

Always all right

I'm always all right.

It's what I told Max, what I said to Joshua.

And I am. All right. Always.

Except at night.

When the ghosts come out to play.

In the wee small hours of the morning, when Seattle sleeps, and I'm alone, they appear. When there's no pretty girl in my bed to distract me, no burglary job that needs my attention, or a nightclub or bar where the buzz of drunks and hookers drowns out their voices, the dead come calling.

Rachel is always there. Her beauty, her dark eyes so full of trust, her innocence, she takes my breath away every time. I recall the sight of her fingers, so slim and elegant as they danced across the black and white keys of the piano. She was alive. She had a future. And I took it away from her.

The night I stared down the gun barrel that her father pointed at my face, I couldn't help but feel relief. At last, I was going to account for what I'd done. I was also scared. If it is true what they say, that there is a heaven and a hell, I have no doubt where I'll end up.

The ghosts will see to it.

Sometimes Rachel is alone when she visits me, but not very often. Most of the times, the others accompany her. Everyone I murdered since I planted the bomb that destroyed Robert Berrisford's car and took Rachel away.

I can't remember the ones that came before, even the real Simon Lehane is gone. Their faces are blurred in my memory. I didn't understand back then.

Of course, Manticore never called it 'murder'. They called it 'sending a message' or 'solving a problem' or 'collateral damage'. Pretty euphemisms that try to hide the truth: we are murderers. I am a murderer. Engineered and raised to be a killer, a cold tool in the hands of the people in charge.

Rachel opened my eyes; after she was gone, no amount of brainwashing could convince me of the validity of our orders.

Sure, I pretended to be the obedient X5, a good little soldier, yes sir, no sir, right away sir. I did what I had to do to stay alive; the weeks I spent locked up in solitary taught me how. Survival instinct is that strong. Yet inside, I was dead already. An animated corpse.

Then Max came along, and she burned Manticore to the ground. I thought that that fire would set me free, that it was my cleansing. For days, I believed I had outrun the ghosts, left the memories behind to wither in the flames. I was wrong. The ghosts live within me, and I can never run far enough to outdistance them.

I said I'm always all right.

I lied.

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