

Death by Desire

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FADE IN:

EXT. OPEN SPACE BESIDE A FOREST - NIGHT (AUTUMN)

It's a hazy dusk. A melancholy breeze stirs the brown leaves.

A GIRL, maybe 12, thin, long dark hair swings alone on a swing, hung from a tree limb, propelling herself higher and higher.

She eyes the darkening sky, not yet dark enough to see stars.

GIRL

Star light, star bright. The first
star I see tonight, I wish I may,
I wish I might, have the wish I
wish tonight.

As if on command, a star's twinkle becomes visible.

GIRL

I wish...

INT. A CONDO, THE BATHROOM - DAY

RIKI SANTANA, 38, detective, ice cold Latin looks, left arm in a sling, long raven hair tied back, peers into a full bathtub at the face submerged under the water.

She uses a pencil to snag the fish line encircling the VICTIM'S neck. She lifts it, pulling the face to the surface.

The MEDICAL EXAMINER(ME), 60, seen it all, bends beside her to peer at the victim, as Riki lifts the head above the surface.

ME

Fish line, huh? Pretty effective
restraint. Struggle, you cut your
throat, do nothing, you drown.

He notes the folding chair beside the tub.

RIKI

They stayed to watch.

ME

Thorough or to enjoy it?

RIKI

Both.

INT. A DARKENED ROOM - NIGHT

SOMEONE types at a keyboard. NATE VALANCE'S photo, late 50s, appears on the screen.

INT. NATE VALENCE'S COUNTRY ESTATE, TEN STALL GARAGE - NIGHT

Riki enters the garage, noting the expensive cars. She finds the ME and his TEAM working on NATE VALANCE, seated in a Ferrari, windows up, hands tied to the steering wheel.

ME

Carbon monoxide suffocation.

Riki notes Nate's head gash from banging against the window.

RIKI

But not suicide.

The ME nods.

INT. ME'S LAB - DAY

Riki watches the ME work on the drowned man and Nate. The ME rubs a white swab over their nostrils, which turns black.

RIKI

Chlorofoam?

The ME nods, then swabs a second swab which turns yellow.

ME

And this is smelling salts.

RIKI

Rendered unconscious, then awakened to experience their death?

ME

Looks that way. No robbery. Pure murder seems to be the objective.

Both recently had sex. I'll have DNA from the partner.

Riki selects a black credit card from Nate's personal effects. It contains no numbers or markings.

RIKI

What's this?

He shrugs. She peruses the drowned man's personal effects and locates a black business card with nothing other than an embossed lemniscates ∞ .

She places the two cards beside each other, eying them.

INT. POLICE HQ, RIKI'S DESK - NIGHT

Riki sits at her desk contemplating the black card and the black business card. The CAPTAIN, late 50's, steps up. He notes her arm, still in a sling.

CAPTAIN

How's it?

She flexes her fingers.

RIKI

Better.

CAPTAIN

It's a bit slow finding a new partner.

RIKI

I'm in no hurry.

He notes the black cards.

CAPTAIN

Anything?

RIKI

Nothing in common except these.

He nods and walks away. She snaps her finger and strides off.

INT. POLICE HQ, COMPUTER ROOM IN BASEMENT - NIGHT

NED, overweight from the chin down, munches potato chips and types at a grimy keyboard while leering at a dating web site.

He spies Riki's approach and neatens his appearance, sliding a forearm across his mouth. His fingers shake over the keyboard.

Riki struts over and leans next to Ned, close enough for her perfume to find him. She lets his eyes rove.

RIKI

I have a favor, Ned.

Ned's hands shake a bit over his keyboard as he gulps. Riki eyes the dating site. He glances to Riki, then averts his eyes.

NED

Whaddya have in mind?

RIKI

Can you cross-reference the cell phone records of the last two murders?

He cracks his knuckles.

NED

Can I.

He starts a timer.

RIKI

What's that for?

NED

Three minutes.

