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+ Geonn Cannon +

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It's a long way to Heaven, it's closer to Harrisburg
And that's still a long way from the place where we are
And if evil exists, it's a pair of train tracks
And the Devil is a railroad car.

Josh Ritter, *Harrisburg*

One

Riley's bed was still a charred remnant, and the spot where the headboard met the wall still smelled of brimstone.

She dumped her duffel bag on the bed with the mouth gaping open so she could just toss clothes inside. She didn't bother folding. It wasn't that she was scared to be in her own apartment, she was just anxious to get out before anyone came to see if she was there. She was trying to avoid landlords and demons alike. The fire that destroyed her bed hadn't burnt anything else in the apartment, but the smoke was a different story. Smoke alarms on all four floors had gone off and sprinklers drenched every apartment. Her mailbox was full of notices and warnings that she could be held responsible for paying the building's insurance premium.

Riley didn't want to fight it, even though she was pretty sure she would win. She just didn't want the hassle.

Riley emptied clothes out three drawers, stuffing them into her bag before turning to start on the closet. As she was turning, something in the center of her charcoal mattress caught her eye. It was a threadbare rabbit, with eyes made of brown buttons and floppy ears brushed back over the top of its head. The thing wore faded blue overalls and had oversized feet spread out to either side, fingerless paws hanging down in front of it.

"Do you like it?"

Riley tensed and moved her hand to the butt of her gun.

"It's just something I found lying around."

Marchosias stepped into her line of sight and picked up the rabbit. He swept his blood-red hand over the top of its head,

and then he tossed it back onto the bed. The skin of his face was stretched tight over his skull, his yellow eyes buried deep in shadowed sockets. He wore a crimson dress shirt underneath a black hoodie. He put his hands in his pockets and smiled at her. "Hello again, Detective Parra. How have you been since our last meeting?"

Riley didn't answer him. She bent to pick up her duffel bag and turned to the closet. "You could kill me any time, March. Either do it or leave me alone."

"Aw," Marchosias said. "Are you leaving, Detective? That makes me feel so bad. I'm sorry to run you from your home."

"Not much of a home, now was it?" she muttered. She shoved a jacket into the duffel bag and yanked the zipper closed. "Don't forget to take your March hare with you when you go." She gave him a wide berth as she slung the bag over her shoulder, holding her breath until she was past him and into the hallway.

Marchosias laughed. "Clever." He followed her from the bedroom. "Am I to presume you are moving in with the lovely Dr. Hunt?"

Riley tried not to show her tension at the demon casually saying her new lover's name.

"It's good. I wish you nothing but the best. Of course, coming from me..."

Riley stopped at the front door and looked over her shoulder at the demon. Marchosias was holding the rabbit again, staring down into its eyes. Riley looked at the rabbit and tried to figure out what the significance was. She'd never had a rabbit like that, or a toy even similar to it, growing up. It did look familiar, though. Maybe she'd seen one in a store. Or maybe it was supposed to signify her lost childhood. Finally she sighed and said, "All right, you win. What's with the rabbit?"

"Oh, this?" he said. He held it with both hands, turning the face toward her. He made one of the paws wave with his index finger. "This is Chekov's gun. In reverse."

“Right.” Riley’s cell phone rang and she fished it out of her pocket. She looked at the Caller ID, and then looked up to find Marchosias and his damn rabbit had disappeared. She flipped the phone open and stepped out of her apartment. “This is Parra.”

“Detective Parra,” a familiar voice from dispatch said. “I got a crime scene for you, if you’re not too busy.”

“You have perfect timing,” she said. She checked the door to make sure it was locked, not that it would make much difference to her myriad of enemies, and started down the stairs. “Where is it?”

There was a pause. “Well, that kind of depends on where you are, Detective.”

Riley frowned as she stepped into the sun. “What’s that supposed to mean?” She opened the back door of her car and tossed the bag inside.

Riley climbed to the top of the elevated train platform and looked both ways down the vacant tracks. Tall metal arches rose around the tracks, framing the train when it was in the station. They were supposed to make the platform seem elegant, Victorian, but they were covered with too much bird crap for that. A few of them had tattered nests tucked into any available openings. Riley couldn’t imagine any birds ever being born there.

A uniformed officer was leaning against the route map, arms crossed over his chest. Riley looked at his name tag and said, “Tell me they’re joking, Baines.”

Baines held his hands out and shook his head.

“They didn’t even bother to stop the train?”

“People gotta get to work.”

She stepped to the edge of the platform and leaned out to look down the track. Buildings hugged the edge of the track, just close enough for the dust to be blown off the bricks when the train went by. She shook her head and checked her watch. “Where are they now?”

Baines took his radio and said, "This is 4-4 Delta. Detective is on the scene at Third Station, requests ETA."

There a burst of static followed by a disembodied voice. "We just passed Second Station. We'll be there in about five minutes, give or take."

Riley sighed and put her hands on her hips. She rolled her neck and said, "Who is with the body?"

"Bodies," Baines corrected. "My partner stayed on the car, making sure no one disturbed the crime scene before you could show up and take a look-see. The medical examiner got on about three stops back. I've been playing catch-up waiting until you got here so I can get back on. I've been to three different stations waiting for a detective."

"Give me a break," Riley grumbled. "I just barely missed it at the last two stops." She had spent the last twenty minutes racing the train, driving through the streets like Gene Hackman in *The French Connection*, trying to get to the next station before the train departed. She wasted time stopping at each one, running up to the platform, and cursing as she watched the train pull away just as she arrived. She finally got smart and jumped ahead three stops, following dispatch's directions.

Finally, the train rounded the corner and slowed to a stop at their station. The doors slid open and passengers disembarked as if it was any other day. Riley sighed and finally snapped, "All right, come on, folks. Not like there's a dead body on this train. Let's move, please." The last passenger got off in no particular hurry, and Riley boarded the train with Baines. She looked toward the front, where the engineer was stationed. "Go get him. I want to talk to him."

Baines headed off, and Riley moved toward the back of the train. A second uniformed officer was blocking the door to the last car of the train, thumbs hooked in his belt. Riley showed him her badge. "Officer Otero," she said, reading his name from the tag. "Been waiting long?"

"Beats being in the room with the body, Detective." He stepped aside and held the door open for her.

Riley stepped inside and let the door close behind her. She stood with her back to the wall for a moment, taking in the scene. To her left and right were eight orange bucket seats, four facing the front, four facing the back. Beyond them, two long bench seats hugged the wall. The bodies were on the benches, one on the left and the other across from him on the right. The kid to her left was dressed in baggy jeans, stylishly torn at the knee, and a sweatshirt Riley suspected was deceptively cheap-looking. The other body was wearing what seemed to be a red robe.

Gillian was crouched in front of the slumming rich boy, examining the bloody flower blooming on his chest. Two technicians in jumpsuits were taking photographs, eyeing the floor in case a random bit of trash turned out to be the case-breaker.

Riley couldn't help feeling claustrophobic in the tight space. She moved forward and crouched next to Gillian. "When I was a kid, you had to be dirt poor to dress this badly."

"The times they are a-changing," Gillian said.

"What have we got?"

Gillian's hair was swept back out of her face and held with a brown and black plastic clip. She glanced over her shoulder and said, "Two victims, one shot each. Estimate their ages to be twenty for this one, about twenty-five for the other. No one saw anything. Bodies were first reported at five-thirty this morning, right when the morning commute was getting under way. Not sure how long they could have been riding back here before someone stumbled in."

Riley looked at the rich kid's body, the blood obscuring whatever logo had once been written across the chest. She sighed and looked at the rest of the car. "Didn't the last car on a train used to be called the caboose?"

"On a rail train, not an el," Gillian said. "The caboose used to be crew quarters. Conductor had a little desk where he could do paperwork."

"You're making that up."

Gillian smirked.

“All right. So I guess we have no witnesses. Either of these guys have ID?”

Gillian gestured at the technicians. “I’ve already bagged the wallets. This one is Keith Wakefield, but the other one is a bit of a mystery. He had a wallet, but no ID whatsoever. Eighteen dollars, a couple of pictures of people I guess are his parents, a generic library card, but no driver’s license.”

“Naturally. Well, we can have the library scan the card and tell us who it belonged to.”

The uniform guarding the door, Otero, stepped inside. “Detective. The engineer asked if he can talk to you after his shift.”

“Sure,” Riley said. Otero remained as Riley turned and squatted in front of the other victim. He was the older of the two, dressed in layers despite the warm weather of the past few days. The outer layer was a bright red robe cinched tight with a belt. His head was covered by a brimless hat, pushed down to his eyebrows. His chin rested on his chest.

Something gold glittered next to him on the seat and Riley craned her neck to see what it was. “Pocket watch. A nice one, considering how he’s... oh, hell.” She knelt in front of the man and pushed his head up so she could see his face. “Oh, goddamn it.”

“What?” Gillian asked, joining Riley in front of the man.

“This is the Crier.”

“Get out of here,” Otero said. “I just took care of him the other night.”

Riley sighed and shook her head. “It’s definitely him.”

Gillian shook her head. “Who is the Crier?”

Riley stood up and put her hands on her hips. “He’s this guy who used to wander up and down the streets all night. I always assumed he was homeless. He walks down the middle of the street and he announces like they used to all the time.

You know, 'Two o'clock and all is well, three o'clock and all is well.' He wasn't completely right in the head, but he was harmless. I think he got the idea from a book. People called all the time with noise complaints—"

"They still do," Otero said.

"I answered more than my share back when I was on patrol. We'd take him to a diner or something, get him a cup of coffee, then tell him to give it a rest. And he would give it up for the rest of the night. And the next day, he would be right out there again, doing the same thing." She looked around the floor and asked the technicians, "Did you find a bell? He carried a little gold bell with him."

