

**Chapter Twenty-One, "Cleopatra on 42nd Street"**

On a sweltering summer day in 1980, Camille stood in a dark, shadowed alley behind 42nd Street in New York City. Her breath came in short, staccato bursts and sweat poured down her body. Her eyes were watchful, panicked.

The alley she hid in was behind West 42nd Street, somewhere between 6th and 8th Avenue, twisting behind a sleazy, grimy row of grindhouse and porno movie theaters. Camille's back was pressed up against one particularly nasty place called "The Egyptian," which was a strange coincidence, considering that the man who was pursuing her went by the same name.

"I can hear you, girl," the Egyptian called out, somewhere nearby.

It was one in the morning, and still hot. Camille covered her mouth with a hand, trying to muffle the sound of her breathing. The Egyptian had put a spell on her the previous night, preventing her from transforming into the Beast. She could still feel it inside, trying desperately to get out, but it was trapped.

The Egyptian wandered into the alley Camille was hiding in. She was hidden in the dark, but he would find her. He didn't look like the one-dimensional fezz-wearing Egyptian villains in 1930s horror films. He wore a dark, elegantly tailored suit with a red tie. His shoes were Italian. He carried a smart-looking cane. His olive skin was unmarked. Yet he reminded Camille of those movie villains just the same.

He walked down the alley, getting closer to her with every step. Camille remained quiet, not even breathing now.

It was no good. He was going to find her.

"Don't think that you can hide from me for long," the Egyptian said. "I'll find you. And if you escape again, I'll send *her* after you."

Camille looked desperately around, searching for an escape. There was a door right next to her, a back exit of the theater, but it was no escape route: there was no door handle on this side to prevent

people walking in without buying a ticket.

The Egyptian was closer now, about ten feet away from the door and her. Camille's eyes widened in terror.

The side door to the theater burst open and two drug addicts, a man and a woman, exited the theater. A needle passed between them as Camille seized the opportunity given to her.

She pounced into action, pushing past them and into the theater.

"Hey, what the fuck, man?!" the male drug addict said as Camille pushed past him.

He didn't say anything else. That was when the Egyptian walked up to the couple, clicked open the handle of his cane and pulled out a razor-sharp sword. He swung it through the air, slicing open the man's throat, spattering the female drug addict with his blood. She screamed as the Egyptian pushed the man's body to the ground and shoved the woman aside, chasing Camille into the theater.

Camille's first impression of the theater was all movie screen. The theater was small but the screen stretched from the floor of the theater to the ceiling, the front seats pushed uncomfortably close to it. Those in the audience paying attention to the movie started yelling at Camille, telling her to get out of the way of the screen.

On the screen, a goopy zombie pushed a woman's head towards a large splinter of wood, which presently punctured her eyeball.

Camille looked around desperately, trying to decide which course of action to take: race through the audience to the lobby and the front exit or hide in the theater?

She didn't have time to decide. The Egyptian entered the theater.

Camille ran into the audience, ducked down below the seats before the Egyptian had time to see her.

The floor of the theater was grotesque, covered in popcorn, spilled soda, semen and blood. A cockroach longer and fatter than her thumb was stuck in a sticky patch of spilled soda and seemed to reach out for her, begging for help. Camille smashed it with her knee as she passed by, being as quiet as she could.

Camille passed close by two men who were openly jacking each other off watching the violence onscreen. She resisted the urge to gag.

She passed a woman smoking dope in the row behind the men, obviously watching them more than the movie. Camille's eyes filled with water and she tried not to cough.

A few rows behind them, a man leaned back in his seat, wearing sunglasses even though it was night and he was indoors. Camille couldn't tell whether the man was dead or just sleeping.

Her question was answered when the man suddenly came alive and shouted over Camille. "Hey, out of the way, man!"

Camille looked up, startled. The Egyptian stood right over her, sword cane raised above his head.

