

## **Chapter Eight, "Villains"**

"What has she done to you, my lovelies?!" Papa screamed into the night.

It was a little after Camille and Kimberly had left the docks, the moon was high, and Papa sat disheveled in the shallow water among the pieces of her Blind Dead. She cradled a severed arm in her hands like a baby. Around her stood four other Blind Dead, standing guard. She had been alerted to the situation by the last Blind Dead standing during the werewolf attack. The walking corpse had sent a psychic signal to Papa, briefing her of the situation, before her soul left her body, leaving it lifeless.

Papa stood up, out of the water, looked around at her soldiers. She put her hands on her head, palms pressed against both temples.

"That cute, hairy little girl is going to be trouble," she said. "Why is it always like this?"

She spoke to the Blind Dead, not getting any kind of response. She went on, not caring.

"Why are werewolves always a problem?" she asked the eyeless dead women. "You'd think after nine hundred years, I'd meet a pleasant, helpful, demure werewolf. Just once. But, no. Well, we can do something about that. We can get her on our side. What do you think? Do you think we can get her thinking our way?"

The Blind Dead said nothing.

"I can see that my erudite conversation is lost on you," she said. "Never mind. The important thing is that I need to find a more permanent hiding place for you lot. Put you out in fairly deep water, a fishing net picks you up. Move you closer to shore, near the docks, and a car hits you and you're torn apart by a werewolf. So, somewhere hidden, somewhere protected. Any ideas?"

The Blind Dead said nothing.

"Let's go, you four," she said. "We'll wake the others once we find a good place for them. The last thing we need is for all of us to be marching down the street at once. I don't want her majesty getting wind of it."

She walked up from the beach onto the docks. As she mounted the planks, she was aware of red and blue flashing lights. The police had arrived.

She could hear them. There were two of them.

"Larry," one of them said. "Can you hear me okay? Yeah, we're checking it out now."

Papa heard radio chatter responding to the officer's report.

"Right, yeah," he said. "Ten-four, I mean. Over and out."

The two officers exited the car. Papa let them get a few steps before she ascended the dock, hands first. She crawled onto it like some mythical Beast. The two officers, one slim, the other portly, drew their guns and brandished them at her.

"Gentlemen," Papa said.

She slowly rose up from all fours and gave them a bow. Both officers relaxed a bit but didn't put away their pistols.

"Jesus, lady," the slim one said, chewing on a piece of gum that couldn't have been regulation. "You gave us a hell of a scare."

"Don't you know it's dangerous to sneak up on cops like that?" the portly one said.

"I do apologize," Papa said.

"Yeah, okay," Slim said.

"You see anything funny around here?" Portly said.

"Funny? You mean, did anything make me laugh tonight?"

"No, he means did you see anything strange?" Slim said.

"Yeah, you know what I mean," Portly said.

"I'm sure I don't," Papa said.

"Look, we got a call saying there was some strange things going on at this dock," Slim said.

"Strange?" Papa said. "How so?"

"Noises, howls," Portly said.

"Howls?" Papa said. "I haven't seen a wolf in these parts in some time."

"Yeah, neither have I," Slim said, speaking to Portly.

"Used to be wolves around her," Portly said. "My granddad used to shoot 'em. They're mostly gone from around here. I haven't seen one in years. Seen a few coyotes, though. Could have been one of those."

"By the docks?" Slim said.

"Never know," Portly said.

"No, I suppose not, but it does seem pretty unlikely."

"What, you mean unlikely like running into a strange woman in a top hat, wet from the waist down? Unlikely like that?"

"Yeah, I see what you mean," Slim said. "Put up your hands, lady."

They both raised their pistols again.

"Oh, am I part of this conversation again?" Papa said.

"I guess," Slim said.

"We need to take you in for questioning," Portly said.

Slim scratched his two-day old beard with the barrel of his gun. Frowned, looked at his partner. "Do we have cause?"

