

**Chapter Twenty-Eight, "Dead by Dawn"**

Manny drove like a madman through the streets, weaving around parked and crashed cars, dodging Blind Dead and debris. They had stopped to grab a few supplies - stakes, gasoline, flares - from a hardware store before deciding to head out to the old Colonial house on the hill, which the Old Woman had assured Manny was where everything was converging.

She seemed to be right. The Blind Dead army was now moving in that direction, no longer setting fire to buildings or staying in one place. However, they still got rid of anyone in their path. Manny had already stopped three times to save groups of fleeing citizens.

"I don't know if it worked," Manny said. "Nothing's happened yet."

The Old Woman shrugged.

"Who's to say?" she said, not very helpfully.

Manny frowned and concentrated on the road ahead. He was rewarded. He saw two survivors running along the sidewalk, in the path of three Blind Dead. They looked exhausted, like they weren't going to last much longer. Manny stopped the car, made to get out then stopped.

"Look," he said to the Old Woman.

It was a curious display. There was a green flash behind the Blind Dead at the back of the pack and suddenly, the Sea Hag was standing behind the corpse. She held the doll in her arms and her mouth was open in a silent scream that rattled around inside Manny's head. The next second, the Blind Dead was gone, simply blinking out of existence. This happened two more times, to both of the other Blind Dead that were pursuing the two survivors. They were safe.

"It worked," Manny said. "Goddammit, it worked! All right."

He got back in the car, energized, and continued towards the old house. The Old Woman said nothing, only smiled, satisfied.

The clock on the dash read 5:23am. Dawn was exactly one hour away.

Camille's eyes fluttered open. She was woozy, and didn't know where she was for a moment. Then it all came back to her.

She looked around and found that she was still on the main floor of the old house, but something

was wrong. There was the chandelier, now crashed on the ground, there were the mirrors, lining the room, there was the dead attack dog, splattered against the wall. All that made sense to her, yet there was surely something wrong, something about the way she was seeing all this. What was it?

Then it came to her: everything was upside down. No, that wasn't right, either. She was upside down. That was what was wrong.

"Good morning," Papa said.

She dropped into Camille's eye line now, bright and happy, victorious. She still had that damn top hat perched on her head. How Camille wanted to tear that thing off. Along with the woman's head itself.

"Or perhaps I should say 'Goodnight'," she continued. "You and I are more night people, I would think. I know I am. But we have some time yet. Anything you'd like to say before I drain you dry?"

Papa had tied Camille up and hung her from the staircase upside down. The top of Camille's head almost touched the ground.

She was human once again. And exhausted. Being hit by a vampire was enough to rattle any werewolf, especially one as young as her.

"You think these ropes are going to hold me for long?" Camille said.

"No, I don't," Papa said. "But you won't be here long, anyway."

"Wendy's still out there. So are my wolves."

"How do you know they're not dead?" Papa asked with that sickening smile that was all her own.

"I would feel it," Camille said. "I would know."

"I'll bet you would. I'm not worried. And you shouldn't be, either. It'll all be over. Right now."

She floated into the air and turned herself upside down, looking Camille right in the eye and snuggling up against her like a lover.

Camille forced her eyes to remain open, to not give into the temptation to close them. If these were her last moments, she wanted to look her killer in the eye. She growled.

"Shh," Papa said. "Hush now. I think I'll make it last. Won't go so fast this time."

And she sank her teeth into Camille's neck. Camille screamed in pain. But there was pleasure there as well. It was mixed in with the pain and it pissed Camille off. Would this kill her? She didn't know. There wasn't exactly a manual for these sort of situations.

She cried out for help with her mind, reached out and shook the mind tree to see what would fall off it. She reached far and wide.

That was when she felt Kimberly.

"No," she said.

She didn't want to hurt Kimberly anymore than she already had but she couldn't stop thinking about her. Her mind reached out and grabbed hold of Kimberly, calling for help.

And Kimberly responded.

Kimberly opened her eyes.

First, before anything else - before the pain, before the feel of the mud below her, before the return of sound to her ears - there was Camille. Her first conscious thoughts were of Camille. Nothing else was important.

She acted instinctively, snapping off the stake that she was impaled on, top first then the bottom. She sat up, pulled herself off the two stakes in her body then grabbed hold of the shard of wood still in her chest.

