

of Blood and Honey

a Book of the Fey and the Fallen

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To Dane Caruthers
Always remember these three words: as you wish.

Callaghan [in frustration] remarked, “You know, Mr. Paisley, we are all the children of God.”

Quick as a flash came the implacable answer. “No, we are not, Mr. Callaghan. We are all the children of wrath.”

—from *Ireland* by Paul Johnson

Chapter 1

Londonderry/Derry, County Londonderry, Northern Ireland
13 November 1971

“Got one of the yabbos, sir!”

Liam lay on the cracked pavement with a British soldier’s boot planted in the center of his back, struggling against the pain to breathe. Thoughts galloped through his head in one long stream. *Oh-God-please-don’t-shoot-Wasn’t-throwing-stones-I-don’t-want-to-die-I’ll-never-sleep-with-Mary-Kate-if-I-do-Shite-Jesus-I’m-sorry-I-swear-I’ll-never-touch-her-again-I-know-it’s-a-mortal-sin-no-venial-no-mortal-oh-for-fuck’s-sake-what’s-the-difference?*

The BA soldier leaned closer. Liam could feel his breath on his neck and itched with the need to escape the cold gun barrel pressed to the back of his skull. As if to illustrate the point, the thud-thud of riot guns went off somewhere. Peppery CS gas drifted by in a wispy clump. Among the crowd, those caught without vinegar-soaked handkerchiefs gagged and coughed. Someone shouted in the chaos. Liam guessed it was one of the Frontliners—the boys who regularly rioted on Aggro Corner—because the words weren’t complementary of BAs, nor, apparently, the farm animals that might accompany them on cold lonely nights.

“Don’t you fucking move. Bullet may be rubber, but at this range it *will* fuck with your day. You got me?”

“Y-Yes, sir,” Liam said, desperately trying to remember the Act of Contrition, but the pressure on the back of his head won out over Sister Margaret’s ruler as far as his memory was concerned. He began to shiver—whether from cold or fear he wasn’t certain. He’d seen what happened to Annette McGavigan last September. She’d been standing with a group of girls watching the Frontliners at their work—hoping to collect a rubber bullet souvenir. Everyone did. In the course of the riot, a BA fired into the crowd. Liam had happened to glance her direction when the top of

her head had come off. It'd given him nightmares for weeks.

A pair of boots appeared inches from his nose. Afraid he'd be kicked in the face, Liam flinched. The BA whose foot rested on his back brought down his full weight. Liam went from struggling to breathe to not breathing at all and for an instant the gun dropped one level of importance beneath the ache of his ribs.

"I said, don't move, Irish scum."

Part of the prayer finally surfaced. *I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee.* It repeated over and over like a cracked record. He *was* heartily sorry—very fucking heartily sorry for not having gone straight home to his stepfather's flat in Bogside. *I am heartily sorry—*

Something smacked the corrugated iron covering a gutted building not far away, and an explosion went off. It was difficult not to throw his arms over his head. When his ears recovered he heard the sharp crack of live rounds.

"Is this one of them?" the new BA asked. His accent was crisp and very English while the other was more nasal and clipped. Both sounded foreign.

"Yes, sir. Saw him throwing rocks over there," the nasal voice said.

Liam gasped in an attempt to explain that he was only watching, that he hadn't even cheered—well, not much—but the only word to escape his lips was, "Didn't."

"Shut it, you."

"Get off him, Private," the BA officer said. "He's choking."

The weight lifted, and the world went from black and dark gray to black and dingy concrete. Liam gulped air. *Oh, Jesus, please. I just want to go home.*

As if he had read Liam's thoughts, the BA officer said, "Give the names of the other rioters, and we'll let you go."

No. Can't. Frontliners are Bogside, he thought. *Won't be a coward. I won't. What'll Mary Kate think, I go and give them over?* Liam shut his eyes.

"I see," the BA officer said. "Take him away."

The gun barrel vanished, and there was an instant of relief before Liam's hands were yanked behind his back. Pain shot up both arms, and cold steel trapped his wrists. The clock-tick of the cuffs locking into place crystallized the realization that he wasn't going to see home or Mary Kate or his mother for what might be a long time.

Two BAs pulled him up from the pavement, and his knees gave out almost at once. They yanked him up again, more roughly the second time. There were no more explosions or insults or thrown rocks. A few feet away, a young boy snatched a rubber bullet from the ground. The Frontliners were long gone. The Royal Ulster Constabulary advised people to go about their business—whatever that might be—provided it did not include watching people being arrested for standing on the street. The RUC weren't popular, and one brave soul told them what they could do with themselves. The crowd began to break up nonetheless.

The open doors at the back of the Saracen Armoured Personnel Carrier threatened to swallow him up.

"Liam!" It was Mary Kate.

He searched the street but didn't see her. For an instant, what he did see gave him pause. A grizzled man with wispy white hair and a blood-red cap gave him a toothy smile. His eyes glinted red, and his teeth had been filed to sharp points.

The soldier gave Liam a shove, and he stumbled. They threw him against the door of the Saracen. He crumpled and for a few moments wished like hell he'd been born a eunuch.

“Let him go, you bastards!” she shouted. “He wasn’t doing anything!”

He wanted to warn her off, but he didn’t have the breath. The soldiers didn’t wait for him to recover; they tossed him into the gaping maw. Others stumbled up behind him. With his arms trapped behind his back he couldn’t get up even if he could manage it. So, he lay as he was, curled up in a tight ball, his eyes watering from the pain. The doors slammed closed, shutting out the light. Someone screamed.

“Shhh. Easy there, son. Easy. You’ll be all right,” one of the men sitting on the bench in front of him said.

Liam looked up. He had good night vision—better than anyone he knew. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness he got the impression of an elderly man with curly grey hair. He was leaning forward to make room for the handcuffs at the small of his back. Liam matched the shadowy face with the voice. *It’s Mr. O’Keefe*, he thought. Mr. O’Keefe lived in the Creggan, a block of council houses near St. Mary’s.

“Roll onto your back as much as you can. Then sit up,” Mr. O’Keefe said, “Take your time.”

The doors at the front of the Saracen thumped closed. By the time the engine roared Liam was able to sit up. The transmission snarled into gear, and the Saracen rolled forward with a jerk. With nothing to hold on to, he slid across the floor.

“Don’t you worry,” Mr. O’Keefe said. Liam wasn’t sure who the reassurance was for—himself or Mr. O’Keefe. “You’ve not been in trouble before. Like as not they’ll let you go after a chat on Bligh’s Lane.”

One of the others snorted. Liam thought he recognized him as a regular from the Bogside Inn. Rumor had it the man was a volunteer for the Provisional IRA.

