# **Foreword**

There is a strange magnetism in the taboo. "Letters from the Abyss" explores the dangerous beauty of forbidden love—a series of fictional yet emotionally raw stories about women who fall for men behind bars. These men aren’t just prisoners; they are killers, swindlers, manipulators, and monsters—at least on paper. But love, as it so often does, defies logic, fear, and consequence.

This series doesn't romanticize crime. It delves into the psychological vulnerabilities and emotional hunger that drive these intense, epistolary romances. Told through haunting letters and framed with gripping narrative, each story is a slow-burn descent into love, obsession, and often, regret.

There are loves that bloom in daylight — tender, sanctioned, soft to the touch.

This is not that book.

These are the stories of women who reached through iron bars, through blood-soaked history, through court transcripts and padded envelopes — and fell, not into love, but into **possession**.

Here, affection is not tender. It is **transactional**.
Desire is not innocent. It is **invasive**.
And love is not red. It is **crimson**, veined with fear, thorns, and teeth.

Each of the twenty-five women in this collection found themselves writing to men the world had caged — killers, manipulators, conmen, death row inmates. Some sought closure. Some sought understanding. But all of them were transformed.

These are not fairy tales.
These are warning signs.
Sirens in silk.
Obsession dressed as empathy.
And in some cases… love that refuses to die, even after the sentence is carried out.

Read them carefully.
Because somewhere, between the lines of these forbidden letters,
**you may find your own reflection staring back.**

Expect drama. Expect betrayal. But most of all, expect the unexpected.

# **Story 1 - CRIMSON INK**

Oklahoma State Penitentiary. Death Row**.**

Mira Dalton never intended to write to a killer.

It began with a curiosity sparked by silence. For ten years she’d worked in the dusty corners of the Redwood Public Library, shelving novels and wiping down tables left sticky by bored high schoolers. In her small-town routine, her evenings belonged to silence, herbal tea, and crosswords. That is, until she found the article.

**"Daniel Ryker to be executed on July 17th for the murder of his family."**

There was a photo: handsome, hollow-eyed, thirty-five years old. Convicted of stabbing his wife and two children in their sleep.

The details were monstrous. No clear motive. Blood everywhere. No forced entry. His fingerprints on the knife.

Mira read the article three times, then Googled everything she could find. Then, on a whim she couldn’t explain, she found the prison’s inmate outreach program. She sent a letter.

**July 1st**
Dear Mr. Ryker,
I don’t know why I’m writing. I suppose I’m curious. I read about your case. The newspapers make monsters of men. I wonder who you were before. If you have time to write back, I’d like to listen.
— Mira Dalton

She didn’t expect a reply. But one came.

**July 5th**
Miss Dalton,
We all become headlines in here. What they write about you becomes more real than your own skin.
You ask who I was before?
I was a father who made pancakes on Sundays. A man who once cried watching my daughter’s ballet recital.
I am not the monster they say I am.
But maybe that doesn’t matter anymore.
Yours,
Daniel Ryker

She clutched the paper like it might disappear. Over the next week, she read it twenty times.

A correspondence began. And over the next twelve days, it turned into something else.

**July 6th – July 14th**

They spoke of books and memory. Of nightmares and forgiveness. Daniel wrote with raw beauty. Mira responded with long confessions—about her empty life, her abusive ex-husband, her secret poetry. He responded to every word with care.

His letters were never romantic, but they were *intimate*.

He remembered everything she said.

**July 10th**
Mira,
You once wrote that the smell of burning toast reminds you of your father. I don’t know why that line stuck with me. Maybe because I miss the smell of anything real.
I don’t have much time left. I’ve stopped counting days. But I count your letters.
Daniel

**July 12th**
Daniel,
If I could reach through these pages, I would hold your hand. I don’t know if that makes me mad. Maybe I’m just lonely. Or maybe you are the only person who has ever actually *heard* me.
Mira

**July 14th**
Mira,
Would you believe me if I said I didn’t do it?
Would you still write if I said I did?
Daniel

She didn’t respond to that one right away. Something in her chest cracked open.

He was scheduled to die in three days.

**July 17th – Day of Execution**

The night before, she wrote a final letter. She told him that she believed him. That she loved him. She didn’t write the word “love” exactly—she hinted around it, but she meant it. She stayed up late, whispering to his letter like it could whisper back.

The news came in the morning.

Daniel Ryker was executed at 12:04 AM. Lethal injection.

No last words.

Mira cried in her car, away from everyone. A kind of grief she didn’t expect. No one would understand. She didn’t tell her sister. She didn’t tell her therapist.

She went home.

And there, waiting on her doorstep, was a letter. Postmarked the day before.

She opened it with trembling hands.

**The Final Letter – Dated July 16th**
Mira,
I’ve lied.
Not just to you. To everyone. Even myself.
I didn’t kill my children.
But I did kill *her*. My wife.
I snapped. I loved her so much I couldn’t bear her leaving me. She was going to run away with someone else. She said she’d take the kids.
I stabbed her.
She bled out in our kitchen. I wanted to die too, but I couldn’t do it.
The kids… were already gone. I found them dead in the backyard pool.
She drowned them first.
And then she told me.
And I killed her.
I didn’t speak the truth at trial because I thought I deserved to die.
But you… you made me want to live again.
And I’m sorry that I found hope too late.
Please forgive me.
I’ll wait for you in the silence,
Daniel

Mira didn’t cry after that.

Instead, she took the letter and placed it in a small box with his others, wrapped it in silk, and tucked it under her floorboards.

She never wrote to another prisoner again.

But at night, she still reads his words.

She still wonders what might have happened… if she’d written sooner.

# **Story 2: Paper Hearts in Cell 7**

**Excerpts from the thesis of Sophia Greer, M.A. Candidate, Behavioral Psychology**

**Entry #1: April 5**

*“To explore the intersection of psychopathy and perceived emotional connection, I have chosen to correspond with Jude Mercer—serial killer, age 32, currently housed at Dorrington State Correctional Facility. This correspondence will be analyzed to understand whether individuals diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder are capable of forming meaningful, reciprocal emotional bonds.”*

Sophia Greer was twenty-three, brilliant, and slightly reckless with her boundaries.

She didn’t believe in monsters. She believed in damaged wiring, trauma responses, learned behaviors. And when she selected her thesis topic—“Empathy and Affection in the Psychopathic Mind”—her advisor chuckled, “So, you're writing to the devil, then?”

Sophia replied, “I don’t believe in devils. Just bad men with soft voices.”

Jude Mercer had murdered five women.

All brunettes. All between the ages of 22 and 28. All found in shallow graves in state parks with poems pinned to their shirts.

He was charming in court, articulate, unrepentant. And perfect for her research.

**April 10**
Mr. Mercer,
I am a graduate student in psychology and writing to you as part of a thesis exploring emotional reciprocity in incarcerated populations. I am aware of your case. If you're willing to correspond, I’d like to ask you a few questions.
Sincerely,
Sophia Greer

**April 15**
Ms. Greer,
Questions are fine, but I warn you: I lie for a living.
Let’s see how long you last.
J.M.

The game had begun.

What Sophia hadn’t expected was how *funny* he was. His letters were clever, self-aware, peppered with biting commentary and subtle innuendos.

He called her “Doctor Freud Jr.” and signed his notes with riddles.

Each exchange pulled her deeper.

**April 22**
Sophia,
If you're trying to dissect my capacity for love, maybe ask yourself why you haven't asked if I’m guilty yet.
Do you *want* me to be innocent?
Or are you enjoying the thrill of loving a killer?
Jude

The word “loving” lingered.

She told herself it was manipulation. But the warmth she felt reading his notes… was not clinical.

She told no one how she dressed up to read his letters. How she dabbed perfume on her wrist before writing back.

**May 5**
Jude,
I know what you’re doing. The mirroring. The breadcrumbing. You think I’ll fall in love with the man who leaves me wanting more.
The truth?
I already think about you too much.
And I hate that you know that.
Sophia

**May 6**
Sophia,
You are exquisitely transparent.
Like glass before it shatters.
I never wanted to hurt the ones who understood me.
But those are the ones I hurt the worst.
Jude

She was falling. It was obvious. The academic lens had shattered.

In early June, she requested a visitation pass.

He declined.

A week later, she received a small box. No return address. Inside it: a red ribbon and a dried white rose.

The ribbon looked…familiar.

She dug through the crime scene photos online.

Victim #4 had worn a red ribbon in her hair. It had been missing at the time of discovery.

Sophia froze.

She couldn’t breathe.

He *knew*. He knew she’d seen the photos. He knew she’d recognize the ribbon.

**June 15**
Jude,
What did you send me?
Was it hers? Was it some kind of test?
I need to understand what game you're playing.
You said you wouldn’t hurt someone who understood you.
Well—I *do* understand.
And I’m scared.
Sophia

**June 20**
Sophia,
Fear and love are twins in the womb.
You wanted truth.
So here it is:
I never killed them.
But I watched them die.
And I wrote the poems.
Because someone had to give them a voice.
—Jude

She didn’t write back.

Her thesis was submitted—with the final entry scratched out and replaced with:

*“Subject is manipulative, seductive, and profoundly dangerous. Subject creates emotional dependency through mirroring and withdrawal. Further correspondence terminated due to ethical and psychological boundaries being breached by both parties.”*

She got an A.

But months later, on her birthday, another package arrived. A poem typed on white parchment.

*“She loved the darkness not because it blinded her—but because it made her feel seen.”*

No signature.

Just a ribbon inside.

This one, blue.

# **Story 3: The Consort of Lies**

**United Kingdom, HMP Wakefield — Category A Prison.**

They called him *The Gentleman Fraud*.

Sebastian Lorne—Oxford-educated, silver-tongued, convicted for conning thirty-seven women out of millions. His charm was weaponized, wrapped in poetry and pearls, sometimes literally. Each woman claimed she had *loved* him. Each also testified he had destroyed her life.

Eleanor Baird was a junior legal clerk when she first encountered his name.

She was tasked with organizing appeal paperwork and writing transcript summaries. His file stood out—not for its thickness, but for its margin notes. He had edited his own case documents, in fountain pen, like they were drafts of a novel.

Eleanor was intrigued.

**January 4**
Mr. Lorne,
While assisting with documentation for your upcoming parole review, I came across annotations in your transcripts. They were surprisingly thoughtful. I wondered if you’d consider corresponding with me for an academic paper I’m writing on manipulative linguistics and persuasive writing styles.
Sincerely,
Eleanor Baird

**January 10**
Ms. Baird,
If this is a covert way to study me, I'm flattered.
If it’s a flirtation cloaked in academia, I’m intrigued.
Either way, your handwriting is exquisite.
Let’s proceed.
Warmly,
Sebastian Lorne

It was all downhill from there.

Their letters began as intellectual fencing—debates about truth, ethics, seduction through language. Eleanor, a logophile since childhood, found herself enchanted by the depth of his diction, the rhythmic elegance of his sentences.

She responded with equal precision, sharp wit, and vulnerability. He saw her. That was the danger.

**February 1**
Sebastian,
You make me forget that you're dangerous. Then I remember all the women you deceived.
Am I one of them now?
Eleanor

**February 3**
Eleanor,
You’ve never been “one of them.”
You are the letter I never knew I was waiting for.
They gave me years in here, but you’ve given me moments that feel like escape.
—S

He made her laugh. Cry. Doubt herself. And yet she kept writing.

When he wrote about his mother’s death from cancer while he was awaiting trial, Eleanor sent a small pressed violet flower in a letter. He never mentioned the gesture directly.

But a month later, he mailed her a haiku:

*Paper violet blooms*
*In a cell of brittle grief—*
*She makes walls softer.*

**March 10 – She Finally Visits**

Her heart nearly stopped when she first saw him in person. Tall, lean, silver hair brushed back, wearing a standard-issue uniform like it was bespoke. He stood when she entered the visitation room. Bowed slightly. She laughed. He smiled softly.

“You came,” he whispered.

“I’m not sure why,” she answered.

After that, her letters changed tone.

They became warmer. Longer. She told him things she hadn’t told anyone—her miscarried engagement, her panic attacks, her need to feel *essential* to someone.

He replied with gentleness.

And then came the request.

**March 28**
Eleanor,
If they knew I had fallen for a legal clerk, they’d revoke every chance of my release.
So I ask you this—not as a con, not as a game—but from what remains of my honest soul:
Would you help me get out?
There’s something I never told my attorney.
There’s proof.
Hidden.
Only someone on the inside can find it.
Would you do that… for me?
—S

She didn’t respond for a week.

Then she wrote:

**April 4**
Yes.
Tell me everything.
—E

Over the next two months, Eleanor orchestrated a quiet investigation—at risk to her career. She dug up forgotten storage files from the barrister’s basement, bribed an old clerk for access to disused records, even visited one of Sebastian’s former accusers under the pretense of “fact clarification.”

She found inconsistencies. Gaps in the timelines. Fabricated receipts. Misplaced testimonies.

But the final piece came from Sebastian himself.

