

'The Finger Snatcher'

by Rory Donohoe

Detective Stephen Cross arrived at the scene of another murder, the fourth one that week. Cross surmised that it was the same culprit. He made his way to the front door, where an officer was waiting for him. Cross was always bad with names that weren't necessary to his job.

"Hey Cross, forensics are still setting up down here, so you're free to check out the place. Just, uh, please don't tamper with any evidence y'know?"

Cross simply nodded and walked up to the victim, Pamela Lawrence's, apartment.

The door was already open, with a cracked frame and splinters littering the immediate area. Cross could already tell that the killer entered by force; it was obvious. The apartment was classy, minus the viscera. The expensive-looking furniture, rich mahogany bookshelves and massive HD television showed that Ms Lawrence was not short on funds. The place had a dank, stale smell, but since the crime had occurred only a few hours before, the stench didn't come from the corpse. Cross found Ms Lawrence's body lying face-down on her kitchen table. A trail of blood from the victim to her bedroom let Cross know that she had been dragged here.

The bedroom was just as nice as the rest of the home. Another large television, still playing reruns of 'Desperate Housewives,' reflected onto Ms Lawrence's bed. The queen-sized mattress was soaked in the victim's blood, and the window adjacent to the bed was shattered. Cross took out his flashlight and leaned out of the broken pane. He saw a safe, split open by the fall, and its contents missing. The murderer could be put down for robbery too. Before he returned to the living

room, Cross switched on the lights. Smearred in blood across the wall was the word “justice.”

The grizzled detective scanned the home once more before examining the body. He discovered that a serrated knife was missing from the kitchen counter. From Cross’ first glance at the corpse, there were a lot of ways she could have died. Blunt-force trauma to the head, cuts all over, you name it, it was there. Cross then spotted the fingers, or lack thereof, and finally had evidence that this horrible act was connected to the other three that week. Michael Marston, the crazed serial-killer, was clearly behind this. The media titled him ‘The Finger-Snatcher,’ but Cross never wanted to give lunatics nicknames.

He almost missed it, but lying under the victim’s lifeless arm was a phone, and next to that, one of her severed fingers. A wave of disgust hit the detective; he was used to crime scenes and a bit of gore, but the killer deliberately leaving these things for investigators to find was just sick. The only way to unlock Ms Lawrence’s phone was with the fingerprint scanner placed on the base of the device. With reluctance, Cross picked up the severed finger with a napkin and used it to unlock the phone. Doing this meant that Cross was breaking many rules, but he wanted results fast. The screen came to life, and at once a call came through. An image of a well-dressed man appeared on the smartphone’s small display.

“Oh!” the man exclaimed, “You’ve finally made it!”

Cross was in a live video call with Michael Marston; he was waiting for someone to uncover the phone.

“What do you want?” Cross said, holding back the anger in his voice.

“Well, I want you to catch me of course!” the killer proclaimed. “This is my kind of game, and I’m having a great time!” The murderer was brimming with glee.

“You think that this is a game? Killing people and taking their fingers with you?!” Cross was confused by Marston, but at the same time, he was dealing with a psychopath.

“The fingers are a bonus, but yes, this is definitely a game.” Marston had a wide smile, exposing yellowed, dirty teeth. “Now, since you’ve been rubbish the last few times, I’m going to give you a hint.” Marston’s excitement was shining through the live video. “I heard that there’s a party going on at St Stephen’s church, you wouldn’t want to miss it!” Cross was prepared to bolt out of the room before the killer said, “Also, detective, you should really stay here, I’ve left you with a few games, and I’d love it if you played...” The call ended and the screen went dark. The detective ran to the window facing the street and shouted at the officers to go to the church. They sped off, leaving only a few people behind. Cross remained in the apartment. He was willing to play along; he needed answers.

Detective Cross returned to the phone. There were a few apps to choose from, but only one game. He clicked the screen and began playing. The “game” was as rotten as its creator. Cross moved a basket horizontally on the display, and he had to catch severed fingers. Everytime he completed a level, an image of Marston’s victim and their name appeared. There were people here who Marston had killed that the police didn’t even know about, and Cross knew that they were deceased because the pictures were of their corpses. Then, something new popped up. Pictures of living people appeared, these must have been planned victims of Marston’s that he hadn’t gotten to yet. One person in danger was Father O’Flynn, and Cross could assume that he was in St Stephen’s church. Without delay, Cross finished the game and recorded all of the potential victims’ names; they were now able to put them into police protection.

The only other thing Cross found on the phone was a notes app. There was only one entry. Cross opened it and was shocked. The entry was from about a year ago, and it read;

“All of these people are criminals. They will not be stopped, so I’m taking it into my own hands to prevent them from harming anybody else. They took my house, my wife, my children, everything I had. Justice will be delivered. They will pay.” This explained why the word “justice” was smeared across Ms Lawrence’s bedroom wall; it was all a cruel form of vigilante revenge for Marston. The entry was unlike the man who Cross saw on the phone, so he either went insane, or it was just an act.

Cross took the phone as evidence and returned to the police station. He gave in all of the information, but kept the phone; he had a feeling that he wasn’t finished with it. The tired detective sat down in his office and let out a sigh of relief, he was done for the day. Suddenly, a notification appeared on the killer’s phone. There was a new level in Marston’s game. With a sinking feeling in his gut, Cross decided to play the game anyway. After collecting enough severed fingers, a picture of John Cross displayed itself on the screen, saying under it,

“You know what you did to my family.”

The detective dropped the phone, every fiber of his being shaking with fear. He brought his hands to his face, inspecting all ten of his fingers. He ran out of his office, out of the station, and didn’t look back...