



Laney

Cristano Law

LANEY

BY

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CHAPTER SIX

Mariel carries dishes to the sink. She returns to the front room with a full plate for her dinner guest, Laney.

Laney collects his plate before Mariel joins him.

"You are too good to me, Mare."

"Why shouldn't I be?"

"What are you up to?" He jibes.

"Ha-ha. Everything. Why? Don't you think you're worth it?" She taunts, using his words against him.

"Ha. Touché. Good one. Clever."

Laney turns silent. Mariel notices.

"Whatchya thinkin'?"

You know, sometimes, I wonder what else a woman like you have to offer life than just—"

"—Than just what? What should I be doing besides what I do? And what do you mean a woman like me? What's wrong with me?"

"No, no. I'm not criticizing. I was just looking at the scope of human life, our overall purpose. A human's purpose. A woman's purpose."

She looks confused. "I don't think I like this conversation. Like what do you mean, like besides just a vocation?"

"Getting out of one's comfort zone."

"You sound like a life coach."

"What would you like me to be?"

Their faces get closer. Mariel shies away. Laney gently turns her toward him, they kiss. They stare into each other a moment. She smirks and turns away.

"I have some plans later. I want you to be a part of them." He mentions.

"What plans?"

"Well, it's not really a thing I have to do. I just would like you to be... I mean, that is if you'd like to..."

"Well, I guess if your plans include me, I could make accommodations."

"Any accommodations you can make will be greatly appreciated."

"Sure. When?"

"I will let you know. Just don't disappear on me like you always do." He jokes.

"Look who's talking, Mr. Mystery guest. Oh, that reminds me. Someone was looking for you. He said his name was, um... H? Mr. H. I think he was making fun of me, though. Talk about mysterious."

"I'm going to meet him right after I leave here."

"Have you known each other long?"

"So long we're like blood relatives. He's a good guy."

Laney heads toward door.

"I'll reintroduce you two. You'll like him. He's the kind of guy you have to grow to love."

"I thought he was a good guy."

"You just have to meet him."

"I already have."

"Very funny, sweet pea."

"Well, I hope you have a pleasant evening. And I look forward to—"

"—So, do I." He rushes. "Thanks for dinner." He kisses her forehead. "Stay out of trouble."

"Sure thing." She watches him until he's out of sight. She shuts the door, collect the rest of the dinnerware and heads to kitchen. She quickly returns to the front room concerned. She spots Laney's briefcase on the couch. She searches for her keys, gathers her things, snatches briefcase, and races out.

Mariel hurries down the stairwell. She digs for her phone and dials. She sends... no connection. Laney, spots his associates waiting inside his car. He sinks into it. They pull out onto street. Mariel rushes outside and searches for him. No Laney. She returns inside, races through garage to her car. She shoves key into ignition, starts it, and yanks out of parking space. Mariel skids out of garage and onto the same street. She searches, again, nothing. Laney and company follow traffic to red light. She swerves into lane, spots his car a few vehicles ahead of hers. She grabs phone, dials hastily. She connects! It rings.

"Laney. I tried to catch you before you left. I've got your briefcase."
Laney tries to wade through phone static. "Hello? Hang on. I can't hear... Who is this?"
He checks phone number, restricted!

"I see you, Laney. I'm coming to you. Hello? Laney? Hello?" Call ends. "Shoot!"
She follows Laney to a dead-end street.

Laney and associates drive halfway through the street.
The two goons from the movie theater, accompanied by two more, zoom in front of Mariel, not noticing her. They turn into the street behind a parked car. They attach silencers to their guns and wait. Mariel turns into the street and stops.

A dark car with fully tinted windows sits idle at the far end of the street, facing all the others. The dark car pulls up to Laney's front bumper.

All parties present sit quietly.
Mariel scans the scene, puzzled.
Laney steps out of his car.

Mariel spots him, grabs her phone, and dials. No sooner than her fingers complete the first three digits of the number two men from the dark car push out, race over to Laney pointing their guns at him. Goons glance at each other confounded.
Mariel watches in horror as the two brutes pounce Laney to the ground.

