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DEBORAH CROMBIE

AUTHOR OF NOW MAY YOU WEEP



A SHARE IN DEATH

THE FIRST KINCAID AND JAMES MYSTERY

A
SSHARE
IN
DDEATH

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IN
DEATH

DEBORAH CROMBIE

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who laid the foundation.

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CHAPTER 1

Duncan Kincaid's holiday began well. As he turned the car into the lane, a shaft of sun broke through the clouds and lit a patch of rolling Yorkshire moor as if someone had thrown the switch on a celestial spotlight.

Drystone walls ran like pale runes across the brilliant green of pasture, where luminous sheep nibbled, unconcerned with their importance in the composition. The scene seemed set off in time as well as space, and gave him the sensation of viewing a living tapestry, a world remote and utterly unattainable. The clouds shifted again, the vision fading as swiftly as it had come, and he felt an odd shiver of loss at its passing.

The last few weeks' grind must be catching up with him, he thought, shrugging away the faint sense of foreboding. New Scotland Yard didn't officially require newly promoted Detective Superintendents to work themselves into early coronaries, but August Bank Holiday had slipped easily into September, and he'd gone right on accumulating his time off. Something always came up, and the last case had been particularly beastly.

A string of bodies in rural Sussex, all women, all similarly mutilated—a policeman's worst nightmare. They'd found him in the end, a real nutter, but there was no guarantee that the evidence they'd so painstakingly gathered would convince a bleeding-heart jury, and the senselessness of it took most of the satisfaction from finishing up the mountain of paperwork.

"Lovely way to spend your Saturday night," Gemma James, Kincaid's sergeant, had said the evening before as they waded through the last of the case files.

"Tell the recruiters that. I doubt it occurred to them." Kincaid grinned at her across his littered desk. Gemma wouldn't grace a poster at the moment, her face white with fatigue, carbon smudge like a bruise along her cheekbone.

She puffed out her cheeks and blew at the wisps of red hair that straggled into her eyes. "You're just as well out of it for a week. Too bad some of us

don't have cousins with posh holiday flats, or whatever it is."

"Do I detect a trace of envy?"

"You're off to Yorkshire tomorrow, and I'm off home to do a week's worth of washing and go round the shops? Can't imagine why." Gemma smiled at him with her usual good humor, but when she spoke next her voice held a trace of motherly concern. "You look knackered. It's about time you had a break. It'll do you a world of good, I'm sure."

Such solicitousness from his sergeant, ten years his junior, amused Kincaid, but it was a new experience and he found he didn't really object. He'd pushed for his promotion because it meant getting away from the desk and out into the field again, but he'd begun to think that the best thing about it might be the acquisition of Sergeant Gemma James. In her late twenties, divorced, raising a small son on her own—Gemma's good-natured demeanor, Kincaid was discovering, concealed a quick mind and a fierce ambition.

"I don't think it's exactly my cup of tea," he said, shuffling the last loose sheets of paper into a file folder. "A timeshare."

"Your cousin, is it, who arranged this for you?"

Kincaid nodded. "His wife's expecting and their doctor's decided at the last moment that she shouldn't leave London, so they thought of me, rather than let their week go to waste."

"Fortune," Gemma had countered, teasing him a bit, "has a way of picking on the less deserving."

Too tired even for their customary after work stop at the pub, Gemma had gone off to Leyton, and Kincaid had stumbled home to his Hampstead flat and slept the dreamless sleep of the truly exhausted. And now, deserving or not, he intended to make the most of this unexpected gift.

As he hesitated at the top of the lane, still unsure of his direction, the sun came through fully and beat down upon the roof of the car. Suddenly it was a perfect late September day, warm and golden, full of promise. "A propitious omen for a holiday," he said aloud, and felt some of his weariness drop away. Now, if only he could find Followdale House. The arrow for Woolsey-under-Bank pointed directly across a sheep pasture. Time to consult the map again.

He drove slowly, elbow out the Midget's open window, breathing in the spicy scent of the hedgerows and watching for some indication that he was on the right track. The lane wound past occasional farms, squarely and sturdily built in gray, Yorkshire slate, and above them the moor stretched fingers of woodland enticingly down into the pastures. Crisp nights must have preceded