

# Maxwell's Daughter

## Part Two

**Sixteen years later...**

'Hello? Anyone in?'

'In the kitchen,' came a voice. Stephen crossed the hallway and into the kitchen. Andrea was leant over the kitchen counter with an icing bag in one hand and her other slowly turning the cake. Stephen kissed her on the cheek and set his leather briefcase down on the kitchen table.

'Looks amazing honey, how's your day been?'

'Oh fantastic, I just need to ice and dust this one and then I need to take it to Auburn hall, want to come, it'd only be about half an hour's drive. You can tell me about your day and then we'll get some dinner on the way back?'

'Sure, sounds great. Do I have time for a shower first?'

'Of course, oh and a package came for you this morning. I think it's that software beta package you were telling me about.'

'It's about time; the beta opens in two days. I'll see you in a bit then,' Stephen left the kitchen and followed the pristine staircase up to the master bedroom and threw himself down on the bed. A small, boxed package lay on his pillow of the double bed. What a day.

He lay with his eyes closed for a minute then undressed and grabbed a towel. He stopped on his way to the shower in front of the dresser, on which was a black and white photograph of him as a child with his brother and parents. Beside it, a photograph of him with Andrea and their son. The resemblance had never occurred to him before. He shrugged and went for a shower.

Stephen Maxwell showered and dressed into casual clothes, walking over to the large flat screen television, which was the central point of attention for the whole room. He pressed it on and the news channel came up instantly. A story about a series of murders, each body found in a different river over the last six months. The chief of police is looking into

the connection of said murders. Stephen sighed and picked up the package and tore the tab at one end. Maxwell frowned with surprise and pulled the contents out. A folded bed sheet? He opened it up; yes, a purple satin bed sheet unfolded in his hands but it wasn't purple anymore. Stains of crimson streaked across the sheet and several large spots occupied the center. From tucked inside the sheet fell a long tooth.

'The fuck?' Stephen muttered. He pulled on a leather jacket and stuffed the bed sheet in the sliding draw of the bed, among the clean sheets. The tooth however, he dropped into his jeans pocket and followed the stairs to the kitchen.

'How's the cake?' He asked smiling but the contents of the package were still playing across his mind.

'Done- it's in the car whenever you're ready to go.'

'Yeah, I'm ready now.'

'Let me just grab my coat, I'll be out in a second.'

Stephen wandered out into the front garden. He observed that the 'sold' sign outside the house across the road had been taken down and a delivery van was parked down the driveway next to the house. Stephen unlocked his Porsche and sat climbed in behind the wheel.

'So the new neighbors moved in this morning,' Andrea said.

'Oh?'

'I've only seen the wife, she seems nice enough, can't picture what her husband will look like though.'

'Why do you assume she is married?'

'Well, it's a big house, expensive too.'

'I guess.'

They drove through the town center. The light was quickly dying, leaving a cold dark atmosphere that made Maxwell shiver.

'Does Robbie not need picking up later?'

'Linda says she's happy for him to stay over but to ring if there was any troubles.'

'Well, in that case we have the house to our self.' Stephen looked round at his wife.

'It does indeed.'

'We could go out for dinner?' Stephen asked.

'Oh I don't fancy it, not tonight. I want to relax tonight, away from life.'

'Yeah of course.'

Maxwell pulled into a suburban backstreet, which, by now was completely dark save for the streetlights above.

'Just on the left there.' Andrea indicated.

She got out and disappeared into the back entrance to the shop, leaving Stephen alone in the dark alleyway. He turned on the radio and sat watching people pass at the end of the alleyway.

A low incessant humming made Stephen shift uneasily in his seat. A sharp scratching sound was moving from somewhere behind him, seemingly under his car and then he saw a shadow flicker in his peripheral vision. Something had moved just below the bonnet of the car.

There was a tapping at his window and Stephen jumped, turning round to see an intoxicated man in a football shirt give him a drunken thumbs up and continue down the alleyway. He was followed by four other men who attempted to make similar gestures, all with diabolical expressions on their faces.

