

**A lost chapter from the last fourth of *Wolf's Trap*:**

## MARTIN

Loose ends were fun, and today was a day for loose ends.

Lots of them.

Martin had always loved the unending possibilities of loose ends, the thrill of making unexpected connections. Unexpected resolutions.

Sometimes he liked to just snip loose ends without connecting to anyone or anything, then enjoying the abruptness of the cut-off. Relationships were perfect loose ends, he had found. Some needed to be tied up in nice little packages, while others were ripe for sudden snipping. Martin did like to snip that kind of loose end, though not every time. Some he liked to play with, teasing them into longer and longer strands before deciding what to do to achieve the closure he craved. The very craving made loose ends desirable, because only with their existence could he have such an exquisite craving which needed fulfilling. The cycle excited him far more than anyone had ever suspected.

Linda, the cute waitress at the diner -- *his* diner -- was a loose end he sometimes contemplated tying. He enjoyed teasing the strand longer and longer, wondering when he would snip it off or tie it into a knot. He hoped it would be satisfying when it became necessary, but in the meantime he vowed to enjoy it for what it was -- a side entertainment at best, one of which he might tire quickly, but not yet.

His new obsession, Doctor Jessie Hawkins, was a loose end he would enjoy snipping off very soon.

*Very soon.* He'd hated to leave her, but he had work here. She could wait. She was a loose end and she was his decision. He had almost changed his mind at the last minute, but then he'd driven all afternoon to get here now, at night.

The beauty of loose ends was that only he could decide whether they would be tied up or snipped. He considered it one of the most personal decisions left to the individual, right up there with sex and fresh produce. Not only *if* loose ends would be tied, or snipped, but also *when*. Not a one-dimensional decision at all.

Martin smiled to himself. He was thinking of Linda, the waitress, and how she basked in his attention. He wondered if he would see the lusty blonde again -- what was her name? She might have to be dealt with. And there was Stacey, Corinne's friend. Yes, that loose end would need to be tied and soon.

But the exquisite anticipation would be nearly as exhilarating as the actual ceremony.

Loose ends.

He came out of the shadow of the untrimmed hedge, parallel to the building's back wall, and stared at the entrance. He had followed Vic there, after the asshole cop Lupo and his geezer partner had left the studio the first time. Martin knew the studio well -- he had even been inside, though never when Lupo's blonde squeeze was there. He wished he had been, but the videos were enough. Those he could watch forever. A gift from her that kept on giving.

Right now, he watched for Vic.

*Loose ends.*

## VIC

Vic let the warmth of the double Scotch slowly unwrap the chains from around his guts.

It was still early afternoon, but he'd slept maybe four hours in the last three days. The coke could only get you so far before you crashed and burned for a week, and he was on a deadline.

You'd think shooting porn was a walk in the park. Naked people, beautiful and vacuous, slipping and sliding and slobbering in front of the cameras and a half-dozen earnest hard-ons.

Sure, and dealing with the attitudes of so-called stars was like dragging a razor blade slowly across one's eyes. Not to mention the greasy go-betweens hired by the money-men to safeguard investments, and the studly but stupid musclemen hired to keep everyone in line and occasionally supply an extra boner. And the long fucking hours. Vic knew the money-men were likely mobsters, or what might once have been referred to as racketeers, but why should he care, as long as the money appeared in his bankbook in a timely manner? What else could a film school drop-out do, without friends in key positions at major Hollywood studios? Especially here, in the boonies. No, his film career had been doomed before it began, thanks to the fact that he had no friends on big Hollywood payrolls. Even the indy production companies, which had gotten hot recently, had turned a cold shoulder to him and his work. Bastards, they were at least as in-bred as the big studios, and maybe even more so, and his stuff had never generated even a ripple of interest from those guys. So there was porn. At least Vic was gaining a reputation and some respect as a better-than-average purveyor of shallow filth -- it got him into exclusive parties well enough, and led to no end of private casting lessons on both sides of the fence. And got him plenty of drugs when he wanted them.

Sipping his Scotch again, he reflected briefly on the nature of success. He had attained success enough in his field that his name on a video box meant something, at least to the porn connoisseur, and that would have to do for now. Maybe music videos next. His own mediocre screenplays sagged on a shelf below his dusty film textbooks, but that was just the way it was done -- you had to pay your dues.

He chugged the Scotch.

*Pay the dues.*

*Sing the blues.*

He didn't feel like drugs just now, though. He poured another drink and sighed into the leather sofa, his feet scrabbling through piles of papers and magazines tossed haphazardly on the coffee table. He knocked a pile aside and swore as it dive-bombed the floor and scattered. He set down the snifter and started picking up the loose papers, including a thin stack of rubber-banded envelopes. As soon as he saw the envelopes, an image clicked in his mind.

What was her name? Corey Diamond, real name Corinne something, handing him the three envelopes. She had been angry, but he could tell there was some fear beneath the anger. She had asked him if he knew anything about the letters, and he had looked at her with enough of a blank expression that she had thrust them at his face and demanded he find out which cast or crew member might have left them for her. He had looked at them long enough to note that they were not mailed, that they bore her name in neatly typed letters, and that each contained a single sheet of folded paper.

Now, as he stared at the letters in his hand, he realized that this had all happened only the day before the end of the shoot, and that someone had run up and interrupted them and Vic had

shoved the envelopes into his jacket pocket and forgot about them until some time later, when he had tossed them onto his cocktail table, probably already having forgotten what they were.

