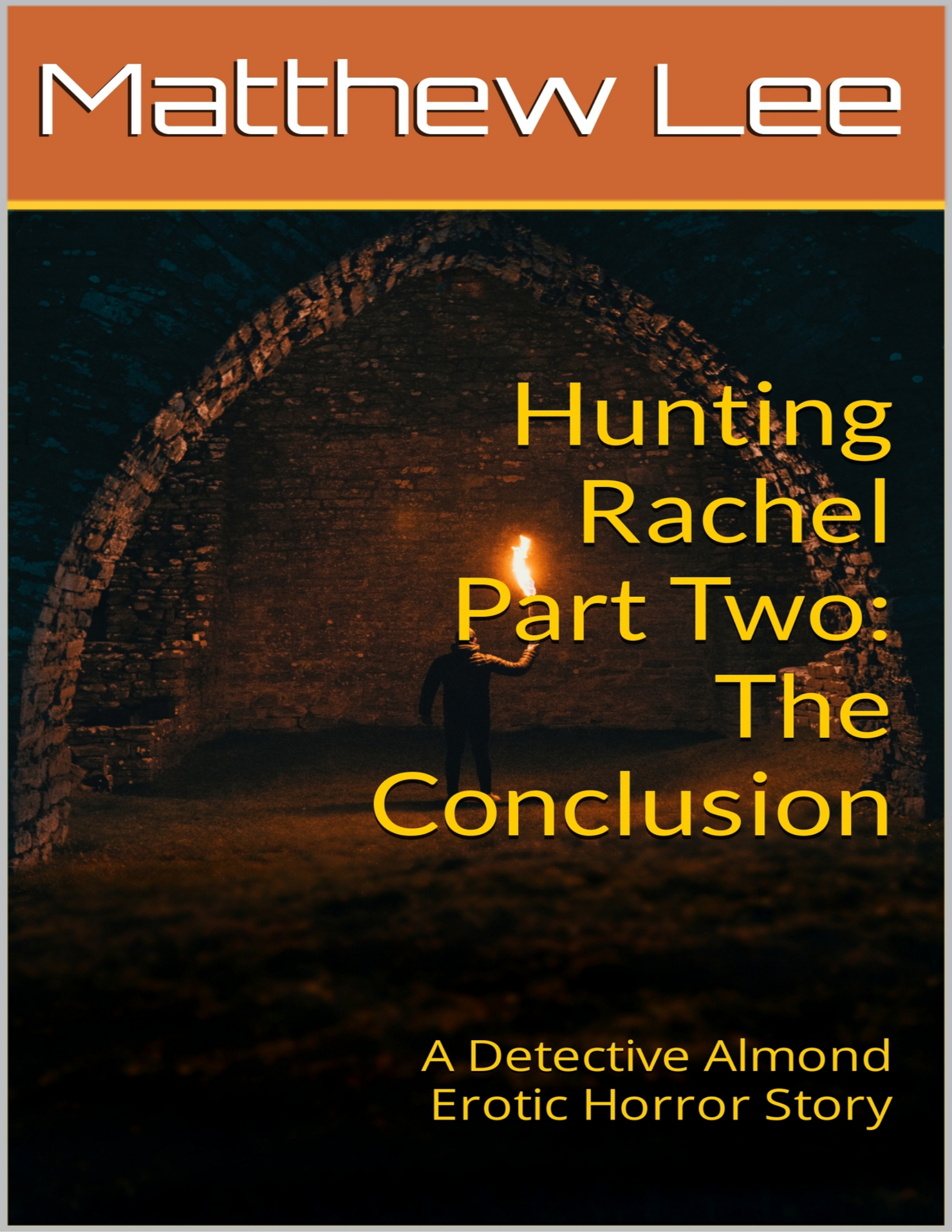


Matthew Lee

A person in a dark, hooded outfit stands in the center of a large, arched stone tunnel. They are holding a flaming torch aloft in their right hand, which illuminates the surrounding stone walls and floor. The tunnel is dimly lit, with the primary light source being the torch. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and dark.

Hunting Rachel Part Two: The Conclusion

A Detective Almond
Erotic Horror Story

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Hunting Rachel

Part Two: The Conclusion

A Detective Almond Erotic Horror Story

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By Matthew Lee

CHAPTER 1

The filthy tunnels now stank of gunpowder mixed with sewage. Emily lay on the slimy stones without moving but Tawny tried to crawl away. I desperately wanted to lie down and close my eyes.

Kali was furious with me. She wanted Rashad dead and I'd failed again. She stepped closer, menacing, angry. The bloody, misshapen fetus at her feet squirmed, clinging to life, and Kali placed her delicate foot upon the baby's tiny throat. Dainty toenails dented soft flesh.

"Look at the vile thing," she told me. "Cain will put one in Rachel."

I looked. The furry mutant baby was already half human, half minotaur. I pictured Rachel pregnant with such a creature growing in her womb and I shuddered. I fought back a sob. I was exhausted, drained. I had nothing left.

"I'm trying," I croaked, hanging my head.

Kali softened. She lifted my chin with a knuckle.

"You're only human," she said.

Her voice was pure sugar. I lifted my eyes to see her. Despite my weakened state, her gorgeous face dazzled me. She was ancient yet vivacious, bursting with youthful vitality, and would always remain so. My eyes travel her body. Her smooth pale skin and full, firm breasts beckoned. A bare vulva begged to be touched, tasted.

I groaned with need. I had barely the energy to stand yet I desired her. My logical mind warned me her dark eyes laughed at my pathetic lust. I saw that she made me want her and then scorned me for doing so. She was merciless. She was the last thing the fly saw before the spider ate.

I bit down hard on the vows I'd made to Rachel and forced myself to look away.

"I want my wife," I insisted.

"Kill Rashad and his pet."

"How? Every attempt ends in failure. I've only made things worse."

She lowered her gaze to the struggling fetus. She pressed her foot and toenails bit into skin. The tiny creature began to cough. She pressed harder and the beast squealed. She curled her toes, nails sinking into esophagus and piercing vertebrae. Blood pooled filling the dents, painting her toenails red. The fetus struggled for life but she slowly crushed all hope. She brought her beautiful face close to mine.

"Find a way," she said, smiling.

She expected me to fail. I saw it in her alluring, exquisite eyes.

"How many men?" I muttered, terrified, yet longing to touch her skin. "How many men have you thrown at Rashad? I can't be the first. You've had centuries. A dozen? A score?"

She pressed her lips to mine.

Electric lust fried my nerves. Fatigue vanished. A jolt raced through me. She'd touched me once before, when her finger grazed mine through prison bars, but this was infinitely more intense. My heart lurched and my penis surged. God! The touch of her lips was the most pleasurable thing I'd ever experienced. I became an addict in an instant. She pulled away and I knew I'd spend the rest of my life craving her. Humans had no chance against creatures like these.

"Hundreds," she purred. "I've thrown hundreds at him."

Icy fingers of despair tickled my heart. *Hundreds*. What hope did I have? She kept her body close, almost touching. Only a life spent stubborn kept my hands at my sides. I *needed* to touch her.

"Your wife will only return when my enemy is dead," she said. "Do as I ask."

She was so close I felt the heat from her body. I was dizzy and weak. I knew her powers include bedazzling men. I knew my lust for her was a trick she played on me. That did not matter. She was a vision, a dream, a fantasy.

I heard tiny bones crack beneath her foot and her spell over me receded a bit. Kali bore down, crushing the small throat. The fetus stopped moving.

Kali stepped away.

"Go," she said.

Get out of here, my father said. *Go home. Regroup.*

I took one last lingering look at nude Kali and began the long retreat out of this awful place. I took another last look over my shoulder because

I'd never desired a woman as much as I desired her. Twenty steps later I took yet another last look. She stood naked and unashamed, one hand on her hip while the other toyed with her long dark hair. She enjoyed my torment. I tore my eyes away. I kept moving.

I began to recognize landmarks and familiar passages. My heart sank with the realization this dreadful labyrinth was becoming familiar. I hurried for the exit. I hurried for home. I needed rest and refueling, healing and calm. I needed better weapons.

I approached a heavy wooden door wrapped in iron and took several deep breaths: beyond this door lay a nightmare. Beyond this door was a small brick room filled with totems of unimaginable suffering. I entered, avoiding the wide-eyed stares of the clay and wax figurines. The stench of burnt hair hung in the air. I darted a glance at the shelves, landing on the newest addition to this hellish room: a small and carefully crafted statue of Charly, his withered cock and balls attached with waxy black thread. Charly would never be whole again.

Kali had warned me the statues must remain undisturbed. They sat at junctures of magical power and any harm visited on these dolls would transfer to the men out in the world. Rashad owned these men forever. I studied the complex runes adorning the walls, trying to understand, but failed. This was a world I did not know, a world I would never know. I aimed for the far door and passed a statue I'd missed previously. I moved closer. The likeness was perfect. The wrinkled penis and small scrotum were shriveled and dusty. This totem had been here a long time.

Sergeant Banes, my commanding officer and the man who'd attempt to block my investigation, sat grimly on the shelf before me. Rashad did indeed have a use for cops. I better understood how that demon had remained hidden so well and for so long. I considered blasting a hole through the heart of this wax and clay figurine, dropping Banes like a bag of dirt up in the real world, but then I realized I'd need him. Banes was my way in. Rashad had fled this underground maze and taken Rachel with him. I would pursue the demon and Banes was my best lead for learning where Rashad was hiding. I flicked the doll's nut sack as I passed, hoping somewhere in the world above me, Banes doubled over in pain.

CHAPTER 2

I opened our front door and walked through. I dropped my keys on the counter. At last surrounded by the familiar and the safe, the dam holding my emotions in check burst. I sobbed. I held my face in my hands and leaned against the wall and poured out all the fear and angst and loss. Faces flashed before me, people lost, people whose lives were altered forever. Poor Charly. Poor Emily. Gary. Tawny. *Rachel*. I wailed in despair, unable to regain control. I let the tears come.

I opened the cabinet and grabbed the bottle of Jack Daniels. I drank. I coughed and drank again. No need for a glass. I required immediate sedation. I drank until my stomach rebelled. I staggered to the couch and flopped facedown.

I awoke hours later. I checked on my various wounds but especially the one on my neck. Rashad had taken a lot of blood from me. I chugged several glasses of water. I hated every minute spent on something other than rescuing my wife, but fools rush in. I needed time or I'd fail, and the prospect of failure was too awful to contemplate. I'd lose Rachel forever and, worse, she'd become a broodmare to a demon. I had to set her free. I had to, but I was afraid.

So much rested on my shoulders. My entire future depended on my success. Failure would end any chance at happiness for me, not to mention dooming Rachel to a grim and monstrous life, although, if I'm honest with myself, she seemed enthralled by that idea. Would rescuing her change her back to the strong and loving person to whom I'd pledged myself? I'd seen so much lust in her eyes down there. I saw her lose herself in the throes of unbridled passion.

Unbridled. That word had new meaning to me. Was she in his thrall or had she simply been freed to be the person she truly is, deep down?

That thought was like acid in my stomach, yet for reasons unknown to me, my dick reacted to the thought.

I stumbled to the bedroom and fell asleep again. I was exhausted. I slept fitfully, haunted by dreams of blood and pain. I awoke feeling feverish, scratchy throat and runny nose. I showered and dressed and ate and sat at our dining table charting my next steps. I hated the idea of walking back into that nightmare but what choice did I have? I either went after Rachel or abandoned her forever.

I checked the station work schedule online. Sergeant Banes was off until Monday, which gave me a few more days to heal. Rashad would need time too. I'd clipped his neck and leg and he'd lost a lot of whatever it was he called blood. He had Rachel and a minotaur, so public places were out. He'd need secrecy and privacy. He'd need multiple exits and a way to move around the city without detection. Sergeant Banes would fill in the details when I confronted him but for now I spread a city map and began taking notes. I researched extensively and learned a lot.

The Puget Sound area has been continuously inhabited for at least five-thousand years, settled by various tribes. Salt water meets fresh water here, and more than a dozen ancient volcanoes dot the landscape, many still active. Glaciers scoured the land, grinding boulders to powder. To ancient peoples, the Earth in this place was alive. Gods and devils played here.

While the pyramids in ancient Egypt slowly rose towards the sky, members of the Duomish tribe had built cities and formed a religion. As centuries passed the religion splintered and a cult formed. That cult had worked to connect the tunnels and caves under the inlet. My reading explained how the cult had grown to great power and influence. Samples of their writing matched what I'd seen underground.

How far did their network stretch?

I searched for any mention of the odd and the strange. I followed every lead regarding the inexplicable in this region, every post made where someone described something bizarre they'd found out in the wilderness. I searched for comments on hiking and kayaking websites, Internet bulletin boards and social media. I read of crude stone altars discovered in deep caves and ruined temple walls submerged under icy lake waters. I found rudimentary, hand-drawn maps and cavern photos, all seemingly unconnected, but I knew better. Armed with my knowledge of the truth, I linked everything into the giant web it was.

The cult continued to grow until it became the official religion of the tribe. A generation passed before the cult splintered again, with most of the

population following the chief and a smaller group following the high priest. The sides quickly learned to hate each other. Civil war arrived. The high priest sought more power and sacrificed captured enemy soldiers to summon a demon. The chief and his people countered with human sacrifices too, calling a demon of their own, Kali, but without the high priest's knowledge, they performed the ritual incorrectly and left the gateway open and unguarded. Kali ushered in many of her sisters before the gate was closed.

I knew now what I faced. The peoples of the tribe had virtually died out but the demons they'd summoned remained, the hate they'd manifested remained, now preying on modern day people.

At last, Monday arrived. When Sergeant Banes began his shift, I was already at the station waiting for him.

CHAPTER 3

I parked my car on the street in front of Bill Speidel's Underground Tours and locked the doors. Mister Speidel would not help me on this journey, not directly, but I would use one of his underground access points. I followed the railroad tracks towards Lumen Field and took a side tunnel that led below the street. I took another smaller passageway to find a barricaded hundred-thirty-year-old iron staircase down into the dark, right where the urban hiking website said it would be. For them it was a mile marker. For me it was a landmark, a crucial clue into the world below.

I forced the antique rusty lock and unwound the chain, slipped through and replaced both, winding the chain to hide the lock. A casual look would see the barrier remained intact.

Pioneer Square had been the heart of this city before it burned to the ground over a century ago. Like countless times throughout history, the survivors of that catastrophic event had simply hauled in dirt, buttressed walls and buildings, and built a new city on top of the old.

At the bottom of the stairs I found old sewers mixed with natural tunnels and man-made passages. I kept moving, always angling deeper.

Sergeant Banes had been tight-lipped Monday morning until I mentioned his totem. I said I would make him suffer if he didn't tell me where Rashad was hiding. He was terrified but he answered. I was pleased. Lumen Field had also made my short list of possible places. I remembered they stopped construction for a time because they ran into tunnels while excavating for the foundation. This whole area is an aggregate of colliding tectonic plates. The stadium sits empty during the off-season, which it was. It's the perfect way in and out of the city and Rashad could hide there for months undetected. We were far from the macabre bookstore that had been my entrance to this ghoulish world but I was certain these tunnels connected us to that place.

Old brickwork and rotting lumber surrounded me. Storefronts from the wild west, now buttressed and forgotten, built upon and absorbed, lined

the wooden planks of my path. Crumbling brick archways and rusty steam pipes loomed overhead. The scene was surreal. I'd stepped back in time more than a century. A modern city pulsed and thrived a mere three hundred feet above. How quickly we'd grown. How quickly we'd buried our mistakes and moved on.

I passed a narrow arch filled with mismatched brick from bottom to top. I stopped and retreated. I checked my crude map and eased the crowbar from my backpack. The antique mortar crumbled quickly. I was through in moments. I activated my night vision goggles, painting everything in pale green. The air on this side was cooler and moist. I stood in a dark tunnel. Roots hung from the packed earth ceiling. I crept a hundred yards, the starlight beam on my shoulder illuminating the darkness like emerald daylight to me. Anyone else would see only inky black.

