

---

---

# DEMONIC TOME

---

---

Sep 2009

Reader Discretion Advised



## Table of Contents

PREFACE.....	2
POETRY.....	5
SHOULD THE WRITTEN WORD BE FREE?.....	5
By Thom Olausson.....	5
<b>Feast of worms</b> .....	8
MY SEARCH.....	10
BY CHRIS BEATON.....	10
DEMONIC SCRIPTURE.....	11
The Stories.....	11
NIGHT BUS TO FARGO.....	11
By Gerald Budinsk.....	11
THE HARVESTER.....	15
By: Michael Garza.....	15
THE OLD MOTHER.....	19
By D. D. Bell.....	19
SHADOWS.....	34
By Kimberly Reichlein.....	34
THE BLEEDER.....	39
By: Jesse Dedman.....	39

Have a question or an opinion that you want to stress, then do so here

[Dedman@demonictome.com](mailto:Dedman@demonictome.com)

[Legato10@swbell.net](mailto:Legato10@swbell.net)



## DEMONIC TOME

READ DEMONIC TOME ON THE GO FOR AS LITTLE AS \$2



WHEN IT'S TIME TO PUBLISH, IT'S...

# E-BOOKTIME

---

---

## PREFACE

---

---

This edition demands special recognition for several reasons. First, it sets off the Month of the Dead contest, which will run until Oct 25<sup>th</sup>, and we are granting you the opportunity to vote for your favorite story. The voting process couldn't be any easier. Locate any link to the recent edition and along with it will be a survey, fill it out without any foul play

---

---

and that's it. Secondly, the issue premier a new edition to the magazine, The Bleeder. Though I penned the focused piece, it is not placed so that I may make a name for myself. The inclusion of this work should provide a better idea as to what we are actively looking for in our search for serialized pieces. There was a time when we had a huge announcement in bold red lettering screaming for serialized pieces, and it was followed by a payment plan. Is this something we are still searching for? You better believe it.

Please, do not forget to vote on the following stories as the authors worked very hard on them and they deserve a moment of your time for the work they performed.

Mr. Dedman

From the desk of the Staff:

We are pleased to announce we have overcome the ruthless trials of Greg. Our bold bastard son of a leader has freed us in the most obvious sense of the word. We no longer reside in that God forsaken basement of terrors and children. The record of our escape, we feel, is central to the growth of our work. It is far from easy to let go of the Violence, hunger, and misery that had broken our spirits. Each man's heart and mind is a mere shell of writing talent bound in flesh without real purpose. We have Greg to thank.

It hadn't really remained all that terrifying down there after all. For the next month or so the terrible creatures beneath the floorboard would drop in every so often to play cards and smoke. After we gave em that footless kid, they sort of developed a taste for youth. The smoke made them wild unsoothable beasts with mad fits of hunger. The only way to stop them from turning on us was to periodically offer a sacrifice. We had grown comfortable after somewhat taming the beasts. The attitude became relaxed and work was put off more and more often. Greg didn't like that. As always, he had a fix for this behavior. By the time we got down to only two kids, our skin was starved of sunshine, our breath was foul, loins were itchy, bowels uncontrollable, and not to mention the real dark side of it all. We stopped getting care packages. Were it not for dictionaries, we would only have other humans as examples for the words we speak. To look at us was to see the definition of misery. Things became hostile and tensions grew as conditions worsened among the group. Lack of smoke gave way to anger among one another. Everyone was tense and we began to turn on one another. One

---

---

morning I awoke to the sound of a mad cackling from upstairs. It had been 8 days since I last ate or smoked and three weeks since I'd written anything. As I slowly gained my awareness I saw a couple of our own were rolling around the floor knocking down the relics and smashing everything in their path. Steve held Felix's throat until his eyes turned red. The veins in his neck became swollen and his face turned purple. I realized where, that is...who, the laughter was coming from. It all flooded in on me at once: The hunger, the filth, and the anger pulled at my sanity. I gave in and I became what Webster would call "Rage". Rather than let the moment spoil, I knocked in the closest staff member's face without hesitation. Mark didn't like that. He pushed me against the great shelf and it began to wobble. The heads were the first to come crashing down. Mark was busy covering his head from the falling debris and I came down ass first. Something landed in my lap. It looked up at me with a mad expression on its face. I grabbed Mr. Dedman's head, with all necessary respect due at the moment, and wailed it into Mark. There were no words, only screams as I let loose at him. There were no thoughts after blood hit my face. His blood. I no longer felt pain. No love and Happiness. No regret. Nothing. I surrendered all feeling and submitted to the blind fury. I didn't stop for a good 13 minutes or so. After I was done they weren't able to match the teeth to the right heads anymore. Meanwhile: the other two were still at it and only just noticed what I'd done. I wanted them to feel it too. I clotheslined the first asshole to run my way and grabbed him by the hair before he hit the ground. His heels touched the ground and I slowly brought him up with my strength. He shook violently and I slammed his head into the floor. He didn't get back up.

Only Felix and I were left after that. The uninvolved were cowering somewhere, at first enjoying the ramble until they realized what was really happening. Felix stopped abruptly and our eyes met in cold silence. Neither broke the gaze as Felix caught his breath and my nails dug into my palms. Fists clenched, Eyes squinted, heart pounding, skin burning, I slowly checked my back pocket and took out a cigarette and lit it with a match. About the time I inhaled I saw Felix sigh in relief. My eyes narrowed at him once more. He quickly looked away and sat somewhere. And I remembered that I once learned that a lion will roar so that he will not have to fight. I was King. Beelzebub. Lord of the Flies. There was silence and things turned from red to darkness. I do not know when the laughter stopped. I swear right before I lost consciousness I could hear the smirk Greg was making upstairs. Everything became dark. There were no dreams.

---

We all awoke someplace else. My eyes began to focus. No more cages. No more children. No more blood. No more walls. For the first time in a long time I saw the sky. I remembered when I read The Ballad of Reading Gaol. It wasn't until this moment I understood what it meant.

"I never saw sad men who looked  
With such a wistful eye  
Upon that little tent of blue  
We prisoners called the sky,  
And at every careless cloud that passed  
In happy freedom by."

---



## POETRY

SHOULD THE WRITTEN WORD BE FREE?

By Thom Olausson

That is the question, isn't it? I have just been on vacation with my family in

---

southern France. It was a brilliant holiday! As we returned to the airport on Copenhagen, Denmark, I met a woman from New York, USA. We got to talking about the economy in the world and so forth. I was intrigued by our discussion, mostly because I have always heard that New Yorkers are supposed to be really rude. She did not disappoint me. She told me that she had lived in the Village her whole life and that she worked at Wall Street. After a while she stopped talking, looked at my cane, then she looked at me and asked me what I did for a living. I told her that I was a writer and a poet, but that it was hard to make any money on that profession these days. She looked me in the eyes and told me that she was of the opinion that the written word should be for free. I told her that as a cripple I had my writing as the only means of making money, and I asked her if she thought that I could feed my kids with giving away my work for free? She told me that in her opinion it was sick to charge readers for wanting to read someone else's stories. She didn't care if the poets or writers made any money. As for work she told me I should have thought about those things before becoming a father. It didn't occur to her that I once was as fit as a soldier, that I used to work as a bricklayer and worked seven days a week. It seems that most people rarely think about those things. People like myself wasn't born with injuries, we got them from somewhere. Anyway, the woman went on her merry way and I went on mine. I thought a lot about what she said about the written word ought to be for free. I just simply do not agree, at all! If the written word would become free for all, then there would soon not be any stories, or poems, for you to read. Books as we know them would cease to exist; no publisher would print books for free. And with no new stories, there would not be any new movies either. Maybe Disney would still make

---

---

movies based on one of their rides, but who would stand that for eternity? On the other hand, technology today just might give that woman from New York right! You can download any book for free on the internet, an easy way to murder culture in the creator's womb. When you download an e-book for free, you are robbing the cradle of fantasy. I have never downloaded a book in my entire life. Mainly because I want a PROPER BOOK in my bookcase! Same thing goes with movies for me. I can't stand that cheap look that homemade DVD's have, it makes my skin crawl! And let us face facts here when it comes to e-books; if your little electronic gadgets decide to die on you, then you are left without. As for me, the one who bought the books; I can still read by the light of a candle. I can read my books during daylight as well, but you, you won't have anything to read at all.

I am glad that people enjoy reading my work, don't get me wrong, but I have to make a buck on it to be able to continue writing. At the moment I don't even own a damn laptop! I have to borrow my parents to be able to write even a little. So please think about all the creators out there when you read their work for free. We have all worked hard for you, and we want to entertain you, but we can't survive on nothing...

So, I have once more gone ape-shit in the world of words. I hope you enjoy reading my little ranting, I sure enjoy writing them. Here are some poems for You, Dear Reader...

### Trapped Soul

Trapped soul, lost hope

---

---

No closure in sight  
Cold heart, frayed rope  
No way out of thy plight

Choking darkness, blinding dawn  
Alone inside thy head  
Fading light, night's spawn  
I make thou wish I was dead

Fear of love, love of hate  
I'll put thy restless mind at ease  
Fear of life, live to hate  
I'll give thy dying heart some peace

Confused inside, endless pain  
Numbing terror of denial  
Shards of steel, falls like rain  
Forgive thy black soul's betrayal

Feed you hope, feed you passion  
I'll let thou in from the cold  
Starve thy heart, dry my compassion  
Dead feelings thy soul will hold

**Feast of worms**

---

The rotting dead will have no ill to say  
eaten by worms they rest within the grave  
Behold the world in its glorious decay  
The fall of Man leaves no one to save

Dead within their hearts as they rest  
corpses feeding our hungry mother earth  
The living shall by demons be possessed  
Satan celebrates their demonic rebirth

Join the feast of the damned, see them eat the slain  
Arise from the tomb, walk the halls of the dead  
Until the end of days, only hate will remain  
Hate feeds hate, fear breeds fear, Death nods his head

Fall into the abyss, the dead shall know the truth, hear them moan  
Fear dilutes the blood, vengeance follow war, Death follow all  
Join the feast of worms, flesh eaten away to the bone  
Until the end of days, remain in thy dark home until I call

PS. Dear Reader, remember this: ...the dead will inherit the earth...

# MY SEARCH

BY CHRIS BEATON

....I'm searching for something that is not there....

Find it I've not, not here, but where?

I'm searching for something I can't explain ...

All that my search brings is confusion and pain.....

I've never yet felt this things presence or touch ...

And searched for this thing, searched I have much.....

Have you seen this thing? For this I must know ...

If you have seen it then there will I go.....?

It makes many happy, and other few sad...

It gives some people things that they have never had.....

I long for its feeling, I long for its touch ...

Why have I not with my actions such...

I hope I will capture this one day in my heart ...

We will conjoin, be never apart.....

Please will you show me, leave me not abroad ...

Oh please, won't you tell me, have you ever seen God?