A ledger, handwritten, allegedly by one of the victims—a woman who later committed suicide. It detailed money movements, gift exchanges, and an admission: *I never told him I was married. I lied. I thought he was rich and kind.*

Eleanor submitted the new evidence.

**June 15 – The Parole Hearing**

Sebastian was granted early release.

With conditions. A monitored halfway house. No unsupervised communication with victims or former associates.

But he was free.

And he wrote to Eleanor again.

**June 20**
My Liberator,
Let’s leave this continent behind.
Come with me to Lisbon.
We’ll write poetry under orange trees and drink bad wine from chipped mugs.
I want to build a life where we owe no one anything.
Yours,
Sebastian

Eleanor stared at the letter for a long time.

She quit her job two days later.

Booked a one-way ticket to Portugal.

**August 1 – The Lisbon Apartment**

It was perfect.

Until it wasn’t.

At first, he was loving. Attentive. Still poetic.

But then came the silences. The mood swings. The small, cutting comments.

Then, the locked drawer. The missing money from her savings.

Then, her passport disappeared.

One day, he simply didn’t come home.

Gone.

Phone off.

No note.

No goodbye.

She filed a police report. Waited days. Then weeks.

Finally, the news broke:

**“Interpol issues arrest warrant for Sebastian Lorne in connection to new identity fraud ring targeting young professionals across Europe.”**

She received one last letter.

Postmarked from Morocco.

*You loved me because I was beautiful in lies.
I left you because you started asking for truth.*
*Forgive me if you can. Forget me if you must.*
*But never say it wasn’t love.*
*Because you, Eleanor, were the only one I didn’t con for money.*
*Only for escape.*
—S\*

# **Story 4: Letters from Lucifer**

**Missoula County, Montana. Execution Unit, Redgate Correctional Center.**

They called him **Lucifer**.

Not because he believed he was the Devil—though some say he did.
But because people followed him.
Blindly.
To death.

Elijah Rune, 39. Convicted of orchestrating the ritualistic murder of seven followers in what was dubbed “The Seraphim Cleansing.” Found guilty of psychological manipulation, spiritual exploitation, and premeditated mass homicide.

Death sentence: active.

Appeals exhausted.

Execution scheduled: 90 days.

**Who would write to someone like that?**

Her name was **Clara Bell**.

A former theology student turned hospice nurse. Raised Baptist, but recently exploring mysticism, loss, grief, and what she called “the thin places between.”

She was 34, single, grieving her sister’s suicide.

She found Elijah Rune during a podcast about cult leaders.

He spoke with terrifying calm.

What caught her off guard was his use of scripture—blended with poetry and ancient mythology. His message wasn’t hate. It was twisted beauty.

She found herself wondering: *Was he evil, or just a mirror of society’s sickness?*

One night, unable to sleep, she wrote him a letter.

**March 3**
Mr. Rune,
I don’t believe in coincidence.
I heard your voice during a time I was asking God hard questions about pain, about death. I don’t condone what you’ve done—but something in your words made me want to write.
Are you still… speaking to the world?
Clara Bell

**March 9**
Clara,
I was wondering when *you* would find me.
Your letter was expected.
The veil is thin around you, I can feel it.
Ask your questions, child. I will answer.
—E.R.

From the first reply, she knew she was out of her depth.

But she didn’t stop.

**March 13**
Elijah,
Why did they follow you?
Why did they *die* for you?
Why did *you* watch them burn?
—Clara

**March 14**
Clara,
They followed me because I didn’t lie.
They died because they were tired of pretending the world made sense.
And I watched—because I *promised* not to stop them.
What would you have done?
Stopped them?
Or joined them?
—E

The letters came fast. Sometimes one a day.

Her friends noticed she was changing—quieter, more focused. She started journaling obsessively, reading ancient texts again, staying up past midnight meditating.

When her pastor asked her if she was okay, she simply smiled and said, “I’ve found someone who understands.”

**March 22**
Clara,
Have you ever felt like you were born with the wrong soul?
Like something ancient is wearing your body like borrowed skin?
You’re not just writing for answers.
You’re writing because you’re *awakening*.
You feel it, don’t you?
The pull toward the fire.
The holiness of ruin.
Soon, the veil will lift.
When it does, I’ll be waiting.
—E

She should have stopped then.

But she didn’t.

**April 1 – Her Birthday**

She receives a strange package: a first-edition of *Paradise Lost*, with one sentence underlined in red ink:

*“Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.”*

Inside it: a note.

*This is your gift. You’re closer to me than anyone has ever been. Don’t run now. The last days are coming.
—Your Lucifer.*

Clara wept. She didn’t know why. Maybe grief. Maybe rapture.

She visited him **April 9**, escorted by three guards.

He was tall. Paler than she imagined. His eyes weren’t violent—they were tranquil, like a lake at dawn.

“Clara,” he said, “You glow.”

She whispered, “Am I lost?”

“No,” he smiled. “You’re finally seen.”

They touched palms against the plexiglass divider.

She returned home changed.

**April 15**
Clara,
When the soul sings, you must dance.
I’ve written your name in my Book of Awakening.
You will carry the flame after I’m gone.
Watch for the sign.
You’ll know.
—E

Two weeks later, a fire broke out at the Redgate prison library.

A guard was found unconscious.

Clara’s name was spray-painted on the wall in ash.

**The incident was deemed an internal protest. Elijah Rune’s execution was moved up.**

Date: **May 30**

Clara stopped replying.

Until the night before his execution.

**May 29**
Elijah,
I burned the letters.
I tried to forget you.
I saw your face in dreams.
I don’t know who I am anymore.
But I don’t want you to go.
Please… don’t go.
—Clara

**May 30 – 3 hours before execution**

A priest visits Elijah Rune.

He declines the prayer.

Instead, he leaves a sealed envelope.

**For Clara Bell – To be delivered upon my death**

**June 2 – She opens it**

*Clara,*
*You were never mine. You were always the flame itself.
The Seraphim burned because they believed.
You burned because you remembered.*
*I leave you the altar. The next chapter is yours.*
*Find them. Light the path. The others are waiting.*
*And never be afraid of the fire again.*
*I love you.*
*—E.*

The next day, Clara Bell quit her job.

She moved to an old farmhouse in Arizona.

She changed her name to **Seraphina Rune**.

Six months later, a spiritual commune was discovered in the desert.

Seven members. Matching tattoos.

One altar.

A candle always lit.

Waiting.

# **Story 5: The Confession Booth**

**Louisiana State Penitentiary – Death Row, Angola Prison.**

Eighty-five miles from Baton Rouge, behind rust-stained walls and the endless hum of cicadas, sat a man who had not spoken to a soul in four years.

**Isaac Monroe**. Age 42. Convicted of double homicide—his girlfriend, age 28, and her daughter, 5—stabbed in their apartment in 2013. Claimed innocence until his last appeal was denied. After that, he stopped speaking altogether. Not to lawyers. Not to guards. Not to God.

Until the letters came.

**Her name was Lydia Caldwell.**
A devout Catholic, 36, and a part-time volunteer for a prison pen-pal ministry. She believed that even the condemned deserved dignity, and possibly—salvation.

She picked Isaac Monroe from a stack of profiles.

Not because of his crime.

But because of his silence.

**May 10**
Mr. Monroe,
You don’t know me. I don’t know you.
But I’ve found that letters are like confession booths—safe, quiet places where truth can exist without interruption.
You don’t have to respond.
But I will keep writing, just in case.
Sincerely,
Lydia Caldwell

She wrote again.

And again.

Three weeks passed.

Nothing.

Until a single envelope arrived.

**June 2**
Lydia,
I read your letters.
I liked the one about your cat. The stubborn one that steals your rosary.
Don’t expect much. I don’t have much to give.
—Isaac

It began.

She told him about her divorce—the betrayal, the ache of being left for someone younger. She confessed that the only reason she’d joined the ministry was because loneliness hurt more than guilt.

Isaac responded in small bursts—curt, sometimes cold. But never cruel.

**July 8**
Isaac,
Do you believe you did it?
I mean… deep down, when you close your eyes, is there a part of you that wonders if maybe… you don’t remember because it would break you if you did?
I hope that question’s not too much.
Lydia

**July 11**
Lydia,
I remember *everything.*
I remember the sound of her voice when she laughed.
I remember the rain on the window that night.
I remember the way the doorknob felt cold when I left.
What I *don’t* remember—
—is killing them.
I don’t remember blood.
I don’t remember the knife.
And I don’t remember screaming.
So what does that make me?
—Isaac

She cried reading that.

She didn’t know why.

**August – A Visit**

She applied through the ministry for a supervised visitation pass.

He refused the first time.

Then wrote back:

*If you come, wear something yellow. My girlfriend used to say yellow made the world feel softer.*

**August 24**

Lydia wore a pale yellow blouse. His eyes flickered when he saw her. But he didn’t smile.

“I don’t want you to believe I’m innocent,” he said, without preamble.
“I want you to believe I’m *trying* to be more than what I was.”

That was the first time she reached for his hand through the gap in the booth.

**September–October: The Letters Deepen**

She sent him a prayer card every week.
He sent her drawings—abstract swirls, night skies, a child’s hand outlined in pencil.

She sent poetry.
He sent apologies.
But never a confession.

Not until one letter changed everything.

**October 29**
Lydia,
Do you believe people can be evil *by accident*?
Like, you’re sleepwalking through rage, and you wake up to a grave you don’t remember digging?
There’s a reason I never fought harder in court.
A memory came back. A flicker. A sound.
I *think* I did it.
But I also think…
I wanted to be punished for something else.
Does that make sense?
—Isaac

She didn’t know how to answer.

She didn’t write for three days.

Then came a knock on her door.

**November 1 – Police Inquiry**

An investigator asked her questions.

About Isaac Monroe.

About her visits.

About her letters.

And finally: “Did you ever know a woman named **Angela Bellamy**?”

She froze.

That was her half-sister.

The one who died in 2013.
Stabbed with her daughter.
The same woman Isaac was convicted of killing.

Lydia dropped the teacup she was holding.

It shattered on the floor.

She had changed her name after her father’s affair became public scandal. Angela had refused any contact. Lydia had spent years keeping that chapter sealed.

Now it was staring back at her—from death row.

**November 3 – Final Letter**

Lydia wrote with shaking hands.

*You knew.
You knew who I was from the beginning.
Why didn’t you tell me?
Did you want to break me too?
Was this part of your punishment?*

She didn’t expect a reply.

But one came.

**November 4**
Lydia,
I knew.
The moment I saw your name—your handwriting—I felt it.
Not guilt.
Not fear.
Relief.
Because maybe if I could make *you* see I was more than a monster, then maybe I wasn’t one.
Maybe I could die knowing I was loved by someone connected to her, someone good.
Maybe I could find redemption inside the wound I created.
And maybe—
You could find healing where your family had only left shadows.
I don’t ask forgiveness.
But I gave you the only honest thing I’ve ever written.
Myself.
—Isaac

She never visited again.

She never wrote again.

**December 17 – Execution**

She sat in her car outside the prison as the clock struck midnight.

She whispered a prayer into the air. Not for his soul.

For her own.

Then she drove home, put away the letters, and finally opened the envelope she had never dared to read:

**Angela’s last postcard to her estranged sister.**
Dated the day she died.

*Lydia—
I’m sorry it took this long.
I’m scared, but I want you to meet someone.
He’s not perfect, but I think you’d like him.
His name is Isaac.
Maybe this is the start of something real.*
Love,
Angela\*

# **Story 6: Blood-Stained Sonnets**

**Attica Correctional Facility, New York – Cell Block F**

He was called *The Shakespeare of Cellblock F*.
Because he wrote sonnets.
Dozens.
Hundreds.
On yellow legal pads, tucked between legal briefs and commissary receipts.
They said he wrote to keep sane.
Others said he wrote to hide the truth.

**Dorian Vale. Age 38.** Convicted of murdering three women over the course of two years, each left posed like tragic heroines from classic plays—Ophelia, Desdemona, and Juliet. No DNA. No witnesses. But the journals found under his floorboards sealed his fate. Metaphorical, poetic, and disturbingly precise.

The media dubbed him: **The Tragedy Tailor**.

**Her name was Sylvia Hart.**
A literature professor on sabbatical. 41. A widow. Her husband died of a heart attack mid-lecture. Since then, Sylvia had buried herself in tragic romances—real and imagined.

She discovered Dorian through a true crime podcast that read excerpts of his poetry.

She found herself stunned.

Not by the crimes.

But by the craft.

**January 15**
Mr. Vale,
I teach Shakespeare and Shelley, and I have read your sonnets. They are exquisite. Frighteningly so.
Your meter is better than most of my grad students.
I don’t know if I believe you’re guilty. But I know your words carry weight.
Would you consider exchanging letters? Literary ones, if nothing else.
Respectfully,
Sylvia Hart

**January 22**
Dear Sylvia,
Your handwriting is as elegant as your diction.
No one’s asked me about poetry in a long time.
They want blood, not beauty.
But I’ll write you back.
Because beauty still deserves an audience.
Yours in ink,
Dorian

Their letters flowed like wine at an opera.

