

**THE POSSESSION OF
NATTIE FILMORE**

A JAIN LAZARUS ADVENTURE

BY

DEVON ELLINGTON



“The Possession of Nattie Filmore”

A Jain Lazarus Adventure

© 2008 Devon Ellington

First Edition

Published by Dragon’s Treehouse Press, New York and Massachusetts

Temporary address: dragonstreehouse@fearlessink.com

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in print or electronic formats, or any storage and retrieval system, without express permission from the publisher.

The characters and situations in this story are entirely fictional. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is entirely a coincidence.

Author's Note:

In the chronology of the Jain Lazarus adventures, this tale takes place after HEX BREAKER, but before OLD-FASHIONED DETECTIVE WORK.

THE POSSESSION OF NATTIE FILMORE
A JAIN LAZARUS ADVENTURE
BY DEVON ELLINGTON

The man crawled forward on his hands and knees through the fallen leaves. The dry twigs scratched through the wool pant legs. He felt blood trickle and the sharp sensation of dirt and rock scraped against open skin. The sound of the cracked, dry foliage reminded him of malicious laughter. He couldn't understand the pain. It seared through his body, making it impossible for him to do anything other than crawl. And he was cold, far too cold for a sunny autumn day. It felt like icy liquid injected into his veins, freezing him from the inside out. He'd swerved the car when the boy stepped into the road. He was sure he didn't hit the boy. He hadn't hit a tree. The car simply rolled to a stop. And the pain began.

He needed help. He lost his cell phone somewhere in the bracken. There was a house only a few hundred feet in front of him. He could get help. Surely someone would see the car and find him, before . . .

He looked up, in spite of the pain. The boy was in front of him, the boy who'd stepped into the road. He was small and slight for his age, which was maybe eight, and wore jeans and a faded yellow and gray plaid shirt. His feet were bare. But it was his eyes that astonished anyone who looked into them. They were dark, too large for his face, and without iris. The man looked into those eyes, reached out a hand and everything went black.

*

*

*

“I’m surprised you called me.” Wyatt East folded his arms across his chest and stared at Jain Lazarus.

Jain barely hesitated as she rummaged through the pack resting in the trunk of her car. She glanced at him and then away, hoping the hurt didn’t show in her eyes. “Your territory. I thought you should know. Plus, now that you’ve got some experience with the preternatural . . .”

“What are we dealing with?”

“Sounds like a straight-up ghost to me.” Jain turned and trusted that she had enough self-possession to look him right in the eye. “Old house abandoned for years because of disturbances. A few different owners in the last dozen years or so, but no one can stay more than a few weeks because it’s so disconcerting. Objects moving, cold spots, footsteps heard late at night. And the appearance, lately, at least, of a small boy with large eyes.”

“You’re talking about the Dempsey place over on Cassidy Pike.”

“Yes. You know it?”

“Been abandoned since I was a kid. We used to go there and see who’d get so scared to run first.”

“I bet you were never first.”

Wyatt smiled. “You’d win that bet. But I always ran, eventually.”

“What was it like?”

“Unsettled. It looked like a typical haunted house. It’s a large farmhouse with shattered windows, a few remains of furniture left. Not even squatters will stay. You’re right about the cold spots, though. If I remember correctly, it wasn’t one single cold spot; the spot moved. It was like it followed whoever was around.” Wyatt frowned, remembering. “It was like an icy hand gripped your heart and squeezed. You felt like you’d never warm up again, even though you sweated from running so fast.”

“Anyone die there?”

“In the history of the house? Plenty of people. People do that, you know. They’re born. They die. Often at home, especially in those days. Lots of the kids who roamed the place had accident, mostly as they ran away, but I don’t remember anyone dying.”

“Any of them children?”

“Not that I remember.” Wyatt thought for a minute. “It’s likely that women and babies died in childbirth or shortly thereafter, and there were plenty of illnesses to keep them from ever getting old enough to even go to school. But I don’t remember anything specific about a young boy’s death. We can do some digging in the archives, if you like.”

“We might have to. Or not. If we find the ghost, we can simply ask.”

“Are you going to use your ectoplasm neutralizer?”

Jain smiled, pleased that he remembered her specially designed and modified gun. “Not unless I have to. I’d rather find out the ghost’s story and find a solution than blast him and disintegrate him.” She glanced at him. “Besides, you still have that gun.”

Wyatt looked uncomfortable. “I forgot to give it back.”

“It’s okay. I built another one.” She smiled. “Keep it. It might come in handy some day.”

“Only if I’m around you.”

“Aren’t you planning to do that?” She zipped the bag. “Are we going in your car or mine?”

“Think we need any of your modifications?”

Jain shrugged.

“Let’s use mine.”

Jain hoisted the duffle bag out, slammed the hatch door shut and locked the car.

