

For They Shall Inherit The Earth

by

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Prologue

London 1980

The large Gothic church of St Ignatius stood in its ancient, snow-covered graveyard in the borough of Lambeth. The dark spire pierced the frozen star-lit sky as a chill wind swept around the headstones

Father Kennedy threw his cigarette butt out into the dark and watched the wind create a flurry of sparks, then closed the heavy front door. He shuffled along the central aisle of the dimly-lit church past rows of empty pews. Suddenly he stopped and felt a shiver run down his spine as he spotted a dark figure through the gloom kneeling before the altar.

The figure rose with blazing red eyes and turned toward the priest and said: "Do not be afraid Father they have sent me here to prepare the way."

"You're a demon! You shouldn't be in here!" said the trembling, holy man.

"A demon in a church," said the figure with a chortle.

"Prepare the way! What do you mean?"

The distant sound of a phone ringing distracted the priest and he turned his head toward the sound. When he looked back the figure had gone and the large Bible, which normally lay closed on the altar, was open at The Revelation of St John the Divine.

Meanwhile, in the New York City borough of Queens a boy child was born to single parent Mia Baumann. She named the child Thomas.

Part One

City Under Shadow

Chapter One

Present Day

A full moon shone over a wind-blown Balgay Hill as Dundee absorbed another Halloween. Children screamed and laughed in the distance as they tricked or treated their way around houses decorated with cardboard ghouls and pumpkin lanterns.

In the graveyard the trees and shrubs waved in the wind which caressed the headstones before heading over the sleeping river Tay. Small animals scurried around the foot paths, separating the lines of graves. A lone dog ran across the iron bridge which connected the cemetery with the hill where the pale-domed Mills Observatory sat.

The moonlight illuminated a large, silver granite monolith with an inscription which read: ‘A time which has ended in this world has just begun in another’. The wind made the rusty chain, which ran around the structure, creek.

Clouds passed over the moon as the graveyard quaked. A rumbling noise filled the air around the monolith as a huge hole formed where turf and soil had sunk out of sight.

A cruel, howling wind erupted as a figure rose from the pit and hovered before descending onto the path beside the stone.

Didier Grondin gazed around the cemetery with crimson eyes as the small animals ran back to the safety of their holes. He laughed! *It was good to be back in the physical again*, he thought. He didn’t need a fucking key to move between worlds he was way too powerful for that! He had gained power in the Dark Realm by destroying the demon Hel and her father Loki, then absorbing their energy. The extra power was enough to allow him to ‘bridge’ the worlds so he could begin his campaign.

Grondin walked across the iron bridge, passed the deserted observatory and descended the slopes of the hill. He strolled through the streets of the city among groups of people in fancy dress. Eventually he took refuge from the crowds in the Howff Graveyard where he sat on a wooden bench. *I need another name*, he thought. He gazed up at an old office block where light blazed out of every window before being permeated by the darkness. "That's it!" he said to himself as he stood up, “Derek Colin Thomson.”

Shadows flowed across the path as he walked past the darkened headstones and left the cemetery. *I need money*, he thought, walking through the city streets before coming to a halt in front of a blue illuminated sign high on a wall which read: ‘Discovery Casino’. *Perfect*, he thought with a grin.

Two heavy muscled men in poor fitting black suits stood on either side of the main casino door as well-dressed people entered the building. Thomson ducked in behind a man and woman in their late forties. The woman wore a dark, violet velvet dress under a black suede coat while the man wore a light, grey suit.

“Evening,” said the man as they approached the security men.

“Evening,” replied one man.

Thomson approached the bouncers as the couple disappeared through the open doors.

“Evening,” he announced.

The men looked him up and down before one asked: “Excuse me sir, but are you a member?”

“No.” Thomson replied.

“Well I'm afraid we can't let you in.”

“Can't I go in for tonight?” Thomson pleaded.

“I'm afraid not. You'll have to fill out a membership form and return it with an ID,” said the doorman as he reached behind one of the open doors and grabbed a form from a shelf.

Suddenly the other doorman screamed and clapped his hands over his eyes.

“What's wrong Tom?” shouted the other bouncer throwing aside the application form.

Blood oozed between the fingers of the stricken man as people in the line behind Thomson screamed and shouted. In the pandemonium Thomson slipped into the club and walked along a dark hallway which had glitter stars stuck to the ceiling and walls. He pulled back into the shadows as two security men ran past on their way to the front door. *His trick had worked well*, he thought with a laugh.

The main lounge was a mass of busy roulette and poker tables. Slot machines lined two of the four walls. A bar ran the length of another wall and waitresses flowed between it and the tables. Thomson walked up to where a young woman sat behind a barred window with a 10 cm horizontal gap at the bottom.