The end of the tunnel opened in a rocky cavern. I was far beneath the street. A twisting black ribbon of water ran through, heading into the labyrinth, crawling towards the Pacific Ocean somewhere. I followed, exiting the cave on the far side and entering a new tunnel. My wife was down here somewhere. I would find her.

Two hours later I stopped to rest and eat. I'd followed the running water deeper, leaving behind any sign of human exploration. Nobody had been down here in centuries. I checked my guns again, confirming my gold-tipped bullets were ready to fly. I packed and continued my search.

My nose became aware of the beast before my eyes did. I'd paused at a T-intersection, deciding left or right, when I caught a faint whiff of musk. I noticed a tuft of hair snagged by the rocky wall and lifted the strands. These were new. These were fresh. Terror rose. My first encounters with the minotaur had been naïve and accidental. Today I deliberately sought confrontation. I marched into the lion's den. I did not feel brave. I felt stupid.

A low growl slowed me. I saw a faint red flickering glow ahead. My tunnel ended, opening into a domed area with dozens of passageways leading out. Water dripped everywhere, sending tiny echoes all around. Scattered stalactites and stalagmites stood everywhere, some so old they formed columns. The air moved in this chamber, a gentle flow driven by distant waves.

Behind the droplets, I heard quiet huffing.

The minotaur sat on a large bed of straw, testing the air for my scent. Rashad and Rachel slept close by on a bed of old blankets. Blood-soaked bandages circled his neck and leg. The beast had smelled me but not seen me. The moving air confused him. My heart leapt and hammered. I did not expect to find them this easily. I certainly never expected to find them sleeping.

I would never be this lucky again.

I moved from pillar to stalagmite, keeping myself hidden from the beast and Rashad. I could hardly draw breath. I was terrified, sweating in the cold underground salt air. I reached Rachel and gazed at her nude body. She bore scratches and bite marks, her labia swollen from use, her hair dirty and matted. I drew my gun but dared not fire. I might kill Rashad but the beast would be on me in seconds, me and Rachel. I could not count on her help. She might even try to help the creature. I aimed at the beast and gently covered Rachel's mouth. She opened dreamy eyes slowly, pleased to see me. I shushed her with a finger over my lips and took her hand, gently pulling her from the straw. This was the moment of truth. Would she come with me or fight to stay with them?

She rose on dainty feet and glanced back at her owner. She turned sorrowful eyes on the beast. The minotaur had my scent but the airflow confused him. He left his straw bed to investigate a tunnel, trying to locate me. He exited our area, I looked at Rachel, indicating my intentions with a jerk of my head. She reluctantly agreed. I thanked God the creature was out of sight. Rachel might not have come with me otherwise. I led us out of there, my heart soaring with joy.

CHAPTER 4

I covered her with a windbreaker from my backpack and led her through the tunnels until we stood at the foot of the iron stairs. She was weak and exhausted but happy, like a drunk. I leaned her against the brick wall and worked the chain and she grabbed my crotch.

"Fuck me," she murmured.

"What? No. Stop it, Rachel. We need to get out of here."

"I want cock in me."

I held her wandering hand. I opened the barricade and hurried us to the car. I feared Rashad or the beast followed our trail, would catch us, take her back. The incubus would be furious when he awoke to discover his remaining female gone. We retraced my steps and soon followed the railroad tracks from under the stadium. Night had fallen and I saw shapes and dangers everywhere. I opened her door and she circled my neck with her arms, kissing me lustfully, tongue playing, a soft moan bubbling in her throat.

"Fuck me," she pleaded, opening the windbreaker coat to show me her body. "Say yes. I need it."

"You need sleep," I countered. "You need time to emerge from the mind-control spell placed on you. You need to come back to yourself."

She cupped a breast and offered me the nipple. Her hair was disheveled and her face smudged with grime. I was sure her pussy was a well-used mess. I couldn't think about that. I pushed her into the car and fastened her seatbelt.

"Let's go home," I said. "I'll fuck you at home."

I pulled away from the curb. She slipped the belt off her shoulder and lowered her head to my lap.

"Let me see it at least," she whined.

Fine.

Moments later her hot mouth engulfed my penis down to my pubic hair and I gasped. Her head began to bob. I allowed her to continue. My

dick kept her occupied. So be it. I focused on driving.

Rachel was a different woman. She'd never sucked my cock like that. She was ravenous, slutty, bold. She delighted in cock, playfully teasing and sucking, lifting my balls to paint wide swaths with her tongue. She giggled. She hummed. Penis brought her joy, made her happy.

Once I was hard she turned serious. Sperm became her mission. She sucked so hard my head expanded to almost fill her mouth. She wanted semen. She craved it.

My ego got bruised. I knew where she'd learned these new skills. I knew on whom she practiced. The terrible truth was it all felt fantastic. I was hard as steel. She handled my penis better than ever. My size was no challenge to her anymore. She'd mastered far bigger.

I swerved in my lane. Her talent was too good. I swerved again as her lips circled my root. I spied an empty parking lot and pulled in, driving to the far corner. Let her have what she demanded. I stopped fighting it. I parked and leaned back. She got to work, coaxing and teasing the sperm up from my balls.

A hard tap on the window startled me. A flashlight beam landed on Rachel, cock in mouth. A uniformed officer gazed down at my lap, watching my wife bob. He grinned, causing his dimpled chin to stick out.

"Roll the window down, sir," he said.

I noticed another cop approaching on the passenger side. Rachel's jacket had fallen open, displaying tits and swollen pussy. The cop ducked his head to peer through her window. I considered mentioning I was a cop too but hesitated. What if these two worked for Rashad?

"Having a little fun tonight?" the first cop asked.

He leaned a forearm on the roof of my car, grinning, enjoying the sight. Rachel would not stop sucking so I leaned over her, trying to shield her wanton behavior.

"Yes," I replied. "I guess we are."

"Solicitation is a crime, sir."

"Oh," I chuckled. "This is actually my wife."

The cop on the passenger side opened Rachel's door. For a better look or to check on her I don't know. I spotted a Celtic symbol tattoo on his bare forearm.

At last Rachel realized we were engaged in conversation and she slipped my erection from her mouth and sat up. I waited for the explosion

of shame and embarrassment, the humiliated apology and the mortified promise to never do it again. None of that happened. Instead, Rachel reached over and placed a palm on Tattoo's crotch. Her fingers gripped the shape she found there.

"Ma'am," he said, looking down. "Please keep your hands to yourself."

"Is she drunk?" Dimpled Chin asked.

"A little," I lied.

"Let me suck it," Rachel pleaded.

"Maybe more than a little," I added. "I'm fine to drive, officers. Let me get her home and to bed."

"Take it out," Rachel said. "Let me see it. I love cocks. I always have. My husband doesn't know that about me. He never knew. It was my secret. I'd be a good wife and keep my dirty thoughts to myself. Take it out, officer. Take it out and I'll suck you off. I'm really good. You'll like it."

The cop laughed. I figured it was time I asked a favor.

"License and registration and proof of insurance, please," Dimpled Chin said.

"No problem," I said. "When you run my ID you'll discover I'm a cop too. Downtown PD. Detective Almond."

I reached for the glove compartment while trying to pull Rachel away from Mister Tattoo. Dimpled Chin's smile vanished.

"We know who you are, Almond," he said.

A chill shot through me. Celtic Tattoo reached for his zipper and drew it down. He fished inside while Rachel scooted closer. She swung her feet outside, leaned her face toward his crotch. Celtic lifted his soft dick and placed a hand on Rachel's head. He guided her mouth forward. My wife eagerly slurped him in, delighted with new penis.

"Rachel!" I barked. "What the hell?"

I reached for her shoulder to pull her away but Dimple stopped me with a hand on my shoulder. I felt a barrel press against my temple.

"You're going to let it happen," Dimple said. "You're going to watch."

As I'd feared, Rashad had spread the word.

"Mister Cain needs you to understand something," Dimple stated. "He needs you to understand he's in charge. He needs you compliant."

Rachel opened her mouth and slid her lips down the shaft. Her nose pressed his uniform trousers. He slid his hand to the back of her head and pulled, flexing his hips and stuffing every soft inch of his dick into her mouth. Rachel reached around to grab his ass and pull him forward. She held him in there, in the hot and wet, tongue swirling, spit drooling. He grew, filling her cheeks, making her throat bulge.

"You're defiant," Dimple continued. "Mister Cain can respect that. You're a fighter. You're strong. You believe in right and wrong. Mister Cain wants you to know even if he can't get to you, he can always get to her. You can't be in two places at once."

Celtic was hard and gleaming. Rachel moved her mouth up and down his length like a pussy, teasing, coaxing his sperm to rise. She worked his belt and he lowered his pants and underwear to his knees, granting access to his hairy balls. Rachel ducked under and curled her tongue around his sack. He rested the bag in her mouth and jerked off. She gazed up at her new lover with lust and adoration as she sucked hard enough to stretch the skin.

"Will you drink what I give you?" he asked.

She nodded enthusiastically. He stopped stroking and squeezed the shaft, forcing a drop of clear precum to emerge. He bent his cock and showed her and my wife swiped the bead with her tongue. He jammed the head into her mouth and forced himself deep. Rachel coughed and gagged but did not back away. Veins bulged on her neck. He held her head and fucked her mouth. He stopped abruptly and leaned over her head, groaning as his hips twitched. He was shooting all over her tongue. His groans grew louder. My wife was sucking the semen out of him, sucking and gulping.

You can't be two places at once, Dimple had warned, and he was right. As long as Rachel was alive, I was vulnerable. I was not free to hunt the demonic bastard. I may have rescued her from him but his reach was long.

Rachel groaned with him. The spurting cock in her mouth fueled her as much as him. I realized she'd been playing with her pussy, jacket wide open, and was about to orgasm. His balls drained down her throat as she climaxed. He left his deflating cock in her mouth as he recovered. He stepped away, soft penis sliding between her lips, and buckled up. Rachel turned to the other cop.

"Fuck me," she told him. "I need it."

Dimpled Chin laughed. He looked at me.

"She's going to be trouble," he chuckled.

He stepped away too. Both cops gave me hard looks. I understood. Behave and Rashad would leave me alone. Continue my pursuit and Rachel would pay. I watched them return to their cruiser and I felt Rachel's hot mouth engulf my dick. She clearly wanted more. The minotaur's intoxicating musk had saturated her, soaked through her skin and inundated her blood. I suspected time would return her sex drive to normal but for now she was insatiable. I let her suck. Better than fighting her off. Besides, she felt fantastic. I was ready to orgasm surprisingly fast and I let my eruption come. She opened her mouth after the first blast and pulled away slightly, allowing me to see my ejaculate fly across the gap and onto her wiggling tongue before she closed the head and sucked hard, yanking my spewing jizz from me.

"Goddamn!" I cried.

She masturbated fiercely, trying hard to reach the pinnacle again. She didn't make it before I started to wilt. She whimpered in frustration.

CHAPTER 5

Rachel rolled over and rested her chin on my stomach. The corners of her mouth curled in an impish smile.

"Fuck me again," she said.

I rubbed my eyes with knuckles.

"Baby," I exhaled. "I'd love to, but I can't. We've already had sex three times."

"I want more. I'm still horny."

"I can use my tongue. I can grab a vibrator."

She shook her head.

"I don't want pretend sex, Andy. I don't want fake sex, simulated sex. I want real sex. I want a cock in me. Nothing compares to a cock in me."

"I can't. Men aren't built that way."

She rolled onto her back, huffing and puffing in frustration. Tense silence filled our bedroom.

"If you can't fuck me," she murmured. "We should find someone that can."

"What did you just say?"

"Don't take it wrong. I'm not calling you out for failing. I'm just saying. What would be the harm? I've already been with other men so why not?"

"Because we're married. Because we took vows."

"Vows you broke, just like me. Remember Emily? Yet here we are in our bedroom still happily married. I want sex, Andy. I *need* to be fucked. Rashad and his creatures did something to me. I crave hard throbbing cock. It's like a vampire's thirst."

The silence returned.

"You've worked vice," she said. "You know the good sex clubs. Let's go to one."

"I'd be recognized and that would be a disaster. Besides, I don't want you with another man."

"It's too late for that, Andy," she said. "We cannot go back to our old life." She pinched the loose skin on my dick, lifted my flaccid shaft, and released. My exhausted penis landed on my thigh with a splat. "Our old life is dead and buried," she concluded.

I studied my wife's face. She felt so much need. She was filled with ache. Her tense body reeked of desire and frustrated sexual want. She had a hand stuffed between her legs. I hated her idea but I hated seeing her like this too.

"All right," I exhaled. "Under protest. Let's get dressed and go. I fucking hate Rashad and what he's done to you."

"I hate it too," she said, unconvincingly, as she hurriedly crawled from our bed.

She stood before our large bathroom mirror and got to work: Hair, makeup, perfume. She hustled back and forth to her closet, trying different outfits, making decisions. My guts twisted into hard knots.

She made herself as appealing as possible for others. She wanted to look her best. She wanted to attract as much male attention as possible, and her final choices achieved that. Her small, tight red dress showed off the curves of her body and showed plenty of skin. Her curled hair framed her face. Her rosy cheeks showed me how much she anticipated our adventure.

The car ride was quiet. She was lost in thought and I was too. I felt like I was driving to my execution. How could I just hand her over like this? I'd only recently got her back.

The club I had in mind was one I investigated years ago. The place was huge, with lots of private rooms and one-way mirrors. No matter where you were, someone was watching, which would be a problem for me except they also kept this club dark inside, darkest of all the sex clubs in this city. A baseball cap was all I needed to hide my face.

I paid at the booth but Rachel didn't wait for me. She was through the door and wandering wide-eyed. The place was dated, with black light velour paintings of naked men and women and easy to clean faux leather couches and chairs. Most everyone was our age or older and almost everyone was naked or nearly so. I saw a few younger girls mixed in and I wanted to check their IDs but had to let it go. I was undercover on this operation.

I caught up to Rachel and walked with her as she gawked. She turned every head. I saw every kind of body: fat, skinny, tall, short. We passed a locker area and she stopped. She turned to me.

"When in Rome?" she asked.

"Do you mean should we walk around naked too?"

"Yes. I feel weird being the only ones fully clothed."

"But you look so good."

"Thank you. Let's strip. I think that sounds fun."

This was some kind of bullshit. If I stayed dressed I'd draw more attention than naked. This was a problem for a man trying to hide his identity. I wanted to drift by unnoticed.

"Fine."

I kicked off my shoes. Rachel was nude in moments. She'd worn neither bra nor panties so naked required only a few quick movements. She shook her hair loose and smiled, surveying the surrounding men. I stowed our clothes and looped the locker key around my wrist.

"Baseball hat?" she asked.

"That stays," I insisted.

"You look a little silly."

"I don't care."

She shrugged a little and left me standing there. She moved through the crowd, eyes roaming, lingering on every penis regardless of size or color. She looked delighted.

"I love it here," she said after a minute.

She got lots of attention. Nobody looked at me. Just as well. My exhausted penis was a pink mushroom nestled in pubic hair. Most of the men looked like me but some of the guys walked around with several soft inches swinging. The muscular guys walked around like they were movie stars. The women were shameless. Nice body or not, they'd learned the currency of their flesh. Regardless of how they looked, there were always men that wanted them. I think maybe women are thin for each other.

We explored the rooms and open areas. Rachel was fascinated. We passed an older man, bald, big gut, and Rachel grabbed his dick as he went by. He jumped and then laughed.

"You like that, girly?" he asked, light Scottish accent adding to his charm.

"It's so big," my wife said.

"You should see it hard. It's a lot bigger then."

Rachel never checked with me for permission. She tugged him sideways so she could sit on a lounge and then opened her legs and bent at the waist. She stuffed his plump head into her mouth. He chuckled, big belly bouncing.

"She knows what she likes," he said to me. "Is she your wife?"

"Yes."

