



J.D.
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WONDERMENT
IN DEATH

EXCLUSIVE SHORT STORY

WONDERMENT IN DEATH

J. D. ROBB



I shall not commit the fashionable stupidity
of regarding everything I cannot explain
as a fraud.

CARL JUNG

We're all mad here.

LEWIS CARROLL

CHAPTER ONE



The dead were his business.

Over the years, he'd built a tidy fortune—though it was never enough, never quite *enough*—exploiting the dead and those who loved them.

He loved his work, reveled in it, and all the bright and shiny things his efforts amassed. But over and above the profit, or at least running through the dollars and euros and pounds, was sheer glee.

A man who didn't laugh himself sick seven times a day didn't know how to live.

One of his greatest amusements—and in truth he had so many—but one of his greatest was when the time came around to turn the living into the dead.

That time had come around for Darlene Fitzwilliams, she of the ebony hair and haunted blue eyes. Such a pretty creature. He'd thought so on their first acquaintance, and had thought the same a number of times over the past five months.

He might have kept her longer, as he did love pretty things, but she had committed the greatest sin.

She'd begun to bore him.

She sat now in the cluttered, colorful parlor of his cluttered, colorful house, as she had once every week for four and a half months. She called him Doctor Bright, one of his many names and as false as all the rest.

"Doctor Bright," she said after sipping the tea he always provided, "I had a terrible argument with my brother this afternoon. It was my fault—I missed an important appointment with the lawyers regarding

the estate. I just forgot. I was distracted, knowing I'd be coming here, and I forgot. Marcus was so upset and impatient with me. He doesn't understand, Doctor Bright. If I could just explain . . ."

Bright lifted his dark, dramatic eyebrows. "What did your father say, dear?"

"He said it wasn't time." She leaned forward, all that hope and faith (and how tedious that had become) glowing on her face. "I'm so anxious to talk to him and Mama again."

"And you will, of course."

He sipped his tea, smiled at her. "Drink your tea. It will help open you to communications."

She obeyed, biddable, boring girl.

"It's hard not to tell him. And Henry."

The tea made her talkative, a little giddy. The effects had amused him initially. Now he saw her as an excitable little mouse, scurrying everywhere at once. And he wanted to whack her with a hammer.

"I'm going to meet Henry tonight," she continued. "He wants to set the date, and that's something else I want to talk to Mama and Daddy about. They were so pleased when Henry and I got engaged. And then . . ."

"Transitions, a journey." He played his fingers in the air as he spoke, watched her watch them dance. "Nothing more."

"Yes, I know that now. It's just . . . I want to share this with Marcus, and with Henry."

"But you haven't."

"No. I promised you, and my father. You said I'd know when it was time, and I feel it is. I hate not being honest with the people I love, even for people I love. If Henry and I set the date tonight—that's a kind of journey, too, isn't it? Marriage."

"And do you feel ready for that journey?"

"I do. Coming here, all I've learned, it's shown me there aren't any ends, just other paths. Before I came to you, everything seemed so dark, so final. And now . . ."

She beamed at him, her eyes wide and bright, and just going glassy. "I can never repay you for all you've given me."

"It's my gift to give. Regrettably, at a price."

“Oh, of course.” She laughed—giddy, yes giddy, primed by his tea party. Opening her bag, she took out a thick red envelope.

Always red for Ms. Fitzwilliams, with cash (he only took cash) in the amount of nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine dollars sealed inside. He’d told her red protected the offering, and nine was a number of power.

In truth red was his current favorite color (though it was about to be supplanted by purple), and he found all those nines amusing.

Darlene set it, as she’d been instructed, on the silver tray on the tea table.

“And the tokens?” he prompted. He wouldn’t touch or count the money. The lovely Ms. March would see to all that. But when the biddable girl took two red pouches from her bag, Bright’s fingers itched.

These he took, these he touched, these he stroked.

The desk clock was old, heavy crystal, small enough to fit in the palm of his hand. Its monetary value Bright estimated in the low thousands, but it was worth so much more to him.

He could feel Gareth Fitzwilliams’s energy shimmering on it, and his father’s before him, and yes, even generations back. So many hands touching, so many eyes marking time.

He opened the second pouch, took out the slim, antique ladies’ watch. A tiny diamond butterfly perched above the twelve, and pretty diamond chips circled the face.

Yes, Bria Fitzwilliams had worn it often, choosing it in lieu of more stylish and practical wrist units, clasping it on thinking of her own mother, her mother’s mother, and back five generations.

Time marked again, birth to death, death to birth and round and round.

“You chose well.”

“They’re favorites.”

“Strong energy. Strong connections. Are you ready?”

He slipped each pouch in a pocket so he could take her hand, lead her from the room. He could feel the vibrations—excitement, fear? Wasn’t it all too delicious?

He led her up stairs he liked for their zigzagging climb, down a corridor he enjoyed as the paint and wainscoting he'd designed gave it the illusion of a slant.

The girl weaved like a drunk, so he had to stifle a quick giggle.

He took her into what he called the Passage Room, where lights glowed blue. She took her seat—a good girl—in the high-backed armchair on the raised platform. The height would keep their eyes level, an essential element to what came next.

“Breathe deep,” he told her as a blue mist swirled around the chair. “Slow and deep. Hear my voice.”

Behind him a white spiral formed on the wall, began to spin. Lights flashed, strobing colors.

“Open your mind.”

A hat seemed to float down, to settle on Darlene's head, its long, red feathers swaying. For a moment it banded tight around her skull, caused discomfort, then that eased, and colors washed the room. She smelled flowers, and her mother's perfume.

“Mama.”

“A moment more.” Pleased with her quick response, he stepped over to a cupboard, opened it, and chose a hat for himself out of the dozens stored there.

A top hat in bold red, for young Ms. Fitzwilliams.

“Into my eyes, into my voice. Follow both to the threshold.”

Her eyes were glass, pinned to his. Helpless, he thought, and this time he did giggle.

He slipped into her mind—so easy now, like sliding on ice—and saw as she saw.

A sun-drenched meadow under perfect blue skies. Birds twittered; a warm breeze fluttered the flowers spread everywhere over the ground.

There, under a tall tree spreading dappled shade on a pretty slope, stood Gareth and Bria Fitzwilliams. Young, smiling, he handsome in his white suit, she lovely in her flowing white dress.

With a happy cry, Darlene ran to her dead parents and embraced them.

Touching, Bright thought, so very touching. He dabbed a mock tear from the corner of his eye and gave her nearly twenty minutes to walk in the meadow.

It was never enough, of course, and she was protesting, reaching out, when the blue mist swirled over the flowers. But it was all he could spare her this time—this last time.

He gave her instructions, made her repeat them twice before he removed her hat, and his own. He led her downstairs where the inestimable Ms. March had her coat and bag—and what was now inside it—waiting.

He helped her on with her coat himself, checked to be sure the recorder was properly affixed. After all his time and effort, he deserved to join the farewell party.

“Once you’re in the car, driving away, you won’t remember me or this house or anything we’ve talked about. You’ll remember your parents, of course, and all you spoke of with them.” He kissed her hand, gallantly. “It’s been a pleasure, my dear.”

“Thank you, Doctor.”

“And where are you going now?”

“To see my brother. We argued. I need to tell him everything and give him a gift.”

“That’s excellent. Good-bye, Ms. Fitzwilliams.”

“Good-bye, Doctor Bright.”

She walked out and to the curb, where his own driver held open the door of his town car. He waved her cheerily off, stepped back, shut the door.

And laughing like a loon, did a jig around the foyer.

“Oh, was that too, too precious?”

He grabbed March’s hands, and kicking off her practical black heels, she joined him in the dance. Giggling with him, she pulled the pins out of her sensible bun so her long, brown hair tumbled and swirled.

“It’s party time, Bright!”

“It’s always party time, March!”

They clutched each other, swaying as they caught their breath. “A surprise party,” he said, “and we mustn’t be late. To the theater,

March, and don't spare the popcorn!"

They raced off together to watch the show.

In the car, Darlene felt energized, almost euphoric. The lights of the city glittered like ice. She was warm, almost too warm, in the car, and reached for the tall, slim glass of clear liquid marked *Drink Me*.

Cool and light on the tongue, it made her smile.

She was going to see Marcus. They'd argued earlier, she could hardly remember why. But the why didn't matter. They would make up, and she'd tell him about the dreams she'd been having. Dreams of their parents, and how they'd helped her accept their sudden, tragic deaths.

They were together, away from all pain, all worry, all sorrow.

She felt the same, right at that moment. She should contact Henry, tell him she'd bring Marcus with her. They'd set the date for the wedding.

But when she started to reach for her 'link, a pain shot up her arm.

Because she wasn't supposed to do that, she remembered. She wasn't supposed to talk to Henry yet. Marcus. She was supposed to see Marcus.

She didn't complain when the car pulled over a block from Marcus's building, but got out, began to walk. The frigid January wind whistled around her ears. It was almost like voices.

A new year, she reminded herself as headlights beamed into her eyes. The year she'd marry Henry Boyle: 2061.

Her parents had died in June of 2060. She wanted them at her wedding. She'd dream them there, she decided. She'd explain it all to Henry—no, Marcus; Marcus first. And they'd all be happy again.

"Evening, Miss Fitzwilliams."

She stared at the doorman. He wore a big red heart over his chest and was gobbling what seemed to be a cherry tart.

Then she blinked, and it was just Philip the night doorman in his thick navy coat.

"You okay, miss?"

"Yes, yes. Sorry. My mind went somewhere. I'm going up to see my brother."

He opened the door for her and, God, the lobby looked so long, so narrow, so bright. “Is he alone?”

“As far as I know. He came in a couple hours ago. Want me to call up for you?”

“Oh, that’s all right.” The elevator doors looked so shiny. She could see worlds reflected in them. She stepped in, had to think very hard to remember. “Fifty-two east.”

The ride up made her feel a little drunk. She needed something to eat, she decided. Had she had dinner? Odd that she couldn’t remember.

A couple got in as she got out, called her by name.

“Oh hello.” She smiled at them, the man with the grinning cat’s face and the woman wearing a crown. “I’m going to see Marcus. I have something for him.”

She rang the bell on her brother’s door, waited with a smile until he opened it.

“I wasn’t expecting to see you.”

“I know.” Just as she knew he was still angry with her. She held out a hand for his. “I’m so sorry, Marcus.”

He sighed, shook his head. Closed the door behind her. “I miss them, too, Darli, and we owe it to them to make sure everything’s done right, for the estate, for the business, for the rest of the family.”

“I know.”

“You can’t keep closing in, shutting down.”

“I know. I know. It’s been so hard, Marcus, losing them the way we did, and I haven’t handled it well. I haven’t done my share.”

“It’s not about the work,” he began, then his eyes narrowed on her face. “Have you been drinking?”

“What? No!” She laughed. “Just tea, lots of tea, and I’ve got so much to tell you. I needed to talk to them first.”

“To who?”

“Mama and Daddy, of course.”

“Darlene.”

“I needed to *know* they’re all right. In a better place. I can see them there, and it’s beautiful. It’s Wonderland!”

“Okay.” He set a hand on her shoulder. “Okay.”

“I brought you something, like a peace offering.”

“Fine. Take off your coat, let’s sit down. We need to talk.”

“In a minute,” she muttered. She opened her bag, stared at the red scarf. Her fingers floated over it, through it, and down to the bright red rose beneath.

“For you,” she said and pushed it at him. In him.

He looked at her so strangely, but then he wasn’t the sort of man who expected a flower. Delighted, she pulled it back, pushed it at him again.

And again, until he sprawled in the meadow covered with red roses.

“I’ll get Mama and Daddy now, so you can talk to them. Sit right there!” She raced across the meadow, pushed past long, flowering vines that barred the view. And climbed to the top of the hill.

She saw her parents dancing by a silver lake and, laughing, flew toward them.

And flying, never felt the fall.

CHAPTER TWO



Instead of enjoying a rare night off sprawled out with her ridiculously sexy husband watching a vid where lots of stuff blew up, Eve Dallas stood over death.

She'd pulled rank—a favor for a friend—to take primary on what, on the surface, struck as a murder/suicide. Sibling rivalry taken to extremes.

The friend was currently in the kitchen area of the crime scene—the swank Upper East Side penthouse of the late Marcus Elliot Fitzwilliams—with her own pretty sexy husband. And the uniformed cop who kept them in place.

Eve studied the silver shears deeply embedded in the victim's chest. Cause of death might have been apparent, but she opened her field kit, crouched to do her job.

“Visual identification of Fitzwilliams, Marcus, confirmed with print match on scene. Victim is thirty-six, single Caucasian male, owner and only listed resident of this unit. Employed CEO and president of Fitzwilliams Worldwide.”

She took out microgoggles, lifted one of the victim's hands with her own sealed ones. “No visible defensive wounds, no signs of struggle. COD, three puncture wounds to the chest. ME to confirm.”

Bled out right here, she thought.

“An attempt to resuscitate the victim resulted in some compromising of the scene.”

Rising, she crossed over to the open terrace door, studied the bloody palm print on the glass. Running it, she ID'd the victim's sister. Who was even now splatted on the sidewalk below.

Eve stepped out into the cold, looked down to the street, the police barricades, the crowd lined up behind them.

The icy wind dragged at her short, choppy brown hair, had her sticking her hands in the pockets of her long leather coat to warm them.

“Long drop,” she muttered.

And since she’d gotten a report from the first-on-scene, she knew Darlene Fitzwilliams had taken that long drop less than ten minutes after the doorman had let her into the building.

She’d talk to the doorman herself, but for now . . .

She wandered back inside. “She comes in. Not much time for an argument or to get heated up. Plus, who carries a pair of scissors that size in a handbag? Stabs the brother in the heart, three times, walks over, goes outside, jumps.”

Eve scanned the room.

Rich, tasteful, with some humorous touches, like the pencil sketch of a frog wearing a crown.

She’d have her partner do a solid run on both of the dead, and the family business, when Peabody got there. But for now, she’d get a sense of things from Doctor Louise Dimatto and Charles Monroe.

The kitchen—a lot of steel and glass—flowed into a lounge area—lots of leather and wood. Charles and Louise sat hip-to-hip on a long, low sofa the color of fog. He had his arm around her shoulders; she had her head tipped toward him.

She’d changed her hair, Eve noted, wearing the gentle blond in a straight, chin-length deal, sharply angled.

And she’d been crying, which made Eve uneasy.

While Louise looked delicate, Eve knew her to be tough as they came, strong enough to defy her wealthy, conservative family and start her own clinic, run a mobile medical that serviced some of the diciest areas in the city.

But now she was pale and puffy-eyed, and fresh blood stained her elegant blue sweater.

Her eyes, nearly the same color as the sofa, met Eve’s.

“Dallas. I couldn’t save him. Marcus. I couldn’t save him.”

Eve nodded to the uniform standing by to dismiss her, then, nudging a shallow bowl of wooden balls aside, sat on the table to face her friend.

“I’m sorry. You knew Marcus Fitzwilliams.”

“We’ve known each other since we were kids. We even dated awhile. Our families . . . There was some hope we’d make a match of it, but we didn’t suit that way. We’ve been friends for most of our lives. You met him—Marcus and Darlene and their parents—you met them at the wedding.”

“Okay.” Eve had a vague recollection of the man she’d just examined dancing with Louise, lifting her off her feet with a laugh, spinning her around.

“It was only a few weeks later—we were just back from our honeymoon, Charles and I—when Gareth and Bria, Marcus’s parents, were killed.”

“How?”

“It was an accident.” Charles spoke now, using his free hand to grip Louise’s. “Rain-slick road, a semi lost control, overturned. Eight people were killed, the Fitzwilliams among them.”

“They were so close,” Louise murmured. “It crushed Marcus and Darlene.”

“Take me through tonight.”

“We were coming over, just for drinks. To catch up. We’ve all been so busy, and we wanted to catch up with each other.” She closed her eyes. “And he wanted to talk to me about Darlene—as a doctor.”

“Why?”

“He was worried about her. She wasn’t coping well. She’d closed off from friends—I can’t count the times she’s put me off in the last few months. There’s considerable to deal with, the business, the estate, but Marcus told me she was dragging her heels at every turn. She’s engaged—a great guy—but she’d been drawing back from Henry, too. She’d been secretive. Darlene’s always been so open—naively so, really—but that changed.”

“And that caused friction between them, between the siblings?”

“Some, yes. But not—” Louise shook her head, took a steadying breath. “They loved each other, Dallas, they’re friends as well as

family. Darlene was going through a difficult period. They argued. Marcus told me they had a shouting match just today when—”

“Today?”

“She missed an appointment, regarding the estate. And not for the first time. An estate is complex and broad-based and takes a lot of time and work to handle. Marcus felt, and I agree, that settling it, closing it, was important for Darlene. It would help her reach some sort of closure. But she put up a lot of roadblocks. She’d say . . .”

“She’d say what?”

“She’d say she needed to talk to her parents before she signed off on anything.”

“Her dead parents.” Sitting back a little, Eve laid her hands on her thighs. “Was she using?”

Louise sighed. “I’ve never known her to, and I’ve known her most of her life. Henry—her fiancé—told me she was using some sleep aids. Herbal-based, nothing heavy.”

The scene, Eve thought, and the players in it read loud and clear. “She argued with her brother today, came here tonight. You were coming over. As far as you know she wasn’t expected.”

