

There are two shorts here, the first follows the events of *The Hitman's Guide to Codenames and Ill-Gotten Gains*. The other is in response to a social media post and can be read before book five.

Written by: ~~Alice Winters~~ Cassel and Leland
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Cassel

“What do we do with it?” I ask as I try not to stare, but what else do I do with my *eyes* when it’s right there?

“Fuck if I know. You’re the one who agreed to this. Just... I don’t know! Do something!” Jeremy says.

It slowly turns to look at us with wide eyes. “You guys do know I can hear, right?” Waylon asks.

“Yo, my bro. Whazzup,” I say, feeling like this is definitely how teenagers speak nowadays.

Weirdly, Waylon quickly returns to staring at his phone with some added vigor.

“I mean, we were both his age once upon a time, what did we do back then?” Jeremy asks.

“Oh! Good idea! After I got out of the circus, Lucas was training me rigorously before he made me take on a few jobs to kill people.”

Waylon slowly looks over at me with even wider eyes. “I don’t want to do *any of that*.”

“It’s fine! Jeremy did cool stuff, I’m sure,” I say as I look at Jeremy.

“I was probably hot-wiring a car that I then outran the cops with so it could be gutted and sold as parts,” Jeremy says.

Waylon’s attention hastily returns to his phone. I think he even shrinks a little in his seat, like maybe we’ll forget he’s sitting there.

“Let me google it,” I say as I turn to my phone for answers. “What do teenagers like... ‘Teenagers love surprises.’”

“No, please. No more surprises. I’ve had enough surprises,” Waylon assures me. “Leland surprised me with that stupid fence. And then he surprised me by blaring a horn in my ear at three AM, dragged me out into the middle of some field and told me to start running. WHY? WHY DID I HAVE TO RUN?”

“We’re not weird like him,” Jeremy says.

“You just told me you hotwired cars and sold them for parts and... aren’t you a cop?” Waylon seems uncertain. “Anyway, I’m fifteen, I don’t need a babysitter.”

“Leland tasked me with the job of babysitting you, so that is what I’ll do. He really cares about you, you know that?”

Waylon sighs loudly. “I do.”

I turn back to my phone. “‘Teenagers love food.’ Well, I can do that. Waylon, one time Jeremy ate a squirrel. I just... would like you to know that. I still have nightmares.”

“It was in a stew!” Jeremy says, like any part of that would help the situation.

Waylon’s eyes are huge. “But... why?”

“Right? I promise I won’t feed you squirrel,” I say as I head into the kitchen and rummage through the cupboard. When I look behind me, I see Waylon has moved off the couch and is eyeing us through the door. “Want to pick something out?”

“Why would you eat a squirrel?” he whispers, clearly still stuck on that, much like I am.

“I didn’t kill it and eat it,” Jeremy says.

Waylon shakes his head. “That makes it sound like you ate it alive!”

“No, listen, Waylon. He didn’t kill it. Instead, he wandered into some stranger’s house who was clearly a serial killer, and when the guy set the bowl in front of him and announced there was squirrel inside, he merrily picked up his spoon and dove in, devouring his bowl *and* mine.”

“Was he a serial killer?” Waylon asks.

“Definitely.”

“He was not!” Jeremy says.

Waylon clearly believes me. “Do you think I could go back to Leland’s?”

“There is no way you think Leland is better than us,” Jeremy protests.

“Leland would never eat a squirrel!” Waylon counters.

“Okay, okay, what about some prepackaged cookies? I guarantee there are no squirrels in that,” I say as I hold them out, but Waylon seems reluctant to take them.

“The weird smile on your face even makes me worried,” Jeremy says, so I raise an eyebrow.

I try to smile harder. “What are you talking about? This is a perfectly normal smile.”

“Were you the serial killer all along?” Waylon asks as he takes the cookies.

“No! Okay, we all got a bit distracted. What if we go do a fun activity? That could be fun. Is there something you like?”

“Well... your computers look really neat,” Waylon says. “Do you play video games on them?”