"Nothing but fast food garbage."

Riley sighed and looked at the other body. "I doubt a murderer just happened across two people he had grudges against in a vacant train car. We need to figure out which one of these guys was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. Killing the Crier was a big mistake."

"Why?" Gillian asked.

"Town criers were protected by the ruling monarchy. To injure or harm one was considered as an act of treason."

Gillian said, "And you mock me for knowing about cabooses."

Riley smiled at her. "Okay. So how are we going to get these guys out of here?"

Gillian took a police radio from her pocket and held it up. "Danny, you still keeping up with the train?"

"Yes, Dr. Hunt. Sure could use a siren next time."

"Hopefully we'll never have to do this again, Danny. You're doing great. We're coming up on the Fifth Street stop. We'll have the bodies ready for transport then. We'll ask the conductor to give us a little extra time so we can unload them." She released the button and raised an eyebrow at Riley. "We're done, right?"

“Yeah. Load ‘em up, move ‘em out. I’ll never again take a stationary crime scene for granted.”

While Gillian and the techs dealt with getting Keith Wakefield into a body bag, Riley looked at the Crier again. The guy was harmless. A bit of a nuisance, maybe, but nobody worth killing. She was sure he was the one in the wrong place and the wrong time. Unfortunately, the entire city seemed to be the wrong place, and no time was very good. She sighed and stepped back to let Gillian do her job.

Officer Otero drove Riley back to her car, and from there she went straight to the library. The building always depressed her; she loved books when she was younger, but she couldn’t remember the last time she’d had time to sit down and read. From the looks of the library, not many other people in the city bothered with books, either. The stairs were cracked, and the flower bed in front of the building was overgrown with weeds.

The woman behind the counter looked up as Riley entered, surprise and then boredom registering in her eyes. “How can I help you?”

Riley showed her badge and placed the library card on the counter. “Detective Parra. I was wondering if you could scan this card and tell me who it belongs to.”

“You’re a lost and found cop?”

“Just run the card, please.”

The librarian sighed and scanned the card. Her demeanor immediately changed when she read the information on her screen. “Oh. This is Stevie C’s card. Steven Cabrera. There isn’t a current home address listed. I would be happy to give it to him when he comes in.”

“That won’t be necessary, ma’am,” The card was found on his body. He was killed sometime last night.

The librarian’s eyes widened and her lower lip began to quake. “He’s dead? Oh, no. Oh, dear, that can’t be. He was always so sweet!” She groped for a chair and pulled it out, dropping into it as she covered her mouth with one hand.

“Did he come in often?”

“No. Well, sometimes. I mean, he would come in if it was cold or raining, and he’d sit for hours. I always just assumed he was homeless. We never asked, because if he had confirmed it, we would have had to revoke his card. So we just kept his parent’s address on the file and looked the other way. He took such care of his books...”

“What did he do on the cold or rainy days?”

She pointed to the back of the main room. “He would take encyclopedia and newspaper back issues, and just go through them. Front to back, taking notes in his little journal. He only checked out the books on local history or biographies of local people. I thought it was nice. A little bit of information about your own city. So many people don’t bother.”

Riley said, “I’m sorry I had to break the news to you. Is there anyone else here who can sit with you?”

“Yeah, yes, um. Martin is in the back...” She perched on the edge of her chair and handed the library card back to Riley. “Detective... Paris?”

“Parra.”

The librarian put the card in Riley’s hand and folded her fingers over it. “Get justice for him. He might have been a nobody, but he was a kind human being.”

“He wasn’t a nobody,” Riley said. “He was the Crier.”

The librarian’s eyes brightened and she said, “Yes, yes he was.”

Riley thanked her again and left the library. The sky was overcast, but it seemed like it always was lately. She sniffed the air, trying to see if rain was in the future, but she didn’t pick up any hint of ozone. Maybe a surprise storm would sneak up and surprise her later that day.

*

Riley parked in the station's garage and headed upstairs. The elevator was a cramped shoebox, the light overhead flickering as she rode it up to her floor. She stared at it, watching the bulb flash and dim until the doors opened. "Is anyone going to fix that damn elevator light?" she asked the man in the maintenance jumpsuit. "It's sending me into fits every time I come in to work."

"So stop coming to work," the maintenance man said.

She dumped her jacket on the back of her chair and was about to go in search of coffee when Lieutenant Nina Hathaway appeared. Riley tensed at the sight of her and quickly looked away before the bad memories could resurface. Riley wasn't sure she would call what had happened between them rape, but it certainly wasn't something worth writing home about. Hathaway said, "Detective, I need to speak with you for a moment."

"Sorry, boss," Riley said. She already knew what the conversation would be about. "Need to get started on this train murder."

"It'll only take a second," Hathaway said. "Caitlin Priest. She's transferring from the Three-Six. She knows the city, and she knows No Man's Land. Congratulations, you have a new partner."

"I don't need a new partner," Riley said. She peered past Hathaway and squinted through the window of the break room. "Has anyone made coffee?"

"Peterson."

Riley wrinkled her nose and decided she didn't need caffeine that badly. She pulled out her chair and took a seat. "I'm doing just fine on my own."

"You've been out of the hospital for a week, Riley," Hathaway said, sitting on the edge of Riley's desk. Riley looked at Hathaway's slacks and had a flashback. "*I want you to ask me for a favor, Detective Parra. I want you to ask properly. Get on your knees.*" In the present, Hathaway said, "You might think you're going to do okay on your own, but

you need someone watching your back. I want someone watching your back. This is non-negotiable.”

Riley said, “I just started the case, and I already have a list of suspects.” She picked up the phone book and held it up. “I just have to narrow it down a bit.”

Hathaway didn’t even smile. “Funny.” She dropped Caitlin Priest’s file on top of Riley’s keyboard. “Get to know her. You’re going to be spending a lot of time together.”

Riley glared at Hathaway’s retreating back as she picked up the file. “Priest. Great. I have such a great track record with them.” And an even worse track record with partners. She shook her head and put the file aside to deal with it later. She stared at her computer for a long moment before she got up and headed for the break room. Peterson’s coffee might be swill, but it was better than nothing.

T W O

The Crier always made his rounds in the same general area. The neighborhood was on the very edge of No Man's Land, basically straddling the line of the haves and have-nots. Crappy cup of coffee in hand, Riley requested a tape of the nuisance reports from the night before to see if the Crier had bothered anyone more than usual. On her way back to her desk, she stopped by Sweet Kara's old desk and went through the drawers. Someone would have to clear her stuff out soon, but Riley didn't have the heart and no one else was dumb enough to take the job from her. She finally found the street map in the top right-hand drawer and carried it back to her desk.

The first call came from Eighth Street at 12:43 in the morning. "Yeah, that moron with the bell is at it again. I gotta be up at four damn thirty in the morning and he keeps on ringing that damn thing."

Fifteen minutes later, on Ninth Street, another caller: "I don't know if anyone's called you yet, but this guy has been ringing his bell for almost half an hour and he's screaming at the top of his lungs. I don't want to get anyone in trouble, but seriously, I need my sleep."

Almost a half hour later, the Crier was about three blocks away on Jefferson Street. "Shut the fucking asshole up before I go down in the fucking street and shove his fucking bell down his goddamn throat! He woke me up and I can't get back to sleep with all-a that ruckus."

Riley listened to enough of the calls to get an idea of where the Crier had been before he was shot. She wrote down the addresses of the complainants and marked them on the map. The last call came in at a quarter past four in the morning,

from someone who lived on Downing Street. She knew the neighborhood; it probably hadn't been the Prime Minister.

She found the el station nearest to the final call. If the Crier was on Downing, then he probably boarded the el train at half past four in the morning from the Lory Street station. His body was then found an hour later. She would have to see if Gillian could narrow the time of death down any further. She tapped her pen against the edge of the desk and decided to go out and canvas the neighborhood to give the good doctor time to do the autopsy before she dropped in.

Riley stopped by the train station to pick up a schedule. The train did indeed stop at Lory Street at 4:30 in the morning. Had the Crier boarded the train with his killer? Was his fellow victim already on the train when he got there? And what were they doing in the last car? The train couldn't possibly have been full at that hour. Riley put the schedule on the sun visor in her car and decided to retrace the Crier's steps going backward. The most likely solution was that the person who made the last complaint followed the Crier down to the station, boarded, shot and killed him. She hoped the case would be that open and shut, but experience didn't make her hopeful.

Riley found the Downing Street address and knocked. After a few minutes, a small window set at eye-level on the door opened. A man peered out at her and she held up her badge. "I just have a few questions."

The window closed, and the door opened. The man was pudgy, dressed in sweats and a ratty robe despite the fact it was closer to lunch than breakfast. There was a dried, discolored splotch of something on the shoulder of his robe. "What's going on?"

"Mr. Paul Gentry?" He nodded. "I'm Detective Riley Parra. I'd like to talk to you about that complaint you made last night."

He grunted and rubbed his face. "Look, it was four in the damn morning, you know? This retard is out there ringing his bell and yelling. He does it all the time. 'Four o'clock and all is well.' Well, thank you very fucking much, ass wipe. I almost

slept through nothing happening.” He sighed and held his hands out. “That was no cause for me to be rude on the phone, but... it was the middle of the night.”

“You obviously had to be up for an important business meeting,” Riley said.

Gentry didn’t flinch. “I have an eight month old girl. You ever tried getting a baby to sleep? Try doing it at four in the morning. My baby was crying, I was pissed off, and I lost my cool. I apologize. But that guy does it all the time. All the damn time. I was just, I was finally sick of it.”

“I’m sorry,” Riley said. “I shouldn’t have...” She shook her head. “Do you own a gun, Mr. Gentry?”