“She wasn’t. She was supposed to meet Henry for dinner, about eight. I hate how this sounds, but he was going to contact me, let me know her mood. We thought a kind of intervention. If it seemed right, Henry would bring her over here, and we’d talk to her together. All of us who loved her.”

“Henry Boyle. Where is he now?”

“You said I couldn’t contact anyone, so . . .” Tears rose up in Louise’s eyes again. “He must be waiting for her. He doesn’t know she’s—I know how it looks.” Some of that toughness came through as Louise leaned forward, gripped Eve’s hands. “I know it looks as if Darlene came here and killed Marcus, then herself. It’s not how it looks. I *knew* them, Dallas. There’s something else here.”

“What time did you get here?”

“About . . . eight fifteen, eight twenty?” She looked at Charles for confirmation.

“Yes, close to that. When our cab pulled up there was already a crowd, people shouting. The doorman told us it had just happened.

Just minutes before. He was pretty shaken up, told us he'd just spoken with her about ten minutes earlier, and she'd gone up to see Marcus."

"There was nothing I could do for her." Louise drew in a breath. "Nothing I could do."

"We ran in," Charles continued, "both of us thinking of Marcus. Security let us up—they know us, came with us. Marcus didn't answer, so they bypassed."

"He was on the floor. I tried to—Maybe if I'd had my medical bag."

"Louise." Charles pressed his lips to her hair.

Turning into him, she squeezed her eyes shut. "No, I couldn't have brought him back. He was gone, but I had to try." She looked down at the blood on her sweater. "He was family to me. They were family."

"We contacted you," Charles said. "Right away. We didn't touch anything but . . . but Marcus, and contacted you."

"Was Marcus involved with anyone?"

"No, not right now. For the last several months, he's been focused on the family business, the estate, the Fitzwilliams Foundation."

"Who gets the money now?"

"I don't know." Because her voice was thick, Louise cleared her throat. "There are aunts, uncles, cousins. Many of them are involved in the business, the foundation."

"Do you know who I'd talk to about that?"

"Ah, probably Gia Gregg—the family attorney. My family's, too. She'd know."

"Enemies?"

Louise shook her head. "I can give you a list of friends, family. I don't know enemies—though I'm sure he had a few. He was a tough and exacting businessman. He'd been groomed to run the family empire, and he didn't suffer fools. Someone set this up, Dallas. Someone set this up to make it look as if Darlene killed him, then herself. I'm telling you, that's impossible."

Eve pushed to her feet. "Make me a list. Friends, exes, family, coworkers. Anyone you can think of, and their connection to both Marcus and Darlene. I'm going to have you taken home."

“Home? But—”

“There’s nothing you can do here.” Harsh as it was, it was true. “You called me for a reason, now trust me to take care of your friends.”

“I do.” Clinging to Charles’s hand, Louise rose. “I trust you’ll find out who’s responsible for what happened here. You need to trust me. What you see here is a cover.”

She rode down with them, arranged for a black-and-white to drive them home.

Then she ducked under the barricade. As she approached the body, Peabody pushed her way through the crowd of gawkers.

“Sorry, Dallas. Twenty-minute delay on the subway.” Peabody pulled her pink and green hat—with bounding pom-pom—farther over her dark flip of hair as she studied what was left of Darlene Fitzwilliams. “Wow. Long drop.”

“Fifty-second floor.”

“Really long.”

“I gave her a cursory look when I came on scene, so I’ll finish her. I’ve already done the one upstairs—her brother. Multiple stab wounds, heart area. Big pair of scissors. Talk to the doorman again, see if he wavers in his statement. He says he talked to the sister here, let her go up to see her brother. Some ten minutes later, she came down, the hard way. Security—along with Charles and Louise —”

Peabody’s head swiveled back. “Charles and Louise?”

“They were coming to visit the brother—old family friends of Louise’s. He was dead when they went in.”

“Oh man.” Peabody’s dark eyes reflected sympathy. “Are they still here?”

“I just sent them home. This one has a fiancé I need to contact who’s apparently waiting for her. She’s going to be really late for dinner.”

“I’ll say.” Peabody tipped her head back, looked up. “Murder/suicide.”

“It sure as hell looks like it. Louise gauges that as impossible. Talk to the doorman, any other wits you can find. We treat it as

undetermined until otherwise.”

Opening her field kit, she knelt beside the shattered body, and put aside what it sure as hell looked like.

CHAPTER THREE



Eve officially identified the body, determined time of death—within two minutes of the first victim. Cause of death was brutally apparent, but the ME would determine if there were other injuries, injuries incurred before flesh and bone met concrete.

No sign of struggle, no break-in, she thought. If the doorman stuck to his story, he'd opened the door for Marcus approximately two hours before his death.

No one except the sister had come calling.

The apartment security showed only the sister at the door, only she going inside.

Sitting back on her heels, Eve played it through.

Sister, depressed, unable to cope with parents' sudden death, friction with brother. Arguments, including one that day. Suffers a breakdown, goes to brother's apartment, stabs him, crosses over to the terrace doors—leaving a bloody handprint—walks out, climbs up, jumps off.

She could see it, just that clearly. And she could hear Louise's voice telling her it wasn't possible.

"Okay, Louise."

Who else had motive? A lot of money and power at stake. The murder weapon. Determine if the scissors belonged to the sister, the brother, or who else. Tox report. Maybe, despite Louise's belief, the sister leaned on illegals to get her through.

Who else had access to the penthouse?

"Bag her," she ordered the waiting morgue attendants, and started to rise when she saw something in a pool of blood.

“Hold it.” She pulled out tweezers and lifted bits of shattered plastic, and what she recognized as a mini lens, in pieces.

Just why would Darlene Fitzwilliams have worn a recorder? Eve wondered as she sealed the bloody pieces into evidence.

Sealed bag in hand, she pushed to her feet. “Tag her for Morris—flag tox as priority. Same with the one inside.”

Peabody jogged back to her. “The doorman’s solid on it. He did say she looked a little off—distracted. And I talked to this couple who got in the elevator on fifty-two as she got out. They live on that floor, know both the DBs. They said she looked right through them even when they spoke to her. Like she was in a trance.”

“She was wearing a mini recorder.” Eve held up the evidence bag.

“It didn’t handle the fall any better than she did. Why would she have been wearing one?”

“Good question. When did the wits see her?”

“They passed just a few minutes before she came down—without the elevator. They ended up walking about a block when the woman remembered she’d forgotten the little gift she’d gotten for the friends they were meeting. So they backtracked. They hit the lobby about the same time she hit the pavement.”

“I’ve flagged her tox, given that a push. Have the Electronic Detection Division go over all the electronics, including security. Let’s take another pass upstairs, and I want another look at his feed, her at the door.”

As they started toward the lobby, Eve turned in the direction of shouting, saw a man struggling against the two uniforms who held him back.

After passing the evidence bag to Peabody, Eve crossed over to the barricade. “What’s the problem?”

“Lieutenant, this guy—”

“Darlene! Let me through, goddamn it, I need to see Darlene. The media flash said—Darli!”

“Who are you?”

He stopped fighting long enough to catch his wind, but his eyes remained wild. “I’m Henry Boyle. I’m Darlene Fitzwilliams’s fiancé. Let me through.”

“Mr. Boyle, I’m Lieutenant Dallas. You need to calm down and come with me.”

“I want to see Darlene.”

Eve nodded to the uniforms, who let Henry through the barricade.

“I want to know what’s going on. I need to—” He stopped dead, every ounce of color leaching from his face as he saw the body bag being lifted into the back of the dead wagon. “Who is that? What’s happening?”

Eve took a firm grip on his arm, pulled him toward the lobby doors and inside. She took him to the far side, ordered him to sit.

“Go up, get started,” she told Peabody. “I’ll take him. When the sweepers get here, make sure they take that recorder, get it to the lab.”

“Are you sure you want him? He’s going to break.”

“Yeah. I got it.” She dragged over another chair, sat facing Henry Boyle.

He already knew. He was clinging to the slippery thread of denial, Eve thought, but he already knew. She cut the thread, fast.

“Mr. Boyle, I’m sorry to tell you that Darlene and Marcus Fitzwilliams are dead.”

“That’s not possible. I’m meeting Darlene for dinner. She’s running late, and the media flash said . . .”

He looked toward the doors, the lights, the barricades, the body bag.

“Oh God.” He started to lurch up. “Darlene.”

“Sit.” Eve pulled him down again.

“The media flash said murder/suicide. That’s insane. That’s absolutely insane.”

Goddamn leaks, Eve thought. “We haven’t determined murder or suicide. Where were you between eight and eight thirty?”

“What? I don’t know. What time is it?” He looked at his wrist unit, and started to shake. “In the restaurant. In KiKi’s—it’s on Third. She was late, she didn’t answer her ’link. Marcus didn’t answer his. Darlene . . .”

“When did you last speak to her?”

“This morning, before I left for work. We live together. We’re getting married. We haven’t set the date, but . . .”

Tears rolled. Eve thought his eyes were still too shocked to realize they wept, so the tears just spilled down his cheeks.

“How would you describe her mood?”

“She’s been struggling—her parents’ death. But she seemed a little steadier this morning. But we talked later, on the ’link, and she was upset. She and Marcus had an argument. She hadn’t gone to the lawyer’s office for the estate meeting. She’d promised him she’d be there, and she hadn’t gone. Papers needed to be signed, so Marcus was frustrated. I spoke with him, too. Mediating, I guess. They’d never hurt each other, not this way.”

He began to rock now, then just dropped his head in his hands and wept.

Eve rose, ordered a uniform to find coffee somewhere, and gave Henry time to compose himself.

And did her best to block his view when they brought the body bag down from the fifty-second floor.

The doorman came up with a go-cup from the staff break room.

Henry cupped his trembling hands around it. “I can’t understand. I keep thinking, no, this isn’t real. I kissed her good-bye this morning. She’s been distant and distracted for a while now, but she kissed me back. She held on to me, and told me she loved me. Just this morning.”

“Was she taking any drugs? Any medication? Any illegals?”

“She used some sleep aid—a natural herbal blend. And she’d taken an antidepressant for a while, right after her parents died, but she threw it away last summer. She didn’t like how it made her feel. I’ve known her for five years, and lived with her for two now. She doesn’t do illegals.”

He drank some of the coffee, set it aside. “I know who you are. I mean, we’ve met. At Charles and Louise’s wedding. You had their wedding at your estate.”

“Yeah, I remember.”

“I work for Roarke.”

That she didn’t remember—or hadn’t known. “As what?”

“Architectural engineer, rehabilitation specialist. New York branch. Lieutenant Dallas, what they’re saying on the media reports, it’s not true. Darlene and Marcus fought like any brother and sister, but they loved each other. And Darlene, she’s gentle. She’s gentle and loving and compassionate. Someone did this to them. You have to find out who did this to them.”

“Working on it. Did she use a lapel recorder?”

“What? No. She didn’t have one. Why?”

“Just details.” Puzzling ones, Eve thought. “Is there someone you’d like me to contact for you?”

“The two people who mean the most to me in the world are gone.”

“Louise?” Eve suggested.

“I—Yes.” He swiped at his eyes. “Do they know? I should talk to them. I should—”

“They know.” Rising again, Eve contacted Louise, got the go-ahead. “I’m going to have you taken downtown, to Louise. She’d like you to stay with them tonight.”

“She loved them, too.”

“Who didn’t?”

He shook his head. “Marcus ran a tight ship, from what I know, and people who have a great deal of money can inspire envy or contempt. But I don’t know anyone who disliked either of them enough to hurt them.”

“Who’ll be running the tight ship now?”

“I’m not sure. I’d guess their uncle—Gareth’s younger brother, Sean. He and his wife—second wife—are based mostly in Europe. He runs their resort business over there. I don’t know that much about it. Darlene’s primarily involved in the foundation work. Marcus handled the reins of the businesses.”

“All right. I need to go through her things.”

He stared, blankly, with red-rimmed eyes. “Her things?”

“You said you lived together. I need to have access to your residence and go through her things. Your electronics.”

“We’re on First Avenue. I can take you.”

“I can get there. Your permission makes it smoother.”

“Whatever you need to do. I can give you my key swipe, my access codes.”

“I have a master. If you think of anything else, let me know. Louise knows how to contact me.”

“When can I see her? Please. When can I see Darlene?”

“I’ll let you know.”

“I kissed her good-bye this morning. I didn’t know it was going to be the last time.” He slid his hands into his pockets, drew out a pair of dark gray ladies’ gloves. “Darlene’s. She left them on the table by the door this morning. I saw them when I got home tonight to change for dinner. She’s always doing that. I put them in my pocket for her. It’s cold out.”

Eve carried his grief upstairs. It weighed on her as she studied the blood on the floor of the penthouse.

“All the electronics tagged,” Peabody told her. “I scanned them—and there’s a conversation between the male vic and Louise about coming over tonight and setting up what they called a mini intervention with the sister. Two conversations with the fiancé—who also left a v-mail about nine, saying Darlene was running late and didn’t answer her ’link.”

“Jibes with his statement.”

“Her ’link’s in the handbag we’re taking into evidence. Several v-mails and texts from the brother about her being late, then missing this meeting. A conversation with the fiancé and two v-mails and two texts from him asking where she was, asking her to get back to him. E-mails that appear to deal with business again—the foundation stuff.

“No illegals,” Peabody continued, “no evidence of another occupant. Sweepers took a good look at the security, and agree with you. No break-in. But EDD will give it the once-over. He’s got some cash, and the place has plenty of easily transported valuables—e-stuff, art, jewelry. We came up with two safes. One in the bedroom, one in the home office. EDD to access.”

“Okay. I want another look at the on-door security feed.”

“I had a look myself.”

Eve accessed the viewing screen through a panel by the main door.

“I ran it back to this morning when the vic left—oh-seven-thirty-eight,” Peabody said. “According to his calendar, he had an eight o’clock meeting at his HQ. Nobody came in or came to the door until he returned at eighteen-sixteen. Alone. And no other approach until the sister. Here. Twenty-oh-three.”

Eve watched Darlene step to the door, press the buzzer. Smile. Watched her mouth move as the door opened, and she stepped inside and out of cam view.

And Eve ran it back, watched again.

“No illegals. They all say nope, she never did illegals. Look at her eyes, for Christ’s sake.”

“Sure looks high.”

“Looks ready to fly, and I guess she did. Assess, Peabody.”

“We don’t really have all the data.”

“Assess with what we have. What’s your gut?”

Peabody sighed. “My gut says Darlene Fitzwilliams suffered a breakdown, likely self-medicated. Guilt, grief, said medication, exacerbated by an argument with her brother over the dead parents, turned that breakdown violent. Impaired by substance or substances as yet unknown, she stabbed her brother, then jumped off his terrace. Sad to the tragic.”

“It plays.”

“But?”

Eve wandered the room—wealthy, privileged, but not fussy, she thought. The sort of place, yes, where friends and family would be comfortable.

“My head agrees with your assessment, given current data. My gut . . . My gut may be overly influenced by the unrelenting insistence of someone I trust and respect that my head’s wrong.” Eve turned around again. “And unless I’m mistaken, those broken, bloody pieces in that evidence bag used to be a lapel recorder. Who was watching?”

“That’s creepy.”

“Hang here for the sweepers—and make sure they take that evidence bag to the lab. Tonight. Then go by Central on your way home, write it up. Write it up straight. I’m going to go by Darlene’s residence, take a look at her things, at her lifestyle. The fiancé gave me clearance.”

“You don’t want me to come with?”

“I want the report in. It’s so fucking clean and simple. I want to see it written up, see if there are holes to poke through. I can’t do that if I write it myself. Then go home, catch a few hours. We’ll probably take the lawyer, this Gia Gregg, first thing in the morning. I’ll give you the where and when. Figure on oh-eight hundred.”

“Will do.”

Eve pulled out her ’link as she headed down to the lobby.

Roarke filled the screen, made her wish she was home.

“I figured you hadn’t hit the rack yet.”

“I’m waiting for my wife.”

“You’re going to wait awhile yet.”

His eyes, so breathlessly blue, stayed on hers. “I knew them a little.”

“The Fitzwilliams.”

“Yes—the media’s having a rout over the salacious idea of murder/suicide in the gilded halls of the wealthy and powerful.”

“Fuck the media.”

“I’m sure others feel the same. You met them yourself—at Charles and Louise’s wedding.”

“I’ve been refreshed. What’s your take on the salacious idea?”

“I didn’t know them well enough to have one. How’s Louise?”

“Handling it. And she’ll be distracted, as I sent the sister’s fiancé down to her. Henry Boyle. He works for you.”

“He does, and for a number of years now. A smart, creative, interesting man. I know he was mad about Darlene.”

She’d seen the love; she’d felt the grief. “I’m about to turn their residence upside down to see if I can find the reason this is murder/suicide or the reason it’s not.” She stepped out in the lobby. “Did you watch the rest of that vid?”

“I didn’t, no. It’s not nearly as entertaining without you.”

“We’ll get back to it. Anyway, don’t wait up.”

“I won’t.”

She clicked off, stepped outside, glanced at her wrist unit.

Nearly midnight, she noted. It looked like the day would end and the next begin with murder.