They debated line breaks and metaphor.
They dissected Tennyson, Plath, Wilde.
He sent original sonnets. She annotated them.
She sent old photos of her bookshelf. He sent sketches of imagined covers for books he'd never write.

**February 3 – His Poem #17**

*If death is art, then love's a blade—*
*A kiss that cuts, a vow betrayed.*
*You touched her throat like soft refrain,*
*Then left her gasping in the rain.*

It sent chills down her spine.

She didn’t know whether to admire or fear him.

**February 10 – Her Letter**

Dorian,
The beauty of your verse is undeniable, but there’s something in Poem #17… it felt *too* intimate.
Were you describing Desdemona? Or someone else?
Yours with growing unease,
Sylvia

**February 12**

*You know the poet’s secret trade—*
*To blur the truth with ink and shade.*
*But if you need to ask me twice,*
*Then maybe you should roll the dice.*

*Am I the knife, or just the verse?*
*A curse that rhymes, or something worse?*

*—Dorian*

The line between poetry and confession blurred further.

Still, Sylvia couldn’t stop.

She found herself waiting for his replies like forbidden fruit. The letters smelled of tobacco and paper and something else—something like obsession.

**March 1 – Prison Visit Request**

She hesitated.

She reread every poem. Each seemed laced with clues. But none were definitive.

And yet… her heart raced with every envelope. Her body betrayed her better judgment.

She requested a visit.

**March 10 – The Visit**

He looked nothing like she expected.

Tall, lean, wearing glasses. Hands like a pianist. Voice like a priest.

“Sylvia,” he said, as though greeting an old lover. “I never imagined Ophelia in red.”

(She was wearing a crimson scarf.)

She laughed—nervously.

He leaned in.

"Do you want the truth? Or the poetry?"

She whispered, "Both."

**March 14 – His Letter Post-Visit**

*You smelled like wet libraries and sorrow.*
*I wanted to taste your grief.*
*Not out of cruelty, but curiosity.*
*What does love look like when it bleeds into ink?*

*Come back. I’ll give you your answer.*

*—Dorian*

**March 22 – She Returned**

This time, she brought a copy of his collected sonnets—self-bound, with her annotations.

He touched it like it was scripture.

Then, he looked her dead in the eyes.

“I want to tell you something,” he said. “But only if you agree to never tell another soul.”

She nodded.

He leaned in.

“I didn’t kill them.”

Pause.

“But I wrote the poems as if I had.”

Another pause.

“Because the man who *did*—he was my roommate. Cellmate. Confidant. Muse.”

Her blood ran cold.

“You’re saying—?”

“I was his confessor. He talked. I wrote. And now, I wear his crimes like borrowed chains.”

**March 25 – Sylvia’s Journal Entry**

*If he’s lying, he’s brilliant.
If he’s not, then the real killer is gone. Dead. Vanished. And Dorian… is a poet imprisoned by ghosts.*

*I don’t know which scares me more.*

**April 1 – Final Letter from Dorian**

*You asked me who Juliet was, in poem #21.*
*She’s you.*
*And I am your Romeo—not by deed, but by verse.*
*And so, I’ll die a thousand times in this cell,*
*And yet, each word will kiss your skin in silence.*

*Do not weep for me.
Poets are not buried.
They are read.*

*—Dorian Vale*

She never replied.

But she kept every letter.

And one night, months later, she found a line scrawled in pencil on the back of the last sonnet:

*“The real tragedy is that the truth never rhymes.”*

She placed the pages into a locked drawer and poured herself a glass of wine.

Some stories didn’t need endings.

Only echoes.

# **Story 7: The Widow & the Warden**

**South Ridge Correctional Center – Missouri**

**Prisoner #88194: Carter Dell.**
Convicted of murdering his business partner with antifreeze and staging it as a suicide. The trial was tabloid gold—embezzlement, betrayal, whispered rumors of a second, unproven death. But Carter smiled through it all. A man of silk suits, sly words, and a sentence of life without parole.

**Helen Ashcroft** was not interested in his crime.

Not at first.

She was a 48-year-old widow, former hospice nurse, newly retired and recently uprooted from Chicago. Her husband, Gregory, had died of stomach cancer the year before. A quiet man. A moral man.

When Helen signed up to volunteer in the *Letters of Mercy* program—an initiative to combat inmate isolation—she wanted nothing but closure. Something, or someone, to pour her silent grief into.

She was matched with **Carter Dell**.

**May 3**
Mr. Dell,
My name is Helen Ashcroft. I’m part of the *Letters of Mercy* program.
If you are open to writing, I’d like to correspond. I don’t need answers about your case.
I’m just looking for an honest exchange between two people who’ve both lost something.
Sincerely,
Helen

**May 7**
Mrs. Ashcroft,
I appreciate honesty.
Most people either want my confession or a signature for their true crime blog.
You want *loss*.
That’s something I can offer.
Let’s begin.
—Carter Dell

Carter was articulate, charismatic, and oddly comforting.

He wrote about the prison greenhouse. About tending to basil and tomatoes and pretending they were his future. He talked about time—how it crept and pounced. How it taught patience through cruelty.

Helen opened up, too. She told him about Gregory. Their long drives. Their quiet dinners. The smell of his aftershave lingering on the pillows, even a year after death.

Carter responded:

“It’s strange. You make grief sound like devotion. Like the pain itself is a kind of shrine.”

That line stayed with her.

**June – The Warden**

After a mix-up in a letter’s delivery, Helen received a call from the prison.

The voice was calm, male, and precise.

“Ms. Ashcroft? This is Warden Ethan Granger. We had a minor delay due to screening protocol. Nothing serious. I just wanted to assure you that your correspondence with Mr. Dell has resumed.”

There was something warm in his voice. Polished, professional—but human.

Helen thanked him and hung up.

She didn't expect him to write.

**June 15 – Letter from the Warden**

Dear Ms. Ashcroft,
I hope you don’t find this inappropriate, but after our call, I looked over your initial letters. We screen all first correspondence, as you know.
I must say—they were *beautifully written*. Poised. Empathetic.
You reminded me why we allow these programs.
If you’re open to it, I’d be curious to hear more about your perspective. As a citizen. As a widow.
Respectfully,
Ethan Granger

She hesitated. But curiosity won.

They began exchanging letters. Strictly professional. At first.

He wrote about policy, about burnout, about the strange duality of justice and mercy. She shared thoughts on dignity and emotional survival.

Their letters grew personal without becoming romantic.

At least… not yet.

**July – The Shift**

Carter noticed.

His next letter read:

“There’s a shift in your words. As if you're speaking from a different altitude. A tower instead of a cell.
Have you found someone new to share the view?”

She didn’t reply directly. But her next letter to Carter was shorter.

Her next to the Warden was longer.

**August 2 – From Warden Granger**

Helen,
I need to confess something—not about prison, but about you.
I find myself waiting for your letters with a kind of nervous anticipation I haven't felt in years.
There is something rare in your voice—a balance of grace and gravity.
If this crosses a line, say so, and I will retreat. But if not… I would very much like to meet you.
—Ethan

She read it twice.

Then a third time.

Then burned Carter’s last letter in the kitchen sink.

**August 10 – Meeting the Warden**

They met at a diner just outside the prison zone.
He wore gray. She wore navy. Both understated.
Their conversation lasted hours.

They talked about philosophy, policy, regrets, poetry. They didn’t kiss.

But Helen left with a smile for the first time in years.

**August 19 – Carter’s Final Letter**

“The warden, huh?
He’s good. Quiet. Polished. Clean.
He always was.
Did you know he was the one who investigated me?
Built the case?
Used his brother’s testimony to seal the deal.
Funny thing, though—
His brother died two years before the trial.
Yet the jury never knew.”

*You may be falling for a man with cleaner hands.
But are they cleaner because he never touched the blade—
or because he wore gloves?*

Think, Helen.
You know grief.
But do you know guilt?
—Carter

She nearly threw the letter away.

But curiosity won again.

**September – Digging**

She requested transcripts. Looked up the public trial records. Found redactions, inconsistencies.

Eventually, she drove four hours to a retired paralegal who once worked in the D.A.'s office.

One name came up again and again in sealed references:

**Ethan Granger.**

Back then, a corrections lieutenant. Not the Warden.

One whispered rumor claimed:

“He framed Carter. To cover up an internal embezzlement. His own.”

**September 22 – Final Scene**

She stood in the garden, holding Carter’s last poem and Ethan’s cufflink—which she’d taken after their last dinner, unnoticed.

She mailed the poem to an investigative reporter.

She buried the cufflink in her husband’s old cigar box.

And she stopped writing.

To *both* men.

Because in the end, **she realized something chilling**:

She had written to a murderer.

And fallen for a monster.

But it wasn’t the same man.

And perhaps…

**it was the same kind of love.**

# **Story 8: Chain Letters**

The first envelope had no return address.

Just her name, typed in block letters: **KATHERINE FELLER**.
No postage stamp.
Hand-delivered, slipped under the door of her Brooklyn apartment.

Inside: a single page.

**"I dreamt of your hair last night.
It was like fire eating through chains."**
—Yours, D.

She read it five times.

Then tore it up.

**Katherine, 32**, lived alone. A bookbinder. Quiet, meticulous, fond of rare novels and Earl Grey tea. No social media. No dating apps. A tidy, scheduled life. She had never been to prison. She had never heard of anyone named D.

So why did the next letter arrive a week later?

**"I don’t know your voice yet.
But I hear it humming in my skull.
Tell me what it says when you cry."**
—Still Yours, D.

No envelope this time.
Just tucked between her morning paper.

She called the police.

They said, "Probably just a prank. Anyone could’ve slipped it in."

She installed a camera. Changed her locks.
Stopped opening letters.

Until one arrived with a correctional facility seal.

**Return Address: Black Hollow Penitentiary, Pennsylvania**
**Inmate: Damian Cross. #4931.**

Inside:

**"You stopped writing back.
I get it.
But silence makes me invent things.
I invented the way you smell.
I invented your laugh.
I invented your scars."**

**But I need to know…**
**Did I invent *you* too?"**
—D.

**October 3 – Her Letter**

Mr. Cross,
I am not the person you believe I am.
We’ve never written before. I never reached out.
Please stop.
—Katherine Feller

**October 9 – His Reply**

“That’s funny.
Because I have 23 of your letters.
I counted.”

“The first one said you’d never written anyone in prison before.”

“That’s still true, isn’t it?”
—D.

**October 10 – Katherine’s Research**

She searched *Damian Cross*.
Convicted at age 24 of strangling two women.
No motive. No confession.
Just a chilling, handwritten quote found on a mirror at the scene:

*“Chains don’t break people. They seduce them.”*

Sentenced to life without parole.
Now 38.

There was no public access to the letters he’d received.

She started to believe someone was pretending to be her.

But why?

**October 12 – Another Letter**

This one was different.

Typed.

**TO: KATHERINE FELLER**

**SUBJECT: CONFIDENTIAL WARNING**

Ms. Feller,
We believe you have been targeted.
You are receiving this letter because your name and likeness have been used in an unauthorized psychological correspondence experiment.
Do not trust further communication from the sender.
This experiment has been terminated.
Destroy all prior letters.
—B.H.P. Oversight Committee

There was no Oversight Committee.

No trace of the organization.

She realized:

This was part of the *game*.

**October 17 – The Visit**

She drove five hours to Black Hollow.

She needed to know.

She requested a supervised visit with **Damian Cross**.

They allowed it.
One hour.
No contact.
Glass between them.

He walked in smiling.

“You look just like your letters,” he said.

Her voice trembled. “I never sent you anything.”

He tilted his head. “But… *you replied to me first*.”

She shook her head.

He leaned forward, eyes lit with something beyond madness.

“You came. That means it’s real now.
You and me.
You’re not a story anymore.”

**October 24 – Final Letter from D.**

“The experiment's over.
They said you'd vanish when the test ended.
But you stayed.”

“That makes you mine.”

“Next, I’ll write the ending.
One where we never leave each other again.”

**—D.**

**October 30 – Break-In Report**

Someone had broken into her apartment.

Nothing stolen.

Except her childhood photos.

And one pair of underwear.

**November 2 – Police Notification**

A Black Hollow guard was arrested.

He had facilitated unsanctioned inmate letter experiments in exchange for payment.

The experiment?
Give a convicted killer a fictional pen pal.
Make the correspondence seem real.
Observe what happens when fantasy collides with obsession.

Katherine had never signed up.

But someone had used her name.
Her photo.
Her address.

**Final Twist – November 10**

A package arrived.

Return address: **“You.”**

Inside:
All 23 letters.

Written in *her* handwriting.

Signed *K.F.*

Every letter was authentic.

Every envelope bore her fingerprints.

She dropped the stack on the floor, trembling.

