

Infernal Dreams Presents

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Blood from the Underground

Vol. 1

An Anthology of Untold Horror

A NOTE OF THANKS

We here at Infernal Dreams would like to thank all the authors involved for making this a reality. I also want to thanks the authors who gave consideration but due to deadlines, obligations and plain old lack of time. I hope you find your way into volume 2. Finally I want to thank you, reader, who without your probing eyes and morbid curiosity we would not even have an arena for this excellent penmanship. Keep writing, keep reading and for heavens sake keep dreaming.

If you wish to submit a story for inclusion to volume 2, we are accepting open submissions. Send all stories in any type of MS Word format to david@infernaldreams.net. Length and content are up to you but generally 1,000 to 1,700 words and tucked somewhere in the horror or thriller genre. Once again a big thank you to all who helped make this a reality.

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HACKED A TALE OF DARK JUSTICE

G.L. Giles

Enzo couldn't wait for the church service to end. He wanted to see if any suckers had taken his computer scamming bait. So, he barely shook the priest's hand, as was common to do, exiting the sanctuary. Then, he got in his beat-up modern day horse of metal and rubber, and raced home as fast as his rundown ride would take him. If only someone had bit; it would only take one sucker to get him a new metal steed, new clothes and possibly a new life. He didn't care a thing about the stupid scamming prey. He was the superior mind capable of duping them, after all. Please, please let this be the day I get illegal access into another's contact list so that I can get paid by friends and acquaintances that love and respect them because I have no respect for someone so stupid as to let me be able to hack them! He thought, or something to that effect, while loosening the tie from around his neck, as he no longer had to be pretentiously formal, now that he was parked in front of his flat.

Lilla hated having to leave her coven, but she didn't like that most members were sanguine vamps, who just didn't want to get that she could receive just as much energy as they without having to ingest any blood. She was a psychic vamp, who had no problem taking energy from other humans, most always with their permission, but without taking any of their blood. In fact, Lilla was a vegetarian. Blood kind of made her sick, unless it was her own. She'd given notice the night before, and was just mulling over how life would be now that she was an independent ronin, as she was shopping in the salad section of the grocery store. Some were disappointed in her, especially those who'd taught her about mind control. Lilla had been a quick study, and her mastery of certain techniques had been applaudable. She could already get into another's mind (well, at least those not prepared for her gentle assault) and sweetly guide them into doing what she wanted, if she so desired.

Enzo eagerly made his way to his computer in the small computer room tucked out of the way in the back of the flat; it was painted with grey paint which was peeling in parts to reveal walls that had once been covered in crisp white and black stripes. Hopefully, he'd never have to worry about his rundown place after logging on to his computer. To his delight, he saw that someone had foolishly answered his URGENT E-MAIL...NAME AND PASSWORD VERIFICATION NEEDED IMMEDIATELY TO KEEP ACCOUNT OPEN header e-mail. He couldn't believe his good luck; just what he needed to hopefully move him out of London, England for good. He hated the cold in the winter and all the people with bad teeth, including himself. Maybe the scammed sucker would have contacts sending him money enough to get them fixed too! He looked at her name: Lilla Draven. He couldn't believe how many contacts she had: thousands! At least one of her friends would surely want to help her out when they saw that she was stranded in England with her wallet just being stolen. It didn't matter that Lilla Draven was living in Virginia in the U.S. because he covered his tracks by saying that she was on vacation when she'd lost her wallet. He made sure to bcc all his emails sent out in her name so that everyone on Lilla's contact list would think they were personally being emailed and, therefore, be more likely to help her out. As he pushed send to massive bcced groups of her contacts, Enzo just sat back and waited with a smile on his face...

Lilla was writing her first book on Psychic Vampyres, so she had left her computer on and she'd stayed logged on to her email, just because she was constantly getting feedback from friends about it. In fact, she'd stayed logged on the entire time she was shopping at the grocery store. After putting away her salad food, veggie burgers, meatless meatloaf, etc., she went to check her emails. She recoiled in horror as she saw emails from friends asking if she were okay, and if it were really her needing money. More embarrassed than anything at first, Lilla quickly answered their emails saying she'd been hacked before Enzo could answer them. As it turns out, he'd taken a trip to the water closet before seeing any return emails from Lilla's friends...fortunately for Lilla. Moreover, realizing that the hacker had changed her password when she tried to close out her account after deleting her contact list, etc., Lilla figured out that because she was still logged on she could simply send herself an email from her other account asking for a password reset, so that's exactly what she did. It was still a huge time-consuming pain in her ass and embarrassment having to explain to her family and friends what had happened, but at least she'd stopped the hacker from doing any more harm. She'd never asked for a dime from friends and family after leaving home at the age of eighteen. In fact, she'd always prided herself on that! By the time Enzo the hacker had returned from his bathroom break, a relieved Lilla was sitting back in her swivel chair... smiling, at least for a while...First she was relieved, true, but should the hacker be allowed to get away with it? She'd had to close her account, lose contacts and go through major embarrassment. She'd have to carefully consider what to do next...maybe she'd take an astral journey later that night...visit him to see what he was all about...there was more than one way to hack after all...some were skilled in mind-hacking, and Lilla was one!

Enzo kicked his poor dog, who'd innocently trotted in to get his master's attention because he hadn't been fed all day, when he saw that he'd been blocked from what he now considered his email contacts, though they were really Lilla's. What the hell? He quickly realized with anger that she must have locked him out of her email account by sending a password reset to herself because she was still logged in, too. He hadn't considered that before, or he wouldn't have taken a bathroom break. He was super upset that it didn't look like he had a stolen ticket out of England anytime soon after all. Nor a new ride, new clothes, etc. He'd underestimated his scammed sucker. In many ways...


It was easier for Lilla to astral plane to a specific location (like an apartment or flat address), but she only had the city (London) of her prey, since that's where the hacker had said she'd lost her supposed wallet. She'd figured that he would have probably wanted her friends and family from her contact list to wire him money there, for her supposedly. So, she had probably narrowed his location down to a city, and she could work with that. She just had to feel her way to the desperation and lack of consideration, which were frequently linked in humans like Enzo, though she didn't have a fix on his name yet. It was more like she followed the traces left from his thought patterns...they were forever fixed in the matrix of life if one could tap into reading them. And Lilla could. It just took concentration and will. Two things she had in abundance along with lots of practice. Ahhh...there he was...sitting with a sad looking and hungry pooch. Poor doggy! She could read his thoughts, too, so she decided she'd try to make sure he'd have a better life than being abused by his unscrupulous hacker master. She'd just have to find the right entrance into his thoughts. It shouldn't be that hard; he'd never come across the kind of hacking she was about to violate him with...a major mind-fucking was about to take place...for the good and justice of all...

Enzo had to put the greasy burger he'd made for himself, still having not fed his hungry dog, down on his computer desk. He suddenly felt so drained, and he also felt a massive headache coming on. Then, he felt his eyesight get blurry as he leaned back in his chair and rested...when he awoke a bit later, he

realized he only had one thought in his mind...take Hanz, his poor dog, back to his ex-girlfriend, who had pleaded to have him when they broke up about three months ago. He really didn't like the dog they'd gotten together at the pound, but he kept Hanz just to spite her. Making both Hanz and her miserable. He realized he had to right a wrong as he called for Hanz to get into his piece of crap car so that he could take him to her...plus, he had the strangest urge to drive by his bank the next day, where he withdraw his entire savings and gave part of it to her for taking care of Hanz...in fact over the next few days, he gave money to everyone he'd ever scammed in one way or another. On the last day, when he finally returned to his normal senses as Lilla's presence started to leave his brain, he had no idea what he'd do for money. All he knew was basically illegal work, and he didn't want to try and learn anything new. Realizing that he clearly couldn't cut it as a hacker anymore, thanks to the thoughts Lilla had planted, and unable to try anything of service to others instead, he saw only one path left for him. And that wasn't one that Lilla planted in his head. He refused to try anything else, so he chose the suicide route as he fell on an old rusty replica sword he'd ordered from a catalogue. Just because it was a copy didn't mean it didn't work just as well as the original...he'd hacked into his own heart by falling on the sharp blade and committed his first honorable act ever in a kind of modern slightly changed Seppuku ceremony.

A NEW TOY

James Patrick Riser

 A groan escaped her lips as she thrust the fingers deep inside her. The vaginal juices flowed over the hand in abundance. She spread her legs, scattering blood and brain matter over the filthy bathroom floor. She continued the masturbation.

Mary lifted the fingers to her mouth and licked the cold digits clean of the crimson coating, then returned it to her snatch. As the chilled flesh touched her warm labial lips, again, a shiver shot up through her spine.

Terry Lars did not care that Mary used her hand to get off since, unlike a few hours ago, her body lay nude, cold, and dead. Mary didn't care either. Terry Lars was a worthless cum-bucket, she thought.

She spread her legs wider; and pushed Terry's hand in her up to the wrist. With her free hand, Mary licked a skull fragment clean. An orgy of experiences rushed through her body. Feelings of passion and excitement got her closer to orgasm, while feelings of disgust encouraged bile to burn the back of her throat.

The bathroom's lights flickered, throwing them into darkness for seconds at a time. In one moment of light Mary regarded Terry's bulging stomach, an unborn child, with a shrill laugh.

She Dropped the piece of bone and proceeded to stroke Terry's stomach. She giggled again. A white, button up dress shirt, with one pocket above the breast, clung to her upper body. She produced a hallow ground razor blade from the pocket and brought it to Terry's stomach.

Samuel Lars finished his tenth cigarette. An ashtray sat in front of him full of butts and a heart in his chest was full of worry. He snuffed out the cigarette. Smoke danced in the dimly lit room as a persistent ember from the butt refused to die. Samuel's eyes followed the trailing smoke until they settled on the telephone in front of him.

Terry didn't come home the night before, last night or tonight, and he waited for her call. He kept his twitching hand close to the receiver, not only waiting for news of her, but also his child. The leather office chair squeaked when Samuel leaned his head back and stared at the ceiling scarcely seen in the darkness.

She said that she was going out with a friend, someone she met at a club a while ago. "I told her not to go," he whispered to himself, and then harshly rubbed his eyes with the palms of his hands. "I told her not to go..."

Mary slowly finished the cut, leaving Terry's stomach flayed out, exposing soft red intestines inside. A bit of red stained Mary's hands, she licked it off her fingers and then cleaned

the knife in the same fashion.

She stared at the blade while it reflected the flickering lights in her green eyes. Everyone told her that her eyes were akin to a cat's, one of the most erotic creatures in the animal kingdom. That fit her just fine, she thought. The knife still had a red fingerprint near the bottom of the blade, above the hilt. She brushed her hair aside and brought the blade to her mouth and gently slid it down her throat deep enough to allow her lips to close around it. She immediately pulled it out and revealed the blade freshly coated in dark red. Mary coughed violently and spat more out of her mouth, letting it splatter on Terry's ice cold corpse.

Pain burned in her throat and she smiled as she coughed. Using the blood from her mouth as a natural lubricant, Mary viciously fingered herself and her cunt became slick again.

The phone rang. Samuel bolted forward almost fell out of his chair as he fumbled with trembling hands to answer it.

"Hello?" He coughed into receiver.

"Samuel Lars?" replied a deep voice.

"Yeah," he gasped, "yeah, that's me."

"This is Inspector Sparrow, Mr. Lars."

"You got my message then?"

"Yes." He sighed, "yes I did Samuel, and there has been no leads on the whereabouts of your girlfriend."

Samuel choked back the sob that lingered as a bulge in his throat.

"Can you tell me about the last time you saw her, Mr. Lars?"

"Yeah, of course," he took a needed breath before beginning again, "She left three nights ago, with some friend that she met at a club a while back, Her name was Mary, or something like that."

"Did she give a description of this friend?"

"No, all she said is that her name is Mary and she met her at a club."

"Okay Mr. Lars, I'll see what we can do; I'll call you if anything comes up, okay?"

Silence.

"Okay?" He repeated, a bit harsher.

"Yeah, okay." Samuel hung up, sighed deeply, and buried his face in his hands, letting warm tears seep through his fingers.

"Baby," Mary managed to choke out; blood rimmed her mouth and ran down her chin. She eyed Terry's flayed stomach hungrily, hungry for more blood, more pain, and more pleasure. She reached toward the corpse for satisfaction once again. "Baby."

Armand hated working the night shift. He was tired of putting himself at the mercy of the night walkers and the weirdos of Lake Park's streets. The loaded .45 under the counter would not be enough to stop a whole group of them if they decide to gang rape and murder him on their

way to that night's big rave. He cursed under his breath and looked under the counter.

A high pitched chime filled the small gas station, indicating that a customer entered.

So did a vile smell.

Armand looked up and found himself face to face with a young black-haired, pale-skinned beauty. Her small, black mini-skirt hugged her generous curves, and sweat made her shirt transparent.

Armand figured out who's been in the restroom for such a long time and discovered where the smell came from. "Can I help you?" he asked, off guard, wondering if she's the victim or the cause someone else's abuse.

"Phone," she choked out with a raspy voice. Blood accompanied her words and speckled the counter with red dots.

"Yeah, yeah of course lady," he said and reached for the cordless phone, also sitting under the counter "you okay?" he asked, not able to take his eyes off her.

