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Grimoire

Stone gazed at his shoes. The shaykh had changed their position, facing the pair outwards as though to guide him out there, away from the lodge. There would be a wisdom behind it. Stone wondered what it could be.

'Help!'

Stone glanced in the direction the shoes were pointing. He could see a woman approaching him. Her clothes were dirty and torn as though she had escaped from a tormenting nightmare. The woman clutched a handbag close to her chest, and her eyes screamed of anxiety and shock. Her legs were marked with strips of blood; branches had scratched flesh during her blind sprint.

'Please! Help me!'

The closer she came, the more noticeable her terror-stricken eyes were, Stone noted. Whatever the reason, this woman was involved in heavy trouble. 'Help me, somebody is chasing me', she uttered, pointing towards the ever-opened

massive wooden door at the main entrance of the tekke, from where she made her way in and reached the old mosque in the yard.

'Don't worry, you are safe here', Stone declared, before leaving her with a handful of female dervishes that had been alarmed by the terrified screams. He quickly made his way to the main gate. Needless to say, he had left the Desert Eagle behind with his old life, together with his other worldly belongings. What he did take along, however, were his profound skills in Chen-style Taijiquan, a highly sophisticated form of traditional Chinese martial arts. Shaykh Sharafuddin had encouraged him to keep on practicing, since, according to him, the technique goes back directly to Noah's son Jafeth - who was sent as a prophet to China - who introduced the land of the rising sun to the secret of the movements after the flood.

Arriving at the entrance, Stone tried to figure out if there was any movement in the moonlit darkness. His eyes locked in at the impenetrable blackness that filled the tiny space between majestic ancient trees and dense, high bushes with myriads of sharp tiny branches that had just torn the soft skin of Celeste's firm legs a few minutes ago. Everything seemed

quiet. Quiet? Stone could clearly make out a strange, rattling sound, coming from the direction where the tekke's cemetery was located.

Unlike many other times, when he walked down the hill towards the final resting place of dervishes and shaykhs that had populated the remote convent throughout the ages, Stone hastily rushed down the narrow path, taking two stairs at once. His ears were being tuned to what sounded like a rhythmic metallic noise that kept on coming closer. The heavy cast iron gate at the entrance stood wide open when he entered the cemetery, a labyrinth of simple stone monuments, honoring the souls of their deceased name-bearers. Some of them had a cone-like hat and turban carved on top of the graves to indicate the spiritual rank of its inhabitant.

Following the metallic sound that was in direct reach now, his eyes made out a slightly moving strain of silver, wrapped around what seemed to be a broad shouldered, heavy type of stature that clearly had his difficulties getting ahead on the uneven muddy terrain. Stone quickly cut the distance between them, but lost sight of the chased shadow.

That irregularity popped up and disappeared between awkwardly leaning tombstones and bizarre tree formations. Stone's main orientation was the chilling sound he had followed since he left the tekke. But suddenly the sound seemed to have ceased and the only thing left to hear stemmed from a close-by owl, announcer of approaching death in many cultures.

The next thing he could make out was a ghostly swoosh coming from behind him, followed by the sudden sensation of a heavy silver chain that would violently wrap itself around his upper body. Each of its links was covered with long metal spikes that turned it into a deadly-moving barb wire. Stone's thick woolen cloak had hindered them from tearing his body open and seemed to provide quite good protection. By starting to quickly turn around his own axis like a whirling dervish in a bizarre death grip, he caused the owner of the deadly weapon to fall from the elevated stone monument he had launched his attack from. Stone used the stranger's impact on the rain-softened, muddy ground to get rid of his heavy cloak and jump towards his opponent. The dark shadow had come to his feet again and turned out to be a

massive assembly of muscles topped by a gruesome shaved head, covered with tattoos. The face around the huge, mad eyes was smeared with blood, pouring from a long open wound on his left cheek. A thick metal ring has been driven through his nose and when he fletched his teeth before hurling himself at Stone, they revealed to be sharpened.