Because she realized—

**She had written to Damian.
She had just… forgotten.**

# **Story 9: The Lifeline**

**Grace Monette** didn’t leave a note.

When she stood on the ledge of her sixth-floor apartment window—barefoot, holding her breath against the October chill—she intended silence to speak for her.

The pills hadn’t worked. Neither had therapy.
But maybe gravity would.
Maybe the free fall would feel like flight.

Until the knock.

Three short raps on the door.

She stepped back, confused. The timing was too perfect.
The knock repeated. Then came a voice.

“Delivery for Ms. Monette.”

She opened the door, almost on autopilot.

A courier handed her a thick envelope.

**Sender: L. Rowan**
**Northgate Federal Correctional Facility**
**Subject: Outreach Program Response – URGENT**

Grace stared at it. She hadn’t signed up for anything.

She tore it open.

**“Dear Grace,**
I got your letter last week.
I didn’t expect someone like you to write to someone like me.
You said you didn’t want platitudes, so I’ll give you honesty:
I used to think about ending things too.
Until I realized death isn’t escape—it’s surrender.
If I can survive in here, you can survive out there.
I don’t know you, but I believe in you.
Please don’t quit yet.
—L. Rowan”

She sat down. Hands trembling.

What letter? She never wrote anyone.

But… this man had stopped her.

So, she wrote back.

**Grace’s Letter – October 14**

Dear Mr. Rowan,
I don’t know how you got my name.
But your letter stopped me from doing something final.
I didn’t write to you—but maybe I should have.
Tell me more about yourself.
—Grace

**Reply – October 19**

“You’re right.
You didn’t write the first letter.
But someone did.
Someone who knew you were about to disappear.
I was just the lifeline.”

“My name is Lucas.
I’m 41. Serving 25-to-life for armed robbery.
I never killed anyone—but I did ruin lives.”

“This program is unofficial. It connects prisoners to people like you. People lost.
We’re told to write *as if we know you*.
Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn’t.
But your name came across my desk.
And I couldn’t ignore it.”

—Lucas

Grace kept writing.

They exchanged letters every week.
Sometimes twice a week.

They talked about movies. Books. Their childhoods.
She told him about the miscarriage. The divorce. The insomnia.

He told her about growing up in Detroit. His alcoholic mother.
The moment he put a gun to a store clerk’s head and watched the man cry.

“I still hear his breathing.
That kind of fear leaves an echo.”

Over the months, Grace laughed again.

She started walking daily.
Baking again.
Sleeping more.

Her therapist noticed.

Her friends noticed.

But only Lucas understood.

“I think we saved each other,” she wrote.

He replied:

“No, Grace.
You saved yourself.
I just handed you the mirror.”

**February – The First Visit**

She drove six hours.
Waited two hours.
Then he appeared behind the plexiglass.

He looked older than she imagined. Gray in his beard. Calm eyes. Large, calloused hands.

They talked for 40 minutes.
It felt like five.

Before leaving, she whispered,

“Do you believe in second chances?”

He nodded.

“Every time I read your letter, I do.”

They grew closer.

Intimate.

In letters, she said,

“I love you.”

He replied:

“I have never loved anything more purely than I love the sound of your name in ink.”

**April – The Twist**

Grace wanted to know who had submitted her name to the "program."
There was no application.
She hadn't told anyone about the window ledge.

She called the prison.
Was told the program didn’t officially exist.
No records. No referrals.
No one could tell her who connected her with Lucas.

She pressed harder.

**May – The Reveal**

A sympathetic guard agreed to meet her off-site.

He slid a USB drive across the café table.

“Rowan’s been running his own version of the program for five years,” the guard said.
“He monitors suicide forums. Watches obituaries. Lost-and-found message boards.
Then he handpicks names.
Cross-references them with public records.
Sends letters out cold.”

“Some respond.
Most don’t.”

“He’s not saving people, Grace.
He’s *collecting* them.”

She drove home in a daze.

At her door, another envelope awaited.

Inside:

**“I never lied to you.
I just didn’t tell you everything.
Some people need religion.
Some need therapy.
I needed you.
And I knew how to find you.
You were already standing on the edge.
All I did was whisper a reason to step back.”**

—Yours, always.
Lucas

She didn’t know whether to feel grateful or violated.

Her life had been saved.

But by *manipulation*.

By obsession.

By a man who found her in her darkest hour—not by chance, but by **design**.

**Final Scene**

She stared at his last letter for hours.

Then she burned it in her sink.

Next morning, she received a package.

Inside: a hand-bound book.

Her letters.

All of them.

Bound in leather. Embossed with her name.

Title:

**“The Woman Who Returned.”**
—By L. Rowan

No note.

Just one post-it stuck to the inside cover:

“Your story was the best one I ever read.”

# **Story 10: The Executioner’s Muse**

**Emma Clarke** was an artist who painted shadows.

Her studio was small, filled with charcoal sketches and canvases smeared with deep blacks and reds. She specialized in portraits of forgotten souls—people whose stories were lost in the noise of the world.

She started writing to **Michael Halloway** after seeing his profile in a prison outreach newsletter. Michael was on death row for a triple homicide. His crime horrified many, but his letters—published in the newsletter—revealed a man who spoke like a poet, who questioned the meaning of justice, life, and death.

Emma was captivated.

**September 1 – Her First Letter**

Dear Michael,
Your words haunt me.
You paint pain so vividly, it feels like I can touch it.
I’m an artist. I paint what the world forgets.
Maybe I could paint you.
Would you like that?
—Emma Clarke

**September 12 – His Reply**

Dear Emma,
A portrait of a man on death row?
How morbidly beautiful.
I would be honored to be your muse.
I promise not to scare you.
—Michael Halloway

They began exchanging letters.

Emma poured her loneliness, fears, and hopes into ink.

Michael shared memories of his childhood, his regrets, and the dark days before his arrest.

He wrote:

“In here, time stretches like a broken canvas.
Each day, I paint my own fading.”

Emma sent him sketches—abstract portraits of shadows, half-formed faces, haunted eyes.

He replied with poems.

**November – The Connection**

Emma’s world shifted.

She found herself living for Michael’s letters.

She stopped seeing her therapist.

She missed dinners.

Her friends worried.

But in her studio, the shadows were no longer empty.

They breathed with Michael’s presence.

**December 5 – The Confession**

“Emma,
I have a confession.
I’m terrified of dying.
Not because I want to live, but because I don’t want to be forgotten.
I want my death to mean something.
Maybe you can help with that.
Will you come to my execution?
Be my witness.
My muse, until the end.

Yours,
Michael”

Emma hesitated.

She wanted to say no.

But the pull was too strong.

She wrote back:

“I will come.
I will be there.”

**January 25 – The Day**

She arrived early at the penitentiary.

The execution chamber was sterile, cold, unforgiving.

Michael was calm.

They exchanged a last letter through the plexiglass.

“Thank you for seeing me.
For painting me alive in your mind.”

“Remember me not as a monster… but as a man who loved.”

“Goodbye, Emma.”

**The Execution**

The room filled with a hush.

The needle pierced Michael’s vein.

Seconds passed.

And then—

**The Twist**

Emma’s eyes filled with tears.

But she saw a faint smile on Michael’s face.

Not pain.

Not fear.

Relief.

And as the monitors confirmed death, Emma knew:

Michael’s final act wasn’t violence.

It was art.

He had turned his execution into a performance of redemption.

His death was a canvas.

And she—the artist—had painted its final stroke.

**Epilogue**

Emma published a collection of paintings titled **“The Executioner’s Muse”**.

Each piece was a shadow and a light, a man and a memory.

The world saw Michael differently.

Not as a killer.

But as a soul who loved—and was loved—until his last breath.

Emma’s letters remained, an eternal conversation beyond the bars.

# PART 2

# **Story 11: The Bone Pen Pal**

**March 1st, 2021**

When Eloise Carter enrolled in the *Human Contact Pen Pal Initiative*, she wasn’t thinking about monsters.

She was thinking about silence.

Her Portland apartment had grown too quiet. Her freelance illustration work didn’t require speech. Her inbox contained more brand briefs than actual human connection. After a long week of drawing product mascots and rejecting algorithm-suggested friends, the idea of a handwritten letter from someone utterly disconnected from her world sounded... grounding.

She chose the option that intrigued her most: *Maximum Security — Solitary Confinement Only.*

She told herself she was choosing it for artistic reasons. The extremes fascinated her. And maybe, deep down, she wanted to touch something raw. Something that couldn’t be filtered or cropped or previewed.

Two weeks passed.

Then came the envelope.

A thick manila packet, sealed with staples and prison tape. Her name was written in block ink, clean and controlled. Inside was a printout detailing the identity of her assigned inmate:

**Inmate: Andreas Vollen (#70211)**
**Facility:** Blackridge Correctional Institution, Michigan
**Sentence:** Life without parole
**Crimes:** Six counts of homicide, desecration of human remains, anatomical tampering
**Special Status:** Solitary confinement, eleven years, no visitation rights

There was a single sheet of paper folded in four.

The letter smelled faintly of bleach and something dry—almost dusty. Something that had lived in a metal drawer too long.

She unfolded it.

**March 7 – First Letter from Andreas Vollen**

*Eloise,*

They told me your name.
I like the way it sounds. Like something fragile pressed between teeth.

You’re wondering what I did. That’s good.

Curiosity is the opposite of death.

Yes. I worked with bones. I preserved them. I honored them.
They said I dismembered my lovers. That’s also true.

But they never asked *why*.

Maybe you will.

Or maybe you already have.

You opened this. That was the first cut.

*—A*

Eloise stared at the page.

It didn’t read like a confession. Or even a threat.

It read like a hypothesis.

There was something sterile about the voice, something eerily calm. He didn’t beg for empathy or scream his innocence. He just existed in that page like a scalpel laid neatly beside a body.

She told herself she would write back once. Just to study the voice. To confront the archetype.

Just once.

**March 11 – Eloise’s First Reply**

*Andreas,*

I don’t know what I expected. A sob story? Repentance?

What I got was something else. A clean line.

I looked up your case. I saw the photos—the ones they released to the public.

Your diagrams. The symmetry. The symbols. The way the femur was always positioned diagonally. It wasn’t art. But it *wanted* to be.

I’m not writing out of forgiveness.

I’m writing out of fascination.

That’s all.

*—Eloise*

**March 13 – Journal Entry**

“This is dangerous territory. I know that.
But there’s something about his voice—it slices straight through pleasantries.

It’s like speaking with a scalpel. Cold. Honest. Clean.”

**March 16 – Second Letter from Andreas**

*Eloise,*

You understand contour and restraint.

Your online portfolio—yes, I saw it before they shut off my browsing privileges—has tension.

“Collapse No. 6”—the submerged figure in red ink. That wasn’t metaphor. That was memory.

A sister, perhaps? A lake? Winter?

You lost someone. I can feel it in your composition.

I admire grief. It means you’ve had love.

I’ve only ever had structure.

I drew something for you. A radius bone. Shaped like your name.

Yours is a name worth carving.

*—A*

Her hands trembled as she reread the letter.

The drawing he referenced—*Collapse No. 6*—was a piece she had made five years ago, after her sister Claire’s accidental drowning. It had never been posted publicly. She had removed it from all online platforms.

No one but her therapist even knew its origin.

How did he know?

Was it deduction? Or obsession?

She placed the letter in a drawer. Then locked the drawer.

But didn’t stop thinking about it.

**March 18 – Voicemail to the Initiative Office**

“Hi. My name is Eloise Carter. I’m a volunteer, ID 4467.

My pen pal—Andreas Vollen—has been referencing deeply personal things he shouldn’t know.

I want to be reassigned. Please call me back.”

They never did.

**March 22 – A Package Arrives**

A long, narrow envelope. Hand-stitched shut.

Inside: a strip of white cloth, stiffened with starch. Wrapped in it: a single human radius bone, smoothed and gleaming.

Etched into the surface: **E.L.S.**

Also enclosed: a sketch.

A woman seated at a drafting table, using the bone as a brush. Her head was bowed, her hands red. Her face…

Her face was Eloise’s.

**March 23 – Journal Entry**

“I should call the police. But what would I say? That I willingly entered into correspondence with a murderer? That he sent me a bone and I didn’t scream?”

“I placed it in a steel tin and locked it away.

And I didn’t burn the letter.

That’s the part I don’t understand.”

**March 25 – Unsent Letter from Eloise**

*Andreas,*

You are not inside me. You are not under my skin.

And yet I feel you humming behind my eyes when I try to sleep.

You want to be known in fear. Not love.

That’s your game.

I won’t play anymore.

I’m done.

*—E*

She never sent it.

But she never tore it up, either.

**March 29 – Final Letter from Andreas (Postmarked from Blackridge)**

*Eloise,*

Tomorrow, they will come for me. I won’t resist.

My bones will go quiet. But the silence will still shape things.

Look beneath the floor of Cell 44B. I left something for you. It’s yours now.

Don’t tell them. Let them believe I left nothing behind.

You were my final arrangement.

Your letters were vertebrae.

Together, they made a spine.