He closed his eyes, blissful. Apparently unfaithful blowjobs feel better. I waited, awkward, wondering what to do with myself. Rachel sucked his cock with abandon, dragging her tongue up his inches, nibbling on the head, sucking one testicle and then the other. He sat next to her and opened his legs and she went to town, pleasuring every growing inch. She played with his balls. She teased the head. He mumbled that he was getting close and tried to take over with his hand but Rachel stuffed the head in her mouth and stroked with both hands. He warned her and tried to push her off but she fought him. When he exploded, she sucked and swallowed and then sucked and swallowed some more. He lost his mind. She giggled with delight, reveling in her power, loving the way she wrecked him.

She left him there, lying askew, mumbling.

"His cum tasted good," she said. "That's a first."

Her eyes were wicked and hungry.

"Maybe it's just you," I said.

"Maybe. Maybe what Rashad did to me altered my taste buds. Maybe semen's sweet now. Let's find out."

She took my hand and led me deeper into the sprawling place. Every room we passed held people engaged in every kind of sex. Soon we entered a circular area with a ring of low, padded benches in the center, benches too low for sitting. Rachel and I tried to understand their purpose. A man who had followed us for ten minutes approached the low benches and lifted his flaccid penis out of his sweat pants. He faced the ring and glanced over a shoulder to see if we noticed. I drew Rachel's attention to the man and she studied the arrangement.

"I get it now," she said. "A woman kneels on the low benches and men stand around the circle."

She stepped over the ring and knelt on the pads, bringing her mouth level with his cock. Another man took the spot next to the first. A woman joined Rachel, positioning herself across the ring with her back to my wife,

the bottoms of her feet touched the bottoms of my wife's feet. Another man stepped forward and offered the woman his dick. Men began to join us, filling in around the ring of pads until no spots remained.

This was a gloryhole without the wall. This was a blowjob ring, a suck-fest. Rachel worked the first man and I stepped back, watching my wife lose herself in oral addiction. Her cheeks dented as she demanded his sperm. Her hands stroked his shaft and played with his balls. Men on either side jerked off, watching and waiting their turn. She'd get to them next.

I felt useless and stupid.

Rachel was ravenous, sucking cock like a fiend, rubbing her pussy to orgasm. The first man blew his load down her throat and she simply shuffled her knees sideways and began sucking the next cock. The first man staggered away, opening a spot on the ring quickly filled. A third woman slipped between the men to join Rachel and the other woman. More men arrived. Soon the ring was filled shoulder to shoulder, a barricade of fleshy lances aimed at the kneeling women. They moved as their hearts desired, sucking off one to shift to the next. Rachel's eyes glowed with lust. All the cocks she desired stood erect and waiting for her attention.

I thought about walking away. I mean all the way to the car and driving home. I'd leave her here. I'd let her psychosis run wild and eventually she'd snap out of it or run out of hard dicks. I thought about walking away, but I couldn't. I'd only just gotten her back. How could I abandon her again?

The man in her mouth began twitching and grunting. His hips jerked as his cock spit. Rachel sucked with greed, her tongue slipping out the bottom to massage the underside of his erection. She milked him dry and climaxed again before moving on to the next man.

The two women drank their fill and exited the ring. Rachel handled the circle of men on her own, working left and right, draining the tasty sperm from every dick. She licked her lips and scooped the spillage off her chin. Semen was honey to her now. She sucked every cock presented and laughed when some men came back for more.

The circle of men dwindled until only two remained. A muscular stud with a huge shank of beef slapping off his thighs walked full speed into the area. He saw Rachel and laughed.

"I'm not too late," he said, stroking his cock.

My wife shuffled around to meet him, abandoning the other gentlemen. She opened wide to engulf his large scrotum and sucked his nuts, drawing the hanging skin down until he left her mouth with a pop. She quickly sucked his balls in again. He jerked his cock, growing long and hard, and she began licking at the base and slowly moving towards the head. When she reached the end, she sucked him in and pushed him deep, engulfing almost half his dick. He looked around the room.

"She has talent!" he exclaimed.

Young idiot.

He let her gobble his meat until he was rock-solid and shiny with spit, then he withdrew from her mouth and entered the ring. He quickly dropped behind her and centered his cock on her pussy, pushing the length in. Rachel gasped with shocking pleasure. She reached for one of the men she'd abandoned and braced herself against his hips. Big cock began fucking her. My wife groaned from deep in her belly, hanging her head and rolling her hips. The young stud grabbed her ass and pistoned his prick in and out, no regard for her. She was there to be used and he was comfortable with that. Apparently, she was too. She offered no protest and continued to push her hips back to meet his thrusts. Her face contorted when she climaxed. He never knew it. When his time arrived, he blasted away inside her without asking. No matter. The look on her face told the room she would have said yes anyway. His big pounding cock ripped another climax from her, leaving her trembling.

Others saw what the stud had done and grew emboldened. I had one instant to shut it all down and didn't. A man left the deepest shadows to penetrate her pussy, and then, using the young stud's sperm as lubricant, pulled out to push up her asshole. My wife whimpered at the anal penetration but pushed her hips at this man like she had the other. He fucked her butt until he blasted his load inside. He withdrew quickly and returned to the shadows, like he feared being recognized. By the time I swung my attention to Rachel again, a new man had filled her pussy.

I leaned against the wall. What a sight. Rachel swam in semen. She was a mess at every hole. She fucked and sucked them all until no hard man remained. She collapsed to the floor, breathing deep and fast. Was she finally satisfied or had she simply run out of men?

I felt my father and Miss Mapleberry in my head, watching, judging me. Janet had nothing to say.

You could stop this anytime, my father scolded. You know that, right? Just grab her wrist and yank her out of there. I'm beginning to wonder if you even want the old Rachel anymore.

He had a point.

She looks neither drugged nor hypnotized. What if all this is permanent?

I'll love her anyway, I answered.

My father scoffed. I felt him vanish, just like he always did when I'd disappointed him, which was often. Miss Mapleberry wrapped me in a lovely spiritual hug. She didn't understand how people could behave this way but she wanted me to know she loved me regardless.

Janet seemed horny.

CHAPTER 6

I gazed through the one-way mirror into the small interrogation room. Miles Turner looked terrible. The man was gaunt and haggard, dark circles under the eyes and sunken cheeks. His mop of black hair was dirty, his clothing grimy. He needed sleep. He needed water. He needed food.

That, my father said. Is a troubled man.

Be careful, Janet added.

I studied the man: he carried a heavy burden. The report he gave spoke of burglaries at his house, items often missing when he and his wife returned from work. Such but theft did not explain his appearance, or his demeanor. Something tormented Miles. I scrutinized him until the walls of my little room began to close in.

The walls aren't moving, Dad said. You need to overcome your fear.

You need to fuck off, I offered.

I tried to focus on Miles again but the fear of being buried alive was rising too fast. I shuddered and grabbed my pen and notepad. I left that small dark room.

I entered the interrogation room and said hello. I sat. I set the tape recorder near my notepad and smiled across the table. I took the pen from my shirt pocket and laid it on the pad. Like every person before him, he watched every move I made. I offered a beverage but he declined.

"My name is Anders Almond," I began. "You can call me Andy, if you'd like. I'm a detective. I'll be handling your case."

He looked me in the eyes with a hard stare.

"You're going to help me?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You look like you got plenty of troubles of your own."

I chuckled.

"Not gonna lie," I said. "You nailed it. But they're personal so they will not interfere with my investigation, I promise you."

"Wife stuff?"

"Yeah, wife stuff."

He shook his head sadly.

"It's always wife stuff," he admitted.

"You're married?"

"I am. Whitney. She's partly why I'm here."

"Okay," I said, and pressed record on my phone app. "Let's hear your story."

The man spoke for sixty-six minutes non-stop. They'd recently purchased a new home and were still getting situated when they noticed items disappearing while they were at work. At first they assumed they'd misplaced them but then Miles ran a few tests, leaving an item on the counter and checking when he got home. The items were always gone. The outside security cameras showed nothing. He was sure there was a secret way into their new home. Recently they'd begun to hear noises at night. Miles gets out of bed to check but finds nothing.

"I came to the police regarding the burglary," he finished. "But after hearing my story they sent me to you. What are you? Some kind of special detective?"

"I am. I get the inexplicable cases, the strange cases. I get the cases that land outside the box. The mystical and the paranormal."

"Is there a lot of that?"

"No, not a lot. But the investigations usually take longer."

"How's your track record?"

"Fantastic," I said. "I rarely lose."

He sized me up.

"Whitney says our home is haunted."

"Possibly."

"You believe in ghosts?"

I leaned forward intently.

"No," I said, emphatically. "I don't believe. I know. I've seen. Ghosts and ghouls and devils and demons and angels and Gods. All of it is real. Every religion. Every God. Every holy book."

"Heaven and Hell?"

"All of it."

If my words didn't convince him, the look in my eyes did.

"So what's your next move?" he asked.

"I write a report and submit it to my supervisor. He approves the inquiry. I dig until I solve the case."

"What do you need from me?"

"Nothing, now. If I get the green light, I'll let you know."

We shook hands. I walked him out and returned to finish my notes. He told the truth and I believed him. There was no faking that kind of sleep deprivation and desperation. Something strange was happening at the Turner residence. I wrote my report and submitted it to Sergeant Banes, notifying him I'd be taking the case. He signed off without comment.

CHAPTER 7

I told Miles and Whitney to get a hotel room, I would occupy their home for a few nights. They were happy to vacate. I checked the tax records and then police reports and learned the family that lived there before them had vanished, abandoning the house to the bank. Foreclosure completed and Miles and Whitney moved in. I sent all the boring documents to my phone and packed my bags. I hated leaving Rachel alone but no way would I bring her on another assignment anytime soon. I wished there was some way I could lock her in the house or tie her to the bed.

I met Miles and his pretty wife, Whitney, in the driveway. He handed me the keys. I wished them well and told them to wait for my report and then waved goodbye. I carried my equipment into their lovely and tasteful home. I wandered the rooms and hallways, getting a feel for the place. I opened closets and cupboards and drawers, learning where everything was and how it looked. I discovered a large black and veiny dildo hidden in Whitney's nightstand. The thing looked perfectly real. Sexy, to most, I suppose, but gruesome to me, considering all the severed penises I'd seen recently. I checked Miles's nightstand and found several DVDs labeled by year. I switched on the television and inserted one, watching a few minutes of Whitney sucking her husband's cock. Miles was all smiles. Whitney had a great body. I put things back exactly as I'd found them.

I wandered the house again, this time looking for anything strange. I opened my mind to the odd. I examined the kitchen, noting one door to the garage and another to the side yard. I investigated the garage. I circled to the back of the house and discovered a slanted and covered entrance to a basement. The handles were chained and locked. I'd seen a key rack in the kitchen so I hurried inside and returned with everything hanging there, testing one key after the other. I found the right key and the lock popped open. I entered the basement and found gardening tools, a lawn mower, topsoil, pesticide, sheets of plastic, and power tools. Everything you'd expect to find, everything covered in dust.

Why dust? Miles and Whitney just moved in. Did these things belong to the previous family? I continued my search. In a tackle box filled with nails and screws I found a receipt from Lowes dated four years ago. Yes, most of the items in this garage were left behind. Weird. The front and back yards looked immaculate. Miles and Whitney must have hired a landscaper. They used none of this stuff and in fact had thrown a chain and lock on the door.

I reentered the house. I roamed yet again, this time placing motion detector cameras and twin tape recorders, sensitive enough to pick up and capture even minute sounds. I once solved a case by what I heard whispered in another room.

When I finished, I headed for the kitchen to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. I sensed this would be a long night. I left the kitchen to roam again, chewing as I moved. I entered the huge family room and stopped. I felt a tension in the air. I closed my eyes and sent my senses outward. Something *was* here. A lingering vibration remained. What was it? I swallowed the last bite and let the sensations come to me.

Annoyance.

No, anger.

No, not anger. *Rage*.

The longer I let myself feel it, the stronger it became. Something furious filled the air. I felt it through the floor. I felt it in the walls. I felt it against my skin. The entire house trembled with wrath. I tried to imagine the previous family living in this space. What happened to them? Where did they go, and why?

My research at the station said a family of five had occupied this place: three daughters, a husband and wife. The neighbors interviewed said the family seemed happy. School and work routines just ended when they all vanished, leaving everything behind. I'd heard of similar cases and even worked a few disappearances. Whenever there's villainy, it's always the husband. He has a mistress and no longer wishes to be married so he kills his family and vanishes. But he always trips up. He always uses a credit card or is seen by someone that knows him or is so secretly consumed by guilt he makes a mistake and gets caught. Maybe his mistress gets bored with him. Maybe he pisses her off and she turns him in. Something. He's always found out.

But not this time.

With no evidence of foul-play, no bodies, and no witnesses, the cops wrapped this up and saved it for later.

A floorboard creaked behind me.

I turned, expecting to see a neighbor or one of the Turners returned, but there was no one.

"Hello?"

I walked a circle through the first floor, finishing in the kitchen. I'd dropped a glob of jelly on the marble counter and grabbed a sponge to wipe it clean. I froze, my hand inches above the dollop. The lump of jelly was crawling, oozing towards the edge of the counter, leaving a trail of smeared scarlet. A chill ran through me. I had the advantage of knowing the spirit world was real and I still shivered with dread. I opened the cupboard beneath to check for wire or magnets but found only pots and pans.

"What do you want?" I asked the empty room.

The jelly made a slight turn and continued.

"I know you're here. I know you're angry. Let me help."

I felt foolish but I followed my instincts.

I heard a footstep upstairs.

I raced up the stairs, rounded the corner and stopped in one of the kid's bedrooms. Miles and Whitney had plans to make this a home office. Boxes sat stacked against one wall, waiting to be unpacked.

The indentations of small bare feet dented the carpet, crossing the room to enter the bathroom. I followed at a respectful distance. The shower curtain shifted slightly, just a few feet off the ground, as if brushed aside by a child's hand.

Downstairs I heard loud rattling.

I raced to the kitchen. A cupboard was open and a cookie sheet on the ground. I understood why Miles got no sleep. I cleaned the mess.

Footsteps ran through upstairs bedroom number two. I climbed the stairs to check on that room and heard heavy breathing as I passed the master bedroom. Soon I heard gasping and labored breathing from every bedroom.

"What do you want?" I shouted at the ceiling.

I doubted their goal was to freak me out. I doubted their only desire was to frighten me. What would be the point? My gut told me they were trying to communicate something and I wasn't understanding and, always, the ever-present raging tempest of fury. I calmed myself and listened. What

was being said? There were no words, only faint and labored breathing. I was soon able to distinguish four separate sounds, four different people wheezing, fighting for air and life: older male, older female, two younger females. I listened closely, seeking words, trying to recognize what, if anything, was being said. All I detected were terrified whines and desperate gasps.

Their goal may not have been to frighten me, but I was growing afraid. There was panic in those pants, terror at fighting for breath. I heard plastic rustle in the second bedroom and crossed the hall. No footsteps on the carpet this time but a creak echoed from the bathroom. I reentered, noticing the shower curtain was now pulled back several inches. I stuck my head in but saw nothing out of the ordinary, just a tub and shower combo common in so many homes.

I smoothed the curtain and turned to leave. The bathroom door slammed shut, trapping me inside this small room. Panic surged.

"No!" I shouted, grabbing at the doorknob.

The door opened easily. I laughed, nervously, at my fear. Yeah, I was afraid. I shut the door behind me and then jumped as some force flung it wide.

"Okay," I said. "You want me in the bathroom."

I hesitated but entered again. I sent my eyes over every inch, but I saw nothing noteworthy. I forced myself to stay in this small space. I turned on all the lights, driving darkness out. I forced myself calm. I let my eyes roam and opened my mind, allowing any observation to enter. I silenced the part of my brain that was already bored with the terrain, already certain I'd seen all there was to see. I forced myself to see everything like I was seeing it for the first time.

