

The Death Of Claire Seymour...

Danny straightened his tie in the mirror and observed himself critically. He wore a black tuxedo and newly polished shoes. His short blond hair stuck out wildly in all directions. He thought of the foster's advert from the telly; Casual, smart, but would Claire's parents be impressed. He figured it was too late to change anything now.

Danny reached over and took a bottle of strong aftershave from the bathroom cupboard. He held it to his neck and let the small bottle spit sharply at him, the strong smell filling his nostrils. His phone vibrated in his pocket, making him jump for a second. He checked the message; from mum- ' Gd luck tonight :) We r proud of u'

Danny finished in the bathroom and sat down on the end of his immaculately set bed, observing his record collection. Two minutes saw two possible candidates. He remembered the chicken and hurried back to the kitchen.

"Shit," He muttered breaking into a run and pulled the oven door open. The chicken was well-cooked and on the verge of being over-cooked. He pulled it out and left it on the surface to light the table candles. Danny was on the third of five candles when the power cut out, darkness suddenly present. He sighed and took up one of the candles, heading for the fuse box in the garage. As Danny stepped into the hallway, he stopped for a second. A sound that had been constant had stopped but as he passed into hallway he couldn't put his finger on what it had been. He followed the corridor into the garage, he grabbed up the flashlight from the wall and powered it on. A door slammed shut inside the house. The wind blowing through from the garage. He flicked the circuit-breaker back on and the lights came on after a second's delay.

Then, as Danny was leaving the garage, voices. He stopped for a second, focusing on the sound before the door bell rang. Shit. They were early.

Danny paused at the door, straightening his hair and suit in the hallway mirror. The door bell rang a second time. He took a deep breath, assumed a smile and opened the door.

"Hey," He said nervously. Claire stood in the doorway, her parents either side of her, both dressed immaculately. A shiver crept down Danny's spine.

"Come in, come in. It's great to finally meet you." Danny led them in, catching

Claire's eye. They shared a quick smile. When he turned back to face her parents, he caught her father observing the staircase in a critical manner.

"Nice house," He said blankly.

"Thank you. It's not much but... well it's home I guess." Danny's father seemed to force a smile before quickly shifting his gaze.

They were now at the living room. Danny gestured to the leather sofas and accompanying armchairs.

"Please take a seat. Oh cr-." He paused, re-adjusting his face into a polite smile. "I'm sorry I forgot to take your jackets." He caught Claire's father's expression. Danny was under the impression that he had been waiting for this and now was somewhat relieved. He took her parents jackets on his arm. "Take a seat, I'll get you a drink while I finish the prep. Wine?"

They both smiled and nodded. Danny let out a small sigh of relief.

He had nearly reached the door when Claire quickly said "I'll help" and followed him into the kitchen. For the first time he was alone with her. She wore a long flowery dress, silver and green diamond earrings and pendant to match. Her skin was gentle and soft. She was innocent.

"You look amazing," He said smiling. She returned it passionately.

"You okay?" She asked. Danny nodded.

"I just don't wanna mess this up, you know." Claire leaned in and kissed him.

"You're doing brilliantly. Don't worry. My parents might seem brutal but they'll be impressed. Anything I can do to help?"

"Erm, you could put one of those albums on the hi-fi and put out some serviettes. That would be awesome."

Danny took the best bottle of wine from the garage and polished off two glasses.

"This wine okay?" He asked Claire's parents, entering the room. Her father nodded curtly. Danny poured the wine and left the bottle on the glass table beside them. He was about to take a step to leave when her father spoke.

"So how long have you been seeing Claire?" He asked, taking a sip of wine. He paused for a second with that weird momentary look of thought whenever someone tastes something for the first time then nodded to himself.

"I'm not sure to be honest, a while I guess."

"You don't know?" He asked.

"Well," Danny thought. "We started hanging out like August so..." He thought for a second. "About six months I guess."

"You care about her?" He asked before receiving a gentle nudge from his wife.

"That's a silly question. You don't have to answer that," She said.

"No it's fine. Well obviously I think the world of her." There was a silence of at least ten seconds, which Danny took as his exit cue. He was halfway to the door when Claire's father spoke again.

"There aren't many photos of you," he said, gesturing to the photo frames on the mantelpiece. Danny tried to hide his instinctive frown.

"I guess... I'm not a very photo centric person." He thought it best to leave out the part where he spent the first ten years of his childhood in various foster homes, waiting for his mother's promises of getting clean to finally ring true but he loved her nonetheless. She was a changed person.

"Anyway I must be getting on with Dinner, if that's okay."

"Of course son," Mrs. Seymour said, smiling.

"Have you prepared a treat for us?" Her husband friendlily joked but Danny missed this.

"I hope so," He said, backing out of the room.

"Bon appetite," Danny said lying the last plate on the table and taking a seat beside Claire.

"Do you not say grace before eating?" Mr. Seymour asked. Danny went red instantly.

"Oh, of course. I' sorry." He said putting his hands together but stopped, catching Claire's look. She was shaking her head with an embarrassed amusement. She reached over and gently touched his hands, moving them apart.