She dug into the open cavity and grabbed the stake, held it hard, and pulled. She screamed in pain but got it out and tossed it aside. There was still a splinter inside her, dangerously close to her heart but there was no time to get it out now. She set her headphones on and turned up the music: Bowie, loud and rocking.

Taking a moment to crack her neck, she jumped and flew out of the hole and continued flying, straight into the house; there was even a hole in the wall already waiting for her.

Papa didn't know what hit her.

Like a missile, Kimberly barreled into the other vampire, knocking the woman off Camille and into a wall. She stopped on a dime and took a moment to cut the rope holding Camille to the staircase. Returned to Papa.

Camille dropped to the floor like a sack of potatoes. She wasn't unconscious but she didn't have the strength to move yet. Blood dripped from the holes in her neck. Kimberly hoped that Papa hadn't exchanged any of her own blood with Camille. *A vampire werewolf?* Was that even possible?

Kimberly grabbed hold of Papa and threw her across the room once again. Papa was off her game for a moment but put it back together quickly. She stood up, snapped her fingers and blew into the palm of her hand.

Fire appeared there. And spread.

It was as if she were throwing fire onto the ground in front of her. The fire spread like gasoline across the floor. Soon the remains of the chandelier caught ablaze, then the staircase.

Papa put out the fire in her hand with a little flick of her fingers, defied gravity and drifted into the air. Her smile was back.

"Kimberly, my beautiful little thing," she said. "Back, are you?"

"Can't hear you," Kimberly said and pointed to her headphones.

"Neat trick. I've still got a few myself."

She produced a deck of cards from her waistcoat, fanned them out. The cards glinted in the light of the fire.

Papa threw one of them at Kimberly. The edge of the card caught Kimberly's shoulder. There was an intense, hot pain where it grooved her flesh. A tiny spark cracked in the wound.

"Razor-sharp," Papa said. "And silver. You don't know how much it hurts holding them. But I'm considerably older than you. I can take a lot more pain than you. It doesn't even set my hands on fire anymore!"

She threw another card. Kimberly was able to dodge this one and the card embedded itself in the wall behind her.

Spinning in the air, Kimberly got away from the fire, which was getting larger by the second. The old house wasn't going to survive the night.

Distracted by the fire, she turned and one of Papa's cards hit her square in the chest. Luckily, it was in the right side, away from her heart. But it was still painful and she was alarmed when she saw smoke followed by flame on her chest. She pulled out the card and tossed it away, her fingers burning.

That was when Papa flew into her, emerging through the rising flames, teeth bared, looking like a demon about to feed.

Manny pulled up to the old house and parked the car. He and the Old Woman got out, gathered the supplies and headed up towards the house. They could already tell that it was on fire.

"Jesus," Manny said. "What's going on in there?"

The Old Woman shrugged. "Beats the hell out of me."

Three Blind Dead stragglers approached them from the graveyard side of the house. The Old Woman didn't hesitate. She grabbed her shotgun from the car, leveled it at them and fired. One took it in the chest, another in the head. They both went down instantly. The third shot missed.

She turned to Manny. "Well, fuck. Outta ammo."

Manny grabbed his pistol from his pants. He didn't want to use the one remaining silver bullet in the cylinder but it looked like he might have to. He aimed at the last Blind Dead, started to squeeze the trigger.

The Old Woman put a hand on his arm, stopping him. He looked at her. She had put down the shotgun and grabbed one of their supplies a crowbar from the car. With surprising strength, she landed a blow across the Blind Dead's face. The corpse's nose came off, along with her upper jaw. Another

blow caved the thing's head in.

The Blind Dead dropped to the ground. She didn't move after that.

Manny let out an exhausted breath. "Close one. We better huff it."

The Old Woman nodded. She handed the crowbar to Manny and picked up the supplies that she had been previously been holding. "Ayuh. Best if we approach the house from different sides."

"Fuck that," Manny said. "We stay together this time."

"All right," the Old Woman said.

They approached the house from the front, just heading up the hill, the opposite way that the others had come. A horrid sight awaited them by the front door.

Wendy - her flesh in tatters, blood covering every inch of her - held a mangled, broken dog in her hands.

She slammed it against the concrete steps of the house, over and over again. Manny was too shocked to say anything. He spotted two more dead, bloody dogs in a heap nearby. That was when Wendy noticed them.