A tiny splinter of paint caught my eye. The shower had an overhead vent for steam, held by a single center screw. A tiny sliver of paint stood up on that screw head, scratched by something. Perhaps something turning the screw? I stepped into the tub and withdrew the knife on my belt. I began to turn the screw. Something shifted beyond the vent and my heart skipped a beat. Something was hidden up here! I reversed the screw until I could lower the vent. I discovered a folded and hastily written note, scrawled in a child's hand:

I feel sick. My arms and legs are heavy. I think Hailey poisoned me! I hear everyone shouting downstairs. They're yelling about the cookies she made. We all ate some. Hailey started laughing. She said she's going to tie us up so we can watch each other die. I don't want to die! I'm hiding in my bathroom. I heard Dad fall and Momma scream. I can't stay awake. Why is Hailey doing this?

I sat on the edge of the tub and read the note again. I pictured a daughter, a child, trapped in the bathroom while her sister slaughters the family downstairs. The police found no bodies tied to chairs. Where did Hailey hide them? I recalled the information I read about the family. Hailey was the oldest daughter, eighteen or nineteen when the family disappeared.

One young female would struggle to move all that dead weight, my dad offered.

That's true, I admitted.

I folded the note and left the bathroom. I walked to the dining area and imagined the scene: mother and father filled with terror, choking, watching their youngest child collapse, fighting to remain conscious as their eldest daughter gloats and laughs, realizing what Hailey had done and how helpless they were. Mom and Dad and one sister were here in the kitchen. The missing sister had run upstairs.

She didn't drag the bodies upstairs, Dad said.

This poor family, Janet added.

I glanced at the countertop. The crawling jelly had smeared a streak of red and I realized with a start it formed a crude letter: *H*.

H for Hailey, my father suggested.

Yes, Dad, Hailey.

I scanned the layout, picturing three bodies on the ground, unconscious, with a fourth upstairs. I'm a teenage girl. What can I do? I can drag the little one from the upstairs bathroom easily. Downstairs is so much easier. Now I have four bodies, including a grown man. I sent my eyes around the house from here, trying to imagine what Hailey had done.

Don't try to guess what Hailey did, Miss Mapleberry said. *Be Hailey.*

I closed my eyes. I imagined myself weaker, lighter. Where can I move my family so they can watch each other die? I know they were moved because they were never found. I bend over to grab my father's ankles. I start with him because he's heavy but I'm at my strongest right now. I'll be tired by the last body. I'll move them from heaviest to lightest. By the time I move my little sister, my arms will ache. I grip my dad and pull. The tile floor helps. I slide him towards the side door. It's dark outside, the neighbors far away. I slide him over the wet grass to the basement opening. More stairs down. Easy. I don't care if I hurt him so I shove. Gravity joins my side, lends a helping hand.

I go back for Mother. I go back for my sisters, one at a time.

At this point, they are all still alive.

I dump the last in the basement.

Enough, my father says.

I shudder and open my eyes. I'm crying. I feel the keys still in my pocket and leave the kitchen. I open the slanted doors to the basement and enter, heart pounding. Previously I'd searched to see what I could find. This time I searched for what was hidden. Big difference. I pace the floor, looking, waiting for something to stand out. I get the idea to measure the basement in both directions. I take those numbers upstairs. The kitchen is directly above so I pace that off too, and come up short.

The basement is much smaller. The basement is too small.

I returned. The walls are bare drywall. Sheets hammered in place over studs. Everything is professionally done except two sheets in the corner. Here the nails run crooked. Hammer blows mark the drywall where the nail was missed. These sheets were hung poorly. I grab a dusty pickaxe and swing, tearing into the chalk. I swing again, punching through. I swing and swing until I've torn a hole big enough for my head. I drop the pickaxe and grab a simple hammer, smashing the drywall and widening the hole, creating an opening. I see a small open space beyond.

I see a chair leg.

I swing harder and faster. The studs are widely separated in this section. There was a space here originally, room for a small office. I knock chunks of wall aside until I can step through into the space beyond.

A circle of four chairs. Four bodies wrapped in dark green plastic trash bags, bags normally used to collect the colorful leaves of fall, now bound with duct tape around arms and legs and torsos. The family had been

seated to face each other, four points of a cross, each topped with a clear plastic bag over their head, sealed at the neck. Each face a grimace of frozen horror. Terror and rage contorted their features. Two little girls frozen in time, soft young flesh now putrid and green. Mom, forced to watch the slow suffocation of her babies, anguished and tortured. Dad, his face a decaying mask of blistering fury and helplessness.

Hailey bound them looking at each other to be cruel. She sealed them in plastic to make their deaths take time and to avoid detection. She gave them time, time to fight for escape, time to struggle.

Hailey gave them time to hope.

I saw the evidence of how hard they fought for life, especially from Dad. He'd dislocated an elbow trying to get free. Mother had broken her own fingers in a failed attempt to get loose, to save her precious children. Did Hailey stand and watch? Did she laugh at them? This had been her family and she'd posed them, positioned them for her own amusement.

Tears rose and I couldn't stop them. I cried. I felt the parents' anger. I felt the families' fear. Grief poured from me, opening my heart with a knife.

I threw up.

I yelled. Not a word or a sentence. I made no pronouncement about revenge. I screamed an animal noise, an unintelligible noise of anger and injustice. An explosion of grievance. This was all so wrong.

I called the station to request a forensics team. I called the watch commander to inform him what I'd found. I called Miles and Whitney and told them they'd be staying in the hotel for several days. When they asked why, I told them I'd found the previous homeowners. I did not give details.

CHAPTER 8

The drive home seemed long. I called Rachel but got no answer. She should be off work by now. I drove a few minutes and called again.

"Hello," she answered, breathless.

"What are you doing?" I asked. "Treadmill?"

"Something like that."

"Did you hit the gym after work?"

"Yes."

Her soft gasp stabbed my heart.

"What are you doing, Rachel?"

"F– F– Fucking," she stammered.

"What?"

"I gotta go," she whimpered. "Unh, see you soon."

She thought she disconnected but she only tossed her phone aside. I heard the familiar rhythmic squeaks from our bed. I heard her moan, with emotion, with feeling.

"Jesus, David," she groaned, clearly loving the feeling. "I forgot how big you are."

David?

My mind reeled. David was her serious boyfriend right before me.

I stepped on the gas.

David was a gym rat, wildly vain, annoyingly arrogant. Had they crossed paths working out? Did my now continuously horny wife invite him to our home? I was broken and exhausted from my day and night at the Turners. I was emotionally defenseless. Rachel was in bed with another man and I simply did not have the energy to battle my feelings right now. I turned the corner, preparing to pull into our garage, but David's beat-up F-150 blocked the driveway. I parked at the curb. The curb! At my own house!

I made noise as I entered, giving them time to throw on clothing and make themselves presentable. I heard Rachel cry out from the bedroom.

"Like that," she moaned. "Fuck, yes, just like that."

I silenced my phone, dropped my belongings, and strode the hall.

Rachel lay on her side on our bed. David had one of her legs pointed at the ceiling, the other threaded between his knees. She was spread wide, pussy exposed, and his slick and gleaming cock pumped slowly in and out. My wife had her eyes squeezed shut, savoring the intensity of his thick and rock-solid meat. His back was to our door.

"You're going to make me cum like this," she whimpered.

I don't understand what happened to me. I was drained, empty, emotionally fatigued. I felt shattered and broken. My usual reactions of dismay and protest simply did not happen. I had no energy to fight what she'd done, what she was, at this moment, still doing.

In the absence of any objections, my mind did a strange thing.

I watched David's muscular ass clench and relax, clench and relax as he sawed that thick veiny tube in and out. Rachel's expression was pure bliss. She was drenched, his cock soaked. I saw it. I smelled it. I heard it. He gripped her leg to his chest and pushed each inch deep, probing, expanding her on the inside. He stuffed her pussy, too big for her narrow tunnel, but she clawed at him to sink it deeper. The muscles across his back flexed. His large balls dragged across her inner thigh.

I saw all this, I saw all the ways he fucked my sweet Rachel, and my dick began to stiffen. I blamed emotional fatigue but that didn't explain everything. I was too tired to react with anger but my primitive mind still had energy enough to get me hard.

In the absence of rebellion, my shattered mind offered a quiet truth: I liked it. I liked watching Rachel get fucked.

I unzipped and freed my growing erection, hiding my body behind the door jamb. They'd been a couple for years. They'd moved in together, shared an apartment, talked of marriage. They had strong feelings for each other back then and I saw they still had strong feelings for each other now. I saw on Rachel's face this was more than an anonymous fuck. David moving inside her again felt *good*.

My weariness quieted all the noise. She looked sexy getting fucked. I'd probably regret this come tomorrow but for now I faced this quiet truth.

David pulled out and turned her face-down. His cock stood up like a horn, sparkling, coated with her desire. An erect penis is a screaming child. It simply cannot be ignored. His balls hung like counter-weights to that

impressive rod, balls filled to the brim with potent sperm. I was sure of it. Rachel reached under her hips, seeking his cock, finding him, guiding the head to her opening. His clenched ass drove the spear deep. He sank every inch, so deep only his testicles were visible. My wife groaned loudly at the invasion. She dug her hands into our bed to brace herself and give him something to pound, which he quickly did. Rachel lost her mind, soon wailing with sexual release. She turned to look at David over her shoulder and spied me watching from the hall.

"Come here," she groaned, pushing messy hair from her face. "Let me suck you while David reminds me how much I loved his big prick."

I shed clothes as I walked. David barely noticed me. The man slowed his hips while I got into position, glancing at me only once. I offered Rachel my erection.

"I want David to cum in my pussy," she said. "You cum in my mouth."

She grabbed my hips and pulled me closer, sucking me down to the root. David chuckled.

"What did you do to her?" he asked. "She's a sex fiend now. She always liked sex before but now she can't get enough. I love it."

I didn't answer. I held Rachel's head and fucked her mouth. I doubted my ability to climax, given the emotional hurricane of my last thirty-six hours, but I was wrong again. All the turmoil and tragic loss of innocent lives bizarrely fueled my lust. Faced with so much death I craved an act of life. I felt depraved. Surely there was something wrong with me. My balls tightened quickly. I had to slow down or shoot too fast. The last thing I wanted was to fire prematurely and then sit and watch and wait while David took his time with my woman. That would be intolerable.

I wish I knew you now, Janet said, giggling in my thoughts. *You're kinky.*

Not now, I shot back. *Get out of my head.*

I'd like to give you head, she laughed.

"I need you to cum," I told David. "Don't hold back."

His eyebrows rose and Rachel moaned loudly. Strange request from a husband.

"In her?" he asked, spitefully.

I felt Rachel tense. She was hanging on my answer.

"Yes, in her," I said.

"Yes, in me," Rachel echoed.

"Just do it," I said.

David laughed and pumped faster. Rachel slowed and then stopped sucking, too distracted by what he did to her pussy. He locked eyes with me. I vaguely recalled I'd stolen Rachel from him all those years ago, so he enjoyed this moment of revenge immensely. Rachel groaned and hung her head, ignoring my dick for now, too overwhelmed by David to suck me. I stood at her face, waiting for her attention again, air cooling my wet dick.

"Neeeeeaaagh!" she cried, climaxing hard on his battering cock.

"Fuuuuuck!"

Blood surged. My penis flared. David noticed but Rachel was gone, oblivious, mouth hanging open, eyes squeezed shut. She'd clamped her pussy around David's invading phallus and continued to orgasm hard.

"She's crushing my cock," David said, amazed. "Holy shit! That's new. She's never done *that* before."

The sensations proved too much for him. He sucked air and held her butt with both hands. His hips hammered her ass, plunging his cock deep on every thrust. He groaned and Rachel grunted encouragement and he shouted as the first blast rocketed into her womb. He held on as his hips took over and his cock spewed liquid fire. He locked eyes with me again, saying nothing but communicating plenty. His face grimaced a little each time he ejaculated in her. I couldn't look away. He was giving it to me just like he was giving it to her.

Rachel grabbed my dick as her climax receded and began to suck again, tickling my balls and stroking the shaft. Her fingers glided over the crown, rushing my orgasm. I held her head and fucked her mouth.

"Lover gets the pussy," David mocked. "Hubby gets the tummy."

What could I say? He was right. He'd taken her from me, relegating me to second place. Rachel slid her lips down my shaft and snuck a finger up my ass and I grunted as I spurt, my orgasm forced from me. My sphincter clenched around her digit, spasming as my nuts contracted. Despite the suddenness of it all, I came hard. David pulled his cock out of my wife and leaned back. He was still mostly hard and covered in sperm and pussy juice.

Rachel removed her finger and gently let my dick slip from her mouth. I was deflating rapidly. David pushed his partially erect cock in her pussy again and Rachel wiggled her ass.

"You feel so good in there," she murmured. "You always did."
David laughed.

"Sex was never our problem," he said.

"You need to leave," I told him.

He chuckled.

"All right," he said. "Fair enough. You can have her back."

He pulled his spongy cock out of her and wiped his cock on our sheets. His clothing was scattered around the floor and he searched for his pants and underwear, dressing slowly, giving Rachel plenty of time to watch, which she did. When he flopped his long cock into his pants and tucked it into place, she turned to me.

"Are you mad?" she asked.

I drew a breath and held it. What was the point?

"No," I said. "Not mad."

Rachel rolled over to watch David drop a T-shirt over his muscular torso.

"I have your number," she told him, informing me at the same time.

He collected his sneakers.

"Use it," he said. "Call me. Anytime. I'll come over. Or you can come to my place. My roommates would love to meet you."

"Sounds intriguing," she said.

We watched him leave. We heard the front door open and close.

"I got so horny," she explained. "I tried to work it off with exercise but David was at the gym. You can imagine the rest."

I joined her on the bed. She studied my face.

"How was your night?" she asked.

"Rough. Maybe the roughest ever."

"Oh, Baby," she said, wrapping her arms around my head and pulling my face to her bosom. "Tell me. Tell me everything."

I sighed.

"I can't. It's too dark, too hurtful. I'd burden you."

"Talking to me will help," she said. "You shouldn't carry all that darkness alone. Get it out. Vent. I'm your wife. Share your thoughts with me."

Cop wives have it hard. We should share but don't, so they feel left out. But there was no way I would describe the evil I'd experienced. If I exposed the real world to her Rachel would have nightmares.

I shook my head. I wanted to, but couldn't. The evil was too great
"Come here, Baby," she cooed. "I'll make it right."

She brushed a nipple against my lips, soft and gentle. I began to suckle. She hugged me tight. I felt silly and immature but I also a little better.

What an incredible contrast between this version of my wife and the version of her coated in other men's semen, the version of her clawing at the beast's back, urging him to spray her womb full. How can those two women live in the same body?

Years of police work had hardened me to moments like this. I've worked cases where loving mothers had killed their babies. I've worked cases where loving husbands took out their entire family and then themselves. Human are each capable of such a stunning arc from sacrifice to indifference. I'd taught myself to bury the feelings of despair such events caused and that helped me survive and function in that world, but it deadened me to this one. The comfort and empathy Rachel offered felt just out of reach. Or perhaps I couldn't fully embrace what she offered because of what I'd seen her do with other men.

I realized with a jolt that I was now one of those people I'd encountered. I was the husband who both loved and hated his wife for what she'd done. A sense of sadness settled over me. I nuzzled Rachel's hanging tits and tried to understand why. The answer came to me as I was drifting off: our old life was dead, gone forever. The old Rachel and the old Anders were already ghosts. Our marriage would never be the same. We'd never return to the days of how things were.

CHAPTER 9

I awoke angry at Hailey, not Rachel, and swore to myself I'd find the girl. I grew angrier on the drive to work. I spent all day buried in research.

After committing her atrocity, the girl had simply ceased to exist. I tried everything to find her. I searched databases and connections to her friends.

