

## SOULLESS BEASTS (The Devil's Burden: Book 2)

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[1.](#)

"You want some company?" the stripper asked as she approached my table.

"Not really. Please leave me alone," I replied.

"Asshole," she said under her breath as she walked away, offended.

I sat at a table in the corner of the club, sipping my beer. That was how I had been spending most of my nights. I was surrounded by humanity, yet comfortably detached from it. A year had passed since I had lost my beloved Jessica. I found a place where I could wait for my mourning to end. In my little corner of the strip club, I was cloaked in darkness and shielded

from the painful memories of my moment of happiness. That wasn't my purpose for going there, though. I went there to be close to her.

I waited for the moment to arrive. I knew it was coming. I had spent most of the night completely focused on getting drunk. I occasionally glanced up at the stage to see a pair of human tits. Most of them weren't very impressive. The dark industrial music that screamed through the speakers had a way of drowning out the sound of the voice inside my head. The laughter and cheers of the other patrons made me feel as if there was no shame in being where I was.

"Please welcome Rose to the stage," the DJ's voice shouted through the speakers.

The moment I had been waiting for had arrived. When I heard her name, my eyes shot towards the stage and she had my undivided attention. When she moved it was as if her body fused with the music, becoming one perfect being comprised of pure energy. She had so much confidence in her naked, tattooed body. I couldn't stop staring at her hazel eyes, though. There was so much tragic beauty in those eyes. It was like she escaped the harshness of reality when she danced. It was as if she was on a different spiritual plane than everyone else that surrounded her. Watching her, I couldn't remember why I hated humanity. I couldn't remember anything. There was only her. Then the song ended and it was over. My trance was broken as she walked off the stage.

I ordered another beer and a couple shots of whiskey. I went back to being the "creepy, brooding guy sitting in the corner". I was well aware of what the people in the club thought of

me. I didn't care, though. I wasn't there for them. I was there only for her. Unfortunately, she really didn't want me there.

"You've got to stop coming here, Sebastian," the woman known as Rose said as she approached my table. It was the first time she had spoken to me since the first night I had saw her in the club.

"Hello, Rachel," I said, surprised that she had acknowledged my presence.

"You've been coming here every night that I've worked for the past three months," she replied as she sat down across from me. "Seriously, dude, this is getting creepy. I really don't need a stalker right now. I get that you feel bad about what happened to my mother. It's not healthy for you to be coming here every night, dwelling on it."

She reminded me of her mother when she was upset. Her voice was firm, but I could hear compassion behind it. Rachel's hazel eyes stared right into me, just like her mother's had. I noticed there was a bruise on the side of her face that she had tried to hide with makeup. I supposed it was a consequence of the lifestyle she had chosen. I wanted to save her from herself. I had watched Jessica die suddenly, right in front of me. It was much harder to watch Rachel slowly self-destruct.

"You don't have to work here," I told her. "You can have something better. I'll help you in any way that I can. Your mother wouldn't have wanted this life for you."

"So you think I'd be better off being your little bitch like she was," she said sarcastically. "No thanks. I'm doing just fine on my own. What gives you the right to disrespect what I do for

a living? Do you really think you're that much better than me? I appreciate you paying for my mom's funeral and the money you gave me after she died, but you and I have absolutely no reason to stay in contact with each other. You should leave now. Please don't come back."

She stood up and walked away. I felt hurt and rejected. I had been human for a year and still didn't understand how words could inflict more pain than a weapon. If seeing me was a reminder of her mother's death, then I could definitely understand why Rachel didn't want me around her. I didn't think she hated me because of the way her mother died, though. I thought that Rachel hated me because of the way her mother had lived. Jessica was completely subservient to Sebastian and he had treated her cruelly. Rachel had no way of knowing that I wasn't the Sebastian that her mother had worked for. She didn't know how much I truly cared for her mother.

I finished my beer and ordered another one. I sat there feeling sorry for myself, completely oblivious to the world around me. I looked up and noticed a man had sat down at my table and was staring at me intensely. He was muscular and dressed in black.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked me.

"The bouncer?" I replied.