“I would like five thousand pounds worth of chips,” he said with red eyes.

The cashier gasped and absent-mindedly selected various chips and pushed them through the gap taking no money.

Thomson sat at a roulette table with two others: a middle-aged Chinese man and a younger man with cropped red hair. The croupier, a woman in her late twenties, was dressed in a dark, grey skirt with a matching waistcoat over a white blouse.

Thomson placed all his chips on red as the croupier announced: “Place your bets please.”

She spun the wheel after other bets were made and, as it slowed, the ball bounced a few times before landing on 21 red.

“Twenty-one red,” said the woman in a casual tone while pushing chips toward Thomson, who again put them all on red. They spun the wheel, and again the ball landed on red. The Chinese man let out a sigh as they shoved Thomson's winnings toward him.

After moving from table to table Thomson decided it was time to leave the casino as his winning was attracting the attention of not only the punters, but the management. He cashed in the chips and strolled along the hallway with the twinkling stars.

Outside, Thomson took a deep breath and patted the pocket where he had placed the cheque for £220,000; he had asked for the remaining £5000 in cash. He strolled along the street past two drunks who were more interested in fish and chips than him.

Back in the hotel Thomson lay back on the double bed in his Executive\Club room and switched on the television. The late news filled the screen; another body had been found in a field to the west of the city, announced the newscaster; that made three in the last four weeks all with the same markings. It now looked as if Dundee had a serial killer on the loose, the woman continued. Thomson raised his head and stared at the images of police in and around a field. “Mm... interesting” he said to himself.

Chapter Two

Matthew Wilson could only gaze at the vision of a huge vampire bat with crimson eyes as it hovered over him; the large, black wings flapping furiously. He tried to move, but it was as if his whole body was paralysed. Then, the creature turned into Didier Grondin and he woke up and jumped out of bed. He anxiously looked around the bedroom, but only the darkness stared back.

After showering and dressing Matthew yawned strolling into the kitchen. He opened the window blinds and watched the wind shake small shrubs in his back-garden through the early morning light. The shrill ring of the telephone brought him out of the reverie.

“Yeah, hullo?” he grunted into the receiver.

“Mattie, it's David de Longford.”

“Jeez! How are you doing?”

“I'm fine. Look, I'm sorry for phoning so early, but did you have a weird dream?”

“What, the one with the bat that turned into Grondin?”

“Yeah, listen I don't know how he's done it, but I think he's slipped back into the physical world!”

“Oh no!”

“Do you still have the Key?”

“It's safe; I checked on it yesterday.”

“Well, check again and be careful. I don't think he's after it though. I don't know where he is, or what he's up to, but it won't be for the good of the planet that's for sure.”

After finishing his breakfast Matthew strolled into the lounge and sat on the settee. His mind went back to the cave where he and David psychically pushed Grondin and the demon Hel back into the Dark Realm. *How could Grondin have freed himself without the Key and if he has managed it what was the point in protecting the Key from him, he thought?*

He left the house into a bright day with a cold wind which made him pull the zip of his jacket up to its fullest extent. Then, scurrying along the street Matthew glanced at the old abbey which brought back memories of the battle for the Key. He thought: *Grondin was desperate to attain the Key; so what has changed?*

He arrived at his work, Arbroath Library, and discovering no-one around he at once took the key for the basement from beside the computer on the main desk.

A musty smell greeted him as he pushed open the heavy, brown wooden door and switched on the light. He entered the old vaulted store room and searched along the lower shelf on one side of the room. After finding what he was looking for, Matthew stuck his hand behind an old book with a worn, brown cover and pulled out a grey cash box.

The lock resisted his small key at first, but relented when he applied more pressure. He gazed at the bronze key with its green patina as it sat peacefully in the packing. The inscription on the handle which could transport a person or something from one world to another, seemed to bewitch Matthew; so he slammed the lid shut. *If Grondin was back, it wouldn't be safe in here; or maybe it would be if he's not interested in it, he thought, as he locked the box and hid it back behind the book.*

Matthew felt a heavy gloom settle over him as he climbed the stairs. *Not back to this demon shit again, he thought, as memories of his girlfriend, Janey, flooded his mind, who turned out to be the demon Hel.*

“All this is supposed to be over,” he said to himself, shaking his head.

“What's supposed to be over Wilson?” Kelly, one of his colleagues, asked at the top of the stairs.

Matthew looked up in surprise, and said: “Nothing just singing, that's all!”

“I think you'd better learn to whistle then, mate!” she teased.

As he reached the top of the stair Matthew watched as she slipped behind the main desk. She had on a long, blue sweater over black legging. Matthew had been working up courage to ask her out on a date for weeks, and he had decided he would do it that day, or maybe... the next!