"Mother and Father are atheist," She said, shaking her head again at her father. Danny let out a sigh of relief.

"Oh, thank God, I am too." Mr. Seymour laughed, his glass of wine just touching his lips.

"Haha, good one." Danny frowned for a second and then laughed himself.

"I didn't mean to..." At this point, Claire's mother seemingly took over.

"Danny, ignore my silly husband. He's just teasing you. The effort you've put in is incredible. If you treat our daughter with as much dedication as you have shown us now, I know I have absolutely nothing to worry about."

"Thank you," Danny said blushing. Claire took his hand on his knee under the table. He turned to her and they shared a deep moment for a second.

Danny's mind wandered momentarily, trying to relax and he consequently found himself searching for an excuse to leave the table. Failing that, Danny merely dropped Claire's hand and stood.

"Will you excuse me for a minute," He said, smiling politely before exiting the dining room, leaving no opportunity for anyone to answer that question.

Danny took a glass and a bottle of whisky from the cupboard then paused with the bottle poised over the glass. He returned the glass to the cupboard and swallowed a large mouthful straight from the bottle. After a few more, he returned to the dining room.

"How's the food?" Danny asked.

"Delicious, thank you," Mrs. Seymour replied quickly, ending any potential for her husband to speak.

"Yes, it's lovely, thank you Danny," Mr. Seymour added.

"Let me take your plates, rhubarb crumble anyone?" Danny said, hurrying to his feet.

"Oh, only a little for me please," Mrs. Seymour replied.

"Thanks hun," Claire smiled as Danny took the plate from in front of her. He took the plates through to the kitchen, taking swigs of whiskey in between trips.

"Thank you," Claire's father said as Danny took the plate he was offering. He turned to leave the room but the what felt like an almost weightless object in his hand, slipped from his grasp and shattered on the wooden floor.

"Oh Fuck," He muttered and then. "Oh God I am so sorry. I don't normally swear it's just--"

"It's fine," Claire's parents both said. Claire got to her feet and knelt beside Danny, gathering the shards together.

"Don't worry about it," She whispered into his ear. But he did. "I think they like you." She kissed him and helped take the remains of the plate to the kitchen.

It was quarter to nine when Mr. And Mrs. Seymour suggested it should be time they were on their way.

"Thank you for a great evening, Claire really is a lucky girl." Mr. Seymour said.

"I'm a lucky guy," Danny replied, smiling at Claire.

Claire turned to her parents.

"You know how Danny's put loads of effort into this, Dad?"

Her father laughed. "What do you want?"

"I just thought it would be nice if I helped clean up?" Her father thought for a second then shook his head.

"I don't think so hunny."

"Oh come on Dad, I'm seventeen."

"I don't see why not?" Her mother intervened.

"You think so?"

"Well they haven't had any time to be together tonight, not with us here. I think they deserve as much, don't you?"

He thought again for a moment and then nodded. "Okay. But be good. Thanks again Danny." And he backed onto the porch.

"I'll pick you up eleven yeah?" Mrs. Seymour asked.

"Sure, thanks mum." And the door shut, leaving the two alone.

"Thank fuck that's over," Danny said leaning back against the wall, his vision clouding slightly.

"Hey it went alright. You did great."

"I guess, I was just so worried about getting it wrong. Your parents are nice?"

"Yeah they like you. Really." Claire took Danny's hand.

"Ah, I'm nothing special."

"Yeah but after..." Claire trailed off quickly.

Danny dropped her hand and tried to make eye contact but Claire shifted her

gaze.

"After what? Claire?"

She sighed and met his eye.

"It's nothing. I've just had a few dodgy boyfriends in the past that's all." There was a few seconds silence.

"Are you okay? Did they hurt you?"

"It doesn't matter. It's in the past now, all that matters is the here and now, with you."

"Sure, and I will do everything in my power to do right by you."

"I know." She said and kissed him. "Can I use your toilet please?"

Claire went upstairs and Danny almost instinctively followed his feet to the kitchen and he drained the remainder of the whiskey bottle. Now he could really feel himself buzzing and as he crossed the room to find another bottle, he noticed his senses felt disconnected from each other. His mind felt distant from his body. How much had he drank in his anxiety? He lit up a spliff and drank more until Claire returned.

"So what do you wanna do? Watch a movie or something?" She asked.

"I just wanna be with you," He half-groaned. They kissed for a while until a loud bang drew them apart.

"What the hell was that?" She asked.

Danny ran his fingers across her skin, the softness pleasuring his mind.

Momentary blackness.

He lifted a glass to his lips and drained it, feeling his throat burn.

Her soft skin, her lips.

He inhaled deeply, Smoke filling his lungs.

Claire downing a glass of wine. Then another.

A small scream.

He fell back onto the soft cushions of the leather sofa.

Her skin.

Another noise of movement.

"No Danny don't. Please don't!"

Her skin. Her body.

More drink, more smoke in his body.

"No please," A distant voice moaned.

Her... Skin.

A knife in his fingers.

A scream.

Blood.

Blackness.