Until now.

With a trembling hand, he undid the rubber band.

Opened one after the other, unfolded the sheets, read the simple words of hate written there.

His hands trembled more, and he had to drop the letters and grab the edge of the cocktail table.

Could it be the cops had no idea these existed? He had the proverbial bad feeling about this. The crazy cop would come after him if he suppressed them, of that he had no doubt. *Somebody* would rat on him, somebody in the crew. They hated him for making them try to act as well as fuck, rather than just fuck. What had Corey said? The letters had been hand-delivered to the set, left at the door for her by different couriers. The letter-writer had obviously hired people to deliver the notes. No wonder she was scared when she gave them to Vic. But he hadn't even looked at them.

*Until now.*

*Fuck!* Now his fingerprints were all over the notes themselves, not just the envelopes.

He stuffed the sheets back into their envelopes, as if removing them from his sight would somehow cancel their existence. Then he slapped them on the cocktail table and drank his Scotch, attempting to look elsewhere. But it was no use -- he couldn't keep his eyes from wandering back to the letters.

With a curse and another drink of Scotch, he swept the phone into his hand and dialed the number the cops had given him. Hadn't they said day or night? *Whatever.* He was transferred

from a desk sergeant to the homicide squad, put on hold, then informed that both Lupo and Sabatini were *out in the field*, whatever *that* meant. He left an inane message to the effect that his name was Vic and he had called. Then he hung up and finished his Scotch.

Before he knew what he was doing, he had his shoes back on and his leather coat on his shoulders. In his hand, the envelopes.

There was only one way to keep himself out of more trouble, and that was to turn the damn things over to the cops. He had an early shoot scheduled for the next morning, a lesbian bondage video, and he wanted to get enough sleep for once. But a quick trip would help keep the assholes off his back, and maybe they wouldn't come barging in and destroy the on-camera dynamic he would have to build carefully tomorrow.

He almost left the light on, then remembered his last electric bill.

*Damn near a fucking celebrity, and I gotta worry about electric bills!*

It just wasn't fair. He flicked off the light and stepped into his hallway, locking the door behind him.

## MARTIN

Martin had been antsy, just moments away from abandoning his post. But when the light right in the window went out, he slid back into the shadows, wondering if the pervert had gone to sleep or was on his way out.

*Loose ends.*

Moments later he was rewarded by the sight of Vic pushing open the outer door of the apartment building and heading straight for him.

*This was gonna be good!*

It was getting dark early, so Martin hugged the shadow until Vic was almost parallel, then he lunged onto the sidewalk, his first slash opening Vic's cheek from chin to temple. Black blood splashed onto the sidewalk, and by then Martin had pivoted and brought the thin, flexible blade back to his side. He watched Vic's hands try to stem the blood flow -- a futile attempt, of course, but purely instinctive -- and then he stared into Vic's wide-open eyes. The director fell onto his knees, as Martin had predicted, and the blade flicked out again, backhand, and the sudden spray of blood from Vic's slit throat barely missed Martin's shoes. He stepped back and let Vic tip slowly sideways into the soaked grass, his grotesque gurgling over almost as soon as it began.

Martin scanned the area and saw no one, no lights, no passersby. Vic was rapidly dying, feet scrabbling feebly in the bloody grass, only a few feet away, and Martin was about to turn and walk away when he saw a blur of white near the sidewalk. He picked up the thin bundle of envelopes, knowing without even looking what they were.

This was interesting. Lupo would never get to see them. *Oh well.*

He destroyed the letters, ripping them into bits and stuffing them in his pocket. There were dumpsters out on the sidewalk. It had been part of his plan to torture Lupo as much as possible with clues, and the letters would have been perfect. But they were less a clue than a mere piece off the board -- a useless piece, except for its psychological value. The blood-splattered envelopes would have been better than perfect.

Fuck it, the hell with the letters.

He looked down at Vic, whose limbs had by now ceased their jerking. The reek of voided bowels hung low.

*Two for one!* What a day.

Yet again it had been almost too easy. Killing the pervert had barely registered on his senses -- it was an empty kill, devoid of the kind of satisfaction on which he had come to rely. The old cop, *that* had been satisfying. He was Lupo's partner and good friend, almost like a surrogate father. *Oh, yeah, that would bother him!* But this pervert, this idiotic plastic porno-man, he was a waste of Martin's time. His talents. Perhaps it had been a mistake then. Maybe Vic could have produced more videos for Martin's pleasure. After all, he had drawn exquisite performances out of Corinne Devereaux/Corey Diamond -- Martin felt himself harden at the mere thought of her face on his large television screen. Maybe Vic could have proven himself useful in other ways.

*Nah.*

Martin shrugged. There was no way to undo his actions. Vic was clearly dead, an empty vessel.

Martin melted back into the lengthening shadows, the knife wiped off and safely sheathed under his thin jacket. He felt empty too, longing for the completeness of his revenge. Lupo's death and the doctor's death would be rewarding for their own sake, and those imminent events would go a long way toward repairing the damage done a long time ago.

It had to, because otherwise Martin didn't know what else he would do. In fact, he consistently avoided any thought of the future. What would he do after his mission was complete? There was a blank calendar just after the here and now.

Maybe he'd move on and find himself a few more pliable call girls in some other city.

Right now, he wanted to live for the moment. Right now, he wanted his revenge.

Minutes later he was driving north again, humming his ditty.