

404: Day Four/Five/Five and Half

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Ash: 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?

Oh, it's just the stained glass. They looked...it doesn't matter. It still doesn't explain why he's here.

[Louder, again] Hey! Can I help you?

[To herself again] This is ridiculous. Why does he keep staring at me? I need to go down and figure out who this clown is.

[Click; rattle]

[Theme music; credits]

[Click, rattle]

Ash: Back at the Navidson Arms, about to head to bed. The batteries died in the recorder, so I didn't get to finish up notes for today, and I wanted to do that real quick so I can start fresh tomorrow. Luckily Miss Stella, the woman who runs this place, had some double-A's to loan me. I'll buy some more at the Stop and Go in the morning on the way in.

That guy wasn't there when I got outside. Just not there. It took a few minutes to get

down from the attic to the front porch—maybe four minutes—, but he wasn't anywhere to be seen. Not on the side where I had seen him, not in the back yard, certainly not in the front of in the house itself. Tony had gone down to get the others; he had talked to Geri in the foyer and then found Jack in the front yard. They were still out there when I came outside. So it's... **[is this the right word, she wonders]** *unlikely* that some guy was in the yard and nobody else saw him.

Geri said maybe it was one of the Junior Satan Club. But it wasn't a teenager, it was a middle-aged man, in a suit for crying out loud. Like an old-fashioned double-breasted suit, like he was living in the thirties or something. That sounds weird, I know. But I didn't imagine it.

[Uncertain now] Maybe I *did* imagine it? And I really don't know what that means if I did. A year ago it would have meant Ash was seeing things. It meant hallucinations, it meant 36 hours without sleep. Let's be honest, it meant detox, right? Intervention. Ash being Ash again. And nobody actually said that today, like nobody said it out loud, but I could tell Tony was thinking it. Maybe Geri was too, but they'd never actually... But I swear the strongest thing I had today was black coffee and a raspberry jelly doughnut. I know I said I was going to have a toke once I got back here, but I haven't even done that.

I'm going to, though, as soon as Miss Stella goes to bed. I feel like a teenager again, waiting to hear my mom turn off Johnny Carson and shut off the light. Climbing out my window and sitting on the roof. Counting the days until I could leave. This is not nostalgia, by the way. I did get out and good for me.

[Changing the subject] So. I don't think I'm seeing things. It's not flashbacks or whatever—I don't think that's even a real thing. Which means there was somebody in the side yard, somebody who the rest of the crew didn't see, and who was gone by the time we walked around the side.

All that means is that whoever it was left through the back yard, where no one could see him. The fact that Jack was in the yard doesn't mean anything, because Jack couldn't find his ass with two hands and a map, as Grandpa Bob used to say.

So, maybe a neighbor, curious about the work? We see that a lot. Old guys—it's always guys and they're always old—wandering by to stand and watch us work. Bored or curious or just genetically predisposed to be in the way. Could be the surveyor, who never actually showed up yesterday, though why he'd come and walk around the outside and then leave I can't imagine. And surveyors don't usually dress like they're going to a Great Gatsby-themed costume party.

So I'm betting crazy neighbor person, even though the closest house is a quarter mile away. If you've got nothing better to do than wander around construction sites, I suppose a little walk isn't going to stop you.

Crazy neighbor. We'll go with that. **[Exhales]** Okay. That feels better.

Nothing much else note-wise for the day. Jack did find the septic line, so he's not totally useless. I still made him stay after everybody to close everything down. Maybe that was mean. I can't bring myself to care much, after the shitty things he said to Geri.

The surveyor didn't show, so I've got to call him back in the morning and see what's up with that. Otherwise we made progress on the downstairs, which is now cleared out for the most part. Tony is working on repairing the floor that the Junior Satan Club burnt. And a lot of boring stuff—scrubbing graffiti off the walls and what-not. Bigger work starts tomorrow, when we tackle the foyer walls and the staircase.

So that's where we are. And since I just heard Miss Stella head up to bed, I think I'm gonna go sit on the porch and relax before passing out.

