over, just acting on instinct. No right and wrong, no more pretenses or masks between them.

But Michael’s eyes were still drawn by the growing red stain on the floor where Abruzzi’s corpse was lying.

No, Sara thought. He’s done too much, has gone too far, not to save himself in the end.

“Michael, look at me.”

Sara’s hand was on his cheek before she could think, until their eyes were interlocked, and it was that same unspeakable magic, that effortless understanding.

“Believe me,” she said, softly. “There are worse people to kill.”
It was only half an hour before Sucre and Lincoln came to, and the both of them helped drag T-Bag’s unconscious and tied up body inside the living room.

In the meantime, Sara sat with Michael in the bathroom, he on the stool (as her patient, he should get the best seat) and she on the edge of the tub, softly wiping the blood off his face with a wet cloth. He let her do this, calm, but also grateful, no longer ashamed to meet her eyes or to enjoy the soothing strokes.

They didn’t say much to each other.

Found, in the end, that there wasn’t much to say.

“I’ll wait a few hours before calling the cops,” factual information again. “It’ll take them some time to get there. The nearest precinct is in Chicago.”

All the while, she focused on her work – pressing the cloth into a clean bowl of warm water, then running it over Michael’s face again, lingering on every crease where the blood had caked a little. After all that had happened, it was pleasant, to have time enough to really look at him – not domineering or holding power over her anymore, but stripped of disguises. Equals.

There was no longer an old, deep-ingrained logic that suggested what Sara should feel, anger, fear. And without her own mask, Sara felt grateful herself. Not indebted. But grateful.

*He might have sooner let himself die before he killed a man, but he did it for me.*

Now, they were both killers. And Sara felt less alone than she had for a long time, less afraid of who she was.

What sort of person leaves the man they love to die?

That question was no longer plaguing Sara’s mind. Torment had left place to a quieter, simpler acceptance.

*I did what I had to do to survive.* Why should there be shame in this? All that had happened in the past few nights, doing what Bagwell wanted only to get him drunk and knock him out, playing her hand as cunningly and ruthlessly as she needed to – that was only doing her absolute best to stay alive, the way of the world. The law of the jungle.

It didn’t mean it was who she was.

A doctor, determined to be part of the solution (*be the change you want to see in the world*). None of those identity markers mattered, in the end, when it was just you and survival, just you and death.

It was all right, that Michael couldn’t see past the shame yet.

Deep in him – as they had been able to feel the truth of each other’s minds nearly from the beginning – he had to know she didn’t judge him, didn’t look on him with disgust or fear.

“I think it could have happened like that,” she said, and he looked up at her, somewhat amazed, a little awed. “I didn’t see your brother or you friend Sucre. I didn’t see you. Bagwell and Abruzzi tied me up in the living room and for the next few days, I didn’t see much of them. Then they came to the living room and fought each other – maybe over killing me. I could have cut myself free and knocked out Bagwell after he killed Abruzzi.”

After all, she had marks to prove that. Raw flesh, bruises and cuts on her wrists from when she’d
thrown her chair against the floor and torn loose from the tape.

“You and your brother run, get where you need to be.”

Michael shook his head. Disgusted at even someone like T-Bag bearing the blame for his own actions. “When T-Bag wakes up, he’ll tell his own story.”

“Who’s going to believe him?”

Michael was silent. It was like he was looking at her through some strange curtain, a thin layer of glass or ice.

Was that too cold, too pragmatic?

Sara put the cloth aside; Michael’s face was clean from blood, washed up from what had happened. But his eyes told a different tale, of course – his eyes remembered.

“I don’t know much about how the mafia reacts to losing one of their members,” she said, “but if they come for revenge, it’s better they don’t come after you.” There was a while of silence, before she explained. “Bagwell won’t pay for what he did to me. He can pay for you’ve done to save me.”

“And what about me?” Michael asked, without raising his voice – genuinely wanting her opinion. “Don’t I need to pay?”

Sara’s eyes never left his. She didn’t need to think, not right now, felt she knew the answer instinctively, in her bones.

“Haven’t you paid enough, Michael?” She said. “If your brother is innocent, if you can prove that, somehow – then you should. You must.”