"Oh my god!" She cries.
They beat, kick, and stomp him to a bloody pulp.
Clearing her phone she searches for the keypad option to dial 911. She peeks up at the horror, fumbling with the keypad as the men stand over their bloody victim. Mariel manages the first two numbers 9-1. But, before she could complete it, the sounds of two mini explosions crackle the airwaves. Mariel's eyes lock in as the men continue to open fire on Laney.
Mariel screams out a lung full as Laney's body goes limp.
The mystery men sprint back to their car and speed out of sight.
The goons watch as the car disappears.
Thinking they're onto her Mariel panics. While shifting into reverse, she accidentally presses the horn. The blare from the horn attracts everyone's attention. All eyes are on her. Quickly she races backwards off of the dead-end street and frantically onto the main road.
The goons and Laney's men skid into gear and race after her.

They race through traffic, goons tailgating her, Laney's men close behind, and Mariel leading the pack to her apartment.

She runs through a red light.

Goon two waits anxiously for the green light.

"Hey, come on, what the hell you doin'? Go!" Yells goon one.

"Are you kidding? If a cops watching, we're done!"

Laney's men swerve onto curb and squeeze through cars and take a chance through the light.

"Damn!" Yells goon one. "Move this car you ass! Get goin'!"

Goon two speeds ahead.

Mariel slides around corner to apartment. She scratches for her garage opener and finger punches it until garage opens. She slithers inside.

Goons drag race toward apartment. They crash around the corner catching a glimpse of Laney's car as it slides around to the front of the building. The goons smash into back of apartment complex, race toward entrance.

Mariel zooms into her space, bunting the wall before her. She slips out of car, fumbles with phone, leaving Laney's briefcase inside car. She calls police as she stumbles to entrance. No connection. She stammers up stairwell.

Laney's men race to front door. One shoots door knob with guns. They race upstairs.

A goon blasts door open.

Another goon hurries to Mariel's car. He searches, spots a briefcase, and snags it. He dumps it into his car then rejoins the pursuit.

The others chase up the stairwell after Mariel.

Mariel continues her dash up to her place.

Laney's men continue their trot up stairs.

Mariel races down her corridor to her apartment. She struggles with keys, finds house key, inserts, turns, twists, and pours herself inside. Without haste she locks door and windows.

Goons race to door.

Laney's guys climb their last flight.

The goons shove, bang, and kick open Mariel's door.

Mariel takes shelter behind her couch.

Goon one scans area before heading to bedroom.

She crawls out from couch tempted to make a run for it but aborts when the other goons make their presence known just outside her door. Mariel sighs in exasperation. The abrupt gunfire puts her on guard.

A shootout between Laney's men and the goons commence.

Laney's men take cover down an intersecting hallway.

Goon one returns from Mariel's bedroom joins his men in the fight but is killed instantly by random gun shots. Another goon scans Mariel's front room.

She whimpers.

Goon two shoots off a few rounds into the couch. One of which grazes her leg.

In anguish, Mariel sweats it out.

Goon moves to couch, peeks behind it. He locks eyes with a quivering Mariel. He raises his gun, cocks it, then... POP! He drops right before her.

She exhales into tears.

Just beyond the goon's dying corpse, his murderer stumbles into the room. He himself has been shot. He searches for Mariel.

Mariel stays put not knowing if she can trust him.

In pain, the man retreats, turns, and drags himself out.

Mariel moves to doorway almost tripping over the dead body. She scans area focusing on the stairwell. She catches a glimpse of her wounded savior stumbling downstairs.

She rests by her doorway slinking to a seated position. She gasps for air. The tears begin again as she searches her mind trying to make sense of what just took place. But, a gunshot startles her back into panic mode. Her eyes become glued to the surviving goon coming from down the hall. She rises quickly.

His next blast splinters the doorframe, just missing her. She falls away from blast and into the hallway. He rushes at her.

She races for intersecting hallway before he can readjust his aim.

He blasts another shot at her. Goon gives chase.

Gathering her strength, Mariel stretches on down the hall. She storms down stairs, away from goon and into a tenant. She catches herself and continues on, racing for the exit. She escapes the apartment, out in the open. She hears a distant gunshot.

"Oh my god!" She utters, thinking the goon must've shot the tenant.

She sprints onward and into an alley. She searches the shadows, expecting him. She walks hurriedly deeper into the alley. At the end she faces two intersecting alleys. Left of her a figure approaches. She looks back down the stretch of road she came from.

A figure races across the alley. She gasps.