“How’s that missing child case going?”

Wyatt frowned. “Not well. We can’t find any leads at all. One minute, the kid went into the back yard to call the dog; the next minute, he’s gone. No sign of a car around the place, or any strangers. It’s like he vanished into thin air.”

“The parents must be frantic.”

“There’s only a mother. The father ran off soon after the kid was born. She works hard, does a good job for the two of them. She’s beside herself. It doesn’t help that her boss threatens for fire her for taking off work while her kid’s missing.” He unlocked his car trunk. Jain tossed the duffle in and walked around to the passenger side while Wyatt slammed the trunk shut and took his place on the driver’s side.

“Did you stop by and have a little chat with him?” Jain gave Wyatt a sideways glance as they fastened their seatbelts.

“Oh, yeah. Maybe after we check out the house, we can swing by again. For emphasis.” He turned the key in the ignition.

“What about the dog?”

“We tried to use the dog to track the kid. The dog just cowers in a corner and won’t let anyone come near.”

“Which means the dog witnessed the snatch and it was so frightening even in dog terms, he’s broken.”

“That’s what I thought, too, but it doesn’t read so well in the police report.”

Wyatt pulled out of the parking lot into traffic.

*

*

*

“House is just a few dozen yards up that way.” Wyatt nodded. The residential street had a single lane of traffic on each side of a double yellow line. The road sloped slightly, creating ditches, before continuing upwards to the neat New England houses with their variations of harvest and Halloween decorations. “Hold on,” he said. “You see it?”

“Yeah,” said Jain. “Someone went off the road.”

“Right at the bottom of the Dempsey drive.” Wyatt frowned. He pulled his car partially into the driveway, careful not to block the other car.

“Door on the driver side’s open.” Jain stepped out of the car, instinctively reaching for the knife sheathed in her boot.

“Noticed that.” Wyatt drew his gun, and he kicked his door shut with one foot. Wyatt maneuvered around the driver’s side. Jain crept up on the passenger side.

“Back seat clear,” she called.

Wyatt reached the driver's side. "Front seats clear."

Jain walked around the front of the car, staring inside through the windshield.

Wyatt lowered, but didn't holster his gun, and leaned in to the car. "No blood."

"Something fell out." Jain pointed to the ground.

"Looks like something's been dragged." Wyatt squatted down, examining the place Jain indicated. "Hard to tell, with the wind picking up and the leaves blowing, but . . ." he looked up at her.

Jain looked around. "Someone else is here. I can feel it."

"Something's not right, that's for sure." Wyatt straightened. "Just not sure what it is yet."

They followed the trail of broken sticks and disrupted leaves, weapons ready. They moved a few feet at a time, eyes searching the area around them as much as watching the trail. Birds called out a warning as they passed, and the scent of mulch and pine mixed with the faint scent of wood smoke from a distant neighbor's fireplace.

"Blood," said Wyatt.

"Fresh," Jain agreed.

They exchanged looks and both gripped their weapons a little more tightly. A few steps more, and they both stopped, shuddering.

"That wasn't the wind," said Wyatt.

"No." Jain swallowed. "It wasn't."

"Is there something we're supposed to do at this point, an incantation or whatever, or do we just keep moving?"

"Keep moving."

Jain stepped forward, glad for Wyatt's warmth so close beside her. They inched ahead, taking their time, sweeping their surroundings with all their senses. The path curved slightly, and the shattered Dempsey house loomed above them, complete with rotting porch posts, the front door half off its hinges, and jagged remains of windows jutting from the frames.

"There," said Wyatt, pointing to their right. The body of a man in a tan herringbone suit wearing shiny yet scuffed dark shoes lay face down on the ground. Jain started forward, but Wyatt caught her arm. "Carefully."

She nodded, knowing he was right, and they approached the still form with the same way they'd walked the path. Wyatt leaned down and felt the man's neck with his free hand. "Dead." Jain reached for the body and Wyatt shook his head. "I have to call it in. I don't want to roll him over until he's been photographed. He's beyond our help, at least in this life."

Jain nodded. She looked around and shivered. "That's not what I felt," she said. "There's something or someone else here."

Wyatt looked up at her. "I know."

*

*

*

Jesse Ryan, Wyatt's colleague, and as dark as Wyatt was fair, headed up the team that met them. Jesse nodded to Jain, and they waited in companionable silence as the body was photographed. "M.E.'s on her way," he said. "Ready to turn him over?"

“Yeah.” Wyatt accepted the surgical gloves Jesse held out, snapping them on. Jesse, who already wore a pair, helped him roll the body over, the photographer ready to do his job as soon as they cleared the frame.

“Crawled,” Wyatt observed, pointing to the blood-stained and shredded knee and upper calf fabric.

