

After Death 14

Chapter 14

Everly was an exceptionally bad drunk. If it wasn't for Olivia, she would have gone at it with the men in the lounge.

It was the first time Olivia saw her friend hugging a man and wailing about being an empty-nester. Olivia had no choice but to bring her drunk friend back to her new rental.

A while back, Jeff's caregiver found out that Olivia was looking for apartments for rent and recommended the apartment of a relative to her. Olivia settled on the apartment because she could save on agent fees. Moreover, the deal was backed by the caregiver, whom she trusted.

Since her landlord wouldn't be back in the country anytime soon, Olivia had not officially signed the lease, but she received his approval via WhatsApp and moved in. Without signing any lease, she left no records behind for Ethan to track her down.

The tiny apartment was a far cry from her family home at the height of their fortune, and it was no match for the villa she shared with Ethan.

Still, it was cozy, and she liked it enough. She even kept her dad's favorite tropical fish in the apartment.

Whenever she opened the windows, she'd have a full view of the ocean. Once, she thought that Collington Cove was Ethan's gift for her. Later, she was aghast to learn that Marina had returned to the country and moved into that place right away.

The fact made her miserable for a long time, but she was finally over it. Be it living in an expensive or affordable apartment, she could still enjoy the same ocean view.

The apartment came with a small balcony, where she lay down some thick rugs. She had initially planned to bring Jeff home when his condition stabilized. She'd like him to spend his retirement at her

place, sunbathing on the balcony and enjoying life.

Too bad things took a turn for the worse. The cancer diagnosis came out of the blue, and she never thought that her dad would remain in the ICU.

The drinking made her feel a little queasy, so she took some medicine and lay on the mattress by the cot she placed in her room. It wasn't the most comfortable arrangement, but that was the only way she'd get some shut-eye.

Thanks to the alcohol, she had a good sleep and woke up late. Everly woke up earlier and made her some breakfast.

No one breached the topic of the wild night. Adults seemed to be good at hiding their insecurities during the day.

After breakfast, Everly rushed to the entrance with a pair of heels in her hands and a piece of toast in her mouth. She mumbled, "Breakfast's ready. I'm running late. Liv, I gotta go now."

Olivia called out to her, "Eve, I probably can't keep you company for the next few days because I'll be busy."

"Don't sweat about it. Do you really think I'm so into splurging? Yesterday's celebration was a grand farewell to our youth. I woke up a new person today, ready to work! I'd take money over men any day! But you have to tell me if you need help, alright? I don't want you struggling to juggle a few jobs."

"Yeah. Got it." Olivia saw her friend at the door, where they gave each other a soft hug. "Eve, you'll find a better man. You have to go through the pain to find your real happiness."

Everly scoffed. "Oh, that's a bit rich coming from you! You can't even keep your perfect husband. Let's see if you'll find yourself a man as good as him in the future."

"In the future?" Olivia looked at the sun and smiled gently. "Who knows?"

Everly was ready to leave but was stopped by the sight of Olivia's lonely figure. She gave Olivia a back hug and said, "I'll be busy for a couple of days too. When things cool down, I'll catch up with you. Take care, okay? It's going to snow soon. Even if no one's keeping you warm, you need to look out for yourself."

"Alright."

After sending Everly, Olivia cleaned the apartment before switching on her phone. To her surprise, she found a missed call from Ethan.

She assumed he had called to discuss the divorce, but unfortunately, she wouldn't have time for that in the next few days.

Aside from Ethan, Chloe also made a lot of calls to her. Olivia called Chloe back, who picked up the call quickly.

She sounded concerned. "Liv, why didn't you pick up my calls? I was worried about you for days. Do you need more money? I'll make a transfer."

Olivia calmed down at the sounds of the ocean waves slapping against the rocks. In the many years after Chloe left, she felt very aggrieved, wondering why she was abandoned. She was in denial when she learned that Chloe was Marina's stepmother.

Of all people, why Marina?

But no amount of pain would change the reality. Olivia was helpless.

She answered, "Mom, I'm fine. Don't worry. Ethan gave me some money. You don't have to think about Dad's hospital bills."

Still, Chloe couldn't shake off the image of Olivia leaving in the rain. "Liv, where are you? I need to see you, and I'd like to make up for the years I wasn't around."

Staring at the blue of the ocean, Olivia replied flatly, “Mom, you wouldn’t have disappeared for years without a call if you had cared about me. And you would have visited Dad when you came back if you still cared.

“It’s my fault for going to the wrong person out of panic. I reached out to you, forgetting that you’ve remarried. I will not repeat this mistake anymore.”

“Liv, I—”

“Mom, let’s stay the way we were before. I’ll take care of Dad. You never had a daughter like me, and I never had a mother like you.”

Rather than blaming Chloe for making her feel ashamed in front of Marina, she was angry at how Chloe went abroad and never kept in touch.

When Olivia was at her worst, Chloe was by Marina’s side, taking care of the daughter of another man. She couldn’t blame Chloe for the decision, but she would never let it slip.

After hanging up, Olivia called her workplace to quit her part-time job. Finally, she texted Ethan, telling him to discuss the divorce another day because she’d be busy.

No matter what the truth was, she and Ethan were over. They’d never remain friends, much less rekindle the relationship.

When she took care of everything, she departed for the hospital. Keith noticed that she came alone. Her shadows were elongated under the sunlight, and that made her look more vulnerable.

He suppressed his feelings and asked her gently, “Are you scared?”

“A little, at first. But I’ll feel reassured if you’re around.”

“Don’t worry. I’m the one who worked on the drugs for your chemo. I’ll try my best to make it effective with the least side effects.”

“Thank you, Keith.”

When she arrived at the inpatient ward, she felt as though she was in a warzone. She had never seen that many patients, who varied in gender and age but shared a similarity—each wore a wig or headwear.

A couple of unbothered middle-aged male patients swung past the corridors with their bald heads. Most rooms were occupied by patients undergoing chemo. Some were weeping, and some stared blankly out of the window.

Olivia knew that she’d join them soon. The light would disappear from her eyes, and she’d lose hope for life as she staggered toward another day.

With Keith’s help, she secured a single room. The young nurse was polite to her. “You’re Ms. Fordham, right? Dr. Rogers told us about you. Please get ready over here. And have your family help you with the hospital admission and make payments at the pharmacy.”

Most patients at the hospital had at least one family member with them. She was the only one who showed up alone, which attracted many sympathetic looks. Those people must have pitied her for battling cancer and going through chemo alone.

She bit her lips and said embarrassedly, “I don’t have a family member with me. Just get me a caregiver.”

“That won’t work. We need a family member to sign off.” The nurse looked troubled. “How about your partner? Any parent or sibling?”

Olivia stood there pitifully like a child whose parents skipped the Parent–Teacher Conference. That was when Keith came forward and announced, “I’m family. I’ll sign her forms.”