A few minutes later, there was a groan and Andrea exited the building.

'Everything alright?'

'Yeah, good. Dinner?' Stephen nodded and reversed out of the alleyway.

With a car strongly smelling of vinegar and the radio playing tunes that would have satisfied a twelve year-old girl, Stephen turned onto their street and headed for the house. He had to come to a stop to let the reversing removal van take off in the opposite direction. As the van moved, it exposed a part of the pavement that its body had previously been blocking. As Stephen followed the road and prepared to turn left into his own drive, his eyes passed over the woman standing on the pavement, previously blocked by the van. The eyes that momentarily locked with his were anything but forgettable. He knew those eyes, he knew that face. An image flashed through his mind; the finger running across his palm, the scratching, the screaming.

Stephen braked suddenly, having missed the turning. He reversed back a few meters and in his mirror saw that the woman had gone.

Stephen sat on the leather sofa, his arm round Andrea and a glass of scotch in his hand. She had fallen asleep over an hour ago but still Stephen's hand absently tipped the bottle into the glass. Stephen tipped the glass and swallowed the fire. He coughed, his chest demanding strong movement from the rest of his body and with a jerk Andrea woke.

'What's going on?' She moaned. She looked over at the clock and then back to Stephen. 'Babe why are you still up? Can't we go to bed?'

'Yeah, yeah.' He got up and with one hand in Andrea's and one clutching the bottle of scotch, he headed for the staircase.

'Hey,' Andrea said, taking the bottle from his grasp and setting it down on the small table. They stumbled sleepily up the stairs to the master bedroom and collapsed onto the bed.

'You know I don't feel so tired anymore,' Andrea said, leaning over Stephen and moving her face close to his. 'Do you feel...tired?'

'Yeah I am a bit, but I can't sleep.' Andrea sighed.

'Maybe I could wake you up a bit?' She said softly, her mouth close to his ear. Stephen let out a loud belch and rolled over quickly, knocking Andrea off onto the bed. He hurried into the en-suite and was violently sick. Stephen rinsed his mouth out with cold water and was sick again. He caught his reflection in the mirror; he was inhuman, black bags underlining his eyes and his pupils heavily dilated. Looking at his reflection with disgust, Stephen realized he was no longer the young man that he once was. Life had ruined him.

He splashed a double handful of cool water in his face and returned to the bedroom to find Andrea lying on her stomach, her face buried in a pillow and breathing deeply in sleep. He crossed to the bed and pulled the duvet over her before sitting down on the edge of the bed. His mind returned to his previous thoughts; what the fuck was she doing here? His mind passed over the package; the blood stained sheet, the tooth.

During his thoughts, Stephen Maxwell had been staring blankly out of the bedroom window and realized with an icy shudder that he had been staring directly at something. At the edge of the property, running the course of the perimeter were a series of bushes and behind the bushes an iron fence that met at a large gate at the driveway to the house. The gate

had been left open, whether it had been Stephen's doing he was not sure, and in the space where the gate would have closed stood a tall figure.

Stephen's blood rushed to his limbs, stabbing needles repeatedly into his skin. He rose to his feet, which carried him to the window where he could make out that the figure was the woman he had seen a few hours ago. Maria.

Her shape was reflected by the streetlights and from the window, Maxwell saw her slowly lift her right arm and point directly at him. Then the streetlight cut out instantly along with the power to the house. Stephen stood in absolute darkness, staring into further darkness. He felt his way to the bed and lowered himself to his knees. He slid the draw out and fumbled around at the bottom of the draw for a second before at last lifting up the bottom of the drawer and taking out a small black metal box. He took out his phone from his pocket and using the light from his screen, turned the dials on the box. With a tiny snap, the lock lifted and Stephen opened the box and took out a Smith and Wesson 39. He slid the magazine inside and released the safety.

Stephen quickly navigated his phone and turned on the LED flashlight. Holding it out in front of him, he shone then light out of the window but the light could not reach the garden.

A muffled thud sounded from below and Stephen froze. He steadied the pistol and stepped slowly out of the door to confront his nightmares of the last sixteen years.