Dept. Q – All The Gory Details

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"Can we do this tomorrow? We'll have a lovely 'deep and meaningful'. All the gory details, yeah?"

It was what Carl had said to dodge Jasper's insistent questions. But he had to know that Jasper wasn't going to let it go so easily. This is that conversation the morning after Carl gets home to find Rachel Irving passing out tennis balls at their kitchen table in episode 1x09.

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Why was it that injuries always felt so much worse after you rested? It was fucking ironic, Carl thought as he squinted at the hazy morning light of another overcast Scottish day filtering in through his bedroom windows.

What he wanted most of all was to cling on to a feeble hope that if he just closed his eyes again, maybe he would drift off to a blissfully unconscious slumber. Life had no such plans for Carl, though.

His shoulder hurt just enough to be a tangible annoyance but not enough to want to take more painkillers, and definitely too much to find a comfortable position to actually get more quality sleep. But maybe that was just as well. His alarm had already gone off twice and had been snoozed twice, and no amount of resolve had willed it away into shutting off entirely.

Carl let out a weary sigh. The night before was still a bit of a blur. Lyle's gun going off, the punch of the impact against Carl's shoulder, the searing pain that followed before he blacked out.

Sure, saving Merritt Lingard's life had all been worth it. More than worth it. As had the feeling of accomplishment for solving a case that he hadn't felt since before he could remember.

All he needed now was to muster the energy to heave his battered body out of bed. Easy. Right? Except… it wasn't. It was just another battle.

Carl knew all about facing battles – the battle of trying to find a reason to get out of bed, to keep going, to show up at work, to just get through the day, and then come home to Jasper being an absolute arse and Martin being exhausting as hell to listen to.

But today… Today actually felt different. A little less grating. Like maybe there was hope somewhere – hidden among the dust of his old life he was still sweeping off the scraped, dirty floor.

With a newfound shred of resolve, he made an effort to sit up, groaning immediately as his shoulder violently protested. “Fuck,” he muttered but pushed himself up to let his feet hang over the side of the bed.

The wooden floor felt cool to the touch against Carl’s naked feet. He waited a moment until the pain in his shoulder receded to a bearable dull throb before he made his way into the bathroom, trying to shake the lingering, achy exhaustion from the previous day’s frenzy.

His morning routine significantly hampered by the uselessness of his left arm, even small tasks like brushing your teeth became a nuisance. He debated leaving the sling off after he got dressed, but ultimately decided to be a fucking grown-up about it. If he’d learned one thing from being an active policeman for over twenty years, it was that rebelling against medical advice seldom did you any favours—at least where physical injuries were concerned.

He had expected the kitchen to be empty when he entered it, and was all the more surprised to see Jasper doing the dishes from the night before. Carl couldn’t recall any previous instances where the boy had done any chores at all without being assertively prompted at least three times. And with assertively prompted he actually meant yelled at, followed by either defiant sulking or complete disregard. Or both.

Carl shuffled closer. “What the hell are you doing here?”

Jasper stopped what he was doing for a moment as if to decide whether to hurl the plate he was holding in Carl’s general direction or maybe drop it to the floor.

He ended up placing it in the drying rack on the sink. The sarcasm in his voice was hard to miss. “Good morning to you too, Carl.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Carl dismissively waved his right hand in front of him as he went over to the counter. “Tell me, *why* exactly are you skipping school again when I clearly remember us having a very recent, very distinct conversation about this exact thing?”

“I’m not.”

“Like you’re not, the last three times you actually did?”

Jasper sighed audibly. “I’m telling you, I am *not*.” He turned around to face Carl. “But if you insist, I can call the school so that they can tell you themselves about the inspection prep day. Jeez, why can’t you believe me just *once*?!”

Carl raised his eyebrows. Was Jasper telling the truth? Carl was willing to consider that possibility. “O…kay,” he said by way of vague acknowledgement.

The silence that followed was uncomfortably charged and fraught with all the unspoken elephants crowding the room and the gurgle of the dishwater going down the drain.

Carl decided to let it go and instead cater to his empty and now attention-seekingly empty stomach. The plate he took from the drying rack was still a little wet on the rim. He fetched a knife from the drawer and the bread from the overhead cupboard with another groan he

couldn't suppress fast enough. He could see from the corner of his eye that Jasper must have heard it.

The fridge was its usual well-stocked. The perks of living with a lodger who didn't have a day job to speak of and liked perusing grocery aisles. Carl grabbed the butter and the cheddar. It would do, he'd never been one for fancy, cooked breakfasts anyway.

He instantly wished Martin was less of a food snob, because cutting slices of cheese from a block of cheddar with only one functioning arm was a whole new undertaking Carl wasn't quite equipped for. He fumbled around, tried to find a workable solution, but ultimately it blew up in his face and the cheddar flew from the cutting board.

In a vain and somewhat instinctive effort to correct his mistake, he hastily groped to try and catch it, but that only made it worse since now the cheese was on the floor and Carl's shoulder hurt like a bitch from the sudden, uncontrolled movement. He let out another heartfelt, "Fuck!"

