

MISTRESS OF THE BLIND DEAD

BY B. R. FLYNN

Chapter Eighteen, "Asa"

Camille swiped at the humanoid bat creature that was carrying her. She pawed and raked at the thing's legs, which ended in great claws digging into Camille's shoulders. Her defiance was to no avail; the bat creature had her and meant to keep her.

They flew out, over the ocean and then circled back around, avoiding the docks and flying back over land near the beach. They traveled inland for several miles, passing the highway and heading into the woods. A large, two-story colonial house came into view. It sat atop a hill, taller than the trees around it. The bat creature descended, heading towards the house. Camille protested one last time, not wanting to be led. She swiped at the creature's midsection, missed because of the angle.

The bat creature reached the highest peak of the house, a tower on the left side of the building. Atop the tower was a little porch. As they got closer, a trapdoor opened in the porch. The bat creature let go of Camille just above the trapdoor. The She Wolf dropped neatly through the hole created by the open trapdoor.

She landed on a dusty mattress in a room lit only by moonlight. It looked like an attic. Camille, enraged, tore the mattress to pieces, covering the room in feathers.

"Done yet?" a voice asked from above.

Camille looked up, through the trapdoor. Wendy looked down at her, a smug look on her face. Camille found herself calming down. It felt like some kind of dark magic was at work. She changed back into a girl again.

"That's better," Wendy said.

She jumped through the trapdoor and landed neatly next to Camille. She wore a sexy black dress, every lovely hair on her head perfectly in place. She looked good. Too good.

"You're a vampire," Camille said. She was visibly disappointed and scoffed in disgust.

"You can talk," Wendy said.

"Why is it that everyone I know has to turn into some kind of supernatural creature?"

Wendy shrugged. "Something you bring out in people?"

Camille nodded. "Yeah. I'm cursed, that's what it is. Everyone I care about is either dead or a fucking vampire. Or both."

"When you're done complaining, can we get going? My mistress doesn't have all the time in the world, you know? Or maybe she does. I don't really know, actually. She's totally old. I mean, she doesn't look old. You know what I mean."

Camille scoffed. "I'm not interested in what your mistress wants with me."

Feathers floated through the air between them. Dust lingered there as well.

"You took me away from the girl I love," Camille said. "She's in danger and I don't know if anyone else can help her right now."

"The girl you love?" Wendy said. "Wait, you're a dyke?" She paused, hand on her chin in thought. "Doesn't really surprise me, actually. You totally have that air about you. And you're quite hairy. I mean, don't get me wrong. You're totally beautiful. I mean, really, really beautiful. But, the way you act and all..."

"I really don't care about the opinion of a vampire slave. I'm leaving." She turned away from Wendy.

Wendy smiled cruelly, digging the metaphorical knife in. "Hate to break the news to you but the girl you love is also a vampire slave."

Camille whirled back around on the other woman, got in her face. "You think I don't know that? I'm working on it, okay?"

"It doesn't matter anyway. You can't leave. My mistress won't allow it."

"I'll tear a hole right through her to get out of here."

"No, you don't understand," Wendy said, taking hold of Camille's shoulders. "You can't leave. Physically. My mistress has created a field around this place. It's a sort of mist. You're not getting out until she gets what she wants."

"Bullshit," Camille said.

"Go ahead. Give it a try."

She let go of Camille, stepped to one side and indicated the trapdoor above them. Camille walked past her and pulled a large chest away from the wall, moving it under the trapdoor.

She mounted the chest and jumped at the hole in the ceiling. She caught hold of the edge of the trapdoor and started to pull herself up. She got her head over the lip of the trapdoor when she saw it. A thick mist, vaguely green in color. It covered everything. And it seemed to be moving towards her.

When the mist reached her, it felt like a great force was pushing against her whole body. It sapped the strength from her and she fell to the ground, the wind knocked out of her. Wendy laughed and sang a few bars of a song Camille didn't recognize.

"You see?" she said. "You can't leave. Oh, by the way, you have a totally beautiful ass. I'll admit that. You do know that you're naked, right?"

Camille got up, dusting herself off. She walked towards Wendy, unconcerned with her nudity.

"Yeah," she said. "Does it make you nervous?"

"No," Wendy said. "But my mistress told me to dress you nicely. Here."

She walked into a corner of the room and grabbed something hanging on the wall. In the dim moonlight, Camille thought it looked like a hanging body, but as Wendy approached, she saw that it was a dress.