Then, when they were both free citizens, maybe they could meet up over a drink and actually talk about what had happened – settle some scores, get to their unfinished business.

But now wasn’t the time.

Now, what mattered immediately, was that Michael and his brother got to safety.

Softly – ever so softly – Michael’s fingers moved closer to her hand, the warmth of his palm encasing hers. “Will I see you again?” He wondered.

“If you make it,” she said. “Maybe. One day.”

It didn’t feel strange that he kissed her, didn’t feel absurd, even some time after he and the other inmates were gone.

Surprisingly, miraculously enough, the logic there was in being kissed by one of the men who had invaded her home and made her a prisoner never faded away, no matter how many hours of therapy piled up.

Sara knew her own mind, was the only person to know what had truly happened, in that cabin in the woods.

And part of her waited, patient and sure, for the moment when she and the man she’d first thought of as King Among Cons might meet again on an equal footing, face to face.
Chapter End Notes

I’ll try not to be too long writing the last chapter. I’ve had the most thrilling time with this story and I’d love to know your thoughts. Please share.
There were dreams about what had happened. The therapist Sara had started seeing a couple of weeks after the events said that was to be expected. The young woman was willing enough to share the nightmares in as many details as she could. Truly, it all felt a little surreal, those hours sitting in a chair opposite a small, balding man whose brown eyes peered intently at her through round glasses. When Sara sat in her therapist’s office, she always had the feeling she was doing this for someone other than herself, bearing it with patience, but without really connecting with what she was saying.

What’s the plan here? A voice in Sara’s mind asked.

Sara was getting used to these voices, slowly acknowledging them for what they were, picking up stray pieces that had scattered over years of denial, drug use and a growing dispassion for life. Forming a coherent self. If oneself ever has any claim to coherence.

Really, she couldn’t say she liked to sit there, in silence, while the man looked at her attentively. “Why don’t you tell me about sleep.”

It was easier to talk about dreams than about the home invasion itself. The official version was still that there hadn’t been more than two inmates in her house – John Abruzzi and Theodore Bagwell. There was too much of a risk of the truth coming out, if she went over the events.

Thoughts of Michael would line the corners of her mind, a flesh and blood enigma.

It didn’t make sense to think of him differently.

Time came with its due amount of questions, the sort she was bound to ask herself – was it all about control? Pressing her lips to his, opening her mouth, feeling him with her tongue – had she done it to make him realer, less frightening than a dominating figure of Absolute Violence?

Sara was no stranger to such defense mechanisms.

Oh, there had been lovers in the past it had been easier to love, if only for the span of a few hours, just to endure their behavior –

Assault could be honed into rough intercourse easily enough, when Sara’s mind was bent on it.

But that didn’t work when a strange man broke into your house, threatened you with a knife and asked you to make him food.

Still, at this stage, feelings were mixed and blurred about the whole thing. Bagwell. Abruzzi. And Michael, finally. A lot of it was trauma, she wasn’t blind to that, but some of it, some of it was –

(different)

Different how?

What her therapist would say if he could see the full truth of her memories. And there were the dreams she couldn’t talk about, the dreams where she opened her eyes, heart pounding from fear, certain she’d heard male footsteps downstairs (although there was no downstairs anymore, not in
Sara’s apartment in Chicago). Dreams where she woke up in that cabin again and there was Michael, standing erect before her, and for a moment, all was simple, the full of her terror and unspoken desires unleashing onto his person.

One person she could touch –

Touching him made him so much realer, less of a monster.

And Michael Scofield, she knew – or had seemed to know when they looked at each other – wasn’t really a monster.

Those dreams never ended in anything other than brute lust. Sometimes, she struggled – battling her own wants rather than Michael? – but most times they were plain fragments of unrestrained eroticism, often charged with violent emotions, always excruciatingly arousing.

It was easy to forget, through PTSD and emotional distress, that she had been in control, in the end. Say what you will about how it started with four men breaking into her home and tying her to a chair, she had called the shots when it came down to the big finish. It had been her choice to lie – to save them.

Sometimes, Sara wondered if that meant she was completely insane, but she didn’t really worry over it – peaceful, at least regarding who she’d become.

What did it matter, whether it had been sane or not?

