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The White Room

A Carnival of Slaughter

In the picturesque mountain town of Crimson Cove, the Founder's Day Fair is in full swing. Tourists and locals revel in the festivities, unaware of the sinister presence lurking in the shadows. A bloodthirsty killer is leaving a trail of butchered bodies in his wake, and the first thing Sheriff Ethan Hunter needs to know is if the perp is human or vampire.

Murder Mansion

But murder isn't Ethan's only problem. The old Victorian he and Sheila moved into has always been shrouded in dark rumors, and as lights flicker, voices whisper, and phantom footsteps walk the chilly halls, it seems the legends may be true. Something sinister wants their attention, and as the Hunters uncover the house's sordid past, they start down a twisted road steeped in vengeance, lies, and blood.

Hidden in Plain Sight

Meanwhile, at the Crimson Corset nightclub, Gretchen VanTreese, beautiful and undead, is spinning a treacherous web. As her dark ambitions take terrifying shape, vampire assassin Cade Colter finds himself in her crosshairs. And when she springs her deadly trap, Cade discovers that sometimes, abandoning your own humanity is the only way to survive.

Prologue

Crimson Cove, 1916

Jane Cradley

Chosen.

Of all four members of the coven, it was she, Jane Cradley, the Queen of Cups, that He'd chosen -- the Tarot spread had told them so.

And now the time had come.

The light of the full moon danced through intermittent black clouds. Lightning throbbed like silver veins, and a soft breeze churned the fog. The promise of rain lay heavy in the air.

In the privacy of the darkened forest, the witches began their ritual.

Nude, they danced until their muscles burned, chanting the incantation that would summon Him, knowing, deep in their hearts, that He would come this night.

The three women carried Jane to the woolen quilt at the center of the circle, gently laid her down, and assumed their proper positions, kneeling, heads bowed, waiting. To Jane's right was Enid Gorman, the Queen of Wands. On her left, knelt Audrey Larsson, who represented the Queen of Swords, and at her head, was the coven's leader, Sarah Crawford, the Queen of Pentacles, who'd initiated Jane just last year. Grueling as those rites had been, Jane had no regrets. Until then, she'd been a solitary practitioner, casting her spells and exercising her faith in hidden corners during stolen hours. Joining the coven had shown her who she truly was -- and what she'd been born to do.

This, she thought. This very moment. This is the defining night of my life, the very reason I was brought into existence. What she was about to do would change the world. Through her, the Dark Prince would at last walk among mankind, and through the Knight He would bequeath her, He would ultimately have dominion.

Something in the atmosphere changed -- a subtle shift in the air, barely perceptible even to those with the keenest of senses.

"He's coming," said Sarah. "Open yourself up to Him, Jane."

Jane parted her legs, aware of a sudden unfulfilled ache. Her sex hungered, and she ran her hands over her naked skin, willing His unholy arrival.

The three women began to chant, low and languidly, beckoning their Master.

Jane heard the snap of a twig and caught movement in the trees -- at first, only a shadow. And then she made out its form -- a dark creature crawling low to the ground.

Jane's heart pounded a primal rhythm, sweat pricked her skin, and sobs lurked in her throat. Now she was frightened. She continued to chant, her voice a rasping grate, willing her legs to remain open to Him.

The Hellborne Beast slowly rose, his body taking on a new shape -- and this one was no less terrifying. His feet were those of a goat's. They stamped the ground, dug into the earth as if He were preparing to charge. Skin as relentlessly black as polished onyx stretched tight over hulking muscles that looked coiled to pounce. The thing appraised her with eyes as red as fresh blood. Jane could see clear to the bottom of those eyes, and what lay in the pit of those depths terrified her.

The lips peeled back in a gruesome smile and from deep in the Beast's massive chest came a low growl on puffs of steam from flared, inhuman nostrils. A cloud passed over the moon so only the planes of the strange misshapen face were visible -- the glitter of a crimson eye, the yellow-white of impossibly long, sharp teeth.

It stepped closer and the stink of sulfur filled the air.

