

Maxwell's Daughter

Part Three

Maxwell stepped through the bedroom door onto the hallway and pointed the Smith and Wesson over the banister into the open living room. In the darkness of the house, Stephen couldn't even make out the floor. His feet carried him slowly down the staircase, each step making a low creak under his weight. He reached the bottom and scanned the room with his phone LED and pistol. By a cupboard next to the drinks cabinet, the woman was standing, clutching a photograph of the family. She looked around at Stephen and pointed at the photograph.

'This is your son?' She asked. Stephen nodded slowly. She took a step toward him and Stephen raised the gun quickly.

'Don't move.' He barked.

'You going to shoot me?' She laughed. Stephen paused for a moment then lowered his gun. His fingers however held it firmly at his side.

'What do you want?' The woman, Maria, set down the photograph and turned to Stephen, her face more serious.

'Do you remember me?'

'Of course I fucking remember you,' Said Stephen bitterly. He had covered his unimaginable guilt with hatred for this woman. He had told himself for years that she was pure evil. 'Look, do we need to do this now? Can it not wait till morning? We can meet over a coffee or some-'

'I've waited fifteen years,' She said in her strong Filipino accent. 'Come.'

She turned and crossed the room to the front door, which lay open, a gentle night breeze blowing into the house. She continued out of sight.

Stephen stood a little stupidly, staring blankly at the empty doorframe before switching the safety off his Smith and Wesson and pushing it into the waistband of his trousers. He followed the woman into the dark neighborhood.

Stephen Maxwell could not see. The night was black but suddenly the streetlight snapped on and Stephen jumped a little seeing Maria standing just a few feet in front of him.

She led him across the street and to her own house. Inside, the house was dimly lit, it wasn't that the house wasn't light enough but it was almost too comforting, too homely. As if a dark secret was being concealed inside. It made Stephen uncomfortable the second he crossed its threshold.

'Here, sit. Can I get you something to drink? Tea? Coffee?' But Stephen's eyes had already passed over the mantelpiece, on which were several bottles of spirits were lined up. Maria took a bottle and placed it on the coffee table in front of the sofa and sat down on the other, opposite the first, separated by the coffee table. But Maxwell instead took a seat in the armchair just beside the sofa. Maria poured some of the strong liquor into a glass for Stephen and pushed it across the table to him. She paused as if thinking then poured herself a glass and downed it in one. Stephen watched her perplexed before taking his own and taking a mouthful.

'How have you been all this time?' Maria asked casually but Stephen snapped at her.

'Stop making small talk, what the hell do you want from me?' Maria lowered her head like he had offended her.

'What? I was fucking happy. I have a good life, a good wife and kid, and you turn up out of the blue and expect me to sit and chit chat like we're old friends. What do you want?'

'Kids.' She said simply.

'You what now?' Stephen said impatiently.

'You have a good wife and kids,' she corrected. 'I'll tell you?' Stephen nodded, blankly. His absent stare was unforgettable.

16 Years ago...

Maria Castillo sat on the toilet seat, staring up at the obscenely graffitied cubicle door. She was far from a stranger to this place. More times than she could remember she had sat in this very cubicle, either being violently sick into the toilet bowl, jacking up on various class As or sitting and staring in her fifteen minute breaks. Over the years, different scribblings and drawings has been added to the door and in some strange fucked up way, the graffiti told the story of her life. She remembered not two years ago being followed into the toilet and as she was cleaning up her

make-up was grabbed from behind and forced into the furthestmost cubicle only to have a hand cover her mouth to muffle her screams. She sighed and raised the pregnancy test in front of her face. Two pink lines. The stick fell from her feeble fingers to the floor. Her eyes were wide, her mascara dripping down her cheeks. How could she be pregnant? She reached into her pocket and took out the box of pills, of which just less than a whole tray was left. Maria turned the box over and checked the expiry date: valid. She let her head fall into her hands and sobbed.

Her boss was surprisingly supportive. Maria was expecting a beating but instead he organized her to meet a contact of his that night. He even paid her for the day, letting her have it off. In retrospect, Maria was fucking naive. In reality, he had wanted the baby ripped out of her so she could be back at work the next day. But she hadn't realized this, she had felt a warming to the man, why shouldn't she? He was doing her a favor after all.

She stepped into the porch out of the rain and hit the brass knocker three times. She heard at least four security locks open before the door swung ajar, held by the security chain.

'Maria?' She asked. The man in a white vest and boxers looked her over before nodding and letting her in.

'So you're Tim's girl right?' Maria didn't answer at first. The correct answer was: no fuck off, I'm not anyone's girl, I'm an individual. But she answered that she was.

'So how comes we ain't seen ya before?'

'I like to stay strictly on business,' Maria said.

'Well of course. Who said anything about straying from business? In fact I wouldn't mind some of your business myself.' Maria would have liked to answer that the repulsive man better keep his mouth shut or it would be her ripping something out of him but instead she smiled and followed the man down the steps to the basement. She found a few men sitting around a low table on which was a large bag of what looked like heroin. One man had a weighing scale and many small dealers' bags. They also had a mixture of what looked like sand, although Maria hadn't long to

ponder on it but was led over to a leather sofa, which had been covered with towels.

A grey bearded man in a white coat, who might have been mistaken for a priest in other circumstances, was awaiting her presence, in his hand a long sharp metal skewer. He had small glasses just a centimeter too far down his nose so that he had to half squint to see properly. He gestured for Maria to lie down as another man took her coat. What a gentlemen.

The doctor, if you could call him that, brought forth a footstool and a large lamp. Maria pulled her skirt back and lifted her legs onto the stool, spreading them before the doctor. He positioned the light in front of her and took a bottle of lubricant from his pocket.

