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TATTOO YOU
by
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Work! He was late for work again....

His mundane dream was interrupted by a much more phantasmal reality. The sleep stuck to his eyes, but he could clearly see no attacker. Then what was strangling the very life out of him? His hands hurried to his neck; eyes finally focusing to see a green reptilian coil about his neck.

His last thought was not a sad one, not a scared one, and not at all questioning. It was ironic, irrational, and irreconcilable.

I'm being strangled by a snake in frigging Chicago!

* * *

"I'm tellin ya' Stephen, they're burnin my ass on this one. Why does my district have to attract all these fucking media circuses?"

"I'm doing everything I can. It's just so...Damn Dan! We haven't found a trace! Not a hair, a print, not even a shittin' fiber!"

Their conversation was interrupted by two plain clothed officers escorting an obvious drunk and disorderly arrestee toward the precinct holding tank.

"Lay off the coat, asshole!"

Captain Jeff Crystal rushed away from his detective; bringing his 280 pound bulk directly to bear with the young offender.

"Listen brat! You're on my **turf** now, so don't be cussin' at none a' my officers, or I'll bruise your little ass so you wont sit for a week! I'm warning ya' about that too," he said, pointing to the emblem on the hoods

jacket, "it's just bullshit! I aint putting up with no Chinatown punk gang!"

"What, only your people can have **clubs**, man?"

"Don't make me put my black fist up your ass, and pull out your tonsils, boy! You know damn well that's not what I mean."

Detective Stephen Kubat slipped out of his boss' office, and out into the night air. He was glad the punk had interrupted their conversation; anything to escape another bitch session was a blessing.

Driving home had him thinking about the case again; the ever elusive case. In his eighteen years on homicide he had never seen a "cleaner" psycho. Of course, the blood and entrails could be messy, but it was the utter lack of clues that was antiseptic. How could a man, or woman for that part, be so brutally savage yet not leave a trace of evidence. It was too weird.

There was one curious detail which was shared by all the victims, however, bringing this up to the Captain nearly had him "pounding the beat" again. It was silly to be of concern, but it was the only shred of congruity that was evident in the case. All the victims had vivid tatoos; not run of the mill anchors or "mothers", but vivid snakes, knives, wolves, and bats. The real strange part was the fact that the guy with the knife tatoo had been stabbed repeatedly. The guy with the split jawed wolf had bite like puncture wounds on his neck. Definitely weird!

The Captain had told him not to breathe a word about it, he didn't want to encourage the media. "I can fuckin' see it in the papers now," he yelled, "the tatoo killer, for Christ sakes!"

That was the end of it.

The beginning of the following week at work finally

brought the detective another mysterious revelation. The tattoo thing had been bothering him again, so he had one of the rookies do some checking for him at the county building.

"Lieutenant, I may have found something for you. There's five tattoo parlors within the precinct. The opening of one of them is contemporary with the first killing."

"Really? It could be something. What's the name of the place?"

"Alastor Kuei's Parlor Of Unusual Tattoos. Just at the edge of Chinatown."

Lieutenant Kubat deepened the creases on his pronounced forehead. That name sounded familiar, but from where? "Let me see it," he said, pointing to the slip of paper the young detective was using as a cue card.

Kuei. Steven knew he had seen that somewhere

recently, but just couldn't figure out where. It hit him suddenly however, when one of the uniformed cops rounded the corner; rounded the corner carrying of all things--a jelly doughnut.

"Davis! Man, am I glad to see you," he said excitedly.

"What's up, sir?" asked the young rookie.

"Remember that Chinatown gang kid you brought in last week?"

"Yeah?"

"What did you run 'im in for?"

"He was graffitiiing the wall of some small grocery store on Front Street. Why?"

"Never mind. What was the name of his gang?"

The younger man's lips totally engulfed the doughnut, dribbling viscous raspberry goo down his chin. "Some Chinese shit...I don't remember."

"Get me his file, and don't get everything all sticky, dumbshit." said Stephen, shaking his head.

* * *

Stephen pulled the address from the file; trying to read and drive at the same time. He made a left onto his target road, drove about a quarter mile, and turned into the drive of a small avocado bungalow.

An elderly Chinese woman opened the door, smiling.

"Hello, ma'am. My name is Lieutenant Stephen Kubat. Is Sai home?"

The woman obviously didn't speak english, as she went into a short musical burst; a melodic scale of Chinese, meaningless to the detective, but pleasing to the ear. She then turned and called for what Stephen figured was her grandson.

"Sai?" Greeted Stephen, as the youth walked to the door.

