Present

The only thing I hate more than blueberries is surprises. And this was turning out to be a day full of both.

When the letter had arrived, there was both excitement and confusion. Mr. Theodore Thisbly had mysteriously passed away. “But we visited just last night!” Mrs. Balcombe, my mother, exclaimed.

“There, there,” Mr. Balcombe had consoled his wife.

The letter held a summons to the Thisbly Manor later in the day to discuss the situation of the late Mr. Thisbly’s material possessions. That is where came the excitement.

Taking advantage of the chaos in the kitchen, I slip away from the breakfast table and my despicable meal of blueberry pancakes. I race up the house’s rickety stairs, taking them two at a time (not three, never again three) and burst into my room sobbing. I was always very close to my grandfather and considered him my closest confidante, informing him of my deepest secrets and requesting his helpful advice. I hope he did not suffer.

Around two hours later, we were all bundled up in the car on our way to the Thisbly Manor. All I could hear was the faint whirring of the car’s engine. I’ve never heard my parents this silent, except for after Felix’s incident.

When we arrived at the manor, we were greeted with yet another surprise. Two police cars were parked on the side of the deceptively simple dirt road. An old Mustang was parked too, and a young couple stood next to it. “Claire,” cried Mrs. Balcombe, jumping out of the car to meet her sister, “What’s happening? Why are there police cars here?”

“Oh Julie,” moaned Aunt Claire, “They haven’t told us anything yet.”

Another car pulls up to the front of the Estate, and Uncle Thomas exits along with his family, looking vaguely concerned. “Julie? Claire?” he questions.

By this time, the entire family is situated in a confused huddle. Two officers in matching uniforms come over from the far side of the property. The first is middle-aged, with a gruff demeanor and a surprisingly buff figure. The second is young, with bright blue eyes, close-cropped brown hair, and a clean-shaven face.

“I’m sure you’re all questioning why we’re here,” begins the younger cop, “I am Officer Bradley and this is Officer Garner. I’m afraid we have some bad news.”

“Mr. Thisbly has been murdered.”

Past

The tiered chandelier hung above the long, vintage table which was set with china of the finest caliber. There was a general light-hearted mood, and all seemed blissful. Well, almost everything. Uncle Thomas sat in his seat glaring rather indiscreetly at Grandpa Thisbly throughout the appetizers. I guess he hadn’t gotten over their argument at the last family get-together. Or maybe there had been another argument that night? I *had* heard shouting earlier in the evening.

Next to Uncle Thomas, sat his wife, Aunt Margaret. She’s definitely my favorite aunt, always bringing us treats from her baking business. Over a seat sat Thomas and Margaret’s three children. Jake is the oldest, seventeen years old just like me. We don’t really talk much, especially after a major disagreement. His younger brother, Andrew, sat beside him. Andrew’s very shy, but he’s sweet nonetheless. Next to Andrew was his polar opposite, Molly. At six years

old, she's a bundle of energy and doesn't *stop* talking. Sometimes I find it funny how the three are related.

Down the table is Aunt Claire and her husband Liam. Aunt Claire always lets you know exactly what she thinks, which can be a good or bad thing. Meanwhile, Uncle Liam merely exists. Nobody really pays him much due.

And, of course, at the head of the table is Grandpa Thisbly, healthy and fit as a whistle.

Present

"His body was found this morning by the gardener," grunts Officer Garner, "Mr. Theodore Thisbly was stabbed three times in the heart and was presumably ten hours dead.

The only possible explanation is that he was killed last night. Meaning…all of you are the suspects."

A series of gasps erupt from the family. I feel my heart drop to my throat. Tears sting my eyes.

"Killed?"

"No, it can't be!"

"Dad was supposed to live many more years!"

"Who would do such a thing?"

"We will be taking each and every one of you aside for questioning in addition to a few of the household staff living here at the manor. We'll begin with," Officer Garner checks his list, "Mr. Liam Smith."

Liam looks mildly shocked to be recognized but then gives a smug nod. He walks with the two officers towards the Thisbly Manor. I nudge my father. “Do you know where they’re questioning him?”

“Hmm…I believe the Silver Office? Why?” he responds.

I don’t answer. I’m already off on the shortcut to the Silver Office with the brisk autumn air turning my cheeks pink.