"Yes," he said. "I'm also Rachel's boyfriend. My name is Tyler. I've seen you come here for months now, harassing my girl. I'm tired of it. It ends tonight. You're going to leave right now and you're not going to come back. Do you understand me?"

"And if I don't agree to those terms?..."

“Then I’ll break both of your fucking hands,” he said angrily. “I don’t care if you are some kind of rich pretty boy. You’re not shit to me. I have no problem with kicking your ass.”

His words provoked the rage that had once burned inside of me. My mind flashed back to when I had beaten John Miller to death with a hammer. My mind took me back to when I had pushed a knife through Charles Miller’s eye. I remembered how much I had enjoyed claiming vengeance upon my enemies. I felt a sinister smile come across my face.

“You’re a very brave man,” I said. “If you know who I am then you probably know what I’ve done to my enemies in the past. Go ahead and make your little threats. I’m sure it makes you feel better about your life, being so brave. You just provoked a hungry beast and that beast will come to you when he is ready to feed. Until then, take comfort in the fact that you are such a brave man.”

“Get the fuck out of here, freak,” Tyler shouted.

I left.

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I arrived at the empty mansion that was my home and went down into the basement. I looked down at the places where four dead bodies once laid. They weren’t there anymore, of course, but my mind took me back to that day. It was the day that I had learned some of the most important lessons about being human. I learned that with the capacity for love also comes the capacity for hate. I learned how fragile and temporary human lives really were. It was the day of my great awakening. I longed to feel that way again.

After the slaughter in the basement, I was able to convince the police that the deaths were the result of a robbery gone wrong. I told them that the Millers had killed Chloe and Jessica. I told them that I had no choice other than to kill the Millers in self-defense. Considering that the story wasn't too far from being true, they accepted my version of the event. Also, Sebastian's wealth and influence allowed him certain privileges not afforded to the common man. As far as the police and everyone else were concerned, I was the victim of a horrible crime. No one had the slightest idea that I had actually enjoyed killing my enemies.

For several months, I cried over the loss of my beloved Jessica and I cursed humanity for their wicked ways. I stepped down from my position at the Davenport Corporation, giving control of the company to the board of directors. I had no desire to be a part of the business affairs of men. I spent most of my days alone in the mansion, like a ghost haunting the place. I had tried several times to contact Rachel, but she ignored my phone calls. I felt that she might be the only person in the world that would understand the pain I was feeling about Jessica's death. The truth was that Rachel didn't give a damn about my pain.

Maybe it was due to human feelings being new to me, but I was completely overcome by sadness and anger. I felt my fragile mind descending into some sort of madness. There was a voice that lived inside of my head. During my lowest points, the voice would tell me to kill myself. Other times it would tell me to kill every human on the planet. There was another voice that I would hear sporadically. It would counter whatever the dark voice had told me and convince me to keep going on my journey. I had been using Sebastian's resources to keep track of Rachel's activities. Most people would call that "stalking", but to me it was the only thing

keeping me from putting a bullet in my skull. I learned that Rachel had dropped out of high school and had got a job as a stripper as soon as she turned eighteen. I had thought if I confronted her at her job, she'd have no choice but to talk to me. When I saw her for the first time since the funeral, it was obvious that she was suffering. Seeing her in that state gave new purpose to my life. I had to save her.

Alone in the basement, I kneeled down next to the spot where Jessica had died. I could almost feel her presence there. I knew that she had spent her life trying to protect her daughter from the darkness in the world. I vowed to do the same. I owed that to Jessica for the kindness she had showed me.

I got off of my knees and walked upstairs to my bedroom. I opened the top drawer of the dresser and took out the .357 magnum that was inside. I tucked the revolver into the front of my pants, using my shirt to conceal it. I decided that it was time for me to claim what was mine.

## 2.

I parked my car at the edge of the driveway so that they wouldn't see me pull up. The plan was simple. I'd break into the house, kill Tyler, and rescue Rachel from her personal hell. She would finally understand that I loved her mother and why it was important for me to save her from a tragic existence. I had originally wanted to spare Rachel from the trauma of seeing

me kill Tyler. That wasn't an option anymore. She'd understand that it was for her own good. She'd know that sometimes good people do bad things to protect the ones they cared about. While my plan was violent, its intent was noble.