A black wedding dress.

"I'm sure it's your size," Wendy said. "Let's get you in it."

"No," Camille said. "I don't like it. Get something else."

Camille didn't know why but there was something wrong with the dress, something she couldn't articulate. It seemed both incredibly old and at the same time, ethereal, as if it had no right to exist. To say nothing of the fact that she generally hated wearing dresses, as a rule. There was too much of that in her youth. She remembered her mother forcing her to wear the damn things all the time. Unpleasant. Give her a good pair of jeans any day. Something with fucking pockets, at the very least.

"You don't have a choice," Wendy said. "This is for you."

Camille sighed, slightly scared to put on the dress. Wendy did most of the work, fitting the dress properly on Camille's body, making sure she looked right.

"I don't have to wear a veil, do I?" Camille said.

"Don't be silly," Wendy said. "But we really should be going."

They left the attic room and headed downstairs. There was a large staircase that connected the upper floor with the grand front room of the house. Since it was a colonial house, it wasn't huge but it was large enough to have a nice chandelier hanging from the ceiling.

Under the chandelier, in the middle of the mostly empty front room, sat a large mirror. Staring into the mirror was an elegant woman in a black dress. She looked into the mirror but she cast no reflection in it.

Camille and Wendy descended the stairs. Several big, black dogs sat around the large front room. When they sensed the two women approaching, they perked up, growling. Camille stared at them, trying to bore a hole through them with her eyes. They knew that she was different, that she was a wild animal, a Beast. One of them barked.

"Cerberus," the elegant woman said, not bothering to look over her shoulder at them. She still looked into the mirror. "Quiet. She is our guest."

Camille and Wendy walked across the wooden floor to the woman. Wendy bowed, even though her mistress was not looking at her. There was silence for several seconds.

"I find myself staring into the mirror more and more often as of late," the elegant woman finally said, breaking the silence.

"But you can't even see yourself," Camille said.

"That's true. Though, sometimes, I fancy that I catch my reflection, just out of the corner of my eye. A fleeting glimpse, no more. It's strange. I haven't seen a true representation of myself in over two thousand years. Oh, scores of great artists - great men - have painted or sketched my likeness, but one can never trust the art of another. Art is biased. It has always been so."

"I tried my hand at drawing," Camille said. "Was never very good at it."

The elegant woman shrugged.

"It is partly vanity, I suppose," she said. "Part of me would like to see how I appear now, whether my looks have stayed with me."

"You look amazing, mistress," Wendy said.

"Did I ask for your opinion?" Still looking at nothing but her own reflection.

Wendy looked crestfallen. She suddenly seemed interested in her feet. "No, mistress."

"Then keep quiet. It matters not. This is but a brief distraction. I've only found myself staring into the mirror for much of the day quite recently."

"How long?" Camille said.

"Hardly the blink of an eye," the elegant woman said. "Fifty years or so."

Camille raised her eyebrows. "You find yourself staring into the mirror most of the day for fifty years now?"

"Yes, no time at all."

"Have you gone outside at all in that time?"

Asa seemed to consider the question for a moment. "Only twice. I went outside when there was some commotion in the town and I wanted to see what it was. It turned out to be something about Victory in Europe, I think, whatever that means. And then, just the other night, when I met and sired Wendy here."

"How do you," Camille said, "you know, feed?"

"I have a servant bring me sustenance."

She finally turned around to face them and extended a hand to Camille.

"I am Asa," she said.

"I'm Camille."

"Yes, I know."

The hand was still extended but Camille didn't take it. Finally, Asa let it drop to her side.

"Now," she said, "we have matters to discuss. Bega has been a nuisance for far too long now."

"Who?" Camille said.

"Bega," Asa said. "Oh, that's right, she goes by another name recently. I believe she started calling herself Papa two hundred years ago."

Camille smirked. "That recent, huh?"

Asa didn't catch the sarcasm. "Yes. She means to destroy this town and she won't stop there. I'm sure you're familiar with the term 'a lesser evil'?"

"Yes."

It looked like Asa was staring right through her, as if she were boring a hole through her soul. "Yes, you certainly are. Well, I am the lesser evil here. Promise to help me and I will use all of my powers to destroy Bega."

She extended her hand once more and, once more, Camille didn't take it. She smiled humorlessly.