“Don’t lie to the boy,” the Provo said. “We’re proper fucked. Bound for Long Kesh, we are. You wait and see.”

Liam’s heart stopped.

Mr. O’Keefe’s voice was so sincere that it almost hid the sound of his panic. “Don’t worry, son. I’ll look after you.”

It was the last white lie Liam allowed himself to believe for nearly three months.

Chapter 2

Londonderry/Derry, County Londonderry, Northern Ireland
15 November 1971

Kathleen Kelly knelt in St. Brendan's church vestibule, slid a coin into the offering slot and touched a lit match to one of the few candles available. It took two tries, and her hand visibly shook as she blew out the match. Fear for her eldest son mixed with anger, tightening her jaw. Hadn't she told Liam to stay away from the ones who were causing trouble? Had she not told him to be careful? She'd been down to Bligh's Lane three times in the past twenty-four hours but still the RUC—the Royal Ulster Constabulary—refused to tell her anything. She had no idea where Liam was, if he were hurt, or what could be done to get him free. In spite of everything she'd done to keep the lad safe he seemed determined to get into the worst of it. None of her other children were as much a problem. Quiet and obedient, they were for the most part, but not her Liam. She supposed it was his father in him.

Why have I not heard from him?

She struggled with old feelings of abandonment and guilt and whispered a Hail Mary, imploring the Mother of God to intercede. Kathleen breathed in the church's perfume of old incense, furniture polish and hot beeswax to slow her heart and ease the tension in her shoulders. She knew there wasn't much hope. After all the sins she'd committed—sins for which she'd paid dearly and yet, still didn't regret—she couldn't bring herself to ask the Lord directly for help, but surely He wouldn't punish her boy for what she'd done for love.

The sins of the father shall be visited upon the sons.

Once more she thought of Liam's father and resisted an urge to light another candle, pulling her coat tight instead. She had fought with him the last time they'd spoken and six months had passed since then. She knew because she'd counted every day. It'd been her own fault, of course. Much as she loved the man, all she ever seemed to do was drive him away. She added a quick prayer in spite of herself. *Mother of God, I know he isn't one of ours, but would there be any harm to look out for him, nonetheless?*

She got up and exited the church, almost walking into her neighbor, Geraldine McKenna. The McKennas lived in the same apartment block, the same floor but three doors down. Geraldine was a small woman in a faded wool coat. Her head was down, and her shoulders were up.

"Is something wrong?" Kathleen asked.

Geraldine looked up, and Kathleen saw her eyes were brimming with tears. She was only a few years older than Kathleen but looked twice that.

The worry does that to you, Kathleen thought. "Have you had word?"

Geraldine's son and husband had both been arrested in August. It had been awful, and Kathleen remembered it well. The soldiers had come in the middle of the night and kicked in the McKennas' door. The banging and shouting had terrified the children. Both men had been sent to Long Kesh internment camp. With more being rounded up every day, it was a common enough story—one Kathleen wanted no part of. She had troubles enough of her own, and all those years ago when it was rumored that she had run off with a Protestant only to have the man die before the babe was born—wasn't it the very same Geraldine who'd turned her back? It was right that those who stirred up trouble drew the attention of the BAs. Perhaps breaking into homes was a bit harsh, but terrorism had to be fought. The IRA went too far. Kathleen believed it. Only now it was her Liam the BAs had lifted, wasn't it?

"Our Michael is sick. A fever. Got the letter this morning." Geraldine sniffed. "They won't let me in to see him. I called."

"I'm sure he'll be fine," Kathleen said and upon seeing Geraldine's distress, regretted her

previous uncharitable thoughts. “Probably nothing. A wee cold.”

“My Barney isn’t political, you know. Never has been. So, why is he in prison? All our men. Without so much as a trial. And whatever for? They told us the soldiers were to protect us from the Loyalists. I wish the BAs had never come.”

Hoping to stem the stream of animosity, Kathleen said, “Come by the flat later. We’ll have some tea. It’ll soothe your nerves.”

“Mrs. Foyle told me about your Liam. I’m so sorry.”

The meddling old baggage, Kathleen thought. *Why couldn’t that woman keep her gob shut for once?* Her Liam wasn’t like the ones that rioted on Aggro Corner. He was a good boy. He didn’t cause trouble—at least, she didn’t think he did.

The sins of the father.

She shut her eyes against the thought and swallowed.

“They’ll see he’s innocent. They’ll let him go,” Geraldine said. It was a lie, that was easy to see, but it was comforting to hear nonetheless. Geraldine pulled the damp white scarf from her head, shook rain water from it and then replaced it. “I’ll light a candle for him as well.”

“That’s very kind.” The words that passed over the lump in Kathleen’s throat were just above a whisper. “Thank you.” Unwilling to continue the conversation, she gave her excuses and made to leave. Before she did, Geraldine cast off a sympathetic look that made Kathleen want to scream.

She took a steadying breath and blew it out her cheeks as Geraldine vanished inside the church. It was Wednesday. There was much to do before school let out and the little ones came home. There was the mending to do. Her husband seemed to put more holes in trouser pockets than any man alive. It had started to rain while she was inside the church, a soft mist, and she opened the umbrella she’d brought with her. The street in front of the church was empty. Rubble formed a hill opposite and not far away from that was the Army check point she’d have to pass through before reaching her flat. As she walked she focused hard on the list of things she needed to do to keep from thinking of Geraldine’s face, and as a result it wasn’t until she’d passed the churchyard gate that she noticed she was being followed. Screwing up her courage, she whirled and was struck dumb by the sight of the very person she’d been thinking of earlier.

“Is it really you?” She blurted it out before thinking. There never seemed to be a pattern in his arrivals. She’d spent years searching for one.

Tall with black hair and pale blue eyes, Bran looked every bit as handsome and wild as he had the first time she’d met him. *That’s not entirely true*, she thought. *Is that grey in his hair?* He stood on the other side of the churchyard wall, rainwater dripping from his hair and shirt. As always his clothes were outdated—all but the pegged jeans she’d given him long ago. *Pegged jeans, ancient linen shirt and bare feet. It’s a wonder no one notices him, a man like him.* It was then she saw the bloody gash in his shoulder. He hadn’t even bothered to bandage it yet. “I need to speak with you, Kathleen.” His voice was grave. “It’s important.”

“You’re hurt.”

“It’s nothing. Please. I don’t have much time.”

“You never do.”

“Oh, now. Don’t start in at me already.”

“Was you that left before it was done,” she said.

“And was you that won’t leave with me at all.”

“I married Patrick and stay with him I must.”

“I’ll fight him for you. I am of the Fianna. He won’t have a chance of winning. But he’ll release

you before it came to that, surely. He doesn't love you as I do."

"I don't want to hear anymore." She passed a hand over her face to hide from the knowledge that he was right.