Jesse frowned. “No other signs of trauma,” he said. “Doesn’t seem to be anything wrong with him, other than he’s dead.”

“Look at the expression on his face,” Jain piped up. “The grimace. Something terrified him before he died.”

The three of them and the two uniformed cops beside them stared at the face, lifeless eyes wide open, lips drawn back over teeth, face twisted into an expression of horror. The photographer leaned forward to capture all of it.

“Could be poison. Could be pain, not fear,” said Jesse. He glanced at Jain. “That’ll be up to the ME.”

“Who’s right here.” A slender woman with large dark eyes behind her black frames, her dark hair pulled into a sleek ponytail, stepped up. “Could be many things.” She put her case down and paused to snap on a pair of gloves.

“Diane,” Wyatt greeted her.

Wyatt’s tone was professional, cordial, and neutral. The woman stared at him for a beat, as though she expected more from him. He frowned down at the body, oblivious to her expectations and the way she half-turned towards him. Jain’s suspicions rose. Something beneath the surface was between them. She tried to shake it off. She and Wyatt had no exclusive understanding; they purposely kept things loose. His life was not

her business during the times she wasn't in it. Yet insecurity pulled at her, gnawed at her nerves, and she hated herself for it.

“Wyatt, Jesse, gentleman,” the medical examiner nodded to those assembled, and then to Jain. “Lady.” She knelt beside the body and spent a few minutes poking, prodding, pulling clothing away. She sat back on her heels and frowned. “Damned if I can tell what killed him without slicing him up.” She reached into the man's inside jacket pocket and pulled out his wallet, which she tossed to Wyatt, who caught it easily. “Soon as you're done, zip him up and we'll get him to the office. I'll put everything else on hold and do the autopsy immediately.”

“Appreciate it,” said Wyatt.

“There's always a chance, albeit a slim one, that this guy had something contagious that killed him,” Diane stated, standing up. “I'm not going to risk its spread. I'll handle it immediately and call the office.” She walked away without looking back once.

“Friendly sort,” Jain muttered.

“Good at her job,” Wyatt returned, as he opened the wallet. “Daniel Persus of Woodbury, NY. Out on Long Island. Wonder what he was doing up here in Western Massachusetts?” He tossed the wallet to Jesse, who caught it, and turned to Jain. “Ready to check out the house?”

“Sure.” Jain had dozens of questions, but decided this wasn't the time to ask any of them.

“Need any of us to come with you?” Jesse asked.

Wyatt shook his head. “Better do the regular routine down here. Whatever Baker’s worried about regarding contagion, we still need to treat this as a homicide, or at the very least, an accidental death until we get her results. We were on our way to the house anyway, and it’s too much of a coincidence that a dead man happens to turn up in the front yard. We’ll yell if we need anything.”

“Good.” Jesse looked at the house and frowned. “I hated that place as a kid, and I hate it now.”

Wyatt turned, stripped off his gloves, stuffed them into his coat pocket, and headed for the house. Jain hesitated for a second, staring at the dead man and then Jesse, before turning to follow him. She still didn’t think it was appropriate to ask any questions. And she noticed, as they approached the house, that Wyatt unholstered his gun.

They tested each porch step before putting their weight on it. When they reached the door, Jain reached into her jacket pocket and put out two slender, high-powered flashlights. She handed one to Wyatt. “I put in fresh batteries this morning,” she said.”

“Of course you did.” He accepted one and turned it on with his teeth. He touched the door gently with his shoulder, and it gave way. He flashed the light around the room, over his gun, and stepped inside. Jain was right behind him.

“Watch the rotted floorboards,” he said.

Jain skirted a hole in the floor and looked around at the dust floating in the occasional sunbeam which filtered through the trees and found its way into the old house. “Living room, parlor, dining room, stairs up,” she said. “This must lead to the kitchen.”

She scooted past Wyatt and walked down the hallway into the large kitchen. He sighed and followed her.

Doors half-hung over the few cabinets which still had them. The kitchen lacked a refrigerator or stove, and the sink sagged from the wall. “What’s this?” Jain asked, pushing at a narrow door.

“Pantry?” Wyatt asked. “I don’t remember noticing this room before.”

“Where you ever here long enough to look for it?” Jain retorted.

“I was upstairs a few times,” Wyatt admitted, “but not in the kitchen.”

Jain moved the door open. “Pantry might be right,” she said, stepping inside. “There are shelves here. But there’s also a few broken pieces of a cot.” She turned to Wyatt. “And it’s cold in here. Unnaturally cold.”

Wyatt frowned. “Yes. Is it my imagination, or is the temperature dropping as we stand here?”

Jain shivered. “It’s dropping.” She moved near the cot. “These floorboards,” she began.

“Careful,” said Wyatt. “I don’t want you falling through to the basement.”

