She - Echo of Death

20081120 : This material, if adapted, could fit in at the point where Ember is eclipsed by her inner demon or when she is bitten by a were and drained by a vampire.

pages ∙ words

Ash stared at the words before her, trying to ignore her body’s response to Ember’s arousal, but they refused to knit themselves into proper sentences. Without warning, the pleasure was spiked with pain and panic. Instantly alarmed, she closed her eyes and focused her full attention on Ember, the book slipping from her nerveless fingers.

A crowd of strange faces danced before her mind's eye. The world began to spin around her before leaping away. As shock and alarm filled unknown faces, one gaze claimed and devoured her attention. A dark face with intense hazel eyes stabbed into her, reaching, reaching. Drinking in her dying thoughts. Fear exploded even as the hard ground cracked under her head. A bright flash washed out everything but those eyes. A primal scream tore out of her throat as she felt herself torn across every nerve ending in her body. Then, nerve by nerve, sensation folded into nothingness. A moment of blankness chilled her and then the rosy glow of sunlight bleeding through her eyelids brought her back to herself.

With a gasp, she opened her eyes.

*Ember!* Ash bolted out of the atrium and rushed into the house. Running in near panic, she knocked her father out of her way as she passed him inside the door. Without even a word, she ripped the phone out of her mother's hand and hung up on her call. She was punching in the numbers for the long distance call even before her mother could begin to protest.

"Ash! What the bleeding hell is the matter with you?" her father growled; stunned by the violence of her actions, his confusion at being startled awake by a bloodcurdling scream rapidly turning to anger. Rowan began backing away from her daughter, the fear that was boiling off of Ash suddenly infected her, compelling her to intercept her husband before he could hit the hang-up button on the cradle.

"Goddamit, Ember, pick up the phone!" Ash cried as the other end kept ringing.

"Mason..." Rowan breathed, grasping him painfully on the wrist. She suddenly remembered the day, twelve years ago, when Ember had roused the entire neighborhood in a panic only to lead them all directly to where Ash and their son Alex had been trapped for four days at the bottom of a dry well. Too late, to the moment of her first scream, to save the boy's life.

Ash slammed down the phone, just about to redial, when it began to ring. The color drained out of her face, and her fist clenched the receiver in a white-knuckled grip. The phone rang twice more before Rowan pried her hand off and took the call. Her end of the conversation consisted of “yes” and “no” repeated a half a dozen times, an “ohmigod” and a final "we'll be on the next flight."

Rowan raised her eyes to Ash's. Ash's hand jerked up to cover her mouth and tears quickly began to flow over her fingers. Rowan wrapped her daughter up in a crushing embrace before the girl could collapse to the floor. Mason reeled in shock unwilling to put two and two together, but unable to escape the conclusion written on his wife and daughter's faces.

"What..." he croaked, "who was that? What did they say? Rowan...?"

Rowan raised a shaking hand, cupping the side of his face. "That was one of Ember's friends at the university," she said. "She said that Ember just collapsed on her way between classes." Mason reached for the phone only to hear the dial-tone. "They are calling for an ambulance," she said to explain the sudden disconnection, "her friend said she would inform us as soon as she knew where they were taking her, but that we should come as fast as we can."

"Jesus," he exclaimed, "what idiot would call us instead of an ambulance first?" He dropped the receiver into the cradle, glancing at his watch. It was two twenty. Two minutes ago, he had been napping peacefully and all had been right with the world. Now it seemed as though the world had gone mad.

"It's done now. They'll have her at a hospital in minutes, but we'll be lucky if we can get there by tomorrow," his wife retorted.

He absorbed this, figuring out what they would have to do quickly in his head. Before doing anything else, though, he grabbed his daughter carefully by the shoulders. "Ash?" he probed, "Honey, can you explain what happened? How... how did you know? Is there anything you can tell us?"