He was taken aback by the question and shook his head. “No. Never even held a gun. What does that have to do with the asshole?”

“He’s dead, Mr. Gentry.”

Gentry sagged against the door and his shoulders slumped. “Ah, Christ. I didn’t... I mean, I just thought you were... the guy...” He shook his head. “Look, I was mad, but I wasn’t that mad. You know? If I’m going to kill anyone, I got plenty of other people higher on the list than that guy. He was a nuisance, but that’s it.”

Riley nodded. She decided the man’s gruff demeanor was due to a lack of sleep and gave him a pass. “I understand, Mr. Gentry. I’m sorry I disturbed you. Thank you for your time.”

“Yeah, sure.”

When Riley got to the street, she tried to picture it at night. She had seen the Crier at work enough to picture him strutting down the middle of the street ringing his bell. She remembered how many times he had irritated her with that ‘all is well’ spiel. What was well? Just a block away, store owners were paying protection money to drug dealers who were using the money to bribe cops to look the other way while they slowly destroyed the neighborhood. What was ‘well’ about that?

She remembered one of the complaints she'd responded to when she was a patrol cop. A woman called in crying, and said the Crier woke her up. "And on top of waking me," the woman said, "the motherfucker is lying."

Riley stopped at a diner to have lunch before returning to the station. Her desk upstairs beckoned, but instead she traveled down to the morgue. Most cops tried to avoid the long, sterile corridors, but Riley had never minded it much. It was peaceful, ordered. She was sure the presence of Gillian Hunt helped her appreciate the morgue's fine points, but she had liked the place even before they started dating.

The main autopsy theatre was a long, narrow room with five steel beds running down the middle. Gillian's office was at the far end, its light reflecting off the cold storage drawers. Riley went through the swinging doors and saw Gillian hunched over a corpse, one of her guests. Riley crossed the room and put her hand in the small of Gillian's back, pushing her hand up along her spine until Gillian straightened. "You'll develop a stoop."

"Not if you keep rubbing out my kinks." Gillian straightened, her face concealed behind goggles and a surgical mask. Since Gillian's mask precluded a kiss, Riley settled for squeezing the back of Gillian's neck in a gentle massage.

Riley gestured at the body. "What have you found out, Jill?"

"They hadn't been dead long before they were found. I figure less than an hour."

"We got a complaint from someone on Downing Street at four-fifteen. I think the Crier boarded the train about fifteen minutes later." She shook her head. "I don't understand why. He walked everywhere. Why did he suddenly decide to take the train?"

Gillian shook her head. "No idea. The other guy, Keith Wakefield. Typical high school honor student with a drug habit. We have track marks all over, some healed and some new. I figure there was a break somewhere in the middle of a rehab or two. Didn't stick. He had drugs in him when he died."

“At least he died with a buzz on,” Riley muttered.

“His parents have been contacted. They’re coming down to identify the body.”

“Do I need to be here for that?”

Gillian said, “No. I’ll let you know if they say it’s not him, but the driver’s license picture doesn’t lie.”

Riley nodded. “Okay. I’m going to see if I can find anything to connect him with the Crier. Maybe they were meeting on the train for a reason.”

Gillian tilted her head and pushed a stray hair away from her face. “You think maybe the Crier bought or provided drugs to Wakefield?”

“I hope not. The Crier was the only person in this town with a consistently positive outlook. I’d hate to think it was just because he was stoned out of his mind.”

There was an Asian man sitting at Riley’s desk when she finally made it upstairs. He was leaning forward, elbows on his knees, a baseball cap hooked on long knobby fingers. Riley approached from a direction where he would be sure to see her. He straightened as she approached and she said, “I’m Detective Parra. Can I help you?”

He rose and tucked the cap into the back pocket of his jeans. “Oh. I was expectin’...” He shook his head. “I’m Joshua Ly. I was running the train where those two... the men were, ah... Thank you for letting me put this off until the end of my shift.”

“No problem, Mr. Ly. Please, sit down.” He reclaimed his seat and Riley sat as well. “Did you have any idea what had happened on your train this morning?”

“Not until that fella came running and banging on the door. I thought he was a nutcase or something, but sure enough...” He exhaled sharply and shook his head. “For the record, I wanted to stop and give you all some time to work. But the boss told me I couldn’t hold up a bunch of people who needed to get where they were going...”

Riley held up a hand to stop him. "It's all right. It all worked out." She found the case file lying in her inbox and opened it to find pictures of the two victims. *Thank you, Jill*. She turned the file around so Ly could see them. "Did either of the victims ride your train regularly?"

Ly looked at the pictures. "I don't get to see the passengers very often, understand. And even if I do, I'm not very good with faces." He pointed at the Crier and said, "Him, though. I remember him because of his hat and that little bell. He was always standing in the station with a big goofy smile on his face. He acted like he was coming home from a day at the office, only he loved his job. Unlike a lot of people I pick up."

Riley nodded. "But you've never seen the Wakefield boy before?"

Ly shook his head. "Couldn't say either way. He looks like a lot of kids who ride the train down to the bad parts of town in the middle of the night, you know? Strung out, eager for a fix. I think the first time they just want a thrill, or something, but pretty soon they can't stop. Then they're stuck."

Riley knew the story all too well. "How many other passengers got onto the train at the Lory Street station last night?"

"Just that young fella with the bell. He was all alone on the platform, because I remember seeing him wave his bell when I rolled up. If someone else had been there, they'd have told him to stop. Or tried to force him to."

"Right," Riley said. "How many other passengers were riding the train this morning?"

Ly rubbed his chin. "Less than half a dozen, but that's all I can say for sure. That time of night I'm half asleep myself, you know."

Riley leaned forward. "Yeah, I know. How did you feel about the Crier? The young guy with the bell."

Ly looked down at the picture and sighed. He shook his head sadly. "He was all right. Wasn't hurting anybody. Kept

quiet on the train, so that's all I cared about, really. It's going to be strange not seeing him anymore."

"So he rode the train every night? Where would he usually get off?"

"Um... he always got off at the same place. The Green Street station."

Riley looked down at her desk blotter. Why did that name sound so familiar? She went through the pages of the file one at a time, aware that Ly was staring at her. Then she found it. Keith Wakefield lived with his parents at 3144 Green Street. It could have been a coincidence; it made sense they were going to the same place seeing as they were both on the same train at the same time. The fact they were both murdered, however, made it seem like a very important clue.

"Do you remember where Keith Wakefield got on the train? Which station?"

"He got on at the station right after Mister... um..."

"Cabrera," Riley provided.

Ly nodded. "It's about an hour from Lory Street to Green. I was about to pull into the Green Street station when the guy who found 'em came and started making a ruckus." He looked down at the pictures. "It's a shame."

"What?"

"Nothing," Mr. Ly said. "It just... it seems so wrong."

Riley nodded and picked the photos up again. "Yeah. It does."

Three

Riley considered going down to the morgue to question Wakefield's parents, but she didn't want to intrude on their mourning. She decided the conversation could wait until the morning. She transcribed her notes from the door to door interviews, as well as the talk she had with Joshua Ly. By the time she finished, it was nearly five o'clock. Officially quitting time in some jurisdictions, and close enough for her.

She shut down her computer and took her coat off the back of her chair. As she was heading for the stairs, Hathaway came out of her office. "Parra."

"Just on my way out, boss. Can it wait?"

"Priest will be here tomorrow."

"I'll be sure to have a nice long list of confessions for him."

Hathaway rolled her eyes. "Caitlin Priest. Your new partner."

Riley shook her head. "I'm in the middle of a case. I can't just catch some newbie up on—"

Hathaway interrupted with a swift cut of her hand. "She's just going to be support on this one. She'll do all the heavy lifting, or any footwork you need done. It'll give you a chance to see what she's good at. And it'll give you both a chance to feel each other out before your lives are on the line. You're getting a new partner, Parra. Deal with it."

Riley sighed and held her hands up in surrender. She went downstairs and took a detour to check in with Gillian. The main hall was dark and the morgue glowed like a beacon at the end of the hall. Riley pushed through the swinging doors and eyed the empty tables in the middle of the room. Jon Bon

Jovi was singing in Gillian's office, announcing that he was a cowboy riding on a steel horse. Riley stepped into the doorway and admired Gillian for a moment. Her hair was coming loose from the black-and-brown catch, wisps hanging down in her face as she signed a report. Her feet were crossed at the ankles, toes of her sneakers pointed toward the ground under her chair. Riley announced herself by singing along with the end of the chorus. "I'm wanted, dead or alive."

"Dead or ali-ive," Gillian agreed. She leaned back in her chair and laced her fingers over her stomach. "Hey, Detective. Heading home already?"

"Yep. We convinced all the murderers to start keeping banker hours. How about you? I noticed all your customers were safely stored."

Gillian nodded. "Yeah, but I still have a lot of paperwork to do. I've probably got another hour here. You go ahead, I'll catch up."

Riley hesitated. "That's all right. I could hang out here for a bit..."

Gillian chuckled and pushed away from the desk. She stood up and put her hands on Riley's hips, lifting one white sneaker to push the door close behind her. "Honey, I know you still feel awkward being alone in my apartment. But you've been out of the hospital for a week. I know you don't want to go home because of... well, you know. And I'm happy to have you there. But you need to get used to thinking of it as home."

"It's just a mental block."

Gillian said, "I understand. But your only other option is to go back to the apartment where demons blew up your bed."

Riley smiled and put her hands in the small of Gillian's back. "Live with you, or risk getting killed by demons. Is there a third choice?"

"Nope. Pick up some Chinese on the way home. I'll be there soon." She leaned in and brushed Riley's lips with hers, their hips pressed together.

