

403: Day Four

[Click; rattle]

Ash [breathing heavily, stage whisper]: Holy shit. Oh god. Shit shit shit. **[Catches her breath a moment]**. Okay. I know this tape is for job site notes, but I need to say this out loud and the tape recorder was laying right by the bed. I might erase this later, but whatever.

I just had the most vivid dream I think I've ever had. It's, what? **[Checks the clock radio]** 2:37 in the morning. I'm sitting at the little desk in my room at the Navidson Arms, smoking a cigarette and trying to stop shaking. Jesus Christ, I can't remember the last time I had a dream that rattled me like that.

I went to bed fairly early, like 10:30 or something. I came home and had a toke on the balcony and then read a little while and then went to bed. The books is the new Hitchhiker's Guide, it's not like I was reading Stephen King or something. I didn't have any trouble falling asleep; we've been working long days and I was tired. I mean, I was a little irritated that I have to talk to Jack this morning—Geri said he's been making some comments to them that are starting to make them uncomfortable. Being a guy, basically. So I told them I'd talk with him before we got started this morning. But I wouldn't say that was weighing on me or anything. It's not unusual to have to have the "talk" with a new guy on the crew, especially a younger hot-shot dude like Jack. That wasn't keeping me up is what I'm saying. I went right to sleep.

None of that matters. I'm avoiding saying the dream. That's weird. Nothing actually happened in the dream. But it feels too scary to say out loud.

[Deep breath]

Okay here it is. In the dream I was standing in the yard at Hawthorne House. It was about dusk, or at least the sky was orange and gold, and the shadows had grown long across the grass. I went up the steps to the porch, to go into the house. I needed something inside the house, I don't know what, but it was important to go in. But as I reached out and grabbed the doorknob, I realized I had lost my key. I couldn't get in on my own.

And then, in the way of dreams, I could see through the door. It just became transparent, and I could see inside the house. It was clean and beautiful—as it must have been back in the 30s. A glass chandelier hung in the foyer, and the light gleamed off the bright oak of the staircase. A tall man in a shabby black sport coat and a fedora was standing near the stairs, looking at the railing like he was inspecting it or something.

I knocked on the door and called out, and the man turned toward me. It was my grandfather, looking like he did when I was a child. My whole heart leapt up. I felt a huge sense of peace and comfort seeing him there. I didn't realize how much I missed him until I saw him standing there. I called out to him through the door and he brightened I knew he recognized my voice. He came to the door to let me in.

He walked the same way, stooped a little, but almost jaunty. He pulled a set of keys from his pocket as he moved toward me. I stepped back from the door, and it became opaque again. I heard the locks pulling back, just like when I first opened the house up this week. And then the door opened and Grandpa Bob was standing there, smiling at me.

But now the sun had gone down completely, and it was cold and dark on the porch. And I knew, the way you now things in dreams, that the thing standing in front of me was not Grandpa Bob. It looked like him; it wore his face. But everything felt wrong. It was too cold, his smile too wide. His eyes were untouched by the smile, and instead looked hungry, like a predator that's

scented blood. The longer I looked, the more it even looked wrong. Its skin didn't sit right. When it walked, its feet didn't seem to rest easy in its boots. The thing on the porch was not my grandfather.

But it said my name, and it stepped forward with its arms spread wide for a hug. "I've been waiting for you, Ashley," it said. "I've been waiting for you."

It kept moving toward me, and I backed up. My foot slipped as the edge of the porch crumbled underneath it. I tried to catch myself, tried to grab the railing. But I couldn't, and as the thing wearing my grandfather's face reached out for me, I fell.

And then I woke up.

[Theme song; credits]

[Ash is in the truck, going to the job site]

Ash: Heading over early to talk to Jack ahead of the day getting started. I'm gonna run through what I want to say while I'm driving over so I don't get tripped up. This Jack guy...he's new, not just to our crew but to doing reno work. He's twenty-three or four, I'd guess, and really only had one job before this. That was with Fleming Asbestos, so not exactly renovation, but the same general feel of going in somewhere old and ripping stuff out before it gets made new. He can do demo pretty good, but needs some guidance when it comes to fixing it up afterwards. All good. Everybody's got to start somewhere, and honestly we can't really be choosers at this point.

But what apparently wasn't on the resume is that Jack has some pride issues. Like, he's got more than he's earned and it especially comes into play if he's working with people who aren't men. Which is half the crew. Geri told him to redo some clean-up yesterday and he

refused in very colorful terms, some of which referred directly to Geri. So I need to have a re-establishing of the pecking order, in which Mr. Carpenter is last. As I said, it is not, unfortunately, the first time I've had such talks with new crew members, and I can't imagine it's the last.

The last time I had to emasculate a chauvinist, I guess, was in Maysville. Maybe that's why I feel so weird about this morning. My telling Matt to knock off the macho bullshit that day didn't have anything to do with what happened later, but it still leaves a nasty taste in my mouth. And it led to all sorts of fun conversations: "Did you ever have any conflict with the deceased, Ms. Mobley?" "Why yes, officer, I called him a misogynistic prick a few hours before he died, but it was just part of the job."

Ugh. Why can't people just give me lots of money to go off by myself and work on old houses?

[She pulls into the driveway, parks, and turns the truck off]

There he is, looking full of himself, eating more doughnuts. Might as well get this over with.