"I... I don't know. It just hit me," she stammered, "I was just reading my book and all of a sudden it felt like I was dying." Mason drilled her with questions, and she tried to describe the vision she had had, but none of it made much sense. The timing was too much of a coincidence, but as far as he could tell, she might have just imagined it all. He soothed and reassured her, promising that they would do everything they could to take care of Ember; trying his best to convince her that it *was* just a coincidence.

With quiet efficiency, he set his wife and daughter to packing for an immediate trip while he called the airport and booked passage for the three of them on the first flight available. A few more calls, and his sister-in-law was on her way over to take care of the house, with her brother to drive them to the airport. It was early evening by the time they were all piling into the car to go when Adrienne Kinkade rushed out of the house; it was a call from the university hospital. Mason had to sprint to beat Ash to the phone. While he introduced himself to the man at the other end of the line, Ash was slipping into Mason's office picking up the extension. The doctor explained that Ember had arrived at the hospital at two twenty eight pm, dead on arrival. The doctor, a pathologist, received her body at approximately three thirty after all attempts to resuscitate her had failed. A preliminary autopsy was conducted indicating that she was in excellent health at the moment she died. No traces of drugs or poisons, no indications of cataleptic shock, no sign of brain trauma. The follow up autopsy detected abnormal levels of endorphin residue in the brain but no discernable trauma. As far as the pathologists were able to determine, her brain simply closed up shop, and death due to asphyxiation resulted. When Mason asked why an autopsy was performed so quickly and without family consent, the pathologist replied that he had simply been following orders, and that all the paperwork had been properly completed.

About halfway through the phone conversation Ash collapsed in shock. Mason heard the receiver drop to the floor over the phone but it didn't connect to anything until the doctor hung up. Following the hunch, he made his way to his office and found Ash curled up on the floor. He tried to shake her out of it, but she was as bad as she had been after the accident when they had pried her off of her brother's corpse. Cursing the helplessness of the situation, he called out to his wife. There was barely time to make the flight, and Ash had gone totally autistic on him. Still, he couldn't leave her like this. Ash's mother came in and assessed the situation at once. Rowan announced on the spot that she would drive her to the local hospital, and Mason would have to fly down to California without them. One of them had to go, at least, and with luck, she could follow him down once Ash was taken care of. Mason helped drag his daughter to his wife's Ranger, gave his wife a quick hug and then he had to fly.

Rowan drove carefully. Mason had not had time to tell her the news, so she had hope for the moment, if only a dim one in light of her daughter's condition. She tried several times to get through to Ash, asking a million questions hoping that she could get a response. She had even brought along the book the girl had dropped on the patio, since reading was one of the few things she had done during the years of her earlier withdrawal.

Due to the hour, she had to pull up to the emergency entrance and call for one of the orderlies to help walk the girl in. Another one parked the Ranger for her so she could go check her daughter in. She explained everything that had happened as best as she could remember, unable to explain what had tipped Ash off on the collapse of her sister so far away. Nor did she really know what had caused Ash's withdrawal. While she sat in the waiting room, she opened her daughter's book. One of the pages was crumpled from when it had dropped. Absently she scanned the page. She almost dropped it herself in disbelief at what she read there. It seemed incongruous but for some reason the short description of a character's death, though in no way easily interpreted to mean anything that could be connected to Ember, convinced her that her eldest daughter was dead. The hope faded out of her as she went to the phone and arduously began to inquire about Ember's fate by calling the university and emergency services until she had the university hospital on the line and officially received the news of Ember's death.

A couple of orderlies arrived, attracted by the sound of her raving grief and ushered her into one of the examination rooms where she was administered a sedative and interrogated by a doctor. After he had pieced together the tragic story and offered his empty condolences, she was taken to see Ash.

She entered the darkened room and found her way to the bedside. Ash was awake, to her surprise. Ash gripped her mother's hand and turned heavily glazed eyes up to meet hers and said huskily, "Ember's dead, mother."

"I know," Rowan whispered, "Oh, baby, I know." Her heart clenched guiltily over the relief she felt to hear Ash speak, even though her words were unbearable. There was nothing more either could say for the rest of the night, but it did not seem like Ash would relapse now that she had faced and admitted the truth.