"Ah, sweet Kathleen. I'm begging you."

"Don't!" Recovering herself, she looked around to see if anyone was listening. "And where were you sixteen years ago? Why were you not begging then?"

"I was in a *Sídhe* gaol. We talked about this before."

"And we'll talk about it again. But it won't make a difference, will it? It changes nothing. It's married I am and married I'll stay."

He sighed and nodded. "As you wish it."

"It isn't what I wish at all. But it's how it has to be." She hated it when he blamed her for the very thing that made her so unhappy. He should've come to her when she needed him. She'd waited for six years, and her with his illegitimate child. The hurts she'd suffered from her own mother were enough to kill her. At the last she'd agreed to marry Patrick. It'd been clear her mother was right after all. Bran wasn't coming back, and Liam needed a father. Except Bran had returned, but it was too late. It was always too late. Sometimes she found herself hating him. No matter his war. No matter his honor and his oaths. To be fair, she knew the situation was her responsibility too. She should never have let herself love him, but she'd been young and stupid.

Well, she wasn't young and stupid any longer.

"Kathleen, please," he said. "It's important. For you and the babe."

"He's not a babe anymore." She found herself walking toward the churchyard gate. "You'd know that if you'd but seen him." The gate squealed when she pushed it open. It was a sound distilled with years of loneliness, pain and grief.

"Was you who won't tell me of him. Was you told me to stay away. Was you who said he was too young to understand."

"Oh, shut up."

Bran smiled that charming smile of his, and it melted her anger all over again. "Tell me. Something. Anything of him at all. Is he big and strong like his father?"

She sighed and blinked the blurriness from her vision. *He's grown into the very spirit and image of you. My heart aches every time I see him.* "I don't want to talk about it."

They walked together between tombstones and Celtic crosses to the back of the churchyard. When she was sure they were far enough from the street she stopped beneath an ancient oak tree. "What is it that's so important?"

Bran's face clouded. "You may be in danger. I'll shield you both as much as I can, but the war with the Fallen has taken a bad turn, and I'm needed elsewhere."

"You're always needed elsewhere." *And if you wanted the truth of it, that's the very reason why I'll not leave this life for you. I can't count on you, she thought. I can't trust you'll stay and be a father to my children. I can't even trust you'll appear in regular intervals.* She stood a little straighter in spite of the emotions ripping her apart. "Well, what is it?"

"Do you know of a creature called a Redcap?"

"You've come from the Other Side to warn me of a bogey man?"

"He's real, Kathleen, and he's sworn to destroy my men, me and mine. One by one."

"Why?"

Bran looked away. "It's lovely here. So peaceful."

"Don't you shy away from my question. You'll tell me straight, or I'm walking out of this

churchyard and never speaking to you again.”

“Oh, Kathleen.”

“I mean it.” To emphasize the point she took three steps toward the gate.

“Wait!”

She slowly turned to face him but otherwise didn’t move or speak.

“Please! It’s important!”

The urgency in his voice frightened her, but she wasn’t about to let him know he’d gotten to her, or how much she needed him. “Out with it, then.”

“It’s only that I wished to speak of more pleasant things first. Rest in the shade of the oak together a while. Talk. Like we used to. When we first loved each other.”

“I’ve no time for your pretty words. I should not have had it then. So, say what it is you’ve come to say. Or I’ll make you swear to speak only truth—”

“You would put such a thing upon me? You would bind me so?”

She didn’t understand why it was he felt so bound by the promises she forced out of him, but it had always been so; and because his word-bond was the only hold she had on him, she had always been careful of it. Bran was a proud man. She knew there was a limit to how far she could push without breaking him. And break him, she could. She’d seen it. Extracting that promise regarding Liam had come close enough. *So many years. So much pain.*

Why do I torture him so? She narrowed her eyes and set her jaw, waiting with a shuddering heart.

“I told you of the war with the Fallen. The ones the new religion brought with it.”

She nodded. She didn’t know what to think of the things he’d told her over the years—that the old myths were every bit as real as the Church. Such thoughts were enough to shake the foundations of her faith. *The Good Folk warring with fallen angels.* She wasn’t sure if she should believe him. In truth, she couldn’t even be sure what or who Bran really was.

Bran said, “There have been setbacks.”

“Go on.”

“The Fallen have summoned allies from over the sea. The Redcap is among the worst,” Bran said. “Very powerful. He established a *rath* not far from the coast. Me and my men broke it and burned it to the ground.”

“That’s all?”

“It’s been a long war even by our terms. Lies mixed with truth goad the fires of hate. Some of our own have died the final death. Emotions run hot, and there are those who thirst for revenge,” Bran said, staring at a tombstone. “Things were done at that *rath* that shouldn’t have been done. Things that went beyond the normal terms of war. It doesn’t matter that I wasn’t the one who perpetrated the acts, or that the ones that did have been punished. They were my men, and they stepped over the line. I’m responsible.”

“Oh.” A cold gust blew from the north, tearing at the scarf on her head and stinging her cheeks.

“Please, Kathleen. For my sake. For the boy’s. Be careful of strangers.” He closed his eyes. “The iron will do no good against the likes of him. Uncle Fionn says you’ll have to use your bitty cross. Keep it with you at all times. Tie red thread around it. Good Irish linen will do the trick.”

“I will.”

“Make sure the boy does the same.”

It was her turn to flinch. “He’s gone. They’ve lifted him.”

“Who?”

“The BAs. The British Army. Who else? He’s gone, and I don’t know where they’ve taken him.” It felt good to tell someone who wasn’t merely interested in gossip—someone who could help. “Will you get him home?”

“I’ll do what I can. I swear it.”

“Thank you.” Her breath hitched and suddenly the tears were pouring down her cheeks enough to compete with the rain. Bran opened his arms to her, and she dropped her umbrella and went to him, grabbing his waist as if she were drowning. Maybe she was. She certainly didn’t care who might see. Most of her life was spent being strong for other people. For once she would have something for herself. She needed him. She needed this. It didn’t matter that it was against everything she’d been taught to believe and everything she taught her own children.

She felt him tug away her scarf. His hand smoothed her wet hair and slid down her back. “Shhhh. There now,” he said. “My beautiful Kathleen.”

A derisive sound worked its way up her throat.

“You doubt me? It’s the truth, I’m telling.”

She felt him kiss the top of her head, and she gloried in his tenderness. After a while she reached into her coat pocket, fishing out her handkerchief. She pulled back and wiped her face. Her nose and cheeks felt half-frozen. Her hair was sticking to her skin. She was shivering now. It was so cold in the churchyard.

“Better?” he asked.

“Yes. Thank you.”