As I slowly walked up the driveway, I began to have second thoughts. The plan made perfect sense to me, but what if Rachel didn't understand? I knew that there were laws against what I was doing. I knew that most people would find it to be morally reprehensible. I could definitely understand why people would condemn murder. As master of Hell, I had dealt with all of the vilest murderers throughout human history. They were unworthy of empathy. However, what I was doing could be considered something beyond simple murder. It could be seen as divine justice. I was an expert on corrupted souls and I knew without a doubt that Tyler was deserving of his fate. Violence was the only effective form of communication for some of the less evolved people inhabiting the world. Tyler was one of those people. He had threatened to harm me. I had suspected that the bruise on Rachel's face was a result of his temper. How do you reason with a man like that?

I looked down at my watch. It was three o'clock in the morning. I knew that they had just returned home from work and probably would not be asleep yet. As I approached the house, I heard shouting voices coming from inside.

"...And I'm sick and tired of that little rich prick coming to the club," Tyler's voice roared. "What have you been telling him? How do I know you're not fucking him behind my back?"

I ducked down and hid behind some bushes in front of the house. I pulled the gun out and waited for the right moment to act. Tyler's tone infuriated me. He was obviously trying to

intimidate the woman who was much smaller than he was. My morality was questionable, but his seemed to be nonexistent. I wanted to immediately intervene, but the conversation intrigued me. I wanted to see where it led.

“I’m not fucking him,” Rachel pleaded. “I haven’t even spoken to him for months before tonight. He was just my mother’s boss. He feels guilty about her death or something.”

“So this is about your mom again?” Tyler shouted. “Every time there is a problem between us you bring her up. You walk around like some kind of depressed zombie all the time. It’s been a year. People die. The bitch is dead. Get over it.”

“Don’t you ever talk about my mother like that!” Rachel screamed.

I heard the sound of flesh slapping flesh. Then I heard Rachel cry out in pain. The death sentence I had issued to Tyler had been justified. He had earned the bullet that was coming to him. The bastard had disrespected the memory of my beloved and he had harmed her daughter. I again heard the sound of him striking her and the sound of her crying out.

“Why do you make me do this?” Tyler said in a calmer tone. “I hate having to hurt you, but you just never listen. Do you want me to leave? Do you want me to leave you just like everyone else has? No one else would ever have you. You’re a pathetic, little depressed stripper. You’re not worth shit to anyone. Do you want me to leave you?”

“No, baby,” Rachel cried. “Please don’t go. I’m so sorry. I’m trying to get better. I really am. I love you. I’m sorry.”

I had heard enough. The level of physical violence Rachel had been subjected to was bad, but the emotional abuse was even worse. I quietly made my way to the front door of the house. I pulled the hammer back on the revolver and prepared to kick the door in. Then I heard a familiar voice come from behind me. I turned around and saw Jessica.

“Don’t do this,” she said. “If you do this, you’ll be lost forever.”

Then, as quickly as she had appeared, she was gone.

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I had trouble falling asleep. Seeing Jessica again had changed everything. I knew that it was just a hallucination, that my mind had been corrupted by rage and grief. It felt so real, though. She looked the same as she did the last time I had seen her. Her voice was just as compassionate as I had remembered it. After seeing Jessica, I left Rachel’s house without incident. I drank a little whiskey to try to calm myself down.

When I finally drifted to sleep, I found myself in the world of dreams. I was back in the first place I had ever known as a home. The majestic wings, that had once brought me a sense of pride, had been returned to my shoulders. I soared high above the clouds of Earth’s sky. The beautiful sound of the angels’ choir echoed throughout the world made of crystal and gold. I was in the one place that I was certain I’d never see again. I was in Heaven. Then she appeared before me, more beautiful than anything I had ever seen.

“Hello, Lucifer,” Jessica said.

“You know who I am?” I asked, ashamed that I had deceived her in the human world.

“You must hate me.”