Instead of frontally clashing against the heavy body, Stone quickly stepped aside, tightly grabbed the voluminous forearm and pulled it while slapping the edge of his other hand against the adams' apple of his attacker. The bizarre hitman uttered a frenzied growl composed of anger and pain and tried to catch his breath again. Stone used the opportunity to place a swiftly executed lotus sweep-kick right on top of the metal ring, crushing the nose bone of the bull. Not unlike the actual animal, the man was in a state of raging anger now - a vessel for raw, uncontrolled energy, aimed solely at the destruction of the source for his pain and agony.

Trying to get out of reach of the frenzy fury, Stone backed up but stumbled over the mighty roots of an old cypress tree and found himself belly up on the wet ground.

He almost immediately could feel his chest sink in under the heavy weight of his opponent, kneeling over him. Accompanied by another growl of blind fury and a mad expression of the eyes, the sharpened teeth surfaced from beneath the distorted face. Before they were able to bury themselves into his jugular vein, Stone managed to extend one hand and drive his thumb deep into the left eye-socket of the madman. Another scream, as the madman reached up to his head, providing Stone with the opportunity to violently strike his solar plexus region and pull the tumbling giant into the mud, making it his turn to be on top of things.

Just as he was about to push a pressure point situated in the collarbone area to demobilize his attacker, Stone suddenly felt the clenching grip of a huge cold, unseen fist, closing in around his chest and leaving him short of breath. The tortured giant seemed to notice that with a devilish grin, and flung his defenseless enemy from him almost like an insect that disturbed him.

Peeping out of the one blood-smeared orbit he was left with, Chain made his way back to his signature weapon of

choice that got left behind in the mud under the old brittle tombstone he had fell from. As he picked it up to deal a fatal blow to Stone, he was so full of rage and sure about his inevitable victory that he didn't notice the resistance the chain made him feel before being brought down to tear apart the flesh of its victim, who was on his knees, desperately grasping for air. By reaching out for the strike, the chain had been slung around the carved cone head on top of the tombstone behind him, its sharp teeth gripping the soft sandstone. Pulling it down now with all his brute force, Chain managed to make the moist soil give way to the weight of the heavy stone it had enclosed for centuries. Turning around to check for the cause of the unexpected resistance interrupting his victory, he only had the blink of an eye to realize that his massive, mutilated body would be crushed by something much heavier on this fateful night. Accompanied by a low dull sound, the giant got pushed deep into the muddy earth, never to rise again.

From further up the hill, Shaykh Sharafuddin watched the scene with focused eyes, exclaimed a silent nod and breathed out slowly. Stone felt his lungs being filled with air again and the cold deadly grip disappear slowly. Angel

turned around and went back deeper into the woods surrounding the cemetery to descend back down to the van. 'It seems like we are dealing with a dignified opponent this time', she said into her phone, half excited and half worried.

'Black tea?' Stone, who was still recovering from the scary and unexplainable attack on his vital energies a few hours ago, joined Celeste Novak in the vast and beautiful garden outside the walls of the tekke.

'Usually it makes my head turn, but today it doesn't matter anymore', she slowly answered. Stone joined her on the green painted wooden bench and handed over the small glass with the red steaming liquid that kept dervishes alert during night vigils since centuries.

'They say tea is half of the way', he tried to start a conversation.

'Which way? And what's the other half then? Biscuits?' Celeste still tried to figure out what to think about this strange place hidden in the hills on the Asian side of Istanbul that had served as a safe haven for her after a night of sheer terror.

'Some say marriage. They might be wrong. The way is the short cut to heaven'.

Even though she didn't really get what he was talking about, Celeste was rather happy to find at least one of these polite but rather closed and pious residents with proper English. She had spent hours trying to talk to Turkish ladies who quietly treated her wounds with fresh herbs and made her consume a lot of soup.

'Did you meet...did he...?'

