

BEYOND A DARKLING POOL
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UNREQUITED

A twist of fate, a jealous seed,
A woman's scorn to mask greed,
Innocence is something gradually eroded,
The smile beckons, promising a moment,
When all is lost to the taste of love,
And a tasteless aftermath,
Flavours of wine age and sour,
Flavours of vinegar remain,
Flavours fade away,
In the end only the memory lingers,
Truer to the thought of her,
Than history explains...

PART ONE:
Jason Greeves Investigates:
MURDER BEYOND THE GRAVE

Just Another Night

Fear. Lisa huddled under the covers. Her tiny hands pushed them back enough for her eyes to catch a glimpse of the room through the golden locks of her dishevelled hair. She looked so fragile in her efforts to remain concealed, but the curiosity brought on by the fear of the unknown dared her exposure to the sounds that inevitably reach out in the dead of night. The full moon cast an eerie glow making the shadows from the branches on the tree outside her window seem like the claws of some demonic creature about to break into her bedroom. Her imagination played the wicked dance of extrapolating something more in her perception of the view. She was terribly afraid, almost too afraid to show herself to the darkness. She wanted to call her *mommy* but then the creature with the red eyes might hear her and instead of watching her through the window, he might break in and eat her. Her teeth began to chatter in her fear, much like they did when the weather grew colder and *mommy* had to walk her to school because of the ice. Lisa peered out from under the covers, daring to expose herself further beyond this fragile sanctuary. She saw the face in the window and was so overcome with fear that it took the breath from her as if remembering a dream that suddenly became so real. The pale face with the red eyes glared at her. The mouth of the creature opened, revealing its fangs. Lisa found her voice. She screamed. The window shattered inward and the creature erupted into her room. Lisa leapt from her bed and retreated to the corner of the room. The creature advanced on her with intent. The door opened and the light of a candle penetrated the darkness. Lisa dived under the bed as she saw her *mommy* hesitate, her own fear plainly engraved on her face. She was overcome with the instinct to protect her daughter. Her heart raced to the rhythm of her fear and excited the creature more; the beat so strong as to make an impact into this night that reverberated in Lisa's head. Her *mommy* grappled with the creature and Lisa heard her own pitiable whimpering amplified into the night. The candle fell and went out as it hit the floor sending a splatter of wax across the worn wood, pouring into the grooves of the timber for a fleeting moment as it hardened and took the shape of the surface to which it adhered. The creature swept her *mommy* down on to the bed like a violent lover, pinning her there as she desperately tried to bring her legs together in an effort to push him away with her knees. He held her there and soon she stopped screaming, a low moan emanating like a soft whine, the only sign that showed she was still alive, and soon that too died to the satisfaction of the embrace as her senses were overwhelmed by the ecstasy that drove her body to respond. Her legs curled about the fiend and her hands slid up and down his back in a caress. Were it not for the destruction wrought on the room, everything would have appeared like some grotesque lovers dance. Lisa clung to the floor as she listened to the curious gulp of the creature. She wanted to get up. She wanted to help her *mommy*. She was too afraid.

Suddenly, the door burst open with a violence that caused it to slam against the wall with the force of the entry. Lisa watched, as a man she did not recognise pulled the creature off her *mommy* and forced him towards the window. The fangs of the creature glistened as the blood that marred its pale flesh soaked into the mouth of the fiend. The eyes glowed with the fire of its hunger and the shock at this brutal interruption. The stranger held a shotgun. Lisa remembered her father's shotgun that he used to frighten off the fox that so often tried to get at the chickens, from a time before he left them alone. The stranger pushed the creature over the edge and stuck the gun in his mouth, though the fiend grasped helplessly against the sudden imbalance perpetrated by the stranger's violent shove and persistent reaction. He pulled the trigger. Lisa's eyes widened in shock, as her heart leapt and her stomach churned, though she could not bring herself to turn away in a moment that seemed to last too long to be recognised as a true facet of time.

'Suck on this!' roared the man and the sound of the gun was like an explosion to Lisa. The creature fell from the window though she saw the gaping hole in its head. Lisa shuddered and hid her eyes momentarily from this gruesome scene.

'Major, don't let the bastard get away!' shouted the stranger.

The rain washed into the room through the broken window. Lisa had not been aware that it had been raining. The moon had been so full and the sky so clear she had not noticed the droplets on the windowpanes. At that moment as the man was lifting her *mommy* from the bed, a scraping sound made the stranger turn. The creature reappeared in the window, almost as a strained voice cried out in alarm from below.

'Jason, he's coming back up!'

The stranger dropped her *mommy* and turned so quickly his motion was almost a blur. The hole in the creature's head had all but disappeared, the last trace of the wound closing as it bounded through the window, making the perfect white skin return to the smooth complexion of the dead. Lisa screamed again.

'You will have to do better than that if you want to stop me, Guardian,' hissed the creature, the blood still mingling with the saliva pouring from its mouth. The man merely grinned and cut the creature across the throat with a long, curved dagger that seemed to appear in his hand too quickly for Lisa to determine where the blade had come from. The head fell backward out the window before the man kicked the creature in the chest and sent the rest of the body sprawling after it. The blood barely had time to settle on the floor in small droplets that followed the flow of the candle that had fallen from her mother's hand, but the fluid flattened and soaked into the wood leaving only a faint trace to show where it had fallen in the shadows that could not be reached by the uncertain light.