“You know that hate doesn’t exist here,” she replied. “Even if it did, I could never hate you. I knew Sebastian Davenport for a year and he never showed me a single moment of kindness. I knew you for six days and you loved me with more passion than any other person would be capable of. I love you. Actually, everyone here loves you. You played your part in the world and everyone knows that.”

“Why did you stop me from saving Rachel?”

“You weren’t there to save Rachel. You were there because a man offended you and you wanted revenge.”

“He’s evil,” I said. “I know evil when I see it. He deserves to suffer for his sins.”

“Maybe,” she said through her beautiful smile. “But it’s not your place to make that judgment. You’re not the beast anymore. You’re a man now and it is time for you to start playing by man’s rules. You killed the Millers because they would’ve killed you if you hadn’t. There is no sin in defending yourself, even if it did bring you some sense of false pleasure. However, the bloodlust that was awakened inside of you must be controlled or it will destroy you.”

“What about Rachel?” I asked. “What will happen to her?”

“That’s up to her.”

“I love you,” I said as I embraced Jessica. “Life is so hard without you.”

“Then why did you let me die?” she hissed.

I released the embrace and moved back from her. She was no longer beautiful. Her body had become a rotting corpse and blood poured from the gash in her throat. I looked around me. I was no longer in Heaven. I was in a place that was much more familiar to me. I could smell the sulfur and feel the heat of the flames kissing my skin. I could see the bubbling lake of fire and hear the screams of the souls that it consumed. I was back in my true home. I was in Hell.

I woke up screaming.

### 3.

A couple of weeks passed. I had not had any more dreams about Jessica, Heaven, or Hell. The one dream had consumed my thoughts, though. Jessica had told me that I was no longer the beast. She had said that I was a man. As a man, I wasn't sure what purpose my life served in the world. When I ruled Hell, everything seemed quite simple. I had a job to do and I did it well. Every moment of my existence had a very clear purpose. As a man, I was conflicted. What I had known as justice was now immoral. Where I had once been confined to a specific task, I now had an unlimited amount of options. Free will was a burden designed for the human

psyche. It was impossible for me to find my place in the world when there were so many possibilities.

I sat alone in my office, reading Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* to pass the time. I had grown fond of reading the works of mankind's great authors. I found that escaping into the literary world distracted me from the things that should be trivial in my life. I had not seen Rachel since the night she told me to leave her alone. Occasionally, thoughts of her would cross my mind. Why should I have cared about her? She didn't possess any of the qualities that I had admired in Jessica. Rachel lacked her mother's integrity, courage, and passion for life. I thought that Rachel was extremely physically attractive, but found nothing about her personality intriguing. I had come to the conclusion that I was better off without her in my life.

I heard the doorbell ring and put down my book. It was very rare for anyone to visit my home, so the sound of the bell startled me. I went to the front door and opened it. Rachel stood in the doorway. She looked terrible, as if she hadn't slept in days. Her timid posture would suggest that she was a person whose spirit had been completely broken.

"Hi, Sebastian," she said. "Sorry to come by without calling first. I don't have your phone number anymore. Can we talk?"

"Of course," I replied. "Come in."

She came inside and sat on my couch. I went to the kitchen and retrieved two beers. I handed one of the beers to her as I sat down next to her. It was obvious that she was

uncomfortable being that close to me, but I didn't care. A lost and damaged creature was in my home and the little bit of compassion I had left urged me to show it affection.

"You haven't been to the club in a couple of weeks," she said. "I just wanted to let you know that I told you to stay away for your own benefit, not mine."

"And what benefit would that be?" I asked.

"Tyler doesn't like you," she said. "He will hurt you if he thinks there is something going on between you and me. He might even kill you. He gets really jealous sometimes."

"Why would you stay with a man like that?"

"It's not always bad with him. He truly loves me. I don't expect you to understand why that matters to me."

Her eyes began to tear up as she sipped her beer. She didn't realize that I understood her situation better than anyone else could. Broken things needed to be loved. That was one of the first things I learned as a human. I had felt the same way once. I didn't tell her that, though. The conversation had to be about her, not me. My job was to listen. That was the only purpose I served in the world for that moment.

