

The Murder at Adler Pond

“No signs of a concussion,” the doctor said waving his light irritating close to my face. “And if it weren’t for that bump on the forehead, I wouldn’t worry.”

“That and the fact I have a huge chunk of lost time that I don’t remember?” I asked.

The man introduced as Doc Herman was one of two things: the small-town doctor torn away from his afternoon off fishing or an enthusiastic outdoorsman who became the town doctor since he had medical training. Doc Herman was wearing a khaki vest and left his fishing waders by the door with a bucket hat loaded down with lures. However, he also had a fully stocked medical bag, so I had to assume he was a professional medical doctor. The police station had put us in a conference room, which was as private as we could get while the doctor looked me over. Everything in the room smelled like stale coffee and cigarette smoke, that was seeping into my coat and hair. I was eager to drink these details in. I knew I had to grasp onto something solid at the realization I was missing time.

“Don’t worry, Mr. Royale,” Doc Herman said, offering me a soft smile. “It’ll come back to you if you give it time. It’s like plants, ya know? It’s better to let the seeds grow than try to force them out.”

“Does the homespun wisdom make the house call cost more?”

Doc Herman chuckled and patted my shoulder. “At least you kept your sense of humor.”

A knock at the door caught my attention. A woman walked in wearing a brown jacket and a gold star on her shoulder. She’d tied her dark hair back into a tight, professional bun, but a non-regulation tattoo of a crow peaked out at her neck. She’d told me her name was Sheriff Sarah Miles, but she seemed a little disappointed when she had introduced herself.

“How’s he looking, doc?”

“Memory loss, for sure,” Doc Herman said, concerned. “As far as we can tell? He’s missing about six months. Doesn’t even remember driving up here.”

“Daniel?” Sheriff Miles asked me. “What’s the last thing you remember?”

“Honestly? I was in Philadelphia. Got home after a terrible day at work and drank a beer before going to sleep. Hoping I have a job when I get back.”

“And you don’t remember Penelope at all?”

“Who?”

“Penelope Royale?” Sheriff Miles asked. “Your wife?”

“Wife?” I scoffed, biting back a laugh. “I’m not married. I’d like to think I’d remember something like that...”

“You were here on your honeymoon,” Sheriff Miles said. “You married three months ago.”

“It must have been a whirlwind romance,” I said. “If it’s alright with you, I think I need to talk to her about a divorce.”

Sheriff Miles frowned. “Daniel, there’s no easy way to put this, but Penelope is dead.”

“Jeez,” I slumped back in the chair. “What happened?”

“Well, we were hoping you could fill in some of the details. She drowned.”

“That’s a real shame.”

“She had a cement block tied to her feet,” Sheriff Miles frowned. “Is there anything you could tell us about that?”

“Wait,” I asked. “You think I did something? Do you always jump to the husband first?”

Sheriff Miles dropped any warmth and glowered at me. She managed to restrain herself until

“Doc, could you give us a few minutes?”

“Of course,” Doc Herman said, taking his medical bag and rushing away. I’d hoped he was eager to get back to fishing, but even I wanted to rush out of Sheriff Miles’ harsh glare. She rocked a little on her heels and sat on the conference room table, keeping taller than myself in the chair.

“So, here’s the issue,” Sheriff Miles said. “You understand that this looks pretty incriminating, right?”

“I swear,” I said, “I don’t even know who you’re talking about. I don’t know any Penelope Royale and even if I did, I wouldn’t kill her.”

“I’m not accusing you of anything,” Sheriff Miles said, but her stern tone made me doubt that. “But the problem is, she was your only alibi. One day, you two are lovebirds in the diner, all smiles, and displays of affection. Then, this morning, you show up in the boathouse an hour after your wife—“

“She’s not my wife!” I snapped. “Look, Sheriff, I don’t know what’s going on here. Yesterday, I was in Philly. How I got to Anytown, Maine is completely beyond me. I’m sure this is a nice town, but my memory of being here begins and ends with the boathouse.”

