

A Game of Chess

England was so beautiful when covered in early morning dew. I sat near the second story window of my small two story house in the city. The dim candlelight is just enough for me to scan my eyes across the pages of one of my blood-stained journals. I smiled softly as thunder and lightning continuously broke the peaceful silence of the night. I analyzed every word as I flipped through the pages of the book. Every place on the book my thumb touched, a new bloody fingerprint was left. The storm outside became more vigorous as I read further into my journal. The more intense my story turned, the more aggressive the storm seemed to become.

An hour or so passed before I finally finished looking over the story of my life. I took a quill and wrote something on the very last page of it, a lovely little secret. Once I closed it I ran my fingers over the tough leather cover keeping my story safe. I went to my desk and wrote a note on a piece of parchment. I folded up the note and put it in my breast pocket. I grabbed my book, a messenger bag, and a small framed picture of a woman. It was time for me to depart. There was just one more thing I needed to take care of first.

I turned around to look at the woman lying face down on the floor in a pool of her own blood. I tapped the woman with my foot. She groaned.

I slowly shook my head at the pitiful sight. "You were always so stubborn, Kate," I said.

I watched with an ache in my chest as Kate tried to drag herself toward the door.

I grabbed my quill from off the desk and twirled it around my fingers. "Why couldn't you just do as I said for one night? I told you not to come here, that I needed some space. It was for your safety, now look where we are. Look what I have to do."

It actually pained me ever so slightly, what I had to do. It wasn't supposed to be her, she was not supposed to be a pawn, she was not supposed to be in this game at all. Kate was different, special, I honestly thought she could have been the one to save my hell-bound soul. Nevertheless, she came in at an inopportune time, and now she must be the first. It's my fault really. I shouldn't have given her a key. Live and learn.

Kate's body shook vigorously as I made my way over to her. "No...P-please...please don't do this to me. Don't hurt me anymore..."

I gave my saving grace a look of pity, before gripping my quill like a knife. "I love you, Katie."

A single tear fell down my cheek as Kate's final scream filled the night air, masked by the roaring thunder.

My humble abode was turned into a crime scene investigation early in the morning around seven a.m. I had taken the liberty of anonymously calling the police myself. I originally planned to let the first body decompose and the smell to be noticed by a neighbor in a few weeks time before the game began, but I didn't want Kate's body to rot in such an undignified way. Now, adorned in forensics attire and blending in with those on the forensics team, I watched as the two best detectives in England examined my dear Katie.

Detective Booker Benson stared down at the body of my dear Kate. "Douglas, analysis." he said.

"Yes sir," Medical examiner Douglas Gifford said as he analyzed the crime scene and body. "Kate Fellington. Age: Early-mid twenties. Skin lacerated in several places throughout the body, all cuts rough and jagged. They were not done with a cutting utensil."

Booker looked up to the sky as he contemplated Douglas's last words. "Are you saying they were made only by the murderer's fingernails?"

"Something such as a rock could have been used as well, however since there is no residue of any such thing in the wounds it is highly unlikely. Therefore, yes the lacerations were most likely made with just the perpetrator's fingernails."

Booker was quiet for a moment, then he nodded. "Continue."

"The woman ultimately met her demise by a quill to the left eye jammed so far in, it penetrated her brain. However the dried blood on the ground and around her lacerations is much darker than the blood emanating from her eye. Which indicates that her lacerations were made a while before the fatal blow. Perhaps an hour or so before."

Booker nodded slowly. "I see. So this girl was cut throughout her body, Yet she managed to keep herself alive somehow for around an hour. The perpetrator got impatient waiting for her to die, so he jammed a quill through her eye socket."

"Precisely," Douglas said.

I had to admit, these two were incredibly adept and observant. A correct conclusion so swiftly was admittedly surprising. I would have to be careful if I want to see this thing play out in its entirety.

"Do we have anything to indicate who the murderer was?" Booker asked Douglas.

"The forensic specialists are dusting the house for prints. So far..." Douglas looked around, his eyes landed on me for a mere moment, before turning back to his partner. "It seems they have not found any yet."

I walked toward Booker. "Unfortunately there are no full prints, just a few partial ones. It's most peculiar."

"Alright then, we will go around the neighborhood and ask the neighbors who lived here. As well as if they would know anything about why he would do this." Booker headed toward the door. "Come on Douglas."

"Yes, sir," Douglas said as he followed Booker out.

As the duo exited the premises, I struggled to conceal the smile begging to form on my face. Asking around would take them a few hours, even for the likes of them. Giving me ample opportunity to continue my little game.

"No I'm sorry I didn't know him all that well. I had just moved here this past week." A man living a few doors down from where the murder occurred said. "Most people had come to my house to welcome me to the neighborhood. Everyone except him. I was going to go introduce myself in a few days on my day off from work. He just seemed very quiet the few times I've seen him around."

Booker sighed. "Alright there's probably nothing else we will get from him, let's go to the next neighbor."