Riley ran her hands over Gillian's back and was very aware that she was only wearing a black T-shirt under her scrub top, and a pair of very thin panties under the bottoms. Riley broke the kiss and said, "We could have sex on your desk..."

Gillian moved her hands to Riley's belt and kissed her neck. "Mm, then I would be running even later. And what I have planned for tonight may have to be delayed."

"You have plans for tonight? Am I involved in these plans?"

"You're a main character," Gillian promised. She slid her hands lower and squeezed Riley's ass before pulling out of the hug. "Go on. You'll be fine."

Riley sighed and opened the door to the office. "Chinese?"

"Yeah. You know what I like."

"Well, I hope so," Riley said. "See you later."

Riley rode the elevator down to the parking garage, surprised to see the janitor had, in fact, changed the light bulb. When she stepped out into the concrete maze of the garage, she regretted putting her jacket on. The night was clammy, residual heat of the day rising from the asphalt and turning the garage into a giant oven. She moved quickly toward her car, already imagining the blissful air conditioning. As she moved, she spotted a man out of the corner of her eye. He was leaning against one of the concrete pillars, arms crossed over his chest, the picture of innocence.

Riley didn't want to overreact and draw her gun, but she swung her key ring around and pinched the longest key between her index and middle finger. She faked a sigh, rolled her shoulders, and flipped her head as if to get the hair out of her eyes. She took the chance to get a closer look at him. He was tall, blonde, fair-skinned, and was already moving toward her. Riley ignored him until he was within arms reach.

"Detective Parra?" he said, reaching out for her shoulder.

His hand never landed. Riley rolled forward on the balls of her feet, spinning at the waist. She brought her fist up and punched the man in the wrist, the key digging into the soft flesh below the heel of his hand. His face twisted into a

grimace of pain, and he shouted as he twisted the key against the raw flesh. Riley shifted her weight to her left foot and swung her right leg around to sweep his feet out from underneath him. Riley pulled her hand back and pushed him to the ground, a knee planted in the middle of his chest, her gun aimed at the center of his forehead. “What was the plan, asshole?” she asked.

The man’s eyes crossed trying to keep the barrel of the gun in his sight. “I just... wanted to speak with you.”

“Quite the conversation starter, isn’t it?” she said, gesturing with the gun. “Gets right to the point, and it can end the conversation very quickly if I don’t like what you have to say.”

“I am the one who felled Samael.”

Riley flinched. She rose off his chest, lowering the gun but not holstering it. “What do you mean?”

“I am Raguel. It was my responsibility to—”

“You’re another angel and you smacked down the bad seed.”

“I am the vengeance of the Lord,” Raguel said. “It’s my duty to strike down those who break God’s laws. Samael transgressed and I dealt with him appropriately.”

Riley said, “So he’s dead?”

“No. He is Fallen.”

Riley finally holstered her gun. Whether Raguel was an angel or a demon, regular bullets weren’t going to have any effect on him. “Stand up,” she said. He got to his feet, and she saw a hint of feathers underneath his long jacket. “Is everyone who wears one of these coats an angel?”

“Not necessarily. Not all angels like the fashion statement it makes.”

Riley sighed and walked toward her car, letting him follow her if he wished. “So. Samael isn’t dead. Are you here to warn me he’s gunning for me?”

“No.”

She unlocked the car and pointed to the passenger side door. "Get in if you're getting in."

Raguel opened the door and peered inside. There were files and papers all over the passenger seat. Riley grabbed them and dumped them in the backseat. "I have some catching up to do. Recuperation is a bitch."

"Yes. How is your side?"

"Why are you here, Rags?"

Raguel sighed and shifted in his seat. Wings obviously weren't conducive to sitting. "I am here to tell you that you will not be alone in protecting this city."

"You going to step up?"

"No. Zerachiel will be taking Samael's place."

Riley rolled her eyes. "You guys seriously need to think about rebranding yourselves. Normal names. Regular, every day person names."

"Like Parra?"

"That's like Smith compared to you guys. All right. Zerachiel. When will I meet him?"

Raguel looked at her. "What makes you think the two of you will meet? You could have gone your entire life without meeting Samael. The only reason he showed himself was in an attempt to deceive you. All you have to know is that you haven't been abandoned, Riley Parra. You're not alone."

Surprisingly, Riley found herself relieved by that. She sighed and said, "All right. Thanks for the heads up, Rags. Can I drop you somewhere?"

He smiled. "No. I have my own means of transportation."

Riley watched as he got out of the car. He walked across the garage, weaving between the concrete pylons until, finally, Riley lost sight of him. "Nice to know I'll have back-up," she muttered. She started the engine and said, "Maybe you could send him a partner. Get me off the hook. Think about it. Get

back to me.” She sighed and tried to remember where the closest Chinese take-out was.

Riley hated the Happy Panda Restaurant, but it was on her way to Gillian’s, cheap, and the food was decent. She waited in the red and gold atrium, staring at the red-topped candy dispensing machines as the clerk got her food. Only a handful of customers filled tables near the back of the restaurant, and the blinds over the window were cockeyed and twisted around themselves. It was hardly four-star dining.

The waiter, an emaciated Chinese man in a white tuxedo shirt and a black bow tie, carried the brown paper bag with her order out from the kitchen. The smile was pasted on his face, his eyebrows raised in a permanent expression of hope. He placed the bag next to the cash register and Riley paid him.

Outside, the businesses all around the Happy Panda were shut down, windows boarded over and doors standing askew. Riley put the food in the passenger seat, securing it with the seatbelt, and drove out to Gillian’s apartment building. She could actually track the neighborhoods getting better, the chain link fences stopped sagging, the cracked sidewalks mended, and the streetlights were mostly lit. It was like watching a time-lapse video in reverse.

Riley parked in front of the building and carried the food upstairs. It was still difficult to walk up the stairs without remembering her first trip up them, bleeding from a multitude of wounds, sure she was about to die. She ignored the painful memories and used the temporary key Gillian had given her to unlock the apartment door.

She left the food on the kitchen counter and quickly went through every room in the apartment. She made sure all the windows were secure, that there was no lingering scent of sulfur on the drapes, and that none of the furniture had mysteriously burst into flames since the last time she had been there. Finding everything in place, she divided the food into two bowls. She placed one bowl in the microwave and carried the other into the living room.

The nature of their jobs meant that she and Gillian would often be eating dinner separately, so they made a pact that neither had to wait for the other to eat. Neither of them liked the idea of the other one starving because she had paperwork. Riley began to eat, but she planned to save her egg roll until Gillian was there. It was technically breaking the rules, but that didn't matter.

She sat on the couch and put the food on the coffee table, looking over the newspaper as she ate. She read the stories differently after her encounter with Marchosias in No Man's Land. She connected the dots, stunned to find that most of the crime in the city could be linked back to him in some way. A crime boss named Dupre was well-known by the police, but Riley could now see the puppet strings connected to his arms. According to the paper, he was connected to a bribery scandal that got the last mayor kicked out of office. Unfortunately, there was no way to connect him to anything criminal.

"What else is new," Riley muttered, and flipped the page. She skimmed the terrible and depressing stories, made herself even more depressed realizing how many smaller stories never made it into the paper, and forced herself to continue. She found a brief article about the two men found shot on the train, but no details were available to the press at the time. Riley was glad for that; the one good thing about being a cop in this hellhole of a town was that they seemed to have the press reigned in pretty tight.

She plucked at the rice with her chopsticks and thought about Wakefield and the Crier. Two completely different kids from two completely different backgrounds, ended up on the same train at the same time, both of them most likely trying to go home. Then someone showed up with a gun and ended them both. But which had been the target? She supposed she had to consider the possibility that neither was the target; random joy-killings weren't unheard of in that part of town. Maybe it was just a gang initiation. Two bodies were double points, for all she knew.

Riley heard the key in the lock and checked her watch. By the time Gillian got inside, Riley was on her way into the kitchen. "Hey, you're early."

"I couldn't bear the thought of you sitting all alone in my apartment," Gillian said.

Riley retrieved Gillian's dinner from the microwave and brought it out to her. Gillian took the bowl and kissed Riley hello. They let the kiss linger, pressing against each other now that they didn't have to worry about someone seeing them. "Did you get the sauce?"

"Yeah," Riley said. She took some sauce from the bag and handed it over as they sat next to each other on the couch. Gillian looked over the newspaper, and Riley looked over Gillian. She hadn't bothered to change out of her scrubs before coming home, and her chestnut-colored hair was hanging sloppy from three different ponytails. Riley slid her hand under the loose strands, cupping her hand over the back of Gillian's neck.

Gillian's eyes closed and she moved her body with each squeeze of Riley's fingers. "Mm. You're going to have to stop that."

Riley leaned in and kissed Gillian's neck. "Make me."

Gillian shivered and put her bowl down on the coffee table. She turned to face Riley, pulling her close. Riley shifted on the couch, pushing her weight against Gillian to make her lie down. Gillian brought one leg up and onto the couch, giving Riley a chance to slip between her legs. Their lips met, and Riley slipped her hands under Gillian's scrub top. Gillian bent her leg and pressed her thigh upward.

They assaulted each other for a long moment before Gillian began working the buttons of Riley's top. She gasped as Riley's hands cupped her breasts through her bra, then slid down over her stomach. "Riley," Gillian whispered. Riley pushed one hand under the waistband of Gillian's scrub pants, over her underwear and between her legs.

Gillian moved her head to Riley's neck and began to suck, lick and bite, moving against Riley's hand while pressing her thigh harder between Riley's legs. Soon, they were both panting against each other's shoulders, Riley biting her lip to keep from shouting out. Gillian came with a quiet, "Riley,

now,” and Riley slipped her wet fingers free. They kissed, and Riley pushed her tongue into Gillian’s mouth.