## The Greatest Story Ever Told

A bird is flying south for the winter when suddenly the climate changes and the bird

freezes and falls to the ground in an open field.

A cow comes along and lays a nice, steaming pile of shit right on the bird and walks off.

The shit thaws the bird out and he seems able to function again.

Then along comes a raccoon and digs the bird out of the shit and eats the bird.

Moral of this story?

not everyone who shits on you is your enemy and likewise, not everyone who digs you out of the shit is your friend

-Christopher Beaton

## DEMONIC SCRIPTURE

The Stories

### NIGHT BUS TO FARGO

By Gerald Budinsk

[Vote For This Story Now!](#)

A thick fog rolled in just as Bret approached the bus station and he could barely make out the parking lot in the glare of the spotlight on the loading platform. He parked his old classic Mini - a car he couldn't trust for a long highway journey - and made his way inside through a haze as dense as a waning forest fire.

There was no one else in the waiting room and the ticket agent was sound asleep in his chair. Bret woke the agent and purchased his ticket to Fargo then smiled when he saw the man close his eyes and immediately go back to sleep. His bus would be the last of the night, arriving a little after nine PM. It was only yesterday he decided to finally visit his father. They said he was very sick and maybe the son of a bitch was dying. He'd grit his teeth and make some civil farewells. Maybe the old bastard would leave him his stamp collection.

Bret heard the bus arrive just a couple of minutes late and was disappointed when he dragged his suitcase outside. The old relic must have been forty or more years old and

the engine clanked away like it was near its last gasping breath. He waited for someone to store his suitcase and he finally called out, "Can I store this bag?" There was no answer so he lugged the bag on board. The inside of the bus was nearly pitch dark and he couldn't get a good look at the driver who was hunched over reading a schedule or something.

"This is the bus to Fargo, right?" Bret asked. The driver only grunted. Well, he hadn't said, "you're on the wrong bus," so it must be OK.

Bret could barely make out a few passengers scattered around the rear half of the bus. No one was reading or anything. No one had put on their overhead lights. Fine, he'd sit alone near the front of the bus and get some sleep, if no one in the back woke up and started chattering.

The bus proceeded on city streets making turn after turn and Bret wondered why the driver hadn't gotten onto the interstate feeder, which was right downtown. The time from Minneapolis was supposed to be five hours but at this rate it would take seven or more. Then suddenly it seemed the bus was on a two-lane road in the country. The fog had lifted but still all was dark as a mineshaft so Bret cupped his hands and looked out the window and saw they were in a thickly wooded area. He didn't recall any big forests this close to the city. No matter – in a few minutes he dozed off into restless sleep.

After an hour or so Bret was awakened by the bus making some rather sharp turns. He looked out and saw that they were negotiating switchbacks like they were climbing some enormous mountain. Wait, this isn't right. There were nothing resembling mountains anywhere between Minneapolis and Fargo. Not any in a radius of a thousand miles. Bret stood up, turned on his light, and tried to make his way up to the driver, bouncing from seatback to seatback as the bus pitched and swerved.

"Where are you taking us, driver? This doesn't look like the way to Fargo."

"Who ever said this was the bus to Fargo?"

He had like a Caribbean accent although the back of his neck was pale as ivory, and horribly wrinkled like a reptile.

"I asked you when I got on and you didn't say it wasn't."

"I didn't say it was, either."

“But it was irresponsible to let me get on.”

“I don’t let or not let. My job is just to drive the bus. I was told there was a pick up at your station and here you are.”

“That’s crazy. OK, you have to let me off at the next town. Where is this bus going, anyway?”

“You don’t want to know.”

“Of course I want to know. I paid good money for my ticket and I have the right to get to where I want to.”

Evidently the bus had reached the pinnacle of the mountain and now was heading downhill on a straight but unusually steep incline.

“You have no rights on this bus,” said the driver. “Just sit down and complete your journey.” He turned toward Bret who recoiled in shock. The driver’s face was as bleached and wrinkled as his neck and his eyes seemed to glow red like lasers. So they hire the handicapped, he thought, but this guy is a nut case as well. Bret was getting very frightened but determined as well.

“Hell, no – what about the other passengers? Have any of the others been kidnapped?”

Brett walked toward the rear of the bus, flicked on a couple of overhead lights then stopped in shock. Each of the passengers, from early middle age to elderly, lay back in their seats, eyes closed and wearing the tight, lipless smiles morticians think look natural. Most had their hands crossed on their chests, three with rosaries, and two with bibles. Haltingly, he touched the back of his hand to the cheeks of two of them: one man, one woman. They were as cold as a day old turkey.

“These people are all dead. What is this, the bus to hell?”

“Yes, now that you’ve guessed it, I must confess: this is the bus to the underworld for evil.”

It was crazy, it was irrational, impossible yet Bret felt the need to protest before it was too late. “But I’m not dead and I’ve led a good life.”

“Nev’rtheless, once you’re on this bus there is no turning back.”

But now Bret's attention was drawn to more urgent matters. The bus was gaining speed alarmingly and the engine was emitting a high-pitched wail as if it might blow to pieces at any second.

"Shouldn't you put it in low gear? We're going out of control."

"We have to build up speed to penetrate the barrier."

"You're insane. Stop this god damned bus before we crash," Bret screeched.

It was light enough so that Bret could see they were still heading downhill toward another mountain. But there was no tunnel; the road just terminated at the cliff. He hurried to a seat and secured his belt, knowing it would do little good. The cacophony of the crash was horrendous. It came with a shower of glass piercing his face and abdomen like ice picks. Then the impact, breaking nearly every bone in his body in agonizingly slow motion, as if the demons in charge wanted to savor every torment. Finally came the fire that consumed his flesh in long, slow rasps.

Eventually it was over and amazingly, Bret found himself totally intact and standing outside the bus. Stunned, he watched as the passengers trudged out like zombies, eyes still closed but able to follow their driver. Ahead of them was a massive hall engulfed with red haze. Bret glanced to the right and his heart leapt with hope. There was a door and a red sign glowing, "Exit." He hurried through the doorway, smiling with joy.

He was back in the Minneapolis bus station and could hear the old bus arriving. Try as he could to resist, his legs took on their own life and marched him out to the platform. Struggling to hold himself back, he climbed the steps and greeted his old friend, the driver.

"Is this the bus to Fargo?" He heard himself say.

This was to be his eternity. He should have brought a book, perhaps a Bible.

**Comments Follow** <http://www.alongstoryshort.net/>



## THE HARVESTER

By: Michael Garza

### [Vote For This Story Now!](#)

Joshua's eyes were slow to open. His head ached. His memory lost for the moment. Darkness surrounded him. He begged his arms to move. Though they resisted, Joshua was able to bring his hands up to his face. A deep cold pressed against his body. He realized he was lying face down.

His hair lay matted to his face, the ends stiff and hard. It only took a moment before the last remnants of his memory returned. Joshua yearned for power. He yearned for the gifts of another world. He'd performed the ritual. Joshua called out to the Illumik. A way through the void opened and Joshua passed through.

He shifted himself slightly with his hands then pushed himself up to his knees. His movements echoed in the darkness. Joshua rubbed his hands along his chest and stomach. He was stripped clean, naked.

He tried to bring himself to stand but found his legs lacked the will. His muscles were wrought with pain. He cringed as he collapsed back down to the hard surface. The cold of this place was overwhelming. His hands shook as he struggled to ball his fists. There was a wash of dread all about him. Joshua did not have the heart to speak. There was something in that place that filled him with terror.

When he could stand it no longer, Joshua came back up to his knees. He breathed deeply, searching for the strength to push further. He clenched his teeth and strained with every ounce of muscle and came to his feet. His body wobbled to and fro and the chill of that place rushed over him.

He took a step forward, followed by another; he held his arms out in front of him like a blind man. The cold enveloped his body. His mind couldn't contemplate the question that he should be asking. Where am I?

Joshua walked for a long time. He struggled in the darkness finding neither a wall in front of him or at his sides. The terror in his heart grew. There was something down there with him in the dark. He had to keep moving.

It appeared as a pin hole at first; a light so small but so bright somewhere far

ahead. He lunged out for it, begging his legs to carry him. With a single minded purpose he pushed on, urging himself to go on.

With every lumbering step the light grew. There was an opening there in the darkness. It was an open doorway he saw. He could finally make it out just up ahead of him. There was a sickly, grey light cascading in from outside. The air warmed as he neared.

Joshua's eyes burnt as the light caught him. He tried to hold it back with his hands before his face. The cold of that place vanished at once. A thick and humid blanket replaced it.

Joshua stepped out into the open. His eyes begged to remain closed as he forced them open. The light of that place was somehow hallow, void of substance. The sky was grey and dead, no clouds or sun, only a vacant light.

The land opened up all around him. Joshua stood atop a dusty soil. Dirt covered his bare feet. His skin was lifeless. He turned to find the door way crafted of decayed old wood. It hung, ends dug into the dirt as it had for centuries. A path way few had come through and even less had returned from.

There was no building, no structure of any kind. From behind, Joshua could see only the land beyond it. Only from the front was the way back into the darkness possible.

#

Joshua looked down at himself. He was a pitiful sight for sure, haggard and loathing. Lost was the confident man who'd begged to cross the void. He was lost and alone. The land did not change. The ground was hard and colorless. The air was stale. Joshua struggled to breath.

He'd walked away from the doorway, directly out in front of it. Some part of him wanted to be able to get back to it if he must. Another part of him believed he would never see that place or the world he'd come from again.

His strength was returning. There was no time here. The sky didn't change; it offered no help or direction. There was only the doorway behind.

Joshua kept the black opening in sight as long as he could. Turning with every few steps to ensure it was still behind him until he could make it out no longer. It was somehow comforting to him.

Once the doorway was lost from his sight, the terror in Joshua's heart returned. He was lost in the void. That much was sure. The promises of power and indulgence unfulfilled.

Joshua continued to walk. After a time a dryness burned in his throat and his belly growled at him. The loneliness of that place was all encompassing.

Finally, something changed. Whether it had been an hour or a decade Joshua couldn't say. The sky darkened. Slow at first then increasingly so. The night of that place

was awful; a black so thick shrouded his body and concealed his hands from his face.

The fear crept across his mind like a dying prayer. There was something in the dark. There was something moving toward him. Joshua knew he could not hide, he could only hope to run. And run he did. Like a mad man Joshua flung himself to sprint. He ran with a furry. He ran for his life.

The sound of his heart pounded in his ears. His breaths gasped out in the heat of the night. Ever still the watcher came after him. Joshua could feel him gaining, matching his every step.

There was a pale light within the darkness. Joshua's eyes adjusted after a time. The barren landscape had changed. As he stumbled, his feet touched a hard grass. The feel of it cut into his exposed skin. His blood fell freely on the ground.

In time the pain with each step was stifling. His mind was plagued by dread and panic. He knew he would never leave this place. They would come for him in time. Not to praise or offer the power he sought but to condemn him. Joshua wept.