“Regardless of what you remember, I have a dozen people at the diner who can confirm you were with her yesterday. That’s less than twenty-four hours before she drowned. You were both in the Honeymoon Cabin off of Adler Pond. ”

“Look, I wish I could help, but I’m in the dark here. You might know more than me.”

Sheriff Miles sighed and shook her head. “Look, I like to think I’m good at reading people. And you two seemed like you were genuinely in love. But you barely blinked when I told you

she was dead. So, either I'm wrong about both of you or—“

“Sheriff, am I under arrest?”

“Not officially, no.”

“Then why are we having this discussion?”

“Daniel—“ Sheriff Miles caught herself, biting back the easy familiarity. “You really don't remember her?”

“I've never heard of a Penelope before in my life. Who even names their kid Penelope anymore?”

“Alright,” Sheriff Miles said. “And there's no...oddness in your family?”

“Oddness?”

“Any conditions that might account for the memory loss? DID or something like that? If we can prove that—“

“I don't...I don't think so. And even if I did have memory blocks, that wouldn't make me a murderer.”

“No,” Sheriff Miles frowned. “But a woman is dead and right now you're the most likely suspect. I like you, Daniel. I don't want this to be the only option, but unless you can give me an alibi—“

“Guilty until proven innocent?”

“That's not what I meant and you know it. Look, this whole thing feels...weird. A young, newlywed couple shows up in town, all lovey-dovey and smiles. Then, a few weeks later, the wife turns up dead and he's got no memory of it? You gotta admit that sounds pretty far-fetched.”

I had my hands folded on the table and shook my head. I might have been losing my mind,

but that didn't explain the lost time. Who was Penelope? Why had we come here? Why did everyone in town seem to know me? Things didn't make sense. "I think I'd like to call my lawyer."

"I'll get you a phone," Sheriff Miles agreed, resigned. "Wait here."

The sheriff left the room and I was alone with my thoughts. I tried to think of a reason. I didn't feel out of my mind, but that was hardly a valid test.

"You did it because I needed you to."

I jumped at the voice. Still, there was no one else in the room. Maybe I was hallucinating or going crazy or—

"I'm so sorry to have borrowed your body like that," the voice continued. "But that girl had it coming...three hundred years of conflict, ended in one night."

I glanced to my left and saw my reflection in a window outside. There was also the reflection of an older man standing behind me. He looked wrong, stretched out in his suit with long features. I did a double-take and rubbed my eyes. He only smiled when I looked at him in the reflection again.

"Not that easy, I'm afraid," Mr. Mirror said. "Rest assured, no harm will come to anyone else. I settled the score and our account with the Montroses is...square."

"This isn't right," I shook my head. "Maybe I do have a concussion..."

"No, you're safe, don't worry. You played your part. The Montroses and the Royales are done with our war. Ms. Montrose--excuse me, Mrs. Royale wasn't alone either. In the end, you didn't kill anyone. This was all as it's meant to happen. And now that it's done—"

"Daniel!" Sheriff Miles came rushing in. "She's awake!"

“What?” I asked. “You said she was dead, not that they were trying to resuscitate her!”

“We—we weren’t. She just woke up in the emergency room. I don’t understand it either, but we need to go to her now!”

I looked at the window again and the reflected man looked irritated rather than shocked. He tilted his head and cracked his neck. “Then it all begins again,” Mr. Mirror said. “Don’t worry, I won’t use you again. I can’t promise either of you will survive though. We’ve both used our most direct methods, but there are so many pawns on the board. Take care, Daniel...oh, and many blessings to the happy couple.”

“Daniel?” Sheriff Miles asked. I looked back at her and then at the reflection. Mr. Mirror was gone and I couldn’t help but notice I looked a little paler for the whole experience. I swallowed and rubbed my face.

“Perhaps it’s time to meet my wife...”