

Monday, July 8th

Dear Karen,

Namaste.

When I first wrote to you I asked you whether you believed in fate. This time I feel I don't even need to ask the question. I know you do. How could anyone go through all that's happened to us over the past few weeks and not believe? For how else is it that the universe brings us together at precisely the time in our lives when we both need each other?

I know I certainly needed you these past few weeks. And I'm writing to thank you for your 'solution' to the events at White Gate last month. I know I don't deserve it. I always thought you would eventually work out that I shot Andrew on the night of Saturday June 1<sup>st</sup> – but I never hoped you'd be so kind and forgiving about it. It means more than I can say, Karen.

Andrew called me as soon as he got home from hospital. He explained what had happened – that you and he got together and agreed to publish a false solution in order to remove any suspicion from me. We agreed on that call to leave things as they are – I won't accuse him of killing my dad and he won't accuse me of trying to kill him. Some family, hey? I know my uncle will keep up his end of the bargain now that I have my dad's letter, so I owe you another big thank you for sending me that. You can be assured that I will keep up my end; as much as I want to see that man properly punished for what he did to my family, I now know that I am not the person to punish him. There's an entire lifetime of karma piling up on that man's head, and the universe needs no help from me to see that he receives his just deserts.

I know you don't need me to explain what happened. But you've gone out of your way to protect me, and I owe you an explanation for my actions at the very least.

I arrived at White Gate completely innocent of my uncle's crime. When I wrote to you back in May I genuinely thought the Hungry Corpse was responsible for my dad's passing. I still don't trust that mask, by the way (we never found out if Lagarde's death was really a suicide, remember), and I wish Dr Woolham hadn't agreed to take it. I've been sending positive and protective energies his way, which I hope will counteract some of the negativity of the mask.

Now I think about it, I would probably still be blaming the Hungry Corpse to this day had my uncle not gathered us all together that Saturday. Irony? Fate? Karma? One of them, that's for sure. For it was only as the evening's debate began that a new idea began to form in my mind. Andrew claimed he had brought us together so dad could rest in peace. Hypocrisy that thick is hard to stomach. If he didn't want to disturb my dad then why bring his death up at all? Why get so hung up on my theory about the Hungry Corpse? These questions were beginning to swirl around my head as we sat at the dining table. They were the first indications for me that something wasn't quite right – that there was more going on that night than my uncle was letting on. I'm sure you noticed that he seemed more interested in proving my dad's passing was a suicide than disproving any magic associated with the mask. He never cared about the mask or what I thought about it. He never cared about me. The whole thing, I now realise, was to save his own skin.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. At the start of the meal I had only a dim intuition that something was wrong. It wasn't until Brian began recounting the night they found my dad that the truth of the matter began to reveal itself to me. As someone who has spent most of their life mulling over their

dad's sudden and unexpected 'suicide,' I was more than familiar with Brian's account. But I saw it that evening in a whole new light; it was as if I was hearing it for the first time. Details I'd never noticed before, or never considered important, now leapt out at me. For one thing, I was struck by the uncanny timing of it all – how Andrew could forget his keys and head back to White Gate just as dad was shot. Then another thing hit me. Andrew claimed he was knocking on the front door when he heard the gun go off. Why hadn't I spotted this before? Because if he and Brian saw dad go into the panelled room – which you know is at the back of the house – why would he try and get his attention by knocking on the front door? No one in the study would hear that. Surely he would just walk around and knock on the windows of the panelled room? It didn't make any sense to me.

Even then, however, I didn't dare join the dots. I was afraid of the picture they would make. If Andrew was innocent, I thought, he would have no reason to lie about his whereabouts that night – so, if he was lying about where he was in White Gate, it stood to reason that he wasn't entirely innocent.

Turns out I didn't need to join the dots. They joined themselves. At the precise moment I knew – I *felt* – what Andrew had done. The realisation hit me like a blow to the stomach. I knew my dad and Andrew had their disagreements, but what siblings don't? But the idea that Andrew might have played some part in my dad's death – that he could have killed someone so full of life as my dad – well, for a moment I really thought I was going to be sick. You might have noticed how I couldn't even reply to Brian when he asked if I wanted him to stop talking. It was all I could do at that point to keep Andrew's pavlova down.