Mary's only response was a bloodstained smile.

The phone rang again and Samuel quickly seized it in a white knuckle grasp. "Hello?" Fatigue infected his voice.

"Samuel...." Said a fuzzy voice, a ghost from beyond the phone lines.

"Yeah, who's this?"

"Terry is your girlfriend," it said, teasingly, singing it like a nursery rhyme.

"Yeah." His weariness instantly dissipated. "Yeah, she is, and what do you know?"

"I know your her boyfriend, she was screaming your name while I was fucking her."

"Who the fuck is this?"

"You know me as Mary."

"Where's Terry? Is she okay?" Samuel stammered and rose to his feet.

"Okay? She was fantastic, her and your child were great playthings."

"Playthings? What do you mean?" Samuel yelled into the receiver, and clutched a handful of cigarette butts in his shaking fist.

"What do you think I mean?" she said plainly "they are with me."

"Where are you?"

"Do you want me to tell you? I could send you her nipples in the mail."

"Fuck you!" he screamed and threw the balled up pile of butts into the darkness "where are you?" Perspiration slicked his face and stung his eyes.

"Or do you want her cunt?" She giggled, "I want you to see my artwork, I'll tell you where your loved ones lie."

All was quiet at Jack's Discount Gas, no car or life in sight. Inside, Armand smiled with his throat ripped out. He lay over his own counter, with a loaded .45 rammed up his colon.

The motor of Samuel's speeding truck and the squeaking of its breaks tore through the silence when he pulled up and halted in front of the station's bathroom door. He got out,

hesitated, and stepped forward several moments later, swinging the bathroom's door open with an open hand.

The rancid, suffocating scent of feces and urine invaded his nostrils. Samuel clapped a hand to his mouth as his eyes poured over the sight under flickering bathroom lights.

Only Terry's torso seemed to be intact, sitting on the toilet bowl. Barb wire dug into her soft, pale flesh. The wire contained her entire torso and Terry's nipples soaked through the thin paper of an envelope pinned to her shoulder, creating two red rings around his name written in cursive.

The lights revealed a red, pulpy pile of flesh in the sink; his child. The water still ran over its small mutilated body. The water cascaded over the sink's rim and splashed on the floor, creating a pale crimson puddle around Samuel's feet.

"I named him," said the same fuzzy voice from the phone, "its Henry." It came from the night, behind him. "I feel your pain, I love your pain."

Samuel found no words to combat hers.

"I get off on it. Now my dear, Sammy," she put her delicate hand on his shoulder, "I want to experience your pain."

"God, the smell is horrible!" Officer Clark blurted out after he kicked open the bathroom door.

Officer Jackson stood behind him, squinting against the early morning sun. “Get used to it,” he said, “and get some light in there.”

If the smell reflected what would meet them inside, he did not want to see it, Jackson thought.

A large flashlight in Clark's hand clicked on and revealed the massacre. Two missing person cases became solved at the same time.

Samuel gazed at the police officers from death, his wrists nailed into the tile. Dark, almost black, blood soaked his white shirt from a slit throat.

The rest of the bathroom's morbid decorations caused the officers to empty their stomachs onto hot concrete outside. They called for backup from the radios attached to their shoulders.

Samuel stared out the bathroom door, with eyes that almost mimicked life. Mary made her way down the highway, hitchhiking along the way, in search of a new toy.

INHERIT DISEASE

Elizadeth Hetherington

The roads seemed long and endless. The journey itself was the courtesy of unconditional love, and an obligation of convenience. Gloria's flabby arms waved as her arguments were shown through the exertion of hand on hand gestures. A dissimilar daughter, Sophia just rolled her eyes of dark eye shadow and drove the winding roads of her father's hometown. A last chance to cease her mother's irrational complaints, she sprawled out some words of reality. "It doesn't matter now what he did to you, or what you did to him. What matters now is that it's done and you're still a fucking bitch." Complacent, she watched Gloria's alarm.

The day had only just drowned in the sky and darkness seemed to creep rapidly while the roads became more winding. "He wouldn't have been alive if I hadn't have saved him from his drug habits!" she argued. "When I met him he was out of his mind! You wouldn't be here if it weren't for me."

As mothers often do, Gloria had missed the point entirely. Sophia pulled a joint from her black leather purse and placed it with confidence on her glossy black lips. "Thanks for nothing," she mocked. Darkness from the vacant street let a haunting glow encompass her face as she lit the joint, celebrating the awkward paranoia as it permeated from the passenger seat. She showed her teeth and observed the righteous glare from her travel companion.

Again, Gloria would only go on about the evil and irresponsible nature of her soon-to-be-former husband. Sophia just rolled her eyes while she inhaled, barely listening to a bitter woman declare the abomination that impregnated her with the eighteen year old driver.

It was late summer. Brute-Al, Sophia's wild father, had lived adventurously with the unexpected twists and turns of a heavy metal guitarist. The transitions that came with the turbulence of underground metal had often kept him away from his wife and daughter, but he'd still managed to find time to raise her to know the

value of individuality. Now, unfortunately, it seemed that he had no time for her. His band, Cyanosis, had reached a higher status of success and the constant touring had taken his life into directions he'd wanted for years. Although it meant that his daughter would be without an accessible father, he'd served his time in his unsatisfactory marriage to an overbearing and critical counterpart. With Sophia eighteen and out of high school, Al's goals had been met as a family man. As a waltzing musician, he'd signed over his deed to inherited land from the Andrews family. This, her eighteenth birthday, was meant for so much more than listening to her mother's side of the story.

It was painfully obvious why the divorce had to happen, but it was horrifying to be the woman on the other end of the phone when Al admitted his plan. Surprise and denial seemed to take her at first, and she spoke sweetly to him as if it was just another disagreement based on their vast differences. In Gloria's mind, it was because of his constant absence from the home that Sophia had become so reckless. "If you're going to be doing that," she nagged, "you best let me do the driving! You'll kill us both if you're going to get high."

She exhaled, laughing and watching the road ahead. "I've been doing this for years, old cow." Her emotionless jabs were the saucy supports she had for defending her father's honor. "My reaction time completely stoned is still better than your self control around a baked ham."

Exhausted from the day of emotional rollercoasters, Gloria scooted slightly back in her position. Nearly two hundred pounds overweight, sweat beads laced her forehead and exposed arm. Still, it was reflex to disintegrate the beauty in others before accepting the flaws in herself. "You're a felon, just like your father."

The argument was old. There were just things about a divorce that assaulted everyone involved in various strands of blunt force. "It's a misdemeanor, anyway," Sophia reminded her.

"It's jail time, Soapy," Gloria yelled. Against her will, Sophia would hear the tale of her father's attempted murder and the small amount of prison time that he'd served. She knew the story, but again, she didn't care. She had eighteen years of information and it seemed that now was the time to decide which parts of her inheritance were ugly and which were brilliant. The flabby arms waved again and

the dark roads started to come to points of gravel driveways and mailboxes. It was time to make the devastating turn onto the land Al would take his daughter to for time alone. “Look, I don’t want to fight with you about it. I just want the pain to stop.” Tears formed again in her eyes, but by this time the waterworks were dry and pity had been stretched and used to the point of annoyance. “I’m just not taking this very well. Please don’t be mad?”

Another hit of a spectacular joint, and the teenager put it out carefully in her ashtray, placing it cautiously on the side of the little metal cup. “I’m not mad, mom. I just want you to see things the way they are instead of making yourself out to be the good guy and him the bad guy. You sit around the house all day eating pancakes, mom. He has to work, practice, manage and keep Cyanosis in line. I don’t give a flying fuck, pardon my French, how many times he cheated on you. You spent years taking his generosity and regrets.”

“It’s not like I have a choice,” Gloria began. The ignorant statement was distracting, and Sophia missed the turn that she normally took to find the great wide nature-land. A bit longer in journey, she managed to turn while a fat woman continued to blame medical conditions for her obesity. “I was born with fibromyalgia. If it was curable, I’d have a job too. He’s left me unable to fend for myself and you’re taking his side!”

“Mom!” she finally yelled back. “I’m not taking sides! Can we drop it?” Gloria looked ahead onto the gravel road in time to see a pale man with a long silver shovel appear quickly in the headlights. The reflection of yellow light mildly irritated her gray-blue iris. Sophia swerved her car gently from the character, but the loose gravel brought her quickly down a steep hill and onto a soft mound of dirt. “Fuck!” she screamed loudly. Gloria breathed heavily, gripping the top of her chest for security. “Who the hell was that?”

“My back! My neck!” Gloria continued to panic and call out her ailments as she discovered them. Sickened by her self-centered mother, Sophia left the car and fished a flashlight out of her trunk. Even in the darkness, she was continuously haunted by the thoughts of becoming like Gloria. The inevitable travesty of divorce had introduced to her the option of becoming like her, a whining sufferer of a possible hereditary nightmare. Sophie would often refer to it as the ‘inherit

disease', because every woman on her maternal side seemed to complain of the incurable pains of fibromyalgia and blame their genetics. She shined her flashlight into the car. "I need my medicine."

"Fuck your Goddamn medicine," the young girl sneered. "My car is stuck in the dirt. I need help." It was difficult for Gloria to breathe, but it truly was a condition brought on by her unfortunate medical condition. "Can you just stop thinking about yourself for once?"

She was furious with insult. "How dare you?" she yelled. Sophia pulled her head down to where her eyebrow and her bangs separated, childishly evading a mother's wrath. "Everything I've ever done was for you, Soapy."

Her hands rose in surrender. "I lent Jason my cell phone, and I have no idea where there's a house; and there's a creepy dude out here with a shovel! Can we fight later?" Gloria had known for well over a decade that her daughter was going to be a handful; when the plain facts were presented to her, it became obvious that sitting in the car wasn't going to help.

"Why would you lend your friend your only cell phone?" Gloria criticized, pulling herself from the four door sedan. The car seemed to tremble as the massive amount of weight left the metal cage.

"Mom?" Both ladies looked up the hill and saw six glowing eyes looking down: eager, hungry, and possibly aroused. "Fuck the pain; you need to run for your life!" It was an incident in which age and limitations weren't obstacles, but insignificant facts to a frightened getaway. Together, a teenager and a victim of painful obesity ran away from the horrific view of white pale creatures of the night. Behind walls of tall grass, Sophia caught her breath and whispered. "What should we do?" Gloria held her hand above her heart and tried hard to answer, but instead, a smile kept surfacing. "You're laughing? Why are you laughing?"

"Guys . . . with shovels, Soapy," she let out. "They're gravediggers." She smiled wide, but continued to heave her breaths cautiously. She held her sides, the pain demanding that she cease motion. "I can't move without pain right now," she revealed. "I need you to stop being a child and go get those guys to help us."

“Mom! They’re not-“ she objected. A pale face appeared by the women and they both screamed.

“Relax,” he spoke. “You’re trespassing, but we’re not going to hurt you.” His face was pale white; vulgar just to lay her eyes on, but Gloria still managed to look accusingly into his bright pink eyes. The albino continued to calmly speak against the dim moonlit scene of tall grass and nocturnal birds. “My brothers and I cannot work in the sunlight, you must understand. We didn’t mean to frighten you.”

Sophia caught her breath and followed her own advice. She looked ahead at a human that stood nearly six feet tall, shirtless and glow-in-the-dark. She’d told Gloria all day long to see things as they were, and she criticized herself for seeing a monster where she could have seen a helping hand, a compatible species. “I’m sorry,” she offered. In the absence of light, the only fear that lives is the fear that breathes and compels an irrational response. She looked into his face and saw thoughts and feelings, in a being that probably understood what it was like to be weird. “What’s your name?” she asked sweetly.

“Brian,” he said shyly. Pretty girls never looked at him so openly, and he let his gaze fall into her and imagined scenarios in which genetics weren’t the prime horror of reality.

“Excuse me,” Gloria interrupted. “I need to get my meds and get home. I can’t handle any more excitement right now.” Sophia’s embarrassment kept her quiet, but she held her mother’s chunky arm and maintained eye contact on the boy. The three of them walked, silently, back to the sedan and found two more pale gentlemen digging dirt from under the car in efforts to lower the tires to a drivable stance.

“I feel like such an idiot,” Sophia said to Brian. The man smiled, rewarded with the rare compassion of the opposite sex. “This is my mother, Gloria, and I’m Soapy. How can I make it up to you?”

Brian laughed, a gentlemen and a good-natured creature of the night. “Don’t crash your car again. You’re far too beautiful to fall prey to some of the frightening things that live in this area.”

The flattery made her smile, but Gloria's wobbling to the passenger side of the car only rendered her the useless observer as the two pale brothers continued to remedy their situation. "More frightening than handsome young albino men?" she flirted.

He smiled, loving the gentle welcomes of a woman. He pointed ahead of him, past the area they'd met. "Behind that fence, that's the Andrews' place. Just stay off that property, and you'll be fine." A gravel road ended right before the fence began, but her spicy eyes questioned his oath.

"That's my property," she said in panic. "What's wrong with my property?" The albino stood away from her in an instant and studied her body for signs of warning. He stepped back a bit before he turned to the car. "What's wrong?"

