

Chapter 9

First, the good news,” the executor continued. “The worth of the estate, to be divided equally among you, is approximately, adding the present value of this house, the home in Palm Beach, and their contents, upwards of \$4 billion.”

Jane watched the reactions. Jack and his paramour embraced. “Holy shit, babe!” Candi screamed. “We’re fucking rich!” And they kissed. Jane wondered if the woman’s use of the plural in her contraction mirrored her boyfriend’s view. Richard remained standing and, to his credit, said nothing. But Jane noticed him curl his right hand into a fist and pump it twice at his hip. Polly closed her eyes, and Danny continued to be Danny, typing away as if all was normal.

“Now... for the bad.”

Hathaway’s voice seemed to drop an octave, speaking those four words with a solemnness that stopped all celebration. Richard’s fist unclenched, the passionate, lip-locked lovers came up for air, and Polly opened her lids.

Danny coded.

“Two weeks ago, your mother called as she got off the plane from London, having visited you, I believe, Polly, and—”

“She went to London, as she does every year, for vacation, John. Visiting me was an afterthought, the first one in five years,” Polly interjected.

“Well, she called me from the airport, demanding I visit her that afternoon. She wanted to include a codicil to her will.”

“What’s that?” asked Candi.

“A codicil is an addition and—”

“Well, then why the fuck don’t you call it that to begin with?”

Jane smiled. She didn’t disagree.

“What—did—you—do, Polly?” Richard’s voice boomed.

“I did nothing, Dick. We spent an entire hour at dinner and hardly talked.” Polly paused, then resumed, muted, as if to herself. “She deigned to give me one fucking hour in the last five years.”

Hathaway realized he was losing control over the gathering and said, “Be that as it may, everyone, Emma was quite adamant. So I drove over, and she handed me her handwritten additions. Two secretaries from my office came as witnesses and a notary; all is in order. I think it would be wise to read it verbatim—and before you ask, Ms. Kane, that means *word for word*.” The woman smirked and raised her left middle finger but remained quiet since she *was* about to inquire about the word’s definition.

“By the way, Kate. You should know that before this cod... er, addition, Mrs. King bequeathed you the sum of one million dollars.”

The housekeeper made no sound and remained still, straight-backed on the couch. Her emotionless reaction caused the detective to ponder: *I wonder if she knew about the bequest in advance?*

Hathaway put on a pair of reading glasses, reached into the breast pocket of his jacket, and withdrew a sheet of paper. He read aloud:

“It says, ‘I realize I have not always been the best of mothers, and I’m sorry for any actual or imagined distress I may have caused you, my children; but, I feel my toughness and lack of coddling were for the greater good. You must be strong in this world and prepare for its dangers. You also must be self-reliant, which is why I fought your father over the million dollars he bequeathed each of you at his death. He thought you needed the head start on your inheritance. I felt it would make you lazy and that you’d squander it, which, from what I’ve learned, all but Polly seem to have done. She has had the sense to invest wisely; however, though she is financially in an excellent position, the rest of her life continues to disappoint me. We fought over that in London and left on bad terms. Yes, one might consider wishing me dead, bad terms.’”

Jane saw Polly close her eyes again, a tear trickling down her left cheek.

True regrets, Ms. King? Jane pondered. *Or are you sad that from the grave, your mother seems to have pointed her finger at you for her murder?*

“For the past three months,” the executor continued, “each of you has come to me, some more than once, and requested—no, demanded!—a substantial advance on their inheritance. And each time, I refused. Firstly, as mentioned, you need to stand on your own two feet. And one never knows what the future brings. I intend to live much longer and might need the money for my affairs.”

“Yeah,” shouted Jack, “how’d that work out for you, *bitch*?!”

Candi stroked his head as if she were comforting the family dog.

Hathaway continued. “But these conversations distressed me greatly. While I might be overreacting, I still fear that one of you may consider earning your inheritance unnaturally or prematurely. I know you must think these are the ravings of an ancient, foolish woman, but I saw in the eyes of each of you a hatred I had never noticed before.”

“Hah!” bellowed Richard. “You obviously weren’t looking very hard, you old fucking *cunt*!”

Aghast, Jane and Ted turned to each other.

Hathaway waited for King to calm down, then continued, quickly recapping the last words before the interruption. “Let’s see, where was I?.. Oh, yes, ‘But I saw in the eyes of each of you a hatred I had never noticed before. Enough, even, to make me fear for my life. Even Kate and I have had harsh words recently, frightening me. So, being of sound mind, I have amended this testament. As before, upon my death, after Kate’s bequest, I will evenly split all my worldly possessions among you four children. You have all been so ungrateful that I considered giving away my money. But you are my heirs. Therefore, I’ll do as expected, as your father wished. If, that is, I die of natural causes; however, all will remain intact if there is any hint of foul play, as determined by the proper authorities.

And there it will stay, in perpetuity, until whoever committed the deed pays for their crime and at that point, and just at that point, the estate shall be shared among those remaining, as set forth earlier in this document. Hopefully, I will live a much longer, natural life and pass peacefully in my sleep. If so, I pray my children use their inheritance wisely and bring honor to the King name. If I am most foully murdered, though, it will not come as a surprise, and I urge the innocent parties to assist the police in bringing the murderer to justice. Only then will I rest in peace, and only then will those who remain drink from the ocean of riches their father and I have so bountifully filled.”

Hathaway stopped reading, put the paper back inside his coat pocket, removed his glasses, and waited.

“What the fuck does all that mean?” Candi asked.

Richard entered the center of the room. He looked at Jane. “It means, Ms. Kane, that we don’t get to see a penny of Mother’s money until, and if, her murder is solved by,” he pointed ahead, “Detective, er...”

“Detective Sergeant Jane Rieger-Franklin, Mr. King. At your service.”

The man frowned. “Rieger-Franklin. I see. One of those hyphenated women. Your husband has to be very understanding.”

Jane smiled. *Great. Another Neanderthal to deal with.* “Yes, indeed. My *wife*... is most understanding.”

The lawyer’s mouth opened, and his eyelids widened. Jane caught Candi and Jack face each other. They grinned. *Hmm, I guess a threesome it is.* Jane shuddered at the thought. Then, from the couch came a voice, heretofore unheard.

“You’re a lesbian! How wonderful.”

It seemed that Danny King had finally found something worth his full attention. He closed the cover of his laptop and added, “*Lesbians* is my favorite category on Pornhub!”

Growing up with a sibling with Aspergers, one would have thought nothing their middle brother could say would shock the remaining King brood. But they, and almost everyone else

in the room, were stunned into silence. Even Candi had nothing to add.

Jane, however, understood that Danny had, in his way, expressed two simple facts—he watched porn, and lesbian porn was his favorite. Nothing more, nothing less. Her cousin Penny had often proffered similar non-sequiturs. So, the detective smiled and answered the man as simply and truthfully as she knew how.

“Thank you, Mr. King. It’s *my* favorite, too.”