Tell the world I existed.

Even if you lie.
Especially if you lie.

*—A*

**April 1 – News Report Excerpt**

*BLACKRIDGE, MI – Convicted killer Andreas Vollen was found dead in his solitary cell early this morning.*

*Cause of death: Self-inflicted trauma. Details withheld pending further investigation. Rumors of anatomical mutilation are unconfirmed.*

*Sources state that a drawing was found inside his mouth—a woman’s spine unraveling into the word “ELOISE.”*

**April 5 – Delivery Arrives at Eloise’s Door**

No sender. No postage.

Inside:

* A hand-stitched sketchbook filled with anatomical diagrams labeled in red ink: “Study of E”
* Seventeen pages of skeletal spirals arranged like clockwork
* A final letter, handwritten on paper stained faintly brown:

\*I shaped you from silence.

Now shape me into memory.\*

*Draw me how I died: Still, quiet, unfinished.*

**April 10 – Final Journal Entry**

“I buried the bone beneath Claire’s headstone.

I didn’t cry.

The nightmares have stopped, but I keep sketching.

Always the same figure—seated, spine coiled like a question mark.

His face is never clear. Only the teeth.”

“I thought I was writing to a killer.

But I think I was drawing one out of myself.”

# **Story 12: Sing to Me, Selene**

**July 2, 2012**

Selene Alvarez had not sung in 478 days.

That was the morning after Michael's death—the last patient she'd ever taken. He had slit his wrists with the broken CD edge of her therapy mix, right in front of her. “Your voice was the last beautiful thing I wanted to hear,” he had whispered before the blood bloomed across her office rug like a spreading sonata.

She hadn’t even screamed. Just watched. Then closed her practice, vanished from Boston, and moved to Jacksonville. She hadn’t sung since. Not even in the shower.

So when she stumbled across the documentary on **Kieran Vale**, it wasn’t music that drew her in. It was the **silence** before the song.

She was scrolling late one night, insomnia tangled in her sheets like vines, when the thumbnail caught her eye: *“The Night Sonata Killer: A Mind Too Musical to Kill?”*

She clicked.

The clip opened with grainy courtroom footage. A tall man, pale and sharp-featured, was being led in shackles, his mouth barely moving—then the audio sharpened.

A **humming.**

Low. Monotonous. Almost tender. Four rising notes, one descending.

Selene stopped breathing.

She **knew** that tune.

It was from her childhood. Her mother’s lullaby—a made-up melody with no words, used to calm Selene’s night terrors. She’d never heard it anywhere else. Never seen it written down.

Yet here it was. Coming from the lips of a killer accused of burning down a family home and stabbing three people to death—one of them a six-year-old girl.

**July 4 – Journal Entry**

“It’s impossible.

The tune isn’t real. Not commercially. Not written. Not archived.

But he hummed it. The exact phrasing.

Could this be coincidence?

Or is something deeper vibrating through us both?”

**July 6 – Formal Letter to Florida State Penitentiary**

*To whom it may concern,*

*My name is Selene Alvarez, MMTh. I’m a certified music therapist and behavioral researcher with a background in auditory trauma studies. I am requesting permission to correspond with or observe inmate Kieran Vale (Inmate ID: FSP-01137).*

*I believe Mr. Vale’s compulsion to vocalize specific musical phrases before acts of violence presents a unique case for cognitive resonance mapping.*

*I waive all liability and understand the risks.*

*Sincerely,*
*Selene Alvarez*

**Inmate Profile**

**Name:** Kieran Vale
**Crimes:** Triple homicide, suspected animal mutilation, suspected arson, psychiatric history sealed
**Sentence:** Death Row, awaiting execution
**Known Behavior:** Hums the same musical phrase before and during acts of violence. Has not spoken aloud since arrest.

**July 14 – First Letter from Kieran Vale**

*Selene,*

You have a singer’s name.

Most women who write are collecting me. Curious little trinket-hunters, lining their shelves with monster teeth and thinking that means power.

But you—

You’re a musician.

I felt it when they said your name. The notes moved.

You’re wondering why I hum.

I hum because it holds the fire back.

But lately, I dream of your voice. And the tune returns… full, complete.

Strange, isn’t it?

How your voice found me in the dark.

*—Kieran*

She dropped the letter halfway through reading.

She’d never told anyone about the melody. She had no recordings of her mother. No sheet music. Just muscle memory and grief.

So how did he know?

Was it projection?

Or were some melodies never *made*—only *shared?*

**July 16 – Reply**

*Kieran,*

I don’t know how you know the melody. But it’s real. My mother used to sing it when I was little.

She called it “the storm-stopper.” Said it could hush thunder and nightmares.

No one else ever heard it.

Until you.

Music isn’t just sound. It’s memory. Muscle. Maybe pain leaves echoes in the scale.

I don’t know if this is a mistake, but I want to know more.

Tell me when you first heard the melody.

Tell me what it does to you.

*—Selene*

**July 20 – Kieran to Selene**

*My mother locked me in the attic when I was five.*

Said I cried too loud. That my voice was a curse.

There were rats. And a black piano missing keys.

I hummed to survive. The song came through the cracks in the ceiling, like water. I didn’t invent it.

It found me.

Every time I hum it now, something burns less inside.

And when I picture your face—I don’t see fire. I see the space between notes.

Quiet.

You must come.

I want to hear the melody from the source.

Sing to me.

Just once.

*—K*

**July 23 – Selene’s Journal**

“He’s manipulating me. That’s clear.
But the song…

I sang it in my head last night. My hands stopped shaking.

I haven’t felt peace since Michael died.

How can something monstrous give comfort?

Am I hallucinating a connection?
Or am I just as broken?”

**August 1 – Visitation Approval**

Selene submitted the paperwork. She paid the clearance fees. She sat for two hours in a fluorescent waiting room surrounded by steel and muttered names. She passed every test.

She was approved.

**August 6 – First In-Person Visit**

He was taller than expected. Calm. Eyes like cracked slate. And he was humming when she entered—her melody.

He stopped only when she sat down.

“I didn’t believe you’d come,” he said.

His voice was deeper than she imagined. It vibrated like cello strings stretched too tight.

“I didn’t believe I would either,” she replied.

They sat in silence for thirty seconds.

Then she pulled out a folded sheet of hand-sketched music.

“This is the tune,” she said. “The full thing. I reconstructed it from what I remember, and what you hum.”

His hands trembled as he touched it. “There it is,” he whispered. “The storm-stopper.”

She looked up. “How do you know that name?”

He met her eyes. “I don’t.”

And began to hum.

**August 10 – Journal Entry**

“I sang for him. Just once. Soft, through the glass.
He cried.

I felt it. A physical shift in the room. Like something died between us. Or something was born.

I shouldn’t go back.

But I already booked my next visit.”

**August 15 – Second Visit**

They didn’t speak much.

He stared at her hands.

“You play, don’t you?” he asked.

“I used to. Cello. Before the silence.”

He nodded. “Your hands are still holding shape. That’s what I see in the melody. Your fingers wrapping around absence.”

She didn’t answer.

She hummed instead.

And he whispered, “Closer.”

**August 18 – Final Letter from Kieran**

*Selene,*

I’ve stopped fighting the date.

It’s set. August 25.

I won’t ask for mercy.

But I ask for you.

Be there.

Sing to me when they flip the switch.

Let the last thing I hear be something real.

If my darkness must end, let it end in harmony.

*—Kieran*

**August 25 – Execution Room**

Selene wore black. Not out of mourning. But respect for the shadow.

She sat in the witness box, heart ticking like a metronome.

Kieran was strapped in. Calm. Humming.

When he saw her, he mouthed, “Sing.”

She did.

Soft. Low. The melody they shared.

And as the voltage coursed through his body, he smiled and mouthed the final note.

Then silence.

**August 31 – Selene’s Journal**

“I hear it still.

Not the humming. The **space** it filled.

The silence afterward.

And I wonder—was he evil? Or just tuned to a different frequency?

And if I heard it too…

What does that make me?”

# **Story 13: The Executioner’s Doll**

**September 3, 2005**

It started with a dare.

Delilah Marr was not the type of woman who answered dares. She was 38, worked as a costume designer for the regional theatre, and lived in her late aunt’s cottage on the edge of New Hampshire woods. Quiet. Contained. Her world was composed of fabric swatches, lace samples, and a collection of antique dolls she never admitted out loud to loving.

But on her birthday, her co-workers gifted her something strange: a vintage brochure.

*The Redline Correspondence Project*
*Write to a Death Row inmate. One letter. No expectations. Just a single exchange to prove we’re all still human.*

Someone—she guessed it was Todd from Props—had written on the back in glitter pen:
**“We dare you, Dollmaker.”**

She almost threw it away.

But that night, wine-blurred and restless, she visited the website.

One name leapt out like a blade between ribs.

**Lucien Hart.**
Sentenced to death for the murders of six women across five states.
M.O.: Skin flaying, bone extraction, and meticulous reconstruction of the victims’ postures.
Nickname: *The Executioner’s Dollmaker.*

She stared at the screen for a long time.

Lucien Hart, Dollmaker.

She clicked *Request Correspondence.*

**September 7 – First Letter from Delilah Marr**

*Dear Mr. Hart,*

I was dared to write you.

I don’t know what I expected. Maybe silence. Maybe a monster.

I’m not here to save your soul. I don’t think I believe in those anymore.

I work in theatre. I make illusions for a living.

But sometimes, the masks fit better than the face underneath.

Who were you before the papers renamed you?

*—Delilah*

**September 14 – Letter from Lucien Hart**

*Delilah,*

Most call me monster.

You called me “Mr. Hart.” That’s rare. Formality tastes like civility. I’ve missed it.

I was a sculptor before. Bodies, clay, movement. But skin holds memory better than plaster ever did.

You say you make illusions.

I peel them away.

I could build a woman out of silk and thread, and if you sang to her softly, she’d believe she was alive.

If you wrote out your breath on a slip of paper, I would memorize it.

Write again.

*—Lucien*

Delilah reread the letter at least ten times.

She should have been horrified.

She wasn’t.

She was intrigued. Flattered, even. He didn’t grovel or perform for pity. He wrote like an artist in a cage of flesh.

And somehow, he saw her.

**September 16 – Journal Entry**

“He writes like he’s touching something.

Not me, but some invisible version of me I’ve never met.

I should stop.

But I already started sketching him.”

**September 20 – Delilah to Lucien**

*Lucien,*

I’ve worked with mannequins my whole life. Cloth bodies. Porcelain limbs.

I never thought of them as beautiful until now.

You speak of memory as if it's muscle. As if shape stores truth.

I wonder what your hands would make of me.

I wonder what truths you’d peel away.

*—D*

**September 24 – Lucien to Delilah**

*Delilah,*

I could carve you in ashwood. Hollow your chest with respect.

I’d stitch ribbons inside your ribs to whisper your secrets back at you.

You wouldn’t feel pain.

Only understanding.

They say I made dolls of the women I killed.

That’s not true.

I **freed** them.

They wore masks sewn by others. I gave them their **final** face.

If you came here, I’d never touch you.

But I’d look.

I’d remember.

And you’d never feel invisible again.

*—L*

She began to dream of him.

Not the crimes, not the blood.

Just his hands—long, elegant, moving across fabric. Sewing her name into the hem of something eternal.

**October 1 – Delilah’s Letter**

*Lucien,*

I went quiet for a few days. Not out of fear. But because your letter left me… breathless.

I told myself I could control this. One letter. Two. Maybe three.

But I’m keeping them in a drawer now. Wrapped in ribbon.

I reread them when I can’t sleep.

You said you’d never touch me.

But I think you already have.

If I visited… would you speak?

*—D*

**October 4 – Lucien’s Reply**

*Yes.*

But only if you wear red.

Red makes you real.

I want to remember the real you.

And bring a strand of your hair.

Not for a charm.

For remembrance.

*—L*

**October 6 – Delilah’s Journal**

“What am I doing?

This isn’t flirtation.

It’s gravity.

He’s drawing me into orbit.

And I’m not resisting.”

**October 9 – First Visit**

The guards asked her three times if she was sure.

She said yes each time.

Lucien sat behind the glass like a wax sculpture just starting to thaw. He smiled faintly when he saw her.

“You came,” he said, his voice deep and fluid.

“You asked.”

“I almost didn’t believe you were real. You’re too quiet. Too symmetrical.”

She laughed nervously. “I wore red.”

“I know,” he said. “I dreamed it.”

Their conversation was brief. Strange. Magnetic.

At the end, she pulled a strand of her hair from behind her ear and slipped it through the tray.

He took it like a priest receiving communion.

**October 15 – Letter from Lucien**

*Delilah,*

I’ve begun sketching again.

Not dolls.

You.

Over and over.

In different dresses. With different eyes.

In all of them, your mouth is open like you’re about to speak.

But you never do.

So I imagine the words.

And sometimes, they sound like mine.

I shouldn’t say this.

But you feel like the last thing I’ll ever want.