And then, before I knew what was happening, Andrew was leading us to the panelled room. As I followed him out of the dining room and through the hall I couldn't help looking at my uncle as an intruder in my childhood home. I used to jump off that staircase into my dad's arms. I used to slide along this parquet flooring with him. We used to wrestle in that garden. *This house doesn't belong to you*, I thought as I looked at my uncle. *You're only here because my dad isn't*.

Even so, it wasn't until we were in the panelled room that I understood *how* my uncle was able to do what he did. Do you remember when Brian asked Andrew if he had made any alterations to the room since my dad used it? I don't know why, but that question made me think. I pictured the room on the night my dad died – the door, the fireplace, the windows. And I thought about those windows and the fact that dad never got round to putting any curtains in that room – in fact, from reading your account of the night I see that I even asked Andrew about the curtains.

Funny how it was the curtains that made me think of it. Because all of a sudden I knew exactly how he did it. How he killed my dad. It was so simple I couldn't believe I hadn't thought of it sooner. I wish I could describe to you how I felt in that moment. All I can say is that it was as if fire was pouring through my veins. It took all my self-restraint not to grab dad's gun and shoot him there and then with all of you watching. I might even have taken a step towards the desk. But then Andrew announced that he was going to spend a night in the panelled room. And as I looked into that smug, cynical face of his I had a better idea. Use his own trick against him. Kill him the same way he killed dad.

The first step was getting hold of the gun. Andrew had conveniently told us it was still in dad's desk, but for obvious reasons I couldn't let anyone catch me rummaging around in there. I waited until you and Dr Woolham went off to find your rooms and then suggested to Jared that we change into our pyjamas. I told him I'd follow him upstairs. Brian, as luck would have it, chose that moment to go to

bathroom.

I want to be clear that Jared was in no way involved in any of what happened. He was completely innocent of everything that took place that night. He still is, in fact – I don't think I have the heart to tell him what I did. Part of me wonders if I ever will.

So I had the panelled room to myself for a brief moment. I searched dad's desk and found his pistol. It had been a long time since I'd fired a gun (I live in America, remember – shooting things is a pastime over here) and I'd forgotten how heavy the things are. Holding it through my skirt to avoid fingerprints I checked to see if it was loaded – it was – and tucked it into my waistband before heading up to my room. When Jared wasn't looking I slipped it into my suitcase.

By the time Jared and I had changed and returned to dad's study you, Dr Woolham and Andrew were already back. Brian, I seem to remember, rejoined us a few moments later. Maybe it was the shock, maybe it was the adrenaline, but I felt charged with a weird confidence at that moment. I even magnanimously offered Andrew the chance to back out of his experiment rather than face the horrors of the Hungry Corpse. I wonder if I got a little carried away, because for a split second I thought I could see suspicion in his face. What if he *did* back out, I suddenly thought? What then?

I should have known I had no reason to worry. Andrew has that Paris stubbornness – there was no way he would climb down from his own challenge, least of all with a crowd of people watching. And so he locked himself up in that room. I couldn't believe how easy it was. He might as well have been climbing into his own coffin.

You and the others headed to bed pretty much straight after. I didn't want to be seen loitering downstairs so I came with you. All I had to do then was wait. Jared, as you know, drifts off in seconds, but I had no idea how long it would take for you and Charlie to fall asleep. I waited what felt like a reasonable time – was it thirty, forty minutes? – before retrieving the gun from my suitcase and slipping it into the pocket of my dressing gown. I put on the dressing gown and headed downstairs, right past the rooms you and Dr Woolham were staying in. Even after all these years I still knew exactly where to tread to avoid the squeaky floorboards on the landing.

I collected the flashlight from the kitchen and the front door key from the side table. I knew there was a possibility someone might check the gun for fingerprints, so I also had to find gloves of some description. Having come from California I obviously had none of my own, and since this plan of mine was less than two hours old I'd hardly had the time to prepare anything in advance. I finally found an old pair of Andrew's gardening gloves by the front door. They were far too big for me, but they would have to do. The last thing left to do was to unlock the French windows in the dining room. In less than five minutes I'd managed to set the stage for Andrew's 'impossible' shooting.

So how did I do it? I can't take credit for it, thankfully. It was all Andrew's doing; I merely tried to recreate the trick he invented.