My heart nearly explodes as I realize that I’ve finally found someone I can show off my precious computers to! “I do something even better! Come!” I grab his arm and drag him off into the room where my computers are set up. I push him down into a seat before I start to show him the absolute wonders of my computers. There’s so much to show him, so I just start going through them piece by piece, thrilled by the captive audience!

“Honey?” Jeremy asks quietly.

I look over at him. “Oh, you want to learn more too?”

“I think... I think maybe that’s enough for a bit, you know? You don’t want to give away all of the good points in one go.”

“He wasn’t done?” Waylon cries. It’s quite the anguished sound, which isn’t really what I was expecting.

“Oh no... he was probably only two percent done,” Jeremy says.

“It’s been an *hour*,” Waylon whispers.

“Time goes fast when you’re having fun!” I announce.

“It felt like fifteen hours,” he adds.

“Okay, now you’re just being freaking picky. What does Leland do that’s so fun?” I ask.

“Leland’s strange and weird! He makes me fight random things and he’s been trying to teach me like these MMA moves. When I actually did one right the other day, you should have seen him. I mean, it really wasn’t that big of a deal. I kind of suck at it, but it made him stop pestering me for a bit.”

He’s loving it.

He’s absolutely loving Leland’s attention even if he’d never admit it.

“Okay, so yeah, we’ll think of something fun and cool to do,” I say.

“I could teach you how to hot-wire a car?” Jeremy offers.

“Aren’t you a cop?” Waylon asks.

“Oh.”

“At least he’s good at it. I mean... you robbed a gas station and didn’t even get away with it,” I remind him.

Waylon pretends like he has absolutely no idea what’s being said.

The front door opens and Nova rushes off to greet Leland and Jackson.

“Thanks for watching our baby!” Leland says as he rushes forward and grabs Waylon.

“No! Stop!” Waylon cries as Leland tries picking him up.

“Was he good for you? Did he make any messes?” Leland asks.

“You say that like you think I just peed on the floor or something!” Waylon says as Leland holds him in a chokehold.

“Well, did you?”

“NO! Stop! You’re almost weirder than Jeremy!”

Everyone stops what they’re doing.

“You think...” Jackson clears his throat. “You think Jeremy’s the weirdest one in the room?”

“He ate a squirrel,” Waylon says.

Leland gasps even though he’s quite familiar with this information. “I always knew he was a monster. Cassel, come. Come, Cassel. We’ll find you a better man.”

Jeremy’s just staring at them like he has absolutely no idea what is happening.

Leland is doing some kind of weird face patting to Waylon. “Did he... Oh, Waylon, I’m so sorry. Did he try to make you eat anything weird? Raccoon? Opossum?”

“All of you are weird,” Waylon decides as he tries to escape the chokehold but can’t seem to figure it out.

“Go for the eyes or the balls,” I inform him.

Waylon is far too sweet and just submits to the chokehold.

“Thanks for hanging out with him. We didn’t want him to get lonely,” Leland says as he starts dragging him to the doorway.

How he can prefer them is beyond me.

“I feel like we should help him somehow,” I say.

Jeremy just shrugs. “But that would mean dealing with Leland more.”

“You’re right. Bye, Waylon! It was fun! Come over again! I’ll show you more stuff on the computer!” I call as he’s successfully dragged through the door and out to the car.

“He really could walk,” Jackson says as Leland picks him up and starts trying to cram him through the open car window.

“Waylon really does like them, doesn’t he?” I muse.

“You... you think he’s enjoying this?” Jeremy asks.

“His face might read like he’s exasperated, but he likes it. What I would have given to have someone like that take me in. Leland’s a bit... odd, but his heart’s in the right place...”

“I’m sorry you didn’t have anyone,” Jeremy says as he wraps an arm around me and squeezes me to him. He shuts the door as he gives my cheek a kiss.

“Well, it led me to you, so that’s okay! Imagine if I’d never met Lucas. How would we have ever met?”

“Uh... maybe I pulled you over after you were driving too fast.”

“Ooh, and what would you do to me, Officer?” I waggle my eyebrows.