'The Hellraiser guy? Has been sent back home. He won't do you any harm anymore. At least not in physical form. But the weird occult tattoos on what is left of his head tell me that he didn't run up the hill just to get his hands on your change. Did you get caught up in a black mass or what?'

Celeste had to swallow, thinking back on what she supposed had happened in the deserted building the last night. 'I guess all the elements were there', she uttered, still terrified. 'Including human sacrifice.'

At this point it might as well make sense to ask advice from someone on the other side of things she thought, sipping on her tea and contemplating on the full reality of the dark forces she was dealing with.

'My name is Celeste Novak. I grew up in Hungary. When I was six years old, my sister got abducted. She was four at that time. One night masked men entered our house in the outskirts of Budapest, stabbed my parents to death and took Annabelle with them. I was hiding in the wardrobe when the noise started. It wouldn't have made much of a difference, but still...I didn't do anything to help her.'

Celeste let her gaze wander over the vast garden area that provided the small population of the place with fresh fruits and vegetables. In the far distance, way beyond this green oasis, the industrial suburbs of the city stretched out all the way to the Marmara Sea, where huge cargo ships were waiting to get rid of their heavy loads.

Stone had listened to the young woman's story next to him with full attention. After taking a sip from the small glass he was holding in between his thumb and index finger, he tried to link it to last night's happenings.

'They wouldn't come back for you after such a long time though I guess. Except if you have been looking for them, that is...'

'The police never came up with any trace. I was put into an orphanage. Needless to say that I spent my whole youth

trying to understand what happened. It was not until I was sixteen that I came across a first clue about what's going on. At that age we had to help out with taking care of the small children in the toddler section of the orphanage. It was there that I noticed that kids seemed to disappear on a regular basis. The institution's management made a business out of selling them to evil people for dark purposes. One night, a man showed up and left with a new-born that had been dropped at the orphanage only a few days ago. I crossed him in the corridor when he left the building, the poor bundle in his hands. One of them had a striking, pyramid-shape tattooed on its back - exactly the same I had noticed on one of the kidnappers who stood next to the wardrobe while I was peeping through the blinds when my sister was taken years ago. I managed to follow him to his car and memorize the number plate. With the help of an older friend of mine who grew up in the orphanage and got a job in the police force later, I traced back the car to an organization linked to the United Nations. It is mainly dealing with the preservation of cultural heritage in countries all over the world. But they are really willing cooperators with inheritors of an ancient cult of evil worship that they help to preserve and keep established.

Human sacrifice is an essential part of it and having access to UNICEF-run orphanages all over the world obviously comes in handy for them...'

Stone was aware that there are thousands of children going missing every year. It's just that nobody ever made a link between them. Plus, if it happened in one of the many economically struggling regions of the globe like Africa, Asia, Latin America or Eastern Europe, destitute parents often wouldn't cry too long over a hungry mouth less to feed. Getting away with it was easier. Corrupt caretakers earned some pocket money and there would be a few bites extra to other needy standing in line. But still, in the face of investigation, the mere idea of such a high scale crime operation would almost necessarily be labeled a conspiracy theory and quickly put aside.

'How did you come to these conclusions? Are there any proofs?'

'I have been looking for them for ten years now. No hard evidence ever surfaced. It was only two years ago that I noticed something that led me right to where I ended up last night. Nowadays, science basically decides what is right or

wrong, determines if something is relevant or obsolete and tells us if something historically existed or rather is pure myth. The probability of Jesus Christ teaching the gospel as a living human being has been highly questioned, due to missing entries in historical documents of relevant chronologists, among other reasons. Religion in general is put in the myth section, which leads the average guy to underestimate the spiritual realm, that those in power are fully making use of. ISIS not only spills the blood of thousands of innocents, but is also very busy with deleting history, tearing down ancient places of pilgrimage and worship. These places might disappear from public perception and scientific research agendas, however, in fact they get sold piece by piece to private collectors all over the world. The interesting thing is that compared to monotheistic religions, the cults practiced by ancient Egyptians are very well documented and considered as historical facts. Lately, the cult of Akkorrah has been prominently featured in scientific research, mainly presented by a guy named La Rosa, who in no time became an international expert in the field. He basically has a dubious academic record, had lost several jobs for being caught pants down with female students who needed to upgrade their