"Guys, let's go," he called to his brothers. The two guys she hadn't met were quick to follow Brian's orders, taking their shovels and walking up the hill with seemingly no effort. Apparently the premier of the hill seemed steeper in the event of fear. Sophia focused, and saw in her view the reality of her situation.

"Ouch," she heard her mother complain. "Where did all the diggers go?"

It was intolerable to Sophia to recall the day. Gloria had said nearly every negative thing she could about Brute-Al, but taken the blame for not one of her problems. As much as she loved her mother, she hated everything she became. She saw seven deadly sins awaken to her keen senses while Gloria fished in her purse for her medicine.

The large woman's pride draped her in expensive fashions; her envy of other women's relationships with her husband caused her to destroy nearly every friendship Al once had. Her wrath was of legends, as she'd frequently destroy the material things of those who had harmed her, but her sloth was incredible when there was no conflict to lash out upon.

"Mom!" Sophia screamed. "They're human beings, just like dad!" She climbed into the driver's seat of her car and started the engine, but coming off of the dirt pile was still a task, as too much weight held the right side of the car. "Get out!"

"I can't," she said. "I'm in pain. I have to--"

“Get the fuck out!” she screamed louder. “If it hurts so much to live, maybe you just shouldn’t.” Her thoughts continued, accusing her of the seven most deadly sins. Her greed drove her to gain nearly everything in life she’d wanted without a day of work. She planned to take everything from the divorce and to leave Al with only the parts of his life she couldn’t tolerate, the death metal scene. Her gluttony was unspeakable and her body surely agreed. Lastly, the only time Gloria had ever felt insatiable lust, the animal instinct that pleaded to mate with a man of such culture. Lust was an essential part of Sophia’s daily rituals. In fact, Gloria’s whole perspective on life had always clashed her own. Sophia’s frustration led her to see the results as they were, unbiased by unconditional love. “What purpose do you serve?” she asked her mother coldly.

“Bite your tongue! I’m not the one that drove down a hill in the middle of nowhere.” She was blunt, but casting blame wasn’t going to get them anywhere.

“I’m going to the land to see what I can find. It’s just over the fence and down the hill. Are you coming or staying?” The very sloth of her nature manifested louder than a response ever could have, but essentially it was nature for the teenager to roll her eyes.

It was a short walk down a steep hill and over a wooden fence before the scene didn’t seem quite so dark and scary. Nocturnal eyes explored the natural darkness of the Andrews’s forestry, and she recalled the adventures she had in her special visits with her father. Together they’d strip their clothes and swim in a small lake—that was now merely a pond of clear shallow water. Aroused at the scent of the memories, she found herself enchanted by the hidden moon and stared up at the sky, barking maniacally in her own unique wail. Impulsively, she shed her black clothes and knelt in the warm, soft clay of the pond.

The moonlight, dim and violent, shined enough to silhouette her features only at slight, but her vision was accurate and precise. She admired her own black lips and darkened eyes in the pond’s reflection. Lines of her face showed her youth and the long proteins of her head even shined in multiple colors and lengths. In the pond, everything was beautiful and nothing was based on the limitless chaos of human emotion. In front of her, a silvery fish caught the slim light in a slow journey across the shore. She grabbed at the creature, hoping for a chance to prove herself,

but failed miserably. Again she tried, but left only a plume of disturbed soil in the water while both her arms came back saturated and empty.

When she looked up, a familiar face from her youth looked back in awe. He approached her and confirmed her identity with a sweet embrace, and she remembered all the days she was deprived of this—having a brother. He was always considerate and affectionate, but mother would never accept him. Heredity was a curse, and had rendered her Andrews brothers unacceptable to the outside world. She loved him, though, and even in total nudity there was no apprehension or shame. Playfully, she licked his arm and he tumbled with her onto the ground.

A small roughhousing, she found the other three watching happily. They were all special, varying only in scent and slightly in size and design. Not for a second did she overlook the masculine overload of the brotherhood. She confessed her hunger, but the scavengers could offer her nothing for support. In dire surrender, she communicated the need for help. Her brothers stood behind at first, but after a moment followed her to the car.

These were the older sons of Brute-Al Andrews, the proud inheritors of skilled hands and modest living. Without much discussion, ten pairs of hands went to work to dig a sedan from a heap of dirt, hoping to level the area for a frightening drive back to the conventional torment of socialization. In the end, only her brothers ever understood her. Only her brothers knew the first thing about unconditional love, because with or without her father, she was always bonded by blood in their hearts. Her useless mother slept in comfort in the car, but even in immobility Sophia could sense her lack of compassion.

Her brothers, Lunas and Scripp, assisted Sophia as she opened the car's creaky old door and crawled inside. Gloria screamed in panic. "Get out! Shoo! Shoo!" Sophia stood tall and looked into the rearview mirror. This was the soul of her pride and the part of herself that her adolescence had forced her to deprive herself of. As her father had taught her, she was proud to be herself.

Inside, we're all animals.

Her words, mouthed in the perfection of homo sapiens dialogue, were lost on her mother's ears. The part of her that was human was the part that would forever

be tainted with judgment, bias and misfortune. Gloria, although terrified and immobile, could do nothing to save herself from imminent fear. This was a stance that Sophia never wanted to take. The part of her that was raccoon wanted forever to feel this sense of actuality and splendor in mischief. Her decision cast, she called out those that she'd loved in mutuality rather than obligation.

Brothers, let's feast!

Gloria's screams were the music of the forest, the car continued to roll down the hill while the fat woman struggled to escape the various bites and scratches of the nursery of raccoons. Alive with pride and adventure, Sophia sunk her teeth deep into the neck of a suffering patient of fibromyalgia. Although the eyes of prey sometimes scream a paralyzed cry of unspeakable terror, the eyes of the predator glow in appreciation as the prey dies in her mouth.

Family has a tendency to sense drama in their loved ones without as much as a word. The Andrews all came out for dinner, feasting together on an ample buffet of human flesh. So many relatives, but her father was away onstage somewhere, with the skilled hands of instinct tapping out the melodies of death.

THE OLD BOY

David Dunwoody

Moss smiled broadly and gestured around the darkened lobby. “Take a look if you don’t believe me,” she cooed.

Denise and Falcchi crossed the floor, their heels clapping like gunshots against the concrete. The Wyce Building was empty now, that much was certain – but Moss’ story was still ridiculous. There at least had to be a stairwell somewhere...Falcchi wrenched open door after door and stared into featureless flat rooms with a scowl. “No elevators...no stairs...what’s really going on here, Jamie?”

Moss clucked her tongue. “Oh, ye of little faith. I’m telling you, the forty-something stories over our heads are inaccessible – this tower is a skeleton, with not a single room ever, ever leased to anyone. There is no Wyce Corporation. It’s a privately-owned lot with a dummy building atop it – it’s what’s beneath that’s important, ladies.”

Falcchi tossed back her blonde locks and crossed her arms. “And what, pray tell, is that? Enough with the fucking theatrics.”

“So unladylike,” Moss replied. “We’re guests here, hon, and our host is old-fashioned. Probably wouldn’t appreciate your tone.”

“Get to the point,” Falcchi growled.

Moss angled her head toward the floor. “Right under our feet is the secret this building was erected to keep hidden. His crypt.”

“Whose?” Denise’s ears suddenly perked up, and she stepped through a beam of moonlight, eyes flashing bright blue. “Whose crypt?”

Moss knelt and ran her palms over the cool concrete. Shivering, she planted her palms on one unremarkable spot. “Here. Here he is – Pfiefer Wyce.”

“A vampire?” Falcchi asked. Her eyes were suddenly aglow with excitement. She stroked her fangs as they slipped down from pale gums. “An old one? A Victorian?”

“From one of the first American clans,” Moss said. She stared at the floor where her hands lay. “I can feel him. He’s still alive and kicking, girls...waiting.”

“For his brides!” Denise exclaimed with a squeal.

“This is what we’ve been waiting for,” Moss breathed, scratching unconsciously at the floor, nipples hardening beneath her sweater as she tried to picture him, the old count... “No more suitors from the city. No more of these ‘modern’ men with their eyeliner and poetry. A real vampire!”

“Old school,” Falcchi whispered. Her fangs grazed her lower lip, and she clapped her hands together. “Let’s get him out of there!”

She stomped her foot into the floor, crushing her pump and knuckling the concrete. “How far down is he?”

“I don’t know,” Moss said, and brought her fists down with a crash. Splinters of rock sailed through the air, and ancient dust rose from the crater she’d made, making them all cough violently. “I just know he’s down there!”

Denise and Falcchi joined Moss at the spot and tore into the floor with a desire greater than the greatest hunger. They'd put up with three hundred years of bullshit since losing their original sire, made to kneel at the feet of angst-ridden ghouls who were frankly more human than bloodsucker. They drank their blood from bags and wrote verses about their yearning for the sun's embrace...the trio didn't want to be the men in the relationship any more than they wanted to be witless slaves to some misogynistic East Coast "aristocrat." And that was their only other option – New York's organized-crime vamps who thought unlife was one big orgy of sex and slaughter. One extreme for the other. But this Pfiefer Wyce, he was a Victorian. He was simple and sophisticated. They could all feel it now, through the floor, his weak heartbeat calling to them...Free me...

Moss punched through the last layer of concrete and struck stone. "Jesus, he's really down there." Pulling off her jacket, she dug deep.

Denise laughed excitedly. "How did you find out about him, Jamie?"

"I've heard rumors," Moss answered, sweat trickling down her face as she worked, "but I never knew where the building was. Not until last night. Talked to a medium on Fourteenth Street who spelled it out for me."

"Who sealed him down there, I wonder?" Falcchi mused.

"Perhaps Wyce himself." Moss tossed a handful of earth over her shoulder. "I think we're almost there."

He hand broke through the ground and clutched at icy air. A chill shot through her arm. "My...my." She licked her lips. "He's so old. And strong. He just needs us to pry him out of there."

"He'll need blood," Denise chirped. "Lots."

“We’ll steal it from Stephen – I mean Stefano.” Moss rolled her eyes. “He’s got a freezer full.”

Falcchi sat at the edge of the hole and kicked away jags of stone, then began to slip down into darkness. The others followed.

They were in a small tunnel. Forced to hunch over, they scanned in either direction with gleaming cats’-eyes. Moss pointed north. “Not far now.”

They crept down the passage. It gradually widened, and as they entered a large round chamber, candelabras along the walls became visible. Denise touched her fingertip to the wicks and summoned flame. Long shadows fell over the marble coffin in the center of the room.

“Pfiefer,” Moss said, placing her hands on the lid. “We’re here.”

Falcchi turned to Denise. “How do I look?”

“Oh, beautiful as always.” Pecking her on the cheek, Denise giggled and rushed to the coffin. “I think it’s going to take all three of us!”

They pried their slender fingers beneath the cobweb-strewn lid and, calling upon all their strength, lifted it inch by inch from the coffin. Dust erupted into the air, nearly suffocating them. Denise dropped her corner of the lid and moaned as it cracked. “Sorry! I’m sorry!”

Falcchi and Moss shoved the lid aside. It hit the floor with a thunderclap. The dust settled, and the brides-to-be looked down upon their groom.

Clothed in oily, foul-smelling rags, Pfiefer Wyce lay frozen, back arched, mouth distended as if in terrible pain. Two-inch fangs jutted from his gray lips. “Oh my,” Falcchi said with a sly smile.

His face was gaunt and bloodless, skin was paper stretched over sharp features. His hands, rough and calloused, were bent into mangled claws on his chest. He had been trapped down here, sealed in this cold tomb by a hundred-thousand-ton weight rising fifty stories into the sky – the man, sealed in and starved for centuries, and with him the traditions of an older, prouder kind of vampire.

Moss touched the hollow of his cheek with one trembling hand. “Pfiefer...? Can you hear us?”

There was a sound like dead leaves rasping over one another. Black ichor dripped from his rags onto the floor of the coffin.

He twitched.

Then, his yellowed eyes snapped open, and he gasped, shoving his claws into the air, torn from his ancient slumber – and he plunged his thick fingernails into Moss’ eyes with a screech.

She grabbed his wrist and shrieked, blood squirting from her head as she shook it from side to side. Wyce grinned maliciously and forced his fingers deeper, pulling himself up to a sitting position.

Falcchi and Denise backpedaled from the coffin and crashed into the earthen wall. Denise screamed, “JAMIE!” and let out a sob. Wyce’s head snapped towards her, and her breath caught in her throat.

The old vampire flew from the coffin and sailed over Moss’ head, landing behind her and wrenched her head to one side with a sickening SNAP. His jaws ripped into her throat. Steam rose into the freezing air as gouts of crimson washed over her breasts.

Wyce fed ravenously, his eyes on the other two all the while as they stood transfixed. Then he hurled Moss aside and glided across the floor, arms outstretched for Falcchi.

She grabbed the nearest candlestick and thrust it at him. He batted it aside with ease and pinned her to the wall. “No!” she screamed, tearing at his rags. He threw his head back, gurgling on Moss’ blood, and a thin, cruel laugh escaped his lips.

Falcchi fell silent. Wyce smashed his fist through her ribs and took hold of her black heart, staring deep into her eyes as he did so, relishing every split-second of anguish as he tore the muscle free and pushed it past his quivering lips.

Denise was running down the tunnel now, tears streaming down her face. She saw the hole in the ceiling up ahead and leapt for it.