Maria's head began to throb like it had never done before. Her eyes flicked to the table where the men were still absently cutting the drugs. Her veins craved a shot. Or was there something more to her feeling? As the doctor felt inside of her, her stomach began to churn. Her head buzzed uncontrollably like a machine was spinning around and around inside her skull. The white-coated man readied the metal spike and slid it inside her.

'No!' She screamed. But the voice was not her own. A male voice from within her, if she'd been able to recollect the events properly she'd have noted that there were several supposedly male voices from within her, screaming.

The lights snapped out and the doctor flew backward into the air and smashed into the wall a good twenty feet away as Maria felt the metal skewer pulled out of her. The table presumably turned over in the air and shattered with an almighty crash on the floor. Lights flickered around the room from the small light bulbs, from which Maria could see blood. A lot of blood. Bodies were strung across the room, mutilated as if a pack of wolves had been released on them. Maria stayed dead still for a few minutes, shaking. Then she pulled her knickers back up her legs, adjusted her skirt and got up. The lights had returned but were much dimmer now. She could see stacks of money spread across the floor near where the table had landed.

She hurried over to it, with a little discomfort, and scooped a pile into a bag before slinging it over her shoulder and hurrying up the bare wooden steps to the hallway. She sprinted from the house, leaving the door wide

open and confronting the dark and drizzly night.

Maria sat on a bus, watching the rain slip quickly down the window. She had just about stopped shaking but where the shaking was, nausea had taken over twice as strong. She didn't just need to be sick; she needed to empty her body until there was nothing inside her; until she was a saggy bag of bones. Only then would she feel clean again. The bus came to a stop and Maria got off. The bus drove on into the darkness leaving her standing in the rain on a street she hadn't walked down for many years.

She pushed against the rain and wind for several minutes until she stopped in front of a small bungalow. All the lights in the house were dead but Maria approached nonetheless. She rapped her knuckles on the door three times and waited. A shuffle from inside perhaps, or had she imagined it. She knocked again and after no reply, moved to the window and peered inside. Nothing, only darkness.

Maria noticed the side gate was ajar and trod through the boggy garden to the back door. She went to knock on this second door but her fist just pushed the door open for, Maria noticed, the door handle and been smashed off and the lock useless. She felt inside and tried the light switch. The lights came on but the one above her only flickered before dying instantly. She followed the light coming from the other side of the kitchen into the hallway. She turned the hallway light on too, her eyes falling upon the inside of the front door, which had been boarded and nailed up with long planks of wood.

There was a scratching against the door from the opposite side and Maria stepped forward to look through the peephole but saw nothing.

She turned back around to the house but came face to face with an old woman. Maria was so startled that she was sick in her mouth but forced it back down and broke into a coughing fit.

'Maria?' The woman asked, flabbergasted. Maria nodded, still coughing.

'My, I thought I would never see your pretty eyes again. Come upstairs where it's warm. Let me get you something to drink.'

She followed the woman up a staircase that groaned as if with the weight of the whole house with each step. She led Maria into a small

bedroom where a fire was blazing in a small stone fireplace. Right beside it, a heavily stained mattress and fur covers strewn across it. Beside the mattress were piles and piles of books, a small disarray of tinned and boxed food. A single, half-full bottle of vodka stood by the head side of the mattress, where a roll of leather formed a pillow of sorts.

‘Sit, sit.’ Maria fell back onto the mattress with relief. She released herself from the clinging wet clothes, which the woman took and hung up above the fireplace, and nuzzled into the warm furs.

‘Here, can I get you anything to-’

‘It’s come true!’ Maria suddenly blurted out. The woman, who had been reaching over to the pile of food, turned with wide eyes. She took Maria’s hand almost forcefully and turned it over. She ran her nail across Maria’s palm, pulling it towards the light from the crackling fire.

‘So it’s true, you are pregnant?’ Maria could only nod for her throat was suddenly closed up.

‘Listen Maria, you have to raise this child. I implore you; your life depends on it! This child, it’s not like us. You must never let it see the light.’

When Maria thought about it, she had always known. She had cursed this woman, accused her of all sorts of forgery and deception. But she had been right.

‘I’m so sorry Dana’

‘Don’t be my dear,’ Dana replied, beginning to pull Maria into an embrace but Maria’s phone vibrated manically in her bag, screaming for immediate attention.

Maria answered it quickly.

‘Hello?’

‘Maria, what the fuck is going on? Where are you?’ Dana snatched the phone from Maria’s grasp before she had a chance to reply.

‘She’s through with you. You come after her, you will meet the same sorry end as your so called friends.’

‘I will fucking find you, you whore! I will find you!’

Dana threw the phone with a surprising strength at the opposite wall, cutting the man off.

‘You need to get away from here, first thing tomorrow. You must find

the father!’

Present day...

‘It took you sixteen years to find me?’ Stephen Maxwell asked.

‘Well I suppose it did,’ she replied. ‘I settled down for most of the time. I found a man, he looked after me until...’ She trailed off, then poured herself some more liquor and downed it.

‘What happened to him?’ Stephen asked, now genuinely concernedly.

‘He’s, he’s back in the Netherlands,’ She concluded.

‘And your, that is our, daughter?’

‘With him.’ Maria answered. Maxwell nodded with relief, a half-smile spreading over his face.

‘It’s late,’ she said. ‘You should go. Stephen nodded and got up; he drained the rest of his glass and headed for the doorway.

‘You’re not your father Stephen,’ she called, her tone nearing one of comfort. ‘I forgive you.’ Stephen smiled and left the house behind him.