



Crimson Regret
By A.R. Moler

The latex was going to be a total bitch to get out of his eyebrows. Woochie demon horns, Ben Nye crimson grease paint, black eyebrow pencil, Velvet black mascara, and black lipstick. Custom fitted fangs and a little denture adhesive. Spray his entire face and neck with Kryolan fixative so the makeup wouldn't run or smear for at least a couple hours and he was good to go.

Brian Townsend stood back from the mirror. He was one deliciously handsome devil. Kind of literally, at least for the evening. No one at the Halloween party would be likely to immediately recognize him as a soft-spoken architect. His skin was colored a bright fire engine red. He had used the latex to mask over the outer edges of his eyebrows so that he could sculpt the rest into steeply upswept points. Three different shades of gold-colored hairspray gave his blond hair a candle flame sort of glow. Brian ran his tongue over the points of his fangs. They seemed secure enough. It would be mighty embarrassing to have them fall

off in his beer. He had spent nearly ninety minutes on the prosthetics and makeup. Now it was time for the tuxedo. He had found it in a thrift store for eighteen bucks.

The party was being thrown at Alicia Day's house. She was one of his fellow architects and they were friends. Alicia's main goal in life lately seemed to be playing matchmaker. She had noticed within a month of his starting with the firm that he was unattached. She had paraded more than a dozen women in his direction, only to be astounded that her efforts were never more successful than getting him to go out for a drink with them. She had been mystified and accused him of studying to be a monk.

He had finally very carefully admitted to her that he had no interest in women, not in the bed partner sort of way. That had given her food for thought, apparently. And she had gone nearly a month without further efforts. The last few weeks, she was obviously on a different tack, asking him leading and slightly embarrassing questions about which actors he thought were sexy. He was moderately sure she was planning on aiming him at some feather-brained cutie at the party. Oh, well, maybe he'd flirt and have a little fun.

God knew, he could use something light-hearted and frivolous. Over a year ago, his long-time lover had ditched him. Kyle had just up and told Brian that he was interested in someone new, and proceeded to move out of their apartment. Brian had been devastated. It had taken him months to get his head back in gear. Brian had moved, changed jobs, and basically tried to start his life over. But there was no one in it. Maybe it was better that way. Damn, he was being pathetic!

He shook himself out of his dismal introspection and grabbed his keys.

Wow, when Alicia had said it was going to be a fairly big party, Brian hadn't realized she meant sixty or seventy people. Jesus, she must have invited every single person in their office and then some. And then he remembered her husband, Mike, was a stock analyst. Mike had probably invited a whole slew of the people he worked with, too.

The brownstone was packed with skeletons, witches, monsters, a few vampires, a trio dressed as the Three Musketeers, and a raft of other costumed bodies. He stood in the hallway looking for someone familiar. A wench whose bust-line was just barely contained by her bodice cruised by.

"Ooh, aren't you the hot one!" she teased. He grimaced at the pun.

"Maybe I'll see if I can light your fire a little later," he responded. Not. But it was all in the name of fun. He went in search of a beer. The main room downstairs held a table full of food, along with little labels like "witch fingers" and "pickled eyeballs." He was particularly amused by the "boogers on a stick," which apparently were pretzels with something green and juicy on the tip. But the absolutely most disgusting thing was the "kitty litter" cake. It looked real enough to make you gag, even if it did smell like chocolate and peppermint.

“Oh, my God! Brian?” Alicia shrieked when Brian ran into her later. “I almost didn’t even recognize you. That is the most awesome makeup job I’ve ever seen.”

“All the better to tempt the unwary,” said Brian. He gave her a fanged grin.

“I never would have expected you to go so all out. Where’d you learn how to do the makeup stuff?”

“College. I hung out with a batch of people who liked to run the science fiction convention circuit. They taught me an obscene amount of makeup and costuming stuff.”

“Did you see Elaine? She’s dressed as a Hershey’s Kiss. She said what with being eight months pregnant, it was the only thing she could find that would fit.” They both laughed merrily.

Brian drifted for a while, chatting with a few people he knew, making lecherous comments whenever possible. It was fun. Questing for a second beer, he noticed a tall man in a Zorro outfit. The black pants were skintight and displayed the man’s long, lean legs. There was absolutely nothing shabby about that tight ass either. Zorro was talking to one of the women from the accounting department. Brian dredged his mind for the woman’s name. Leigh? Leanne? No, Lenore. She was dressed in a spandex unitard, and was trying to pull off her best *Fantastic Four* impression. Unh, spandex was a privilege, not a right. Her body was definitely not the “looks good in spandex” type, but she was sweet.