Footsteps are heard clapping upon the pavement toward her. The figure from her left comes into view.

She backs away tripping over herself. "Who's there!?" She bawls.

The figure in a black suit and tie continues his stride just enough as to not reveal himself.

She scans him, horrified.

He extends a hand to her.

She hesitates.

He motions for her as if in a hurry. Inadvertently, he exposes his gun, sheathed at his waist. Mariel, threatened, foots it as fast as she can back up the alley and into traffic. She stammers out of traffic and down another street. Though her energy wanes, she pushes on. She peeks back checking her level of safety. To her chagrin, another figure looms after her.

He gains on her. He raises his gun. He shoots!

"Ahh!!" She screams.

He misses.

Mariel veers in another direction.

He has her in his sights, again. He steadies his aim.

Mariel peeks back. She whimpers as she sees the gun pointed at her. She zigs. She zags.

Shots pang and ping against random objects.

She lets go a distressing sob. Then, she's showered by a beam of headlights.

"Ahh!" She bellows, crashing to a halt just before a police car.

The cop approaches from the gleam of lights.

Mariel focuses in on him, then, checks her surroundings. Nothing! No one! She's alone.

A squad car zooms in front of the emergency entrance of the South Pointe Hospital. An officer hurries inside and toward the desk.

"I need someone, now!"

Plunged through the revolving double doors, strapped to a gurney, and sedated, Mariel mutters incoherently on her way through the hospital.

The rescuing officer tries to communicate but a nurse hastily intercepts the bed and continues to a room.

"I appreciate your concern, officer, but she needs rest. She's not gonna be much help to you sedated."

"Right, right. I'll check back," he obliges.

A hint of daylight seeps through the blinds. Mariel resurrects from her slumber. Refocusing her vision she searches the room. Her awareness sharpens upon realizing she's not at home. She lifts herself, scans room more intently. She finds the officer.

"Good morning. Your food'll be in shortly." He informs.

"Did you find him?"

"Him? Him who?"

"The man chasing me. Any of the men shooting at me. They shot up my place. They tried to kill me."

"We checked your residence, ma'am. Didn't notice anything out of place."

"What?! You've been to my apartment?"

He nods.

"The bodies? You saw the dead bodies?"

He shakes his head.

"The bullet holes?"

He shakes head.

"The splintered doors? Skid marks?"

He continues shaking head. "There was nothing there out of the ordinary. No signs of a struggle. No blood. No nothing. All I found was you running frantically about the streets."

Mariel stretches over for her clothes.

"What were you doing out last night?"

"I already told you. I was being attacked. And Laney..."

"Who?"

Her eyes well up with tears. Mentioning his name makes it all too real.

"The guys who tried to kill me, they killed Laney. Laney is dead."

"Laney is dead. Was he one of the guys trying to kill you?"

"No! I can't believe you didn't see any of the bodies." She murmurs to herself. "They were lying right outside my door."

She continues dressing herself.

"I don't think it's a good idea to leave, ma'am."

"I don't care... I don't know," she murmurs, unsure.

The officer seeks out a nurse. "Nurse. Nurse. How long before the doctor comes?"

"It doesn't matter. I'm leaving. I don't care what the doctor says."

Nurse slips in.

"Well, do you feel okay? You were in bad shape last night. And you look it today."

"I'm sorry. I'm gonna go. I'll be alright."

"Well, okay. But, you must sign some release papers."

"Okay. Please hurry. I need to get outta here."

Officer continues as nurse disappears. "We must talk some more. I need more info on these perpetrators chasing you."

"What's there to talk about? I tried to tell you what happened. You obviously don't believe me. What else could I tell you?"

"We could go to the station and look at some mug shots. And this Laney had nothing to do with the attempt on your life?"

"No! Laney was... He would never..."

"People we trust do crazy things, sometimes."

"Not Laney," insists Mariel.

"Well, come down to the station and we can try to straighten this thing out."

She adjusts her clothes, and nods in agreement.

Mariel finds herself in an interrogation room browsing through a suspect album. The officer watches over her shoulder before wandering out.

He makes his way over to the desk clerk and hands him a document.

The clerk scans document, rises, and heads over to another room. The officer follows.

The two enter a computer room. The clerk enters information in about their subject, Clayton Delaney.

The clerk completes the data entry and waits. Officer searches the screen, awaiting the results... no records found.