“Probably just hand you a ticket and be on my way.”

“Well, that’s no fun! You were supposed to make me step out of the vehicle and strip-search me.”

“I don’t do that too often in the case of speeders,” he says.

That makes me grin. “Good, good. I don’t want to be jealous.”

“You definitely don’t have to be jealous.”

“Officer... I think I just ran a stoplight,” I purr.

That makes Jeremy also start to grin. “Oh? I think I need my handcuffs—”

“Ew, you guys are just creepy.”

My attention snaps over to Leland who had poked his head in through the front door.

“Waylon forgot his phone and when I came in to grab it, I stumbled upon this lackluster role-playing. At least get some spurs and a whip,” he says as he hurries into the living room to fetch the phone.

“We definitely don’t need help from you,” I say. “Do you not remember my eyes burning after what you’ve made me *witness*?”

Leland stops and tips my chin up. “Do you want me to bring Jackson back in for round two?”

“No! Get out of here, you creeper!”

Leland cackles as he passes behind Jeremy before stopping, which makes Jeremy look *quite* worried.

“Let me help,” Leland says as he grabs Jeremy’s hands like Jeremy’s a marionette. ““Ohh, Cassel, did you see that mighty fine man who was just in here earlier? I believe his name was Jackson because he’s as hot as the sun and makes my pecs tingle.””

Leland is trying to make Jeremy rub his own pecs, but Jeremy’s hands are refusing to move.

“I know you just want an excuse to touch Jeremy. Get your ass out,” I say as I try to shoo him off.

Leland just laughs as he finally leaves.

“About that red light you ran,” Jeremy says, one hundred percent pretending like all that with Leland didn’t even happen.

“You can only arrest me if you catch me,” I say as I hurry back toward our room.

The following short story was written in response to a social media post placed on release day. I’ll place the post here in case you missed it (and so the short story that follows makes sense!) If you already read the post, skip past to “Cassel’s POV.”

Leland: I am thrilled to announce that I’ve replaced Alice for today to celebrate that the best book that has ever been about a fence has released!

Jackson: Leland... what happened to Alice?

Leland: Jackson, don’t worry about it. We’re announcing our new book. Come help me by doing a strip tease! The crowd will love it! This mighty fine audience appreciates your mighty fine ass.

Jackson: Well, I’m kind of worried about it.

Cassel: **walks into the room** Hey guys... Why’s there a bloody handprint in the foyer?

Leland: It’s not blood... it’s chocolate.

Cassel: I... see... and the duct tape... what’d you use a whole roll of duct tape on?

Leland: **speaking loudly** The Hitman’s Guide book 5 releases today! You won’t want to miss—

Jackson: Leland, I hear something muffled coming from the basement.

Leland: That's just the dungeon reminding you how much it misses you. Listen closely. **using a squeaky voice** "Jackson... I miss your booty." Did you hear that? Sounds like I'm not the only one who misses the tush.

Cassel: Does he think this group becomes his if he gets rid of Alice?

Leland: **kicks some incriminating evidence under the couch** Why do you guys think I would do something to Alice? I'm just here to remind you that you can get the book today! Audiobook will release sometime in December! I'll be back—because this is my group now—to share the spoiler thread and short story.

Jackson: You're going to have to let Alice out to write the short story. She forgot about it and went to Florida instead, so the Word document is currently blank.

Leland: I'll write it. Problem solved... not like there *is* a problem. I'm sure Alice is just off... doing... stuff... important stuff...

Cassel: I'm pretty sure it would just be an Ode to The Fence if you wrote it. I'll handle it. Jackson, find Alice.

Cassel's POV as he does his best to write the short story for Alice

That is the moment the most beautiful man walked onto the scene, locks fluttering in the wind. The sun beaming down on him like it burned just for him and him alone.

"You have to be talking about Jackson here. This is definitely Jackson's introduction. Jackson! Jackson, Cassel's writing about you!"

I stop typing and glance up at Leland. "No! I'm clearly introducing Jeremy!"

