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## **I, Night Angel**

*My name is Brent Weeks, I'm the author of the Night Angel trilogy and the Lightbringer series. What you're about to read is my thank-you for your pre-order of The Broken Eye. This selection may turn into the first chapter of a new Night Angel book, it may become a short story, or it may go as far as your eyes now and no farther. All I know is that one morning, I woke at 4 a.m. with a burning desire to write this rather than what I was supposed to be writing.*

*This picks up on one of the plot threads I intentionally left dangling at the end of The Night Angel Trilogy, but it will mostly make sense whether or not you've read those books.*

*I should also note that this is one of the more disturbing scenes I've written, so I'll dedicate this to the late Stephen J. Cannell, legendary TV producer and novelist, who passed along a horrific story he'd heard from some L.A. homicide detectives. I only hope they were pulling his leg.*

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...

The big man is tied face in to a tun barrel as tall as he is, arms spread like a child begging for a hug. The best torture is imagination.

The tun is lying on its side, full of wine, and it's as heavy as any ten or twelve men put together. The way Ugh's tied, he could push off from his toes and roll it—if he wanted to crush his own head when it continued rolling him down on the other side. Tied with hands and feet close against the barrel, though, he can't get the leverage to do anything else.

“Ugh, I admire your courage. I was once tied up like you are now. Scary. But courage should be put in the service of good. Duchess Jadwin is a murderer and worse. Why protect her?”

“Oh, so you’re the good guy now?” he asks. They’re the first words he’s spoken since his *firstugh* when I broke his nose and gave him that blood mustache.

“Good guy?” I ask. “Huh.” I start unfolding a package on top of a hogshead barrel I upended for the purpose. We’re in an empty cellar in a noblewoman’s house that’s under construction. It’s dark in here.

I forget. I can see perfectly in darkness. I see that the darkness is there, but I simply see through it. When I’ve had to describe it, I’ve said the darkness welcomes my eyes. Nonsense descriptions have to do, sometimes, when you have to describe that which is like nothing else.

I light a single candle so Ugh can see. What fear he was going to feel from being with a creature like me in the perfect darkness has already been juiced from his flesh.

Now to give his imagination some pulp for new nightmares.

He can now see the torture implements laid out on the smaller hogshead barrel, barely, if he cranes his jowly head back as far as he can.

I peel off my tunic. Carefully turn it right side out. Carefully fold it. That I’m of medium height and medium build is generally an asset in my work, but it does mean big men don’t find me threatening. As if something small can’t kill.

People are irrational. You can’t change it, so you work with it. I’ve been training for hours every day since I was perhaps eleven years old. It’s not pride to note that I’ve an impressive physique.

But I don’t act as if he’s supposed to be impressed. He’ll pretend not to be. Machismo is irrational, too. Instead, I move the hogshead forward a bit so he can see it better.

I unfold the cloths on the table to reveal a graduated hollow metal cylinder, some olive oil, a live mole trapped in an open bottle, and a length of rope.

I bow over the table, reverent. I light another candle.

*“Ch’torathi sigwye h’e banath so sikamon to vathari. Vennadosh chi tomethigara. Horgathal mu tolethara. Veni, soli, fali, deachi. Vol lessara dei.”* I do my best to make it sound like a prayer to some dark god. It’s actually the blessing Durzo spoke over me. I’d never heard the language before, and haven’t heard it since, and while my memory is very good, it needs refreshing now and again.

I sigh.

I really don’t want to do this.

I bow my head again as in prayer, tenting my hands in front of my chest. Ugh’s head is cranked as far toward me as possible. He’s gonna have a crick in his neck tomorrow if he keeps that up. And lives.

I take a dab of the olive oil on my fingertips and take a deep breath, as if bracing myself.

~I love this part.~ the ka’kari says in my head.

Quiet.

I draw the oil in a strip across my chest.

Steam escapes. I grunt, pursing my lips. The skin bubbles, and jet-black metal is revealed beneath torn skin.

I take a few deep breaths, and repeat it on the other side. Again, hissing and bubbling. I moan to cover the lack of a sizzling sound. It takes me hours of practice to figure out a simple illusion, and so far I can only do visuals. Aural illusions would be awfully handy, and I know it can be done. Other wetboys have been famous for being able to throw their voices or even other sounds. But I can’t do it. Yet.

Durzo’s gone to Cenaria, and he couldn’t teach me everything in the few days we had together after the Battle of Black Barrow. The only other people who might teach me anything at all would rather capture me and study *me* instead.

“No, to answer your question: I’m not a good guy. A good man wouldn’t do what I’m going to do tonight.”

I smile at him, and as I smile, my teeth go ka’kari-black.

You give little glimpses.

Because fear is irrational, too.

I look away. “I want you to know, Ugh. I’m not here for you. But when the Night Angel is upon me, don’t meet my eyes. If I look into your eyes then, I will judge you. I will see your every sin, and I will punish.”

A lot of the rest of this is mummery. The gibberish, the illusions...but this last is all true, devoid of exaggeration. Durzo once said that after holding the ka’kari for a long enough time, he had become so sensitive he could see a lie as a man spoke it. I’m not that sensitive. Maybe I never will be. But when I see awful, awful things, I move to end them, because some monsters I will not suffer to live.

