

Chapter 65 - Interrogation

Jane

Explaining death to four years olds is almost as difficult as watching Ethan muddle through the next few days in a complete fog, appearing more like a zombie than the man I know so well. Every time I tell the pups that Petra is gone and won't be coming back, the message only seems to sink in for a few hours. Soon enough they're asking me when they're going to see Petra again, and I have to try to explain the concept of permanence to four precious beings who simply cannot understand it.

Still, watching Ethan is harder. We got through all the planning and preparations for a massive state funeral with great exhaustion and stress, but little emotion on his part. I keep waiting for him to break, to come out of shock and grieve the way he needs to so desperately. It hasn't happened yet, and I merely pray that he will find the spark he needs before the funeral is over this afternoon.

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planning and preparations for a massive state funeral with great exhaustion and stress, but little emotion on his part. I keep waiting for him to break, to come out of shock and grieve the way he needs to so desperately. It hasn't happened yet, and I merely pray that he will find the spark he needs before the funeral is over this afternoon.

Most of the day is a series of overly formal ceremonies and traditions, and I'm simply proud that the pups get through hours of being on their feet in stuffy clothing without a tantrum. It's not until we're traveling from the graveyard to the memorial service that they finally reach a breaking point, and I call in Linda for some emergency babysitting. I plan on staying with Ethan until the last mourner leaves the service, but I'm on my way back from handing the kids over to my friend when the investigator from the crime scene intercepts me.

It's the same man who was at the hospital after the attack on Paisley, and I greet him as warmly as I can, assuming he's here to wish the family his condolences. "Ms. Carrington, can I speak to you for a moment?" He asks, pulling me aside.

"Of course." I agree, "do you need me to make another statement?"

"Actually I have some questions for you." He answers,

more gruffly than I would have expected. "Can you do me a favor and refresh me on what your relationship is with the Alpha?"

Something inside me tells me that this isn't just another interview, and suddenly I'm painfully aware that I did commit a few very real crimes when I faked my death and forged a new identity for myself. "Well," I say, taking a deep breath. "We used to be in a relationship and now share our pups. I'm living with him for the next few months as part of a... I guess you could call it a custody arrangement."

"And Elise Carrington is your legal name?" The detective presses, "because forgive me for saying so, but you bear a striking resemblance to the Alpha's ex-wife - his deceased ex-wife."

Staring at the investigator long and hard, I decide to simply face this head on. "Look, how much trouble am I in here? Ethan and I split on very unfortunate terms and I did what I felt was necessary to protect myself."

"I'm a homicide investigator." He answers simply, pulling out a notebook and pen. "I don't care about forged papers and misdemeanors, what I do care about is whether or not you had a motive to kill Mrs. Blackwell."

"Excuse me?" I gape. "I... are you saying I'm a suspect?"

"Well, you were the last one to see her alive -"

"Actually I think you'll find her killer was the last one to see her alive." I correct him.

"The last person whom we are aware of, who saw her alive." He amended, "and you found her body and called in the crime."

"Which I would not have done if I was guilty of it." I grit out.

"But you do have a history of aggression towards the deceased, do you not?" He presses. "Mrs. Blackwell and Eve Mechante filed assault charges against Jane Blackwell – and that is you, is it not?"

"That was more than 6 years ago, and those charges were dropped." I remind him.

"I understand that, ma'am." He concedes, "but it stands to a history of conflict with the victim. Can you please recount what happened on that occasion for me?"

"You know I'm starting to think I need to have a lawyer for this conversation." I state tightly, already wondering if it's bad form to call in two favors to Linda in one day.

"Why, do you have something to hide?" The investigator questions, eyeing me very sharply now.

"No, but I do have the right to protect myself from investigative negligence." I snap. "Why have to zeroed in on me for this? Ethan told you last night that Eve was the one responsible for this."

