Red Lips

I wake to the musky, rotten smell of blood and sweat, thick in the air around me and on my clothes. My hands are sticky, and a horrible taste saturates my mouth. I groan as I sit up on the cold, concrete floor. Then the night comes rushing back. The forty-ninth guy I'd been forced to seduce, our last date, me killing him and eating his heart.

I jump up and run to the nearest corner to be sick. I cough, heaving up blood and guts. *Just one more guy to go.*

Every month, I've been forced to seduce a guy and kill him on our last date, then eat his heart. I don't *want* to, but that's why they created me.

Sixteen years ago, in the year 3018, the government created me and countless others across the globe to control the world's population, and study humans even further. Designed for secrecy and ease to finish our tasks, we seduce and kill people. None of us are extremely attractive, but we aren't ugly, we're just neutral. We're plain as mud, so that no one would remember us or the association we had with any of their friends or family. Unless we want them to notice us, in which case we are irresistible and is only with our potential victims.

This has gone on ever since I turned sixteen for eternity, so as to stay young and capable. I've killed forty-nine guys in forty-two months. *Just one more,* I remind myself, spitting out the last of the heart. *Just one more, then my Ferris wheel will be full and I can stop.*

I stand up from the ground, wiping my red lips on my sleeve. I turn to leave the basement, before I remember that I still have to drag the body of my last victim, Simon, to my Ferris wheel.

Cringing as I pick up his limp, dead feet, I whisper a quiet apology. I don't like killing people, I don't like having a taste of love only to find it replaced by the taste of blood and heart.

Dragging Simon's corpse up the basement stairs into the abandoned building, I keep telling myself, *"One more person. Only one more person..."*

Laughing, I lightly punch Cory's arm. "Shut up, Cor."

"But you know it's true, Sam!" Cory retorts, throwing an arm around my shoulders and taking us both down to the grass, laughing. "You can't keep wild birds as pets."

Cory obviously doesn't know this, but he'll be the last person I'll need to kill before I can finally fill up my Ferris wheel and be finished with this nightmare. It's been over two months since I met Cory, more than I ever stayed with someone. We were each given fifty months to kill fifty people, but I haven't gone the predictable route of a person per month. Sometimes I stay with a guy for two months, biding my time until I feel ready (which I never am, but I have to unless I want to be ordered to do it again if I fail to kill enough people in fifty months) but sometimes, I'll go on some crazy, horrible adrenaline rush where I take the lives of three guys in one month.

I had seven months left when I met Cory, and I planned to spend them all with him. Which may be the worst thing to do in my case, as I'll only grow more attached to him and, inevitably, be unable to kill him in five months time. But the time I've spent with Cory has been some of my best, so I don't worry too much about the future and just concentrate on now, this warm September afternoon.

"Sam, I love you," Cory tells me, planting a soft kiss on my right cheek.

"I love you, too," I reply, closing my eyes and fidgeting with my hands, hoping his blood would wash off them five months from now.

"Sam?" My friend Vincent says, seeing me with Cory at my locker. "Sam!"

Cory doesn't notice him in the commotion of the hall, but my enhanced hearing does. I quickly kiss him and tell him that I've got to get to class. He smiles and walks away.

"Vince!" I yell, hugging my best friend as he runs down the hall towards me. "I haven't seen you in ages! Where did you go?"

Vincent's smile fades. "I left, to... to hunt."

I stop smiling as well. Vincent was made by the government, too, and we've known each other forever. But of course, the government had to make some people bisexual, too, and that's what Vincent is. He must've gone away to find more gay guys to hunt. None of us wanted to have to kill fifty people again, so we all do anything we can to finish.

"So did you finish?" I ask, quietly.

He nods. "Killed the last one two days ago, hid him in the bunker with the rest. I came back yesterday."

I relax, relieved that he won't have to go through everything again.

"But... what about you?" He jerks his head toward the hall Cory had disappeared down. "You only have ten days left, Sam. He'd better be your last, or you're dead."

I swallow hard. "Yeah, he's my last."

We all have built in empathy, to help us sense when our victims are vulnerable and completely trusting of us, which is when we strike. But empathy works in other ways, too.

Vincent sighs. "Sam, don't tell me you've been with him for a long time?"

I don't say anything.

He sighs again. "Sam, I did this too once. His name was Wayne. I got too attached to him, and it took everything I had in me to kill him. Trust me, it does NOT feel nice. Promise you'll kill him soon."

I force myself to look at his face. Brown hair, hazel eyes, tan skin. Despite who I am, I do feel a slight attraction to him.

"Please, promise." His voice is pleading. "I don't want you to have to kill fifty more people."

I take a deep breath. "I promise."

Vincent smiles, and I feel a slight pull in my gut, unsure if I can keep that promise.

I've always hated Valentine's day. I was so jealous of those couples who had nothing to worry about, no 'killing-your-lover' on the horizon. But today will be worse. In past years, I normally sat there wallowing in self-pity and wishing I could love someone without having to kill them. But this year, I'll actually have to kill someone on Valentine's day. And it's Cory, who's currently holding my hand and tracing patterns on it with his left index finger, sending shivers up my arm.

"Can you believe this?" He asks me, amused. "They managed to turn Valentine's Day into a fair with roller coasters, cotton candy and Ferris wheels!"

I wince. One of those Ferris wheels is mine, closed off by the government for me to hide my victims' bodies. I turn away, a lump in my throat.

"Hey," I nudge Cory, pointing to a dark corner of the fair.

His blue eyes widen, full of realization, and puts an arm around me as we walk toward it.

No turning back now, I tell myself. *I kill him tonight.*

I'll never forget Cory. I'll never forget the way he kisses me, pressing his chest to mine and dragging his fingers through my hair.

So as I slowly pull the knife out of my pocket, I hesitate. Do I *really* need to kill him? Maybe I can let him live, and go into hiding together. Maybe I'll get some others to join us, start a society underground. But I can't. I know I can't.

"Sam?" Cory mumbles against my mouth. "What's wrong?"

I take a step back and cradle my head in my hands. I can't kill Cory, but is one person's life more important than fifty others?

"Sam," Cory begins.

"Don't come near me!" I hiss.

Cory looks at the knife, and shifts to stands with his arms and legs spread. "Do it," He says.

"W-whaaaaat?"

"I said do it. Vincent told me that you had to kill me unless you wanted to kill fifty more people, so do it."

Vincent? Screw him, I can't kill Cory!

"Do it!" Cory's face is intense, his jaw locked. "Kill me so you won't have to kill fifty others!"

I can't, I can't...

I take a breath. I *can.* I'll kill him, I'll forget him, I'll get over his death like all the others. In the grand scheme of things, Cory doesn't matter.

I step forward with the knife. Cory presses his lips mine. "I love you," He mumbles against my mouth. Months ago, I would've returned it without hesitation.

I lightly press my knife to his chest. Cory's life for fifty others. I have to.

I brace myself. One more kill, then it'll be over.