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AUTHOR OF THE KAELY QUINN PROFILER SERIES

NIGHT FALL





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To John Frye,
who knew what it meant to live a life
of service to others.
I'm so grateful to have been given
the gift of your friendship.
I'll miss you, John, until the day comes
when we can dance together again in heaven.

Do you hear the Train Man rumbling in the night?
Can you see his dreadful face grinning with
delight?
If you hear his horrid wheels clicking round and
round,
Cover your head and plug your ears to block the
frightful sound.

For any little boy or girl who hears the Train Man
speak,
Who feels his rancid breath caress their pretty
cheek,
Must close their eyes, pretend to sleep, and very
softly pray,
Or else the evil Train Man may carry them away.

—“THE TRAIN MAN,” A NURSERY RHYME

Prologue

His mother sat in the chair next to his bed, reading from The Book. He was almost twelve now, and she'd been reading it to him ever since he was a little kid.

Adam hated it. It scared him. Did everyone really come from beings in the sky? Were people really born either demons or angels? Mother said they were—and that they had no choice in the matter.

He'd begun to believe he was a demon, but he'd always been too scared to ask her. He suspected she thought he was, though, because of the way her dark eyes bored into his. It made him feel strange inside. But if he was a demon, didn't that make her and Father demons too? Mother said demons could have only demon children, which meant demon children always had demon parents. He didn't want to be a demon. If only he could run away. Go somewhere else. Be someone else. But that would never happen. He was trapped.

He tried to be as good as his mother wanted him to be, but it was hard. Too hard. She considered everything a temptation. Even food. That meant they never had much to eat in their house. Tired of being hungry, he'd stolen a candy bar

from the store when no one was looking. He'd stuck it in his pants pockets, and he hadn't been caught.

But would an angel steal? Or just a demon?

The truth was he hated his mother. He was closer to his father, who had a high forehead and large eyes that reminded Adam of a drawing he'd seen of an alien. Maybe *The Book* was right about where they all came from.

Surely his father was an angel. He gave him treats when Mother wasn't looking. And he made faces at her behind her back, making Adam want to laugh out loud. Of course, they couldn't really laugh at Mother. They were both afraid of her. If Father weren't afraid, he'd just tell her to shut up. He'd ignore her orders to beat Adam with the paddle she kept in the kitchen. But he always did whatever Mother told him to do.

When he wasn't teaching Adam his school lessons or out making what little money they seemed to have, Father spent most of his time in the basement smoking. Mother wouldn't let him smoke anywhere else in the house. When she asked him what he was doing down there, he said he was working on *things*. Adam had no idea what these things were. He wasn't allowed to go down there. He was sure Mother didn't know either. She had a bad leg so she stayed out of the basement. She didn't seem to mind Father spending time downstairs, though. It was clear she didn't like him any more than he liked her. Maybe Father didn't want to be a demon either, but Mother treated him like he was.

Although Adam hated the beatings, he was even more afraid of the times her eyes went dead and she put her hands around his neck. Usually when Father wasn't there. Adam had grown taller in the last year, but she was still stronger than he was. It hurt. He could hardly breathe. Sometimes

he wondered if she would stop. Sometimes he wished she wouldn't, but he was afraid of dying. Which planet would he go to when he died? The one for angels or the one for demons?

Most of the time he understood what he'd done wrong when he was punished. He'd stayed outside too long, or he'd forgotten something he was supposed to do. Then once, at one of the special meetings his parents had taken him to every week until a few months ago, he smiled at a man's pretty daughter, who was about Adam's age. That made Mother really angry, and he got a beating that night. She kept telling Father to hit him harder because what he did was so bad. His father acted like he was obeying her, but the paddling got softer and softer.

Adam hadn't been taken to the meetings again. That was all right with him. He liked being home alone. Sometimes he'd sneak food out of the refrigerator, and so far Mother hadn't noticed. He'd also stare at the paddle on the wall, thinking about using it on *her*. The image in his head made him smile.

An angel wouldn't think about hurting his mother, would he? Yet, more and more, thoughts about hurting other people swirled in his mind. The feelings they caused were so strong he had to force himself to think about something else. Otherwise, he might do one of those awful things.

His mother finally closed *The Book*, then started reciting that scary poem about the Train Man. For as long as he could remember, she'd said it every night so he'd stay in bed and not make any noise.