The next day I interviewed neighbors and dug through high school records. I returned to the house and found her school annual in the garage. I researched and contacted every person who'd signed it, which were few. She was a loner all her life and most likely still was. I found no connections to other places or people. Hailey had vanished. She'd probably purchased a bus ticket and now lived far away.

I'd never stop searching. I promised myself that. Hailey must pay. I found her picture in the annual and used the police computer to age her. I printed photos of her with blonde and red hair to go with her natural brown. I added photos of her hair cut short or worn long. I would find her. I had to. I continued my quest from home.

Nobody truly vanishes. In all my missing person cases, there was always something that led to them, some habit or preference or obsession. To truly obliterate a person was exceedingly difficult. Somebody somewhere knows something. Hailey had stronger motive than most, but she was only human, despite her inhuman acts.

I rolled my chair away from my desk and stretched my arms overhead. Rachel entered my home office, ready to go shopping with a friend. She wore a short black skirt and thin white camisole, stiff nipples tenting the fabric. Knee-high black boots and touches of makeup finished the look. She was wildly sexy. Vivacious and happy. Her friend, Paula, was a woman she'd met recently at a bar. Paula was divorced, and just coming out of her shell. They were having fun acting slutty. I was relieved Rachel was no longer going out alone. I could not control her sex drive and a growing part of me no longer wanted to.

We were having the best sex of our lives.

Our intimacy had diminished in direct proportion to our rise in physicality. We talked less but fucked more. Rachel wanted everything done to her. She asked to be tied up, whipped, and triple penetrated. She wanted to sample everything. Rashad had unlocked some secret chamber in her mind and freed a maelstrom of lust. I suspected that every man she fucked, including me, was, in her mind, Rashad. My wife would not be free of him until he was dead.

I'd checked on Emily and Tawny but Kali had abandoned the women on the street as soon as they could take care of themselves. Both had immediately taken to solicitation, earning money while salving their inflamed lusts. Their normal lives fell apart but neither cared. All they craved was cock.

Kali was furious Rashad still lived. I told her I needed help. She and I must hunt the incubus together. He was too much for me alone. She feared him as much as she feared her loss of control. The draw of the minotaur was too much for her.

Rachel approached and kissed me deeply. Her warm wet tongue played in my mouth. Out in the city some man walked around right now not knowing his cock would soon be in my wife's mouth. I felt under her skirt to sink a finger into her drenched cunt. She moaned. We both knew what she was about to do.

We said our goodbyes and I returned to the computer. Once night fell, I'd head for Kali. The succubus and I needed a plan. I must convince Kali to act as bait.

Hours later I left my desk. Hailey had one true friend in high school, a girl named Mary Pampa. I would visit Mary tomorrow and twist the thumb screws. If anyone knew anything, Mary would be the one. I showered and dressed to meet Kali.

CHAPTER 10

The sound of dripping water covered my footsteps, but I was sure Kali heard my approach anyway. The body of a homeless man lay partially in the water surrounding her island. I pulled the man out and laid him straight, trying to ignore the gashes on his throat. He weighed half of what he should. Kali had drained him dry.

I waited less than a minute before I saw her emerge from her hut and float across the waters. I tried to slow my heart. She was stunning, yes, but some of her beauty was a trick played on my male brain. She was pale and dark, with a body that screamed sex and filled me with lust. I fought for control and she laughed.

"This is how they'll catch you," I said, pointing to the dead man. "You're sloppy. You'll feast on someone you shouldn't and a war party will come looking."

"I'll feast on them too," she purred.

My dick started to swell. There was no way to prevent it. She was breathtaking, a gorgeous Goth stripper that promised all your fantasies realized.

"What do you get from our blood?" I asked. "Do you need it to live? Or do you simply enjoy killing men who can't take their eyes off you?"

She touched down directly in front of me.

"Both," she admitted.

Her firm breasts were in my face and I've never wanted to touch a woman so badly in my life. I looked away.

"I should kill you," she said. "You know too much. I've killed every human that learned of my existence. You know where I live. If you cannot slaughter Rashad for me, of what use are you?"

I kept my eyes on the ground.

"Human blood is delicious," she said. "Terror improves your flavor. Sentience, the awareness of your frail mortality, spices everything. Animals die in a dumb panic, driven by a million years of instinct. Humans die

knowing. They've spent their entire lives knowing the day is coming. Then they learn today is that day and their blood turns delicious. Their eyes go large with fear. They know what's happening to them. They understand all they are about to lose. Long ago tribes in this area would offer me captured prisoners of war. We'd spend days on their death. Your species exceeds mine in cruelty, believe me."

I sensed the rage behind her flippant attitude.

"Why do you take so long to do as I've asked?" she said.

"I can't get a clear shot. Cain moves too fast. He always knows where I am, when I'm coming. I want him dead as much as you."

"He controls your wife."

"Yes," I admitted. "He lives in her head. She thinks of him constantly. She craves him but satiates those cravings on others. I want to drop his severed head at her feet so she knows he's gone forever."

She stepped closer, her nude body brushing mine. I was hard in my pants. My fingers twitched with desire to touch her. Rachel faded from my mind. Kali floated higher, arching her back to graze my lips with a nipple. I trembled all over. The deer in the headlights was me. God! I wanted her so much. Her fingers circled the back of my neck. She eased my mouth forward. I parted my lips. Her stiff nipple slipped in and I sucked gently. The same act from Rachel had provided comfort. For Kali, I felt only raging lust. She pushed more of her firm tit into my mouth. Her free hand caressed the front of my pants. She found my erection and squeezed.

"Lovely," she whispered. "Would you like to be inside me?"

No! I thought. *Nonononono.*

She opened my pants. The heat from her feminine body cooked me. I felt cool air and hot flesh. She floated higher, directing my penis between her legs, roasting my meat. The head split her labia.

"Oh my God!" I cried.

She chuckled. She settled her slit onto me. My dick glided up her slick and sweltering tunnel. She was tight, enveloping me, gripping me. She gasped a little at the pleasure and I thought I would explode. I was fucking her! After so long and so much want, I was in her! She curled her legs around my waist and her arms around my neck. She bit my throat lightly, teasing the skin, and then harder, piercing. I winced in pain and fear, and she suckled gently. My cock throbbed inside her, milked by her slippery

cunt. She sipped my blood and moaned and I did not care if this was the end of me. Her pussy was a smoldering vise clamped tightly around my inches.

She leaned her head away and I saw a small smear of my blood on her lips. She offered me her throat but I did not understand.

"Your turn," she breathed, bringing her perfect skin to my mouth. "Bite. Drink."

My heart was a jackhammer. My legs weak. I felt her pulsing vein against my lips. I was utterly overwhelmed. I was inside her! That truth screamed inside my mind, ran around in there like a man on fire. The pleasure was more than anything I'd ever experienced. Nerves howled, electrified by the sensations they carried. Now she offered me this? Now she granted a sip of her blood? I dreaded what tasting her would do to me but I could not resist. She gasped with pleasure at my cock in her and I was undone. I gave *her* pleasure?

I pressed an incisor against the beating capillary and her skin parted easily. Rich red blood, hot as the sun, squirted into my mouth, a tiny fountain of sweet nectar. Her blood was scrumptious, succulent honey. I gently sucked and strength surged through me. My penis swelled, expanding and turning to diamond. Kali groaned. Strength poured into my muscles. Stamina and vigor rushed through me, racing to every corner of body and mind. All fatigue was wiped away, all fear and anxiety. I threw my head back and roared and she laughed, delighted, grinding her hips on me and coaxing my load. I drank again and she moaned, louder.

"Here is all the speed you require," she murmured. "Here is your strength. Take all you need. Kill him. Kill him for me and I'll be your lover forever."

Her insides milked me, a fluttering embrace massaging my inches. She crossed her ankles and rode my hips, working her pussy up and down my length. I was going to cum. My greatest dream realized: I was going to ejaculate inside this Goddess. I was a titan, a demigod, an unstoppable force. Her blood electrified me, changed me, altered me forever. I felt the transformation and welcomed it. There would be a price, a cost, I was sure. But my cock never felt bigger or harder. My body never held so much power.

Her gasps and moans were building and bringing her to orgasm would complete my existence. I sucked more blood from her throat and worked my hips. She screeched, throwing her head back and howling, the

demon revealed. Her soaked cunt pulsed around my meat. Her nails scratched my shoulders. I took another sip and felt the power of Heaven and Hell flood me.

Kali orgasmed like a hurricane, thrashing in my arms, skewered by my cock. I held back no longer, roaring like a train, erupting like a volcano. I sprayed my seed into this evil Goddess and believed I could conquer the world. On and on my sperm exploded, gushing into her womb, dripping from my tight balls. Her orgasm subsided but mine continued for several moments, leaving me a quivering wreck, barely standing.

"Dangle Rachel," she said, recovering her wits. "He desires her, too. Use your wife to lure Rashad into the open, and then kill him."

I understood. I drove my iron cock deep and spurted one last blast. Kali groaned.

"I will," I said.

I had no idea what I was saying. I'd just offered my wife as bait. Kali was an exhilarating compulsion and I was still balls-deep inside her.

CHAPTER 11

I leaned against the fountain and gazed through the trees at the towering apartment building across the street from the park. At this late hour, only a single light burned. Hailey, recently home from her graveyard shift at the hospital. I knew if I sifted through the records of that hospital I would discover a slight uptick in the number of deaths, an uptick that matched Hailey's start-date, an uptick that matched Hailey's shifts. Not enough to notice, but enough to satisfy the sick urges of a deranged young woman.

My investigation had led me to her only childhood friend, Mary Pampa. Mary had been caught torturing animals more than once. I'd terrorized the young woman, using my new powers to tear through her front door, to pin her head against a wall, to crush her cell phone in one hand. Sobbing with fear, she'd confessed everything. Once her defenses crumbled, she quickly revealed the late-night conversations with Hailey, the twisted pleasure of plotting death. She spoke of Hailey's flight, her new address, and her name change. Hailey was now Celia and lived in the apartment high above.

Kali's blood had altered me, changed my human body into something far faster and far stronger. The blood of the succubus had transformed me mentally too. I was sharper, smarter, with flawless memory and rapid insight. I noticed everything, observing even minute changes around me in air pressure and temperature. I calculated events in seconds, knowing in advance what was about to happen around me. Colors and sounds and tastes and smells were all heightened, but none of those compared to my sense of touch. Every centimeter of my skin had become directly connected to my lightning-fast brain. My fingertips felt ink on the page as ridges, easily read. Sex with Rachel left me catatonic.

When I'd gotten home from my encounter with Kali, I'd known from the moment I stepped into the house that Rachel had been with David again. I smelled his semen in her pussy. I smelled his cologne on her neck and

arms. I'd raced upstairs and halted her from stepping into the shower. I'd carried her to our bed. I was hard again already, hard as diamond. I'd torn my clothing away and grabbed handfuls of her hair, pulling her to my cock. Her eyes had gone wide: I was bigger, bigger and harder and laced with throbbing veins. This was not the cock she'd known. She'd reached for me, eager to stuff me in her mouth, but I'd pinned her to our bed and sunk into her used pussy. I'd fucked her for hours, losing count of her orgasms, dragging her back to the bed if she tried to escape. I'd fucked her until I detonated in her womb.

My new cock had stayed hard.

She was still eager to suck so I granted her wish. I'd smelled David's semen mixed with mine but Rachel enthusiastically licked away both. I marveled at the masculine blue veins crisscrossing my shaft. She'd groaned with delight around my dick in her mouth.

I'd taken a long time to soften. I'd spoken of Hailey while Rachel worshipped my dick, describing what I'd learned in vague terms, leaving out the nightmare cruelties she'd heaped upon her family.

"Hailey must pay," I'd told my wife.

Rachel did not care. All Rachel needed was a male body within reach.

I'd left my wife in bed and resumed my hunt. Now I stared at that bright apartment window and plotted. Hailey who was now Celia would not escape me. I'd already decided I would not arrest her. I would not give her the chance to slip through our imperfect legal system. Perhaps Kali's blood coursing through me also gave me a sense of righteous indignation, but I answered to Hailey's mother and father. I answered to Hailey's two little sisters. What I was about to do, I did for them.

The building had a card reader but I did not care. I waited for someone to exit and used my new quickness to dart through the open door behind them. The elevator was out of commission so I climbed the stairs, thirteen floors to Hailey's door. I knocked. No answer. I focused my hearing inside and heard the shower. I heard her singing in the shower and grew angry. How dare she draw pleasure from this life. I used the fire escape at the end of the hall to climb onto a narrow ledge circling the building and shuffled around the corner, something I would never have attempted before drinking Kali's blood. Now, I could do anything, or believed I could. Hailey's apartment enjoyed a small balcony and she'd covered hers with

houseplants, leaving the double doors open to the crisp night air. I climbed the railing and stepped into her place. Music played: Etta James, *Stormy Weather*. Hailey's small apartment was cluttered with knick-knacks; mementos of the life she'd created after the lives she'd extinguished. An empty container of Ben and Jerry's double chocolate sat on her small dining table.

It wasn't right. There is an injustice to eating something delicious, to listening to one's favorite music, even to taking a nice hot shower after you've killed four, including children. What might their favorite flavors have been? What songs would they have sung? I imagined the little girls dancing to Katy Perry and a fire of rage flared in my heart. I wandered her small place. A vibrator sat on the bed. A laptop sat on the nightstand. I made sure she was alone and then I seated myself on her sofa, facing the bathroom, and waited. Eventually the singing and the shower stopped. I heard toweling. I hear the brushing of teeth. I sat patiently.

The bathroom door opened.

Hailey was nude, alone in her apartment, or so she thought, and needed only to cover the short distance to her bedroom. There were no windows high enough to see in. She was safe, free to walk around her apartment naked. She was prettier than I expected, thin but strong. I spotted orthopedic sneakers on the bathroom floor behind her. She exited the steam-filled room and then the short hallway.

"You're going to confess," I said, slow and clear.

At last her brain registered me. She shrieked. She tried to cover her body with her arms. She tried to crawl to the safety of the bathroom, but I moved like lightning, grabbing the scruff of her neck and lifting her to her feet. She slapped at me, terrified. I grabbed her wrist and walked her to the dining table.

"Write it out," I commanded. "Admit what you did and why."

"What are you talking about?" she screamed.

"I found the room!" I shouted back. "I saw the bodies. I know what you did."

I stunned her. She froze, literally paralyzed. A million questions raced behind her eyes. Her jaw moved but she said nothing. I forced her naked body into a chair.

"Write," I said. "Acknowledge what you did. Tell them you're sorry."

I squeezed her wrist, bending the bones. She whimpered, trying hard to find a way out. I squeezed again and she gasped but sat.

"At least let me put a robe on."

"No," I spat. "You will face shame. Write."

A cup held pens and pencils. A notepad sat on a nearby bookcase.

"Who are you?" she asked, fear rising.

"Write."

"Are you a friend of theirs? Are you a neighbor? How did you find me?"

I released her neck to pinch a nipple. She gasped loudly, eyes opened wide.

"Write," I insisted. "Forget about me."

I squeezed the soft nub. Tears sprang to her eyes.

"I will torment you all night," I said. "Your days of freedom are finished. Confess, in writing. You owe your family that."

"I owe them nothing!" she snapped.

I pinched. Hailey squealed. She tried to fight me but my new strength was astonishing. I held her easily. She stopped struggling and lifted the pen.

"Why?" she asked. "Why do you care?"

"It's not right," I said. "I will not stand for it. I've seen too much, too much wrong in the world. Your act of cruelty stands out. I will not bear it. Write."

"You'll take my confession to the police?"

I leaned my face close to hers.

"I am the police."

She hung her head and began to cry. I held her wrist like a vise, unrelenting, and waited for her to finish. Her tears were only for herself. She wiped her nose and lifted the pen.

"Why did you do it?" I asked, watching her hand move.

"Ask my father," she snarled. "Ask my mother."

"Angry with your parents?"

"Something like that."

"Why kill your little sisters? Why like that? They took a long time to die."

"I hated them too."

I'd heard enough. I stopped talking. There was no point in asking why.