He lifted her chin and before she could speak a word against it, he kissed her. She didn’t fight it. Worse, against her better judgment, she kissed him back. The strength of her passion made her forget all but the fire that ran through her body. His hands crept beneath her coat and inside her blouse. His fingers were cold at first but grew warmer by the time he plunged into her bra. Her pulse quickened in response. When she was sure someone was going to notice she released him and stepped back. “I have to go.”

“Stay. Give me a little something to keep warm.” He winked.

“I thought you had to be somewhere?”

“Uncle Fionn can wait.”

“And your son? What of him?”

He combed the fingers of his right hand through his hair, a gesture she’d seen her eldest son replicate in every way since he was a boy. She shivered again and this time it wasn’t the fault of the chill.

The sins of the father.

Bran said, “You’re right. I’ll go to him.”

“He knows nothing of you, or your kind,” she said, buttoning her blouse. “Bear that in mind when you find him.”

“You’ve never told him anything?”

“Nothing at all,” she said. “I’m still not sure he’d understand. He... he looks like you. You’ll know him by that at least.”

A flash of pride and surprise shot across his expression.

“Let me tell him in my own way,” she said. “It has to be done gently.”

“Don’t worry. He’ll never even know ’twas me.”

“Good.” She tucked in her blouse and smoothed her skirt. “How do I look?”

“Like a beautiful woman in dire need of a good bedding.”

“Hush now!” A laugh burst out of her before she could stop it. She covered her mouth to catch it but was too late. “I’ll have you know, I’m a respectable woman.”

He arched an eyebrow at her. “Ah, more’s the pity. For I love you, Kathleen O’Byrne, and I always will.”

Kelly, she thought. *I’m Kathleen Kelly, but not at this moment.* She allowed herself an indulgent smile in spite of herself. “I love you too.”

“Are you sure you’ll not come with me?”

Retrieving her umbrella, she decided the rain had already done its work and closed it. Let them think her mad for walking in the rain. It was the same rain that ran over her lover’s body and the only intimacy she’d ever share with him again. “Ask me another time.” Before her resolve could break, she turned and ran out of the churchyard like a school girl.

As she went, his voice floated after her. “I’ll love you forever, Kathleen.”

She couldn’t help thinking that forever was a long time for one of the Good Folk.

Chapter 3

Long Kesh Internment Camp
Lisburn, County Down, Northern Ireland
December 1971

Trailing behind Kevin O’Donohue, Tom Finney and Hugh Conner, Liam paced the perimeter of the chain link fence in the cold and battled intense homesickness. He used to believe men didn’t weep for their mothers no matter how frightened they were, but a few days in the Kesh had taught him otherwise. Men cried in the night when others couldn’t see. It didn’t matter that with forty prisoners packed into a space designed to hold half that many that there was every chance of being heard. The hearing wasn’t the issue. It was the being seen. So it was that the first lesson he’d learned from Long Kesh was that men didn’t acknowledge what happened in the dark no matter what.

Each night their cots were shoved edge touching edge in order to fit inside the old tin Quonset hut. Of course, about all that did was keep the rain off since the space heater didn’t work past the first row of cots. Built in the 1940s and intended for use as an airplane hanger, the barrack was bloody freezing and the air seemed crowded with the hacking cough of the sick.

Being the youngest in his “cage”—the term the prisoners used for the fenced compounds inside the Kesh—meant that at best he was tolerated or at worst, bullied, which wasn’t much different

than the outside when he thought about it. It didn't hurt that Liam was taller than average. He had a good three inches on Kevin and a whole foot over Tom and Hugh. Some of the older prisoners liked to joke and call him the "big man." Although, what the others didn't have in height they made up for in brawn, unlike Liam.

"You want a smoke, Liam, my lad?" Kevin was eighteen and as luck would have it, from Derry. He had sandy-colored hair that brushed his shoulders, and he walked with a limp, the result of a confrontation with a BA.

A blond guard in the tower above them looked down at them. Something about the way he was staring spooked Liam.

"Sure." He accepted the cigarette, uncertain what to do with it. His mother didn't approve of smoking—not that he'd had the money for it, anyway. As a result, he'd never smoked in his life and didn't carry matches or a lighter. His stomach tightened in a jittery knot. He was afraid of shaming himself. He didn't know Kevin well, having only seen him in the streets around Derry. The other two were from other parts of the country, and he didn't know them at all, but it was easy to see that Tom and Hugh didn't approve of Kevin's sympathies.

"Aren't you going to light it?" Tom squinted at him.

Hugh sneered. "Maybe he don't got a light."

Stuck, Liam looked to Kevin, who pantomimed placing the cigarette behind an ear. "Oh," he said, taking Kevin's hint. "Ah. I think I'll save it. For later."

Hugh laughed. "Look at him. A right cool one, he is."

"To be sure," Tom said. "Until someone knocks the piss out of him. Then we'll see him crying for his mammy like a babby."

Kevin said, "Maybe Liam is saving it for trade."

The chain-link fences between the cages were where one went to barter with the other prisoners. News, books, food—all flowed through the fences from one cage to the next. The entire make-shift prison was connected like one big organism in this way. Some Loyalists were known to barter with Catholics upon occasion. Cigarettes made good trade because no matter the brand they crossed the divides.

Hugh asked, "Saving it for trade? What you got in mind must be special. What might that be?"

"Don't know, yet," Liam said. "But I'm sure I'll think of something."

"He's sure to think of something," Tom said in a sing-song falsetto. "Oh, pull me other one."

"Knock it off yous," Kevin said. "Let's talk to the boys in the next cage. Maybe one of them got the paper." Kevin played football and was among the best in spite of the leg. He liked to keep up with the Derry City team as well as Celtic—not that there would be any football news. The season was well over, but there was always the speculation about next year's season.

The moment Kevin's back was turned Tom's expression changed into something that said Liam was no better than a dog's leavings and whispered, "Going to pound the shite out of you, mammy's boy."

Liam was confused as to why Tom insisted on calling him that. There'd been no word from home yet, and he hadn't had a visit either. He was starting to wonder if his mother had forgotten all about him.

Hugh gave him the two fingers and then trotted to catch up with Kevin.

Deciding it'd be best to stay behind, Liam paused and considered his options, but Kevin turned and shouted for him to stop lagging. He glanced up at the blond guard who was still watching with an intent expression. A chill ran down Liam's back for no reason he could name and that settled

it. He ran after Kevin.

Dinner consisted of a thin stew which Kevin warned him not to eat with a shake of the head. Liam put his spoon back down and reached for the slice of bread balanced on the corner of the bowl. Tom kicked him hard under the table, and when Liam reached down to massage the hurt out of his shin Hugh snatched the bread slice and glared. Taking a big bite, he paused to give Liam a toothy grin. It was easy enough to get the message: *Don't say a word, or you'll regret it.*

Liam drank his tea in silence. A strange prickling sensation started in his fingers, shot up both arms and slammed into his chest. Breathing became difficult. The tingling grew painful. He tried rubbing his palms on his jeans to make it go away, but it didn't work. Increasingly uncomfortable, he reached down and shifted his chair. The instant his hand gripped metal, the feeling stopped.