Nothing sane could have come out of such a situation.

Allowing her feelings for Michael to grow had been like watering seeds in freezing winter and waiting for flowers to blossom.

Which they had, against all hopes and logic.

That was a pleasant image, the most pleasant Sara had for their relationship. Winter flowers shedding scarlet petals on immaculate snow.

That day, when Sara’s therapist asked her about the dreams, she found it safer to be evasive (they’d been of Michael again). “Nothing out of the ordinary.”

“What’s ordinary?” The man wanted to know.

Sara would like to know, too. “They’re very – vivid.” That much, she could say.

“And would you say,” the question was framed smoothly, “that they’re a way for lost memories to resurface?”

“I don’t know. Probably.”

Hypnosis had been mentioned as a way of bringing clarity to the most traumatic bits of the experience, but Sara was quite sure she didn’t want to go down that road – too much like digging up fresh graves where every corpse is a part of you that died trying to resist unspeakable defilement.

A shame Sara couldn’t talk to her therapist about what really troubled her. If her feelings for Michael hadn’t been tangled in those few sleepless days of horror and survival, then she could wrap her head around it better, get a clearer idea what they were –

(You know those feelings) from the voice in her head (you’ve felt them before).
It was safer for her to keep mostly silent for what was left of this interview. Their time was almost up. But then, Sara’s therapist surprised her – his eyes very keen behind his rimless glasses. “There’s something I’ve been meaning to broach.” He said.

“Oh, of course.”

Looking at her, like he’d studied her closely – more closely than she’d thought. “I’ve been wondering…”

“Yes?”

“If there’s been any guilt, since the incident.”

Sara was genuinely surprised. “Guilt?” Yet the word came out wrong, like an actress speaking. It came out – guilty.

She was suddenly afraid of the next question he would ask – Is there something you haven’t told me?

“It’s not infrequent, when someone’s been coerced into certain things.”

Sara found it somewhat cowardly of her therapist to say certain things instead of debasing sexual acts. She’d been through them, she could certainly hear the words out loud.

“No,” she said, thinking – about ninety percent sure – that she meant it. “No guilt.”

What was there to feel guilty about?

As far as she knew, Bagwell hadn’t shared his side of the story with the authorities. True, he hadn’t really had the opportunity to do it – had been attacked the hour following his return to prison, most likely by Abruzzi’s people. Sara had kept herself well-informed about this. Though they didn’t kill him, they did what Sara considered much worse – left him to lead his miserable life in prison, diminished forever to the eyes of the inmates that Bagwell might have considered his people.

(In Fox River, Sara had no doubt T-Bag and not Michael was King Among Cons)

Slit his throat, doing terrible damage to his trachea, so he wouldn’t be talking to the police or anybody for some time – maybe forever. Sara didn’t really believe in poetic justice.

Was starting to wonder if she believed in justice at all.

Still, her therapist was looking at her like she was a womanly-shaped question mark, whose well-planned answer should make sense but didn’t – not completely.

“I should get going,” she checked her watch. Usually, she was able to wait until he put an end to the interview, but their half-hour limit had been reached at least three minutes ago, and she wasn’t sure how long she could stand the inquisitiveness in his eyes.

“Sara, I realize I’ve already mentioned hypnosis –”

“Yes. I’m still not interested in trying.”

“So, you don’t want to get to the bottom of this?”

Laughter came soaring from Sara’s throat – honest. A little frightening. Relaxing on her chair, a little, running a hand through her hair, trying to figure out whether she should just get on her feet and
After all, she didn’t owe this to anybody.

Her father had suggested she see a professional and put her in contact with Dr. Oliver Sholes, who was currently looking gravely at her.

“Don’t you see,” she said, simply, “that I’m still at the bottom of it?” It wasn’t the first time she was sincere with her therapist, though it was the first time she ventured to take such a risk. (*Truth is a slippery slope*). “I’m more interested in making my way back.”

That may be the single most efficient way to put it, Sara realized, as she said the words.

What she was going through wasn’t healing, really – simply returning to the world, to life, relearning the rules and singularities of being human.

Rather impressed with the effect of the words she’d spoken out loud, Sara grabbed her coat and headed out of the office.