Wyce grabbed the waist of her jeans and slung her to the floor. She wailed as he kicked her onto her back and splayed his claws.

“P-please don’t!” she cried. “We came to save you! To honor you! We love you...please...”

Kneeling over her, Wyce gently took her face in both hands and lifted her up until she was millimeters from his bloody lips. He studied her face. She placed her hands on his shoulders and whispered, “Please Count, Pfiefer...we want to be with you...I want to be with you...why would you hurt us?”

His lips parted, a black bubble bursting in her face, and he drew a deep breath. Then, in a voice like a death rattle, with the moldy breath of a thousand years and the icy intonation of the Devil himself, he said:

“I’m gay”

SIAMESE BLOOD

BellaDonna Drakul

CHAPTER I

Beauty never fades, but weakens over time. As the years pass, we obsess over our youth and envy those who are fairer than thou. We try to ignore the fact that our looks have diminished, but we are reminded daily when we gaze into mirrors and see time passing us by. However, when I look into mirrors I see my sister staring back at me. She stands to my left as a literal attachment and reminder of a beautiful defeat. I can not live without her presence nor can she without mine. Unfortunately, sibling detachment can occur in one's life but in my case it was a definite...

I was born into a world of love and hate in the year 1857 A.D. in the lower west side of Manhattan, New York. I was an atrocious being that was born next to a radiant beauty in a world of Siamese births. "Perhaps she'll grow into a graceful swan...", my mother would say as she spoke to our house nurse. "But one fact is certain, she will never be as lovely as her sister, Tarina." Yes, even as a baby my mother would compare me to the perfection of my sister. "Unfortunately, Nalina will always be a reminder of a beast to Tarina's beauty." And with that heinous name calling, my parents decided to recruit us at seventeen years old as "The Beauty and The Beast Siamese Twins" in the flamboyant world of P.T. Barnum's carnival sideshow.

Being born as a Siamese twin in those days was considered a tragedy and for the most part it felt that way. Fortunately, we learned to embrace our deformity over the years and met several individuals that accepted us as normal. My sister and I were new to the sideshow circuit but after quite some time we became the star attraction and replaced Helga, the scandalously tattooed bearded lady as a head liner. I can still remember the first time Mr. Barnum introduced us as the main attraction in his show.

"Ladies and gentlemen," P.T. bellowed at the beginning of the show, "I introduce you to an array of oddities that only the unusual can admire. As you all well know," he paused as he straightened his top hat, "I have searched the world for many years to find beings that share the same body and I have succeeded... drum roll please!" P.T. shouted as the red velvet curtain raised before us as we sat together on a dark upholstered chaise lounge. "Please gaze upon the world's first ever set of Siamese twins, the Brofera sisters, or as we like to call them... 'The Beauty and The Beast Siamese Twins'!"

The crowd cheered as we stood from our seat and bowed graciously before them. We were frighteningly odd looking to many of them, but they seemed to enjoy our performance for we had one attribute that other Siamese twins did not. Despite the fact that I wasn't as beautiful or as talented as my sister, I had a harmonious voice that bellowed into P.T. Barnum's ears and Tarina and I became the first Siamese sirens/actresses of our time. I would sing for my supper

while Tarina performed skits for hers to those who would listen in hopes of becoming gods of the carnival world. Unfortunately, some sideshow attractions tend to grow envious of one's stardom and yearn to override the fate of others. Sadly, this was the case of the Brofera sisters on a dark and sinister night in the late winter of 1878.

On that somber February evening, a grievous error had occurred that was considered to be taboo amongst our kind. Our fellow performers decided to send a type of bloodthirsty sideshow attraction to kill my sister and me while we slept in our carnival tents. The echoes of screams awoke us as we quickly arose from our bed to see a vision that could only be described as nightmarish in nature. The creature was ghastly as he thrashed his teeth towards us, blood dripping from our multiple wounds that he inflicted. The pain we endured was unbearable which after a day or two had transformed my sister and I into a new aged term known as a vampire. Our parents were concerned and devastated by this ordeal, but found themselves relieved when Mr. Barnum decided to renew our contract indefinitely with promises of a thirty percent raise in our paycheck each week. We had finally felt the presence of a godlike status which grew more each day and we had become legendary amongst the sideshow acts from years past. However, I felt that my new form was a curse rather than a wealthy blessing.

As time progressed, we no longer felt the bliss of the sun's rays upon our flesh but rather a new regenerating feeling of the evening's moonlight. Upon our vampiric transformation, Mr. Barnum ordered immediate removal of all of our human possessions from our quarters. We were required to obtain new sleeping arrangements as our bed was replaced by a large, wooden crate and we were moved into a darker tent on the carnival's premises. Many of our daily routines had grown from normal into abnormal and made our existence a strange one indeed. Food, formerly a necessity, had become obsolete and was replaced with blood that only I had the stomach to endure for Tarina and myself. Our need for youthful innocence was replaced with a diabolical urge for death and destruction. And sadly over time, my relationship with my beloved sister became bitter like the blood that coursed through our veins for survival. For you see, when I looked in the mirror and saw my immortal sister I felt a sense of pain that enveloped me. Tarina was once a sweet and angelic being that I adored and would've died for. But after she had said goodbye to daylight forever, Tarina had transformed into a radiant demon that made others suffer.

My beloved sister had quickly become a vain and cruel being who was worshiped by all who saw her nightly performances. Every evening before we graced the sideshow stage with our presence, Tarina would seduce strangers from afar with her sultry demeanor while I hid behind her in the shadows. She would start off by enticing her new admirers with a flirtatious look with almost haunting eyes that bellowed "come hither". Then Tarina would follow with a slight licking of her lips, making the strangers swoon in a hypnotic way which was enough for me to make my move. Without a moment's hesitation, I would lunge towards the strangers like a bloodthirsty scavenger. The deafening howls arose from them as they would gaze upon my heinous features while I grasped them by their throats, relishing in their crimson nectar.

Upon every victim's departure into the afterlife, Tarina would utter in my ear, "Thank you sincerely, dearest Nalina... I value your carnivorous appetite that provides sustenance for us both," she paused as she brushed away long sun-drenched locks from her waxen face.

“This lifestyle harms you and benefits me greatly...” And then she would cackle vociferously as if she had committed the brutal act herself.

This type of murderous bloodshed took place nightly before each performance. While my sister enjoyed the slaying of others, I felt an emptiness inside me that even blood couldn't fulfill. And as the days passed by like years, I searched for the creature that took our life while Tarina enjoyed the world of immortality. The life we led was not that of a “normal” sideshow entertainer but that of a vile monster who stared at me in the mirror daily. In the past I was recognized as a beast with an obscene amount of birthmarks on my face, but over time my dearest Tarina had become a beast herself. Aye me... if only she could feel the pain of death that consumed me rather than the popularity of her trivial acting abilities. Perhaps the years would prove to her that life was a blessing, but as I looked at her diabolical beauty in the mirror I knew that she would never embrace life again.

As I pondered this thought often, Tarina would shout at me. “Isn't a life filled with fame, fortune, and death marvelous?” She would pause awkwardly as she applied her over the top stage makeup to her pale face. “No, I have forgotten. Death is only truly appreciated by those who can embrace it and you, dear sister, will remain a burden to me in this life...”

CHAPTER II

The life of a carnival sideshow entertainer is one that is extraordinary in comparison, but when you add the ingredient of vampirism it becomes inconceivable. The first few years of performing in Mr. Barnum's sideshow seemed enjoyable. An extensive group of abnormal friends made us happy, but once we were introduced into a darker side of life we were reduced to

mere outcasts. Early friends such as the gentle giant, the sword swallower, and the nearly nude contortionist began to shun us from their circle and loathe us with an indescribable feeling. I sensed their cold stares as my sister and I performed on stage nightly and knew that they truly thought of us as “freaks of nature”. In the latter part of the 1800s, the fiendish creature that attacked Tarina and I was decapitated by a group of hunters in the northern woods of town. Much to my dismay, the vampire curse he bestowed upon my sister and me was not eliminated entirely. We spent the rest of that century known as “The Bloody Siamese Twins” and started a new attraction on the sideshow circuit that brought upon millions of carnival dwellers that made Mr. Barnum very wealthy indeed.

By the summer of 1893, Tarina and I had become quite successful but with all of the glory of stardom comes devastation to those you hold dear. I had slain several individuals over the past few decades for my sister yet I still felt incomplete. The breathtaking sights, delicious smells, and boisterous sounds of the early carnival era had been enthralling to Tarina but I never felt her happiness. She relished in the spotlight as a beautiful being for years and attempted to vanquish me, but never succeeded. Many moons had passed over Manhattan before Tarina’s vicious behavior had arrived. I can still remember one sweltering night before one of our many performances. Tarina had been previously talking with the dominating fire breather, Berethor, when she uttered the most horrible phrase that I had ever heard. “It’s devastating that my beauty has to suffer at the weight of your grotesque appearance, Nalina.”

Suddenly a gut wrenching pain overcame me as my sister emotionally drove a stake through my heart. “Why would you say such a horrendous thing to me, Tarina?” I gasped. “I’m your sister... do you not still care for me?” My heart ached as I looked in the mirror at her smug expression as she curtly replied.

“You are my sister, dear Nalina, and I do care for you a great deal. But sometimes I yearn to know what it feels like to live my own life. To be by myself when I’m sad or to be just alone in general. Berethor told me earlier...”

“Berethor?” I snorted loudly. “What business is it of his to come between sisters? I stood next to you and didn’t hear him say anything hurtful.” I glanced at Tarina’s reflection in the mirror, her icy blue eyes staring back at mine, as I cried. “We are still sisters, aren’t we?”

Tarina deviously smiled as she applied a dark rouge to her lips, “Alas... we are. But how can you expect me to live this kind of life without any kind of happiness?” She paused to return my sullen stare in the mirror. “The reason you never heard anything hurtful is because you weren’t listening. You seemed more concerned with other distractions that I found myself having to whisper half of my conversation with Berethor.” She paused as if she had found happiness suddenly. “Aye me... the blissful words from Berethor complete me in a way nothing else can. He is such a...”

“What did he say, Tarina?” I snapped towards her. She looked coldly at me as if to respond but halted as we heard the beginning of Mr. Barnum’s opening introduction for our

performance.

“Thank you very much, Nalina. Because of your ludicrous questions we are late for our performance and you have not supplied us with blood for the evening!” She shrieked as she saw the fear in my disfigured face that slightly resembled her own. “I’m sorry, dear sister... I did not mean to speak to you with that tone.” Tarina paused as she gently touched my face and said, “I do not blame you, dear Nalina... we will feed after our performance.” She bellowed as we sat upon our chaise lounge and waited for P.T. to finish our introduction. As many performances throughout our career, we entertained our audience with yet another spectacular sideshow. I must admit that after Tarina’s apology I felt a bit better and performed quite well with my siren like vocals. Yet much to my dismay, I worried about our evening feeding for all of the strangers had already seen us.

Several hours later after the carnival had closed for the night, Tarina and I strolled through the dimly lit streets of upper Brooklyn searching for victims to feed upon. From the moment a stranger would appear before us, Tarina would attempt to hide me beneath the shadows so as to seduce her potential victim. She found four or five gentlemen callers that quenched her thirst so she instructed me to feed from all of them. Their blood coursed through my veins as it did to hers and she too felt satisfied. Moments later after feeding off of our last victim, we caught the last trolley leaving Brooklyn and headed home to the carnival.

Nearly thirty minutes later, we arrived at the carnival and retired to our tent for the evening. The bustling noises of the carnival performers echoed in my ears as I looked at my dear sister. Tarina seemed exhausted as she smiled at me and fell asleep as soon as she laid in the wooden crate, a darkness enveloping us both. I felt a sense of uneasiness as I laid next to her knowing that her feelings of resentment towards me were overwhelming. I had trouble sleeping that night and realized what Tarina had meant by her earlier statement. I loved my sister unconditionally but within the emptiness of my heart, I sensed that her being without me by her side would be blissful for her. “But how could you separate a siamese twin without killing them both? Wouldn’t both twins feel alone without the other one by their side? And if so, why would my beautiful sister want to be without me?” I thought quietly to myself in the darkness of the crate, Tarina sleeping peacefully next to me.

I felt utterly alone as I laid next to her and could never imagine being without her everyday for the rest of our immortal existence. My body grew tired as I drifted off to sleep but not before I heard something odd. I was startled to hear Tarina moaning loudly as if she was being filled with an almost erotic sensation. “Oh, my darling Berethor...” She gasped as if she would rather lay next to him than me. Tarina gasped once more in a sensual voice, “We will be together for all eternity once she’s gone, my darling...” My heart ached as if it had burst in my chest when I realized that she wanted me gone. I wept vampire tears at the thought of siamese separation but all I ever wanted in life was to make my sister happy. Unfortunately, her plan to rid me from her life was something that I had to put a stop to immediately before it was too late.

CHAPTER III

People throughout time have said that sibling detachment is quite common, but I'm guessing they never spoke to siamese twins about that subject. That thought had repeated itself the entire night in my mind's eye as I finally drifted off to sleep, still wondering about Tarina's relationship with Berethor. After much thought, I decided I would deal with that matter once I got a good night's sleep. As I laid quietly next to my sister, I had an unsettling feeling in the pit of my stomach that gave me the fear that something odd was going to occur. Perhaps it was a premonition of something evil that walked among us, shadowed by a hint of innocence. The thought itself was nauseating as it filled my dreams with horrific visions.