The darkness went on forever to his sides. It was when Joshua had reached the end of his strength that a light appeared. Different than the grey sight of this place, Joshua knew the light at once; fire.

He could do no more than a slow walk. That which followed him slowed as he did. It mocked Joshua as his strength failed. It had all the time it wanted.

The fire divided as Joshua neared. The light dotted all along the landscape ahead. There were figures within the shadows. Joshua advanced slowly. He drug his bloodied feet across the grass forcing back the cries of pain.

He moved close enough to count the fires. Tall torches planted in the ground. The dim light revealed a grove of trees. From a distance the short woods looked twisted and disfigured. Few branches clung to each truck, their sway erratic in a wind Joshua could not feel.

A sudden stammer brought Joshua to his knees. In the darkness behind him a terrible pounding crash rang out. Joshua lost his breath. He trembled, pressing himself closer to the ground half lifeless with terror.

He could not hold still. Though he had no strength to speak of, Joshua clung to a will to live. He came to his feet and rushed forward. The light of the trees was near.

#

Joshua's pace faltered. There was movement in the edges of the light ahead. The silhouettes of the trees danced under the flickering light. He scanned the darkness. On all fours the first one came. It ran in between the trees like a wild dog. There was a dark fur about it with patches of skin between. It came to a stop just beyond Joshua and rose up on two awkward legs.

Joshua dropped back down to the ground as he gasped for breath. The creature

faced away from him as it reached out toward a tree. It was then that Joshua became aware of the truth of the grove.

He saw the eyes first. Bleeding and jutting back and forth in panic. The trees were alive. It was no trunk at all but the body of a man. His legs planted firmly in the ground, his arms held out wide to his sides.

The horror of the scene was overwhelming. Joshua looked from one planted figure to the next. There were women among them, their bodies exposed. Gashes and wounds lined the skin, the stains of dried blood giving them the dark wooden look from afar.

Wide eyed with fear Joshua took in the grove all in one. Even spaced bodies all dug into the ground from one side to the other. Some still struggled in the light like branches swaying in the wind. Their arms held up by long sticks pierced into their sides and again in the arms.

He could not force himself to move. The something following him neared. He could hear its steps as it crept up from behind. Joshua focused on the creature before the tree. Its head swayed back and forth as it looked into the eyes of the victim.

Without word or reason it reached up with a long arm and gouged its fingers into the eyes of the victim. Muffled screams filled the grove as the creature dug at the eyes and pulled them free. Long bits of human debris dripped from the empty sockets even as the creature tossed the morsels in its mouth.

Joshua laid in morbid bewilderment, in the darkness. He could no longer grasp his reality. All he wanted was to wake up from this awful nightmare and promise to seek his fortunes elsewhere. Alas, his time had come.

There was a fierce pull at his head. A tight grip took a hold of Joshua's hair. His body was drug across the ground as he kicked and screamed. The hard grass of that place sliced his body in the most wicked manner.

Joshua flailed about in a fit of mad terror. The sight of his assailant's burnt and blackened feet stomping beside his head as he was drug filled him with trepidation. Pulled into the light, Joshua could see the broken legs of those unfortunate enough to be planted here. The fur covered creature was near, he ran alongside Joshua's body like a hunting dog returning home.

They came to an open patch in the middle of the grove and Joshua was flung to the ground. He scratched at the ground to pull away but found another hand tight around the back of his neck. Joshua was turned to see the face of the assailant from the darkness.

A massive figure bent over him, its skin blackened and weathered. Lose pieces of flesh dangled from exposed limbs. Powerful arms took hold of Joshua and lifted him from the ground. A face was hidden behind the shadows of that place though its eyes pierced the darkness.

Of all the things he'd seen, it was the eyes that would haunt Joshua for eternity. They were void of humanity and empty of all but delightful agony. Joshua convulsed as

his feet were driven hard into the ground.

The bones in his feet and legs broke and splintered all at once. Figures danced in front of him as he let out a battered scream. His arms were lifted, a long slither of wood jabbed into his sides, his arms pierced through the muscle, held out wide.

Joshua let out a pitiful plea. As he did something was forced in his mouth and his jaw pressed close. Small lengths of wood dug into his upper plate and tongue. Blood flowed from Joshua's wounds as the assailant stepped back to admire his work.

There was a deep laugh and a vulgar, wide grin. Joshua could not move. An agonizing pain consumed him. He could see the fur covered creature run forward, another of its kind close behind. As it brought itself up on two legs before him, Joshua trembled. He went back in his mind to the hope that he would wake up from this terror.

Joshua tried to scream as the creature reached out for him. The spiked wood in his mouth dug further into his tongue. Joshua knew he would pay eternally for his deed. And a sightless eternity it would be as the creature gouged its fingers deep into his eyes.

---

## THE OLD MOTHER

By D. D. Bell

[Vote For This Story Now!](#)

It was early morning in the near deserted police station and officer, Alec Ballack, sat slovenly at his desk reading the Nottingham Evening Post when he should have been working at his backlog – a large mug of sweet tea steamed at his elbow to complete the unfortunate tableau. There was nobody about to check up on him so he did as he pleased; Sergeant Dalton was still out on patrol and Kelvin had his head down in one of the empty cells. Suddenly the hairs on the back of his neck stood up, as if an impulsive draught had come across him. He threw down his newspaper and spun around on his chair to face – there was nobody there for him to see.

“Kelvin.” he shouted out in panic.

He heard rapid footsteps coming up from the corridor and then the young police officer, Kelvin, rushed into the office straightening up his tunic as he went. He rubbed at his bleary eyes. “What’s up? Is Dalton on his way back?” he gasped.

“N... no...” stammered Ballack. “It... It’s happened again... Kelv... it happened again.”

Kelvin let out a groan. “You woke me up to tell me that load of old rubbish... there is nobody else here but me and you... you fat twit.”

“I felt its breath on my neck again.”

Kelvin turned. “Bugger this I’m going.” Before he went he made the shape of a phantom and let out a theatrical groan.

“It not funny, I tell you this place is bloody haunted.”

“Don’t be flipping ridiculous, the building’s newly built so how can it be?” returned Kelvin.

“That doesn’t matter,” ranted Ballack, “it was probably built on an old grave yard or something.”

“Idiot,” Kelvin said as he disappeared down the corridor and towards the cells for his slumber.

Alec couldn’t settle. He turned his chair away from his desk and looked towards the office door lest something should sneak up behind his back and take him by surprise. He reassured himself that it was only three hours until he handed over to the day shift – then he had three days off. He picked up his newspaper and began to read it again to take his mind off things – every minute or so he cautiously peered over the top of its pages to check if anything was on the approach. It was, however, his last night shift and he was very tired; his eyelids were as lead and he was soon pushing out the Zs despite his recent trauma...

...A sudden crashing sound came so loud it caused him to jump rudely awake out of his stupor. He fell to dizziness as his chair spun around rapidly until he fell from it to the floor in an undignified heap. His much-needed spectacles had fallen from his ruddy face and he staggered against his desk as he tried to blindly right himself. He could hear maniacal laughter. The laughter increased as he shouted near-hysterically for Kelvin to come and save him. A chill worked its way up his back and the hairs bristled on his neck once more as he heard... heard a familiar tone.

“Ballack you lazy sod, what have I told you about falling to sleep on duty?” bawled Sergeant Dalton; his face so close Alec could feel his hot breath on his face – rather like a hairdryer. Kelvin guffawed like a loon in the background until the big Sergeant’s stare turned him to stone as if the Medusa herself had looked upon him.

“I’m sorry,” Ballack whined as he found his spectacles. “It will never happen again.”

“It better not... now get on with some work, BOTH OF YOU,” Dalton bellowed with venom. He looked at his wristwatch. “We’ve got a couple of hours before we’re off so I want to see your desk cleared Ballack; Kelvin give this office the once over... get rid of the cups for a start. – DID YOU GET THAT?”

The twain nodded liked scolded schoolboys.

“Leave them a minute, Kelvin and go and get me a drink,” he said as he sat down behind his desk. “Milk, two sugars.” He took off his shoes and lifted his legs onto the desktop. Kelvin scuttled off to do as he was told whilst Alec pulled a manila folder from his in tray.

Alec kept his head down as Dalton slurped at his steaming brew – Kelvin busied himself ineffectually tidying up the office.

The door slowly opened with a gothic creak and Alec turned around to face it

with terror in his eyes. His heart went into palpitations.

“Super,” said Dalton as he took his feet down from his desk.

The Superintendent sighed heavily. “Shouldn’t you be out on patrol, Sergeant?” he said without a greeting.

“The clutch went on the patrol car, Super and all the other cars are out. I can’t get another until tomorrow. I’ve left a message for the motor pool manager.”

“The organisation at this nick is a bloody disgrace... no bloody cars indeed,” he said to nobody in particular. “No wonder we never solve any crimes.” He suddenly directed his tone towards Dalton. “There’s a patrol car parked right outside the station in the car park, I’ve just walked by it,” he said with indignation. He looked towards Ballack. “What are you gawping at, man?”

“Nothing, sir,” he said as he set back to his work with a shudder.

“The car’s new, sir, it’s only just arrived and I can’t find the keys in the press,” the Sergeant lied. “Besides it’s not had its radio fitted yet.”

The Super shook his head and left hurriedly. They heard him slam his office door shut behind him.

“He’s early,” said Kelvin.

Dalton put his hands behind his head and leaned back into his chair. “He’s having his balls chewed by the press over the *Full Moon Restaurant* murder – they want some results.”

“That was pretty gruesome,” interjected Alec. “Tom from forensics said that...” He stopped abruptly upon noticing his Sergeant’s icy stare.

Dalton looked at his wristwatch; it was nearly seven, the dayshift would be upon them soon.

\*\*\*

Just as Dalton finished handing over to the dayshift Sergeant, the Super burst into the office holding a bunch of car keys aloft. “Sergeant Dalton,” he said. Dalton forced a smile in the face of his Superior. “Here are the car keys you couldn’t find – they were in the press.” Dalton feigned surprise. “I want you to get over to Wellock and bring Mrs Bowens in for questioning, it is in regard to *The Full Moon Restaurant* murder.”

“With respect, sir, I’ll be off duty in a short time, couldn’t one of the dayshift go and get her?”

“We appear to be short staffed today – half the shift has come down with swine flu Sergeant Briggs tells me.”

Biggs nodded solemnly.

“What is it with this station?” continued the Super with raised eyebrows. “Everyone seems to be reluctant to work for one reason or another... my, my.”

“It’s a bit early to bring someone in for questioning, sir... are we to arrest her then?”

“She’s not a suspect... as yet... she said she wanted to come in earlier sooner than

later, it suits her time wise... she needs to feed her chickens or something equally ridiculous but at least she's agreed to come in... now are you going to fetch her as I've asked? Clarke is on his way over and he won't be pleased if she is not here because he had to get out of bed an hour earlier than normal... that's detectives for you nowadays."

"Of course, sir."