"Why did you come here today, Rachel," I asked with as much sympathy as I could summon.

"I was hoping that I could borrow some money," she said through her tears. "You offered to help me once. Business is slow at the club and I'm behind on my bills."

“Of course I’ll help you,” I replied.

I saw the look of relief on her face. It must have been hard for her to swallow her pride and ask for my help. She had rudely declined my offer to help her just two weeks prior. Things must have gotten bad for her if she was willing to come to me. Or perhaps Tyler had told her to. Either way, I was glad to offer my assistance to her. Then it occurred to me that she could have been deceiving me. It could have been some kind of test to see how I’d react. I had been hurt when she rejected me before. She could have been trying to see if I still cared about her. Considering that I had avoided seeing her at the club for two weeks, she might have thought I’d given up on her.

“Was that the only reason you came here?” I asked.

“What other reason could there be?” she replied.

“I was the last person to see your mother alive,” I said. “I know how much she loved you. I believe that you loved her just as much. I never had a mother, so I can’t imagine the pain of losing one.”

I had unwittingly revealed part of my secret. All humans had mothers. I hoped that she wouldn’t take my words literally. I anxiously awaited her response. I was relieved when another tear streamed down her cheek. The conversation was still about her, not me.

“I can’t talk to anyone about what I’ve been going through,” she cried. “No one understands. I was the only thing in my mother’s life. She worked so hard her whole life just to take care of me. She’d be so disappointed in what I’ve become.”

“No she wouldn’t,” I replied. “I got to know your mother really well in her final days. She was the most caring and decent person that I’ve ever known. Throughout my existence, I’ve dealt with the worst people mankind has to offer. Your mother was the complete opposite of the other souls I’ve seen. She was good. That goodness could live on in you, if you let it. What you do for money does not define who you are. The asshole that you’re dating is not what makes you the person you are. Your current situation is just a compilation of events you had no control over. You alone decide who you are, no one else.”

“I have no idea who I am anymore,” Rachel said.

I realized that Rachel and I had something much deeper in common than just our love for Jessica. She was eighteen years old and had thought she knew her place in the world until one event changed everything. I had existed for eternity and thought I knew my place until one event changed everything. It was Jessica’s death that had changed Rachel. It was Jessica’s love that had changed me. Rachel and I were both in the process of discovering our true identities.

“I guess if you don’t know who you are,” I said with a smile, “you can be anyone you want. Figure out the person you want to be and then be her. It sounds simple enough. You should try it.”

“I want to be stronger than I am,” Rachel replied. “I thought I could get over mom’s death and move on with my life. When you showed up at the club a few months ago, it reminded me of how much I’m not like her. She worked for a powerful millionaire. I take my clothes off for money. She never let any man into her life that didn’t respect her and her child. I’ve spent the last nine months being smacked around by the only guy on the planet that will

have me. I miss her so much. Then, when you stopped coming to the club, it made me miss her even more. Does that make any sense?"

It made perfect sense. That was the exact reason I had sought out Rachel to begin with. I needed the reminder of Jessica, too. It was what drove me to be better than I was. The tears began pouring out of Rachel's eyes. It was painful for her to talk about her situation. It was painful for me to hear about it. I gently hugged her to reassure her that she wasn't alone in her grief.

"You know my mother used to despise you?" Rachel said. "She would talk about what a shallow and cruel man you were. Before she died, her feelings changed, though. She began to really admire you. I can see why she did. You're a good man, Sebastian Davenport."

She leaned over and softly kissed my cheek. She told me that she had to leave. I told her that I would go to the bank and withdraw the money she needed. She could come by and pick it up the next day. She agreed and then left. I could have given her cash from the safe in my bedroom. I could have just written her a check. The truth was that I needed an excuse to see her again. She made me feel connected again. I wasn't sure if I would ever be capable of loving a woman again. However, if I was, I was certain that Rachel would be that woman.

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I pulled into the parking lot of the strip club. The anxiety I was feeling was almost overwhelming. I had to see Rachel again. Waiting until the next day wasn't an option. I felt as if I could survive longer without oxygen than I could without seeing her. It had only been hours

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