"Sit still, you wee shite," Hugh hissed.

Fuck you and your fucking friend, Liam thought and went back to his tea. He imagined giving Hugh a good kicking and the prickling returned. Experimentally, he touched the edge of his chair. Again, the sensation receded. *Interesting.*

Guards strolled along the edge of the canteen, the blond man from the tower among them. Liam looked away before anyone could notice and caught the stench of bad cologne with an undercurrent of stale beer as the man moved closer. Something brushed the back of Liam's neck when the blond guard went past. Instinctively, Liam jerked away.

"What's with you?" Tom asked.

"Sod off," Liam whispered.

"I heard that," Hugh said.

After dinner Liam decided to take a walk. The others were off practicing football to keep warm and while a good runner, Liam was shite at football. The older ones were off playing cards or writing letters in the study hut. Each cage had four or five huts which included living quarters, the recreation hut with the washroom, the study hut and the drying hut where wet clothes were hung when the weather was bad. In Liam's short experience, the weather was almost always bad. He'd heard the drying hut was where you went when you wanted to be alone. However, he was new and wasn't sure it'd be safe. So, he pulled up his collar against the north wind and buttoned his coat. He considered what Mary Kate might be doing. It would be Christmas soon, and if they didn't release him, it'd be his first away from home. Christmas was his favorite holiday. His mother did the baking every year, filling up the flat with the smells of fresh bread, biscuits and tea.

His stomach rumbled.

It was no good torturing himself. He changed the image in his head from the kitchen to the sitting room. His Aunt Sheila would make a huge paper chain out of yellow construction paper with the help of the little ones. The tree would go up next week, and if he were home, the thing would annoy him something fierce—not the smell. He loved the smell of fresh Christmas tree, but no matter how small it was it would take up half the room. Now, he wished for nothing more than to be tripping over it in the dark on his way to bed. His chest ached, and he blinked back tears, taking a deep breath of cold air.

Furtive whispers to his left stopped him. Too late, he saw it was Tom and one of the other young internees. A glimpse of ragged magazine pages and a photo of a bare breast told Liam that Tom was negotiating the use of his most recent and most valuable commodity—three pages ripped from a copy of *Mayfair*. Liam had heard that Tom and Hugh were charging for five minutes alone behind the shed with the photo of your choice.

Blushing, Liam brought his shoulders up and continued walking in the hope that he'd not been

noticed.

“Liam!”

Dread knotted Liam’s stomach in an instant.

“I’m feeling generous today. You can have a go at Eleanor for that cigarette you been holding.”

Liam shook his head no. The heat in his face spread out to his ears. He turned his face away.

“What’s the matter, mammy’s boy? Never seen a snap of a naked bird before?” Tom asked, retrieving the wrinkled pages. His latest customer vanished down the path in hurry.

“I have,” Liam said. “My stepfather has whole magazines. Not only a page.” At age twelve he’d stumbled upon a copy of *Mayfair* hidden in a cupboard and was found out before he’d had a chance to peek inside the cover. Patrick had nearly beaten the life out of him and had threatened worse if Liam said a word to his mother. The next day the magazine was gone, and he’d never had another chance since.

Tom said, “All right, then. One cig.”

“Smoked it,” Liam said and shrugged in an attempt to look worldly. It was a lie, of course. He’d given it away to another prisoner who’d asked for it.

“Oh. That’s a pity, that is,” Tom said. A rueful smile flitted across his face. “You know, maybe I feel a bit bad about you going hungry tonight. Tell you what, I’ll make it up to you. I’ll let you have a go at Eleanor for nothing.”

Liam blinked.

Holding the photo out, Tom said, “Well? Go on. What are you waiting for? You queer or something?”

While Liam didn’t trust Tom, he didn’t want to miss the opportunity either. He moved closer and reached for the torn magazine page. The blonde woman in the photograph rested against a mound of white fur pillows and was wearing a pale blouse so sheer that it might as well not have been there at all. Lips parted and eyes half-closed, she cupped the underside of each breast with delicate hands. Her nipples showed through the cloth as small knots of dark pink. The blouse was unbuttoned from just below her breasts down to the hem—spread to display an expanse of smooth belly and rounded hips. She wasn’t wearing any pants, and her bare thighs were parted wide enough for him to spot a dark cleft nestled in soft, sparse curls.

The image felt slick against his fingertips. His breath caught as a memory of an afternoon with Mary Kate popped to mind—the time they’d been snogging, and he’d grown bold enough to slip his hand up under her skirt. His fingertips had brushed warm yielding wetness an instant before she’d slapped his hand away. He hadn’t seen, but—

“Fuck you, mammy’s boy,” Tom said, laughing and snatching back the photo.

Liam was grabbed and pulled behind the shed. Turning to see who had accosted him, he was then shoved in the back. Icy gravel bit into his palms as he hit the ground. Rolling over, Liam spotted Hugh looming over him.

“Me and Tom,” Hugh said. “We got something to tell you.”

The ground was wet, and Liam tried to get up to prevent soaking his trousers, but Tom put a boot in his chest and pushed him back down.

“Right,” Liam said. “So, yous don’t like me. I get it.”

“Wouldn’t say that. You got your uses,” Tom said. “Hugh here gets hungry.”

“That I do.”

“Here on out, you’re to give him your bread at dinner,” Tom said. “Don’t worry, you’ll still have the stew or whatever’s on offer. It’s fine if you get hungry enough. And sometimes the screws don’t

even piss in it.”

Hugh laughed.

Culchie cow fuckers, the pair of them, Liam thought. He wanted to break Hugh’s nose for him but knew he didn’t have the strength. Best he could do was run, but here he was, flat on his back. The wet had soaked through his trousers now and the frigid ground was getting to him. His stinging palms tingled with the cold. He could feel blood oozing from the cuts. The prickling sensation flowed through his veins, up both his arms and legs and nestled in his chest fast as an electric shock. He thought of what happened at dinner and wondered what it might mean.

Tom said, “Look at me when I’m talking to you, you wee fuck.”

Left with little choice, Liam glared up at the bastard. When he did, Tom’s confidence faltered. Liam blinked. *He sees something. But what?* Startled, he didn’t notice Hugh until it was too late and took the kick full in the side. For a moment he forgot all about Tom and the tingling under his skin. Curling around the pain, Liam prepared himself for a beating.

“Get him up and hold him,” Tom said. “I want to get a few good ones in.”