After Mother turned out the light and left his room, he hooked his hands behind his head and stared up at the ceiling.

It was so dark in here. Not that it mattered. What was there to see? Just a small bed with an old mattress that smelled, a nightstand that wobbled, and the desk and chair his father found next to a trash dumpster.

A few months ago his family visited his aunt's house. Until that day, Adam hadn't even known his mother had a sister. His aunt had kind eyes and a soft touch. And her house was beautiful. Bright and cheerful. He'd looked around the kitchen. No paddle. He couldn't help but wish his aunt could be his mother. When she smiled at him, it made him feel something he'd never felt before. Envy.

Turned out she had a boy Adam's age with a bedroom full of wonders. New furniture. Posters on the wall. Toys. Video games. He couldn't believe it. His envy turned into something even more dark. Anger. He wanted to hurt his cousin and take all his amazing treasures. Why should that boy have everything Adam wanted? It wasn't fair, was it?

They didn't stay long, and after they left, Mother announced they would never go back. She said their house had too many temptations. Maybe that was true, but he didn't know what was true and what wasn't anymore. New feelings had begun to grow inside him. Resentment. Rage. Hatred.

As he tried to force himself to go to sleep, he kept an ear turned toward the train tracks that ran somewhere behind their house. Thankfully, he heard only silence, yet he knew that a train could go by at any moment. Even though Adam was fairly certain the Train Man wasn't real, he was terrified of him. Reluctant to take a chance, he'd stay in bed no matter what.

Someday he'd find a way to leave here. Maybe he could

live with his aunt. But if Adam really was a demon, and she found out, she wouldn't want him there, would she?

His eyelids finally grew heavy, but suddenly the door to his room squeaked open. Light streamed in from the kitchen, and Father stood in the doorway with an odd look on his face. He motioned to him with his fingers. "Come with me," he said.

As Adam followed him, he wondered where Mother was. She'd be mad if she caught them, and he'd get another beating. He wasn't sure how many more of those he could take. His father didn't seem concerned about her, though. And when he stopped at the door to the basement, Adam was confused.

"I have something to show you," Father said.

Adam trailed him down the stairs. When they reached the bottom, his father pointed to something lying on a large wooden table.

Now Adam knew the truth.

He *had* been raised by demons.

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Twenty years later

Patrick walked next to the railroad tracks as he searched for an open boxcar. November was still especially cold and rainy, and a sudden gust of wind grasped him in its icy fingers.

Clouds above him blocked the moon for several minutes, and surrounded by blackness, Patrick stepped carefully. He stayed on the side of the train where a copse of trees helped hide him from prying eyes. As their limbs shook and bent from the strength of the wind gusts, his tattered coat provided almost no protection. He could feel winter waiting in the wings. He needed to find a Salvation Army soon. They'd let him take a shower and give him clean clothes. Maybe even a new coat to keep him warm.

As he pulled on yet another boxcar latch that stayed tight, his mind drifted to his mother and older brother. Years ago, they'd pleaded with him to come home. He should have, but he was cocky, certain he didn't need them. He'd been raised

in church, but he'd wanted a different kind of life—especially after his father died. He craved an existence full of fun and adventure. Well, this sure didn't qualify. His laugh was low and hoarse, and it triggered another spasm of coughing.

Patrick stopped for a moment, then took a partially smoked cigarette out of his coat pocket. He'd found several of them on the sidewalk outside a movie theater in downtown Kansas City, and he'd scooped them all up. He cursed softly when he remembered this was his last one. New packages of cigarettes were impossible to steal now. Almost every store kept them either locked up or in a place inaccessible to the public. Sometimes a smoker would give him a whole cigarette when he asked for one, although that was a luxury. He would smoke only half of it, saving the other half for later.

He coughed again, trying to ignore the pain in his chest. He'd been spitting up blood for a few weeks. He should find a free clinic—maybe here in Independence—but he was pretty sure he knew what they'd say. He didn't want to hear it.

When he reached for the book of matches in his pants pocket, his fingers got caught in a ragged hole. The matches were gone. He could search through the canvas bag he carried with him, but he wouldn't find them. He'd definitely put them in his pocket. His curses echoed loudly through the black of night.

“Are you all right?”

Patrick startled at the voice coming from the darkness. A man walked into the yellow beam provided by a looming light pole behind the train cars. He seemed to have stepped out of nowhere.