CHAPTER FOUR



Eve considered double-parking, then homed in on a spot across the street. She hit vertical, took the short flight crossways over traffic, executed a quick one-eighty, then dropped down.

Not bad, she decided as she got out. Not half bad.

Since traffic was fairly light, she gauged it, jaywalked—more jay-jogged—back across the avenue, then hiked the three-quarters of a block to the pretty white-brick townhouse where her victim/suspect had co-habbed with Henry Boyle.

It shouldn't have surprised her to see the ridiculously handsome Irishman sitting on the top of the three steps leading to the front door.

"I believe you just broke several traffic laws, Lieutenant."

"Maybe."

She stood at the base of the steps just looking at him, the way the wind ran through that black silk hair, the way that beautifully sculpted mouth curved just for her.

She wondered how many people could claim to have a spouse, a partner, a lover sitting out on a cold, windy January night waiting for them. Not many. And if you added in how gorgeous that spouse, partner, lover looked doing it, that number whittled down to one.

Just her.

"Why aren't you home in the warm getting some sleep?"

"I'll tell you," he said, with the Irish a gilded thread woven through the words. "I debated my choices. Going off to bed without my wife, or coming out to join her." He rose, tall and lean. "I found it an easy choice, even without the added incentive of poking about in other people's belongings."

He'd enjoy that part, of course, she mused; had built the foundation of his empire doing just that as a Dublin street rat.

She climbed up until they were eye to eye. "Did you mess with the locks, ace?"

"I didn't, no. As yet." Still smiling, he brushed his lips to hers. "Would you like me to?"

Her master would get them in. His skill would get them in quicker. And it was freaking cold.

"Go ahead, have some fun. Tell me about Henry Boyle," she said as Roarke went to work.

"Bright, as I told you. Talented, creative. Earned a promotion about ten months ago. He's done good work—and I have him in charge of engineering on the youth shelter. I like him quite a bit."

So saying, Roarke opened the front door and gestured Eve in. In the dim light of the foyer, she saw the security panel blinking.

"I didn't get his codes," she began.

"Please." Roarke only shook his head as he scanned the panel with some little tool, which had the light blinking off then going steady green.

"It's a nice system," he commented.

"One of yours."

"It is, which made that simple."

He glanced around the foyer, one that spilled seamlessly into a living area with cozy conversational groupings, a small glass-tiled fireplace and art of various European cities. She recognized Paris, Florence, London. Wondered a bit that she'd actually been to those places.

"Lights on full," she ordered, and wandered into the living area. "Casually urban," she decided.

"What does that tell you?"

"Just that it's a comfortable space for a couple of city-dwellers. The art's probably originals, and some of the dust-catchers are likely important. But it doesn't come across as 'we're really rich.' Then again, I guess he's not."

"He does well—and earns it."

Roarke glanced around himself, noting she'd been right about the art.

"But no, he wouldn't have her generational fortune. I met her a couple of times—before the wedding. I recall having a conversation with her about philanthropy. She was very dedicated to her work in her family foundation. And I would say she and Henry were very much in love, and nicely suited."

"How did he get along with the brother?"

"Very well, as far as I know. Is Henry a suspect?"

"Right now I have what reads as murder/suicide. He wasn't there—I checked his alibi on the way over. And he has no motive I can see."

"But."

"But both he and Louise—with Charles backing her—insist it couldn't be what it reads. So . . ." She looked around. "Plus I found what appear to be pieces of a busted-to-shit lapel recorder beside the body. Who wears a recorder when they're about to commit murder/suicide?"

"Some might want it documented—last words and so on—but jumping from the fifty-second floor would eliminate that."

"Exactly. I'm going to start in the bedroom—must be upstairs. Why don't you take the electronics?"

They started up together, then Roarke turned into a room serving as a home office. Comfortable again, Eve concluded on a quick glance. Organized without being obsessive about it. A coffee cup left on the desk, sketches pinned to a board, an ancient pair of skids—his—in a corner. A data and communication unit with an auxiliary comp. One large wall screen.

As Roarke took off his coat, she moved on.

A guest bedroom: soft, soothing colors, and the required—for reasons she couldn't fathom—mountain range of pillows.

She found the master—a little more elaborate here. The bed, a soaring four-poster, struck her as an antique, while the set of chairs in the sitting area with their silky blue and silver print hit solid contemporary. Wood floors, a silver area rug, a sweep of blue—silky

again—to frame the windows. The fireplace was a long, narrow rectangle inserted into the wall across from the bed.

Clear glass lamps vied with a painting of blue and white flowers in a thick, deeply carved silver frame. Real flowers—white lilies—speared out of a massive urn that looked as old as the bed.

She tried the closet.

It had likely been another bedroom at one time, gutted and outfitted as a massive closet. Henry's clothes ranged along one side—slightly jumbled, and with plenty of room for more.

Hers, on the other hand, were double tiered, with the back wall reserved for countless pairs of shoes. Eve noted the comp, had seen its like before. Darlene could consult it when choosing an outfit, could use it to revolve the clothing from day wear to evening to sports.

Apparently she'd taken wardrobe as seriously as philanthropy. And since Eve herself was married to a man who did the same, she couldn't be too critical.

A large counter lined with drawers stood in the center of the closet. Eve opened a drawer at random and counted over a dozen bras.

Why does one set of tits need so many? she wondered, and began to rifle through them.

The drawer below that held sweaters—she didn't bother to count these—and below that was stylish gym wear. In the bottom were the leggings, sweatpants, and T-shirts that told her the woman had worn regular clothes at least some of the time.

She moved down, top drawer middle: panties, and plenty of them, skimpy, lacy, colorful, all neatly folded.

And at the bottom of the stack—where a male co-hab was unlikely to go—she found a silver card case.

Inside she found business cards for psychics, sensitives, mediums, tarot readers, spiritualists.

“Interesting,” she murmured. “Why hide these from Henry?” She took out an evidence bag, dropped the case in.

Under another stack she found a few brochures—the same deal—with rates for readings and consultations, and with testimonials from

satisfied clients.

By the time Roarke joined her, she'd finished the closet.

"I can't say I've found anything helpful," he told her. "Nothing on his office electronics, the house electronics and 'links that seems to apply. Her office is on the next floor, and what strikes is what's not there."

"What's not there?"

"She has it set to automatically delete any searches twice daily."

"And you let that stop you?"

He gave her a quiet look. "Hardly. I can tell you the vast majority of her searches fell into the area of research for her work. Running organizations that applied for a grant, that sort of thing. But she's spent considerable time doing searches on the afterlife, on communicating with the dead, on those who claim to serve as a bridge between this world and the next."

Eve nodded. "Like this?" she asked, and upended her evidence bag on the bed.

Roarke studied the brochures, pamphlets, business cards.

"Yes, like that."

"She had these hidden—underwear drawer, and inside an evening bag. It's quite a collection. New York, New Orleans, Arizona, Europe—Western and Eastern. I'm going to say she contacted at least some of these, paid visits. And the fact she hid it means she wanted to keep it to herself, and/or friends and family disapproved."

"She suffered a great loss, and looked for comfort."

Eve plucked up a brochure. "Nutritional Psychic. A grand buys you an hour consult where Doctor—and I bet that's a loose one—Hester will recommend which herbs and berries you should consume in order to open yourself up to messages from the dead."

She tossed it down, picked up another. "Now this one's a bargain. Initial fifteen-minute consult's free. During that consult Lady Katrina and her spirit guide, Ki, will determine if you have what it takes to pass through the portal."

She tossed that down as well.

"I'm also betting when I check her financials I'm going to find big gobs of money pissed away on this crap."

“I tend to agree with you regarding Doctor Hester, Lady Katrina and Ki, but we both know there are legitimate sensitives.”

“Who talk to dead people.”

He flicked a finger down the dent in her chin. “You do.”

She rolled her eyes. “I dream about them—small wonder.”

“Agree there as well. And no, I wouldn’t put my money on any of these holding conversations with the dead. I’d say the dead speak if and when the spirit, we’ll say, moves them.”

“Don’t go all Irish on me.”

“In the blood and bone. Still.” He laid his hands on her shoulders, sensing her frustration. “I see where you’re going, and it makes perfect sense. She got herself overly involved here, and it maybe fell under the influence of someone not just illegitimate but dangerous. But how could that influence be so strong, Eve, to have her kill the brother she loved, and herself?”

“I don’t know yet. But it’s an angle. She had a good life here. You can feel it.” She poked at him when he lifted his eyebrows. “That’s not psychic mumbo. You just have to look around, and you get it. She had a good life here, a man she loved, work she loved, family, a place. She took a kick to the gut, I get that, too. Either grief twisted her up to the point she had a psychotic break, or someone twisted her up in it.”

“You’ll find out which.”

“Yeah. Either way, she won’t be crossing the bridge and coming through the portal to tell me. We work it.”

She rebagged her evidence.

“Got another hour in you?” she asked with a glance up.

“What did you have in mind?”

“I want to go through the rest of it before Henry comes back. Plus, I didn’t find any snazzy jewelry, and she’s bound to have it, which means a safe. You find the safe, and I’ll go through the rest of the place.”

“And finding it, do I open it?”

“Yeah, you open it.”

He flashed a grin. “This is much more fun than sleeping alone.”

CHAPTER FIVE



She dropped into bed at two a.m., with the muttered request that Roarke wake her at six if she slept through. He was better than any alarm.

With a low fire simmering, the cat curled into the small of her back, and Roarke's arm wrapped around her, she tumbled straight into sleep.

The dead had a lot to say. In dreams, she thought, dreaming. And that was different from believing you could walk over some magic golden bridge into the afterlife and have conversations with vics.

No golden bridge for her. She sat in Interview A, with Marcus and Darlene Fitzwilliams seated on the other side of the scarred table.

"What gives?" she asked.

"I love my brother. I'd never hurt him."

"It's pretty clear you did."

"I've never hurt anyone in my life, not on purpose. You were in my house. What did you see?"

"It's all right, Darli." Marcus draped an arm around her shoulders, pressed his lips to her temple.

She'd seen that, Eve remembered. A photograph of just that, in a frame. Another when they'd been teenagers—Darlene riding on Marcus's shoulders as he hammed it up. Her in a bikini, Eve remembered, him in swim trunks, up to his waist in a blue sea.

Other photos, many photos. The siblings, the parents, Darlene and Henry, Marcus and Henry. Holiday photos, casual photos, formal photos.

A life in frames.

“You had secrets,” Eve said.

“Everyone has secrets.”

“And some people kill to protect them.”

“Do I look like a killer?”

“Mostly killers look like everybody else. You jammed scissors in your brother’s heart.”

“I couldn’t.” Darlene gripped the handle of the shears now buried deep in her brother’s chest. Yanked them free. “I’d kill myself first.”

“You killed yourself second,” Eve pointed out. “Grief can mess you up.”

“How do you know? You’ve never lost anyone. You don’t know my grief, you don’t know my sorrow. My parents were angels. Yours were monsters.”

Darlene drove the bloody points into the table. “You’re surrounded by evil. How can you see through it to what’s good?”

“You just have to look hard enough.”

“Then look! I was going to have what you have. I just wanted answers. That’s no different than you. I wanted what you want.”

Eve opened her eyes and looked into Roarke’s. “This. She wanted this.”

“You’ve a few minutes left to sleep, but you dream so hard.”

“She wanted this, and she had the person who wanted to give it to her. Why end everything? Gotta look deeper.”

“All right.” He kissed the brow she’d furrowed.

She laid her hand on his cheek. “Sometimes you don’t have to look very hard.”

“For what?”

“For what’s good. You’re right here.” She tipped her face up, touched her mouth gently to his. “And when things aren’t so good, you’re still right here.”

“Always.”

She eased over so her heart lay on his, so her mouth lay on his. The only bridge she needed, she thought, was the one that led to him.

Her body, warm, smooth, fit so perfectly with his. His lanky, leggy cop. They could fill each other with love, with light, a kind of

awakening after the long, dark night.

It touched him, the tenderness of her hand on his cheek, the sweetness of her fingers sliding through his hair. As much a lifting of the heart as arousal. He gave her the same; soft and easy, slow, dreamy kisses as desire roused.

He shifted. When he covered her she opened. She welcomed. She enfolded.

With their mouths meeting again, again, their bodies moved together, a rise and fall, rise and fall until that final peak.

And the quiet, sighing slide that followed.

* * *

SHE THOUGHT OF IT LATER WHEN SHE STOOD IN HER HOME OFFICE, studying the murder board she'd set up.

Darlene had wanted that—not just the sex; the connection, the continuity. And Eve had seen that connection in photographs in the townhouse.

Eve glanced over to a photograph of her and Roarke, taken by some enterprising paparazzo. They'd taken down the bad guy, and were both a bit bruised and bloody—a contrast to the glittery evening clothes. And they grinned at each other.

The connection was there, clear to see.

Who'd give that up and jump off a building? You'd have to be crazy—and that might be the answer. If she was sane, the logical answer was Darlene had been pushed. One way or the other.

She texted Peabody with a change of plans and told her partner to meet her at the morgue at oh-nine-hundred. Meanwhile she split the list of reputed psychics, gave Peabody half to run.

She'd start on the others, but first she wanted a look at Darlene's financials. That might tell its own tale.

* * *

TEN MINUTES LATER SHE WAS UP AND CROSSING TO ROARKE'S adjoining office.

"I know you're busy."

He glanced over from his wall screen and the schematics on it. "I've been busier."

"It's a money question."

"I'm never too busy for that."

"I'm looking into Darlene's financials. For the past eighteen weeks—including the morning she died—she withdrew nine thousand, nine hundred and nine-nine dollars from her personal account. I'm reading it as cash."

Roarke sat back. "Isn't that interesting."

"There's other activity. Deposits, transfers, other withdrawals—one every month for five or six thousand. But eighteen weekly for that amount's a flag for me."

"One dollar more, you hit ten thousand and the IRS might do a sniff. Blackmail springs to mind, but with what you found last night, another idea leapfrogs over it."

"Somebody's been taking her for a ride for four and a half months. Parents died seven months ago. I need to find out when she started hunting for psychics, but that's what rings. She has another personal account—years old. This one? She opened it about five months ago, and not at her usual bank. I think she was hiding this, just like she was hiding the business cards and pamphlets."

"I'd agree, but if you're angling from that to whoever she was paying somehow pushing her to murder/suicide, why? Forget the how for a moment. Why? A dollar shy of ten large a week is a very nice income from one source."

"Maybe she'd decided that was it." Demonstrating, Eve swiped a finger through the air. "Maybe she'd figured out whoever she was paying was full of bullshit, maybe argued, threatened. Could be this bullshit shucker figured out a way to get more if he eliminated her, and her brother. A lot of ropes to tug there." She jammed her hands into her pockets. "I need her tox." She hadn't given Morris enough time, and found that frustrating. "I need how. She was high, and everyone says she didn't use, but damn it, she was high. So maybe

she didn't know she was using. Still doesn't tell me why she'd kill her brother. If we stretch it to mind manipulation—not a big stretch since we've dealt with it before—it still doesn't explain the why." She'd taken a turn around his office before she caught herself. "Sorry."

"I never tire of watching you work."

"I'm working these angles because two people who loved her insist she couldn't do what she did."

"Not just because of that."

She blew out a breath. It could be disconcerting to have someone who knew her inside and out.

"No, not just," she admitted. "My sense of her, too. Money's part of it. Gia Gregg—lawyer. Do you know her?"

"Not personally, but she has an excellent reputation. Specializes in estate law, high-end clients."

"Too early for her, too. I'm going to get out of your hair, go on in. I can start running the list on the way, and maybe get lucky and push Morris on the autopsy."

"Would you like me to look for more?"

"More what?"

"Money, darling."

"You can give it a glance if you have time. Thanks. I'll be . . . communing with the dead for a while, one way or the other."

"Give them my best or my worst, depending. And take care of my cop."

"I can do all that. See you later."

She started her run on the psychics at the top of the list as she drove downtown, letting the in-dash do the work. She eliminated one straight off, as he was doing time for fraud.

Two others had done time. Eve bumped them down, figuring Darlene had enough brains and certainly enough resources to have gotten the same information. And while she might have been gullible, she didn't strike Eve as brick-stupid.

She toggled that with Darlene's travel. Though she had flown to Europe twice in the last six months, there was nothing for the last eighteen weeks.

Eve bumped down anyone on the list out of the country. But she'd check with Henry Boyle, and with Darlene's office, just to be sure she hadn't snuck any travel in that didn't show.

She continued the runs as she walked through the white tunnel of the morgue—and tried to resign herself to spending a good chunk of her day talking to woo-woo shovelers.

She found Morris with Darlene's shattered body, and with the brother laid out on a second table.

"Jumpers or floaters," she began, "which is worse?"

"Floaters go on a sliding scale. The longer they're in the water, the higher they rate."

He wore a steel gray suit today, paired with an electric blue tie. He'd gone silver with the cord that twined through his single thick braid of black hair.

And he looked, she thought, both rested and alert.

"Jumpers," he continued. "We can judge them on a sliding scale as well. The higher they go, the higher they rate."

"Fifty-two floors. She rates pretty high."

"She does. Years ago I had a jumper—literally. A skydiver."

"Why do people do that?" It absolutely baffled her. "People actually pay to do that."

"It's exhilarating."

"You?" Surprised, she frowned at him. "You've jumped out of a plane? On purpose?"