Ned displays a map on his monitor as he types on the keyboard.

LATER

The timer shows about a minute of sand. Ned notes a cross-hair on the map.

NED

They both made calls from one location.

He scribbles an address on a dirty scrap of paper and hands it to her. He opens another bag of chips.

RIKI

You're a peach, Ned

Ned munches chips as he watches her stride away.

NED

Sorry about your partner.

She continues away without comment.

INT. A DOWNTOWN LUXURY OFFICE TOWER - NIGHT

Riki walks up to a bored SECURITY GUARD playing chess on his computer. He doesn't take his eyes from the game.

SECURITY GUARD

What can I do you for?

Riki slides her badge into his line of sight. He jerks upright.

SECURITY GUARD

Sorry, Officer.

RIKI

It's Detective. I'm looking for something, but I'm not sure what.

He eyes her askance, as a very well-dressed couple catches her

eye. They disappear around the corner.

RIKI
That may be it. Where are they going?

SECURITY GUARD
You can't get in there.

RIKI
(noting her badge)
Really?

SECURITY GUARD
I mean I don't have access to it.
It's a special entrance.

Riki show him the lemniscates business card.

RIKI
This?

He nods. Riki follows the couple's trail, stopping at a black elevator door with no call button. A white lemniscates straddles the doors.

SECURITY GUARD
See what I mean. We have no keys for it.

Riki contemplates, then notes a card key reader. She extracts Nate's card and slides it through the reader. The doors open splitting the lemniscates in half.

The interior has no floor buttons, just a pristine interior. She glances to the guard, his jaw hanging open. She enters.

RIKI
Queen to bishop's four.

GUARD
What?

RIKI
You're playing white?

GUARD
Yeah.

RIKI
Queen to bishop's four sets up mate
in three moves.

The guard stares dumbfounded as the doors close.

WITHIN THE ELEVATOR

ELEVATOR VOICE (FEMALE)
Good evening, Mister Valence. I hope
you're well. The usual table?

RIKI
(pause to think)
Uh huh.

ELEVATOR VOICE
And preferred cocktail as well.

RIKI
Uh huh.

ELEVATOR VOICE
You have interest from two females,
one heterosexual, one bi-sexual and
one male... homosexual.

They're in attendance. Shall I alert
them to your arrival?

RIKI
No.

ELEVATOR VOICE
Feeling alright, Sir? You sound a
bit under the weather.

RIKI
(mumbled)
Fine.

ELEVATOR VOICE
Well, we're here. Enjoy your evening.
May your hunt be productive.

CLUB LEVEL (40 STORIES HIGH)

The doors open to an absurdly elegant club, with breath-taking
views. The club logo, a snake in the shape of a lemniscates,
swallowing its tail hangs on the wall with the club name, 'The
Pythos Club' below it.

A lovely HOSTESS greets Riki. She wears a choke collar around
her neck with a light chain connecting it to a wrist manacle.

Nate's photo is on her computer, confusing her.

HOSTESS
Oh... Miss Santana. Must be some
mistake in our computer.

Riki flashes her badge. The hostess is further taken aback.

HOSTESS

Oh... this is a game? I wasn't informed—

RIKI

VIP pass.

(pause)

How do you know my name?

Before the hostess can reply, DALUS, mid 50's, well-maintained, suave with a dark edge, appears beside Riki from behind.

DALUS

Might I help you?

RIKI

Looking for someone in charge.

DALUS

That would be me.

Dalus looks her up and down.

DALUS

Interesting attire.

HOSTESS

Miss Santana, may I log you in?

Dalus waves off her request and guides Riki through the crowd. The patrons are drop-dead gorgeous and brutally handsome. Some wear overt expressions of their dom/sub orientation.

RIKI

How did your hostess know my name?

A stunning woman beside them makes eye contact with Riki as she strokes her cleavage. Dalus leads Riki to a mirrored wall.

DALUS

You showed her your badge.

RIKI

It was before that.