Patrick's body tensed. But he saw the person now approaching him was younger than him and held a can of spray paint. A train tagger. Not dangerous.

“You have any matches?” Patrick asked.

The man smiled. “No, but I have a lighter and some cigarettes.” With his free hand, he reached into his coat pocket and took out both a plastic lighter and an open, almost-full pack of cigarettes. “I have more smokes in the car. You can have these.”

“What about the lighter?”

The man held out his hand. “Keep both.”

Patrick grabbed them before the guy could change his mind. “Thanks,” he mumbled. “I mean it. Very nice of you.”

“Not a problem.”

“You’re a tagger?”

The man laughed. “I guess the paint can gave me away.”

Patrick smiled as he put a fresh cigarette in his mouth. He tried to ignite it, but the wind kept blowing out the lighter’s flame.

“Hey, there’s an open car down here,” the man said. “If you get inside, you can light that a lot easier.”

Patrick thanked him again. This was turning out to be a good night. Cigarettes and a place to sleep. He was so tired. His bag held a small pillow and a blanket he got from some do-gooders who’d found him under a railroad bridge a few months ago. They needed to be washed. Or replaced. Another reason to go to the Army when he got to the next city. They might even give him a sleeping bag too. That would help a lot.

He followed the man down several cars to the one that was open. Another light pole illuminated the tag the man had painted. Patrick liked most of the graffiti he’d seen on trains. A lot of it was interesting and colorful. This one was a little different. He stared at it a few seconds, trying to figure out what it meant, then decided he really didn’t care.

The man set his paint can inside the open car and pulled

himself up into it before reaching down to help Patrick up. Patrick walked a little way inside the empty car and lit his cigarette. He sighed as the smoke entered his lungs. Once again he was seized with coughing, and he fought to control it.

“Sounds like you should give up smoking,” the man said.

Patrick’s family had said the same thing, but he didn’t like anyone telling him what to do. Suddenly, his mother’s voice seemed to speak out of the darkness. *Pat, you need Jesus. He can help you. Change you. Save you.*

He could almost see her tear-filled eyes as she spoke those words. Why was he revisiting this now? Something powerful poured through him. Regret? In that moment, he wished he’d listened to his mother. But it was too late. He couldn’t go back.

“Thanks for the cigarettes and helping me find a place to sleep,” he said. “I’m Patrick.” He held out his free hand, and the man grabbed it with a gloved one.

“And I’m Adam.” Without letting go, he took a step closer. “Have you heard of the Train Man, Patrick?”

He shook his head. *The Train Man? Who’s that?* “I don’t think so.”

Adam began reciting a strange poem as he smiled in the glow of the burning cigarette. Patrick didn’t see the first flash of metal until the last second. Then as life began to drain from his body, he could get out only one word. “Jesus.”

Alex Donovan could almost feel the air around her bristle with tense excitement as she took her seat in the Quantico conference room Monday morning, along with two other members of the FBI’s Behavioral Analysis Unit. She still had trouble believing she was part of this elite squad. As coordinator for

the National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime while stationed in Kansas City, she'd been a liaison between local law enforcement agencies and the BAU. Her work with the violent crime squad had earned her respect from the agents she'd worked with in the BAU. Those connections opened a door she'd dreamt of stepping through ever since she was a teenager.

Her goal had always been the same—to get to this place—and she was finally here. It still felt surreal. And now she'd been asked to meet with the BAU unit chief.

She tried to ignore the butterflies in her stomach that seemed to have turned into wasps, stinging her insides with apprehension mixed with anticipation. The door to the room opened, and the chief, Jefferson Cole, walked briskly into the room. Alex noticed the tight line of his jaw. Something was wrong. Something big.

The first time Alex met him, Jeff reminded her more of an accountant than an experienced FBI agent and talented analyst. He was tall and lanky with dark hair and black glasses, and sometimes she almost expected him to ask for a list of her deductible expenses for last year. But the comparison ended when he opened his mouth. Jeff was a man who knew who he was. He always gave his best, and he expected no less from those who served under him.

Even though she could tell the situation was serious, Alex couldn't quell the feeling of exhilaration bubbling up inside her. She clasped her hands under the table and tried to appear like the calm professional agent she knew she was.

Jeff sat down at the table, then gestured toward the phone sitting on it. "I'm expecting a call from Kansas City. They're asking for our help."