A moment later, the kiss broke and Gillian said, “Ugh, sweet and sour pork...”

Riley laughed and licked Gillian’s cheek, gripping her hips for balance as she began to rock hard against her. “Come for me,” Gillian whispered, her hair mussed and crossing her eyes like a veil. Riley’s toes curled inside her shoes as she arched her back and did as Gillian commanded. She swallowed her cries, the veins in her throat throbbing madly.

Riley finally collapsed and kissed Gillian’s lips again. Gillian flipped them so that Riley was on the bottom, pinning her to the mattress. “There,” Gillian said, sweeping her hair out of her face with the back of her hand. “May I please eat my dinner now?”

“No,” Riley said. “But I can feed it to you.” She stretched one arm out, plucked a piece of chicken from the bowl, and held it out.

Gillian wrapped smiling lips around Riley’s fingers and plucked the chicken free with her teeth. She chewed thoughtfully, then said, “Hm. There’s a peculiar aftertaste to this particular batch...”

Riley realized which hand she had used to offer the food. “Oh, damn,” she chuckled. “Sorry.”

“Don’t be,” Gillian said. She sucked the excess sauce from Riley’s thumb and said, “I think I have a new favorite dipping sauce. Of course, I can think of a sauce I would like better...” She slid her hand down Riley’s body and cupped her between her legs.

Riley wriggled against the cushions and kissed Gillian as she was stroked. She cupped the sides of Gillian’s head and tried to think of the last time she had felt happier, or more fulfilled. With Gillian, she could face demons or angels or whatever Hell threw at her.

FOUR

Riley woke the next morning with a renewed belief that sleeping on the couch was a very bad idea. Gillian was exhausted, and went to bed before the late news ended. Riley wanted to stay up for a little while longer and get lost in the idiot box. Unfortunately, she hadn't lasted very long. She grunted as she sat up, putting both hands in the small of her back and stretching her tired muscles back into their usual shape.

She searched the living room for Gillian, and then noticed the sound of running water in the bathroom. She had just enough time to think about water conservation when her cell phone chirped. She sighed. "Naturally." She flipped the phone open without checking the Caller ID. "Detective Parra."

"Detective. Did I wake you?" Riley groaned. Lieutenant Hathaway was not the person she wanted to hear first thing in the morning.

"No, I was up," Riley said. "What's going on?"

"Keith Wakefield's parents are here. They want to speak to you about their son's murder."

"Great," Riley said, quickly waking up. "I want to talk to them, too. Are they in the office?" She reached down and hooked her fingers in her shoes, pulling them closer.

"Waiting at your desk as we speak."

"Give me twenty minutes."

She hung up and went into the bedroom to make a quick change of clothes. She glanced at the closed bathroom door and wondered if she could resist temptation long enough to bathe. The mental image of Gillian's naked body under the

flow of warm water was enough to convince her that she wouldn't be able to restrain herself. She changed out of her day-old outfit, threw on the first clothes she found, and slipped into the bathroom.

The mirror was steamed, so she wrote her note there. "Had to go in to work. I'll see you there, or later. XO. Riley."

She frowned at the "XO." She had never done anything like that, such a high school thing. But she couldn't wipe it away without being obvious. So instead, she slipped out of the bathroom and hoped Gillian wouldn't hold it against her.

She drove to the station and parked in the garage. There were no angels waiting to ambush her, and she reached the elevator without incident. When the elevator doors parted, she saw Hathaway standing at her desk. The lieutenant frowned, checked her watch, and said, "You couldn't possibly have made it here from your apartment so quickly."

"You're right," Riley said. "The parents waiting at my desk?"

"I moved them to interrogation room two, actually," Hathaway said, falling into step next to Riley. She headed off Riley's shocked look. "It was their choice. They didn't want to spend anymore time than necessary 'surrounded by the dregs of society.'"

"I thought Talbot had the day off."

"Ha," Hathaway said. She said, "Be nice to them, Riley."

Riley knocked on the interrogation room door before she slipped inside. Keith Wakefield's father was a large man, broad in the shoulders and tapered at the waist. His hair was cut in a military style, his eyes blue and fierce. The mother was just as intimidating, blouse perfectly ironed and bright white hair cut short. Riley was suddenly extremely aware of how badly she had to reek.

"Mr. and Mrs. Wakefield? I'm Riley Parra. I'm the detective investigating your son's death."

Mr. Wakefield stood and extended a hand. "Eugene. This is my wife, Hattie. I want to apologize for the trouble our boy has caused you."

Riley hesitated before lowering herself into the seat. "Trouble...? Did Lieutenant Hathaway explain..."

"She explained everything quite clearly," Hattie Wakefield said. "Our son was involved in a criminal enterprise. It got him and some other young man killed yesterday morning. It's hardly worth your time."

Riley was stunned. She noted on to the mother's way of speaking and said, "I take it you're military."

"Both of us," Eugene said. "It's where we met."

Riley nodded. "And Keith didn't quite live up to the doctrine."

Hattie sighed as if this was a conversation she'd had many times before and didn't quite enjoy it. "Don't misunderstand. We loved our son. We gave him every opportunity. He chose to squander it for a life of drugs and thievery."

"Right," Riley said. "I just want to find out who killed your son and Steven Cabrera—"

"Who?"

"The man who was found with your son's body."

Eugene nodded. "Oh. The homeless man. Forgive me for asking, Detective Parra, but... who cares? I know that sounds incredibly harsh, but who does care that one homeless man has been removed from the world? He was a bit of a public nuisance, if what I'm told is correct."

Riley stared at him. She couldn't believe how callous he was being. "The man was a human being. He deserved to be treated with respect in life and in death. Sir, you and your wife have basically told me your son didn't deserve to live and the other victim wasn't worthy of being considered human." She decided she was done playing nice with the family. "Mr. Wakefield, I assume you own a gun?"

He narrowed his eyes at her. "What does that—"

"Where were you yesterday morning between 4:30 and 5:30?"

Eugene leaned back in his chair and placed his hands on the table. "I did not kill my son."

"Sir, please just answer the question."

"I was jogging. I wake up every morning at five and jog. My wife exercises in the house using one of those video things. I didn't get home until six, so I guess neither one of us has an alibi for you."

"Pity," Riley said. "You never said, sir. Do you own a gun?"

"Yes, I do. I own nine," Eugene snapped. "I just told you, I'm military, you sanctimonious bitch. I ought to..."

Riley raised an eyebrow. She gathered her papers and pushed away from the table. "Mr. and Mrs. Wakefield, it's been a soul-sucking experience speaking with you. Don't leave town. A uniformed officer will accompany you home to examine your weapons. Thank you for waiting for me so we could have this chat."

"Now just wait a damn—"

Riley was out of the room before Eugene Wakefield could say anything else. She slammed the door behind her and nearly collided with a blonde woman lurking outside the room. Riley backpedaled and said, "Watch where you're standing, damn it."

The woman was a few inches taller than Riley, blonde hair cut short. She wore a gray vest over white dress shirt and red tie. "Detective Parra, I presume?" she said.

"I don't talk to reporters," Riley muttered, trying to push past the woman.

"That's a good philosophy. I don't talk to them either."

"Glad we're..." Riley stopped walking and hung her head. "Oh, shit, no."

"Caitlin Priest. I'm your new partner."

Riley turned and examined the woman more closely. She was not much older than thirty, with clear skin and bright blue eyes. She looked eager to please, but there was a

hardness in her eyes that told Riley she'd taken her punches. Based on the first impression, she decided that working with Priest might not be a total disaster. Still, anyone trying to replace Sweet Kara was bound to be a disappointment. She sighed. "Riley Parra. I drive, except in the case of an extreme emergency. Like I have broken arms and my legs don't work. Or if I get shot in the head with a nail gun."

"Does that happen often?"

"Lately, I wouldn't be surprised," Riley said. She started toward her desk. "What do I call you? Kate? Caitlin? If you say Katie, I'll shoot you right now."

"Priest is fine."

Riley pointed at the desk that was once occupied by Kara Sweet. "That's where you sit. But not right now. I need you to take Mr. and Mrs. Wakefield home. Get a uniform and a crime scene tech to gather any and all handguns you find."

"Do we have a warrant?"

"Hm," Riley said. "They never mentioned we would need one."

Priest raised an eyebrow. "Ah, so that's how things work."

"Don't get into the habit of that. Rules aren't made to be broken," Riley said. "Unless they need to be bent. Those people really pissed me off."

"Gotcha." Priest sketched off a salute and headed to the interrogation room.

Riley watched her go and shook her head as she examined the memos on her desk. A case she'd been working for almost six months had been closed by another detective whose case overlapped with it. Fine by her, one less open case on her books. There was a call from a law firm regarding Marchosias' stronghold in No Man's Land. It was the place Riley had nearly died twice, and the last place she'd seen Samael. She was hoping for an owner's name, some link she could follow back. Unfortunately, the lawyers claimed the building was condemned and, as far as they knew, unoccupied.

She tossed the memos aside as Hathaway approached the desk. "Did she find you?"

"I hate her."

"Sweet Kara hated you when you first met."

Riley shook her head. "I don't need a partner, Lieutenant."

"And I say you do," Hathaway said. "Do you know why that's such a good argument? Because I'm the boss and you can't punch me."

"Anything's possible to those willing to face the consequences," Riley muttered as Hathaway walked back to her office.

While Priest took care of the Wakefield weapons, Riley decided to do a little investigation of the Crier. She did a computer search for any and all reports filed on Steven Cabrera. The first mention of him in their records was six years earlier, when he would have been nineteen. He was brought into the station on a public nuisance charge. The arresting officer let him sit in a jail cell overnight and let him go in the morning with a stern warning.