The secret to Andrew's illusion hinged not on the culprit or even the victim, but on the witnesses. By stepping into the panelled room, you and I destroyed the one piece of evidence that could explain how the trick was accomplished. Quite a few people have commented on the similarities between dad's death and Andrew's shooting. The one similarity no one seemed to dwell on, however, was the

fact that in both instances the witnesses had to break in through the window in order to get into the room. I guess that seems innocent enough given that the door wasn't budging. But in that act lies the key to the entire mystery.

If you have the June 4th edition of *Witness* nearby, find the bit where Brian is recounting the discovery of my dad's body. "I followed Andrew round to the back of the house," you reported him as saying. "By the time I was outside the study Andrew was already trying to shift one of the sash windows, but the latch wasn't budging. I tried the other one to no avail. Both windows were latched from the inside. That's when I heard Andrew break one of the panes. He stuck his hand inside and undid the latch that way. That's how we got in."

Now think back to our discovery of Andrew last month. Again I'll quote from your account: 'The three of us, with Lisa at the front, slow down as we approach the windows ... Lisa steps up to the nearest window and I see her eyes grow wide ... Lisa shuffles slowly to face us, her back pressed against the window as if to shield us from the scene inside ... I step up to the window. Lisa doesn't budge. It's as if she's fixed to the spot.'

Maybe you begin to see what's going on? In both cases Andrew and I made sure we were the first to get to those windows, and in both cases we made sure we blocked the view of one of those windows from the other witnesses. Why? Because in both cases there was already a bullet hole through one of the panes – the same pane we then both smashed in order to get into the room. In both instances we shot our victim from outside that window. Both times there were no curtains to block our view. And then, once we had led the witnesses to those windows, we both stood next to the broken pane so that no one could see it. I even told you and Dr Woolham to close your eyes when I threw that rock through the pane, just in case one of you might happen to notice the break before I shattered the glass. Only once the pane was completely smashed could we step back from the window, safe in the knowledge that no one would think the glass we'd just shattered was already broken in some way. For the other witnesses present the panelled room looked like it had been hermetically sealed until that moment.

This was what I realised when Andrew was showing us around the room earlier that night. And this is what I was preparing for when the rest of you were in bed. By this point it must have been around twenty to one in the morning. Now armed with gloves, the flashlight and the gun, I let myself out the front door and walked around to the back of the house. It was a horrible windy night. Rounding the corner, I could see light shining out of the two windows of the panelled room. I approached them. With those gardening gloves slipping off my hands I reached for the gun in the my pocket.

Then came the first tear in my plan. I had expected to find Andrew sitting at the desk, reading a book or something. I had certainly planned to shoot him while he was sitting at the desk so his death would mirror my dad's. But when I peered through those sash windows I thought for a second that the Hungry Corpse really had driven him mad with terror. He had ransacked the desk and was pulling books off the wall. The mess we found in that room was entirely Andrew's doing and had nothing to do with any armed struggle as you suspected. Not that I knew this at the time. It wasn't until our phone call that he told me what he'd been doing in there – maybe he told you too? Once he'd locked himself in the study, he explained, he began to think my strange mood just before we went to bed. Part of him wondered whether I might have figured out his secret – and whether I might have something to say about it. He dismissed the notion at first, but as he sat in that room – the very room in which he committed his crime, remember – paranoia began to set in. I would like call it guilt, but I suspect it was

only self-preservation. Either way, he decided to check dad's gun was still in the desk, just to be sure, and then he could relax for the night. I think you can guess what happened. The gun wasn't there. He checked the desk. He checked it again, this time emptying the drawers onto the floor. Then, with mounting fear, he began to turn the whole room inside out looking for that gun. Of course he didn't find it buried under dad's old correspondence or stashed away behind one of those books.

It was at this point I found him. My confusion quickly turned to irritation – this wasn't part of the plan. Not only was he not sitting at the desk, he'd made a complete mess of the room. When people found his body in a setting like that they weren't going to instantly assume it was suicide like they all did with my dad.

By now Andrew had accepted the fact that the gun was missing, and I think he knew that I had taken it. The unflappable Andrew Paris even started to panic, pushing the desk across the room to bar the door in case I was planning to shoot the lock off or something. For a moment I considered walking away. The idea of letting him stew in terror the entire night certainly had its appeal. But a single sleepless night would have hardly made up for what he did. That wouldn't even count as revenge, let alone justice. In that moment I searched myself, and I knew I was committed.