"And that's all that matters to you, isn't it?" she said.

"It should at least be something that concerns you," Asa said. "You're not like her. You're like myself, using evil to do as much good as you can, given the circumstances."

"What good do you do?" Camille defiantly stepped towards Asa, openly challenging her. The dogs, each one resting in a corner of the room, got up and growled, began to approach them. "Huh? What good have you done standing here staring at a mirror for fifty years? You can't even see yourself in it! So tell me what good you do?"

"Back, dogs, back!" Asa called off the dogs, who were mere feet away from them now. She met Camille's challenge directly, never breaking eye contact with the girl. "You think fifty years matters? I saw Christ on His cross. I saw Rome fall. I was on the Norman ships that sailed onto the shores of England to conquer it, sat beside William as he declared himself king. Fifty years is *nothing*."

Camille forced herself to meet the old vampire's gaze even though she felt small in the woman's presence. "Then why do you care what happens to any of us? Why do you care what happens to this town or this country? Who cares if Papa, or Bega or whatever her name is, takes us all over, rules us with a fucking iron hand? Is that the same as Rome falling? Huh? What do you care?"

Those eyes. Those fucking hypnotic eyes. Asa's eyes roved over Camille like she was a specimen under glass. "I care because neither Pontius Pilate, nor Nero, nor William the Conqueror, were vampires. None of them have the kind of power that Bega or myself have. I may have provided council, may have helped, provided history with a gentle push, but I never ruled. Nor did any others of

my kind. Not since the very beginning of human history, the dark days. We were not meant to have that kind of power. Bega is insane. She cannot rule this country. If she does, there is no hope for this world. Now, I may not be caught up on current events but I like this world. And neither I or yourself will be alive to see it anymore if Bega succeeds in her power play."

Camille was silent for some time. Asa never broke eye contact with her, her penetrating eyes burrowing into her head. Wendy stared at her as well. Even the dogs seemed to be waiting for her response. Finally, it came.

"You make a good point," Camille said. "But you have to promise me something."

"What can I do for you?" Asa said.

"Kimberly. I want Kimberly. I don't want her harmed."

"That woman is a creature of Bega's now," Asa said, visibly disgusted. "She cannot be trusted."

Camille frantically shook her head. "No, I can get through to her. And once we destroy Papa, her hold over Kimberly will be destroyed, too, won't it?"

"Her hold, yes. But what of her loyalty? I know that Wendy here would still be loyal to my cause even if I were to perish during this Hellish night."

"Don't talk like that, mistress," Wendy said.

Asa still wasn't looking at anything but Camille. "I only speak the truth. I may not live through the night. Once the curse is lifted, Bega will be coming for us. There is no stopping her. And if she has turned this woman towards her cause, it won't matter if she still has a veil over her mind or not. She could betray us."

Camille felt that pressure again; that weight of Asa's eyes upon her. She overcame it. "I don't care. She will not be harmed."

The influence seemed to fade. Asa's eyes warmed ever so slightly. "All right. I give you my word that I will not harm her and that I will do my best to protect her. Anything else?"

"I don't want any of my other friends harmed, either. Most of them are dead anyway, but anyone who's left is off limits, you hear me?"

"Yes. Now, do we have a deal?"

Asa extended her hand for a third time. Camille hesitated.

"What do I have to do?" she asked.

"You only have to take my hand," Asa said. "Shake my hand and the curse is lifted. Shake my hand and I will make the mist disappear around this house, you can go save your friend and we can prepare for the battle that is coming."

Camille slowly reached out, her small, teenage-sized hand shaking as she accepted Asa's handshake.

The woman had a strong grip and they shook, a smile forming on Asa's face.

It spread like a wave throughout the entire town. It was like that sensation one gets while falling in a dream and suddenly jerking awake.

Everyone in town felt it, spreading out in an ever-expanding circle from Asa's house. Manny and Kimberly felt it on the docks. Sheriff Barnes felt it sitting in his squad car, even through his pain.

Papa felt it, more acutely than anyone else. She was in her cave when the sensation hit her. Once it did, she ran outside the cave and stood on the beach, looking towards town, towards the house on the hill, the one she could never get close to.

"You hairy little bitch," she said to no one in particular. "You chose the wrong side. Well, no matter. This town is doomed. I'm gonna burn it to the ground. And I'm going make you watch."

To Be Continued...

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