At lunchtime, in the common room, he read the local daily newspaper while eating a cheese and pickle sandwich. An article which attracted his attention was entitled: 'Mysterious Hole Found in Balgay Cemetery Dundee'. Workmen had found a large hole in the upper part of the cemetery next to a large monolith. Police suspected vandals, but were at a loss as to why someone would dig a large hole then apparently walk away. They found no other damage.

Matthew recalled that demons occasionally appeared out of holes in the ground because of the way they relate the physical world and other dimensions in space, and a shiver ran up his spine. Was Grondin close-by?

The next day, his day off, Matthew watched rain sweep across the rooftops from his bedroom window and then, stepping over the newspaper from the previous day, which was lying on the floor by his bed, he headed downstairs and made coffee and toast.

The mail delivery had brought nothing of great interest to read so he switched on the radio, and the kitchen filled with the voice of a newsreader discussing the upcoming General Election. Matthew abruptly turned it off and consumed his breakfast in silence. He then shaved and showered; deciding to go to Dundee... to Balgay Cemetery.

Raindrops chased one another sideways on the bus window as it sped along the dual carriageway toward Dundee. *Should I be doing this?* Matthew thought as he gazed at the wet countryside speeding by. *Maybe he should leave it well alone or phone David, but he couldn't go running to David all the time; or could he after all it was David who had phoned, and Grondin was his nemesis—the two demons had been feuding for eons!*

Eventually the bus pulled into Dundee Bus Station and Matthew climbed down the steps past the driver. He then strolled along the streets of the city after leaving the bus station as the rain clouds decided it was time to stop persecuting the citizens.

He entered Balgay Park where workmen swept up wet leaves. A foreboding coldness passed through his body as if something was telling him to stop. He followed the path in between the two parts of the hill connected by the blue painted iron bridge. Walking below it he wondered if Grondin *had* re-entered the world in the area.

Matthew entered the graveyard by the side of an overgrown, open mausoleum which had the words: 'This House is Appointed for All the Living' etched into the lintel, and he climbed up the hillside passing the ancient headstones of former Dundee citizens.

Beside the approach to the iron bridge a huge granite pillar reached for the leaden sky. Wrapped around it and three wooden stakes, was a yellow and black police tape, which surrounded a large hole with soil and turf spayed out around the perimeter.

There was no one around so Matthew peered over the tape. The hole extended down two metres he reckoned, but it was difficult to judge, because it looked like a lot of the sides had collapsed and filled in the bottom. He raised his head and gazed through the trees toward the placid river Tay. The hole was the right size for a human-sized figure to have risen out.

A dark shadow appeared behind him and he sensed evil. He turned around quickly, but there was nothing there. *Time to go*, he thought. Then, as he crossed the bridge, he pulled out his mobile; it looked as if he would need to phone David de Longford after all.

"Yeah, Mattie?"

"David, there's been a development.

"What?"

"You told me, or somebody did, that demons can rise out of the ground leaving a hole-right?"

"Yes, I've done that in the past."

"Well, I've seen a large hole in a graveyard in Dundee, where there's no obvious explanation."

"Was it conical and roughly human-sized?"

"Yup!"

"It could be where our friend re-entered the world, and he's come through in Dundee for a reason, other than to be close to where the Key is. We'll just need to keep an open mind on this one."

“Another thing: I thought someone or something evil was watching me while I was there!”

“Listen Matthew, I think you’d better take time off your work and come over to Amsterdam.”

“Okay, if you think I’d be safer?”

“I don’t know what he’s planning, but come over anyway, we need to talk.”

Matthew walked past the Mills Observatory as a class of excited schoolchildren were being marched inside by a stern looking teacher. *He had to find out what Grondin was up to and try, along with David, to stop him using his demon powers. For their sake, he thought watching the last of the kids disappear through the doorway—for everyone’s sake!*

Chapter Three

The winter sun began to set as Thomson stood in the arched doorway of a disused building which had been a jute mill in another age. He looked over the busy Marketgait on to the main front door of the Dundee police headquarters of Police Scotland a glass and steel building from the 1960s.

He watched as uniformed and plain clothed officers came and went until a thick set man in a grey overcoat, made him pay closer attention. The man had receding brown hair and a thick moustache which sat under a stubby nose.

Thomson crossed the road and followed the man along Bell Street past the pillared front of the courthouse where people stood on the steps blowing blue cigarette smoke into the air. He then followed the policeman along Constitution Road where he watched him stub out a cigarette and enter the Bread Bar.

The pub was filled with late afternoon drinkers, mainly students from the university next door. Thomson stepped up to the bar and ordered a pint of ale. A shout went up from a group sitting at a table in the far corner as a stalky youth balanced an empty glass upside-down on his head.

