

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.

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.

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 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.

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

since we had parted ways, but it felt like it had been longer. When the words inside my head couldn't find their intended audience, my head felt like it was going to explode. There were so many things that had to be said to Rachel. No one else had bothered to tell her the things that she needed to hear, so it had become my responsibility to do so. She needed to hear that her life had value. I walked to the front entrance of the club and was greeted by Tyler.

"What the fuck are you doing here?" he growled.

"Get out of my way, Tyler," I insisted.

"You going to make me, bitch?" he replied as he bowed up, preparing to fight.

"I will," a short, bald man standing behind Tyler interrupted. "Tyler, you're fired. Mr. Davenport here is purchasing the club. He let me know earlier today that you are no longer welcomed here. He wanted me to wait until he got here before I fired you, though."

"Steve, don't fire me, man," Tyler said as he turned around to face the club's manager.

"I..."

"You heard the man, Tyler," I said. "You're fired. Now get off of my property."

"I'm taking Rachel with me," Tyler replied.

"She is no longer yours to torment," I raised my shirt up a little to let Tyler see the pistol tucked into my waistband. "You're leaving now, one way or another. I'd recommend you doing it without a bullet in your head. Either way, it's your choice."

"This isn't over," Tyler threatened as he left.

I told Steve that I appreciated his help. I walked passed him and into the club. I saw Rachel sitting at a table with an overweight, middle-aged man. He was eagerly talking to her, but it was obvious that she didn't care about anything he was saying. I approached the table.

"Rachel," I said. "Come with me. We're leaving."

"What the fuck, dude?" she exclaimed. "I'm trying to work."

"You told me earlier that you didn't know who you really were," I replied. "Well, I think I know who you are. Come with me and I'll show you. Don't worry about making money tonight. I'll compensate you for your time."

"I'm not a whore!"

"Don't be foolish, girl. I'm trying to fix you, not fuck you."

"I'm trying to talk to the lady here, pal," the fat man said to me.

"Interrupt me again and I'll remove you eyelids and urinate on your face," I replied to him. Rachel giggled.

"If I go with you, I'll get fired," she said. "I really need this job."

"You won't be fired," I assured her. "I'm in the process of buying this place. I'll give you the club if that's what you want."

"What about Tyler," Rachel pleaded. "He'll be pissed if he sees me leaving with you."

“Tyler is gone,” I said. “You don’t have to be afraid of him anymore. I can make sure he never harms you again. I can make sure no one ever harms you. You deserve better than what you have. As soon as you realize that, you’ll be that stronger person that you said you wanted to be.”

Rachel’s eyes lit up. It was as if she had just realized that life doesn’t always have to be difficult. It was like she finally understood that another human could care about her, regardless of what she thought of herself. After a few moments of hesitation, she agreed to go with me.

“So this is what you wanted to show me?” Rachel asked, unimpressed.

We were in my rose garden. The moon and stars burned brightly in the night sky. It was the place that I had wanted to spend my last moments with Jessica, but didn’t get the chance to. If I had, she would still be alive. I had not visited the garden since Jessica’s death, but my gardener had done an excellent job of keeping it up.

“I came out here once when life was confusing to me,” I told Rachel. “It kind of helped me make sense of things. Life can get so loud that it deafens you. When that happens, you can’t hear the voice that will guide you to where you need to be.”

“What does that voice sound like?” she asked.

“It’s different for everyone, I suppose,” I replied. “For me it’s the voice of someone I once loved. She guided me from a place where I simply existed to a place where I could actually start living.”

“So are you like the Buddha or something?” Rachel asked jokingly.

I laughed. I briefly considered sharing my secret with her. If she knew what I really was, she’d understand that there is hope for anyone to find their place. If the prince of darkness could see beauty in life, then anyone could. I decided not to tell her, though. She would either think that I was insane or she’d be terrified of me, probably both. Besides, bringing her to the garden was as much for my benefit as it was for hers. I had grown weary of my solitary existence. I was in desperate need of a companion and she was the only person that I had been the slightest bit interested in.