She rolled over onto her back and kicked out with both feet in one fluid movement. Her aim was true and she kicked the man in the balls. The Egyptian winced in pain as Camille rolled back over and jumped to her feet. She ran towards the front of the theater. Her friend was out there, on the street somewhere, she just knew it. They planned to meet in front of the theater a few minutes ago.

She made it to the lobby just as the Egyptian grabbed her by her curly hair from behind.

"Cleo!" she screamed. "Cleo, help!"

"No one can help you now," the Egyptian said. "Now, do you want the sword or do you want to deal with... *her*?"

"Sir, put the sword down."

It was the ticket-taker, little more than a boy. He had red hair and acne.

The Egyptian shot him a murderous look, then lunged forward with his sword and embedded the point of it in the man's eye. Blood spewed from the wound, but only when the Egyptian pulled the sword out with a flourish.

Camille punched the Egyptian in the throat and he let go of her hair. Camille ran but the Egyptian tripped her. He fell upon her, sword once again at the ready.

"Hey, honky."

The Egyptian turned his head to find out who had spoken, then froze, eyes wide. He fell off Camille, landing to her left, revealing two things: a switchblade embedded up to the handle in his left armpit, and the beautiful, statuesque form of Cleopatra, a local prostitute Camille had befriended. She was tall, dark and gorgeous, with a moderate afro. She offered a hand to Camille, who took it and stood up with Cleo's help.

"Thanks, Cleo," Camille said.

"You know I got your back," Cleo said.

Cleopatra, Camille thought. Another coincidence.

"She... will destroy you," the Egyptian managed to say before he slumped over, dead.

Camille felt the spell that the man had cast on her lift away, could feel the Beast breathe a sigh of relief inside her.

"You think he was talking about me?" Cleo said.

Camille shook her head.

"No," she said, "he was talking about--"

The glass doors of the lobby shattered, shards speckling the worn carpet. Camille and Cleo shielded their eyes. A tall creature entered the building through the broken door. It was a mummy, bandaged and lumbering, the whole nine yards.

From the prominent curves on display, it was a female mummy, but a mummy all the same, a creature doing the Egyptian's bidding, even after death.

"What the fuck is that?!" Cleo said.

"It's a fucking mummy," Camille said, almost smiling.

She let the Beast out, felt the change come over her. She growled and pounced at the monster, preparing for battle.

Camille, buried alive inside her coffin, roused from the memory. She had experienced an epiphany. She didn't need to be alone. She could accept the help of friends. Cleo had helped her. They had defeated the Egyptian and his luscious female mummy together. And now she could ask for help from her friends, here in Bolton. She started to howl, loud and wild. The Beast was trapped but it could still call out. Still howl!

She slammed the iron mask into the wooden lid of the coffin and continued to howl, calling out to her pack and, assuming that their bond was strong enough, Kimberly. It was all so clear to her now.

Once they destroyed Papa and Kimberly was no longer under her spell, they could be together. Kimberly would still be cursed but they could be cursed together. They need not be alone.

She howled again and smashed the iron mask into the lid of the coffin, where she could hear it begin to crack. Pain shot through her head, the nails driven into her face exploding whenever she slammed her head into the lid of the coffin.

Several minutes later, up on the ground above, the remains of Camille's wolf pack arrived.

And began to dig.

## **Chapter Twenty-Two, "Bolton Burns"**

Manny and Kimberly turned a corner onto a major road in the middle of town when a man dashed out in front of the car. They were going too fast to stop and plowed right into him.

The man went right under the wheels and Manny could hear bones crunching as they passed over him. Kimberly put both hands to her mouth, stifling a scream. It was horrible, Manny knew, but he couldn't help thinking it was for the best.

The man was on fire.

His whole body consumed in a raging inferno, a great orange/red Roman Candle of flames dashing into the street. Manny looked where the man had come from, a little bookstore bathed in fire as well.

"What the Hell?" he said, finally bringing the car to a stop a little past the fiery bookstore and its corresponding corpse in the middle of the road.