Thomson took a sip from his drink and turned to Detective Sergeant Willie Main who was standing next to him holding a half pint of stout to his lips. An empty shorts glass sat in front of him.

“Hard day?”

“They’re all hard,” growled Main without looking around.

“Yeah, well mine wasn’t great either, said Thomson as he took another slug from his pint.

Main turned to look at Thomson. “Why, what have you been up to?”

“Oh, I had to sack a few workers. You want another?”

“Aye, on you go.”

“What is it you do?” Thomson asked as he signalled the barman.

“I’m in the police.”

The barman, a man with a shaven head and a broken nose put a half pint of stout and a glass of Grouse Whisky in front of Main and took Thomson’s money.

“Funny place this to drink in, sir?” asked Thomson.

“I like it, there are no police: you get away from work!”

“You on that case they’re all talking about: the serial killings?”

Main gulped back his whisky and said: “Aye, I’m afraid so.”

“My mate was saying there’s something funny about the markings on the bodies.

“Something funny!” Main said in a raised voice as he gazed at the empty glass.

“I’ll tell you I’ve never seen anything like it: two small holes in the neck. The pathologist says there was massive blood loss through two small holes!” He then looked at Thomson, and said:

“Here, your no we the press are ye? I shouldn’t be talking like this.”

“Nah! I’m in sales. Pity about the victims.”

“Ach! They were all drug dealers.”

A cold wind rushed along the dock and climbed up the side of the ferry before tugging at Matthew’s jacket. He stood on the upper deck of the DFDS ferry 'The King of Scandinavia' and gazed at the lines of cars and vans in storage in a docklands yard.

The last time he stood on a ferry awaiting a journey to Amsterdam Janey was with him and they were looking forward to a night of dancing and cavorting. He smiled at the memory, but then the thought of the monster she had become stole the smile from his face.

The ship's horn blew and the P A system played a taped brass band piece designed to get people in the mood for a cruise. And, as the ferry eased away from its berth, the sun disappeared behind the Newcastle skyline. *Here we go again*, thought Matthew as he strolled inside the main upper-deck cabin.

The DFDS bus dropped Matthew off the next morning, in the centre of Amsterdam, and then vanished into heavy traffic. He strolled up Damrak past the many restaurants and souvenir shops which ran up one side of the street.

The bells of the Royal Palace chimed ten times as he crossed Dam Square and turned into Spuistraat where he saw the familiar frontage of 'The New Amstel Bookshop' on the corner of a small lane on the other side of the street.

The shrill ring of a bicycle bell made him jump back as a woman with two young children in a large wooden box on the front of her cycle pedalled by. He realised he had been standing on the cycle lane.

The Marriage of Figaro filled the shop as Matthew walked up to the desk where a woman stood pricing books.

"Hello Aada," he said with a gentle smile.

The assistant raised her head and said: "Ah Matthew. David's in his office through the back."

Passing car headlights cast shadows, which danced on the headstones of the Howff Cemetery in Dundee as Thomson strolled along the main path which bisected the ancient burial ground. He was on his way back to his hotel room and couldn't resist a walk through the darkening graveyard. Gnarled trees appeared out of the dark like spiny monsters creeping past the Gothic headstones. The lights shining from the windows of buildings which provided a total perimeter closure of the cemetery added a bizarre Hitchcock film set effect to the area.

Laughter erupted as he approached where the path he was on crossed another. He headed along the path in the direction of the sound and came across three youths sitting on a wooden bench passing a joint back and forth.

"Hey! Who's there?" shouted one of the youths, who was on the end of the bench nearest to the approaching Thomson.

"Where did you get the drugs?" Thomson asked.

"Go fuck yourself!" shouted the same youth, who suddenly tugged violently at an imaginary rope wrapped around his neck much to the amusement of his two friends. The laughter ceased and the sound of running and screaming filled the air, as the unfortunate boy rose, unaided, off the seat into the air.

"Now, I'll ask you again. Where did you get the drugs?" Thomson asked with eyes like two red-hot coals.

"Telephone box in St Murchar Street!" the youth gasped.

"When?"

"Most mornin's."

"Tomorrow?"

"Yeah!"

The youth fell onto the bench, gasping for breath, as Thomson disappeared through the forest of headstones.

The next day, as double-decker buses swept by, Thomson stood across from a telephone kiosk in a semi-derelict street. He noticed a few roughly dressed people standing around as he pulled the collar of his overcoat up and shrugged his shoulders. A few weekend shoppers scuttled by on their way into the city centre seemingly oblivious as to what was about to happen.

After half an hour a big, well-made man with a shaven head dressed in a black leather jacket and jeans strolled along to the kiosk and disappeared around the back followed by a group of the loiterers.