"Thank you," said the Super as he passed over the keys. With that he was gone.

"You know who Mrs. Bowens is don't you?" asked Briggs

Dalton shrugged.

"You do; she's Esther... the Old Mother."

Dalton laughed. "Are we to have her for witchcraft then? Prepare the ducking stool, Alec?"

"I wouldn't make such a joke out of it if I was you, Bert" said Alec as he went to leave for home, "I've heard some right stories about her if you ever cross her."

"Where you going, Ballack?" Dalton asked.

"I'm going home... I'm done."

"No you're not... you owe me a few hours don't you?" said Dalton as he threw Ballack the car keys. "You get to drive a new car as well."

\*\*\*

It was a dark and dreary late March morning they stepped out into. The car park was in darkness; they hadn't yet fitted the new security lights as yet. The twain walked towards the vehicle, which was parked at the far end of the car park. Alec switched on his torch to see the way. Just before they got to the car the torch flickered off.

WHOOSH

Something brushed by their legs. Dalton switched on his torch to see a fox disappear into the undergrowth.

"That's one magnificent animal, Alec, did you see its brush?"

No reply.

"Alec, where the hell are you?" said Dalton as he scanned the deserted car park with his beam. His colleague was nowhere to be seen. "Alec," he shouted. He heard a feeble reply.

"I'm over here."

Dalton turned to see Ballack cowering behind a dumpster.

"Get yourself back here; it was only a bloody fox for God's sake – what's up with you, man?"

"I'm a bit off lately, that's all," Alec continued in the same pathetic tone as before. "I'm concerned that the station is haunted and my nerves are to pieces."

"*Concern* yourself with the driving before I put my boot up you, you knob cheese."

Alec unlocked the vehicle and they got in.

"I like the smell of new cars," said Dalton as he settled back into the passenger

seat as Alec drove the car out of the car park and headed north towards Wellock.

\*\*\*

They pulled off the main road to take the quicker back road to Wellock. A heavy mist hung around at head height as they approached the ford. Alec slowed down and took the car slowly through it. However just before they reached the other side the car spluttered to a halt.

“Bollocks,” said Alec as he tried to restart it – it wouldn’t respond. He switched on the hazard lights – they flashed a few times and then died like the engine.

“Bloody hell,” ejaculated, Bert as he took out his mobile to call for help. “I’ve not got a signal. Put a call out on your radio, Alec.”

“I haven’t got it; I was on my way home when you made me come with you, remember? I’ve left my mobile in my other pocket too because you made me rush!”

“No need to get shirty, lad, there’s a house up there with a light on; go and ask to use their phone.”

“Why should it be me to get my feet wet?” Alec complained.

“Because I’m a Sergeant and you are only a humble constable.”

Grudgingly Alec got out of the car and immediately stumbled in the darkness over a fallen branch – he hit the water with a splash. Concerned, Dalton jumped out of the vehicle to help him; the cold water came up to his ankles and he shuddered. Nevertheless, unperturbed, he went around to the other side of the vehicle to see the dripping figure of Alec stagger to his feet.

“Are you all right, Alec?” he asked with genuine concern. However, just as Alec opened his mouth to whine, the big Sergeant slapped his shovel hand over the constable’s mouth. “Over here,” he whispered as he dragged him towards the side of the road and into the shadows. Alec’s eyes widened as he heard a rustling coming from a small wood, which stood to their backs. “Shush,” said Dalton as he removed his hand.

THUD

Something heavy was thrown onto the grass verge from the woods – it was a dead lamb. A tall shadowy figure pushed through the hedgerow after it and nonechalantly picked it up. He threw it over his shoulder and set off up the road with a swagger. He had only swaggered a few yards, however, when he was sent sprawling with a rugby tackle. He fell to his face with the full weight of Dalton’s knees pressed down onto his back.

“Now then, Poacher Pete,” said Dalton, “What is it with you this morning?” He laughed at his little joke.

“Get off me you arse wipe, Dalton. You weigh a ton,” he let out breathlessly.

Dalton read him his rights as he slapped on the cuffs. He stood him to his feet. “Have you got a mobile, Pete?”

“What’s it to you, Dalton? There’s no law against them is there?” he replied gruffly.

“Can I use it to phone the station?”

A dripping Alec pushed Pete through the water and into the stranded motor and he got back into the driver's seat as Dalton called the station. He tried the car again to no avail; the dash lit up but little else would function.

"Our back up will be here soon, Alec..."

Before he could finish his sentence, Alec let out a blood-curdling scream and jumped out of the car.

Dalton sought after him. "What is it, Alec, what is it?" he asked as he grabbed the blubbering constable in a bear hug.

"The car... the car..." he managed between gasps, "look at the mileage."

Dalton leaned into the car and looked at the digital display. Pete sat screwing his forefinger into the side of his head at their strange antics.

"Have you seen it?"

Dalton growled. "It's done six hundred and sixty six miles, what of it?"

"666 it's the sign of the beast," yelled Ballack almost hysterically. "What is happening these dark days?"

Dalton sighed heavily and looked at his watch.

\*\*\*

The three days off went too quickly and they were soon back to the station before they knew it – at least it was their turn for the dayshift. They were called into the Super's office before they had time to settle on their first morning.

The Super sat behind his desk staring at them from behind boiled egg eyes.

"Dalton, Ballack," he suddenly said before pausing back into silence once more.

The twain looked at each other and Ballack raised his thick eyebrows.

"Something amusing you, Ballack?" said the Super.

"No, Sir," replied the constable.

"You two caused quite a commotion the other morning; stalling a police car in the ford amongst other things..."

Ballack tried to interject. "We... we..."

**SILENCE!**

"Sir."

He continued. "You didn't bring in the sus... Mrs. Bowens for questioning as I asked you. I returned from my mini break in the Cumbrian lakes with the dear wife to find her un-interviewed. We've been tipped off by an unknown source that Bowens was the last person to see Gladys Jones alive... is that not important to our investigations? It's bloody basic police work." He raised his voice to good effect. "I'm not happy, my seniors aren't happy either... neither are the bally press."

"With respect, sir, we got distracted with the arrest of Peter Parker for poaching Smith's sheep... that's..."

The Super's face turned beetroot as he tried to stifle his rage. "Poaching? Poaching? I don't give a flying fig about poaching, Dalton, I've a murder to solve... a

gruesome one at that... enough of that.” He paused once more. “Go and bring her in, Mrs. Bowens, and YOU HAD BETTER NOT BLOODY RETURN WITHOUT HER.”

\*\*\*

“I’ll drive,” said Dalton as they stepped into the car park.

“What do you know of the murders, Serg?” asked Ballack.

“Same as you, I expect... there would be hell on if the press found out wouldn’t there?” Dalton replied solemnly as he climbed into the vehicle. “Better they don’t find out from us.”

The press knew that there had been a murder... they didn’t know there had been two... Arthur and Gladys Jones were both dead, killed. They were a locally well-known couple. They owned *The Werewolf Experience*, which used to be the Old Mill leisure wear retail unit until a werewolf was reputedly spotted on the mill’s C.C.T.V cameras one evening. Arthur had made a fortune selling werewolf merchandise and opening *The Full Moon* restaurant thereafter.

The press knew that Arthur had been shot and killed by a local ex soldier in collusion with Farmer Smith as they guarded his flock from poachers – they had both been detained whilst enquiries continued. Gladys however... that was different – they thought her missing. Whereby Arthur had been evidently shot whilst supposedly worrying Smith’s flock in the nude, Gladys had been torn apart – as if a beast had been at her – if they found out about this there would be a panic in the community and everyone would go around shooting each other’s dogs. However, it wouldn’t be long before the press found out what was what and the Super wanted the murderer rightly banged to rights before they did.

*“The ambulance man told me had seen nothing like it as he helped to lift the dead figure onto the stretcher. Not only did she have a horrific wound to the bone on her cheek, but also her throat was rived like a mad dog had been at her. Further to this her right femur had been crushed – the bone was shattered like it had been trapped in a vice.”*

#### **An extract from Detective Clarke’s notebook.**

Dalton turned the vehicle off the main road and drove down the back road towards Wellock as Alec had done three nights ago. He drove through the ford and past *The Werewolf Experience* – which was obviously closed – and down a narrow overgrown lane towards Esther’s cottage. Alec gulped as they drew up next to the garden; Esther was on all fours at her herbs. She looked up towards the car.

She had the face of a hag; her nose was crooked and her teeth stumps. She peered up at them from behind bright green eyes that should have belonged to a ginger cat. The strange thing about her was, although she had the face of a hag, she also had the nubile body of a twenty-five year old; or so it seemed. Her straggly white hair hung uncombed

to her waist and her red face was without foundation. She wore a pair of black thigh hugging jeans and a loose neck jumper. She stood up clutching a handful of herb leaves – she didn't look happy as Dalton stepped out of the car to greet her.

“Mrs. Bowens?”

“Have you come to search the cottage again? They didn't find anything last time,” she ejaculated with petulance.

“No madam, we've to ask you to come down to the station for questioning.”

“You are late... Am I under arrest?”

“No not at all... we've just some questions to ask regarding Gladys and Arthur Jones. We have been informed that you were the last person to see them alive”

“I thought they said that Gladys was missing... you said that I was the last to see her ALIVE. Is she DEAD?”

“I can't comment on that, madam.”

“You are Sergeant Dalton are you not?”

“I am madam and that is...”

“Alec Ballack.”

Dalton nodded.

“He's afraid of me; I can smell the fear from here.”

Dalton laughed.

“Tell you what Sergeant, I'll come down to the station if he asks me to,” she said whilst indicating to Alec, who was cowering in the passenger seat.

“If you don't come we'll probably have to arrest you, madam... it's not something I want to do but I will... I'm not here to play games we are conducting a very serious murder investigation.”

Esther smiled. “I like you, Sergeant, you are very straight talking. Give me a minute and I'll wash up.”

“Thank you, madam.”

“You may call me Esther,” she said as she stepped into the cottage.

Dalton looked towards Alec. He opened the door. “Get yourself out here you fat fool.”

Alec did as he was asked, albeit reluctantly. He stood next to the vehicle with his head bowed. Dalton launched into him.

“What is up with you? You stood back-to-back with me when we got into a ruck with two coach loads of football supporters the other week, without flinching. You were cowering in front of that old lady... and she saw you... pull yourself together. Here she comes.”

Esther locked the door and walked down the path, she secured the gate behind her. Alec opened the door for her as Dalton went around to the driver's side. “The... the... there you go, Old Mother,” he said shakily.

She stopped and looked straight at him. He was trapped like a rabbit looking into

car headlights. "You think I'm old do you?"

"No... no."

"Then why did you called me *old*? That's ageist, I could have you in front of your betters for that."

"He didn't mean anything by it Esther," interrupted Dalton with a grin.

"I think he did... didn't you, Alec," she teased for a reaction.

Dalton came around the car. "Stop teasing him, Esther and get in the car please," he said firmly.

