

DEAD-END DETECTIVE

AMANDA FLOWER

AUSTIN CAME BACK INTO THE room about forty minutes later, just when I was really regretting my decision to ask him to pull the file, because the stomachache I'd had at dinner was so much worse now. I felt like my insides were being twisted.

He set the box on the table.

"That's quite a file," I said.

"It's the only other murder Herrington had ever seen up to this point." He lifted the lid off of the box. "You have to keep in mind that Joshua was stabbed, so some of these images will be hard to look at."

I stood up and peered into the box. "Are you still trying to protect me, Austin?"

He lifted an envelope from the box. The photographs were inside. He took them out and set them on the table.

I swallowed hard. They were difficult to look at, as he'd said. I made myself do so anyway. Joshua had been killed in the kitchen. I pushed the photos aside.

"I have the interview with Gina, his wife, right here. She said she didn't know who could have done this to

her husband. He didn't have any enemies. He was well loved. He never had any arguments with anyone."

"That's not true," I said.

Austin riffled through the papers in the box. "There is nothing in here about another kid in the family or about anyone named Penelope."

"Could Joshua have purposely buried the story?"

"Maybe. I'm sure if there is nothing mentioned here, his wife was in the dark."

"Tate didn't know anything about it, but he was born long after all of this went down."

Austin frowned when I mentioned Tate and began to repack the box.

"I wasn't done looking at that."

"There's nothing else to see," he said shortly. He closed the box. "Heed my warning, Darby. Stay out of the investigation."

"Or?"

He didn't answer.

TATE WAS WAITING FOR ME in the police station's lobby just like he'd promised. He jumped out of his chair when I came out. "They let you out. You were in there for so long, I thought for sure you were going to be thrown into a cell."

I peeked at my watch. I had been at the police station for nearly an hour and a half. My shoulders slumped.

"I called Patrick like you asked. He wanted to come

down here, but I told him to hold off. However, if you had been arrested, I would have driven him here myself.”

“Thanks. I need to keep the police on my side as much as possible. The paint matches. It was my car that was used to kill Samantha.”

“It’s what we expected,” Tate said. “Why didn’t Austin arrest you?”

I shook my head. “He said he will have to this weekend if there’s not another break in the case. I told him about Samantha looking for her father’s killer, but I don’t think he took me seriously.” I felt like all the energy had been sucked out of my body.

“You look beat. I’ll take you back to the agency. You and Gumshoe can chill out then.”

I was too tired to argue. “Okay.”

“Yikes. Let’s get you home. I know when you are so agreeable you really are spent.”

I followed him out. Before I went through the external glass doors of the station, I looked back and saw Austin watching me from the office. There was a scowl on his face. He wasn’t happy with me, but then again, I wasn’t happy with him either.

Tate still had the top down on the convertible.

I pointed to the folded roof. “You might want to put that up in case it rains tonight.”

“Let me worry about my rental car and the rain, and you concentrate on getting into the car without falling over. You look like you might drop.”

I blinked, and the world seemed to spin in front of

me. “Now that you mention it, I don’t feel very good. I’m kind of dizzy.”

Tate was immediately at my side. “Dizzy how?”

“Like I’m going to fall over.” My words were coming slower. “Like any minute I could fall right down.” I wanted to say more to better explain what was going on, but I couldn’t.

“Did you eat anything strange? Did someone give you something?”

“N—no.” My eyes closed, and all I saw was blackness.