Maybe therapy hadn’t been such a waste of time.

Be it because she didn’t truly believe that, or because she thought she’d taken all she could get from it, she never went back.

…

When Michael Scofield showed up on her doorstep, eight months exactly after he and his fellow inmates had invaded her home, Sara wasn’t surprised in the least.

Yes, there were signs of ragged breathing, increasing heartbeat, but not from surprise, she was sure, or really from fear.

She’d known he was coming.

In the past few months, she’d followed his quest for freedom over the news – a little too epic a name for it, maybe, but she found it rather fitting. After all, when he surrendered himself to the police, Michael Scofield did have the solemn dignity of heroes, and the press didn’t shy away from depicting him as one –

‘Mastermind Escape Artist turns himself in’

‘Fox River Eight Leader Michael Scofield makes shocking claims about government corruption’

‘Evidence of conspiracy against Lincoln Burrows is brought to a dumbfounded jury’

Michael was alone in going to the police and, as far as she knew, never spoke a word as to his brother’s location until both their names were effectively cleared.

The sort of documents that enabled Michael to protest his brother’s innocence were classified, and little was revealed to the press. Though Sara didn’t speak much to her father, she could tell the sphere
of politics was head over heels over the matter. Scandalous. Of course, President Reynolds denied every one of Michael’s claims and declared him to be a dangerous lunatic. It was only when an official statement was made that Caroline Reynolds would be made to appear in court that denial was abandoned.

The American public wouldn’t be satisfied with politicians acting offended and blaming criminals with the worst of society’s evils. Sara had actually seen her father try it, on TV –

‘Justice Frank’, cornered by a journalist in the streets: “It’s outrageous any sensible jury would give credit to the word of a convicted felon over that of their own President.”

But the wind was blowing, strong, and it wasn’t in Frank Tancredi’s direction.

_Nice try, dad_, Sara thought. _Here, in America, we don’t believe in rulers by divine right. People who govern are accountable for their actions – and they’ll answer to the people. President or not._

Besides, Michael was becoming extraordinarily popular. His story was carried well beyond the court room and soon became an object of fascination to the public.

He spoke the truth (almost all of it), neglecting only to mention the episode in Sara’s cabin. At this point, she would have been in almost as much trouble as he and his brother for it, but she could see, in the graveness of his cold eyes, how much it cost him.

It was clear to Sara Michael hadn’t just gone to the police to exonerate his brother.

The man wanted to be _judged_ more than you would think possible.

And when he explained, in a statement that would feature the front page of almost every newspaper on the next day, how he had gone to prison with the sole intention of saving the life of his wrongfully accused brother, Sara caught herself sharing all of America’s fascination.

The feel of her lips on his, the despair on his face when they said goodbye to each other, was like a faraway dream.

Of course, the possibility of Michael being sent back to prison was briefly discussed, and the young man did nothing to oppose it.

“I’ll abide by the verdict of my country’s justice.” He said soberly.

Sara imagined how the jury trembled, not daring to vote on his return to prison, as if they could already see themselves being judged in a greater, almighty Court, where there would be no way to justify this decision.

And yet, as Michael stood there, before her, the mythical bubble of fame and attention that had formed around him deflated immediately.

Sara took in his full figure – he was dressed plainly, dark to black colors, contrasting with the beige suit he had worn in court, and his head and face were still neatly shaven. A shiver crawled down her spine at the thought of his scalp rubbing against her chest when they’d embraced.

Far, so far out of her reach.

Like a dream she’d had in another life, or in another dream.

“Hello, Sara.”
She realized she had no idea how long they’d been standing there, staring at each other, not speaking.

He cleared his throat. Were these prepared words?

“{I came here so you could take a decision.”

“Ah.”

Of course. Looking at her, not really the man she’d known in the past, but a man awaiting judgement. He’d been declared Not Guilty by a court of law, and still, he was waiting.

“You’re the only one who knows the full story.”

“So, it’s my voice that matters?”

“Yes.”

Sara nodded. “Come in.”

Chapter End Notes

There will be a last chapter before you can ask, and I can’t wait to know what you think of this one. Don’t be shy on comments. It’s been one of my favorite-ever stories to write.
You could have argued he was tricking her, giving her the illusion of power when he was still in full control, when he could turn the tables on her any minute.

