

Another Kingdom

by Angie

*“Violent souls, but only
As the hollow men
The stuffed men.”
- TS Eliot*

Vincent could not forget the evil he had seen the two young men enact in front of him, even if they didn't know it. As he told Catherine, it would continue to haunt him unless he did something.

But what could he do? He could not testify in court. Could he stop them somehow? He thought about that. The men chose prostitutes, it seemed, mostly young ones, and probably from the stroll where those at the lower end of the class waited for customers. The car he had seen them drive was distinctive. He would know it if he saw it again.

How often did they kill? It was becoming more frequent, Catherine said.

He remembered a poem by TS Eliot and it haunted him almost as much as the depredations of the two men. Eliot knew the bleakness of life ... and death. He knew about hollow men.

*Those who have crossed
With direct eyes, to death's other kingdom
Remember us - if at all - not as lost
Violent souls, but only
As the hollow men
The stuffed men.*

Vincent recalled that Catherine had recognized the obvious passion, courage and empathy of Jason Walker – but was puzzled by his lack of mercy. Yet Jason had not killed him when he could have easily done so, on the bridge.

The two 'hollow men' had none of Jason's compassion. They were killers, with no consideration at all for their victims. They wanted to kill, enjoyed it, wanted more.

Recalling that poem gave Vincent inspiration. He recited a stanza silently to himself.

*Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow*

Yes, that was a role he could play, in fact it was one he was uniquely suited for.

Thus it was that he happened to see the car and tracked the two men silently from the darkness of alleys, as they searched for their next victim. He had no doubt at all that they were doing that. Why else would two rich men patrol an area of cheap hookers?

He saw them approach a prostitute and talk her into going into an alley near where he was hiding. He made his voice project out to them before they got far.

“Let her go.”

They heard him, but didn't at first believe what they were hearing. He had to reinforce it.

That time they gave up for the night, but Vincent knew they would be back. They were only temporarily thwarted. So it was. He mulled over the next stanza as he waited, and was nearby when they again tried 'to do' another prostitute. The heartless two words one stated chilled him to the bone.

*“Between the conception
And the creation
Between the emotion
And the response
Falls the Shadow”*

He, the Shadow, broke in between the emotion and the response. And again, they seemed to give up on their victim. But he saw them talk to another, older woman, and guessed that they had another plan.

*Life is very long
Between the desire
And the spasm
Between the potency
And the existence
Between the essence
And the descent
Falls the Shadow*

He did not have to wait long to find out what that plan was, after he saw them pay the woman. He sensed Catherine growing nearer and prepared himself. She had been duped by the woman to come here, the two men trading on her wish to see their activities cease.

The fight in the old theatre was worse than he could have imagined. He'd had to make sure the men did not survive it. He had run out with Catherine, but found himself leaning against a wall, mentally devastated - and physically exhausted as no tunnel labour could make him. He'd had to kill again to save his love. He felt himself slipping into madness, and TS Eliot again seemed to understand.

*This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but with a whimper.*

He heard Catherine's voice through his pain, asking him if he was all right.

His reply was as much of a reflection of the poem as the night's deeds.

“Nothing but madness. Nothing but blood. When will it stop?”

Catherine had no answer, except to move close enough to hug him. Her love and concern calmed him and allowed a sliver of hope to reach him. It would not be enough. He knew that.

Sometime soon, he would have to pay for his killings. It was inevitable. He was no better than the men he had killed, no matter the reason. He was not hollow – but he was broken.

Later, when Catherine had returned home and he was again in his chamber, Elliot's poem haunted him once more.

*Is it like this
In death's other kingdom
Waking alone
At the hour when we are
Trembling with tenderness
Lips that would kiss
Form prayers to broken stone.*

Yes, how could he expect to kiss the woman he loved with so many deaths on his hands? How dare he pretend that tenderness would win in the other kingdom he inhabited? There was hope in another stanza of the poem, and he recited it to himself.

*Eyes I dare not meet in dreams
In death's dream kingdom
These do not appear:
There, the eyes are
Sunlight on a broken column
There, is a tree swinging
And voices are
In the wind's singing
More distant and more solemn
Than a fading star. **

With a sigh, Vincent got into bed, closed his eyes, and tried to forget the night's work. He wanted just a little peace ... and sleep.

END

* *The Hollow Men* by T.S. Eliot