Thomson surveyed the area as he sensed someone was watching from a distance, but whom—the police? He redirected his attention back on the kiosk and watched the dealing unfold, and suddenly it came to him: there was someone or something lurking around—something without a soul!

After around ten minutes the drug dealer left the rear of the telephone box and, after checking for police, he walked along the street, then headed down Victoria Road and entered the Wellgate multi-storey car park. Thomson followed.

On the virtually empty top floor a black BMW came to life as the shaven-headed dealer approached it. He opened the driver's door and was about to climb in when a black blur pushed him onto the bonnet.

Thomson watched from behind a blue Toyota 4x4 as the blur formed into a tall man dressed in a black suit. His face was of sallow skin stretched over a thin skeletal bone structure with totally black eyes trained on the drug dealer, who seemed to be paralysed.

The attacker leaned over his victim and sank two large canine teeth into his fleshy neck and sucked the life force out of him. The dealer's eyes, however, told of another fear; a greater than death fear that approached.

The vampire raised its head with blood dripping from retracting fangs and turned to gaze in horror into crimson eyes. He tried to move, but found that it was as if someone attached him to the concrete floor.

"What have we here?" Thomson asked cynically.

The vampire emitted a hiss somewhat like a cat.

"Let me see if I have this right." Thomson said as he turned his back on the beast and stared across the city. "You're going around Dundee killing drug dealers." He then turned around slowly as the vampire rose into the air. "The question has to be... why? I mean besides your natural, or should that be unnatural, lust for blood, which you could I presume get from anyone."

The soul-less black eyes just stared at him.

"Looks like we'll have to do this the hard way. Why is it always the hard way?"

The beast screamed as Thomson released a million souls, the souls of the victims it had sucked the life from, to wrench at its mind.

"Okay," it hissed. "I supply most of the dealers in this area. Lately, however, some of them have decided that they would rather trade with some other supplier."

"So you felt all betrayed and helped yourself to a feed!" Thomson said with sarcasm.

"No one leaves me!"

"What was in it for you, did you take your cut?"

"Along with the drugs came type O positive blood - nectar!"

"Ah I see, you're paid in blood. So where do you pick up the supplies?"

The vampire hissed.

"I won't ask again."

"I go to Stirling Castle every Tuesday at midnight."

"Where—the esplanade?"

"Yes."

"Hmm..." pondered Thomson.

"Okay, I've told you all I know, now let me go!" The creature said as it gazed at him.

Instantly it slumped to the floor and then rose with a grin which turned to a look of horror as it turned to see a thin shape get larger and larger until the 'no entry' sign sliced its head off.

DS Main will have his work cut out trying to figure this one out, thought Thomson as he looked at the two bodies, then at the CCTV camera broken and dangling, before leaving the car park.

Chapter Four

The gargoyles on the old, turreted building that was the Barceló Stirling Highland Hotel stared down through the swirling mist as Thomson walked through Stirling's Old Town toward the castle. He had arrived by train and ambled through the city centre before climbing up Spittal Street where the fog mixed with street lights giving an eerie glow.

Thomson paused opposite the dark mass of the Gothic Church of the Holy Rude. He thought it would be better to view the castle esplanade from the side; so he jumped over the locked gate at the side of the building which led to the Valley Cemetery and disappeared into the gloom.

As Thomson moved deeper into the graveyard, the mist cleared and he saw the illuminated castle before him in the distance. He passed a monument of two statues encased in Perspex. The figures, two women, had pained expressions and seemed to be telling him to stop what he was doing.

A pyramid appeared out of the dark beside the esplanade wall. *How odd, to find a pyramid in Scotland*, he thought as a ghostly cackle filled the air and a clock struck midnight. A movement on the esplanade wall interrupted his thoughts: Something was scampering along the wall!

He jumped up high into the night sky and then landed on the wall in front of what turned out to be a vampire bat, which instantly turned into its human-like form.

"Who are you?" The creature hissed.

"I've come for a word."

"You're a demon, I don't talk to demons."

"Oh! You will talk to me."

The vampire made to jump off the wall, but found it couldn't move, which made it look like some grotesque gargoyle.

"Now, the drugs, where do they come from?" Thomson asked as he crouched.

"I'm telling you fuck all!"

As with the vampire in Dundee Thomson watched as its mind filled with a million dead souls. It screamed and then said: "I'm only a link in the chain. I gather the drugs in Newcastle and then supply Scotland. I supply one brother tonight and another on Thursday. Now let me go."

"Where and when in Newcastle?"

"Monument Metro steps; Sunday; midnight. I know no more that's the way it's worked."

"Where are the drugs?"

"In my vehicle over there," he said looking toward the road which led up to the esplanade.