A few days later, there was another complaint filed and another officer went to quiet him down. It took a few weeks before it became evident nothing they did would dissuade him, so the cops started the tradition of sitting him down and getting him a hot meal. Riley leaned back in her chair and spotted Talbot a few desks away. "Hey, Talbot. Did you ever pick up the Crier?"

"Couple of times when I was in uniform," Talbot said, not looking up from his work.

"What was your impression of him?"

Talbot shrugged. "I don't know. He was a loony. But he was polite and kind. And clean. He never threw up in my cruiser." He leaned back in his chair. "Kind of sad he's gone. Haven't thought about him in ages."

"Yeah," Riley said. "Me either."

She ran her thumb over her bottom lip and stared at the list of complaints. There were hundreds of them, people disturbed by the Crier and wondering what the cops were going to do about it. She wondered why he kept doing it. What possible good did it do to walk the streets and say all was well? Even the most self-delusional citizen knew the best days of the city were behind them.

Of course, she was one to talk. She saw angels and grappled with demons.

She also wondered how many thousands of dollars had been spent feeding the poor kid. Riley herself had sat down across from him countless times. She and her partner both appreciated the break in the shift, and they could fool themselves into thinking they were actually helping someone. Prison would break the Crier, not help him. It was half an hour out of the day, and a couple of dollars every couple of shifts. It was the least they could do.

She remembered their breakfasts together. She would sip a cup of coffee while the Crier told her about things he read in the paper and in history books. She had always nodded and pretended to pay attention, but mostly she spent the time looking out the window or listening for a call to come in over the radio. She wished she had treated him better.

She figured she could make up for it now, by finding out who had murdered him. She still didn't know which victim was the intended target. Once was a nuisance and the other was a disgrace. Had a drug dealer come after Wakefield and decided to get rid of the only witness? Or had someone decided enough was enough and silenced the Crier for good?

Riley rubbed her face and rested her elbows on the edge of the desk.

Where was the bell?

She opened her eyes and looked at the top of her desk. The Crier's bell was missing. He always carried a little hand bell that barely made a 'tink' sound, but he waved it like it was the Liberty Bell. He was never without it, at least when he was on his rounds. If Wakefield had been the target, why would the

killer have taken the bell? Riley was about to call the crime scene unit to see if they found any sign of the bell in the Crier's personal effects when her phone rang.

"Parra."

"Riley, it's Gillian. I need you to come down here. There's something interesting with the Crier's body."

Riley was out of her seat before the phone was completely in the cradle. First one clue dropped into her lap, maybe there was a chance Gillian was going to offer her a second one. Maybe she was going to be able to close this case after all.

The elevator seemed impossibly slow, but she finally arrived in the morgue. Gillian wore her scrubs, as usual, and a crisp blue apron over it. The Crier lay naked on one of her tables, a sheet draped over his midsection. He was much heavier than Riley would have guessed, and his torso was almost pink compared to the brown of his arms. Riley pulled on a pair of rubber gloves and said, "Tell me you found something good."

"I'll let you be the judge of that," Gillian said. She stepped to the side and pointed at the body. "Do you see anything right there?"

Riley leaned in. "Where?"

Gillian stepped close, pressing against Riley's side. She aimed her finger at the body again, this time resting her arm on Riley's shoulder. "There."

Riley turned her head slightly, breathing in Gillian's scent. "I'm not sure I see it. Maybe you should come closer."

Gillian did a poor job concealing her smile. Her free hand came up and swatted Riley's hip. "Murder investigation," she whispered.

"Right," Riley whispered. She looked back at the body and focused. She saw a splotch of red on the Crier's throat. "Blood spatter."

"That's what I thought. It's consistent with the wound," she said, pulling away from Riley and going to the top of the bed.

She lifted the shirt the Crier had been wearing. “But you’ll see there’s no blood anywhere near the collar.”

“So he was hunched forward, trying to protect himself.”

Gillian shook her head. “The blood was odd enough, and I’m curious enough, that I took a sample. It’s not the Crier’s DNA.”

“Wakefield’s?” Riley asked, but she knew Gillian wouldn’t call her down here for anything less than amazing.

“No. Wakefield and the Crier were the same blood type. AB. This blood came from someone who was A-positive. I looked at Wakefield’s clothes and, surprise, surprise, the same blood was on the cuffs of his shirtsleeves.” She looked down at the body. “I think they were both at another crime scene that night.”

F i v e

Riley drew a diagram of the train car on her pad, staring at it and waiting for inspiration to strike. She had every detail marked; bits of trash, each individual bucket seat. She drew an X where the murderer had to have stood. She couldn't picture someone walking onto the train, pulling a gun, and killing Keith Wakefield and Steven Cabrera in cold blood. Neither had put up a fight. Neither had tried to run.

Caitlin Priest returned and stood next to the desk for a long minute. Riley was aware of her presence, but refused to break her silence. Finally, Priest gave up and went to Sweet Kara's old desk. "Gathered up all the Wakefield's guns. Only two of them matched the bullets Dr. Hunt took out of our victims. What have you been up to?"

"Trying to figure this shit out," Riley said. She turned the pad around and held it out to Priest. "Here. See if you can make any sense of this."

Priest took the pad and looked over it. "So what do I call *you*? Parra? Or just Riley? Calling you Detective might get a little old, but I'm willing to give it a try."

"Riley's fine," she muttered. She rested her chin on her hand and tried to fit all the pieces of the puzzle together in her head. "I still don't understand the bell being taken."

"Bell?"

"The Crier always carried a bell. When we used to take him into diners to keep him off the streets, he treated the thing like it was alive. It was a treasure to him. But there was no bell on him or in the train car when he was found. Why the hell would someone take it?"

"Maybe it was an antique?"

“It was a shitty little thrift shop bell. It barely even made a sound.” Riley sighed and rubbed her eyes. “He had eighteen dollars in his wallet. If it was a robbery, why not take that?”

Priest pointed at the drawing. “Why did the other one sit there?”

“Sit where?”

Priest turned the pad around to show her. “They’re sitting across from each other. They both died where they sat. So someone shot one of the guys, and then turned around and shot the other one. Whoever was shot second had to sit there while the other guy got killed.”

Riley sat up and frowned at the diagram. She supposed the killer could have stood between the victims, a gun in each hand, and shot them at the same time. But this wasn’t some cheesy action movie. Someone quick enough could have done it. Pop, spin around, pop. If the Wakefield kid was the second victim, his reflexes may have been slowed by too many drugs. If the Crier was the second victim, he may not have realized his life was in danger until it was too late to move.

“That still doesn’t explain the fucking bell being gone.”

“Maybe the kid dropped it.”

“He’s the Crier. He treated that bell like it was the most precious thing in the world.” Her phone rang and she answered it with a sigh. “Parra.”

“Detective. We found Steven Cabrera’s mother.”

Riley grabbed a pen. “It’s about time. Where does she live?”

“I’ve got an address here,” the officer said, “but it looks like no one’s been there in a long time. I finally got a-hold of the landlord. He recognized the picture from Cabrera’s wallet, and he told me where I could find Mrs. Cabrera.”

“If you say the name of a cemetery, I swear to God...”

“No, not a cemetery,” the officer said. “Close.”

Riley sighed and braced herself for bad news.

*

Riley was surprised it had taken so long to find the family, but the surprise diminished when she was introduced to the mother. She looked ancient, but Riley knew she couldn't have been more than fifty. Her clothes looked like they hadn't been laundered in quite a while, her face devoid of make-up. The lights of the hospital room didn't do her any favors, but Riley knew the woman was having a tough decade.

Riley tried to avoid looking at the man in the bed between them; he wasn't easy to look at. "I take it you weren't home when the officers did the canvas," she said.

"I haven't been 'home' for about a week, Detective," Ana Cabrera said. "And our real home... well, it's been even longer. A lifetime." She looked at the man lying in the bed between them. "Since Ernesto's accident, I've been here as often as possible."

Riley nodded and suppressed a shiver. She'd had her fill of hospitals in the past few weeks. She waited until Steven's mother pushed herself out of the seat and said, "It's about time for me to do my walk. I need to get up and move around a bit every day so these old joints don't lock up on me. We can talk and walk at the same time, can't we?"

"Of course."

Ana slipped past Riley, and Riley looked at the young man lying in bed. She guessed he was a few years younger than Steven, tubes running in and out of his body in every possible place. According to the doctor's, he hadn't moved in almost seven years. His friend had been driving and the car went off the road, wrapped around a tree. The driver died, but Ernesto Cabrera had been thrown into a coma. It wasn't long after that the first nuisance calls started coming in, and the Crier was born.

Riley turned and followed Ana into the corridor. "I'm sorry to be the one to tell you about Steven, Mrs. Cabrera."

She shook her head. "I knew. When he didn't come back to the hospital yesterday, I knew. I've just been dreading the news." She exhaled a shaky breath and said, "But murdered. I never would have... I never imagined."

"He must have really loved his brother."

Ana laughed. "They were inseparable. After the accident, Steven was despondent for so long. I don't know what finally pulled him out of his funk, but he found a way to get out of his bedroom. That's all I cared about at the time. Then police officers started bringing him home." She sighed. "His whole deal was wishful thinking. He just wanted to believe that if he *said* everything was all right, then maybe it would be. And though the people who complained might not want to admit it, whenever they heard him outside, they would know they were safe. That if a robber was outside, or a murderer, or a rapist, they would have either shut him up or ran away. My boy was a laughingstock, I know, but he did help people. Even if no one is willing to admit it."

Riley nodded. "I answered a few calls about your son myself. He was a good kid. I liked him a lot. I... was under the impression he was homeless."