Portly turned to his partner, a sour look on his face. "She's on the scene of a possible crime. And she's acting weird. Is that not cause?"

Slim shrugged. "I don't know, you've been doing this longer than me. What do you think?"

"I think she needs to get her hands up. Put your hands up, lady!"

"All right," Papa said. "If you say so, officers."

She raised her hands in a little flourish and snapped her fingers. Slim approached her cautiously, getting his handcuffs out while Portly covered him. Slowly, deliberately, the Blind Dead mounted the docks behind Papa. They brought with them the scent of death and of the ocean, of the Pit. Fog seemed to rise with them, unnaturally.

"Oh Christ," Portly said.

He saw them first. Slim saw them a second later. His mouth dropped open, his gum falling to the ground. Papa, supernaturally fast, knocked his gun and cuffs out of his hand and grabbed hold of his face with her right hand, thumb and pinky finger pressing against each cheek, the other fingers just above his eyes on his forehead.

"Let him go!" Portly said. "Let him the fuck go!"

"If I let him go, he will be at the mercy of my friends here," Papa said, eerily calm. "Regrettably, they have no mercy. I, however, can offer you both a quick death."

She squeezed and there was a cracking sound as she began to crush his face. Slim screamed.

"I said let him go!" Portly yelled.

He fired twice, both shots hitting Papa in the chest. She barely flinched and looked down at the wounds. Blood dripped from them for a moment then stopped. The Blind Dead had finished climbing onto the docks and started towards Portly. The officer fired three more times, his aim now directed at the dead women.

"Seems unsporting to let them have you," Papa said.

She let go of Slim and thrust out her free hand, palm outwards towards Portly. It was as if he had been frozen. He couldn't move his arm, couldn't fire his revolver.

"Let's see," Papa said. "By my count, you've fired five times, is that right?"

Reluctantly, Portly nodded.

"Now," Papa continued, "correct me if I'm wrong - I'm so out of date when it comes to modern devices - but that's means you only have one shot left, correct?"

Portly nodded again. Papa parroted his nod.

"Good," she said.

She moved her free hand ever so slightly and Portly's arm moved with it. He was being controlled, his arm obeying her and bending at the elbow. It would be pointing at his own head any second.

Papa started to laugh. She increased pressure on Slim's face. His skin broke and blood began spraying from between Papa's fingers. His nose snapped a moment later, falling to the left.

"You asked me before if I saw anything funny tonight," Papa said, laughing.

Portly's pistol was now staring him in the face. He was drenched in sweat.

"Well I have now," Papa said.

Slim's face collapsed in on itself, a mixture of skin, bone and brains left in Papa's hand as his lifeless body dropped onto the dock. Portly's finger started to squeeze the trigger.

"Your faces," Papa said, laughing uproariously.

Portly could now see that her fangs were elongated and sharp, like a vampire. Desperately he fought against his own finger as it squeezed the trigger. But it was no good.

"They make me laugh!" Papa said.

Portly pulled the trigger of his pistol and he saw no more.

Arthur looked in the mirror and did not like what he saw. He stood in a grimy, tiny bathroom. Shit stains covered the walls and there must have been a battalion of flies formulating battle plans in the toilet. The mirror was cracked and Arthur's image was fragmented.

He gently touched the long scratches that covered much of the right side of his face. They weren't healing. Pain surged through his body as he touched them and he was pretty sure they were infected. There was a white build-up in one of them. Pus.

"Fuck," he said.

A least the bitch hadn't bit him. That was how the curse was passed on, wasn't it? He nodded into the mirror.

He had been reading up on werewolves at the library during the day. The staff and fellow patrons

stared at him, an older man wearing an eye patch and with visible wounds on his head reading up on werewolves and coughing periodically.

Ah, yes, the coughing. He was sick all right. No doubt about that. The bitch had given him something. He was infected and sick.

But not a werewolf, thank merciful God.

He held his own gaze in the mirror. Earlier that day, he had had an epiphany, the most profound religious moment of his life. He knew what he had to do, knew his calling.