But Sara knew, simply knew, in her bones, this wasn’t true.

Michael sat on one of the armchairs in her living room. Plump, fake-leather into which he sank demurely. The couch, opposite the television which had enabled Sara to follow the news so closely these past few months, was more comfortable, but Michael blushed at the mere sight of it.

Sara, too, could remember the both of them embracing on a couch like this one…

John Abruzzi surprising them, like cursed lovers; but of course, that wasn’t what they had been.

There was still that image in Sara’s head, planting seeds in winter and waiting for flowers.

But that didn’t take away all that had happened between them.

She remembered the force of his body, tackling her to the ground, half naked, in the woods. His silent agreement when they tired her up. The things he’d done and others he’d abided. She remembered.

“Coffee?”

“No. Please, don’t bother yourself.”

It was no bother. She was going to make some, anyway, because she’d never get through this without some sort of stimulant. Especially, she was looking for something that might stand between she and Michael, something concrete, a porcelain mug in her hand – anything between the vividness of their feelings, rising fresh from the ground, opening wounds she felt had never stopped bleeding.

Those dreams, she felt, those dream when she looked up and there he was, standing and –

Sara’s hand tremored slightly around the knob of the kettle. In the kitchen, momentarily concealed from Michael’s eyes, she took all the time she could. Pouring herself a cup, and pouring him one, while she was at it. If he didn’t drink it, she would. Though it took effort for her hands to remain steady around the tray when she laid it on the coffee table, she pulled through.

It was only when the tray was there, between them, that the absurdity of it all struck her across the face. Icy and harsh. It hurt like a slap.

The sound of breaking glass waking her at night, the sight of Michael’s shoes as she hid under the bed and he went to search her bedroom, to see if the house was occupied.

And here she was, having him in her home.

Sara wished she could throw the tray against the wall, boiling water and all. But it would only be a pointless show of feelings. After all, it wasn’t Michael’s fault. He’d objected to her making coffee.

“So,” she said.
He looked at her readily. Yes, she could tell, completely in her power – if she asked him to give himself over to the police and subject himself to their trials once again, he would. Hell. She thought he might throw himself out the window right at this instant, if she demanded it.

“I thought I’d worked out all my anger issues.”

He nodded. “You should be angry, Sara. You should probably hate me.”

“And you shouldn’t tell me what I should feel.”

He nodded again. Though she could see it was hard for him, not having control (especially with her), he didn’t lower his eyes from hers. Good. What had she to be merciful for?

Oh, she didn’t wish Michael any ill, certainly – before this very moment, she had been very certain she actually wished him well, that he was a young man who’d been through enough in a lifetime.

Not right now, surprisingly.

Right now, he was only the man who’d violated her privacy, once upon a lifetime, and had turned her life into something of a nightmare. He hadn’t done it alone. But, of course, none of the others had come here to take full blame.

“I came here because you deserve justice.”

“How do you propose to give me that?”

His mouth opened on air that looked solid enough for him to choke. Maybe he’d been planning for her to tell him, like she had a revenge-plan well prepared in the back of her head.

“I don’t think you can.” She said. Merciful, in the end. “I don’t think your being sent to prison would ease my mind at all – it might actually make things worse.”

“There must be a way,” he said, solemnly – as if his willingness to do anything she asked of him couldn’t lead him to a dead end, “that I can do something for you. That I can repair what I’ve done.”

“Why?”

He was silent.

“Because you want to?”

Sara wanted to smile. She felt it would have been easy to smile, and yet, her lips remained frozen, serious – maybe because of the way they’d looked at each other, when he was pinning her to the ground, both of them terrified, but it was her naked thighs against the dewy glass, her hands being held above her head.

“You think that because you’re sorry, because you did all of that to save your brother – that there’s some magical way you can fix what happened, Michael?”

“When we said goodbye.” He spoke softly. Not trying to coax her. “At the cabin –”

“I said you’d paid enough. And I believe that. It doesn’t mean that you can take away the things that happened to me.”

The sharp exhale of air he let out was inaudible. She imagined this is what he must look like, in front of a difficult puzzle – and she doubted it happened to him very often, finding things difficult.
“So, where does that leave us?”

