

Hera Love & Revenge by Jenny Fox

Chapter 12

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I can't help but cover my mouth to not shout out. I can't believe it. It's really him. My heart just goes insane, beating like a drum and threatening to jump out of my chest. I have to be wrong, why the hell would Rick be in New York?

"Hera?"

I don't react. I'm just completely stunned, in shock. A wave of memories suddenly takes over my mind, driving me insane with melancholy and bitter, stinging feelings I had buried deep before they drowned me. Rick's gotten older by a few years, but there's no way I'd forget the face of the only man I ever loved. On the screen, he looks like any other cop standing perfectly calm in his NYPD uniform. Since when the fuck did he even become a New York City Cop?

"I was about to leave," Abe answers the question I already forgot.

Rick nods, and lets him walk away, while Charles still seems suspicious. My God, those two on the same screen is like a nightmare come true. What the hell is Rick doing at my funeral? Abe walks away, but then, he suddenly darts to the side, to stay behind and witness the scene. The camera goes dark, and we can't see the two men's actions nor faces, but we can hear them just fine.

"...Long time not see."

"Agent Rivera," Charles comments. "That's funny, I don't remember you being part of the NYPD?"

"I moved departments recently."

"New York is quite far from your hometown."

"I had personal interests here."

The shots are being fired and my heart's being cribbled with bullets. Someone amongst the female vampires chuckles, visibly excited by the tension, but I'm not quite the same. It's horrible for me to listen to this, and I'm just glad I can't see it. I want to scream, but instead, I just muffle it behind my palm.

"...My condolences," Charles mutters. "I know you had some feelings for her too."

"I did."

The answer's angry tone clearly means he held more than "some feelings" for me, but Charles pretends not to hear it. He clears his throat.

"I understand you'd want a minute," he calmly says. "After all, you didn't get to... see her again."

He tries to walk away, the brunette's heels right behind him, but before we hear more than three steps, Rick's voice echoes in the church.

"It's strange, isn't it?"

Charles stops.

"...Excuse me?"

"How she was alone, the night of her death?"

"I'm very sorry, Agent Rivera. I was attending a Charity Party on the other side of Manhattan. I should have had someone stay with her, but June barely accepted anyone but me by her side in the... last weeks."

That's not true. I just didn't have anyone else to turn to.

"So you left her on her own, in a hotel room?"

"She chose to stay there herself, she felt safe in the hotel. You can ask her manager, she'd picked it hers-"

"There were lots of blades in that room."

"...Excuse me?"

"There were razors, kitchen knives and many other dangerous things."

"She lived there, agent Rivera. June didn't get out, she needed the things that are used in an actual apartment for her everyday life."

"Your fiancé was diagnosed as being in an extremely depressive state, and you had no issue leaving her alone with all sorts of dangerous objects for several hours?"

A heavy silence follows. We're all eyes riveted on the screen, despite it being completely dark. Wherever Abe hid, there isn't a hint of light, just a crazy good echo.

"...I'm not sure what you're hinting at, Agent Rivera. I recognize I may have underestimated June's state, I didn't think she'd actually go ahead and... commit such an atrocious thing. However, your colleagues from forensics confirmed it was a suicide, as you probably know. I'm not really sure what you're trying to do

here, but I'd suggest you deal with your grief in a better way than accusing me of neglect. I was her fiancé, you were her ex-boyfriend. For you to come into the picture now to accuse me of not caring enough for her is a bit out of line, isn't it?"

Bart lets out a whistle, and Cecily chuckles. I'm not the slightest bit happy about this. We hear steps of people walking out, Charles and that dark-haired woman. From what we hear, Rick stays behind, and the video suddenly stops. I let out the air I've been holding in all this time.

"...Well, that was interesting," says Rebecca, raising her thin eyebrows.

"So you traded Agent Cutie for the stuck-up dude?" Cecily frowns. "Is there something wrong with your eyesight?"

I ignore her, all of them, and stand up, turning around to face Richard and Grace.

"What the fuck was that!" I shout. "Did you really have to put me through this? What was the point?! Show me how little people actually cared about my death? Or to show how stupid I'd been to commit suicide? I get it! I get it, alright? I'm a fucking failure and a selfish bitch!"

"No one called you that, Darling," says Cata, looking genuinely sorry.

"Then what! Why did you have to do this? Even if some people cared about me, it's too fucking late now! I can't just go back, June Starr is dead! She chose to kill herself and she didn't!"