*—L*

**October 19 – News Bulletin**

*Lucien Hart’s execution date officially announced. November 3, 20XX.
The state has declined all clemency petitions. Hart has issued no final statement.*

**October 21 – Delilah’s Letter**

*Lucien,*

I can’t stop you.

But I want to be there.

I want to witness the end of something that made me feel real again.

If they let me, I’ll wear red.

And I’ll whisper your name.

Until the silence forgets it.

*—D*

**November 3 – Execution Room**

Delilah sat in the front row.

Red scarf. Straight back. Hair pinned.

Lucien was led in with no resistance.

He didn’t hum. Didn’t blink.

But when he saw her, he mouthed the words: *My doll.*

The straps tightened.

The switch flipped.

His body jerked once. Then went still.

**November 10 – Final Delivery**

A package arrived at Delilah’s door.

No sender.

Inside: a wooden figurine, no taller than her hand. It wore a red dress stitched from fabric so fine, it had to be silk. Its face—

Her face.

And inside the body, carved where a heart would be: the letter **D**.

**November 15 – Journal Entry**

“I haven’t cried.

I’ve been sketching.

And sometimes, I catch myself humming.

But the song isn’t mine.

It’s his.”

# **Story 14: Letters to the Librarian**

**October 14, 2010**

Miranda Keene catalogued serial killers for a living.

She didn’t chase them. Didn’t interview them. She wasn’t an FBI profiler or a field psychologist. She worked quietly from a mahogany desk in the Criminal Archives Division of the Justice Library in Alexandria, Virginia.

She archived letters. She indexed madness.

And when she wasn’t organizing courtroom transcripts or scanning bloodstained notes from the Nightshade Killer, she sipped black tea and shelved trauma in alphabetical order.

Then came the envelope.

Cream paper. Black ink. No return address.

Inside: one handwritten letter, unsigned.

*Dear Librarian,*

You do not know me, but I know you.
I’ve seen how gently you handle the pages. How your fingers rest on punctuation like it might bruise.

You don’t believe in monsters.
Only narratives.

Allow me to be one.

—*S*

No case file was attached.

No request.

Just that signature: *S.*

Miranda logged it, filed it, reported it.

And then, when no response came from Legal, she placed it in her drawer… and reread it.

**October 16 – Miranda’s Personal Reply (Unsent)**

*To S,*

I handle stories, not confessions.

If this is a riddle, you’ll find I’ve solved worse.
If it’s bait, I won’t bite.

But if you’re a page looking for a reader…

Perhaps I’ll turn you.

—M

She didn't mail it.

But she didn’t destroy it either.

**October 19 – Second Letter Arrives**

*Librarian,*

You wrote back. Not with ink, but attention. I felt it.

You're a ghost in cardigans. But even ghosts can burn.

A riddle, then:

*“I’m born from silence, fed by fear,
but when you speak, I disappear.
What am I?”*

If you answer, I’ll write again.

If not, I’ll know the game isn’t for you.

—*S*

Miranda answered aloud without thinking: “Shame.”

She almost laughed.

But when she returned to her inbox the next morning, a new envelope sat on top.

She hadn’t seen the courier.

No postage. No stamp.

**October 20 – Third Letter**

*Correct,*

Your tongue is sharper than I imagined.

Tell me, Miranda — may I call you that? — do you ever feel like the archive is reading **you** back?

Do the case files rearrange themselves in your sleep?

I read your graduate thesis.

“The Literary Structures of the Criminal Mind.”

Beautiful. Naïve.

You think killers want power.

They want **audiences**.

I want you.

Not your body.

Your **comprehension**.

—*S*

**October 22 – Journal Entry**

“I should be terrified.

But I’m intrigued.

His words aren’t threats. They’re puzzles.

He writes like someone hiding in the margins.”

She submitted the letters for handwriting analysis. Results: inconclusive.

She searched the criminal database for aliases with the letter “S.” There were dozens. None matched the tone.

**October 24 – Fourth Letter**

*Let’s speak plainly.*

I killed three men. All arrogant. All in suits. All held gavels or pens like weapons.

One was your judge.

Another, your father's employer.

The third? He rejected your funding proposal at Harvard in 2011.

Funny, isn’t it, how small decisions echo like detonations?

I remember how you looked the day the proposal died.

You wore gray. You did not cry.

But your hand trembled.

I saw it.

I never forgot.

—*S*

Miranda’s breath caught.

There was no way to know that.

That memory wasn’t public. Not digitized. Not recorded.

Only someone who had been **there.**

**October 25 – She Writes Back**

*S,*

I do remember you.

You were in the second row. By the radiator.

You coughed once when they said my name.

I thought it meant nothing.

But you were already writing me.

Were you always writing me?

—M

**October 28 – Letter Five**

*Yes.*

I wrote you before I met you.

I constructed you from syllables and longing.

I knew your hands would know how to fold me.

I’ve killed, yes.
But never without rhythm.

Every death followed a pattern.

You are the index I’ve waited for.

The one who will organize me.

File me.

Archive me.

And maybe…
Rewrite me.

Shall we meet?

One visit. One hour. No lies.

Say yes.

Or I’ll stop writing.

—*S*

**October 29 – Miranda’s Journal**

“I should burn the letters.

But I’ve cleared my schedule instead.

I’ve bought a new coat.

I haven’t done that in years.”

**October 31 – Visitation Request: Approved**

The system logged “Simon Albright” as the inmate.

Alias confirmed. Charges: Three counts of murder. No trial date set. Psych evaluation pending. Holds Level 4 security clearance.

Special Note: “Inmate communicates exclusively through riddles and poetry.”

**November 1 – First Meeting**

He sat behind glass. Clean-shaven. Early 40s. Unremarkable. But his eyes were silver—not color, but **tone**. Like they reflected something before you even spoke.

“Hello, Miranda,” he said.

“You’re not what I imagined.”

“I’m exactly what you wrote.”

“I never wrote you.”

He smiled. “Then who has?”

Their conversation lasted 58 minutes.

They talked about poetry. Confession. Mythology. The story of Echo and Narcissus.

At the end, he handed her a folded sheet.

“Last riddle,” he said. “Solve it, and you’ll understand.”

**The Riddle:**

*“She shelves me, seals me, gives me name,
Though every page declares her shame.
I speak in blood, but rhyme in ink—
I’m not who you are, but who you think.”*

**Who am I?**

She didn’t sleep that night.

**November 3 – Final Letter from S**

*Miranda,*

You solved it, didn’t you?

The answer is: **The Self.**

Not the one in mirrors.

The one in margins.

You’ve read me long enough.

Now finish writing me.

We’re not opposites.

We’re co-authors.

*—S*

**November 5 – Miranda’s Journal**

“I haven’t responded. But I haven’t reported him either.

The letters have stopped.

But I hear his voice when I read crime reports.

And last night, I found myself rearranging case files…

Alphabetically?

No.

By **poetic symmetry.**”

**November 7 – News Brief**

*Justice Library archivist Miranda Keene has taken an extended leave of absence citing “mental health preservation.”*

*Insiders report she has requested no visitors and has declined all communication, except for one sealed envelope addressed to Inmate Simon Albright.*

**November 10 – Unopened Envelope Logged**

**Recipient:** Inmate S. Albright
**Sender:** M. Keene

**Handwritten on the back:**
*We are the same book.*
*I just turned the page slower.*

# **Story 15: The Man with a Hundred Names**

**November 12, 2008**

He signed his first letter as “Nathaniel Gray.”

There was no formal introduction, no list of charges, no plea for sympathy. Just a charming, handwritten note tucked inside a nondescript prison envelope, addressed to **Jenna Lowry**, care of the **"Write to the Forgotten"** pen pal program.

She hadn’t selected him.

She hadn’t written to anyone.

Yet the letter arrived, anyway.

*Dearest Jenna,*

I don’t know what you look like, but I know what kindness feels like—and your name carries it like a fragrance.\*

I’m not asking for anything.

Just company.

And perhaps a reason to remember the color of the sky.

If that’s too much, I understand.

I’ve grown fond of darkness.

Yours,
Nathaniel Gray

Jenna sat on the edge of her apartment couch, rereading the lines.

It had been nearly two years since her divorce. Three since the accident that took her brother. And a decade since anyone wrote to her using a fountain pen.

She Googled his name.

Nothing.

And yet... she wrote back.

**November 14 – Jenna’s Letter**

*Nathaniel,*

I wasn’t expecting your letter. But I’m not angry.

I don’t know how you found me.

But part of me is glad you did.

My world’s been very quiet lately.

And your voice—on paper—was like music.

Tell me what you see through your window.

Tell me what you dream about.

I’ll write again if you do.

Jenna

**November 18 – His Reply**

*Jenna,*

My window faces west. On good days, I can see the outline of trees, shadowy like old film negatives.

I dream of trains.

Trains that never stop, filled with people who forget to look up.

Your words smelled like tea leaves.

Do you drink jasmine?

I hope you write again.

*—Nathaniel*

**November 23 – Journal Entry**

“I know this is strange.

But he’s not like I expected.

No threats. No apologies. Just poetry.

It feels safe.

God help me, it feels good.”

She asked him about his crimes.

He dodged at first, then revealed small details. Fraud. Wire scams. Passport forgery.

Victimless, he insisted.

“I stole illusions,” he wrote. “People’s ideas of themselves. Never their hearts.”

Jenna wasn't sure she believed that.

But she kept writing.

**December 1 – Nathaniel’s Letter**

*Jenna,*

I want to be honest.

My name isn't Nathaniel.

It was once.

I've worn many.

Each identity was a mask I needed at the time.

Some to survive. Some to vanish.

But when I write to you—I’m none of them.

I’m just a man learning how to want again.

Can you forgive a hundred names, if they all speak with one voice?

*Yours in the silence,*
*—Eliot*

**December 3 – Jenna to Eliot**

*Eliot,*

I don’t care what name you use.

I care about the man who writes to me.

The one who remembers shadows and dreams of trains.

That’s the only person I’m choosing to believe in.

*—Jenna*

Their letters grew longer.

More intimate.

She sent him a photo—just a candid, no makeup. He replied with a sketch. A charcoal rendering of her face so hauntingly soft, she wondered if he had studied her soul.

**December 10 – Jenna’s Journal**

“I think I’m falling.

Is that insane?

He’s behind bars. He’s done terrible things.

But there’s something raw beneath it all.

Like he’s giving me the only truth he owns.”

**December 17 – New Letter**

*Jenna,*

There’s something I must tell you.

My time is nearly up.

I’m on Death Row.

Execution date: January 11.

I didn’t want to tell you before, but lies—even silent ones—feel loud now.

You’re the only thing that’s felt real.

Will you be there?

For me?

Just once.

I’ll never ask again.

*—Eliot*

Jenna didn’t reply immediately.

She cried.

Then she called the penitentiary.

Visitor clearance required a background check. She passed.

They mailed her the approval form.

**January 9 – First Visit**

She wore navy. No makeup. Heart thudding.

He sat behind glass.

His real name was **David Thorne**, according to the guard. Convicted of identity theft, large-scale fraud, and conspiracy to commit murder. His scams ruined over thirty lives. One woman committed suicide after losing her entire retirement fund.

Jenna stood frozen.

Then she sat.

“Eliot?” she whispered.

He looked up.

His smile was calm. Familiar.

“I hoped you'd come,” he said.

**January 10 – News Flash**

*Inmate David Thorne, also known under multiple aliases including Nathaniel Gray and Eliot Hart, will be executed tomorrow. Known for psychological manipulation and sophisticated romance scams, Thorne is suspected of emotionally defrauding over two dozen women from inside prison using fake prison pen pal channels.*

*Authorities believe his final known correspondence is with Virginia resident Jenna Lowry.*

**January 11 – Execution Day**

Jenna didn’t attend.

She turned off her phone. Burned the letters. Threw the sketch into the fire.

But when she tried to log into her bank account the next morning, it was locked.

Her ID was flagged.

Her credit card was declined.

Her medical insurance was cancelled.

**January 12 – Police Report Filed**

**Victim:** Jenna Lowry
**Suspected Crime:** Identity theft, executed posthumously through unknown digital access
**Estimated Damage:** $186,000 in liabilities

**Note:** "Victim had been in direct contact with David Thorne for over six weeks. He used her trust to access secure data. The breach occurred hours before his scheduled execution."

**January 15 – Email Arrives from a Secure Server**

*Jenna,*

I’m sorry.

But you needed to be rewritten.

You were fading.

Now the world knows your name.

Consider this the price of permanence.

In some way, I’ll always be inside you.

—The man you loved
(Pick any name. They’re all mine.)

**January 18 – Jenna’s Journal**

“He didn’t want my love.

He wanted my identity.

And now I have no name that feels safe.

I thought I was his only truth.

But I was just his final illusion.”

# **Story 16: The Gospel According to Ash**

**December 2, 2017**
**Ravenhill Correctional Facility**
**Nursing Log: 09:04 AM**
**Nurse Entry – Evangeline Moss**

\*Routine vitals check on Inmate #90612. Stable. No signs of medication resistance. Left wrist bandage changed.