His mistress, Trudana Jadwin, is one such.

“Has the poison started working yet?” I ask.

“Poison?” he asks.

“Didn’t notice, huh?”

“You didn’t...You couldn’t...You never...”

“Should be a discomfort in your belly by now.”

He goes silent.

I grin, flashing black metal teeth. “It’s only a laxative.”

“A what?”

I imagine he’s heard of laxatives, so he’s wondering why. “I need room to work.”

“The hell does that mean?!”

“You want your trousers off, or on?”

“Damn you!” he shouts.

“Good trousers, too.”

“Off, dammit. Off. Please!”

The ka’kari makes a hell of a knife. I slide a finger down each outseam, and his trousers and underclothes fall off.

He's livid that I cut them, swearing at me in words damp with fear. As if I were going to untie him so he could take his trousers off. I scoot a chamber pot between his legs with a foot, and step back.

It doesn't take long. The cramps wrack him, and he tries to hold back, but he makes the inevitable splattering mess. Odd thing, with the ka'kari covering me, I can't smell it.

~I was assuming you'd rather not.~ it tells me.

You assumed right.

The ka'kari's in no hurry to tell me its secrets, and I usually stumble across them like this. I had no idea it could do that. Wiping out my sense of smell? That is an odd kindness, though, isn't it?

When Ugh is done, I slosh water generously over his butt and legs.

"I'll kill you," he says. He's so flushed he's gone almost purple. Sometimes I forget how easily people get embarrassed. "I swear to all the hundred gods, I'll kill you."

Anger covering fear. Maybe I won't have to do this after all.

I put a foot on the tun barrel, a thumb's width below his manhood. He starts in fear. More afraid of getting kicked in the stones than of demons in the dark. Ugh's an odd one. I push hard, and the barrel rolls.

His bonds lift him off his feet, and when he's fully lying atop the tun barrel, I kick blocks beneath it to keep it from rolling farther. I adjust his bonds to draw his knees out, frog-like, ass in the air.

I slosh water again on his privates, making sure he's clean.

Oh, I'm sorry, does this offend your delicate sensibilities? You know what kind of man I am. You know the work I do.

"What are you doing?" he asks, and this time the mask of anger is thin as rice paper.

~A question I was going to ask myself. Albeit for different reasons. Are you *narrating*?~ the ka'kari asks.

I'm telling the story once, in my head, as I do it.

~Then later, you'll just have to write it all down?~

That's the plan.

~You think your memory is that good?~

No, no, quite the opposite. See, I do it this way because everyone's memory is bad. If I try to remember exactly what happened later, long after it's all happened, I'll...what's that word? Where you half-remember two things and put them together accidentally without realizing it?

~Confabulate.~

Right. This way, I note what happens as we go, and if I live so long, I'll write it down. If she didn't want the story in rough, she should never have asked.

~But you're not *actually* writing it down as it happens.~

No, *I'm* not. Because I'm not shape-shifting metal.

~What?~

You know your letters, you've carried written messages before, I've seen it. So you get to write down what I'm thinking aloud as we go.

~You're turning me into your *scribe*?!~ He—it—swears at me then. Sometimes the ka'kari's curses are breathtaking, other times baffling. What, precisely, *is* a rump-fed runion?

It's something to worry about later. Durzo himself warned me a hundred times—a thousand—about not getting distracted just because you think you're in control.

I say, "In Cenaria, the Sa'kagé was constrained from the top. Our Shinga had a code. She weeded out the monsters. Thought they were bad for our work. Invited investigations, interference." Momma K is a singular character, and I respect her more than anyone. If anyone can successfully make the transition from crime lord to lord, it will be her. "But other cities aren't so lucky with their scum. I was visiting the Sa'kagé in—well, never mind where—and they were torturing a woman. They didn't care if she died, which is an important thing to decide when you start torturing someone. They had a method that was one of the most disturbing things I've ever seen. I'm going to see if it works on a man."

Piquing the imagination. Very important in torture.

Some inchoate cursing follows.

I dribble olive oil down his butt crack.

Oh, right, we were talking about your delicate sensibilities. You're curious about the work of a killer—and now a torturer, it turns out—but you don't want to hear anything too disgusting. Odd little bundle of contradictions you've got going for you there, isn't it?

But fine, I've got my own little contradictions my own self.

Damn, that didn't really sound very good, did it? Maybe I will have to edit these recollections a bit. Later. If I live that long.

Anyway, I'll warn you when it's time to turn away from what I do. You can trust me. I'll let you stand at a safe distance. I won't describe his hairy butthole or his shriveled scrotum.

More cursing. He flails against his bonds so hard that if I hadn't used silk rope, he'd have bloodied his ankles and wrists and knees by now.

"I've got friends. I'm not here alone! They'll be here any moment."

Friends, he calls them. Tougher than he looks if that's the lie he tells now.

"Were there the six, or was that seventh one of them too? I couldn't tell. He moved like a civilian, but I took him out as well. Just to be safe."