"What? Is there something else you can try? I mean, she's adamant that she saw this man die." Officer inquires.

"No sir. That's it. If it ain't in here, it ain't nowhere. Either this guy's so far off the grid that he's practically a ghost, or she's a loon. No Delaney in any record."

"No, ssn? No license? No Id, period?"

The clerk shakes his head.

"Huh." Replies officer. "Okay. Thanks, champ."

"Sure thing, sir."

Officer trails back to the interrogation room where Mariel sits patiently with suspect album open midway through.

"Any luck yet?" He asks.

"I went through it twice. I don't recognize any of these."

"Yeah... just like there's no Laney."

"The guys I saw were well dressed... what?"

"No Clayton Delaney exists in any record anywhere in this town or anywhere else. None that match your description."

Mariel looks confused.

"Are you sure you're not just—"

"—I told you everything I know. I... I don't understand. Are you sure you're looking for the right man?"

"I searched using the name you gave me! The work place and history turns up nothing!" Officer retorts, hot headed.

"I work where he works. Everybody knows Laney. I can take you where he works. I'm not making this up. I work there, too."

"Okay. Okay. Calm down."

"Okay, calm down? You're the one yelling at me!"

"Okay, okay. Just, hold on. I'm sorry." He ponders. "You know, I gotta lot of stuff that needs to get done."

"Well, you called me down here! I wanted to go! It's obvious I'm some type of delusional idiot! I didn't ask to come down here!"

"Okay. You're right. You're right. Alright. Let's go to school."

Seated opposite a few staff members and the principal, all of whom don't seem to want to be there, Mariel anxiously awaits as the officer conducts his interrogation.

"Okay. So, basically none of you have any records or knowledge of a Laney?"

Staff shakes their heads in response.

Mariel can hardly contain herself. "What is this? What do you mean? You all just talked with him last week. Why are you all doing this?"

"Mariel," officer calls.

She continues, "Principal Dixon? You had a—"

"—Mariel!" He shouts. "There's no need in wasting anyone's time." He continues to principal,

"I apologize. I had to be sure. Mariel was sure that she experienced—"

"—I did experience this—"

"—Can we go now, officer?" Asks the principal callously.

"Yes."

The faculty empties the room like a herd of hungry cows.

"Cora!... Val!... Cindy!" Mariel calls out amazed. "This is insane!"

"Enough, Mariel, I have had enough. I have other things to do. Now, I suggest you go home and rest. Whatever you've experienced, it has all passed now. Just... let's go home."

Mariel. Mariel resists then drags on, defeated.

As she follows the officer down the long hall of shame, she gets stares from teachers and students as if she's been sentenced to death.

There's a noisy hush of silence inside the squad car. The officer checks on her, glancing over his shoulders.

"Mariel, it's gonna be alright. You'll see. Just, try and relax yourself. Get some rest. When you've had time to recuperate you'll feel better... you know... I know some good doctors you can talk to... They will take care of you. It won't cost you a thing."

She gives him a stare then rolls her eyes toward the window. They pull up to the front entrance of her apartment. Mariel scans the area. No signs of a break in, a tussle, or blood.

"Just think about what I said okay, Mariel."

He hands her a business card. Mariel twist up her lips at him. "Just let me out, please."

He makes his way to her door.

She slides out of the patrol car and heads up to her apartment.

She enters vestibule, scanning for blood, bullet holes, broken door hinges and glass. She finds nothing.

She continues on up the stairs, no spots, nothing out of place.

She enters her floor toward her apartment, still searching, no dead bodies, no police tape, no broken door, nothing. Outdone, she turns the key, pushes door to a crevice, and peaks in. Scanning area, she takes caution. Again, no bullet holes, no blood. She stops at the couch. She examines the cushions, a perfect couch. Fear trickles through her body. Somebody or a bunch of somebodies have been here, she thinks.

She steps to her bedroom. Everything is in place. Perfect.

She races back to the front door. She locks door and jams the doorknob with the back of a chair. She returns to her bedroom crash landing onto her bed. She thinks about the teachers. How could they put on a show like that? What's going on? Why is this happening? She drills herself. How did I survive this? Why am I not dead? Who were those losers? Why would they kill Laney? Why him? Strong at first she breaks down into tears. The quietness, the solitude, her bed are her only comforts...