Kimberly was eerily quiet for a moment. Manny looked from the burning bookstore to her face, which was bathed in the light of the fire. It was 2:47am.

"It's started," Kimberly said.

"What? What's started?" Manny said.

"Papa. She's destroying the town."

"How do you know that?"

She turned her head to regard him, her face blank, eyes unblinking. Fire danced in her eyes. Manny was scared of her in that moment.

"She told me," she said. "I must join her."

"What?" Manny said, putting his fear aside for the moment. "Hey, wait a minute."

Kimberly opened the door, started to step out. Manny grabbed her hand to stop her.

"Now, hold on," he said.

Kimberly turned her head once again to look at him. Still that blank, emotionless face.

"She can't control you anymore," Manny said. "You hear me?"

"She is my mistress," Kimberly said.

"Look, you're better than her. We have to find Camille. You have to find Camille. Camille. You understand?"

Kimberly didn't answer. The fire still danced in her eyes.

"I guess you don't," Manny said.

She looked at him, stare still blank. From nearby came the sound of breaking glass and fire flaring up. Manny looked for the source of the sound and saw a naked, eyeless corpse woman standing outside of a barbershop that was now engulfed in flames. As he watched, the corpse woman drew back an object in her hand and threw it at a building two down from the barbershop.

The object was a Molotov Cocktail and this building went up in flames as well.

"Jesus Christ," Manny said. "Kimberly, we should--"

But she was gone. Manny looked for her and found her walking up the street in the direction of the walking corpse. At least she still had the radio, he thought.

As he watched, a young woman came running down the street screaming. She was perhaps twenty years old with long blonde hair, clothes torn from some kind of struggle. Manny called out to her but it was no good.

Kimberly was between them.

The young woman saw Kimberly and ran towards her, steering away from the walking corpse who, despite being eyeless, seemed to be eyeing her. The young woman grabbed Kimberly by the shoulders, panicked.

"You gotta help me," she said.

"Hey, girl, get away from her!" Manny yelled.

He knew what was coming, knew that Kimberly was unstable, vulnerable and dangerous.

"What?" the young woman said.

Kimberly stared at the young woman, her head tilted to one side quizzically. Manny considered driving the car into Kimberly in that moment, as crazy as it sounded in his head. But it would do no good, he would hit the young woman as well. He pressed his hand down the horn and screamed.

"Get the fuck away from her!" he said.

"I'm hungry," Kimberly said.

"What?" the young woman repeated.

Kimberly grabbed hold of the woman, her short, strong nails digging into the woman's arms and drawing blood. She sank her fangs into the woman's throat and began to drink deep. The young woman's eyes rolled up into her head, her mouth open in a gape. Her whole body shook. She slipped away as Kimberly completely drained her of blood.

"Fuck!" Manny said.

He stopped honking and pounded on the steering wheel in frustration. There was nothing he could

do so he put the car into gear and drove up the road, past the burning buildings, past the corpse woman, past Kimberly. Once more, he considered running her down but couldn't bring himself to do it. He hoped that some part of her was still human, still reachable, even now.

As he passed, Kimberly dropped the bloodless corpse of the young woman to the ground and watched him leave. Manny met her gaze and shuddered at what he saw.

Her eyes were those of an animal.

Fires broke out all over town. Along with much more unpleasant things.

On Hodgson Street, near the water, an old sea captain exiting a bar gaped at what he saw out on the ocean. It looked like a ghost ship, torn sails flapping as though in the midst of a gale, green fog enshrouding it. As he watched, the vision faded and was replaced with something even worse.

A line of eyeless, walking corpses ascended from the depths of the ocean and onto land, heading into town. They were covered in seaweed and a greenish slime.

"Sammy," the sea captain called out behind into the bar. "Sammy, you better get--"

He was silenced by a hand that seemed to come out of nowhere and clamped down on his mouth. It was one of the Blind Dead, hiding behind the still-open bar door. She stepped out from behind the door to face him, her hair dripping and crawling with small crabs. Several of the crabs scuttled down her arm and onto the sea captain's face. He screamed a muffled scream as the crabs went to work on his eyes first.

