

Chapter Nineteen, "Friends, Old and New"

"Now, hold on a minute," Manny said. "I'm no good to you. Really. I'm a cook. There's too much fat in my veins. You want someone lean and young. Not ol' me."

"You'll do just fine," Kimberly said.

She walked towards Manny across the dock. He could hear every small step of her bare feet on the wood, could smell her as she approached. She smelled like a mixture of fresh roses and death. Undeniably arousing but dangerous in her sensuality.

"Hey, I'm a friend of Camille's," Manny said. "I've been working with her for months now. You don't want to hurt anymore of her friends, do you? So many of them are dead, or changed. I'm the only one left. Come on, now."

"Camille?" Kimberly said.

It was as if she had just remembered the girl. She looked away from Manny, confused.

"Where is Camille?" she asked.

"I don't know," Manny said. "Some... thing carried her away. Don't you think we should go find her? Help her?"

"Help Camille," Kimberly said. "Yes. We need to help Camille."

"I saw which way the creature was flying. We could try to find her."

Kimberly nodded. She seemed to be coming down from her bloodlust, at least a little bit. They stayed where they were for some time. He wanted to be sure that she was alright before approaching. When he felt the time was right, he did so.

"Here, let me cover you up," he said.

He unzipped his sports jacket, took it off and put it on her. He was taller and much larger than she, so the jacket reached halfway down her thighs. Manny zipped it up.

"There," he said. "Almost presentable. Now I saw I car back there, parked alongside one of the warehouses. Door was hanging open. I'm guessing that it belonged to the guy who just went over the side of the docks with ol' Toothpick Man. Let's go get it."

Kimberly nodded again. Manny picked up Arthur's .357 Magnum, still loaded with one silver bullet, tucked it into his jeans and they started away from the docks. That was when the wave hit them.

Both of them were visibly shaken by the wave of psychic energy that passed through the town. Manny teetered on his feet, just managed to remain standing. Kimberly actually fell over, hitting her head on the ground.

"You okay?" Manny asked, going to her side.

"I'm fine," Kimberly said, getting up.

"What the Hell was that?"

"It was Camille."

Manny frowned. "Camille? What do you mean?"

Camille shook her head. "She just broke the curse. She picked a side. And not the one I'm on." She looked downtrodden, defeated.

"Curse?" Manny said. "You mean Bolton's curse? You mean that shit's real? Hold on, now." He took hold of Kimberly by both shoulders, made her look at him. "Are you telling me that there are two warring women that have been cursed to never come near each other for a hundred years and that, now, Camille has just broken that curse?"

Kimberly nodded slowly.

"Oh, Jesus," Manny said, letting go of Kimberly, a hand on his forehead. He felt very tired all of a sudden. "Jesus fucking Christ. I guess I should have had it clocked the moment I saw Camille sprout fangs and hair. A goddamn werewolf. Skinwalker. Only thing that can break the curse. Who the fuck knew it would all turn out to be true?"

"She chose right," Kimberly said, tears in her eyes. "I am evil. I am a servant of Satan. Manny?"

Manny looked at her. She spread her arms wide, openly crying now.

"Take out that gun, Manny," she said. "Shoot me through the heart. I'll burst into flames, so you'll have to back away. I don't know if it will kill me but I pray to God it will. I don't deserve to live."

"No fuckin' way," Manny said.

Her eyes were full of fury. "I'll kill you if you don't shoot! You hear me, I'll kill you?!"

"Bullshit."

Her eyes narrowed. "I can see into your mind, Manny. Just a little, but I can see. You have a wife, don't you?"

"Yeah."

"I know where you live, Manny. I can see it, a little house near the highway. If you don't shoot me, I'll go to your house and I'll tear your wife to pieces, you hear me?! I will kill her!"

Manny pulled out the gun, pointed it at Kimberly. The girl wept deeply. It was a pitiful sight.

"Do it!" she screamed. "Shoot me!"

Manny took aim, his finger tightened on the trigger. But he didn't fire.

"No," he said.

"Fucking shoot me!" Kimberly said.