By the time I’ve hidden myself behind some drapes and a plant in the corner of the room, the two officers and Liam walk in.

“Well then, Liam,” Officer Bradley begins, giving him a comforting smile, “We’ll give you a chance to confess up front. Did you commit the murder?”

Liam shakes his head. “Of course not. What would I stand to gain?”

“Revenge,” Officer Garner suggests, “For them never noticing you.”

“Nah,” Liam replies, “Not my style.”

“Hello Jake,” greets Officer Bradley, “I’m aware of your…ill feelings towards the late Mr. Thisbly. Do you want to talk about them?”

Jake glares at the officer. “I didn’t do it.”

“I didn’t mean to imply anything,” Officer Bradley replies, hands in the air in innocence, “But you can see how your feelings might be incriminating? Especially given your criminal record?”

“I wouldn’t stab the old man,” Jake muttered, “Even if he deserved it.”

Past

"Hello everyone," began Grandpa Thisbly, starting the toast, "I know some of us have our differences, but I'm glad that we can all be here tonight. Even if *some* of those differences result in foolhardy, irrevocable decisions. I'm hoping light can be shed on these decisions, responsibility will be taken, and we can work together to find a way to move forward. If not, I will take it into my own hands. I am nothing if not understanding, and I do realize people make mistakes."

"Additionally, I hope we all keep little Felix in our prayers. That night he fell down the stairs will forever remain in our memories. This has been an especially hard time for Will, Julie, and of course my dear Kiera. Oh Kiera…"

"On another unrelated note, upon reexamining my will, I have found some inconsistencies in the sharing of my possessions. Claire, as the youngest, you have been sadly neglected. I am sorry for that. Tomorrow morning, I will be signing a new copy. That is all. Thank you."

Present

"Hello," greeted Aunt Margaret as she entered the room, "I wasn't sure if either of you got a chance to eat, so I brought blueberry scones." I physically recoil in my hiding spot. Although I love Aunt Margaret's cooking, I can't help noticing the detestable blueberries tucked into her delectable scones. It's taking all my willpower not to run out the room. I take a deep breath and plug my nose, hoping that the scones leave somehow.

"Thank you," Officer Bradley says, smiling.

"Yeah thanks," says Officer Garner, "But this is an interrogation, not a family baking event. I've poked around and found that, despite being generally well-liked by most of the family, Mr. Thisbly hated you. Absolutely despised you. Why is that?"

"I…I don't know why," Aunt Margaret quivered.

"Don't mess with me. Thisbly knew something about you. What. Was. It?" Officer Garner questions, leaning close into Margaret's face.

She instantly bursts into tears. "He knew I stole the recipe for my famous blueberry turnovers! I wish I never did, but then my bakery business grew and grew! I want to give it back! He thought if I stole the recipe, I would steal something from Thomas or the family! But I would never! I spend every day trying to make up for the terrible thing I did!" Margaret wailed wildly, tears flying everywhere.

Officer Bradley glares at Officer Garner. "If that is all, I think she can go now."

"Wait," Officer Garner stops her, "None of you thought it was weird that you didn't see Thisbly for the rest of the night?"

Margaret shakes her head. "He often excused himself from the fighting well before the rest of us left. We assumed he had gone to bed."

With that, Margaret leaves the room, still sobbing, but luckily taking the loathsome scones with her.

"Mr. Balcombe. Interesting last name Balcombe is, isn't it?" questions Officer Garner, "In Old English, it means 'evil' or 'calamity'. A name only given to families that have some evil lurking within. Do you have some evil, Mr. Balcombe?"

"Of course not," my father replies, "But we certainly have calamity. It hasn't been easy since my poor son Felix has been in the hospital and the bills have been stacking up."

"We have it here on record that you lost your job last month and you've been struggling to stay afloat ever since. And you haven't told anyone. Even your wife. Is it possible you needed some money quickly and couldn't wait for Mr. Thisbly to die naturally?" surmises Officer Bradley.

Mr. Balcombe sighs. "I admit I had the thought. But I didn't do it. Someone else must have got to Thisbly first."

Past

"What do *you* even need the money for anyway?" Mrs. Balcombe yelled over the appetizers, "You don't have kids to raise and take care of! You don't have a kid in the hospital!"