I pulled the gun out my pocket and aimed it at the window. I needed to be careful about which pane I shot through – it had to be close to the latch otherwise it might look suspicious later on. Andrew had just finished pushing the desk into place. I think he must have remembered my comment about the curtains, because he suddenly turned to face the windows. For a moment – whether it was a split second or an entire minute I honestly couldn't say – we simply stared at one another. He had the strangest expression – not so much fear as regret, almost like he was disappointed in himself for letting this happen. It's the same face people pull when they realise they've forgotten something. Anyway, I pulled the trigger.

And I missed – the head, that is. I told you it had been a long time since I'd fired a gun. Hence the awkward bullet to the stomach that had everyone so confused. Although I didn't realise I'd hit his stomach at the time – all I knew was that I'd shot him somewhere and he'd fallen to the floor. I assumed he was dead; that mistake would be the second tear in my plan.

Then came the third. There was one crucial difference between Andrew's shooting and mine, for when Andrew pulled the trigger White House was empty with the exception of my dad; the nearest person was Brian, and he was still a minute or so away. Andrew therefore had time to perfect the illusion: after firing the gun he widened the bullet hole in the pane until it was big enough for him to reach his hand through and unlatch the window. He could then enter the panelled room, place the gun in my dad's hand, leave and latch the window all before Brian returned. This was my plan as well, but had I given it more thought I would have realised I didn't have the time – not with three other people in the house. It was simply too risky – what if one of you caught me in the act? It would be all over. Even as I was thinking this you and Dr Woolham were already out on the landing. Besides, with the study in such the mess I wasn't sure how much difference the aesthetic nicety placing the gun in his hand would actually make. So rather than climb into the room, I simply widened the bullet hole until I could fit the gun through – I was at no risk getting any tell-tale cuts with those gardening gloves on – and threw it into the room. When it hit the floor it went off again, sending a bullet into the skirting board – that part of your fake solution, at least, was correct.

That second gunshot rattled me. In fact it scared the life out of me. I actually screamed when it went off, although thankfully no one heard me over the blast. What the hell had I just done? How was this any better than what Andrew did? My annoyance at failing to pull off the illusion perfectly was



melting into horror at the fact I'd attempted it at all. My hands were shaking as I tried to take off those gloves.

I knew I couldn't give up just yet, however. I still didn't want to get caught, and if I was to get away with this the next few minutes would have to be carefully stage-managed. I got those gloves off and threw them behind me – clearly not carefully enough, because you noticed them on the lawn just a few minutes later – and headed back round to the front of the house. As I did so I could hear you knocking on the door of the study. I had no time to lose.

I let myself in through the unlocked French windows in the dining room, reckoning that to be a more discrete entrance than the front door. It would have been even more discrete had I not knocked a wine glass off the table. Had you not been banging on the study door at the time I'm certain it would have been all over for me. Once I felt I could breathe again I continued to the dining room door and peered out. The hall lights were on by now, and I could see you and Dr Woolham outside the panelled room. Jared, I later found out, was still in bed – how he slept through all this I have no idea. I had just enough time to bolt the front door and put the key back on the side table, so that you would think no one had gone in or out of the house, and made my way towards you.

Now came the stage management. I had to lead you and Dr Woolham to the study windows without either of you suspecting that was my plan. You'll remember it was my suggestion that we head outside. And you'll notice that I made sure I was always in front so that I could block the broken pane from view. When I positioned myself at the window I made sure I didn't move away until the pane was shattered. Believe it or not, this was the hardest part of the trick to pull off. Shooting Andrew – well, my fingers did that for me. But having to return the scene of the crime just minutes later? You noted that there was 'a wild, wary look' in my eyes at the time. Now you understand why it was there.

It was only once I'd unlatched the window – once I'd performed my role, as it were – that I allowed myself to be overwhelmed by the relief and exhaustion and horror of it all. I have no memory of Dr Woolham catching me. In fact I have no memory of even falling. The next thing I knew I was in his arms, watching you climb through that window. I felt – I was going to write that I felt drained, but it was more than that. I felt hollow. Utterly hollow.