Jane made out the phallus between its goatish legs, and whimpered. The sex organ was massive and hardened in arousal. Too thick and too long to defy gravity, it hung there like some cruel medieval weapon, marbled in thick pulsing veins, shining black in the silver moonlight. Its tip wasn't a tip at all, but a hard blunt end, not human, that oozed thin glistening streams of pearlescent threads which sizzled and steamed as they hit the earth between the Beast's fur-covered cloven-hooved legs.

Aware of tears streaming down her face, Jane willed her thighs to open wider and continued the chant. The Dark Prince knelt before her, and with hands that ended in claws long enough and sharp enough to pierce a heart, He touched her, running his charred, Hell-hot fingers over the smooth, moon-white skin of her thighs.

He entered her like a knife.

Jane screamed, tried to disengage herself, but his cock was like a blossom, swelling to several times its size inside of her. Blooming, it tore at her insides, stretching her body beyond its limits, locking them together. With animal grunts and a strength both inhuman and unholy, He slammed into her, coring her like an apple, shoving deeper with each thrust until she thought she'd split in half. The pain was trapped thunder, and beneath a weight that made it hard to breathe, Jane drew air in hitches and gasps, closed her eyes, and forced her thoughts elsewhere.

She thought of her husband, Dominick, at home, fast asleep, unaware that she was not beside him. He wouldn't miss her -- this she knew, for she'd slipped belladonna into his wine tonight.

But what would she tell him if the baby came and it had its father's devil-red eyes, its goat's feet, its monster's cock?

But that wouldn't happen. Her son would appear perfectly normal.

She thought of the child now, cradled in her arms, and soon, the pain seemed far away -- the memory of a memory. And in the eyes of eternity, that's all this was -- just a memory. She was doing what needed to be done -- what was *right*.

With renewed determination, she turned her attention back to the hot, heaving body on top of her, back to the pain. The women of the coven danced circles around them, singing in high, lilting voices about the coming of a new age. Gritting her teeth as hot tears streaked her cheeks, Jane moved her hips in harmony with the soul-piercing thrusts of the Beast, giving herself to Him completely. Giving herself to the pain. Giving herself to the Darkness.

Rain began to sprinkle, then patter, and soon came down hard on all of Crimson Cove, beating on the rooftops of saints and sinners alike.

Tomorrow would begin a new era.

A different kind of Dark Age.

Part 1

“The will to conquer is the first condition of victory.”

--Ferdinand Foch

Chapter 1: Crimson Cove, Present Day

Cade Colter ran through the forest behind the cabin. Shirtless, he followed the sun-dappled trail toward Crimson Lake. He ran for the same reason he'd joined a gym three months ago, the same reason he did combat training with Father Vince several times a week: because he didn't want the monsters to win.

At his hip, in a leather sheath, was a slim silver-plated dagger, and around his neck he wore a small amulet -- the trine -- which rendered him scentless to vampires. Not that he had to worry about vampires in the day, but it was habit now. Usually, he had a dagger strapped to each ankle as well, but they slowed him down when he went running.

Detecting the musty scent of the lake on the cool February breeze, he knew he was close. Through the trees, he caught glimpses of the water's smooth surface. On days like this, when the sky was a cloudless powder-blue, the lake glittered like sapphires.

Heart pumping like a piston, Cade ran harder, sweat pouring from his face and sheening his bare chest as Billy Joel sang *We Didn't Start the Fire* from his earpods. The trail was rough, but it got easier each week. Since he'd gotten serious about physical fitness, his muscles were beginning to develop. He didn't have Brooks' biceps and brawn, or the sinewy strength of Father Vince, but his physique had taken on a nice, diamond-like cut. More importantly, his speed and stamina had improved, and that's what would keep him alive.

Faster! he urged himself, lungs burning and face full of heat. *Faster! Faster!* Sprinting now, legs pumping, and his mind on hunting vampires, he promised himself he could rest when he got there. *Faster!*

His foot caught on a root and he went down, face-first, in the dirt. It knocked the wind out of him and he scraped his hands and his chin on the ground. The months of combat training, which required keeping a tight grip on his weapons, had calloused his hands but his chin was another story.

He lay there a moment, puffing, listening to squirrels chatter in nearby trees.