Esther looked at Alec and smiled. She suddenly started to sing. "I put a spell on you..." she could not manage anymore and burst into laughter.

"I'll drive," said Alec as he fleet-footed it to the driver's side of the car.

Dalton laughed. "You are one naughty lady," he said as he got into the back of the car next to her.

"I can be a lot more naughty than that, Bert," she said with a twinkle in her green eyes.

"I'm sure you can," returned Bert who suddenly became aware that he was becoming aroused. He coughed nervously. "Nice garden you've got madam, do you like to grow hollyhocks?"

\*\*\*

They pulled up in front of the police station and Bert escorted Esther into the reception area; Alec dared only watch her movements through his rear view mirror as he took the vehicle around the back and into the car park. Because of the gentleman that he was, Bert opened the swing door open to let Esther inside first. However, Detective Moore, a fat piddling middle-aged man wearing a tweed jacket and corduroy trousers was not such a gentleman and he rudely bumped into Esther as he hurriedly escorted a jet-haired young man out of the building and towards a waiting car. He sent Esther flying back into Bert's arms. The young man looked towards Esther and his eyes widened in horror. He let out a fearful gasp and tried to get outside. However, Esther and Bert blocked the doorway so he couldn't get forward. He looked as if he would cry any moment.

To the policemen's surprise Esther hissed like a wild cat and spat at him.

He let out a comical wail and managed to push past her before running up the street without stopping for his car. Bert struggled to hold Esther as she tried to free herself from his restraint.

"Calm down, Esther," he said breathlessly as he wrestled her to be still. She suddenly stopped struggling and went limp in his strong arms. Moore looked on in astonishment and scratched the top of his balding pate. The Super appeared to check out the fuss and he was not best impressed with what he saw.

"Get into my office, Moore... NOW," he snapped. Bert thought it best to take Esther straight into the interview room lest there should be another incident like the one

he had just witnessed.

\*\*\*

Detective Clarke looked into the interview room from behind a two-way mirror. He knotted his brow at Ballack's strange behaviour. He looked quite odd as he slumped against the door inside the room. The detective could see him taking deep breaths and wiping at his sweaty brow with a large white handkerchief. Dalton came into the room.

"Detective Clarke, how are you?" he asked politely

"I'm fine thank you. Isn't it amazing the figure on that old hag, Bert? What's that all about? How can she look so young and yet look so old?" said the Detective.

Bert shrugged.

"I'd put a bag on her head," he leered.

Bert frowned. He felt uncomfortable in the face of sexual innuendo. "Shouldn't we go and interview her now?" he said gruffly.

"Come on then, Bert... no need to get sniffy, I was just having joke."

"Jokes are meant to be funny."

Before they left the room Dalton asked Clarke what he knew about the incident at the doorway with Esther and the lad.

"Moore has got a right bollocking over that and rightly so; he should have taken the witness out of the back way to avoid Mrs. Bowen's approach. He can tie her to the crime scene... he's a waiter, local man, Elvis Smith, works at *The Full Moon Restaurant* and he saw Esther talking to Arthur and Gladys around the back when he went out for a sly fag... not long before Mrs. Jones was found dead."

"Than why has it taken him so long to come forward?" Bert asked.

Clarke shrugged. "He seemed to be petrified of her but realised his duty... he's asked for police protection for god's sake... from an old lady..."

Before Bert could respond they heard a heavy thump. They looked through the mirror to see Alec flat out on the floor. Esther was sat at the table without a reaction. The twain burst into the room to see their colleague in a *right state*, as they say hereabouts. Alec was mumbling some nonsense that they couldn't make out.

"He's red hot," said Dalton as he pulled his hand away from his pallid brow. "We'd better call an ambulance," he added as he loosened Alec's clothing and felt at his rapid pulse.

"He seems to have a bit of a fever," cackled Esther, "I've a poultice that will bring that down."

Alec promptly vomited onto Clarke's shoes.

"You dirty, fat, bastard," Clarke let out involuntary.

"She's done for me," whimpered the suffering constable before falling into unconsciousness.

\*\*\*

"We're very sorry for the delay, Mrs. Bowens," said Clarke as he switched on the

tape. “You understand your rights as read to you by Sergeant Dalton?”

Esther nodded.

“For the benefit of the tape, Mrs. Bowens nodded.”

“I do hope your colleague will be all right, Detective, he did look quite ashen when he took a tumble.”

“I’m sure he will be just fine,” said Clarke with a grin.

“He made quite a mess of your shoes also.”

Clarke grimaced as he looked down at his stockinged feet. He suddenly sat bolt upright and stared hard into Esther’s smiling face. “You were seen talking to Arthur Jones and his wife, Gladys in the back yard of *The Full Moon* restaurant minutes before he was shot and, further to this, the... er... disappearance of his wife occurred around about the same time.”

Esther’s face took on a shadow and her cruel features came to the fore. “Nonsense, I finished my meal and went home... I’ve never been around the back of *The Full Moon* with anybody, least of all with that fool, Arthur Jones and that nag of his wife, Gladys.”

“We have a witness to say different.”

“He’s wrong.”

“He heard raised voices.”

“He’s wrong.”

“He will swear it in court.”

Esther smiled wickedly. “No he won’t.”

“What do you mean by that?”

The Old Mother folded her arms and sat straight in the chair. “I’ve nothing more to say. Either arrest me or take me home... which will it be?”

“Interview terminated at 11.30 AM,” said Clarke with a sigh.

Bert didn’t like the way the interview had gone; there was definitely more to Mrs. Bowens than he first thought. He saw her green eyes turn steely grey and soulless as she sat brooding in the interview room. Maybe he should have taken more notice of Alec in the first place and been more wary of her – he had only thought her an eccentric old dear. He did not believe in hocus-pocus but if he had to deal with any he would, without a doubt, and he would overcome it. He would somehow get to the bottom of it all to be sure – as he always did and in his own way. He hoped that Alec would be better soon; he was worried about him. He thought he would call in for a pint at his local on his way home – he could do with a drink after the day he just had. It was near to the end of his shift and he would soon be handing it all over to Sergeant Briggs. He smiled; at least he wouldn’t have to organise the press conference for the Super.

Just before he left, Clarke took him to one side and told him everything about the crime and what the Super would be unleashing onto the press. Bert shook his head in disbelief as he left – he needed that drink more than ever now.

### **The Press Conference**

The Super sat down behind a table next to Clarke. He nervously pushed his hand through his grey thatch. "Remember Clarke, let me do all of the talking... just agree with me."

Clarke nodded grimly.

"Let them in Briggs," he said boldly to the Sergeant standing guard at the door. The press entered noisily and pushed each other for the best seats near the front. The Super gave them time to settle and then switched on his microphone. "Gentleman of the press... and ladies of course..."

"What news have we of Gladys Jones?" interrupted a loud man from the *Bugle*.

"Listen there, man, if you interrupt again you will be thrown out," said the Super as if he was talking to a child. "I will talk and you will listen without interruptions... do I make myself clear?"

"What charm school did you go to, Super?" said Clarke under his breath.

The man nodded; his face red with embarrassment.

The Super continued. "Arthur Jones was accidentally shot by Kevin Simpson. Simpson believed that Jones was a poacher after the flock and fired a shot to warn him off. Unfortunately, Simpson was under the influence of alcohol and because of his intoxication his aim was off, which resulted in the unfortunate death of Jones." He paused. "Any question on that matter alone?"

A cacophony of voices came at the Super.

"I will have you *all* thrown out... have some order," he barked. "Put your hand up if you want to ask a question," he said angrily.

A man from the *Stars* raised his hand and was eventually allowed to speak. "What was Arthur Jones doing worrying sheep? He was naked too I believe... did he not have a motive of bestiality?"

A laugh went up. The Super waited patiently for calm. "We don't know why he was naked, his shredded clothes were found at the back of *The Full Moon Restaurant*. His motive for worrying the sheep, I'm afraid we don't know that either... I shall now move on. Gladys Jones was found dead at the back of *The Full Moon Restaurant*. She died of severe blood loss..."

A cacophony of voice came once more. The Super waited until they subsided. "She had a serious wound to her cheek... which was caused by Arthur Jones' teeth according to DNA. However, the actual cause of death was due to her throat been rived and further to this her left femur was shattered."

**ARE YOU SAYING IT WAS ARTHUR THAT KILLED HER?**

"No I am not. At this stage in our investigations we do not believe that Arthur inflicted the horrific injury that killed her."

**WHO KILLED HER THEN**

The Super coughed. "DNA suggests that some kind of wild dog was responsible

for the fatal injury and the crushed femur... now that should be it... we will let you know of any further developments... thank you.” With this the Super abruptly left.

The man from the *Bugle* shouted after him as the room was infused with bright camera flashes. “So what you’re saying is that some kind of hyena killed her? A normal dog wouldn’t be able to crush bones. Is there an escaped hyena about then or a super bone crushing dog?” he yelled to the amusement of his colleagues as they rang through to hold the front pages.

“Good one, Super,” said Clarke as he stood up to leave the room. “I can see the headlines, *Bone Crusher kills woman*. Not so long ago they thought they had a werewolf running about. Wellock is going to be stacked out with sightseers tomorrow... and it won’t help our investigation at all.”

“Did you say something, Detective?” asked Briggs.

“No nothing at all,” replied Clarke. “Nothing at all.”

\*\*\*

The pub appeared to be more popular than usual judging by the amount of cars in the car park. It was only early evening but the days still refused to let their fickle light brighten up the overcast evening. The lights were on inside the pub and he could see a lot of people in the lounge – it was obviously a party. As he neared the door he saw Old Sam standing at the bar surrounded by his family. Sam had been a desk Sergeant when Bert had joined the force. He had a lot of time for the *Old ‘Un* as they called him. Sam was a bottomless pit of advice and experience – all you had to do was listen and learn. Bert decided to go into the lounge and buy him a pint; it must be his birthday – he must be nigh on 90 if he was a day!

Sam saw the big Sergeant as soon as he walked through the door. Bert went to him and they shook hands.

“Happy birthday, Old ‘Un,” he said with a big grin.

Sam frowned. “You’re not yourself, Bert, what is the problem?”

Bert chuckled; you couldn’t hide anything from Sam.

“Is it Esther Bowens? Is she the problem again?”

“Again?” replied Bert in astonishment. “How did you know we were investigating Esther Bowens?” he added in bewilderment.

“We’ve just been watching the news on the telly, you’ve just missed it. They’re calling it *The Bone Crusher*... nice.”

“You said *again*, Sam, has she caused problems before?”

“Didn’t I ever tell you lad? The goings on is not the first time you know – the crushed bones and the like... must have been 40... perhaps 50 years ago,” he said in the vernacular. “No one ever believed me what I saw that night up at Wellock Farm. They thought that I had been working too much overtime and I was brain-tired!”

“What was that, Sam?” Bert asked. “What did you see?”

