

DEMONS - OF THE - NOTHING



JUSTICE IN DEMONIC PROPORTIONS.

Prologue

From nothing, I am becoming something.

Sight.

I can see. I see a man, grubby, naked, the mark of a gibbon across his heart. Soon he will be mine, and I will be his.

I see a room. Dark, dirty, in disrepair. My man is down on his luck, but I will change that when I am his.

Sound.

I can hear. I hear chanting. The man kneeling on the floor is calling to me. Calling me by name. I have a name. I am Akai.

I hear dripping water, the crunching of rats in the corner. I will save him from this awful place.

Taste.

I am growing stronger. I can taste the stale air, taste his hunger for blood. For vengeance. I taste the hatred in the air.

Speech

I can speak. Only a whisper, a hiss in his ear. I let him know I am coming. I am his. Yes, yes, pull me from the Nothing, and give me his vengeance.

Smell.

I am almost real. I smell him, my rundown man fills my nose with stale urine and beer. It doesn't matter. I will make him good, make him whole, and he will love me.

Touch.

I feel the warmth of the stagnant room. My hand reaches for him. One touch and I am his.

But I still can't touch.

My nameless man, kneeling in the dark, has stopped calling to me. Distracted by the click of the door, the turn of a handle, the crunch of a boot on concrete.

He can't stop now. Just a few more words and I can take the vengeance he desires. But no more words pass his lips.

The hammer raises, glinting in the pale of the light from the thin window.

Say the words, and vengeance will be done.

The hammer swings. Bone crunches, blood sprays, brain matter spills.

My man... My master he will never be. He topples forward, no longer seeing.

I was so close to freedom. The sweet metallic scent of blood dominates the air. I long for his bond. For touch, for more.

But no more words will ever pass his lips again. No sight, no sound, no touch or taste.

Alas, I fade back to the darkness.

Chapter One

Kelsey

"Detective Inspector Christopher Kelsey," the Detective Chief Inspector introduces me to the Crown Prosecution Service lawyer. Of course, she needs no introduction. Crystal Monaghan, known for throwing out cases before they get to court save reputation. She holds out her hand, but I don't take it, wishing I could crush it in my larger hand.

"And Detective Sergeant Colin Redbridge." DCI Geoff Andrews moves to my partner of seven years.

Colin sits back in his chair with a groan as he is introduced. His crossed arms make it clear he won't be shaking hands either.

"I know my decision isn't to your liking, but if we charge a mother with murdering her own children, we need to be damn sure we are going to win the case." Monaghan defends her actions.

It isn't the news any of us want to hear. Our case has been thrown out by a lawyer more interested in image than justice. We have all the evidence we need, just no lawyer with the balls to charge her.

"Mrs Rangoon will not be charged with her family's murders? The evidence all pointed to her, but still, she gets off scott free?" Colin protests. I imagine this is harder for him, he has a wife and two children around the same age.

"If there is even a shred of doubt over her guilt, the papers would have a field day," Andrews explains again.

I'm not going to drop the case because some high and mighty lawyer is worried about the newspapers running a negative story about the department. Justice is more important, but we seem to be the only ones who care about that.

"The evidence is good," Colin sides with me, we put hours into this investigating making sure to cross the Ts and dot the Is. There is no doubt in my mind that she did it.

"Her lawyer is better. I'm sorry guys." Andrews sides firmly with the lawyer.

"Then let him fight for her in court. If we lose, then she goes free, but give the evidence a chance." I hate cases that come down to cost and reputation. I have too long a list of such cases over my career.

"I know this is a difficult decision, but trust me, it will not show negatively on your personal files. You two are still our best team."

I'm about done with work for the day, this has really ruined my mood. It is going to take fifty reps in my home-made gym to ease the anger I'm feeling. "I'd be happy to stay and discuss this until home time." But I want out. Now.

"Fine, go home," Andrews takes the bait and dismisses us for the day.

It is four on a Friday afternoon; he doesn't have the energy to fight us on this.

"You should take the promotion," Colin informs me in the way he does regularly.

"And leave you? Never." We're both career cops, but the difference between me and Colin is that I have no one at home. The DCI sees that as perfect when offering the work-all-hours job he has lined up. I don't want that. I'd rather have someone to go home to. The apartment has been too empty since... but that was over a decade ago. I should be over my loss and move on, but no matter how I try, I just can't.