“Hey, Lenore, care for a bite?” said Brian, and flashed his fangs at her. She blushed.

“Alicia told me you were a demon,” she giggled. “I was really surprised. Your makeup’s great. Like the tux, too.”

“Introduce me to your boyfriend,” Brian suggested.

“He’s not my boyfriend. Unless maybe I can convince him to be,” she grinned and patted Zorro on the butt.

“Should you need rescuing, I am at your service. I am, however, not in search of a wife, senorita,” said Zorro. His voice was low and smooth. The guy was certainly playing it up. “Could I beg your indulgence and ask you to point me toward... drinks?”

“I was actually headed in that direction myself,” said Brian. “Maybe you could follow me... along the path paved with good intentions?”

“Ouch! ...Lead on, kind sir,” said Zorro.

The bar was set up in the corner of the kitchen and people were stacked around it, getting drinks. Brian stepped on something that rolled out from under his foot and he lurched

backward, trying not to fall. Zorro grabbed him around the chest and lifted him back to his feet.

“Oh, man, sorry. I stepped on something,” apologized Brian.

“No problem. I’m good at rescuing ...people,” replied Zorro. He smiled at Brian. Oooh, baby. Maybe it was the fact that he couldn’t see the upper half of the man’s face, except the eyes, but that jaw line and that lower lip. That was a mouth just begging to be kissed, thought Brian. He was really glad his make-up was bright shade of crimson red, because it would hide his intense blush.

That hesitation before Zorro’s last word... Was that a hint? Did Zorro like guys? Brian was suddenly having bad flashbacks of a sombrero with pom-poms: not sexy. This guy was hot. The puffy sleeves and loose cut of his black poet’s shirt accentuated his broad shoulders. The deep vee at the neck was only partly laced up and showed a tantalizing slice of hairy chest and strong collar bone. If he stood here looking at this guy much longer, he was going to need to adjust his pants, because they were definitely feeling too tight.

The crowd of people shuffled so that they were able to move close enough to the bar to order.

“I’ll take a Hoegaarden,” said Brian. Trust Alicia to serve something a generous cut above domestic swill. No hard liquor, but eight kinds of beer and a half dozen wine selections.

“What’s Hoegaarden?” asked Zorro.

“It’s a Belgian wheat beer. It’s good. Try one. Especially since they’re free,” said Brian.

“Okay. You’ve got a point,” said Zorro.

“Two in fact,” said Brian, aiming a finger at his horns. Zorro groaned.

“Give me one of the Hoegaardens, too,” he said to the bartender. “Maybe I can drown myself before this guy kills me with the puns.”

“I’m going to go outside for a while. It’s really packed in here,” said Brian.

“I’ll catch up to you in a few minutes. I need to go say hi to Mike.” Zorro squeezed between several people and headed off toward the front of the house. Brian presumed the Mike Zorro was referring to was Alicia’s husband. He went out through the door at the back of the kitchen out onto the porch. It was at least twenty degrees cooler outside, but it was a welcome change after the press of people inside.

A half moon was peeking through a broken layer of clouds. Nice night, he thought, leaning on the railing. If Zorro did actually come back to talk to him, how exactly did he go about finding out if the guy was interested? Much as he hated the gay bar scene, if you went to one of those, you generally didn’t have to worry about getting decked if you propositioned somebody or copped a feel. He’d done that once at another party, long ago. Slightly drunk, he’d felt up a really nice behind. The guy had been absolutely pissed and hauled off and punched him in the face. One black eye later... Brian had learned his lesson.

After twenty minutes, Brian figured he'd learned another lesson. Guys who were interested showed up. Zorro hadn't. Brian had already been at the party for a couple hours, seen and been seen by a host of his co-workers. It was probably time to start thinking about packing it in and heading for home. He heard the porch door open and he glanced back. Four people came out; three were digging out cigarettes and lighters, but the last was Zorro, headed toward him.

"Thanks for the suggestion about the beer," he said. "It's good. I'd never heard of it before. You a beer snob?"

"Yeah, I guess you could say that. I can't stand most of the domestic stuff, except some of the microbrews," replied Brian. Zorro leaned back against the rail next to him, propping an elbow on it.

"So the demon has discerning tastes?"

"I'd like to taste you." Oh, shit, he couldn't believe he'd said that. Talk about a really bad pick up line. Once again, he was obscenely glad of the red makeup. Zorro was silent for a moment. Maybe the man was trying to find a way to be polite with his refusal.

"I... might be interested in letting you," he said. The comment promptly tied Brian's stomach in a knot. "Why don't we, uh... walk down in the garden?" Zorro suggested.