When the blows stopped, Liam was left gasping on his knees—one hand on the metal shed to keep from falling face first. His bruised sides throbbed with agony which slowly faded into a dull but constant ache. The pain was bad but would pass soon enough.

“Tell Kevin we gave you a hiding,” Hugh said, “and we’ll really lay into you next time.”

The pair of them walked off, laughing.

There wasn’t much Liam could do about Tom and Hugh, but there was plenty he wanted to do. He decided to bide his time, though. There was bound to be an opportunity eventually, and when it came he’d bloody well take it.

“Kelly! William Ronan Munroe Kelly!”

The two guards calling his name stood in the center of the yard. Thinking it might be a message from home, Liam got up from the ground. Everyone seemed to be watching as he crossed the yard.

“Come with us,” said the first guard, “like a good little taig.”

Liam kept himself from reacting to the insult, but his jaw tightened nonetheless. “I’ve not done anything.”

“You will soon enough.” The first guard laughed and there was a nervous edge to it that sent a jolt of adrenaline through Liam’s veins.

“Stop it, Bert,” the second guard whispered.

Something’s not right, Liam thought.

Each put a hand to an arm as if they were afraid Liam would rabbit, and he was escorted from the yard and the cage. He endured a search and then went through a wire tunnel and into the next cage. When they reached the infirmary the stench of death was overpowering. They took him up the stairs to an office, but the surgeon wasn’t anywhere in sight. The room was small and painted white with a barred cell to one side. No one was in it. Liam’s heart thudded in his chest like a Prod’s bass drum. He tried to think of what he’d done to be singled out. Had he committed an infraction? Nothing came to mind. “What’s this, then?” he asked.

Neither guard answered. They shoved him in front of a desk positioned at one end of the room and waited until the door slammed open. The blond guard entered and sat down in the surgeon’s chair behind the desk. He didn’t so much as gaze in Liam’s direction.

“Get him ready,” the blond man said.

“Right,” the second guard said. “Clothes off. Now.”

Liam's heart staggered. "What?"

"Strip search. Stop your gawking."

Shaking, he stripped down to his kacks. The room was warmer than the barracks but not by much. Cold air prickled against his skin. He was visibly trembling now.

"Shed the rest."

"What? No!"

One of the guards slammed a night stick into Liam's back, and he went down. Unlike Tom and Hugh, the guards knew their business. The pain was terrific, and Liam couldn't breathe for what seemed a full fifteen minutes.

The blond man's chair squeaked. "You seem to be operating under the misconception that you have a choice. Do as you were told."

"On your feet, taig."

Liam got up from the floor, shed his underpants and covered himself as best he could with his hands. Shame burned his cheeks, and he stared down at the ground.

"Will you look at that," one of the guards said. "Catholics. No wonder there's so many of them."

The burning in his face worsened.

"Get him over to the cell," the blond guard said, licking his lips. His tone was bored, but there was tension in it that spoke of extreme interest.

Pushed to the right, Liam was next positioned a short distance in front of a cell door and shoved. Liam caught himself before he fell into the steel bars face first. He was up on his toes now. His legs were kicked apart, and he kept himself from tumbling by hanging onto the cell door. The trembling got worse, and it was hard to keep himself from falling. He tried to get into a more stable position but was slapped on the ear.

"Did anyone say you could move?"

A drawer on the desk slammed and there was a metallic clink. A chair scraped the floor. "That's enough. You can leave now, gentlemen."

Liam felt the blond man press next to him as he heard the other guards leave. Keys rattled in the lock. The blond guard grabbed Liam's wrist and snapped a cuff around it. The cuffed wrist was then yanked up above his head and shoved against a bar closer to his face. He lost his balance. Left cheek and shoulder slammed into iron. The second cuff was looped through the cell door. His cheekbone throbbed.

The blond man spoke in Liam's ear. "Grasp the bar next to your left hand."

Terrified and humiliated, Liam did as he was told. The second cuff went around his right wrist. *It's only a search, he thought. Nothing more. Perfectly normal. It'll be over with soon.* He'd heard about body cavity searches from one of the other prisoners. By the description it sounded horrible, but it could be lived through. A lot could be lived through, he'd come to understand. He tried to slow his breathing. He was sweating in spite of the chill. The stench of cologne and stale beer filling Liam's nose was enough to make him sick. The painted white iron bars pressed into his palms. The cuffs burned cold on his wrists, and his legs ached. His whole body prickled. The blond man pressed closer. Rough uniform fabric brushed against Liam's skin. A hand slid down his back, cupped one butt cheek and squeezed.

Liam's heart stopped.

"My name is Philip Sanders. You may call me Phil." Sanders reached up to smooth hair from Liam's face. "Tell me something," Sanders said, lowering his voice to a whisper. "Have you fucked before?"

The hand slipped between Liam's legs, and he stopped breathing.

"Tell me." *Squeeze.*

Liam screamed. A hand clamped hard over his mouth.

"Not a sound," Sanders said. "Do you want the others to know you for a fairy?"

After that, Liam shut his eyes and prayed, but there was no God in Hell.

It was dark when he was dumped back in the cage. He was glad of that. No one could see his shame. He should've died fighting, but he hadn't. He'd let that man do what he would. Worse, he'd— *Don't think about that.* He staggered back to the barracks, keeping his mind as blank as possible. *Nothing happened.* He wanted to be sick, but he didn't want the others to notice. They'd see it in him if he wasn't careful—see it in him as Sanders had. They'd see Sanders had— *A shower.* That's what Liam wanted. The other prisoners were off playing at football by the sound. They were always playing at football or betting on any random thing because there wasn't much else to do in the cage. He went around the backs of the buildings until he reached the Quonset hut that contained the washroom.

The pain had been horrific. The memory of Sanders's voice sent a shard of ice through his chest. *I'm to be your first. Isn't that sweet?* Liam closed his eyes and shuddered. *The shower,* he thought. *Have to make it to the shower.* He checked to see if anyone was inside. There was no one. He didn't bother to strip—just turned the water to the coldest setting possible and stood in the stream. When he was sure he could move again without getting sick he then took off his wet clothes, picked up the soap and started scrubbing at the blood and shite. It took ten washings to get the feeling of Sanders off him. Then he sat on the frigid concrete floor and curled himself into a tight ball. He waited for the icy water to numb his skin and then cried in silence, hiding his tears in the shower's stream. He wept until he felt as blank as the cinderblock wall. Then he dressed in his wet things, avoided the mirror above the washbasin and went to bed early. He didn't sleep. He merely lay in his cot and stared at the tin wall, huddling under his blanket in his damp clothes and wishing himself dead.