"An amazing sensation. I'm quite a fan of sensations."

"Jumping out of a plane would give me a sensation of insanity."

"Only if you did it without a chute. My skydiver, however, ran afoul of his business partner, who'd sabotaged his chute. His fall of thirteen thousand feet puts him at the top of my scale. Not as far for her, but the results . . ." He glanced down, quiet pity in his eyes. "She was a lovely young woman before that last step."

"Yeah, and lovely young women are more inclined to pills for self-termination. What can you tell me about her?"

"At this point I haven't found any injuries prior to that last step, but it's going to take more time to be certain, given the state of her."

“It’s the tox I’m most interested in right now. She and the brother? Friends of Louise’s.”

“Ah, I’m sorry to hear that.”

“Louise, Charles, and the woman’s fiancé—who looks to be in the clear on first pass—are all adamant she didn’t use. But the security feed on the brother’s door and two wits who saw her get out of the elevator all say she looked high on something.”

“I can tell you that before that last step, her liver, kidneys, lungs, heart showed no signs of abuse or disease. She wasn’t a habitual user. Her stomach contents? Tea, sugar cookies—real sugar—and about two ounces of white wine.”

She caught the inflection. “And?”

“The blend of tea to start.” He gestured to his comp screen, brought up some sort of colored chart with a lot of words she didn’t understand. “It was a chamomile base—harmless enough—but laced with other elements. Valerian, for one.”

It rang a bell. “A sedative, right?”

“Yes, it can be used as one. Peyote.”

“Hallucinogen. Shit. Is this like the Red Horse?”

“No. I remember that too well, and this wasn’t the same. Nothing in this would trigger violence. But there are elements here and in the other stomach contents I can’t identify. I’ve flagged it top priority for the lab, as requested. They’re minute traces, nothing debilitating. It may be that the combination of them caused such violent effects.”

“If we weigh in the insistence she didn’t use, it leans toward her being dosed.” Eve circled the body. Had she known she was falling? Eve wondered. Had she seen the ground rushing up?

“Where’d she get the scissors? That’s a question. Not the sort of thing you carry around in a purse—they were huge.”

“Shears, actually,” he corrected. “Nine-inch blades. I did a quick exam of his wounds. And I’d agree, it’s not the sort of thing most women carry.”

“And no reason I can see why her brother had them sitting out where she could grab them,” Eve said. “He had kitchen scissors—in a knife block—and a pair in his office, desk drawer. Which makes it lean premeditated. For somebody.”

Eve turned from Darlene, stepped over to Marcus.

“She was smiling,” Morris said.

“I’m sorry?”

“When she rang his buzzer. She was smiling—glassy-eyed, yeah, but smiling the way people do when they’re ready to say, hey, sorry about that. And nothing I get in my read of her says she had that kind of chill. That she could stand there, smiling, with a pair of nine-inch blades in her purse she intended to jab into her brother’s heart.”

She shook her head. “There wasn’t enough time for them to have a serious argument. Five, six minutes after she went in, he’s bleeding. Then she went straight out to the terrace and off. She was dosed, that’s my read on this. Who wanted her dead? Her and her brother.”

“She can’t tell me that.”

Eve let out a half laugh. “She believed she could. She was seeing psychics, mediums, all that crapola. Parents killed in an accident last June, and she’s got a secret stash of business cards and info on talking to dead people.”

Now Morris smiled. “I talk to them all the time. So do you.”

“Ever have them talk back?”

“In their way.” He touched a hand, gently, to Darlene’s shattered shoulder. “I talk to Ammarylis often.”

Eve slid her hands in her pockets. Morris had lost the love of his life the previous spring. “I’m sorry, Morris.”

“No, it’s a comfort. I hear her voice quite clearly at times. She picked out this tie, just this morning.”

Not sure how to respond, Eve said, “Okay,” and made him laugh.

“I reached for a gray one, as it matched my morning mood. I heard her tell me to wear the blue—the bold blue. So I did, and it lifted away the gray. Young Darlene was looking for answers, and comfort, I suspect. There are those who can give both—and those who exploit grief and naivety.”

“I’m going for door number two on that one, as the one she walked into led her to that long fall.”

CHAPTER SIX



Eve was halfway through the tunnel heading out when Peabody came in.

“I’m not late!” Automatically quickening her steps in her pink, fussy-topped boots, Peabody checked her wrist unit. “I’m not late.”

“No, I was early. No sign in the female vic of habitual drug use. But she had valerian, peyote, and some as yet undetermined substances in her system—mixed, it appears, with tea and cookies.”

“You think somebody drugged her? But murder/suicide takes—” Peabody’s eyes popped. “Shit! Red Horse.”

“Not according to Morris. Not the same.” And they could all be grateful for it. “Ingested, he believes,” she added as they walked out to the car. “He’s going to crack the whip at the lab so I don’t have to. We wait on that. Where did she get the scissors—shears, Morris called them?”

“Dressmaker shears.” Peabody climbed into the passenger seat, belted up.

“Dressmaker?”

“Broad term, I guess. I have a pair I use when I’m doing some sewing, or a craft project.”

“I went through her residence. I sure didn’t see any signs she did the crafty. No sign in the brother’s place he’d have use for that sort of tool. And if it didn’t belong to either of them, where did she get it?”

“Is it *it* or *them*? Shears, scissors—it’s like plural, probably because of the two blades, but it’s still just one tool, so . . . never mind,” Peabody finished when she caught Eve’s cool stare.

“We’re going by to talk to Louise and the fiancé. I want to know if she owned those shears. She had to have an assistant, an admin at work. Dig it up, check with whoever that is if she had something like that, or access to it, in the office.”

“How about the psychics?”

“On the slate.”

“A pair of mine are in the wind. Bench warrants out on them—co-habs, partners. Fraud and theft. He’d rifle through purses and wallets, help himself, while she held a séance. They’ve been running that scam or others for about five years. They pack up and move off fast, pick another spot, try another variation with new names.”

“Darlene ran backgrounds—not a complete idiot—so that should’ve popped. We’re going to factor in the drugs, look for somebody who hypes the use of herbs to help open the portal.”

“The portal?”

“A couple of the brochures used that one. Bridge, portal, channeling. They’ve got a patter, and there’s a sucker born every second.”

“Minute. Born every minute.”

“In my world they pop out every second, and Darlene Fitzwilliams reads like one. She stabbed her brother three times in the heart, didn’t waste a minute, then didn’t waste a minute jumping off the terrace.”

“It looks like that’s what she went there to do.”

“Yeah. What if she thought she was doing something else? It’s not Red Horse, it’s not Jess Barrow’s version of mind-control VR, but we’ve dealt with fatal delusions before. She was smiling,” Eve added. “That ‘I’m sorry, and I know you’ll forgive me’ smile. She wasn’t pissed or afraid, she wasn’t nervous. A woman who’s never committed a criminal act, who’s lived a responsible life, goes to her brother’s door intending to kill him and herself? I should be able to see some nerves. Or at the very least, resolve.”

“Not if someone put the whammy on her. I know what you’re going to say,” Peabody continued in a rush. “There is no whammy. But there sort of is, or could be, when you factor in the drugs.”

“Drugs are drugs, and not a whammy.”

“They assist the whammy, that’s what I’m saying. Make her more susceptible. Then?” Peabody lifted her hands, flicked her fingers out. “Whammy.”

Eve disliked the idea of the whammy, but had to acknowledge it fit. “And what form would this whammy take?”

“Maybe it’s like internal VR, or brainwashing. Brainwashing is a true thing. Documented.”

“I’ll give you brainwashing,” Eve said as she looked for a parking space on Charles and Louise’s pretty street. “Internal VR makes no sense. But some form of brainwashing paired with drugs. When Cerise Devane jumped off the Tattler Building a couple years ago, and I sat there on the ledge trying to talk her in, she was perfectly lucid. She knew who I was, who she was. But she was compelled to fly off that ledge—thought I’d enjoy going with her. So maybe that sort of mind-control paired with drugs, with brainwashing. Maybe a whole new fucked-up way to make people die.

“But why—that’s a key. What’s gained?”

“A lot of money’s at stake now.”

“Yeah, and greed’s a favorite for a reason.”

Eve looked down the street toward Louise’s home when they got out of the car.

The doctor and the former licensed companion were building a good life here, a happy, settled one. On the surface, it had looked the same for Darlene and Henry. Nice house, comfortable and settled.

As shattered now as Darlene’s bones.

“Sometimes people get off on fucking things up. Not much of a motive,” Eve said, considering. “But some people do.”

“Somebody who had a grudge against Darlene or Marcus or Henry Boyle,” Peabody speculated. “Or the Fitzwilliamses in general.”

“Possible,” Eve said as they walked. “The parents—straight accident. I checked it in and out, so their deaths aren’t connected—not in an overt way. But months later both of their children are dead, so . . .”

“A family member who wants more, taking advantage of Darlene’s vulnerability.”

“Yeah. You’ve got to look at it.” She went through the little gate, down the short walk through what had been a garden in the summer, and up to the front door of the dignified brownstone.

Louise answered. She wore leggings and a black sweater—and shadows under her eyes.

“Dallas, Peabody. You have news?”

“Not really, but some questions.”

“We’re in the back. Charles and I cleared our schedules for the next couple of days. We want to be here for Henry. Marcus’s uncle’s on his way here from Europe. The family has a pied-à-terre here, and there’s the estate on Long Island. Gareth and Bria’s New York home,” she explained. “It came to Marcus and Darlene. That was one of the things they were to talk about . . . God.” She rubbed her hands over her face. “Sorry, none of that matters. Come on back.”

“It all matters. Were they going to sell the Long Island house?”

“No, I don’t think so. It’s been in the family five, maybe six generations.”

The kitchen and great room sprawled over the back of the house with views of the patio beyond through wide glass doors.

Henry pushed up from his chair, misery and hope warring on his face.

“You know what happened? You know who did this?”

“We’re investigating, Mr. Boyle. We have more questions.”

He sat again, shoving his hands through his hair. “Henry, just Henry. When I woke up, there was a moment I didn’t remember. I could smell her hair. I could smell her. Then I remembered, and it was gone. Even that was gone.”

Louise bent over, kissed the top of his head. “I’ll make fresh coffee.”

“I’ll get it.” Charles brushed a hand down her arm, crossed over into the kitchen.

“Henry,” Eve began, “did Darlene own a pair of dressmaker shears?”

“Dressmaker shears? No. She didn’t sew.”

“Maybe she—or you—had a pair for some other project. You did a lot of the rehab on the townhouse yourself, right?”

“Yeah. I helped design it—with plenty of input from Darli. She had definite ideas about how it should look. We did some of the painting, refinished the floors—we wanted our stamp on it. But we didn’t use anything like shears. The only specialty shears we have are poultry shears. Darli bought them last year when she got it into her head to try making coq au vin.” His eyes lit for a moment. “That was a disaster. Fun, but . . .” The light died. “They’re in the kitchen somewhere, I guess.”

She’d seen a weird pair of scissors in a kitchen drawer.

“Maybe she had something like that at work.”

“I can’t think why. I don’t see what . . .” He trailed off as Louise took his hand. Eve saw when realization hit him. “Is that . . . That’s what killed Marcus.”

“Would he have had a pair?”

“For *what?*” Color flooded back into his face—anger now. Denial was over. “He didn’t sew. He didn’t make things. For Christ’s sake, I bought him a set of screwdrivers as a joke, because as smart as he was, he could barely change a lightbulb. They weren’t handy people, Dallas. They were good people. Generous people. Loving. If you’d spend five minutes *listening* to me, you’d know she didn’t do these things. Why aren’t you—”

“Henry.” Louise said it softly, drawing their joined hands up to her cheek. And he deflated.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I know you have to ask questions. I just . . . I smelled her hair. Now I can’t.”

Charles brought in a tray with a tall white pot and five oversized white mugs. He set it down on the table, sat on the arm of Henry’s chair while Louise poured the coffee.

“I didn’t get into this last night,” Charles said. “So I’m going to say this to you now, Henry. I’ve known these two women for a while now. If anything happened to Louise, I’d want these two women looking after her. I’d want them looking for the answers. Because I know they’d find them. Answers won’t bring Darlene and Marcus back, but having the answers will matter to you.”

Nodding, Henry took a mug from Louise and, as he had the night before, cupped it in both hands. "I'm sorry."

"Don't worry about it," Eve told him. "I went through Darlene's things. I found these hidden in a drawer in the closet."

Eve opened the file bag, took out the evidence bag, showed the cards and pamphlets.

"I don't understand. Hidden?" He took the bag, read through the plastic. "She had all these? Psychics, tarot readers? What would . . . Mediums." He closed his eyes. "She hid them from me. She couldn't talk to me about it, so she hid them from me."

"She never mentioned her interest in this area?"

"God. About a month after her parents died—she and Marcus were in grief counseling, but she stopped going. I asked her why she'd stopped, and she told me she wanted to explore another avenue. She hadn't been able to say good-bye, had questions she needed to ask them, so she'd gone to a sensitive. A friend of a friend had a friend, that sort of thing. I was . . . tolerant. I probably showed how fucking tolerant. The sensitive she went to didn't have the capabilities to communicate with the dead."

He waved his hand by his ear as he used the phrase. "But she had some recommendations. I said something like I thought grief counseling would be more beneficial than tossing time and money at some gypsy with a crystal ball.

"I don't believe in that sort of thing, so I dismissed it all. I—I dismissed *her*. So she hid all this from me because she felt I wouldn't understand or approve."

"Was she going to someone?" Louise asked.

"We're looking into that, but we do know she withdrew cash weekly from a new private account she set up a few months ago."

"A new account?"

"A new account in a different bank. Every week she withdrew nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine dollars."

"Ten thousand a week?" The stricken guilt on Henry's face shifted to puzzlement. "For how long?"

"Including the withdrawal she made yesterday morning, eighteen weeks. Do you know of any reason she'd want or need that much

cash?”

“No. Just no. She’d have some cash, sure, but Darlene preferred using plastic. She’d have a clear record monthly that way. She was generous, and she didn’t deny herself either, but she was raised to know where her money went.”

He pointed to the evidence bag. “One of them. One of them was scamming her. Scamming her.” He shoved forward in his seat. “Marcus must have found out and threatened to go to the police. That could be why he wanted to hold the intervention, Louise. Because he found out some fake medium was scamming Darlene.”

“Henry, he would’ve told me,” Louise said.

“But it makes sense,” Henry insisted. “It finally makes sense. This medium got into Marcus’s apartment somehow, and killed Marcus. When Darlene got there, he forced her onto the terrace, pushed her over. You have to find him,” he said to Eve. “You have to find whoever she was paying. That’s who killed her, killed Marcus. You have to find them.”

“I intend to. Do you know if she took any trips, did any traveling in these last eighteen weeks?”

“I know she didn’t. She was supposed to go to East Washington last month and to London, ah, about six, eight weeks ago—both trips she sent her assistant in her place, and handled her part via ’link conference. She said she didn’t want to leave home. Just couldn’t leave home.”

“One more thing. You’ve all said she didn’t use—and that’s bearing out—but did you notice any changes in her behavior, any signs she seemed impaired over the last weeks?”

“She started sleepwalking.”

“Henry, you never told me.”

He shook his head at Louise. “She asked me not to say anything. The first time—maybe three months ago—I found her downstairs, in the kitchen, middle of the night. She was making these pouring motions. I asked her what she was doing, and she looked at me. Through me, I guess, and said she had to pour the tea for the tea party. It was kind of funny, really, and she woke up as soon as I touched her. She didn’t remember getting up.”

He set his untouched coffee down. “A few weeks later, I woke up, heard her talking. She was crawling under the bed, calling out to someone to come back. I thought she meant her parents—that she was having a stress dream about them. I tried to coax her out at first, and she laughed. She laughed, and said she wanted to go down the rabbit hole. She wanted to see where he’d gone. She woke up again when I took her hand.”

“And didn’t remember?” Eve prompted.

“No. She was baffled, and a little embarrassed. It happened one more time about two weeks ago. I woke up, and she was sitting on the side of the bed staring at me. I asked her what was wrong. She said—it was like a riddle. Ah, she said: *Why is a crow like a desk?* I think.”

“A raven?” Louise asked. “Why is a raven like a writing desk?”

“Yeah, that’s it. A raven.”

“It’s from *Alice in Wonderland*, the book. And the riddle has no answer. The rabbit hole, that’s an Alice reference, too. And the tea party could be the Mad Hatter’s tea party.”

“Was she a big fan of that story?” Eve wondered.

“I don’t know,” Henry told her. “Not that I know of, especially. Maybe it’s something she read as a kid, or her parents read to her. So it reminded her of when they were alive, when everyone was safe? I don’t know.”

“All right.” A question for Mira, Eve supposed, the department’s head shrink. “We’ll get back to you,” she said as she rose.

“Isn’t there something I can do?”

“We’ll go be with the family,” Louise told Henry. “In a little while we’ll go be with the family. I’ll walk you out,” she said to Eve and Peabody.

Eve waited until they were out of Henry’s earshot. “There were sedatives and hallucinogens in her system. A bunch of long, complicated names, and some elements we have to wait for the lab to ID. Being as you’re a doctor, I’m telling you I’ll clear you to talk to Morris and Berenski if you think you can be any help putting that part together.”