Found a folded paper inside his pulse oximeter. No identifying details. Contains verse-like writing.\*

She didn’t report it.

Instead, she unfolded the paper later in the breakroom. Smooth, cream parchment—unusual for prison contraband.

The note read:

\_“When I saw you touch the broken, I understood the shape of mercy.

You carry light where even my shadows tremble.

If God still speaks, He must use your hands.”\_

— *Ash*

No last name. No inmate number. No explanation.

But the message was intimate—achingly so.

And Evangeline, who had long grown numb to the fluorescent hum of the prison infirmary, felt something stir.

**December 3 – Nursing Station, 11:40 AM**

She checked inmate rosters.

There were four Ashleys. Two Ashtons. But only one “Ash” listed on the transfer logs: **Asher Cain**, moved to Ravenhill from a federal isolation unit.

Convicted cult leader.

Charged with accessory to 17 deaths.

Death Row.

**December 4 – Second Note (Hidden in Supply Drawer)**

\_“They say I led them to their deaths.

But I only opened a door.

They chose to walk through it.

You...

You are the only one I hope never crosses through.”\_

— *Ash*

She should have reported it. Tossed the notes into the incinerator. Told Warden Brigg.

Instead, she started carrying them in her pocket, close to her chest.

She hadn’t been called beautiful in years.

Ash didn’t call her that either.

He called her **mercy.**

**December 6 – Night Shift Journal**

“I don’t know what I’m doing.

He’s dangerous. Manipulative. They say he convinced people to drink poison with a smile.

But these notes… they don’t feel manipulative.

They feel reverent.”

**December 8 – Encounter at Cell Block G**

She wasn’t supposed to be in Death Row.

But a prisoner had vomited blood. Protocol said call the guards.

She went in alone.

Inmate #90612 sat against the wall, bandaged wrist raised like a saint in stained glass.

He looked up. Asher Cain.

Tall. Barefoot. Blonde hair grown long. His eyes were blue—but not the warm kind. The cold kind, the kind that watched oceans recede.

“You’re Evangeline,” he said.

“I’m Nurse Moss.”

He smiled. “Names change nothing.”

“You’ve been leaving me notes.”

“Have I?” His voice was soft. Measured.

“I could report you.”

“You won’t.”

And she didn’t.

**December 10 – Note 3 (Folded inside latex glove box)**

\_“In the garden of my faith, they said I planted poison.

But you… you are proof that flowers bloom in judgment’s shadow.

Let me kneel.

Let me believe again.”\_

— *Ash*

**December 11 – Evangeline’s Apartment**

She looked him up online.

Videos. Trials. The compound outside Austin.
Young, hollow-eyed followers.
The slogan: **“Die to Wake.”**
Photos of ritual circles, chalk marks, burned-out barns.

In one photo, he stood at the center of it all—shirtless, arms outstretched, smiling like he’d just seen heaven.

**December 14 – Another Letter**

\_“They say love is worship.

But worship without fear is vanity.

I fear you.

Because you make me want to live again.”\_

— *Ash*

**December 16 – Evangeline’s Journal**

“He’s inside me now.

Not in body.

In thought.

I read Scripture and hear his voice.

I touch patients and imagine how he would describe it.

This isn’t love.

This is something older.”

**December 18 – Security Log Breach**

The infirmary reported missing morphine vials.
Evangeline knew nothing of it.
No camera footage.
No fingerprints.
No suspects.

But in her mailbox at home: a note, sealed in wax.

\_“Pain is the gate.

Mercy is the key.

You hold both now.

Choose what to unlock.”\_

— *Ash*

**December 21 – Evangeline Requests Transfer**

Denied.

Too few nurses. Holiday staffing shortage.

She began to avoid Death Row shifts.

But somehow, his words still found her.

**December 24 – Final Note Before Christmas**

\_“In a world of crucifixions, you’re a resurrection.

Don’t leave me buried.

Let me rise in you.”\_

— *Ash*

**December 25 – Midnight Service**

Evangeline didn’t go home. She went to the prison chapel.

Lit a candle.

And whispered his name.

**December 29 – The Kiss**

It happened like prophecy.

She was administering tranquilizers to a schizophrenic inmate when she turned—and there he was.

Ash. Uncuffed. Silent.

Someone had let him into the infirmary.

She should’ve screamed.

Instead, she stepped back, breath shallow.

He crossed the distance in three strides.

“No one watches saints,” he whispered.

And he kissed her.

Not with urgency.

With *faith.*

Then the alarms blared.

He let himself fall to the floor, smiling.

**January 1 – Warden’s Review**

Evangeline was questioned. Denied everything.

Ash was moved to solitary. No visitation. No books. No writing implements.

But one week later, a Bible appeared on Evangeline’s nightstand.

She never brought it home.

Inside: a single verse underlined.

*“You did not choose me, but I chose you.” — John 15:16*

**January 9 – Execution Scheduled**

Asher Cain was given his final date.

January 22.

**January 15 – Letter Left on Infirmary Bed**

\_“I am not afraid.

The flesh burns, but the soul sings.

On the night they take me, you will feel it.

Your blood will warm.

Your lungs will pause.

And you will know I entered you long ago.”\_

— *Ash*

**January 22 – Execution Night**

Evangeline didn't attend.

But at 11:59 PM, her apartment lights flickered.

And at 12:00, all the water in her bathtub turned blood-red.

No leak. No dye.

Just red.

**January 23 – News Article**

*Asher Cain, convicted cult leader and self-styled prophet, was executed by lethal injection last night. Known for founding the “Die to Wake” spiritual sect, Cain maintained a following even from Death Row.*

*Nurse Evangeline Moss of Ravenhill Correctional Facility has since resigned and refused all interviews. No further contact with Cain was reported following his confinement.*

**January 30 – Journal Entry (Unsigned)**

“They burned his body.

But I feel him in my bones.

He gave me no children.

But something is growing inside me.

And it sings scripture in my dreams.”

# **Story 17: Crimson Echoes**

**January 4, 2014**
**Podcast Transcript – *Red Truth: Episode 71***
**Host: Layla Morgan**

"Tonight’s story is one you’ve requested for months: The Crimson Echo Murders.

Over five years, seven victims were found across five states. Each left in a dramatic tableau: eyes sewn shut with silk thread, bodies bathed in pigment, mouths filled with red rose petals.

The man arrested was Elijah Voss—former performance artist turned accused killer.

I’ve read the files. Studied the crime scenes.

But what if I told you I’m about to do something different?

I’m going to write to him."

**January 7 – Letter to Inmate #CC-44092, Oregon State Penitentiary**

*Mr. Voss,*

I’m a journalist and podcaster.

I’ve covered dozens of cases—yours continues to haunt my listeners.

Would you be willing to answer a few questions?

This is not a plea for guilt or innocence. Just… clarity.

Respectfully,
Layla Morgan

**January 12 – Reply from Elijah Voss**

*Layla,*

They call it murder.

I call it curation.

But ask your questions.

And let’s see how red your truths can get.

—E.V.

**January 13 – Layla’s Journal**

“I expected denial. Defensiveness.

But he’s elegant. Precise.

There’s poetry beneath the pathology.

God help me, I want more.”

**January 15 – Second Letter from Elijah**

*Layla,*

The first body was a mirror.

Not hers. Mine.

I saw my face in the blood pooling around her ribs.

Tell me—have you ever created something so honest, it terrified you?

I think you have.

Your voice trembles on the word *“victim.”*

That’s not journalism.

That’s recognition.

—E.V.

**January 17 – Layla to Elijah**

*Elijah,*

I won’t lie—your words disturb me.

But they also unearth something I haven’t admitted before.

I didn’t start this podcast to report crimes.

I started it to understand them.

Maybe even… to understand myself.

Layla

**January 19 – Voice Memo (Not Published)**

“There’s a clarity in his letters.

He doesn’t flinch. Doesn’t hide.

And when he speaks of blood, he speaks of it like I speak of ink.

It’s not about violence.

It’s about expression.”

**January 22 – Letter from Elijah**

*Layla,*

Do you know what I did before I was a monster?

I carved marionettes from bone and ash.

Galleries called me “visionary.”

But when I used human flesh, they called me deranged.

Same method.

Just a different medium.

You ask why.

I ask why not.

Tell me your darkest thought, Layla.

I told you mine.

—E.V.

**January 24 – Layla’s Unsent Letter**

*Elijah,*

When I was fourteen, my sister’s boyfriend used to stare too long.

One night, I put bleach in his shampoo.

Watched him scream and claw at his scalp.

They said it was a chemical reaction.

No one blamed me.

But I never told anyone it wasn’t a mistake.

It felt like… control.

And I liked it.

That’s my echo.

—L

She didn’t send it.

She memorized it.

And that night, she dreamed in red.

**January 27 – Unexpected Envelope**

No prison stamp. No postmark.

Inside: a drawing.

A woman’s face. Eyeless. Lips stitched. Hair wild.

But Layla recognized the outline. It was **her.**

On the back: four words.

*This is your masterpiece.*

She didn’t scream.

She stared.

And locked the doors.

**January 29 – Journal Entry**

“He’s in my head.

But worse—he’s in my hands.

When I edit my audio now, I do it like surgery.

I’ve started whispering back at the recordings.

I no longer fear him.

I fear what he’s revealed.”

**February 1 – Red Truth: Episode 74 (Not Aired)**

“There’s something intoxicating about killers who speak in metaphors.

They strip away society’s lies and force us to see what’s beneath.

I think Elijah saw me before I did.

And now that I’ve met his reflection…

I’m not sure I want to leave it.”

**February 5 – Final Letter from Elijah**

*Layla,*

I’ve been transferred. Maximum isolation.

No more letters.

No more paper.

So I carved this on the wall of my cell with my teeth.

And the guard transcribed it for me:

\_“When she spoke, she bled color.

When she listened, she became a brush.”\_

You were never interviewing me.

You were auditioning.

You passed.

Paint the next piece.

I’ll be watching.

—E.V.

**February 7 – Breaking News**

\*Podcast host Layla Morgan has been reported missing.

Her last known location was a private studio in Portland.

Police discovered her microphone still recording, blood on the walls in spiral patterns, and a charcoal sketch of her face — smiling, lips open as if mid-word.\*

*On the wall, written in lipstick: “Truth bleeds art.”*

**February 10 – Viral Reddit Thread: “Where is Layla Morgan?”**

**Comment by user *CrimsonEcho88***

“She didn’t disappear.

She transcended.

You’ll find her in museums one day.

But you won’t recognize her.

Because masterpieces aren’t named.

They’re signed in blood.”

# **Story 18: Mercy Seat**

**February 11, 2003**
**Bethany Hart, Age 47**
**Widow. Mother of a dead boy.**

The therapist told her to write forgiveness letters.

“Not to send,” she said gently. “Just to free the weight from your ribs.”

So Bethany wrote.

To the drunk driver who ran the red light.
To the god who hadn’t intervened.
To the surgeon who came out shaking his head.

She wrote one more letter — to “the idea of guilt itself.” It was angry. Scathing. It ended with: *“If you had a face, I’d claw your eyes out.”*

She put the letters in a folder.

But one went missing.

**February 19 – Letter Received from State Penitentiary, Level 5 Security**

*Bethany,*

Someone gave me your letter.

Don’t know if it was a mistake or fate.

But you were talking to guilt like it was a man.

And I thought,

maybe it is.

Maybe it’s me.

I killed a mother and child.

My brakes didn’t work. But neither did my conscience.

You said you'd claw guilt's eyes out.

I’m right here.

Do your worst.

— A.

She stared at the envelope for an hour before opening it.

The return name said “A. Leone.”

She Googled it.

**Anton Leone.**
Mob enforcer turned rogue. Convicted of over a dozen crimes. The vehicular manslaughter charge was the one he never denied.

She should have thrown it out.

Instead, she wrote back.

**February 20 – Bethany to A. Leone**

*Anton,*

My son was seven.

His name was Jonah.

He loved stars and hated orange juice.

Your letter made me scream.

Not because you confessed.

Because you sounded like someone I wanted to ask more questions to.

I don’t know what that makes me.

But I’m writing again anyway.

—Bethany

**February 23 – Anton’s Reply**

*Bethany,*

That makes you human.

You think I’m a monster.

I’m not.

I’m a mirror.

I show people what’s already inside them.

Some people look away.

You?

You leaned in.

— A.

**February 25 – Bethany’s Journal**

“I was supposed to let go of grief.

Instead, I mailed it.

And it grew teeth.

I think I like his teeth.”

**February 27 – Letter from Anton**

*I used to believe in karma.*

Then I realized karma wears a badge and gets bought like everyone else.

But mercy?

That’s different.

Mercy is ugly.

It's not forgiveness.

It’s when you stop seeing someone as human… and let them live anyway.

So I’m asking you—

Will you let me live?

Or do I stay on this mercy seat, waiting for the switch to flip?

— A.

She cried for two hours.