Alex nodded, studying the other agents around the table.

She'd noticed Supervisory Special Agent Logan Hart as soon as she joined the unit. It was hard not to. He was good-looking, with kind blue eyes and dark blond hair that always seemed to need a good combing. Alex thought it looked good that way, windswept and romantic. She'd spoken to him a few times and found that his easy smile and manner matched his personality. Some people in the unit called him "Preacher" because of his spiritual beliefs, but they said it with affection. Everyone seemed to like him.

Before she realized she was doing it, she reached up and touched her bangs. Speaking of windswept, November's strong breezes could certainly mess with one's hair. She kept her long dark mane in a ponytail when she was working, though, so the wind wasn't really a huge problem. However, her bangs were another story. She hoped they looked all right. Now that she was thinking of them, she wanted to fluff them out. She fought the urge, but it was difficult to put her hands back in her lap.

She was being ridiculous. She wasn't looking for a boyfriend. Being part of the BAU was everything to her. Her focus was on her career. Any kind of relationship would just get in the way.

Looking across the table, she caught Monty Wong staring at her. She liked him, but he made her a little nervous. He was attentive and serious, and he rarely smiled. He was nice enough but just a little tightly wound. She tightened her lips to hold back a smile when she realized she was describing herself.

"Logan and Monty, you're here because you're seasoned and your work has been exemplary," Jeff said. He turned to Alex. "And you're here, Alex, because you worked with us out of the Kansas City Field Office. The special agent in charge has high praise for you, and your work as our NCAVC coordinator was

impressive.” He locked his gaze on hers. “Kansas City PD is asking for our help. I want you to coordinate with them and our Kansas City office. Having someone who already knows the KCPD and our agents in that area will be really helpful.”

Alex’s body tensed. Lead the team? She knew she was respected for her work with NCAVC, but she’d only been here six months. What did Logan and Monty think of this? She quickly glanced at them. Monty’s expression hadn’t changed. Logan looked a little surprised, but he covered it well. A few extra blinks, but she didn’t see any other physical actions that betrayed his true emotions.

“Yes, sir,” she said. She had no reason to say anything else. This wasn’t a voluntary assignment. When you were told to go, you went. And you did what you were told to do. Period.

Jeff started to say something else, but then the phone rang. He pressed the button for the speakerphone.

“We’re here, Stephen,” he said.

Stephen Barstow was a well-known figure in the Kansas City law enforcement community. A decorated detective, he’d earned Alex’s respect as they worked several cases together during her time in Kansas City.

“Good,” Stephen said. “I hear you’ve assigned Supervisory Special Agent Donovan to help us, is that right?”

“Yes. She’s sitting right here.”

“Hello, Alex.” The smoothness she remembered in his voice came through the phone.

“Hi, Stephen. Glad to be working with you again.”

“Same here.”

“I also have Supervisory Special Agents Logan Hart and Monty Wong with us.”

“Good to have you all on board. So as you know, Jeff, we

have a problem. Four murders. Only a week or two between each one, and they all look random. Nothing about the victims is similar—as if our UNSUB is selecting whoever is in the wrong place at the wrong time. Three men, one woman. Two Caucasian, one Black, and one Hispanic. Three of them younger, one in his seventies. All the bodies were discovered on trains and were stabbed multiple times.”

They could hear him take a deep breath before going on. “Unusual tags on the outside of the boxcars. Something like Bible verses, but we’ve searched several Bible apps to find them, and they’re not in any version we could locate. We’re not sure what the UNSUB is trying to tell us. He signed his work, but we have no idea what the initials TM mean. His name? Or something else?”

There was a slight pause. “I’m sending you some photos of the tags right now, along with everything else we’ve got, which isn’t much. We don’t have any real evidence. This guy is careful . . . and smart. At this point, we’re not in charge. He is. Have your team look over this information before they get here, okay? I’ll expect them at the command post in the morning. We’re setting it up now. Does that work for you?”

“They’ll be there, Stephen. Talk to you soon.”

The call done, Jeff turned on his laptop and pulled up the information Barstow had just emailed. He sent the file to a large screen on the wall and began slowly clicking through the photos.

In mere seconds, Alex felt like all the blood in her body had frozen, as if time itself had come to a halt. Her mind couldn’t seem to process what she was seeing.

How could this be happening?