

Chapter Twenty, "The Binding"

They had just left the docks when Kimberly pointed. Manny looked, saw what she was indicating and they made for it. Parked along a wall of the warehouse was an old beater, possibly a Chevy, Manny couldn't tell. The driver's side door was hanging open. Lying on the ground under its wheels, was the headless corpse of a wolf.

It was clear what had happened: Arthur had driven up to the warehouse, saw a pack of wolves and drove into them. He hit one and scared the others off. He then decapitated the dead wolf and went after Camille and Kimberly.

What drew him here? Were he and Camille connected since she attacked him, marked him?

Kimberly examined the backseat. Manny got in the driver's seat. He got the car working just fine. Old it may be, but the engine still turned over. He got the car moving, heading towards town.

Kimberly took a final look at the dead wolf from the open window, as if she were mourning it in some vague way, before rummaging through the back seat.

"Anything?" Manny said over his shoulder as he drove.

"Jesus, it's like he lived out of his car. Ah, what have we here?" She produced a pair of jeans, sniffed them. "Not too noxious. Think they'll fit?"

Manny shrugged. He then looked away as Kimberly leaned back, legs in the air, and shimmied them on.

They would do, she decided. She rolled up the jeans so she wouldn't trip over her own feet before returning to the search. Manny heard the sound of many small objects being tossed about. When she was finished looking through the car, Kimberly climbed into the front seat. She was holding a briefcase. Once she was settled into the passenger seat, she opened it.

"Hell's bells," she said. "Manny?"

"Yeah?" Manny said.

"Have a look at this."

She turned the open briefcase so he could see it. It was full of money, stacks upon stacks of money.

"Jesus," Manny said.

"I know," Kimberly said. "Could come in handy."

"Couldn't hurt." He shrugged. "Anything else we could use?"

Kimberly rummaged around, opened up the glove compartment. She looked for a moment, and pulled out a half dozen red sticks.

"Some flares," she said.

Manny nodded. Kimberly closed the briefcase and bundled up the flares. They drove off in the direction the bat creature flew, unknowingly heading towards the old house on the hill, and destiny.

The Beast bounded into town. The black wedding dress she was wearing was torn, ripped, but not to pieces. The moon was high above, peeking out between the dark clouds.

She reached a mid-sized abandoned house on the outskirts of town and decided to go through it instead of around. Shattering a window as she jumped through it, she landed deftly onto ground and almost instantly sensed that something was wrong.

It was somehow too dark in the abandoned house. There was an eerie silence that only her heavy, animal breathing broke.

She sniffed the dank air, looked around. She couldn't see anything but knew that something was amiss. She turned to leave the way she came but it was too late.

Staring at her through the shattered window, bathed in moonlight, were four Blind Dead. She growled, turned back around.

There were more of them.

They seemed to stream out of every door and arch of the house towards her. Camille backed into a corner, swiping at the dead women as they approached.

They fell upon her, clawing at her. With a defiant growl, she threw them off, knocking them to the floor in a heap.

She slammed her fist down on one of the dead women's foreheads, crushing it. She grabbed two of them by their necks and smashed their heads together. Their skulls shattered.

She tore her way through them but, in the end, there were too many of them. They seemed to fill the house.

As they began to take her down, Camille noticed that the ground was covered in cockroaches, rats and centipedes. They crawled and skittered across the floor. Camille followed their movement, traced it back to see where they were coming from. She bashed aside one of the Blind Dead and saw that the vermin were streaming in through the shattered window.

And, standing in the window, was Papa. She smiled hideously, her top hat perched atop her head at

an odd angle.

"You think I don't know where you are?" Papa asked. "I can smell you, you hairy little bitch. You may have broken the oh-so-special-connection we had when you shook hands with the enemy but I can still smell you!" She barked over her shoulder. "Bring the bonds!"

Two Blind Dead walked into the room holding a length of chain between them. Camille knew, instinctively, that it was made of silver.

She fought violently. It took a dozen Blind Dead to hold her down. They turned her over as the two holding the chains approached.

With an effort, they held her hands and feet together as the two others bound her. Camille could feel and hear the silver handcuffs clip into place, binding her.

Almost instantly, she transformed back into a girl, the silver overtaking her. She sighed, defeated.

The Blind Dead picked her up, turning her over as they did, and carried her towards a door near the broken window. Papa looked on as the Blind Dead opened the door and carried her outside. Then she followed them as they carried her around the side of the house, through a tangle of rough weeds to a little clearing.