'How about that?' offered the stranger. He seemed no more disturbed by the return of the fiend than he would have been by someone entering the room through the damaged door. The stranger lay Lisa's *mommy* on her bed. He lit a cigarette and moved to the window, peering out into the night to make sure that the creature did not somehow manage to repeat the performance. The absence of his fear was something that Lisa could not understand. He was oblivious to the harm that had been perpetrated here or to the danger that such a creature posed.

'Major, I need you up here. Jonathan and Stephanie can take care of the remains. Make sure!'

The stranger mopped her *mommy's* brow with the side of the bed sheet. He arched her head and checked the wound on her neck, two points of red that seemed so dark against her pale skin. The blood trickled down her neck and soaked her favourite nightgown. Lisa could hear the sound of footsteps bounding up the stairs. She remained in the corner, huddled in her fear and uncertainty. Lisa saw another man enter the room. He was older than the first one and reminded her of her grandfather, though she sensed that he wore a great deal of agitation that was only kept in check by the adrenalin coursing through him. Lisa barely moved. She even tried to hold her breath so she wouldn't be noticed.

The Major tended to the woman.

'Will she live?' asked Greeves.

Lisa began to sob. Her *mommy* couldn't die. The Major leaned down and drew her out from under the bed. Lisa hadn't realised that she had clambered further under the bed when the creature broke through the window.

'Show some tact, man!' he barked. 'Don't worry little girl, your *mommy* is going to be all right. There is no need to worry. The bad man will not be coming back.' The Major cast Jason Greeves a scowl of disapproval. Jason shrugged.

'She will be fine. He only took a little of her blood. She is in no danger.'

Lisa trembled, partly from the cold but mostly from the shock but this older man seemed friendlier, and the exertions of his climb up the stairs made his heart beat strong and fast, like the rhythm of a drum reverberating in her head. The Major glanced around the room gauging the level of disarray.

'I think we should close the shutters and move the girl and her mother to the other room. She will come round soon. It might be better if she doesn't have to face the state of the child's bedroom right away or the implications of what just happened.'

Jason nodded. He tossed the cigarette through the window and closed the shutters. Lisa watched as he secured the latches and dragged her wardrobe in front of the window.

The Major scooped the little girl up while Jason took her *mommy* in his arms. They took them both into the other bedroom and lay her *mommy* on the floor beside her, taking a blanket from the bed to place about them both.

'Better to put her on the floor, Jason. If she wakes with a fright she might only suffer further injury in a fall.'

The Major settled them both, rubbed the little girl's cheek and offered a disarming smile that could in no way throw back this nightmare.

'Look after your *mommy*, little girl. Don't worry it will be all right now.'

Lisa watched the men leave. As she heard the heavy footsteps retreat down the stairs and the door close, she crept ever so softly towards the window. She saw a pale woman with red hair get into a car with the men and noticed there was another man, younger than the others. She watched them drive away as her *mommy* woke, full of terror. Lisa retreated to her *mommy*. She clutched Lisa in her arms and cried, and waited for the morning to

come. Lisa nuzzled close to her *mommy*. The smell of the blood excited her senses, the taste that still trickled down her neck and touched her lips awakening an awareness that had been suppressed in the charade and the instincts that clung to her dead body. She had nothing to fear. The moment of her apprehension faded in the taste of the blood. After all, she had come here to make her *mommy* one of them, so she could be with her forever. Lisa's fangs extended. She sunk her teeth into the wound created by poor Markus. Her mother was weak now and couldn't resist. In fact, she did not try to resist, the immediate sensation of ecstasy returning as if the interruption had been nothing more than a fleeting moment. Markus had come at her bidding to assist in the taking of her mother. He had done enough to leave her frail and her heart would not last long in the throes of the child's deliberate embrace. Lisa fed as the clouds closed about the moon and cast the room into a veil of darkness. The eyes of the child glowed, two piercing emerald glimmers in the night that burned with a hunger that had been sated for now. Lisa tore open her wrist with her fangs in the way that Markus had shown her. She fed her *mommy* just enough to ensure her rebirth and struggled to push her away at the moment the feeding became more intense. Now they would be together for all eternity. They would hunt together for other children for Lisa to play with, and for her *mommy* to care for and they would never be alone again.

'I said, turn the car around! We are not finished! Damn it Jason, why didn't you mention the child?' shouted Stephanie in frustration. 'You always do this. The point of discussing the whole thing is so that you know what to do.'

Jason shrugged. The Major rolled his eyes. He, at least, should have been more careful given his previous difficulties. Everything is never as it seems. Trust nothing that the eyes tell until you know the truth. All the words of caution in the world still found them making the same pitiable mistakes.

Jonathan was already turning the car, barely slowing the pace of the vehicle as the tyres screeched in alarm.

'Her daughter died. It was the death of the children that brought us out here in the first place.'