“Something’s under them.” She knelt down, removing the knife from her boot sheath and pried up a floorboard, which was attached to several others.

“Light first, don’t lose a few fingers,” Wyatt cautioned.

She glared at him. “This isn’t the first time I’ve done this, you know.”

“I know. I also know one can sometimes get carried away with a find.”

Jain flicked the light from the flashlight into the small space. “There’s definitely something here,” she said.

Wyatt looked around the room. He saw what looked like a discarded wooden knitting needle, picked it up, and handed it to Jain. “See if you can dig it out with this,” he said. At her look, he added, “Just in case it’s booby-trapped.”

Jain nodded. She wasn’t sure if she felt grateful for his concern or annoyed that he didn’t think she had enough common sense not to get her fingers snapped off. She took the knitting needle, slid it beside the small bundle, and managed, with some maneuvering and a minimum of swearing, to pull it forward.

As the stained, cloth-wrapped bundle emerged from its hiding place, Wyatt grasped it and yanked, freeing it. Jain dropped the semi-raised floorboards. “What about a booby-trap?” she demanded.

He grinned at her. “You protected me.” He leaned forward to kiss the tip of her icy cold nose and she smiled, in spite of herself.

“It’s so cold we can see our breaths,” she said, taking the bundle he offered to her. “It feels like mid-winter, not October.” She unwrapped the soiled cloth and gasped as she stared at the small, leather-bound book in her hands. She flipped through a few pages. “It’s a journal.”

A sound startled them. They turned towards the kitchen. A small boy stood there, staring at them. He was dark-haired, barefoot, in a gray and yellow plaid shirt and blue jeans. But it was his eyes that were his most extraordinary feature. Large and dark, they had no iris.

Jain got up slowly. This was the mysterious boy sighted on the property. “He doesn’t look like a ghost,” she said quietly.

Wyatt made a strange, strangled sound. Jain turned to him, in time to see him clutch his chest and collapse to the floor, dropping his gun. “Nattie Filmore,” he gasped, before losing consciousness.

*

*

*

“Wyatt? Can you hear me? Can you open your eyes?” Jain leaned over Wyatt’s hospital bed. She held his hand in hers. He was warmer now, almost back to normal, not cold-as-death, the way he was when he first collapsed.

Finally, he squeezed her fingers in response, indicating he could hear her and he was returning to consciousness.

“That’s it,” she encouraged. “Come back to me.” She waited until those pale eyes opened and focused, then smiled at him. “You scared the hell out of me. And that’s not easy.”

“What happened?” Wyatt coughed.

Jain grabbed the water beside the bed and handed it to him. He took a drink, watching her. “I’m not sure,” said Jain. “The boy stood in the kitchen, staring at us. Suddenly, you clutched your chest and fell to the ground, like you were having a heart attack, and lost consciousness.”

“What happened to the boy?”

“When I looked up, he was gone.” She frowned. “Who’s Nattie Filmore?”

“The missing boy.”

“The boy in the kitchen wasn’t entirely human.”

Wyatt frowned, the creases between his brows deepening. “What do you mean?”

“There’s something otherworldly about him. It shows in his eyes, and in the fact that he’s what causes the temperature to drop.”

“Nattie Filmore’s just a little boy,” said Wyatt. “A little, kidnapped boy, whose mother is frantic about him. We’ve got to get search teams up there.” He shifted higher in the bed. “I’ll call Jesse and get dressed and—“

Jain covered his hand as he reached for his cell phone on the nightstand. “No.”

“Do you have any idea how long we’ve looked for this kid?”

“It’s not Nattie.”

“I can show you the photograph, if you don’t believe me.”

“I believe you. The body might be Nattie’s, but not . . .the rest of him.”

Wyatt dropped his hand back to his side. He closed his eyes for a minute, as though he fought a headache or an outburst of temper, and opened them again.

“Explain.”

Jain bit her lip. “I think he’s possessed.”

Wyatt raised an eyebrow. “By the devil?”

“Nothing that simple.”

“Of course not.” Wyatt shut his eyes again and sighed.

When he opened them, Jain said, “While the doctors ran every test known to man on you, I read the journal. It was written by a young woman named Aurora, who worked for the Dempseys. She had enough education to read and write, but her family died of disease, and she hired herself out as a servant. Seemed their son Alfred viewed the servants as personal property and raped her whenever he felt like it. She got pregnant.

The family was worried she would ruin their reputation, so they converted the pantry into a room for her. She named the baby Longfellow, for the poet. They were kept as prisoners in the house, mostly in that little room. She knitted and wrote in her journal to keep from going crazy. The last few entries were written when Aurora was very sick, and Longfellow, who was about eight at the time, stood by the bed, watching her die. The family wouldn't bring in a doctor, although the wife snuck in sometimes to try to help Augusta."