"Attacked by my mistress' own dogs," she said. "Not my night. I think I'll take it out on you two."

"Now hold on," Manny said. "Wait a minute. We can talk through this. You know me. We've been friends for a while now."

"I'm not that person anymore."

She walked towards them, slowly, methodically. The moonlight glinted off her blood-soaked skin as she moved.

"As you can see," she said, "I've lost a lot of blood. Need a little refresher, if you know what I mean."

"Stay back," Manny said.

He pulled the pistol from his belt and pointed it at her. Wendy cocked her head to one side, smirked.

"A gun?" she said. "What do you think that'll do?"

"There's still one silver bullet left in it. Don't make me use it."

All of a sudden, she was right in front of him, and snatched the gun out of his hand. She tossed it away, into the woods around the side of the house.

"Silver," she said. "You don't say. What's your plan now? Wooden stake? Garlic, maybe?"

"Neither, bitch," the Old Woman said.

She was holding one of her supplies - a gasoline can, which was now open - and splashed fuel all over the vampire. Wendy gasped as the gasoline got into her wounds and sent stabs of pain through her. Manny acted instantly grabbing hold of one of the flares, broke it open and lit it. He tossed it onto

Wendy.

She went up like a Roman Candle. Fire engulfed her and she screamed in horrible pain. She ran from them, off into the woods, a bright light in the dark.

"Thanks," Manny said.

"No problem," the Old Woman said. "She didn't seem very nice. Shall we go in?"

"Better leave that there." He indicated the gas can.

The Old Woman nodded and left it on the ground. Manny pulled two wooden stakes from his bag and passed one to the Old Woman.

As they entered, Blind Dead approached the house from almost every direction. But even as they did, they began to disappear. The Sea Hag was having the night of her death and was eating her fill.

## **Chapter Twenty-Nine, "Taming the Beast"**

Manny and the Old Woman burst through the front door. Manny held a crowbar in his hands. He looked about.

Camille was hanging upside down, suspended from the rising of the second floor landing above. She was a werewolf once again. As Manny watched, she tore out of her bonds, fell to the floor and pounced to her feet.

The whole building was on fire now. The heat felt like a scorching hot blanket slamming into Manny's body every second or so. He shielded his face from the blaze.

Camille stood in front of the burning chandelier, the Beast in charge, snarling.

Kimberly and Papa fought brutally. Kimberly slammed the brunt of her fist into Papa's face, again and again. Papa swiped at Kimberly's midriff, scratching out long, deep trenches in her skin. Both of them were screaming.

Camille pounced onto Papa's back, wasting no time at all. She bit into the vampire's shoulder. Manny was reminded of a vice. It seemed like there was no way that Papa could get out of that.

Papa screamed, and started kicking out with her legs at Camille. The She Wolf wouldn't budge, letting go of the vampire's shoulder - taking a large chunk of flesh and bone with her - and biting the side of her head.

Papa was distracted enough to let Kimberly bite down on her wrist. She held onto the limb with both hands and started drinking immediately. Papa's eyes rolled up into her head. She was losing consciousness rapidly.

That was when the backdoor to the room was kicked open. Blind Dead began to file inside. Camille and Kimberly were momentarily distracted.

Papa seized the moment and kicked Kimberly off her and thrust her head into Camille's face. When Camille's mouth dislodged from Papa's head, she took the vampire's ear with her. Papa kicked her in the stomach, dropping her to the ground.

"Protect me, children!" Papa screamed.

Blind Dead swarmed into the room en masse. They came from the backdoor. They came from the hole in the wall. They came through the front door.

Manny and the Old Woman were forced further inside, towards the raging inferno. Manny kicked one of the Blind Dead in the chest as it approached him. The corpse woman fell into the fire, where she writhed in pain.

They were all overwhelmed. The Blind Dead were everywhere. They cornered Kimberly and Camille. They circled around Manny and the Old Woman. There was nowhere to run. Papa laughed in triumph.

That was when it happened. Just as the Blind Dead were about to attack Camille and Kimberly, they stopped.

A wet, green/white hand fell on the shoulder of the nearest Blind Dead. It was the Sea Hag, her mouth open wide in a terrifying, silent scream. The Blind Dead disappeared. The same thing happened to the next Blind Dead, and the next. All across the room. One moment, they were there, the next they were gone, like a jump-cut in a film.