Jason looked at the Major and shrugged again. Stephanie frowned at her husband.

'All right. Next time I'll listen.'

Jonathan didn't even try to suppress a grin.

'So what's so funny?'

Jason lit up three cigarettes and passed one to Stephanie and Jonathan.

'I'm just glad to see that I'm not the only one who doesn't listen to Steph.'

Stephanie punched them both in the shoulder. The Major was the only one who remained dour. He could not see what there was to be happy about. In all likelihood, that child had taken another life. One they could have saved if they had been more professional. However, given the horror they faced in their lives, he decided not to mention that point. This was not about keeping score or adding any more guilt. This was about doing the best they could in a bad situation. He was tired. They were all tired. Mistakes were inevitable. The Major only hoped that some day a mistake would not cost them dearly. Jonathan brought the car to a halt with a suddenness that caused the tyres to slip momentarily on the wet, leaf soaked road. Jason was out of the car first but the Major stepped passed him. He had already done his part here. The Major took it upon himself to dispatch the child and the mother. They passed into the house with more care than they had practised on the previous occasion when they were motivated by the urgency of seeing the fiend enter the child's bedroom. The Major crept soundlessly towards the room until a creaking floorboard gave him momentary cause for reproach. The child had been so busy feeding morsels of blood to her new fledgling mother she did not notice him until he stood over them both and severed Lisa's head from her shoulders. The eyes of the child stared up from the head locked in shock and surprise before they closed involuntarily and the expression sagged to one of calm and peace. The abrupt cut sent a splash of blood over the nightgown of the mother. Her eyes opened in savage confusion, all too briefly in the experience of this new existence to matter. The Major repeated his action and took the mother's head. Jason remained in the shadows and while the Major knew the necessity of having someone watch his back, he detested the idea that he might need a safety net. They had dispatched six children and four adult *Fallen* in this region in the last few days. The Major still had the bite marks on his neck to remind him that he had been taken in by one of those seemingly innocent children on the first night. He had let his guard down and would have paid the price were it not for Jonathan's timely intervention. No one had chided him for his mistake. They had all been there at sometime or another. These creatures had been different to those they had encountered on the Moor in what seemed so long ago. The stake did not destroy them, merely immobilised them. The blade had proved most effective. The shotgun stunned them long enough to finish them off; at least most of the time. Still,

the Major felt no cause for joy. The mother could have been saved if they had been more careful though whether she would have wanted to go on living in the aftermath of knowing the great harm that had befallen her child was another matter. The point was moot. They had been too late, or too careless to consider such recriminations. Now they had two victims instead of one.

Stephanie insisted on burying the bodies away from the creature who had taken the child. She wanted them to be together and not cast down with the fiend who had caused this tragedy. They were on their way back to Jason's house long before the light of dawn crept over the horizon. The curious trace of light was always a welcome sight though these companions of fate had spent increasingly more time living in the darkness than they had done in the light in recent months. The Major remained silent on the return journey, locked in battle with his own demons. He never really had a problem with all this until it became a business. They were supposed to be doing this for a greater purpose. However, in recent months Jason had developed a growing reputation that drew clients who were willing to pay for the resolution of problems that defied the laws of man and nature. Of course, they still did the occasional regular work to fight the forces of evil but this had become a business. While such afforded them a certain level of immunity to the consequences of their questionable actions, the Major was uncomfortable with the idea that they could profit from misery. The rest of the world didn't want to believe that such evil existed. They retreated to the comfort of plausible deniability and were reluctant to look with any degree of interest into the possibility that real horror lurked in the night outside the safety of their own comfortably ignorant lives. The authorities took a similar view. They ignored, deferred and turned a blind eye to the inevitable results. In fact, there were times when they directed those afflicted with the unexplainable to someone who might be more sympathetic to the problem. The Major doubted that the child's father would see this as a favourable outcome to the affair, even if he had been alienated from the mother for some time before the child had fallen victim to a vampire. While it was unlikely that he would provoke a reaction from the authorities to investigate the outcome, his grief would be in no way lessened by the consequences of the night. He would not risk the scrutiny of his own questionable behaviour or the exposure of his disregard to take responsibility. He would not wish to appear insane in the light of his new life with a new family or to damage his social standing by disclosing his interests or the revelation that such horrors existed. His involvement had been miniscule at best. In the end, the evidence of any wrongdoing would have dissolved in the aftermath, as the victims of the *Fallen* became nothing more than a trace of dust in the soil in which they were interred. The burial of such losses was merely an effort to provide peace for those who had been taken so cruelly by the darkness, and to satisfy Stephanie's need to ensure that they had done all they could for the victims of this tragedy. This was not one of those times where they had taken a client for profit but the Major was disturbed by the difference in their attitude to the cases they selected. Stephanie was inclined to share his view. Jason and Jonathan were another matter. The practicality of receiving some benefit for their efforts had been brought about by the fact that Jason was a professional investigator who had been accustomed to getting paid for his troubles. Jonathan was his associate. They didn't see this as a conflict of interest. In the end, this was just another night. However, the Major was disposed to believe that there had to be better ways to make a living.