She punched him in the left shoulder. It was a hard hit and Manny stumbled backwards. He righted himself almost instantly, tucked the gun into his pants and looked her defiantly in the eye.

"No," he said. "I need your help tonight."

"Kill me!" Kimberly said.

She punched him again, this time in the face. Manny's head rocked backwards and he felt a tooth dislodge, his mouth filling with blood. He shook it off, spat a big splotch of blood onto the ground, along with the tooth.

"I'm not killing you," he said.

Kimberly collapsed into his arms, crying. Manny put his arms around her, comforted her.

"It's gonna be okay," he said. "Camille doesn't care what happened to you. She's like you, she's... something else. She loves you, I can tell."

Kimberly nodded, her tears abating. She looked up at him, wiped away the last of them.

"We have to kill her," she said.

"Who, Camille?" Manny asked, confused.

"No. Papa. She's the one who made me like this. We have to kill her. But I'm getting hungry, Manny. I've got to feed very soon. If I can hold it long enough, maybe I can feed on her. That would be beautiful. But, if not, you better be ready to use that gun. Understand?"

Manny nodded. "Yeah. I'll be ready."

They headed towards the labyrinth of warehouses, towards the car Manny had seen.

Sheriff Barnes sat in a patrol car along the side of a lonely, tree-lined road near the beach. It was 1:03am, the moon high in the sky, and Barnes looked into the vanity mirror in the car and did not like what he saw.

His face was red with first and second-degree burns. That son-of-a-bitch had done a number on him. Fucking runes. He had seen Papa messing with them in the past but she had never really liked them very much and Barnes had never been bothered to learn anything about them. He had a township to maintain and didn't have the time to mess around with any magic mumbo jumbo.

He had to get in contact with Papa, had to get new orders from her. He also had a bone to pick with

her.

Just as he was thinking this, he saw her, walking along the highway, right in the middle of the road. She had just come into his field of view. She was dressed to the nine, top hat sat at a jaunty angle, black clothes form-fitting and lovely, revealing a healthy amount of skin. And behind her...

Oh, God. Holy Christ-fucking Jesus.

She was leading a group of Blind Dead. More than a hundred strong. They spread out behind her like a parade of rats. Skittering between their legs were all manner of vermin: bugs, rats, some small, white, dog-like creature that Barnes didn't recognize. They blocked the whole highway.

Barnes got out of the car, ran towards Papa. "What the fuck are you doing?! Everyone will see you! Everyone!"

She didn't stop walking, forcing Barnes to walk alongside her in order to talk.

"I really don't have time for you right now, Todd," Papa said.

"I've told you before to call me Sheriff or Barnes."

"Oh," Papa said in mock sweetness, "you're still little Todd to me, sweetie. Now you better get out of here before I lose my temper."

"Your temper?" Barnes said. "You're angry, are you? What about me? Four of my men dead in a matter of days! You're not supposed to touch my men. You promised me."

Papa held up a hand, two fingers upturned. She picked them off. "First, I never promised you anything. I said I'd try my best. Second, I only killed two of your men. I have no idea what happened to the others."

They were passing Barnes' squad car now and the radio crackled to life inside it.

"*Sheriff!*" the radio barked. It was Charlie, one of the sheriff's deputies. "*Sheriff, oh, Jesus!*"

Barnes ran to the car, picked up the radio.

"Charlie," he said, "what's the matter?"

"*Christ, sheriff, it's true. The Stonewall Diner is history. Bodies everywhere, blood all over the place.*"

"Fuck," Barnes said.

"*But that ain't all. There are...people here.*"

"People?"

"*People standing outside the diner. They're right near my car, actually. They scare me.*"

"Describe them to me."

"*They're all women and they're all... naked. And... they have no eyes.*"

Barnes smacked a hand against the dashboard. "Oh, Jesus. Charlie, I want you to get out of there

right the fuck now!"

"Ten four, sheriff, I--"

There was the sound of breaking glass.

"Oh, shit!" Charlie said over the radio.

"Charlie!" Barnes said.

"Sheriff, they're inside the car, oh, help me, Jesus!"