Brian nodded, suddenly tongue-tied. He followed the man in black down the steps into the landscaped backyard. The long narrow space had been decorated with bushes and trees. A couple of wooden benches and a stone fountain completed the wall-enclosed area. Zorro ducked behind a broad tree not too far from the exterior wall. He set his bottle on the ground and leaned back on the tree, legs crossed at the ankle. Brian stood a couple feet in front of him.

"You still interested?" asked Zorro softly.

Brian was nervous. He wasn't generally a instant gratification sort of guy. But, Christ, it had been a long time... Zorro held out a hand. Brian swallowed hard and stepped close. Long fingered hands settled lightly on his hips, tugging him closer. He had to separate his feet a little to avoid Zorro's and that left him straddling the other man's thighs.

There was a moment of awkward hesitation, and then Brian kissed him. An almost chaste brush of lips. That mouth, that soft full lower lip. Brian kissed him a little harder. Zorro's breath hitched a little and he pulled Brian closer.

Brian was now leaning gently against the length of Zorro's body, and he pushed his tongue into his partner's open mouth. Zorro tasted of the beer and something vaguely spicy. He could hear his blood pounding in his ears and it was rapidly rushing toward his groin. Brian moaned softly against the other man's mouth. He swiped his tongue along Zorro's teeth, and that drew a low sound from his partner. One of Zorro's hands was tangled in his hair, the other cupped his butt. That mouth was just so unbelievably delicious and, God, the guy could kiss, unlike so many men he'd known. Zorro was nipping gently at his lips, his own tongue exploring, plunging, tracing along his teeth.

Brian could feel the hard length of his partner's cock grinding up against the base of his own. He was still slightly straddling the other man's legs. He leaned into the embrace more, pushing his own erection harder against Zorro's. It was a slow, torturous friction that went on and on as the kiss intensified. His hand crept downward cupping the front of Zorro's groin, stroking his palm firmly on the fabric that separated his hand from what lay beneath. Suddenly, there were voices approaching and both men froze.

"How 'bout I fuck you up against the wall?" said a male voice.

"Thought you wanted to unlace my corset," replied a female voice.

"That's for later." And there was much low giggling as the voices passed toward the far end of the garden.

"Guess we're not the only ones looking for a place to make out like a couple of teenagers," said Zorro. His voice was a husky whisper in Brian's ear. Much as his body was just dying to continue what they were doing, he was suddenly a little uncertain at the thought of getting caught. "Didn't I see a tool shed in the corner near the deck?" said the man in black.

"Are you suggesting we go *into* the closet, as opposed to coming out?" said Brian. It was just too irresistible. Zorro groaned a little.

"How 'bout I suggest you stick something your mouth and spare me the puns?"

"Your sword maybe?"

"I'll give you a sword."

"I can suggest a really good place for it."

"Mmm, bet you can." Zorro pulled him back into a heated kiss. "Now about that closet..." he mumbled against Brian's lips.

"Might be locked."

"If it is, we'll have to come up with another plan." He grabbed Brian by the arm and took off in the direction of the alleged tool shed. Just as he'd said, there was a structure tucked in the corner of the backyard almost under the edge of the porch. Zorro pushed the door open and glanced inside. Shovels and rakes hung neatly on one wall and a variety of other garden tools were stacked below. The floor space however was empty where the door swung in. Zorro pulled him inside and leaned back against the door. It made a certain amount of sense. If he was leaning against it, it would make it difficult for someone outside to get the door open.

Brian swiftly returned to what he had been doing, rubbing the hard cock trapped beneath the black fabric of Zorro's slacks. In the near darkness, he pulled the belt buckle loose and then realized there was a second belt buckle, too.

"One's for the sword belt," whispered the masked man. Oh, yeah, forgot about that, thought Brian. He slid the fly down and hooked a thumb in the elastic of the other man's briefs. His hard cock bobbed free as Brian shoved his underwear down around his thighs. Brian's free

hand stroked him and Zorro huffed out a moan of pleasure. Brian dropped to his knees and licked across the already slick tip. His partner bucked slightly into the sensation.

“Watch the fangs, okay?” Zorro muttered. Brian snickered a little. He’d never sucked anyone off while wearing fangs before. First time for everything.

The guy tasted delicious. It would be nice to do this slow and really enjoy it, but this was not really the right place for that sort of thing. Too chilly, for one. He hollowed his cheeks a little and sucked on the hard cock, swirling his tongue around the tip. It only took a couple of minutes before his partner was coming with a harsh gasp. He stood up and leaned on Zorro’s chest, kissing him.