Ana sniffled and dabbed at her eyes with a Kleenex. "Yes, I suppose he was. Ernesto's bills are astronomical. We lost the apartment and both cars. I found a tiny apartment where I could stay, but there was only one bedroom. There was hardly enough room for one person to live, let alone two. Steven told me it was all right, said he had a place to stay. I knew he was lying, but I couldn't..." She shook her head.

"It's all right, Mrs. Cabrera."

"No, it's not all right! I gave up everything for one of my sons while I ignored the other. I lived in a shoebox to pay for this son's bed, while my other son slept on a train every night. That's not a good mother." Fresh tears rolled down her face. "I should have let Ernesto go."

Riley wasn't listening to Ana anymore. She stopped and put a hand on Ana's shoulder. "Steven slept on the train?"

“In the last car. The train hardly ever filled up, so he didn’t get disturbed very often.”

Riley thought back to the diagram. Maybe someone shot Wakefield, and the noise woke the Crier up. He sat up, confused and disoriented, and the shooter killed him. That explained the shooting order; Wakefield had to have been the intended victim and the Crier was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. But if that was true...

“Why did Mr. Ly say that Steven always got off the train at the Green Street station?”

Ana lifted her head and stared at Riley. “Did you just say ‘Mystery’?”

“No. The engineer of the train was Mr. Joshua Ly.”

“Detective, my son was terrified of someone named... someone I *thought* he was calling Mystery. He said the man harassed him. Called him a vagrant, tried to kick him off the train all the time. I just thought it was a made-up person. But if...”

Riley was already nodding. “I think I’m going to be having another talk with Mr. Ly very soon, Mrs. Cabrera.”

When Riley got back to her car, she called Priest. “I need you to do something for me.”

“Anything, boss. I live to serve.”

Riley ignored the jab. “There’s a number on my desk blotter for a Joshua Ly. He’s the conductor of the train where the two men were shot yesterday morning. When I hang up, I want you to call and make sure he’s at home. I don’t care what you tell him, just don’t tell him you’re a cop. And I want you to find his address.”

“Okay. What did this guy do?”

“He lied to me.”

“Didn’t know that was a capital crime.”

“Good thing you learned it early,” Riley said.

Priest fumbled with the phone and said, "All right, I have his address right here. Got a pen?"

"Just give it to me." Priest gave her the address and Riley wished Kara were around with her encyclopedic knowledge of the city streets. "I'm on Hayes Street now. How far away is that?"

"About ten minutes, give or take. You need back-up?"

"No."

"All you have to do is ask, Riley."

Riley hung up and muttered, "Yeah, yeah." She shoved the phone into her pocket and gripped the wheel with both hands.

She had a lot more of the puzzle in front of her now; the Crier slept on the train, and Mr. Ly wasn't exactly understanding about it. Things got a little out of hand, Ly pulled a gun, Crier got shot. But that didn't make sense. She had just decided *Wakefield* was the first victim. And what about the blood on the Crier's neck? Where had that come from? Ly? She didn't remember any wounds on the man, but maybe the Crier punched him and caused a bloody nose.

No. There were no signs of a struggle on the train.

"Damn it," Riley said. "This damn case..."

"I could tell you what happened."

Riley jumped and nearly swerved the car onto the sidewalk. She looked in the rearview mirror and saw Marchosias lounging in the backseat. "No thanks," she said.

"Ah, come on." He slid to the edge of the seat and leaned over her shoulder. His breath, rotten and sickly sweet, washed over her face. "I know every little detail. All I'd have to do is whisper it in your ear..."

"And then I would owe you one teensy favor. And the next time I get stuck on a case, I would think, 'well, hell, I already owe him one favor..."

Marchosias laughed. "I bet you never turn the newspaper over and peek at the crossword answers, either."

Riley looked in the side mirror, double-checked the rearview, and slammed on her brakes. Marchosias slammed against the front seat and then crumpled in the floorboards. Riley twisted in her seat and said, "Out of the car, March. Now."

Marchosias pulled himself back up onto the seat. "All you had to do was ask nicely, Detective." He coughed, straightened his jacket, and said, "Good luck figuring it out." He winked and then Riley's vision twisted. She blinked to clear it and, when she looked again, Marchosias was gone. She shook her head and turned to face forward again. "Damn demons."

Six

Riley managed to find Ly's house without any problem. The mailbox was shaped like an old fashioned steam train, the façade of the house made up to look like an old fashioned depot. She parked in the driveway behind Ly's truck and pulled her badge as she approached the front door. She knocked and stepped back, ready to badge whoever answered. Even if it was Ly himself, he would know it wasn't a social call.

The door opened and an Asian woman about Ly's age peered out at her. "Hello," she said, her eyes flicking from Riley's face to the badge. "How can I help you?"

"Mrs. Ly?"

"I just have a few follow-up questions for your husband. Is he in?"

The woman clung to the door and shook her head. "No, I... h-he said he had to go in to work even though he's not scheduled."

Riley resisted the urge to curse. "Thank you, Mrs. Ly. Do you know which train he's working today?"

"The B train," she said. "I know, he told me specifically when he left. 'Gonna take the old B train.'" She smiled and said, "He's... not in any trouble, is he?"

"Why would you say that?"

She shook her head. "I don't know. Since the murders, he's been so distraught. I think if you're able to close the case quickly, it would do him a world of good."

Riley nodded curtly. "I hope so, ma'am. Excuse me."

She turned and hurried off the porch, fishing her cell phone free as she went. She dialed Priest's number as she got back into her car. "Priest, it's me. I need you to call the train station and find out when the B train left. Joshua Ly is the engineer. I'm not sure what he's planning, but I doubt it'll be anything good. I need the schedule so I can find out where to intercept it."

"Got it. You need back-up? Come on, Riley, might as well get it over with."

Riley growled and said, "Fine. Call me back when you know where I can get onboard."

She flipped the phone shut and pictured Joshua Ly as the shooter. It made sense that the conductor of a train going through No Man's Land in the dead of night would carry a gun. But why would he choose that night to kill the Crier? Ly didn't seem to think the kid was a nuisance. Maybe all of his complaints were addressed to his bosses rather than the police department.

Overhead, Riley saw a train streak by on elevated tracks. She hoped it wasn't the B train.

Riley thought back to the list of complaints delivered the night the Crier was killed. There was nothing out of the ordinary to them. Well, nothing except... she frowned and thought about the map she had drawn. People were complaining because the Crier had been yelling for half an hour. But that wasn't his way. He walked, he meandered through neighborhoods. Maybe he would cross his own path every now and then, but crying in one spot for over thirty minutes?

Her phone rang and Riley flipped it open. "I want you to check open cases from the night the Crier was killed," she said. "Anything in that general area."

Priest was thrown. "Um. Okay. I have the stations. You need to get to Adams Street in the next four minutes or, barring that, Quincy Street in the next twelve."

"Got it. Get me those open cases."

“Yes, ma’am.”

Riley made a sharp turn and raced down Adams Street. She figured she would just barely make it in time to catch the train. Her mind raced with the pieces of the puzzle. She thought about the Crier remaining stationary, and why he would have stopped moving. She wished she had asked the complainants about *what* he was yelling. Maybe he had seen something. The spot of blood on his neck, the blood that didn’t seem to have come from anywhere. The Crier had been at another crime scene that morning.

She parked illegally at the train station and raced up the stairs. She flashed her badge at the station agent as she ran across the platform, the doors standing open like an invitation. She jumped onto the train just as the doors were closing; cutting it tight enough that she thought her shirt was caught between the two doors.

She paused to catch her breath and her phone rang again. She answered it, returning the stares of the commuters all around her. They were representatives of the few respectable businessmen and women in the city, and she was wearing yesterday’s clothes and reeking of sweat. A few people nearby wrinkled their noses and stepped away. She wanted to flip them off, but instead she focused on Priest. “What do you have?”

“Do you ever say hello on the phone?”

“Priest...” She started toward the front of the train.

“Dead body found in the alley on Ninth Street. Drugs and paraphernalia in his pockets. No ID. It’s in No Man’s Land, so the cops barely gave it the old once-over.”

“That’s all I needed to know. Thanks, Priest.”

Priest said, “I’m on the move now. I’ll catch the train at Madison.”

“Take your time,” Riley said. She hung up and slipped the phone into her pocket.

The Crier saw something. Something very bad, like a drug deal going south. Keith Wakefield maybe deciding he wasn’t

going to pay this time. Maybe he couldn't pay and needed the hit. Whatever had happened, there was a fight and the dealer was killed. The Crier saw it and couldn't claim "all is well." So he tried to tell people. That was what a crier did, after all.

She pictured the Crier, a sweet innocent kid who just wanted to believe everything would be all right, being chased through the streets by Wakefield. Wakefield would have caught up to him at the train station. Maybe he tried to intimidate the Crier into keeping quiet. She could very clearly see Wakefield grabbing the bell and tossing it onto the tracks. Ly would have seen what was happening on the platform. The Crier and Wakefield boarded the train and the fight continued. Ly grabbed his gun and probably just meant to threaten the kid with it. Things got out of hand. Ly was probably just trying to protect the Crier at first.

Riley reached the engineer's station, a small closet at the front of the train. There was an egg-shaped window in the door, and she could see Ly staring blindly out at the tracks ahead. She knocked on the glass with her badge, and he turned to look at her with sad eyes. Riley mimed opening the door, and Ly stood up like a man expecting a hangman's noose.

"Mr. Ly," she said once the door was open. "Maybe you'd like to tell me what really happened that night."