“I don’t have all the answers,” I said. “I do know that if you’re alive and healthy, if you have at least one person that genuinely cares about you, and you’re still not happy, then you are definitely doing something wrong.”

“Who the hell is going to care about someone like me?” she asked.

“I care about you,” I replied. “It’s not because I knew your mother. It’s not because I feel guilty about what happened or because I feel sorry for you. I care about you because you are worth caring about.”

Rachel smiled the same beautiful smile that her mother used to. She leaned in and kissed me on the lips. I could feel my face begin to blush. I had no intention of taking advantage of her vulnerability. However, I felt my body become aroused. I took a step back from her.

“I’m sorry,” Rachel said. “I didn’t mean to embarrass you. It’s just been a while since anyone has been so nice to me.”

“No need to apologize,” I assured her.

We stood there staring at each other for what felt like forever, but was actually only a few seconds. I felt a few drops of rain fall onto my head. I was thankful for the change in the weather because it gave me an excuse to break the awkward silence.

“It’s starting to rain,” I said. “We should go inside.”

“Can we stay out here for a while?” she asked. “I love the rain and I really like your rose garden. This is the first time in a while that I’ve actually felt like a real person.”

“We can stay out here for as long as you’d like,” I replied.

“Hold me,” she whispered as she wrapped her arms around me, hugging me tightly.

Rachel began undressing me. I wanted to resist, but didn’t. It was her moment to claim whatever she wanted from the world. If what she wanted was me, then I would not deny her. She quickly removed her clothes and then shoved me to the ground. She climbed on top of me and furiously kissed my lips and neck. The rain began to pour down on us as I penetrated her. It was only the second time I had ever had sex with a human. The first time had felt shameful and filthy. With Rachel it felt natural. Even with the rain soaking us and dirt from the ground covering our nude bodies, it felt pure. Lying flat on my back, I looked up at Rachel as she rode me. I had seen her naked several times before at her job, but with her skin glowing in the moonlight, she was the most beautiful thing in the world.

4.

For the next four weeks, Rachel and I were inseparable. It was like a real human relationship. She had quit her job at the strip club and decided to go to college. That was what her mother would have wanted. We had moved all of her belongings out of Tyler's house and into mine. He was not at home when we went to collect her things. Neither Rachel nor I had heard anything from Tyler since I had him fired. I didn't think too much about it, though. I was too happy with my situation to be worried about that insignificant prick.

The best part about the new relationship was that I felt like I had regained my sanity. With my loneliness alleviated, the dark voice in my head had been silenced. I wasn't sure if I loved Rachel, but I definitely loved the way that she made me feel. I hoped that the feeling would last forever. For the first time since I became human, I was starting to seriously think about my future. I would eventually grow old and die. Until then, I wanted to spend every moment I could with Rachel. I had found my place in the world and it was with her.

The brief relationship that I had had with Jessica came with an expiration date attached to it. I knew that I only had a week with her before I got involved with her. It was different with Rachel, though. The possibilities were limitless. I understood why humans felt the need to pair off with each other. It was the most exciting and frightening thing I could imagine. Being

with someone meant taking the risk that you might someday lose them. It also meant that every moment that you didn't lose them was a victory.

"What are you thinking about?" Rachel asked me.

We were in bed, recovering from our midday sexual encounter. We had sex on a daily basis, sometimes multiple times every day. It had become so much more than just a physical experience. I had felt so alive every time I was inside of her. We had the kind of passion that was only possible between two souls trying to escape suffering.

"I was thinking that we should sell this house," I said. "As soon as you decide where you want to go to school, we can sell this place and just start over somewhere new."

"Hasn't this house been in your family for over a century?" she asked. "It's a really nice house. Are you sure you want to sell it?"

"It's just a material possession," I stated. "People love their material possessions. They don't seem to realize that their possessions will never love them back. Therefore, there is no real value in anything we own."

"You are so sexy when you get all deep and philosophical," Rachel replied as she kissed me. "Whatever you want to do, I will support your decision. It doesn't matter where we live as long as we're together."

My cell phone rang, interrupting our conversation. I was reluctant to answer it. Whatever the call was about couldn't possibly be more important than discussing my future

with Rachel. I let the call go to voicemail. The phone began to ring again immediately so I answered it. I received some disturbing news and then hung up.