Silence. Then he says, "Dear gods."

I don't tell him, of course, but I didn't kill them. A knockout poison and a lot of rope.

Problem with knockout poisons: what's a lethal dose for one person, another shakes off in an hour. Durzo figured out some of the factors that affected that: good physical condition, habitual drinking, and oddly, vegetarianism can all push sensitivity up. But when you don't have time to ascertain a deader's full surgical history, you make do. Rope and gags are your friends.

Like so much else in wet work, you've got to have solid fundamentals to back up the magic and the toys.

Good thing, I suppose. Killing a man ought to be hard.

I move to the table again to draw his attention to the items there. He looks at them blankly.

This one's imagination appears to be a blunt instrument.

Fine then.

I pick up the hollow graduated cylinder and smear oil generously on it.

Then I put it down, disgusted. That much isn't an act.

"I don't think I can do this," I say. A lie. I'm capable of a great deal worse. "But *he* can."

Hints and intimations have done nothing. Time to drop subtlety completely.

I grab at my bare chest and groan. Then I start digging at the skin, as if cracking open the heavy covers of a book. As the skin peels back over my sternum, a single iridescent blue line is revealed along the black skin. I'm still experimenting with my Night Angel physique, but I like this deep burning cool blue. Don't know why. I might be immortal; I might live seven hundred years like my master, but right now I'm twenty. I think it's scary.

Ugh's eyes bug out.

I brace myself and tear my skin off like I'm shucking off a coat. It is pretty horrific-looking, if I do say so myself. Skin clings to my hands, and at my neck and above, bleeding from being torn. My chest is all gleaming obsidian muscle and blue accent lines.

I walk out of the line of his sight. He turns, looking for me, but he can't turn far enough. Sweat drips down his cheeks, dampens his hair. Finally.

I grunt and groan, as if in more pain, but really to make noise to cover the sound of me stripping off my trousers and underclothes. The ka'kari could simply devour them—but then I'd be without trousers and underclothes.

~You're not bringing that up *again*, are you?~

I let the ka'kari come to my skin. It covers me perfectly and silently in black metal curves and—grudgingly—burning blue accents. I keep it free of my head, though—best to do this in stages if I don't want to actually torture Ugh.

As I step back into view, he says, "Gods, what are you?"

"Not a good guy. Not that." I'm still working on the voice. I haven't had to speak much as the Night Angel. It should sound different than my regular speaking voice, though, shouldn't it? I want to be intimidating, like the Night Angel is actually possessing me or something—like I'm not in control of my actions—but I don't want to be goofy raspy. Also, I should only do the voice when I'm wearing the entire outfit, including over my face, right?

No time to think about it now.



I say, “I aspire to be a good tool. I am the imperfect avatar of an immutable ideal. I am Justice. Your mistress has escaped me, for a time. War does that. Evildoers escape and black deeds go unpunished. The king’s amnesty was a necessity to the healing afterward—for good men under great duress do evil—but others like your mistress take advantage of war to do more evil, and then they take advantage of the amnesty to escape justice. And some do escape indeed, in this mortal realm—but not her. I am the reaching hand of the curse. I am the hungry maw of justice. I am the sharp teeth of vengeance. I am the open throat to hell.”

I can’t tell if his silence now means I have a great future as a torturer, or none.

“So I’m going to tell you exactly what I’m going to do, and if you’re completely honest with me, I’m going to leave you a very dull knife you can use to cut your ropes and escape.”

“You idiot, you fool! Release me this instant! My men are on their way even now. Don’t you know who I am?”

Ah, progress.

“Duke Aemil Jadwin. Brother to the late duke, husband to the late duke’s wife. Clearly she didn’t grieve your brother’s death for long. One wonders how long she’ll grieve you. Aemil, you’re not very good with disguises, and your men don’t like you much. I know who you are, and no one knows we’re here. Because we’re not where you think we are. I moved you while you were unconscious. No one’s coming to save you. I’m not the best at what I do, but I am very, very good. Duke Jadwin, your wife’s cheated on you already, but I don’t ask you to avenge yourself on her. I care not for her sins against you. Trudana murdered the prince. A loathsome character in his own right, but that murder precipitated war. A war in which many thousands died. And then she, a traitor and murderess and, not least among her crimes, an artist, she made statues from the bodies of the dead. Including two of my friends.

“I need two things from you: the name of the mage who helped her in her work, and Trudana’s location.”

“What are you going to do to me?”

Imagination is the best torture. But second bests abound.

Especially when your torturee has no imagination. Fine. “This tube goes in your rectum. I force the mole down the tube. Then I tie your legs together so it can’t get out the way it went in. The mole panics and tries to dig out some other way. Good diggers, moles, and don’t

need much air. Sometimes they actually dig their way out.”

“Oh gods have mercy.”

“Don’t make me do it, Duke. I don’t like killing the innocent.”

“I’m not... I’m not entirely innocent.”

“I was talking about the mole.”

And without my quite meaning to call it forth, the black ka’kari comes up over my face in hues of cold fiery blue judgment, and I stare into his eyes and see.

Remember that thing I said? About turning away? Now would be a good time.

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