Jasper was there not two seconds later, picking the cheese up off the floor. Carl instantly hated it. "Don't," he barked at Jasper.

"Carl," he said in a tone that was markedly more no-nonsense than Carl could remember hearing from the teenager before.

Behind him, the toaster ejected the bread slices with a metallic pop. Carl had already lost his appetite but was now determined to finish the simple task of making himself the most basic bloody breakfast out of sheer spite.

Maybe he should start with caffeine. And maybe they should finally invest in one of those capsule machines because the French press was always such a fucking nuisance, except that then Martin would go on forever about how they were an environmental nightmare and how the coffee tasted so much better if hand-pressed from freshly ground beans.

What they should also invest in was a more user-friendly electric kettle, because this one tended to randomly snap its lid closed at the most inopportune times, like it did now just as Carl held it under the sink, with the water splattering everywhere except into the actual fucking kettle.

Frustrated, he let it drop into the sink where it clattered with a loud noise to the tune of Carl's, "God fucking dammit!"

And there was Jasper again next to him. "Carl. Sit down."

"No, for fuck's—"

Jasper interrupted him in a tone that even Carl found hard not to submit to. "Jesus, Carl, sit the fuck down!"

He had no choice. He knew he had to suck it up.

"All right," Carl conceded, retreating to the kitchen table where he pulled away a chair and sat down.

Jasper put on the kettle. “Coffee, right?”

“Yeah,” Carl acknowledged wearily.

Carl could do little other than watch Jasper make him toast and coffee with an unfamiliar sting of hurt pride and an extra serving of mild humiliation.

Most days, the boy drove him up the wall, Carl’s patience already thin from the ever-growing frustrations of his workday or Hardy’s passive-aggressive self-sabotage. The relationship with his stepson hadn’t exactly improved since the accident.

Or so Carl had thought.

That day in the ice cream shop, horrible as it had been, it had unlocked something, had strangely bonded them in the worst possible way.

That conversation with Vic was all too fresh in his mind—her casually dropping that Jasper hadn’t left Carl’s side after he was shot. That had thrown him for a loop.

The shooting, *that* shooting. It, too, was a blur. Or rather a several gaping holes in his long-term memory. And as ironic as it was, even though he could only remember fragments, he just couldn’t shake that worst of days that had torn more to shreds than just his flesh.

It had been months, the physical wounds had all healed nicely, but some days the few things he *could* remember were still fresh in Carl’s mind as if it had happened yesterday. Like that day he was on TV. Irving had called it a panic attack. He hated that term, was loath to admit that she was probably right. Akram had seen it too, had helped him through it. He should probably have thanked the guy.

Carl was pulled from his reverie as Jasper wordlessly set a plate with two slices of toast and a mug of coffee in front of him, then sat down across the table.

Carl briefly looked up. “Thank you.”

Jasper said nothing but gave him an almost imperceptible nod.

For a full minute, the only sounds that disrupted the silence were the crunches of Carl biting into his toast.

Jasper was finally the one to speak up. “Well… It’s tomorrow.”

Carl gave him a quizzical look. “Am I supposed to know what that means?”

“You said last night we’d go into all the gory details tomorrow. It’s tomorrow now.”

“Technically, it’s *today*.”

Jasper shot him a *cut-the-crap* look and Carl succumbed. “Okay. Which gory details do you want to know?”

“How did you get shot?”

“With a shotgun. Pellet shots. Hurt like a motherfucker.”

“So it happened on the job.”

"No, it happened as I was languidly strolling through the forest during hunting season." He paused, then added in a marginally less impatient tone, "Yes, it happened on the job."

"Aren't you supposed to… I dunno… Wear a bulletproof vest or something?"

Carl let out a dry chuckle. "You're watching too many American cop shows, fella."

"So what, you just wander around crime scenes, catching bullets with no protection whatsoever?"

A sigh escaped Carl's lips. "Firstly, it was buckshot and not a bullet. Secondly, no, we don't just wander around, catching bullets. It's not like I make myself a target on purpose, you know. Just sometimes… it comes with—"

"The job," Jasper finished for him. "Yeah."

Carl put down the slice of toast he was holding, raising his voice. "Look. This is what I do, yeah? This is what I signed up for. And yes, it's part of the job. It's not like I *like* getting shot, you know. In fact, I'd much rather *not* get shot because, trust me, it's a fuckin' awful experience. Zero out of ten, cannot recommend."

Jasper was now visibly clenching his jaw and something inside of Carl wished he hadn't shot back one of his confrontational retorts. They just came too fucking easy, had become instinct.

Carl took another bite and followed it up with a sip of the strong caffeinated brew he'd been served.

"You said something yesterday," Jasper stated. "Something about being a policeman for the first time in a long time."

"Oh wow. You were actually listening."

"Carl…"

He lifted his right hand in a vaguely apologetic gesture. "Okay, sorry. Yes, I did say that."

"What did you mean by that?"

It wasn't something Carl could just brush off with a one-sentence answer. Was he ready to explain all of that to a 17-year-old who had no idea about the job, about the things he saw on a day-to-day basis?