"What does that have to do with Nattie Filmore?"

"I think Longfellow's spirit hangs around the house. I think he can't discern between the Dempsey men and anyone else, and attacks anyone male. You said there were a lot of accidents there, when you were growing up?"

Wyatt nodded. "Yeah. I was lucky, I only sprained my ankle a few times, but some of the other kids broke arms, legs, there was a bashed skull or two, as I recall."

"Were all of them boys?"

Wyatt thought for a moment. "Now that you mention it, I think so."

"This is what I think happened," said Jain. "I think Longfellow's fed on rage and fear for years. Nattie must have visited the place at some point, maybe with his dog. That's where Longfellow first saw him. And decided it was time to enter a body and do even more damage."

"Revenge on all men for his mother's death?" The corners of Wyatt's mouth turned down. "That doesn't sound very logical."

"It might to a young child who holds the men of the house responsible for his mother's death." Jain licked her lips. "You could almost say they murdered her."

“Unlawful imprisonment, at the very least,” admitted Wyatt. “So what do we do?”

“You stay here. I’ll go back to the house and deal with Longfellow/Nattie.”

“Perform an exorcism?”

“Hopefully, it won’t be that dramatic.”

“Can you do it without killing Nattie?”

“I don’t know.”

“A dead kid’s going to complicate things. Not to mention break his mother’s heart.”

“I’ll do the best I can. I don’t want to make a promise I can’t keep.”

Wyatt caught her hand. “I know. I’m thinking out loud.”

“I’ll explore every option I’ve got.”

“You’re not going there alone.”

“You can’t go with me. He’ll attack you again.”

“You think once he figures out what you’re up to, you’ll be safe?”

“Probably not. But I have the advantage of being female, I can magically protect myself, and by the time he realizes what I’m doing, it’ll be too late.”

“I don’t like it.” Wyatt shook his head, thinking. “Patty Brayne.”

“Who?”

“She’s a fellow detective. Damn good cop. And a female. I’ll call her, ask her to meet you at the house.” At Jain’s dubious expression, he added, “I’d trust her with my life. It’s either you trust her with yours, or *I’m* coming with you.”

“I’ll work with Detective Brayne,” said Jain, after only the slightest hesitation.

“Which means not going into the house until she gets there,” Wyatt instructed.

“Yes, boss.” She made a face at him.

“No one can figured what the hell’s wrong with you.” Diane Baker strode into the room, frowning. “And the only thing that’s wrong with your victim is that he’s dead when he shouldn’t be. Heart stopped. And there was no reason for it so to do. I don’t like it.” She glared at Wyatt, as though it was his personal fault. “I’ve asked them to keep you overnight and run more tests.”

“If there’s nothing wrong with me, I should go home.” Wyatt made no attempt to hide the testiness from his tone.

“I think it’s a good idea to stay overnight,” said Jain.

“The missing boy was spotted,” Diane added, “not too far from where you found the body. Maybe he saw something, though I hope for the kid’s sake, he didn’t. They’ve sent out a search-and-rescue team.”

Wyatt and Jain exchanged looks. “Go,” said Wyatt.

Jain nodded and left the room, walking as quickly as she dared without attracting attention. As she hurried past the nurses’ station, one of the nurses looked up, recognized her and frowned. Jain remembered that her name was Theresa, and, although she’d never asked Wyatt, Jain had the distinct sensation that she and Wyatt were once involved. Theresa waited until she passed, then walked in the direction of Wyatt’s room. Jain suppressed the urge to join them. She couldn’t afford distractions right now. And if Wyatt was distracted, it was the best way to keep him safe. Between Theresa and the medical examiner, he’d have his hands full. She grinned. It might be amusing, if she could control her pangs of jealousy. She punched the elevator button, then decided to

take the stairs. She was about to push open the door when a command stopped her.

“Lazarus!”

She turned and watched as Diane Baker stalked down the hallway towards her.

“Don’t you usually deal with the dead?”

“I’d like to prevent anyone else from landing on my slab for a few days.” The woman stood in front of Jain. She was a few inches shorter than Jain, and had to look up at her. “What’s going on?”

Jain shook her head. “You wouldn’t believe me if I told you.”

“Try me.” Diane folded her arms over her chest. “I work with the dead. They’re not as quiet as most people think.”

Jain considered this for a minute, then looked around to make sure they weren’t overheard. “I think Nattie Filmore’s been possessed by the spirit of a boy who watched his mother die in the house, and he’s attacking men.”

“Stopping their hearts?” Diane asked.

“Sounds crazy, I know.”

“He was scared to death.” She looked at Jain. “Explains why East is on the phone to Brayne. I’ll follow you.”

“I don’t think an audience—“

“If you’re right, any male who crosses paths with this kid is in danger. And East has a point, you can’t go out there without backup. You’re dealing with someone who stops hearts because he can. Brayne’s a good cop and I don’t scare easily. Let’s go.”