marks and I suspect him to act as a kind of PR-agent for the cult. Most of his research is based on exclusive access to artefacts that are strictly kept away from the public eye for the one reason that they are still needed and in use. He is currently lecturing at the University of Istanbul and I have been following him around since I arrived here two months ago. He also led me to the empty warehouse where I have been caught yesterday and...got caught...by this....'

Their tea had become cold. Neither of them had felt like drinking for a while. Both of them were busy with their thoughts and sat there in silence until the call for the noon prayer from the small mosque in the yard reached their ears.

Right away after Stone had left to join the other dervishes, that would leave their daily duties, perform the ritual ablution and gather in the place of worship to wait for their Imam to arrive and lead them in prayer, Celeste sensed some movement in the far end of the garden. Dense branches covering a vast vegetation of raspberry bushes and hazelnut trees were pushed aside and revealed the silhouette of what

seemed to be an old dervish in his simple, worn out gardening clothes. By the time he had passed the area where tomatoes, cucumbers and herbs were planted in the moist and rich soil and got closer to the big oak tree that stood right behind from where Celeste was sitting, she noticed a surprising elegance and dignity in his movements.

'A rose for a rose', the grey-bearded man addressed her with a deep, warm voice, after he had reached into the cloth wrapped around his head and removed the deep-red flower that had been attached to it, to offer it to the young woman with a sweet smile on his face.

'Thank you', Celeste answered, deeply touched by this simple gesture and rather surprised to hear the man speak in English. She willingly made space for him when he showed intentions to sit down next to her.

'How...do you like it here?' he asked, his calm eyes aimed at the far away sea, where a lively breeze conjured white wavetops on the water.

'It is peaceful', she slowly answered, following his gaze and contemplating the horizon.

'You are home here', the man said. 'This place is like the one you played at as a child...up on the hill, in your town...'

Celeste immediately turned towards the old man. Her eyes had widened. The rose hill, situated in the quiet second district of Budapest, is a popular site among tourists and locals alike, due to its fabulous view over the beautiful old part of the city. Most visitors took the story of Gul Baba - the rose father, a Turkish poet who had come with the Ottomans to spread the beauty of his belief among foreign folks and whose mausoleum was situated on top of the hill - as a fairytale. On a few occasions though, Celeste and her family would witness the arrival of strangers who would spend hours in the octagon-shaped building around the burial place and made it the most northern point of pilgrimage for Muslims in the world. The Novaks regularly spent time there, having a picnic in the soft, green grass or refreshing themselves using water from the fountain after the somehow exhausting walk up the hill, before...before everything changed. But how could this man know about that? Celeste was speechless, pictures of her early childhood spun in her mind, when things were still fine. She suddenly realized how precious these memories were to her and how safe and

protected she had always felt up on the rose hill, next to Gül Baba.

'Yes', the mysterious man next to her continued slowly. 'Novak. That is Slavic. He was from the Bektashi...an Order that is well known in Slavic countries. You are from his noble blood line. You are special...like him. And your sister is special too...that's why they wanted her...'

Celeste now couldn't hold to herself anymore. 'My sister?' she uttered unbelieving, nervous and confused. 'Is...special? Does that mean...that she is still alive...?' Her whole body was shaking now, unable to understand what was happening.

'Some...thing in her is still alive', the man answered, as his eyes narrowed and he slowly nodded several times.

'Sidi!'

Stone's face brightened as he approached the unlikely couple on the bench, carrying a precious, richly decorated garment folded over his outstretched hands and a cone-like green hat with a neatly wrapped turban of the same color around it on top.

'We have been waiting for you', he added, reaching for his shaykh's hand to touch it with his lips and forehead.

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