Sara reached across the table for her mug of coffee but didn’t raise the brim to her lips. She didn’t want to break eye-contact with him. “You want my best guess?”

“Do we have to guess?”,

“What’s our other option?”

He was silent again, waiting for her to resume.

“I think we should sit there for a moment.” She said. “Look at each other. Give me time to look at you, when you have no power over me – set my mind at peace, with a little luck. Give you time to look at me in a better state than I was when you held me captive in my own home. Restore us as equals.”

He didn’t nod. Possibly, his mouth was too dry for words. “Then?”

“Then, considering all that’s happened – I think, Michael, that I’ll forgive you. And we’ll both be better off.”

“Forgive me.” He repeated.

“Yes. Isn’t that enough?”

She knew it wasn’t before she had to ask, before she saw the look on his face. Of course, he could never forgive himself.

“You’ve done awful things to me, Michael.” She said, not coldly, but without emotion – she’d resent for him to make her up to a martyr. “But I believe that, according to the circumstances, you’ve also done what you could to make sure worse things didn’t happen. You killed someone for me. I’ll never forgive that. And I don’t want you to walk out of this apartment and disappear from my life. Though you’re responsible for what happened to me, you’re also one of the only persons who can understand it, and I’m not ready to face it alone. But, for now,” she added, “forgiveness is all I can give you.”

He shook his head. “That’s what you want? For me to walk out of here – a free man? No punishment?”

“Well, if you want to get on your knees and whip yourself, go ahead. Just don’t mind I won’t be watching.”

Michael actually chuckled – unsure, she could tell, whether she was joking or not, and plainly too surprised to help himself. “But you’ve said,” he made sure, “you think you might want me to come back here?”

“Maybe not for some time. But, yes – I do think it wouldn’t be the least therapeutic activity.”

To be fair, she didn’t really think “therapeutic” was the right word for it. She’d given up on therapy. But Michael didn’t correct her. Didn’t suggest there might be anything else to it.

The truth of each other’s mind was, in the end, still as plain as it had been, inexplicably, in those woods.

“And there’s nothing I can do, in the meantime?”
Sara considered this for a second. “Don’t drink your coffee.”

“I wasn’t going to.”

“Good.” She had a sip of hers only, then she put her mug back on the table and stared at him.

They were no longer worlds away from each other, as they had been when she was a prisoner and he wandered freely in her house. Still, between them was the free flow of time, wounds that had tried to sew themselves shut, pain that had turned solid as crystal or left gaping holes, like mouths begging for a drop to drink. Sara knew about that, certainly.

But she felt there were certain wounds they could help each other heal.

Chapter End Notes

This was an important story for me, and rather a long one, all things considered. Please let me know your final thoughts and whether you’d like to see more of such darkish material.

Now, I’d just like to make one last statement before I close this story, and it might seem a bit contradictory: I really don’t support the “abduction as romance” trope (though I did write a Mi/Sa fic that exactly fits that pattern, it was many years ago, before I had time to really reflect on the problems it posed in the representations of power relations between men and women). That is, I don’t generally like or approve of fictions in which the female protagonist falls in love with a man who has held illegitimate control over her, under any circumstances. At the beginning, I had no intention for this to turn out as a romance: it was going to be a horror story, and it would be terrible to see Mi/Sa brought together in such a situation. Though there was certainly passion between them (and even some kissing) I really would appreciate if you wouldn’t see it as actual romance – more of a desperate way to deal with desperate times? Maybe it’s just that romance is so absurdly easy to write in an abduction story that it felt natural – or that I can’t imagine any story in which Mi/Sa wouldn’t end up together, even with some abducting in it. Anyway, I realize this is an awfully long end note, but it really felt to me like I had to get this out of the way.

Best to you all!

End Notes

I know I’ve got a lot of Prison Break fics started, but I was in the mood for something a little darker. I took some liberties with Sara’s past, but the rest should be quite faithful to the show. If at any point you think the rating should be changed to M, please let me know, I’m always
very bad at telling which to choose. I hope you’ve enjoyed this. I’d love to hear your
thoughts and ideas for the next chapters. Comments are always welcome!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!