Heart of Darkness

by chrissofhearts

Summary

Modern/Noir Alice in Wonderland AU. The body of a dancer from the Eat Me, Drink Me club is found, matching the MO of the notorious Mad Hatter killer. Criminal profiler Regina Hart joins the case, must fall down a rabbit hole of murder and mystery in order to catch the killer.

It rained all night. It always rained all night, Regina Hart mused, when there was a murder.

Murders didn't happen on warm, sultry nights of the Indian summer, or amidst the crisp, amber glow of the city in winter. Murders happened when the city was shrouded by the drizzly curtain, when blood mixed with rainwater as it trickled into the bowels of the city. Rain was the killer’s veil.

She sat at her bedroom window, watching the raindrops dance across the glass, and observing the city below. It had become a nightly ritual for her, and she had it all memorized down to the tiniest details: the blue flickering of the neon kebab sign across the street, the muffled yapping of her downstairs neighbor’s Yorkie, the echo of a police siren’s wailing several streets away.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw her alarm clock show the passing of another minute. 2:43am. Almost time for the clubbing students to stumble back into their buildings. In seventeen minutes, the cellist across the street would come out onto his balcony in a bathrobe and smoke a cigarette. Somewhere, deep within the city, lovers walked by the river, parties raged on in a numb haze, and
insomniac poets attempted to capture it all. And perhaps somewhere, somewhere your parents warned you about, or even somewhere you visit every day, a gun has been drawn, and somebody is about to die.

People who slept through the nights missed so much.

She almost expected the shrill ringing of the phone to cut through the moment. It wasn’t the first time, and it wouldn’t be the last. The caller ID showed Daniel Weiss. She knew exactly what to expect. She picked up the phone.

“Hello, detective,” she said.

“Sounds like I didn’t wake you,” said Daniel, his voice somewhat hard to decipher over many raised voices and sirens.

“Who was it?” asked Gina.

“Young female, dancer at Eat Me, Drink Me. Found her just outside the club. Time of death, approximately one hour ago. You’re definitely going to want to see this. I told the coroners to hold up until you got here.”

“It fits the M.O.?”

“To a T. Fair warning, it’s pretty grisly.”

“I would expect nothing less by this point. Tell them I’m on my way. I’ll be there in fifteen.”

“Right. See you then.”

“Bye.”

Gina hung up the phone and slipped it into the front pocket of her jeans. Like every night, everything she needed had long since been prepared in her satchel, standing by the coat rack. She shrugged into a trench coat, slung the satchel over her shoulder, snagged an umbrella, and slid out the door.

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As soon as she pulled onto Spade Street, a sense of strange relief passed over her. This was her natural habitat. A world flooded in blue and red, humming with a somber energy, sirens like a dirge. This world seemed to slow and blur around her as she entered the crime scene. She was in her element, and everything else muted around her as she focused on the body at the core of it all.

Acknowledging Daniel with a small wave, she weaved her way through the crowd of bystanders, policemen, and a handful of sleep-deprived reporters until she stood right before her.

The girl, or what was left of her, had the toned body of a dancer, and wore a form-fitting black dress and heels to flatter it. Apart from some bruises around the shoulders, she did not seem to have any wounds. However, where there had once, most probably, been an attractive face and a full head of styled hair, there was now a bloody stump at the end of a long, elegant neck. Gina had seen too many of these to recoil anymore.

“‘Well, I think it’s pretty obvious,’” said Daniel, walking up silently behind her. She turned away from the body to face him. His boy-next-door features had always seemed out-of-place amidst a crowd of hard-boiled coroners and forensics teams.
“Young, attractive female. Head removed, clean cut, seemingly by a large blade, no other injuries or signs of struggle. It’s our friend.” Gina stepped around to get a closer look at the neck wound.

“They’ll do an autopsy, but if it matches the rest of the victims, I don’t think there’ll be anything of interest. He’s already taken what he wanted.”

Gina nodded. “Who found her?”

“One of the dancers. She’s talking to one of the officers inside. We shut the club down but we’ve kept the staff inside for questioning. I’ll take you inside if you want to do some digging of your own.”

“Sure,” said Gina.

Daniel turned to lead her inside, but Gina hesitated. “Daniel?”

He turned around. “Yeah?”

“Nobody…saw anything, did they? Not in the act or getting away or..?”

Daniel shook his head. “I’m afraid not. Not as far as we know. Sorry, Gina. Coming?”

“Sure.” She followed him as they slipped away from the crowd and through the steel doors of the club’s back entrance.

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