[Click; rattle]

[Click; rattle]

[Ash is on the porch. We hear wind and bird calls]

Well, that went better than I expected. I didn't count on Jack's Southern upbringing. Once I hit the stern tone just right, he was all "yes, ma'am" and "no ma'am" and "you're right, ma'am." He says he's going to apologize to Geri when they get here. Even if he's just Eddie Haskelling me, it's better than nothing. I can't help what's in his heart of hearts. I just need him to play nice in my sandbox.

Anyhow, glad to have that out of the way. Now we can get back to figuring out why the outside of the house measures nineteen and a half inches less than the inside, and to finish tearing out the wall in front of that bookcase. And maybe we can get that attic open. I'll report back later.

[Click; rattle]

[Click; rattle]

[Ash is in the foyer. Quiet. The grandfather clock ticks.]

Lunch break. I'm eating in the foyer, because it's gotten too cold to sit on the porch. There were some slight snow flurries earlier today, but it's clear skies right now. Fingers crossed we don't get a big snow until things are a little more set up in here.

But—accomplishments this morning! Let's see. Ray is here with a couple of other guys, and he thinks he can have the wiring done by tomorrow afternoon. Apparently it's not as bad as he thought now that he's working on it. Or maybe he purposefully overestimated and is now taking pity on us. Either way, lights in the lower level tonight and lights throughout and possibly heat tomorrow night. So that's a big deal. We'll need to have oil delivered for the heater, so I'll call about that this afternoon.

I got the rest of those bookshelves uncovered. They do run the whole length of the hallway, and there was a bunch of stuff in there with them. Some old books too moldy to read, but a few in better shape. An old picture album, which is pretty cool and might be a nice artifact for the place once it's a B&B. Some Dickens novels, which Tony wanted, and two books that look like sketch books. Those are mostly blank, from what I saw on a quick flip-through.

The bigger and cooler thing of course are the shelves themselves. Beautiful hand-carved wood, set into the wall floor-to-ceiling. I can't believe anybody would cover it over. And the

covering was shoddy, too. Wood and plaster done really slapdash. I'm happy we found it. It really changes the feel of that hallway, which was sort of wasted space before.

Oh, and I suppose I should update on the situation with Jack. **[Deep sigh]** Apparently he was just bullshitting me with the respectful "yes ma'am" stuff. He started the morning by apologizing to Geri, but then immediately started making little jokes about women in construction, and those got increasingly more off-color and sexual, until Tony told him to shut the fuck up, and then Jack came to me to complain about Tony. Just drama and bullshit.

So I had a second talk with Jack, and basically told him to grow up or he's fired. I don't have time for this middle school business. Then I sent him out into the cold to find the septic tank and figure out where the sewage line leaves the house. I really don't want to find another crew member at this stage, but I'm not gonna make Tony and Geri put up with that kind of atmosphere on the job site. So two strikes for Mr. Carpenter.

Anyway.

This afternoon: we've got a surveyor coming to double-check why we can't get these measurements to line up. And me and Tony are going to get into that attic. Or at least we're gonna try our damndest.

Okay. I have finished my tuna fish sandwich. Let me go see if our man-boy has found the sewer line, and then we can bust into that attic.

[Click; rattle]

[Click; rattle]

[Speaking to Tony as the recording begins]

Wait, wait, I want to turn on the recorder so I can document this.

Tony: Okay. Just say when.

Ash: I am here with Tony, balanced precariously on either side of this metal ladder, about to try and force open the attic trapdoor. I'm gonna—here, Tony, move this hooklight—I'm gonna clip the recorder to my belt.

[Rustling as she does this]

Okay. Let's try this. If you brace against the wall on that side, I can probably...

[More movement]

All right. On three. One...two...three!

[They make two attempts to force open the trapdoor. On the third try, we hear the door move aside]

All right! We did it! Let's check this out. Tony, bring the light.

Tony: Got it!

Ash [climbing up into the attic]: Oh wow! It's huge! It...uh...it looks like it runs the length of the house, sloping down to the eaves, but I can stand up pretty easily here in the middle. Wow.

There's a heavy chest that looks like it was partially on top of the trap door, which is why it was such a bitch to open. It's pretty well-lit. That stained glass window is across from me, and it lets in a lot of light, this time of day anyway. There's some junk up here—two or three storage chests, another or those weird dressmaker's dummies, some old clothes on a hanging rack, some old pieces of wood or something.

There's a pile of bricks over there. That's not good—all that weight. We'll need to get that out of here. The dust is thick as hell, like an inch or more in places I'd say. We'll need to get the junk out, which won't be fun, carrying it all down this ladder. But I suppose they got it up here somehow.

Tony, go get the others. Let's show them what we've got here.

[We hear Tony leave via the ladder; Ash walks around the attic during this next]

This is a big space. There are several posts holding up parts of the roof, and some ropes or cables hanging down from the central beam. The stained glass window is strange—it doesn't have a match on the other side. It looks out on the side yard.

[She goes to the window]

Yeah. That's the side away from the parking area. It looks all scarlet and blue through this window, like the world is jeweled.

[A beat]

Who is that? Somebody just came around the side of the house from the back. A tall man dressed in a black suit, with his hands clasped behind him. He's walking along the side of the house, looking at the ground, like he's lost something. Who is this dude? We can't have people wandering around the property.

[She bangs on the glass]

[Louder] Hey! Can you hear me?

[To herself again] He stopped anyway. I think he heard me. I need to go down and see what. Oh! He's looking up here. He's...oh my god. What's wrong with his eyes?

[Theme music; credits]

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