He was a servant of God.

That was the only explanation of how he survived the attack. God wanted him to survive and strike down that evil, satanic bitch. It all made sense now. How could he have missed it before?

There was a loud knock on the bathroom door.

"Are you done in there or what?!" someone asked. "I gotta take a fucking shit, man! Come on!"

"Just about," Arthur said.

He pulled the .357 Magnum from his jacket, checked the cylinder. It was loaded with regular ammo. He had put the silver bullets on a speed loader, in his pocket, for use when the time came for His work.

"Come on!" the person on the other side of the door yelled.

Arthur could tell that the man was right next to the door, his face pressed against it. And there was something else. He could feel it through the door. The man wanting to get inside was evil. He was a demon, a Devil. Red smoke poured into the bathroom from under the door. Arthur's mouth dropped open in shock.

He recovered, got his wits together. He had to fight, had to get out of here.

The door opened outwards and carefully, Arthur took hold of the doorknob. He hesitated for a moment, then turned the knob and pushed the door open with all the force he could muster.

The door slammed into the young man waiting to get inside. Three of his teeth were knocked loose with the force and he fell to the floor.

Arthur looked down at the young man and saw that he was a demon, red-skinned with horns and a forked tail. He stepped on the man's neck hard until he heard a crunch and then kicked him in the face repeatedly. Somewhere, hidden deep in the back of his mind, he knew that the young man perfectly normal, but it was so far back, so hazy that it barely registered at all. Was it the infection? Arthur didn't know or care.

When the demon stopped moving, Arthur looked up. He had been in the horrid bathroom of a dive bar on the edge of town but that wasn't where he was now.

He was in Hell.

Well, it was still the shitty dive bar but it was now draped in red currents and the six remaining people frequenting it had been transformed into Devils. On the jukebox, Ram Jam's "Black Betty" started up.

And that was enough for Arthur.

He raised his pistol and shot the first Devil in the forehead. It was a young man playing pool. His pool stick had turned into a pitchfork and he had been pointing it at Arthur but the bullet had done its job and the Devil dropped to the floor, dead. Well, of course the bullet had done its job. He had blessed it earlier in the day. He was a servant of God, wasn't he?

The girl who had been playing pool with the young man screamed and started to run. Arthur shot her in the back of the head and she dropped, fire erupting from her red-skinned body.

Arthur shot the old man sitting at the bar before he could get up. The old man's head hit the beer he had been drinking as he slumped over onto the bar.

Arthur walked through the bar and found the two sluts that were laughing at him earlier as he got up to check on his wound in the bathroom. They were still at their little table, cowering around it. Their forked tails intertwined as they kissed, smoke trailing from their nostrils.

"Fucking evil Devil dykes," he said. "I knew it."

"Don't," one of them said. "Please."

Arthur shook his head and uttered a horrible chuckle out of the side of his mouth. The two young women screamed as he shot them both in the face. In the muzzle flash, he saw for a split second what they really were: just two scared girls, tears in their eyes, clutching each other in fear as he gunned them down.

But no, that couldn't have been the truth, could it? A servant of God wouldn't - couldn't - do that to normal people. No, they were evil. All of them.

The bartender vaulted over the bar, a bat in his hand. Arthur spun around and put the last bullet into him, hitting him in the stomach. The Devil bartender fell, his flaming sword dropping to the ground beside him.

Arthur took a deep breath. It was over. All the Devils were vanquished. He, the servant of God, had defeated them.

He popped open the cylinder, dropped the empty shells onto the ground and reloaded. He looked around and smiled as the red curtains rolled up to the ceiling, where they disappeared. "Black Betty" continued on the jukebox.

Calmly, he exited the bar, leaving seven perfectly normal people dead in his stead. He had escaped Hell, for now. But it was always there, just under the surface of the world, ready to pounce.

And, from now on, he would be prepared for it.

To Be Continued...

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