"Hera, stop it."

I look at Richard, furious, crying and even madder that I can't just keep screaming my agonizing feelings out. His ice-blue eyes are just so calm, like a prison forcing me to stay under his control instead of just erupting.

"You didn't choose to kill yourself."

...Did I just mishear that? I glance around, but the other vampires are just about as confused as I am. My emotions at their wits' ends, I nervously laugh, hysteria knocking right behind that already wrecked door.

"What did you just say?" I hear myself asking.

"Your death was not a suicide."

I shake my head. Perhaps Richard's mad, or he didn't understand something.

"Richard, I committed suicide," I mutter. "I did. I'm... grateful, if you're trying to console me, but I remember very precisely what I did. I remember every bit of it, it wasn't a dream. I did it. Me."

"Do you remember your sensations?"

I'm left speechless, again. What is he playing at with this strange question? I hesitate, but glance around, and there's a whole room of vampires waiting for me to answer him as if his question made any sense. I close my mouth for a second, trying to find an answer.

"...Yeah. I remember that... void. That deep, overwhelming sadness that just kept me in that dark place. It... it was like I couldn't laugh or smile ever again. Like I'd never get out of it. I wanted to, but I always just wanted to cry, to disappear. It was like that every day, for weeks. Nothing could make me smile, I just felt completely... void. Like there was a heavy, heavy weight on my heart that just sucked all the happiness and joy away. Like I wasn't in tune with the rest of the world, as if... it could just go on and keep spinning without me."

I try to pretend like I don't know I've got tears running down my cheeks. The mere memory of that... horrible turmoil, the maze of sadness, loneliness and pain trapping me all over again. It's not just my actual death; I remember days and days going by without me seeing anything that could end my torture. The depression kept me stuck in bed, or on the floor, with just no idea what to do with my pathetic self, almost hoping that feeling would magically go away someday, and knowing there was no way it would.

"...That's depression if I know anything about it," mutters Benedict, crossing his arms. "And I do."

"We all do, Bene," sighs Lancelot.

"...What about when you woke up here, in London?"

Richard's question throws me right back into the rollercoaster. I shrug, utterly confused.

"I was fine, I suppose. It was all gone."

"...That doesn't make any sense."

I turn my head to Anna, who's staring at me as if I'm some confusing problem. She tilts her head, and turns to Benedict.

"There's no way, right?"

"What are you talking about?" I ask.

"Depression doesn't magically disappear," Cecily rolls her eyes, as if it was obvious. "You don't just get rid of it within two days, certainly not because you're transformed. Most of us took days, if not weeks, to get over whatever trauma caused our deaths, Baby. You getting up depression-free makes no sense."

...Does it? I turn to Richard, but he's also staring at me, although undecipherable as always.

"But I'm... better," I mutter. "Because my troubles are gone, I guess?"

"Nobody gets better about dying, Baby," says Rebecca. "It just doesn't make sense. Clinical Depression isn't just a state of mind, it's an actual, diagnosticable illness, Hera. Someone diagnosed you, right?"

"Yeah, the Agency sent a psychiatrist, and that's how they... got me out of the upcoming projects."

"Did you have a regular therapist?"

"No, just meds. ...I'm sorry but I still don't get it. Where are we going with this?"

"You had the means to get someone who could have helped you, a therapist or a psychiatrist, and you didn't?"

"Unless you didn't hear my ex-fiancé just now, no, I didn't. I literally saw no one but him and perhaps a couple of staff for weeks, so now, can you tell me what the hell that has to do with my death?"

"Everything."

While I'm still confused, Richard suddenly takes out a piece of paper, and hands it to Rebecca. She raises both eyebrows, but stares at it, quickly reading the lines with her eyebrows slowly tilting from upwards to downwards. I barely saw anything, but it looked like a lot of numbers and words.

"Rebecca, what is this?" Bart asks, glancing over her shoulder and for once, about as confused as I am.

"...One very dirty proof that our Baby didn't commit suicide of her own volition."

It just gets more and more confusing by the minute. While most of us are still confused, she reads out loud.

"There's an interesting mix of Beta-blockers, Corticosteroids, isotretinoin, carbidopa, ropinirole... and opioids."

"Opioids?" I mutter, recognizing only that word. "Like drugs? What is that paper?"

"That's an extract of the blood and tissue analysis Ethan conducted on you," Richard says. "He only highlighted the most... irregular results."