“What’s wrong, baby?” Rachel asked.

“I’ve got to go,” I replied. “That was Steve. Someone broke into the club last night and vandalized the place. The police are there. They need to get a statement from me.”

“You should never have bought that place,” Rachel said.

“I had to. It was the only way to get your attention.”

“I’ll go with you.”

“No,” I said. “You wait here. Don’t bother putting clothes on. This shouldn’t take very long.”

The interior of the club was destroyed. The tables and chairs had been broken and thrown around. Shattered glass from liquor bottles littered the floor. Profanity was written all over the walls with red spray paint. One sentence written on the wall caught my attention. The big, red letters read “Sebastian Davenport is a dead man”.

“Do you have any idea who would’ve done this?” one of the police officers asked me.

“No,” I replied.

“I told them it was probably Tyler,” Steve offered his opinion.

“It’s possible,” I said. “It doesn’t matter. I won’t be pressing charges.”

“I have to urge you to reconsider that, sir,” the officer said to me. “You should take this threat against your life seriously.”

“Trust me, officer,” a replied with a smile. “I take it very seriously.”

When I returned home, there were three cop cars parked in front of my house. An ominous feeling came over me. The last time I had felt a sense of happiness, the most horrible thing imaginable happened. I could not bear another tragedy in my life. For a moment I thought the police might have been there for my protection, even though I had declined their help. I realized that couldn’t be true. It had only been an hour since I gave my statement about the vandalism. There was no way that they could’ve processed the report and decided I needed protection that quickly. They could’ve been there to arrest me. Sebastian had committed several crimes throughout his life. It was only a matter of time before his past caught up with me. I stepped out of my car, ready to face whatever was coming.

“Mr. Davenport,” a man in a suit said as he approached me before I could walk into the house. “There’s been an incident inside your home.”

“What?” I was shocked. “What kind of incident? Where’s Rachel?”

“Rachel Riley was attacked,” he replied solemnly. “She managed to call 911 before she lost consciousness. She was taken to the hospital in critical condition. That’s all the information I have about her right now.”

Things were much worse than I had imagined. I felt desperate and afraid. Those feelings faded quickly and were replaced with rage. Someone had hurt the person I cared about. I imagined that they had done it to hurt me. The feelings that I had when Jessica was murdered returned to me. I wanted vengeance. I looked at the detective and realized that I had met him before. His name was Logan Bryce. He was the one who had investigated the quadruple homicide the previous year.

“These kinds of things just keep happening to you, don’t they?” Detective Bryce said, almost sarcastically. “You’re a real unlucky guy, aren’t you, Mr. Davenport?”

“You think I had something to do with this?” my anger turned its focus towards Bryce.

“No,” he said coldly. “You and I both know who did this. Tyler Penn. I’m just wondering what you’re going to do about it.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, the last time someone hurt one of your girlfriends things didn’t end well for them,” Bryce said. “You beat one of them to death with a hammer and put a knife through the other one’s eye. What are you planning on doing to Penn?”

He knew the truth. He knew that I had killed the Millers out of vengeance, not self-defense. I didn’t know why the detective had covered for me. I wasn’t sure what kind of game he was playing. If he was my enemy, he could’ve already found a reason to arrest me. If he was my ally, he could’ve come forward earlier and claimed a reward for his service to me. I

didn't trust him, but I had no choice but to accept whatever help he offered. Only one thing mattered and that was Rachel.

"Take this," Bryce handed me a 9mm caliber pistol. "I'll be getting a warrant to arrest Tyler Penn at his home. It should take me about two hours. When I get to house, I'll find him dead from an obvious suicide. I guess the guilt from what he did to Rachel will get to him. Two hours. Obvious suicide. Got it?"

"I've got to get to the hospital," I said desperately. "I've got to see Rachel."

"There will be time for that later," he explained. "There's nothing you can do for her at the hospital. There is something you can do for her here, though."

"Why are you helping me?"

"Let's just say that I've got a vested interest in your welfare."

5.