Douglas nodded. They both went to the next house and knocked on the door.

It was comical really, they've been at this for hours, going door to door asking the same questions, getting the same answers. I was sure they'd be finished by the time I planted my next pawn, but here they were, going back and forth, house to house trying to find anything they could.

As the day dragged on, I continued to watch them closely from the shadows of the alleyways. Most of the neighbors I overheard talking to them said roughly the same thing: That I am very quiet and conservative and kept to myself most of the time. However the few people who did speak more about me said that I was kind, and friendly, just incredibly shy. I'm flattered. What they never got was my name, a disappointment really. This would be more fun with a challenge.

Booker leaned against the house him and Douglas just came out of. He closed his eyes and crossed his arms. "We are getting nowhere with these people. Either they actually don't know anything about this man, or they were all in on it so they don't want to be caught."

"I believe they genuinely don't know anything," Douglas said. "Most, if not all of them, seemed truly shocked at the murder."

Booker sighed. "Are we almost done for today? These people are giving me a headache," he said as he put his middle and pointer finger on his forehead.

"We have one more house to go to." Douglas turned in the direction of the last house: the farthest one from the crime scene. "If the people living there are like the rest of the neighborhood, we'll be done in less than five minutes."

"Alright..." Booker headed toward the last house. "Let's get this over with."

I sat on a park bench, newspaper in hand as the detectives reached the final house. Douglas knocked on the door with the knuckle of his middle finger. After a few moments, the door began to slowly creak, and stopped when it was at about an inch open. A single eye peaked through the gap and looked at the two men on the porch.

"May I help you...?" A small, female voice asked them.

"Good afternoon," Douglas said. " We are part of the crime investigation. We came to ask you about the murder that occurred last night and we would like to ask you a few questions about the perpetrator. May we come in?"

The woman stared at them in silence for a few seconds. "Of course," She finally said as she opened up the door letting them in.

My eyes widened at the sight of the woman. It was Jane, the woman who was supposed to be the first pawn. I hadn't realized she lived so close. I was heading to intercept her off the trolley on main street when Kate came in.

My anger rose at the sight of her. She was small, no taller than 5'3" with thick, slightly unruly brown hair. She was also alive, when my dear Kate was not.

"Please, come in," Jane said to them as she closed the door behind them.

I quickly ducked into the alleyway next to the house. There was a window that was barely cracked open. I pushed on it just enough to open it more, but not enough to be overly noticeable. I ducked away just as the trio came into the living room. I kept to the shadows to remain unseen, but I could hear and see everything.

"Would you like some tea?" Jane asked.

"No thank you," Booker replied. "Let's just get this over with."

"Oh... Alright." The woman sat down in a chair across from them. "What is it you want to ask?"

"The man who lives in the house where the murder took place, do you know him?" Booker bluntly asked.

"Not well. We did speak a few times though. He seemed like such a gentleman. Very kind and proper. I never would have expected he'd be capable of something..." She put her hand on the side of her face. "This horrible."

Booker looked at the woman with an unreadable expression on his face. "Miss, did he ever tell you his name? A first or last?"

"He never told me his last name, but he did say his first name once."

"What was his first name?"

The woman looked down at her hands in her lap. She took a deep breath, then looked back up at Booker.

"Damien."

I smiled at the sound of my name. French origin, meaning untamed. A fitting name for someone such as I.

As the detectives left the premise, another police officer came running toward them.

"There's been another murder. Adelaide road, one street down."

"So soon?!" Booker said. "It's the middle of the day!"

"According to forensics, it seems to have happened last night roughly an hour after Fellington's murder. Killed in the same manor, quill to the eye. There was one word written in blood on the wall. *'Takeback'*"

“Come, Douglas,” Booker said. “We must hurry, the lead will grow cold quickly.”

A wicked smile formed on my face.

“Wait,” Douglas said.

My smile dropped.

“What’s the next street down from Adelaide?” He asked the cop.

“Gainsborough Grove.”

Douglas turned toward Booker “The killer might be going from street to street. I’m going to Gainsborough to keep an eye out for another body or anything or anyone that seems suspicious. Booker you go inspect the crime scene on Adelaide Road and see if anything there could help us in this investigation. Meet me in Gainsborough when you are finished.”

Booker nodded. “I will see you there.”

I heard the three pairs of footsteps fade off into the distance. Douglas figured out the pattern quickly, I’m impressed. Things are finally starting to get interesting.

Douglas arrived in Gainsborough Grove shortly after he departed from Booker. He searched the street, asking around and looking for anything suspicious. The sun was reaching its peak height for the day by the time he found her in the dumpster. His speed was impeccable, but he was still too late. Two hours too late.

I watched from the shadows as Douglas examined Rachel's body. It was marked from head to toe in gashes. This time a thin metal pipe protruded from the left eye socket. He found the two words I had sprawled on the cover of the dumpster in Rachel’s blood. ‘*Your move.*’

They made no progress on the investigation for several days. Yet I kept going, making my moves as I had. Finally, the day of the final move had come, the day of Katie's funeral.