"Yeah?"

"Could I come in? I have to ask you a couple of ques...."

"Aw...come on! I told 'em everything last week. All I did was paint a couple pictures on a wall. Don't you guys have a better way of spending our taxes?"

"You've got the wrong idea. I'm only trying to get some information. Your not in any trouble."

"Damn straight."

* * *

Stephen had to wait until the following day to go to the library. By the time he had left Sai Lee's last night, it was already closed. He headed for the reference section, looking for the Encyclopedia Britannica, but his eyes caught something better.

"Encyclopedia Of Religion And Ethics." he mumbled, grabbing his needed tome, and heading off for

an empty seat.

He flipped through the pages, stopping when he came to demon. The directory then broke into categories by nationality. He flipped to the Chinese section looking to validate the information he had received during his visit the night before. He scanned the page until his eyes rested upon his desired target. Sai had told him the truth; it was right in front of him in black and white. Kuei was a chinese name for demon. The boy had told him that the name of their "club" was the demons.

It didn't go into much detail regarding the name, but there was some interesting historical beliefs about the evil deeds of the demons. He read on and on into the Christian Section, the Coptic, Egyptian, and finally the Greek.

One paragraph in particular caught his attention. It read:

...in the Agamemnon of Aeschylus (1477), after the murder of her husband, Clytemnestra boasts that she herself is the incarnate demon of the Pelopids, 'so gross with o'er grown flesh'. In such capacity the evil demon often bore the special title Alastor.

Alastor Kuei...Evil Demon! He looked at his arms, watching the hair rise on end from the swelling goose bumps. It was just too bizarre. It was difficult to come to grips with.

* * *

The next evening, Lieutenant Stephen Kubat drove over to Alastor Kuei's Parlor Of Unusual Tatoo's. The sign said the parlor was open until eight, so he only had about ten minutes to check the place out.

He opened the iron grate door, which squeaked hesitantly, like it was only opened on the rarest occasions.

The inside of the place was very dim. It was mostly

lit by several large red candles sitting atop gaudily formed tall black candleabras. Weird statues and other grotesquery adorned the place; most of it far eastern in origin, some of it Byzantine.

Stephen's visual search of the place was interrupted by a man who walked out from behind a red velvet curtain, which must have led to the storeroom or possibly the proprietors living quarters.

"May I help you, sir?" asked the short wizen-faced man.

"Oh...I'm just looking." said Stephen as he grabbed up the "art book" which contained the designs for the various tatoos that the artisan could fashion.

The old man smiled--a knowledgeable smile, and stroked his long Ghengis Khan style moustache. "Hope you find what you are "looking" for."

Stephen tried to remain calm, but could tell he

appeared nervous. He tried to steady his trembling hands as he paged through the book; not really looking at the pages, just trying to act like he was.

After the weather beaten old man disappeared behind the curtain again, he truly began to look at the tatoos. He felt shock and revulsion as he began to recognize the works. There was the bear with the vicious claws, the snake, wolf, eagle, and the knife with the dripping blood. The eerie feeling he had experienced in the library returned, only it was tenfold stronger. Only, he didn't know what he could do.

Again, the old man interrupted his solitude.

"Have you made a selection?"

Stephen looked up, seeing his crooked smile.

"I'm not sure I've found what I'm looking for."

The old man lifted his hand, pointing his claw-like finger in Stephen's direction.

"I think you have, detective!"

* * *

The world went momentarily black for Stephen Kubat, before he regained the faculty of his senses. He tried to raise himself from the chair which he surprisingly was sitting upright in, but he couldn't.

"Do not struggle..." said the old man, not looking up from the pillaging of Stephen's wallet, "...detective...Kubat. You can't get up."

"But...but how did you know I was a cop?"

"Men are so silly! I have had centuries to study human ways. I knew you were not here to purchase a tattoo. I could tell...you were up to something. Anyway, I knew someone would start to catch on soon, someone always does--eventually. Thus another chapter in my unending book of perils ends, only to start over somewhere else. What a marvelous game the master lets

me play!"

The old man walked over to the seat at which Stephen seemed to be glued to; held in place by some supernatural bond which he had no hope of freeing himself from. The wrinkled fingers with the long sharp nails looking ever more like the claws of a reptilian beast, ruffled through the pages of the leather bound manuscript. He reached up on a shelf and took down a tray with the various tools of the tattooer's trade. He began arranging the various bottles of colored dyes and needles on the small table next to the chair.

He looked up at Stephen, smiled, and said, "How do you like dragons?"

The End