

21. May I Offer You a Proposition?

“Need a hand?”

I had my arms full, the body still barely pink, but physically cold in my clutches. I was staring up at the fire escape, wondering how I'd return the way I came with my burden. Down is infinitely easier than up, you know.

The new voice belonged to a young man, his eyes cruel and clever, moving towards me in the dark. I maintained my innocence in my mind, despite the evidence in my arms. He came within arm's reach, looking down with a slight frown at the cold and empty form in my arms.

“Hm, I'd have thought she'd be colder by now,” his voice sounded only slightly forlorn, but not the least bit concerned why I was holding a dead body. He reached out slowly, raising a brow to me as I struggled to put together the pieces of his intrusion. Figuring I was as good as caught, I handed her over softly, watching as he cradled her gingerly against his chest.

I climbed up the dumpster again, pulling the ladder down and reaching down. He helped me toss the body over my shoulder like a limp rag doll, her limbs still pliable and fresh. I snuck back to the window I'd come from, replacing her in the exact same position I'd found her when I crept in the first time. As I returned to the window, I found my new friend already at the fire escape, smoke creeping from his lips. He helped me through, sliding the window down slowly behind me. I started down, looking above to find him in tow.

As soon as he leapt to the ground, I grabbed him and brought him to the gravel. I kept my knees on either side of him, a hand locked to his throat.

“Now, as much as I appreciate the hand, I’d rather know who the hell you are.”

He still had the smoke in his mouth, despite the tumble, smiling slowly. With a series of sharp motions, he pulled himself free, leaving me sitting on the ground thoroughly confused. He reached down to help me up politely, running a hand through stark red hair as he did so.

“Let’s just say...I’m a fan of your work, Mister Dorrance. Or would you prefer Hyde?”

I nodded slowly, intrigued by his confession. “Go on.”

He stepped closer to me, a great truth hidden in his eyes. “Hyde, there is a great art in living life, and an even greater one in its termination. You have taken it upon yourself to make a statement, but nobody notices because of the subjects you choose. I have a bit of a proposition for you, if you will.”

I folded my arms, still intrigued, but slightly nervous of who, or what, I was trusting here.

“If you’ll help me create a continuous sort of living art with your talents, I will do everything in my power to help you constantly maintain your freedom to work. I have resources you couldn’t even dream of.”

“Sounds interesting lad, but how do I know I can trust you.”

He smiled wider, smoke sneaking out between his teeth. “You don’t. That’s the beauty of all this, dear Hyde. The blind virtue of it, without warning or precedent; you can either accept the possibility of a lifetime, or walk away, allowing fear to continue to rule your life.”

His words were clever, and I gave him that. He had a masterful way with people, a talent I would be eager to acquire through this partnership. I had everything to lose on one hand, but

everything to gain at the same time. He reached his hand out warmly, the final decision waiting.

“So will you be the Madman to my Martyr?”

I reached out apprehensively, but locked his wrist tight, pulling him close for the most secure and psychotic handshake possible in the world. He was pleased with the arrangement, escorting me out of the alley to somewhere a bit more private to continue our conversation.

“The name’s Corvis, by the way.” He paused slightly, “So tell me, Mister Dorrance, what inspires you?”

And that would be the story of him.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you Mister Corvis Hunter.

Forgive me Father, for I have sinned.