Dalus ignores her comment. He presses a tiny device in his hand which opens the wall to an elevator.

IN THE ELEVATOR

Dalus eyes her sideways, a blend of curiosity and familiarity.

DALUS
I give you points for creativity.

Riki fixes him with a stare.

RIKI
Do we know each other?

Dalus begins to speak, then stops.

DALUS
Of course not. Detective, you said?

RIKI
Yes, Homicide.

Dalus notes her handcuffs.

DALUS
Ever have to use those?

Riki narrows her eyes, but ignores the question. He smiles.

IN DALUS' OFFICE

Dalus' office overlooks the club. Riki looks onto the scene from the one-way glass as Dalus sits at his desk, eyeing her.

Riki notes the variety of overt sexual orientations.

RIKI
What goes on here?

Dalus stares at her, as if trying to figure her out.

DALUS
What do you think?

Riki eyes him in the glass' reflection.

RIKI
Murder, apparently.

DALUS
I beg your pardon?

Riki turns now to face him.

RIKI
Nate Valance.

DALUS
Why do you have his membership card?

RIKI
He won't need it any longer.

Dalus eyes her puzzled. She extends Nate's morgue photo to him.

DALUS
Is this a role play game?

RIKI
(noting the photo)
Does this look like a game? I'd like
some information on Mister Valance.

DALUS
I'd like to see your badge, Detective.

Riki hands it to him. He examines it, then returns it to her.
He eyes the morgue photo, the reality sinking in.

DALUS
He's really dead.

Riki nods.

DALUS
So you're a Detective investigating
his murder?

RIKI
Am I going too fast for you?

DALUS
Our games never get this serious.

Riki hands him photos of the drowned victim.

RIKI
Game?

Dalus eyes the photo, eyes registering concern.

RIKI
Another member?

Dalus nods.

RIKI
If this is your idea of a game,
it's gotten out of hand.

DALUS
Who killed them?

RIKI
I'm hoping you could help me.

DALUS
Did you kill them?

RIKI
You may find this amusing, but I don't.

DALUS
On the contrary.

Dalus punches up the member profiles of the two victims.

RIKI
I'll want their profiles and
anyone they've had contact with.

DALUS
That's impossible.

Riki turns her gaze back to the crowd through the glass.

RIKI
I'll ask again, what goes on here?

DALUS
The wealthy and bored comprise our
membership. We provide excitement.
Games of intrigue, role-playing.

RIKI
Murder?

DALUS
Never.

Riki stands pensive, ready to leave. Dalus notes her arm sling.

DALUS
Line of duty?

RIKI
Occupational hazard.

DALUS
And the bad guy?

RIKI
Not comin' down for breakfast.

ON THE CLUB FLOOR

Riki meanders through the crowd. A HANDSOME GREEK MAN catches

her eye. He has a nice smile. She measures him with a glance, then looks away, up to the glass of Dalus' office even though nothing is visible therein.

She strides to the exit under the curious scrutiny of several men and women.

BACK TO DALUS' OFFICE

Dalus observes Riki's exit. From the shadows,

LILITH (OS)
What was that about?

DALUS
I don't know.
(pause)
Is she toying with me?

LILITH (OS)
She seemed authentic enough.

DALUS
Too authentic.

LILITH (OS)
Were those two involved in a Hunt?

Dalus nods.

LILITH (OS)
And now dead?

DALUS
Apparently. I'm not sure.

LILITH (OS)
I am.

From the shadows the Tarot card for Death drops to the floor. Dalus glances to it.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE LUXURY OFFICE TOWER, STREET LEVEL - NIGHT

Riki pauses to consider Nate's black membership card, then glances to the moon.

INT. BLACK CORVETTE POV, PARKED STREET LEVEL - NIGHT

SOMEONE watches Riki walk to her cruiser. They compare her to a woman's picture, a spitting image of Riki.