"Got plans this weekend?" Colin accepts my answer as usual, stands up and grabs his coat from the back of the chair.

I give half a shrug. Despite working as a detective for over a decade, I still lived alone in my large apartment. I live for work and spend my free time working or exercising, which does make me perfect for the promotion. Yet somehow Colin manages to find time for a wife and kids. All the things I want but can't find time to have. Not a wife, just a significant other.

Maybe that's how Colin can shrug off these defeats. I don't seem to be able to let things go.

"No plans." Nothing I will admit to anyway. Just hanging about in some dodgy gay bar looking for a good time.

"Sorry, gentlemen, we've had a call." Andrews opens the office door, poking the top half of his body into the room. "We have a dead body."

"My favourite words on a Friday afternoon." My shoulders droop as I remind myself why I live alone.

"Let's get this over with." Colin sighs, checking his badge and warrant card in his pocket

I grab my tablet from the desk and check the details are loaded.

"There should be a law against killing people on a Friday afternoon," Colin grumbles as we walk down the length of the main station to the door.

"I believe there is a law against killing any day of the week," I chuckle, pressing the button for the lift down to the staff car park. "But we'll be out of a job the day people listen."

"Shotgun," Colin calls, jumping in the lift as the door opens.

I chuckle over my colleague's words. There are only the two of us, and I'm driving. Of course, Colin would ride shotgun. But I say nothing, leaving the lift, finding my bay, and climbing into my Honda Civic.

"OK, so we have a body reported," Colin reads the file aloud as I drive. "Uniformed cops responded to a call of strange activity, at the abandoned Kent Towers. Found a body and what looks like a potential ritual."

"I love ritual killings." I find the late-night research fascinating. Getting into the mind of the killer, understanding their thoughts and reasoning. Rituals are about more than madmen, they are about history and speculation, all pieces in the puzzle of everything. It probably didn't help solve cases as much as I'd like to think, but so long as I enjoy it and have nothing better to do, I guess I'll keep studying.

"No wonder you don't have a family." Colin always brings his family up when my mind wanders down the rabbit hole of rituals.

I pull up beside the lone police car and kill the engine. This isn't the most inviting place, especially in my nice suit, but my wages certainly cover the dry-cleaning bill.

Most of the time, we avoid crawling through uninhabitable spaces looking at bodies, delegating that to the CSI team, but seeing the site first hand is immensely useful during the later investigation. There is no way any of our clothing is going to be fit to wear again after this. Kent Towers is a state, an office block that was abandoned decades ago and left to fester. Ritual killers always find the oddest places to murder their victims, I've always noted.

"We got a call this morning from one of the residents across the way; they saw lights and heard spooky sounds during the night." A young constable with the name tag Jenkins greets us. "She still waited until this morning to call it in. As the report was already so old, it wasn't down as a priority, so we only responded half an hour ago."

"And you found the body?" Colin pulls his work tablet from his pocket to take notes.

"Uh, yes. PC Peter Jenkins, Sir. I am the only one who entered. I left as soon as I saw the body, called it in."

"And your companion?"

"PC Selina Murray. She stayed outside as the tower interfered with the radios. That way I could shout to her, and she could radio in to control."

"Sensible." Noting the woman's pale complexion, I'll be advocating to leave her behind again.

I click on the beam of the torch I always kept in the car, examining the entrance as Colin pulled on his latex gloves.

"Show us the body." Colin steps to the side to let the PC through. I'm pretty sure we could find the body by ourselves, it's nice to have someone to navigate us through the crap lying around.

In, turn left, second on the right, I make a mental note of the route. It feels important to have a rapid exit plan in a place like this.

The room is small, dirty and stinks of ammonia, so much so it stings my eyes as we enter. The dead body lies naked in the middle of the room, awkwardly positioned on his front with bent legs under him. He had probably been kneeling on the floor when he'd been attacked.

"I'm thinking the fella was living here." Colin circles the body to a threadbare mattress against the far wall. "Not much in the way of belongings."

"So, he was possibly staying here. Question is, who drew the symbol on the floor?" I step into the pentagram, avoiding the blood and brain matter covering the inner circle of the drawing, as I seek a bird's eye view.

