

DEADLY REFLECTIONS

written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

A funeral concludes. More than a hundred people in attendance. The deceased had a lot of friends and family.

MANDY NEILSON (23), athletic, a tough lady hidden beneath a prim appearance, a girl who takes everything to the limit, dressed in black, is seated in the front row. Shocked, she stares at the casket.

JENNIFER WELLS, same age, feminine, sits next to Mandy. She dries her tear-soaked face with a tissue.

Some guests leave, others stay in groups. Few dry eyes to be found.

Mandy refuses to look at anyone as she walks away. Nearby, a middle-aged WOMAN stares at her with hatred. Mandy stops to watch her. Seeing the woman troubles Mandy.

A MAN the same age guides the woman over to another group of mourners but her glare stays focused on Mandy.

Jennifer places an arm around Mandy's shoulders. Leads her toward their car. Mandy twists to look back at the casket one last time.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Five stories tall, swanky.

INT. MANDY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - SAME

Sketches of people and places, showcasing great talent, decorate the walls. Many are drawings of Steve Crawford (26), clean-cut look, a dashing young man.

Mandy, still dressed in black, lies in bed, propped up on pillows. Her red face wet from excessive crying. She wipes her nose with a tissue.

A picture of Steve, Mandy in his arms, occupies a special place on the nightstand. Mandy holds it before her, a gorgeous engagement ring visible on her finger.

Mandy sits. Her gaze moves from the picture to her sketches of Steve. An invisible light bulb goes off in her head.

INT. MANDY'S STUDY - DAY

Comic book collectibles consume the décor. A wall poster depicts five gangsters, and Steve, dressed as a young man right out of the 1920s. Action figures for the characters fill shelves.

SUPER: THREE YEARS LATER

The framed first issue of a comic book named "City of Rage" holds the prized position on a wall, in the midst of many other issues. Credits read "Written and Illustrated by Mandy Neilson."

An artist's desk occupies the center of the room. It contains plenty of art supplies - paper, pencils, erasers, etc. A photo of real Steve is displayed near the edge.

Seated at the desk, Mandy sketches with great concentration.

INSERT - SKETCH

Mandy pencils in Derek Mariano (35), a ruthless but classy gangster who epitomizes the traditional Godfather persona. He pulls a gun from underneath his pinstriped jacket.

An animated likeness of Steve takes form on the opposite end of the block, a holster strapped to his chest. He fires an old-style pistol at Derek.

BACK TO SCENE:

Mandy grabs a stack of finished sketches from her desk. Thumbs through them.

INSERT - SKETCHES

Portraying a crime-ridden city. Steve battles against Derek and other gangsters to save innocent citizens.

BACK TO SCENE:

Mandy returns the stack to its spot.

INSERT - SKETCH

By Mandy's hand, four gangsters appear behind Derek. Their guns drawn and ready. Each has the appearance of mobsters out of the 1920s era.

BACK TO SCENE:

Mandy continues for a few moments. She glances at her watch, jumps up and grabs her newest sketch.

Places it, along with the stack of finished sketches, inside a box and hurries from the study with it.

INT. PUBLISHING FIRM - OFFICE - DAY

Three employees work at desks.

Mandy enters with the box in hand. JOHN PETERS (28), cultivated good looks, eager smile, springs to his feet upon seeing her.

JOHN
Mandy. Good morning.

Mandy mutters an offhanded sigh.

MANDY
Hello, John.

JOHN
Since you're here, and it's almost
lunchtime, maybe we could grab a
bite together.

MANDY
Um, that would be nice, but I have
to take a rain check. I'm behind on
this month's issue.

JOHN
Sure.

He gestures to the box.

JOHN
Can I help you with that?

Mandy cradles her sketches even closer.

MANDY
No, thanks. I'll give it to Brad
myself.

JOHN
Well, okay then.

He sulks back to his desk.

Mandy rolls her eyes.

Behind the RECEPTIONIST, a door reads "Brad Harris -
Publisher."

Mandy walks up to the desk.

RECEPTIONIST

He'll be with you shortly, Miss Neilson.

Mandy sits off to the side. She looks over at John. He eyes her as he works.

Mandy's gaze shifts in the opposite direction.

INT. BRAD'S OFFICE - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Seated at his desk, BRAD HARRIS (40), businesslike, studies Mandy's sketches, mainly the last one. Fingers pressed to his face, what he sees bothers him.

Mandy stands at the window. She twists the charm on her necklace as she looks out at the panoramic city view.

Brad sits back in his chair, hands folded in front of him. He heaves a heavy sigh.

BRAD

Is this heading where I think it is?

Mandy turns to him, looks away, looks back.

MANDY

I've really thought it through. And I think the change needs to be made. To keep the story fresh, to keep me fresh.

BRAD

But killing off the...

Mandy steps up to the desk.

MANDY

I'm frustrated, Brad. I used to pump out these stories two a month and now I'm bumping up on a deadline. That's never happened to me before. This change will help me. I know it will.

Brad stares at her. He leaves his desk to stand at the window.

BRAD

I've got a little game... word association. Very simple. I give you a word, a title, something. You answer back. Quick as you can.

MANDY

But...

BRAD

Wizard of Oz.

MANDY

Wicked Witch of the West.

BRAD

Star Wars.

MANDY

Darth Vader.

BRAD

Silence of the Lambs.

MANDY

Hannibal Lector. What's your point, Brad?

Brad turns away from the outside world to face her.

BRAD

The point, Mandy, is that you named the villains. Not virginal Dorothy. Not boring Luke Skywalker. Not buttoned-down Clarice Starling.

Mandy sighs.

BRAD

In literature, what I consider your books to be, the villain is often the most interesting character in the story. If you want my opinion, kill off Steve.

MANDY

Steve's the hero. The protagonist.

BRAD

He's boring. Look. I make my arguments. You make your choices. I think what you're planning to do is the wrong choice, and honestly, boss to employee, publisher to artist, we have to look at the bottom line.

MANDY

I can do what I want with these characters. It's stated in my contract.