"What's going on?!" Papa screamed.

Soon, all of the Blind Dead were gone, taken and eaten by the Sea Hag. The spectral being in question appeared before Papa. She said nothing, only held out the doll that Manny had given her.

She looked like she was offering it to Papa. The vampire even made to grab it but before her fingers could touch it, the Sea Hag dropped it to the ground in front of her. She smiled that awful smile and disappeared.

"Who was that?" Papa said.

"That was the Sea Hag," Manny said. "And your little army is gone."

"No."

"It's true," Kimberly said. "I can't feel them anymore. They're all gone."

"No," Papa insisted.

But the look on her face told the truth: she knew that they were gone for good. She screamed so loud and piercing that every mirror lining the room exploded. A million shards cascaded through the air. Manny shielded his face and felt the glass pepper the back of his hand, leaving small cuts behind.

Papa's scream was still deafening. The fire around her swirled into a column that reached all the way to the second floor, scorching the ceiling where the chandelier had once been.

She rose into the air and flew like a bullet towards the back of the house. She didn't bother with the backdoor, crashing through the wall into the woods beyond.

Camille and Kimberly turned to watch her go, but Manny wasn't paying her any mind. He ran to the two women, avoiding the fire, until he had reached them.

"Camille," he said.



He put a hand on Camille's shoulder. The Beast whirled around, blood covering her mouth, chin and neck. Manny backed away, afraid. The Beast snarled.

"Camille, it's me," he said.

Camille didn't seem to understand. She pounced at Manny. He dropped to the ground. He could feel the heat of the flames nearby. Soon, they would all be engulfed.

"This isn't you!" he screamed.

Kimberly grabbed hold of Camille, trying to wrap her arms around the girl's waist. It was no good. The She Wolf was going to kill Manny. This was it.

Manny closed his eyes. He was thinking of his wife.

There was a loud clap. Manny opened his eyes.

Everyone looked up at the Old Woman. She put down her hands after clapping. "That's enough of that shit. Werewolf, calm down! We're your friends."

Camille stayed where she was for a moment, perched over Manny, then backed off. She curled into a ball at Manny's feet.

Manny looked up at the Old Woman. He raised his eyebrows in an unspoken question.

The Old Woman shrugged. "Werewolves. You have to know how to deal with them."

Kimberly put an arm around Camille. The She Wolf shuddered but accepted her lover. Kimberly kissed her.

"It's okay," she said to Camille. Then, to Manny, "She's okay."

"Yeah," Manny said. "Let's get out of here."

"We can't," Camille said, standing up - still the Beast, still enraged. "We can't let her get away."

"What?" Manny said. "Let's cut our losses and just leave. We're alive. That's good enough."

"Camille's right," Kimberly said. "If we let her go, she'll just rebuild her army one day."

"Yeah, one day," Manny said. "Not today, though."

"Manny," Camille said, slightly more measured this time, "thank you for everything you've done tonight. But you have to go. Go find Dana and give her a kiss. Go find your wife. Kimberly and I have to finish this."

Manny shook his head, frustrated. He looked Camille in the eye and saw the young woman he had once known and worked with. But she was buried deep in those eyes, behind the Beast and its animal gaze.

"Okay," he said. "Okay, we'll go. I pray you'll make it through the night. Here, take these." He handed them two wooden stakes. "Running out of ways to kill vampires tonight."

Camille and Kimberly took the stakes and made to leave. The Old Woman stopped them.

"There's another way to kill vampires, you know," she said. "Dawn will be here in a few short minutes. Make sure you're inside before that happens." She said this last to Kimberly. Kimberly nodded.

The pair of them stepped through the hole Papa had left behind and looked back, just once. Manny would never forget them. He would remember them just like that: covered in blood and looking back at him, just before they left in pursuit of the master vampire.

He never saw them again.

He and the Old Woman left the old house. They drove back through town, helping survivors along the way.

Manny tried to convince the Old Woman to come with him when he left Bolton but she would have none of it. She made him drop her off at her home.

After that, Manny drove out of town, towards Providence and, hopefully, his wife. He scanned the radio but could find no Patti Smith. He settled on a Donovan song. It was a sad song.

He didn't know why.

To Be CONCLUDED...

*Copyright 2023 Brian Flynn*