More breaking glass, followed by screams and horrible, wet, gurgling sounds. Then static. Barnes let the radio mike drop to the floor of the car and put his head in his hands for a moment. Then the rage was back. He got out of the car, caught up with Papa.

"It's all falling apart!" he screamed. "Everything! Charlie's dead now, too! Killed by your little harem here. What the fuck?!"

"Oops," Papa said. "Let's not make a big deal out of this, Todd."

"Big deal?! These people are dead! And we're not talking about some piddling little wastes, here. These are my people! What the fuck is wrong with you?!"

She still wasn't looking at him. Like he meant nothing at all to her. "There's nothing wrong with me. I just no longer require your services."

"What?!"

"You are redundant."

"Oh, redundant, am I?"

Barnes pulled his service pistol and shot the closest Blind Dead in the forehead. She fell over, immediately being stepped on by her fellow Blind Dead, and scampered over by the various vermin.

"How does that feel?" he said. "I just wasted one of your people."

"Go ahead, if it makes you feel better," Papa said. She still hadn't looked at him. She kept her gaze straight ahead, down the highway and towards town. "You've got six bullets in that gun and I've got more than a hundred of my soldiers. Six will make no difference."

"Fuck," Barnes said.

He holstered his weapon in frustration and kept up with her. She was walking quite fast and Barnes was getting a workout.

"What about this, huh?" He pointed at her face. "Some fucking guy comes into the office and throws some fucking runes in my face. How 'bout that?!"

"Runes, huh?" Papa said. "Never could get the hang of those. Don't worry, he was just some servant of Asa's. A lot like you, actually. I wouldn't worry. You'll heal."

"What's your plan, huh? What is this all in aid of?"

Papa smirked. "It's in aid of me, *Todd*. When we get to the crossroads just ahead, we'll be splitting up. Again, actually. Some broke off back down the road. I expect that's who your little friend Charlie ran into."

Barnes was sweating. He rubbed his forehead and raked his nails down his face, leaving visible marks. "What are you doing here? This is madness."

"I am destroying your town, *Todd*. I have no need of it anymore. Nor of anyone inside it. I'm going to kill every last person here and burn every building down. Then I'm going to set the forest on fire and watch it burn. Then I'm going to kill Asa. But most important of all, I'm going to make that fucking hairy little werewolf pay for the choice she made."

"And what if I stop you?" Barnes said.

"You can't stop me, little boy," Papa said. "You don't have enough bullets."

"And what if I told you that I know another way to stop your army, huh? What if I told you that I've been reading, believe it or not? I know how to stop this army!"

Papa stopped walking. Every single Blind Dead stopped alongside her. It was a stunning sight. The vampire finally turned to regard Barnes. She stared at him, eyes big.

"I..." Barnes said, backing away. "I didn't mean it. I'm still on your side! Look, I'm still with you! You don't have to do anything!"

"Threaten *me*?" Papa said.

"I...I would never threaten you. I was just talking out of my ass. I would never--"

She took a step towards him. "Get smart on *me*?!"

Barnes took a step back, nearly tripping over a rock in the road. "Smart? No, I'm not smart. I do what I'm told. Look--"

"You are obsolete! You are bug food, *Todd*!"

She thrust a hand towards him, palm held out to face him. The bugs in his body began to churn. The pain was incredible.

"Please stop," he said.

The roaches began to swarm, traveling up and down his body. He could feel blood vessels burst, could feel organs being squeezed.

"Oh, God, no," he said.

The roaches started to go crazy. He felt his stomach explode inside his body, felt the bugs gather around at every orifice.

"You're done, *Todd*!" Papa screamed.

All the roaches exploded from his body at the same moment. They swarmed out of his mouth, his

ears, his eyes, his asshole. They crawled out of his nipples, creating little volcanoes of erupting cockroaches. Mercifully, he didn't live for long.

When Papa was done with him, she started towards the crossroads, towards town once again, leaving a bloody mess of skin, bones and blood on which thousands of cockroaches swarmed and skittered.

To Be Continued...

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