“Jesus, that was amazing... Your turn.” Brian was entranced by the low husky tone. He let the other man push him back against the door. His own pants were pushed down over his hips and, in the chilly air, he could feel the firm grip of a warm hand wrapped around his hard, aching cock. He hissed a little as the wet heat of a mouth took him in. This was going to be embarrassingly fast. That talented mouth was doing fabulous things and his head hit the door with a dull thunk as his partner deep-throated him. He came hard with a strangled groan. His legs were shaking as he hitched his pants back up and did the fly and belt with less-than-agile fingers.

“Good?” asked Zorro. His hands were tracing down Brian’s sides, beneath his jacket.

“Oh, yeah,” panted Brian. Zorro leaned in for another kiss, pinning him hard against the door, then easing back to just letting his body-weight gently hold Brian immobile.

“I know you won’t believe me, but I’m not usually the type to blow a guy the first time we meet. You intrigue me. The makeup, the bad puns, it’s... sexy and intelligent.”

“Did you just imply that you like me for my mind?”

“Yeah, I guess I did.” There was a long silence. In the darkness, the sounds of the party in the house above were filtering down. “No witty comeback?”

“Uh... No... I just kind of assumed it was a physical thing.”

“I like that part, too, but unless you’ve got a brain to go with a delicious body, I’m not interested.” Brian was floored. This wasn’t ending quite like he’d thought it would. “Maybe we should go back upstairs,” Zorro suggested. He opened the door and they stepped out in the half-light cast down over the edge of the porch.

“Um, you have my lipstick all over your mouth,” said Brian. The other man rubbed his sleeve across his face.

“Black on black shouldn’t show too much,” he smiled.

“Yeah, guess not,” replied Brian. “Might be lipstick other places, too...”

“Yeah, well, I don’t think anyone else is going to see that part tonight. Oh, damn...” Zorro was suddenly fishing in his pocket. He pulled out a buzzing cell phone and glanced at the

number. “Shit, shit, shit. Only night this week I’ve had off... Hey, what’s up? ...Okay, how long ago? ...Uh, okay, I’ll be there as soon as I can.” He thumbed off the phone.

“Problem?” asked Brian.

“Work. I gotta go.”

“Can’t you tell them to take a hike? You’re busy, call back in the morning?”

“Nope. I’m a cop, and there’s dead body waiting for me,” said Zorro.

Brian stood with his mouth hanging open as Zorro headed in the direction of the porch steps. The other man pulled off the head covering, and Brian saw dark brown hair, cut conservatively, a narrow straight nose and high forehead. He was gorgeous.

It wasn’t until Zorro had passed through the kitchen door that Brian realized he didn’t have a fucking clue who the guy was. No name, no number, nothing. He bolted up the stairs only to have to fight his way through the still crowded kitchen. He squeezed past numerous people with hasty excuses. But by the time he reached the front door, there was no sign of Zorro. He grabbed the arm of a lady skeleton.

“Did you see a guy dressed like Zorro go out the door?” he demanded.

“Oh, I don’t know. I wasn’t paying attention,” she said. Brian went out on the front porch and scanned the street. There was no sign of him. Brian banged his fist on the porch column. Damn, he needed a way to find Zorro or at least find out who the guy was. Where was a glass slipper when you needed one? Or, for that matter, a fairy godmother?

Oh. Maybe, just maybe, Alicia fit the bill for that role. He went back inside to find her.

“Alicia, I need your help,” said Brian. “I need to know the name of a guy who came to the party tonight. He was dressed as Zorro.” Alicia frowned a little at the request.

“I’m not sure who you mean,” she replied.

“Fairly tall, sort of thin, dressed all in black. Oh, and he said he was a cop,” offered Brian. Alicia’s husband Mike, who had been standing behind her facing in the other direction, turned around.

“Bet you mean Tristan. I think he’s the only one here tonight that’s a cop. Well, homicide detective, actually,” said Mike.

“Tristan Blake?” said Alicia.

“He left in a hurry. Said there was dead body waiting for him,” Brian commented.

“Yeah, that sounds like Tristan,” said Mike.

“Do you know how I can get in touch with him? We... um... were talking about beer. I’d like to invite him to a beer-tasting over at Hops-n-Scotch,” said Brian. It was the first plausible

thing that came to mind. It wasn't like he wanted to admit to the other part of the night's events.

"I'm sure I've got his email address somewhere. Probably on my PDA. We get together now and then for some pick-up hockey. Alicia, remind me to look up the address in the morning," Mike said. Brian heaved an internal sigh of relief.

These days, an email address was almost as good as glass slipper.

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Printed in the United States of America.

Torquere Press, Inc.: Sips electronic edition / October 2008

Torquere Press eBooks are published by Torquere Press, Inc., PO Box 2545, Round Rock, TX 78680