"Okay, said Thomson, casually, as he jumped off the wall and walked away.

"Hey! What about me?" The vampire hissed.

"Oh yeah, said Thomson as the creature flew up into the dark air and tried, to revert to its bat form, over the pyramid before plunging with a horrendous scream onto the surrounding iron fence.

Thomson left the castle and walked through Stirling's Old Town where he heard a shout for help. He decided to investigate and headed down a close to find himself in a car park where two drunken men were abusing a young girl. He felt an immediate affinity with the female.

"Will you gentlemen please stop that!" He shouted.

The men looked toward him while holding the partially clothed girl.

"Fuck off baldie!" One of them shouted.

"Okay, it looks like we'll need to do this the hard way again," sighed Thomson raising his gaze to the sky with red eyes.

One man left the girl and rushed at Thomson, who raised one of his hands—palm up, and said: "Up."

The man froze and then rose into the air.

"Now that's no way to treat a lady," said Thomson as he approached the floating body.

The victim could only move his eyeballs, which flashed from side to side betraying the fear that was gripping his mind. Meanwhile the other attacker ran and pulled an old wooden fence post from the ground, then approached the demon.

“Tut, tut,” said Thomson as he spun round waving a finger.

The man stopped and hit himself around the body.

“Oh well, time to go,” sung Thomson leaving the car park, as the floating body spun covering the surrounding area, including the attacker clubbing himself, with vomit.

“Wait, a minute!” shouted the female, picking up and pulling on her scattered clothing, as she ran after Thomson.

“I’d like to thank you, but you scare me,” she said dropping to a walking pace alongside Thomson.

A gentle rain had begun.

“You’re welcome my dear—I think!” Thomson said as a taxi flew by, the swish of the tyres on the tarmac attracting the attention of the young girl.

“Your eyes...” she uttered turning back toward Thomson, but she was alone.

A flyer advertising 'Bon's Balls', an AC/DC tribute band, at DeVito's Nightclub in Arbroath the following evening scuttled along Dundee's Commercial Street propelled by the chilly wind.

Thomson, who was walking back to his hotel room after another successful night at a casino, trapped the leaflet with his foot then picked it up for a look. *Ah AC/DC*, he thought. *Time for a visit to the old town.*

A small car with a perforated exhaust cruised past with loud rap music erupting out of the open windows. A youth stared at him and screamed, “Hey you!” He then stuck his fist out and gave the masturbator's sign.

Thomson waved a hand; the car sped up and the front tyres blew out. The driver lost control, and the vehicle flew over the pavement and rammed into a large shop window. The two in the front, not wearing seatbelts, smashed through the windscreen.

As the soul of the driver escaped, Thomson grabbed him around the neck while standing in the void between worlds with blazing eyes. “Now what was it you wanted?” he asked the alarmed spirit. Then with a grin, he said, “Cheerio then,” as he released the essence and gave the masturbator's sign.

The crowd were a mixture of old rockers and young punks, as Thomson, with shaven head and a long black overcoat, strolled up to the DeVito's bar. He ordered two double Drambuie's and then took the drinks to a seat at one of the high tables in the darkened rear of the club.

As the band took to the stage, complete with a guitarist in schoolboys outfit, Thomson noticed a familiar figure in the swollen crowd. Matthew's cousin, Jake, was standing at the end of the bar nearest to the stage; he was easy to pick out because he had the only shaven head in that area amid a mass of hair that bobbed along with the music.

Thomson drank his whisky and laughed at kids around him drunk on vodka and Red Bull as they jumped around in the dark under the watchful eye of a bouncer. One kid threw a drink over another and was quickly thrown out of the bar.

The opening riff to Highway to Hell saw Thomson finish his drink and then move through the cheering crowd to stand behind Jake.

“That's a magic number, eh?” Thomson shouted in Jake's direction.

“Yeah, it's their best.” Jake answered as he put his pint on the bar and glanced at Thomson. He then looked back at the band before turning back to face Thomson.

“Jesus!”

“Nah! Other end of the scale!” Thomson said as the group reached the first chorus.

Jake then gasped as tightness gripped his throat.

“Where's that brat of a cousin of yours? He's not at home, I called by before coming here. It looked as if no one had been there for days.”

“Why don't you fuck off and leave us alone!” Jake whispered as the grip became tighter and he was about to pass out.

“Now listen to me. If you want this to stop tell me where he is.” Thomson said as he pushed his head forward so that his right ear was next to Jake’s mouth. Inevitability descended over Jake and he whispered: “Amsterdam.”

Chapter Five

The London-bound train eased into the gentle curve of Newcastle Station's platform four and came to a halt. Queues of tired looking people formed at the opening doors barely allowing room for the departing passengers to step onto the platform.