INT. POLICE HQ, COMPUTER ROOM IN BASEMENT - NIGHT (LATE)

Riki steps up behind Ned, surfing porn, oblivious to his surroundings.

RIKI
Anything interesting?

Ned jerks around, startled.

NED
What are doing here this late?

Riki hands Ned the lemniscates black business card.

RIKI
Another favor, Ned.

Munching a potato chip, he takes the card with a grimy hand. Riki's feminine presence intimidates him.

NED
What you got in mind?

RIKI
Can you hack this site? I need information on the two victims. Seems they were members.

NED
What kind of a club?

RIKI
Sex. Should be right up your alley.

Ned's anxiety is palpable. He eyes Riki.

NED
I'm not a pervert.

RIKI
What you need is a real woman. One night with a flesh and blood female would cure you of this for good.

They've veered into uncomfortable territory for Ned. He turns attention to the black card.

NED
I'll call you when I have something.

Riki raises her eyebrow and freezes Ned with a stare.

RIKI

Please do.

Riki receives a page on her beeper. Reading it,

NED

Best be quick, Ned. Looks like we
have another one.

EXT. A HOUSE PATIO - NIGHT

A WOMAN is tied to a wrought-iron patio chair. A heavy-duty extension cord is plugged into an outlet, then spliced to the metal chair. The crackle of electricity still runs through the victim's body.

Riki, the ME and his team examine the scene. ONE covers his nose at the stench of burnt flesh. Riki pulls the cord from the outlet. The victim's body relaxes.

RIKI

Electricity- seems pretentious.

The ME notes her observation.

RIKI

Feels like the other two doesn't it?

ME

Yeah, that unhurried, almost relaxed
sense of murder.

Riki notes a chair facing the victim.

RIKI

They enjoy this.

The captain arrives, clearly roused from sleep.

CAPTAIN

Number three?

RIKI

Appears so.

CAPTAIN

That makes it serial. What do we know?

ME

They're very tidy, leaving us nothing
to go on. Renders the victim unconscious,
sets up the murder, then revives them
to experience their death.

CAPTAIN
(to Riki)
Thoughts?

Riki picks up the electrical cord.

RIKI
Each death is different... first
water, then air and now... fire?
All elements. What's the next element?

ME
Earth.

INT. DOCTOR THEO MAURTINO'S OFFICE - DAY

THEO, mid-40's, cerebral, works at his desk. Via intercom,

RECEPTIONIST (VO)
A detective to see you, Doctor.

THEO
Did I have one scheduled?

RECEPTIONIST (VO)
She says it's important.

He looks up from paperwork. He opens a desk drawer to view a monitor of his lobby. He squints at Riki's image.

THEO
(into the intercom)
A detective...?

RECEPTIONIST (VO)
Santana.

Theo leans back in his chair, contemplative, then looks back at the monitor.

THEO
Send her in.

AT HIS DOOR

Theo opens the door to greet Riki. He eyes her intently as she takes a seat. He reclaims his chair.

THEO
You're a detective?

Riki eyes him.

RIKI

Homicide.

Theo picks up a dagger-style letter opener and holds the end between each index finger, contemplative.

THEO

Interesting.

RIKI

How so?

THEO

No matter. How may I help you Detective—

RIKI

Santana.

Theo glances for a moment to the painting on his wall.

RIKI

You've worked with the department to create perp profiles?

He nods. Riki places a case file on his desk.

RIKI

I need a profile of a killer.

He sets the letter opener down and pulls the file toward him.

THEO

Anything I should know?

RIKI

It's all in the file.

She stands up to leave.

THEO

Do you paint, Detective?

RIKI

No.

THEO

Appreciate the arts?

RIKI

Not particularly.

THEO

A pity.

With the letter opener, he indicates the painting on the wall.

THEO

I would've appreciated your opinion.

Riki glances to a painting, eerie in its beauty, eyes staring from thunderclouds.

RIKI

Melancholy.

THEO

I'll be in touch.

He watches her exit, then turns to contemplate the painting.