

Chapter 7

The note is written on pastel yellow stationery that is monogrammed “S H E”—Susan Eaton Hines. The message is one sentence:

Sweetie, no more lies.

There are water stains on the paper. Tears, maybe. Is this really Sue’s suicide note? How can I be sure? And if it is, what the hell do I do with it? I have to publish it, don’t I? I can’t take this to Bo Hines. He wouldn’t let me in the house. Even if he did, why would he help me? This could be damning to his trial. Obviously his wife killed herself because of his lies. Right?

Dammit, I shouldn’t have had the last bourbon and coke. The walk four blocks to the loft helped to sober me up...some. Big Boy is bouncing all over the place so I attach the leash to his collar and we head out to find Dare. Maybe she will recognize the handwriting. She won’t answer my phone call, but she will answer the door at her house if she sees me with Big Boy.

It’s after nine, but Dare stays up late. If her porch light is on, we will ring the doorbell. To hedge my bet, I text her. She can’t ignore a text.

Coming over with BB. Have new info on Sue

I send a second text message:

Please

While we were walking towards Aragon, Dare texts back:

K

Dare lives in the trendy downtown neighborhood, Aragon, which is built on the site of a former housing project one block north of Pensacola Bay. Twenty years ago, the city fathers realized, with the help of local developers who made large contributions to their campaigns, people would pay top dollar to live downtown near the bay. Why waste the view on poor black people? The city moved the housing project with the understanding that Aragon would have a quarter of its lots set aside for first-time homebuyers. The catch phrase for the project was a “new urbanist traditional neighborhood.” Really, that’s how they described it when the developers presented the drawings to Rotary Clubs in the area.

The poor people were moved. The tenements were replaced with expensive townhouses, cottages, park houses, sideyard houses, small cottages, and row houses. The developers made millions. The city added \$35 million to the tax rolls.

What about the first-time homebuyers? They turned out to be sons and daughters of the developers and the other homebuyers. No blacks, none of the offspring of the families moved off the property.

Dare lives in a two-story row house in the middle of Aragon. Big Boy and I reach her house in about 20 minutes...there are a lot of trees between my loft and her house. Both Big Boy and I take advantage of more than a few of them.

The front porch light is on. Big Boy makes a dash for Dare's front door as soon as he sees it. Hearing the jingle from his dog tags, Dare opens door and greets the mutt with a hug and kiss. She unhooks his leash and Big Boy runs in immediately jumping up onto her couch. I follow behind the pair, shutting the door behind me.

"I'm still pissed at you," Dare says over shoulder as she sits next to Big Boy, who puts his head in her lap. She is dressed in a red Ole Miss polo and Navy blue shorts, wearing pearls, of course. On the coffee table, financial reports and contracts are spread next to her laptop.

"I know, I know. Isn't everyone?" I reply. "Dare, that's my superpower...pissing people off."

"Stop right there, Walker," Dare interrupts. "You brought Big Boy here to soften me up, but it won't work. Just tell me what you found."

I hand her the note. She turns on the light next to couch and grabs her reading glasses off the coffee table. She reads it three times, hands me back the note, gets up and leaves the room. When she sits back down five minutes later, she has a tissue. Her eyes are watery.

I ask, "Did Sue write that note?"

"Where did you get it?" she asks.

"From a fat lady, but that's not important right now," I say. "Dare, did Sue write it?"

"Walker...I think so. Sue had a unique writing style, a mix of cursive and print letters. There was not rhyme or reason to it, except it worked for her" Getting up Sue says, "I think I have a "thank you" note she wrote me a few weeks ago."

Dare goes to her study. I can hear her rummaging through her desk. Big Boy has fallen asleep and is snoring. She brings back the "thank you" note. It, too, begins with "Sweetie" and the word is written nearly identically to the suicide note. We have a match.

Dare starts to sob. I hold her for a few minutes until the wave of tears passes. Then I walk into the kitchen and pour us each cups of coffee. Good old Dare, she always has a pot of coffee brewed. Dare follows me and we sit around the large island in the middle of the kitchen.

“I still can’t believe it, Walker. What lies is she talking about? What has Bo done? Sue worshiped him. Is it about the Arts Council money?”

“I don’t know,” I say in between sips. “It could be the missing funds. It could be something far worse. I mean Spencer in the state attorney’s office is acting like they want to drop the case against Bo. He could walk away from this with a slap on the wrist. Nothing to die for.”

Dare starts to tear up. “You are an asshole. You’re talking about my friend, Walker.”

“I’m sorry. Really I am, but help me figure this out. Did you hear that Bo is now supporting Jace Wittman’s petition drive? He gave it ten grand tonight.”

“What? That makes no sense. Sue told me that Bo’s company was going to do all the site work for the park.”

“Read tomorrow’s paper. Maybe it will make sense to you. I sure as hell can’t figure it out.”

Dare asks, “Do you think the donation has anything to do with the note...the one from Sue? Is Jace involved in this, too?”

“I don’t know.”

Slamming down her empty mug, Dare shouts, “Then what the hell do you know, Walker? What the hell do you know, dammit,?”

“I know I have to publish the note.”

I put down my coffee cup and walk out the backdoor heading home. Big Boy could spend the night with Dare. No reason for both of us to lose a night’s sleep.

My superpower is working overtime.

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