Sometime before lights out a jar of what the others jokingly called "Murphy's Poteen" made the rounds. Usually Liam didn't bother to sample the contents. The smell of it made his eyes water. However, this time he accepted the jar and drank as much of the foul brew as he could stand. Maybe it would kill him, or maybe he'd go blind. He deserved it. He hadn't fought, not hard enough. He wasn't natural. He'd—

Kevin frowned at him. "What did you do to your face?"

Memories surfaced of having his head slammed into the bars for struggling. Liam shoved the images down and away into the dark. He didn't have the energy to speak. So, he didn't. Unable to get an answer, Kevin let him be.

A storm rolled in during the night, and the wind fairly screeched with the force of it. He listened to the corrugated tin rattle and the water drip from the ceiling, thoughts alternating between emptiness and memories of stark terror. The weather let up after a few hours, but the wind continued to howl. Dreams flitted past his eyes like shredded phantoms as he half-dozed—images of a huge black wolfhound. The creature was searching for him. The knowledge was strangely reassuring. He couldn't have said why. His next recollection was of being shaken. He choked back a scream and forced open his eyes. There were grey patches showing through the bars on the window. Everyone appeared to be gone. One of the older prisoners stooped over him. He'd never learned the man's name.

“Come on, lad,” he said. “You’ll miss the morning line up.”

Liam didn’t move. He didn’t care if the guards came and shot him.

“You look a fright,” the older prisoner said. “Do you need to go to the infirmary?”

“No!” Liam shot up off the cot before the old man could call for the surgeon. He stuck his feet in his shoes and stumbled outside. A headache smacked into his brain with the brightness of the light. It was a slammer—the worst he’d ever had. He wanted to throw up but did his best not to show it. His body was a mass of bruises, and his arse was sore. He purposely didn’t think of why. Taking a place at the back of the group and as far away from Kevin, Tom and Hugh as he could manage, he waited while the guards called out the names.

Christmas came and went. He didn’t care. He didn’t join in the stories and the singing of the songs. He didn’t even attend the Mass. He couldn’t, not with such a great sin on his soul. There was no chance he’d go to confession. He didn’t shave either—because shaving meant looking in the mirror, and he didn’t want to see what Sanders saw. As luck would have it, Sanders seemed to be away on holiday. Liam kept a watchful eye nonetheless and was careful not to be alone with any of the guards if it could be helped. It was weeks before he stopped jumping at shadows, or ceased shuddering each time his name was called. A few days after Christmas he got a package from home containing a card from his mother, two letters from Mary Kate, biscuits, tea, a brown neck scarf and a pair of thick socks. The biscuits and tea never made it past the guards. The only reason he knew they’d been in the box was because they’d kindly left him the crumbs and crumpled wax paper. As for the scarf, Tom took it off him two days later, giving him a black eye in exchange. At least he had the socks, for which he was grateful, and the letters, which he hid where Hugh wouldn’t think to look. He desperately wanted to know what Mary Kate had written but couldn’t read them. So, Liam carried both letters with him close to his skin, the paper growing dog-eared with each passing day.

One day, he was making his usual route around the cage when he spotted a huge black wolfhound on the other side of the chain link fence topped with razor wire—the area between the fences that everyone called “No Man’s Land.” The cage was surrounded by other cages on three sides. This was the fourth, and it provided a view of yet another fence, a guard tower and brick wall. How or why the great beast had gotten inside No Man’s Land was beyond Liam. The creature had no collar and looked nothing like a guard dog—the BAs used Alsations. The strange wolfhound pressed against the fence and whined. Thinking of the dreams, Liam moved closer and saw the beast’s fur was caked with mud. *Dug under the wall, then.*

“Hello,” Liam said. “What’s your name, boy?”

The wolfhound pushed his muzzle through the chain link and whined again. Liam put his hand up so the dog could sniff him. The hound licked his fingers and something in Liam’s chest loosened.

“You’re a friendly one, aren’t you?” Liam asked. “Bit mad too. No one breaks *into* this place.” He checked the area before sitting down in the gravel, but he needn’t have worried. Everyone, except for Tom and Hugh, left him alone now. Although it was never mentioned, Liam knew why. It was because of what had been done to him. On some level the others knew without being told and were afraid that they’d be next.

“You can’t stay, you know,” Liam said. “You’ll have to scarper before the screws come.” That was the most Liam had spoken in weeks. His voice felt rusty, but it was nice to have someone to talk to—even if the poor thing didn’t understand a word he was saying.

The beast moved its muzzle to a diamond-shaped space close to Liam's face and licked him on the cheek. Liam laughed. It felt wonderful to laugh. He hadn't laughed since before—*your first*—hadn't laughed in forever.

"There's no telling what the screws will do if they find you here. Probably shoot you," Liam said, forcing his hand through the links to stroke the dog's fur. He suddenly felt better than he had in a long time. "Thank you for the visit. If you see my Ma—"

The hound growled.

"Where did that monster come from?" It was Hugh.

Liam brought his hand back through the links. He wasn't afraid the wolfhound would bite. Somehow, he knew the dog wasn't snarling at him.

"Why were you talking to it?" Hugh asked, picked up a stone and threw it at the dog. It hit the fence and bounced off. He selected another, smaller. Sharper.

"What's it matter to you?" Liam asked, getting up from the ground. Hugh could beat the shite out of him, but Liam didn't care. He wouldn't have the poor lost thing tortured. Liam shivered with electric energy and narrowed his gaze, willing Hugh to forget the dog, to go the fuck away. Liam focused with all his hate.

Hugh blinked. The fear was plain on his face as he took a step back. The dog barked.

"Put down the rock, Hugh."

In a daze, Hugh dropped the stone.

Stunned, Liam stared in disbelief. The wolfhound barked again.

A thought occurred to Liam, and he decided to take the chance. "I'll have my neck scarf back, you fuck."

Hugh pulled the brown scarf from around his neck and held it out for Liam to take. Liam wrapped himself in its warmth and felt more comfortable at once. "Now, get the fuck away from us."

"It's fucking mad, you are."

"Aye. Sure. The dangerous sort of mad," Liam said, "and you've made me all the madder." He smiled in satisfaction as Hugh panicked and ran.

"Thanks," Liam said, but when he turned he found the wolfhound was gone.