“She might have taken a sedative, but I can promise you, she wouldn’t have taken a hallucinogen, not knowingly. The sleepwalking—three incidents Henry knows of, which doesn’t mean there weren’t others when he didn’t wake up. That’s a concern. As is the money, and the fact she hid all those cards from Henry, didn’t tell Marcus. She didn’t tell him, or he’d have told me when he asked us to come over, possibly talk with her.”

She gripped Eve’s hand, then Peabody’s. “Someone manipulated her, fed her drugs, caused her to kill Marcus and herself. Why?”

“Find out what she ingested. Leave the rest to us.”

CHAPTER SEVEN



Considering the herbs and sleep aids, Eve made the psychic nutritionalist the first stop. Doctor Hester housed her business in a street-level shop in Soho, tucked between a health food store and a bakery.

She'd go for the bakery every time.

The reception/retail area held shelves full of apothecary-style bottles, instructional and motivational discs, candles and crystals.

The girl at the counter sported multiple visible piercings: ears, eyebrow, nose. And a tat of a winged dragon on the back of her right hand.

"A bright and healthy morning," she said, each syllable heavily weighted with the Bronx. "What service can we provide for you?"

"We're looking for Doctor Hester."

"Doctor Hester is preparing for a consultation. If you'd like to book —"

Eve pulled out her badge, held it up.

"We're fully licensed in accordance with all city, state, and federal laws."

"That's not my worry right now. Get your boss."

"Hang a minute." She slid off the stool and went through a door behind the counter area.

Eve watched Peabody ease over toward a section of metabolism boosters.

"Don't even think about it."

"Easy for you when your metabolism runs like a rabbit, and mine's a slug on Zoner. Besides, they're all natural products."

“Nature’s a vicious bitch.”

A woman came out—short, lavender hair that matched her eyes, a deep purple dress that flowed to her knees. Her data listed her at fifty, Eve recalled, but the perfect, unlined skin carved ten away.

“What can I do to help you?”

“What can you tell me about Darlene Fitzwilliams?”

“Ah, a tragedy. I heard a media report. You’re looking for answers. Seeking death is rarely an answer.”

“Was she a client?”

“I don’t remember her.”

“She had your business card, a pamphlet, and a bottle of your Natural Rest.”

“I see. Casseopia? Would you check, please?”

Casseopia settled on the stool again, swiveled to her counter comp. “Darlene Fitzwilliams, fifty-minute introductory consult, August three of last year. No follow-up on record.”

“Would you pull my notes on that?” Hester gave Eve a quiet smile. “A single consult. It’s difficult to remember the details.”

“I figured you’d . . . intuit that sort of thing.”

The smile never wavered. “My gift is one that intuits, as you say, the inner person. Such as . . .” She turned to Peabody. “You shouldn’t worry so much about your weight. Good nutrition, regular exercise, of course, but you have a very healthy, robust body. Your perception of your body is harsher than the reality.”

“Really?”

“Natural metabolic boosters such as chen pi, sheng jiang, rou gui can be helpful. But you’re young, healthy, and active. It’s the sweet tooth,” she added with a knowing smile, “that challenges you.”

“Your notes.” Casseopia offered Hester a handheld.

“Thank you. Oh yes, so sad,” she murmured as she read. “The loss of her parents, so sudden and tragic. She wasn’t sleeping or eating well—all that stress and grief. I did recommend a sleep aid, and a nutrition plan, and suggested additional sessions to work on emotional healing and acceptance. But . . .”

Hester lowered the handheld. “I remember her now. She wanted to contact her parents.”

“Her dead parents.”

“I understand the skepticism. Contact with those who have moved on in the cycle is not my gift.”

“Your pamphlet says otherwise.”

Hester shook her head. “I can assist, and there are certain herbs and practices that can open and enhance the gift if one has its root. I didn’t sense that root in her, and couldn’t ethically encourage her. She took the aid, and the plan, but didn’t contact me again.”

“She came in a couple more times,” Casseopia said. “I checked for you. She bought more Natural Rest in October and again in December. Purchased some candles and some bath salts.”

“I wish I could have given her more, but I didn’t have the answers she looked for. I’m afraid I don’t have the ones you seek either.”

“Anything in here that causes hallucinations?”

“I don’t traffic in hallucinogens, even natural ones. I believe reality is to be embraced.”

“The Natural Rest stuff, could it cause them in combination with other herbs?”

“I would have given her a list of herbs, foods, medications to avoid while taking the product. I wouldn’t have recommended it if she had been a proponent of altered-reality substances. She was clean, Lieutenant, as both of you are.”

“If you can tell that by looking, we could use you in Illegals testing.”

“That’s not my path. I hope you find the answers you need on yours.”

“She seemed pretty straight,” Peabody commented when they walked out.

“For a psychic nutritionalist. No buzz anyway, but we’ll see what the lab says about the sleep aid. Meanwhile, we’ve got a couple more right in this area, then one in the East Village. And I want to talk to the lawyer. See if you can get her to come in, save us a trip uptown.”

* * *

THEY INTERVIEWED THREE PSYCHICS—WAKING UP ONE WHO CLAIMED to commune with spirits only between the hours of midnight and five a.m.

“Nothing there.” Eve got back in the car, aimed it toward Cop Central.

“The second one we talked to? Mikhal Lombrowski? He was the real deal. The others, maybe they had something, but mostly they were looking to score. He was genuine.”

“Why him?”

“My dad’s a sensitive, and he kind of reminded me of my father. He wanted to help her—that’s what came through for me—but he couldn’t give her what she wanted, so like she did with Hester, she cherry-picked, and moved on.”

“I tend to agree. It’s also telling that she went to all of these before she started making those weekly withdrawals. We need to find the one she settled on.”

As she pulled into Central’s garage, Peabody glanced at her signaling ’link. “Huh. The lawyer’s on her way in. We don’t get that kind of result often.”

“Set us up a conference room and give Dickhead a goose on the tox.”

“You want me to goose Dickhead?”

Eve thought of the chief lab tech. “It’ll throw him off coming from you instead of me. Maybe we’ll get happy results there, too.”

She needed to set up the board and book in her office, write everything up.

And if she didn’t have the tox results within an hour, she’d personally go to the lab and sit on Dick Berenski’s egg-shaped head until he produced.

She turned in to Homicide, noted all her detectives and cops were present. “Is there no crime today?”

Baxter, feet on his desk, a ’link at his ear, grinned at her. “Tying one up now, LT. The asshole Trueheart and I took down bright and early this morning’s down in booking.”

She glanced at Trueheart, who’d soon be ceremoniously awarded his gold detective’s shield. Obviously Baxter had dumped the

paperwork on his partner.

She glanced across the bull pen to where Santiago sat morosely under a big black cowboy hat with a shiny silver band. “How much longer do you have to wear that?”

“A bet’s a bet.” Behind him, Carmichael smiled smugly. “And he lost.”

“I went double or nothing with her—it’s a sickness.”

She decided not to comment on Jenkinson’s tie, because it looked like an explosion of radioactive waste. Instead she escaped to her office, set up her board. Armed with coffee, she sat at her desk and wrote everything up, in detail, adding a query to Mira.

Then, with more coffee, she put her boots on the desk, her eyes on the board and let her brain play with theories. And, still thinking, she pulled up an incoming from Morris.

“Dallas.”

She held up a finger to hold Peabody off, finished reading. “Morris found traces of peyote, cannabis, phencyclidine, and mint inside the female vic’s nasal passages, sinuses.”

“She inhaled it?”

“Inhaled this—he believes in vapor form. Ingested more in liquid form. What about the lab?”

“Berenski says he’ll have the final when he has it—then I played the innocent underling card, said how you were all over my ass, complimented that weird facial hair he’s been growing lately. He said to give it another twenty.”

“Good job. If she wasn’t taking this crap voluntarily, somebody was doing a hell of a number on her. Morris confirms, even without the elements we haven’t nailed down, she’d have been in a euphoric and altered state.”

“Maybe she didn’t know what she was inhaling and ingesting, or maybe whoever mixed all this up told her it was what she needed to communicate with her parents.”

“Either way, whoever gave it to her is responsible for two deaths.”

“Her lawyer’s here—the family lawyer, I mean. I had her taken to the conference room.”

“Let’s go dig out who stood to gain.”

Gia Gregg sat ramrod-straight at the conference table, talking on an ear 'link. She gave Eve a nod and continued her conversation. She wore a black suit, sharp as a scalpel, and her hair in a dark crown of tight curls with shimmering red highlights. It suited her coffee-regular skin and her cool green eyes.

She completed her conversation, then removed the ear 'link and slipped it into a pocket of her jacket.

"I'm sorry. It's a difficult and busy morning."

"We appreciate you coming in."

"Sean Fitzwilliams has arrived in New York. I spoke with him before I came in, and he instructed me to give you my full cooperation. The family is, understandably, devastated. And they want answers, Lieutenant, Detective, because no one who knew Darlene believes she did what the media is gleefully claiming."

She took out a notebook, set it on the table. "I intend to take careful notes of our conversation, as I and my clients also want answers. Have you any leads?"

"Our investigation is active and ongoing." Eve sat, took the lawyer's measure. A solid rep, Roarke had told her, and he would know. Her own research indicated Gia Gregg had represented the rich and richer with a steady hand for more than three decades.

"At approximately eight thirty last evening, Darlene Fitzwilliams entered her brother's apartment. Within minutes she stabbed him three times in the chest with a pair of nine-inch shears and immediately walked out to the apartment's terrace and jumped to her death."

"I don't believe that."

"It's fact. However," she added before Gia could protest, "our investigation leads us to believe Miss Fitzwilliams was under the influence of a hallucinogenic cocktail."

"Darli—Miss Fitzwilliams did not use. In fact, part of her work in the Fitzwilliams Foundation supported rehabilitation and education centers for illegals abuse."

"The final toxicology report is still forthcoming, however, the preliminary has already identified several substances in her system, including valerian, diazepam, peyote, phencyclidine, and cannabis."

Gregg's eyes widened at the length of the list. "Then someone dosed her without her knowledge or consent."

"That may be. If she consented, it's highly probable she did so in the belief the substances would aid her in communicating with her parents. Were you aware she'd been seeking the help of psychics and mediums for that purpose?"

"Not until this morning. I've also spoken with Henry, her fiancé. He told me what you found in her closet, and about the bank account, the withdrawals. Someone used her grief, someone did this to her and Marcus."

"At this point, with the evidence we have, I agree with you."

Gia's shoulders relaxed for an instant. "We need to issue a media release. Darlene's reputation is being—"

"We're not going to do that. Her reputation isn't my concern. Finding whoever provided her with illegals, whoever convinced her to take them or gave them to her without her consent is. Who stands to gain by their deaths?"

"Both Darlene and Marcus leave a considerable estate in their own rights, and have numerous beneficiaries. The foundation itself would be the largest for both."

"Who gets the biggest piece of the pie?"

"Before their parents' death, we had a meeting—the four of them—regarding updating their estate plans, beneficiaries. Darlene chose to leave ten million to Henry on the event of her death, as well as her share of the home they purchased."

"Funny he didn't mention that."

"He doesn't know. Darlene was also firm on that stipulation. He's a proud man. He was raised by a single mother who worked very hard to support him and his sister. He was able to go to college and grad school because of her hard work, and his own. Scholarships, interning. He made his own. And you can trust that when it became apparent he and Darlene were serious, her parents did a thorough background check on him." Gia sighed. "He's a good man. I'm very fond of him myself. He loved her. The money? It didn't play a part for him—in fact, it was an obstacle initially. I'm also aware he works for your husband, who would also have done a thorough background on

him. Henry wouldn't work for Roarke in such a key position if he weren't ethical and clean."

"She had a lot more than the ten."

"Yes. There are individual bequests to family members, most sentimental rather than monetary. Marcus, for instance, left Darlene his apartment. There's a difficult area here, as he predeceased her."

"By a couple minutes."

"By seconds would amount to the same, legally. He left most of his property to her, so—though I will study on this—it appears this will flow into her estate. As I said, the bulk goes to the foundation, and to individual organizations the foundation supports. Darlene earmarked several for single bequests or for continuing grants."

She took a disc from her bag, offered it. "I have a list for you, though I can't see how it applies. Darlene researched and investigated all grant requests. She, Marcus, Sean, and two other foundation officers would then review and vote on the grants."

"They—these officers, staff—draw a salary?"

"Yes."

"Who runs the show now?"

"Sean would be acting president, and acting CEO of the business. I can also tell you these aren't positions he wants. He and his wife are well settled in Europe. His youngest child is in school there, his oldest—with his first wife—lives minutes away with his own wife and children. The loss of Darlene and Marcus is shattering, and so close to the loss of Gareth and Bria. It's going to take time and work to restructure the positions, the responsibilities."

"Best guess?"

"They'll try to keep it in the family. I would recommend they divide both Marcus's and Darlene's positions. Several candidates stand out, but none of them would kill for the job."

"People kill for all sorts of reasons," Eve said. "Maybe one of them told her about a medium, guided her where they wanted her to go. Who was she close to? Who would she tell when she decided to go this route?"

"Marcus, and obviously he didn't know. Henry, the same. And Louise Dimatto, whom I know you're aware was a close family friend.

Darlene had other friends, of course, but those three were her foundation. If she told none of them, she told no one. I wish she had. I wish she'd talked to me. We had a good personal relationship."

Tears swam into her eyes, and she paused for a moment until she'd controlled them.

"If she'd come to me, I might have been able to help her. I could have used my resources to find her the right person, someone gentle and kind as well as gifted."

"So she could talk to her dead parents."

"While I may be a bone-deep skeptic on such matters, I discount nothing. But I know this: If she'd been able to reach them, they'd have told her to move on with her life, and they'd never have suggested she use drugs. So I have to conclude she didn't reach them."

"We're going to agree on that."

"The family requested I ask when they can have Marcus and Darlene."

"We'll release the bodies as soon as we can."

"Sean—particularly—would like to see them. Henry, he needs to see Darlene."

"No, he doesn't." Eve gentled her tone, just a little. "No one needs to see Darlene as she is now. Trust me on that."

"They'll insist."

"Let me talk to the ME, see if anything can be done to . . . minimize the damage."

"That's very kind of you, and much appreciated."

"You're going to be with the family. If you get any sense, hear anything that leads you to believe someone played a part, I want to hear it."

"You can depend on it. I won't, but I also won't withhold any information that pertains to their deaths. They mattered to me, Lieutenant, as much more than clients."

CHAPTER EIGHT



Obviously complimenting Dickhead's excuse for a goatee worked, as Eve had his report in her inbox when she returned to her office.

The minute she read it, she sent a copy to Mira, then headed out.

"Dallas?" Peabody called from her desk. "Are we back in the field?"

"I need Mira first. Work out the best route to hitting the rest of the psychic list. I'll be back in ten."

She had to get through Mira's snarly admin, but she needed answers. Louise was an option, she thought as she jumped in an elevator despite the crowd inside. She'd given Louise the data mostly to keep her busy, but she'd be a good source.

Still, she was strictly medical, and Mira was both a medical and a head doctor. And a superior profiler.

By the time Eve made it to Mira's office, she was ready to attack. It came as a slight letdown to see the admin's desk unoccupied and Mira's office door open.

"Did someone slay the dragon?"

Mira glanced over. "She's still at lunch. I've only gotten back myself now. Your toxicology report—"

"Have you read it?"

"I just reviewed it. Sit."

"No, I'm revved up, need to get back in the field. That combination inside her—inhaled, ingested—that's extreme."

"Yes. Even in these minute amounts, and particularly when combined with regular use of this sleep aid. The aid itself is perfectly harmless, and potentially beneficial, but no sensitive, no legitimate

one, would combine these other substances, even not knowing the client was taking a valerian-based holistic.”

“She’d hallucinate.”

“She would have been very susceptible to hallucinations, yes. I’m having tea.”

“No, please. I mean go ahead, but I don’t have time for it.”

In sapphire blue heels to complement her winter white suit, Mira ordered tea from her AutoChef.

“Not only would she have experienced an altered state—a sensation of extreme well-being—but a kind of spacial confusion. I’m surprised she was able to navigate to her brother’s apartment.”

“The doorman said she walked to the building. Maybe whoever gave her this crap transported her close to the building.”

“I don’t believe she could have driven herself in this state. Eve, I’ve never seen this combination of drugs—herbal and chemical, but with some of the derivatives sometimes used to aid in hypnosis, to relax the patient, help open them to suggestion. Some practitioners use small doses to aid in weight loss, rehabilitation of substance abuse, even anger management. But this combination?” Mira took a sip of tea from one of her delicate china cups. “I would want to do a full analysis myself, but I believe this would have left her open to post-suggestions with hallucinations and altered perceptions. The addition of phencyclidine?”

Eve wasn’t a chemistry whiz, but she was a cop. “That’s the base element for Zeus.”

“Yes, and while this amount and combination isn’t Zeus, it could cause someone to harm themselves. To burn themselves—even set fire to a building mistaking a flame for a flower, for instance. Or cut themselves believing a knife was a bar of soap. To fall, seeing a drop off a building as a set of stairs.”

“She stabbed her brother three times. She might have thought she was giving him a love tap. She fell fifty-two floors, maybe thinking she’d sprout wings and fly.” This fit, Eve thought. This worked for her, both brain and gut. “We may never know, but it’s pretty damn clear somebody fucked her up, and if she needed help getting to her brother’s place, they wanted him dead, too.”