Fifteen minutes later she rested the pen on the table. I leaned over to read what she'd written. Satisfied with her confession, I eased her from the chair, moved her towards the balcony.

"Tell Lucifer I say hello," I said.

She was confused until the last moment, but by then it was too late. I held her wrist and hustled her through the open sliding glass door, onto the balcony. I cupped her ass at the last instant, lifting and heaving and launching her body into the open air, into the dark night. She sailed upward ten feet before hanging there an instant, face frozen in shock and horror as realization hit. She screamed, hands clawing at empty air, feet running with nothing under them, desperately trying to reach the railing and save herself. She screamed again, eyes pleading with me to save her, begging me to undo what I'd done, but I only watched her fall, listening until her screams were ended by her body smashing on the ground.

I left her confession, now a suicide note, for the cops to find on the small dining table next to the empty container of Ben and Jerry's.

CHAPTER 12

I am a murderer.

I waited for the guilt to consume me, like you see in the movies. I'd sworn an oath to uphold the law and I'd murdered a young woman. I waited, but guilt never arrived. In that oath was also a line about serving justice, and justice had been served. I sat at my desk at the station, surrounded by my brothers and sisters in law enforcement, and pondered the great wrong I'd committed.

I deemed myself just. If I returned to the Turner home, I knew the whispered voices would be silent. No more cookie sheets would hit the ground. No more items would go missing.

My father was suspiciously silent. Janet and Miss Mapleberry too. I'd created a deep conflict for them. They felt my heart and listened to my reasoning, yet sensed I'd still done something terribly wrong. I let them chew on it.

Officer Gregson stopped by my desk to shake my hand. We'd been partners, briefly, when I worked vice. The station was abuzz about my discovery of the bodies and Hailey's subsequent suicide. Everyone assumed Hailey had seen the headlines and knew the law would come for her. My colleagues were impressed with the work I'd done and the faint clues I'd strung together, impressed enough to overcome their usual distaste for me and stop by my desk to shake my hand. Most cops hate injustice. They especially hate those that murder kids. They hated Hailey and what she'd done as much as I did. They were pleased the killer was dead, the wrong righted. In their minds, I'd nudged the needle back towards righteousness.

I wondered who else deserved justice. Why stop with Hailey? In my many years of police work I'd met or heard about scores of individuals who deserved the same fate as she. A sense of virtue and morality settled over me, a rightness to my path: I would become judge, jury, and executioner to those that deserved it. I sent my mind roaming over the years and the people I'd put away and quickly formed a short list of those that deserved death.

Instead we housed them and fed them. We let them read and watch movies and learn and laugh. Their continued existence felt so wrong. On future cases I would not be so tolerant and understanding.

I faced my computer and began typing, wondering how many of my former arrests had been released. How much evil had been set free? I was relieved to discover the cases I'd built held. The evil I'd locked up remained locked. Only those that died escaped prison.

"Detective Almond?"

The voice was deep and harmonious. I turned. Another detective, new to the force from a small town in Utah, sat a file box on my desk and extended a hand. He wore a crisp new gray pinstripe suit and a pocket handkerchief that matched his polka dot tie. He had broad shoulders, a narrow waist, and a square jaw that screamed law enforcement. This man would never work undercover. He was handsome, in a War Hero kind of way. I was sure his eyes twinkled occasionally, but not right then.

"I'm Detective Ridgway."

I shook his hand.

"I've been assigned as your partner," he added.

"That can't be true. I work alone. Nobody likes me."

"So I hear. Captain's orders. Don't worry, it's temporary. I have a case kicking my ass and Cap said you're the guy to help me."

Terrific. I've been assigned partners before. They never last.

"What's the case?" I asked, gesturing towards an empty chair.

He pulled the chair around and knelt on one knee, spreading the contents of the box around my desk: dozens of plastic bags and photographs, all tagged.

"Missing person. Fourteen-year-old girl. Riley."

"I don't do standard cases," I protested. "What's strange or unusual about this one? Why'd Cap send you to me?"

"Room locked on the inside. Fifth floor apartment."

"Father? Step-father?"

"I thought the same, but no. Loving single mom."

I opened my desk drawer and grabbed my car keys.

"Let's go," I said.

"Where?"

"To that room. Photographs and bags of evidence won't do. I need to feel the place. I need to walk the floor, touch the walls."

He chuckled.

"What's funny?"

"They said you'd want to go immediately."

"They?" I asked.

He swung a hand like he worked the stage on *The Price Is Right*, indicating the police station and all the officers in it.

"Theeeeeey," he drawled.

I shrugged my jacket on. We departed.

The drive was mostly silence. My reputation at the station keeps people quiet around me. We arrived at the building. Some tech guys were on the sidewalk stowing their gear. Ridgway chatted with a few and then the patrolman standing sentry waved us through. We rode the elevator up.

"Mom's back at work. Money's tight. She's tough. Refuses to cry until we give her a reason to. No boyfriend. Every day the kid comes home from school and does her homework in her room. Mom gets home a couple hours later and makes dinner. Same routine for years. Three days ago, mom got home but no kid. Mom freaks. Neighbors saw the kid get home. Heard her moving around in the apartment. We know she was here."

We entered the apartment. Cheap furniture, pictures of fun days on the refrigerator, held by magnets, cheap sofa covered with a blanket. Exactly everything I expected to see. We moved to the kid's room. I felt an evil presence from out in the hall and slowed, lifting a hand.

"What's up?" Ridgway asked.

I shook my head but said nothing. How could I explain my heightened senses? We opened the door to the bedroom and I held him back, sent my eyes crawling over every object. I used my hand to feel the air. This was a different kind of evil. This was new to me. The room held a bed, bookcase, desk with computer, nightstand by the bed piled with books. The room was neat, clean, tidy, organized. Ridgway tried to take a step in but I stopped him.

"Wait," I said. "Something's here."

He looked at me funny but held back.

"What?" he asked. "What's here?"

"Something evil. Something dark."

"What?" he laughed. "Like a ghost? Come on, Anders, ghosts aren't real. The only thing evil here is the bastard that stole this kid."

He brushed past me to enter the room, examining her desk. I sent my senses in a slow circle, feeling a spike near the child's closet. I headed that way, palms up, reading the vibration. Ridgway crossed the room to look out the window and down to the ground.

"No way she jumped," he said. "Walls are too smooth to climb up or down. No traces of rope. Tech guys examined the ground. No traces of blood."

I paid him no attention. Whatever had happened in this bedroom had happened in the closet. I stopped before the two sliding doors. Raw hatred radiated. I slid a door aside. The girl's clothing lay piled on the floor. Empty wire hangers, some stretched into a diamond shape, hung on the wooden bar.

"Ridgway?" I said. "Would you mind running downstairs to the tech guys and have them bring up a UV light?"

"They scanned the room already."

"Yes, they scanned the room. They scanned the bed and the floor and everything in the room. I can tell they did not scan the closet."

I plucked a girl's shirt from the pile and pinched the shoulders, allowing the fabric to hang. The bottom half of the shirt was gone. The edge looked dissolved, not torn.

"Will you get them please?"

"All right."

He left. I dropped the shirt on the pile and placed a palm against the back wall in the closet. Loathing oozed through the eggshell paint. I waited. Why a pile of messy clothing when the rest of the room was orderly? Ridgway returned with a tech guy carrying a blue light unit.

"We scanned the room already, Almond," he said, annoyed. "There is zero blood or semen present."

"I'm not looking for either," I said. "I know you have a different setting on that instrument. I want to see through this paint."

Ridgway and the man looked at me funny. The tech shrugged and plugged in his apparatus. He set the dials and pressed a few buttons.

"Where?" he asked.

I moved my hand in a vague circle pointing at the back wall.

"That's random," the tech mumbled.

He aimed the wand at the wall. I asked Ridgway to draw the curtains and turn off the overhead light. A deep blue glow, almost purple,

filled the small room. The tech moved the wand. A faint circle of runes, about three feet across and looking like Chinese characters but more arcane, glowed through the paint.

"Can you make the light brighter?" I asked.

The tech turned a dial. The closet flared with purple light. The outer ring of letters was obvious now but we also saw smaller rings within, the letter gradually shrinking in size as you moved towards the middle.

"What the fuck is that?" Ridgway asked.

"Were you one of the first in the door?" I asked the tech.

"Yeah, we beat the other units so we got started."

"There's a stack of books on the nightstand," I said. "Did you find them stacked or did you stack them?"

"We stacked them. They were scattered on the floor, in our way. I needed to run tests. The books are clean."

I looked at Ridgway.

"Take pictures of that," I said, pointing at the circle on the wall.

"Lots of pictures."

He nodded and drew his phone. I moved to the stack of books. Third one down looked different, older, with a heavy leather cover. I opened it but the language was incomprehensible, tiny red squiggles on the pages. Someone had written notes in the margins long ago. Latin.

"How smart is our missing person?" I muttered. "What kind of grades did she get? Good student?"

"Mom says she a genius," Ridgway said. "But you know proud moms."

I sat the book on the bed and began examining the ceiling. I found a small recessed panel in the corner, too small to climb through, even for a young girl. I pulled a chair over. I lifted the thin piece of wood and extended an arm to feel around. I detected a bare spot in the blown insulation.

"How long have mother and daughter lived here?"

"Ten years. Almost eleven."

"Who rented this apartment before them? We need to know. I'm guessing a retired professor or bookstore owner."

"What the fuck, Almond?" Ridgway said. "Where is this headed? What are you thinking? What did you find up there?"

The tech killed the light and turned to listen. I point at the panel in the corner

"Bright girl, bored, doing homework day after day. She notices the panel in the ceiling, which she's seen a million times, but is now old enough to be curious. Lifts the panel, finds a book. Can't read it or the Latin but she's smart, resourceful. She uses her computer to translate the margin notes and how to pronounce the words."

I swung my arm to point at the closet.

"What she doesn't know is that she's messing with the unfathomable. She doesn't know the man that lived here before her dabbled. This room was his study. He drew a portal on the wall, which got painted over when he died, and our girl opened it."

The tech was mesmerized, convinced. Ridgway scoffed.

"A portal?" he mocked. "Like a gateway to Hell? In the closet?"

"Probably not Hell," I said. "That would be much harder to open. Probably some demon's interdimensional lair." I pointed to the clothes on the ground and the bent hangers. "Our girl got sucked through the opening along with some of her wardrobe and a few wire hangers." I turned to the tech. "We need a Latin professor. Try the colleges. We also need to know who lived here before mother and daughter. Ridgway and I will try the building super or manager, maybe even some neighbors who've lived here a long time. Go."

Ridgway eyed me suspiciously.

"You're serious," he said. "You believe in this crap."

I shook my head.

"It's not a belief. It's knowledge. Big difference. Let's get started."

We had answers in less than an hour. Mention a missing child and people get motivated. The previous tenant was an older man, retired military, who dabbled in rare books and manuscripts. He'd become incoherent rapidly and died suddenly. The Latin professor was a woman, Evelyn, eighty-two, with sharp eyes and modest dress. She'd driven herself to the apartment. I handed her the leather book with a warning.

"Read the words to yourself and tell me what they say. Do not read them out loud. I'm looking for any that speak of opening a door or window, any that speak of connecting paths or roads, anything that refers to separate points. Be careful. I'm right here with you and I'll keep you safe."

Ridgway rolled his eyes.

"Once we have those words isolated, I'll ask you to speak them, if you're willing."

"I'll be willing," she stated, determined.

"This is bullshit," Ridgway muttered.

Evelyn began to read. I placed myself behind her, ready to grab her clothing. She was ready in less than a minute. I told her to go ahead. From the moment she uttered the first words the air began to vibrate. The Tech Guy had returned to see how this all played out and stood in the doorway. Evelyn continued to read out loud and the building trembled.

All at once the circle in the closet opened and sick red light billowed out, a howl rose as air began to flow inward. I spied a rocky and blasted landscape through the opening, a little girl in a fetal position, covering her head and ears. Clothing lay scattered around. Ridgway saw her too. The circle was expanding, more air sucked in. Hangers stretched toward the aperture. Clothes lifted from the rug to fly through. Evelyn's voice cracked with terror but I placed a hand on her shoulder.

"Keep reading!" I shouted.

Ridgway couldn't wait. The sight of the little girl was too much. My new partner jumped through the hole in space, buffeted by roaring winds on the other side.

"Goddamn it!" I yelled. "Evelyn, keep repeating those words!"

I jumped to the gateway. Ridgway had reached Riley and scooped her into his arms, but the winds were focused on him now, knocking him around, driving him away from the breach. He fought hard to get home but lost ground.

He wouldn't make it. I stepped through.

The hurricane force knocked me around until I got my feet under me.

"Hold the girl!" I yelled. "Do not let go!"

I plodded towards Ridgway, besting the wind with my new strength. I grabbed his sports coat and pulled him towards the way out. If not for the blood of Kali, we would all be lost. I fought hard, head down, one foot after the other. Muscle and sinew refused to relent. I headed into the gale until I reached the lip. With a surge of strength, I shoved Riley and Ridgway into the bedroom, following closely behind.

"Stop reading!" I yelled to Evelyn.

She was in tears, terrified, but steadfast. She slammed the book shut and the circle vanished, dissolving whatever clothing was caught between. Wire hangers tumbled. Tech Guy was ashen. Ridgway hugged Riley like he'd never let her go. Evelyn staggered to the bed and began weeping.

"Did you see it?" Ridgway mumbled.

"See what?" I asked.

"The thing with wings. The big black thing coming for us."

"No. I saw only you and Riley."

Ridgway began to cry. I checked on the little girl. She was unconscious, possibly in a coma. I pointed at the tech guy whose name I still did not know.

"Get medical up here now," I said.

"I already called them," he said. "When I looked through that—that-porthole and saw the girl on the ground. That looked like the moon. What the fuck just happened?"

I didn't answer. I checked on Evelyn, lifted the book from her, and then checked on Ridgway. The medics came through the door. I pointed at the little girl.

"Whatever she needs," I said.

Tech Guy watched me closely.

"Have you done this before?" he asked. "Because you're not freaking out at all. What the fuck? Why? Why aren't you freaking out?"

I gave him a fake smile.

"We can go," I told Evelyn and Ridgway. "Let's get out of here."

I paused downstairs to find a female officer and told her to contact the mother. More units were arriving. Tech Guy could explain. We didn't need to be here. Evelyn said she was fine to drive and I thanked her profusely for her courage and selfless behavior. She had a million questions but saved them for later. I told her I would soon call and explain. I put Ridgway in my car and drove. He was silent a long time.

"We had God on our side," he said, at last.

"The most dangerous words in the history of man."

"No, I'm serious."

"So am I."

"How can you say that? We faced evil. I saw the face of the Devil."

"You saw a minion. You saw a worker-bee. The true face of the Devil would have killed you. Lucifer's face would melt your bones inside

your body. He's beautiful."

"You didn't see what I saw. How would you know?"

"I told you I sensed evil in that room. Next time you'll believe me."

CHAPTER 13

"I'll pour you a drink," I said as we entered my home.

"I'm Mormon," Ridgway said.

"I'll pour you a drink anyway."

I dumped three-fingers of Jack Daniel's whiskey in a tumbler and handed it to him. He gulped it and handed me the empty glass. I refilled the thing. This time he sipped. I joined him in the living room, bringing the bottle with me.

"What was all that?" he asked.

"You saw. Now you know the truth."

He pondered that a moment.

"God, Satan, angels and devils, ghosts: it's all real, isn't it?"

"Yes, and monsters. But I will tell you none of the religious books have it exactly right. Not the Bible, not the Quran, not the Torah. Language always fails to describe something like this. I can't even describe a dream to someone. What makes them think they can put what they learned into a book for us? Heaven and Hell are not what you think, trust me."

"I'm starting to."

He glanced around my living room as if wondering how he got here.