He closed the door behind him and said, "I was just trying to shut the kid up. I kept saying I didn't mean to shoot him. I said it over and over again. But that kid was so annoying, with his goddamn fucking bell. I was sick of him. I pushed him down in the seat, but he kept callin' me a murderer." He rubbed his face with his hands. "I just wanted to scare him into shutting up. I didn't mean to pull the trigger."

Riley saw Ly pulling Wakefield off the Crier. Jostling around on a train, it wouldn't be hard for the gun to go off accidentally. Wakefield fell into the seat, gun went boom.

"Doesn't this train have a dead man's switch?"

Ly nodded. "I have a way to jerry-rig it. In case I need to go to the bathroom or deal with an unruly passenger or something."

Riley looked out the front of the train and saw that they were fast-approaching Madison Street. She hoped Priest was already there waiting for her. "Here's what's going to happen, Mr. Ly. You're going to stop the train, and you're going to let my partner and I take you in."

Ly looked out the window and shook his head. Riley followed his line of sight and watched the train whip past the station without stopping.

She tensed and looked at the door to the engineer's cabin. He had a way to jerry-rig the dead man's switch so the train wouldn't stop. Riley felt a chill and said, "Mr. Ly, open the door."

"Door's locked."

Riley shoved him out of the way and tried the handle. It wouldn't budge. She peered through the glass and saw a long stick with a wedge-shaped foot pressing against the pedal. The stick extended back underneath Ly's chair, braced against the back wall of the cabin. The train wouldn't be able to stop and, without Ly to maneuver it around the curves, they were going to turn into a runaway train. If they were lucky. If they weren't, the first turn in the track would turn them into a silver bullet.

Riley tried to break the glass with her badge, but all she managed was scratching the surface. She pulled her gun and hammered the butt against it. Still nothing. She didn't want to try firing her weapon in such an enclosed space; it would deafen everyone in the car. But she didn't think she had a choice. She pulled her handcuffs off her belt and turned to Ly. "Unlock the door right now."

"I can't."

Riley growled and dragged Ly away from the door. She shoved him into a seat and cuffed him to one of the security bars. "Stay here."

She turned to face the crowd of commuters, dread sinking in as she realized the enormity of what was about to happen. Mothers, fathers, all of them with someone waiting for them on the outside. She whistled to get their attention and held her badge over her head. “Everybody listen to me! This is a police emergency. I need everyone to move to the back of the train right now. Keep it orderly and safe. There’s no need to panic. Thank you for your cooperation.”

Riley waited until they began evacuating before she aimed the gun at the glass. “Even if you get in, you have no idea how to drive a train. The ricochet will probably do more harm than good. God, Parra, you’re...”

The train began to slow.

Riley looked out the window and saw that they were indeed coming up on a turn, but the train was rapidly losing speed. They would be stopped before they reached it. She lowered her gun and moved to the glass, peering out to see if something on the tracks could have stopped them. Behind her, Ly said, “What did you do? What happened?”

“Shut up,” Riley said.

There were footsteps on the ceiling of the train car. A pair of shoes suddenly dangled in front of the window and Riley stepped back, gripping her gun in case things had just gone from bad to worse. *If this is Marchosias, I swear to God...* The person dropped from the roof of the train, slowly enough that Riley saw flesh-toned hands sticking out of the dress-shirt sleeves. As the person fell, a pair of pristine white wings spread out to either side of their body, catching the wind and slowing the descent.

Riley recognized their savior’s suit and her shoulders sagged. “Oh, you’re fucking kidding me.”

Caitlin Priest dusted herself off, turned to face the tracks, and folded her wings against her back. She spotted Riley in the glass and waved to her. Riley pointed to the side of the train and Priest stepped onto the track to walk around to the side. Riley holstered her weapon, the adrenaline seeping from

her as she turned to walk back to Ly. "Sorry, Mr. Ly. You don't get to martyr yourself today."

"I just wanted to make amends," he whispered.

"By killing dozens more. Couldn't wait until tonight when the train was empty to off yourself? Had to make a big splash in rush hour? Just say 'thank you, Detective Parra, for letting me live to see my wife again.'"

Ly hung his head and wept.

The doors opened and Priest stepped onto the train. Her suit was immaculate, and her wings were nowhere to be seen.

"I thought your name was Zerachiel," Riley said.

Priest shrugged. "You're the one who said we should get new names."

Riley gestured at her own back. "What happened to the, uh...?"

"We don't have to show them if we don't want to."

"Raguel and Samael wore big coats to cover them up."

"Boys. Such show-offs."

"Speaking of, I thought you were also supposed to be a guy."

Priest shrugged. "I can take any form I deem necessary. I decided you would respond better to a woman."

"And a blonde to boot," Riley muttered. She looked down at Ly, who had apparently ignored their conversation. She decided to leave him to weep. "Come on, angel. Help me evacuate these people."

Epilogue

Riley went into Gillian's apartment, dumped her things on the couch, and dropped down next to them. She bent to untie her shoes and peel them off her feet before stretching out on the cushions. She had spent all afternoon talking to newspaper and radio reporters, telling them over and over again that the train "miraculously came to a stop on its own when the brace Joshua Ly set up was knocked askew by the vibrations of the train." By morning, her name and picture would be all over the damn city. She was cursing the decision not to take a shower that morning.

Her evening was filled taking Ly's statement. He confessed to killing the Wakefield boy in defense of the Crier, killing the Crier accidentally, and attempting to kill all of his passengers along with a police officer when he crashed the train. There was debate about whether he could get off with the insanity defense, but Riley was sick and tired of listening to it all. She finally filed her report and slipped out before Priest found her.

She was about to fall asleep fully dressed when the bedroom door opened. She managed to open her eyes and watch Gillian walk into the living room. She wore a lilac nightgown and the matching robe was hanging off one shoulder. Riley smiled. "There's something worth coming home for," she said. She held her hand out and Gillian walked over, curling up on the couch next to her. They kissed, and Riley said, "Hey."

"Hey yourself." She undid the top two buttons on Riley's blouse. "Come to bed."

"In a minute. I just needed a break from being upright."

Gillian nodded and leaned down. She pushed apart the collar of Riley's shirt and kissed the flat part of her chest. Riley put her hand in Gillian's hair and closed her eyes.

“I almost lost you today. Again.”

“Sorry.”

Gillian kissed Riley’s neck. “I know. So how did the train get stopped?”

“My new partner is an angel.”

Gillian leaned back and looked for signs Riley was joking. “Seriously? Caitlin Priest?”

Riley shrugged.

“Wow. I guess I can relax knowing an actual angel has your back.” She curled against Riley’s side and played with her fingers. “You did very good work today.”

“Thank you.”

“But now it is time for you to go to bed.” She kissed Riley’s cheek and moved to the edge of the couch. “Come on.” She wrapped her hands around Riley’s and pulled her up. Riley grunted and let Gillian lead her out of the living room. Riley put one arm around Gillian’s waist and said, “I should probably take a shower first.”

“Probably should,” Gillian said.

Riley released Gillian and went to the bathroom under her own power. She undressed and quickly bathed, feeling the life seep back into her as the hot water seeped into her pores. She ran a hand through her hair, scrubbed to make sure she got every last bit of sticky, stinky sweat off of her, and toweled off. She put on one of Gillian’s big fluffy robes and went into the bedroom.

Gillian was sitting on top of the blankets reading the newspaper. She looked up and smiled when Riley came into the bedroom. “Already a far sight better.”

“Yeah,” Riley said, flipping her hair onto the collar of the robe. “I clean up well.”

“Ya clean up reeeal good,” Gillian drawled. She put the newspaper aside and said, “C’mere, darlin’. Let me show ya how we do thangs down south.”

Riley shed the robe and climbed onto the mattress. Gillian parted her legs, the nightgown riding up her thighs. Riley settled between her legs, pushing the nightgown higher, and kissed her lips. Gillian ran her hands down Riley's naked body, pausing at her breasts to tease her nipples. Riley moaned and put her hand on Gillian's hip, resting her weight against the crux of Gillian's legs. Gillian gasped and wrapped her arms around Riley's waist. She kissed Riley's chin and jaw, then began a slow trail down her throat.

Riley turned her head to give Gillian some more room, and opened her eyes to see the dresser in the back corner of the room.

A rabbit in blue overalls sat in front of the mirror.

Riley's chest constricted and she wheezed, trying to draw air into lungs frozen stiff with fright. She pushed away from Gillian, her desire fading as she looked at the stuffed toy. "*This is Chekov's gun. In reverse.*" Marchosias. That was what he said when he showed her the rabbit the day before. Riley was aware of Gillian questioning her, but she couldn't register the words. Instead, she pointed across the room. "Where the hell did that thing come from?"

Gillian frowned and looked. "Gravy?"

"What?"

"Gravy the Rabbit. My grandmother made that for me when I was eight."

"Has it... always been here?"

Gillian nodded. "Yeah. He's been there since I moved in."

"You never noticed him missing?"

"No... Riley, it's okay. You don't have to notice everything—"

She shook her head. "No, you're right. You're right." She closed her eyes and pushed thoughts of the demon out of her mind. She turned back to Gillian and kissed her once, then again, pushing her down to the mattress and forcing herself to focus on making love rather than what the rabbit in the corner meant.

The rabbit in the corner meant that Marchosias had been in the apartment and took something.

It meant he had gotten back in, undetected, and put the rabbit back.

It meant that Marchosias could get to Gillian whenever he damn well pleased.

Gillian brushed her hand over Riley's cheek and said, "Sweetheart. You're crying."

Riley closed her eyes and buried her face in the curve of Gillian's neck. "I'm just so happy, Jill. That's all."

+ end +

*Some say that man is the root of all evil
Others say God's a drunkard for pain
Me, I believe that the Garden of Eden
Was burned to make way for a train.*

Josh Ritter, Harrisburg