[Click; rattle]

[Click; rattle]

[Ash is in the foyer, sounds of sawing and hammering intermittently in the background] Notes for day five. It's Friday, December 4th. Geri tells me it's Marissa Tomei's birthday, and honestly I've quit wondering why they know so much celebrity trivia. This is our mid-morning break, although Tony's working through it since we got a late start because of Jack.

Jack didn't show up for work this morning. Neither Tony nor Geri talked with him last night, and he was still here when we all left. There's no phone here, obviously, so after an hour of waiting I drove back to the Navidson Arms to see what was up. He wasn't there, and Miss Stella said he didn't get breakfast. His room's empty. I know he hadn't come in by the time I went up to bed at midnight or so.

I'm not worried, I'm just pissed. My feeling is he got his panties in a wad because I held him to account yesterday, and he's throwing a tantrum. He's so fired, oh my god. I have no idea if he's planning on coming back or not, but I certainly can't just sit around and hope. So now I have to spend some time at the pay phone at the Stop and Go trying to find somebody else to come up and help. I'm hoping Pete Russell is free, but even if he is, Monday or Tuesday's the earliest he could get here.

So I'm off to the pay phone. I bet we're two days behind schedule before this gets figured out. Goddamn Jack.

[Click; rattle]

[Click; rattle]

[Ash is driving] Okay, so Pete Russell can come help, but he's got to finish a job this weekend, and then has something on Monday, so it'll be Tuesday before he can get here. We're supposed to be taking weekends off—Geri and Tony are heading home this afternoon so we can

save the money on the Navidson Arms—but now I wish we weren't.

[Sighs] I'm not gonna lie, I feel like I'm just holding it together. There's so much riding on this, and we're a whole week down with not much to show for it. I could kill Jack. Why can't you just show up and be professional? I should probably let the owner know. *Goddamnit!*

[a beat]

Breathe, Ash, breathe. What would Grandpa Bob do? First off, he wouldn't spend time regretting things that can't be changed. "The past is dead and buried, Ashley." And that's the truth. You can't change the past. And let's be honest here: Jack was bad news, and if he's decided to run away like a little bitch then good riddance. We'll work faster and better without him. Everyone gets along with Pete, and we can have the site ready to go when he shows up on Tuesday. **[another deep breath]** We can do this.

[She pulls into the drive and gets out of the truck]

And we've still got the afternoon to finish up the...Hey! Hey you!

[she starts running] Hey! Stop! Come here!

[she stops in the backyard, breathing heavily]

Where did he go? It was...**[catching breath]**...the same guy. Tall. Three-piece suit. He walked around the corner into the backyard right as I was getting out of the truck. But now he's gone. Where did he go? Did he climb a tree? **[louder]** Hello? Can I help you? **[to herself]** "Can I help you?" I sound like a checkout girl at Food Lion. **[louder]** Hello? You can't be here! I don't want to have to call the police!

[long beat; we hear the wind and Ash's breath, comingled]

You are talking to an empty yard, Ash. And you're freezing your ass off.

[she walks back toward the front of the house]

[muttering] I bet it's a neighbor. I should ask around and see. It's a renovation, folks, not a spectator sport.

[unmuttering] I bet it snows tonight or tomorrow. I need to remember to watch the weather tonight. **[beat]** I think I'll pay the extra to Miss Stella for tonight and Saturday and see how much I can get done on my own over the weekend. I bet I can finish stripping the staircase and cleaning up the bookshelves in the hall, anyway. I won't tell the guys. I can surprise them Monday morning.

Yeah. That feels good. That feels proactive. That's what Grandpa Bob would do.

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[Click; rattle]

[Click; rattle]

[Ash is in the house]

Notes for what I'm gonna call Day Five and a Half, since we're not technically supposed to be working today, and since I won't get nearly as much done without Geri and Tony. It's 4pm. I've been here since around 11. I did at least let myself sleep in and had the real sit-down breakfast at the Navidson. And then I packed a little bag of snacks and tools and supplies and headed over here.