Nodding, Mira brushed back a curve of rich brown hair. “Look for someone who’s skilled. This combination took time and practice to perfect. Someone also gifted. It’s very likely they are indeed a sensitive, as they read this victim very well. They also gained her trust, and I would say gained it quickly.

“It’s most likely a male—she would see a male as authoritative, experienced. Probably between forty and sixty. He’s experienced, he’s studied, and she wouldn’t have been as susceptible to a younger man.”

“Misses father, depends on older brother.”

“Yes. Your killer is a sociopath who exploits his own gift. He’s organized and intelligent, and enjoys having control over others, and looks for gain. He likes to live well. He may also be a psychopath, finding pleasure in causing death, yet he has no direct hand in the killing.”

“I found pieces of what the lab’s confirmed was a lapel recorder near her body.”

“Ah.” Mira nodded again. “No direct hand in the killing, but a desire to watch. To kill, essentially, without being there or getting his hands bloody. He’s unlikely a physical sort. A manipulator.”

“She was sleepwalking.”

Mira frowned over her tea. “The sleep aid should have prevented that.”

“The three times her fiancé found her at it, she was doing or saying weird things. Pouring tea for a party, down in the kitchen; crawling under the bed saying she needed to go down the rabbit hole. Sitting on the bed, waking him up with a riddle about a raven and a writing desk.”

“*Alice in Wonderland.*”

“That’s what Louise said.”

“Interesting.” Mira sat back in her blue scoop chair, sipped more tea. “A sort of test, I’d think, laying a base for the post-hypnotic suggestions. An interesting choice. A kind of surreal story filled with a young girl’s bizarre adventures. Some interpret it as drug-based—the hookah-smoking caterpillar, the mushrooms that cause Alice to grow, and so on. He may be an addict himself. A combination of

psychic abilities and hallucinogens would give him a heady sense of power.”

“He kills—or rather causes another to kill because he can, and because it gives him a sense of power. Watches, from his . . . client’s point-of-view—that gives him a front-row seat.”

“Yes, and Alice again. Perhaps delight; a childish delight in watching the murder and suicide he’s manipulated.”

“He’s probably done it before.”

“It worked so seamlessly, really, it’s difficult to believe this was his first.”

“Then I’d better find him before he sets the next one up.” Heading back, she switched from elevator to glide, moving briskly, and spotted Roarke the minute she turned in to Homicide. He sat on the corner of Jenkinson’s desk holding a conversation that had her detective grinning.

When he saw her, he rose, strolled over. “Lieutenant.”

“Are you here to report a crime?”

“No. I had a meeting nearby and took a chance my wife might be about. And here she is.”

“Not for long.” But she considered her options. “How much time do you have?”

“That would depend.”

“If you’ve got an hour, maybe two, I’d split Darlene’s list with Peabody.”

“Then I’ve got an hour, maybe two.”

“Good. Hold on a minute.” She stepped over to Peabody’s desk. “See if Feeney can spare McNab. If so, take him with you and check out the last half of Darlene’s list. If McNab can’t do it, take Uniform Carmichael. Roarke and I will work on the first half.”

“Sure. I’ll tag him now.”

“McNab or Carmichael, Peabody. Good eyes and experience. We’re looking for a sociopath with at least some psychic abilities, one who may be an addict. An interest or obsession with *Alice in Wonderland* is likely, so look for any sign of that. Psychopathic pathology’s also very probable.”

“Solid backup because he could try to put the whammy on me.”

“Solid backup.” Eve left it at that, turned away, and noted that Roarke must have slipped into her office and back, as he held her coat.

“Thanks. Report after every meet,” she told Peabody, and strode out, swinging on the coat as she walked.

“You probably know more about this *Alice in Wonderland* stuff than I do.”

“I know the story,” Roarke said. “I’ve read the books, and seen a variety of vid interpretations.”

“Like I said, you know more than I do, so you’ll be handy. The person we’re after likely knows a lot about it, too. You might catch something I’d miss.”

“Such as a white rabbit or mad hatter?”

“If you say so. I’ll drive,” she said when they reached the garage.

“You don’t know the story?” he asked her.

Her childhood hadn’t been prone to bedtime stories. Then again, she thought, neither had Roarke’s.

“Some kid falls down a rabbit hole, which makes no sense because rabbits are a lot smaller than kids. Weird stuff happens.”

“It’s considerably more entertaining than that. Though it was written as a children’s story, it has fascinating symbolism, intrigue, social commentary.”

“Whatever it’s got, somebody who may have psychic abilities and certainly has access to and knowledge of hallucinogens is using that knowledge, and those possible abilities, to kill. And at least with Darlene Fitzwilliams, some of this Alice stuff played in. It’s unlikely she was the first,” Eve continued as she navigated traffic. “But I can’t run like crimes. I can’t know if it’s a murder/suicide trend, just murder, just suicide. Or maybe ruled accidental when somebody walked in front of a maxibus because they thought they were chasing that white rabbit thing.”

“People will ruin everything, won’t they? A beloved story becomes twisted to kill.”

“Something strikes you Alice-like, let me know.” Unwilling to take the time to hunt up street parking, she pulled into a lot. “There’s two within walking distance.”

They got nothing from either, then backtracked to the parking lot. Eve headed across town to the East Village.

“It strikes me how much of your day is routinely spent doing this. Talking to people who turn out to have no connection to your case or who may give you another line to tug.”

“That’s why they call it a job. This next one? Goes by the name of Madam Dupres. She even had her name changed legally. But she started out as Evelyn Basset, born in Yonkers, fifty-four years ago. Some twenty-five years back, she had a pretty thriving business.”

This time Eve hit on a street spot and zipped into it at an angle and speed that had Roarke’s eyebrows lifting.

“Had a rep, had a screen show, made a bunch of money, and lost it all when her husband-slash-business manager ran off with her assistant. He’d also gotten her to sign over the bulk of her earnings along the way, so he could—legally, if not ethically—walk away with the dough.”

“I imagine her reputation suffered.”

“You got that.” Eve stepped onto the sidewalk with him, gestured north. “Who wants to shell out for a psychic who doesn’t know her spouse is screwing around on the side and who’s going to end up leaving her broke? Part of her thing was connecting people with dead loved ones.”

Eve stopped in front of a Ukrainian restaurant, nodded at the sign on a skinny doorway. “Now she runs her shtick out of a second-floor apartment over this place.” Eve pressed the buzzer, mildly surprised when it buzzed back seconds later to unlock the narrow door. “The thing is,” she said as they went into a dim stairwell, “she’s clean. No criminal, no litigations I could find. In fact, she worked with cops numerous times in her heyday. Specialized in finding missing kids—the reports claim she was instrumental in locating a number of them. So I figure, if Darlene did her due diligence, this is one she would have come to.”

The entrance to apartment 200 boasted a bold red door and a brass knocker in the shape of a dragon. Eve took the dragon by the tail and knocked.

The door opened.

The name had given Eve an image of turbans and colorful scarves, but Madam Dupres stood about five-foot-five in a simple dress as boldly red as the door with her dark curling hair loose and unstyled. A number of large and glittery rings adorned her fingers, so that was something.

“Lieutenant Dallas. Roarke.”

“That’s right.”

She smiled as she stepped back. “No mind reading necessary. I recognize you. Please come in.”

The apartment—surprisingly spacious; Eve saw it ran the length and width of the restaurant below—reflected a quiet taste and elegance. A collection of crystal balls in a wall case caught the sunlight and seemed attractive rather than occult.

“I don’t read anyone without permission,” she said. “So discourteous. You’ll have to tell me what I can do for you, but first, please sit. It’s coffee you prefer, isn’t it? I’d be happy to serve you.”

“We’re fine.” Eve took a seat in a high-backed chair with curved legs while Roarke took its twin, and the madam settled on a long, low couch.

“I’ve read of your work—both of you—and very much enjoyed Nadine Furst’s book on your investigation of the Icovs. It’s my sense you don’t generally seek the services I provide.”

“We’re here on official business. Did you know Darlene Fitzwilliams?”

“Fitzwilliams?” Madam Dupres’s dark eyes narrowed. Her index finger went to her right temple, pressed. “Darlene. Why?”

“Last night she stabbed her brother to death, then jumped off his fifty-second-floor terrace to her own death.”

“Death? Two deaths?” Now all four fingers pressed, and her color drained. “What time? Could you tell me what time they died?”

“Between eight and eight thirty last night.”

“I . . . I’ve been in meditation. I was disturbed, felt something dark crowding me. Shortly after eight last night.”

“Is that so?”

“I dreamed of death—a waking dream—so much blood, such grief. There was no ignoring such grief, so I went into meditation,

inside a circle of light.”

“Are you going to tell me you know why Darlene killed her brother and herself?”

“Fitzwilliams?” Pain clouded her eyes. “I don’t . . . Was she—I’m sorry, terrible headache.” She got to her feet. “It came on so quickly. I need to take a blocker. I want to help, but . . . She was young, wasn’t she? Very beautiful and young and in love and sad and—I’m sorry. If you’ll excuse me for just a moment.”

She walked away quickly, turned in to a doorway.

“Meditation, circle of light.” Eve pushed to her feet. “She knows something. Your bullshit meter’s as tuned as mine. What’s your take?”

“The pain was real.”

“Yeah.” Frustrated, Eve jammed her hands in her pockets. “Yeah, it was. We’ll give her a minute. There’s something . . . She avoided a yes or no. Did you know her or not? And she damn well did. People don’t go pale and sick over the death of a stranger.”

Impatient to get back to it, Eve looked around. “The place looks normal, quiet and normal. Where’s all her trappings?”

She circled the room, glancing at crystals, candles, then angled to look into a neat kitchen with white cabinets.

“She’s taking too long.”

Suspicion rose up to twine with impatience. Eve crossed to the doorway, saw the pretty bedroom beyond. Across from it another doorway opened to a kind of cozy sitting room, with dozens of white candles.

Circle of light, she thought, and started to step into the bedroom, to call again, when she heard the sound of breaking glass.

She charged in, tried the closed door, found it locked. As Roarke rushed in behind her, Eve kicked the door once, cursed, kicked it a second time.

Dupres lay on the white tiled floor of the bathroom, blood pooling around her from the deep gash in her thigh.

“Call for a bus!” Eve shouted.

Grabbing towels, she kicked the shards of broken mirror out of her way, crouched down to bind the towels on the wound.

“She’s bleeding out—gashed the femoral artery. For Christ’s sake.”

“On their way.” Roarke took another towel, wrapped it around the deep gash in Dupres’s hand.

Dupres’s eyes opened, stared into Eve’s. “Beware the Mad Hatter.”

“Who is that? Give me a name.”

“Lies, all lies. All his words, even his name. Dark is his truth. Death is his joy. I sent her to him. I sent her to her death. He’ll seek yours now. Beware the Mad Hatter,” she repeated, and the eyes staring into Eve’s died.

CHAPTER NINE



Having someone die under her hands pissed her off. Having someone die under her hands during a damn interview added a whole new level to pissed.

She watched the MTs pronounce Dupres and wished she had something handy to kick into pulp.

“There was nothing you could have done,” Roarke said.

“I let her walk off, walk out of sight to get a damn blocker.”

“The pain was real,” he reminded her. “You’d need to be psychic yourself to have known she intended to kill herself.”

“Yeah.” Eve loosened the fists she’d balled into the pockets. “The pain was real,” she repeated, and yanked out her ’link to contact Morris.

“I’m sending one in to you.”

“I’m sorry to hear that.”

“Self-termination—broke a mirror, jabbed a shard into her femoral artery.”

“That would do it.”

“She had a severe and sudden headache a minute before she did it. It came on during the interview when I asked her about Darlene Fitzwilliams. I think we’re dealing with the same thing here. Drugs and mind-control. Some sort of post-hypnotic trigger. Look for any similarities with Darlene Fitzwilliams, will you?”

“I will. Mira might be helpful here, as she’s trained in hypnotherapy.”

“I’ve talked to her, and will again. Do me a solid, send the dead wagon.” She gave him the address, signed off. Then immediately

tagged Peabody to have her and McNab report to her.

“Dupres was a link,” Eve said to Roarke. “We’re going to turn this place inside out, find out where Dupres sent Darlene Fitzwilliams. Mad Hatter, my ass.”

“But you’re considering the fact both dead women made references to *Alice in Wonderland*.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

“I’ll start on the electronics while you consider.”

“McNab can handle it. This is going to take longer than the hour or two I asked for.”

“She died on my watch as well, Eve.” Roarke took her hand briefly. “I’m fully in it now.”

Understanding, she started her search in the bedroom.

Dupres had a conservative wardrobe—nothing extravagant, but good fabrics, good quality. The same ran true with jewelry, accessories. Nothing there shouted mind-reading psychic who talks to dead people.

No sign, Eve noted, anyone else had spent any time there—no sex toys or enhancements, no men’s belongings. No women’s belongings, she noted, other than what appeared to belong to Dupres.

Oddly, in the underwear drawer, like at Darlene’s, she found a small notebook. A paper book with a good leather binding. She frowned as she paged through, and was still standing there reading when Peabody stepped in.

“The morgue’s right behind me,” she said, and glanced into the bathroom. “That’s a lot of blood.”

“Gashing the femoral artery will empty you out pretty fast.”

“Why kill herself if she’d drugged Darlene into murder/suicide? Did she try to . . . you know?”

“Put the whammy on me? No. And I don’t think she killed herself because she worked Darlene into killing. I think the same person who did that, did this.”

“But . . . you were right here. Was she high?”

“Didn’t appear to be, and that’s troubling. But it fits for me.”

“What’s that?”

“It’s like a diary, but not. Just observations, thoughts, little poems. She mentions bad dreams, headaches, memory blanks. Sleepwalking.”

“Like Darlene.”

“The Mad Hatter and the March Hare hold their tea parties, but the tea is blood. The Dormouse sits in the corner, counting the money.’ What’s a dormouse?”

“I don’t know, exactly. It’s another character in the story.”

“Figured. And here, the last thing she wrote. ‘Day and night, darkness bright, he has the sight and feeds it on their sorrow. Bright and mad, deceiving sad, take what they had and bring them death tomorrow.’”

Eve glanced up. “Then she writes ‘WHY CAN’T I REMEMBER?’ in all caps, and circles it again and again.”

“So he used her, probably to solicit rich clients—the dormouse counting the money—and somehow blocked her memory of it.”

“Something like that,” Eve agreed. “But the keys here are ‘he.’ So it’s a man, like Mira predicted, and more, there are three. If we take this literally. Mad Hatter, March Hare, Dormouse. Three of them working this.”

“It’s weird to the mega. Where do you want me to start?”

“Take the kitchen,” Eve told her as the morgue team did their work. “We’re going to send samples of any tea, coffee, herbs—hell, pretty much any consumables. And we’ll get the sweepers in here, in case there’s anything.”

McNab, who could’ve passed for a weird psychic in his sunburst shirt and the hip-swinging vest covered with neon blue stars, came to the doorway, then sidestepped for the morgue team and body bag.

“We may have something.”

“What something?” Eve demanded.

“We found a memo cube in the room across the hall. A recording. Roarke says it’s your vic’s voice. It’s weird, like she was in a trance.”

Eve nudged by him and went into the room where Roarke stood working his PPC.

“Her circle of light,” he said.

“Yeah, I saw that. This cube?”

When he nodded, she picked it up and activated it.

“In my circle the door is closed. Nothing passes through. Safe and quiet mind, safe and quiet mind. Too much blood! Too much. What have I done? Help me see. Blue smoke, blue light. Too many voices. Quiet, be still.”

Just breathing now, long, deep, a shuddering breath, and more steady ones.

“Blue smoke, blue light. See through it. See true. Bright, bright, bright. Not true. A lie, another lie. I am not weak.”

Weeping now, the words thick with tears.

“I found my strength after the lies. These are just more. I didn’t see. I didn’t know. Bright. It hurts to see. It hurts to know. Blood on my hands. So much blood. Bright blood. A lie, see through the lie to truth. Simon. Zacari. Roland. Carroll, and more and more. One truth in the lies. Where is the truth? All are death. That is the truth.

“Now rest, just rest, mind, body, spirit. Know his truth is death, and don’t follow.”

“Peabody, run those names and all combinations. Simon, Zacari, Roland, Carroll—add *bright* into them. She says bright too often for it not to mean something.”

“I already am.” Roarke continued to work his PPC. “Give us a few minutes here, it’s a dicey job on a handheld.”

“McNab, tag Feeney. Let him know we need the lab. It’ll go faster at Central.”

“Considerably,” Roarke agreed.

“We’ll load up her electronics, take them with us. Let’s move. Peabody, let Dawson know the sweepers need to send samples of anything she’d have consumed to the lab. Officer . . .” She read the name tag of the uniform on the door. “Kinsey. Hold here for the sweepers.”

“Yes, sir.”

They hauled down Dupres’s tablets, links, desk comp.

“Roarke, narrow the search, crossing the names with psychic and/or medium work and licenses.”

“I didn’t just come down in the last shower of rain,” he replied, and slid into the passenger seat.

“What does that even mean?” She gauged the traffic, cursed it, then shot away from the curb. She felt the first real crack in the case, needed to widen it—and snarled at the fat, sticky knot of vehicles in her way.