On Carpenter Street, near the highway, a young sailor on leave stepped out of his hotel room, the prostitute still on the bed inside already forgotten. He hadn't meant to hurt her but she had laughed when she saw his dick and he got mad. Real mad.

He wasn't sure if she was dead or not but he didn't really care and lit up a cigarette. The cool night air felt good on his bare chest and the cigarette felt even better, the smoke filling his lungs almost sweet.

So uncaring was he, so unobservant, that he had left the door to the hotel room open behind him. What did it matter? It was so late, no one was going to bother them.

He was enjoying his cigarette so much, enjoying the feel of the night air, that he didn't notice the soft, subtle sound of the back window of the hotel room opening. He didn't see the two Blind Dead crawl in through the window and crawl across the floor to the bed and mount it. They each sat on opposite sides of the body of the prostitute who was, indeed, dead, beaten to death. They plucked out her eyes and opened her mouth wide. They took turns vomiting black, thick bile into her open, dead

mouth. They stripped off what little clothes she was still wearing and made a prayer to their mistress, asking for the miracle of resurrection.

Their prayers were answered as the prostitute coughed a few times and sat up. She felt the bodies of her new sisters and slowly inclined her head towards the open hotel door, towards the sailor, listening for him.

The young sailor finished his cigarette, dropped it to the ground and put it out with his bare, calloused feet.

It was when he looked back up from this mighty task that he noticed the fires. Smoke rose into the sky from at least ten different locations and the patchy clouds in the sky danced with the light of flames from below. He could hear screams from several different points in town.

"What the fuck?" he said.

That was when the prostitute grabbed hold of his balls from behind and squeezed. She sat between his legs near the crushed cigarette looking up at him as she squeezed with every ounce of her strength. The sailor screamed as his scrotum burst. The two other Blind Dead grabbed him from behind as their new sister torn his dick off and tossed it aside. She started to climb up his body, blood spattering her own body from the sailor's stump. She smiled at him, her eyeless gaze the last thing he ever saw.

On Main Street, in the heart of town, the night crew of the movie theater, just having closed after the midnight movie double feature, gaped at the horrid sight before them. Skittering down Main Street like a plague were thousands of vermin. Rats, roaches, centipedes, snakes tumbled over each other as they rushed down the street, devouring everything in their path.

The night crew started to run in every direction away from the horde. Some of them even escaped. Others were not so lucky, overtaken by the vermin and eaten. The beasts were supernaturally strong and venomous. A diseased, malnourished dog-like creature, white and hideous, bit off the nose of a young man trapped in a phone booth.

Watching it all from the end of the street, Papa laughed long and hard. She was having the time of her life, which was saying something considering how old she was. She raised her hands to the sky and spoke to it in an ancient, forgotten tongue.

The sky answered, black clouds gathering in several areas on the edge of town and opening up with rain. Papa didn't want enough rain to put out all the fires but she definitely wanted some. It wouldn't be as fun without the rain. Her laugh became a chuckle as she listened to the cries of terror erupting all around her.

It was 3:32am.



Camille's pack worked hard but they were only a few wolves and they still had a long way to go. Their paws dug at the earth frantically, kicking it up behind them. They were going to need help if they hoped to finish before everyone in town was dead.

Camille, in her grave, finally broke a small section of wood away in the coffin lid. Her head hurt and pounded but the metal mask was taking most of the damage. Dirt started to fall into the coffin, but not much. She just might have some kind of chance here.

That was when the rain started to come down. Black clouds gathered above Camille's gravesite and poured down onto the wolves. Water quickly filled the hole they had dug and soon they were working half-submerged.

Down below, Camille's coffin began to fill with water, slowly but surely. Camille felt it: cold water stinging her back and ass.

"Ah, shit," she said.

To Be Continued...

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