"Ew. Why?" Leland asks as he cringes.

"You're the one who made Alice disappear before she could write the short story! And now I have to do it because we all know we can't trust you to do anything useful."

"Anything useful? I've saved all of your lives *multiple times*," he says.

I push him off and turn back to the computer.

When Jeremy sees me, he beams, smile brightening up the whole world as he goes, “Hey, sexy. Can I see your hard drive? Or do you want to see the solid-state drive... in my pants?”

“What the fuck was that?” Leland asks. “I had secondhand embarrassment just reading that.”

“It was a computer joke! A sexy one! Stop looming over my shoulder! Maybe you could go let Alice out from wherever you put her, and she could write something at least semi-decent!”

Leland grabs my chair and pushes it off into oblivion as I hear him quickly typing away.

Jeremy pauses and turns before gasping loudly as a large black stallion races onto the scene, the most beautiful man alive upon his back! As Jackson slides off the horse’s back and lands on his two perfect feet that aren’t in the least bit a little weird with that one toe that’s a little longer than I think it should be but Jackson’s perfect so let’s not worry about that at all, shit where was I? Oh yeah,

Jeremy drops to his knees in awe. “Oh, my raging heart,” he gasps out. “Now that is a man.”

“Why the fuck are you focusing on my feet so much?” Jackson asks.

“Jackson! NO! Don’t look at it! Cassel wrote that!” Leland says as he tries shoving me away again!

I glower at him. “Dammit, stop! This is my job now! Your job is to find Alice!”

“I think she tried escaping. I can’t find her,” Leland says. “I mean... I didn’t actually look very hard, but she’s gone.”

“Maybe she’s embarrassed by you guys and is hiding,” Jackson suggests. “Why don’t you write something normal?”

“Got it,” Leland says, which tells me he absolutely doesn’t “got it.”

As Jeremy quivers and Cassel shakes, Jackson tosses his beautiful locks of hair as he goes, “There is my mate. The man of my dreams high

upon that tower, but the only way I can reach him is if I climb this mighty fence! The horror! My nemesis has revealed itself!”

But Jackson’s love was raging too hard. As hard as his mighty muscles! And he knew that if he was to save the man of his dreams, the man who made him complete, the man he was nothing without, he would have to brave this task, so with a thundering heart, he threw his luscious body against the fence.

He leapt and jumped and scrambled but alas, The Fence proved too hard for him, so he snapped his fingers and Jeremy rushed over and picked Jackson’s mighty fine ass up and—

“What the fuck?” Leland cries as Jackson deletes all of it—every last bit of it—before pushing Leland out of the way.

Jackson, Leland, Cassel, Jeremy, and all the other poor souls that Leland has tortured for years came together and had a fun dinner where they said normal stuff and did normal stuff and then they lived happily ever after. The end.

“I think that’s the worst try yet,” I mutter.

“Right? God, gross,” Leland mutters before hesitating. “I mean, baby! You tried so hard! You did so good! But maybe you should leave it to the professionals. All this writing has made me hungry. You guys hungry?”

“I could eat,” I say as I wander off to join him. As I wait for the pizza to arrive, I realize I’d forgotten my phone in the room with my computer and hurry back to it just as Jeremy’s leaving.

“You should have seen the atrocities Leland was writing.”

“I’m sure,” he says.

I glance at the blank screen a moment before sitting down as Jeremy comes up behind me.

“Leland can write ridiculousness all day long, but I have faith that you know just what to write.”

“Hmm... I don’t know.”

He kisses the top of my head. “Just give it a try.”

While calling this group my friends or family is an absolute tragedy, there’s something to be said about having people in your life who would drop anything and give up everything to save you or what they believe in. A

group who has drawn me from the darkest parts of my life and shown me what it's like to live and love.

I wouldn't trade them for anything in the world, even if Leland is the strangest person I've ever met, even if Jeremy ate a squirrel, and even if Jackson is just as odd for being so normal yet going along with Leland.

I'm happy to call them my family.

Oh, and Jeremy's the hottest.