“I’m going in hot,” she announced, hitting lights and sirens.

In the back, Peabody said, “Oh boy,” and clamped her hand on McNab’s. Focused on the work, Roarke simply tightened his seat belt without glancing up.

“I might have something on Zacari. One Anton Zacari, lived and worked as a spiritual consultant in Prague from 2049 to 2052. Closed up shop, relocated to Kashmir.”

“Where?”

“Himalayas, darling. And there he went missing on a mountain trek, and is presumed dead.”

“The dead don’t kill.” Judging an opening, she punched for more speed. “Got an image of him?”

“I do. Age forty-eight when he dropped off the grid. No marriage, no co-habs, no criminal. Hmmm.”

“Try an image match with the other names,” she began, then caught his quiet stare as she hit a fast vertical to circumvent vehicles that wouldn’t get the hell out of her way. “Fine. If you’re so damn smart, why aren’t you a cop?”

“You’ve just answered your own question. Image matches will go smoother and faster in the lab, but I’ve got something here on Roland. Angus Roland, spiritualist, Edinburgh, 2045 to 2048. Relocated to Istanbul, where he drowned in a boating incident in the Sea of Marmara. Body never recovered. Isn’t that interesting?”

“It’s bollocks, that’s what it is. Image?”

“At a glance, no match, but . . . with a bit of work. Ages are wrong by a few years, but only a few.”

“Changes appearance and ID, fakes death after a relocation. The world’s his sick playground.” Eve ignored the wide eyes of a pedestrian foolish enough to try to beat the sirens, swung hard to

miss said idiot, then zipped back to avoid a collision with an oncoming Rapid Cab.

“Stop muttering, Peabody,” Eve ordered.

“She’s praying, Dallas.” She caught McNab’s grin in the rearview. “This is some wicked ride.”

She hit vertical again, did a kind of midair, two-wheeler turn to take the corner tight enough to have the glida-cart operator doing business on it scramble back.

“Wasn’t that close,” Eve said under her breath. “Glorified grifter, that’s what he is. If the other names don’t run the same, I’ll kiss McNab’s bony white ass.”

From the backseat, McNab snickered. “How can I lose?”

The comment pulled a reluctant laugh out of Eve as she arrowed toward Central’s garage. And with a scream of tires and a squeal of brakes, she shot into her slot.

“Thank you, Jesus, Buddha, and the goddess Morgana.” On shaky knees, Peabody climbed out. “I covered my bets.”

“Lab.” Eve doubled-timed it to the elevator. “Three or four years in one location. How long’s he been in New York? How long does he stay after he scores?”

She rode up to her level, cops and staff and civilians clambering on and off. “I need five in my office.” She bulled her way off. “I’ll be right behind you.”

“She needs to put Dupres on her board,” Roarke commented. “Acknowledgment.”

“We’ll get him.” Since Eve wasn’t there, McNab wound his arm around Peabody’s shoulders, gave her a squeeze. “On the scent now.”

When they got off and turned toward the lab, e-geek Callendar crossed paths. She wore a hat with snowmen dancing around the brim and a scarf of purple, yellow, and green in lightning bolt stripes—both courtesy of Peabody’s talent with yarn.

“Yo. Heard you caught a hot one.”

“Scalding. You out?”

“Was. Scalding?”

“Total,” McNab confirmed. “Multi-search, single name cross, global, image matches with variance. Background, deep, on the bogus front—missing and presumed.”

“True? Psychic deal, yeah?”

“True. Fresh DB on the slab.”

“Want assist?”

“Won’t say no.”

“All in.” She pivoted, walked with them to the lab. She gave Roarke a sunny smile. “Dallas?”

“Had to make a stop. She’ll be along.”

“Chill.”

When they reached the lab, Callendar pulled off her green coat with its purple sleeves and unwound her scarf. Under it she sported a cap-sleeve sweater in puce over a long-sleeve turquoise tee, lime green baggies, and buttercup yellow knee boots.

Between her and McNab it looked as if neon had invaded the planet. Then Feeney stepped in wearing his habitual shit brown jacket and wrinkled beige shirt. The contrast only made the neon glow more fiercely.

He scratched his fingers through his wiry mop of silver-threaded ginger and studied the transported electronics with his baggy, basset hound eyes.

“Callendar, let’s you and me give these toys a what-for while the others get set up.”

“Aye, aye, Cap’n.”

Roarke found it surprisingly easy to fall into work rhythm with a lab of cops. He shifted away from that work for a moment and ordered three large pizzas with a variety of toppings. His wife would mutter about it, but she’d eat.

In the shorthand geek-speak that made Eve’s eyes glass over, he and McNab worked out a plan of attack and, with Peabody on auxiliary, settled into it.

Through the glass walls of the lab, Eve noted the sharp and colorful Callendar chair dancing as she worked beside Feeney. Peabody huddled over a comp while McNab stood, that bony white ass tick-tocking, and Roarke—suit jacket shed, sleeves rolled up,

hair back in a leather thong—sat on a stool dancing his fingers over a keyboard and a touch screen.

She stepped in and frowned at the chatter. Why couldn't geeks just speak regular English?

"Status?"

"We're running deep on your vic's e's," Callendar told her. "In case something's buried or pinched."

"Doing background, underlayment," Peabody said, "on the two Roarke pulled."

"Image matches on auto." Roarke continued to work. "Analysis of facial elements, probability run on possible reconstruction."

"Got reports on the missings and presumed," McNab added. "And jiving into search and cross on remaining names."

"And there. See it?" Roarke asked.

McNab shifted toward Roarke. "And there's the bingo. Collect the stuffed elephant."

"Carroll, Niles George, licensed psychic and hypnotherapist, London, 2039 through 2044. You could toss this image in the mix, lan."

"All about it."

"A bit of trouble here."

"Yeah, I see that." Eve stepped closer to read the data on the screen. "Had a client walk out of his place, go to her son's place, and, Jesus, set fire to it. The son, his wife, and two children got out. The client didn't."

She felt the pieces fall into place as she read on. "Hallucinogens found in her system. By the time they traced her steps back to this Carroll—and you have to wonder about anybody with three first names—he was in the wind. He could blow pretty far with the three-quarters of a million he'd pulled from the dead client over six months. Some other clients dumped another five million and change on him during his London stint."

"See here?" Roarke brought up another report. "The son was taking legal steps to take over his mother's finances, citing mental and emotional instability."

“Which gives Carroll—or whatever the hell name—motive to get rid of the son, and the client while he’s at it. Drain them, eliminate them, and blow. He doesn’t just blow, doesn’t just shift away from one client to an easier mark, because deluding the client into killing a loved one is part of the whole. Maybe his end game.”

“His name wasn’t Carroll.” Peabody swiveled on her stool. “Niles George Carroll with that ID number didn’t exist before 2038. It’s pretty good fake data, but there are holes, and when you go into them, it falls apart.”

“Got more names here.” Feeney leaned back in his chair. “Dupres encoded them, sandwiched between other data.”

“Looks like she did the input about three this morning,” Callendar added. “The way it reads, Dallas, these are all pre–your bogus Carroll dude. Six in total.”

“Let’s throw them in. Which is the first?”

“First, if we figure this is chrono order, is Ravenwood.”

Eve pulled up a stool next to Roarke’s.

“I can run it,” he began.

“Yeah, do that. I’m taking Bright. If this is chrono, and Bright wasn’t just a rhyme, this could be who he is now.”

“Hit on Simon.” McNab did his little boogie. “Got your pattern, clear as they come. François Simon, psychic advisor and spiritualist, New Orleans, 2053 to 2057, went missing on a sabbatical to South America. Presumed dead.”

“Three to four years, each spot habitually,” Eve said as she worked. “He’s still here, but probably not for long. Callendar, I want you to—”

“Run a search for murder/suicides each location just prior to the fuckhead’s exit. On it.”

Roarke hit on two others, with the pattern holding.

When the pizza arrived, Eve did indeed mutter—but grabbed a slice of pepperoni. The lab might have smelled like a pizzeria, with a sugary topping of fizzies, but the work got done.

“Louis Carroll Ravenwood,” Roarke announced. “McNab, do a double, would you, to confirm this is the first?”

“Can do.”

“Daresbury, England—which, as I’ve spent a little time boning up on Lewis Carroll—was where Carroll was born and raised.”

“Not a coincidence,” Eve stated.

“I’d say not. Spiritualist, offering readings, consultations, séances, and past-life regressions; 2022 to 2028.”

“His longest stint.”

“It seems. Pulling related data, I have an article or two. He claimed to be a connection of Carroll himself, through one of Carroll’s sisters. And was called to Daresbury by Carroll’s spirit, whom he also claimed to channel. He worked with his sister, not surprisingly called Alice.”

“There’s no sister mentioned in any of the other data on the other names.”

“Wouldn’t be,” Roarke confirmed, “as she died in Daresbury in 2028. Suicide.”

“Bang.” Eve’s eyes narrowed. “Mira will make buckets of shrink juice with that.”

“And more so as it was discovered Alice Ravenwood had been an addict with a taste for meth and LSD. She suffered from acute depression and, after lacing a pot of tea with sedatives, served it to herself and her brother. She died; he nearly did. He left Daresbury soon after. There’s nothing on him, under that name, past that.”

“I want to see the police report. Maybe he dosed the sister. Either way, it gave him his springboard for all the rest. Crazy bastard skins the clients, then picks one to re-create the—Fucking A, I’ve got him. Carroll Bright. Claims to be a ‘Doctor of Paranormal Studies.’ I’ve got a goddamn address.”

CHAPTER TEN



Bright sighed as he entered the lovely parlor where Ms. Harriet March was setting out the service for tea.

“My dear March, the time has come for us to move on. How do you feel about Budapest?”

“Hungry for goulash.”

He chortled, giggled, slapped his thighs. “That’s the spirit! I’ve given notice. We’ll begin packing after our session with the delightful Mrs. Melton.”

“Our Mouse signaled they’re on their way.”

“Excellent.”

“And will Mrs. Melton join her sister in the Wonderland?”

He smiled at the avid look in her eyes. He’d been right to keep her. He’d sensed her potential when she’d first come to him—seeking communication with a lost love. A shadow of darkness inside her, so easily deepened with time and patience.

And of course the tonic she’d become so fond of.

“She and her husband will make their journey tonight, even as we make our own.”

Eyes shining, she clapped her hands. “We’ve never sent two clients down the rabbit hole so close together.”

“Isn’t it fun! Our time in New York has been so lucrative, and we waited so long for the first to go. I thought sending another would be our little farewell party. And there she is now! Would you get the door, Ms. March?”

“Of course, Doctor Bright. The tea and cakes are all prepared.”

Naturally, he thought, and swallowed the little tablet that would offset the tea. He checked himself in the mirror—his favorite looking glass had traveled with him around the world. And he decided he'd use his favorite top hat for this last session in New York.

Then he turned to greet the marvelously wealthy and wonderfully hopeful Mrs. Melton.

She came to him, both hands outstretched. "Oh, Doctor Bright, I've so looked forward to today. I'm so anxious to speak with my sister again."

"There's nothing like a sister," he said with a wide, wide grin. "Let's have some tea."

It would, he thought, be a lovely party.

* * *

EVE PLANNED HER APPROACH CAREFULLY. SHE AND PEABODY WOULD go to the house, gain access.

She circled the conference room where she'd assembled her team. "I want him in the box. Once we get him out, the search team—with the warrants—goes in. The detectives from Illegals will handle the search for the drugs. McNab and Callendar take the electronics. And since the expert consultant civilian wants in, he's on finances. We want to establish Fitzwilliams paid him that nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine dollars a session and do a secondary check to see if he scammed his way into her will, probably through the foundation.

"Look for false IDs—licenses, passports—and a client list. Check for recordings of the Fitzwilliamses' murders, and any others." She glanced around the room, nodded. "Peabody."

"Set."

"Let's hit in."

Roarke moved up beside her as they headed out. "He must have abilities. He'll try to read you."

"I know how to block. Peabody's father's a sensitive, and he taught her how to filter. She's anxious about it, but we've got to go in."

I want to see his place, see his reactions before we bring him in.”

“He’s not working alone.”

“Thought of that. This is what we do, Roarke.”

He knew it, all too well. “It’s one thing when your body’s on the line. This is your mind as well, so have a care with both.”

“Plan to.” She separated from him in the garage, got into the car with Peabody.

“I’m a little nervous,” Peabody admitted. “What if he tries to put—”

“Don’t say whammy.”

“What if he tries to put the thing I’m not saying on us?”

“Think about sex with McNab.”

“Huh?”

“Didn’t you say your father told you to fill your mind with other thoughts, confused and jumbled? Do that. Nobody’s going to want to keep pushing in if all he gets is you and McNab and sex.”

Catching Peabody’s smile, Eve hissed. “Not now. Stop thinking about it now. It creeps me out.”

“Just practicing.” Happily, Peabody practiced all the way uptown.

Rather than search for a space, Eve flipped up her On Duty light and double-parked. She didn’t think this first stage would take above fifteen minutes.

“Wow, this place is really beautiful.” Peabody studied the wide, three-level townhouse as they approached. “It looks sort of European. I bet it’s on the historic register. One of those great old buildings from the nineteenth century that survived the Urbans.”

“We can admire the architecture later.” Eve had been studying it as well. Doors, windows, exits. She doubted her quarry would rabbit—a loss of control and power—but she wanted the layout.

“Cop face—no bullshit, straight out.”

“Sorry, I’m thinking about sex with McNab.”

“I could learn to hate you,” Eve threatened, and rang the bell.

Palm plate, cams, police locks, she noted. She stared stony-eyed ahead until the voice came through the intercom.

“Please state your business.”

Not a computer, she thought. Not with that squeaky tone. So, at least two to take on.

“NYPD. We need to speak with Doctor Bright.”

“Doctor Bright’s unavailable. Go away, and come back later.”

“You can open the door, or I’ll stand right here until I get a warrant to open it myself.”

And if he didn’t, she’d use the warrant she already had. But the door opened a crack. She had to look down a half a foot to meet the eyes of the man with a wild thatch of brown hair. Those eyes had the pinkish tint of a funky junkie.

“The doctor can’t talk to you now.”

Eve solved the first problem by getting her foot in the door, nudging it open a little wider. “Who are you?”

“I’m Dorbert Mouse. Who are you?”

“Lieutenant Eve Dallas.” Dormouse. It suited. “Why don’t you tell Doctor Bright I’m here, along with Detective Peabody?”

“Because he can’t be interrupted when he’s communing with the Other Side!”

The quick excitability spoke of something in addition to the funk.

“He needs to commune with us.” Eve nudged the door wider still and saw the brightly colored painting of a hookah-smoking caterpillar curled on a toadstool.

“Nobody invited you! Go away!”

“Look Mouse—or is that Dormouse?”

His pink-rimmed eyes filled with rage. His nose twitched manically. “You can’t see my whiskers! They’re not for you to see.”

He kicked her, the move so unexpected his foot connected with her shin before she anticipated it. Then he ran, bolting up the steps.

“Shit. Call the e-team in for backup,” Eve ordered, and pulled her weapon as she gave chase.

He bounded up, with her and her aching shin in pursuit, and Peabody coming up behind her shouting for the e-team to move in.

He made a fast turn on the second-floor landing and vanished. But not before Eve caught the movement of a wall panel sliding shut.

She tugged at it, got nothing, then ran her fingers along the carved chair rail. When the panel slid open again, she grabbed a statue of a white rabbit with an oversized pocket watch and used it to prop the panel open.

Inside, in half light, she saw crooked steps leading up, and leading down. She closed her eyes for a moment, heard the sound of feet scrambling.

“Up,” she said. “Watch your step.”

She went up two at a time and caught sight of the shin-kicker darting down an oddly slanted corridor toward a closed door. Blue light leaked under it.

At a full run she hit the door seconds after he scurried through and went in low, weapon sweeping.

Mouse jumped up and down in the blue light, the blue fog, squealing about his whiskers. A woman with long, dark hair giggled and twirled just outside the fog. She stopped when she saw Eve, and her face filled with rage.

“Off with her head!”

To Eve’s bemusement, the woman hefted fisted hands over her head as if brandishing an axe, then charged.

Because there was yet another woman—older, sitting in a chair blanketed with that blue mist, her head cocked under a feathered hat, her eyes glazed and glassy, Eve took the quickest route.

Two short, hard left jabs put the charging woman down.

“Stay out of this blue stuff, Peabody.”

She caught a movement, saw through the blue curtain the tall, thin man in a purple top hat. Eyes wild, and yes, she supposed, mad with it.

She pivoted toward him as the world went as mad as his eyes.

Lights flashed, bright, multicolored lightning, while crazed laughter boomed. The floor seemed to tip right, then left, as she struggled to keep her balance. Images bloomed in the fog—a grinning cat, the caterpillar that puffed out more smoke, a fat white rabbit with a glinting pocket watch.

And the man in the top hat, who chortled gleefully while he poured tea into cups.

A pretty blue bottle sat on a table, a white light beaming on it. A large label dangled from it.

It said: *Drink Me.*

And it was tempting.

Out of the corner of her eye she saw Peabody step forward, start to reach out. And snapping back, Eve grabbed her arm, yanked.

“Don’t.”

“But it says!”