"The winds that hammered us came from his beating wings. He was like a huge angel, but black. He was covered with soot. He had shiny, dark, shark-eyes. He was naked. He had a penis. I was shocked. Why would a dark angel have a penis? "

"Why wouldn't he? That's the better question. He's not a Ken Doll."

"The look in his eyes was pure murder. He hated me for being alive. I've never been so afraid."

"You were incredibly brave. You went in after the little girl. You saved her."

"You would have saved her if I wasn't there. You weren't afraid at all and your strength was inhuman. The force from the winds barely bothered you. No human is that strong. Are you one of them?"

"No," a lovely voice answered. "My husband is human."

Rachel entered from the hallway. She'd heard us talking and decided to join in, but only after loosely tying a short terry cloth robe around her naked body. Ridgway stared as she approached.

"Hi," she said, extending a hand. "I'm Rachel, Andy's wife."

He chuckled.

"Your first name is Andy?" he asked me.

"Yup. Anders, if you'd prefer."

"What's yours?" Rachel asked.

"Beckett."

"Nice to meet you, Beckett," Rachel said.

She was flirting but she does that a lot lately. He caught himself gawking and looked away. Rachel sat next to him on the couch.

"Are you gentlemen all right?" she asked. "Did something happen? Beckett, you look shook."

"I am," he said. "I just learned that black angels occupy another dimension side by side with us."

"Beckett rescued a little girl about an hour ago," I explained. "Saved her from incredible evil."

"That's wonderful," Rachel said, scooting a few inches closer to the man. "What happened?"

I told her the story. I told her everything, exactly as it happened.

"My heroes," she giggled, with true admiration. "That's a grateful mother, I promise you. Wait until your colleagues at the station hear about it."

"I feel dizzy," Beckett said. "I haven't had whiskey for decades. May I use your restroom?"

"Of course," I said, pointing down the hall. "First door on the right."

He sat his empty glass on a coaster and shuffled away.

"I want to fuck him," Rachel said.

"What? For fuck's sake, Rachel. You only just met him."

"Yes, but I do. Very much. He's good. He's wholesome. He's Captain America and Keanu Reeves rolled into one. Did you notice his square jaw and piercing eyes? His shoulders are broad. I pictured him naked and I'm already wet. Let me fuck him."

"Rachel, he's my partner. You can't fuck a cop's partner."

"That's just another reason to do it," she said, slipping her arms around my neck. He's a good man. A true good man. I can see it in his eyes. Say yes."

"If I said no you'd do it anyway."

"So say yes. It's better to feel like you're involved than on the outside looking in."

Strangely enough, I wasn't totally against her idea. I could use a close ally on the force and his guilt would make him pliable. Also, he knew things about me, he'd seen me do things I'd rather he did not talk about. Rachel could buy me his silence.

"I'll excuse myself to go work in my office," I said, relenting. "You can seduce him on our sofa."

She rubbed her palms together like a cartoon villain.

"Muahahahaha," she fake-villain-laughed. "I bet he's got a big cock. He's sweet but he has that deep and easy confidence like all men with big cocks. Like no matter what else life throws at them, they've got the big-penis thing handled. They might suck at math or geography but the dick situation is under control."

"There's no way you can know that."

"Girls know. Want to bet on it?"

She was sassy, cocky. I got caught up in the competition and forgot for a moment we were discussing my partner's cock.

"A cool hundred says you're wrong."

She untied her robe and retied the two halves to barely hide her breasts.

"Deal," she said. "Make yourself disappear when he returns. Go do work in your office like you said. That's a good idea. I'll make a move and let you know what I find."

"Why should I trust what you say? You'll lie to win the hundred."

"Because if he isn't hung there'll be no hiding my disappointment. You'll know the truth the moment you see my face. I'll still fuck him though. I want to corrupt him."

Ouch. Rachel saw the sting in my eyes.

"Poor baby," she said. "What will you do with your wayward wife? Can you picture yourself riding to some crime scene with Beckett by your side, knowing he's been in me?"

"You flirt with the dangerous."

She laughed.

"It's exciting!"

"What if he falls for you and wants me out of the picture? A cop is only as safe as his partner's loyalty."

She shook her head dismissively.

"I'll make it clear to him the kind of woman I am now. He'd be a fool to fall for me. I want him to use me and disrespect me. He'll understand he could never trust me."

"But I can?"

"You can trust my love," she giggled. "But you can't trust my pussy."

Rashad has ruined your wife, my dad said.

I disagree, Janet quickly argued. I'd love to be used and disrespected too. Don't put Rachel on a pedestal.

I tuned both out. Rachel was regarding me with a naughty gleam in her eye. There's nothing like new dick, I suppose. I still wasn't completely comfortable with her new needs and probably never would be. Such is life.

The bathroom door opened and Beckett emerged. He returned to his spot on the sofa. I refilled his tumbler with another three fingers.

"That's a lot," he said.

"You just went through a lot," I countered.

"Someday," he said, taking a sip, "once you trust me more, I want to hear the whole story about you. The guys on the force have you all wrong."

"Sounds good," I said. "For now I leave you with Rachel. I have work to do in my office. Order some food. Take a nap. Watch some football. I'll be back in about an hour and a half, maybe two."

I left the room, glancing backward through the banister. Rachel was casually dropping onto the spot next to him on our couch. With her in that robe, the man had no chance.

I entered my office and started my computer. I kicked off my shoes and opened a few cases I had been working on, but that lasted only a few minutes. Curiosity sank her claws and I crept down the hall to see what transpired.

Rachel already had the man naked. She may have started as the aggressor but he'd taken over. Our brush with the occult had filled him with dread and the fear of dying, and that fueled an almost frantic need to copulate. Rachel's face and tits were pinned against the wall, her robe

draped off her shoulders. Beckett was behind her, his hands on her back, his hips pumping. She was right: his cock was big. Most of it was buried out of sight in her pussy but his girth had her stretched.

He fucked like the Devil whipped his ass. He fucked like he'd experienced the greatest terror of his life just an hour ago. His face was twisted with emotion. I couldn't tell if he was about to cry or about to scream. He'd faced death and survived and now fucked like he was desperate to feel alive, desperate to seize life. Rachel was lost to bliss. His thick cock plunged and his fat balls slapped and she held her back arched. She made a constant offer of her cunt and Beckett claimed it. He muttered something too low for me to hear. Rachel smiled.

He moved his hands to her hips but she took the opportunity to spin around and kiss him. She shrugged her robe to the ground and held his face with both hands. He grabbed her big tits from the sides and assaulted them, fierce passion driving the man. I saw his erect cock plainly now and he was so hard he throbbed. Rachel lifted a leg and guided him in so he could fuck her while standing. She locked her legs around his waist. He started crying and thrust harder.

Rachel loved that she was corrupting his goodness. I saw it in her eyes. She laced her fingers behind his thick neck and leaned back.

"Let it out," she said, tenderly. "Let everything out. Give it to me. Give me all you have." She grew more excited as she talked. "Put it in me. I want you to put it in me."

She bounced on his erection, leg muscles flexing, arms taut. She was drenched. He must have found it too difficult to climax like that because he dropped to a knee and laid her on her back. His cock never slipped out. With the carpet beneath her he could thrust harder and so he did, hammering my wife into the rug.

"Yeah!" she shouted. "Unngh! Fuck me!"

This poor Mormon boy had no chance against her. I doubt he'd ever met a woman that loved fucking so much. Her pussy was a tight tunnel wrapped around him, stimulating his cock, coaxing his load. Any concerns about betraying his partner were long-gone. He was a rutting bull, grunting, digging his meat deep. She slapped her hands on his round ass and dug her heels under his butt cheeks. She squealed with pleasure as an orgasm took her, body shaking under his. He fucked faster, driven by her sounds, and then thrust once all the way in and groaned. His ass clenched over and over,

little round sphincter clutching and squeezing. He was blowing his load inside.

I returned to my office. The orgasm would clear his head and he'd realize what he'd done. God would be so disappointed. Guilt would crush him. Better for him if I wasn't there. I opened an old file and tried to work but heard their low voices muttering. I heard Rachel laugh. I soon heard Beckett laugh too. Instead of crushing guilt my partner enjoyed a warm afterglow of coital delight. I still believed guilt would come for the man but not yet. Rachel had rocked his world. I tried to forget about them and concentrate.

After a while I heard soft bare feet pad down the hall.

"Hey," her soft voice said.

I turned. Her hair was a tasseled mess. She was nude, leaning in my doorway, a look of concern on her face and streaks of semen dribbling down her thighs. That's how it was with her now: a little compassion, a little cruelty.

"Hey yourself," I answered.

She left the door to come sit on my lap, her wet and squishy pussy soaked my pant leg, breasts and swollen nipples in my face. She circled my neck with her arms. She kissed my ear gently.

"About a gallon," she whispered.

Electricity shot through me. That woman is the Devil's bride. I realized all her little taunts and jabs were aimed at stoking the fire in me, turning me into the fuck-machine she craved. I'd throw her around our bedroom, reclaiming my scandalous wife, and she'd love every minute of it.

"Take me to bed?" she asked, innocently.

"I'd be rough," I warned. "Maybe even vengeful."

Her eyes narrowed. I'd pushed a button. She cupped my crotch.

"Beckett is a stud. His thick cock got so hard for me. I sucked on it but only for a few minutes. Once I saw his true girth, I needed him in me. Am I upsetting you? Your partner has the biggest balls I've ever licked. His blasts of sperm were powerful. I felt them thump my inner walls. I got so turned on, Baby—"

I'd heard enough. She knew what she was doing. I lifted her off my lap and sat her on my desk. She was already fumbling at my pants, desperate to free my cock.

CHAPTER 14

"I need to tell you something," Beckett said.

"Later."

"No, now. We might die in there."

"Shitty time for a confession, Ridgway."

We'd parked my car in front of Bill Speidel's Underground Tours and grabbed our gear. We'd marched through Pioneer Square and followed the railroad tracks. The city was dead this time of night. Mist floated down the empty avenues, muting sound. Everything was always wet all the time.

A long, low, distant howl wandered through the air.

I'd done my best to discourage Beckett from joining me but he'd insisted.

We stared at each other.

"You heard it too?" he asked.

"I did."

I scanned the surrounding buildings and alleyways. The echo made it impossible to locate the source. We heard it again, this time from above, and I looked up.

A lone figure, half-man, half-raven, stood atop the Space Needle, balanced on the large outer metal ring. He gazed on the city below, hunting, occasionally looking vaguely in our direction. He opened his black wings wide, stretching.

Beckett whimpered.

"Is that the creature from the portal?" he asked. "From Riley's room?"

"No," I said, shaking my head. "That is Rashad Cain. He's a personal enemy."

Beckett looked at me like I was insane.

"You *know* him?" he asked, incredulous.

"He's the reason we dipped your bullets in gold. Gold kills him. Kills his lapdog too, who's probably around here somewhere. You know

what a minotaur looks like?"

"Yes. I've played Dungeons and Dragons."

"Good. Keep an eye out for something like that. Half man, half bull. The beast is fast and strong. Gold kills him too."

I felt my partner's eyes on me.

"I had you figured all wrong," Beckett admitted. "I thought you were a burnout, a cop too afraid to take on real cases anymore, to do real police work. I was so wrong. You're fighting a battle for all of us and you're fighting it alone."

"Is that what you needed to tell me? Is that your confession?"

He looked at the ground.

"No," he said, shuffling his feet, struggling to find the words. "I had intercourse with your wife. I had sex with Rachel. I'm so sorry. She came on to me and we'd just returned from Riley's room and I was feeling emotional. The whiskey made everything worse. I needed something to hold onto. I needed someone. I wanted you to know. I couldn't die with that on my conscience."

I let him suffer with the angst a while, looking him in the eye.

"Yeah," I said, finally. "I already knew."

He looked stunned.

"She told you?"

"No, I walked in on you while it was happening."

This was too much for him to believe.

"Why didn't you stop us? Why didn't you shoot me?"

I pointed at Rashad perched high above.

"Because of that fucker," I said. "Not so long ago he captured Rachel. Held her. Used her. Made her his slave. He changed her into a sex-craving nympho. Rashad uses human women to breed new minotaurs, which he uses to hunt a female version of himself named Kali. Rashad wants her dead. It's a long story which we do not have time for right now. If we survive tonight, I'll tell you everything."

He stared.

"Every time you open your mouth I'm forced to reevaluate you," he said.

"That's fair. Lately I've often had to reevaluate myself."

Beckett checked on Rashad. The incubus lifted his arms and sounded his haunting cry again. Was he calling the minotaur to him?

"Why doesn't he come down here and kill us?"

"He may not see us this far away. Also, I wounded him last time. He's been lying low. He knows I know how to kill him. Maybe he's a little afraid. Maybe Rashad is afraid to get too close."

"Do we continue heading underground or climb the Needle to get him?"

"We continue underground. His pet monster is down here and I want that thing dead too. Rashad may try to save his creature and we get two for one. Let's go."

I moved. Beckett was nervous, sticking close. We followed the tracks and took the stairs, soon leaving the sewers for natural tunnels. Like last time, the correct path was always the one angling deeper. I set a rapid pace.

"Why are we doing this alone?" he asked. "Why haven't you gone to Sergeant Banes? We should have an army with us."

"Rashad owns many humans. He owns the women he charms, like Rachel, and the men he coerces. You don't want to know how he controls men."

"How?"

I shook my head.

"You're a little obnoxious," I said.

"It's been said. How?"

"You don't want to know this."

"I do. I want to know everything. How?"

"He has their cock and balls surgically removed and stitched to a voodoo doll using ancient magic spells. They do what he says after that."

Beckett winced.

"He removes their equipment?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"I've seen the mysterious room where they're kept."

"Banes is one?"

"One of many. Rashad can look human if he wants. He moves among us, finds the men he needs, and takes what he wants. I know he controls a lot of law enforcement. He controls politicians too. Lawyers. Muscle."

"Cuts off their genitalia," Beckett murmured. "Harsh."

"We need to end him."

"You mean arrest."

"No, Beckett, I mean kill. He's not human. He's a creature from our nightmares. If you have the chance, shoot to kill."

That landed hard. Beckett chewed on what I'd said, tried to get a handle on it. He was a good man.

"We aren't assassins," he said.

"No, we aren't, but would you try to arrest a grizzly bear? Would you try to arrest that thing in Riley's room? You need to understand what's at stake. I need to know you have my back like I have yours. I've lost two friends down here already."

Rashad howled into the night. We looked up to see him spread his wings to their fullest extent. Beautiful and magnificent, in their own way.

"What's he doing up there?" Beckett asked.

"I think he smells Rachel and is trying to locate her."

Beckett made a face.

"Why would he smell Rachel? Isn't she at home?"

"No. Before we left the house, I told her where we were going. I told her we would be hunting Rashad. She's desperate to be with him. I knew she'd come running."

Beckett gawked at me, disbelieving.

"That's terrible," he said, voice strained. "You used your own wife? What man does that?"

"A man desperate to end this bullshit," I snapped.

He studied my face, adding two plus two.

"Rachel had intercourse with that creature?"

Intercourse? What planet was this guy from?

"Yes, my wife engaged in illicit congress with a demon."

The way he looked at me changed right before my eyes.

"How can you endanger the woman you say you love? Or is this revenge for her infidelity? You'll let her die as punishment."

I got in his face.

"You need to shut the fuck up about shit you don't understand," I snarled. "Your naivety was cute at first but now you just sound stupid, and check your feelings regarding my wife while you're at it. Rashad doesn't want to kill her; he wants to breed her. She's not in danger of dying or even

being hurt. He'll use her and then hand her over to his beast for impregnation."

"You're a cold man," he said. "Does she know? Is she in on your gambit?"

"No. If she was aware of my plan, she'd wreck it. She wants him safe. Both of them. Her heart will break when I kill them, but she'll get over it."

Beckett shook his head. He was out of his depth.