And I don't know, I may end up getting a lot more done than I expect. It's weird how much of my time is spent supervising and deciding for the crew what to do next. Looking over shoulders. Not because Tony or Geri need me to check behind them—they're the best crew I've ever worked with—but because I'm ultimately responsible for the job. Today I've been able to just work. Just do whatever needs doing. I finished stripping the main staircase, and then went on to do the same thing to the wainscoting on the rest of the foyer. There's some repair work to

be done on part of the stairs—one riser is cracked and there are chips on the railing, but otherwise it's ready to go. Tony can get those places fixed on Monday. We're gonna do the floor in there, too, to get that big stain up, but that's also Monday.

I moved from there to the hallway behind the living room. I'm going to set up the space heater in here and finish cleaning out around these shelves. I got the plaster and wood cleared away for the most part, but it's needs cleaning out, and I want to check the woodwork on the shelves to see what needs repair. We'll probably strip it too, so we can stain everything to match. Though this wood is darker than the wood in the foyer just in itself. Like it's not stained—it's dark wood. So maybe we need to make the rest of downstairs match this?

Anyway, that's the plan. But I got distracted by this picture album, which I've been flipping through. It's a real goldmine when it comes to restoring this place. There are pictures of the outside of the house from several angles, including a good one of the side with the stained glass, and a dozen photos of the interior. There's not a clear shot of the hallway, but in this one of the living room you can glimpse the bookshelves through the doorway in the background. So they go back at least that long.

[we hear her flipping pages in the album]

The pictures are all in pretty good shape, only a little yellowed. A few are peeling up at the edges, but most of them are still pasted down. Weirdly, being sealed up behind this wall probably helped preserve them. There's people in most of them, of course, and in one of them you can see that dressmaker's dummy from upstairs. It's got an actual dress on it, and a woman is kneeling by it, pinning up the hem. You can see the door to the attic behind her. So cool.

[Turns another page]

The same woman is in several of these. She looks like the daughter of the family. Looks

young anyway, late teens or early twenties. The other people are older, and are probably her parents? Some servants, looks like.

I should put this down and get back to work. It's getting cloudy outside, and I don't want to drive back through snow.

[Turns another page]

Ooo! There's the foyer all done up and fancy! Looks like a full-on chandelier. The stairs sweeping down to a gorgeous Turkish rug. A bunch of people posing at the foot of the stairs, smiling that strained old-fashioned picture smile, like a family portrait.

[Turns another page]

Wait a minute! That looks like...it is! That's Grandpa Bob! He's standing right there with them! I wonder if for some reason they let the

[Ash's voice fades; we hear static and then—is that whispering?]

[Click; rattle]

[Still in the house; we can hear wind rising outside]

It looks like the batteries died again. Luckily I bought some extras and stashed them in my bag. I don't know what I was saying or even where it stopped recording. I kept talking for a while and then went and worked on the bookshelves. I only noticed when I picked it up to document what's happening.

I have severely misjudged the weather. It's snowing really hard right now, and the wind is picking up. I'm shutting everything down now and heading back to the Navidson before it gets too bad. I'll do notes for the end of the day while I go.

[walks across the foyer as she talks]

The shelves are in good shape except for some bad scarring along the top for about half

the length, probably from when the wall was put up over it, and a shelf near the bottom that's broken neatly in half. That's easy to fix.

[She opens the front door; the storm is very loud—wind howling, snow swirling]

Jesus Christ! I need to get to the truck...

[Click; rattle]

[Click; rattle]

[She is back inside. The storm can be heard raging outside]

This is bad. It looks like I'm hanging out here for a while. Somehow, the two back tires on the truck are flat. Like flat flat, rims on the ground. Under normal circumstances I could probably limp the mile and a half to the garage on Ellis Street, but there's no way I'm trying it in this. The roads are already filling up with snow. I have no idea what the plow situation is in this town.

I came back in, moved the space heaters into the living room, and fired them up. Unfortunately the oil hasn't been delivered yet, so the central heat isn't on, but at least Ray got the lights working. Hopefully this won't last too long. Worst case scenario, I can trudge through the snow to a neighbor's and call a cab or something, assuming the main roads are drivable by then.

Otherwise, well. I'm not going to think about otherwise. I've got lights, I've got heat, in this room at least, and I've got snacks in my bag that I'm glad I rationed through the day. This will be unpleasant, but that's all. It's not like I'm trapped trapped.

[the wind continues to howl]

I really wish I had told someone where I was, though.

[Theme music; end credits]