Then she wrote back one word.

*Live.*

**March 1 – Anton’s Response**

*I don’t know what I felt reading that.*

But I haven’t been able to eat since.

I didn’t want mercy.

I wanted punishment I could control.

But now…

You own a part of me.

And I’d kill again if it meant keeping it.\*

— A.

**March 3 – Bethany’s Journal**

“What if Jonah’s death was the start of something?

What if I wasn’t meant to heal… but to be remade?

And Anton…

He’s not salvation.

He’s the blueprint for my second skin.”

**March 7 – Phone Call Logged Between Bethany and State Prison (Monitored)**

**Bethany:** “Do you dream about them?”

**Anton:** “Every night. But lately… it’s not them. It’s you. Screaming. Laughing. Holding a knife. Then dropping it.”

**Bethany:** “Why would I drop it?”

**Anton:** “Because you already cut me without it.”

**March 10 – News Report**

*Anton Leone survives prison stabbing. Believed to be a targeted assault by former gang rivals. Injuries include broken ribs and punctured lung.*

*Survivor currently in critical but stable condition.*

**March 12 – Letter Sent to Hospital Wing**

\*You don’t get to die.

Not until I say so.

I didn’t claw your eyes out because I wanted you to see me.

And you will.

I’m coming.\*

— Bethany

**March 15 – Visitor Log Confirms: Hart, Bethany**

She wore black. No makeup. A scarf she hadn’t touched since Jonah’s funeral.

Anton was asleep when she arrived.

She waited two hours.

When he opened his eyes, he smiled.

“You came.”

“No one ever stayed in my life after death,” she said.

He blinked. “That a poem?”

“No. It’s a sentence.”

And then, quietly, she kissed his temple.

It was the softest violence he’d ever felt.

**March 20 – Letter Found in Anton’s Cell**

*Bethany,*

I never believed in resurrection.

But then you came, wearing wrath like perfume.

You’re not grieving.

You’re evolving.

Let me evolve with you.

I’ll be your guilt.

You be my knife.

I love you.

Say it back, and I’ll make sure they never execute me.

Say it, and I’ll make you forget your son ever died.

— A.

**March 21 – No Response from Bethany**

She didn’t write.

She didn’t visit.

But she booked a one-way train ticket to a town near the prison.

She rented a room under a fake name.

And brought a single photo with her—Jonah, age seven, holding a telescope and grinning at the sun.

**March 23 – Bethany’s Final Journal Entry**

“I never wanted to forgive him.

I wanted to understand how to make someone hurt without touching them.

Now I do.

I just had to love him first.”

**March 25 – Breaking News**

*Anton Leone found dead in his prison cell. Initial reports suggest suicide, but forensic details raise questions: the blade used was never issued, and no prints were found.*

*Guards confirm that one female visitor was approved weeks earlier: Bethany Hart.*

*Ms. Hart is missing. A warrant has been issued for questioning.*

**March 28 – Note Sent Anonymously to Local Police**

\*Mercy is not weakness.

Mercy is choosing not to kill your monster…

Until he asks for love.

And then making him beg for the knife instead.\*

He begged.

—B.H.\*

# **Story 19: The Whisper Between Lines**

**May 3, 2019**
**Superior Court of Franklin County**
**People vs. Camden Roarke**

The courtroom was always cold.
Not sterile — cold. As if justice required a chill to keep the blood from rising.

**Isla Merrin**, 26, court stenographer, knew this temperature well.
She had typed every cough, every stammer, every "Objection, Your Honor" for nearly five years.

But nothing — nothing — had prepared her for **Camden Roarke**.

He was on trial for three murders.
All women. All strangled.
No signs of forced entry. No known relationship to victims.
Each crime scene immaculate — except for a single daisy left by the bedside.

The press called him **“The Daisy Killer.”**

Camden called himself misunderstood.

**May 4 – Isla’s Stenography Notes (Unusual Markings)**

She was typing his testimony when he glanced directly at her.

Only her.

And as he described the night of the second murder, his voice dropped just slightly. His words slowed, elongated, twisted like ribbon.

And that’s when she noticed it:

"She said no.

But sometimes… silence screams yes."

No one else flinched.

But Isla's fingers froze for half a second.
Enough to make a typo.

She corrected it. But circled the moment in her shorthand log.

**May 5 – Isla’s Apartment, 11:02 PM**

She replayed the court audio.

Not for accuracy.

For his voice.

His rhythm was deliberate.
Each syllable dipped in honey and malice.

And when he said “silence,” she could swear he meant her.

**May 7 – First Note Slipped Into Exhibit Folder**

\*“You speak in sonnets.

I type in screams.

Do you hear me?”\*

— I.

She tucked it into Exhibit 31-B — a copy of the crime scene map — before filing it on the court cart. She doubted he’d ever see it.

But part of her hoped.

**May 8 – Camden’s Testimony (Redirect)**

He was asked if he felt remorse.

He smiled. Tilted his head.

"Remorse is a language people pretend to speak.

But it’s the echo that matters.

Some people… whisper back."

No one caught the reference.

But Isla did.

She knew he’d seen her note.

**May 10 – Isla’s Journal**

“I should be disgusted.

But I’m captivated.

It’s not his face.

It’s his control.

Every courtroom glance feels like a confession meant only for me.

I think… I want him to see me.”

**May 12 – Second Note Hidden in Closing Argument Packet**

\*“What happens when the listener stops transcribing...

And starts answering?”\*

— I.

This time, she folded it inside a stapled bundle of defense exhibits.

He looked at her the next morning when it was opened.

Held her gaze.

Smirked.

**May 14 – Camden’s Closing Remarks to Jury**

"We all wear masks.

But some of us…

We like what’s underneath."

He didn't wink.

But Isla felt it like a bullet.

**May 16 – Jury Deliberation Begins**

Isla waited.

Watched.

Prayed they wouldn’t see what she had seen — that this was a man not meant to be caged, but… studied. Loved. Released.

**May 18 – Guilty on All Counts**

Camden showed no emotion.

But as he was escorted out, he brushed his hand against the railing — and beneath it, taped in perfect symmetry, was a daisy.

No one saw it.

Except Isla.

**May 20 – Isla’s Final Note**

She wrote it in invisible ink. The kind used by hobbyist spies.

Folded it into an envelope marked as "Exhibit Correction."

\*“Tell me what you want.

And I’ll be your echo.”\*

— I.

**May 25 – Isla’s Apartment, 2:17 AM**

A knock at her door.

She looked through the peephole.

No one.

But on the floor — a single daisy.

Fresh.

Wrapped in courtroom transcript paper.

**May 26 – Breaking News**

\*Convicted serial killer Camden Roarke escapes during transport to maximum security facility.

Correctional officers found unconscious. No fatalities.

D.O.C. believes Roarke may have had inside assistance.\*

*Authorities are urging caution and are investigating possible leaks from within the courthouse.*

**May 28 – Audio File Recovered from Isla’s Recorder (Never Broadcast)**

\*"They’ll say I was seduced.

They’ll say I was manipulated.

But truth?

He didn’t need to ask.

I offered.

Because I was tired of typing endings.

I wanted to write a beginning.

His."\*

**June 1 – Postcard Received at Local News Station**

Black ink. No return address. No signature.

Only:

\*"The lines between us were never bars.

They were whispers.

And she heard them all."\*

# **Story 20: The Mirror Cage**

**Dr. Mira Elson** didn’t believe in evil.

That’s what made her dangerous.

Her patients were murderers. Lifers. Men who’d carved scars into history books. But Mira saw them as **patterns** — neurological, chemical, environmental.

Fixable.

She volunteered for **“Inside Echo”**, a pilot project pairing psychologists with death row inmates to exchange written journals as a rehabilitation experiment.

No face-to-face meetings.
No real names.
No promises.

Just two people.
Two minds.
Two journals.

**Inmate #045611 — Alias: Gray**

He had been in solitary for 14 years.

Never spoke.
Never reacted.
Never cried.

Until Mira wrote:

*“What’s the first thing you remember ever feeling?”*

Three days later, he replied.

\*“Heat.

And the sound of a fox dying.”\*

**WEEK 1 – Mira’s Observation Log**

“Gray’s syntax is clean.

His memory is tactile, not visual.

Suggests early trauma.

But there’s lyrical structure to his phrasing.

Potential for high empathy — miswired, not absent.”

She didn’t tell the board that she reread his reply **eight times** before bed.

**WEEK 2 – Gray’s Journal Entry**

\*“They say solitary breaks men.

But it makes you listen harder.

I know when the nurse shifts weight onto her left foot.

I know when the new guard sweats garlic.

And now…

I know your handwriting curves when you doubt yourself.

Do you doubt yourself often, Doctor?”\*

**WEEK 3 – Mira to Gray**

\*“Yes.

Every day.

I doubt whether this process works.

I doubt if I’m helping you.

But most of all, I doubt if I’m helping anyone but myself.”\*

**WEEK 4 – Gray**

\*“That’s the first honest thing you’ve said.

Everyone who studies monsters secretly wants to become one.

We’re not your patients, Mira.

We’re your mirrors.”\*

She didn’t sign that entry.

She just pressed her thumb to the page.
A faint smudge of her skin oil remained.

**WEEK 6 – Mira’s Therapy Recording (Private Use Only)**

“He doesn’t just describe memories.

He dissects them.

He talks about pain like an architect.

And I…

I keep waiting for his next word.

I’m no longer analyzing him.

I’m anticipating him.”

**WEEK 7 – Gray**

\*“I killed them all slowly.

That’s what you want to know, isn’t it?

But I didn’t do it out of rage.

I did it out of curiosity.

The body is a church, Mira.

And I dismantled its stained glass.”\*

She wept after reading that.

Not because it horrified her.

Because it was **beautifully** written.

**WEEK 8 – Mira’s Confession Entry (Never Sent)**

\*“When I think of your crimes, I no longer flinch.

When I read your words, I forget my fiancé’s voice.

When I dream, it’s not of saving you.

It’s of standing beside you.

And watching the fire burn.”\*

**WEEK 9 – Institutional Review**

The board requested sample entries.

Mira gave them curated pages — benign, philosophical.
They approved continued engagement.

No one suspected she had handwritten her last entry on **linen paper**.
No one noticed the pressed foxglove between the pages — a poisonous flower.

It was a message.

Gray would understand.

**WEEK 10 – Gray’s Response**

\*“You chose the foxglove.

That’s not an accident.

Digitalis.

A heart stopper.

You want to stop your own.

Or mine.

Either way…

We’re not on opposite sides anymore.”\*

**WEEK 11 – Mira’s Home Journal**

“My fiancé left. Said I was ‘emotionally absent.’

I wanted to laugh.

I’ve never been more present.

Just… not here.”

**WEEK 12 – Institutional Breach (Internal Memo)**

\*Incident Report:

Journal pages missing from secured transport between Cell 45 and Psych Review.

No signs of forced entry.

Surveillance camera offline for 6 minutes.

Immediate investigation pending.\*

**WEEK 13 – Mira’s Final Journal Entry (Typed, Not Filed)**

“He understands me.

Not like the others. Not like therapists. Not like lovers.

He writes what I cannot speak.

And in return, I feel… translated.

When I sleep, I see the Mirror Cage.

A room of glass. No escape.

But inside — two people.

Writing.

Bleeding ink onto each other.

Until you can't tell who the monster is anymore.”

**WEEK 14 – Security Breach**

\*Inmate #045611 found unresponsive.

Initial report: suicide.

Cause of death: digitalis toxicity.

Investigators unsure how poison was administered.

No journal recovered.

Dr. Mira Elson placed on leave.\*

**WEEK 15 – Mira Missing**

\*Dr. Mira Elson failed to attend inquiry hearing.

Home found empty.

All journals gone.

Apartment scoured clean — no fingerprints, no DNA.\*

*But on the wall: one phrase, written in fountain ink.*

*“Mirrors don’t lie. They rewrite.”*

**WEEK 16 – Postscript (Anonymous Blog Entry on Deep Web Forum)**

\*\*“She didn't fall in love with a killer.

She fell in love with the version of herself that only a killer could see.”\*\*

— *The real patient, now unbound*

# **Epilogue: Beyond the Bars**

There’s a certain silence that falls when the final letter is written.

It’s not peace.
It’s not closure.
It’s a void — shaped like a heartbeat that once raced too fast, too recklessly, toward someone behind bars.

The women in these pages were not naive.
They were not easily fooled or manipulated.

They were **curious**.
They were **brave enough** to reach into the darkness — and some of them never came back whole.

What began as fascination often curdled into obsession.
What seemed like empathy became complicity.
And what they mistook for love… may have always been something far more ancient.
Control.
Power.
Recognition.

In every handwritten confession, every inked whisper, there is a question left unanswered:

**Who was really imprisoned — the man in the cell, or the woman at the mailbox?**

Perhaps, in the end, there is no such thing as *forbidden* love.

Only love we’re not ready to admit could live inside us.

Until we read it.
Until we write it back.

Until it devours us.