She turned and started down the stairs.

Jain shook her head and followed. As they walked down the stairs, Diane tossed over her shoulder, “Just for the record, I think Wyatt East is fascinating and attractive. I let him know. He let me know he wasn’t interested. He’s too caught up with you.” She glanced over her shoulder at Jain. “I’m sure you’re curious. I sure as hell would be, if our situations were reversed. And for the record, if he ever loses interest in you, which I don’t see happening until hell freezes over, or you break his heart, which I think is more likely, I’m going to be right there to pick up the pieces.”

Before Jain could respond, Diane Baker reached the bottom landing and sailed through the door.

*

*

*

By the time they reached the Dempsey House on Cassidy Pike, it was chaos. A mish-mash of patrol cars stood at odd angles to each other, and several ambulances loaded uniformed officers into them. Three or four K-9 officers stood off to the side, stupefied, as their dogs howled and shook.

Jain got out of her car and stared. Diane bolted out of her own car to join her. An athletically build woman with light brown hair walked over. “Brayne,” said Diane, “what’s going on?”

“The officers are dropping like dominos,” she responded.

“All male?” Jain asked.

“Yup. Our two female officers are fine.” She nodded towards two uniformed woman, who looked shaken, but otherwise unharmed. “And the dogs are losing it. These dogs never lose it.”

“He’s gaining strength from every man he takes down,” said Jain. She looked at Patty and Diane. “How do we keep everyone back while we go in?”

“Leave it to me,” said Diane. “Hey!” She raised her voice, making heads turn in her direction. “We need all of you to stay back. Do you understand? We think the boy’s sick. If there’s contagion, you could all be in danger. So stay here, while we investigate.”

“If this is some kind of contagious disease, won’t you be at risk?” One of the K-9 officers asked.

“If we go down, send in people in HazMat suits after us,” Diane snapped. She turned to Jain and Patty. “Let’s go.”

“Good thinking,” said Jain.

“I don’t suppose you’re going to fill me in?” Patty Brayne asked, as they trudged through the fallen leaves towards the house.

“Dead boy possess living boy to kill men as vengeance against those who killed his mother,” said Diane. “Short version.” She looked at Jain. “Did I get it right?”

“Yeah,” said Jain. “I’m impressed.” She stopped for a minute, feeling the air. “He’s around back.”

“What, exactly, is the plan?” Patty asked.

“Stop the kid,” said Diane.

“I’m not shooting a kid. Not unless he’s armed and aiming at me.”

“We won’t need to do that,” said Jain. “I just have to convince Longfellow this isn’t a good idea.”

Diane snorted. “Good luck.”

“I see him,” said Patty. “Over there, next to that pile of stones.”

“It’s a cairn,” said Jain. “I bet his mother’s buried under there.”

“Soon’s this is cleared up, I’ll have her exhumed,” said Diane.

“Don’t stay it in his hearing,” Jain cautioned. “He’ll probably get upset.”

Nattie/Longfellow stood beside the cairn, which reached nearly to his knees. He stared at the three women as they approached, with a strange, sad, solemn expression on his face.

“Those eyes are a little creepy,” Patty’s tone was quiet.

“Try not to look in them directly,” Jain instructed, “and if you start feeling cold from the inside, get out.”

“I’m your backup, I’m not leaving,” Patty retorted.

“What do we do?” asked Diane. “Do we need a priest? There’s an Episcopalian Reverend a few towns over who’s female, if that helps.”

“No time,” said Jain. She motioned for the other two women to wait and stepped closer to the boy. “Hello, Longfellow.”

He stared at her. “You know my name.”

“Yes, I do. You’ve been around a long time. Don’t you think it’s time to join your mother?”

He licked his lips. “Not until all the bad men are dead.”

“The bad men are dead, Longfellow. Now you’re starting to hurt good ones.”

He shook his head. "The man over there," he gestured in the direction where Daniel Persus's body was found, "he did to someone else what Alfred Dempsey did to my mother."

"Alfred was your father."

"Don't care. He hurt my mother."

Jain wasn't sure she wanted to hear the answer. "What about the man with me, the one you hurt earlier?"

"He's strong. I needed his strength."

"He's not a bad man."

"I needed what he had. He made me stronger."

"What about those men you hurt just now?"

"They would have hurt me."

"No, they just don't understand that you and Nattie are together right now. They're looking for Nattie because Nattie's mother is really worried about him. You wouldn't want Nattie's mother to worry, would you? You wouldn't want someone else's mother to hurt?"

For the first time, he looked unsure. "No."

"Is Nattie still in there?"

"Somewhere. But I'm much stronger than Nattie."