The following evening seemed to be overflowing with several strange occurrences as Tarina and I awoke from our slumber. All was quiet, which was very unusual even for the carnival, as we crawled out of our wooden crate to see Manhattan's moon shining off in the distance. The moonlight seemed to fill the air with an almost haunting energy as I gazed at the performers that rushed around the carnival grounds. I watched them in awe as Tarina dressed us in our gold sequined costume for our first performance of the evening. The visions before me were delightful as the entertainers seemed to dance on air, their costumes flowing with an overwhelming beauty and mystery.

"Do pay attention, Nalina, and dress yourself properly." Tarina huffed as she attempted to drag me across the room to our makeup table. "Tonight is important so we must dress the part."

"Yes, Tarina." I said in an obedient tone while I accepted a hairbrush that she offered to me, swiftly brushing my belligerent golden locks. "What is so important about tonight, dear sister?" She gazed at me, vainly admiring herself in the mirror, as she replied.

"Tonight we start our fire breathing training with Berethor and after that P.T. wants us to take photographs for his advertisements for the sideshow." She paused and took a deep breath, intense irritation flowing from her as she spoke. "If you paid attention once in awhile, dear sister, you would know what's going on outside of your invisible box." I nodded in agreement and was about to speak when I glanced in the mirror to see Berethor standing behind us.

"Good evening, ladies." Berethor said with a hint of arrogance in his tone. The story of Berethor's arrogance was one of greed and fame. He was once a sweet and gentle soul, but as fate would have it his performances made him a legend and he embraced the spotlight like a moth to a flame. He became cruel to those who loved him and admired him. "Are we ready for our training tonight?" He said as he brushed away his long, wispy raven mane from his face.

"I am positively elated about training with you, Berethor, as I'm sure Nalina is as well." Tarina smiled sweetly with sultry eyes towards Berethor. "I think this training will be a wonderful addition to our act. Siren like vocals, prestigious acting, and death defying fire

breathing... the act will be glorious!”

“I wholeheartedly agree!” Berethor smiled as he gently touched Tarina’s face and stared at mine with a nauseated smirk. “Besides, if you add an extra talent to your performance I’m sure P.T. would be willing to add another ten percent to your weekly pay. And,” he paused, “I could possibly add a small percentage as well to my weekly pay.” He said with a diabolical look in his chestnut colored eyes.

“You are a wonderful performer, Berethor, I’m sure P.T. would graciously pay you a higher percentage for helping us.” Tarina said as she applied her last bit of rouge to her lips.

“And your performances are wonderful as well, ladies,” He smiled again before turning towards the door. “I must go for now, but I look forward to seeing you momentarily at my tent to start our training. I bid you ladies, adieu.” Berethor said as he bowed before us, his tattoo covered arms bulging, and exited our tent.

“We must feed early tonight, dear sister. Berethor informed me yesterday that our training starts promptly after dusk which is an hour from now. So we must hurry so as not to keep Berethor waiting.” I nodded in agreement as I covered my face and body in dark clothes so as not to be noticed. Tarina quickly brushed her hair, grabbed my hand in hers, and took me into the darkness outside of our tent to look for food.

As we quietly walked around the carnival grounds looking for strangers to feed upon, I noticed something peculiar a few feet in front of us. I had another fear that something odd was going to occur that night and by the vision before me, my undying concern was growing stronger. I gazed into a dim light to see Berethor and the carnival’s hypnotist, Xander, talking and what seemed to be an exchanging of brightly colored documents. “What are on those papers?” I thought to myself. I attempted to peer closer, but Tarina found a victim for me to feed on and drug me in the opposite direction.

“Come on, Nalina, if we don’t hurry he’ll get away from us!” Tarina, with her voluptuous sexuality, promptly seduced the stranger with one longing stare as I hid patiently in the shadows waiting to make my move. The dingy clothed stranger seemed to float towards Tarina as if he was under a spell. “Now kiss me.” She said to him as he drew his lips closer to hers. He breathed a sigh of ecstasy as she softly licked his lips in an erotic fashion. Then in one delicate move, she whispered softly into his ear. “Now it’s time to die!” With a frightened look on his face, I turned towards him with fangs bared. He gasped in fear as I ferociously penetrated his throat, blood spewing from the multiple wounds from his jugular vein. I drank his rich blood as it coursed through my veins into Tarina, his body thrashing violently as I suckled nearly every drop. She sighed happily as if she was satisfied yet again, “Let’s go, Nalina... Berethor waits for us.” I wiped a few drops of blood from my mouth as Tarina pulled me towards Berethor’s tent in the opposite direction.

As I stood outside of Berethor’s tent while Tarina spoke to him on the inside, I couldn’t help but wonder what was on the papers he gave to Xander. My brain fumbled over this thought for what seemed like hours until something caught my attention across the carnival

grounds. Now at that point in time I should've been listening to their conversation, but I saw Xander and the bearded lady talking in secrecy. I couldn't quite hear what was being said but I saw Xander give Helga the same brightly colored papers that Berethor had given to him moments ago. "Why would Xander give Helga the documents that Berethor gave to him?" I thought to myself. "Is there something important written on those papers that only the three of them know about? And if so, what could it possibly be?" The questions were troubling me and I wanted to know the answers but...

"Nalina, it's time to start our training so get your head out of the clouds and let's go!" Tarina shrieked as she placed a large torch, saturated in kerosene, and a small lighting device in my hand. At that moment I was incredibly nervous, but not because of my fire breathing training. I had to find out what was on those documents as soon as possible and pray that it didn't involve my sister or anything that would cause a separation between us.

CHAPTER IV

In a world full of secrets and hidden mysteries, there is a strange desire to interpret their meanings. I knew deep inside me that there was something unnatural written on those papers and I had to find a way to read them without Tarina finding out about it. Unfortunately, that would be easier said than done seeing as how we were literally attached to each other. As I patiently listened to Berethor's teachings, my mind was racing at the thought of his secret meeting with Xander. "Nalina, please pay attention." Tarina said as she lit one of the torches that Berethor had given to her. "If we don't learn this new technique then we will never excel as true sideshow performers." I half smiled at her as Berethor handed a torch to me, deception flowing through him.

The training was a grueling process with a hint of death attached to it. And after an hour or two we had finally finished our first fire breathing session with Berethor and headed back towards our tent. I felt a sense of pain in my slightly burnt hands as we arrived at our tent moments later, but I felt a stronger ache in my heart for the secrets that were being passed around the carnival grounds. My mind was still racing when Mr. Barnum rushed into our tent to have his photographer take several photographs of us for his sideshow advertisements. Unfortunately, I had to put my thoughts and fears on the back burner for awhile to pose for the photographs and practice our new sideshow routine for P.T.'s approval. "I wonder if he knew what the documents were for?" I thought to myself.

As Tarina and I tried on several lavish costumes for our photographs and rehearsed our new act for P.T., I caught myself looking at the occupants within the room and wandered if they knew what those documents were all about. The only people that were there was P.T., the photographer, and us but there was still an unexplainable feeling that filled the room. A feeling of secrecy seemed to flush over the faces of everybody but I didn't know why... or did I? I had to think of some way to get those documents and find out what was so important about them. "No, I need to talk to Tarina first." I thought to myself. I had a feeling that since she seemed close to Berethor then maybe she had read the papers or at least seen them.

"Nalina," P.T. looked at me with confusion, "are you alright?" He slowly ran his fingers through his graying handlebar moustache with a concerned look upon his face. I nodded my head yes with a smile, hiding my pain from within. From the grim expression on P.T.'s face, I could tell something was amiss. He looked at me as he withdrew a small piece of paper and pen from his coat pocket and began writing something. Mr. Barnum took a moment or two to write out a brief message, quickly folded up the piece of paper, and discreetly hid it from Tarina's view. Luckily, Tarina was talking with the photographer so she never saw what P.T. and I were doing. "Nalina," P.T. whispered to me, "I need you to read that message after you go to sleep tonight. Place it in your breast pocket and never let Tarina know what that paper says."

"But she's my sister, Mr. Barnum... I never keep secrets from her." I said as I hesitated to grab the piece of paper.

"You must keep this a secret from her, Nalina, she must never find out about

this. Terrible consequences could occur that could lead to tragedy.” He paused to lower his voice in a more hushed tone. “You must trust me on this, my dear.” I quickly nodded in agreement, grabbed the message from P.T., and then he and the photographer left our tent to get ready for that night’s performance. A few minutes thereafter, the carnival had come alive as it did every night and P.T. Barnum was the ringleader of it all.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” P.T. bellowed as we sat backstage on our chaise lounge ready for our introduction, “Please focus on the red velvet curtain behind me and brace yourself to gaze upon the world’s only set of vampire siamese sirens/actresses and soon to be fire breathers... ‘The Bloody Siamese Twins’!” He smiled as he straightened his top hat and bowed before a large cheering audience.

The evening’s performance, despite the way I felt, was a complete success. The evening started out with me singing a beautiful collection of songs, followed by several wonderful skits performed by Tarina, and then Berethor assisted us in finishing our performance with a dazzling display of fire breathing that mesmerized the audience. All in all, the evening was far better than I expected but very tiring as well. A few hours later after the carnival had closed for the evening, we returned to our tent to get a restful night’s sleep. As we entered the tent, Tarina turned to me with a look of concern upon her sweet face and asked, “Is something the matter, dear sister? You’ve had a look of worry all over your face tonight.” She said as she gently grabbed my hand. “Don’t ever forget that I am your sister and I will always be there for you... no matter what. You know you can trust me.” The sincere look on her face told me that she truly meant what she said, but I still couldn’t tell her what was going on even though I wanted to.

“Nothing is the matter, dear sister, I’m just a little tired is all.” I said to her with a forced smile. “You seem tired as well so perhaps you should get some sleep and we’ll talk more tomorrow.” She nodded her head in agreement as we crawled into our wooden crate and quickly fell asleep... at least she did. I waited awhile until Tarina was fast asleep before I withdrew the folded up piece of paper and the lighting device for the torches from my breast pocket. I began to sweat profusely as I fumbled to use the lighting device to see the letter that I had been curious about all evening. My heart felt as if it had been ripped from my chest as I nervously began to unfold the letter, but before I opened it I stopped briefly to collect my thoughts. “Why am I doing this?” I asked myself. “She is my one and only sister and I love her dearly. What could possibly be in this letter that P.T. wouldn’t want her to see?” I had so many questions running through my brain about that tiny piece of paper. And finally after much consideration and torturing myself for what seemed like hours, I decided to open the message and read what was within:

My Dearest Nalina:

I am writing you in regards to answer a question that has been puzzling you recently. I know that you have wondered why there has been such secrecy here at the carnival between Berethor, Helga, and Xander. I know that you have seen the exchange of documents between the three of them. And although I can not give you full details on the matter at hand, I can tell

you this... those documents involve your sister. I have discovered that she is in a deadly ordeal with the previously mentioned party. I am sorry to inform you of this distressing news, but I suggest that you watch the people who associate with your sister. Do not tell her about this message for she is in danger as are you.

Sincerely,
P.T. Barnum

Fear rushed throughout my body as I thought about the letter. “What was P.T. referring to?” I asked myself. “And why are Berethor, Helga, and Xander after Tarina and I?” I paused to recollect my thoughts. “We have never done anything to them so why would they want to harm us?” My mind fluttered with these questions knowing that in order to protect Tarina, I had to warn her of the events that were about to occur.

CHAPTER V

We are only given one life when we are born and once we die we are chosen to live out eternity in either Heaven or Hell. If that is true, then what is the explanation for that when you become immortal? The true sense of death is slightly complicated for immortals, they die and then they are reborn into a world of constant death. Heaven and Hell do not exist for the immortal breed and if it does, is the person judged before they become immortal or after? If Tarina and I are being hunted by our fellow performers, will we be sent to Heaven or Hell when we die? Those questions haunted me once I read P.T.'s message about the fate of my sister and myself. I couldn't understand why our fellow performers would want to kill us but I knew that Tarina would understand and perhaps know why.

After I read Mr. Barnum's message, I discreetly hid it and the lighting device in my breast pocket from Tarina's eyes and quickly fell asleep beside her. Knowing that we had been marked for death by our colleagues was a horrifying thought, but it was one that I couldn't forget as I tried to sleep that night. The visions of separation from my sister were terrifying and I couldn't imagine it happening, but I feared that it was inevitable. However, I also knew that Tarina would protect us both and we would always be together in life and death. I also knew that if I was to save Tarina and myself, I had to warn her...

The sun disappeared from the Manhattan sky once more as Tarina and I awoke from our wooden crate the following evening. I was devastated when she awoke and said, "What a glorious life we lead as a vampire... we will never die and we have nothing to fear." I cried a little inside for I knew that her statement was false. How was I going to tell my dear sister that we were marked for death? She believed that once we became immortal that death would never touch us again but she was wrong. It was at that point that I realized that I had to warn her before it was too late.