In the clearing, a hole had been dug, a pile of dirt beside it. On the other side of the hole sat an open coffin. It was old and the lining was rotted, leaving little more than the bare wood beneath.

"You fucking bitch," Camille said.

Papa shushed her as the Blind Dead dropped Camille into the coffin. It was uncomfortable with her arms chained underneath her.

"It's not as deep as I'd like it to be," Papa mused idly, surveying the hole. "But it'll keep."

Camille made one last move, one last effort to get away. The Blind Dead immediately stopped her; she was much weaker in human form.

Papa knelt down, looked Camille in the eye. Gripped the edge of the coffin. She paused, as if searching for the right words. Smiled.

"Did you see *Tron* this summer?" she asked.

"No, I missed that one," Camille said.

Papa shrugged. "I admit that the moving picture still mystifies me somewhat, but I do like to catch a late show from time to time. And, believe me, this one you've got to see."

She stood up, excited, talking animatedly.

"You see," she continued, "this man enters into some kind of other world. The details escaped me, by and large, but that doesn't matter. He enters into this strange other world where everything is lit with odd, fluid lights and there are doubles of his friends, and his enemy. Doppelgangers, if you will. There's

also a double of him as well, but he dies before the hero meets him."

"Is there a point to this story?" Camille asked. "I have an appointment underground is all."

"I'm getting to it, you ungrateful whore," Papa said. "You see, as I'm watching it, I began to realize that this other world was of the hero's own making - he had created it himself! All these people, all these strange things were of his own design. He had created them in his head to help him through some kind of problem. The infernal machine that zapped him just helped him along. And I got to thinking: I've done that myself. Once, about ninety or so years ago, I sat in a box for a year. It was a rather small wooden box, pushed into the corner of a basement in a tall, narrow house in London. No one knew I was there. I had to get my head straight, you see?"

Camille sighed. "No, but continue."

"I had gorged myself on blood before I crawled into the box so I wouldn't be hungry - incidentally, I hope you've had a good meal recently. Inside the box, my mind wandered. I created people to talk to, people to control. They seemed almost alive. It's where I got the idea for this army. I've taken them from all over, brought them here, for this night. I wouldn't have had the idea if I wasn't in that box for a year."

"What happened when you got out?"

Papa gestured dismissively. "Oh, well, let's just say that the family that lived in the house didn't have a very good night, and leave it at that."

"So," Camille said, "you're burying me alive so I can think about what I did, is that what you're saying?"

"In essence," Papa said. "Like a good father would when dealing with a belligerent child." She got serious. "You disappointed me, you cute little bitch. I wanted you on my side. I wanted you with me. You, me and Kimberly, sharing everything. Is that so bad?"

"You had no right to take her from me."

"I *have* every right. She's mine and has been since the moment she was conceived. We were going to be together and you ruined all of that. And I want you to think about that while you're in the ground. I want you to think about that while you listen to this town burn, as you imagine what I'm doing to its people. And to Kimberly."

She snapped her fingers and three Blind Dead approached. The first held a hammer, the second a box of nails, the third a hemp bag which looked very old. Papa took hold of the hammer and nails.

"Hold her down," she said.

Four Blind Dead held her down as Papa knelt by the side of the coffin. Camille spit into the vampire's face.

"Feel better?" Papa said.

"A little," Camille said.

"Good." She looked at her soldiers. "Put it into place."

The Blind Dead holding the old hemp bag approached, knelt down opposite Papa. She opened the bag and pulled a metal object out of it.

It was a mask. An iron mask.

The face of a beast adorned it. Four holes dotted the surface, two at the bottom of the chin on either side and two high on each cheek, just below the eyes.

Camille fought as the Blind Dead placed the mask onto her face. Two more Blind Dead held her head still. The mask fit perfectly onto her face.

"Look at that," Papa said. "Almost like it was made for you."

She placed a nail in the hole situated at the top right cheek and hammered it in. Camille screamed in pain.

"It'll be over in a minute," Papa said.

She hammered the three other nails in place. Blood streamed down Camille's neck and the sides of her head, soaking her hair.

"You'll live," Papa said through the girl's screams. "You're strong. You still heal fast and you'll simply heal around the nails. It'll sure hurt if you ever rip them out, but you'll live."

The Blind Dead let go of Camille. The girl was in too much pain to fight back as the Blind Dead closed the coffin lid on her.

She was still screaming as they lowered her into the hole. Still screaming as they filled the hole with dirt. It was only when they were done and she was in total blackness, complete silence, when she stopped screaming.

And started thinking.

To Be Continued...

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