I drove faster than I had ever driven. I knew that I had very little time to carry out my mission. Killing Tyler would not help Rachel survive, but it still felt like the right thing to do. Tyler's crime reminded me of why I had despised humanity. I wanted to return to my old realm. Things were better when I could punish the wicked without human laws interfering. I hated Sebastian Davenport for tricking me into giving up my world. Everything that had

happened to me in the past year had stemmed from the pact Sebastian and I made. Looking back on it, it was a foolish decision on my part.

Everything that I had touched since becoming human had been poisoned. It was futile for me to care about anything because evil men would just come along and destroy whatever it was. I hated humanity. I hated the evil men that destroyed the innocent. I hated the innocent that were too weak to protect themselves. The whole world was corrupted. Killing one man wouldn't change anything, but it would satisfy my bloodlust. It was time for me to unleash my fury upon the world.

"It's not too late," she said.

I looked at the passenger seat next to me and saw Jessica. I had seen her before in my dreams. I had seen her in hallucinations while I was awake. I had heard her voice inside my head before. This time was different. She was really there.

"You can still find redemption," she said.

"I do not seek redemption," I told her. "I seek vengeance and I shall have it. You said I was a man now. You said that I was no longer the beast. You were wrong. It doesn't matter what body I wear. I will always be the beast."

"The beast that you were wasn't capable of love," she replied. "Did you ever really love me?"

"If I did, it wasn't real," I responded bitterly. "It was just a trick my pathetic human mind played on me. How can anyone truly love anything about this disgusting world? You

need to leave me alone. Stop haunting my dreams. Stop corrupting my mind. I do not need your love or your guidance anymore. Just leave me the fuck alone.”

“If that’s what you really want...” and she was gone.

I sped down the highway until I reached Tyler’s house. I wasn’t sure if any of his neighbors saw me arrive, but I didn’t care. Law and justice were two different concepts. At that moment, law was irrelevant. Besides, Bryce would be able to cover up my crime. I didn’t worry about the consequences.

I thought about kicking the door in, but decided to test to see if was unlocked. It was. I entered the house and was disgusted by its filthy condition. The place smelled like cat urine and stale beer. I found Tyler passed out on the couch with an empty liquor bottle in his hand. I knelt beside him and pulled the pistol from my pocket.

“Wake up!” I shouted.

“What...,” Tyler moaned as he opened his eyes. “What the fuck are you doing here?”

“There is an imposter sitting on my throne in Hell,” I said. “When you see him, tell him I’ll be reclaiming my place soon.”

I put the barrel of the gun to his temple and pulled the trigger. The side of his head exploded, splashing blood and brains everywhere. I placed the gun in Tyler’s hand and staged the scene to look like a suicide. A warm sense of satisfaction came over me. I had killed an evil man and I knew what was waiting for him on the other side. I briefly thought about how much

fun it would be to kill everyone on the planet. It was a pleasant thought, but I didn't have time to dwell on it.

When I arrived home, the police were no longer there. I disposed of my dirty clothes and took a shower. While I was washing myself, I considered going to the hospital to check on Rachel. I wasn't sure if it was a good idea, though. I had promised to protect her and I failed. Maybe it was my provocation of Tyler that had led to his act of violence. No. It wasn't my fault. Rachel had made the decision to get involved with that psychopath. Why should I care, anyway? I didn't love the girl. She was just someone I was fucking until my pathetic existence came to an end. I despised her humanity and her weakness. It didn't matter if she lived or died. The world had tried to trick me into believing that I could be part of it. It was obvious that I couldn't. Fuck humans and fuck their world.

I got out of the shower and put on clean clothes. I found a bottle of whiskey that would help me figure out my next move. I had to devise a plan to get back my kingdom. I had had enough of emotions and physical limitations. If my minions back home had seen my recent behavior they would be disgusted by me. I wondered if they had realized they were serving an imposter. If the man ruling Hell was exposed as an impersonator, the Fallen Ones would destroy him. They were loyal to me. If they knew I was stuck on Earth, they'd never stop searching for a way to get me back. It was also possible that Sebastian was doing a good job in my place. He was vile human garbage, but he was an intelligent and ambitious prick.