Thomson, with his shaven head and long black coat, rose from his seat and left the train. He then crossed the iron bridge, which spanned the tracks, and descended onto the main concourse. He pushed his ticket into a slot on a barrier watched by a disinterested guard and then walked through the open gates.

Out on Neville Street taxis and buses charged along in both directions. Thomson crossed the road when the lights changed and walked past a pub advertising Guinness and televised sports. Music flowed along the street from some distant bar as he turned onto Grainger Street and passed Yates Wine Bar. Two couples fell out of the doors and eyed him before linking arms and skipping away in the opposite direction.

As he neared the tall pillar that was the Earl Grey Monument Thomson glanced at his watch: *Five past eleven, still early*, he thought. A man with a banner which read: 'Jesus Saves' offered him a leaflet on the Gospel. Thomson turned to face the man while accepting the flyer, and letting his eyes turn deep red, he growled: "You follow the wrong master."

"Oh! Cried the man as he backed off crossing himself.

Thomson then held out his hand with the leaflet upon it, which burst into flames and then blew away in a gust of wind which had suddenly swept along the street.

Thomson gazed up at Earl Grey, who stood on top of his monument surveying the city, as he slid back into the shadows of a shop doorway, which had a view of the Metro stairway.

A tall man dressed in black appeared at the top of the subway steps allowing the crowds to pass around him. The man surveyed the square and then looked up at a large clock above a Jeweller's shop.

"These guys all look the same," whispered Thomson to himself as he left the shop doorway and walked toward the stairway.

The vampire threw off the mind-grip Thomson cast over him as he turned to look at the approaching demon.

"Who are you? Where is my brother?"

"He won't be coming I'm afraid. You have me instead," said Thomson, jovially.

The creature descended the stairs, but found he could only move down a few steps; so he ran up to the top and then ran down Grey Street. After a few yards he found the going very difficult, it was as if he was running through knee high mud.

This one's stronger than the others, thought Thomson as the man ran in the other direction, and climbed the few steps at the base of the monument. He kicked open the small door on the side of the plinth and disappeared into the dark. Thomson followed him and climbed the worn stone treads in the claustrophobic, spiral stairwell. When he reached the top, he looked over a metal railing at the Eldon Shopping Centre. He ran around the space between the railing and the base of the statue, but there was no vampire. A hiss from above made him move at great speed and catch the beast by the neck as it swooped down from the statue.

"Listen here you blood-sucker!" Thomson shouted as he felt the cold, dead flesh and stared into the soulless black eyes.

"What is it you want, money?" Hissed the vampire.

"Nothing that crass, I just want to know from where the supply of drugs come.

"Oh that! Well, no great secret—it's Amsterdam. They come over on tulip lorries."

"That's it?" asked Thomson in astonishment.

"Yeah, Amsterdam's where the brothers hang out."

"What do you mean?"

“It’s vampire central man!”

“Hmm...”

“All right, now you know; let me go!”

“Okay,” said Thomson as he released his grip allowing the vampire to plummet through the morning air.

Thomson watched as the creature took on the shape of a bat then flew away. He then raised his head and gazed along the curve of Grey Street and said to himself: “Well it’s off to Amsterdam with no element of surprise, but who cares!”

Back in Dundee as Thomson threw things in his holdall, the hotel room phone rang. He strolled around the bed and grabbed the receiver while sitting. “Yeah, hullo?”

“Mr Thomson, it's Hayley in reception. I have DS Main of Police Scotland asking to see you. Can I send him to your room?”

“Yes.”

“What's this fucker want?” Thomson asked himself as he replaced the receiver and rose off the bed.

Moments later there was a knock at the door. Thomson sighed, strolled over and opened the door. “DS Main, please come in,” he said standing aside to let the man in.

“I know you, don't I, sir?” Main said showing Thomson his ID card as he entered the room.

“Do you?” Thomson said closing the door.

“The other day in the pub?”

“Ah yes, I remember. Please take a seat.”

“Right.”

“We've had bother tracing you sir... Mr D. C. Thomson. There's no record of you anywhere in the UK.”

“Really! Let's just say I'm from another place.”

“Okay, well that's not my concern. The hotel says you've been staying here for the last three weeks.”

“Yes, I'm here in Dundee on business.”

“And that business is...?”

“I'm in fire alarms.”

“Oh, okay.”

“So, what is this about Sergeant?”

“Well, do you recognise either of these two?” Main asked handing Thomson two photographs.

Thomson looked at the photographs of the drug dealer and the vampire. “No I don't, I'm afraid,” he said handing the photos back.

“I have to ask for your whereabouts on Saturday past, the sixteenth?”