"Tarina, my dear sister, there is something of the utmost importance that I need to tell you..." And before I could finish that sentence, Mr. Barnum had entered our tent with a bizarre expression on his face.

"Good evening ladies! And how are my favorite siamese vampires this beautiful evening?" He smiled with a devilish grin imprinted across his face. We smiled as he replied, "We have a lot of planning to do tonight for tomorrow's final performance here in New York. We must finalize your fire breathing training with Berethor, design new costumes for your performance, and pack your belongings for the transfer to Europe for our next tour." He paused as he looked around our dark tent. "And looking around this room, I think the packing part of our schedule should be addressed first while our costume designer works her magic for you. You have two hours in which to collect your belongs and then you must report to the seamstress immediately thereafter." P.T. smiled as he tipped his top hat towards us, "I will speak to you ladies at a later time... I bid you adieu." P.T. said as he quickly left our tent and we started packing for the transfer to Europe the following evening after our performance.

Now that we were alone, I felt that it was the best time to speak to Tarina about

our fellow performers deadly plan for us. “Tarina, there’s something I need to tell you...” And yet again before I could finish my sentence, I was interrupted by the bearded lady as she pulled back the blue and silver striped curtain of our tent.

“Dearest Helga, what brings you to our neck of the woods?” Tarina smiled sweetly as Helga entered the tent.

“I was just instructed by P.T. to help you pack your belongings for the transfer to Europe. What would you like for me to pack for you first?” The burly woman asked as she stroked her massive beard. Tarina pointed to a few sequin covered costumes across the room and Helga began to pack them into small cardboard boxes. As she began to pack up all of our costumes, I felt that it was time to whisper to Tarina the plans of our demise. Unfortunately before I could even open my mouth, Helga had finished packing our costumes and asked Tarina what else did she need help packing. Tarina pointed to our makeup table that was overflowing with a large variety of costume makeup supplies so Helga started packing those too as she was instructed. The large, tattoo adorned woman packed up our makeup table as quick as a flash and said, “I’m all done here, ladies. And all that’s left to pack is your personal mementos and then P.T. wants you to meet me at the seamstress’ office immediately.” She paused as she walked towards the tent’s exit. “I will see you two in a few moments, until then.” Helga said as she walked out of our tent. Tarina quickly began packing up the rest of our belongings as I waited for her to finish so that I could talk to her. After a few moments, Tarina had completed her task and I finally had the chance to warn her about the performers plan for us. I looked deeply into her eyes, gently grasped her hand in mine, sat her down on a nearby bench in our tent, and said,

“Tarina, there’s something I need to tell you before it’s too late.” She looked concerned as I started to speak. “I don’t know quite how to say this because I was commanded to keep it a secret from you... but you are my sister and I think you need to be forewarned.” I paused as I took a deep breath to recollect my thoughts. “Yesterday evening when P.T. had come to visit us, he left me a message that I think you need to read.” I said as I passed her the small piece of paper that I had received from Mr. Barnum the night before.

I sat there quietly as she read the letter, but much to my surprise she did not react the way I thought she would after reading it. “Oh, my darling Nalina,” she paused, “you must not believe everything you read.” Confusion quickly rushed over me as I asked her what she meant. She laughed as she replied, “This letter was probably meant to be comical in nature and apparently you didn’t understand that.” She laughed again, an almost sinister voice rising from her. “To view the world as a diabolical thing might be your cup of tea, but do not forget what we are and that everything is not always what it seems.”

“We may be immortal, dear sister, but there are ways to kill us and our fellow performers plan to do that.” I paused briefly as I looked deep into her icy blue eyes that matched my own. “Aren’t you even the least bit worried about what they plan to do to us? Or do you even care?”

“Of course she cares, my dear.” Berethor said as he rushed into our tent accompanied by Xander. He smiled as Xander stood before Tarina, looking deep into her eyes as if he was trying to hypnotize her. “Now what she cares about is beside the point.” He paused as

Tarina locked eyes with Xander. “And you, my dearest Nalina, could better your situation and hers if you didn’t believe everything you read.” He said as he snatched the message from Tarina’s hand.

“Read the message, Berethor!” I snapped at him. He laughed loudly as he told Xander to continue to perform a hypnotism on Tarina. Berethor stared hard at me and grabbed a nearby torch that had fallen on the floor.

“My colleague and I were instructed to make you forget all about this and that is exactly what we are going to do!” Berethor said as he quickly lit the torch, forced the flame into his mouth, smiled devilishly, and blew the fire onto the piece of paper. The small paper burst into flames in midair and disappeared like the flicker of a candle flame when the wind blows hard. I yelped in fear as Xander quickly locked eyes with me and began to hypnotize me as well.

“Ladies, you will remember nothing of this letter.” Xander calmly said as he stared deep into our eyes, his eyes transforming from dark green to a ghostly white. “You will perform your show like always and will never speak of what happened here again.” And with that, all memories of the letter seemed to fade from our mind’s eye as Xander and Berethor promptly escorted us to the seamstress’ office to get ready for that night’s performance.

CHAPTER VI

When life becomes a blur without your realization, you tend to not notice it passing you by. With that being said, the past twenty-four hours of our life had seemed to disappear as if it had never happened. As the moon reappeared on the final night in Manhattan, Tarina and I had trouble remembering the events that had taken place the night before. We awoke from our crate to gaze upon an empty tent that had once been filled with our possessions. It felt as if we were starting a new existence into another one from the life that we had led in New York for so many years. And if that didn't seem like enough of a tragedy, Tarina's excitement would've surpassed it rather quickly.

"Sweet Nalina, can you believe that tonight is the last night that we will call Manhattan home for quite some time?" She gasped with a hint of giddiness in her voice. "I have always dreamt of performing in Europe and after tonight's performance that will be possible!" She said as she danced us around the room but quickly stopped when she realized that I was saddened by the thought. "Oh, sweet sister," she said, "I can not feel joy towards this new lifestyle if you can not share that happiness with me. Please," she paused again as she touched my deformed face, "tell me what is troubling you so."

I held back tears of pain as I quickly replied, "Nothing troubles me that does not trouble you as well. But..." I paused as I stared sullenly at her. "I fear that something terrible is amiss and if we do not find out what it is there will be consequences for our actions." Tarina smiled sweetly as she brushed a dingy lock away from my face.

"Dear sister, the nonsense that you speak of is new to me and we shall not make our final evening in New York a bitter one. You have nothing to fear as long as you're with me." She paused once more, this time on a calmer note. "Now let's head over to the seamstress' office and get dressed for our final performance here and afterwards we will complete our final training session with Berethor before going on stage." She smiled as she drug me out of the tent.

"But sister, I fear that something terrible is going to happen tonight!" I shrieked as I grabbed her arm and pulled her back into the tent. Tarina seemed confused as I spoke. "Tarina, I can't explain what is going to happen but I know that it is not going to be a pleasant experience. You have to believe me..."

Tarina laughed vociferously as she brushed my hair away from my face again. "I do believe you, sweet Nalina, but what you speak of is preposterous." She paused with an almost frustrated tone. "But as I said moments ago, we must hurry and go to the seamstress' office and..."

"But Tarina you don't understand that..."

"I do not want to repeat myself to you again, Nalina!" Tarina said as she angrily clenched my hand in hers. "I understand every tiny detail of the stories you are

fabricating but I am tired of your behavior so let's go!" She screamed as she pulled me by my wrist towards the seamstress' office on the other side of the carnival grounds.

Before I knew it, we were sitting inside of the seamstress' office, a small ornate room that seemed to go on forever despite its minuscule size. The walls were covered with jeweled costumes, elaborate headdresses, and feather adorned masks. And among all of that lavish apparel was our costume for our last performance in this fair city. It was beautiful in nature but odd as well. It looked as if the seamstress had lost her mind and sewn together the clothes of a scullery maid and a brothel madame. "Trust me," the stout, dwarf sized woman said as she noticed the look of confusion upon my face, "Mr. Barnum asked for this exact costume for your performance tonight so I did not make a mistake." Even though I felt that our costume was a blunder on the seamstress' behalf, I didn't complain and tried it on with a hint of disarray burning inside me.

Moments later after several makeup artists applied mounds of rouge and shadow to our faces, we ran over to Berethor's tent for our last training session before finally running off to the stage. As we stood amongst the curiously dressed performers backstage while waiting for P.T. to make our introduction, I attempted to talk to Tarina once more. "Dearest Tarina, I feel that you are not listening to my warning and..."

"Please, Nalina, I do not want to hear about your silly warnings anymore tonight! You are making a fool of yourself and I will not stand for it any longer!" She shrieked as she quickly replied, "Now you need to control your emotions and get ready for our final performance!" I nodded my head sadly in agreement as we watched the last performances of our fellow sideshow entertainers in America.

Although I was devastated by ill thoughts of memories that I couldn't recollect, I was amazed by the performances of the sideshow performers on stage before me. The sounds, smells, and sights of the carnival were just as wonderful as the sideshow being played out before us. The seamstress had really outdone herself as we watched Zamora the contortionist and Sliveran the sword swallower set the stage ablaze with their astonishing costumes and brilliant talents. And if their performances weren't amazing enough, we were then entertained with death defying acts by Berethor as well as others. Suddenly, almost as if it hit me like lightning, all my concerns of terrible occurrences seemed to fade away completely as if they had been horrific dreams. In fact, it felt as if all of my harmful memories of the past had been erased in an instant. And with that paranoid delusion gone, I smiled sweetly as I looked at my beautiful sister with pride. The audience cheered at the performers on stage as Tarina grasped my hand in hers and said,

"Now is the time for our final performance in America, dear sister." She said as we took our places on the chaise lounge backstage. "Are you ready to perform like this performance was your last?" I nodded happily as we awaited our introduction from Mr. Barnum, all the while feelings of disaster ran ramped throughout my body. Call them premonitions or ill feelings, they were there running amuck in my brain. But for some strange reason, I had the hardest time trying to remember why I had those feelings to begin with. It almost felt as if I had

been...

“Ladies and gentlemen,” P.T. shouted from the rooftops as he quickly halted my thoughts, “are you ready to witness a spectacular showcase of wonderment and intrigue from New York’s favorite siamese sisters?” The crowd quickly let out an uproarious clapping as did the performers who awaited us to join them on stage. P.T. took that as an approval to continue his introduction and said, “Then please put your hands together for the world’s only vampire siamese sirens/actresses in their last performance and I mean that literally... ‘The Bloody Siamese Twins’!” And as Mr. Barnum finished introducing us, the red velvet curtain raised and I had suddenly remembered the night before.

CHAPTER VII

Death is inevitable for those who choose it, but when it is not an option it is terrifying to face it head on. I knew at that exact moment when P.T. said that it was literally our last performance, that we were destined to die on that stage that night. The crowd sat on the edge of their seats as Sliveran walked towards us with a small silver dagger in his right hand. “We must first remind them of their connection to one another!” Sliveran shrieked as he knocked Tarina and I onto our stomachs, ripped a chunk of material from our costume, and carved small hearts on our left shoulder blades with the initials N.B. and T.B. inside the hearts on the other sister’s back. The pain was intense as he carved into us as we laid there with blood dripping from our wounds. “And now these ladies will know what it’s like to truly be sisters!” Sliveran screeched as he drug us to our feet in a standing position, the crowd cheering loudly.

“Stop it!” I yelled as the crowd continued to cheer. “I remember what happened to us the other night!” The crowd laughed loudly and stared at me as if I was insane. “Stop it!” I paused to catch my breath. “Don’t you see... don’t you see what they’re doing? They’re trying to kill us!” I screamed as the crowd started an uproarious bout of laughter at my remark.

“We’re not trying to kill the two of you, Nalina...” P.T. said as he emerged from the crowd of sideshow entertainers. “We’re simply trying to separate the two of you so your sister can surpass you into a higher level of fame.” He paused again, “Didn’t you ever wonder what those documents referred to?” I shook my head no as he smiled a sinister grin. “Then perhaps you should ask your sister what was on those documents and why she consented to this.” A pain overcame my body much like that of death as I turned to see the devastating look on Tarina’s face.

She lowered her head in a shameful manner as she spoke to me, the crowd watching the scenario before them in awe. “I tried to tell you to stop speaking of such nonsense but you wouldn’t listen...”

“You... you knew about this and you never told me?” I whimpered silently. “You knowingly signed a paper to have us killed?” I yelled at her as her face became paler than usual.

“No! I signed a paper to have us separated so that we can live our own lives... not to be killed.” She said as she looked at the anguish upon my face when I released her hand that I had been holding previously. “You have to believe me, dearest sister. I... I just thought life would be more fulfilling if we could walk in it together but as individuals. I... I never would’ve signed anything if I knew that this was going to happen.” Tarina sniffled a bit as she spoke. “I am so sorry, Nalina... please forgive me.”

And at that exact moment, I felt a human emotion that I hadn’t felt in many years. For the first time since I was transformed into a vampire, I felt a single tear drop fall down my cheek. I was very confused by all of this and wasn’t exactly sure how to react so I quietly

replied. “Do it... perform the separation.”

“No!” Tarina shrieked as she turned to see Sliveran walking towards us with a large silver sword in his left hand.