"Was he disturbed midway through, or was he the sacrifice?" I have a habit of thinking out loud at crime scenes; Colin knows me well enough, and I don't necessarily expect anyone to reply.

"Mark of the Gibbon," a quiet voice whispers.

"Sorry?" I look up at Jenkins, but the man is facing away, his attention on a strange shadow on one wall.

Colin is also busy, taking photos of the vagrant's belongings, but I know his voice well enough to rule him out.

"Say it." A breeze comes from nowhere, pushing on the surface of the congealed blood covering the floor.

My eyes pick up writing under the bodily fluid, becoming more visible as the blood recedes back towards the victim. I rub my eyes in disbelief, doubting my own vision, but words are visible now, albeit stained red.

"Daemonis paries animae." I give it my best shot. Strange Latin words that seem to sound natural as they roll off my tongue.

"Yesssssss," the small voice praises me. I look around but see nothing to explain the odd sounds. Even shoving my pinkie in my ear and giving a quick wiggle doesn't help.

"Whatever," I huff and step out of the circle. This is freaky stuff.

"Our guy could have been living here for a while, and either he starts a ritual and is disturbed halfway through, or someone comes here and uses him for a ritual killing?" Colin ponders aloud, answering himself with a shrug. "We'll know more when CSI gets done. Forensics always finds something extra for us."

Chapter Two

Kelsey

I take another look around the abysmal space, trying to imprint all the details to memory. Every inch of this room will be photographed by the Crime Scene Investigators, but photographs and 360 videos are never the same as being here. Sight is the only one of my senses that can be transferred from the scene. Everything else must be remembered or noted. Smell, sound, touch, and while I try to avoid it, taste.

I inhale every scent that lingers in the room, hear every sound, feel how the room feels. Even note the words of the small voice in my ear. Not that I'll be putting that in any reports.

A photo can't capture the cold chill or the presence of death. Whatever ritual had been taking place, it had real roots, proper origins. Not simply a vagrant making shit up; this has been researched. Which means that I now have enough research of my own to fill the whole weekend.

"Hello? CSI here?" A distant voice calls out.

"Would you like me to help them, Sirs?" Jenkins pipes up.

"Yes, please." I like being called Sir. It makes me feel important, and inappropriately hard when a young guy like Jenkins says it.

"Are you ready for them?" Jenkins calls, halting the vanguard of men in white tyvx bodysuits at the doorway. Every time I see them, I long to ask for a few protective onesies, but it's never the time or place.

The CSI won't work around us and making them wait isn't an option. We are done. I have absorbed all the information I can.

"Yeah, sure, we're leaving," Colin answers, stepping across the body to leave the room.

I follow, since stepping over the body is the best way to avoid stepping in any of the evidence, I take the shortest route. As my foot finds some clear flooring within the circle, I feel the wind again.

"Free," a little voice whispers in the hint of the breeze.

"Weird," I scold the impish thoughts haunting my mind. I'm going to need a stiff drink.

It only takes one mention of the smell on the phone call back to the station to get both of us dismissed for the weekend. Again. I drive from the crime scene towards Colin's home, with the feeling I'm being watched. I can't explain it or place any rationale to it. It is just a feeling and it's making me check my rear-view mirror insanely often. As Colin climbs out, I give in to the temptation to turn and look, but the rear is void of life, unless some small cockroach has taken up residence in the old Coke can that is overdue for its disposal.

"Everything OK?" Colin mutters, opening the rear door to find what interests me so much. Reassured that my partner can't see anything either, I wave him off and turn back in the seat. "See you Monday."

"Try to actually get some sleep," Colin accuses. "No research tonight. Sleep first, unending rabbit hole of weird killing fetishes tomorrow."

"I have every intention of researching tonight, but after the usual workout and beers, I will pass out on the sofa and leave the rabbit hole of - what did you call it - until tomorrow."

I know what he called it, but the word fetishes mean something very different in my personal life. To the point I can't say it around Colin.

It is highly unlikely that I will get any sleep. While I only have the photos taken by Colin's phone for now, it will certainly give me a starting point to begin researching into the occult. There will be no sleep until the killing is solved, and that wouldn't happen until we had the CSI report pinged through into the digital case file.

