

I'm Coming for You

By Vanessa Finaughty

Detective Asher Jackson stared at the message scrawled in red koki on his bathroom mirror.

I'm coming for you.

A smiley face with its tongue stuck out had been drawn below it.

Someone had been in his flat while he was at work.

His head pounded and his vision blurred. This was the last thing he needed after the day he'd had.

A quick search of his flat revealed nothing obviously missing, nothing out of place. This wasn't some burglar messing with him.

Could it be the serial killer he'd been investigating for the last few weeks? He'd been on the news two nights ago. The whole city knew he was the lead detective on the case. In hindsight, maybe that hadn't been such a great idea.

A shudder ran down his spine. The murders were particularly gruesome, all red-haired women in their thirties, and all with their eyes gouged out and faces smashed in. Whoever the killer was, he – or she – seemed angry. Asher wasn't too happy about the sicko knowing where he lived... if indeed it was his serial killer.

He'd caught hundreds of criminals over the years. It could be any of them, he consoled himself.

He went back to the mirror and stared at the message again.

Who was he kidding? It was his serial killer, for sure. The handwriting was the same as the word 'slut' that had been written in red koki on the victims' naked abdomens.

According to the forensic handwriting examiner, the killer was very obviously trying to disguise his handwriting, and had done a rather good job of it.

The latest victim hadn't had a boyfriend or lover in years according to everyone who knew her, and wasn't the type to sleep with random men. So why the word 'slut'? Had she rejected the killer and his ego was bruised?

He looked around again. How had the intruder got inside his flat? His front door had been locked when he'd got home a few minutes ago, as were all the windows.

A chill ran through him.

He must still be here.

Asher searched the small flat, even the tiny crawl space above the ceiling that was far too small for a person to fit. He was alone.

The fucker has a key, he realised.

He guessed someone might have manipulated a copy out of the landlord, but it was highly unlikely. His landlord was a very by-the-books type of guy whom Asher couldn't imagine handing out copies of his tenants' keys to strangers.

Unless it's not a stranger...

The thought hit Asher like a hammer to the head.

He thought about the serial murders. He'd been increasingly drawn to the horrific crime scenes lately – in a not-so-healthy way. He was simultaneously fascinated and repulsed by the battered corpses. Earlier today, he'd imagined himself having been the one to commit the murder, how satisfying it must be to punch someone's face so broken. He'd almost felt the warm blood on his hands, heard facial bones crunch, and the sweet sound of screaming. As much as the thoughts were macabrely satisfying, he was equally sickened by them. It didn't help that the victims all resembled his ex-wife, who had cheated on him and was the biggest bitch on the planet.

Asher massaged his temple. The job was getting to him. Maybe it was time to pay a visit to the precinct shrink.

Shaking the unsettlingly appealing thoughts from his mind, he went to check his CCTV cameras.

He played that day's footage at double speed until the front door opened shortly after lunchtime, and then he rewound and played it at normal speed. The camera showed a furtive figure in a police uniform slip inside the flat and head straight for his bedroom.

A cop!

Asher began to relax, shaking his head. His buddies were messing with him.

“Very funny, guys,” he murmured.

Actually, it was a damn good prank. He’d shat himself for a while. He grinned.

The grin froze on his face when the uniformed figure exited the bedroom a minute later and looked up at the camera, his expression calm and collected.

Asher’s own face stared straight at the camera, winked and then turn to leave.

Convinced that it was a trick, he replayed it five times before his mind could accept the chilling truth.

He hadn’t been fantasising about killing those women.

They were memories, come unbidden to taunt him, to tease him, to drive him mad.

Asher understood now.

The message on the mirror: *I’m coming for you.*

Two dark versions of one man had been hunting each other. One, a man of the law dedicated to protecting the innocent. The other, a sinister force to be reckoned with, a seeker of justice of a different sort.

I’m coming for you.

The words echoed in Asher’s head, his voice, but not his voice.

The message was a warning from the darkness within him.

I’m here.