“Well I left the hotel at about 11 o'clock and strolled to the newsagent for a newspaper. Had lunch here at one, and in the afternoon went for a couple of pints in the Bank Bar in Reform Street.”

“Can anyone corroborate on your whereabouts?”

“Look Sergeant, what is this about?”

“Well sir, I'm investigating the murders of these two,” he said holding up the photographs. “And someone saw you leaving the Wellgate carpark at about the time it happened.”

“Someone saw me?”

“You're on cc tv leaving the level. Unfortunately the camera on the level was unavailable on the day.”

DS Main rubbed the back of his neck. “I think you'd better come down to the station, sir.”

“Are you arresting me Sergeant?”

“No, you'll be helping us with our enquiries.”

That night the fire alarm at the police station went off twice; the first time, the police escorted the prisoners out of the building along with any civilian staff. Everyone assembled in the carpark until

the fire brigade, who reported the sound of laughter and banging on the walls, checked the building. They assumed the alarm to have had a malfunction. The second time, an hour after everyone was ushered back in, was ignored. A blaze in a ground-floor storage room had then been discovered and the whole procedure enacted.

The next morning DS Main and DC John Taylor sat in interview room three.

“Okay bring Thomson in here.” Main ordered two uniformed officers.

After a few moments the men returned. “He's gone, sir!” one said.

“What do you mean gone?”

“The duty Sergeant opened the cell, and it was empty!”

Main and Taylor ran through to the cell block and found Sergeant Bob Young scratching his head while explaining to his superior that the cell was occupied all last night.

“Could he have escaped during the fire last night?” DC Taylor asked.

“Nah! They were all counted back into their cells-twice!”

Later that day Willie Main strolled into the Bread Bar with a tired look on his face. The barman finished serving and then headed to where the policeman was standing at the bar.

“Oh Willie, there was a gent in here today. He told me to give you this,” he said pulling a pint of brown ale. He then fetched a double whisky and put them both on the bar in front of Main.

“Bloke said something about you having to review your fire alarm system.”

Chapter Six

Matthew knocked on the mahogany door and then entered the dimly-lit room, slipping off his backpack.

“Mattie!” David de Longford shouted from behind his computer monitor. “It’s good to see you, he continued as he looked up.

“It’s good to see you too David,” said Matthew, who couldn’t stop from thinking his friend’s skin was becoming more sallow, more like the half-demon he was.

“So it looks as if our friend has returned.”

“How’s that possible?”

“I have a terrible feeling that he gathered so much power in the Dark Realm that nothing could stop him not even the boundary between the dimensions. Now, I’m afraid, he’s our problem again!”

Matthew looked around the darkened walls and tried to focus on the paintings as someone knocked on the door.

“Come in Aada!” David shouted.

The assistant pushed open the door with one hand while holding a small tray in the other.

“Coffee gentlemen?” she asked in her accented English.

“Thanks Aada; I don’t know what I’d do without you,” said David with a grin. She placed the tray on a coffee table in a corner of the room where there were two leather easy-chairs.

David left his desk and went to sit in one chair.

“Sit down Mattie,” he said as he ran a hand through his thick, black hair, which ended in a short ponytail. “I don’t venture out much any more,” he continued, waving a hand around his facial features. “I trade online if I can.”

Matthew sipped his coffee and nodded. “So the Key’s of no use any more?”

“The Key still has power over the Dark Realm, not Grondin!”

“Sounds like he’s become the most powerful of the demons!”

“Yes, said David ponderously as he stroked one of the chair’s arms. “The Key is safe for the moment; so we’ll leave it where it is and let Grondin make the next move.”

Thomson collected his large holdall from a carousel in Schiphol Airport and strolled through the large concourse. He then left the complex and hailed a cab.

The day was bright with a blustery wind which blew large clouds across the city as the yellow taxi entered the canal infested city centre and drew up at Hotel Pulitzer on Prinsengracht.

After checking in Thomson threw his bag on the bed of the elegantly decorated room on the first floor and then gazed out of the Gothic arched double window. The rays of the setting sun, which squeezed between the buildings, danced on the rippled canal. He looked at the moored barges, which lined both sides of the canal, and touched the glass, it felt cool. An echo from a time long gone passed through his mind, and a faint voice asked him what he was doing. The telephone beside the bed rang bringing him back to his senses.

“Yes, hello?”

“Mr Thomson, this is Lisle at reception. I have a call for you.”

Who could know I was here, he thought.

“Put it through please.”

“Do you want to meet us?” A hissing voice asked.

“Who is this?”

“Be at 51 Westerstraat in an hour.”

The line went dead and Thomson placed the receiver back in its cradle. He then strolled across the room and picked up a leaflet from the table which contained a map of Amsterdam. He traced Westerstraat and then left the room.

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