Still, I have nothing better to do apart from phoning my mum every Sunday, the closest thing I had to my own ritual. I turn onto the small drive and wait as the garage door responds to my push on the small remote. As usual, it sticks halfway. Sometimes repressing the button works, but today isn't one of the days.

"Fucking door." I'm going to have to go out and give it a push.

As I reach for the car door handle, I catch the flicker of a shadow in the corner of my eye. Turning to investigate, the whirl of the garage door distracts me. The motor lifts the door without issue, and the shadow slips from my mind. I drive the car into the garage and park. Such dire monotony. I wonder what my neighbours do to pass their weekends alone when they don't have paranormal research to do.

Armed with the old Coke can, I leave the car in the garage and head to the top floor apartment I call home. Although that isn't strictly true; most of the time I call it the out-of-

hours office. It is familiar and has all my personal possessions, but something is missing. Maybe I just need company, but I can't decide between a boyfriend or a dog. Maybe a boyfriend with a dog?

Maybe I just need to find Mr Right. So far I'm failing to find anyone who lasts longer than the weekend. I don't know how Colin manages it. I'm simply married to the job. It's the first thing I think about when I wake, and it's the last thing I think about when I fall asleep, usually at the desk in the spare room. The hint of a shadow catches my eye. Again.

My apartment isn't huge but more than enough space for me. The front door opens into an open plan living space with exposed beams and stuff from when I moved in with big plans. The other half is walled off into four rooms and a junk space above that could have been so much more.

"Home?" The small voice whispers. Damn it, I thought that was a fluke from the tower's atmosphere.

"Yes," I reply, as though talking to strange, discombobulated voices is normal. I need a beer. Or whisky. Or stronger.

"Master?" The voice questions.

"Who are you?" I turn sharply as the voice becomes more real. This is not my imagination.

"Akai."

That doesn't help. Is that a name, a thing, a type of monster.

"A name," the voice tuts.

"What are you?" I move closer to the corner, to where the shadow seems densest.

"Akai is Master's."

"Lovely. I always wanted a pet shadow." Maybe I'm just tired. That sounds a whole lot better than insane.

"Akai is more than that." It gives a chuckle that bounces quietly off the walls. The shadow is no longer in the corner.

"What are you?" I turn quickly, but only ever manage a glimpse in the corner of my eye. "I've asked this already."

"Akai is vengeance."

"Someone is using you to get vengeance on me?" My hand grabs at an umbrella, tearing it from the stand. It's a useless weapon against an invisible foe, but it's better than trying to joust with an old Coke can.

"Akai grants Master vengeance."

"Who do I need to get vengeance on?" Seems that list is longer than I would care to imagine.

"Akai does not know." The voice seems to ponder on that question. "Akai was called by the man with the mark of a gibbon."

"Dead dude with the monkey tattoo?"

"Yesssss."

"He called Akai, but he died before Akai could help. Master finished his call. Now Akai is Master's."

"I have no one to take vengeance on." I try to sound sincere with my words, while case after case flashes before my eyes. The list is long, so many guilty people, let off by good lawyers or lack of evidence. The list starts with Mrs Rangoon and goes all the way back to the first case I ever worked on.

"There, Master, such a vengeful soul."

"Can you read my mind?" I step back in horror from nothing and feeling stupid for it; like distance could somehow become a barrier for my thoughts. Stepping back from something I can't find seems a little redundant, but it puts my back to the wall, which somehow feels safe.

"My vengeful Master."

"I'm just tired," I declare to the air, walking away. I enter the kitchen area and flick the kettle on, feeling decidedly more exhausted than before.

"Tea, strong with three sugars." My shadowy whisper decides to narrate my life.

"I know how I take my tea," I huff.

"That is how Akai likes tea."

I chuckle at the voice and glance down at two mugs. Did I get them out? I can't even recall getting my own out, let alone one for the weird spirit of vengeance stalking me.

"So, you want a cup of tea? With milk and three sugars?"

"If it pleases my Master," the voice purrs.

The strange creature's words please me. Master sounded so much better than Sir.

"Fine. Waste of a bloody tea bag if you ask me." Muttering to myself, I make the second tea, just to prove my own insanity.

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