I watched behind a tree as the service was held and she was buried. My heart ached at the sight of her coffin being lowered into the ground. I don't let my mistakes define me, but for this one, I would never forgive myself.

Many people were there, including the detectives. They asked the family questions, but they couldn't tell them anything. Kate's family didn't know about us, they don't even know I exist. Kate wanted it that way, and that was perfectly alright with me.

It was time this game got back on track. Katie was killed because of it, it needed to end.

As the detective walked away, I came out of the shadows with my top hat on and bumped into Booker, purposely dropping today's newspaper along with my final play on the ground in front of his feet.

"Watch it," Booker spat.

Without a word I walked away. I wanted to smile, everything was going according to plan, but I couldn't. I looked over at Kate's grave and once again, a single tear fell from my eye. A single tear, filled with an abundance of regret.

Booker's eyebrows raised in questioning at the newspaper at his feet. He grabbed the paper, as he did so, something fell out from in between the newspapers pages. Booker grabbed what had fallen from the paper. My journal, with a star professionally etched on the cover of it. He turned his gaze back to the paper and opened it up. His visible eye widens as he sees words written across the paper in blood, right under the title of the article, which was: *'Who is this Murderer? What does he want?'*

The wording written under it said: '*To finish this.*'

Booker looked all around for me, trying to see where I had gone, but he couldn't find me, he never would.

"Douglas, look at this!" Booker held out the newspaper toward him. "Read the article title, then the words scribbled on top of the paper."

Douglas took the paper in his hands and read it. He grabbed his chin in thought. "Well that's quite ominous and direct."

Douglas gazed over the whole front of the paper, noticing something in the top right corner of it. "Here." He placed the newspaper on the desk and pointed to the corner. "It appears to be a star, drawn with blood."

Booker looked at where Douglas was pointing and saw the star. "Well I'll be..." He walked over to a nearby picnic table and set the book next to the newspaper. He pointed to the star etched in it. "This looks like the star on this book."

He opened the book and flipped through the pages. "It's full of a woman's writing. It looks like a diary." He flipped to the first page and read. "This diary belongs to Mathilda Simmons..."

"Could the murderer be a woman?" Douglas asked. It took all of my strength not to guffaw at the idea.

"I doubt it." Booker skimmed through the diary entries. The first few were just about her daily life. Matilda was a nun. Booker flipped a little faster. He was about to slam the diary shut and toss it over his head in frustration, when he noticed that she started talking about having nausea and strange cravings. Then an entry dated twenty-three years ago caught his eye.

'This is bad, VERY bad. I found out I am...pregnant. I am unclean. I don't want to have to go through the horrible process of the cleansing. I've seen it performed hundreds of times, and it brought a shiver to my spine every time. Maybe I can hide it? Our robes are very big. Perhaps it can conceal my bump when it begins to grow. Yes, yes I'm sure it will work. I'm sure of it.'

Booker flips a page and reads an entry from the week after the last one: *'I can't believe it, I'm starting to show already. The baby is growing immensely fast. Thank goodness for these robes, no one can tell...'*

Booker frantically flipped a few more pages when he found another entry dated about seven months later. *'No....No No NO! Not now, I can't be in labor now! It's only been seven months. The baby can't be ready. I'm not ready. Oh Mother Mary, a contraction just hit, and it hit very, very hard...Why must it come out now?'* There were a few empty lines, then she wrote one more thing: *'Why is this happening to me...?'*

Booker turned the page and found an entry in a different handwriting.

'Mathilda Simmons was found dead in her chambers after giving birth to a son created from an unholy union. The child was named Damien. May this be a warning to all the Sisters to keep the vow of celibacy. May Sister Simmons rest in peace.'

He flipped to the last page and saw freshly written words on it. Written less than a week ago. "A game of strategy and skill."

"Chess..." Booker muttered. "This is a sadistic game of chess."

A photograph fell from the pages. It was one of Jane on Adelaide street through her window. Written across it in blood read one word. "Check."

“We need to get to Adelaide street now!” Booker said. They took off running, but they were too late, as they always were.

I’m standing in line waiting to board the next boat to America. They check my bags and my passport and let me board. I take a seat by the railing and take a deep breath. I pull out today’s newspaper and read the headline.

‘Where is the Grandmaster Now? Will he play another game?’

I had to admit, I liked the sound of the name Grandmaster.

Several photos of the victims took up most of the front page. I forced myself not to look at Katie’s photo. But Jane’s I could look at all day. She was covered in gashes and a soup spoon protruded from her eye. Above her head on the floor was drawn a crown with her blood. The word ‘*Checkmate*’ next to it. The caption read. *‘His most recent victim over three weeks ago was Jane Ana Foster. Will she be the last one? Or will he want to play another game?’*

I smiled to myself and looked out into the sea, wondering what America will be like, and what kinds of games I would be able to play there.