“Bob Hall I think it was, a local farmer, he had his throat ripped out and his bones

crushed by some kind of dog. One of the labourers had seen it happen and he said it was Esther that did it – she looked no different than either believe it or not. Nobody believed him and he was sent from the police station with a flea in his ear from the Sergeant at the time. I felt that someone should keep an eye out for him and I decided to stand guard over him – the Misses said I was barmy. I hid in some woods near his cottage – I knew she would come for him – he lived alone. Unfortunately I was proved right. Late that evening I saw the Old Mother quietly let herself into his cottage – no one locked the doors in them days. By the time I got to the cottage, a large beast, at least the size of an Irish wolfhound, came running out of the only door and knocked me over as I tried to get in – it was a powerful beast but I couldn't see it properly because it was too dark. At the time it seemed to me a hound from hell. When I got up and dusted myself down, the labourer was dead, his injuries similar to Bob's. The thing was the Old Mother was nowhere to be seen – she definitely went in and the beast definitely came out. There was only one door and all the windows were shut from the inside... makes you think doesn't it, lad?"

"It does make you think, Sam," said Bert as he made for the door.

"Where are you going? You've not bought me a drink for my birthday."

"Sorry, Sam, I've got work to do. I'll get you a drink on your hundredth."

"Cheeky young bugger," said Sam with a smirk for he knew that he had sent Bert on the right track.

Bert went straight to his car and opened up the boot. He looked in. He moved some footballs out of the way and a bag full of football strips – he ran the police 5-a-side football team. There it was, right at the bottom of his boot... that's what he was looking for. He folded it up and shoved it into his jacket.

\*\*\*

Elvis drew his curtains as dusk began to fall darker; he felt assured by the sight of a patrol car slowly driving past his house – he lived alone on a scummy housing estate to the north of Wellock. He made himself a cup of tea and sat down on his threadbare sofa to watch *Coronation Street* – he needn't have bothered about work as *The Full Moon restaurant* was shut indefinitely. He shuddered at the memory of the godforsaken place and Gladys shrieking at her naked husband whilst holding aloft a broom that she had just broken over his back. He had been, understandably, experiencing a recurring nightmare of Arthur biting into his wife's cheek like he was a wild animal – he bit her right through to the bone. He nearly hyperventilated as he remembered how the Old Mother had stopped him spearing his wife with the sharp end of the broom shank that she had snapped agen his spine. He watched wide-eyed as a snarling Arthur ran off into the woods followed by the cackle of the crone – it was a NIGHTMARE and he didn't dare let on *all* that he saw lest they should send the men in white coats for him. To keep his sanity he had even denied himself the full extent of the horror. He had gone back inside the restaurant and vomited because of sheer terror he had experienced. They sent him

home – they thought he had swine flu. Further to all of this, Esther had actually seen him watching... she had grinned at him and gently shook her head that he should never let on. Now she knew he *had* let on. How could the police have been so careless as to let her see him coming out of the station? He wished that he had left it as just a phone call. She would come for him – that was for certain. He turned the volume of the television down – he thought he heard something moving about in the back garden. Without switching on the kitchen light he cautiously peered out into the garden between a small gap in the curtains. He took a sharp intake of breath as he thought he saw a shadowy figure step into the shadows to the side of his garden shed – his mind was probably playing tricks, he thought. He turned on the light and looked in the mirror. He rubbed his sausage fingers across the top of his Teddy Boy quiff. His parents were Elvis fans and they had named him after the star. He enjoyed the music and had become an Elvis fan too. He switched the kettle on and put a teabag into a chipped mug ready for the boiling water... he froze to the spot when he suddenly heard a low growling sound coming from his garden; he didn't dare look. He switched off the lights and got under the table. He shut his eyes and put his fingers in his ears... *La, La, la*, blocked out any more noise reaching him.

“Stay right where you are, Esther,” said Bert firmly as he stepped out of the shadows from behind Elvis' garden shed.

Instead the creature slowly moved out of the undergrowth towards him, snapping twigs underfoot as it went. Bert nearly shit himself at the size of it when it fully appeared on the overgrown lawn – it must have been nigh on 200 Kg he estimated in the near darkness. It was on all fours and its massive head was down for the attack. It let out a low growl once more. Bert set himself ready; he had a plan – he nervously fingered the small 5-a-side football netting that was hidden behind his back. He was thrown for a second when he heard a soft female voice issue from its muzzle.

“Arthur wanted to be a wolf, what do you want to be, Bert; have you a fantasy?”

Suddenly the beast launched itself slavering towards the Sergeant. Big as he was he was also nimble – despite his age he kept goal for the Police football team. He dived to one side and threw the net deftly over the beast. He held onto one end as the beast rolled over itself entangled in the netting – nearly pulling the arm out of his socket as he did so. He jumped to his feet and pulled the net tight around the beast as it struggled to free itself. With a superhuman effort he dragged the beast towards the shed and heaved it inside, thereafter locking the door to keep it secure. Such was the strenuous action he fell exhausted with his back to the door. He felt faint and he fought back nausea. Although many curtains twitched in the neighbourhood, no one came to his aid. His vision blurred... just before he passed out he heard a siren; thankfully somebody must have phoned the police.

When he came around his bones ached and he felt hot. He saw many dark legs around him. He cried out in dismay when he saw the door of the shed – it was torn asunder.

Clarke knelt down next to him, he was wearing a facemask “Not feeling too good,” he mumbled through the fabric. “Looks like you’ve caught swine flu... you can thank your mate, Alec for that.”

Summoning up all of his remaining strength he indicated towards the shed.

“Who did that?” Clarke asked.

“Is Elvis okay?” Bert managed.

Clarke nodded. “Of course he is; why shouldn’t he be?”

Bert allowed himself to slip back into unconsciousness. Safe in the fact that he had saved Elvis... but just for the now.

The End



---

## SHADOWS

By Kimberly Reichlein

### [Vote For This Story Now!](#)

Any normal place in the world, when it is dark and closed to people, becomes creepy. That’s why they film horror movies in abandoned fairgrounds, big mansions where the lone teenage girl is set to care for the babies, toy factories with machinery to mutilate. Anything that should be normal and can be made into evil will do. The shadows. Because dark is not scary, the night’s twisted version of reflections is scary. Shadows make things *loom*. Like the perfectly ordinary shelves of merchandise were doing now. *Looming* like they had no right to do. Casting shadows on the perfectly normal, yet shadowy and terrifying, linoleum floors. Floors that, in the daytime, looked like they were white with brown speckles and now, in the night, looked like they were dingy with blood speckles. The shelves towered and loomed, the floors bled and her heart pounded. Aiden turned around fast. She was alone in the store; there shouldn’t be anyone making noise or movement behind her. The sound of someone pushing a cart around the store was just the freezer making noise. And the glimpses of action just out of her peripheral vision were only her imagination. After all, when she turned around, no one was there.

Like this time. No one there. Her brow creased and she tried to pretend that her fast beating heart was silly and she had nothing to fear. She was just psyching herself out, that was all. And the voice

*Aieden....*

that she heard? She certainly wasn't going crazy. She didn't actually hear it out loud, it was her imagination. She didn't care much for the throaty, choking desperation that her brain had given the voice, but she rested easy knowing that it was indeed in her own imagination. Every time she managed to convince herself it was fake, it came again, and sounded just a little bit too real. A little bit too outside her head.

She sighed in annoyance at herself and headed back to the stockroom. So what if the store was huge, dark and shadowy? That was just her lot and no mature adult would be afraid of it. She refused to walk faster when she heard footsteps behind her, matching her own. She kept her breathing easy, while in her head the panic struggled to find a hold. She was a girl alone in a store at night and if something happened to her no one would know until morning. But the footsteps behind her were not a pale, sweaty, jaundice eyed creature with a blade intended for her. The skinny, scraping steps she felt as much as heard did not belong to a twisted man-being in moldy clothes. She wasn't going to be smothered in the putrid stench of decaying flesh as rotting hands took away her fight and gave her the last breath she would ever take. She wondered what it would feel like if this time it were real. How would she react if she did feel a blade slicing into the small of her back? What would she do as she felt no pain and fell to the floor, her spine having been expertly popped into two equally

*need you*

useless pieces? What could she use as a weapon as the yellow eyes bore into her own and the dirty brown fangs tore at her flesh? You couldn't fight the supernatural. She wasn't the heroine in this story, and she never had been; she was the set up to scare people before the monster was finally beaten. She was unnamed mysteriously new officer aboard the Star Trek Enterprise who had never been seen before, and was hired as fodder to show that the bad guy was bad. She was the extra, not the protagonist. Of that she was sure. Unable to take the immense pressure of dread at the thought of the hands that were going to reach for her throat at any moment, she turned around.

Nothing. Of course.

The store she worked at closed at midnight. It was now better than an hour past that and here she was, spending her Friday night fretting over the state of the stockroom. And looking over her shoulder for figments of her imagination, too, but that was beside the point. Would her superiors be angry if she didn't stay till all hours of the night cleaning up other people's messes? No, nor would they be impressed by her. She needed them to be impressed; she didn't want to be an assistant manager forever. She was paid well as it was, but when you were a store manager you were paid far better, and you didn't have to kill yourself or

*die pretty girl*

worry about making an impression so much that you gave up on having a life outside of work. So screw the demons lurking in every corner of her life, and apparently in her store, she was going to clean the damn stockroom.

She swallowed hard as she passed the trash compactor. She had read in the paper last week about a robbery where the guy had forced the employees of a store into the trash compactor and then turned it on. It had to be a horrible way to die and her writer's imagination could picture every second of it. The crazed eyes of a killer as he

*love you kill you*

shut the door on a group of people with kids and wives and parents, and there's a trace of smile on his face, almost sexual. What emotions must be flowing through your veins as you fight to push back people who you once called friend, so as not to end up at the bottom of the deathpile. The feel of calming madness as you don't have to breathe in the fetid waste anymore because your jugular has been crushed by the knee of one of your coworkers. The cries that change from terrified to insane as the people around you feel their insides turn to mush and begin to leak out of unnatural bodily orifices.... And somehow it wasn't too hard to imagine that it had happened in this very compactor.

Aieden felt a bit light-headed as she caught a vivid picture of her knees being lifted and the smell of the grimy compactor. She fell into the dark and her nails caught the layers of muck of trash past. If she w- BANG!

A pitifully weak and high pitched groan escaped her this time as the trash compactor decided to kindly interrupt her morbid train of thought with a

*die Aieden baby*

loud and nearly pee inducing reminder that her imagination had gone wild. She paused and held onto the side of one of the shelves until her heart stopped thundering. The trash compactor made that noise all the time.

Finally she scoffed at herself in a final attempt to get off her mental crazy train and moved to load the cart that she was going to take on the floor to stock shelves. She turned because someone was moving behind her and marveled at the fact that the expectation of seeing a ghost white face reflected in the glass of the window that showed the sales floor was so much more frightening than it would have been to actually see it. She pushed the cart out of the stockroom and tried not to think of her increased feeling of unease in this place over the past few weeks. She wasn't the jumpy type, but her melancholy thoughts and odd feelings these days were enough to leave her wondering if she going delusional or at least getting depressed. Or maybe it was just the stress from work and the uncharacteristic feelings of being

*never leave need you*

put upon. She guessed that everyone must have times in their lives when everything seemed to go wrong all at once.