"I'm sure you are. You've had a lot of practice. Will you let Nattie go so he can come home?"

"No." Longfellow/Nattie frowned. "I like being in here. Nattie will fade away soon. He can't hold on much longer."

Damn, thought Jain.

Longfellow/Nattie's chin lifted. "I can scare dogs, you know."

"Yes, I saw it," said Jain. "That's not very nice."

"People were never nice to me."

"How did you die, Longfellow?"

He pulled aside Nattie's collar to show dark marks on his neck. "My father strangled me after my mother died."

"So you're both buried there?" Jain pointed to the cairn.

"Yes."

"Where's your mom?"

"There." He pointed. "I just told you."

"No, I mean, where is she? You're here, in front of me. You were in the house, and now you're in Nattie's body. Where's she?"

"I don't know."

"Don't you miss her?"

"Yeah." Suddenly Longfellow/Nattie looked like he wanted to cry. "I can't find her."

"If I find her, will you go with her?"

"If I can't find her, you can't. And I've looked for years." His tone was scornful.

"But if I do? You'll go with her and let Nattie go back to his mother?"

"Yes."

"By Odin's oath?"

"Sure." He shrugged. "Don't know what that means, but . . ."

“It means you can’t go back on your word.”

“Oh.” He looked uncertain. “Then I don’t know if I want to promise.”

“Too late.” Jain let her tone sound harsh. “You made an oath. You break it, it’ll be worse than when your father strangled you.”

“You tricked me.” He looked angry, and Jain felt the energy gathering. She tossed up protective shields around herself, Diane, and Patty, and concentrated. She reached down, into the earth, into the cairn. She could feel the bones of Aurora and Longfellow. She reached past the bones, breaking the dimensional barrier, and searched the astral. She sent out the signal, searching for Aurora, sending out the call that her son needed her.

She felt the temperature drop around her. The wind picked up. She sent a stronger call, feeling Longfellow’s rage tearing at her protective shield. If he started feeding on the life force of women, too, he might then decide to feed on the life force of all living things, like an energy vampire. It would be much more difficult to stop him. She reached, reached, reached, and felt a sudden warm breeze, as though someone opened a door to a well-heated room.

“Longfellow?” The voice was tentative.

Jain fell to her knees and opened her eyes. A woman stood beside the cairn, long brown hair unbound, streaming almost to her waist. She wore a long, white nightgown, with lace at the neck and cuffs.

“Mother?” Longfellow took a step or two towards her.

“I’ve been looking for you. Where have you been?”

“Right here, mother. Why did you leave?”

“Because we can’t stay. We have to move on.”

“Why? We need to hurt the people who hurt us.”

“They’re all gone, darling. They can’t hurt us or anyone else anymore.”

“There are still bad people around.”

“Let someone else worry about them.” Aurora reached out her hand.

Longfellow/Nattie took a few steps forward, reaching out his own hand. As they clasped hands, Aurora smiled. Longfellow stepped out of Nattie’s body, letting it fall to the ground like a pile of rumpled clothing. Patty and Diane rushed towards the fallen child. As Longfellow joined Aurora, he turned to stare at Jain. She felt the knife-like cold pierce her skin, heading for her heart, squeezing, and, with a gasp, fell into blackness.

*

*

*

“You hungry? I’m in the mood for Chinese.”

Jain opened her eyes to find Wyatt, dressed in jeans and a loose shirt, sitting next to her hospital bed. Although his expression was neutral, she saw the worry in his pale blue eyes. “More thirsty,” she said. Wyatt handed her the water glass and she drank.

Wyatt watched her. “I’d ask you never to scare me like that again, but I don’t think you could stick to it even if you wanted to.”

“You’re right.” There were so many questions Jain wanted to ask. Looking into Wyatt’s eyes, feeling his concern for her, she realized that if things didn’t work out between them, the fault lay squarely with her. He wasn’t hiding anything that happened

with Diane; as far as he was concerned, it was resolved, simple, not an issue, and not necessary to discuss or dissect. Wyatt was in the here and now with Jain. So, instead of asking the questions that originated in her own insecurities, she handed back the drink and asked, “How’s Nattie?”

“Scratched, bruised, frightened, but back with a very grateful mother.” Wyatt stared at her. “So you called up the dead.”

“The only way to convince Longfellow to let go was via his mother.”

“He still tried to take you out as he left.”

“He failed.”

“Because Baker performed CPR on you when you fell. He stopped your heart.”

“That would explain why my chest hurts,” said Jain. She wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. “Yuck.” She experienced a moment of guilt. Diane Baker could have left her on the ground with a stopped heart, clearing her way towards Wyatt. No, it wasn’t in the woman’s character

“Under the circumstances, I’d hope you were grateful. I am.” Wyatt leaned forward to give Jain a long, lingering kiss on the lips. “Better?”