“No, Tarina... this is what you’ve always wanted so it shall be done.” And with that remark Sliveran took it as a sign and sliced our bodies completely in half at the hip and we fell to the floor on the stage. The pain from that point on was something that I shall never forget. It felt as though my very existence had ceased to be as I looked at my sister and saw her laying inches from me for the first time in my life. “Tarina... help me...” I wept as I held my hand out to my sister. She raised her hand out to me as P.T. stepped on it to separate us once and for all.

“And now ladies and gentlemen,” P.T. shouted, “be the first to witness the world’s first live, and might I add successful, separation of siamese twins!” The crowd stood to their feet and cheered as the blood from our wounds dripped onto the stage. I soon felt the blood that ran through our veins gush from my body like a volcano. The feeling was unbearable but nothing could compare to what was about to happen. “And now before your very bloodthirsty eyes,” P.T. paused to allow the crowd to release a boisterous laugh. “We will exterminate the sister that will never ‘cut’ it as a true sideshow performer in this world. Drum roll please...” P.T. paused again. “Sliveran, perform the decapitation now!”

Suddenly, I saw the world as I had never seen it before. Sliveran quickly swung his sword in a downward motion and made a clean cut straight across my throat and decapitated me. “No!” Tarina shrieked hysterically as she rose to her feet and ran towards me before falling to the ground once more. “Nalina...” She bellowed as she held my hand, my last moments of breath ceasing to exist. “Don’t leave me, dearest sister... I can’t live without you...” Tarina wept as she too felt the human emotion of true pain for the first time in many years. “Please don’t leave me...” Tarina wept louder as a hush grew over the newly solemn crowd as she spoke yet again in a type of poetic fashion. “Your life has ended, your innocence is gone. This world no longer lives for you, it’s time to move on.” She paused to catch her breath as she held on tightly to my lifeless hand. “So please don’t cry, dear sister, or live in fear. Beauty doesn’t last forever... your end is finally here. For you see and I now know this is true, death comes to us all but for you... it was premeditated.” And then she wailed as she released my hand from hers and stood before the crowd with rage in her eyes.

P.T. saw the expression on Tarina’s face and said, “Why are you crying, my dear child? This is what you always wanted, complete and total separation from your sister! And now you have it and you’re upset about it?” P.T. said as he pointed towards Helga, Berethor, and Xander across the stage. “You and your sister stole the spotlight from Helga so she asked me to help her devise a plan to stop you from ever upstaging her in the future. I accepted the challenge that she laid before me and granted her request.” P.T. said with a smug look on his face, twirling his moustache through his fingers as he spoke.

Tarina looked confused as she walked towards P.T. with a feeling of revenge that was strong enough to burn through the souls of the damned. “Wha... what plan and wha... what do

they have to do with it?" Tarina gasped as she too pointed towards Berethor and Xander.

P.T. let out a boisterous cackle at that remark as he replied. "Well, how else do you think the plan came to be?" He paused as he walked towards me. "It's all very simple really... Helga wanted you gone so I found a vampire to kill the two of you which was obviously unsuccessful." P.T. paused again as the crowd cackled wildly. "And then Helga convinced Xander to perform a hypnotism on the two of you, but only after Berethor had promised Xander that he would in turn seduce you into trusting him."

Tarina was shocked at that remark as she felt an overwhelming gushing of blood emanating from her wounds. "You... you planned all of th... this?" P.T. nodded in agreement as he turned around to face the crowd. "You... you heartless bastard!" Tarina screamed as she fell to the stage floor once again.

The devious crowd rose to their feet once more and cheered as P.T. said, "And now ladies and gentlemen, we will perform the second decapitation of the evening!"

CHAPTER VIII

People once believed that time stood still when someone died, but as an immortal who has seen death I now know it is something that humans shall never truly understand. Time ceased to be when the crowd cheered once more for a second decapitation upon my sister. “Sliveran, the crowd awaits your final stroke upon this monster’s head!” P.T. paused to catch his breath. “Rid the world once more of this type of abomination and decapitate her!”

The crowd applauded loudly as Sliveran raised his sword above his head to decapitate my sister before she cried. “I’m sorry... forgive me.” And once those last words were uttered from her lips, the sword came hurling down and sliced straight through her neck with one swift thrust. The sinister crowd let out a boisterous cheer as her head detached itself from her body and rolled into the crowd in front of the stage. Suddenly, a waif thin woman in the crowd let out a ghastly screech as Tarina’s head rolled onto her foot. She and others finally realized that all the events that had taken place that night were not part of the sideshow performances. A gruesome outcry filled the carnival air as people began to trample each other trying to rid themselves of the heinous acts upon that stage. P.T. became hysterical as he screamed,

“Stop!” He paused briefly as the crowd turned to see what was the matter. “Don’t leave... this was the type of show you all wanted to see, was it not?” The herd of people grew silent as P.T. continued to speak, knowing that they all had an insatiable lust for death. “Did you not expect to see horrific sights when you paid to see this sideshow of freaks?” He shrieked towards the group of onlookers. “Did you not yearn to feel the cold clammy hands of death upon your shoulder? Did you not expect to see bloodshed on our last night in Manhattan?” P.T. cackled as the waif thin woman in the crowd screamed,

“You’re a murderer! And all of you people disgust me for thinking this is part of these fiendish performers’ act!” And as the woman turned to depart the crowd, P.T. pointed towards her and Sliveran came up from behind and slit her throat with one quick stroke of his sword. Blood spewed from her throat like a broken sprinkler head into the crowd as they started to trample each other once again.

“Stop!” P.T. screamed at the top of his lungs. “You all didn’t think you could witness what happened here tonight and not pay the price for it, did you?” A few of the members of the crowd turned to see what Mr. Barnum was referring to which was the worst thing that any of them would ever witness in their lifetime. “Berethor,” P.T. shouted as he turned towards his fellow sideshow performers. “Release these people from the visions that they have seen today...” P.T. cackled with a maniacal grin upon his face. “Light the torches now and burn them all!” Berethor nodded in agreement and quickly lit each and every one of his torches and began to set the carnival and everything within it on fire.

Without a moment’s hesitation, Berethor stuck a torch in his mouth and excreted a burst of flames into the crowd. Panic exploded throughout the crowd like a deadly

virus unleashed. A horrified stadium sized group of people ran for their lives as the carnival was set ablaze. Those that weren't trampled by terrified individuals were torched to mere ashes by Berethor's flames. And for those unfortunate humans who weren't burned to death or run over by a mob of frightened people, they were savagely mangled by Sliveran's massive sword across their throats.

"Kill them, kill them all!" P.T. screamed as he too began to attack the crowd with his monumental sized whip. For each person that crossed his path as he tore through the gang of potential victims, P.T. would crack them with his whip across their weak human flesh and cackle as blood spewed forth from their exposed lacerations. "Oh, the blissfulness that death can bring... it makes one's blood run cold and I will be there to watch them all suffer!" P.T. cackled as he walked through the newly appointed field of decaying corpses. "Freaks of the carnival," P.T. bellowed, "look upon the massacre we have created and destroy any and everybody that crosses your path!"

"Pl... please sir... sp... spare my life... I beg for your mercy..." A young boy cried out as he clutched onto the hem of P.T.'s bloodstained trousers. P.T. looked down at the boy covered with blood from lacerations across his stomach, knelt down next to him, and said.

"You mean nothing to me and now you shall suffer like the rest of them!" Rage enveloped P.T. at that point as he hurtled his whip across the young boy's face and beat him to death. Blood quickly emerged from the boy and landed on P.T.'s crisp white jacket. "You sniveling little wretch!" P.T. screeched as he mercilessly continued to beat the dead boy that laid at his feet. And then as if nothing had ever happened, P.T. turned towards his fellow sideshow performers and said in a rather calm tone. "I suggest that if you want to catch the train to Europe then you all need to gather all of your belongings and meet me at the carnival's entrance immediately." He paused to straighten his blood covered jacket, gaze upon the death and destruction that covered the carnival grounds, and continued to say, "I can't even imagine what the newspapers are going to say about all of this... I hope they depict me accurately." He cackled as he led his fellow carnival performers through the field of corpses towards the train station nearby... never to be seen or heard from for many years thereafter.

And as P.T. had hoped, the newspapers did depict him rather well. Reports stated that the merciful murdering, committed by the sideshow performers alone, continued for hours on end as the carnival grounds grew from a small flame to a crucial inferno that killed a few thousand innocent bystanders in a single blow. And for those who walked away from this tragedy that the newspapers described as "The Carnival Sideshow Of Horrors", always seem to recall the same occurrence as the one before. For everybody that was interviewed concerning what had happened that night in the autumn of 1893, everyone of them had said nothing was more horrifying than what they did to those poor vampiric siamese twins in front of an unknowing group of carnival goers. They suffered at the sick enjoyment of our entertainment.

And as I stand next to my sister in a world unbeknownst to us both, I try to think of better times of days long gone. For you see as you have read this story, we have gone

on to become restless spirits in a realm that is not like Heaven or Hell. We are terrified for what is to become of us, but we have learned that nothing can harm us as long as we're together. And as I finish my tragic tale for those who care to hear it, you'll be happy to know that beauty was bestowed upon me after all and the bond between sisters is something that even death can not touch...

FORSAKEN DREAMS

Edwin Ong

The body is nothing but a tool to get what the soul wants. At least that was the way it was to Jillian Hebert. As she made her way through the dream, she knew it wasn't the first time she had been used and abused. She wanted the nightmares to stop, yet it always seemed far beyond her reach.

"What do you really want from me?"

"Nothing but your flesh. I need your body to possess."

The monster would appear and chase after her with the cruelest of intentions. She always ran away from the monster but, without exception, it consistently caught up with her. It was she who died every time, her dead and lifeless body becoming the plaything of the creature of the night. Sometimes it beat her to death; other times it tied her up and tortured her. Sometimes it raped her body in the foulest of ways before consuming her. Never had she emerged victorious.

"And if I refuse?"

"Then I will keep on hunting you in your dreams."

As she opened the creaky double door, she couldn't help but tremble with fear, for she knew that fear was what kept her alive. Fear was but her body's way of warning her of danger. She was so scared of this nightmare...yet, even more so of death.

"You know that I will keep on running away from you."

"You're only delaying the inevitable. I will have you."

The chilly air greeted her as she entered the stairwell. She shivered as the familiar cold feeling swept over her. She was used to the cold. She remembered the time she kissed her first boyfriend. His heart was cold as ice, though she didn't realize it then. The times he had beaten her were long over, yet the feeling of warmth still remained only an illusion to her.

"Why do you want me, anyhow?"

"Because I can see the emptiness of your life. You have less to lose than all the others."

She made her way down the dark stairway. It wasn't the first time she had descended into the darkness. She used to be her daddy's little angel. That was before the drugs and Juvenile Hall. Then she became a fallen dove.

"My life isn't empty. I have friends, and they love me."

"Ah yes, but do you really love them back?"

As she exited the building, she looked around the darkened parking lot. No one was in sight. She remembered the loneliness of her life. It had hurt to be so alone, yet there was emptiness in it which she craved. She kept going.

"Please...I do. I even have a best friend."

"Yet, you prefer to be alone."

She started walking through the lot and saw an open manhole. The bottomless pit looked so inviting. It wasn't the first time she had thought about entering a dark, moist hole. She had liked other girls, too. She remembered the first time she kissed a girl. As her tongue roamed toward the dark, moist hole, it felt so good, and yet, so bad.

"I can try to live my life better. Is that what you want?"

"You can try all you want; it cannot stop you from being what you really are."

She approached a playground. The empty swings glowed under the pale moonlight. She had seen those chains before. Being raped for the first time had changed her...yet, it also went far beyond that. Through a lifetime of mistakes, she preferred to be submissive rather than dominant. Visiting those bondage clubs, she preferred to be on the bottom rather than on top.

"I can't help being what I am, but I also don't want to die."

"You're already dead. Dead to yourself and to the world."

She saw cracks on the sidewalk as she kept walking down the empty street. She had seen those scars before—on herself after her stepfather had thrown that iron at her. It had scarred her for life—both on her flesh and inside her heart. She was still beautiful, or so she thought, but the wound marks on her soul made her ugly inside.

"They made me what I am. It was their fault."

"Everything was taken from you, yet you took no action to get it back."

The raindrops began falling. It was like the tears she remembered crying whenever she thought back on her life. The rivers flowed down her face into a lake. She had swum many times into that lake made of regret to be drowned in the sorrow. It was a lake that had no lifeguard to pull her out. She was all alone with her tears.

"But I thought I tried so hard...I wanted it back."

"However hard you try, it still remains beyond your grasp."

A bolt of lightning struck from high in the sky above. She remembered sensing a light within her last boyfriend, shining through her darkness, and how he had tried to show her a place where she could see more clearly. She never forgave him for leaving her heart that one night to visit

someone else's. She knew that all light would eventually give way to the darkness. All light but the sun, where she was afraid of being burned.

"I've had no one to help me."

"You had yourself. That should have been enough."

A cold hand gripped her shoulder. Jillian spun around and came face to face with the monster. She had always run away from the monster in her dreams. But now, maybe this could be her only chance to escape the coldness, the fear, the hurt, and the suffering of her life. Her body was only a tool to get what her soul wanted anyway.

"Fine, you can have my body."

"Then it belongs to me now."