"Look Ms. Blackwell, Ms. Carrington – whatever name you won't to go by today, it's my job to explore all possibilities here. Now like it or not, this is the way it is: the moment your lawyer comes in here, I cease being able to help you. As long as it's just you and me talking, you can give me the information I need to eliminate you as a suspect, but I guarantee your lawyer's going to shut down our conversation like that." He shares, snapping his fingers.

"So I'm just going to tell you how it looks from my end." The increasingly infuriating detective continues. "I've got a woman with a known history of violence towards the deceased. You broke the law to get away from the Blackwell family and are now in some sort of custody battle with the victim's son. We've got Mrs. Blackwell's blood all over your clothes, which we found in a trash bag in the building's trash chute late last night, in addition to the fact that you "found the body." And all this is happening while you have a very convenient scapegoat on the loose, with whom you also have a negative history, but who never had any conflicts with the victim."

"What was that about my clothes?" I repeat, struggling to wrap my brain around this detail.

"Oh yes, we found the dress you were wearing last night,

covered in blood, in the trash chute." He announces, offering me a toothy grin.

"What makes you think it's my dress?" I demand.

"Because it has your name stitched into the dry cleaning tag." He explains.

I don't wait for any more information. "This interview is over. If you want to speak to me again, my lawyer is going to be present."

"That's fine Ms. Blackwell." He smirks, "by all means, let's do this the hard way."

Storming back into the funeral home, my head begins to spin. It doesn't take an idiot to see that Eve could have pulled any one of my dresses from my closet to plant this so-called evidence, but suddenly it's becoming a lot clearer what her motive for killing Petra was: the bitch wants to pin it on me so that I'll be out of the way and she can have Ethan for herself.

I charge back inside to look for Ethan and tell him what just happened, but when I get to the main parlor, I don't see him anywhere. I follow his scent into the back of the house, and when I catch sight of him, I realize I can't put this on his shoulders too – at least not now.

He's seated alone on a bench just outside the back door, slumped over with his head in his hands. Approaching warily, I rest a hand on his shoulder, "Ethan?"

He looks up at me with tears streaming down his rugged cheeks, "She's gone." He growls, "She's really gone."

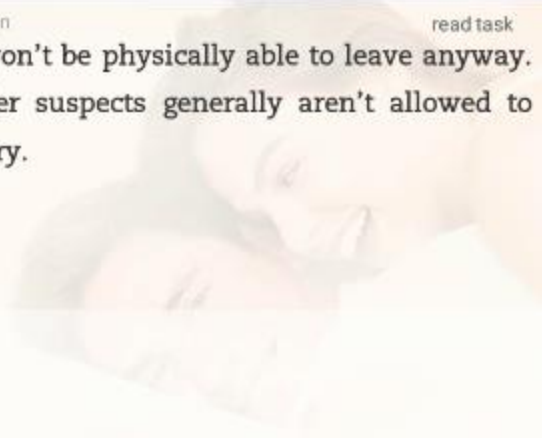
Without thinking about it for a moment, I move between his legs and wrap my arms around his burly shoulders, letting him press his face into my breast as his powerful arms come around my body. "I know." I croon, feeling my own emotions welling up in concert with him. "I know, I'm so sorry."


The only time I've seen Ethan shed a tear was the night of Paisleys's surgery, but he spent most of that night comforting me. It wasn't like this. He didn't even cry at his father's funeral. He's always been so stoic and unshakable, like a mountain. But now he's sobbing into my dress, and I feel helpless to take away his pain. I can only hold him as he pours out his anguish.

And to think, a few nights ago I was telling Eric we needed things to calm down. It seems like every day I stay in this city sends my family spiraling closer to disaster, but I can't possibly cut the trip short now. Ethan shouldn't have to bear this tragedy alone. Whatever happened between us in the past – or even between Petra and I – losing your mother is one of the hardest times in anyone's life. I may not be able to be his wife again, but I can be a friend.

Besides, the way things are going right now, there's a

good chance I won't be physically able to leave anyway.
After all, murder suspects generally aren't allowed to
leave the territory.



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