Chapter 4

Long Kesh Internment Camp
Lisburn, County Down, Northern Ireland
3 January 1972

The wolfhound didn't reappear, but Sanders did, and Liam returned to his former dread. The nightmares came back and several times he woke up screaming in the middle of the night, which didn't endear him to the rest of the barracks. So, he stopped sleeping as much as he could, starting in fear at furtive movements in the dark. The others began to avoid him outright—Hugh having told them of the wolfhound and of being bespelled. Liam was cast from his food clique which

meant he couldn't share food parcels and was once more left to eat whatever the guards served. Rumors were whispered just out of his hearing and sometimes within it. His eyes glowed red when angered, and he growled in his sleep, the others said—proof he was possessed by a demon. That was why he didn't go to Mass when it was offered or look in mirrors. They said he'd grown the beard only to hide the devil's sign. In addition, a ghost was said to haunt Cage Five at night, and its howls could be heard in the wind on the other side of the hut's tin walls. Several men moved out and into whatever accommodations could be arranged in the other huts. Hugh and Tom remained. Soon, Hugh stopped eating, fell sick with a fever and then died in the infirmary. Shortly after that, Tom was mauled by an Alsatian during a barracks inspection. The wounds quickly became infected, and he lost an eye and three fingers. About the only positive effect was that word got around that bad things happened to people who crossed Liam. When two guards were reported missing, those outside blamed the 'Ra, but those inside Cage Five suspected otherwise. A rumor surfaced that a shredded uniform sleeve was all that had been found of either man. Both were said to have beaten Liam, and soon the suspicions spread to the guards. A few prisoners knew the rumors for rubbish, Kevin being one of them, but even those who didn't believe began to keep their distance after the story of the uniform sleeve. It didn't help that as the guards grew more and more nervous, they increased the frequency of their late night raids, and thus, the entire hut was short on sleep as well as temper.

In the end, Liam was left with no company but Mary Kate's letters. He was painfully slow at the reading, but after a few weeks he'd made it through the first and was rewarded with the knowledge that she missed him and would be waiting for him when he got out. She wrote about her family and his, filling him in on various small events and reassuring him that he'd not been forgotten. With newfound motivation, Liam got through the second letter within a few days. He wanted to answer her and made several attempts to do so but couldn't bring himself to send them. His little sister Moira had better handwriting, and she was five.

When he wasn't reading and re-reading Mary Kate's letters he spent his time hiding from Sanders, but being ostracized made it difficult. The time would come, much as he dreaded it. He could see it in Sanders's eye. So, Liam prayed for the strength to fight, muttering every prayer he knew in the hope that God hadn't abandoned him as well. The day finally came when his name was called in the yard. Two different guards waited for him, and it gave him a moment's hope that the inevitable hadn't arrived, but once again he was led out of the cage, through the wire tunnels and gates to the infirmary, and once again the surgeon's office was empty of anyone but Sanders.

"Strip."

When Liam didn't obey, the guards beat him down and yanked the clothes off him. Again, he was shoved against the cell door at that awkward angle. Again came the burst of cold against his naked skin as the other guards left. He shut his eyes and tried to breathe using bruised ribs. A hand circled his wrist. He listened to the metallic click of handcuffs being opened. Sanders's hot breath tickled his ear, and Liam couldn't keep himself from trembling. *Fight, damn you! Move!* But he was frozen. The tingling sensation—the one he had come to associate with intense emotion—had gathered enough force now that his skin itched with it. Terror spiked his heart at the feel of a rough hand on his bare back.

"Not a sound, or they'll—"

know you for a fairy.

"Our little secret. There's my sweet—"

Quick fire rage cramped his jaw. *Never fucking touch me again*, he thought. *I'll kill you. I'll*

fucking— He struggled against the sluggish weight of time to shove an elbow backward and into Sanders’s face before the cuff locked into place. —*kill you. I’ll*— The prickling grew worse, far worse than it had ever been. A swarm of electric insects crowded underneath Liam’s skin. The sensation engulfed him and then devolved into agony and the horrible feeling of bones and muscles stretching into foreign shapes. The cuffs dropped to the concrete floor with a clatter. An overwhelming hatred wrenched control from him. —*kill you. Kill YOU. KILL*— His vision blurred, and a snarl escaped his clenched teeth. Sanders stumbled, his face lengthening into a soundless shriek. Liam pulled air into his lungs, and an inhuman howl filled the infirmary from floor to ceiling. Sanders clawed at his holster. —*YOU. FUCKING KILL YOU.* Liam swung. The hand that connected with Sanders’s jaw was coated in black fur and tipped with long obsidian nails. Four long lines of blood appeared just before the wounds gaped, revealing the stark white of bones and teeth. Watching from a numb and distant place behind the rage, Liam felt queasy.

Sanders stumbled in a panicked retreat, his left cheek in tatters and his eyes bulging. He collided into the desk, tripped over a chair and upended it. Landing with a crash, he scabbled on the floor from the broken chair like a crab, the ruin of his face soaking his shirt in gore, his jaw moving in odd jerks as if the scream born in his throat was too gigantic, too tangled to get out.

The scene faded into black and white, and then Liam was watching an old horror film through holes in a mask with a long black nose. The room was smaller somehow, and he wasn’t himself anymore. Someone or something was acting for him—a great black beast whose rage propelled him across the room to Sanders—the guard who had raped and tortured him. The guard who had to be taught that some things, some people, were best left alone. A cloud reeking of ammonia, terror and sour sweat blurred Sanders’s features, blunting its humanity. Two steps. Liam watched the beast shred Sanders’s shirt and then kneel—no squat—one furry knee in Sanders’s solar plexus.

Trembling and weeping, Sanders finally found his voice. “No. Don’t. Please stop.”

A savage pant—almost a laugh—puffed foul breath that blew hair from Sanders’s forehead. Sanders raised a fist, but the beast caught his arm with ease and slammed it on the concrete floor. Liam felt bones give way with a sickening snap and was pinned between satisfaction and revulsion. Sanders howled. A talon plunged into the flesh beneath the man’s nipple, the screams changing timbre as flesh blossomed gory gashes. Hurried blows thundered against the other side of the locked infirmary door, announcing the arrival of the other guards. Shouts.

Sanders let out a high-pitched shriek. “Get it off me! Get it off me! It’s a monster! Get it off! Oh, God! I didn’t know! I’m sorry!” His eyes were no longer focused but round with madness.

The black beast straightened, standing on its—*paws, haunches*—the crawling electric pain returned, intensified and then vanished. Liam looked down in shock, reading against his will the crooked letters that had been etched into bleeding flesh. They spelled one word: *F—A—I—R—Y.*

I didn’t do that, he thought, backing away from the terrorized guard. *I didn’t. It was a—*
“Monster!”

Wishing he could shut up Sanders, Liam wiped a hand slick with blood against the outside of his bare thigh. Gobs of skin compressed into hard lumps were jammed under his fingernails. Adrenaline jolted through his veins in violent tremors.

The door slammed open, and the guards swarmed in. Naked, Liam slipped to the floor and cowered against the far wall. A group clustered around the now gibbering, pointing Sanders.

“Kill it! Mah-mah-monster!”

Three of the men turned to see where Sanders pointed. Upon spotting Liam covered in gore, they descended upon him.

And the kicking began.