"That's already a fucking lot," scoffs Rebecca. "Richard, I've never seen someone's body this fucked up by an impossible cocktail. This makes the poisons

of my time look like child's play. They even messed with her food. She has vitamin D, Magnesium, Iron and Zinc deficiency."

She grimaces, and passes it over to Benedict, for some reason, while she turns to me, suddenly looking nicer than before.

"Hera, someone's been messing with your food and the drugs you took. All the things that I listed are known to be depression inducers."

"...Depression can be induced?" I utter, shocked.

"Yes," Rebecca nods. "They've only just begun to work it out, but after all, depression is another biochemical reaction of your body, everything can be explained by science. I've been an apothecary, pharmacologist and even a doctor for decades, and I can tell you for certain, someone literally programmed you to be depressed. Did you have any heart conditions, blood pressure issues?"

"Not that I know of?"

"Then why the fuck would you have been prescribed beta-blockers? ...Did you ever get out at all? Get some sunlight?"

"...No, but there were big windows in the hotel room."

"Did you get direct sunlight?"

"N-no, they were facing another building..."

"Hera, humans need vitamin D, which comes from sunlight. Not just to look a bit tanned, but vitamin D is literally a happiness provider. Magnesium, Iron and Zinc are essential too, if you're in deficiency, it can mess you up a bit, but you're missing all of them big time. Plus, they were giving you drugs that are not for depression, but known to have depression as a side effect. It is not that easy to simply get someone to be very depressed. But they did it to you."

She sighs and starts counting on her fingers.

"Baby, you had no support system, no friends or family to talk to. You didn't have any kind of fresh air that would have done you some good, you were locked up in one room all alone. Someone had to be providing you your food and your medicine, and they made sure you got anything but what you actually needed to get better."

I try to calm down, but there's no fucking way. They are all staring at me, some looking angry, others looking sorry for me, and I just don't get it. It can't possibly be, right? I clearly remember what I did, although I wish I didn't. It wasn't just... a nightmare, it was real, every single bit of it. I just don't get what they are trying to tell me, or, more accurately, I don't want to. It feels unreal, and fucking sickening.

"...So she was... Like, drugged?" Asks Bart.

"Yes," nods Rebecca. "In small, subtle doses, but since it had been going on for a long time, it's really bad. Someone was bent on getting you more and more depressed, Hera."

"I knew there was something off," mutters Cata, visibly shocked. "Nobody's ever that sick upon transformation... She was so ill for hours..."

"That was her new body rejecting all the crap," nods Benedict. "Our system gets rid of all the impurities. Usually it's things like alcohol, drugs, tobacco or just junk food, but for Hera, it must have been fighting to cleanse her system of everything that was administered to her for so long."

"Stop it!" I suddenly shout. "Just stop with all... All those conspiracies. There's no way, alright? I... I chose to die. I chose to do this."

"Hera," Rebecca shakes her head. "That's what we are telling you, Baby. No one who got what they fed you would have been responsible for their own acts. You were forced into depression, and if you'd been in your normal state, or at least treated like you should have been, none of this would have happened to you."

"...Rebecca," I mutter. "Do you even... You're saying someone could have coerced me into killing myself?"

"It's not could, Baby. I'm thinking that's exactly what happened. Someone wanted you dead, and they made you sure you'd do the deed yourself."

"...Looks like the ex-boyfriend was onto something," chuckles Cecily.

I glare at her, furious. She takes her smirk right back, but that's not enough. I glare at Rebecca, I glare at all of them behind my tears.

"You're all mad," I mutter. "You're all insane!"

I run out, past Richard and Grace, past Cata's sorry expression, away from all of their gazes. I run to the main door, and jump outside, in the darkness of night, my bare feet on the asphalt. I stop right there, with no idea where to go. Nowhere to go.

I suddenly burst into loud, ugly tears.

It's too violent, it's too much. All those scary vampires that just became my family, the tension, the sight of my funeral, my father's cold heart, my brother's anger, and... And Rick. Rick, who my damaged, broken heart wasn't prepared to see again. And now, this. It's just too fucking much. I need a minute to cry and wash my emotions out, otherwise I'll just explode.

I hear footsteps behind me, but I couldn't care less. I keep crying loudly, ruining my makeup, and I feel two arms gently hugging me from behind, a thumb rubbing against my shoulder.

"I'm sorry," mutters Bart. "I'm so sorry, Baby Vamp."