

The Special Dead

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MACMILLAN



First published 2015 by Macmillan
an imprint of Pan Macmillan
20 New Wharf Road, London N1 9RR
Associated companies throughout the world
www.panmacmillan.com

ISBN 978-1-4472-9831-1

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1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Typeset by Palimpsest Book Production Ltd, Falkirk, Stirlingshire
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

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For Detective Inspector Bill Mitchell

If you are reading this then I am dead.

To know a person's name is to conjure with it.

1

The green eyes were regarding him candidly. Mark suspected she was weighing him up and wasn't sure she liked what she saw. Jeff, on the other hand, was having an easier time with the girl's friend. *Trust Jeff to strike it lucky, the bastard.*

Mark took another slug of his pint. If the girls came as a pair, then the fact that green eyes didn't fancy him might mean Jeff got the brush-off too, which would bring Mark no end of grief. As though reading his mind, Jeff threw him a look that urged him to try harder.

When Jeff had suggested he come through to Glasgow for a Friday night on the town together, Mark had jumped at the chance. True, he'd had to cover his tracks a bit with Emilie and make out he was playing five-a-side football with Jeff and his mates. She'd been a bit suspicious about that, until Mark had suggested she could come with him and watch if she liked. That had done the trick. Plus he'd promised to be back to take her out for lunch in Edinburgh on Saturday. A promise he meant to keep.

They'd been in four pubs before this one and Mark had lost count of the variety of drinks he'd consumed. None of the previous pubs had produced the possibilities of this one and he owed it to Jeff to play it out. Mark marshalled himself for one more go, but he didn't get the chance.

'So,' she said suddenly. 'Want to come back to my place?'

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To say he nearly fell off the chair was putting it mildly. He shut his mouth, realizing it had dropped open, and tried to look nonchalant.

'Sure thing.'

She immediately stood up. Mark expected the pal to get up too, but she didn't. The two girls exchanged some unspoken message and the pal laughed. Jeff, equally surprised by the way things were going, looked askance and not a little jealously at Mark, who grinned in triumph, then followed green eyes to the door.

Outside, he offered to wave down a taxi.

'No need. It's just round the corner.'

Mark felt himself stir in anticipation. It looked as though Jeff wasn't the lucky one after all.

She ushered him inside and shut the door firmly behind him. A black cat appeared from nowhere to rub itself against her ankle. When she lifted it, the purring grew louder. The cat fastened its eyes on Mark and he was struck by their similarity to the girl's eyes. Through the alcoholic haze, sharpened by the coke he'd snorted in the last pub toilet, the scene took on a bright hallucinatory hue.

The long hallway was dimly lit and painted blood red. He identified a series of doors that shifted and merged until he closed one eye.

'In here,' she said, throwing open a door on his right. She gave him a slight push and he stumbled inside what was definitely a bedroom. The cat, discarded from her arms, mewed in annoyance and darted off, tail stiffly upright.

'Take off your clothes,' she ordered. 'And lie down on the bed.'

Mark had experienced a variety of sexual encounters

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under the influence of alcohol and coke before, but he'd never been bossed about. He found he rather liked the experience.

'Are you for real?' he grinned.

'Just do it.'

Her expression suggested if he didn't do what was asked, he would be out the door. Something he definitely didn't want.

Mark pulled off his shirt, then his jeans and stood in his boxers.

'What's your name?' he said, suddenly feeling he should know what to call the girl he was about to have sex with.

'You're not here to ask questions.' She ran the green eyes over him from top to toe. 'Now the boxers.'

In a show of bravado, Mark exposed himself.

She studied him intently, then licked her lips. The result of which was a shot of an aphrodisiac he didn't require.

'Okay. Now lie down.'

Relieved that he had passed muster, Mark did as ordered.

The few clothes she wore were removed in seconds, then she stood before him in all her glory. Mark drank in the smooth white skin, the pink pointed nipples, the neat brush of auburn hair highlighted between the long smooth legs.

Who was the lucky one now?

When the cat suddenly jumped on the bed to spoil his view, Mark tried to sweep it aside.

'Leave it,' she said sharply.

Before he could protest, the cat had settled on his face, its silky warm body acting like a suffocating blindfold. The purring rose to a crescendo as its open claws kneaded his shoulder. Mark's surprised cry was smothered in hot fur.

He could no longer see the girl, but he felt her climb

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aboard and firmly straddle him. As she lowered herself, pain and pleasure met and exploded in his head.

His stomach heaved, bringing him back to consciousness. Mark rolled onto his side and vomited a pool of warm stale beer on the carpet.

Where the hell was he?

He shivered suddenly in his nakedness. Flashes of memory began bombarding his brain. The girl staring down at him. The smothering action of the cat. The crazy coupling. He turned to check the other side of the bed but there was no one there. The luminous dial on his watch told him it was five o'clock in the morning.

Sitting up, he swung his feet out of bed, trying to avoid the wet patch caused by his vomit, but not entirely succeeding. He contemplated his next move, which should be to get dressed and leave as quickly as possible. Rising a little shakily, he located the pile that was his clothes. As he dressed, a pair of green eyes appeared suddenly in the semi-darkness.

He recalled the cat settling on his face and the girl ordering him to leave it there. The memory brought a rush of pleasure. For a moment he was back there, wanting more of the same, then the whiff of his vomit reminded him it was wiser to leave. Now.

Dressed, he checked the corridor, found it empty and stepped out of the room to be presented with four doors leading off the hall, all of them closed. Mark stood for a moment, trying to recall last night and which door might be the exit point. Finally accepting that he had no idea, he chose one and attempted to open it as quietly as possible.

Immediately the cat tried to squeeze past his ankles,

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mewing loudly. Mark swore under his breath, attempted to stop it with his foot and tripped over it instead. The cat sprang into the room, tail bristling, with Mark stumbling headlong into the darkness in its wake.

He eventually righted himself and stood very still, praying the room, whatever its purpose, was unoccupied. Moments later, he decided it was, although something had definitely spooked the cat. Its mewing had changed into a high-pitched keening sound that reverberated through his brain and would eventually rouse anyone else who might be in the flat.

Which meant he should get out of here, and quickly.

Mark swung round, desperate now to make his exit, and immediately walked into a small hanging object. As spooked as the keening cat, he tried to sweep it aside only to have it swing back at him, and poke him in the eye.

Swearing under his breath, he caught the offending item in his hand.

In the faint light from the hall, he now saw it was a doll.

Naked, long-legged, with pert breasts and flowing silver blonde hair, it hung from the ceiling via a length of cord wound tightly round its neck.

Jesus. Last night had been weird, but this was even weirder.

Mark released the doll in distaste and it swung away from him, only to immediately collide with something else, setting off a series of eerie clicks and clacks accompanied by the creak of moving objects.

What the hell was that?

Mark stood stock-still, knowing he shouldn't turn, but aware he would anyway.

When he did, he found that the doll wasn't alone.

There were at least twenty of them, swinging in the light

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filtering through from the hall. Blondes, brunettes, redheads, naked, eyes glinting. All were suspended from the ceiling by a string tied round their necks, all set in perpetual motion by his action.

The swaying scene was grotesque, but not as terrible as what Mark now discerned beyond the hanging dolls, and the true reason for the cat's distress.