One of the things about lower management, you always heard about what you did wrong,

no matter how many things you did perfectly. Lately she'd started to feel as if her whole life were taking that turn. Her family, her friends, her soon to be ex boyfriend (she was getting the break-up vibe from him, anyway), no one seemed to think she was trying hard enough, pushing far enough, achieving fast enough. But maybe that was in her imagination as well. Maybe she was just in such a

*love eat you up yum*

dark place emotionally she was imagining the pressure from all the people around her. She wasn't really sure of anything anymore.

Only that was wrong. She was sure she didn't want to be cramming a shelf full of pork and beans at, what time was it now.... Forty-seven minutes past one in the morning. Only she couldn't stop. She couldn't stop yet. Her heart pounded so hard, and all she could do was keep at her project because if she stopped, something dreadful would happen. She was going to meet the devil tonight. She didn't know why, but she suddenly knew that her life had been building to this point.

Her hands were shaking as she put the last can on the shelf and moved on to the next box on her cart. The front doors were in her view and she couldn't allow herself to look at the cloudy, distorted mirror they produced, which was why her eyes were burning to look in that direction. It didn't matter whether she looked anyway, it didn't matter that her eyes were glued obediently on the box and the sharp

*cut you to pieces cut you*

blade of her box cutter. In her mind she could see, clear as day, the pale, white, melting face of Satan, with the eyes that could turn you insane with a single look. And you couldn't help but look when that's what he wanted, could you? It was when she actually smelled burning that she almost lost her cool. It was sulfur but... not. She knew the scent that wafted to her olfactory was not natural, and she felt hopeless tears stinging at her eyes.

She got up just quickly enough to make her feel a little insane and pushed the cart that she had only half emptied back into the stockroom, not bothering to put it back in it's designated area. She sported the kind of half walk, half run that can only truly be pulled off by someone who is running from the sort of thing that they are certain cannot exist, and equally as certain that it does.

*burn you make you scream*

She punched in the code that got her in the office and skipped her locker because she already had her coat on the counter, since who needed a stinkin' purse or driver's license when your keys were in your coat pocket anyway? She could get that unimportant

*die heart you die*

stuff when she came back to work tomorrow. When there would be people present. She clocked out quickly and continued her walk/run to the front doors, still fighting tears. She hoped that was a good thing. As long as she was crying because she was fighting panic, it meant she wasn't fully panicked yet. But she was crying because the needy voice she was

hearing was not in her head, it was real. And everyone knows that disembodied voices either mean you are crazy or you are in the presence of evil. Neither of those thoughts appealed to her. She set the alarm to the front doors and exited in record time, and it was then that she heard the noise that made her yelp in pathetic fright.

“Aieden,” the deep voice said.

She jumped around and nearly had a heart attack at what she saw.

“Steve? What the hell are you doing here?”

“You know it’s not generally acceptable behavior to swear at your employees....” Steve said with a smile that was more concerned than anything. He’d observed her fright.

Damnit.

“Yeah, I’m sorry. You just scared me....”

“I noticed. I missed my bus and I was hoping that maybe I could catch a ride home with you.... I mean, um, you know. I was, uh, hoping you’d take me home – to *my* home.... You know....” He blushed, aware that he had said the word ‘my’ far too loudly and was probably letting on far more than he wanted to.

For her part, Aieden was glad that he was letting on. He had been hired three or four weeks ago and she had taken to him right away. She had a major crush on him, though she would never admit it, since she was not allowed to date her employees. That did not stop her from noticing that he was pretty much the most attractive man she had ever seen in her life, and thinking that maybe catching a guy like this on his way up was worth losing a stinking entry level management position over.

And he was on his way up. Oh yes, Steve was halfway up already. He was working at her store because he wanted to devote all of his time to grad school, and he already had a position waiting for him when he graduated in six months. He didn’t drive a car because he had put all of his money towards graduating with as little debt as possible, and he was doing a very good job of it. He was a smart, sensible, funny, kind.... Pretty much everything you could want in a man. And *he* was getting flustered over *her*?

“Yeah, I can give you a ride,” she said, pretending not to notice his jumbled speech. “It’s no problem at all.”

He smiled. “You know, since I gave you such a fright, I figure maybe I should buy you a cup of coffee or something before you take my sorry ass home....”

All of a sudden all her silly fears of the night had passed. The stupid voices and smells and feelings that must have been in her head the whole time were put to rest and, while not completely forgotten, they remained as harmless in the back of her mind as the memories of doing her laundry last Thursday.

Aieden smiled to herself at the slightly nervous small talk that Steve was making with her. She had always been shy around guys but for some reason, him acting like she was something to be nervous about put her at ease. She was starting to really like this guy. When they were in the car she buckled in and turned toward him, hoping to talk for a bit before they got underway and draw this out as long as possible.

“Kill you,” Steven said with a slight smile. Almost sexual.

“Pardon?” she replied with a laugh.

“I’m going to kill you.”

She realized he was serious, she realized that she had been right, that she could once again smell the not right sulfur that she had caused her to flee the store. Pure evil sat in front of her, only his eyes, those glowing red embers, did not cause her to go insane. He was going to take his time with her. And she was calm. She was in quite a pleasant mood, thank you very much. “You’re not.... scary....” she told him stupidly.

“Of course not, baby,” Steve replied with a smile. “If I was scary, you would have never let me into your car.”



## THE BLEEDER

*By: Jesse Dedman*

It was a few minutes past midnight when the commotion subtly uprooted the diseased calm that lingered in the alleyway. The back doors of the van were wide open, but the pocket of darkness offered a great cover. The brake lights glowed with a hue that seeped into the dark, revealing a glimmer of movement. A body, or something that resembled one, was thrown out to tumble along the rough pavement. The heap splashed into a puddle of water and stayed without the slightest twitch. Just like that, the van was gone, driving off into a distance unseen by the huddled homeless.

Curiosity lured a few, which later grew into a modest crowd. They observed and discussed the strange form of the man's condition. His arms and body were swollen with bulging muscles, and there were metallic etchings throughout his skin invoking a wave of questions. They pointed at his face, explaining the oddity of his mask, which was a modified welding mask. There was a metallic cube with extreme weight that illuminated with flashing

dials, which connected to his body by a series of tubs and hoses.

Being starved for most of their time, the homeless crowd was only as humble as their basic needs. They tried as hard as they could to pillage from the helpless manifest. Swooping as if they were vultures over a rotten corpse, and they attacked the pockets of his jeans only to find fine lint. It was only the strange bulk of metal that was profitable, but it wouldn't come undone. They beat the connections with bats, and the failure led to a bigger consumption of desire. One of them was wise enough to use his knife, but the sharp edge of his blade was dulling to the surface.

His arms moved, flopping in the puddle, but nothing significant. The mere fact that he was becoming aware scared off most of the people; the three that remained were the most rugged, disgusting, and unclean of the bunch. They were the alphas of their ken, or perhaps just the most desperate. They watched him move and grew with eagerness; their victim was weak, shaking to keep his own weight. Caught in a desperate cycle, the desolate fiend struggled to even kneel.

The boldest one acted first, placing his gritty, contaminated palm upon the surface of the cube. He brushed against the surface, feeling the cold untouched metal, while toying with a clever idea. A series of chords detached from the sides of the device and lunged at the man. One by one, three different lines snapped into his body with a force he couldn't contest. His cry and torment was not given a reply he hoped for. His brethren ran off, but their attempt was without success. The remaining lines expanded the distance and pierced through their chests.

A web of chords drained them of their blood and other valuable fluids at a rate that their body couldn't adjust to, a strong piercing pain, followed by a searing vacuum that gave allowance to a creeping coldness. The dials on the device flourished with an assortment of lights, while

the entity attached suddenly had the strength he needed. He rose from the ground, carrying the device in his hand, which he clipped to the narrow bars that ran along his exposed back. The being took notice of his surroundings and couldn't help but feel the overwhelming sensation of being lost, alone, and without help. He could see the damage done to him, but not feel the pain.

He took the overcoat from the bold one and used it to cover his shirtless torso. The fabric loomed over the device, rendering him as muscular hunchback. He walked throughout the narrow pathways as if to find something, while studying the sudden change in place. The shadows were thick, but his eyes were keen to resolving that. He saw with illumination, everything was beaming at the seams with a slight golden tint. It was beginning to fade as they have been over used.

The smell of tobacco redirected him to another narrow passage, where a slender young woman stood with cigarette in hand. She wasn't aware of his presence and that was the moment of invitation. He approached with hand opened with its machinery infused fingers and lunged for her frail neck. She screamed but was silenced by a sudden slam to the wall. A gash was indented into her skull, which bled out onto the crusty pavement.

He knelt over her and opened the visor of his mask. His pale skin was riddled with crust lines and scars and the eyes were of a more enriched story. Strained from the constant injections, the whites of his eyes were of that of a waterlogged, blood-soaked sack, and drooped with moisture. With careful fingers He gave release to his sight, and began to take hers. His fingers were tipped with a silver piece that housed many uses. They adjusted to what his body needed to complete the exchange of eyes.

It was shortly after this procedure that he heard the low rumble. It was a subtle bass that pounded from a source unclear. He searched for it, following the noise. It grew in texture, expanding into a chorus of speeches and mid-

topic rants. It was difficult for the lab designed creature to follow, but what he found were basement doors that had seen better days, bared with an iron piece, chained by a web of iron and padlocks, all of which were destroyed in a contest with his strength.

He bled from the tips of his fingers at an invariable rate until the last drop. He didn't faint, nor did he suffer. It was this exploitation that was seen as a miracle by those around him. This ability blessed him with continuous tribute, placing him as an idol before their praised lord. They tested him, searching for flaws in ability, but all the questions were answered with a notion that their faith was honest. The men and women in this chamber serve a god not too alien from common beliefs, one that rules with intolerance and justifies punishment, pain and torment, by any means, **Nzulmbi**.

The third day of their trials delivered onto them a fatality that bolstered the creature's reputation. It was during a ceremonial chant. The head of the Covent praised the work of other members, disgusting foul showcases of violence, while reading a passage from an ancient tome. He spoke in Latin about a deity that rules with righteousness, blessing thoughts that should be blessed, those willing to make great sacrifice. The speech was what made his accidental death something of a novelty by the group. They watched as the creature drained the head priest until his flesh was cold.

With natural reason diluted by actual practice, the Covent was quick in their efforts. They appointed a new head priest and developed a network of trustees that would allow them to offer sacrifices to their newfound idol. The first was meek, but new, the others grew with more elaborate chanting and festivities. The moldy basement became more alive after each additional victim, until the day she was offered.