She saw now they’d stepped too close, that the fog twined around them. Feeling light-headed, she shoved Peabody clear, stumbled back.

She thought she heard voices echoing, and running feet pounding. More coming to the party.

She barely swallowed down the giggle that rose to her throat and aimed her stunner at what she hoped was the man in the hat and not some illusion.

“Turn this shit off, now, or I’ll put you down.”

“No need,” Roarke said, and the flashing lights fell with a resounding crash—or so it seemed to Eve. The mist crawled back on tiny blue feet to be swallowed up by a gaping mouth in the floor.

“Shit. Shit. I inhaled.”

“You’ll be all right.” Roarke hauled the man in the hat away from some sort of computer. The computer became a fat cat that yawned and stretched, then curled up to sleep.

“Mind taking him?” Roarke passed the Mad Hatter to Callendar.

“No prob. Hey, asshole.”

“You’re not the White Queen.”

“No. I’m an e-bitch goddess. Illegals coming in, McNabber. I’m bringing in the wagon for this group.”

“Yeah, good.” He was on the floor, cuddling Peabody, who patted his cheek and smiled dreamily.

“Hi, sweetie! Want to have lots and lots of sex?”

“Yeah, that’d be frosty. How about we get you some air first? What the hell’s in that stuff?” he asked Roarke.

“A wild trip, I’d say, but hardly fatal, as the three of these had their share. Best call in the MTs.”

“Aw, man, don’t call them.” Eve waved the idea away with her stunner; Roarke gently took it from her. “I’m fine, we’re all fine. Got the bad guys. Somebody oughta do something with the lady over there. She is *out* of it.”

“The MTs will see to her.” But his wife was Roarke’s priority.

“Okay, good. She prolly thinks she’s talking to a dead relative.”

Roarke put a supporting arm around her waist and led her out.

“I gotta secure the scene and investigate.”

“The Illegals detectives can handle that part now.” He thought about telling her to mind the stairs, then just solved it by picking her up.

“You’re so pretty. The mouse kicked me in the shin.” Giggling, she kicked her feet. “I fell down the rabbit hole.”

“So it would seem.”

“I didn’t like it. I like being here with you better.”

She was placid enough sitting on his lap while an MT examined her. And perfectly cooperative when he bundled her into the car. As he drove, he could see her start to come back by the way her body lost that pliancy and her eyes started to clear.

“And there you are. Take this.”

“What. Jesus.” She shoved at her hair, and the raging headache under her skull, knocking off the snowflake hat she knew she hadn’t put on for the trip to Bright’s.

“It’s for the headache the medicals promised you’d have when you started coming down. And drink this.” He passed her a bottle of water as he continued to drive downtown. “Just water. You’ll be dehydrated a bit.”

Her throat felt as though she’d swallowed sand. She took the stupid pill, guzzled the water. “Bright.”

“In custody. All three of them. You dealt with it, Lieutenant, impaired or not. That’s the cop in you.”

“What impaired me?”

“It’s quite a cocktail, according to the lab—as it’s the same, assuredly, as what Darlene Fitzwilliams inhaled. Fortunately, you and Peabody didn’t have more than a whiff or two.”

“Peabody.”

“She’s right here.”

Eve turned around at McNab’s voice, saw her partner curled up with her head on his lap, sleeping. “She’s okay?”

“They said she’d just sleep it off, and a single exposure like the two of you had wouldn’t have any lasting effects.” He stroked Peabody’s hair as he spoke. “But . . .”

“I contacted Louise—as you’d want her to know what happened,” Roarke continued. “She’s on her way into Central, as we are, and she’ll have a look at both of you.”

“I’m fine. I’m starving. I want . . .”

Roarke activated the AutoChef, which produced a large bag of soy chips.

“Oh yeah. Fucker drugged me,” she said with her mouth full of chips. “I *hate* that. He’s going to . . . Oh, Jesus Christ, there was a woman. In the chair.”

“Andrea Melton,” Roarke told her. “The MTs transported her to the hospital. She was heavily dosed, and likely routinely dosed. But they know what he used, and they’ll treat her.”

“I need to talk to her.”

“Tomorrow, at least, for that.”

“Not for Bright, or whatever his name is. That’s for tonight.”

“And good luck with it.” Roarke pulled into Central. “Want a hand with her, Ian?”

“No, I—Well, maybe.”

Together, they got Peabody out, on her feet, where she smiled cheerfully. “Hi! Did we get ’em?”

“Yeah.” Eve led the way to the elevator. “We got them.”

“Yay! I feel really wooshy.”

“Tell me about it.”

“Are those soy chips? Can I have some soy chips?”

Eve gave her the bag as they got into the elevator. “Don’t you have a headache?”

“No, I . . .” Peabody’s entire face winced. “Ow.”

“Here we are.” Gently, Roarke slipped the pill between her lips and offered her the bottle of water he’d had in his pocket.

“Okay, thanks. He’s so pretty,” she said to Eve.

“Yeah, I know.”

“Mine, too. Sooo pretty. But my head hurts and I’m starving. I’m not supposed to be harsh about my body image, so I’m eating these

chips.”

“Take her up to the crib,” Eve advised. “Louise can take a look at her up there. If she’s clear, take her on home. Good job all around, McNab.”

“Thanks.”

Too tired for the glides, Eve rode all the way to Homicide, gave her partner a last look, and got off so McNab could continue to the crib.

“I need to put all this together, then take on the Hatter and his crazy crew. I don’t need Louise.”

“I have some lines.” He kept hold of her hand as they walked. “And one of them is you’ll get checked by a doctor before you finish this. If you argue I’d be forced to mention to your division that you giggled.”

“I did not. Shit. I did. I half remember. Fine, fine. But I want coffee, and lots of it. And that’s my line.”

“Agreed.”

She decided it was just as well she’d made the deal, as both Charles and Louise were waiting in her office.

“Let me look at you. Sit.”

“Coffee.”

Roarke nudged her into her chair and went to the AutoChef while Louise opened her medical bag. She took Eve’s wrist in her hand. “Pulse is strong and regular. Follow this light with your eyes only.”

Eve rolled them first, then obeyed.

“Peabody?” Charles asked.

“Coming around. McNab took her up to the crib. We’re fine.”

But Louise still took out a bunch of tools that made Eve scowl. She poked, prodded, scanned, measured. Then nodded.

“You are fine.” She took Eve’s hand again. “Thank you. Thank you for myself, for Charles, for Henry.”

“I haven’t finished it yet.”

“But you will. He’s staying with us for a while—Henry. We can go home and tell him you have the person responsible. It’ll help. I’ll let you get to it. I want to see Peabody.”

Before they left, Charles leaned over, kissed the top of her head. "Thanks for everything, Lieutenant Sugar."

"It's the job."

She blew out a breath when they left. "I probably need you to fill in some blanks spots. When he turned on the light show, I must have been disoriented enough to turn into that mist, just enough. But I had my stunner on him. I remember that."

"You did. Callendar dealt with the other man—the little one—and McNab pulled Peabody out of the mist. You'd knocked her back—I saw that as I came in—but she stumbled into it again. I found the controls, shut down the program, and . . . restrained the suspect. I'm assuming you took care of the woman who was laid out on the floor, sporting a hell of a bruise on her face."

"Yeah, and yeah, okay, I got it. Nice assist, pal. I need IDs on all of them."

"No ID on record for the Hatter. The woman is Willow Bateman—a few minor bumps prior to 2054 when she lived in New Orleans, then off the grid."

"I'm guessing that's when she hooked up, one way or the other, with . . . Okay, the Hatter works."

"The other man is Maurice Xavier. A number of bumps there, and some time in a cage for aggravated assault. He, too, drops off the grid, three years ago."

"Same deal, most likely. I'm going to have the head guy brought up. I think the other two were heavily under the influence, so I'll wait on them. You're going to hang, aren't you?"

"Absolutely."

"Figured. Let me set this up so I can box him in, then shut him down."

"Looking forward to it," Roarke said. "I'll take myself up to EDD, find the money, and help you close the door."

"Have fun with that."

"No question of it."

EPILOGUE



After the Hatter was brought in, Eve took a few minutes in Observation to study him. Tall and skinny, long face, long body, he sat in his prison jumpsuit with a cagey smile on his face and eyes of so pale a gray they seemed almost colorless.

Confident and cocky, she concluded, at least on the outside, but she noted the way his fingers tapped, tapped, tapped on the table as if he played a tune on invisible keys.

“He figures his ability gives him an edge,” she said to Peabody. “That he’ll read us, and use that to tangle things up.”

“Or put the you-know-what on us.”

“You can skip this,” she reminded her partner. “I told McNab to take you home.”

“No way I’m missing this part. Should I think of sex with McNab again?”

“Whatever works.” She pulled out her ’link, read the detailed message from Roarke. “The man is good,” she murmured. “Three hidden accounts, three different names—all leading back to the Hatter—who, according to Feeney’s search, is actually Louis Carroll Ravenwood, born Devonshire, England, in 1999—one sibling, Alice.”

“So he was who he was until the sister self-terminated.”

“Prior to, he and the sister—big surprise—worked the carnny circuit.”

Eve looked back through the glass. “Add the money and the false IDs to the whole bunch of drugs Illegals found in his house, and he’s not going to look so happy when we’re done. Let’s go wipe that smile off his face.”

He looked over as they came in, and his smile turned into a grin.

“Dallas, Lieutenant Eve and Peabody, Detective Delia entering interview with Ravenwood, Louis Carroll—”

“I’m Doctor Bright.”

Eve just kept speaking. “On the matters of case numbers . . .” She reeled off many as she took a seat across from him. “Mr. Ravenwood, you’ve—”

“I prefer Doctor Bright.”

“You’ve been read your rights,” she continued. “Do you understand your rights and obligations in these matters?”

“I understand perfectly, and so much more. How are you feeling?”

“Better than you will. A hell of a lot better than your two pals are. They’re getting jittery. That’s what happens when addicts don’t get their fix. I figure they’ll roll on you within twenty-four, but I don’t need them. Peabody, why don’t you list the illegals found in our guest’s home?”

Peabody took out her PPC and crisply read off the report from illegals.

“Quite a collection.” She kept her eyes on his, actually felt him try to probe her thoughts—and pushed her will against his. “That alone’s going to get you a nice long stay in a cage. Add in using said illegals on individuals without their consent or knowledge—”

“They come to me.” He played his fingers in the air. “They come seeking my help. I give them what they seek. We cross the bridge together, and the crossing requires peace. A quiet mind, quiet, relaxed, still.” His fingers played, played, as if stroking a purring cat. “Imagine drifting under a blue sea, under a blue sky. See the clouds, white and soft.”

He had something, she thought, and it pulled. But it wasn’t enough without the kick of his herbs and chemicals. She leaned closer. “You think you can mesmerize me? You’re a fraud. You’ve been a fraud your whole life. You just figured out how to use a mediocre talent to get rich and feel important.”

“Mediocre!” He slapped his hands on the table. “My gift is beyond. My beyond is genius!”

“Your gift is bullshit, Ravenwood. Or should I call you Niles Carroll? Maybe Angus Roland or Anton Zacari or François Simon?”

Something flickered in his eyes—the first hint of fear.

“I have many names. My gift demands it.”

“Gift.” She snorted. “I’ve seen carneys with more than you have. That’s where you started, right?” She pushed up, moved around the table, coming at him from behind. “Telling fortunes, getting people to quack like a duck at some two-bit carnival? You and your sister.”

His body jerked. “Be quiet.”

“Golly.” Peabody widened her eyes. “You’re pissing him off, Lieutenant.”

“Am I? Does it piss you off to talk about your sister? Did you feed her the drugs that hooked her, or did she do it to herself? Why did she try to kill you? Did one of your sessions go south? Or maybe you’d just had enough of her, drugged her up good, faked the whole thing so you could kill her.”

“She killed herself.”

“Like Darlene Fitzwilliams? Like—wait, let me read your mind.” She held her hands over his head, swayed. “I feel their spirits reaching out to me. Marian Beechem in London, Fiona MacNee in Edinburgh, Sylvia Garth in Prague.”

“Get away from me.” He shrieked it, but Eve continued to list names. “All women, like your sister.”

“I bet he couldn’t bring her back,” Peabody said. “She wouldn’t come. Not after what he did to her.”

“Shut up! Shut your mouth! You can’t speak. Your tongue is tied, your throat is closed!”

Peabody’s lips clamped together, her eyes widened as she lifted her hands to her throat. Choked and gasped. Then dropped them. “Nope, I can speak just fine.”

Good one, Eve thought. She glanced at her ’link, read Roarke’s text. Smiled. Then walked around the table again. “Jesus, the guy believes his own shtick. No good without the tea party and the mists, the lights. The hats? What is it with the hats?”

“Carneys like props,” Peabody suggested. “Maybe he’ll pull a white rabbit out of one.”

“Or a March Hare. But her name’s really Willow Bateman, and she’ll do all kinds of flips on you.”

“Ms. March is loyal.”

“To your illegals cocktails, sure. But without them . . . You shouldn’t have pitched your pathetic ability against someone like Dupres. She’s the real deal, and she gave us everything we needed to shut you down.”

“Impossible.” He flicked his hands in the air.

“Why? Because you slipped your ugly little mix into her tea leaves? Because you went to her, drugged her, then picked Fitzwilliams out of her client list? And while she was drugged, you planted the order for her to kill herself if she remembered, if she was questioned? Jesus, she lives over a restaurant. Did you really think no one would see you go up to her place?”

“I didn’t go! I sent Ms. March.”

“Right.” Eve sat again. “You sent Bateman posing as a client, and she laced the tea. And Mouse—that’s Maurice Xavier—brought them to you. Fitzwilliams now, such an easy mark, and such deep pockets. Wait.”

Eve pressed a hand to her temple. “I’m getting another psychic flash. Nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine dollars. Cash. Such a fat fee for you. But . . . there’s more. That well-heeled foundation. Millions to pump from that. What’s that? What? Yes, I can almost see it. There! The Looking Glass Fund.”

“Get out of my head!” The madness was back in his eyes. “You can’t see! I want my hat. Get me my hat.”

“You really think your stupid hat can stop me from seeing? The Amazing Dallas sees all, knows all. You had to get rid of them both. Push Darlene to make a twelve-million-dollar bequest to your shell charity, and get rid of them both. For the money, and the satisfaction. Sister, brother, just like you and Alice.”

He bared his teeth, all fury now. “I can make you beat your head against the wall until you’re dead!”

“Try it.” She reared up, pushed her face into his. “Just try it. I’m not drugged and grieving like your victims. You sent Darlene to kill her brother. You gave her the shears. What did she think they were?”

Candy? Wine? Flowers? Flowers,” she repeated when she saw his eyes shift. “I’m so sorry we argued, Marcus. I brought you flowers.’ And she stabbed him in the heart, then she jumped off his terrace, hallucinating, thinking what? She was walking on the beach, stepping into her own house? It doesn’t matter, you killed her, killed them both. And for what? For money. For money and entertainment. And to feel powerful.”

“I am powerful. I gave her what she wanted, didn’t I? She’s with her parents. I gave her what she asked for. I deserve the money. I want my money! I want my hat!”

He beat his fists on the table, his feet on the floor. “You’ll kill each other before the night is through. I can make you, like I made all the others. You’ll cut each other to ribbons. Ribbons of blood. And with blood we’ll paint all the roses red.”

He took a deep breath, and the shoulders that had come up to his ears relaxed again. “Now, have Ms. March fetch the tea.” His fingers played in the air again as he stared into Eve’s eyes, smiled. “We’re having tea. It’s my tea party, and it never, never ends.”

“I’ve got news for you. The party’s over.”

When they’d finished with him, at least for the night, Eve had him taken down to where he’d be held in the psych section, on suicide watch.

“Mira’s going to have a hell of a time with him,” Eve said. “We’ll take the other two in the morning. We’ll see what kind of mood they’re in after a night without their particular brand of tea.”

She watched Roarke come out of Observation.

“I regret to say, I do believe he’s mad as a hatter.”

“Probably,” Eve agreed. “That’s up to Mira, and I don’t give a rat’s ass if he spends the rest of his life in a concrete cage or a padded room. Either way, he’s done.”

“He gave me the creeps.” Peabody shuddered.

“It didn’t show.”

“Well, he did, and if it’s okay with you, I’m heading home and staying away from you until morning. So we don’t end up cutting each other to ribbons.”

“For Christ’s sake, Peabody.”

“Why take chances? I’ll write it up, but I’ll write it up at home. With McNab sort of keeping an eye on me.”

“Fine. I’m going the hell home myself.”

“And I’ll keep an eye on her,” Roarke promised Peabody.

She went to her office for her coat. “He has something.” She circled her neck. “Not nearly what he’s deluded himself into believing he has—most of it hinged on the drugs. Wherever he ends up, he won’t have them, but he needs careful watching.”

“He was afraid of you, afraid you have more than he does.” Roarke tapped the dent in her chin. “Perhaps you do.”

“Not a psychic—just a cop who knows how to read killers.”

“I have a hypnotic suggestion of my own.” This time, he laid a finger on her forehead. “You want to go home with me and have lots and lots of sex.”

“You putting the whammy on me, ace?”

“I certainly intend to.”

As they walked out, he pulled the snowflake hat out of his pocket, fixed it on her head.

What the hell, she thought. As hats went, it was warm—and pretty sweet.