"I can think of plenty of things I could use the money for!" shouted Aunt Claire, "Just because I don't have kids, doesn't mean I don't have a life!"

"You don't have a life! That's why I trusted you to watch over Felix! And you couldn't even do that!" Mrs. Balcombe retorted.

"You take that back! I told Kiera to keep an eye on that *precious* Felix anyway! So stop blaming me!" Aunt Claire shrieked.

Present

"Welcome in, Julie. Now, I have it on solid grounds that you and your sister Claire were arguing that night about Mr. Thisbly's decision to change the will," Officer Bradley says.

"Yes, that's right," Mrs. Balcombe confirmed, "But I would never kill my father. He and my daughter, Kiera, share a very special relationship. I would never sabotage it. Especially at this time when she's so emotionally vulnerable. She was right there the night Felix got hurt."

"I see. However, your father changing the will meant you would get less of the money promised to you. In exchange for someone who, in your words, 'doesn't need it'" stated Officer Garner.

"Fine, I was angry. But not *that* angry. If you're looking for that level of anger, seek it somewhere else. Have you checked the records?" asked Mrs. Balcombe.

"We have. I assume you're referring to the fact that your family has a long line of money-related murders?" Officer Bradley asked.

"Yes," confirmed Mrs. Balcombe, "So I would suggest you direct your attention over to Claire. You do know she killed my grandmother?"

"Ha! She tried to put the blame on me? That dirty Julie," chuckled Aunt Claire.

"You're taking this…rather lightly?" Officer Bradley asked, confused.

"Of course!" laughed Aunt Claire again, "What would I stand to gain by murdering my father? He hadn't changed his will yet. I lose money this way. No, no, no. You're barking up the wrong tree. Don't believe *everything* my sister tells you."

Past

"Father does not need to hear you two arguing!" Uncle Thomas broke in. "I'm taking him outside."

Uncle Thomas gently escorts Grandpa Thisbly out the room, whisking him away from the fighting just as the waitstaff began clearing the plates from the main course. I can already hear the two Thisblys murmuring, starting up another of their frequent fights.

"Now see what you've done?" my mother accuses Aunt Claire.

"What *I've* done? This was all you!" Aunt Claire retorts.

"The two of you need to stop!" my father interrupts, "Don't let money come between your bond."

Aunt Claire sniffs. "It's too late for that."

Present

"You were the last one seen with Thisbly. Once you escorted him outside, he was absent for the rest of the evening. That doesn't look very good," Officer Garner accuses.

"I didn't kill my father. When I was ready to go inside, I asked him to accompany me. He said he wanted more fresh air, so I left him outside in the garden," defends Uncle Thomas.

"Are you sure? Based on other records, the two of you were always fighting about your choice of wife. Did this not bother you? Did it not make you seek revenge?" questions Officer Bradley.

"No," Uncle Thomas simply states.

"One last thing. Can you confirm everyone was present at the table throughout the entire meal?"

"I think so."

"Cheryl, you've been working for the Thisblys for many years and you were serving the night of the murder. What can you tell us about this family?" Officer Bradley asks.

"Truthfully? I'm not supposed to tell you this, but they're all horrible. At least the job pays well. I mean…wealth of the Thisblys' amount doesn't come from playing nice," Cheryl remarks.

"Did you notice anything strange about that night?" questions Officer Garner.

"I was taking out the garbage when I overheard the Balcombe's daughter arguing with Mr. Thisbly. I think I heard them mention the little brother? It was really odd, considering she's the only one who has a good relationship with Mr. Thisbly" adds Cheryl.

"Anything else?" Officer Bradley prods.

"Usually, everyone thoroughly enjoys their meal. Especially when Margaret brings her dessert. But that night, one plate was completely untouched."

Past

I walk back into the dining room after excusing myself to the bathroom.

"Kiera, your face looks so flushed. Are you alright?" asks Aunt Claire, looking concerned.

"Oh, I didn't realize," I say, reaching up to touch my cheeks, "I'm fine. Don't worry."

Present

"We only have one question for you, Kiera. What was served for dessert last night?" Officer Bradley asks.

I look up and stare him dead in the eye.

"Blueberry pie."