The monster plunged its hand into her chest and yanked out her heart. She could feel the pain as all four of her heart chambers snapped. She stood there, bleeding. Then the monster entered her...penetrating her in both body and soul...

That was when Jillian woke up, drenched in her own sweat. She knew she was a different person from that moment on. The monster had finally gotten her.

* * *

Years later...

"Situation update. As of yet, the terrorists have made no demands. There are still no life signs of any of the hostages."

At age twenty-three, Jillian Hebert was the youngest person on the SWAT team. She was also the only woman. Something had pushed her far beyond the limits of her body and made her much more adventurous than she was a few years back. A force she couldn't even begin to comprehend possessed her.

"Then we're going in. Why the hell did they choose to take over an old museum of all places? Who are these terrorists again?"

She could feel its infectious roots writhing deep within her. The icy cold touch of the monster caressed her very heart, trying to find her soul. There was no antidote for that virulent fungus. Yet, she didn't want any, even if she could have it. This was the moment when she felt the most alive.

"They're some kind of cultists, who worships some make-believe demon called the Dream Eater."

Jillian eased her tense fingers, trying to calm herself. Tactical breathing helped her relax. She needed all the digits of her hands steady for the moment the trigger required pulling. The harsh police training had been ingrained into her relentlessly. She knew she was a professional.

"This should be a walk in the park then. Everyone get ready. Go!"

The doors of the SWAT van opened, and Jillian followed her teammates out. She was greeted by the breeze of the night. It was the second layer of chills which caressed her body instead of her heart, like a cold lover who wanted her for her outside, rather than inside.

"Element, stack up."

The SWAT team approached the giant doors of the dark building and stacked against it.

“Red team, try the door.”

“Locked, sir.”

“Breach, bang, and clear. Go when ready.”

“Yes, sir.”

One of her teammates lifted a gun and fired a slug round into the doorknob. As the door burst open, another teammate threw in a flashbang.

“Go! Go! Go!”

“Police! Freeze!”

Jillian stormed in, holding her sub-machine gun at the ready. She scanned the room. The weapon-mounted tactical light pierced through the darkness like a bright needle. Shining the light of justice onto the shadows of crime was her job. Order onto chaos. Good onto evil.

“Clear!”

“Copy. Proceed.”

Jillian approached another set of closed doors and stacked against it with another teammate. Her teammate kicked the door open and threw in a flashbang. Jillian entered after it exploded. It was a room of dead bodies. The lifeless rested below her, so dead, and yet, as she stood over them, so alive.

“I found some of the hostages. They’re dead.”

“Understood. Keep going.”

There was a door on the opposite side, which led to a dark room. It was open, as though inviting Jillian to come in.

“Blue team, stack up on that door.”

“Yes, sir.”

Jillian and her team stacked against the nearby door.

“Move and clear.”

“Go! Go! Go!”

Her three teammates rushed in. Jillian was about to follow them in when the door slammed shut in her face, knocking her back. There were bloodcurdling screams from her teammates soon after that. Jillian stood up and kicked the door open. Her teammates were lying in various uncomfortable positions—all dead. She quickly scanned the room with her weapon-mounted light. There was no one else in sight.

“Officers down!”

There was no response from the radio; only an eerie static sounded. The lights in the room flickered on and off. Jillian noticed that she was all alone. She backtracked out the room and back to the front museum entrance. The security gate was down; she couldn’t exit the museum.

“Hebert!” a police officer shouted from beyond the gate. “The gate suddenly lowered. It’ll take us a while to cut through this thing. We lost radio contact with your whole team. You should stay here until we can get more reinforcements in.”

“No,” Jillian responded. “I have teammates all over the building, and they’ll need my help.”

“Alright,” the cop replied. “Just watch your six.”

Jillian went back to the room where the dead SWAT officers were. Shining her tactical light around the dark room, she noticed that the bodies were all gone. She hesitated for a split second, then proceeded to the next room.

There was a dark figure in the center of the room. He was dressed in military-style black and gray camouflage fatigues and wearing a black mask.

“Freeze, motherfucker!” Jillian shouted.

The terrorist raised his hand, and Jillian felt herself thrown backward, out the door through which she had come. She landed hard on her back, and swore.

Jillian wasted no time getting back up. She cautiously made her way back into the room and saw that the terrorist was nowhere in sight. Then, a strong arm grabbed her from behind.

She grunted as she flipped her attacker over. It was one of her dead SWAT teammates.

“Michael?” Jillian asked incredulously. “What the fuck? I saw you die.”

The dead cop lay still. The thuds of bodies collapsing sounded behind her. The female cop spun around and saw the bodies of the remaining two dead teammates sprawled on the ground right in front of her. She checked them all for a pulse. There was none.

Jillian turned just in time to spot another terrorist crawling on the ceiling toward her like a giant spider. She raised her weapon at it. Before she could get a clear shot, the terrorist crawled up into an open vent and disappeared.

Suddenly, gunfire erupted from an adjacent room. Jillian turned, rushed toward the door leading to that room and kicked it open. A wounded SWAT member was trading fire with a terrorist. She entered the room and shot the terrorist in the back.

“Hebert, watch out!” the SWAT cop shouted. “These guys aren’t human.”

The terrorist she had shot suddenly rolled over and started crawling toward the teammate at an uncanny speed.

“Holy shit!” he shouted as the terrorist crawled above him. “Get him off me, Jill!”

“I don’t have a clear shot, David,” Jillian shouted back. “Kick him off!”

Suddenly, a blade sprouted from the terrorist’s arm and slashed downward, slicing the teammate’s head in half.

“No!” Jillian shouted, and sprayed the terrorist with her sub-machine gun. Seeing that he was clearly dead, she turned and scanned the rest of the room carefully. It was empty. Another masked terrorist appeared in the doorway. Instead of a weapon, it was holding some kind of doll.

“Freeze!” Jillian shouted.

The terrorist cackled with evil laughter and twisted the doll. Jillian felt her arm was about to snap. With her good arm, she fired her gun one-handed in short, controlled bursts. One of the bullets struck the doll, and Jillian felt a sudden pain in her stomach. She doubled over, her vision fading. Suddenly, the pain in her abdomen ceased. She raised her head and saw that she had nailed the terrorist between the eyes.

She was about to step forward when the fallen terrorist with the bladed arm suddenly sat up and slashed at her. Jillian felt pain again as the blade sunk into her foot. She unloaded the rest of the magazine into the terrorist before limping back into cover. As she reloaded her sub-machine gun, she heard a burst of gunfire coming from the opposite room. Crouching low in a tactical stance, she approached the open doorway. Another SWAT officer was trading fire with a terrorist. Jillian entered the room and shot the terrorist in the side.

“Hebert, this one can mind-control!” the SWAT officer shouted. “Get out of here now!”

Suddenly, the officer jerked and raised his shotgun at Jillian. Jillian fired a few more rounds into the terrorist’s body and the officer collapsed. She rushed to the officer’s side and helped him up.

“Come on, we must find out what these guys are after.”

The two of them rushed into an adjacent hall. A nearby wall exploded, showering the both of them with debris. A uniformed terrorist appeared from the hole in the wall holding two long swords. Jillian fired a burst at the terrorist. Her foe moved his swords with uncanny speed, striking the bullets with his swords. He then started to rush toward the SWAT officers.

Jillian tossed a flashbang, which suddenly exploded, temporarily stunning the sword-wielding terrorist.

“Shoot!” she yelled. “Now!”

Jillian’s partner blasted the terrorist with his shotgun, blowing a bloodied pit in the terrorist’s torso.

“Let’s go.”

The two cops rushed through the hole in the wall and into a gigantic room. Unexpectedly, the ceiling collapsed and more SWAT officers rappelled down.

“What’s the situation?” one of them asked. “We lost radio contact with your team.”

Jillian was about to answer when gunfire erupted in the room. The officer with the shotgun collapsed, blood spurting from his neck. Jillian turned and saw a terrorist wielding two pistols and firing at her teammates.

A SWAT officer collapsed with each shot until the remaining SWAT members sprayed the terrorist with gunfire from all sides.

When the gunfire subsided, screams of agony were heard in the adjacent room, followed by the sound of bodies being ripped to shreds.

“We’ve got officers down!”

“Cover that sector.”

Jillian joined the new officers and cautiously approached the door.

“Door’s locked.”

“Set up a charge. Breach and clear.”

An officer planted an explosive on the door. The team cowered as it exploded.

“Go! Go! Go!”

Jillian entered, followed by the rest of her team. It was a room full of dead terrorists, who were lying before some sort of altar. Their bodies were torn to pieces. The altar was vibrating. Flames instantly engulfed the room.

“Get back!”

Something gripped Jillian’s heart. She rushed forward and stood in front of the altar. Jillian felt no pain from the flames. The altar exploded, and in its place stood a huge, black portal.

“No...” a weak, unfamiliar voice sounded.

Jillian turned and saw a wounded terrorist gasping his final breaths.

“We were...trying to stop...the Dream Eater...”

Suddenly, a huge, scaly demon arm exploded out of the portal and grabbed Jillian’s neck. The rest of the creature’s body began emerging from the portal. It looked like a giant serpent with arms.

Jillian realized her gun was empty. She kned the Dream Eater hard, and then whacked it with the butt of her gun. The creature staggered backward, but its grip on her throat didn’t release. Instead, it only got tighter.

As Jillian reached desperately for her backup sidearm, she realized that she was passing out. The last thing she saw was the creature’s serpentine eyes hypnotizing her.

* * *

Jillian Hebert was running again in her dream. But this time she wasn't running away from a monster. Instead, she was running toward one in the dark night. She hurriedly began climbing a cold fence. It reminded her of climbing that huge, icy mountain. How near the brink of death she was. One slipup meant falling miles down below. She was so full of life then, as she was now.

"I know you're there, Dream Eater. I'm coming for you, you motherfucker."

She leapt down from the fence and rush onward. She had only gone a few yards when she suddenly felt her foot giving way and fell face down into a swimming pool. Unfazed, she kept swimming to the other side. It felt exactly like the time she went scuba diving for pearls. Back then, she was swimming deep in the underwater caverns and avoiding the giant crocodiles.

"No one chokes me and gets away with it. I'm gonna buy a strap-on just for you."

She emerged from the other side of the swimming pool. A motorcycle was lying on its side in front of her. She hopped on it and started the engine. It roared to life. Jillian remembered the roar of the plane's engine just before she leapt out to skydive. She was a falling angel, and nothing could stop her from soaring down from the sky. Nothing.

"Did you hear me, you sack of shit? I'm gonna kill you."

It was hard to see in the thick fog. Suddenly, a scaly hand reached out from nowhere, gripped her throat tightly and pulled her off the motorcycle. It was her first day applying for SWAT, and an instructor had put her in a chokehold. No woman had ever managed to meet the physical requirements to join the team. Nobody thought she could do it. But she had proved them all wrong.

"Ghnnn...die..."

With surprising strength, Jillian plunged her hand into the creature's chest and pulled out its heart. The grip on her neck suddenly loosened. The Dream Eater howled an inhuman wail into the air. It shuddered and collapsed. Jillian suddenly felt queasy, and also felt a familiar presence leaving her body. Her monster stood in front of her.

"It was you. You changed my life. You gave me the strength to defeat the Dream Eater. Yet, you're leaving me now. Why?"

"I could only possess you when you were weak. You've become too strong for me."

Jillian reached for the monster with her free hand. Only empty air was grasped. It was unlike the past. She couldn't feel the monster anymore.

"You only wanted to help me all along. But how can I live without you?"

"You already had the fight in you, Jillian. All I did was bring it out."

She looked up and saw the monster's face clearly for the first time. Her very own face stared back at her. Suddenly, she understood. Tears began seeping down her cheeks with the revelation.

"This whole time...you were me."

"I am the part of you best forgotten now."

It had been many years ago since the monster had first come into her existence. Ever since she had been abused by life for the very first time, the monster had started visiting her. As her life grew more miserable, the monster only grew stronger and more fearsome. Now she realized the monster was her.

"Don't leave me, please."

"Goodbye, Jillian."

The monster faded away, and Jillian was left all alone once again.

* * *

Jillian opened her eyes. She was standing in the museum in her bloodied SWAT outfit. Before her lay the dead body of the Dream Eater. In her hand she held its heart. She noticed the portal had closed.

“Holy shit!” a SWAT teammate gasped. “Did you see what Jill did? She fucking tore that thing’s heart right out.”

“I saw it,” another said. “I just don’t believe it.”

“Hebert.”

Jillian’s radio suddenly came to life.

“The museum is secure. Go to the front entrance.”

Jillian turned and walked past her stunned teammates. She made her way to the front entrance of the museum where she had come in earlier, passing the dead bodies of terrorists, SWAT members, and civilians. Her police commander stood before her.

“Hebert,” he began, “you know that supernatural forces really do exist and can sometimes be a threat to humanity.”

Jillian nodded.

“This is top secret,” he continued. “The government is setting up a new special force to combat these things, and we need people like you in it. You seem to have been born ready for this sort of thing. Are you interested in joining?”

“Yes, sir,” Jillian answered. “What is this force called?”

“Paranormal Extermination,” the police commander replied. “Or PAREX for short.”

Jillian’s forsaken dreams might be over, but her new life was just beginning.