A little girl, not much older than ten was delivered in front of the idol. He sat on a handcrafted stone throne,

a tribute from one of the more talented individuals, with a calm much like with the previous victims. The network of cables launched out from his backside, but they didn't strike into her flesh. Instead he studied her more carefully and saw in her a gentle innocence; she was young, fresh with life, and blessed with a clean slate something different from the others.

"The sacrifice must be made, as it claims it so in the tome of the ancient king. Don Laviwall was an honest man willing to make our lord happy no matter what the means. The death of this young girl will bring his eyes onto us and enlighten us with a type of kindness never seen before. Wealth will rain down onto us from the heavens as we know how valuable our lives are in comparison to the lord," said the Priest.

"She is so little. She has no life yet to take, seizing a beginning," said the masked creature.

"But you, as the bleeder, must surely understand. You did after all come to us and give insight."

The light within him had been contested before, but the memory of it was faint. Searching for it, digging through a dark hole, scratching at any photographic image. He breathed slightly and never felt his lungs expanding. He thought with an active mind, a mind that has been conditioned and void to deep wondering. He was a shell of a man, but inside was something animated by carefully designed mechanisms. It was partly because of these machines that he lived in this numb state. Even when he bled, it pours out of his body without any feeling.

The image of the girl, her flush cheeks and blond hair, freed him from the nothing he was so accustomed too. It was for this feeling that he moved to defend her against a group that had housed him for months. He felt nothing to fight them, only slight confusion, as he never registered anything they have said.

"I have to think, does your messiah really profit from her lose?"

"He profits from our existence, but we don't exist without his blessing. This is for us to begin a new cleansing."

"You exist right now, you feel it don't you. You feel it when you breathe, when you move. The one that doesn't exist is I. I don't exist and neither does this lord that you speak of."

"The Bleeder might have misspoken, he wouldn't denounce his creator, not with full intent. Perhaps we were wrong about the level of your servitude. You are less of what you seem; the Bleeder is thus a shadow of another idol. We will find that such idol, and we will create a better platter for it. Right now, we have this dear child to offer to Nzulmbi and that must be done. To not will bring this Covent down to a low unimaginable."

"No one will hurt this child; no one will even touch this child. A group of men like you stand before me, with a mind much more diluted than mine. That bothers me and makes me feel something I have long forgotten about. The absence of emotion had left me stale, but that has been revoked. I dare you all to challenge me, but I dare you even more to challenge each other. This lunacy has gone far enough," said the Bleeder.

"You are part of what you just labeled as lunacy. You are a totem of worship. Your body is not by design from the god we neglect, but by the god we worship. You are him. You will feast."

"If God created me, then he owes me an explanation."

"We are the messengers of that. You must know it to be true, you found us."

The Bleeder paused and his hesitation grew as he thought about that notion. He couldn't remember the last

time he felt aware; or even felt at home with anything. His mind was diluted into a despairing loss and was of no use other than to further dissolve any stable radiant. He moved from his place and felt an instant gain of pressure and had to use the arm of the stone chair to keep his place.

"You see, you are weak without her blood. Your body needs to be revived so that it can once flourish at full strength. Your ability to live is because of the way he crafted you. You steal blood, gain nutrients and bleed out the rest. You are what you hate. Do not let this girl be the end of you."

The chords launched from his back, lunging through the air at a rate faster than previous. The metallic lead of the cable stabbed through the priest's neck, causing him to gasp for air.

"...This isn't his will..." were his last words before the lead readjusted so that it could absorb the blood. The other cables launched out, attacking random people in the thick crowd. The rest are speechless and not sure what to make of it. The head of their command, of their view was cut off and not they are bleeding for their idol.

"This isn't his will, then he is a traitor and must be punished," said a bearded man.

The bleeder regained his strength and swallowed the frail girl into his arms. He bolted for the door, while offering his thick skin and muscles as protection against the rain of attacks. The rioting crowd was of no contest to his will; he reached the door and left with his web of cables springing back into place. The sporadic movement of the cables caused further injury onto the people, slicing through the skin of many.

The fallen idol slammed through the door shattering it into a thousand splinters and kept on running. He ran through a network of passages, running past several sleeping homeless, junkies, and social misfits. He was in a place much worse than before, even though it was more open.

It was a forgotten part of the city; a place that once had a great view of the river bend, now it was collection of scattered cars, buses, and other housing for the people that lived here. They were the type that considered a morning injection of heroin to be a good way to start the day. A type that wouldn't care at all for his intrusion.

Using the darkened mask of the place as a cover, the Bleeder began to pace much slower and wandered without any direction. The escape had dissolved to an expanding calm, he stooped behind a brick wall releasing the girl from his grasp. He examined her and sighed to the strange feeling. Her eyes moved, twitching to a disturbance known only to her. They opened revealing blue watery eyes. She squirmed for a moment, startled for a second that went by slower than how it started.

"Home, I want to go home," she cried while crawling out of his arms. "Where am I?"

"You want to go home. Home, that is where you should be, where is it, your home."

"What happened to you? You look weird, eww gross, is your hand bleeding?"

"Yes, it bleeds, and what happened to me is the reason of my being. That is the only thing I can make out of this misery."

"Why are you so sad?"

"Is this sadness? I don't know. I saved you from those people. Do you remember the people that brought you before me?"

"I thought that was just a dream. Does that mean I get to go home now."

"Yes, but where is it."

"I don't know, not from here anyway. We should leave this area. Head for a much wider street."

"I will try, but I'm not sure where here is."

A group of people gathered at the opening of the ally, and the sound they made brought to them his attention. He poised his dark image before them; it was the crowd from before. They charged at him, leaving him with only seconds to think. He glanced at the girl and spotted a latter. He offered her cover and rough persuasion as she climbed to the rooftops. They swarmed him like ants on a spider, weak and pathetic, but the swarm of their numbers was a greater advantage than first thought. He spun his fists, pounding on them for release, but they stayed with their fight. He grasped a kneecap and smashed it with his fist, causing the pile of bodies to cave.

He fled from the scene, but turned around to find a man with shotgun in hand. The barrel was pointing directly at his chest, and the man didn't hesitate any longer. The shot was fired and the bullets punctured through his chest creating a cavity that exposed the fumes of his inner workings; a musky green essence seeped out, causing the man to churn with a repulsed stomach.

The Bleeder climbed the ladder with difficulty at first, but he proved to be too strong for the others to hang on. Upon reaching the top he lunged for the face of a follower and smashed it against the brick wall. The body fell unto the others, freeing the ladder from their efforts. The little girl was at the edge of the building seemingly amazed by the sight of the busy city.

"You are okay, but only if we hurry?"

"My home is over there," she said while pointing at a collection of rundown apartments. The Bleeder glanced at the sight and became one with the objective. He pulled the girl closer to him, further staining her white dress. She was more repulsed by his roughness than his skunk-like

stench.

"I will take you there."

"What about those people, are they trying to kill you?"

"I believe so, but their intent shouldn't last too long. I am stronger than they are, and will succeed."

"You might want to see a doctor, I never seen green smoke come out from a person's chest before."

"I can't say I haven't and I doubt a doctor would be able to do much. I'm a monster after all."

"Yeah, you are, aren't you? But then that makes you my monster, I don't mind."

"I see that you don't," he took her into his arms and jumped across to the other roof. He ran over the rooftops with the speed of a bull but was nothing close to being acrobatic. The pavement would crack to his landing, any glass surface would shatter to the vibration of his stomping, and the ledges crumbled easily to his presence. The air was the only thing he didn't harm as his coat flapped through every jump. The girl screamed with fear at first, but that soon changed to excitement.

He crashed onto the roof of an apartment and shattered it, causing a great commotion as the residents were rudely awoken. He ignored the shouting and continued towards the girl's direction. He navigated the grounds of the place, stomping over grass, bushes, and flowers until he reached a fence that was instantly taken down. She was amazed by his strength and laughed at him for his sheer determination. He didn't respond, as he didn't know what to say. He stopped suddenly at her door and gave no indication of being out of breath. He set her down and turned his back.

"Wait, where are you going? You should meet my father,

he should thank you."

"If he is like you than yes," he said.

"He is, he taught me much about the world and trained me to be smarter than most." She opened the door and ran into the small apartment. For a place that was centered in a rat's nest it was actually well kept, taken into high regard in appearance and smell. The Bleeder had difficulty walking in but finally found the girl rejected by her own father.

"You are not to be here. How did you get here?"

"Daddy, I was saved by this man here, I think some bad people were going to do some awful things to me."

"That awful thing was what they needed to do, what we needed to do. You are my only daughter and to offer someone like you with your importance is a sacrifice I am willing to make. Humanity needs to be redeemed."

"So, you let them take her. You just gave her up for a belief?"

"What are you supposed to be?"

"They worshiped me, I think. The people you gave her to..."

"Dad, I don't get it, what is going on," asked the girl.

"Abigel, this is the thing that was to take your life. Salvation is close... all he has to do is strike."

"That is not happening. I might be lost, and some sadistic manifest, but I am not some tool. You as her father failed, and the only salvation is in your death," yelled the Bleeder. He lunged for the father and raised him by the neck.

"Wait, he is my dad, my family."

"Do you have a mother?"

"No, she died when I was born."

"Hmp... Her death was my awakening," said the father.

He squeezed his hand just enough to give a stern warning. The girl cried a wave of tears, "You monster."

The Bleeder closed his grasp, teetering with a cold delivery of death, but she stopped him. She wiped her tears and looked too clever for her age, "He wants to die, don't give it to him. Instead take me to my aunts and I will explain what happened."

"She'll never believe you and I will win in court. You are my property," said the father.

"What about the cult," asked the Bleeder.

"We do not exist, nor do we give detail of anything we do."

"Then your death will free her"

"My will locks her into another; there is no way to stop what must be done."

"Then he will die too, I made my decision and I will protect her, as she is just a girl."

"Then Nzulmbi will take you back and he isn't passive like the others, he will find you and set you back."

"I'm a creation of something human, that I believe to be true and it is your cult I have to thank for that." He squeezed the throat with full might, snapping it into a flatten mesh of flesh, bone, and blood. He let dropped the

body to watch it fall and noticed the girl's repulsive reaction.

He left her there with a promise that he would keep watch. She didn't want her only security to be far and away, but her cries were of no use. As much as he wanted to protect her, there was a growing curiosity of his creation and real purpose. A monster such as him shouldn't be real, but that is a moot point when considering what man can do so long as there is desire and drive to do it.

---

#### **What to look forward to next month:**

**The Bleeder II:** A tale of a man rendered into a horrific monstrosity caught between concepts of "good" and "evil", while trying to figure out who he is.

#### **Credits:**

First and foremost, Demonic Tome is owned by Jesse Dedman. All images are the property of their respected copyright holders. Poems, stories, and columns are property of the author(s) unless otherwise noted, which may not always be presented in the magazine.

Jesse C. Dedman: Owner and Manager

Greg: Submission coordinator