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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 you 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. Charl

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—withering 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 blood 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 use 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 at 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 conversation 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.

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