"I meant that it had been a while since I actually solved a case and saved someone's life in the process."

"So you got shot to save a life?"

That was one way of seeing it. He nodded. "Yeah, in a way."

"In what way?"

Carl could see he wasn't going to get out of this one so easily. "It's a little more complicated than that."

"Can you not uncomplicate it for me?"

"No, not really."

He could see Jasper wasn't happy with that answer. "It was the Merritt Lingard case, wasn't it?"

Carl's eyes widened. "Where did you hear that?"

"Carl, I'm not stupid. I know how to use the internet. The video of you at the press conference wasn't exactly flattering."

Carl rubbed the side of his face. Yeah. The press conference. "Of course you had to see that. What else do you know?"

"Was it Merritt Lingard's life you saved?"

"Yes."

"Wow."

That response surprised Carl. "Wow?"

"Yeah, I mean, she had been missing for so long."

"Four years."

"So where was she?"

"A hyperbaric chamber."

"What's a hyperbaric chamber?"

"Kind of a metal cylinder that's under pressure."

"She was kept in a metal pod the whole time?"

"No, this one was pretty large. Think prison cell."

"Where the hell do you keep something like that for four years without anyone noticing?"

"An old industrial unit over on Mhòr, tucked away in an abandoned warehouse. Pretty genius, actually."

This was now piquing Jasper's interest. "So you found it? Found *her*?"

"*We* did, me and Akram."

"Who is Akram?"

That was a good question. Carl didn't want to say partner. Hardy was his partner. "A colleague."

"Did Akram also get shot?"

Jeez, what was with the shooting obsession? "No. Just me, the apparently luckiest mark around here for target practice."

Jasper's jaw was working again, but he ignored the comment and pestered Carl with more questions about the case. Why had they held Lingard in a pressure chamber for all these years? Who had done it? Why Mhòr? How had they found clues that led there?

Carl answered as best as he could, knowing most of it would be revealed in a press conference later today anyway. Surely Moira was already having the statements drafted. And surely she'd be waiting for him to turn up at the station to go over the details. Probably she'd want him to speak to the press. Although maybe not, after how he botched up the last one.

What Carl did not expect was for Jasper to suddenly change the subject when he outright asked, "Are you shagging Rachel?"

The idea was preposterous. "What? No, I'm not shagging Rachel. I'm not even sure we're on a first name basis."

"You had beer with her last night."

"Yes, but that wasn't entirely voluntarily now, was it?"

"She came here to give you tennis balls."

Carl couldn't help but smirk. "Yeah. She gave me balls."

Jasper's mouth curved into a grin as well. "But you like her, right?"

Carl shrugged with one shoulder. "I suppose I like her the way you can like your therapist."

"She's your therapist?"

"Yeah. Or… she was. For a hot minute."

"Since when are you seeing a therapist?"

"Wasn't by choice. Seriously injured on the job, mandatory counselling sessions, dealing with trauma, bla bla bla."

Jasper gave him a quizzical look. "Even *you* have to see that that's maybe not such a bad idea."

Carl shook his head. "When did you become such a smartarse?"

Jasper ignored it. "Is it helping?"

"Helping? No. I don't know." He pushed his mug with his thumb so that it moved a fraction. "Maybe."

"So… you talk about the shooting? With her?"

Nope. Carl definitely wasn't going there. "No. And I'm not talking about the shooting with you either."

"So what *do* you talk about with her?"

"None of your fucking business. Plus she's not even my therapist anymore."

"Okay. So… are you going to date her?"

What the fuck? Why could Jasper not leave this alone? "None of your fucking business either."

"I think she's nice."

"*Do* you now? Not sure how you can make such an expert judgment call after meeting her for all of two hours, but okay. I guess that's better than you passionately hating her right off the bat." After a moment he added, "Not that that's an admission of any kind of dating aspirations or romantic interest or anything of the sort."

Jasper's mouth formed into a smirk as he muttered, "Sure, Carl."

"What?!" he countered.

"Just… don't be an arse with her. I think she likes you."

"Okay," Carl said impatiently, pushing the now empty plate away from him. "Conversation's over. I trust you'll want to do the washing up for me, too?"

Jasper stood up without paying any further attention to Carl. "Nope. You've still got one functioning arm, don't you?"

Carl sighed. How could he forget there was still a petulant teenager just hovering underneath the surface? "Fine. Be that way. Leave the invalid to his own devices."

Jasper called over his shoulder from the doorstep, "Now you're just being a bloody drama queen."

"Fuck off," Carl called after him, but Jasper was already off to his room.

Carl leaned back against the backrest of his chair, feeling the sting in his shoulder once more. As reluctant as he'd been about Dept. Q, Akram and the Lingard case, he was willing to admit that maybe it had been a blessing in disguise. Not just for him, also for his relationship with Jasper and, perhaps more importantly, Hardy. Him and Hardy, now they both had something to fight for again.

He allowed himself a small smile, before he pushed himself out of the chair with another hardly suppressed groan.

Time to get to the station and face the music.