“Much. How are you feeling?”

“Fine. Hoping they’ll let us both out of here I have no intention of spending tonight in separate rooms.” He grinned. “Brayne’s having a hell of a time filling out the report so it doesn’t sound like she’s crazy. I know the feeling.”

“She’ll figure it out. I have the feeling her intelligence matches her courage. She never flinched. Did Diane exhume the bodies?”

“Of Aurora and Longfellow. They’ll get a proper burial now. She’s paying for it, along with the headstone. Alfred Dempsey’s been dead for decades, but maybe Aurora and Longfellow can now rest in peace.”

“I hope so,” said Jain. A tendril of liking and admiration for Diane Baker crept into Jain’s consciousness. She pushed it away. The last thing she wanted to do was feel all warm and fuzzy towards the woman who wanted Wyatt.

Wyatt took her hand. “Got any plans for Halloween? I was lucky this year. I drew the early shift. I get off at four, barring emergencies.”

“I’d like to spend it with you,” said Jain. “Barring emergencies.”

“Isn’t it one of your busiest nights?”

Jain pulled him forward for another kiss. “I’ll turn off my phone. I’ve earned taking this one off. I’d rather spend it in bed with you.”

THE END

If you enjoyed this story, you'll enjoy HEX BREAKER, the first Jain Lazarus adventure, available from FireDrakes Weyr Publishing.

Hex Breaker Jain Lazarus joins the crew of a cursed film, hoping to put to rest what was stirred up before more people die and the film is lost. Tough, practical detective Wyatt East becomes her unlikely ally and lover on an adventure fighting zombies, ceremonial magicians, the town wife-beater, the messenger of the gods, and their own pasts.

**To read an excerpt of HEX BREAKER, visit the Jain Lazarus website:
<http://hexbreaker.devonellingtonwork.com>**

**To purchase your copy of HEX BREAKER for only \$4, visit
www.FireDrakesweyr.com and click the "Bookstore" link.**

The next Jain Lazarus book, OLD-FASHIONED DETECTIVE WORK, will release from FireDrakes Weyr in Spring of 2009.

Detective Wyatt East finds himself the primary suspect when hex breaker Jain Lazarus disappears after their romantic weekend in Vermont. In spite of the suspicions, Jain's boss, Maitland Stiles, hires Wyatt to track her down, forcing him to face aspects of his own painful past and revealing more about hers.

Saddled with two rebellious runaway paranormal teens, he's embroiled in a shapeshifter pack disagreement, and must learn to work with both a caustic dragon and a cantankerous mermaid to not only find Jain, but help her help an old friend who's in over his head. Wyatt learns he is not without psychic abilities of his own, although he prefers old-fashioned detective work.

Stay tuned!

More information on Devon Ellington's writing on the next page!

BOOKS, BLOGS, AND OTHER FUN STUFF:

If you like fun short fiction at affordable prices, visit Penny's Dreadfuls, where you can experience the Remarkable Adventures of Cornelia True and Roman Gray, or travel with the rambunctious scoundrel Mick Feeney as he tackles the Greatest River in the Galaxy (and tries to win the heart of card sharp Eliza Valentine), or walk the dark streets of a mysterious metropolis with a cynical detective in The Nowhere Chronicles.

<http://pennysdreadfuls.devonellingtonwork.com>

Coming in November 2008!

Sensory Perceptions: Techniques to Improve Your Writing Through the Six Senses by Devon Ellington. Use the six senses to take your writing to the next level via a series of sense-specific exercises. By the end of seven weeks, you complete seven short stories. \$1.29 USD.

<http://store.payloadz.com/go?id=183217>

5 in 10: Create 5 Short Stories in 10 Weeks by Devon Ellington. This booklet takes you from inspiration to writing to revision to marketing. By the end of the session, you will either have five short stories or the chunk of a novel.

Find it on the "Bazaar" page of the Devon Ellington website:

<http://www.devonellingtonwork.com/bazaar.html>

Writing Rituals: Ideas to Fuel Creativity by Cerridwen Iris Shea. This ebooklet contains several rituals to help you start writing, get you past writer's block, and help send your work on its way.

Find it on the "Bazaar" page of the Devon Ellington website:

<http://www.devonellingtonwork.com/bazaar.html>

Devon Ellington's main website is:

www.devonellingtonwork.com

Cerridwen Iris Shea's main website is:

www.cerridwenscottage.com

Devon's freelance writing site, which also contains information on workshops, coaching, and manuscript critique services is Fearless Ink:

www.fearlessink.com

For Devon's blog on the daily ups and downs of the freelance writing life, visit Ink in My Coffee:

<http://devonellingtonwork.com>

To receive Devon's Random Newsletter, send an email to

newsletter@devonellingtonwork.com

With "Subscribe" in the header.