Several hours passed since I had killed Tyler. I assumed that Detective Bryce had done his job and I didn't have to worry about any legal consequences. I had gotten just drunk enough to become sentimental. I had gone through every emotion possible during the course of a few hours. I remembered how excited I had been when I first began my relationship with Rachel. It could not hurt to see her one last time. If she was still alive, I'd say goodbye to her. If she had died, then there was one less thing complicating my world.

"I'm sorry, sir, but visiting hours are over," the nurse in the ICU told me. "Only family members are permitted to see patients and Ms. Riley only has her mother listed as her next of kin."

"Her mother's dead," I replied firmly. "Rachel has no family. I'm her boyfriend and I've donated millions of dollars to this hospital over the years. Are you going to take me to Rachel or do I need to talk to your supervisor?"

"You're Sebastian Davenport," the nurse said. "I'm so sorry, sir. I didn't recognize you. Ms. Riley is your girlfriend? Then you must be the baby's father."

"Baby?"

"She's four weeks pregnant. Sorry, I thought you knew. It's a miracle that the baby survived."

I followed the nurse into Rachel's room. She was unconscious and hooked up to several medical devices. I couldn't believe that she was pregnant. Four weeks? That would be about

the time of our first sexual encounter. I never even considered the possibility that I could impregnate her. Even though I knew that it was probable that neither Rachel nor the fetus would survive, the possibility of being a father intrigued me. I had lived the lives of an angel, a devil, and a human. I had never imagined living the life of a father. I was, by nature, a destroyer. I had never created anything. The nurse was right when she said it was a “miracle”.

“I don’t want to get your hopes up,” the nurse told me. “The chances of the fetus surviving are very slim. The chances of Rachel surviving without permanent brain damage are even slimmer. She has a subdural hematoma along with other traumatic injuries. She’s been in and out of consciousness ever since they brought her in. She hasn’t been able to speak at all. She may never speak again.”

“Leave us,” I said to the nurse and she obeyed, closing the door behind her.

I stood over Rachel’s bed, looking down on her. She was bandaged and bruised all over her body, yet she looked like she was sleeping peacefully. Just hours before that, I had hated her. I had hated everyone. Seeing her in that vulnerable state had changed my mindset. It wasn’t her weakness that put her there. It was mine. The child that grew inside her womb had a soul. If the child was mine, then I had created something pure. It was something that would be born without sin, something that wasn’t evil. I supposed that all children are born with the ability to change the world, but at some point in their lives they are corrupted by it instead. My child could somehow be different. The door to the room opened.

“I thought I’d find you here,” Detective Bryce said as he entered.

“What the hell are you doing here?” I asked, furious that he had interrupted my private moment.

“I just wanted to let you know that I tied up all the loose ends with Tyler Penn,” he said arrogantly. “I thought you’d also like to know that he wasn’t the one that did this to your girlfriend.”

“What?” I shouted.

“You murdered a man that had committed no crime against you,” Bryce laughed. “You really are an evil beast. Don’t worry, though. Your secret is safe with me, Lucifer.”

“Who are you?”

“You’ll find out soon enough.”

The detective left the room and closed the door. I was terrified. He knew all of my secrets. If he was telling the truth, then I had unjustly killed a man for something he didn’t do. Bryce had used me as a pawn in some kind of twisted game. I started to follow him out of the room to get answers, but then her voice stopped me.

“Sebastian,” Rachel said as her eyes opened. “I love you.”

After she said the words, she lost consciousness again. I stood by her bed and held her hand. My eyes began to tear up. I had often thought about my future when Rachel was beside me. For the first time, I realized just how dangerous that future was going to be. I still had so much to learn about the world. I wasn’t sure if I was the beast or if I was a man. The beast

never knew fear or love. I had felt both of those things. Having a human body didn't make me human, though. Having a cock didn't make me a man. I had blamed the world and everyone in it for every bad thing that had happened to me. I never accepted responsibility for my own actions. It was time for me to make the decision of who I was going to be. I didn't know what would happen next. I did know that no matter what happened, I'd face it as a human. I looked at Rachel and knew that I wouldn't have to face it alone.

END