And then I heard you say that Andrew was still alive. Until this point I thought he was dead, remember. Clearly the universe did not want me to be a killer like my uncle. I see that now, and I'm so grateful to whatever force or guardian spirit deflected that shot. The fact that Andrew had survived, however, meant that I would have to keep up the performance a little longer. Not wanting to seem disinterested in my uncle's welfare, I summoned my remaining energy and followed you into the panelled room. You were kneeling over him by this point and he was trying to tell you something. "Pane," he said. "The pane." Meaning, of course, the window pane I had smashed to cover my tracks. I thought it was all over there and then. He even pointed at the pane in question – although you assumed he was pointing at the Hungry Corpse. It was only a few minutes later that I wondered whether you might have heard a different word to me. Even so, I didn't dare come too close to him for fear that he might use his last remaining breath to accuse me.

Eventually the paramedics came and I could get away from my uncle. When they carried him away I stayed behind. I stood in the middle of panelled room – in the middle of the books and blood and paper and mess – and for the first time I understood the scale of the chaos I'd unleashed. I'd set out to fake an unquestionable suicide and had instead created a situation that left people with nothing but questions.

Then, to make matters worse, the very next morning you began pulling and prodding at things. I suppose I should have seen it coming, you being a journalist and all, but I was so exhausted I could barely keep up with your questions, and more than once I came close to tripping myself up. It was only when we were talking on Sunday morning, for instance, that I remembered the wine glass I'd knocked over. So I had to make up that story about hearing it smash before the shots were fired.

When I could catch my breath I did try to frustrate your investigation in my own little way, such as when I refused to let you and Dr Woolham take the mask, or my insistence that we didn't discuss the shooting when you came to the party. Hardly the machinations of an evil genius, I'm sure you'll agree. But then I had to be careful – if I appeared too reluctant to catch my uncle's assailant people would begin to grow suspicious.

Looking back over this whole horrible mess, I've tried to think when it was you first started to suspect me. I'm pretty sure a spark of something lit up your eyes when I carelessly pulled the flashlight out of my dressing gown pocket, and I don't think you ever really believed the story I had to spin to account for how it got there. I made another mistake when I was fabricating that story about the smashed wine glass – I think you noticed this one as well? How I said that I saw you and Dr Woolham *walk* down the stairs when you heard the gunshots? It was only when I read your account in the magazine I learnt that you two had run down those stairs – something I would have surely known had I been in the dining room at the time, like I claimed.

That same something flashed in your eyes when you find out Jared and I were leaving White Gate to join our friends in London so soon after the shooting. Obviously now you understand why I didn't want to hang around that place. If truth be told I wanted to head back to the States straight away, but again I was worried it would look suspicious, especially once the police got involved. Those two remaining weeks of our stay in England were the longest of my life. I was sure that any minute now someone would find out what happened. I began to think people were staring at me in the streets.

Then you called. It was the morning of the party, my last full day in England. I was certain you'd worked it out. I very nearly didn't show my face that evening. And then when we were talking in the garden, and you tried to tell me my dad's death upset Andrew, I very nearly confessed to everything just to prove you wrong. But then Debbie appeared and I dropped the idea. My last hurdle and I cleared it. Just.

Somehow I managed to get back to California without telling anyone what I'd done, or without anyone else telling me. Sitting on the plane home I couldn't believe my luck. I still can't. And then Andrew called to explain the deal you had struck with him. And then your false solution arrived in the post. I cried with relief when I read that, Karen. Out of the chaos I'd created the three of us someone managed to strike an arrangement or compromise or stalemate or whatever it is. Thank you. Again. I can only reassure you that I will keep up my end of the agreement.

And there we are. That's my version of events. You could, I suppose, take this letter straight to the police. I would be powerless to stop you. However, after all you've done for me I think I right in believing you won't.

You'll understand if I keep my distance for a while. I'm going to need plenty of time to re-balance and find myself again after all of this. But you know by now that physical distance never has to me separation. We are connected, now and forever; I felt that connection even before we met, and I feel it still even though we are apart. The universe meant for us to come together, and I like to think

that we've both gifted knowledge to each other. As a small token of gratitude for our friendship I'm delighted to let you know that Jared and I have agreed to dedicate *Ancient Echoes* to you, Karen Yu. It's the least I can do. Now your name will forever be synonymous with the wisdom and insight of past life regression and the New Age.

With peace, love and understanding,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lina". The letters are dark and fluid, with a large initial 'L' and a trailing 'a'.