Rashad leapt from the top of the Space Needle and plummeted, wind whipping his feathers. At the last instant, his wings snapped taut, scooping air. He twisted left and right, maneuvering through the concrete canyons of downtown, dodging street lights and parked cars, angling towards Lumen Field stadium. I'd hinted to Rachel what Beckett and I were doing tonight and where we were going. I knew she'd put the clues together and run to be with him. Beckett was right: I am coldhearted.

"Come on," I said. "I see where he's headed."

I ran and Beckett followed.

CHAPTER 15

The journey leading us into the twisted tunnels under the stadium was much like before. We reached the archway I had punched a hole through and we stepped into cooler and wetter air. I told Beckett to activate his night vision and we got moving again. The end of the tunnel opened in a rocky cavern with a ribbon of black water running through.

"What now?" he whispered.

"We follow that stream into the labyrinth. There's a tunnel that leads to their lair. Last time I was down here I was hunting for Rachel. Rashad and the beast were distracted, suffering a rare defeat and recovering from their wounds. I slipped away with her undetected. We won't be that lucky this time. We'll start with their sleeping quarters and expand our search outward."

"Where's Rachel?"

I pointed at the root-covered ceiling.

"Somewhere up there," I said. "We made good time. I'm sure she's still somewhere above us."

We continued. Beckett was rubber-necking the place, amazed that all this lay hidden beneath the city. We'd left behind the frontier town, burned down long ago, and entered the lava tubes and washed out sandstone tunnels that crisscrossed the sound. When we began to rise again, he grew hopeful. Soon we were again amongst the artifacts from the wild west. We hit upon an old tunnel, now all dilapidated basements and support structures, and stepped into an area beneath a former sheriff's office. Old jail cells lined the walls. A pile of several bare mattresses sat in the center, but that's not what drew our eyes.

"Good Lord!" Beckett exclaimed.

Rashad had not been idle.

Rashad had not laid low, recuperating from his wound.

Rashad had been busy.

A dozen nude women, all at different stages of pregnancy, filled the cells. Beckett was thunderstruck. His jaw hung slack. I'd warned him of the monster we faced but here was indisputable proof. Seeing is believing. He holstered his gun and moved towards the closest cell.

"Wait," I said. "You can't free them yet."

"Why not?" he croaked.

"Because they don't want freedom. Because they'll fight you to stay with him. Because if we tried to shepherd them back the way we came, we'd take all night, with no guarantee of success. By the time we returned Rachel, Rashad, and the beast would all be gone. I'd be forced to start over. Trust me, these women want to be here. We'll return with paramedics and more officers. If you free them now, everything is lost."

Beckett turned to gaze at the women. A few sat up, staring back at us. One approached the bars of her cell. Her belly barely showed her condition.

"Bring me your cock," she begged. "Give me your seed."

Beckett recoiled in horror.

"This is a nightmare," he muttered.

The women were healthy but dirty, covered in grime and dried spit. Several looked like they'd been down here a long time and then I realized the truth.

"I'm a fool," I mumbled.

"Why do you say that?"

"I've been thinking like me and I should have been thinking like him. Rashad keeps harems, He has groups of women hidden under the city. Do you believe me now when I say Rashad must die."

"I'm with you," Beckett said. "I've seen enough."

My new partner was grim. He backed away from the cells.

"Let's keep moving," he said, drawing his pistol. "The bastard must be close."

We continued our search but our options narrowed. Fewer tunnels meant we covered ground faster, but I worried we were moving too fast. Sloppy equals dead.

We found a narrow passageway and followed it, and the air turned fresh. Soon we stepped into the open. We'd traveled under the stadium, all the way to the Sound. We'd emerged from a sewer onto the industrial docks.

The stadium was now behind us.

"Dawn arrives soon," Beckett said, searching the cloudy sky.

I gazed over the placid waters and then turned to see the stadium, frustrated we'd come so far for nothing.

Movement caught my eye.

I thought a large bird frolicked over the playing field. I was wrong. Rashad held Rachel in his arms, hundreds of feet above the ground. His huge wings beat slowly, launching them skyward where they'd slowly reach the pinnacle of their arch, then turn, rotating to begin their fall, only to be launched upward again with a strong beat of his wings. My wife clung to him, oblivious to her danger, delighted to be in the arms of the lover she craved. Beckett followed my gaze.

"She's nude," he murmured.

"She is," I admitted.

He squinted, following their arcing flight through the sky, suddenly realizing what I'd spotted immediately.

"He's fucking her," Beckett stated.

"Yes, he is."

Rachel had her legs wrapped around his waist and her arms around his neck. His cock curled from his hips to vanish inside her. My wife rode his stiff meat while he carried them both through the heavens, looping and soaring. Rachel's long hair flowed wildly, following their path. She kissed Rashad passionately. I looked away.

"When he finishes with her," I said. "He'll take her to the beast."

"The jail cells."

"The mattresses."

"Look!" Beckett said, pointing.

The stadium is open at both ends and within we saw a large creature bounding over the empty seats. The beast stopped to watch his master and the aerial display, and then hurried on, climbing and leaping, as eager as a salivating dog.

"Follow the minotaur," I said.

We holstered our weapons and ran. The beast watched Rashad fuck Rachel, running briefly and then gazing skyward again. He cavorted across the hard plastic seats, watching. We were fortunate the creature stopped often. We would have lost the trail otherwise.

Overhead we heard Rachel cry out in ecstasy. Rashad soon followed with a roar of his own. The beast understood and raced for the mattresses

and his own reward. We stayed with the monster, following as he took a culvert leading under the stadium. We heard him ahead of us, splashing through the shallow water, grunting and huffing, eager for his prize. We entered the jail cell area through a different tunnel from the first and hid behind a large pile of rocks. The minotaur sat on the mattresses, waiting, cock rising in anticipation. Beckett grew angry at the sight, jealous and protective of Rachel. She does have that effect on a man.

The beast perked up. Ears better than ours detected a sound he liked. Soon footsteps echoed down a tunnel. Rashad, in human form once more, entered with Rachel. Streaks of semen stained her inner thighs. Her windblown hair matched her just-fucked expression. She was light-headed, euphoric, floating on an erotic afterglow.

She saw the beast and hurried to him, throwing herself into his hairy and muscular arms. He was not happy to see her. His connection to my wife was purely physical. Rachel knew these things and welcomed them.

The creature lifted her as if she were a kitten. He pinned her to the dank bed of straw, sinking his hard cock into her recently used and sloppy pussy. Rachel groaned in satisfaction, impaled. She clutched at his shaggy body hair to pull him closer, pull him deeper. Her squeal rose in pitch and volume until she climaxed, wailing in pleasure and disbelief. He kept feeding her cunt more cock.

Rashad grinned wickedly.

"Embrace the powers of creation," Rashad told Rachel. "Offer your womb."

Rachel groaned long and deep, nodding her head rapidly. Her eyes opened wide and then wider still, shocked at the sensations the cock moving inside gave her. The minotaur began thrusting harder and faster, fucking Rachel with animal ferocity, conquering her, body and soul. A dozen pregnant women got to their feet to watch, each clearly wishing it was themselves under the monster, receiving the pounding. Rachel cried out as another orgasm ripped through her body. She was almost weeping, gasping and moaning, mind gone and body in charge.

I waited for the right moment, a clear shot at Rashad's head. The demon left the upper step to stand close to the mating pair. A column obscured my angle and I tried to calculate a path forward, close enough to blow the bastard away.

Beckett couldn't take it. He leapt to his feet and raised his gun, firing golden bullets as fast as he could squeeze the trigger, every hasty shot missing the target. Chips of rock and brick sprayed.

Rashad reacted with blinding speed. We'd caught him by surprise, our human scent mingled with the women held here, but even so he was surprisingly fast. He crouched and launched himself, crossing the space to us in two bounds, and then lacerating Beckett's abdomen with a slash of razor claws. The proud Mormon ignored the pain, firing over and over, dropping the empty clip to rapidly reload. Rashad spun to face him and I fired, hitting the incubus in the chest.

Kill that fucker! my dad shouted.

A dozen pregnant women screamed, cursing me, begging me to leave Rashad alone. The demon moved again, running sideways along the cavern wall to throw himself at my face. I ducked with my new speed and it saved my life. His claws raked my back, tearing clothing and opening flesh. My new strength kept me on my feet. I screamed in pain but stayed focused, aiming and firing and hitting my target again.

The minotaur tried to rise, tried to withdraw from my wife but she fought his retreat, eager for more fucking. He shoved her away and stood and I blasted two bullets into his chest. He howled in agony and ran for his life up a tunnel. Rachel screamed at seeing him hurt.

I spun on Rashad again. The demon had taken refuge behind a natural stone column, hiding from Beckett and his golden bullets. I joined my partner, the wailing of the women ringing in our ears.

"You cover left," I snarled. "I'll take right."

"Got it. You're bleeding."

"So are you."

We shared a determined moment, neither willing to back down or tend to ourselves. Rashad remained hidden for a heartbeat and then feinted left to go right. That was a feint too and I fired four times before I realized he actually *had* gone left. He charged Beckett and I feared my friend was doomed but the disciplined officer held his ground unflinching and fired his gun. Bursts of crimson exploded across Rashad's chest and stomach, turning the demon furious. Rashad grabbed Beckett's wrist, snapping bones quickly and easily. I barely missed the demon's head. He darted around a stalagmite and reversed direction, charging me. I put two more in him before he snatched that gun from my hand and crushed it. Beckett switched his pistol

to his good hand and continued firing, opening additional wounds on the monster.

Why won't he die? my Father cried.

I drew my gold-laced trench knife and rammed the blade between Rashad's ribs. He howled like a banshee. I smashed his face with gold-plated knuckles and he staggered backward. Beckett seized the opening and pumped three shots into the demon's head. At last the incubus buckled, dropping to the cave floor. The women screamed in dismay. I joined my partner, aiming and firing, filling Rashad with gold-coated death. I saw my bullets hit again and again until the clip was empty. I reloaded.

Rashad gurgled out his last moments of life.

"I won, fucker," I hissed.

He shook his head slowly.

"My brothers will come for her," he slurred. "She'll always crave me."

I put my foot over his mouth to silence him and leaned my weight. The women wailed. Rachel sobbed. Rashad died slowly, fighting for life every second. His body began to transform, melting, shifting. Wings sprouted and then wilted. His face turned demonic before turning soft. My boot sank partially into his skull. At last he stopped moving completely. Once he was gone, I turned to Beckett.

"I wounded the minotaur," I said, hurrying after the fucker. "Stay with Rachel. Make sure that asshole is dead. I'll be right back."

Beckett grabbed her arm and pulled her away, firing again and again until every golden bullet was gone.

I followed the minotaur's blood trail through twists and turns, arriving at a dying beast trying to crawl away. I rolled him over with my foot. He coughed and tried to claw me. I caught his wrist, strong enough now he couldn't break my grip. All the rage, all the humiliation, all the fear I'd felt over the last weeks boiled to the surface. I hated this creature. *Hated him*. I knelt on one knee and placed my barrel in his fang-lined mouth.

"Fuck you," I said. "Fuck you to death."

I pulled the trigger and the creature's head exploded, a golden bullet tearing through flesh and bone and gray matter. I stood and aimed at his heart, firing four more shots, just to be sure. I watched him bleed out before leaving.

I rejoined Rachel and Beckett. Rashad's body was crumpled on the ground, all light extinguished from the eyes. Rachel stared at her fallen lover, distraught, face stained with tears. The pregnant women wept. I drew my knife again.

"Turn her away," I told Beckett. "Get her out of here."

Beckett covered her head with his arms, hugging her, nudging her towards a nearby tunnel. Rachel reached for Beckett's zipper but he turned his hips away.

"Please," she whimpered. "Your cock will make me feel better."

"Not now," Beckett said. "Later."

I was unsure of his words. Did he try to comfort her with a promise of more later, or was there truly intent? Would Beckett try to bed my wife again?

I knelt over Rashad and began cutting.

Beckett dropped the empty clip from his weapon and reloaded. I pulled a black nylon bag from my pocket and shook it open, finishing the final slashes on Rashad's neck. I lowered the demon's severed head into the bag and drew the string.

Beckett stroked Rachel's hair, murmuring sweet things. He was so entranced with my wife that his wounds were forgotten.

"Call it in," I said. "We'll meet the first responders topside and lead them down here. These women will need a lot of help."

We followed the largest tunnel out. We stumbled upon unused railroad tracks and followed the line into the rising sun. Rachel was nearly catatonic, responding to Beckett, barely, but to me not at all. He placed his jacket around her shoulders to cover her nudity. She was desolate, inconsolable after her loss.

Beckett lifted his cell phone and dialed the station. Soon this place would crawl with medical personnel. We'd lead them to the women below. Beckett's blood loss was greater than we realized so he sat, waiting for help. Rachel again tried to free his penis and when he stopped her she stole a kiss.

"I'm sorry," he told me, guilty.

"She's not herself," I said. "Give her time."

"What do you plan to do with that?" he asked, gesturing at my black bag.

"Payment," I said. "For Kali."

"Grim. Macabre."

"Ture," I admitted. "But I'd be dead if not for Kali."

"I saw how fast you moved in there. I saw your superhuman strength again. I'm guessing Kali gave you your heightened abilities?"

I nodded to confirm, glancing at Rachel.

"I won't ask how," he added.

"Good," I said. "I'd hate to lie to you. Take care of Rachel. I'm going to Kali now."

"Understood."

My back felt better already. Would these powers fade in time? I took a step down the rail line but stopped. Somewhere down in that warren of tunnels a connection existed that would take me to Kali's island. I would trust my new senses to guide me.

I turned to jog into the labyrinth once more.

CHAPTER 16

I approached the underground lake and opened the bag. Rashad's head had transformed into the incubus face again. His human face gone. I grabbed a handful of hair and lifted, acting much braver than I felt.

"Here's your prize!" I shouted.

I waited.

A soft and tantalizing chuckle spun me on my heel. She was there, dressed for the human world, tight professional skirt and high heels. I gasped before I could stop myself. She was stunning. *Stunning*. Her hair was still long and dark and her skin still pale but the aura of evil and danger had diminished. She'd just come from my world. I lifted Rashad's head and her eyes sparkled. She stepped closer, taking the head from me, gazing with wild and delighted eyes.

"Honestly," she murmured, voice filled with delight. "I expected failure."

"So did I. Your blood saved me."

She turned the head in her hands, staring like she couldn't believe the truth of it.

"So?" I said. "It's over?"

"Unless you have plans to kill me too."

I ran my eyes over her staggering beauty. My heart ached.

"I couldn't," I said. "Never. Not you."

She turned from the severed head to meet my gaze. I saw fondness and adoration. I'd pleased her and that thrilled me.

"I feel the same," she said.

"Thanks."

I tore my eyes away from her beautiful haunting face to examine her clothing.

"You spent time in my world," I said.

"I got hungry."

That wasn't the whole truth but I dropped it.

"What will you do now?" she asked.

"Work on my marriage. Try to win Rachel back. Solve new cases."

"You'll lead an army down here. You'll destroy my world."

"Yes," I admitted. "There are families wondering what became of loved ones. There are the answers to many unsolved cases down here."

"Don't dig too deep," she warned. "Some things should remain undisturbed."

"Agreed."

I remembered the tentacled monster under the water. She stepped closer. My heart jumped and flipped. She kissed me softly on the lips, with feeling. I worried my heart would explode.

"These new abilities you gave me?" I asked. "Are they permanent?"

"Yes. You're no longer simply human."

"What about Rachel?"

"Rachel's desire for Rashad and his pet will diminish but never fade completely. She's not the same woman."

"I understand."

"You don't. You'll outlive them all: your wife, any children you have with her, all your friends and family. You'll die eventually but only after a life of heartache. To you, my gift is also a curse."

"Rashad said his brothers will come for Rachel. What does that mean?"

"You'll never be safe. I wondered if he'd attempt such a gambit. I'll gather my remaining sisters and prepare. I must leave this underground world and find a new home. May I count you as an ally?"

"Stop killing the innocent."

She smirked and nodded.

"Also," I added, "stay away from my partner."

End.

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